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Unaligned policies hamper fight against plastic pollution

Apart from national framework to harmonise efforts at all levels, academic calls for public education and incentives to motivate compliance among industries.

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Call for autism mapping to enhance distribution of care

Proposal aimed at providing insights and helping to prioritise areas that lack sufficient resources for affected individuals.

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Potential of greater risks from basikal lajak riders

Children engaging in such dangerous activities may progress to motorcycles in adulthood and become *mat rempit*, says safety expert.

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Malaysia's growing prominence as a centre for counterfeit products has far-reaching consequences for the national economy, local businesses and consumer behaviour. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

Fake goods scourge

Stronger legal framework with harsher penalties and enhanced enforcement needed to counter imitation products proliferation that distorts market dynamics and impacts tax revenue: Economist

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'Sustain momentum for new year resolution success'

► Use right tools such as tracking apps or mark calendar with small daily goals to provide accountability and help maintain focus, says expert

BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: As Malaysians gear up to welcome 2025, New Year resolutions are usually made, and for some, they are broken just as easily.

HRDC-certified coach and former news anchor Sheahnee Iman Lee offers key insights into keeping resolutions.

"The challenge often lies in sustaining the momentum beyond the first week of January. People who approach their resolutions with the right tools have a higher chance of success," she said.

Lee points to practical aids such as tracking apps, gym memberships with personal trainers, or just marking a calendar with small daily goals to provide accountability and help maintain focus.

Reflecting on her journey, Lee shares a resolution that had a profound impact on her life.

"I never had much success with resolutions because, like many people, I could barely keep the momentum going for more than a week. But the one resolution I succeeded in, which made

a huge impact on my life, was to quit smoking.

"That was in 2008. I was about to get married and hoped to have kids. I wanted to be in the best possible health to be a wife and mother. My sense of purpose going into 2009 was strong, and within six months, I was smoke-free.

"I'm very proud of myself for sticking to that resolution and making it last. Now I need to find that same purpose for my weight loss."

Lee said many people struggle to keep their resolutions due to the lack of motivation and practicality.

While most individuals have a clear idea of their desired outcome, the steps they take to achieve it often prove unrealistic or unsustainable.

She emphasised that resolutions are more likely to succeed when they align with an individual's lifestyle and values.

"Going into the new year with a vision is great, but it's important that we recognise that real change takes time, achievable small steps, and long-term commitment.

"We are so lucky to be able to live in an age where we can find any app or tool we need to help us achieve our goals, though finding the right tools is a process of trial and error."

Lee said when setting goals one should focus on a clear, strong purpose. For instance, instead of merely aiming to improve fitness, a more effective approach would involve setting a specific milestone, such as transitioning from daily walks to running and eventually completing a half-marathon within the year.

"It's important to align such goals with personal health motivations, as these connections can provide a deeper sense of commitment," she said.

Lee stressed that support systems play an invaluable role in maintaining motivation.

"The support system is everything. Things are going to get tough. There will be days one can't get out of bed and do what one set out to do.

"Having a supportive partner who will say, 'Come, I'll go with you,' makes all the difference."

For those feeling overwhelmed by the idea of setting resolutions, she recommended starting small, with just one major goal, and breaking it into smaller, achievable steps.

Lee said focusing on incremental progress makes the journey towards self-improvement more manageable and less daunting.

She also emphasised the importance of aligning resolutions with one's personal values and life purpose.

"Ask yourself how your resolution will improve your life and make you happier."

Malaysia to highlight national unity Asean summit

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is poised to showcase its unique model of national unity at the Asean Summit in 2025, with the National Unity Ministry highlighting how the country's multiracial, multicultural and multiethnic harmony has become a key global attraction.

National Unity Deputy Minister K. Saraswathy said the ministry is distinctive, as it is the only one of its kind in the world, and this uniqueness positions the country as a model of peaceful coexistence for other nations.

"On the international stage, we are seen as a country with a multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic society, yet we have been able to maintain a very high level of unity and understanding among the people," she said on Wednesday.

Malaysia's success in fostering unity is also gaining recognition globally, partly due to the efforts of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who has actively engaged with international leaders to promote investments in Malaysia.

"One of the attractions for investors is the unity that is prevalent among our communities.

"Other countries are keen to learn from our experiences. We have had our ups and downs, but we have overcome these challenges to emerge as a role model for this region," she added.

Saraswathy said Malaysia's strength lies not just in the absence of racial tension but also in the nation's ability to foster peace and harmony.

"When we talk about unity, it's not just the absence of disunity. In some nations, there might not be outright disunity, but there is often racial tension or animosity.

"That is not the case in Malaysia. We have created a society based on our *Rukun Negara* principles," she said.

Highlighting Malaysia's achievements, she emphasised the importance of promoting the values of unity at the Asean level, particularly as Malaysia prepares to take the helm of the regional bloc in 2025.

"We want to showcase that we are not only investing in human resources and infrastructure, but also in values that uphold unity.

"This is something that we can promote at the Asean level, especially the concept of peaceful coexistence," she said. — Bernama

Increased wildlife protection among successes: Ministry

PUTRAJAYA: An increase in wildlife protection enforcement activities and the introduction of a new fine amount of RM10 million for environmental criminals were among the successes of the Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry this year.

Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the ministry has increased wildlife protection enforcement activities, including for *Harimau Malaya* in 2024, by increasing community rangers to 1,924 people, which involved a cost of RM60 million.

It also implemented amendments in the Environmental Quality (Amendment) Act 2024.

"The Act in force since 1974 has also been amended where the maximum fine for environmental crimes has been increased from RM100,000 to RM10 million, and there is a mandatory jail term for environmental offenders for up to five years," he said in a post on his official social media page on the summary of the achievements of the ministry's 2024 team.

Nik Nazmi said about 350,000ha of land and ocean areas have also been gazetted as new protected areas as of September last year under the Ecological Fiscal Transfer incentive.

The ministry has also implemented an initiative last year to help villagers and *Orang Asli* with property and crop losses due to wildlife attacks.

He said Malaysia's greening programme, through the planting of 100 million trees, had also been successfully completed a year earlier, with the 100 millionth tree planted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. — Bernama



Nik Nazmi said the ministry has also implemented an initiative to help villagers and *Orang Asli* with property and crop losses due to wildlife forays. — BERNAMAPIC

Promote local history, says Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim hopes initiatives to promote tourism products related to legendary sites, history, local legends and myths can be enhanced to attract tourists to the country.

In a Facebook post yesterday, which was accompanied by a photo of his visit to Dream Forest Langkawi on Langkawi Island, Kedah, Anwar said the efforts should be boosted to strengthen the country's tourism sector.

He also expressed admiration for the Dream Forest Langkawi creative talent that highlighted the uniqueness of the island, as well as showcasing local legends and myths that are an important part of the country's heritage.

"I hope more initiatives such as this will be created to strengthen the country's tourism sector, as well as revive interest in the legends and history of the country," he said. — Bernama

'Growing market for fake products concerning'

➤ Demand undermines legitimate businesses, causing decline in economic activity and tax revenue: Expert

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's growing prominence as a centre for counterfeit products presents far-reaching consequences for the national economy, local businesses and consumer behaviour, said economist and Global Labour Organisation lead for Southeast Asia Prof Niaz Asadullah.

"The International Chamber of Commerce put global counterfeiting and piracy losses at over US\$2.3 trillion (RM10.29 trillion) annually. Malaysia's strategic trade position in Southeast Asia makes the country highly vulnerable as well, and even a slight fall in GDP due to counterfeiting could cost billions in revenue and taxes."

On Jan 8, the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry embarked on a crackdown on the counterfeit goods market, which is said to be worth some RM300 billion per annum.

Its enforcement division director-general Datuk Azman Adam said between January and November 2023, RM14.9 million worth of counterfeit goods were seized from hotspots in Jalan Petaling, Jalan Chow Kit and Jalan Kenanga in Kuala Lumpur.

The ministry's Johor director Lilis Sasinda Pornomo said it disposed over RM2.1 million in counterfeit goods as of Dec 16, involving 152 cases.

"We also handled 1,287 cases of illicit distribution and sales, with seizures totalling RM29.7 million and fines amounting to RM1.33 million."

"Between January and December, 66 cases involving Malaysian suspects and two involving foreigners were linked to counterfeit goods under the Trademarks Act. The cases saw the seizures of products worth RM320,435.60."

Niaz said counterfeit luxury items have become increasingly popular among younger tourists, such as Gen Z travellers from South Korea who are drawn to them and genuine secondhand products.

"The convenience of online marketplaces has fuelled this demand. The growing market undermines legitimate businesses, causing significant declines in economic activity and tax revenue."

SMEs in Malaysia bear the brunt of the issue since counterfeit goods divert sales from genuine products that are more expensive to produce due to regulatory compliance and quality standards.

A check by *theSun* showed online live

sales on platforms such as Shopee and TikTok often feature luxury handbags marketed as "exact copy ori", complete with serial numbers and authentic-looking designs that are sold at between RM200 and RM400 or more, with sellers claiming the products "might be genuine", leaving buyers to rely on luck for authenticity.

Niaz said over time, the presence of counterfeit products would discourage businesses from investing in research and development, stifling innovation and the introduction of better products.

He stressed that beyond financial losses, the proliferation of counterfeit pharmaceuticals and personal care items poses serious public health risks, amplifying the social costs of counterfeiting.

"Poor awareness on the dangers of counterfeit food or medicines worsens the problem," he said, adding that counterfeit goods distort market dynamics by undercutting legitimate product prices, creating unfair competition and

disincentivising quality adherence among local businesses.

He emphasised the need for a multi-faceted strategy, and said strengthening Malaysia's legal framework by imposing stricter penalties on counterfeiters and enhancing enforcement of intellectual property rights are crucial.

He also highlighted the importance of international collaboration, particularly with China and Hong Kong, which account for 84% of global counterfeit seizures.

"Enhanced intelligence sharing and cross-border cooperation could help dismantle counterfeit networks. Supporting Malaysian SMEs is vital as many operate semi-formally and lack the resources to protect their intellectual property."

"Providing legal assistance and resources for brand protection would empower them to address counterfeit threats."

He said public awareness campaigns, such as the US "Truth Behind Counterfeits" initiative, could play a key role in educating consumers about the dangers of counterfeit goods and encourage ethical purchasing decisions.

"Japan's adoption of blockchain to address counterfeiting in Asia also serves as a valuable example for Malaysia."



SHOWCASING MEMORIES ... A picture frame maker preparing an order at his shop Classic Digital Imaging in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, which has produced various frames for wedding photos, souvenirs and posters in the last 30 years. — *AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN*

Exemption from land, parcel tax penalty arrears

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang government is granting a 100% exemption from quit rent and parcel rent penalty arrears to land and parcel owners in the state who make payments for the two taxes from Jan 2 to Feb 28, 2025.

The Chief Minister's Office said the matter was agreed during the Government Executive Council meeting last week.

The meeting also agreed to provide a 50% reduction in land and parcel tax penalty arrears to land and parcel owners who make payments from March 1 to May 31, 2025.

"The incentives and the offer are extended to land or parcel owners who have received Notice of Penalty 6A (land tax) or Notice of Penalty 11 (parcel tax). However, the offer is not extended to payers who make payments in instalments."

The Chief Minister's Office also stressed that the offer is not retrospective and cannot be enjoyed by land or parcel owners who make late payment of fine arrears before the date of the exemption and reduction comes into effect.

It said checks found that there were high arrears of late fines involving 40,371 land tax accounts and 67,537 parcel tax accounts in Penang, amounting to nearly RM40.1 million.

"If land and parcel owners do not pay the land tax and parcel tax immediately, it is feared that their land or parcels will be forfeited by the state authority due to the existing arrears."

The discount incentives are aimed at encouraging land and parcel owners to pay tax for 2025 at an earlier period, and to ease the burden on owners who have high tax penalty arrears due to non-payment before May 31 every year. — *Bernama*

Non-Muslim houses of worship get land

GEORGE TOWN: A total of 129 non-Muslim houses of worship have received land from the Penang government between 2018 and this year, said Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow.

He said this was to ensure houses of worship for followers of other religions receive the necessary facilities and space to grow.

"Through the state government's Unity Manifesto, RM10 million has been allocated to meet the requirements of non-Muslim houses of worship until 2028."

"The state government remains committed to prioritising the values of mutual love and respect in maintaining religious harmony."

He emphasised that his administration is steadfast in providing essential services and facilities to ensure individuals can practise their beliefs in accordance with the Rukun Negara.

He said the establishment of the Penang Harmony Corporation in 2021 was aimed at creating a management system for non-Muslim affairs in the state. — *Bernama*

Response pledged in MH370 search

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has given an assurance that the government would respond if efforts to locate Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 yielded results.

He emphasised the importance of balancing the need to search for the aircraft with ensuring the most prudent use of public funds.

"The government will extend its cooperation should the search achieve a breakthrough," he said in a Facebook post on Wednesday.

On Friday, Transport Minister Anthony Loke announced that on Dec 13, the Cabinet agreed in principle to accept an offer from marine robotics company Ocean Infinity to resume the search for the wreckage of MH370, *Bernama* reported.

He said the deep-sea search would focus on a new location, with an estimated span of 15,000sq km in the southern Indian Ocean.

Action needed to protect children online, says MP

KUALA LUMPUR: The government move to license social media services to overcome various problems on the internet, including digital predation on children, is apt, said Bukit Bendera MP Syerleena Abdul Rashid.

She said the implementation of an integrated operation by police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission revealed a worrying reality in the community.

"The internet, once celebrated as a vast repository of limitless knowledge, has become a dark space for those who seek to exploit children. From predators hiding behind

anonymous profiles to harmful content masquerading as entertainment, children are increasingly exposed to dangers that threaten their safety and well-being."

"Social media platforms, gaming communities and even educational apps have turned into gateways for cyberbullying, grooming and exposure to disturbing material."

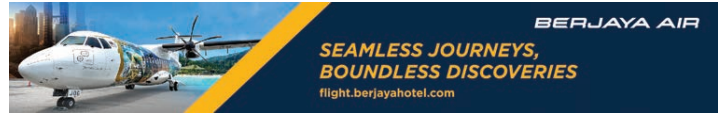
She emphasised that the lack of accountability in the digital space has allowed these dangers to proliferate unchecked, underscoring a need for clear regulations to enhance the protection and safety of children.

She urged the government to implement

strict regulations requiring social media companies to prioritise user safety and prevent the dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

"We must push for immediate and comprehensive reforms to ensure these platforms are held accountable for the content they host."

"We call on all Malaysians to remain vigilant and report suspicious online activity involving CSAM to authorities. Protecting children is not just a collective responsibility, it is a moral imperative that demands immediate and decisive action," she added. — *Bernama*



BY QIRANA NABILLA
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Call to address disparities in autism care service provision

► Govt could target regions in need and ensure equitable distribution of treatment: NGO

PETALING JAYA: The National Autism Society of Malaysia has called on the government to conduct a comprehensive mapping exercise to address regional disparities in the provision of autism care services.

Its programme head Rusmawati Abdullah said data from the Social Welfare Department could be used for the purpose, and the initiative would provide insights and prioritise areas that lack sufficient resources for the autistic community.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri said as of Oct 31, there were 33 autism care centres in the country while the number of autistic individuals with learning disabilities in the same period totalled 65,191.

She said the government could target regions in need of support and ensure a more equitable distribution of care and services for autistic individuals across the country, especially in underserved areas.

"The mapping effort could serve as a foundation for future policy decisions and resource allocation, improving the quality of care and services for individuals with autism."

She said while the services are more accessible in the Klang Valley

area, there is a need for centres in northern and southern Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

"The shortage stems from the increasing prevalence of autism, limited facilities, lack of trained professionals and financial constraints faced by families. While we have made strides in addressing autism care, the infrastructure is inadequate to meet the demand."

She said limited private sector involvement, underfunded NGOs filling service gaps, low public awareness on autism care's financial needs, geographical inequalities in rural and semi-urban areas, and high initial infrastructure costs hinder the expansion of autism care services.

Johor Disabled Children Charitable and Cares Organisation founder and president Dr Yahya Haidrus said the gap between service demand and availability is substantial, with many existing centres being overcrowded, resulting in long waiting lists and limited one-on-one support.

He said there is limited availability of specialised training programmes in Malaysia, which affects the quality of care being provided.

"Many caregivers and therapists lack the skills to handle complex autism cases while the shortage of certified professionals has resulted in unequal access to therapy. This highlights the need for

service expansion."

Hua Ming Autism Society members echoed the concerns and said the shortage of autism care services has placed significant strain on families through stress and financial burden as they are left to manage without adequate support.

"While help exists through various agencies, it is insufficient. Collaboration between government bodies, NGOs and private companies needs improvement and faster implementation," it said in a statement to *theSun*.

UiTM Faculty of Communication and Media Studies senior lecturer Dr Mohd Yusof Zulkefli, who is also an expert in autism and communication, said the gap between available care centres and the number of autistic individuals in the country underscores a systemic inadequacy in service provision.

"This disparity often leaves families with limited access to essential support, resulting in delayed intervention, unequal opportunities for skills development and heightened financial stress. The lack of sufficient facilities also places pressure on existing centres, potentially compromising the quality of care."

He said insufficient care centres delay access to critical therapies that improve communication, social interaction and cognitive skills, especially when early intervention is pivotal for shaping the developmental trajectory of children with autism.

"A comprehensive national policy focused exclusively on autism care that includes early diagnosis and intervention programmes in all primary healthcare facilities is crucial as developmental milestone tracking for children starts from infancy."

Workforce must be strengthened, says expert

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's workforce needs to be strengthened to ensure they are future-ready, particularly in the artificial intelligence (AI) and renewable energy sectors, said Learning Edge founder Perthpal Singh.

The company is a professional and corporate training organisation that aims to cultivate the development of Malaysia's workforce.

Perthpal noted that only between 35% and 40% of Malaysian organisations were taking steps to upskill their workforce to meet the challenges posed by automation and emerging technologies.

He said data from the World Economic Forum estimates that 44% of global workers will face significant skills disruptions within the next five years, Bernama reported.

He cautioned that Malaysia risks falling behind regional peers, such as Singapore and Vietnam, unless immediate interventions

are implemented.

"The gap between what our workforce is equipped for today and what tomorrow's industries demand is widening at an alarming rate."

Perthpal pointed to foundational issues in Malaysia's education system, with less than 50% of secondary school students enrolled in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) streams.

Of these, only 21% pursue pure science, and 27% enrol in technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

"These figures are well below the levels needed to produce a talent pipeline capable of driving growth in high-demand sectors, such as AI, renewable energy and data analytics."

"Singapore has invested heavily in education and training, ensuring 70% of its workforce is highly skilled."

He added that Vietnam has doubled its

investment in technology training programmes over the last decade, positioning itself as a competitive hub in Asean.

"Initiatives such as the National STEM Policy and the RM6.8 billion allocation for TVET in Budget 2024 were commendable."

"Programmes such as TVET empowerment have begun aligning curricula with market needs, and efforts to inspire students through initiatives such as sending young scientists to schools are steps in the right direction."

He stressed that these efforts need to be intensified to bridge the widening gap.

"Malaysia is at a tipping point. While we have made commendable efforts in policy and initiatives, the root issues remain unaddressed," he said, adding that without bold reforms and strategic investments, Malaysia risks missing out on the US\$1.7 trillion (RM7.63 trillion) global opportunity presented by Industry 4.0.

'Avoid excessive loans after salary increase'

PUTRAJAYA: Civil servants are reminded to not make excessive or overlapping loans following salary increases under the Public Service Remuneration System.

Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public Service (Cuepacs) secretary-general Abdul Rahman Mohd Nordin said the system should not be an incentive or excuse for civil servants to take more loans.

"It should only be for purposes that would make a profit in the future, such as housing loans or children's education. Not to buy a phone and so on."

Under the system, officers in the implementing, management and professional groups would receive a phased salary adjustment of 15%, with 8% in Phase One starting December and 7% in Phase Two starting January 2026.

The top management group would receive a salary adjustment of 7%, with 4% for Phase One and 3% for Phase Two.

Abdul Rahman said the implementation of the system was timely as the salaries of civil servants had not been reviewed for almost 12 years while the cost of living had been increasing throughout the same period. — Bernama

Action to address coconut shortage

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority has taken measures to address the lack of coconuts in the market by boosting purchases of coconuts from Indonesia to ensure adequate supply for domestic use, especially during festive seasons.

Its chairman Aminuddin Zulkipli said the authority, through its subsidiary Famaco, has increased purchases of coconuts from Indonesia to 320 metric tonnes from this month compared with the previous 180 metric tonnes.

This follows a drop of up to 50% in local coconut supply at several major markets in locations that included the Klang Valley, due to unfavourable weather in the past three months that affected the yield of coconuts at local plantations and export countries. — Bernama



Aminuddin said the authority has increased purchases of coconuts from Indonesia. — BERNAMAPIC

New marble attraction in Gua Musang

GUA MUSANG: An arrangement of 10 marble stones, each inscribed with verses from the *Quran* and *zikir* phrases, at Persimpangan Bendahara here is a new attraction.

Gua Musang district officer Nik Raisan Daud said the 100 metric ton stones have not only enhanced the district's image but also served to promote high-quality natural marble.

He said as the gateway to Kelantan, the district office is working to enliven Gua Musang and create a unique landmark that would be memorable for visitors and passers-by.

"Many people are unaware that the *zikir* phrases and short *Quranic* verses inscribed on these marble stones were done freehand by an artist from Golok in Thailand." — Bernama

Basikal lajak menace poses public safety concern

► Need for collective efforts to tackle root causes as such activities endanger road users, says expert

BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: *Basikal lajak* or illegally modified bicycles used for dangerous stunts and racing remains a serious public safety issue with their continued presence on public roads, said Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research chairman Prof Dr Wong Shaw Voon.

He said the issue is still critical as most riders are young people engaging in dangerous activities that pose risks to themselves and other road users.

"*Basikal lajak* activities are very dangerous. While they may be compared to extreme sports, the key difference is that extreme sports take place in controlled environments, while these activities occur on public roads, which are meant for transport, not racing."

Wong highlighted the tragic 2017 incident in Johor Bahru where a crash involving teenagers riding modified bicycles resulted in eight deaths and eight others injured.

He said although many of these activities occur during the day, they are especially alarming at night when the risks are even higher.

"While many motorists avoid driving late at night, some, like factory workers or those with demanding schedules, have no choice but to

travel during late hours. With distractions like *basikal lajak* on the roads, crashes are almost inevitable.

"Public roads are not designed for such activities, and the consequences of using them irresponsibly can be devastating," he said, emphasising the need for collective efforts from the authorities, public and local communities to tackle the root causes of *basikal lajak* activities.

He said allowing children to roam the streets at midnight and engaging in dangerous activities reflects parental failure, while some are not concerned about other people's children.

However, Wong said crashes can affect anyone, including innocent bystanders, and they could lead to tragedies.

He warned that failing to address such issues could have far-reaching consequences on youths who disregard the law, as they could contribute to larger societal problems.

"When they are older, these youths might turn to riding motorcycles and becoming a *mat rempit*.

"This would worsen the situation, as they might develop a lasting tendency to disregard the law.

"While some of them might change for the better, many will seek the same thrills and carry

the habit into adulthood."

Universiti Putra Malaysia Road Safety Research Centre head Assoc Prof Dr Law Teik Hwa said *basikal lajak* is a societal problem due to its "dangerous nature being normalised by the public," especially on social media.

"Groups promoting modified bicycles on social media often glamorise the risks, encouraging young people to join in. Shops selling and modifying these bicycles worsen the trend.

"To address the matter, social media companies should collaborate to remove such groups, and enforce stricter content policies. Shops should also be regulated with rules against illegal modifications and be held accountable."

Law said the issue stems from families enabling or failing to stop their children from participating due to cultural norms or lack of awareness about the risks. In some communities, the activity is seen as harmless fun, and parents may neglect to supervise their children.

Section 33 of the Child Act 2001 allows legal action against parents who fail to supervise their children, with penalties of up to RM20,000, five years' imprisonment, or both.

"To tackle this problem, it's essential to carry out parental education campaigns that emphasise the dangers of modified bicycles, using real-life examples for greater impact.

"A combined approach of enforcement, education, and community involvement is essential to stop the *basikal lajak* menace."



Law said *basikal lajak* is a societal problem due to its 'dangerous nature being normalised' by the public, especially on social media. —BERNAMAPIC

MACC to focus on graft on procurement, enforcement

PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) aims to focus on eradicating corruption in procurement, enforcement and grand corruption to help the country's economy, reduce leakages and return misappropriated national assets and money next year.

MACC Chief Commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said the MACC will also carry out a transformation of the MACC structure, namely improving the assignment approach and empowering the functions and roles of each division to be more effective in carrying out duties.

"As the chief commissioner, I will 'revamp' the approach used in MACC, including the practice of working, thinking and mindset so that MACC would not be trapped in a comfort zone.

"So, we have to go through a transformation

to increase effectiveness and expertise so that officers are more professional and carry out impactful work."

He said emphasis would be placed on governance investigations through the rebranding of the Inspection and Consultancy Division to the Governance Investigation Division.

"It gives authority to ensure that the results of the governance investigations are implemented by the department concerned.

"It is important to close the space and opportunities for corruption in strengthening governance and governance practices," he said.

On the increase in the allocation to MACC in Budget 2025, Azam expressed appreciation to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for approving the allocation.

"I would also like to thank the prime minister

for approving the additional 200 officers, and we are working closely with the Public Services Commission for this recruitment process.

"The addition of officers is aimed at strengthening the MACC's operational division, especially in areas involving money laundering and high-profile cases in line with the strategy set for 2025 and the coming years."

He said the additional allocation to MACC would also be utilised to promote good governance, especially in the public sector, strengthen international cooperation with various countries as well as support more impactful prevention and education programmes.

MACC will also review all standard operating procedures related to the chief commissioner's Standing Order to address the current corruption challenges. —Bernama

Manager denies removing controlled goods illegally

KOTA BHARU: A warehouse manager pleaded not guilty at the Pasir Mas Sessions Court here yesterday to a charge of removing controlled goods from licensed premises earlier this year.

Muhamad Hilmi Mohamad Ashari, 35, entered the plea before Judge Zulkifli Abdullah.

The accused allegedly removed the controlled goods, namely 2,411kg of cooking oil and 480kg of coarse sugar, from premises specified in the wholesale licence at 9pm on Jan 14.

The alleged offence took place at Jalan Tengku Petra Semarak, Kota Bharu, with the goods transported to an address in Kampung Lubuk Tapah Lati in Pasir Mas, which is not specified in the licence.

The charge was framed under Section 20(1) of the Control of Supplies Act 1961 and punishable under Section 22(1).

Zulkifli set bail at RM20,000 and ordered the accused to surrender his passport if any, report to the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry office in Kota Bharu every month, and not interfere with prosecution witnesses.

The court fixed Feb 3 for the next mention and the appointment of legal representation.

Meanwhile in KANGAR, a Thai woman was fined RM9,000 by the Sessions Court yesterday after pleading guilty to a charge of possessing 34kg of subsidised packet cooking oil without a licence.

Judge Sharifah Norazlita Syed Salim Idid meted out the fine, in default five months in jail, on Salmee Changwang, 49, after she pleaded guilty to the charge.

She was charged with possession of the controlled item, comprising 34 packets of 1kg subsidised cooking oil in a Toyota Hilux Revo pickup vehicle without a permit at Jalan Kaki Bukit-Wang Kelian at 4.30pm on Dec 19 last year. —Bernama

Evacuees return home as floods recede

KUANTAN: The floods in Lipis have fully receded, and two temporary relief centres housing 89 evacuees from 28 families were closed at noon yesterday.

The District Disaster Management Committee Secretariat, in a statement, said the evacuees at the Sekolah Kebangsaan Lubuk Kuit and Kampung Beletik Mosque centres were allowed to return home at about 12.30pm.

"Although the weather is currently fine, we still advise residents, particularly those in low-lying areas, to stay cautious, vigilant and follow authorities' instructions as the country is still experiencing the northeast monsoon season," it said.

The flood was reportedly caused by the overflow of a river from Raub, which then flowed into a river in Lipis, inundating several homes and forcing residents to relocate to relief centres by midday. —Bernama

Housewife loses RM147,700 in scam

KUANTAN: A 38-year-old housewife from Bera, near here, lost RM147,753 after falling victim to a part-time job offer scam through a social media application in December.

Pahang police chief Datuk Seri Yahaya Othman said the scam occurred after the victim was lured to join an online job offer using a platform called Hand Craft Group 049 on Dec 13, which promised lucrative profits for every product sold on Telegram.

"The victim realised that she had been scammed when the suspect told her she had suffered losses as she failed to redeem her commission of RM200,000," he said on Wednesday. —Bernama



Unaligned policies snag to plastic waste fight

➤ Nationwide legislation and mentality reset needed to ensure sustainable future: Expert

■ BY DEEPAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's battle against plastic pollution is facing significant challenges due to the absence of a uniform plastic policy, said Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Forestry and Environment senior lecturer Dr Mohd Yusoff Ishak.

"This has led to inconsistent enforcement across the states, with some banning plastic straws and others charging different amounts for plastic bags. This confusion undermines the policy's effectiveness."

He was commenting on a recent statement by Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, who acknowledged in the Dewan Negara on Dec 17 that existing policies on managing plastic waste were fragmented.

Global data and business intelligence platform Statista said Malaysia received more than 405,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste in 2023 from several countries, ranking it among the top importers of such material.

He said the fragmented approach to managing single-use plastics has also led to uneven environmental outcomes.

"Weak regulations contribute significantly to plastic pollution, with single-use plastics often ending up in water bodies, harming aquatic life and ecosystems."

"Coastal and riverine ecosystems are among the most affected as plastic waste accumulates in such areas, endangering turtles, fish and seabirds, among others," he said. He added that the use of technological solutions, such as Polymateria Lifecycle Technology, which "self-destructs" plastic and safely returns it to nature after a year if not recycled, must be complemented by changes in human behaviour to ensure a



Mohd Yusoff said inadequate regulations contribute to the presence of plastic waste in water bodies, harming aquatic life and ecosystems. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

sustainable future.

"Implementing a nationwide plastic-related Act is feasible but requires sustained political commitment at all levels of government. A comprehensive Act must go beyond setting recycling targets and address the unique challenges Malaysia faces."

He said legislation should strengthen waste management in underserved areas, prevent illegal dumping, enforce stricter penalties for repeat offenders and hold producers accountable for the full life cycle of their plastic products.

Mohd Yusoff said to address the disconnect between federal and state policies, the federal agency must involve state governments and local authorities in the policymaking process to ensure alignment with regional realities.

He also proposed revisiting the role of the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation and allocating funds from EPR (extended producer responsibility) initiatives to support municipal waste management improvements.

Mohd Yusoff cautioned that without a uniform policy, plastic pollution would jeopardise the country's net zero carbon goals, with inadequate recycling systems and inconsistent regulations worsening pollution and emissions.

"Public education is also vital as it helps

the people understand the broader environmental consequences of plastic pollution, such as its impact on rivers, wildlife, ecosystems and human health, while policies provide a framework to act against those flouting the law."

Stressing the need for stricter regulations and incentives on the role of industries, he said they must take responsibility for the entire life cycle of their products, including waste collection, recycling and disposal.

"Incorporating incentives such as tax breaks and penalties for non-compliance is essential to engage industries to reduce plastic pollution. Such a framework must address plastic pollution comprehensively, engage multiple stakeholders and support sustainable development," he said.

Mohd Yusoff also emphasised the need for immediate government action to harmonise efforts across state and local levels through a national plastic policy framework, in which cross-ministry collaboration between the Housing and Local Government Ministry and the Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry is crucial.

"These measures should complement the existing Zero Single-Use Plastic roadmap by enhancing alignment, improving enforcement and fostering stakeholder collaboration."

Unusual bounty from padi fields

TANAH MERAH: Looking for rice locusts, scientifically known as *chortophaga viridifasciata*, has become a source of supplementary income for a grass cutter in Kampung Tok Che Dol, Kelantan.

Muhammad Rozali Zulkifli, 37, said he started selling the insects nearly a decade ago while working as a grass cutter.

"At first, I sold these locusts in small quantities, not expecting them to gain such popularity and high demand," he said.

Armed with a handheld net, Rozali searches for the locusts at night in the *padi* fields near his home, typically catching about 1kg of the insects each night.

The father of three said he normally leaves his house at 8pm and works until midnight to catch the grasshoppers, with the rainy season being particularly fruitful.

"The locusts are soaked first and then lightly fried until they turn reddish before being sold."

Aided by his wife, Nor Wan Zianal Atikah Aziz, 27, Rozali utilises the internet to promote their grasshopper products on Facebook.

"I earn between RM500 and RM700 a month from this, which helps supplement my family's daily expenses."

Muhammad Rozali said he sells the finished product at RM10 per 100g and has customers in Selangor, Perlis and Penang. — Bernama

Customs seize RM1.6m cigarettes, alcohol

TEMERLOH: The Customs Department has dismantled smuggling activities involving cigarettes and alcohol worth over RM1.6 million in three separate raids in Johor and Selangor.

Pahang Customs director Mohd Asri Seman said in the first operation on Dec 3, the Temerloh Customs raided a house in Ulu Tiram, Johor, which was being used as a storage facility for cigarettes.

The team seized 449,400 sticks of cigarettes of several brands, estimated to be worth RM49,000, with unpaid duties amounting to about RM300,000.

On Dec 10, an MPV was seized in Tebrau, Johor, with 380,800 sticks of cigarettes worth about RM55,000 and unpaid duties of more than RM250,000.

On Dec 12, a container was checked in Port Klang, Selangor, which contained 52,800 cans of beer, suspected to lack proper import permits. The goods were valued at about RM60,000, with unpaid duties amounting to some RM890,000. — Bernama

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Tears, prayers as Asia mourns tsunami victims 20 years on

► Disaster claimed 226,408 lives

BANDA ACEH: Tearful mourners prayed yesterday as ceremonies were held across Asia to remember the 220,000 people who died two decades ago when a tsunami hit coastlines around the Indian Ocean, in one of the world's worst natural disasters.

On Dec 26, 2004, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake off Indonesia's western tip generated massive waves that pummeled the coastline of 14 countries from Indonesia to Somalia.

In Aceh Province, where more than 100,000 people were killed, a siren rang out at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque to kick off memorials around the region, including in Sri Lanka, India and Thailand.

"I thought it was doomsday," said Hasnawati, a 54-year-old teacher at the mosque, which was damaged by the tsunami.

"On a Sunday morning when our family were all laughing together, disaster struck suddenly and everything's gone. I can't describe it with words."

Some mourners sat and cried at Aceh's Ulee Lheue mass grave, where around 14,000 are buried, while some villages held their own prayers around the province as they remembered the tragedy that devastated entire communities.

Many later visited a larger mass grave and held a communal prayer in provincial capital Banda Aceh, while beachside memorials and religious ceremonies were held in Sri Lanka, India and Thailand, some of the worst-hit countries.

Victims of waves as high as 30m included many foreign tourists celebrating Christmas on the region's sun-kissed beaches,

bringing the tragedy into homes around the globe.

The seabed being ripped open pushed waves at double the speed of a bullet train, crossing the Indian Ocean within hours.

In Thailand, where half of the more than 5,000 dead were foreign tourists, commemorations began early in Ban Nam Khem, the country's worst hit village.

Tearful relatives of the dead laid flowers and wreaths at a curved wall in the shape of a tsunami wave with plaques bearing the names of victims.

Napaporn Pakawan, 55, lost her sister and a niece in the tragedy.

A total of 226,408 people died as a result of the tsunami, according

to EM-DAT, a recognised global disaster database.

There was no warning of the impending tsunami, giving little time for evacuation, despite the hours-long gaps between the waves striking different continents.

But today, a sophisticated network of monitoring stations has cut down warning times.

Indonesia suffered the highest death toll, with more than 160,000 people killed along its western coast.

"It feels like it just happened yesterday. Whenever I am reminded of it, it feels like all the blood rushes out of my body," said Nilawati, a 60-year-old housewife who lost her son and mother.

The disaster also ended a separatist conflict in Aceh, with a peace deal between rebels and Jakarta struck less than a year later.

In Sri Lanka, where more than 35,000 people died, survivors and relatives gathered to remember around 1,000 victims who died when waves derailed a train.

The mourners boarded the restored *Ocean Queen Express* and headed to Peraliya – the exact spot where it was ripped from the tracks, around 90km south of Colombo.

A brief religious ceremony was held with relatives of the dead.

Nearly 300 people were killed as far away as Somalia, as well as more than 100 in the Maldives and dozens in Malaysia and Myanmar.

"My children, wife, father, mother, all of my siblings were swept away," said Indonesian fisherman Baharuddin Zainun, 70.

"The same tragedy was felt by others as well. We feel the same feelings." – AFP



An Indian woman performs rituals for victims of the tsunami at Pattinapakkam beach in Chennai yesterday. – AFP/IC

Cambodia court jails opposition party leader

PHNOM PENH: A court in Cambodia sentenced the head of an opposition party to two years in jail yesterday for inciting social disorder, in the latest criminal case against government opponents.

The court in Phnom Penh found Nation Power Party president Sun Chanthy guilty of the charge, which has been used repeatedly against critical voices in Cambodia.

Rights groups have long accused Cambodia's government, headed by Prime Minister Hun Manet, of using legal cases as a tactic to silence opposition voices and legitimate political dissent.

As well as the prison term, the court also fined Sun four million riel (RM4,471) and removed his right to vote or stand for election.

The charges related to social media posts by Sun, including a video in which he criticises the Cambodian government during a meeting with supporters in Japan.

Defence lawyer Choung Choungy said the ruling was an "injustice" to his client and they were considering an appeal.

"It is very serious (punishment) as what he said in Japan wasn't a mistake but constructive criticism for development," he said.

Hun Manet assumed power in 2023 after his father Hun Sen stepped down following nearly four decades of rule.

Rong Chhun, an adviser to the Nation Power Party, which was founded last year, is facing similar incitement charges and could be jailed for up to six years if convicted. – AFP

JAL systems back to normal after cyberattack

TOKYO: Japan Airlines (JAL) said yesterday its systems have returned to normal, with same-day ticket sales resuming, after a cyberattack delayed some domestic and international flights.

The attack began at 7.24am (6.24am in Malaysia), affecting internal and external systems, JAL said earlier. It temporarily shut down a router that was causing malfunctions and suspended ticket sales for flights departing yesterday.

The company said no customer information was leaked, adding that it suffered no damage from computer viruses.

ANA Holdings, Japan's other major carrier, experienced no signs of an attack on its systems, a spokesperson said.

American Airlines grounded all flights for an hour this week, disrupting travel for thousands on Christmas Eve, due to a technical glitch involving network hardware.

JAL was the latest Japanese firm to be hit by a cyberattack.

Japan's space agency JAXA was targeted in 2023, although no sensitive information was accessed. – Reuters/AFP

World's largest hydropower dam to be built in Tibet

BEIJING: China has approved the construction of what will be the world's largest hydropower dam, kicking off an ambitious project on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau that could affect millions in India and Bangladesh.

The dam, which will be located in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, could produce 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, according to an estimate provided by the Power Construction Corporation of China in 2020.

That would more than triple the

88.2 billion kWh designed capacity of the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest, in central China.

The project will play a major role in meeting China's carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, stimulate related industries such as engineering, and create jobs in Tibet, Xinhua news agency reported.

A section of the Yarlung Zangbo falls a dramatic 2,000m within a span of 50km, offering huge hydropower potential as well as unique engineering challenges.

The outlay for building the dam,

including engineering costs, is also expected to eclipse the Three Gorges Dam, which cost 254.2 billion yuan (RM155.7 billion).

Authorities have not indicated how many people the Tibet project would displace and how it would affect the local ecosystem.

But according to Chinese officials, hydropower projects in Tibet, which they say hold more than a third of China's hydroelectric power potential, would not have a major impact on the environment or on downstream water supplies

India and Bangladesh have raised concerns about the dam, with the project potentially altering not only the local ecology but also the flow and course of the river downstream.

The Yarlung Zangbo becomes the Brahmaputra River as it leaves Tibet and flows south into India's Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states and finally into Bangladesh.

China has already commenced hydropower generation on the upper reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo, which flows from the west to the east of Tibet. – Reuters

Sri Lanka keen to join BRICS

MOSCOW: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake expressed interest in joining BRICS in a letter sent to Russian President Vladimir Putin in October, and the country expects a positive response next year, said the republic's ambassador to Moscow Pakeer Amza.

"We have also addressed other BRICS countries with a request to join as a partner country and expect their positive response," Amza said.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath said Colombo has decided to apply for membership in BRICS and the New Development Bank.

He said Sri Lanka views BRICS as an effective partnership to realise its aspiration for mutually beneficial cooperation, peace and development.

Dissanayake has also asked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to support Colombo's bid to join BRICS.

BRICS is an intergovernmental

association created in 2006.

In addition to Russia, Brazil, India, China and South Africa, it now includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, according to the Russian 2024 BRICS chairmanship website. – Bernama



A bushfire burns out of control in the Grampians National Park in Australia's Victoria state. — AFP/PPIC

Leave home, communities in path of bushfire told

MELBOURNE: Australian authorities urged people in dozens of rural communities to leave home at once yesterday to escape a bushfire tearing through a national park.

About 600 firefighters were battling the blaze in the Grampians National Park 240km west of Melbourne, a Victoria state emergency services spokesperson said.

The blaze has persisted for more than a week in hot, windy conditions, scorching 55,000ha of the park, causing environmental damage, livestock losses, and damage to outbuildings and sheds.

No deaths have been reported so far.

State emergency services warned residents to leave home in more than two dozen mostly small rural communities, with populations ranging from as

few as six to as many as several hundred.

People in several other communities were told to take shelter indoors because it was unsafe to leave.

Firefighters expected shifting winds to complicate their task during the day, said Victoria state control centre spokesman Luke Hegarty.

"We are reaching a critical part of the day when we see the wind change moving through the western part of the state," he said in an afternoon update.

"We've seen expansion of the fire to the southeast this morning, and early this afternoon with the northwesterly winds."

He said winds knocked down trees.

A total fire ban was declared across the whole of Victoria, barring any fires in the open air. — AFP

Taiwan conducts simulation of war with China

TAIPEI: Taiwan's Presidential Office conducted its first ever tabletop exercise simulating a military escalation with China, several officials briefed on the matter said, at a time when the island is facing renewed Chinese military threats.

Dozens of central and local government agencies as well as civil groups took part in the three-hour exercise yesterday, the sources said, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

China has in recent years stepped up military threats, including the large massing of naval forces this month and daily military activities close to Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own over Taipei's rejection.

The war game held inside the Presidential Office in Taipei was led by Vice-President Hsiao Bi-khim and National Security Council Secretary-general Joseph Wu, said officials familiar with the meeting.

The exercise simulated scenarios including China's "high intensity" grey-zone warfare as well as when the island is "on the verge of conflict" to test response readiness by Taiwan government offices and civil society, a security official familiar with the matter said.

China has staged two rounds of major exercises around Taiwan this year to pressure Taipei, one in May and one in October, dubbed "Joint Sword - 2024A" and B, respectively. — Reuters

Ex-mayor charged for bribery, misuse of political donations

Prosecutors seeking more than 28 years jail term

TAIPEI: Prosecutors here charged a former mayor of Taipei who heads a small opposition party with accepting NT\$17.1 million (RM2.3 million) in bribes over a major property development in the capital and misuse of political donations.

Prosecutors asked for a combined total of more than 28 years in prison for Ko Wen-je, saying he had helped a conglomerate "illegally benefit" to the tune of billions of Taiwan dollars.

He also embezzled tens of millions in political donations, the Taipei District Prosecutors Office said in a statement yesterday.

Ko, mayor from 2014 to 2022 and who came third in January's presidential election, was arrested in August after investigators raided his home and party and questioned him for hours.

The property scandal concerns Core Pacific

City, a redevelopment project that saw its floor area ratio substantially increased — done with the city government's approval which allegedly benefited developer Sheen Ching-jing.

"Ko personally received NT\$15 million as bribe money" given by Sheen in 2022 and pocketed another NT\$2.1 million from his company, deputy chief prosecutor Kao I-shu told reporters.

Sheen had allegedly obtained illegal benefits of more than NT\$20 billion in the Core Pacific City project, a court previously said when ordering Ko's detention.

"Torn up notes were found in Ko's office during the investigation, with instructions for accomplices to flee the country," Kao said.

"His post-offence attitude was also deemed poor."

Reuters was not able to reach Ko for comment, who is currently detained. Ko has previously denied wrongdoing in the property case, which involves approvals given for a shopping centre project when he was mayor.

The Taiwan People's Party (TPP), which was founded by Ko, told a media briefing the

prosecutors failed to offer concrete evidence to support Ko's bribery charges and said it was a "political prosecution" and called for his release.

Ko and several other TPP members were also charged for the misuse of political donations to the party, including embezzling donations of more than NT\$68 million.

He and the TPP have previously acknowledged that campaign funds during the presidential campaign were misreported.

The TPP said Ko did not embezzle any political donations, which it said was used according to Taiwan laws.

Ko has been widely expected to seek the presidency again at the next election in 2028. But opinion polls show that the scandals have hammered support for him and the TPP, which he founded in 2019 in an attempt to create a third force in Taiwanese politics.

The TPP has only eight lawmakers in Taiwan's 113-seat parliament but has an outsized role as neither the ruling Democratic Progressive Party nor the largest opposition party, the Kuomintang, has a majority. — Reuters/AFP

South Korea acting president faces impeachment vote

SEOUL: South Korea's main opposition party said yesterday it would introduce a Bill to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo and hold a vote today, a move that could deepen the country's constitutional crisis triggered by a short-lived martial law.

The opposition Democratic Party had threatened to impeach Han if he does not immediately appoint three justices to fill the vacancies at the Constitutional Court. Parliament voted in favour of three nominees yesterday, but they have yet to be formally appointed by Han.

The court is trying the impeachment of suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol over his Dec 3 declaration of martial law.

"It has become clear that Prime Minister and acting President Han Duck-soo does not have the qualification or the will to safeguard the Constitution," Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae said in a statement.

If Han is impeached, the finance minister will assume the acting presidency. The Democratic Party has majority control of parliament, but there is disagreement between the parties and some constitutional scholars over whether a simple majority or a two-thirds vote is needed to impeach the acting president.

Han said earlier yesterday that he will not appoint the justices until political parties reach agreement on the appointments, because for him

to do so without political consensus will harm constitutional order.

Two of the proposed appointees for the Constitutional Court up for the vote were nominated by the Democratic Party and one by Han's ruling People Power Party. The ruling party objected to the breakdown, saying it had not agreed to it.

Han has been under pressure to make the appointments, but political parties have disagreed on whether he has the authority to do so as acting president.

The court is set to hold its first hearing today in the trial to decide whether to remove Yoon or reinstate him.

Under the constitution, six justices must agree to remove an impeached president, meaning the current justices must vote unanimously to remove Yoon. The court has said it can deliberate without the full bench.

Yoon, who was impeached by parliament on Dec 14 in a vote joined by some members of his centre-right party, has not submitted legal papers as requested by the court as of yesterday, court spokesperson Lee Jean told a media briefing.

On Wednesday, he did not respond to the latest summons for questioning in a separate criminal investigation.

Yoon's repeated defiance has sparked criticism and calls from the opposition for his arrest. — Reuters

Azerbaijan mourns 38 killed in plane crash

► Holes in wreckage point to anti-aircraft missile system

ASTANA: Azerbaijan held a national day of mourning yesterday after a passenger jet from its flag carrier crashed in western Kazakhstan on Christmas Day, killing 38 of the 67 people onboard.

The Embraer 190 aircraft was supposed to fly northwest from the Azerbaijani capital Baku to the city of Grozny in Chechnya in southern Russia, but diverted far off course across the Caspian Sea. It crashed near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan.

An investigation into the causes of the crash is underway, but some aviation and military experts said the plane may have been accidentally shot by Russian air defence systems as it was flying in an area where Ukrainian drone activity had been reported.

Officials condemned "speculation" about what happened.

"We need to await the end of the investigation," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Kazakh Senate speaker Maulen Ashimbayev was quoted by Russia's TASS news agency as saying it was "not possible" to say what may have damaged the plane.

"Real experts are looking at all this and they will make their conclusions. Neither

Kazakhstan, nor Russia, nor Azerbaijan, of course, are interested in hiding information, it will be brought to the public," he said.

But Russian military expert Yuri Podolyaka said holes seen in the wreckage of the plane were similar to the damage caused by "an anti-aircraft missile system".

"Everything points to that," he said. Azerbaijan Airlines initially said the plane flew through a flock of birds before withdrawing the statement.

The airline reported that 67 people were on board the jet - 62 passengers and five crew members.

Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbayev said that 38 people had been killed, while the Kazakh Emergency Situations Ministry reported "29 survivors, including three children".

Eleven of the injured are in intensive care, the Kazakh Health Ministry said.

Azerbaijani state news agency Azertac reported that 12 of the survivors were being flown to Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared yesterday a day of mourning and cancelled a planned visit to Russia for an informal summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a grouping of former Soviet nations.

"I extend my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives ... and wish a speedy recovery to the injured," Aliyev said.

The Flight Radar website showed the plane

deviating from its normal route, crossing the Caspian Sea and then circling over the area where it eventually crashed near Aktau, an oil and gas hub on the eastern shore of the sea.

Azerbaijan Airlines said the plane "made an emergency landing" 3km from Aktau.

The Kazakh Emergency Situations Ministry said its staff put out a fire that broke out when the plane crashed.

It said 150 emergency workers were at the scene.

Kazakhstan said the plane was carrying 37 Azerbaijani passengers, six Kazakhs, three Kyrgyz and 16 Russians.

A Kazakh woman told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that she was near the crash site and rushed to help survivors.

"They were covered in blood. They were crying. They were calling for help," said the woman, who gave her name as Elmira.

She said she saved some teenagers.

"I'll never forget their look, full of pain and despair. A girl pleaded: 'Save my mother, my mother is back there,'" said Elmira.

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation with Aliyev and "expressed his condolences in connection with the crash," his spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a news conference.

A Russian Emergency Situations Ministry team had been sent to Aktau with medical personnel and other equipment, Putin said later as he opened the CIS leaders' meeting in Saint Petersburg. - AFP



Emergency workers at the crash site on Wednesday. - REUTERS/SPIC

Russia wants legally binding peace deal

MOSCOW: Russia sees no point in a weak ceasefire to freeze the war in Ukraine and wants a legally binding deal for lasting peace that would ensure the security of both Russia and its neighbours, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday.

"A truce is a path to nowhere," Lavrov said, adding that Moscow suspected such a weak truce would be simply used by the West to re-arm Ukraine.

"We need final legal agreements that will fix all the conditions for ensuring the security of the Russian Federation and of course, the legitimate security interests of our neighbors," Lavrov said.

He said Moscow wanted the legal documents drafted in such a way to ensure "the impossibility of violating these agreements".

President Vladimir Putin said last week he was ready to compromise over Ukraine in possible talks with US President-elect Donald Trump on ending the war and had no conditions for starting talks with Ukrainian authorities.

Putin said the fighting was complex, so it was "difficult and pointless to guess what lies ahead". "We are moving, as you said, towards solving our primary tasks, which we outlined at the beginning of the special military operation."

Trump, who has repeatedly said he will end the war, said on Sunday that Putin wanted to meet him. Russia says there have been no contacts with the incoming Trump administration.

Trump's Ukraine envoy, Retired Lt-Gen Keith Kellogg, will travel to Kyiv and several other European capitals early next month as the next administration tries to bring a swift end to the Russia-Ukraine war, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter.

"I really hope that the administration of Mr Trump, including Mr Kellogg, will get involved in the root causes of the conflict."

"We are always ready for consultations," Lavrov said. - Reuters

Alarm over south Lebanon destruction

BEIRUT: The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (Unifil) expressed concern at the "continuing" damage by Israeli forces in the country's south despite a ceasefire in the war with Hezbollah.

The truce went into effect on Nov 27, about two months after Israel stepped up its bombing campaign and later sent troops into Lebanon following nearly a year of exchanges of cross-border fire.

The warring sides have since traded accusations of violating the truce.

Under the ceasefire agreement, Unifil peacekeepers and the Lebanese army were to redeploy in south Lebanon, near the Israeli border, as Israeli forces withdrew over 60 days.

Unifil said in a statement yesterday that "there is concern at continuing destruction by the IDF (army) in residential areas, agricultural land and road networks in south Lebanon".

The statement said "this is in violation of Resolution 1701", which was adopted by the UN Security Council and ended the last Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006.

The UN force also reiterated its call for "the timely withdrawal" of Israeli troops from Lebanon, and "the full implementation of Resolution 1701".

The resolution states that Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers should be the only forces in south Lebanon, where Hezbollah exerts control, and also calls for Israeli troops to withdraw from Lebanese territory.

"Any actions that risk the fragile cessation of hostilities must cease," Unifil said.

On Monday the force had urged "accelerated progress" in the Israeli military's withdrawal.

Lebanon's National News Agency reported "extensive" operations by Israeli forces in the south.

It said residents of Qantara fled to a nearby village "following an incursion by Israeli enemy forces into their town". - AFP

Israeli strike kills five journalists in Gaza

GAZA STRIP: A Palestinian TV channel affiliated with a group said five of its journalists were killed yesterday in an Israeli strike on their vehicle in Gaza, with Israel's military saying it had targeted a "terrorist cell".

A missile hit the journalists' broadcast van parked in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, according to a statement from their employer, Al-Quds Today.

It is affiliated with Islamic Jihad, whose gunmen have fought alongside Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The channel identified the five journalists as Faisal Abu Al-Qumsan, Ayman Al-Jadi, Ibrahim Al-Sheikh Khalil, Fadi Hassouna and

Mohammed Al-Lada'a.

They were killed "while performing their journalistic and humanitarian duty", the statement said.

"We affirm our commitment to continue our media message."

The Israeli military said it had conducted "a precise strike on a vehicle with an Islamic Jihad cell inside in the area of Nuseirat".

It said that "prior to the strike, numerous steps were taken to mitigate the risk of harming civilians".

According to witnesses in Nuseirat, a missile fired by an Israeli aircraft hit the broadcast vehicle, which was parked outside Al-Awda

Hospital, setting the vehicle on fire and killing those inside.

The Committee to Protect Journalists' Middle East arm said the organisation was "devastated by the reports that five journalists and media workers were killed inside their broadcasting vehicle by an Israeli strike".

"Journalists are civilians and must always be protected," it said in a statement.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said last week that more than 190 journalists had been killed and at least 400 injured since the start of the war in Gaza.

Israel's military offensive has killed at least 45,361 people in Gaza. - AFP

UNDER ONE ROOF

Q: My 12-year-old daughter follows all of her favourite celebrities on social media and is always checking her phone for Instagram posts and updates. I have noticed that many of these celebrities post racy photos and expletive-filled rants, which concerns me. How should I address this with my daughter?

Focus on the Family Malaysia: The place to start is to have a conversation with your daughter about people in general.

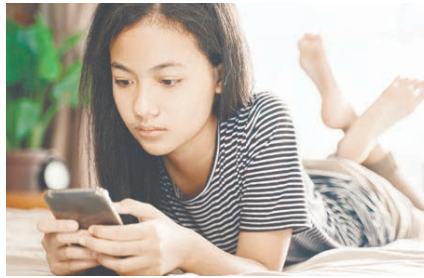
You may have probably done this to some extent. However, discuss about people whose lives are truly worth emulating. Who are some of these individuals? What qualities make someone worth "following"? Name a few names.

Set the bar high on people you admire – both living and deceased – individuals who have selflessly extended themselves for others, giving sacrificially beyond what is considered "normal".

These individuals believe that there is no greater gift than to lay down their lives for someone else. For example, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Albert Einstein.

We all have flaws, and there is no perfect person to model our lives after. However, there are countless individuals who have been exemplary in ways that are worth

Helping children recognise true role models



Help your daughter understand that there is nothing wrong with looking up to others, and ensure she has a clearer roadmap to discovering what these people are truly like on the inside.

emulating.

Your daughter needs to understand that these people are not focused on posing for selfies or gaining fame. They are not posting racy photos or expletive-filled rants.

Instead, they are virtuous individuals of great character, and they stand out culturally because of it.

Help your daughter understand that there is nothing wrong with looking up to others.

However, ensure she has a clearer roadmap to discovering what these people are truly like on the inside, and to identify those who are genuinely making a positive impact today or who made a difference in the past.

Q: As a busy mom with young children, I often have to take them shopping with me. But sometimes, they drive me crazy in the store.

Please help.

Focus on the Family Malaysia: When families shop together, they are valuing the time spent with each other in everyday life.

You may be surprised that many shoppers do not mind being stuck behind a cart steered by a five-year-old – as long as mom or dad is in control. However, some outings can become frustrating if we are not prepared.

Author Karen Ehman offers some helpful tips for shopping with children.

➔ **Feed them first, and avoid hot spots:** Temptations are everywhere. If children are hungry, you may be inviting trouble – let's face it, we all have our "hangry" moments. And if they have not yet learned the difference between needs and wants, it is best to steer clear of certain aisles.

➔ **Build incentive:** Give children a coupon for a special treat ahead of time. If they get through the shopping trip without complaining or misbehaving, they can redeem

the treat.

➔ **Offer financial awareness:** If your older child wants something, discuss the cost with them. If they do not have enough money, brainstorm ways they can earn it.

➔ **Buddy up:** Some stages are tougher than others. Coordinate with another parent who's also struggling to watch each other's children while you take a solo trip to the store.

Most importantly, hang in there. Not every shopping trip will be stress-free but making efforts to guide your children's behaviour can have a lasting impact.

This article is contributed by Focus on the Family Malaysia, a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and strengthening the family unit. It provides a myriad of programmes and resources, including professional counselling services, to the community. For more information, visit family.org.my. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Interim measures on health insurance welcomed

BANK NEGARA Malaysia's (BNM) announcement on Dec 20 regarding interim measures for insurers and *takaful* operators (ITO) to assist policyholders impacted by premium revisions on their medical and health insurance/*takaful* products, along with a call for urgent reforms in the health sector, is welcomed.

The Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy supports the proposed measures, particularly those aimed at protecting policyholders aged 60 and above.

The centre also endorses the development of sustainable health financing solutions to strengthen and ensure the provision of quality healthcare for those in need.

However, this is a temporary measure and it is not intended to be a permanent solution to the problem of healthcare inflation in Malaysia.

Unfortunately, it is the equivalent of kicking the can down the road for three years. The problem of double digit healthcare inflation continues to exist and grow, but for the moment, by capping yearly premium adjustments to less than 10%, there is relief and a reprieve for many people who were trying to decide whether or not to continue with their individual or family insurance or *takaful* policies, especially if they are older and above the age of 60.

The offer of reinstatement for those who have terminated their policies after repricing and not requiring additional underwriting to do so is particularly good and should be commended.

ITO, through their agents, have a duty of care to reach out to their policyholders and advise them immediately to ensure that informed decisions are made on how to proceed.

Though this can be considered a win

for the consumer, if the premium increases are kept under 10% during this period, it calls into question what happens after, especially since healthcare inflation is expected to increase to at least 15% next year.

Will this temporary delay result in an inevitable drastic increase later as the cost of claims continues to skyrocket beyond reasonable estimates?

Insurance and *takaful* products are businesses which need to respond to ground realities, such as the escalating cost of hospital charges which continue to be unregulated. Though this temporary measure is welcomed, the issue of private hospital charges needs to be addressed urgently and decisively.

There is no compulsion, requirement or incentive for private hospitals to work with insurance operators to reduce private hospital charges. Other than the consultant fee, hospital charges are a largely unregulated area.

Generally, the division of a hospital bill is 10% to 15% consultant fee, 20% medicines and the rest covers items such as medical consumables, use of medical devices, diagnostic tests, gloves, use of wheelchairs and kidney dishes and even bed linen.

More than 60% of this bill is currently unregulated and may contribute to the inflationary nature of a hospital stay. This component needs to be reviewed and regulated. These health insurance premium increases do not happen in a vacuum.

We do not believe that it is the responsibility of the consumer, policyholders, patients, their families and communities to reduce medical inflation.

A regulator with a mandate of healthcare consumer protection is needed for this purpose.

We need an independent statutory

commission to regulate the private healthcare sector, particularly hospital charges. A regulator, similar in role and powers to the Malaysia Competition Commission, should be established.

The Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 1998, which currently regulates only doctor and procedure fees, is likely inadequate for this purpose. As such, new legislation should be introduced to enact a Private Healthcare Commission.

The commission could be mandated to independently review charges and fee increases. If the commission finds a rate increase to be unjustified, excessive or unfairly discriminatory, it should be considered unreasonable and would need to be subjected to review and publicly disclosed.

To ensure the commission's effectiveness, relevance and harmonisation of policies, it may also be necessary to transfer the responsibility of regulating health insurance and *takaful* from BNM to this commission.

Currently, caps and thresholds on insurance premiums and hospital charges appear to be determined by the industry rather than regulated.

The Galen Centre agrees to the need for responsible medical and health insurance usage, which would reduce the pressure on premium increases. If premium increases are necessary, they should be reasonable and justified.

The Galen Centre supports a co-payment approach to healthcare, specifically within the context of adopting a national health insurance model. Co-payment in healthcare is important as it ensures the sustainability of the healthcare system.

Azrul Mohd Khalib
Galen Centre Chief Executive

Holiday joy dampened by airport shortcomings

LIKE many Malaysians over the year's end, I recently went on a holiday. The excitement of the trip was palpable but my journey began and ended at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), where I was sadly reminded of how much improvement is needed.

Malaysia's top airport is supposed to be the country's pride. To many visitors, it is the first point of contact upon reaching Malaysian soil. Instead, it felt outdated, inefficient and nowhere near the standards you would expect from a major international airport.

The long wait for the shuttle bus to ferry us to the satellite building can easily dampen any holiday excitement.

While waiting for my flight, I looked up global airport rankings, and the result was disheartening. KLIA was ranked the eighth worst airport by Skytrax in March.

Meanwhile, Singapore's Changi Airport boasts cutting-edge technology, seamless connectivity and world-class amenities. Even Jakarta and Bangkok are surging ahead with aggressive investments in their airports while we seem stuck in the past.

The problem is clear: KLIA and other Malaysian airports urgently need upgrades. This is not just about fixing broken facilities or adding more shops – it is about completely rethinking the airport experience.

From better connections to smoother processes, KLIA must become a place people look forward to visiting, and not avoid.

This is why the proposal led by Khazanah and the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) to take

Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB) private offers hope. By reducing bureaucracy and bringing in expert management, MAHB can focus on transforming KLIA and the 39 airports it oversees.

We need global infrastructure experts who are on top of this competitive industry to move the needle. We need MAHB to be unencumbered by bureaucracy to carry out long-overdue efforts to revive our airports.

It is not surprising that of the top 25 airports ranked by Skytrax for 2024/2025, a majority are not publicly owned. These airport companies are not bogged down by cumbersome bureaucracy that limits their potential.

This is why the plan by Khazanah and EPF to take MAHB private sounds like a good idea. From what I have read, most independent research houses say the RM11 offer to shareholders is fair.

Hopefully, this move will give MAHB the room it needs to focus on improving our airports and make KLIA a place we can all be proud of again.

This deal is Malaysia's best chance to reclaim its spot as a global travel hub. I remember the glowing review KLIA received in the past. It was such a proud moment for Malaysia.

Let us stop settling for mediocrity and give KLIA the revival it desperately needs. As Malaysians, we must support this step forward – for our economy, tourism and pride.

Jacob Song
Kepong



the Sun **LYFE**

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Food galore

Celebrate New Year's Eve in style - P12

WEEKLY FOCUS

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Technology and social media

TUESDAY
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INSIDE **p21** Selangor gears up for big year in tourism **p22** USFDA makes changes to list of healthy foods **p23** Feasts for year-end holiday season

- PIC BY ST REGIS KUALA LUMPUR



Four-course menu at Maria's SteakCafe.



New Year gala buffet dinner at the Brasserie, St Regis Kuala Lumpur.

Dine in style

➤ End 2024 on delicious note with curated experiences to suit every palate

As the year draws to a close, there is no better way to usher in new beginnings than with culinary experiences and festivities. Across Malaysia, premier dining destinations are pulling out all the stops to create memorable New Year's celebrations, combining delectable menus that promise unforgettable moments.

St Regis Kuala Lumpur
St Regis Kuala Lumpur, renowned for its elegance and sophistication, sets the stage for a spectacular New Year's Eve. Enjoy opulent dining experiences, complemented by the sight of Kuala Lumpur's fireworks lighting up the night sky.

Start your evening at The Brasserie with a Gala buffet dinner featuring a selection of festive delights. Guests dining here also gain access to The Reading Room for a private viewing of the midnight fireworks. For a more vibrant setting, head to rooftop restaurant Crystal that is offering a bespoke four-course dinner.

Indulge in luxuries such as the Caviar and Bellini Tower, a premium

seafood platter and the signature BBQ 24-hour Short Rib, all against the city skyline. The celebrations continue at Astor Bar, which hosts the New Year's Eve Countdown Soirée with live entertainment and a refined ambience, while Crystal transforms into a lively countdown party by the pool.

Sunway Resort Hotel
At Sunset Terrace, indulge in a buffet paired with views of fireworks over Sunway Lagoon. Highlights include pineapple-ginger glazed leg of lamb, salmon Coulibiac and other global delicacies. End the meal with a dessert counter filled with festive treats, serenaded by live jazz music.

Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill offers a sophisticated five-course menu featuring premium dishes like confit duck egg, sea trout with caviar, lobster ravioli and Hanwoo beef sirloin. Each dish embodies indulgence and refinement, complemented by a selection of premium wines and artisanal cocktails.

Black Tap Craft Burgers & Shakes brings a slice of New York with a festive platter and live entertainment.

The New Year's Eve Festive Platter is packed with Black Tap favourites such as the all-American burger, crispy chicken sandwich, house salad, crispy Brussels sprouts and salt & pepper wings. Sweeten the experience with the paired classic vanilla and chocolate shakes, as well as two glasses of lemonades.

At the Linkway Cafe, book the Countdown Table Package and enjoy a Celebration Sharing Platter, which features Derby hot browns, Kartoffelpuffer, crabmeat-Stuffed celery and bresaola & melon skewers, festive mocktails, a bottle of Prosecco and party packs to kick off the New Year in style.

Maria's SteakCafe
Usher in 2025 with Maria's SteakCafe's four-course menu, offering a wide selection ranging from steaks, seafood and poultry. Each set begins with truffle angel hair pasta topped with caviar, followed by truffle mushroom soup. The meal culminates in your choice of a main course and ends on a sweet note with a chocolate pudding.

This New Year's Eve and New Year, diners can savour refined options, such as the rich and buttery Wagyu grade MB9 and the prized Japanese Wagyu A5 Miyazaki. For the true connoisseur, the pinnacle of indulgence awaits with the Japanese Kobe A5 Striploin.

Non-steak lovers can savour the NZ lamb cutlet or beef Wellington with foie gras, made with Angus short ribs, wrapped in truffle mushroom



Holiday-themed afternoon tea at St Regis Langkawi.

duxelles and buttery puff pastry. Seafood lovers can indulge in lobster Thermidor, pan-fried atlantic cod, grilled salmon fillet with Mediterranean-style couscous, and seafood spaghetti aglio olio with tiger prawn. The menu also includes a poultry option such as honey mustard chicken.

St Regis Langkawi
Celebrate the season in tropical luxury at St Regis Langkawi. Kayuputi presents an intimate culinary journey with pan-Asian haute cuisine, while Pantai Grill offers an international buffet by the beach. Both venues feature live music and culminate in a stunning fireworks display to welcome 2025.

Imperial Lexis Kuala Lumpur
Welcome the New Year with the Japanese misoka Flavours six-course dinner at Umi Japanese restaurant, featuring dishes like datemaki, wagyu Saikoro steak and Inaniwa udon, or go for the five-course dinner at Poolside Bistro with dishes such as Canadian oysters, Hokkaido scallops and Australian wagyu sirloin steak.

For those seeking vibrant nightlife, enjoy the chic Poolside Countdown Soirée or celebrate at Satellite Restaurant & Bar's NYE countdown party on Dec 31.

As we toast to new beginnings, let us celebrate the joy of flavours that make life truly special.



(Left) A lavish buffet spread at Sunway Resort Hotel.



(Right) Six-course dinner at Umi Japanese restaurant, Imperial Lexis KL.



Ninja Van Malaysia offers SMEs cost-effective solutions

► Company delivers flexible system that scales according to business size and need, ensuring that clients pay only for what they use

BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Domestic small and medium enterprises continue to face challenges when adopting data-driven and automated logistics solutions.

One major obstacle is the high cost of implementing technology, as many SMEs operate with limited resources and find it difficult to invest in expensive logistics software and infrastructure.

To address SMEs' logistical issues, Ninja Van Malaysia offers cost-effective solutions that scale according to business size and need. This ensures that businesses pay only for what they use.

"Through our system, SMEs gain full visibility into their operations, enabling them to track shipments in real time. Automated reports provide actionable data on performance, helping businesses identify inefficiencies and plan their next steps. These insights empower SMEs to make informed decisions, streamline their supply chains, and enhance operational efficiency," Ninja Van Malaysia CEO Lin Zheng told *SunBiz*.

He said Ninja Van Malaysia is transforming traditional restocking processes by leveraging e-commerce expertise and agile logistics capabilities.

With a flexible approach and an extensive fleet, the company enables businesses to resupply efficiently with lower minimum volume requirements. This adaptability allows businesses to expand into underserved rural and semi-urban markets, Lin said.

"Automation plays a key role in enhancing delivery reliability. By optimising routes and strategically placing inventory hubs, Ninja Van Malaysia minimises transit times and ensures faster deliveries, even during peak seasons or unexpected market shifts.

"Additionally, the automated sort centre in Shah Alam has increased parcel processing capacity by over 50%, enabling the company to meet rising demand more effectively."



Lin says Ninja Van Malaysia is transforming traditional restocking processes by leveraging e-commerce expertise and agile logistics capabilities.

Lin said the integration of automation and data analytics has significantly improved customer experience at Ninja Van Malaysia by streamlining logistics operations, making them faster, more reliable and transparent.

He said real-time data and automation provide customers with accurate delivery timelines, reduced delays, and seamless communication throughout shipping. This expertise, honed in e-commerce, has also been extended to the traditionally manual restocking segment.

"Looking ahead, SMEs can expect increased integration of advanced analytics and AI across all operational touchpoints. Ninja Van Malaysia's integrated data systems will provide real-time tracking, predictive analytics, and insights into supply chain trends.

"This proactive approach will help businesses anticipate challenges, enhance supply chain resilience, improve communi-

cation with suppliers and retailers, and adapt swiftly to market changes, fostering long-term growth and stability," Lin said.

Meanwhile, Budget 2025 marks a crucial step in encouraging SMEs to adopt smart logistics solutions, with strong support for sustainability and digital transformation, he said.

The 60% investment tax allowance for smart logistics activities is expected to drive the adoption of advanced technologies like energy-efficient vehicles, route optimisation software, and delivery planning tools, reducing fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, the RM3.8 billion allocated for digitalisation and automation will enable SMEs to integrate innovative digital tools and automation systems.

"This support will enhance efficiency, foster sustainable practices, and position businesses for long-term growth in an increasingly eco-conscious market," Lin said.

Ministry to expand, enhance Green Electricity Tariff programme in 2025

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of Energy Transition and Water Transformation's (Petra) Green Electricity Tariff (GET) programme, launched in 2021, will be enhanced in 2025 to meet user needs better and support the government's renewable energy goals.

The initiative offers electricity generated from renewable sources to Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) customers who are committed to reducing their carbon footprint.

In a statement, Petra said for 2025, a minimum quota of 6,600 gigawatt-hours (GWh) will be available at the same premium rates, with 10 sen/kWh for low-voltage users and 20 sen/kWh for medium- and high-voltage users.

New long-term subscription options will also be introduced, allowing users to subscribe to GET until 2027. This will provide businesses with greater certainty in their planning for green electricity usage.

Further, the GET programme for 2025 will introduce several updates to enhance its appeal and sustainability.

Subscribers will not incur Imbalance Cost Pass-Through charges for actual energy usage, ensuring green electricity remains unaffected by fuel price fluctuations.

Subscription options will open on March 1, 2025, with backdated subscriptions available from Jan 1, 2025, and will include a lock-in period until Dec 31, with automatic renewal unless cancelled by users.

Additionally, long-term plans will be introduced, allowing subscriptions of up to three years with discounted premium rates: 10 sen/kWh for one year, 9 sen/kWh for two years, and 8 sen/kWh for three years for low-voltage users, and 20 sen/kWh, 19 sen/kWh, and 18 sen/kWh, respectively, for medium- and high-voltage users.

Early termination will be allowed, subject to a termination fee of 2 sen/kWh for unused quotas.

Petra said revenue generated from the programme would be used to support the nation's energy transition efforts, including initiatives like the Solar for Rakyat Scheme (Solaris).

Since its inception, the GET programme has supplied 9,400 GWh of green electricity to over 3,000 users, helping them fulfil environmental, social, and governance commitments, particularly in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Encouraged by strong uptake and international recognition, Petra, in collaboration with the Energy Commission, has reviewed the programme's operations and principles to maintain user confidence.

Malaysia's livestock industry trade rises to RM1.4 billion in 2023

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's total trade in the livestock industry grew 23.2%, or RM254.7 million, to RM1.4 billion in 2023, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM).

In the Malaysia Trade Statistics Review 2024, DoSM said the growth reflected the increasing demand for livestock and related products to meet domestic consumption and industrial needs.

The review synthesises Malaysia's

trade performance for the livestock industry, focusing on selected livestock such as chicken, eggs, cattle, sheep, goat, duck and swine.

Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin said the livestock industry in Malaysia has shown significant growth and resilience over the years, contributing substantially to the agricultural sector.

"The poultry sector, particularly chicken and eggs, remained the largest contributor to the livestock subsector,

playing a pivotal role in meeting the protein needs of Malaysians. The value of chicken exports is RM26.7 million in 2023, an increase of 27% or RM154.4 million as compared to last year," he said in a statement yesterday.

Mohd Uzir said egg production in Malaysia continued to exhibit strong performance, exporting RM671.2 million worth of eggs in 2023 and catering to the demands of regional markets.

He said the ruminant industry in

Malaysia is dominated by the external sector, where the value of imports for live cattle surged to meet domestic consumption, with the import value increasing from RM82.8 million in 2022 to RM108.7 million in 2023.

"The import value of livestock for sheep and goats reached RM27.2 million in 2023, with Australia and Indonesia remaining as the primary exporters to Malaysia. Malaysia's trade of swine improved significantly from RM141.7 million in 2022 to an

impressive RM179.1 million in 2023."

Mohd Uzir said Singapore continued to be the main export destination for Malaysia's livestock products, contributing 96.4% of total livestock exports, followed by Vietnam and Brunei as key export destinations.

"The top countries of origin for livestock imports were Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, collectively accounting for 84.8% of Malaysia's total livestock imports," he added. - Bernama

Airei leads M'sian palm oil sector into tech-driven future

► Champions sustainable practices, leverages transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics

BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Airei Sdn Bhd aims to propel the Malaysian palm oil industry to the forefront of global innovation by championing sustainable practices and integrating transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics.

"We aim to redefine how the industry operates while minimising its environmental impact," founder and CEO Surendran Kuranadan (*pic*) told *SunBiz*.

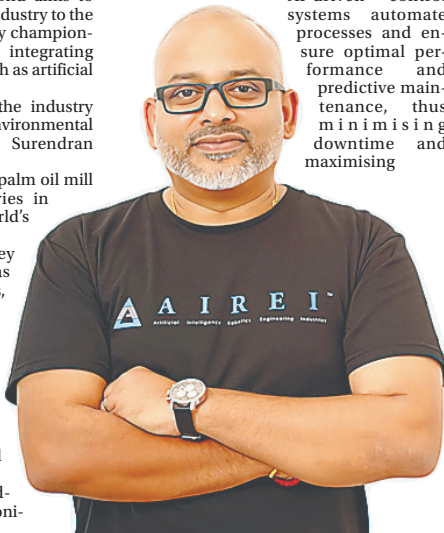
He said the AI-driven smart palm oil mill launched at Minsawi Industries in Kuala Kangsar, Perak, is the world's first of its kind.

The facility addresses key industry challenges such as labour dependency, rising costs, inefficiencies, and environmental concerns. Powered by Airei's flagship platform, MyPalm, it combines advanced sensors, AI-driven control systems, predictive maintenance, and AI-powered closed-circuit television (CCTV) to revolutionise mill operations and sustainability.

MyPalm incorporates advanced sensors for real-time monitoring

of critical parameters and AI-powered CCTV for tracking fresh fruit bunch volumes and enhancing quality control.

AI-driven control systems automate processes and ensure optimal performance and predictive maintenance, thus minimising downtime and maximising



machinery efficiency. Collectively, they drive operational excellence, cost reduction, and environmental sustainability.

Surendran said the smart mill's automation features initially reduce labour dependency by 35%, streamlining operations and allowing the workforce to focus on more skilled tasks. This shift alleviates labour shortages and improves overall productivity.

"Sustainability is at the core of our mission. By leveraging AI and other advanced technologies, we aim to reduce the environmental impact of palm oil production. Our solutions promote energy efficiency, optimise resource use, and enhance traceability, contributing to a greener future for the industry," Surendran said.

When asked about the collaboration with Brazil-based Fine Instrument Technology to enhance Airei's offerings, Surendran said the partnership brings SpecFIT magnetic resonance technology into MyPalm.

"This integration enhances traceability, precision, and efficiency, strengthening our ability to tackle industry challenges and positioning Malaysia as a global leader in sustainable palm oil practices.

"This launch is a wake-up call for the industry to embrace change. By adopting AI-driven solutions like MyPalm, we can enhance efficiency, improve quality control, and foster sustainability. It is time for the industry to evolve, balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship for a brighter future," Surendran said.

Jan 9 economic forum to chart priorities, policies for next year

KUALA LUMPUR: The government is set to organise the Malaysian Economic Forum (FEM2025) on Jan 9 to chart Malaysia's priorities and policies for 2025.

According to the Minister of Economy, Rafizi Ramli, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is expected to deliver a keynote address at the forum.

"FEM2025 will see a gathering of stakeholders from various sectors to discuss issues such as innovation and technology, investment opportunities in Malaysia, Malaysia's role as the Asean chairman and the strategies to deal with global economic challenges," he said

in his Facebook post yesterday.

According to the FEM2025 website, this annual event will track the medium-term progress of the government's initiatives and set the narrative for the coming year.

"With Malaysia assuming the chairmanship of Asean in 2025, 'Seizing Malaysia's Moment' recognises the country's inherent strengths to seize the opportunities that lie ahead," it said, adding that the one-day forum will gather influential leaders from academia, industries, and government.

Notable speakers will include Anwar; Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah

Yusof; Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz; Minister of Finance II Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan; Bank Negara Malaysia governor Datuk Seri Shaik Abdul Rasheed Abdul Ghaffour; and Bursa Malaysia chief executive officer Datuk Muhamad Umar Swift.

"With topics ranging from fiscal and monetary policies, technology to education reforms, each panel will also include a Malaysian Minister. The ministers' policies, combined with insights by expert panellists, will foster dynamic dialogue and spark new ideas," it said. — Bernama

Bright Packaging to enhance capabilities, strengthen global presence in 2025

PETALING JAYA: Bright Packaging Industry Bhd has disclosed its strategic focus for 2025, emphasising enhanced operational capabilities and a fortified global presence.

Executive deputy chairman Nik Mustapha Muhammad said despite navigating a challenging landscape in 2024, marked by geopolitical conflicts, the company has demonstrated resilience and remains committed to growth.

Nik Mustapha highlighted that Bright Packaging's reputation for premium-quality tobacco and liquor packaging continues to be a cornerstone of its success.

"With longstanding relationships with major customers like Philip Morris, Diageo, Unilever and Procter & Gamble, the company remains a trusted partner in the supply chains of global household and luxury brands. Its specialised services, including lamination, coating, and metallised film lamination, distinguish it as a

leader in the industry," he said in the company's annual report filed with Bursa Malaysia.

He said a key driver of Bright Packaging's success is its ability to meet stringent quality standards imposed by its customers.

"These standards, combined with the industry's capital-intensive nature, create significant entry barriers for competitors. This unique position has enabled the company to maintain its market leadership and secure long-term growth opportunities," he added.

Nik Mustapha noted that the company's products reach more than 15 countries, including Russia, Germany, Australia and China, ensuring a global footprint that supports the packaging needs of fast-moving consumer goods.

Bright Packaging's operational excellence ensures that its products, often associated with household and luxury brands, play a pivotal role

in shaping its customers' product image, he said.

In financial year 2024, Bright Packaging reported revenue of RM52.5 million, a decline from RM61.9 million in 2023. However, the company's gross profit improved significantly, increasing to RM8.5 million from RM7.7 million in the previous year. The growth reflects the company's ability to optimise its operations and adapt to shifting market conditions despite external challenges.

Bright Packaging's net profit stood at RM2.6 million in 2024, with earnings per share (EPS) of 1.25 sen. This compares to a net profit of RM5.4 million and EPS of 2.45 sen in 2023, primarily due to higher unrealised foreign exchange losses amounting to RM1.7 million.

The company maintained a robust financial position, with other financial assets and cash reserves totalling RM52.3 million and a healthy net working capital of RM73.7 million.

Mastic in tripartite partnership to advance STI data management, analytics

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Science and Technology Information Centre (Mastic), the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (Kisti) and the International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation under the auspices of Unesco (Istic) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to advance science, technology and innovation (STI) data management and analytics.

The tripartite collaboration underscores the commitment of Mastic, Kisti and Istic to enhance global STI ecosystems through thorough data analysis and the establishment of a comprehensive repository.

The MoU reflects a shared vision to harness STI for informed policymaking, strategic innovation, and socioeconomic development. It outlines a strategic partnership focused on building a modern STI data repository to enable seamless data access and sharing.

The objective is to enhance data analysis capabilities that facilitate evidence-based decision-making in STI policy. Additionally, it seeks to develop initiatives focused on capacity-building in the areas of big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and computational technologies. Furthermore, it promotes collaborative research and innovation projects that align with both national and international priorities.

Mastic deputy director Karen George Abraham, representing the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation at the MoU signing ceremony, emphasised the importance of the initiative, stating that the partnership signifies a pivotal step in transforming Malaysia into a hub for STI data-driven decision-making.

"By leveraging data analytics and repository systems, we aim to support innovation and policy development on both national and regional levels," she said.

The collaboration will include activities such as establishing a centralised STI data repository, organising workshops and training programmes on advanced data analysis methodologies, sharing expertise and technologies to improve STI data management systems, and conducting joint studies and projects to explore emerging trends in STI.

Kisti president Dr Lee Sik expressed his optimism on the collaboration with Mastic and Istic to drive advancements in STI through data excellence. "Together, we will build a future where science and technology fuel sustainable development," he said.

Istic chairman Professor Dr Mohd Basyaruddin Abdul Rahman said the collaboration is a milestone in fostering South-South cooperation.

Looking ahead, Nik Mustapha said Bright Packaging is poised to invest further in operational efficiency and innovation.

"By leveraging its existing strengths and fostering deeper customer relationships, the company aims to sustain its market leadership and drive future growth. Plans to enhance capabilities, streamline processes, and expand its portfolio underscore its commitment to delivering greater value to customers worldwide."

Nik Mustapha noted that Bright Packaging, with its resilient foundation, strong financial position, and clear strategic vision, is well-positioned to thrive in 2025.

"As it continues to adapt to evolving market dynamics, the company remains focused on creating long-term value for stakeholders and strengthening its role as a key player in the global packaging industry," he said.

TIV for new vehicles in 2025 seen **falling** to 755,000 units

► Decline due to potential removal of RON95 subsidy and revision to open market value calculations: CIMB Securities

KUALA LUMPUR: The total industry volume (TIV) for new vehicle sales is expected to decline by 4% year-on-year to 755,000 units in 2025, compared with 790,000 units in 2024, according to CIMB Securities Sdn Bhd.

In a research note, it said the decline is impacted by headwinds such as the potential removal of the RON95 petrol subsidy in mid-2025 and a possible revision of the open market value (OMV) calculation method that would effectively increase the excise duty.

Citing the Malaysian Automotive Association, the research house said the OMV calculation revision could raise the average selling prices of locally assembled vehicles by 8% to 20%, though the implementation has been extended until Dec 31, 2024.

OMV refers to the total value of the locally assembled vehicle at the ex-factory stage.

"Despite these challenges, removing the RON95 subsidy could accelerate the adoption of battery electric vehicles (BEVs).

"We also anticipate higher BEV adoption in 2025 driven by new model launches, new entrants, and rising competition among electric vehicle players ahead of the duty exemptions for imported models ending in 2026, after which domestic assembly will take precedence," it said.

CIMB Securities noted that demand for national brands like Proton and Perodua is expected to remain robust, supported by first-time buyers and the mass-market segment, in addition to the government's plan to retain subsidies for 85% of RON95

users under Budget 2025.

"As a result, we expect national brands to maintain their dominance, capturing a 65% market share versus 35% for non-national brands in 2025," it added.

Meanwhile, CIMB Securities projected a 3% net profit growth for the automotive sector in 2025, reversing the 23% contraction in 2024, mainly driven by Sime Darby's higher earnings from UMW, increased equipment sales and rentals, and a recovery in its China motors division due to improved cost control and economic rebound.

"Additionally, our economist forecasts potential ringgit strengthening against the US dollar in 2025, driven by expected interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.

"This currency tailwind could further support net profit growth for the automotive sector in 2025," it said.

Hence, CIMB Securities has maintained a "neutral" rating on the sector due to a subdued growth outlook amid intensifying market competition. - Bernama

Southern Cable wins RM173m cable, conductor delivery contract

KUALA LUMPUR: Southern Cable Group Bhd's (Southern Cable) wholly owned subsidiary Southern Cable Sdn Bhd, has been awarded a RM172.57 million contract to supply and deliver cables and conductors in East Malaysia.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, Southern Cable said the contract will run for 24 months, from Dec 20, 2024, to Dec 19, 2026.

"The contract is expected to contribute positively to the earnings of the group over the duration of the contract," the filing said.

The contract is part of Southern Cable's regular business operations, and the associated risks are considered normal operational risks, similar to those encountered in similar projects.

Further, Southern Cable said this contract is not expected to significantly impact the company's and its subsidiaries' net assets or gearing for the financial year ending Dec 31, 2024.

"However, it is anticipated to contribute positively to the group's earnings throughout the contract's duration," it said in the filing.

Crescendo's landbank supports strong earnings outlook: Mercury Securities

KUALA LUMPUR: Crescendo Corporation Bhd (CCB) is poised to capitalise on further lucrative land sales at a premium (vis-a-vis its low acquisition costs), driven by the strong demand for data centre infrastructure in Johor.

Mercury Securities Sdn Bhd said with about 27 acres of landbank remaining in Nusa Cemerlang Industrial Park (NCIP), CCB's earning visibility is supported by yet-to-be-recognised profits from land sale deals in NCIP.

This includes RM115.9 million from 20.5-acre land sales and RM120.1 million from another 18.4-acre land sales in December.

Beyond NCIP, the company still has a total land bank of 2,468 acres across Johor, with 43% or 1,065 acres strategically located within Iskandar Malaysia.

"With the robust property demand in Iskandar Malaysia driven by the development of the Johor-Singapore

Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ), we think this should augur well for CCB," the research said in a report.

Mercury Securities said in the first half of FY25 (H1'25), CCB's property development and construction division contributed 88% of the total revenue, with 75% coming from land sales related to data centre projects in NCIP.

Even excluding these land sales, CCB's core profit from property development still surged by a remarkable 170% YoY.

Upcoming launches include mid-to-high-end landed properties and shop offices in Bandar Cemerlang with a GDV of RM237 million, a 1,200-unit serviced apartment near the JB-SG RTS station with a GDV of RM1 billion, and an industrial park development in Bandar Cemerlang.

Mercury Securities said CCB is currently trading at an attractive adjusted price-to-book (P/B) ratio of 0.9x

post share split, with a strong net cash position of RM238.4 million and a comfortable gearing level of 0.1x.

"As of H1'25, CCB has declared a total dividend of RM50.3 million or 6sen on a split-adjusted basis, which we think has room for more, given the active ongoing land sales. We note that management has also started to do share buybacks since Nov 18," the research firm said.

Mercury Securities said the stock consolidated after hitting its 52-week high, forming a bullish falling wedge pattern.

"The return of trading interest pushed the stock higher and initiated a pattern breakout.

"Supported by the pattern breakout, the stock is now set to test its first resistance at RM1.50.

"A breakout above this level could form a stage for the stock to revisit its 52-week high at RM1.61," the research firm said.



CCB's property division generated 88% of revenue, 75% from NCIP data centre land sales. - AFPPIX

EDUCATION

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Taiwan blocks Uber-Foodpanda merger

TAIPEI: Taiwan has rejected Uber's plan to buy Delivery Hero's Foodpanda on the island, stating yesterday that the deal would significantly harm market competition.

The US ride-hailing giant was aiming to acquire Foodpanda Taiwan by the first half of 2025 for US\$950 million (RM4.2 billion), merging the top two players in Taiwan's food delivery market.

"If Uber acquires Foodpanda, it will be completely unrestrained by competition," Taiwan's Fair Trade Commission (FTC) vice-chairman Chen Chi-ming told a press conference.

"The disadvantages to market competition from this merger far outweigh its economic benefits," Chen said, adding the merged companies' market share would exceed 90%.

"No corrective measures could sufficiently ensure competition would be maintained."

Uber had described the deal, announced in May, as one of Taiwan's largest international deals outside the semiconductor industry.

Chen said the FTC conducted an economic analysis to assess the merger's impact on competition, and received over 600 responses from food delivery platforms and relevant agencies.

Taiwan's delivery trade union welcomed the FTC's decision, with spokesman Su Po-hao saying it secures "greater benefits for the future of the food delivery industry".

The union had argued that the merger would have created a monopoly and led to widespread losses for delivery riders, vendors and consumers.

The companies have also reached a separate agreement for Uber to buy US\$300 million in newly issued ordinary shares of Delivery Hero, according to May's statement. - AFP

China's cautious consumers rent, rather than buy

➤ New forms of demand are boosting consumption: State media

BEIJING: China's domestic demand is gathering pace as cautious consumers increasingly choose to rent items from cameras to handbags rather than buying them, the official *People's Daily* said, though government data tell a different story.

The rise of the "rent, not buy" model has injected new impetus into the world's second-largest

economy, the newspaper said in an upbeat commentary, flagging a trend that provides businesses with a "new perspective".

As China's domestic demand weakened this year, reluctance to spend has fed a boom in rentals, with internet platforms letting consumers hire a drone, for example, at 1 yuan (RM0.63) a day, versus a typical cost of more than 5,000 yuan.

For 35 yuan, one can get a "99% new" Louis Vuitton handbag, a listing on a popular app showed.

New forms of demand are giving rise to new consumption formats with "huge" potential, the paper said.

State media typically talk up China's consumption outlook even

when government data flag a more sobering trend.

Retail sales of consumer goods grew just 3.5% in the period from January to November compared with a year earlier, statistics show, as a low-base effect that helped boost 2023's post-pandemic retail sales by 7.2% faded.

To spur consumption, China launched a trade-in scheme this year offering subsidies for purchases when consumers trade in old appliances, bicycles and even cars.

Officials say sales surpassed one trillion yuan this year under the programme, "unlocking" a wave of consumption yet to show up in government data.

China has leaned heavily on

manufacturing and exports this year, with household demand deep in the doldrums as a years-long real estate slump depressed consumer wealth and confidence.

Economists have urged Beijing to take a more consumer-focused turn in its policies.

At a meeting this month, top officials of the ruling Communist Party said China ought to "vigorously" boost consumption next year and seek to expand domestic demand "in all directions".

"With the development of (China's) economy and society, the trend of consumption upgrading is obvious," the *People's Daily* said.

"But both are not advancing in step." - Reuters

L'Oreal acquires South Korea's Dr.G in skincare deal with Migros

PARIS: French cosmetics giant L'Oreal said it had agreed to buy Gwooonsesang Cosmetics, which includes South Korean skincare brand Dr.G, from Swiss retailer Migros.

The Korean beauty market is dominated by local brands known for being among the world's most innovative, and increasingly popular overseas as part of a trend for "K-Beauty".

Dr.G will meet rising demand for K-Beauty and effective yet affordable skincare, L'Oreal said in a statement, adding it has a growing pan-Asian presence and global growth potential.

"We have been following the brand and its success for many years

and we look forward to accelerating its growth in South Korea and the rest of the world," said L'Oreal's consumer products division global president Alexis Perakis-Valat.

Reuters reported earlier this month that L'Oreal and Migros were in final talks on a deal.

Migros announced a strategic review of its Mibelle cosmetics group in February, saying it wanted to find a new home for the owner of Gwooonsesang and other brands.

L'Oreal did not give a valuation for the deal, which comes amid a slowdown in China, previously one of the fastest-growing beauty markets.

In 2018, it acquired South Korean makeup firm 3CE. - Reuters



The L'Oréal logo is seen on a company building in Paris. - REUTERS/SPIC

India's small businesses drive jobs growth, wage gains curbed by inflation



Goods are transported on a cart driven by a bull covered with a blanket at a wholesale market on a cold winter morning in New Delhi. - REUTERS/SPIC

NEW DELHI: India's small businesses spanning the manufacturing, trade and services sectors added about 11 million jobs in the year to the end of September, with total employment rising to 120.6 million from 109.6 million the previous year, though wage growth was limited by high inflation.

Job creation remains a major challenge for Prime Minister Narendra Modi despite the economy growing at an average annual rate of more than 7% over the last decade, and unemployment among young people remains persistently high.

The number of small manufacturing businesses, mainly family-owned units such as garment makers, auto component makers and food processing enterprises, grew to 20.15 million in the 2023/24 year from 17.83 million the previous year, the government report showed.

Meanwhile, the total number of small businesses across trade, services and manufacturing grew to 73.4 million from 65 million a year earlier.

The survey covers the period

from October 2023 to the end of September this year.

"The unincorporated non-agricultural sector, comprising small manufacturing, trade and other services, plays a crucial role in the economy ... contributing significantly to employment," said Saurabh Garg, secretary at the Ministry of Statistics, while releasing the findings of the annual report.

During the survey period, the number of small businesses grew by 12.84%, while employment showed robust growth of more than 10%, Garg added.

However, wages were affected by inflation.

The average annual wage in nominal terms per hired worker rose 13% in 2023/24 to 141,071 rupees (RM7,400), reflecting a modest increase compared with annual retail inflation of about 5.5%.

Wages at small businesses, often located in rural areas and urban slums, remain much lower than the national average per-capita income of about US\$2,800 (RM12,500). - Reuters



The robo-crypto bull statue is seen at the Miami Dade College Wolfson campus in the US state of Florida. – AFPIC

Crypto insiders push Trump to take action on day one

► Industry seeks bitcoin stockpile, banking access and special council

SAN FRANCISCO: The cryptocurrency industry is pushing President-elect Donald Trump's team to kick start his promised crypto policy overhaul when he takes office next month with executive orders that would help push tokens mainstream, according to industry officials.

Trump plans to issue a flurry of executive orders and directives on everything from immigration to energy on his first day in office on Jan 20, Reuters reported this month.

On the campaign trail, Trump courted crypto cash with promises to be a "crypto president", and the industry wants him to make good on that pledge with executive orders creating a bitcoin stockpile, ensuring the industry can access banking services and creating a crypto council, the people said.

They are pushing for those executive orders within Trump's first 100 days in office, and expect at least one could come on Jan 20, said two other people with knowledge of the matter.

"Given the tenor of the campaign, it would be imperative for executive orders to really set out what the actual priorities will be on day one and provide some kind of roadmap," said Rebecca Rettig, chief legal and policy officer at crypto company Polygon Labs.

Worried about crime and volatility, President Joe Biden's regulators cracked

down on crypto companies, but Trump has pledged to reverse course.

His crypto policy team is already taking shape, with the announcement this month of crypto-friendly Securities and Exchange Commission chairman Paul Atkins and White House crypto czar David Sacks.

"There has been an effort in the Washington bureaucratic swamp to stifle innovation ... but President Trump will deliver on his promise to encourage American leadership in crypto," Trump transition team spokesman Brian Hughes said in a statement.

Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, hit new records above US\$107,000 (RM478,000) this month after Trump reiterated his plan, first unveiled in a speech in July, for a strategic bitcoin reserve.

Bitcoin has since fallen back below US\$100,000.

Analysts are divided on whether Trump could use executive powers to create the reserve, potentially via the Treasury Department, or whether an act of Congress would be necessary.

One industry group, the Bitcoin Policy Institute, has gone as far as to draft a text of a potential executive order Trump could use to establish such a stockpile.

That draft would designate bitcoin as a strategic reserve asset and require the Treasury secretary to spend US\$21 billion over a year to amass a national bitcoin stockpile, according to the draft seen by Reuters.

Zack Shapiro, the Bitcoin Policy Institute's head of policy, said the United States should get ahead of geopolitical rivals in monetising bitcoin, "rather than have the price run up without the US having any reserves".

He declined to say if the group had shared

the draft with Trump's team.

Trump also said in July that he would not let banks "choke" crypto firms out of the traditional financial system, and some executives expect he will also try to address that issue with an executive order.

Crypto companies have long complained that banks will not work with them due to regulatory scrutiny, although regulators say banks are free to lend to crypto firms that follow the law.

While an executive order directing bank regulators to go easy on crypto would send a signal to agency officials and provide them with political cover, it is unlikely to have legal force since federal bank regulators are independent, some executives warned.

"(They) are not going to change policy on the ground on day one," said Jonah Krane, partner at financial firm Klaros Group.

"But they will tell you what direction this administration wants to head."

Trump has also said he will create a crypto industry council and his team is discussing how to structure and staff it.

Previous administrations have stood up specialised councils via executive orders, executives noted.

More broadly, Trump could also try to address crypto complaints that existing regulations are not fit for the industry with an executive order articulating core principles for crypto regulation, similar to an order Trump issued in 2017 directing regulators to review banking rules.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you get something like an executive order early on that directs the agencies to re-examine their rules in this space," Krane added. – Reuters

Fed announces major changes to bank stress tests

WASHINGTON: The US Federal Reserve said it was considering major changes to its annual bank "stress tests" in light of recent legal developments, including allowing lenders to provide comment on the models it uses, in a major victory for Wall Street banks.

The Fed said it may also allow lenders to provide input on the hypothetical scenarios it uses for the annual bank health checks, and that it may also average results over two years to reduce annual volatility in how much capital banks must set aside to absorb potential losses.

The Fed created bank "stress tests" following the 2007-2009 financial crisis to assess whether big lenders could weather an economic shock.

They are core to the US capital regime, dictating how much cash lenders must put aside to absorb losses, and how much they can return to shareholders.

The Fed said the proposed changes were not designed to affect overall capital requirements, but followed recent court rulings that have significantly changed the framework of administrative law in recent years, the Fed said.

"The Board analysed the current stress test in view of the evolving legal landscape and determined to modify the test in important respects to improve its resiliency."

In June, the Supreme Court dealt a major blow to federal regulatory power by overturning a 1984 precedent that had given deference to government agencies in interpreting laws they administer.

The precedent the court overturned arose from a ruling involving oil company Chevron that had called for judges to defer to reasonable federal agency interpretations of US laws deemed to be ambiguous.

While the 2010 Dodd-Frank law passed following the crisis broadly requires the Fed to test banks' balance sheets, the capital adequacy analysis the central bank performs as part of tests – the resulting capital it directs lenders to set aside – is not mandated by law. – Reuters

Musk's AI startup raises further US\$6b

PARIS: Billionaire tech mogul Elon Musk's startup xAI said it had raised US\$6 billion (RM27 billion) from investors in its latest funding round, as it battles stiff competition in the artificial intelligence market.

The firm, whose flagship product is the Grok chatbot, garnered support from US venture capitalists, chipmakers Nvidia and AMD, and investment funds from Saudi Arabia and Qatar among others.

Musk has repeatedly warned that AI poses a risk to human civilisation, but he is pushing hard for a bigger slice of investment in the sector and xAI already raised US\$6 billion in May.

The company is now one of the world's most valuable startups with an estimated US\$50 billion valuation, though still dwarfed by chief competitor OpenAI's estimated US\$157 billion.

Despite the sky-high estimates, critics have pointed out that AI firms are burning through cash and still have no clear path to profitability.

Announcing the funding this week, xAI said it would use the cash injection to "ship groundbreaking products that will be used by billions of people".

It would also "accelerate the research and development of future technologies enabling the company's mission to understand the true nature of the universe".

Musk, who also acts as boss of SpaceX and Tesla and is a chief backer of US president-elect Donald Trump, wrote on his X account that "a lot of compute is needed" to power AI products.

He launched the company in July 2023 shortly after he signed an open letter calling for a pause in the development of powerful AI models. – AFP



UK seeks industry views on EV sales targets

► Consultation follows warnings that current plan could lead to factory closures and job losses

LONDON: Britain began a consultation this week to review rules that force automakers to produce more electric vehicles (EVs), following industry warnings that the current plan could lead to factory closures and job losses.

The consultation will take views from the industry on changing the so-called Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which requires automakers to sell a higher proportion of EVs each year, or pay fines.

Carmakers say lower-than-expected EV demand has forced them to spend billions of pounds on discounts to entice customers and

meet the sales targets, which have hurt Britain's appeal as a manufacturing hub.

Last month, Vauxhall owner Stellantis said it would shut a van factory in southern England, risking more than 1,000 jobs, partly reflecting the impact of the ZEV mandates.

Britain's Labour government said it would consult to update the targets without compromising the overall direction of the regulations, which form part of Britain's wider climate goals.

The consultation will seek views on the restoration of a 2030 deadline to phase out new

petrol and diesel car sales and whether vehicles such as hybrid cars can be sold alongside ZEVs.

It will also consider measures to boost consumer demand for electric vehicles.

"We are steadfast in our mission to help our world-leading automotive industry thrive, and this consultation will look at how we can support manufacturers, investors, and the wider industry to reach their targets," Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said.

The auto industry welcomed the consultation, which runs until Feb 18.

"With the 2025 market looking under even greater pressure, it is imperative we get an urgent resolution, with a clear intent to adapt the regulation to support delivery, backed by bold incentives to stimulate demand," Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders chief executive Mike Hawes said. – Reuters

Fiserv bets on gig economy financing with Payfare deal

SAN FRANCISCO: US fintech firm Fiserv will buy Canada's Payfare in a \$201.5 million (RM625 million) deal as it looks to expand payments offerings for gig economy workers, the companies said.

The transaction follows Payfare's strategic review of its business, initiated shortly after it revealed that its agreement related to DoorDash's DasherDirect card programme would not be renewed beyond early 2025.

The disclosure had wiped off 75% of Payfare's value in a day.

Fiserv's offer values Payfare stock at \$4, a 90% premium to its last closing price, but is way below the stock price before the DoorDash announcement.

Acquiring Payfare will allow Fiserv to expand its footprint in a fast-growing market.

Gig economy workers often approach digital banking platforms for funds during unforeseen financial emergencies, especially if they lack enough savings.

The deal, expected to close in the first half of next year, could also mark one of the final undertakings by Fiserv CEO Frank Bisignano, who has been picked by President-elect Donald Trump to head the Social Security Administration.

Payfare's partners include some of the most recognisable gig economy platforms such as ride-hailing firms Uber and Lyft.

"The deal is consistent with Fiserv's intent to lean into embedded finance," TD Cowen analysts said.

"Fiserv has announced key wins in recent months and this acquisition will further its technology offering."

The number of transactions processed by fintech providers, in partnership with employers to allow employees early access to their wages, grew more than 90% year-over-year in 2022, according to an estimate by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in July. – Reuters

ECB proposes EU-wide disaster insurance system

PARIS: The European Central Bank (ECB) and the EU's insurance regulator published this week a proposal to create a European-wide system to better respond to the costs of natural catastrophes.

Scientists believe that natural disasters will increase in frequency and severity as global temperatures rise, but currently only about a quarter of damages due to natural catastrophes in the EU are covered by an insurance policy.

With such scant coverage leaving people, businesses and governments exposed to major economic risks, the ECB and the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) proposed a two-pronged solution.

The first would be to create an EU-wide reinsurance scheme for natural catastrophe coverage to help expand availability and ensure affordability.

"By pooling private risks and perils across the EU, this scheme would exploit economies of scale and diversify the coverage of high risks at the European level," they said in a statement.

The second element would be to create an EU-wide fund to help member states rebuild public infrastructure following natural disasters.

"Recent events in Europe have shown the challenges the EU and its member states are facing in dealing with natural catastrophes," EIOPA chairman Petra Hielkema said.

"This calls for coordinated action."

Reinsurer SwissRe earlier this month estimated that intense flooding in Europe caused US\$10 billion (RM45 billion) in insured losses this year, pointing to the major floods in Central Europe in September. – AFP



A worker walking past an assembly of eDrives, used in a variety of Ford EVs, at the Ford Halewood transmissions plant in Liverpool, Britain. – REUTERS/SPIC

Investors swoop in to save German flying taxi startup

FRANKFURT: A German flying taxi startup was saved from collapse after a consortium of investors swooped in at the 11th hour to take over the ailing firm.

Lilium had already filed for bankruptcy in October, and was expected to fold entirely this week unless it could secure new sources of funding.

But the startup, which has been developing small electric-powered jets that can take off and land vertically, announced a "major breakthrough".

Mobile Uplift Corporation, a company set up by a consortium of European and North

American investors, had signed a deal to buy the assets of the crisis-hit German company, Lilium said.

Lilium, which is based in the southern state of Bavaria, did not disclose the price of the deal.

The agreement is expected to be finalised at the start of January, which will "allow us to restart our business", Lilium CEO Klaus Roewe said.

Lilium had attracted substantial interest, with Saudi Arabia's flag carrier Saudia earlier this year signing a deal to buy 50 of the firm's jets with options to purchase 50 more.

But it has yet to conduct a manned test flight, with the first such trial not expected until next year,

and burnt through huge sums in development costs.

It was forced to turn to the state for emergency funding but the German Parliament's budget committee refused in October to approve a loan guarantee to the tune of €50 million (RM232 million).

Lilium was founded in 2015 and employed more than 1,000 people, although most were made redundant ahead of this week's deadline to get new investors on board.

The company is facing tough competition, including from aviation giants Airbus and Boeing, to develop flying taxi technology. – AFP

MARKET ROUND-UP: DECEMBER 26

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 26 Dec 2024

Participation

- Retail**
Net (in RM million): -87.48 **26.47%**
- Institutions**
Net (in RM million): 112.47 **46.56%**
- Foreign**
Net (in RM million): -24.99 **26.97%**

Source: Bursa Malaysia
Preliminary stats (excluding trade amendments). For final data, please refer to www.bursamalaysia.com
Detailed version available at our Facebook Page iPacOnline

iPhone 16 Giveaway! Find out more at our Social Media channels!

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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	12,379.50	+96.70
FBMVKLI	1,613.70	+10.71
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	545.47	+6.20
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	173.35	+2.97
CONSTRUCTION	301.42	+1.39
FINANCIAL SERVICES	18,958.30	+74.59
ENERGY	822.18	+7.12
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	540.48	+5.63
HEALTH CARE	2,332.12	+11.14
TRANSPORTATION	1,050.06	+12.23
PROPERTY	1,098.10	+15.06
PLANTATION	7,541.11	+32.43
FBMSHA	12,353.40	+115.83
FBMACE	5,333.36	+51.80
TECHNOLOGY	64.91	+0.81
TURNOVER: 2.467 bil		VALUE: RM1.885 bil

Persistent buying leads Bursa to close broadly higher

BURSA Malaysia sustained its bullish momentum to finish on a firm note yesterday, supported by persistent buying interest amid positive sentiment across the board, said an analyst.

At 5pm, the benchmark FBM KLCI rose 10.71 points or 0.67% to 1,613.70 compared with Tuesday's close of 1,602.99.

Bursa Malaysia was closed on Wednesday in conjunction with Christmas.

The market bellwether opened marginally higher by 0.59 of-a-point at 1,603.58, and moved in an upward trend from its intraday low of 1,602.79 during the morning session to a high of 1,615.28 in the late afternoon trading.

The broader market was also positive, with gainers thumping decliners 692 to 295, while 499 counters remained unchanged, 936 were untraded and 17 suspended.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors' head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan attributed yesterday's performance to buying interest in blue-chip stocks during the window dressing period.

"Market sentiment was further supported by Wall Street's extended gains on Tuesday, with technology stocks leading the advance and bolstering investor optimism.

"However, trading volume remained subdued at 2.4 billion units as many investors continued to observe the Christmas holiday period," he told Bernama.

Among heavyweights, Maybank rose four sen to RM10.12, Public Bank eased one sen to RM4.54, CIMB added seven sen to RM8.04, Tenaga Nasional gained 10 sen to RM14.18, and IHH Healthcare climbed 12 sen to RM7.20.

For active stocks, Zen Tech and Sarawak Cable were both flat at half-a-sen and 14 sen respectively, JCY perked 3.5 sen to 56 sen, SNS Network firmed 10 sen to 67 sen, and Vanzo rose 2.5 sen to 20.5 sen.

Top 20 Actives				
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
ZENTECH	0.005	-	-	1,506,678
JCY	0.560	0.035	6.67	803,545
SNS	0.670	0.100	17.54	745,387
VANZO	0.205	0.025	13.89	621,938
YTL-C79	0.025	-0.005	-16.67	417,904
HM-R1	0.015	-	-	397,632
SCABLE	0.140	-	-	300,987
GENM	2.240	0.050	2.28	281,351
YTL-C98	0.070	-0.005	-6.67	245,106
GTRONIC	0.605	0.030	5.22	243,409
YTLPOWR-C64	0.075	0.005	7.14	234,830
YTL	2.630	0.030	1.15	232,075
TWL	0.025	-	-	229,801
YTLPOWR-C53	0.020	0.005	33.33	228,284
TOPGLOV	1.320	-	-	221,571
WINSTAR	0.645	0.005	0.78	216,705
CEB	0.375	0.015	4.17	206,471
PUC	0.045	-	-	203,242
VELESTO	0.155	0.005	3.33	200,968
GENETEC	1.330	0.030	2.31	188,176



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
UTDPLT	30.600	0.600	3,014
MPI	25.960	0.480	678
SCIENIX	4.570	0.340	6,537
ALLIANZ-PA	20.800	0.300	25
FBMVKLI-HA3	0.500	0.265	1
HIND	14.440	0.260	373
ARKA	1.680	0.230	299
ALLIANZ	20.520	0.220	254
PETDAG	19.580	0.200	614
PCHEM	4.890	0.170	24,681
AJI	15.380	0.160	116
PPB	12.340	0.160	2,272
GENTING	3.820	0.150	126,024
MBMR	6.010	0.140	6,328
RVIEW	3.200	0.140	25
IHH	7.200	0.120	14,681
PMETAL	4.800	0.120	19,514
AEONCR	6.320	0.110	6,435
MAGNI	2.530	0.110	3,914
PENTA	4.160	0.110	7,038

Top 20 Gainers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DRBHCOMC3H	0.015	200.00	7,900
JCY-C17	0.015	200.00	9,454
MBSB-C72	0.015	200.00	110
SIMEPROP-C35	0.025	150.00	20,073
FBMVKLI-C43	0.500	112.77	1
CFM-WA	0.010	100.00	7,050
CTOS-C12	0.010	100.00	200
DRBHCOMC3E	0.010	100.00	480
GENM-C2V	0.010	100.00	120
GENM-C2Z	0.030	100.00	1,891
GENTINGC31	0.020	100.00	2,000
GTRONIC-C34	0.010	100.00	200
MI-C22	0.010	100.00	1,000
SNS-CD	0.065	85.71	14,050
SNS-CC	0.045	80.00	39,419
DRBHCOMC3I	0.035	75.00	1,000
HENGYUANC57	0.035	75.00	11,251
SNS-CB	0.035	75.00	7,689
ASOCHIN-CG	0.050	66.67	22
SNS-CA	0.050	66.67	24,215

World Stocks/Commodities			
INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	43,297.03	+390.08	+0.91
S&P 500 (US)	6,040.04	+65.97	+1.10
NASDAQ (US)	20,031.13	+266.25	+1.35
NYSE (US)	19,341.48	+134.37	+0.70
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	4,857.86	+4.93	+0.10
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,136.99	+34.27	+0.42
DAX (GER)	19,848.77	-35.98	-0.18
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	39,568.06	+437.63	+1.12
TOPIX (JPN)	2,766.78	+32.92	+1.20
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	20,098.29	+215.16	+1.08
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,987.48	+1.85	+0.05
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,398.08	+4.73	+0.14
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,429.67	-10.85	-0.44
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	181.75	+0.26	+0.14
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,220.86	+19.28	+0.24
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,471.55	+18.85	+0.22
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	78,465.69	-7.18	-0.01
FBM KLCI	1,613.70	+10.71	+0.67
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,764.10	-5.45	-0.14
WTI (US\$/BBL)	70.45	+0.35	+0.50
BRENT (US\$/BBL)	73.91	+0.33	+0.45
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,642.30	+6.80	+0.26
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	30.23	-0.05	-0.17
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	940.19	-6.17	-0.68
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	409.40	-1.60	-0.39
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	8,950.50	38.50	0.43
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	448.50	+0.75	+0.17
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	534.75	-5.75	-1.06
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	40.30	-0.36	-0.89
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	11,852.00	+106.00	+0.90
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	194.40	-0.60	-0.31

As at 5pm, Dec 26

Top 20 Losers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	97.540	-0.260	139
AYER	7.250	-0.250	252
CHINAETF-MYR	4.680	-0.150	50
BYD-C32	0.015	-0.135	55
BKAWAN	20.020	-0.100	55
CARLSBG	20.680	-0.100	46
PANAMY	17.500	-0.100	130
YINSON	2.600	-0.100	15,908
HIBISCS-C72	0.065	-0.085	4,160
MAHSUNG-C73	0.065	-0.085	300
APOLLO	6.430	-0.070	284
GCE	0.365	-0.065	50
SPS00-H51	0.450	-0.055	754
EWINT	0.275	-0.050	30,520
MCEMENT	4.890	-0.050	5,694
SHL	2.350	-0.050	108
TGL	1.050	-0.050	10
GAMUDA-C2W	0.150	-0.045	8,287
GESHEN	3.910	-0.040	82
HEIM	23.620	-0.040	224

Top 20 Losers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
BYD-C32	0.015	-87.10	55
HSI-CY8	0.005	-85.71	3,816
HSI-PWBA	0.005	-75.00	5,151
DAYANG-C44	0.020	-60.00	3,447
HIBISCS-C72	0.065	-56.67	4,160
MAHSUNG-C73	0.065	-56.67	300
BORNOIL-WD	0.005	-50.00	2,215
BORNOIL	0.005	-50.00	25,938
EAH	0.005	-50.00	766
KGROUP	0.005	-50.00	4,127
PERMAJU-PA	0.005	-50.00	21,006
WEGMANS-WC	0.005	-50.00	4,262
MLAB-WD	0.015	-40.00	194
EKOVEST-C65	0.035	-36.36	537
FBMVKLI-HM8	0.035	-36.36	1,400
EKOVEST-C67	0.020	-33.33	10,000
FAST-WA	0.010	-33.33	62
JTIIASA-CX	0.010	-33.33	4,800
PARLO-WA	0.010	-33.33	1,436
TOPGLOV-C4K	0.010	-33.33	5,473

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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Bursa seeks feedback on amendments to BMD rules

KUALA LUMPUR: Bursa Malaysia has issued a consultation paper seeking public feedback on the amendments to the Rules of Bursa Malaysia Depository Sdn Bhd (BMD).

In a statement, the exchange said these amendments aim to facilitate Bursa Malaysia's move towards embracing further digitisation in the issuance of securities account statements to depositors (CDS statements), as part of the exchange's broader commitment to environmental sustainability.

Bursa Malaysia said the proposed amendments aim to provide CDS statements through the MyBURSA portal, offering depositors easier and more convenient access.

Hard copy statements will still be available for a fee or under exceptional circumstances for depositors with a valid need for them.

"The proposed amendments also mandate that all issuers with securities deposited in the BMD keep their information current.

"Additionally, all parties governed by the BMD rules must ensure they provide accurate and complete information to the BMD," Bursa Malaysia noted.

The exchange said these requirements are crucial to ensure the highest standard of data integrity and transparency.

"The proposed amendments above are part of the exchange's ongoing commitment to enhance operational efficiencies and sustainable practices while ensuring that the BMD rules remain fit to serve the needs of investors and stakeholders," it said.

Further details on the proposed amendments are available at https://www.bursamalaysia.com/regulation/public_consultation.

Interested parties are invited to submit their comments to Bursa Malaysia by Feb 14, 2025.

Ringgit rises against dollar, supported by higher oil prices

THE ringgit finished stronger against the US dollar yesterday, supported by rising oil prices which benefitted Malaysia as an oil exporter.

At 6pm, the ringgit rose to 4.4670/4715 versus the greenback from 4.4845/4900 at Tuesday's close.

The ringgit has outperformed other Southeast Asian currencies year to date by posting nearly a 2.8% gain against the US dollar.

As of the time of writing, Brent crude had breached US\$74 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate stood above US\$70 per barrel, supported by expectations of increased demand from China following news of new stimulus measures along with a decline in US crude inventories by 3.2 million barrels last week.

It was reported that Chinese authorities will issue a record US\$411 billion in special treasury bonds next year as Beijing increases fiscal stimulus to revive its struggling economy.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said that expectations of a global economic rebound are likely to drive higher oil demand, thereby supporting the ringgit.

The ringgit continued to trade higher against other major currencies.

It appreciated versus the Japanese yen to 2.8373/8405 from Tuesday's close of 2.8547/8586, firmed against the British pound to 5.5967/6023 from 5.6209/6278, and rose vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6448/6495 from 4.6603/6660.

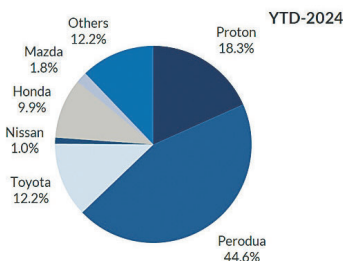
The local note performed better against most Asean currencies.

It improved versus the Singapore dollar to 3.2875/2913 from 3.2979/3024 at the previous close, and rose against the Thai baht to 13.0340/0543 from 13.1283/1517. - Bernama

Exchange Rates			
FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5360	4.4000	4.3900
1 Australian Dollar	2.8470	2.7320	2.7160
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3390	3.2410	3.2330
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1570	3.0700	3.0580
1 Euro	4.7240	4.5680	4.5480
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5740	2.4770	2.4610
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3390	3.2410	3.2330
1 Sterling Pound	5.6980	5.5170	5.4970
1 Swiss Franc	5.0780	4.8590	4.8440
100 UAE Dirham	124.9400	118.4400	118.2400
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8750	3.6070	3.4070
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.5800	59.9100	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.9000	59.7000	59.5000
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.0300	56.0700	55.8700
100 Indian Rupee	5.4100	5.0800	4.8800
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0290	0.0262	0.0212
100 Japanese Yen	2.8880	2.7940	2.7840
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.9000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.0400	37.6800	37.4800
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6600	1.5500	1.3500
100 Philippine Peso	7.8500	7.3900	7.1900
100 Qatar Riyal	125.7900	119.4200	119.2200
100 Saudi Riyal	122.1200	115.9300	115.7300
100 Norwegian Krone	25.1400	22.6900	22.4900
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5800	1.4500	1.2500
100 Swedish Krona	42.2800	38.4900	38.2900
100 Thai Baht	13.8700	12.2900	11.8900

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Auto & Autoparts Neutral



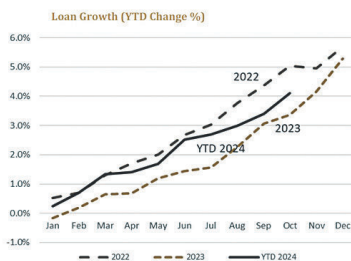
Source: RHB Research, Company data

IN November, the MAA recorded a TIV of 67.5k units, which took YTD TIV to 731k units – up 1.4% YoY from 11M'23's numbers. TIV weakened MoM in November, with the major carmakers charting softer numbers. This was led by Toyota, which saw a 6.7% MoM decline in sales volume, followed by Perodua (-5.7%) and Proton (-5%). Honda, meanwhile, recorded a 12.7% MoM rise. YTD, Perodua has sold close to 326k units and is well on course to surpass its 2023 sales level of 330,325 units, which will mark another record-breaking year for the national carmaker. Total production volume or TPV fell 14% MoM and 10% YoY to 60.9k units in November, bringing 11M24 TPV to 724.8k (+2.3% YoY). The MoM decline was seen across the major marques – Proton (-21%), Perodua (-9%), Toyota (-19%) and Honda (-7%).

Generally, the performances of the auto sector players met expectations, as both SIME and MBM Resources (MBM) met our forecasts. Meanwhile, results from Tan Chong Motor (TCM) and BAUTO fell short of our estimates. SIME started off its FY25 (June) with a 11% YoY rise in Q1'25 earnings, mainly contributed by the consolidation of UMW's numbers into its bottomline. MBM's net profit improved QoQ – as expected – given higher Perodua sales volumes (the national carmaker had two planned factory maintenance shutdowns in Q2). TCM, on the other hand, concluded its 9M'24 with widening losses while BAUTO's 1H'25 (April) earnings fell 42% YoY due to weak sales delivery (-46% YoY).

Our Top Picks are still BAUTO (attractive valuation, higher-than-sector-average dividend yield) and SIME (well-positioned for the RON95 rationalisation, with its broad EV line-up). - RHB Research, Dec 26

Banking Overweight



Source: TA Research, Bank Negara Malaysia

WE anticipate loan growth of 6.4% in 2025, with consumer loans remaining a key driver, bolstered by a resilient labour market, supportive policies, and steady consumer demand. Business and SME loans are also expected to gain momentum, driven by robust manufacturing, technology, and construction activity. With that, we forecast healthy net interest income (NII) growth of 5.3% and 5.1% YoY in CY25 and CY26, respectively, driven by healthier loan growth and stable net interest margins (NIM). Income from Islamic Banking Operations is projected to rise by 6.3% and 6.7% YoY over the same period.

Loan growth has been accelerating steadily. According to the latest October 2024 data, loans expanded at a robust 6.0% YoY, with YTD growth at 4.1%. This marks a significant improvement compared to October 2023, which saw loan growth of 4% YoY and 3.4% YTD. Consumer loans remain the backbone of loan growth, rising 6.4% YoY and 5% YTD. The YTD loan growth aligns with our 2024 forecast of 6.3% and reflects resilient consumer demand.

Business loans also showed marked improvement, growing at 5.4% YoY and 2.8% YTD, a notable recovery from the 1.4% YoY and 1.7% YTD recorded in October 2023. However, overall business loan growth continues to fall short of our full-year projection of 5.9%. Contributing factors include geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and Ukraine, China's slower-than-expected market recovery, uncertainty around US interest rate cuts, and volatility from the recent US presidential elections. Despite these challenges, the strengthening growth momentum suggests a positive trajectory, with consumer demand and selective business recovery leading the charge. - TA Research, Dec 26

Petronas Chemicals Group Bhd Outperform. Target price: RM5.47



Source: Kenanga Research

PETROCHEMICAL prices appear to run in 3-to-4-year cycles. Historical price trends of LLDPE and HDPE (polyolefins) reveal a recurring 3-year boom-and-bust cycle. For instance, prices entered a bearish phase in 2019-2020, falling to approximately US\$700/mt during the Covid-induced economic recession. However, by 2021, prices surged to a peak of US\$1,380/mt. Similarly, polyolefin prices experienced a 2-year downturn in 2016-2017, followed by a significant spike in 2018. This cyclical pattern highlights the industry's sensitivity to macroeconomic trends and supply-demand dynamics and will typically fare better in the third year of the market cycle.

Based on historical trends, 2025 marks the third year of the polyolefin price cycle, suggesting a potential uptrend. Adding to this, the US ISM Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) has been in a downturn since 2022, consistently hovering below the 50 level during 2023 and 2024, indicating prolonged contraction in industrial activity. The positive PMI trend has been moving in tandem with the YoY improvement in polyolefin prices, hence we believe investors should look out for a potential inflection point in 2025.

We believe that the share price (-33% since May 2024) has priced in the bear case scenario for PIC loss which we assume at an estimated RM780 million due to weak polyolefin-olefin spreads, implying an EBITDA breakeven scenario at 80% utilisation for FY15F. That aside, we hold a slightly more bullish outlook on its olefin & derivatives division with a price assumption of US\$1,150/mt on the back of the business cycle thesis, arriving at a FY25 PER of 12.9x, significantly below its 5-year average (15.7x).

OUTPERFORM with RM5.47 TP. - Kenanga Research, Dec 26



Spectacular fireworks display.



Aizat (in red) performing the official theme song, together with VSY 2025 mascot Spark the Firefly and other VIPs.



Amirudin taking a memorable selfie with concert goers.

Govt launches Visit Selangor Year 2025 with festival, concert

➤ State allocates RM8m budget, eyes 8m tourists by 2025 to generate RM11.7b in tourism receipts

TOURISM Selangor, the official tourism promotion agency of the Selangor state government, has launched Visit Selangor Year (VSY) 2025 under the tagline Surprising Selangor, targeting to attract 8 million tourists by the end of 2025.

The VSY 2025 campaign was launched by Selangor Chief Minister Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari and took place during the VSY 2025 Festival and Concert, a three-day event from Dec 20 to 22 at Setia City Park, Setia Alam.

Attracting over 5,000 visitors, the festival offered a platform to celebrate Selangor's rich culture, natural landscapes and wide array of attractions. This event was made possible with Tourism Selangor's partners Cuckoo, Anbot Store, Shah Alam Municipal Council and Courtyard by Marriott Setia Alam.

A standout moment of the launch was the free-entry concert last Saturday, where Tourism Selangor introduced the VSY 2025 mascot Spark the Firefly and unveiled the campaign's digital portal visitselangor2025.my. It also presented the official theme song performed live by Aizat Amdan. The captivating performance, accompanied by an electrifying flash mob, set the tone for an unforgettable year-long celebration.

The event featured performances by artists such as Cakra Khan, Amy Search, Meng Spring, Zubir Khan, Suki Low and more. Visitors also enjoyed a diverse lineup of activities, including an energetic pound workout, the Love Food Festival with 70 booths offering 60 viral Selangor delicacies, a tourism exhibition, lucky draws and a spectacular fireworks display. These highlights celebrated Selangor's rich cultural heritage, culinary delights



Tourism Selangor inks a MoU with Avis Malaysia to launch the Squad Visit Selangor Year 2025 initiative.

and leisure experiences.

Selangor's Exco of Local Government and Tourism Datuk Ng Suee Lim said VSY 2025 marks a pivotal milestone in the Selangor First Plan, concluding in 2025. To support the campaign, the Selangor state government has allocated RM8 million in its 2025 budget, funding various initiatives including iconic events such as Art of Speed Malaysia and the Selangor Travel Fair, grants for local tourism operators and extensive marketing efforts locally and internationally, to position Selangor as

a premier travel destination.

"This RM8 million allocation underscores our commitment to boosting Selangor's tourism sector as a key driver of economic growth. Through this investment, we aim to attract 8 million tourists by 2025, generating an estimated RM11.7 billion in tourism receipts and creating new job opportunities throughout the state.

"In support of VSY 2025, we have reduced the entertainment tax to foster a vibrant arts and culture scene, granting local artists duty-free status throughout the year. This

Aizat performing the official VSY 2025 song *Surprising Selangor*.



MoU between Tourism Selangor and Cuckoo enables the company to contribute to the vibrant tapestry of Selangor's tourism industry.

initiative not only encourages greater tourist inflow but also promotes Selangor as a hub for arts, culture and entertainment," said Ng.

The Visit Selangor Festival included the exchange of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Tourism Selangor and Cuckoo International (Mal) Bhd, designating Cuckoo as the official healthy home creator for the Visit Selangor 2025 Campaign. This partnership aligns with Cuckoo's commitment to fostering Malaysians to be #SamaSamaHealthier and

enables the company to contribute to the vibrant tapestry of Selangor's tourism industry, as well as bringing lasting positive impacts to the people of Selangor. The MoU exchange at the festival sets the stage for even more initiatives from Cuckoo in 2025 that Malaysians can eagerly anticipate.

Tourism Selangor has also joined forces with Avis Malaysia by signing an MoU to launch the Squad Visit Selangor Year 2025 initiative. This mobile campaign will navigate through key public spaces in Selangor and other states, introducing the state's diverse attractions to a wider audience such as government offices, tourism attractions, public spaces and more.

Ng said Tourism Selangor's efforts will continue throughout 2025, with a series of engaging events designed to sustain momentum and highlight the state's diverse attractions.

Key destinations such as in northern and southern region of Selangor will be featured prominently as part of the year-long campaign, inviting visitors to explore the many wonders of Selangor.

"Through our continued collaboration with local municipal councils and tourism operators, we are committed to providing hospitality and tailored experiences for both domestic and international visitors," he added.



Special performance by Cakra Khan during VSY 2025 Concert and Festival.



ARIES
Mar 21 – Apr 19
Your professional aspirations are gaining exciting momentum. Opportunities for advancement may present themselves and your determination will be key in seizing them. Stay focused on your goals but remember to balance work with much-needed relaxation to avoid burnout. Channel your energy into constructive actions.



TAURUS
April 20 – May 20
Fresh starts and positive transformations are on the horizon. Personal and professional growth opportunities abound, encouraging you to bravely step out of your comfort zone. Embrace these changes with an open mind and adventurous spirit. Trust the process and your unique talents.



GEMINI
May 21 – June 20
Significant relationships and financial matters take centre stage this weekend. It is a good time to evaluate your partnerships, ensuring they align with your long-term objectives. Open communication will be essential in navigating any challenges that arise.



CANCER
June 21 – July 22
The emphasis is on cooperation and trust within your significant relationships. Working together towards shared goals will strengthen your bonds and understanding. Take time to listen deeply and understand your partner's perspective, fostering harmony and mutual respect.



LEO
July 23 – Aug 22
Balancing work and personal life is crucial for well-being. Implementing a structured routine and committing to healthy habits can enhance your efficiency and happiness. Remember to allocate time for self-care amid your busy schedule.



VIRGO
Aug 23 – Sep 22
This week encourages you to wholeheartedly pursue your heart's desires. Engage in creative activities, hobbies or pursuits that bring you joy and inspiration. Allowing yourself to indulge in these passions will lead to personal fulfilment, emotional balance and rejuvenation.

Your weekend horoscope

Snack bars out, salmon in

US revamps 'healthy' food labels

THE United States has redefined what qualifies as "healthy" food for the first time in 30 years, striking items like white bread from the list while welcoming nutrient-rich options such as eggs and salmon, officials said.

The move comes against the backdrop of a growing domestic crisis of preventable, diet-related chronic diseases, which experts warn demand immediate action.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also announced it is developing a new symbol to help manufacturers quickly signal to consumers that a food meets the "healthy" criteria.

"Diet-related diseases, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes, are the leading cause of disability and disease in the US and contribute to America's status having the lowest life expectancy amongst large high-income countries," senior FDA official Jim Jones told reporters last week.

Alarming statistics highlight the urgency of the issue: 77% of Americans exceed recommendations for saturated fat intake, 63% surpass limits for added sugars, and a staggering 90% consume too much sodium.

Nearly 80% fall short on



Salmon is among the items added to the US FDA list of healthy foods. - PEXELSPIC

dairy, fruits and vegetables.

"The healthy claim has been updated to help ensure that consumers have access to more complete, accurate and up-to-date nutrition information on food labels," added Jones.

Under the new rules, foods labeled as "healthy" must contain a meaningful amount of one or more food groups recommended by the FDA's dietary guidelines, such as vegetables, proteins, dairy or grains.

They must also stay within specific limits for saturated fat, sodium and added sugars.

Not all fats are created equal, emphasised Claudine Kavanaugh of the FDA. When the original rule was introduced in the 1990s, "the focus was on lowering all fats. Today, the emphasis is on reducing saturated fats while recognising the benefits of healthy fats."

This shift means avocados,

nuts, seeds, high-fat fish, eggs and olive oil now qualify as "healthy."

Conversely, sugary fruit snacks, heavily sweetened snack bars, fortified breakfast cereals and yoghurt or fruit punch high in added sugars - all of which previously earned the label - no longer make the cut.

Once introduced, the new symbol will serve as "a quick signal to empower consumers, including those less familiar with nutrition information, to identify foods that are the foundation of a healthy eating pattern," said Kavanaugh.

The FDA has not, however, provided a timeline for when the symbol will be ready.

President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to lead the health department, Robert F. Kennedy Jr, has shown a strong interest in promoting healthy food and eating habits, with the issue to remain in focus. - AFP

F&B campaign leverages *Squid Game 2*

TO celebrate the release of *Squid Game* Season 2, Foodpanda Malaysia and Tealive have partnered for a campaign featuring limited-time drinks, snacks and interactive activities.

The campaign launched with an event in Bukit Bintang, where fans enjoyed free drinks, spicy *budae* popcorn chicken and photo opportunities with *Squid Game*-inspired elements like pink guards and Netflix's MRT makeover featuring the iconic Young-hee doll.

Fans can enjoy *Squid Game*-themed drinks like Honey Toffee Cream Cloud Macchiato and limited-edition cooler bags available in Tealive stores and via Foodpanda delivery. Experience the excitement of this limited-time *Squid Game* campaign through Tealive stores or by ordering on Foodpanda.



Foodpanda riders with the pink guards and Young-hee doll.



LIBRA
Sep 23 – Oct 22
Reflection on your past, family and home life is particularly beneficial.

Consider making positive shifts that enhance your domestic environment and relationships. Creating a harmonious and supportive space will provide a solid foundation for future endeavours.



SCORPIO
Oct 23 – Nov 21
Engaging in new experiences will broaden your horizons and offer fresh perspectives.

Stay open to the knowledge and insights that come your way. Embrace curiosity and adaptability as your guiding principles for growth.



SAGITTARIUS
Nov 22 – Dec 21
Financial matters take precedence as you focus on stability. It is an ideal time to

review your budget and seek ways to increase your prosperity. Prudent financial planning now can lead to greater security, long-term opportunities and peace of mind. Stay disciplined in your spending.



CAPRICORN
Dec 22 – Jan 19
You are stepping confidently into the spotlight. Assert your goals and embrace your

authenticity with determination. Confidence in your abilities will attract the recognition and support you deserve. Use this time to make significant strides toward your aspirations.



AQUARIUS
Jan 20 – Feb 18
This reflective period emphasises mental health, rejuvenation and clarity. Taking time

for introspection and mindfulness will be especially beneficial. Engage in activities that promote relaxation and balance to prepare yourself for the busy times ahead.



PISCES
Feb 19 – Mar 20
Social activities, collaboration and networking are important this week. Setting new

and exciting goals with friends or groups can be deeply fulfilling. Collaborative efforts will lead to meaningful connections and shared achievements. Your compassionate nature will shine through in group settings.

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

THE end-of-year holidays are the time to indulge in beloved dishes that bring family and friends together. Most gatherings this week will feature Christmas favourites to reflect the seasonal mood.

From savoury classics to sweet treats, these traditional holiday foods add warmth, nostalgia and joy to the festive season. Whether you are hosting a large gathering or enjoying an intimate celebration, here are 10 traditional festive foods to make your holiday celebration unforgettable.

Eggnog

Nothing says festive season quite like a glass of creamy, spiced eggnog. This iconic holiday beverage is made from a base of milk, cream, sugar and eggs, infused with warming spices like nutmeg and cinnamon. Eggnog is versatile too - it can be served warm or chilled, depending on your preference. For adults, a dash of rum, brandy or bourbon adds an extra festive kick. Originating as a winter drink in Europe, eggnog has become a holiday tradition across the world, warming hands and hearts alike.

Roast turkey

A centrepiece of many year-end meals this week, roast turkey is a dish that brings a sense of grandeur to any table. Prepared with care, this large bird is often stuffed with a mix of herbs and aromatics like thyme, sage and rosemary, which infuse the meat with deep, earthy flavours as it cooks. Served with a rich, homemade gravy, roast turkey is as delicious as it is iconic. Its crispy, golden skin and juicy, tender meat make it a beloved holiday staple. Leftovers can also be transformed into sandwiches, soups, or even a turkey pot pie, perfect for post-Christmas meals.

Roasted potatoes

No festive season meal is complete without a side of roasted potatoes. Crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside, these golden bites are a crowd-pleaser that pair well with any holiday main dish. Traditionally, they are tossed with olive oil, garlic



These classic dishes, essential to holiday feasts, are deeply woven into the holiday's cultural traditions. - PICS BY FREEPIK

Holiday classics

➤ 10 dishes for delightful year-end feasts



Flavourful and herbal, stuffing goes well with turkey or chicken. - PIC FROM YOUTUBE @MYFOODBOOK

and herbs like rosemary, which add a fragrant, savoury touch. Some families take it up a notch by adding duck fat or goose fat for an extra-crispy finish. Roasted potatoes are versatile and easy to make. Their warm, hearty flavours make them a good match for turkey or ham.

Christmas pudding

Rich, dense and packed with flavour, Christmas pudding is a traditional British dessert that is usually made

weeks or months in advance to allow the flavours to develop fully. This steamed pudding is filled with dried fruits, nuts and spices. It is often doused in brandy for a rich, decadent taste. Many families enjoy the ritual of pouring brandy over the pudding and setting it alight before serving, creating a dramatic and festive presentation. Topped with a dollop of custard or brandy butter, Christmas pudding is an indulgent way to end the holiday meal.



Eggnog is creamy, spiced drink that is a holiday classic.



Sweet, spiced and bite-sized mince pies.



Cranberry sauce is tangy holiday essential. - PICS BY PEXELS



Roast turkey is usually the centrepiece of any festive meal.



Sweet, savoury and beautifully caramelised honey-glazed ham.



Roasted potatoes are crispy and golden, the ultimate holiday side.



Brussel sprouts are nutty and crispy when deliciously roasted.

Honey-glazed ham

For many families, honey-glazed ham is a mainstay during the holiday season, providing a savoury alternative to roast turkey. This tender meat is coated in a sweet glaze made from honey, brown sugar and spices, which caramelises beautifully as it bakes. With a crispy, sweet crust on the outside and juicy meat within, honey-glazed ham offers a satisfying balance of flavours. The leftovers are just as delicious and can be enjoyed in sandwiches, salads or breakfast dishes throughout the holiday season.

Stuffing

Although traditionally served with turkey, stuffing is a festive favourite that stands on its own as a holiday favourite. Made from bread cubes, onions, celery and herbs like sage and thyme, it is baked until golden and crisp on top while remaining soft and flavourful inside. Some variations include sausage, nuts or dried fruits for added depth and texture. Whether served inside the bird or as a side dish, stuffing brings a comforting, savoury flavour to the festive feast that is hard to resist.

Brussels sprouts

Though Brussels sprouts may be divisive, they are undeniably a traditional seasonal side dish that brings a unique, earthy flavour to the

table. Typically roasted with garlic and bacon, Brussels sprouts become crispy and caramelised, with a slightly sweet and nutty flavour. Adding a sprinkle of Parmesan or a drizzle of balsamic glaze can elevate this humble vegetable even further. Brussels sprouts provide a refreshing, lighter counterbalance to the richer holiday dishes and are packed with nutrients, making them a wholesome addition to the meal.

Mince pies

These miniature pies are filled with "mincemeat", a mixture of dried fruits, sugar, spices and occasionally a dash of brandy or sherry. The sweet and spiced filling is encased in a buttery pastry, creating a bite-sized dessert that is traditionally enjoyed throughout the holiday season. Mince pies pair beautifully with a cup of hot tea or mulled wine and are perfect for sharing with friends and family. Often topped with powdered sugar, they add a classic, festive touch to any holiday spread.

Cranberry sauce

Cranberry sauce might be simple, but it is essential to traditional festive meals. This tangy-sweet sauce, made from fresh cranberries simmered with sugar and sometimes orange zest, adds a refreshing contrast to the savoury flavours of roast turkey or ham. Its bright red coloured sauce is easy to make and can be prepared in advance. It also brings a splash of festive cheer to the plate. Cranberry sauce is easy to make and can be prepared in advance, freeing up time during the holidays. Some families even like to add cinnamon or cloves for a unique twist.

Feast for all to enjoy

These seasonal foods carry the nostalgia and togetherness of the holiday season. Whether you stick to tradition or add your own twist, these 10 classic dishes are sure to make your holiday celebration a memorable one. Gather your loved ones, set the table with these festive favourites and enjoy a holiday feast that brings comfort and joy to all. So, eat well and be happy!



Christmas pudding is a rich, fruity dessert steeped in tradition.



Gamechangers

First ride reviews of the Zontes 368G, 703F and 703RR

BY WAHID OOI

FIVE YEARS AGO, just before the world went in survival mode, we visited the Guangdong Tayo Motorcycle Technology company in China, the maker of Zontes motorcycles.

We had toured the R&D department during that time and saw the engineers designing several scooters, plus perhaps more interestingly, an inline three-cylinder engine.

Fast forward five years and here they are: The Zontes 368G, Zontes 703E, and 703RR.

Zontes 368G

Let us start with the 368G since there is already so much anticipation among Malaysian enthusiasts after it was launched in Thailand in September.

The demand is so high that some motorcycle dealers and shops have begun taking pre-orders despite not knowing the official Malaysian launch date.

So, we jumped on the chance to test ride it (in China, no less) as soon as we received the invitation.

What is it?

The Zontes 368G is a scooter built on Zontes' all-new 368 platform and is the latest contender in the crossover scooter segment. That means semi-knobby tyres on wire spoked wheels, and crash bars.

Launched in China in May 2024, it has taken the Chinese, European, and Thai markets by storm, so much so that the factory's production is currently in overtime just to keep up with the orders.

Well, why not, because the Thai distributor alone saw 9,000 orders on the very same day it was launched!

Features

Be warned, the list of features will put even some bigger and more expensive bikes to shame, much less its direct competitors! Zontes says that they took inspiration from the *Gundam* anime series for the bike's design.

- 368cc, liquid-cooled, DOHC, single-cylinder engine that produces a whopping 38.8hp and 40Nm of torque, takes the prize as the most powerful powerplant in the 350cc-400cc scooter category.

- Upside-down 41mm forks adjustable for compression damping and tension (rebound damping).
- Dual shocks adjustable for preload and tension, with remote reservoirs.

- 300mm front disc grabbed by a four-piston J.Juan radially-mounted caliper. J.Juan is now owned by Brembo.

- ABS is dual-channel but the rear ABS can be turned off for off-road riding.
- Standard seat height is 790mm. Owners can opt for the 770mm lowered seat height.

- Ground clearance is 180mm. Front wheels are 17-inches, the rear are 14-inches.
- Massive 52-liter underseat storage space that can take two full-face helmets. You can fit an adventure helmet (sideways) at the rear portion! - Three. Yes, 3(!) USB charging ports.

- 8-inch colour TFT screen.
- Two power modes - Sport and Economy.
- Backlit switchgear.
- Keyless ignition and fuel filler cover.



Now where have we seen these front ends before.



The controls of the 368G are easy to use

- Adjustable windscreen over 7 positions.
- Adjustable front and rear brake levers.
- Hand protectors are standard.
- Extra pair of footpegs for the rider to stand on when riding off-road (or if he wants to ride aggressively).
- Front and rear facing dashcam as standard feature.

Our first ride

The media were bused to a remote region for a nice stretch of country road over a reservoir dam. A few minutes later, a truck arrived and dropped off the 368G, 368D, 368E, plus the Zontes 703F triple.

The three 368Gs looked like they had just rolled off the assembly line, given all the plastic covers over the decals.

We rode over a really bumpy road through a quaint farming village that served as the initial test of the bike's suspension.

Scooters are always blighted by short suspension travel, causing them to bounce like crazy over bad road surfaces, but not the 368G.

We did not even bother to ride on the smoother concrete portion as the chassis



The Zontes 368G promises good looks and convenience.



Spoke wheels speak volumes about the intent of the 368G.

behind compared to those on other scooters for comfort.

As for the electronics, the TFT screen is now much, much more improved - larger, sharper, brighter and can be read even under direct sunlight.

The switchgear's backlight is also much brighter and in red (not blue anymore) so to not degrade the rider's night vision.

The other bits that impressed us were the build quality and attention to detail, which pictures do not justice.

The panels fit superbly and the paint was top notch (Zontes uses robots to paint their bikes). The plastic bits did not feel cheap to the touch either. The finish on the mirror stalks and brake levers are the best we have seen.

It is simply lightyears ahead of the 155 and 310 series, and it shows what Zontes has achieved in just 5 years from our initial visit.

Price and availability

Zontes Malaysia says it will sell under RM29,000 and are targeting an official launch in the first quarter of 2025. The Road Transport Department (JPJ) will take two months for testing in order to award the bike its Vehicle Type Approval prior to its sale, anyway.

Conclusion

We hope to be able to test the bike more extensively when it gets here. Every one of us came away super impressed with the Zontes 368G.

The engine, suspension, attention to detail, quality, features, and finally price may well see it as the most popular scooter in the country.

ZONTES 703F

As mentioned earlier, Zontes was in the midst of developing three cylinder engines and motorcycles when we visited the factory in 2019. They teased it on and off since then and there had been several prototypes along the way. Now, after just three years, they have launched the Zontes 703F three-cylinder adventure bike.

The Zontes 703F has the distinction of being the first fully Chinese produced three-cylinder motorcycle.

The top *honcho* of the company had stated that he prefers the three-cylinder format as it provides strong torque in the low-end and mid-range RPMs and useable maximum horsepower in the upper RPM range.

And true enough, the bike was launched at EICMA this year when it has already been in

soaked it all up.

We cut loose as soon as we hit the beautifully pulled dam road and the Zontes 368G just purred smartly and quickly without that familiar shake typical of single-cylinder bikes. And it steered smartly into the corners too, without hesitation.

Oh, I forgot that I had a passenger onboard at the time. On later runs, the fastest (and most daring rider) managed to clock 166kph with more to spare! Remember, these bikes have not even been broken in yet.

The throttle response has no perceptible flat spots - open it and it goes, close it and the bike slows down smoothly.

Similarly, the brakes had a good bite while providing great feedback. You just know how much force is needed to slow the bike. It is a much-welcomed improvement over the house-built calipers of the old Z155 and Z310 series.

Although it looks like the X-ADV at first glance, there are many differences. For one, the footboards are also narrower, allowing the rider to plant his feet confidently on the road.

Speaking of feet, we were surprised to find an extra pair of footpegs in addition to those for the passenger.

These are meant for the rider to step on when he rides off-road, rather than stepping on the edges of the floorboards.

Not only that, the rubber pads can be removed, for the footrests' spikes to grip the rider's sole.

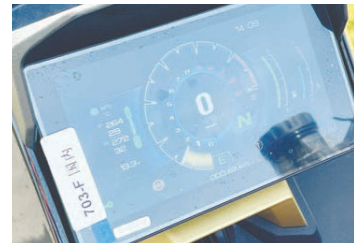
Additionally, the handlebar has markings for more accurate positioning. The passenger's footrests are also placed higher and further



The 703F is great for tall and not so tall riders.



The front end of the 703F is unlike anything else.



Meter cluster of the 703F is unique yet easy to read.



The exhaust of the 703F is quite unique

production back at their factory, unlike other manufacturers who take another year to produce their final products.

But Zontes being Zontes, the bike is not just the engine and little else. As such, it is equipped with a whole litany of features.

Highlights

- 699cc, three-cylinder, DOHC, fuel-injected engine which produces 97hp at 10,000 RPM and 76Nm at 7,500 RPM. That is a good spread of RPM between maximum torque and maximum power.
- Six-speed transmission with quickshifter.
- Cast aluminium frame (not welded anywhere).
- One-piece cast aluminium swingarm.
- One-piece cast aluminium subframe.
- Full coverage sump guard.
- Handguards.
- Marzocchi upside-down forks adjustable for compression and rebound damping.
- Marzocchi monoshock adjustable for compression and rebound damping.
- Two variants, one road-biased version fitted with 19-inch front wheel. The other is an adventure variant, fitted with a 21-inch front wheel. The rear wheel is 18-inches for both. The wheels are fitted with Michelin Anakee tyres.
- Dual 310mm brake discs gripped by J.Juan 4-piston calipers up front.
- Seat height 825mm.
- Electrically adjustable windscreen.
- 8-inch colour TFT screen.
- Automatic headlights and cornering lights.
- Traction control and ABS are standard.
- Built-in front and rear dashcam.
- Keyless ignition and fuel filler cap.

First ride experience

To start off, the seat was low and allowed even the shortest of us testers to plant our feet securely on the ground. Although the specs say a seat height of 825mm, it felt much lower than that.

That low seat height made lifting the bike off its stand rather easy despite it weighing 240kg, wet. Pushing it around was a different story, though.

The engine started with the characteristic three-cylinder roar, and the stock exhaust system was actually pretty loud and gave off a throaty rumble.

That rumble is combined with a howl at higher RPMs just like what a triple is supposed to do. It surely surprised us because new Euro5+ compliant bikes are aurally emasculated these days.

Slip the clutch and the bike goes. The engine was super smooth for a triple, which the factory told us was due to the new frame. In fact, it was the smoothest triple we have ridden thus far, besides sounding smooth too.

But do not mistake the smooth character for a gutless bike! Because we snapped the throttle open and the bike responded immediately and just took off.



The 703RR is slated for a Malaysian debut in 2025.



The 703RR LED lights are stylish to say the least.

We rode on the same narrow road on top of the dam and it was shared with the villagers on their trikes around here, so we took it easy. However, the fastest rider in our group plus a racer from Zontes Malaysia managed to hit 200kph from a rolling start in just 500 metres!

The suspension was also much improved compared to the internally-built ones of old. The damping rates were much more supple regardless of what kind of surface we rode on.

Our concern was mainly for the 21-inch front end of the adventurer, or more specifically whether it wanted to tuck under when cornering. But that did not happen.

Conclusion

Zontes spent the last several years working non-stop on this bike and it shows. The body panels all fit well and are robot painted without a single blemish. There were no loose cables and wires anywhere, nuts and bolts were

hidden away. Its quality rivals the best Japanese and European bikes that are double its price.

We did not get to ride the Zontes 703F as much as we wanted but all the indicators point towards a well-developed bike. It just goes to show how much the premium Chinese motorcycle makers can improve in just a short time.

The right pricing shall see it command the midrange adventure market!

ZONTES 703RR

The Zontes 703RR represents the company's first ever sojourn into the big capacity sportbike category, by utilising their new 699cc, three-cylinder, DOHC engine which also powers the 703F adventure model.

In fact, Zontes had planned to build a sportbike based on the new engine from the beginning. It had just been launched at EICMA, less than a month prior to our visit.

What is the Zontes 703RR?

It is the sportbike of the Zontes family and looks to be the flagship model, at least for the time being. It features a beautifully sculpted and distinctive bodywork with sharp lines, even winglets covered in aerobodies.

A short highlight of its features include:

- 699cc, inline-triple, DOHC engine, fed by a ram air intake. It produces 100.5hp at 11,200 RPM and 74.5Nm at 8,500 RPM. Ram air intake should add another 10hp in the upper RPMs.
- The frame is the real wow factor here: Each side of the twin-spar aluminium frame is cast as one piece then joined in with the other side. On the other hand, conventional aluminium frames have their headstock and "uprights" that hold the swingarm pivot welded onto the

spars.

Zontes claims that this reduces engine vibration and also provide better targeted stiffness versus flex characteristics.

- The subframe is also a one-piece cast aluminium component, and bolted to the back of the main frame.
- Adjustable Marzocchi forks and monoshock.
- Dual front disc brakes gripped by J.Juan calipers, dual-channel ABS is standard.
- LED lighting all-around.
- 8-inch colour TFT screen complete with power modes and lap timer.
- 196kg wet weight.
- Seat height is 795mm.

Riding the Zontes 703RR

The ergonomics are somewhere along the lines of the Aprilia RS660 mixed with that of the Triumph Daytona 660. The clip-on handlebars are mounted slightly higher than the top of the fuel tank, so they do not put your weight onto your wrists. And that seat was so low that putting your feet down was of no issue.

The only place to test ride the bike was on a small track at the factory's compound. The front "straight" was just 100m long and there was a double-apex hairpin on each end, with a three-turn chicane in between. So it was tight like a small go-kart track.

Heading into the first turn, I squeezed the front brake lever with two fingers and was almost thrown off. It was that powerful!

Despite messing up the corner entry from overbraking, the Zontes 703RR happily tipped into the corner without threatening to collapse the front tyre.

Still in 2nd gear, I opened the throttle as the bike touched the apex and the engine went whoooooo!!! Thankfully, the corners were marked by lines drawn on the road rather than physical curbs, because the bike shot all the way from the exit of the first corner to the last corner!

So, I short-shifted into 3rd and rounded the last turn, and stood the bike up quickly and rolled on the throttle to exit the corner.

The 703RR just blasted down that 100m straight in a flash. The engine's torque is just so right!

I continued going around and around, and avoided making eye contact with those in the starting area because I did not want to be flagged in.

In the end, a Zontes crew stepped almost onto the middle of the track to wave me in. I must have covered some 9 laps.

Conclusion

Yes, yes, it was a short ride but having ridden so many motorcycles before, I can confidently say that the Zontes 703RR has the chops of a great bike, although its prowess on the track needs to be discovered.

But, as a middleweight street superbike, the present contenders better watch their backs.

We asked Zontes Malaysia if it will make it here. The official returned a cheeky smile.

GREAT WALL MOTOR (GWM) Malaysia celebrated a significant achievement with the production of the 1000th unit of the GWM Haval H6 Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) at the EP Manufacturing Berhad (EPMB) facility in Melaka. This milestone marks GWM's growing impact in the Malaysian automotive landscape, demonstrating its commitment to delivering high-quality, eco-friendly vehicles to meet the nation's increasing demand for hybrid mobility.

The Haval H6 HEV has quickly gained popularity among Malaysian drivers for its affordability, fuel efficiency, and reduced environmental impact. This achievement underscores the country's rapid transition to hybrid vehicles, fueled by eco-conscious consumers seeking cost-effective and sustainable driving solutions.

Locally assembled in Malaysia, the Haval H6 HEV benefits from GWM Global's engineering expertise and meticulous attention to detail.

Each vehicle is crafted to meet stringent international safety and quality standards, ensuring exceptional performance and reliability.

GWM Malaysia has emphasised that its production approach prioritises quality over quantity, reinforcing its commitment to delivering vehicles that customers can trust.

The GWM Haval H6 HEV is powered by an advanced 1.5L turbo hybrid engine, combining

High-brid demand

Haval H6 HEV CKD production hits 1,000 units



electric and petrol energy for a total output of 243PS and 530Nm of torque.

Its Dedicated Hybrid Transmission (DHT) technology enables the SUV to accelerate from

0 to 100kph in just 7.7 seconds.

Additionally, the vehicle boasts an impressive fuel efficiency of 5.8 L/100km and a range of up to 1,000km on a full tank, offering

both performance and practicality.

With a best-in-class wheelbase of 2,738 mm, the Haval H6 HEV delivers exceptional interior space and comfort, making it an ideal choice for families seeking a premium driving experience in a C-segment SUV.

Priced competitively at RM139,800, the Haval H6 HEV is available in five stylish colour options: Energy Green, Ayers Silver, Crayon Grey, Hamilton White, and Sun Black.

To further enhance its appeal, GWM Malaysia is offering an extensive warranty package for the Haval H6 HEV.

This includes a 10-year or 1,000,000km engine warranty, an 8-year or 1,000,000km hybrid system warranty, and a 7-year or 200,000km full vehicle warranty. These assurances reflect GWM's confidence in the quality and reliability of its hybrid SUV.

The production of the 1000th Haval H6 HEV is a testament to GWM Malaysia's commitment to driving the hybrid vehicle market forward.

By focusing on quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction, GWM is set to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of sustainable mobility in Malaysia.

With the Haval H6 HEV already making waves, GWM Malaysia continues to solidify its position as a leader in hybrid technology, delivering vehicles that offer both environmental benefits and an engaging driving experience.

Iconic SP concept closer to production

OVER a year has passed since Mazda introduced the Iconic SP concept at the Japan Mobility Show, hinting at the return of its iconic RX series.

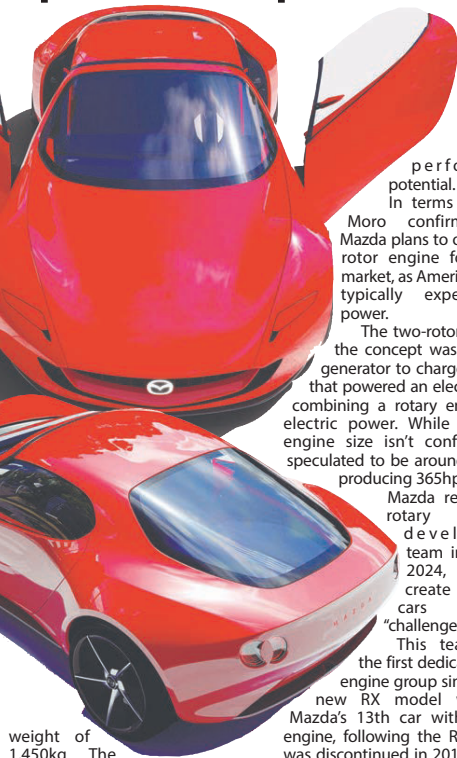
The sleek two-seater coupe with a two-rotor engine sparked excitement and speculation about the revival of the RX line.

Now, Mazda's CEO, Masahiro Moro, has confirmed that work on the Iconic SP is progressing.

While not an official confirmation of the RX's return, his statement suggests that the project is moving forward, and fans can expect the road-going version of the car - though it may be smaller than the concept.

Mazda's chief designer, Masashi Nakayama, previously hinted that the car could be smaller, possibly similar in size to the MX-5 Miata. This has led to speculation that the Iconic SP could preview the next MX-5 rather than a direct RX model.

The concept was 4,178mm long, 1,849mm wide, and 45.2 inches tall, with a 1,148mm wheelbase and a



weight of 1,450kg. The car's weight distribution was balanced, which enhanced its

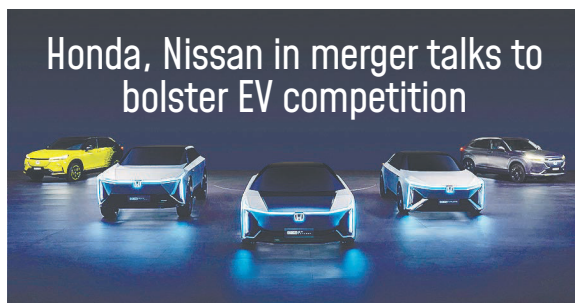
performance potential.

In terms of power, Moro confirmed that Mazda plans to offer a two-rotor engine for the US market, as American buyers typically expect more power.

The two-rotor engine in the concept was used as a generator to charge a battery that powered an electric motor, combining a rotary engine with electric power. While the exact engine size isn't confirmed, it's speculated to be around 1.6 litres, producing 365hp.

Mazda reignited its rotary engine development team in February 2024, aiming to create exciting cars with a "challenger spirit."

This team marks the first dedicated rotary engine group since 2018. A new RX model would be Mazda's 13th car with a rotary engine, following the RX-8, which was discontinued in 2012. Fans are eagerly awaiting the return of the RX series.



Honda, Nissan in merger talks to bolster EV competition

JAPANESE automakers Honda Motor and Nissan Motor are reportedly entering discussions to merge under a single holding company in a bid to strengthen their position against electric vehicle (EV) industry leaders like Tesla, according to reports.

Reports also stated that the two companies are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding to establish the new entity. Mitsubishi Motors, where Nissan holds a significant stake, may also be included in the structure, potentially forming one of the largest auto groups globally.

Honda and Nissan issued statements addressing the report, clarifying that neither company had made any official announcements. However, they acknowledged their ongoing exploration of collaborative opportunities, leveraging each other's strengths, as previously disclosed.

This development follows a March agreement between Honda and Nissan to explore strategic partnerships in electric vehicle production.

Chinese automakers, particularly BYD, have gained significant ground in the EV

sector, leaving traditional Japanese manufacturers trailing.

China, now the world's largest vehicle exporter, has cemented its position with a strong focus on EVs, while Japanese automakers have prioritised hybrid technologies.

Honda announced in May its plans to double EV investments to us\$65 billion (RM293b) by 2030, targeting 100% EV sales by 2040.

Similarly, Nissan outlined its electrification strategy in March, committing to launching 30 new models within three years, with 16 of them being electrified vehicles.

Despite these ambitious plans, Japanese automakers have faced criticism for their slow adoption of fully electric vehicles.

While global demand for EVs is growing, concerns about high prices, limited range, and insufficient charging infrastructure have tempered market expansion.

These issues have contributed to a slowdown in the EV sector, even as governments and automakers push for less polluting alternatives to combat climate change.

Das Treffen, a celebration of Porsche passion

ON December 15, 2024, the ninth edition of *Das Treffen* - the ultimate gathering for Porsche enthusiasts - brought the karting circuit at Impact Speed Park in Muang Thong Thani, Bangkok, to life.

What began as an intimate meet-up among friends with a shared love for Porsche, envisioned by founder Sihabutr Xoomsai (fondly called Tenn), has grown into a full-fledged festival celebrating the legacy, innovation, and community spirit of the Porsche brand.

Das Treffen 9 broke records this year, attracting 3,050 attendees and showcasing more than 627 Porsche sports cars. Enthusiasts travelled from as far as Singapore and Vietnam to be part of this vibrant

celebration. The event's theme, "Limited Edition," added an extra touch of exclusivity.

A highlight was the showcase of rare Porsche models, affectionately referred to as "unicorns," which included iconic creations like the Carrera GT (limited to 1,270 units) and the 911 GT3 RS 4.0 from the 997 generation (only 600 units produced).

These vintage and modern masterpieces stood



proudly in the heart of the circuit, drawing admiration from fans and collectors alike.

Founder Sihabutr Xoomsai expressed his gratitude, saying, "The record turnout at *Das Treffen 9* proves once again that Southeast Asia has one of the most vibrant and passionate Porsche communities in the world."

The Porsche Village, a stunning two-story open-air pavilion, added a luxurious touch to the gathering. Guests enjoyed

panoramic views of the car displays while engaging with interactive features like racing simulators and a Porsche Lifestyle boutique.

Rare models, such as the 918 Spyder (one of only 918 units worldwide) and the latest limited-edition 911 S/T, further elevated the event's prestige.

Taking center stage was the Taycan Turbo S Celestial Jade, a one-of-a-kind creation by Porsche's exclusive *Manufaktur Sonderwunsch* programme.

Das Treffen 9 marked the culmination of an extraordinary year for Porsche in Thailand, highlighted by major milestones like the launch of the first regionally-assembled Cayenne S E-Hybrid Coupe.



302 Jobs

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WE ARE HIRING MEDIA SALES REPRESENTATIVE / AGENT (FREELANCE) Requirement: Minimum 1 year sales experience in classified ad, print and digital advertising.

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR IN THE FEDERAL TERRITORY OF KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA COMPANIES WINDING-UP

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTARY WINDING UP OF LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF CIMB PRIVATE EQUITY ADVISORS SDN. BHD.

IN THE MATTER OF PESONA NETWORK ENGINEERING SDN. BHD. (COMPANY NO. 200901007252)

CALL TO PLACE CLASSIFIED ADS KLANG VALLEY | PENANG | KEDAH PERAK | PERLIS | PAHANG | KELANTAN TERENGGANU MS. Shoba / MS. Balqish

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF 3STEP IT MALAYSIA SDN. BHD.

ORDINARY RESOLUTIONS 1. THAT in accordance with Section 513(1) of the Companies Act 2016,

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Creditors of the above company which is being wound up voluntarily are required to appear before the Liquidator

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Final Meeting of the member of the abovementioned Companies Act, 2016 that the Final Meeting of the Members

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETABLE OIL INDUSTRIES (MALAYSIA) BERHAD

DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJESTRI DI SHAH ALAM DALAM NEGARA SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA GUAMAN NO. BA-472NDvc-1008-08/2024

NOTIS ADALAH DENGAN IN DEBET bahawa suatu Petisyen untuk pengumuman Syarikat yang dinamakan di atas oleh Mahkamah

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Final Meeting of the member of the abovementioned Companies Act, 2016 that the Final Meeting of the Members

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF ACME SKY SDN. BHD. (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING-UP)

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETABLE OIL INDUSTRIES (MALAYSIA) BERHAD

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETABLE OIL INDUSTRIES (MALAYSIA) BERHAD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETABLE OIL INDUSTRIES (MALAYSIA) BERHAD

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETIMAX SDN. BHD.

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SKYWORKS DEVELOPMENT BHD

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF VEGETABLE OIL INDUSTRIES (MALAYSIA) BERHAD



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BERJAYA LANGKAWI RESORT MALAYSIA

BY CHRIS WILSON

FOUR-TIME F1 world champion Max Verstappen has been tipped for a shock move away from Red Bull if the team is unable to continue its recent success.

The Dutchman has won four consecutive world titles with the Milton Keynes-based team, and his contract runs until the end of 2028, though the team suffered a poor run of form midway through the 2024 season, with Verstappen not winning for 10 races between Austria and Sao Paulo.

And former McLaren F1 mechanic-turned-pundit Marc Priestley has suggested that incoming regulation changes for 2026 mean that Verstappen, who will be joined by new teammate Liam Lawson in 2025, could be tempted by a move away in the future.

"The drivers market is so complicated at the moment because everyone is basing their move on the regulation changes in 2026," Priestley said.

"You have to choose the team you think will produce the best car, it could be a team like Williams. It's a tough call.

"If you're Max Verstappen, you'd look at McLaren but they have two young drivers for years to come, Mercedes are not at the

Bull run coming to end?

Verstappen tipped to join surprise F1 team in 2026

top at the moment but everyone knows they're a solid team and very good operators.

"We also know Verstappen has had a lot of talks with Mercedes. You could also look at Williams who, under the leadership of James Vowles, are building heavily towards 2026 with big expectations.

"I know for a fact they expect to compete right at the top with the best teams on the grid, maybe it's an opportunity for Verstappen."

The 2026 season will bring changes to the regulations surrounding the chassis and power unit on cars, with Red Bull potentially facing more difficulty than other teams due to the incorporation of a brand new power unit that they have designed themselves.

Nevertheless, if Red Bull's performance was to drop, Priestley believes the Dutchman "could easily retire in the next

few years" rather than move to a rival.

"After years of winning continuously, having a slight drought of trophies could make you lose interest in the sport," he said.

"If Red Bull suddenly drop to a mid-table team in 2026, Verstappen will start asking himself questions. I can see him hang up his boots then.

"But, maybe he'll see a decline at Red Bull before 2026 and join a new team ahead of the regulation changes, like Lewis Hamilton has done by joining Ferrari," he added.

"It's like any of us changing jobs, it's exciting at the beginning.

"If Verstappen changes team and it goes well, he'll continue on winning, but if he's not winning as much as he usually does, I can 100% see him leaving the sport earlier than most would expect." - The Independent

3 talking points ahead of the new F1 season

LANDO NORRIS threw down the gauntlet for 2025 when he led McLaren to their first team title since 1998 and warned four-time world champion Max Verstappen "next year is going to be my year".

The British driver's perfectly-judged win at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix endorsed his credentials for a potentially fierce drivers' championship battle while Lewis Hamilton bade farewell to Mercedes with a stirring reminder of the enduring race-craft and speed he will transfer to Ferrari.

Here's a look at three key emerging talking points for next season:

Norris ready to fight Verstappen

After a bruising introduction to the reality of fighting for wins and titles, Norris and McLaren have arrived at the peak of Formula One as Verstappen and Red Bull show signs of decline.

The loss of star designer Adrian Newey to Aston Martin and sporting director Jonathan Wheatley to Sauber/Haas are just two of the departures that coincide with an end to their outright dominance.

Based on form since his maiden triumph in Miami in May, Norris is not only fast and smart, but also driving the best car - and has learned from his wheel-bashing exchanges with Verstappen this year.

Mercurial Hamilton set to flourish at Ferrari

Despite a topsy-turvy end to his glorious 12 years with Mercedes, Hamilton remains capable of race-winning speed and moments of unequalled perfection. His drive from 16th to fourth in Abu Dhabi with the pace to win, proved it.

But after weeks of tantrums and inconsistency, he will arrive at Ferrari next year as a much-scrutinised 40-year-old former multiple champion rather than, like Norris or his new teammate Charles Leclerc, a man for the future.

Leclerc, 27, who finished a bold third behind outgoing teammate Carlos Sainz, after starting 19th, expects Hamilton to bring new purpose to the Italian team.

If Ferrari deliver a winning car, Hamilton may realise many dreams and take his eighth drivers' world title - if he can find the pace to beat the rapid and ambitious Leclerc.

Russell top at Mercedes, Sainz at Williams

George Russell will take Hamilton's role as top dog as Mercedes start a new era with 18-year-old Andrea Kimi Antonelli joining the team while Carlos Sainz moves from Maranello to Didsod, swapping Ferrari for a rejuvenated Williams.

Both will generate great expectations, as will Oscar Piastri, in hoping to challenge Norris and Oliver Bearman, with Haas, during the course of another 24-race season that runs from Melbourne to Abu Dhabi.

In other known changes, F2 champion Gabriel Bortoleto, 20, joins Sauber, a team expected to blossom when taken over as Audi in 2026. It may signal 2025 as a year for youth over experience.

AFF

322 Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAN TINGGI MALAYA DI SEREMBAN... MALAYSIA PETITEN KORAN... NO. 14-33-190-10/2024

Dalam perkara Sakyo-Sakyo 53 dan 54 Akta Membarau Undang-undang (Perkahwinan dan Perceraian) 1976... DAN

Dalam perkara Mengenal Kaedah-kaedah Prosiding Perceraian dan Hal-Hal Perkahwinan 1980... DAN

Dalam perkara Petisyen Perencatan antara JENI SRI APY SUBHARAJAN (No.KP:770328-14-5600) dan RADIA KRISNA A.L. DEGA LA MARIAN (No.KP:70087-08-9613)... ANTARA

JENI SRI APY SUBHARAJAN (No.KP:770328-14-5600) ... PEMETIYEN ISTERI DAN RADIA KRISNA A.L. DEGA LA MARIAN (No.KP:70087-08-9613) ... RESPONDEN SUAMI

ISJAL... NOTIS ADALAH DENGAN INI DIBERI bahawa Suatu Nota Prosiding bertarikh 27.10.2024, Petisyen Perencatan bertarikh 21.10.2024, Alahdan Pempetisyen Bagi Menyatakan Petisyen bertarikh 21.10.2024, Akuan Perencatan dan Pernyataan Bagi Anak-anak bertarikh 21.10.2024 ("bertak-keras kuasa teresbut") akan diadakan pada suatu Penghakaman berhadapan Responden Suami yang dinamakan diatas RADIA KRISNA A.L. DEGA LA MARIAN (No.KP:70087-08-9613) di Mahkamah Tinggi Seremban (bilik-petisyen) bertarikh 07 Januari 2025 pada jam 10.00 AM bagi perkara No. 14-33-190-10/2024.

DAN bahawa Pengurusan Kes bagi Nota Prosiding bertarikh 27.10.2024, Petisyen Perencatan bertarikh 21.10.2024, Alahdan Pempetisyen Bagi Menyatakan Petisyen bertarikh 21.10.2024, Akuan Perencatan dan Pernyataan Bagi Anak-anak bertarikh 21.10.2024 ("bertak-keras kuasa teresbut") berhadapan di Mahkamah Tinggi Seremban (bilik-petisyen) bertarikh 07 Januari 2025 pada jam 10.00 AM bagi perkara No. 14-33-190-10/2024.

DAN bahawa Pengurusan Kes bagi Nota Prosiding bertarikh 27.10.2024, Petisyen Perencatan bertarikh 21.10.2024, Alahdan Pempetisyen Bagi Menyatakan Petisyen bertarikh 21.10.2024, Akuan Perencatan dan Pernyataan Bagi Anak-anak bertarikh 21.10.2024 ("bertak-keras kuasa teresbut") akan diadakan pada suatu Penghakaman berhadapan Responden Suami yang dinamakan diatas RADIA KRISNA A.L. DEGA LA MARIAN (No.KP:70087-08-9613) di Mahkamah Tinggi Seremban (bilik-petisyen) bertarikh 07 Januari 2025 pada jam 10.00 AM bagi perkara No. 14-33-190-10/2024.

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Pengacara untuk Pempetisyen Isteri ialah Tetuan Thanushellie & Co berhadapan di No 224-1, Jalan Pasir Dapangan 3/4 Pasir Dapangan Seremban, 71950 Seremban Negeri Sembilan.

Ditandatangani Tetuan Thanushellie & Co. Pengacara bagi pihak Pempetisyen Isteri

PERHATIAN: - Sebagai yang telah hadir pada tarikh Pengurusan Kes Nota Prosiding bertarikh 27.10.2024, Petisyen Perencatan bertarikh 21.10.2024, Alahdan Pempetisyen Bagi Menyatakan Petisyen bertarikh 21.10.2024, Akuan Perencatan dan Pernyataan Bagi Anak-anak bertarikh 21.10.2024 ("bertak-keras kuasa teresbut") pada jam 10.00 AM kesetua berhadapan memandangkan kehadiran dalam tempoh baka (7) hari dari tarikh penghakaman ini dengan menyerahkan semua pengantaraan dengan pos kepada Pengacara Pempetisyen Isteri ialah Tetuan Thanushellie & Co, suatu orang teresbut, atau sekiranya ia adalah seorang firma, nama dan alamat firma yang ditulis diatasnya oleh orang atau firma yang berkenaan atau pengacaranya (jika ada) dan Nota berhadapan dihadap dengan mereka yang mematuhi supaya sampai kepada pihak yang dinamakan di atas sebelum pukul 12.00 petang pada 07 Januari 2025 pada jam 11) hari sebelum tarikh yang ditetapkan untuk Pengurusan Kes Petisyen Perencatan.

Nama ini disediakan oleh ini ditakrif oleh Tetuan Thanushellie & Co, Pengacara bagi pihak Pempetisyen yang berhadapan di No 224-1, Jalan Pasir Dapangan 3/4 Pasir Dapangan Seremban, 71950 Seremban Negeri Sembilan. (No. Tel: 014-688524) (Email: thanushellieco@gmail.com)

Australia take charge of 4th Test

AUSTRALIA'S top four all slammed 50 or better yesterday to take a firm grip on day one of the fourth Test against India, with fearless teenage opener Sam Konstas stealing the show.

Batting after captain Pat Cummins won the toss on a steamy day, the hosts reached 311-6 by the close in front of more than 87,000 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

They were aided by some inconsistent early bowling and a flying start from Konstas.

The 19-year-old blasted a hugely entertaining 60 off 65 balls in a debut to remember, pounding 18 off one Jaspit Bumrah over and having a run-in with superstar Virat Kohli.

At the close, Steve Smith was not out 68 and Pat Cummins was eight. Marcus Labuschagne made 72 and Usman Khawaja 57.

All the bowlers were punished but they rallied with four wickets in the final session, including dangerman Travis Head for a duck, to haul themselves back into the contest.

Bumrah led the charge, ending with 3-75. "It was quite surreal with the big crowd, the biggest crowd I've ever played before," said Konstas.

"I just played with freedom and backed myself. Lucky to get a few runs. A bit disappointed with the way I got out but hopefully we have got a bit of momentum for tomorrow."

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 after India won by 295 runs in Perth before being crushed by 10 wickets in Adelaide. The rain-affected third Test in Brisbane was drawn.

With Konstas in for the axed Nathan McSweeney, he and Khawaja shared an 89-run opening partnership - the hosts' best of the series - before the teenager was undone by the spin of Ravindra Jadeja.

A frustrated Virat forcefully bumped shoulders with him at one point and they exchanged words, which could see both players in trouble if the match referee takes the matter further.

"I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. But that's just cricket, the tension," said Konstas. -AFP



Australia's Sam Konstas plays a shot against India yesterday. -AFP/ICC

Heavy Fury looked ridiculous, says former champ

CARL FRAMPTON said Tyson Fury looked "ridiculous" after weighing in at 127.5kg for his rematch with Oleksandr Usyk, who beat the "Gypsy King" again last weekend.

Seven months after outpointing Fury in Riyadh, Usyk produced the same result in the Saudi city, retaining the unified heavyweight titles.

In fact, the Ukrainian beat the Briton more easily this time, with 116-112 scorecards from all three judges, after earning a split decision in May.

Fury had promised an aggressive approach in the rematch, and his career-heaviest weight of 127.5kg seemed to back up that claim.

Yet Fury, 36, was unable to effectively use his size to bully Usyk, 37, who weighed 25kg lighter than the former champion.

"I think he should have been more aggressive in the fight," former world champion Frampton told Talksport yesterday.

"I was disappointed with the size of

him and the weight he came in at. It looked ridiculous, to be honest.

"I think because he was so heavy, it's harder for him to carry that about and he blows out a little bit prematurely, because he's just so big. I think that was an issue for him, I really do.

"Fury trains hard, I know he spars a lot, but what is he eating? How many calories is he putting in?"

"Look, people are different. Some people are body beautiful and get into shape and ripped up pretty easily, some

people have athletic physiques and whatever.

"But if you're training hard twice a day, lifting weights and running and sparring, and everything else, I don't know how you can look like that."

The suggestion that Fury faded as the fight went on, perhaps due to his weight, was backed up by the judges' scorecards.

One official gave Usyk the last seven rounds (out of the 12 contested), and the other two gave the Ukrainian six of the last seven. - The Independent

SIDENETTING

'Spurs need to reinforce'

ANGE POSTECOGLOU expects Tottenham Hotspur to bolster their squad during the January transfer window. Spurs have been hit by injuries and suspensions during the past month, with Postecoglou refusing to rein in his attacking approach as the London club have dropped down the Premier League table during a run of inconsistent results. A thrilling 4-3 win over Manchester United in the League Cup quarterfinals last week was followed by an embarrassing 6-3 loss at home to Liverpool in the league on Sunday. But ahead of this morning's match at Nottingham Forest, Spurs manager Postecoglou said he was aiming to bring in new recruits next month. "Like I said a while ago, we've been planning," he told a pre-match press conference. A lot of it was going to be around where we're at around this time. Fair to say we're still a little bit short in a couple of areas and we need to reinforce." I think the fact that, obviously, we're still in the Carabao (League) Cup semifinal, still got Europe, FA Cup, we're in all the competitions, it's not like our schedule's going to ease up at any stage. So, I think it makes sense. We will try and reinforce. Where and what number we'll have to wait and see."

Mice add to Devils woes

AS IF faltering results on the field and a leaking roof were not enough to be dealing with, Manchester United are tackling an infestation of mice at Old Trafford, according to a newspaper report. The *Daily Mail* said the issue had seen the club's food hygiene rating drop to two stars out of a possible five. United are currently considering whether to redevelop Old Trafford or build a brand new stadium. "Manchester United implements a robust pest-control system throughout Old Trafford," a club spokesperson told the *Mail*. "Multiple weekly checks are made in all catering areas and stringent measures are taken to ensure levels of hygiene and cleanliness are high wherever food is stored, prepared and served. If incidences of this nature do occur at the stadium, immediate and appropriate action is taken." A Trafford Council spokesperson said: "Our environmental health officers gave a food hygiene rating of two following a routine visit. We are now working closely with Manchester United to ensure it complies with the rating and carries out the necessary improvements."

Valencia hire West Brom's Corberan

LA LIGA'S relegation-threatened Valencia have appointed Carlos Corberan as their new manager after prising him from English second-tier side West Bromwich Albion, the clubs announced yesterday. The fallen Spanish giants exercised a buyout clause in Corberan's contract to bring him to Mestalla on a deal lasting to 2027, days after sacking coach Ruben Baraja. Corberan, a former Valencia youth goalkeeper, guided West Brom to the Championship playoffs last season. He spent just over two years at the club, which expressed its "gratitude and best wishes." Corberan, 41, has also coached Huddersfield Town and Greek giants Olympiacos as well as assisting Marcelo Bielsa at Leeds United. He faces a daunting challenge to save Valencia from the drop. The six-time Spanish champions have not played outside the top flight since the 1986/87 season but sit 19th in La Liga, four points from safety, with just 12 points from 17 matches.

Djokovic eyes more Slam glory

... as Swiatek returns under doping cloud

NOVAK DJOKOVIC is confident he can still win Grand Slams, starting at the Australian Open, with the Serbian kickstarting his bid for an unprecedented 11th title and record 25th major crown in Brisbane this week.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, who is gunning for a third Melbourne Park trophy, joins him at the Queensland Tennis Centre from Dec 29-Jan 5 in a stellar women's field.

The 2025 season gets under way today with the mixed-teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney, headlined by world No. 2 Iga Swiatek in her first tournament since revelations that she served a one-month doping suspension.

It is the first season since 37-year-old Djokovic began playing that none of the other so-called "Big Four" will be on the other side of the net following the retirements this year of Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. Roger Federer called it quits in 2022.

As they faded, Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz stepped up to become the new Grand Slam kings, with both men opting against a warm-up tournament leading into the first major of the year which begins on Jan 12.

As doubts grew over Djokovic's motivation and ability to take down the new guard after a disappointing 2024, he stunned the tennis world by hiring Murray to coach him.

The British three-time major winner is set to miss Brisbane but hook up with his old rival at the Australian Open.

"I still will try to go strong because I feel like my body is serving me well. I still have motivation to win Grand Slams, make more history," said Djokovic, who needs one more Slam crown to surpass Margaret Court's 24.

"That's one of the biggest reasons why I asked Andy to work with me, because I still have big plans, so as long as that's the case, I will keep going."

By his standards, 2024 wasn't kind, failing to win a Slam, claiming just one title - Olympic gold in Paris - and ending his season in October.

A resurgent Grigor Dimitrov, Holger Rune, and Frances Tiafoe are also playing in Brisbane, as is Australian Nick Kyrgios, who returns after injuries restricted him to just one ATP Tour singles match in two years.

He and Djokovic are set to play doubles

together. Challenging Sabalenka on Pat Rafter Arena will be America's top talents Jessica Pegula and Emma Navarro, ranked seven and eight respectively, along with former world No. 2 Ons Jabeur and veteran Victoria Azarenka.

Sabalenka recaptured the No. 1 ranking from five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek, whose reputation was rocked in November when it was revealed she tested positive for a banned heart medication in August.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency accepted that the violation was not intentional, and the Polish star escaped with a one-month sanction.

Swiatek called it "the worst experience of my life", but vowed: "I know I will be stronger than ever."

Her case is similar to that of Australian Open winner Sinner, who is still waiting for the outcome of a World Anti-Doping Agency appeal against his initial exoneration for twice testing positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March.

The agency told *AFP* a ruling was not expected before the new year, but it could conceivably be handed down before or during the Australian Open. - *AFP*



Sabalenka.
- REUTERS/SPIC

WORLD NO. 1 Aryna Sabalenka says she is "fresh and ready to go" in her bid for a third straight Australian Open title, warning she has plenty of room for improvement.

The 26-year-old enjoyed a sensational 2024, reaching seven finals and winning four titles, including the US Open.

Her year was kickstarted by defending her Australian Open crown, beating China's high-flying Zheng Qinwen in the final.

Should she win it again, she will become the first woman to claim three straight Melbourne Park singles titles since Martina Hingis between 1997-1999.

"I feel fresh and ready to go," the Belarusian said, according to the WTA website yesterday, after

arriving for the Brisbane International which starts on Sunday ahead of the Australian Open from Jan 12.

"I love Australia and I always come here hungry and always come here ready. I feel all the support here, and I think that's the best thing about Australia, that people are really, really, into tennis."

Sabalenka also began 2024 in Brisbane, reaching the final without losing a set only to crash to Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in the decider.

She spent time in the off-season at her home in Florida before heading to the Middle East to prepare for Australia and will use the Brisbane tournament to fine-tune her Grand Slam preparations.

"You work hard on lots of things in the pre-season," she said.

"The first tournament before the major tournament is the one where you can try it out and see what's going to work well for you, and what's not."

Despite her rise through the ranks to be the player to beat heading into 2025, Sabalenka said there were still parts of her game that need work.

"Oh, there is so many things to improve," she said.

"I mean, I'm not that good with maybe my game at the net in singles. There is a lot of things to improve in my touch game."

"There is so many things, even my serve is not as good as I want it to be, so there is always (elements) to improve." - *AFP*

Retirements leave organisers pushing to 'sell' next icons

BY SHRIVATHSA SRIDHAR

THE RETIREMENTS of tennis greats Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Serena Williams has made promoting events more difficult but organisers must grab the opportunity to push new talent into the spotlight, the United Cup's tournament director said.

The popular US\$10 million (RM45m) mixed team event aims to do just that when it kicks off the new season today, with tournament chief Stephen Farrow confident the sport is in good hands.

"It's true to say that from a promotional standpoint, it's very easy if you've got Roger Federer or Rafa Nadal turning up," Farrow said after the draw for the 18-team tournament was held in Sydney recently.

"You're talking about people who are absolute superstars of the sports arena... with those guys moving on, it does make it a bit more difficult to promote and tell the story of the athletes playing the event."

"I always see that as a positive, because it's on all of us in tennis to tell the story of this new talent."

"We've got a lot of them playing the United Cup. They're incredibly exciting and captivating to watch. I'm not worried about the future."

Grand Slam contenders Alexander Zverev, Taylor Fritz, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff will all be in action for their countries at the Dec. 27-Jan. 5 tournament staged in Perth and Sydney as they prepare for the Australian Open starting on Jan 12.

Farrow also said the United Cup was still building its brand and boosting awareness with fans and players.

"Last year we saw a really big step forward when we moved to a new format with one women's singles, one men's singles and one mixed doubles. It was incredibly competitive."

"Now we've established ourselves on the tennis calendar two weeks from the Australian Open. We've seen with the field this year that players want to play this event."

Spain take on Kazakhstan while China meet Brazil today in Perth. - *The Independent*

BY SIMON PEACH

DEFIANT Ruben Amorim insists Marcus Rashford's absence is not a distraction and that he knows what he is doing as the head coach seeks to get the best out of the forward and turn Manchester United around.

Erik ten Hag's successor has had a topsy-turvy time since taking the reins, one epitomised by going from a late comeback win at Manchester City to a 3-0 home defeat by Bournemouth the following Sunday.

That week also saw United lose a chaotic Carabao Cup quarterfinal 4-3 at Tottenham and scrutiny over the future of homegrown star Rashford, who was omitted from the matchday squad for all three of those games.

'I know what I'm doing'

Amorim remains defiant over Rashford absence

The 27-year-old fuelled speculation by admitting he was "ready for a new challenge" in a midweek interview, meaning the England international remained a hot topic heading into the new year.

"Normal situation," Amorim said. "When I feel that it's the right moment I will change something. Until then I will continue to think what is the best for the team."

"I speak with him every day. Not about the interview, about the performance."

Amorim confirmed that Rashford "wants to play, he is trying" but "it's my decision, only my decision."

"I spoke with a lot of players - individually, during training - so I'm trying to do things... I am doing

things my way," the recently appointed head coach said. "And it's the only way I know."

"If I don't do that I will lose myself and I will not lose myself. I know what I'm doing."

Amorim questioned the "choices" of people surrounding Rashford after leaving him out against Bournemouth, when Gary Neville said the forward leaving felt like an "inevitable ending".

The former United captain also called it a "distraction for the manager" - something the Portuguese denied.

"No, I don't think so," Amorim said. "Not for me, not for the other players because everybody is there every day during training, so they understand and that is the key point."

"For the media and for the other people, I cannot control that. But I'm really focused and they know, I'm so clear in my message, everybody in Carrington know what I'm talking about and what I want from Marcus

and everybody else.

"So, it's not a distraction for us. Maybe it's for the media but that is not my concern."

Asked to clarify what he would like to see from Rashford, he said: "Like any other player, the best that they can be."

"If you have big talents, big performance, big responsibility, big engagement, like push forward everybody in this moment."

"And some guys have a big responsibility here because they are here for a long time."

"So, this is maybe one of the lowest moments in our club, so we have to face it and be strong in this moment. That's what I want for every player on the team." - The Independent



Amorim (left) and Rashford. - AFP/IC

SPORTS TOTO RESULTS

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6TH	3 3

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The inevitable

FROM BACK PAGE

RASHFORD RETURN WILL FALL FLAT

Ok, so recent events suggest that Marcus Rashford may leave his boyhood club as early as January. But while this time seems different, speculation over his future is hardly a new revelation.

Expect him to hold showdown talks with Ruben Amorim and come back rejuvenated, refreshed, and ready to enjoy his football again with a smile on his face.

The excitement among United fans will reach fever pitch - unlocking the potential of one of their own could be Amorim's springboard to elite level success.

Of course that bit won't happen. The ex-England man will show flashes, often flatter to deceive, and leave pundits wondering if a generational talent has been lost.

CHELSEA TO SACK MARESCA

Enzo Maresca has worked wonders so far at Chelsea. From trimming a bloated squad, to exiling some big money signings, to propelling them into the title race - it's the closest we've come to calm during Todd Boehly's chaotic tenure.

He might even end this season with a trophy or two, earning himself a long-term contract and a licence to mould his own team moving forward.

Absolutely no chance. This is Chelsea under Boehly, where progression gives way to poison and success must be scuppered by chaos.

There will be a minor disagreement next summer, an order or two, and that will be that. Chairmen, like leopards, rarely change their spots.

GAMES ABROAD

It will never happen. The fans will revolt. Gary Neville will lead a procession with

pitchforks and placards. The game will lose its soul.

Oh, actually, La Liga have embraced the concept of league matches abroad now, clubs are earning millions from it, and we'd like some of that to level the playing field please.

When an idea, no matter how much it betrays tradition, is continually floated around in football it essentially means it will one day be implemented.

The global market is now such that once the ball gets rolling with this, English football will inevitably follow suit.

EVERTON WILL SURVIVE

This club survived being 2-0 down on the final day to Wimbledon, survived an FFP points deduction, they even survived appointing Mike Walker.

So rivals mocking the prospect of Everton's new Stanley Park home spending it's grand opening in the Championship might as well face reality - somehow, someday, the Toffees will cling on again.

MAN CITY'S CASE WON'T BE SETTLED

Oh yeah, depending on your outlook we left the biggest, or most boring, news until last. But expect Portsmouth and Swansea fans already planning for the visit of Manchester City in the Championship next season, and Citizens themselves keen to put the saga to bed, to be disappointed.

The verdict is not expected until around February, so make that April. Regardless of the outcome an appeal from either side is expected, which won't be concluded until 2026 at the earliest.

There is too much legal complexity involved for this to be settled while Thomas Tuchel is still in charge of England, so expect '115' jibes to continue a while yet.

Express Newspapers

WINNING NUMBERS da ma cai

Draw Date: 25/12/24 (Wed) Draw No: 5848/24 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

1+3D SUPER1+3D

1st Prize	1200
2nd Prize	5436
3rd Prize	0869

Starters	Consolation
5095 6483	4943 0221
2542 3370	4050 5640
6764 3539	3052 4054
6235 5641	7029 7549
5803 7251	6347 7469

1+3D Jackpot

Jackpot 1	RM5,827,161.00
1200 + 5436	5436 + 1200
1200 + 0869	0869 + 1200
5436 + 0869	0869 + 5436
Jackpot 2	RM113,488.80

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

3+3D Bonus

1st Prize	Bonus	1st Prize Bonus
931 200 + ROOSTER		RM1,041,146.80
2nd Prize	Bonus	2nd Prize Bonus
225 436 + SNAKE		RM1,015,904.60
3rd Prize	Bonus	3rd Prize Bonus
450 869 + DOG		RM1,511,506.00

Starters	Consolation
835 095 236 483	404 943 990 221
782 542 833 370	414 050 615 640
816 764 693 539	203 052 004 054
596 235 895 641	467 029 017 549
065 803 447 251	526 347 137 469

3D

1st Prize	200
2nd Prize	436
3rd Prize	869

3D Jackpot

Jackpot	RM849,540.10
200 + 436 + 869	436 + 869 + 200
200 + 869 + 436	869 + 200 + 436
436 + 200 + 869	869 + 436 + 200

Winning combination matches the Top 3 Prizes in any order.
1+3D Jackpot 2 RM546,332.10 won on 22/12/2024!

The Community Chest is an independent, not-for-profit, non-governmental charitable organisation which supports education for the sole benefit of the Malaysian community and is primarily funded by the profits of Da Ma Cai.

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First archery tournament to be held at Elmu Campus in Nilai

THE National Archery Association of Malaysia (Naam), Enforcement, Leadership and Management University (Elmu) together with Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission's (MACC) Prihatin Foundation will be organising an archery tournament in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan on Dec 28 and 29.

Event Director, Jeffri Zaiham Jamaluddin said the National Field Archery Championships @Elmu 2024 will see the senior and junior categories compete across various age groups and skill levels in a competitive and inclusive atmosphere.

"Archery on the course is more similar to golf which has 18 holes, but this event requires archers to complete 24 check points and the target distance varies.

"So the challenges are very interesting and most archers who are used to archery in open locations will face different challenges," he told *Bernama TV's Apa Khabar Malaysia* programme today.

Meanwhile, MACC Prihatin Foundation chairman Zuhairie Abu Bakar said the organisation of the tournament will indirectly bring the community closer to MACC and thus would be able to support integrity in efforts to prevent corruption among Malaysians.

"When you look at the categories contested, there are seniors and juniors, so there are categories of groups for us (MACC) to be close to them besides welfare, we support integrity efforts so that they are close to the MACC and eventually become ambassadors in efforts to prevent corruption," he said.

The tournament, being held for the first time, will be contested at the Elmu Campus in Bandar Enstek, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. - Bernama

Kelantan to host National Jr GP Circuit Finals

THE Kelantan State Badminton Association (PBNK) will be hosting the National Junior Circuit Grand Prix Badminton Championship (Finals) in June next year.

Its president Dr Naharuddin Hashim (*pic*) said it will be the first time the state is hosting the National Junior Circuit Finals for local U-16 players.

"This is the first time we (PBNK) have been given the task to organise the finals of the National Junior Badminton Circuit in three categories namely U-12, U-14 and U-16 involving singles and doubles for boys and girls.

"Previously, Kelantan has never been given the responsibility of

organising the National Junior Circuit GP (Finals) and it is an honour for the state and PBNK itself," he told reporters after the signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding between PBNK and Fresh Life Water Resources (M) Sdn Bhd at PBNK Hall yesterday.

He said that as the host, the association would also line up several top



state prospects (players) to win the tournament.

"Among the players we will be fielding is Kashah Khairul Azlan, 14, who just finished runner-up in the U-15 category at the Woncheon Yonex Miryang Korea Junior International Challenge 2024 tournament held in

Miryang, South Korea from Nov 25 to Dec 1.

"Therefore, PBNK will work with the Kelantan State Sports Council (MSN) and the state government to ensure that the tournament can be held smoothly," he said.

He said before the finals is held, each team must first participate in two National Junior Circuit GP League tour series in March to April next year.

"The National Junior Circuit GP League is usually held in two tour series, where each team is divided into two groups to collect points before qualifying for the National Junior Circuit GP (Finals)," he said. - Bernama



Muhammad Fareez Anuar. - BERNAMAPIK

THE country's rising para badminton star Muhammad Fareez Anuar still does not seem to believe that he can achieve so much improvement in performance in just two years since leading the country's challenge in the sport back in 2022.

The 28-year-old said he had set his sights on achieving an impressive level of play within three years but his involvement turned out to be an impact that could formide other world champions in the SU5 men's singles category.

"It feels like a dream, I didn't expect that in two years I would have had various experiences, including the opportunity to compete for the first time at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

"The progress in performance for two years is very fast for me because I expect three years to reach the level of the game now and catch up with other great players," he told *Bernama*.

Muhammad Fareez said one of the secrets of his achievements was the effectiveness of the training programme prepared by coach Nova Armada.

He said he was very happy with the approach applied by the Indonesian coach who has a variety of training patterns according to the tournaments and sports games he participated in.

"Sometimes there is a relaxing time, sometimes there is a time when he will push us hard. I like that approach, as an athlete for us to feel less stressed and enjoy," he said.

Not only that, the world No. 5 said the opportunity to train with world No. 1 and two-time Paralympic gold medalist Cheah Liek Hou has also helped him to get to where he is now.

Despite making it to the semifinals with an energetic performance at the Paralympics, Muhammad Fareez admits that

... but more time needed for impact on world stage, says Muhammad Fareez

sometimes he still can't completely forget his failure to bring home a medal from the world's prestigious sporting event.

"Until now still thinking about the Paris action, feel sad for not bringing home a medal. It is difficult to move on," he said.

Muhammad Fareez's dream of a medal was dashed after losing to Indonesia's Dheva Anrimusthi, 21-17, 19-21, 12-21 in the SU5 men's singles bronze medal match at the Porte de La Chapelle Arena last September.

He had earlier shown his prowess by winning Group B, including shocking second seed Fang Jen-Yu of Taiwan, with a 21-14, 21-18 straight sets victory.

At the same time, he was also aggrieved that he could not close the 2024 campaign more gloriously when he fell to Dheva 15-21, 17-21 in the final of the 2024 International Bahrain Para Badminton Championships in Manama, Bahrain, recently.

However, the player from Johor continued to excel with Liek Hou when they topped the SU5 men's doubles competition in the same tournament by coming back to defeat the Indonesian pair represented by Dheva and Hafizh Briliansyah Prawiranegara, 13-21, 21-17, 21-16.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Fareez has a mission to penetrate the top three best players in the world next year and added that he was currently undergoing training and is scheduled to return to the court during two tournaments in Spain next March, namely the 2025 Spanish Para Badminton Championships I and II. - Bernama

NSC approved 32 players for PP2025

THE National Sports Council (NSC) has approved a total of 32 sepak takraw players for the 2025 Podium Programme (PP2025), in preparation for several important tournaments and games for the next two years.

Malaysian Sepaktakraw Association (PSM) secretary-general Datuk Abidullah Salleh said all 21 male and 12 female players will report to NSC on Jan 2.

PSM had previously sought NSC's consideration to increase the men's team quota from the previous 18 to between 21-24 players.

"The selection and monitoring session was carried out by the national squad coaching staff based on the current performance of the players during the 2024 Khir Johari Gold Cup Tournament, Sepak Takraw League (STL) and 2024 Tun Ali Cup for the men's team.

"The women's squad was selected during the Sarawak Malaysia Games (Sukma), the 2024 Tun Ali Cup and the selection session from Dec 9-13 at NSC Bukit Jalil," he said in a statement.

Among the challenges that will be faced by the national teams are the Thailand SEA Games next December, the 2025 Asian Cup, the 2025 Thai King's Cup Sepaktakraw Championship and the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan.

Based on the list released by PSM, the mA total of 10 gold medals will be up for grabs in the sepak takraw arena (including chinlone) at the 2025 SEA Games, while eight gold medals will be at stake at the 2026 Asian Games. - Bernama

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4D Classic

1st Prize	7185
2nd Prize	1127
3rd Prize	0110

SPECIAL	1802	5881	3440
2215	2083	3814	3518
1435	3315	1509	4900
1986	3367	6208	7626
0628	0410	3638	4454

4D Jackpot

Jackpot 1 **RM4,724,329.92**
PARTIALLY WON

7185 + 1127	7185 + 0110
1127 + 7185	1127 + 0110
0110 + 7185	0110 + 1127

Jackpot 2 **RM383,001.43**
WON

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4 5 6 8 18 19 22 26
+
2 14
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RM1,000 EVERY DAY for 20 years
2nd Prize
RM1,000 EVERY DAY for 100 days

Jackpot Gold

Jackpot 1 **RM11,289,798.98**
Jackpot 1 - Group 1 + Golden Number

Jackpot 2 **RM231,866.83** **PARTIALLY WON**
Jackpot 2 - Group 2 + Golden Number

GROUP 1	8 5 2 7 1 0
GROUP 2	85271 OR 52710
GROUP 3	8527 OR 2710
GROUP 4	852 OR 710
GROUP 5	85 OR 10
	OR 27
GOLDEN NUMBER	11

All jackpot amounts stated above are for this Draw. Subject to T&Cs of the Scheme. Please visit to www.magnum4d.my for more info. THE BIGGER PLAY IS TO PLAY RESPONSIBLY.



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Predictions for 2025

SO HERE we are again. The clock is ticking on another surreal 12 months in the Premier League, a year which kept us guessing, had fans behind sofas panicking about outcomes, and threw up the kind of drama that continues to see England's top-flight lauded as the most exciting and exhilarating in the world. Well, kind of. Manchester City won the title, again. Erling Haaland grabbed the golden boot, again. Ange Postecoglou frequently used the word "mate", again.

Some things that will almost definitely happen in the Premier League next year

And as for all three promoted clubs? "We never saw it coming"... said absolutely no-one.

Even VAR settled down with more sensible procedures. But at least we head into 2025 with some mystique, most of it surrounding the City meltdown and Marcus Rashford, and for once the title race isn't as predictable as Russell Martin sticking to his philosophy.

Amid all that excitement and uncertainty though, here's some guarantees on things that will definitely (maybe) happen...

Arsenal won't win the title

It's May 2025. Arsenal have just come from behind to beat already relegated Southampton on the final day, Kai Havertz has defied his doubters with a crisp finish for the winning goal, and Mikel Arteta is being applauded while thanking the travelling fans.

The three points wasn't enough to land the Gunners the silverware on the final day, falling agonisingly short for the third successive season.

But fear not, this is a young, progressive, ambitious coach who has established a team with an identity.

The new year is nearly upon us too, and the club has big spending plans to make sure that next year, it will be their time.

Sound familiar? Probably, as with the exception of the venue, it depicts the exact scene we all witnessed for the finale to the 2023/24 season. Arsenal have undoubtedly taken steps

forward under Arteta, but until a clinical front man is purchased, then fans can keep their posters of the Invincibles.

Pep will rise again

Ok, let's enjoy it while it lasts. From that day when neutrals danced on the streets because Sergio Aguero had ended the dynasty of Manchester United, it's City who are now the team everyone loves to hate.

And their recent problems (results-wise, not the 115 off-field ones), have brought festive joy to many.

Pep Guardiola also looks a man in need of a sleep by the fire. But is the drop off that unfathomable?

It's almost as if the same group of players competing for four major trophies year in, year out, under a zealot known for his manic intensity, can take its toll once in a while.

City will not win the title this season, with Liverpool currently looking their most likely successors.

A multi-million spending spree this summer will follow, as will the return of the seemingly irreplaceable Rodri, and normal business will resume in August and September.

Nunez will nail title winner

Remember Michy Batshuayi winning Chelsea the title? No, you probably don't, as by that point in the season you'd long switched off from Antonio Conte's suffer-ball, but it was one of just eight Premier League goals he scored for the Blues in 48 appearances.

Which is the exact ratio Darwin Nunez is currently scoring at in the top flight, having bagged two in 12 this season.

Although his tendency to charge around like a nutcase, subtly described by pundits as "threat", along with regular attempts to shatter crossbars, make him a more prominent star than Batshuayi.

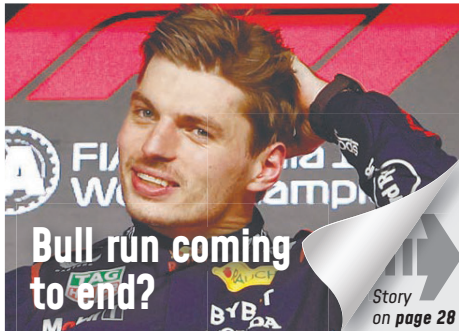
Nothing would be more Darwin than not getting his third until late on in the campaign. Nothing would also be more Darwin than said goal being an absolute screamer that lands Arne Slot the title and cements the Uruguayan in Anfield folklore for evermore.

■ MORE ON PAGE 30



Pep Guardiola

Nunez



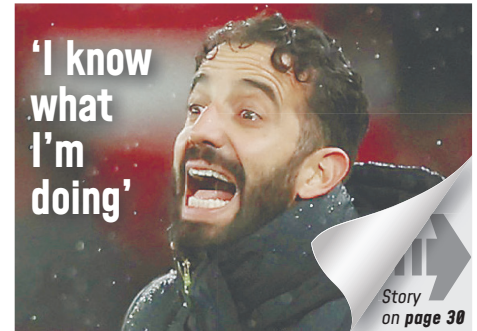
Bull run coming to end?

Story on page 28



Joker eyes more Slam glory

Story on page 29



'I know what I'm doing'

Story on page 30