



### Doubts raised over effectiveness of female-only car park sections

While such designated spaces may provide some form of reassurance, move does little to address broader public safety concerns: Society chief

Report on page 5

# Cockle industry choked by pollution

Production in Sabak Bernam drops to zero, prompting calls for targeted strategies to instil greater awareness, curb contamination and protect public health.

Report on page 3

**CULTURAL UNITY ...** Multiracial performers taking part in the Penang Chingay Parade on Saturday in a display of harmony and social cohesion. — **BERNAMAPIC**

Report on page 6



### 'Amend law to reflect rights of single dads'

Current legislation on marriage and divorce does not do justice to evolving roles of fathers in family unit, says association president.

Report on page 2

### Prioritise heart health, older women urged

While commonly associated with symptoms like hot flushes, fatigue and emotional changes, negative impact of menopause on cardiovascular system often overlooked: Doctor

Report on page 4

## Pahang Sultan launches palace fire safety team

**KUANTAN:** The Sultan of Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah launched the Pahang Royal Palace Fire Safety Team on Saturday, the first of its kind in the country.

He said he has a deep connection to the establishment of the team as it was an idea by the Pahang Palace, which was realised in collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Department.

Al-Sultan Abdullah expressed hope that the team would train palace staff and their families to be prepared

for emergencies and extend assistance to those affected in times of need.

"I hope all palace staff would play their roles by assisting neighbours and family members whenever a tragedy such as a fire or flood occurs.

"I am truly impressed by the dedication of firefighters, who are always present during crises to save lives. In every sense, they are the true frontliners," Al-Sultan Abdullah said during the launch at the Pahang Fire and Rescue Department

headquarters here.

Its director-general Datuk Nor Hisham Mohammad and state director Datuk Dr Wan Mohamad Zaidi Wan Isa were also present.

Al-Sultan Abdullah also unveiled a "Menghapus Bahaya" (Eradicating Danger) plaque and witnessed a demonstration conducted by the fire safety team.

Currently, the Pahang Royal Palace Fire Safety Team, which has 48 members, is overseen by Senior Assistant Fire Commissioner

(Honorary) Tok Aria Rakna Ahmad Norbadelin Abdul Murad, the Sultan's special private secretary.

Nor Hisham said the initiative was inspired by Al-Sultan Abdullah's directive to enhance fire preparedness within the palace, ensuring a swift and effective response to any fire incident.

"We are aware that palaces house numerous irreplaceable historical items.

"The loss of such treasures, including the Sultan's long-standing

artworks, would be immeasurable," he said, adding that the concept would be shared with other palaces nationwide.

Meanwhile, Nor Hisham said 9,510 notices were issued to 1,260 buildings, representing 13% of the 18,439 buildings inspected nationwide this year.

"Compliance has been encouraging, with only 94 notices unheeded out of the total issued. Legal action will be taken against those cases." - Bernama

## Industrial park gets RM30b in investments

**SIPITANG:** The Sipitang Oil and Gas Industrial Park has secured investments totalling about RM29.87 billion, said Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor.

He said the investments include those from Esteel for a green steel plant with a phased investment value of RM20 billion, and Petronas for the development of a floating liquefied natural gas facility with an investment value of RM8.8 billion.

Other investments include RM1 billion from E-Concern Sdn Bhd for waste management and RM70 million from Tex Evolosi Waste Management Sdn Bhd.

"All the companies I mentioned will start operations in 2026 and 2027. These investments will create job opportunities, starting with the construction phase and during operations.

"Certainly, the residents of Sipitang and surrounding areas will benefit in various economic sectors," he said.

He was speaking at the official launch of the Arts, Culture, Tourism and Traditional Food Carnival in conjunction with the Sabah Kadayan Annual Food Festival 2024 yesterday.

The text of his speech was read by State Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Arifin Mohd Arif. - Bernama

# Call to amend legislation to reflect rights of single fathers

► While law stipulates that male parent can seek custody in court cases, process usually favours maternal care for young children, says association president

BY HARITH KAMAL  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PETALING JAYA:** The Father's Rights Association of Malaysia is calling for the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 to be amended to reflect present-day norms, and the evolving roles of fathers in the family unit.

Its president Malcolm Fernandez said while the law outlines the rights of single fathers in custody and child support cases, it is often seen as favouring mothers in custody decisions.

"While fathers can seek custody, the process often favours maternal care for younger children. Child support is legally required, but enforcement is difficult when former partners are uncooperative."

Fernandez added that bias extends beyond the law into societal perceptions, with single fathers facing assumptions that men are less capable caregivers.

"This stigma leads to our exclusion from parenting networks, the reluctance of school heads to engage us as primary caregivers, and even judgement from extended families."

He said such biases isolate single fathers and discourage them from seeking help or joining parenting programmes, affecting their ability to support their children emotionally.

Fernandez said up to 40% of single-parent families, including those led by fathers, face financial challenges as they often earn less than the median income.

He said single fathers also face limited childcare options and have to

deal with workplaces that lack family friendly policies.

He added that they frequently encounter difficulties in navigating educational and healthcare systems, which are often designed with mothers as the primary caregivers.

Despite challenges, single fathers like Linus Liau, 52, remain committed.

Liau, a financial consultant, focuses on his responsibilities rather than the biases or societal perceptions.

"I'm not affected by what people say. I was raised to believe a father must be involved in his children's upbringing.

"It was tough at first. After the breakup, I couldn't see my son, and everything seemed chaotic. But over time, things improved. I reconciled with my ex-wife, and now I see my son more often and without issues."

Liau, who has two sons aged 18 and seven, expressed concern about not being able to monitor his younger child's upbringing.

"My older son lives with me and my seven-year-old lives with his mother. I see him every Monday and Thursday for two hours and he stays with me every other weekend.

"When my ex-wife is at work, her

parents care for him, but they struggle with his education. That's why I spend as much time as I can to help him.

"At his age, learning is crucial, and I worry he's missing out on this important phase of his life. Fathers are meant to be there for their children. Without a father figure, children can feel lost and lack guidance."

However, for Alexander Joseph, 51, societal perceptions significantly impacted his life.

Joseph, who separated in 2020 and recently finalised his divorce, said his breakup affected his work and relationships, causing him to lose clients, respect and family support.

"The toughest part was being alienated from my child. For nearly two years, I couldn't see him or share everyday moments."

He added that despite a difficult custody battle, things are improving, and he now treasures every moment with his son.

"Balancing work and parenting is tough, but time with my child makes it all worthwhile. I've learnt to forgive and let go because anger only causes harm. Above all, I have to put my son first, even if it means making compromises."

## No reports of M'sian passengers on ill-fated S. Korean plane

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Malaysian Embassy in Seoul is actively gathering information from official sources and is closely monitoring the situation following a crash of a South Korean passenger plane carrying 181 people at an airport in the country's southwest yesterday.

A statement from the Foreign Ministry said there has been no confirmation that any Malaysian was among the passengers.

Yonhap News Agency reported that the accident happened at 9.07am, when the aircraft veered off the runway while landing, and collided with a wall at the Muan International Airport, in the Muan county, about 288km southwest of Seoul.

At press time, the death toll had been confirmed at 174. - Bernama



Fernandez says bias extends beyond the law into societal perceptions, with single fathers facing assumptions that men are less capable caregivers.

- ADIB RAWI  
YAHYA/THESUN

# Concern over decline of cockles due to pollution

➤ Targeted strategies crucial to address contamination issues as seafood from tainted waters could cause food poisoning and liver damage, says expert

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PETALING JAYA:** Pollution has killed Sabak Bernam's cockle seed production, which has fallen from 555,048 metric tonnes in 2019 to zero in 2023, causing concern among academics, especially since Malaysia's cockle industry is Southeast Asia's largest.

"Sabak Bernam was one of the largest cockle seed production areas in Selangor and Peninsular Malaysia's western coast, (but) other important seed production areas such as Muar-Rengit in Johor, Kuala Kedah in Kedah and Lekir-Bagan Datuk in Perak still exist," said Universiti Putra Malaysia Department of Aquaculture Fisheries Biology lecturer Prof Dr Aziz Arshad.

However, Universiti Putra Malaysia Food Science Department food toxicologist Assoc Prof Dr Ahmad Faizal Abdull Razis said the concern is growing over the safety of seafood harvested from polluted waters. Hence, targeted strategies are crucial to tackle contamination and protect public health.

"Toxins from harmful algal blooms, vibrio bacteria, pesticides and industrial chemicals in polluted waters can contaminate cockles, causing food poisoning, gastrointestinal issues, liver damage, neurological problems and long-term risk of cancer," he said.

Ahmad Faizal warned that consuming even small quantities of cockles exposed to pollutants can be dangerous, with the risk largely depending on the type of toxins present and their concentration.

Aziz added that the death of cockle production in Sabak Bernam has affected farmers there and in Selangor, especially those who depend on seeds produced from spatfall areas (breeding grounds).

"Improving farm management, protecting water quality and preserving habitats for seeds and growth is critical to sustaining the industry."

He said environmental disturbances and seed smuggling activities have also contributed to reduced production, which impacts the supply chain and consumers,



Ahmad Faizal urged the government to implement regular testing of water quality and seafood products, including setting up monitoring stations to track heavy metals, bacteria and toxins in shellfish. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

causing prices to rise.

In case of low production, importing cockles from neighbouring countries is not an option as Malaysia is the sole major producer.

Aziz said environmental conservation remains a long-standing issue, with measures required to mitigate its impact.

However, greater public and industry awareness is needed to prevent the illegal dumping of toxins, organic pollutants and agricultural waste into aquatic ecosystems.

He said cockle beds near estuaries are particularly vulnerable, and greater coordination between the Fisheries and Environment departments is needed to protect them and other aquaculture ventures in the country.

Ahmad Faizal urged the government to implement regular testing of water quality and seafood products, especially in known polluted areas, including setting up monitoring stations to track heavy metals, bacteria and toxins in shellfish.

He said several areas in Malaysia,

particularly in Selangor and around the Klang Valley, are known to be polluted due to industrial activities and agricultural runoff.

"Coastal areas near industrial zones such as Port Klang and densely populated urban centres where untreated sewage and chemical discharge are common are more prone to contamination.

"Fishing in areas near rivers that carry polluted waters is also dangerous, especially those with poor water management or where pollution control measures are inadequate."

Ahmad Faizal said monitoring and regulating seafood safety in affected areas should be part of a National Seafood Safety Programme, which requires a coordinated effort across multiple agencies.

"Seafood, including cockles, must be safe for human consumption. Monitoring contaminants effectively and transparently would be a step in the right direction.

"Local authorities and fishermen should also establish regular monitoring programmes to ensure water quality and seafood safety."

## Good response to 'MySawasdee' service

**BUTTERWORTH:** There was strong demand for the MySawasdee Penang Edition special train service operating between Butterworth and Hat Yai when it began its maiden journey yesterday, with over 70% ticket sales.

Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) special duties (International Affairs) chief Roshidi Yahaya said the trial service, which offers 60 seats per trip, will run until Jan 5.

"We are thrilled with the launch of the MySawasdee Penang Edition.

"This trial service aims to assess passenger demand for the Penang edition, which could lead to expansions to other popular destinations.

"Public response has been very encouraging. The train departed Butterworth at 7.40am and arrived in Hat Yai at about 12.05pm Thai time," he said after the launch at Butterworth station.

The route connects major stations such as Bukit Mertajam, Sungai Petani, Alor Setar, Arau and Padang Besar, with one-way fares priced at RM45.

Roshidi said the initiative is expected to attract tourists from Thailand to Malaysia, boosting domestic tourism while contributing to economic growth and national revenue.

He added that the introduction of the new route also provides an opportunity for residents in northern Peninsular Malaysia and tourists from Thailand to enjoy a seamless and comfortable journey without the need to switch trains.

Passenger Tunku Intan Nadiah Tunku Mohammad Nazarin, 30, shared that she and her friend Shyahirah Abdul Salim, 31, were eager to experience the MySawasdee Penang Edition service for a holiday in Hat Yai.

The civil servant said she had driven to Hat Yai previously but opted for the MySawasdee service for their three-day, two-night getaway for a change.

"I have taken KTMB's train to Bangkok a few times before, and that's one reason I chose MySawasdee," she added.

Tickets for the special MySawasdee train can be purchased via the KTMB mobile app, kiosks or the official website at [www.ktmb.com.my](http://www.ktmb.com.my). — Bernama

## Youth leader named Malay language icon

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Johor Unity Ambassador Lim San Shien has been named the latest "National Malay Language Icon" by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

The award was presented during a recent appreciation awards ceremony by its board chairman, national laureate Datuk Dr Anwar Ridhwan.

Lim, a youth leader, was selected for his outstanding achievements in language, leadership and academic initiatives. He has consistently worked to enhance the status of the Malay language, promote literature and foster a knowledge-driven culture.

The language icon recognition aims to celebrate individuals across various fields who exhibit a deep commitment to elevating and using the national language correctly, inspiring others to engage with the language and its literature.

Other recipients included Fedtri Yahya, Roslan Madun, Haziq Rosebi, "Dr Malar" and "Boss James".

Each recipient received a cash prize of RM1,000.

Lim, a Johor native, expressed gratitude and joy over the recognition and attributed his passion for the Malay language to his mother, a Malay language teacher at a government school.

"My mother instilled in me the importance of the national language. It led me to write academic articles and read newspapers and magazines, which enriched my vocabulary and improved my command of the language," said Lim, who dedicated the recognition to his parents. — Bernama

## Pardon applications must follow procedures: AGC

**KUALA LUMPUR:** All applications for pardons related to offences committed in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya must be submitted to the Pardons Board, which is chaired by the King, said the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC).

In a statement on Saturday, the AGC said it had been instructed by the King to inform the public that such applications must follow the procedures and channels prescribed by law and regulations in force, and not through any other means.

"Therefore, if any party wishes to propose that any prisoner, including former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, serve the remainder of their sentence under house

arrest, the application for such a matter must be submitted for consideration by the Pardons Board chaired by the King," the statement said.

The AGC stated that under Article 42(1) of the Federal Constitution, the King has the authority to grant pardons, reprieves and respite for offences committed in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya.

Article 42(2) of the Constitution further provides that the King may remit, suspend or commute any sentence imposed by the courts.

"In this matter, decisions made by the King based on the advice of the Pardons Board

under Article 42 of the Constitution are also subject to applicable legal provisions to prevent such actions from being challenged in court for being unlawful," the statement added.

Najib, 71, is serving a six-year prison sentence after being found guilty of misappropriating RM42 million belonging to SRC International Sdn Bhd.

The High Court initially sentenced Najib to 12 years in prison and imposed a RM210 million fine.

However, the sentence was shortened to six years in prison and the fine reduced to RM50 million following a royal pardon petition filed on Sept 2, 2022. — Bernama



# Warning on heart health risks after **menopause**

➤ Statistics show rate of cardiovascular issues doubles within 10 years after cessation of regular menstrual cycle

BY **KIRTINEE RAMESH**  
newsdesk@thesunday.com

**PETALING JAYA:** A cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon has urged menopausal women in their 50s and older to be vigilant about their heart health due to the increased risks they face.

Dr David Khoo Sin Keat of IHeal Medical Centre highlighted that in 2021, the average life expectancy of Malaysian women was 78.3 years, while the average age for the onset of menopause was 50.7 years.

"Women are expected to spend one-third or more of their lives in post-menopause, a state of oestrogen deficiency. While commonly associated with symptoms like hot flushes, fatigue and emotional changes, the impact of menopause on cardiovascular health is often overlooked," he said.

Khoo explained that statistics show the rate of heart attacks in women doubles within 10 years of menopause. Lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, stress, smoking and unhealthy diets further contribute to an earlier onset of menopause-related cardiovascular issues.

"Oestrogen protects the heart and with menopause, the risk of cardiovascular disease increases as its level decreases. By the age of 55, the incidence of cardiovascular disease in Malaysian men and women is equal, with coronary heart disease (CHD) being the leading cause of death in both sexes."

He also noted that women often exhibit atypical symptoms of CHD, which are commonly linked to microvascular heart disease.

Their symptoms tend to worsen due to mental and emotional stress, unlike men, for whom physical exertion is the usual trigger.

"Oestrogen helps maintain blood vessel flexibility, reduces inflammation and regulates cholesterol by increasing 'good' high-density lipoprotein cholesterol while lowering 'bad' low-density lipoprotein cholesterol," he said.

The loss of oestrogen during menopause leads to elevated levels of bad cholesterol, higher blood pressure and reduced blood vessel elasticity.

These changes significantly increase the risk of atherosclerosis (plaque buildup in the arteries), coronary artery disease, stroke and heart failure with "preserved ejection fraction", a condition more common in women, in which the heart pumps normally but is too stiff to fill properly.

"Many women mistakenly view heart disease as a predominantly male issue. They

ignore symptoms such as fatigue, shortness of breath and palpitations, which could indicate underlying cardiovascular problems," Khoo said.

Menopause symptoms such as severe hot flushes and night sweats can strain blood vessels, while persistent fatigue may signal heart-related concerns.

Palpitation or irregular heartbeat are also warning signs that require medical attention.

Khoo emphasised that heart disease is largely preventable.

"Women can take proactive steps during perimenopause - the period shortly before menopause - and early menopause to reduce their risk. A heart-healthy lifestyle is key," he said.

He recommended regular exercise such as brisk walking or swimming, combined with a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins to significantly lower the risks.

Avoiding smoking, limiting alcohol intake and managing stress through mindfulness or yoga are equally important.

Routine health check-ups to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels are critical for early detection. In some cases, hormone replacement therapy under medical supervision may help alleviate menopause related symptoms and reduce cardiovascular risks.

"During menopause-related visits, healthcare providers should discuss the impact of declining oestrogen on heart health and provide tailored informational materials for perimenopausal and postmenopausal women," he said.

Khoo also stressed the importance of community outreach through health talks, workshops and online campaigns, especially in collaboration with NGOs and women's health organisations.

"Culturally sensitive communication plays a crucial role in Malaysia, where taboos around menopause may exist. By adapting messages to resonate with diverse cultural contexts and using relatable examples, healthcare providers can empower women to prioritise their heart health."

## Association committed to empowering **Bumiputra** businesses

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Malay Businessmen and Industrialists Association of Malaysia (Perdasama) will continue to act as a vital bridge between the government and *Bumiputra* entrepreneurs, championing efforts to empower the community.

Its president Mohd Azamanizam Baharon said Perdasama, which has 27,263 members nationwide, remains committed to supporting and advancing government initiatives and policies at both state and federal levels to strengthen the position of *Bumiputra* entrepreneurs.

He also urged the government to actively involve NGOs in shaping policies, particularly those focused on *Bumiputra* development, to ensure more comprehensive implementation through the *Bumiputra* economic council.

"We hope Perdasama and other *Bumiputra* NGOs will be included in the process of shaping and determining government policies."

"This is an agenda we aim to champion in 2025 and we strongly encourage government representatives to participate in meetings focused on *Bumiputra* initiatives," he said during Perdasama's 26th annual general meeting (AGM) held on Saturday.

Regarding the AGM, Mohd Azamanizam said Perdasama proposed that government assistance schemes and grants be extended, particularly to *Bumiputra* companies involved in high-tech industries, renewable energy and artificial intelligence-driven businesses.

He stressed the importance of expanding the market reach of Perdasama members, leveraging Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean in 2025 to unlock regional opportunities.

"We need to prioritise the Asean market, especially with Malaysia chairing Asean in 2025. This is an excellent opportunity for Perdasama to collaborate closely with the government." - Bernama



**CAPTIVATING ART ...** A visitor taking a photo of a display showcased at the 'Kenyalang Circus' exhibition by young graphic and textile artist Marcos Kueh held at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. - SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THESUN

## No break in stride for running enthusiast

**BATU PAHAT:** Every time Najwa Natasya Mohd Hisham hears about a running event, she eagerly signs up and participates.

For the Southern Volunteers Fun Run held recently, the Universiti PolyTech Malaysia student, 22, made a quick trip back to her hometown just to take part.

Najwa shares her passion for casual running activities with her mother, Sarizal Japeri, 45, and is also a member of a group called the "Casual Run Group", which joins organised running events.

Despite having activities at her campus in Kuala Lumpur this week, Najwa was determined to return home to join the fun run with her mother and members of the group, who are her mother's friends.

"For me and the Casual Run Group, our goal is to participate in at least one running event every month. It's also how we maintain our health and practise a healthy lifestyle," she said. - Bernama

## Penang facing hotel room shortage to meet booming demand

**GEORGE TOWN:** Penang is experiencing a shortage of hotel rooms to accommodate the increasing number of foreign and domestic tourists, particularly during festive seasons and major events.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said the state has about 12,000 hotel rooms and highlighted the need for more, especially in Seberang Perai, to meet the growing demand for tourist accommodation.

"I believe the Penang Development Corporation, as the state's economic

development arm, has plans to address hotel infrastructure and is creating opportunities for the hospitality sector to invest here.

"I was also informed that the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority offers incentives to private players in tourism and hospitality, not just the manufacturing sector.

"I hope the private sector seizes this opportunity," he said at the soft launch of the Iconic Marjorie Hotel in Bayan Lepas on Saturday.

Chow added that the state welcomed 6.18 million domestic and international tourists via

the Penang International Airport from January to October, representing a 7.46% increase in arrivals compared with the same period last year.

He expressed confidence in Penang's tourism prospects over the next two to three years, driven by visa exemptions for Chinese and Indian tourists, along with additional direct flights to Penang from key cities around the world.

Chow also predicted growth in meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions tourism, supported by the opening of the Penang

Waterfront Convention Centre next year.

The 76,000sq ft facility is expected to become a premier venue for various events in the state.

Efforts to enhance hospitality facilities, dining experiences and recreational attractions will continue to be intensified to provide tourists with memorable experiences, he added.

Regarding the launch, Chow said the Iconic Marjorie Hotel, a collaboration between the Iconic Group and Marriott International, will positively impact the local economy and create job opportunities. - Bernama

# Female-only parking sparks debate on long-term impact

➤ Experts call for better enforcement, infrastructure and cultural change to enhance women's safety

BY HARITH KAMAL  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PETALING JAYA:** Female-only car parks are designed to enhance women's safety but their long-term effectiveness remains uncertain, according to All Women's Action Society deputy president Khairiah Abdul Malik.

She noted that while such designated spaces may provide immediate reassurance for women, they do little to address broader public safety concerns.

"The introduction of female-only car parks in Malaysia aims to address women's safety concerns in urban areas, particularly following incidents like the tragic 2003 case of Canny Ong, who was abducted from a basement car park and later found murdered."

Khairiah said female-only facilities, such as parking spaces, show mixed results in reducing crime.

She referenced a 2020 nationwide survey by Engender Consultancy, an organisation promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, which found that 58.6% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces, with 70.4% of incidents occurring during the daytime.

"These findings demonstrate that while women-only zones offer a temporary buffer against certain crimes, they do not address the underlying systemic issues contributing to gender-based violence."

Khairiah said female-only parking spaces are often strategically located near mall entrances and should be made mandatory in all multi-storey buildings for safety.

Essential features include better lighting, surveillance cameras, panic buttons and security personnel to enhance protection.

"Female-only parking spaces promote security, empowering women to engage in public life more freely. However, misuse by men or couples undermines their purpose. This issue persists due to insufficient legal enforcement as there are no penalties for rule-breakers," she said.

Lee Ming Hui, a 24-year-old banker from Damansara, expressed frustration over the frequent misuse of female-only parking spaces by men.

"I usually shop alone and always park in the female-only section. Many times, I've seen men parking there despite clear signs indicating it's reserved for women. It's infuriating and I always confront them, but they just brush it off, claiming there's no difference in where anyone parks."

"I'm sure there are CCTV cameras or security personnel around but every time this happens it feels like nothing is being done to address it," she said.

Women's Aid Organisation acting executive director Nazreen Nizam stressed that stricter enforcement

and penalties are necessary to prevent the misuse of female-only parking spaces.

"The effectiveness of these spaces depends on rigorous enforcement and public respect. While they contribute positively to women's safety, continuous efforts are crucial to ensure their impact," she said.

Nazreen suggested penalties, such as fines or towing vehicles, to deter misuse.

Additionally, constant surveillance through CCTV, regular security patrols and clear signage would support enforcement efforts and increase the likelihood of detection and punishment.

"These measures not only reinforce the rules but also underscore the importance of these spaces in protecting women's safety in public areas," she said.

Khairiah highlighted that several factors still need to be addressed to improve the safety of female-only parking areas, including better infrastructure and, more importantly, changing societal attitudes towards

women's safety.

"Many malls in Malaysia offer good security for female-only car parks, but poor lighting, inadequate surveillance and unclear signage can undermine their effectiveness, increasing fear. Well-maintained areas with good lighting and visible security are essential for safety," she said.

While female-only car parks provide temporary relief, Khairiah stressed the need for a broader approach encompassing better urban design, stricter rules and cultural education to create inclusive and safe public spaces for everyone.

"Safety in female-only car parks is a shared responsibility among women, facility management and the public. Women should also remain vigilant and use available security systems."

"Through cooperation, awareness, and consistent use of safety resources, female-only parking spaces can achieve their intended purpose of providing a secure and accessible environment for women."



Khairiah said female-only parking spaces are often strategically located near mall entrances and should be made mandatory in all multi-storey buildings for safety. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

## Tidal gates keep S'wak town flood-free

**KUCHING:** The seasonal flooding problem affecting the town of Spaoh in Betong and its waterfront areas has been addressed with the construction of three tidal control gates at the Spaoh River, according to Sarawak Deputy Premier Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas.

Uggah, who visited the waterfront yesterday, expressed satisfaction with the solution.

"So far, so good. The project appears to be performing its intended function of preventing floodwaters from entering. In the past, whenever we experienced heavy rain and the Spaoh River overflowed its banks, flooding occurred here in Spaoh."

"We are also reviewing other enhancement projects, including a walkway and a gazebo," he said in a statement issued yesterday.

Uggah, who is also the Bukit Saban state assemblyman, noted that the RM500,000 project undertaken by the Betong division development agency was completed ahead of its scheduled completion date of May 2025.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) reported in Kuala Lumpur yesterday that heavy rain is expected to persist across Terengganu until today.

In an alert issued at 12.30pm yesterday, MetMalaysia forecast similar weather conditions for Kuantan in Pahang, as well as Jeli, Tanah Merah, Machang, Pasir Puteh and Kuala Krai in Kelantan.

An alert-level continuous rain advisory has also been issued for parts of Kelantan, including Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Kota Bharu, Bachok, and Gua Musang, extending until tomorrow.

Other areas under the advisory include Jerantut, Maran, Pekan, and Rompin in Pahang, as well as Mersing in Johor.

In Sabah, the advisory applies to the Interior (Tambunan), West Coast, Tawau (Lahad Datu), and Sandakan regions, including Telupid, Kinabatangan, Beluran, and Kudat. — Bernama

## Eight injured in MPV-trailer collision

**JOHOR BAHRU:** Eight people, including three children, were injured in a crash involving a multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) and a trailer in Jalan Mersing Nitar near Felda Nitar 1, Mersing, on Saturday.

Mersing fire and rescue station operations commander senior fire officer II Shamsuri Shafai said the station received a call about the crash at 3.01pm.

A team comprising a Light Fire Rescue Tender vehicle and a Navara four-wheel drive vehicle with 13 personnel from the Mersing fire and rescue station, was dispatched to the scene.

"Upon arrival at 3.21pm, it was found that the accident involved an MPV and a trailer. The team worked to rescue all eight victims in the MPV, including the driver who was trapped, using specialised rescue equipment," he said in a statement.

He added that the driver of the trailer did not sustain any injuries. — Bernama

## Siblings in crash coping well after surgeries

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The two siblings who survived a horrific accident involving five vehicles at KM204 of the North-South Expressway northbound last Monday are coping well following their surgeries.

Their paternal grandfather Mazupi Abdul Rahman, 64, said the children were discharged on Saturday.

"They are both stable and in the healing process and will continue with follow-up treatment at the

Orthopaedics Department in Serdang Hospital and the Psychiatry and Mental Health Department of Kuala Lumpur Hospital," he said.

However, he noted that Muhammad Uwais Al-Qarni Khairul Ikhwan, seven, and Nur Sofea Humaira Khairul Ikhwan, four, remain in a state of grief after learning about the deaths of their parents and youngest sibling in the crash on Dec 23.

The accident also involved a tour

bus and three other vehicles.

"Their schooling will resume once they are fully recovered as confirmed by the doctors and I will handle all their schooling arrangements," he added.

On Wednesday, Muhammad Uwais underwent surgery for an injured right thigh, while Nur Sofea Humaira had surgery for a broken left thigh at Malacca Hospital. Both children were allowed to return home that evening.

The two siblings are the only

survivors from their immediate family, who tragically lost five members in the accident. The deceased include their parents, Khairul Ikhwan Mazupi, 32, and Fadzlenna Ramli, 32, their youngest brother, Muhammad Umar, two and their maternal grandparents, Ramli Ab Wahab, 66, and Fauziah Jaafar, 69.

The crash also claimed the lives of the tour bus driver, Noorisnien Khamid, 56, and a Singaporean passenger, Lamrah Asid Ali, 66. — Bernama

# Chingay parade draws thousands

➤ Performances by multiracial troupe members entertain both locals and tourists

**GEORGE TOWN:** Thousands of locals and foreigners took to the streets here to be part of the Penang Chingay Parade on Saturday, which began at Jalan Johor in Padang Brown.

State Tourism and Creative Economy Committee chairman Wong Hon Wai said 41 teams, including Chingay flag bearers, acrobatic troupes, bands, Muay Thai and silambam exponents as well as floats, made their way through Jalan Datuk Keramat, Jalan Penang, Lebuhraya Chulia and Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling before arriving at the Esplanade three hours later, having travelled about 4.5km.

"Chingay in Penang is not just for entertainment but a symbol of the cooperation and appreciation towards the rich cultural heritage shared by all races. The parade brings all of us together and strengthens us as a community," he said.

The crowds that lined the streets were entertained not only with performances of Chingay flag acrobatics, but also lion and dragon dances as well as martial arts displays by Malay and Indian participants, alongside their Chinese counterparts.

Trader Mohamed Azizul Abu Bakar Sitiz, 29, said he started dabbling in Chingay since he was seven after he attended a parade with his uncle and took nearly eight years to master performing with the giant bamboo flagpoles.

He is part of the Sungai Pinang Chingay Association, that has more than 20 multiracial members aged 18 to 40, Bernama reported.

"You need to have skill to manoeuvre the flagpole and know

which way the wind is blowing so that it is easier to balance. Chingay isn't easy and if you slip up, it can be dangerous not only to yourself but also other team members," he said.

"After training for eight years, I can now balance the flagpole using several parts of my body, including my back and chest."

A Chinese tourist who gave his name only as Lin, 29, said it was the first time he witnessed the vibrant Chingay celebrations.

"This is my first time experiencing Chingay and it's really interesting. We do not have Chingay performances in Shanghai," he said.

Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said during his opening speech that it was the state government's mission to promote Chingay globally next year with Johor and Singapore by submitting an application for it to be included on the Unesco Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

"The state government is convinced Penang can be a state that inspires the nation not only in the economic field, but also in cultural conservation, social development and other aspects that contribute to the development of the country and its people's civilisation," he said, adding that the Penang Chingay Association would be part of the delegation at the Singapore Chingay Festival in February.

The word Chingay originates from the Hokkien word "chin yi", which means "pure art". The parade has been held annually for the past 100 years and has become a cultural attraction in Penang.



Despite being wild animals, the hippopotamuses at the zoo are accustomed to the presence of visitors. - BERNAMAPIC

## Crowds smitten by hippo family

**TAIPING:** At every mealtime, June the hippopotamus enthusiastically mimics the actions of her brother Atan and parents April and Lek, opening her mouth wide at the edge of their pond to receive food.

One by one, bundles of napier grass, vegetables and fruits are tossed into their mouths by caretaker Muhammad Shahrul Izwani Muhammad Azhari, 27.

After eating, Atan swiftly dives back to the bottom of the pond, followed closely by his younger sibling.

The playful antics of the family of Nile hippos, scientifically known as *Hippopotamus amphibius*, are a huge attraction at the Taiping Zoo.

June was born on June 5 and has just been weaned and is learning to eat solid food, while Atan was born in 2016.

Muhammad Shahrul, who has been caring for the animals for eight years, said while managing them is not difficult, all tasks must be done carefully, especially when cleaning the area around the pond, as hippos are aggressive and fast animals.

"When they see us entering their enclosure, they will run quickly toward us. What we do is have another worker feed them to distract them while I clean the pen."

He said the hippopotamus family consumes about 50kg of vegetables and fruits during each

meal, four times a day.

Zoo director Dr Muhamad Ridhwan Affendi said June has become a popular attraction.

"Hippopotamuses spend 90% of their time in the water, including mating, giving birth and nursing their young."

"June was also born and raised in the water. We only saw her follow her mother onto land after a few weeks," he said.

He also said the zoo has also introduced African catfish into the hippopotamus pool, and they act as "dentists" for the animals.

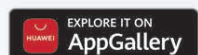
"The catfish swim into the hippopotamus's wide-open mouth, cleaning any food residue around its mouth and teeth," he said. - Bernama

## ENJOY A SEAMLESS READING EXPERIENCE.

Read our iPaper at <https://www.thesun.my/>



Or download **theSun** app  
Malaysian Paper  
on the AppStore or Google Play



# All but two feared dead in fiery South Korea plane crash

➤ Aircraft carrying 181 from Bangkok

**MUAN:** A Jeju Air plane carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea crashed on arrival yesterday, smashing into a barrier and bursting into flames, leaving all but two feared dead.

A bird strike and adverse weather conditions were cited by authorities as likely causes of the crash that flung passengers out of the plane and left it "almost completely destroyed," according to fire officials.

Video showed the twin-engine Boeing 737-800 from Bangkok landing on its belly at Muan International Airport, skidding off the runway as smoke streamed out from the engines, before crashing into a wall and exploding in flames.

"Passengers were ejected from the aircraft after it collided with the wall, leaving little chance of survival," a fire official told families at a briefing.

"The plane is almost completely destroyed, and identifying the deceased is proving difficult. The process is taking time as we locate and recover the remains," he said.

Only two people were rescued, both flight attendants, and 167 people were confirmed dead by early evening, the fire department said.

Flight 7C2216 was attempting to land shortly after 9am (8am in Malaysia) at the airport.

"Only the tail part retains a little bit of shape, and the rest of (the plane) looks almost impossible to recognise," Muan fire chief Lee Jung-hyun said.

Authorities have switched from rescue to recovery operations and because of the force of the impact, are searching nearby areas for bodies, Lee said.

The two crew were being treated at hospitals with medium to severe injuries, said the head of the local public health centre.

Hours after the crash, mortuary vehicles were lined up to take bodies away, and authorities said a temporary morgue had been established.

The crash site smelled of aviation fuel and blood, according to witnesses, and workers in protective suits and masks combed the area while soldiers searched through bushes.

Authorities had worked to rescue people in the tail section, an airport official said shortly after the crash.

The crash is the worst by any South Korean airline since a 1997 Korean Air crash in Guam that killed more than 200 people.

Investigators are looking into bird strikes and weather conditions as possible factors, Lee said.

The control tower issued a bird strike warning and shortly afterward the pilots declared mayday, a Transport Ministry official said.

About one minute after the

mayday call the aircraft made its ill-fated attempt to land, the official said.

A passenger texted a relative to say a bird was stuck in the wing, the News1 agency reported. The person's final message was, "Should I say my last words?"

The passengers included two Thai nationals and the rest are believed to be South Koreans, according to the Transport Ministry.

The Boeing 737-800 jet, operated by Jeju Air, was manufactured in 2009.

Jeju Air CEO Kim E-bae apologised for the accident, bowing deeply during a televised briefing.

He said the cause of the crash was still unknown, that the aircraft had no record of accidents and there were no early signs of malfunction. The airline will cooperate with investigators and make supporting the bereaved its top priority, Kim said.

No abnormal conditions were reported when the aircraft left Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, said Kerati

Kijmanawat, president of Airports of Thailand.

Founded in 2005, Jeju Air is a low-cost airline that operates international routes to Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines, in addition to domestic flights.

Boeing said in a emailed statement, "We are in contact with Jeju Air regarding flight 2216 and stand ready to support them. We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew."

All domestic and international flights at Muan airport had been cancelled.

South Korean acting President Choi Sang-mok, named interim leader on Friday, said the government was using all its resources to deal with the crash.

Two Thai women were on the plane, aged 22 and 45, Thai government spokesperson Jirayu Houngsub said.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra sent condolences to the families of the dead and injured. – AFP/Reuters



Rescue workers examining the crash site at Muan International Airport yesterday. – REUTERS/SPIC

## Cambodia pardons jailed surrogate Philippine mothers

**MANILA:** Cambodia has pardoned and sent home 13 Philippine women who were jailed over a scheme to become surrogate mothers, an outlawed practice, the Philippine government said yesterday.

They were among 24 foreign women detained by Cambodian police in September and convicted and sentenced to four years in prison on Dec 2 for attempted cross-border human trafficking.

The women "and three of their babies" were sent home to Manila yesterday and taken to a

government shelter for trafficking victims, the Social Welfare Ministry said in a statement.

"All 13 (women) departed Phnom Penh and arrived safely in Manila following the royal pardon by His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Boromneath Norodom Sihamoni," the Philippine Foreign Ministry said.

The Cambodian court said it had strong evidence showing that the 13 had "the intention ... to have babies to sell to a third person in exchange for money, which is an act of human trafficking".

The court did not give details on what would happen to the babies of the 13 when they were born.

The Foreign Ministry said "surrogacy is banned in Cambodia and any violation thereof is punishable under Cambodian laws".

The Social Welfare Ministry said "there is no law prohibiting or allowing surrogacy in the Philippines, providing a legal grey area prone to abuse".

In 2016, Cambodia issued a snap ban on commercial surrogacy after Thailand pulled the plug on the trade

the previous year – putting an abrupt end to a thriving industry for hopeful parents, many from Australia and the United States.

But demand for commercial surrogacy remains high after China eased its one-child policy and agencies in Cambodia continue to offer the service.

Sources in Cambodia said foreign couples are willing to pay between US\$40,000 and US\$100,000 (RM178,879 and RM447,196) to surrogacy agents to find a woman who can carry their child. – AFP

## France appeals to transfer prisoner from Jakarta death row

**JAKARTA:** France has sent Indonesia an official request for the transfer of a French death row inmate who has spent nearly 20 years in prison.

Indonesia has in recent weeks released half a dozen high-profile detainees, including a Filipina woman on death row and the last five members of a drug ring.

French diplomats have acknowledged that talks were under way for the transfer of Serge Atlaoui, a 61-year-old Frenchman arrested in 2005 at a drugs factory outside the capital Jakarta.

The Indonesian government has now confirmed it received the official transfer request, which will be discussed next month.

"We have received a formal letter requesting the transfer of Serge Atlaoui," said senior Law and Human Rights Minister Yusril Isha Mahendra.

The French embassy in Jakarta declined to comment.

Atlaoui's lawyer, Richard Sedillot, said that France's intervention brought "immense hope".

"It would be the culmination of a long battle that has often been discreet, but which has always been carried out throughout these years," he said.

"It's been tireless work and we're happy with an outcome which could be favourable."

Father-of-four Atlaoui has maintained his innocence, claiming that he was installing machinery in what he thought was an acrylics plant.

He was initially sentenced to life in prison, but the Supreme Court in 2007 increased the sentence to death on appeal.

Atlaoui was held on the island of Nusakambangan in Central Java, known as Indonesia's "Alcatraz", following the death sentence, but he was transferred to the city of Tangerang, west of Jakarta, in 2015 ahead of his appeal.

That year, he was due to be executed alongside eight other drug offenders but won a reprieve after Paris stepped up pressure, with Indonesian authorities agreeing to let an outstanding appeal run its course.

In the appeal, Atlaoui's lawyers argued that then-president Joko Widodo did not properly consider his case as he rejected Atlaoui's plea for clemency – typically a death row convict's last chance to avoid the firing squad.

The court, however, upheld its previous decision that it did not have the jurisdiction to hear a challenge over the clemency plea.

Together Against the Death Penalty said the official request is the "penultimate step in a long fight" for those at the organisation who have campaigned for years to prevent Atlaoui's execution. – AFP

## North Korea party meeting adopts tougher strategy to counter US

**SEOUL:** North Korea will launch its "toughest" ever strategy to counter the United States, state media said, reporting on a key year-end party meeting overseen by leader Kim Jong Un.

The five-day party meeting last

week was held to chart the country's course for next year, the Korean Central News Agency reported.

"The US is the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy," the lengthy report in English said.

It slammed growing ties between South Korea, the US and Japan, saying it had "expanded into a nuclear military bloc for aggression".

It also said South Korea had "turned into an out-and-out anti-communist outpost of the US".

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how," KCNA said.

Against this backdrop, Kim's speech to top officials "clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-US counteraction to be launched aggressively".

The meeting reviewed the response to widespread flooding earlier this year, and also included a vow to boost ties with "friendly" countries.

Such meetings and Kim's speeches are used by Pyongyang to make key policy announcements. – AFP



## Yoon defies summons third time in a row

**SEOUL:** South Korea's suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol refused a summons to appear for questioning yesterday, the third time he has defied investigators' demands in two weeks.

Investigators had ordered Yoon to appear for questioning yesterday, a demand he rejected.

Yoon, a former prosecutor, also failed to attend a hearing he was summoned to last Wednesday, giving no explanation for his absence.

The conservative leader was stripped of his duties by parliament on Dec 14, following a short-lived martial law declaration that plunged the country into its worst political crisis in decades.

Yoon faces impeachment and criminal charges of insurrection, which could result in life imprisonment or even the death penalty, in a drama that has shocked democratic South Korea's allies around the world.

"President Yoon Suk Yeol did not appear at the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO)," said the office in a statement.

"The Joint Investigation Headquarters will review and decide on future measures."

The CIO is expected to decide whether to issue a fourth summons or ask a court to grant an arrest warrant to compel Yoon to appear for questioning.

He is being investigated by prosecutors as well as a joint team comprising police, Defence Ministry and anti-corruption officials, while the Constitutional Court deliberates on the impeachment motion passed by parliament.

If upheld by the court, which is required to deliver its ruling within six months of the impeachment, a by-election must be held within 60 days of the court's decision.

Former president Park Geun-hye was impeached under similar circumstances, but she was investigated only after the Constitutional Court removed her from power.

A 10-page prosecutors' report stated that Yoon authorised the military to fire their weapons if needed to enter parliament during his failed bid to impose martial law. — AFP

# AT&T, Verizon fend off cyberespionage attack

## Hackers linked to China, says spokesperson

**BENGALURU:** The Chinese-linked *Salt Typhoon* cyberespionage operation targeted AT&T and Verizon's systems, but the wireless carriers' US networks are now secure as they work with law enforcement and government officials, the companies said on Saturday in

their first acknowledgment of the attacks.

"We detect no activity by nation-state actors in our networks at this time. Based on our current investigation of this attack, the People's Republic of China targeted a small number of individuals of foreign intelligence interest," an AT&T spokesperson said.

While only a few cases of compromised information were identified, AT&T was monitoring and remediating its networks to protect customers data, and continues to work with authorities to assess and mitigate

the threat, the spokesperson said.

"We have not detected threat actor activity in Verizon's network for some time, and after considerable work addressing this incident, we can report that Verizon has contained the activities associated with this particular incident," Verizon's chief legal officer said in a statement.

An independent and highly respected cyber security firm has confirmed the containment, Verizon said.

On Friday, US officials added a ninth unnamed telecom company to the list of entities compromised by the *Salt Typhoon* hackers and said the Chinese involved gained access to networks and essentially had broad and full access, giving them the capability to "geolocate millions of individuals, to record phone calls at will".

The US Department of Defence and the Federal Communications Commission did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the company statements. China's Foreign Ministry could not immediately be contacted for comment.

Chinese officials have previously described the allegations as disinformation and said Beijing "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms".

Officials previously alleged hackers targeted Verizon, AT&T, Lumen and other telecom companies, and stole telephone audio intercepts along with a large amount of call record data.

In response to that cyberattack, the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency on Dec 18 urged senior government and political figures to move mobile communications to end-to-end encrypted apps.

Targets of *Salt Typhoon* reportedly included officials connected to Democrat Kamala Harris and Republican Donald Trump's presidential campaigns.

There is growing concern about the size and scope of the reported hacking into US telecommunications networks and questions about when companies and the government will be able to assure Americans about the issue. — Reuters



**FLOUR FIGHT ...** Revellers dressed in mock military garb take part in 'Els Enfarinats' in the southeastern Spanish town of Ibi on Saturday. In this 200-year-old traditional winter festival, the participants — known as *Els Enfarinats* (those covered in flour) — dress in military clothes and stage a mock *coup d'état* as they battle using flour, eggs and firecrackers outside the town hall as part of the celebrations of the Day of the Innocents, a traditional day in Spain for pulling pranks. — AFP/PICT

### BRIEFS

#### SHARK KILLS PASTOR FISHING IN GREAT BARRIER REEF

**SYDNEY:** A shark killed a 40-year-old pastor fishing with his family in the Great Barrier Reef. The predator bit him on the neck on Saturday afternoon off Humpy Island on the country's east coast. The victim was Luke Walford, a youth pastor at the Cathedral of Praise church in the central Queensland town of Rockhampton, according to broadcaster ABC. "The man was fishing with family members when he was bitten by a shark," Queensland state police said. He sustained "life-threatening injuries" and died about an hour-and-a-half afterwards. A Queensland ambulance spokeswoman said he died at the scene after sustaining a "significant life-threatening wound to his neck". — AFP

#### ONE DEAD, ANOTHER HURT IN LIGHT PLANE CRASH

**SYDNEY:** One person died and another was seriously injured in a light plane crash north of Sydney yesterday. Emergency services, including police, ambulance crews and a rescue helicopter, were dispatched to the site of a recreational aircraft crash at an airfield on Palmers Island, over 500km north of Sydney. Police said the pilot died at the scene. He has not yet been formally identified but is believed to be a man in his 60s. The sole passenger, a man believed to be in his 30s, was treated at the scene for serious injuries before being transported to a nearby hospital. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that the plane crashed just off the airfield's runway. — Bernama

## Trump sides with Musk in worker visas row

**WASHINGTON:** Donald Trump weighed in on Saturday in a bitter debate dividing his traditional supporters and tech barons like Elon Musk, saying that he backs a special visa programme that helps highly skilled workers enter the country.

"I've always liked the (H-1-B) visas, I have always been in favour of the visas, that's why we have them" at Trump-owned facilities, the president-elect told the *New York Post* in his first public comments on the matter since it flared up last week.

An angry back-and-forth, largely between Silicon Valley's Musk and traditional anti-immigration Trump backers, has erupted in fiery fashion, with Musk even vowing to "go to war" over the issue.

Trump's insistent calls for sharp curbs on immigration were central to his election victory in November over President Joe Biden. He has vowed to deport all undocumented immigrants and limit legal immigration.

But tech entrepreneurs like Tesla's Musk — as well as Vivek Ramaswamy, who with Musk is to co-chair a government cost-cutting panel under Trump — say the United States produces

too few highly skilled graduates, and they fervently champion the H-1-B programme.

Musk, who himself migrated from South Africa on an H-1-B, said luring elite engineering talent from abroad was "essential for America to keep winning".

Adding acrimony to the debate was a post from Ramaswamy, the son of immigrants from India, who deplored an "American culture" that he said venerates mediocrity, adding that the United States risks having "our asses handed to us by China".

That angered several prominent conservatives who were backing Trump long before Musk noisily joined their cause this year, going on to pump more than US\$250 million (RM1.1 billion) into the Republican's campaign.

"Looking forward to the inevitable divorce between President Trump and Big Tech," said Laura Loomer, a far-right figure known for her conspiracy theories, who often flew with Trump on his campaign plane.

"We have to protect President Trump from the technocrats."

She and others said Trump should be

promoting American workers and further limiting immigration.

Musk, who had already infuriated some Republicans after leading an online campaign that helped tank a bipartisan budget deal last week, fired back at his critics.

He warned of a "MAGA (Make America Great Again) civil war".

Musk bluntly swore at one critic, adding "I will go to war on this issue".

That, in turn, drew a volley from Trump strategist Steve Bannon, who wrote on the Gettr platform that the H-1-B programme brings in migrants who are essentially "indentured servants" working for less than American citizens would.

In a striking jab at Trump's close friend Musk, Bannon called the Tesla CEO a "toddlers". Some of Trump's original backers say they fear he is falling under the sway of big donors from the tech world like Musk and drifting away from his campaign promises.

It was not clear whether Trump's remarks might soothe the intraparty strife, which has exposed just how contentious changing the immigration system might be. — AFP



# Putin apologises for tragic downing of airliner

➤ Air defences were firing on drones, Azerbaijan told

**MOSCOW:** President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to Azerbaijan's leader for what the Kremlin called a "tragic incident" over Russia in which an Azerbaijan Airlines plane crashed after Russian air defences fired against Ukrainian drones.

The extremely rare publicised apology from Putin was the closest Moscow had come to accepting some blame for Wednesday's disaster, although the Kremlin statement did not say Russia had shot down the plane, only noting that a criminal case had been opened.

Flight J2-8243, en route from Baku to the Chechen capital Grozny, crash-landed on Wednesday near Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from southern Russia, where Ukrainian drones were reported to be attacking several cities. At least 38 people were killed.

Four sources with knowledge of the preliminary findings of Azerbaijan's investigation said Russian air defences had mistakenly shot the airliner down. Passengers said they heard a loud bang outside the plane.

Putin called President Ilham Aliyev and "apologised for the tragic incident that occurred in Russian airspace and once again expressed his deep and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the injured," the Kremlin said.

"At that time, Grozny, Mozdok and Vladikavkaz were being attacked by Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles, and Russian air defence systems repelled these attacks."

The Kremlin said civilian and military specialists were being questioned.

Putin also phoned Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, his counterpart in Kazakhstan, to express his condolences over the loss of life in the crash, the Kremlin said.

Azerbaijan said Aliyev had told Putin that the plane had been "subjected to external physical and technical interference in Russian airspace, resulting in a complete loss of control and redirection to the Kazakh city of Aktau."

Until Saturday, Russia's last working day before a long New Year holiday, the Kremlin said it was improper to comment on the incident before official investigations were completed.

The Embraer jet had flown from Azerbaijan's capital Baku to Grozny, where

the incident occurred, and then travelled, badly damaged, another 450km across the Caspian Sea.

Footage shot by passengers showed oxygen masks down and people wearing life jackets. Later videos showed bloodied and bruised passengers climbing out of the wreckage. There were 29 survivors.

Baku cited injuries from objects that had penetrated the aircraft's fuselage from outside and testimonies from survivors as evidence of "external physical and technical interference."

The crash underscored the risks to civil aviation even when aircraft are flying hundreds of miles from a war zone, especially when Ukraine has deployed drones to try to hit back at Russia behind the front lines.

Russia uses electronic jamming to confuse the geolocation and communication systems of Ukrainian drones, which it also targets with air defence systems.

In 2020, Iranian Revolutionary Guards mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian airliner, killing all 176 on board.

And in 2014, Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine, with the loss of 298 passengers and crew, by what Dutch investigators said was a Russian BUK missile system. Russia denied involvement. – Reuters

## Israel detains 240 in Gaza hospital raid

**CAIRO:** Israeli forces detained more than 240 Palestinians, including dozens of medical staff from a north Gaza hospital they raided on Friday, including its director, according to the Health Ministry in the enclave and Israel's military.

The Health Ministry said it was concerned for the wellbeing of Hussam Abu Safiya, director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, as some staff freed by the Israeli military late on Friday said he had been beaten up by soldiers.

The Israeli military said the hospital was being used as a command centre for military operations and those arrested were suspected gunmen. It said Abu Safiya had been taken for questioning as he was suspected of being a Hamas operative.

On Friday, Hamas dismissed Israel's assertion that its fighters had operated from the hospital throughout the 15-month-old Gaza war, saying no fighters had been in the hospital. The group had not yet commented on the arrests.

Hamas on Saturday urged the UN and international agencies to intervene urgently to protect the remaining hospitals and medical facilities in northern Gaza and supply them.

It also called for UN observers to be sent to medical facilities to refute the Israeli allegations that they were being used for military purposes.

The raid on the hospital, one of three medical facilities on the northern edge of Gaza, put the last major health facility in the area out of service, said the World Health Organisation.

Some patients were evacuated from Kamal Adwan to the Indonesian Hospital, which is not in service, and medics were prevented from joining them, the Health Ministry said. Other patients and staff were taken to other medical facilities.

The Israeli military said 350 patients and medical personnel had been evacuated before the raid, while another 95 had been evacuated to the Indonesian Hospital during the operation.

Separately, the Gaza Health Ministry said Israeli strikes across the enclave had killed 18 Palestinians on Saturday, at least nine of them in a house in Maghazi camp in central Gaza.

In the past few months, Israeli forces have pushed people out and razed much of the area around the northern Gaza towns of Jabalia, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiyah. – Reuters



The remains of a destroyed monument to Syria's late president Hafez al-Assad, who died in 2000, in Deir Attiyah. – AFP/IC

## Syrian new intelligence chief pledges reforms

**DAMASCUS:** The new head of Syria's intelligence services announced on Saturday a plan to dissolve the institutions that were so feared under the rule of ousted dictator Bashar al-Assad.

"The security establishment will be reformed after dissolving all services and restructuring them in a way that honours our people," Anas Khattab said, two days after being appointed to his post by the country's new leadership that overthrew Assad in early December.

In a statement carried by the official Sana news agency, he stressed the suffering of Syrians "under the oppression and tyranny of the old regime, through its various security

apparatuses that sowed corruption and inflicted torture on the people."

Prisons were emptied after Assad's fall as officials and agents of the deposed regime fled.

Most of these installations are now guarded by fighters of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the group that led the coalition that seized power.

Numerous Syrians have rushed to former detention centres in the hope of finding traces of relatives and friends who went missing during the 13 years of a devastating civil war that left more than a half million dead.

"The security services of the old regime were many and varied, with different names and affiliations, but all had in common that

they had been imposed on the oppressed people for more than five decades," Khattab said.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 100,000 people died in Syrian prisons and detention centres during the conflict.

On Thursday, a general who ran military justice under the former regime was arrested in the west of country, accused of being responsible for sentencing to death thousands of people held in Saydnaya prison.

And in Europe, several former senior Syrian intelligence officers accused of torture and other abuses have been convicted and jailed since 2022. – AFP

BRIEFS

### HAMAS, QATAR REVIEW TRUCE TALKS DEVELOPMENTS

**ISTANBUL:** Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdulrahman discussed with a Hamas delegation on Saturday developments in the Gaza Strip's ceasefire negotiations and ways to advance them. The Qatar Foreign Ministry said Mohammed "received in Doha a delegation led by Khalil Al-Hayya", who is the deputy chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau. It said "the meeting reviewed the latest developments and explored ways to push them forward to ensure a clear and comprehensive agreement that ends the war". Hamas said on Wednesday that a ceasefire and prisoner swap had been delayed by new Israeli conditions. – Bernama

### NEW GEORGIAN PRESIDENT SWORN IN AMID PROTESTS

**TBILISI:** Mikheil Kavelashvili, a hardline critic of the West, was sworn in as president of Georgia yesterday amid a political crisis after the government froze European Union application talks in a move that sparked major protests. Outgoing President Salome Zourabichvili said in a defiant speech to supporters outside the presidential palace that she was leaving the residence, but that Kavelashvili had no legitimacy as president, which is a mostly ceremonial position. She said Kavelashvili was not duly picked, as the lawmakers who chose him were elected in an October parliamentary election that she says was marked by fraud. – Reuters

# Delicate balance between hope and reality

**A**s we inch closer to 2025, many of us look to the new year as a fresh chapter, a time to start anew with hope and aspirations.

For those who found 2024 challenging, there is an inherent longing for a brighter horizon, with horoscopes and predictions offering glimmers of optimism.

Conversely, those who enjoyed a fruitful year may be keen to sustain or amplify their good fortune. However, in the pursuit of success and happiness, an age-old question arises: Is life merely about wealth or does it encompass something far greater?

The answer, nuanced as it is, oscillates between “yes” and “no”. For those in their twilight years, the accumulation of riches often takes a backseat to health and well-being. They begin to realise the fleeting nature of time and cherish moments of vitality over monetary gains.

In stark contrast, the younger generation, millennials and Gen Z frequently equate life with financial success. Raised in an era steeped in materialism, their worldview often revolves around wealth as the ultimate goal.

This fixation is not inherently flawed. As a spiritual teacher recently pointed out in a podcast, there is nothing wrong with desiring financial stability or wealth; it is the means of acquiring it and the purpose it serves that matters most.

Money, undeniably, is a powerful tool as it provides security, facilitates dreams and solves practical problems. Yet, the perception of money differs drastically based on one’s circumstances.

A wealthy individual once remarked that if a problem stems from a lack of money, it is the easiest to resolve, a perspective born from abundance. Yet, for someone living paycheck to paycheck, this statement feels detached from reality. To them, money is often the hardest hurdle and the lack of it exacerbates every other challenge. Both perspectives hold truth, shaped by personal experience.

Regardless of financial status, life’s trials and tribulations offer profound

lessons. Every resolved crisis, whether monetary or otherwise, enriches us with resilience and wisdom.

But what happens when life throws challenges that no amount of money or preparation can solve? The recent tragic accident involving an express bus is a stark reminder of life’s fragility. Attempting to avoid a stray tyre, the bus veered into the opposite lane, resulting in multiple fatalities.

Among the victims was a two-year-old child, an innocent soul whose life ended before it truly began. How does one make sense of such an incident? How do you reconcile the unfairness of losing someone who had not even comprehended the concepts of life and death?

This tragedy exemplifies the precarious nature of existence. We often operate under the illusion of control, believing that diligence and caution are enough to safeguard us.

Yet, life is unpredictable. You can follow all the rules, make all the right choices and still fall victim to circumstances beyond your control. This reality is both humbling and terrifying.

Life, at its core, is precious and fragile. It demands that we value each moment, not merely as a stepping stone to the next, but as an irreplaceable fragment of our journey.

Wealth, success and material possessions, while significant, are not the sole measures of a life well-lived. Relationships, experiences and the ability to find joy in the mundane hold equal, if not greater, importance.

As we step into 2025, let us resolve to strike a balance. Pursue dreams with determination but remain grounded in the understanding that life’s greatest gifts often lie beyond the realm of materialism.

Be kind to yourself and others, for you never know what battles they are fighting. Cherish your loved ones, for life offers no guarantees.

In recent times, the global landscape has become increasingly fraught with hostility as countries find themselves embroiled in conflicts of escalating magnitude.

The phrase “all is fair in love and war”



*“Wealth, success and material possessions, while significant, are not the sole measures of a life well-lived. Relationships, experiences and the ability to find joy in the mundane hold equal, if not greater, importance.”*



Life is precious and fragile. It demands that we value each moment, not merely as a stepping stone to the next, but as an irreplaceable fragment of our journey.

– BERNAMAPIC

appears to have taken on a grim literal meaning, with warring factions displaying neither regret nor remorse for the collateral damage inflicted upon civilians.

The pursuit of power is relentless and unyielding, and it seems to dominate the world stage, overshadowing the moral imperatives of humanity and justice.

But didn’t Aristotle once suggest that humans are “political animals”, inherently inclined to form societies based on cooperation and mutual benefit? If this is true, how did we arrive at a point where such unity is fractured and weaponised against one another?

The truth lies in a complex interplay of historical, economic and ideological factors. Conflicts often arise from the desire to control resources, assert dominance or defend nationalistic ideologies.

Yet, as history has repeatedly shown, war rarely results in lasting solutions. Instead, it leaves behind a trail of devastation, broken lives, displaced populations and shattered infrastructures.

Innocent civilians bear the brunt of these conflicts, their homes reduced to rubble and their lives forever altered. The increasing indifference to civilian casualties is a stark reminder of how dehumanised warfare has become.

It begs the question: Has the thirst for

power rendered humanity incapable of empathy or is there still a chance to reclaim the values that once defined us?

The pursuit of power need not come at the expense of humanity. It is possible to envision a world where strength is measured not by dominance but by the ability to uplift and unite.

As we reflect on the state of affairs, let us remember the words of Mahatma Gandhi, who profoundly stated: “An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind”.

The world will always have its share of challenges and we will continue to grapple with existential questions. But perhaps the greatest lesson lies in accepting life’s uncertainty while striving to live with purpose, gratitude and compassion. After all, it is not the length of life but its depth that truly matters.

Human beings possess an innate capacity for vileness. Yet, it is the very same human beings who possess the remarkable capacity to live and die for love.

Happy 2025 to one and all.

*Dr Bhavani Krishna Iyer holds a doctorate in English literature. Her professional background encompasses teaching, journalism and public relations.*

*She is currently pursuing a second master’s degree in counselling. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com*

## EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

Education matters remain an important component of Malaysian society. Today the landscape is fast paced with new exciting developments in technology such as AI, coding, virtual reality, and cybersecurity, leading the way for changes in curriculum development. To showcase the latest and most updated content, we invite you join us in 2025, and be part of our Education Focus!



# Digital reform no cause for alarm

## COMMENT

By Martin Vengadesan

**A**S the year comes to an end, it is a good time to reflect on the momentous and sometimes turbulent changes affecting the media landscape.

Firstly, let me express my conviction that freedom of the press is an important pillar of a functioning democracy. Our nation's press has been suppressed in the past during times like Ops Lalang, Reformasi, Bersih and the 1MDB financial scandal.

Therefore, it is commendable that press bodies and related NGOs are vigilant over any changes in regulations that may impinge upon this.

However, over 90% of complaints made to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) concern scams, internet trafficking, sexual abuse material, grooming, illegal drug sales, access to weapons and the spread of terrorist ideology and hate speech.

Early last week, we were informed of the shocking news that the police and MCMC launched a series of raids on individuals suspected of possessing and distributing child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

The figures were astounding. Over 40,000 CSAM and adult pornographic content from various devices including computers, cell phones and hard disks were seized.

After the raids in six states, some 13 individuals aged between 20 and 74 were arrested. This illustrates the importance of intelligence provided by MCMC, with some suspects even admitting to finding and buying

explicit content via social media and messaging platforms, such as X and Telegram.

The suspects operated online under false identities and were flagged for actively accessing and sharing CSAM content on messaging and social media platforms.

Aside from these horrific revelations, there are many other avenues for illegal operations to thrive unless they are checked by legislation.

According to a report in a newspaper, imitation gel-blasters are widely available online through e-commerce and social media platforms. Last year, nearly 150 crimes were committed using these imitation weapons.

Hence the need to introduce measures, such as the "Regulatory framework for internet messaging service and social media service providers", which was released on Aug 1 and is set to take effect on Jan 1, 2025.

The regulatory framework requires that all social media and internet messaging services with at least eight million registered users in Malaysia must apply for an applications service provider class licence under the Communications and Multimedia Act by Jan 1, 2025. One of the requirements to obtain this licence is using locally incorporated companies.

This also illustrates why it should not reach

the stage where every initiative by the communications ministry and regulatory bodies, like MCMC, is greeted with alarm and suspicion.

As the digital media industry evolves, it becomes necessary to put in new safeguards. This is imperative as traditional print and even online media reach is in decline and being replaced by social media as the primary information source.

Some governance is required, yet at the same time, we do not want it to be too heavy handed. A situation that must be avoided is giving too much power to the authorities to clamp down on dissent and satire.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim himself recently spoke out against any possible action against graphic artist Fahmi Reza, who was reportedly summoned by Bukit Aman over a satirical piece.

"Frankly, I think for the purpose of this matter, I want to tell agencies like MCMC and the police that on the criticisms towards the prime minister, let it be," he said last week.

What is clear is that the landscape is shifting and that there will be hiccups and obstacles. Transparency is required, and in attempting to prepare a governing code of conduct, MCMC has begun consultations with

relevant stakeholders.

Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil has also said that the government has no plans to block users' access to social media platforms that fail to register for the annual licence.

Based on what we have seen this year, there have been overreactions to the update of the press accreditation card and the codification of the Malaysian Journalist Code of Ethics.

There was also uproar over an initial plan requiring all internet service providers to implement public domain name system redirection last September.

Furthermore, on Nov 1, when MCMC announced U Mobile's selection as Malaysia's second 5G network operator, with the goal of ensuring that the full benefits of 5G technology reach the general public, industries and the nation, this too was greeted with complaints.

The selection was based on a combination of factors, such as business and technical plans, customer complaint rates, satisfaction records and the company's track record in executing other infrastructure projects.

Thus, we can see the need to strike the right balance. While remaining vigilant, the public and the media should not automatically assume a suspicious attitude towards initiatives which are key towards updating and upgrading our laws to prepare for a digital future.

Disinformation and misplaced frustration have been factors, and it is hoped that with the new year, a fresh, open-hearted and cooperative attitude can develop as the country proceeds with transformative reforms.

**Martin Vengadesan** is a veteran editor and consultant in the digital media industry. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

*"While remaining vigilant, the public and the media should not automatically assume a suspicious attitude towards initiatives which are key towards updating and upgrading our laws to prepare for a digital future."*

## Finish what you start

## COMMENT

By Nahrizul Adib Kadri

**I STARTED** running back in 2011 to shed a few extra kilograms. Back then, I never considered myself a real runner – I was just someone trying to get healthier.

Yet, somehow and somehow, I ended up crossing the finish lines of four marathons, including the Penang Bridge and Standard Chartered Kuala Lumpur Marathon, and even a couple of ultramarathons.

Today, I still lace up my running shoes, not for the glory of another marathon finisher medal, but simply to keep fit. And every time I hit the pavement, I am reminded of how running, much like life, is less about speed and more about endurance.

Life, with all its twists and turns, is not a sprint. It is a marathon – a long, gruelling journey that tests our resolve, patience and ability to endure.

To truly live, we must embrace not just the thrill of starting but the discipline of finishing. Dreams, relationships, personal growth – all require the same principle: finish what you started because that is where real triumph lies.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* offers wisdom that echoes this reality: "victory is reserved for those who are willing to pay the price". Starting something meaningful is only half the battle; enduring the challenges and seeing it through to the end is what leads to triumph.

Marathons are uniquely fitting in this analogy because they allow no shortcuts. Once you are in the race, there is no turning back.

The streets are blocked, the buses do not run and taxis (and Grabs) are nowhere in sight. Fatigue may whisper temptations to quit but quitting is not an option. The only way forward is to finish.

And life mirrors this in profound ways. When challenges arise, there is often no easy way out. The path demands that we keep going, even

when every fibre of our being wants rest.

It is in these moments when quitting feels like a siren song, that we grow. Delayed gratification, enduring now for the sake of something greater later, is not a weakness – it is a virtue.

### Endurance over instant gratification

The life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a testament to the strength found in persistence. When he received the message of Islam, the obstacles seemed insurmountable.

Persecution, exile and relentless opposition could have easily stopped him. But the Prophet did not waver. His journey from Mecca to Medina, known as the Hijrah, was not just a migration but a marathon of faith, resolve and endurance.

Despite the hardships, he pressed on. The Prophet's life teaches us that endurance is not about ease; it is about resilience. His unwavering commitment reminds us that the finish line is not always visible but it is there for those who persist.

Modern life, with its promise of instant results, often undermines the value of endurance. Social media, online shopping, same-day deliveries and on-demand entertainment feed a culture of immediacy and impatience, making the idea of delayed gratification feel almost foreign.

But instant rewards are fleeting and transient. True satisfaction – the kind that lasts – comes from the effort and patience of finishing what we start.

Gratitude also finds its place in endurance. When we commit to the journey, we begin to appreciate every moment, even the difficult ones.

In Islam, the concept of *shukr* (gratitude) teaches us to value what we have and to trust in what lies ahead. Allah reminds us in the Quran, "if you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]" (*Surah Ibrahim: 7*).

This gratitude for the present – for the kilometres already covered in a marathon – grounds us. It reminds us that every step forward, no matter how small or painful, is a



Life's marathon is not about speed; it is about steady, purposeful movement. Some miles will feel effortless while others will test the limits of our endurance. The reward lies not just in crossing the finish line but in knowing we gave our all to get there. – PIC BY HUCKSTER/UNSPLASH

bleasing. Overthinking or lamenting what lies ahead only robs us of the joy of moving forward.

### Price of not finishing

But what happens when we stop mid-marathon? We are left stranded, surrounded by blocked streets and an unfinished race. Life is no different.

Leaving things undone, whether it is a project, a relationship or a personal dream, will fill us with a gnawing sense of regret. We will lose not just the opportunity for growth but also the confidence that comes from perseverance.

Sun Tzu warned: "He will win who has prepared himself and waits to take the enemy unprepared". Life's challenges are the enemy.

Those who endure, who commit to finishing, gain the upper hand. Not because they never faltered, but because they kept going when it mattered most.

Life's marathon is not about speed; it is about steady, purposeful movement. Some miles will feel effortless while others will test the limits of our endurance. The reward lies not just in crossing the finish line but in knowing we gave our all to get there.

So, as you face your own race, remember this: the roads may be blocked, the buses may be gone, but the path ahead is open. The only way out is through. Perhaps, life's greatest challenge – and its greatest reward – is found in that next step forward.

In the words of "real" runners everywhere: finish strong because that is what life asks of us.

**Dr Nahrizul Adib Kadri** is an associate professor of biomedical engineering and the Principal of Ibnu Sina Residential College, Universiti Malaya. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

THE continuous strengthening of the Asean economy in the last decade showcases the true resilience of the region, coupled with promising economic prospects owing to its strategic location, diverse economies, and commitment to regional integration.

With the Asean-6 gross domestic product growth strengthening to 4.8% in 2024 from 4% in 2023, and to remain stable at 4.7% in 2025, the region is in a strong position for accelerated growth and at the same time cushioning risks from geopolitical uncertainties.

Malaysia's Asean chairmanship comes at an opportune time. It underpins the theme of "Inclusivity and Sustainability", signalling the need for cohesive socio-economic development and planetary wellness. With Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank) already well aligned to the theme, our joint aspiration is to empower a people-centric Asean, not just for 2025, but going beyond it.

This is our differentiating factor, centred on our purpose, which is to be a values-driven platform powered by a bionic workforce that humanises financial services.

To deliver on this aspiration, we bring our strengths together via four main pillars - Values-Based Finance, Inclusive Economy for MSMEs, Sustainability, and Social Impact. Maybank's involvement will be centred on supporting regional financial stability and facilitating cross-border trade and investment within the Asean Economic Community as well as accelerating community empowerment initiatives across the region.

We have the opportunity to strengthen our commitment to a diverse set of beneficiary segments including students, youth, women, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities via our Beyond Banking initiatives and corporates, SMEs and MSMEs and individuals via our banking initiatives.

Our commitment will include supporting key Asean chairmanship initiatives, including organising thought leadership forums surrounding Asean-led meetings and events, partnerships with ministries and Asean, and introducing new products and solutions that will further accommodate the operating environment.

# Maybank aspires to empower a people-centric Asean

We have the right expertise to see this through. Via our deep understanding of the region, holistic approach and smart multilevel collaborations, we remain optimistic of the prospects. The time is now, to create meaningful outcomes for all our stakeholders, and we have already made several headways.



further boost businesses' competitiveness in the halal economy.

To further spur sustainable regional growth, we are committed to drive an inclusive economy, especially by empowering MSMEs.

With this segment being the backbone of the economy for many countries in Asean, Maybank will continue to support MSMEs by scaling up our offering across key markets by providing expanded funding access and integrating solutions for ease of operations. Recently, Maybank announced a strategic investment in Funding Societies | Modalku, the largest unified digital finance platform for MSMEs in Southeast Asia, in efforts to promote inclusivity and bridge funding gaps within the communities we serve.

On the digital front, we continue to build on our regional digital banking ecosystem which would truly create a borderless environment for businesses and individuals transacting. Continued leadership in this segment saw strong growth in digital payments with more than 9.9 million active digital customers in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Cambodia.

In supporting Asean's role in managing key regional affairs, particularly in sub-regions such as the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, Maybank is committed to be the preferred bank for Malaysia-Singapore transactions as we actively engage and connect businesses and governments for mutual benefit of both nations. Our support includes joint efforts to attract investments from Singapore but also as a gateway to expand in Asean. This will also include enabling key industries to

thrive such as data centres, semi-conductors, wealth management, logistics and manufacturing.

Through our global banking segment, we have placed an added focus to drive cross border trade and investment by enhancing regional cash management services for our customers via seamless digital onboarding.

We also remain committed to serving the region by facilitating a stimulus investment environment as we continue to top the league tables by ranking number one in the Asean equity capital market and defended leadership across products in Malaysia.

With our strong footprint across the region, we are capable to further connect and broaden our clients' access to the global economy. In supporting this agenda, our Invest Asean series will take centre stage with the objective of bringing together the region's major investors, high net worth individuals, family offices and corporates in one centralised platform for engaging and revealing conversations.

With Sustainability being a critical factor on the future of doing business, Maybank will be playing an even more active role in transitioning the region. We surpassed RM100 billion in sustainable finance in September 2024, and published a white paper on decarbonisation plans covering the power, palm oil, steel and aluminium sectors, outlining our interim emissions targets and decarbonisation strategies.

As we strive to strengthen Asean as an attractive economic destination, we are cognisant of the need to drive positive social impact across the region. Through Maybank's social impact arm, Maybank Foundation, which is the only financial institution in the region to have an Asean accreditation, and our extended business sectors, we remain steadfast to uplifting the

communities we serve via our Beyond Banking and other banking initiatives.

To date, Maybank has uplifted 2.13 million lives across Asean with a total social investment of RM354.73 million. This includes serving our stakeholders via three main pillars of empowering education, community empowerment and environmental diversity under Beyond Banking initiatives. This includes contribution via Islamic social financing such as zakat, waqf and Islamic financing.

Via our banking initiatives, to date, Maybank has disbursed RM43.54 billion in financing to 836,537 individuals and 122,766 SMEs. We have also provided affordable Etika insurance coverage to close to 745,000 customers who comes from the B40 and the underprivileged segment.

In ensuring sustainable value creation for the region, Maybank has implemented measures to enhance its workforce's capability. Through Maybank's diverse Asean-centric workforce with 99% of it are from Asean countries, we have a future-ready workforce and we are in a strong position to further contribute to the region's success. 25% of our employees are now in next-gen roles, equipped with data, digital and IT skills, and we will continue to upskill them via comprehensive talent development programmes.

The Asean chairmanship by Malaysia will strengthen the region's position as a competitive economic block, further connecting itself to the global economies. Maybank will play its own role to support this chairmanship, leveraging new economy opportunities favourable to the countries in Southeast Asia while solidifying the region's overall socio-economic growth prospects.

*This commentary is contributed by Maybank president & group CEO Datuk Khairussaleh Ramli (pic).*

## Generali Malaysia houses general, life branch networks under one roof

**PETALING JAYA:** As part of its growth journey, Generali Malaysia has integrated both general and life insurance branch networks under one roof.

Leveraging its expertise in general insurance - spanning medical and health, motor, home, travel, personal accident and business solutions - the company remains committed to addressing the evolving needs of its customers while providing a consistent, seamless and convenient customer experience. Its life insurance segment complements these offerings with tailored solutions for protection, medical coverage, savings and legacy planning at every stage of life.

Generali Malaysia reaffirms its dedication to community impact through The Human Safety Net

(THSN), a global movement of people helping people. Under THSN, the Munch & Move Programme, launched in collaboration with Yayasan Generasi Gemilang, has supported more than 531 families with young children (up to six years old). This innovative initiative promotes healthy eating, responsive caregiving and early learning through fun, play-based activities that help children develop healthy habits and a love for learning.

Additionally, the company expanded its efforts by partnering with Suriana Welfare Society Malaysia to provide early education for children aged three to six years from underserved families in Kg Muhibbah. Through these initiatives, Generali Malaysia continues to empower communities, fostering brighter

futures and reflecting its unwavering dedication to sustainability and social responsibility.

Generali Malaysia's performance across its general and life insurance businesses has earned prestigious accolades. In the general insurance segment, Generali was awarded the International General Insurer of the Year - Malaysia for its significant milestone launch of Generali Malaysia, following the acquisition and integration of MPI Generali Bhd with AXA Affin General and Life Insurance in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the life insurance segment was recognised with the Insurance Initiative of the Year - Malaysia for its success in rebranding, complex system integration and distribution revitalisation.

Achievements include the migration

of two core life systems and more than 15 integrated peripheral systems in under 20 months, alongside strong growth in both agency and bancassurance channels. This achievement reflects growing customer trust and loyalty, reinforcing Generali Malaysia's position as a lifetime partner in its customers' journeys.

Generali Malaysia, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has been driving efforts to enhance the resilience of SMEs through access to tailored insurance and risk financing solutions. This collaboration focuses on safeguarding SMEs against the growing challenges of climate change and other emerging risks, reflecting Generali's commitment to addressing global challenges at a local level.

In recognition of these efforts, Generali Malaysia has been honoured with the prestigious MSME Insurance Initiative of the Year - Malaysia and BMI Sustainable Brand Awards 2024.

"Our journey has been defined by our relentless pursuit of innovation, operational excellence, and community impact. We are honoured by the recognition we have received, which reflects the trust our customers place in us and our dedication to creating value for all stakeholders. As we look ahead, Generali Malaysia will continue to lead with purpose, fostering a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable insurance landscape for all Malaysians," said Generali Insurance Malaysia CEO Fabrice Benard, who is also the country head for Generali entities in Malaysia.



# the Sun Biz & Finance

MONDAY | DEC 30, 2024

Editorial  
T: 03-7784 6688  
F: 03-7785 2625  
E: sunbiz@thesundaily.com

Advertising  
T: 03-7784 8888  
E: advertise@thesundaily.com

## M'sia in position to become Asean tourism magnet

BY JOHN GILBERT  
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's role as the Asean Chair in 2025 positions the nation as a critical starting point within the regional bloc in promoting tourism.

KL Metro Group managing director Datuk Low Tak Fatt said the government has intensified efforts to diversify its tourism strategy, targeting a broader range of markets beyond traditional focus areas such as China and the Asia-Pacific.

He said Malaysia will stand out as a key destination in Asean, drawing interest from major markets such as China, India, the United States and Europe.

"The government's recent initiatives have expanded to Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, India and the Gulf region, reflecting a strategic shift to attract a wider demographic of international tourists. Within Asean, Malaysia has also seen a rise in visitors from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, driven by improving regional economies.

"These trends indicate sustained growth in tourist arrivals, not only in 2025 but also as Malaysia gears up for Visit Malaysia Year 2026. The government is expected to allocate significant resources to ensure the success of this campaign, solidifying the country's position as a premier destination in the region," Low told SunBiz.

He said the company's confidence in the current government and Malaysia's economy has driven its decision to launch two significant projects.

"Following the successful introduction of Lexus Hibiscus 2 in Port Dickson recently, we are set to launch Royal Lexis in Kuala Lumpur next year, a high-end commercial development similar to the existing Imperial Lexis, further expanding our footprint in tourism-related projects.

"Our efforts have attracted foreign buyers from 58 countries, underscoring the success of our international marketing strategy. Through strong partnerships with real estate agents across Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Macau, and the Middle East, we continue to build a global presence and expand Malaysia's appeal as a prime investment destination," he said.

Foreign buyers make up almost 60% while

Country's role as chair of regional bloc in 2025 can be starting point in attracting international visitors



Low is confident that Malaysia will stand out as a key destination in Asean, drawing interest from major markets such as China, India, the United States and Europe.

local buyers make about 40%, he added.

Low iterated that the supply of hotels or resorts with private pools is limited, giving properties such as KL Metro Group's Lexis Hibiscus and Lexis Hibiscus 2 projects a distinct advantage.

"A luxury product, such as a room with a private pool, naturally attracts more guests, setting us apart from other resorts. The private pool is undoubtedly a key selling point, and the bold and ambitious nature of the Lexis Hibiscus projects complements this. The development of Lexis Hibiscus and the upcoming Lexis Hibiscus 2 is a daring endeavour built above the sea on massive platforms.

"The water homes are unique, with very few resorts in Malaysia or the broader region offering such accommodations. Only the Maldives and Malaysia have water homes, as other Asian countries face natural challenges like earthquakes, volcanoes, and typhoons, making water home developments unsuitable.

"With the limited supply of water homes

and strong demand from tourists, these distinctive features make our resorts an attractive destination, drawing visitors from around the world," he said.

Lexis Hibiscus has been generating solid revenue over the years from sustained foreign tourist arrivals and domestic travellers, Low said.

For context, he explained that with 1,710 rooms in Lexis Hibiscus and a 60% occupancy rate, the resort will have about 1,026 rooms occupied each night. "Assuming an average of three tourists per room, this results in about 3,078 tourists per night. Over a year, this totals around 1.1 million tourist arrivals. If each tourist spends RM800, the annual revenue generated would be approximately RM876 million."

Low said Port Dickson offers a significant advantage, particularly due to its proximity to Kuala Lumpur and Malacca and its appeal to tourists.

"Over the past 20 years, we have developed strong relationships with tour agents from across the Asia Pacific region, further enhancing our strategic position," he added.

## CPO futures seen bullish on weaker output, lower stocks

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The crude palm oil (CPO) futures contract on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives is expected to trade with a bullish bias this week due to weaker output and lower stock levels, according to palm oil trader David Ng.

Speaking to Bernama, he projected that CPO would trade between RM4,580 and RM4,750 per tonne during that period.

Meanwhile, Interband Group of Companies senior palm oil trader Jim Teh said the market is expected to remain quiet due to a holiday-shortened week ahead, with most international traders on year-end and Christmas holiday leave.

He said CPO futures are likely to trade at between RM4,400 and RM4,500 per tonne.

On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the spot-month January 2025 contract rose by RM213 to RM4,975 per tonne, February 2025 jumped by RM210 to RM4,781, and March 2025 added RM191 to RM4,624.

The April 2025 contract went up RM156 to RM4,459 per tonne, May 2025 gained RM124 to RM4,331 and June 2025 improved RM112 to RM4,253.

The physical CPO price for January South increased by RM150 to RM5,050 per tonne.

Meanwhile, the rubber market is expected to be trading range-bound with a downside bias this week as demand seems to be sluggish during the holiday season, said industry expert Denis Low.

Continuous rains in the rubber-producing regions are affecting the production of rubber and disrupting rubber-tapping activities, he said.

Speaking to Bernama, Low said Thailand's rubber output in December had decreased by nearly 30% due to floods and heavy rainfall.

"With the lack of supply, the rubber market has somehow equalised itself with the lack of demand," he said.

Meanwhile, a dealer said local rubber prices will continue to track the performance of regional rubber futures markets, the ringgit's performance versus the United States dollar, and benchmark crude oil prices amid ongoing concerns about the shortage of global natural rubber (NR) stocks due to rainy weather in major NR-producing countries.

"Market operators are also keeping an eye on further cues on China's stimulus and the latest developments surrounding global geopolitical tensions and economic indicators," she added.

On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the Malaysian Rubber Board's reference price for Standard Malaysian Rubber 20 rose by 6.5 sen to 869 sen per kg while latex in bulk decreased by 22 sen to 699.5 sen per kg.

## Strategic investments to drive F&N's long-term growth

**PETALING JAYA:** Fraser & Neave Holdings Bhd (F&N) is solidifying its position as a key player in the region with strategic investments aimed at driving long-term growth and resilience.

CEO Lim Yew Hoe said the group's focus on expanding its operational capabilities in Malaysia and Cambodia underscores its commitment to delivering value to shareholders while navigating a challenging economic landscape.

"In Malaysia, F&N has initiated several projects to bolster its production capacity and meet growing market demand.

"Among these are new manufacturing lines for carbonated beverages and drinking water in Butterworth, a sterilised milk filling and packing line in Pulau Indah, and a state-of-the-art chocolate manufacturing line in Rawang.

"These upgrades are expected to not only enhance product offerings but also improve operational efficiency," he said in the annual report filed with Bursa Malaysia.

Lim said the development of a dairy manufacturing plant in Cambodia is progressing steadily, marking a significant step in F&N's expansion into the Indochina market.

"Once operational, the facility will enable the group to tap into Cambodia's growing demand for dairy products, further diversifying its revenue streams.

"The investments align with F&N's long-term strategy of capturing growth opportunities in Southeast Asia while addressing evolving

consumer needs," he added.

Lim highlighted that these initiatives are part of a broader effort to optimise assets and strengthen the group's competitive positioning across key markets.

Despite challenges such as higher startup costs for the dairy farm and the removal of tax rebates in Thailand, he noted that F&N remains optimistic.

"The group's ability to adapt through operational efficiencies, automation and digitalisation initiatives positions it well to mitigate rising costs and sustain profitability," he said.

Lim noted that its growth strategy is the company's adoption of artificial intelligence and automation technologies under the "Future



FRASER & NEAVE HOLDINGS BHD

Now" initiative.

"This digital transformation aims to streamline operations across the command chain, supply chain, and value chain, fostering agility in response to market changes," he added.

F&N sustained growth in FY24 with revenue increasing by 4.9% to RM5.25 billion, driven by strong domestic sales in Malaysia and Thailand, along with exports to Cambodia.

Operating profit rose 10.4% to RM709.5 million, while profit before tax improved by 11.6%, despite higher restructuring and startup costs.

F&N food and beverages division operating in Malaysia reported a 3.5% rise in revenue to RM2.95 billion, buoyed by successful marketing campaigns and festive demand.



# Expect significant changes to stamp duty from 2025

**TAXPAYERS** usually do not pay attention to stamp duty unless there is a transfer of property that requires the title to be transferred, or transactions undertaken between third parties which may have to be litigated in the courts. Unless the document is stamped, it will not be accepted in the courts.

At the moment, there is no compulsion for taxpayers to stamp their documents. Generally, intercompany agreements between related parties are not stamped because they do not anticipate any disputes that will go to court. However, this will stop from 2026 with proposed amendments in the Finance Bill 2024 whereby the Inland Revenue Board (IRB) has the right to review all agreements and collect stamp duty.

## How stamp duty is applied

This is a unique tax that is applied on agreements that fall within the definition of an instrument, and an instrument is defined to include any document which is handwritten, typewritten, printed, or documents electronically recorded or transmitted in an electronically readable form. This will include agreements, letters, memorandums, emails, etc.

The stamp duty liability will only arise if the instrument is listed in the First Schedule of the Stamp Act 1949 (Stamp Act) and the rate of tax

is outlined for every item in the schedule.

The common mistake made by taxpayers is applying the wrong duty because of the incorrect classification of the instrument.

Many taxpayers do not know how to interpret this legislation because it was enacted during the pre-independence period written in a legalistic manner.



**TAX MATTERS**  
BY S.M. THANNEERMALAI

## Significant changes

The most significant change is the introduction of self-assessment in stages from Jan 1 2026 for instruments or agreements related to rental or lease, general stamping and securities; Phase 2 from 2027 will be applied on instruments for transfer of property ownership; Phase 3 from January 2028 will be for all other instruments.

Under the self-assessment regime, the burden of determining the correct duty will be entirely on the taxpayer. If it is incorrect, there will be additional duties and penalties that can range up to 100% of the additional duty if there is no prosecution. However, if the matter goes to court, the fines can range from RM1,000 to RM10,000, and may have to pay a special penalty equivalent to the underpaid duty.

It is important to remind taxpayers that all instruments under the Stamp Act will have to be stamped and this will include intercompany transactions such as provision of services and financing, sale of business, sale of goods, etc. unless it is specifically exempted by the Act.

From 2026, the IRB has the power to audit, and it can go back for five years after the date the duty is paid or would have been paid.

It is extremely important for taxpayers to avoid this problem and review all their documents and ensure that they get it appropriately stamped now to avoid the above penalties. However, many of these documents will also be subject to late stamping penalty. The late stamping penalty rates are increased from Jan 1 2025 to a maximum of 10% if it is stamped within three months after the time for stamping and 20% thereafter. All documents must be stamped within 30 days from the date of execution.

Currently, under the official assessment system, all documents must be sent for adjudication, and the duty is only payable thereafter. Upon the introduction of the self-assessment system, the adjudication will only be done after the taxpayer has filed a self-assessed return which will be deemed to be an assessment on the day the return is filed. In the event the adjudication gives rise to additional duty, there will be additional assessments issued.

The changes to the Stamp Act in 2025 and 2026 are very significant because the imposition of stamp duty is now mandatory.

*This article is contributed by Thannees Tax Consulting Services Sdn Bhd managing director SM Thanneermalai (www.thannees.com).*

## UVCell Solar, Iozela Data Center collaborate on major projects in Penang, Pahang

**PETALING JAYA:** UVCell Solar and Iozela Data Center have entered into a strategic collaboration to develop two major projects, with Penang serving as the location for a highly advanced data centre complex, and Pahang becoming the site for a comprehensive renewable energy hub.

Together, these projects will contribute to Malaysia's environmental sustainability goals while boosting the local economy and fostering international collaboration.

The Penang data centre will be developed with a strong focus on sustainability, integrating full facilities, including a management office, staff accommodation, and a green plantation farm designed to enhance the overall environmental, social and governance (ESG) impact of the project. The site will integrate nature and technology, creating an eco-conscious ecosystem.

The data centre also aims to advance Malaysia's digital infrastructure while minimising its carbon footprint, serve as a model for ESG-compliant technology, and support the nation's low-carbon ambitions.

In Pahang, UVCell Solar will develop a renewable energy hub featuring solar and biomass farms capable of generating 300-500MW of clean power to supply the Penang data centre and surrounding infrastructure, cutting reliance on traditional energy and reducing carbon emissions.

UVCell Solar will also establish a management office in Pahang to oversee the development and operations of renewable energy facilities.

The combination of solar and biomass technologies will help Malaysia further diversify its energy sources and enhance its energy security while contributing to the country's zero-carbon emissions goals.

The collaboration will involve top-tier vendors from around the world, including Japan, China, the United States and Singapore, to ensure the highest standards of innovation and expertise. These international partners will bring their advanced technological expertise in renewable energy, data infrastructure, and sustainability.

While international collaboration is key, the majority of the workforce for both projects will be locally sourced from Malaysia, with a focus on training and employing skilled professionals from the surrounding communities in Penang and Pahang. This approach will not only create significant job opportunities but also help build long-term capacity in Malaysia's renewable energy and digital sectors.

The projects in Penang and Pahang will contribute significantly to these efforts, showcasing how green technologies and digital infrastructure can coexist to create a more sustainable future.

Additionally, the partnership will help bring foreign investors to Malaysia, strengthening the country's position as a hub for green technology innovation in Southeast Asia.

Both companies are committed to ensuring the success of this project, which will not only provide environmental benefits but also drive economic growth, create jobs, and enhance Malaysia's reputation as a global investment destination for green technologies.

## 'Halal certification should not be made mandatory'

**PETALING JAYA:** Halal certification should not be made mandatory as it adds an additional layer of burden and cost to businesses, especially to SMEs and small traders.

Small and Medium Enterprises Association of Malaysia (Samenta) national president Datuk William Ng (pic) said obtaining a halal certification is not just a matter of not serving non-halal food items but also requires extensive documentation on the part of the applicant.

"The requirement is understandably stringent and extends to business premises, processes, suppliers, packaging and labelling, transportation, and others," he said in a statement.

Ng all these add substantial costs and time requirement to businesses. He was responding to the recent decision by the Kelantan government to mandate halal certification

among food and beverage (F&B) operators in the state, beginning with Kota Bharu, prior to rolling out the initiative across the state.

He noted that halal certification promotes better food safety and traceability, and allows F&B businesses operated by both Muslims and non-Muslims, to be better promoted to Muslim consumers. This is especially relevant in Kelantan, where about 96% of the population are Muslims.

Ng said F&B operators are also required to provide periodic training to employees, which require time-off and constant training as staff turnovers.

He said the cost of halal certification is not just the fee paid to Jakim. Applying for halal certification could mean up to RM200,000 if modifications to the premises are required, and up to RM50,000 more a year if a halal coordinator is required on top of the training

costs of new and existing employees, he added.

Ng said larger chain stores may be able to afford to follow these stringent regulations, especially given the benefits of being halal certified. However, for small traders, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the process and costs of having halal certification add another layer of expenses and burden, in an already high-cost, low margin business environment.

"Mandating halal certification at both application and renewal of business licensing will work against us as an economy – as it adds time and costs to starting a business – a key parameter in almost every 'ease of doing business' and competitiveness ranking.

"We urge the Kelantan government to reconsider this decision, and instead work with F&B operators to promote halal certification and with the certification authority to further streamline and reduce the burden and costs of obtaining such certification," Ng said.

## Engie: Well-designed approach will create robust carbon trade system

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A well-designed approach can be transformative for Malaysia's carbon markets as it incentivises industries to reduce emissions while creating a foundation for a robust carbon trading ecosystem, said Engie Services Malaysia Sdn Bhd.

Managing director Wong Yin Kee said the carbon tax complements initiatives like Bursa Malaysia's carbon exchange, providing a transparent price signal and enabling businesses to earn and trade carbon credits by cutting emissions.

This not only drives decarbonisation but also positions the country as a key player in global carbon markets, aligning with mechanisms like Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement, he said.

The Article 6.4 mechanism allows countries

to trade reductions in carbon emissions, going beyond zero-sum offsetting, to fulfil their commitments under the Paris Agreement.

"In my view, tying financial incentives to emission reductions is an inevitable move to complement Malaysia's broader decarbonisation efforts.

"With the right design and implementation, this will be a crucial step in ensuring Malaysia achieves its net zero ambition," he told Bernama in an interview.

In Budget 2025, the government announced plans to implement a carbon tax for the iron, steel and energy industry by 2026, emphasising the country's commitment to its emission reduction goals.

Wong pointed out that collaboration among government, industries, and stakeholders will

be essential to align the tax with Malaysia's nationally determined contributions and energy transition plans.

Moreover, he added that support for affected industries and communities, such as subsidies or incentives, will ensure an inclusive transition while maintaining economic growth.

Wong said the carbon tax can be a powerful catalyst for Malaysia's carbon market.

He noted that the government sends a strong message to industries to prioritise decarbonisation by pricing emissions, creating strong incentives to adopt low-carbon technologies and energy-efficient practices.

Among the main advantages of implementing a carbon tax is ensuring Malaysian exports remain competitive.

# Shareholders approve Paragon Globe's deals

Property developer Paragon Globe Bhd secures nod for acquisition of industrial, agriculture land and divestment

**PETALING JAYA:** Property developer Paragon Globe Bhd shareholders have approved the company's acquisition of several strategically located parcels of land, including 14.85 acres of freehold industrial land and 19.33 acres of freehold agriculture land in Mukim of Plentong, Johor, for RM28.56 million and RM34.96 million, respectively.

Recognising the market's evolving needs, shareholders also approved the disposal of 47.86 acres and 19.759 acres of freehold industrial land in Desa Cemerlang, Johor, to Bridge Data Centres Malaysia IV Sdn Bhd for RM238.32

million and RM98.98 million, respectively.

This strategic divestment unlocks significant value from Paragon Globe's landbank, allowing for the development of a data centre that will contribute to Johor's digital infrastructure.

At an extraordinary general meeting in Johor Bahru last week, shareholders also endorsed Paragon Globe's plans to diversify its income streams and pursue strategic partnerships, including a joint venture with Tropicana Danga Bay Sdn Bhd to develop landmark project in Danga Bay, respectively.

The development rights agreement with Tropicana Danga Bay involves an investment of RM102.46 million.

"We are grateful for the resounding support from our shareholders," said Paragon Globe executive chairman Datuk Seri Edwin Tan Pei Seng.

"These approvals enable us to execute our strategic vision and capitalise on opportunities in the

dynamic property market."

Paragon Globe remains committed to integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles into its operations.

The group is actively pursuing green initiatives, including Provisional GreenRE-certified projects such as Desa 27 (Plot 3 and Plot 4) at Desa Cemerlang and PGB Hostel at Pekan Nenas, and its upcoming serviced apartment developments in Johor Bahru.

"Sustainability is an integral part of our business strategy. We believe that by incorporating ESG considerations into our developments, we create long-term value for our stakeholders and contribute to a better future," said Tan.

With shareholders' approval, Paragon Globe is well-positioned to execute its growth strategy and solidify its position as a leading property developer in Malaysia.

The group remains focused on delivering innovative and sustainable developments that meet the market's evolving needs.

## FMM opposes base electricity tariff hike, says industries already face challenges

**PETALING JAYA:** The Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) strongly opposes the increase in the base electricity tariff for 2025-2027, its president, Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said.

He said the 14.5% increase will have a big impact on industries especially when the manufacturing sector is facing its toughest time with escalating costs and uncertainties.

"Not only will there be an impending increase in operational costs expected in 2025, such as the higher minimum wage and other compliance costs imposed by evolving regulatory requirements, the sector is also bracing for global uncertainties such as geopolitical tensions, persistent supply chain vulnerabilities and shifting trade policies including potential new or higher tariffs enforced by the US administration," Soh said in a statement.

Last week, Tenaga Nasional Bhd announced a new tariff schedule with a base tariff of 45.62 sen per kilowatt-hour for Peninsular Malaysia under Regulatory Period 4 (RP4), which will be implemented starting July 1, 2025. The base tariff under RP3 was set at 39.95 sen/kWh between 2022 and 2024.

"The current electricity tariff schedule, which has been in place since 2014, will continue to be in effect, with no change in the electricity tariff rate and tariff structure until June 30, 2025," TNB said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia on Thursday, Bernama reported.

The following day, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the government would not allow an increase in electricity tariffs that could adversely affect the majority of Malaysians. He said that although tariffs need to rise, this should not affect a significant portion of the population.

"We do not allow electricity tariff increases that affect the general public. Any increase, as before, will only involve the upper-income group... what I refer to as the ultra-rich or profit-making industries," Anwar was quoted saying.

Soh said it is imperative to note that in the last few years, the industrial sector has seen several significant

operational cost increases.

These include the natural gas price increase to above RM40/mmBtu since the third quarter of 2022, the increase in water tariff for the non-domestic sector from August 2022 to January 2023, with tariff review every 3 years, including electricity charge, which is reviewed annually.

Further, since January 2023, there have been double-digit imbalance Cost Pass-Through surcharges for medium and high-voltage users, which have impacted domestic industries.

Soh said local industries are seeing the continued impact of amendments to the Employment Act, which came into effect on Jan 1, 2023, that expands the scope to overtime entitlement for those earning up to RM4,000, increase in maternity leave to 98 days, reduction in weekly working hours to 45 hours from 48 hours previously, among others.

And in 2024, Soh said, domestic businesses faced significant cost increases, including a 300%-400% rise in Department of Occupational Safety and Health inspection fees (e.g., RM3,435 to RM14,750), an 8%-12% hike in logistics costs due to a 6% service tax increase, additional expenses for e-invoicing IT systems, and higher penalties under the Environmental Quality Act and Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Further cost pressures are anticipated in 2025, with the minimum wage rising to RM1,700 on Feb 1, adding RM10.8 billion to annual payrolls. The implementation of a multistage levy system and mandatory Employee Provident Fund contributions for non-citizen employees are estimated to increase payroll costs by RM6.6 billion annually.

"With the overall significant cost increases highlighted above, FMM reiterates its call for the government to keep the industrial tariff rates unchanged so that Malaysia continues to be competitive as well as attractive to foreign investors.

"The government also needs to hold an immediate dialogue with stakeholders on this matter," Soh said.



From left: Independent non-executive director Tan Sri Mohd Shukor Mahfar, group executive director Datuk Seri Godwin Tan Pei Poh, Edwin Tan, executive director Leong Siew Foong, company secretary Solehah Adam and senior independent non-executive director Tee Boon Hin after Paragon Globe's EGM in Johor Bahru on Friday.

## Ringgit pursues stability amid firm US dollar, upbeat domestic outlook

**PETALING JAYA:** The ringgit has outperformed expectations last week, reversing course to strengthen below the 4.50 threshold as the US Dollar Index (DXY) softened last Friday after a lower-than-expected core personal consumption expenditures reading.

Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd (Kenanga IB) said the DXY rebounded last Monday, stabilising above 108.0 after the US averted a government shutdown.

The research firm said the US dollar's strength was further supported by the euro's continued weakness, which was driven by weak

eurozone economic prospects and the European Central Bank's dovish stance.

"Despite these pressures, the ringgit held steady within the 4.47-4.49/USD range, bolstered by Bursa Malaysia's uptrend from year-end window-dressing and domestic economy optimism," Kenanga IB said in a report.

The firm said market sentiment wavers between expectations of two US Federal Reserve rate cuts and a single cut next year, with a small factor now considering the prospect of an increase.

"Persistent inflation concerns under Trump 2.0 could dominate 2025 monetary policy uncertainty, keeping the USD strong and pressuring the ringgit through Q1 of 2025. While the ringgit may close 2024 slightly stronger than anticipated, it is projected to trade around 4.50-4.60/USD in early 2025, contingent on Trump's policy decisions," Kenanga IB noted.

Although domestic factors might lend support to the ringgit, robust US dollar demand is expected to outweigh these influences, the research firm said.



Kenanga Investment Bank says while the ringgit is projected to trade around 4.50-4.60-USD in early 2025, contingent on Trump 2.0's policy decisions. — BERNAMAPIC

theSun **READ OUR paper HERE** /thesun



Ruling People Power Party lawmakers (bottom) arguing with National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik during the plenary session for the impeachment vote of Han at the National Assembly in Seoul. - AFPIC

# Political turmoil shakes South Korea's economy

➤ Business and consumer confidence take biggest hit since start of Covid pandemic, central bank figures show

**SEOUL:** After South Korea's president and his replacement were both deposed over a failed bid to impose martial law, deepening political turmoil is threatening the country's currency and shaking confidence in its economy.

The won, which plunged last Friday to its lowest level against the dollar since 2009, has been in near-constant decline since President Yoon Suk Yeol's attempt to scrap civilian rule in early December.

Business and consumer confidence in Asia's fourth-largest economy have also taken their biggest hit since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to figures released by the Bank of Korea.

Lawmakers impeached Yoon in mid-December on charges of insurrection, and on Friday they impeached his successor, acting president and prime minister Han Duck-soo, arguing that he refused demands to complete Yoon's removal from office and bring him to justice.

That thrust Finance Minister Choi

Sang-mok into the additional roles of acting president and prime minister.

Choi has pledged to do all he can to end "this period of turmoil" and resolve the political crisis gripping the country.

At the heart of the stalemate is the Constitutional Court, which will decide whether to uphold parliament's decision to impeach Yoon.

It must do so by a two-thirds majority, however.

And because three of the court's nine seats are currently vacant, a unanimous vote is required to confirm the suspended president's removal.

Otherwise, Yoon will be automatically returned to office.

Lawmakers last Thursday nominated three judges to fill the vacant seats, but acting president Han refused to approve them, precipitating his own impeachment.

After an acrimonious day in which lawmakers from Yoon's party erupted in protest, the country's newest acting president sought to project calm.

"Although we are facing unexpected challenges once again, we are confident that our robust and resilient economic system will ensure rapid stabilisation," Choi said Friday.

The 61-year-old career civil servant has inherited a 2025 budget - adopted by the opposition alone - which is 4.1 trillion won (RM12.5 billion) less than the government had hoped for.

"There are already signs the crisis is having an

impact on the economy," Gareth Leather of Capital Economics wrote in a note to clients, citing the dip in consumer and business confidence.

"The crisis is unfolding against a backdrop of a struggling economy," he added, with GDP growth expected to be just two percent this year, weighed down by a global slowdown in demand for semiconductors.

"Longer term, political polarisation and resulting uncertainty could hold back investment in Korea," Leather wrote, citing the example of Thailand, another ultra-polarised country whose economy has stagnated since a coup in 2014.

But other economists noted that the South Korean economy has so far weathered the chaos well.

As early as Dec 4, the day after Yoon declared martial law following a budget tussle with the opposition, the central bank promised to inject sufficient liquidity to stabilise the markets, and the KOSPI Index has lost less than four percent since the start of the crisis.

"Like everyone, I was surprised when Yoon took those crazy measures," Park Sang-in, a professor of economics at Seoul National University, told AFP.

"But there was a resilience of democracy." "We come from being an underdeveloped country to one of the world's most dynamic economies in very few years, and Yoon Suk Yeol is a side effect of the growth."

"Korean society was mature enough to counter his crazy actions." - AFP

## Christmas Eve box office in China plunges to 13-year low

**BEIJING:** China's box office revenues for Christmas Eve plummeted to the lowest in at least 13 years, data from ticket booking platform Maoyan showed.

Zhang Yiwu, a literature professor at Peking University, attributed the decline to a confluence of factors, including an unimpressive selection of films and the rise of streaming services.

"The leading reason in my view is a lack of blockbuster films," Zhang said.

Takings for Tuesday were 38.4 million yuan (RM23 million), less than a quarter of last year's 170.5 million yuan, and the lowest since Maoyan began keeping records in 2011, when revenues were 115.9 million yuan.

Christmas Eve is not a public holiday in China and the big dates on cinema schedules are the week-long Spring Festival next month and National Day holiday in October, but Christmas Eve sales are closely watched because this is the last sprint at the end of the year.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, China's annual film box office was on an upward trajectory, peaking in 2019.

However, the pandemic's restrictions on gatherings led to a decline in box office, and the recovery has been weaker than insiders' hopes in the past two years. - Reuters

## Shinsegae to set up joint venture with Alibaba

**SEOUL:** South Korean retailer Shinsegae plans to set up a joint venture with Alibaba International, Shinsegae affiliate E-Mart said.

The joint venture will be formed partly by Shinsegae investing its 100% stake in South Korean e-commerce platform Gmarket, it said in a regulatory filing.

AliExpress Korea and Gmarket will be incorporated into the joint venture, which will be set up in 2025.

But the two platforms will continue to be operated independently, Shinsegae said in a separate statement.

In November, Alibaba Group Holding missed analysts' estimates for quarterly sales as Chinese consumers cut back on spending with the world's second-largest economy struggling amid a property sector crisis and increased youth job insecurity.

Meanwhile, in South Korea's e-commerce market which is the world's fourth-largest according to Euromonitor data, Gmarket has been struggling against local e-commerce giants Coupang and Naver while facing increasing challenges from Chinese rivals like AliExpress and Temu. - Reuters

## Toyota global production down for 10th month

**TOKYO:** Toyota Motor's global production decreased for a 10th straight month in November, the Japanese carmaker said, although its worldwide sales grew for the second consecutive month on solid demand in the United States and China.

The world's biggest automaker manufactured 869,230 vehicles globally in November, down 6.2% from the same month last year, a larger fall than October's 0.8% dip.

Toyota's US output was down 11.8%, making a slow recovery although the production of Grand Highlander and Lexus TX SUV models resumed in late October after a four-month stoppage.

China production dropped 1.6%, which was however better than a 9% decline in the previous month, as Toyota saw higher local sales of its Granvia and Sienna minivan models and the electric sedan bZ3 jointly developed with BYD.

Amid the rise of BYD and other Chinese brands, Toyota has decided to build an independent plant in Shanghai and start manufacturing electric cars for its Lexus luxury brand from around 2027, the *Nikkei* newspaper reported.

In Japan, which accounts for about a third of Toyota's global output, production was down 9.3% in November, due in part to a

two-day production halt at its Fujimatsu and Yoshiwara plants.

Toyota saw its worldwide sales rising for a second straight month, by 1.7% to 920,569 vehicles, setting a new record for the month of November.

In the January-to-November period, Toyota's global output was 5.2% lower than the same period last year at around 8.75 million vehicles, while global sales were down 1.2%.

The production and sales figures include vehicles of Toyota's Lexus brand but exclude those of group companies Hino and Daihatsu. - Reuters



# India considers cutting personal income tax

➤ Move will provide relief to middle class and boost consumption

**NEW DELHI:** India is considering cutting income tax for individuals making up to 1.5 million rupees (RM78,000) a year in February's budget to provide relief to the middle class and boost consumption as the economy slows, two government sources said.

The move could benefit tens of millions of taxpayers, especially city dwellers burdened by high living costs, if they opt for a 2020 tax system that strips exemptions like housing rentals.

Under that system, annual income of 300,000 rupees to 1.5 million rupees is taxed at between 5% to 20%.

Higher income draws 30%.

Indian taxpayers can choose between two tax systems – a legacy plan that allows exemptions on housing rentals and insurance, and a newer one introduced in 2020 that offers slightly lower rates, but does not allow major exemptions.

The sources, who did not want to be named because they were not authorised to talk to the media, said they had not decided on the size of any cuts.

A decision would be taken closer to the budget on Feb 1, they said.

The Finance Ministry did not immediately respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

The sources declined to share revenue

loss of any tax cut but one said reducing tax rates would make more people choose the new system that is less complicated.

India gets a bulk of its income tax from persons earning at least 10 million rupees, the rate for which is 30%.

More money in the hands of the middle class might help rev up the economy, the world's fifth-biggest and which grew at its slowest pace in seven quarters between July and September.

High food inflation is also biting into demand for goods ranging from soaps and shampoos to cars and two wheelers, particularly in urban areas.

The government has also been facing political heat from the middle class over high taxes, and as growth in wages is unable to catch up with the pace of inflation. – Reuters

## Indian banks' balance sheets remain robust

**MUMBAI:** Indian banks' financial position has stayed robust, marked by the sustained expansion in loans and deposits, while their gross bad loan ratio has dropped to multi-year lows, a central bank report showed last week.

Banks' gross non-performing assets ratio (NPA), or the proportion of bad assets to total loans, slipped to an over-13-year low of 2.5% at end of September from 2.7% at end-March, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its *Trend and Progress of Banking* report.

Net bad loans of banks fell to 0.57% of total loans at September-end, from 0.62% at end-March, driven by stronger loan-loss buffers, the RBI report said.

The asset quality of non-bank finance companies (NBFCs) also improved further in 2023-24 amid a sustained double-digit balance sheet growth, the central bank said.

Over the past year, the RBI has warned the financial sector against "all forms of exuberance", tightened rules for credit card and personal loans, made it more expensive for non-banking finance companies to borrow from banks and imposed restrictions on non-compliant lenders.

Banks have also cleaned up their balance sheets in recent years by selling bad loans to asset reconstruction companies or by writing them off.

Their capital and liquidity buffers stayed well above the regulatory needs while profitability improved for the sixth consecutive year in fiscal year 2023-24, the RBI report said.

Going forward, banks need to strengthen their risk management and IT governance standards, and focus on checking unscrupulous activities, including suspicious and unusual transactions, the RBI said.

Meanwhile, for NBFCs, an imprudent "growth at any cost" approach would be counterproductive, the RBI said, highlighting the need for robust risk management frameworks.

Non-bank lenders need to strengthen customer grievance practices and avoid recourse to usurious interest rates, it said. – Reuters

## 'Nippon-US Steel deal has support in steelmaking areas'

**TOKYO:** Japan's Nippon Steel is seeing support for its proposal to acquire US Steel in the regions of the United States where steel mills are located, Nippon Steel's President Tadashi Imai told reporters.

Last week, a US foreign investment committee referred the decision whether to approve or block the US\$15 billion deal to President Joe Biden, who has 15 days to decide.

Biden and his incoming successor, Donald Trump, have both expressed opposition to the purchase.

Imai reiterated that Nippon Steel has made a number of commitments to address national security concerns of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, adding he believed there was "progress in understanding".

"In the communities of the various regions where the steel mills are located, there is a considerable amount of support for this acquisition. I hope that President Biden will understand ... the value of this acquisition to the US economy."

Both companies have previously said they had planned to close the deal, which has also faced opposition from a powerful the United Steelworkers labour union (USW), before the end of 2024.

On Wednesday, Nippon Steel shared a letter to Biden dated Dec 23 and signed by two dozen US municipality officials in areas where US Steel mills are located, asking the American president to approve the takeover deal.

"We respectfully urge you to listen to the voices of the steelworkers and everyone else whose economic security is tied to US Steel – they are speaking loudly in unison that this deal must be approved," the letter said. – Reuters



Shoppers purchasing packets of vegetable oil at a supermarket in Mumbai. – REUTERS/SPIC

## Thai economy slows in November

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's economy slowed in November from the previous month as private consumption and investment contracted but activity remained supported by tourism and exports, the central bank said.

Growth in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy has lagged regional peers since the pandemic, hobbled by high household debt and borrowing costs as well as declining manufacturing.

The central bank said private consumption dropped 0.4% in November from October, when the government made cash transfers to some households under its digital wallet stimulus scheme, and private investment fell 1.8% on the month, mainly in

machinery and construction categories.

Exports rose 9.1% in November from a year earlier, while foreign tourist numbers increased 19.5% annually, the Bank of Thailand said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the central bank maintained its economic growth forecasts at 2.7% this year and 2.9% in 2025. Last year's growth was 1.9%.

The current account surplus widened to US\$2 billion in November from a surplus of US\$0.7 billion in October.

Industrial Ministry data earlier on Friday showed manufacturing output dropped by a larger-than-expected 3.58% in November from a year earlier due to a slump in auto production.

Figures showed car production in Thailand fell 28.2% in November from a year earlier, down for the 16th straight month, due to weak sales and exports, according to the Federation of Thai Industries.

Poonpong Naiyanapakorn, head of the Trade Policy and Strategy Office, told a news conference that the Commerce Ministry is maintaining its export growth target of 2% to 3% for 2025.

"We are not worried about exports next year," he said, adding the ministry was preparing for US trade policies.

Commerce Minister Pichai Nariphaphan said this month the government was aiming to beat the 2025 export goal. – Reuters

# Trump return will not stop clean energy boom

➤ Biden-era law providing subsidies for solar and wind projects near-impossible to repeal

**WASHINGTON:** Donald Trump's return to the White House will refocus the nation's energy policy onto maximising oil and gas production and away from fighting climate change, but the Republican's presidency is unlikely to dramatically slow the US renewable energy boom.

That is because a Joe Biden-era law providing a decade of lucrative subsidies for new solar, wind and other clean energy projects would be near-impossible to repeal, thanks to support from Republican states, while other levers available to the next president would only have marginal impact, analysts say.

"I don't think a Trump president can slow the transition," said Ed Hirs, energy fellow at the University of Houston.

"This is well underway."

Renewable energy sources like solar and wind are the fastest growing segments on the power grid, according to the Department of Energy, driven by federal tax credits, state renewable energy mandates, and technology advancements that have lowered their costs.

President Biden in 2022 signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) guaranteeing billions of dollars of solar and wind subsidies for another decade as part of his

broader effort to decarbonise the power sector by 2035 to fight climate change.

Before the election, Trump slammed the IRA as being too expensive and promised to rescind all unspent funds allocated by the law – a threat that, if accomplished, could pour cold water over the US clean energy boom.

But doing so would require lawmakers, including those whose states have benefited from IRA-related investments like solar panel factories, wind farms and other projects, to vote to repeal it.

"The jobs and the economic benefits have been so heavy in red states, it's hard to see an administration come in that says we don't like this," said Carl Fleming, a partner at law firm McDermott Will & Emery, who advised the Biden White House on renewable energy policy.

Many of Trump's allies also benefit from the IRA through their investments in clean energy technologies, Reuters has previously reported.

Fleming said Trump could, however, slow things down around the margins by hindering federal agencies that deliver IRA grants and loans, or by reducing federal leasing for things like offshore wind.

"You could see a new

administration come in and they can very quickly begin to cut budgets or restrict budgets or restrict the freedom of agencies to do certain things that are tied to funding," he said.

"But I think that's a smaller subset of the larger renewables market that's really relying on those, so I don't think it would have a shocking effect."

The Biden administration has rushed to ensure it spends the majority of available grant funding under the IRA before a new president arrives, Reuters has previously reported.

One way Trump could slow the transition is through executive action by changing public lands leasing, analysts said.

The Biden administration had sought to expand lease auctions for offshore wind in federal waters, along with solar and wind on land.

"I think you would see more preference given to fossil fuel extraction on public lands and waters," said Tony Dutzik, associate director and senior policy analyst at Frontier Group, a non-profit sustainability think tank.

That could have an outsized impact on the offshore wind industry, which aims to site projects in federal waters. Most onshore solar and wind projects are located on private property, as is the vast majority of oil and gas drilling.

Trump has said he intends to end the offshore wind industry "on day one", arguing it is too expensive and

poses a threat to whales and seabirds, a dramatic policy reversal after his first administration supported offshore wind development.

Bernstein Research said Trump is likely to enact a moratorium on new offshore wind lease sales.

Meanwhile, US fossil fuel production is likely to look much the same under Trump, experts said.

The US has already become the world's largest oil and gas producer, under the watch of Biden, thanks to a drilling boom in fields like the Permian Basin under Texas and New Mexico.

Trump paved the way for the boom by slashing red tape during his term in the White House and he could expand US fossil fuel production in a second term by rolling back Biden's climate initiatives, his campaign said.

Trump could, for example, push for drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Biden blocked ANWR drilling leases, but even if Trump opens up the pristine area prized by environmentalists, it is uncertain whether companies would be willing to pump in the rugged north.

"Presidents can make a lot of noise about plans for US oil and gas, but ultimately it's individuals and companies responding to prices of a global commodity that make the decisions on when to drill," said Jesse Jones, head of North American Upstream at Energy Aspects. – Reuters

## EU universal charger rules come into force

**BRUSSELS:** EU rules requiring all new smartphones, tablets and cameras to use the same charger came into force on Saturday, in a change Brussels said will cut costs and waste.

Manufacturers are now obliged to fit devices sold in the 27-nation bloc with a USB-C, the port chosen by the European Union as the common standard for charging electronic tools.

"Starting today, all new mobile phones, tablets, digital cameras, headphones, speakers, keyboards and many other electronics sold in the EU will have to be equipped with a USB Type-C charging port," the EU Parliament wrote on X.

The EU has said the single charger rule will simplify the life of Europeans and slash costs for consumers.

By allowing consumers to purchase a new device without a new charger, it will also reduce the mountain of obsolete chargers, the bloc has argued.

The law was first approved in 2022 following a tussle with US tech giant Apple. It allowed companies until Dec 28 this year to adapt.

Makers of laptops will have extra time, from early 2026, to also follow suit.

Most devices already use these cables, but Apple was more than a little reluctant.

The firm said in 2021 that such regulation "stifles innovation", but by September last year it had begun shipping phones with the new port.

Makers of electronic consumer items in Europe had agreed on a single charging norm from dozens on the market a decade ago under a voluntary agreement with the European Commission.

But Apple, the world's biggest seller of smartphones, refused to abide by it and ditch its Lightning ports.

Other manufacturers kept their alternative cables going, meaning there were about half a dozen types knocking around, creating a jumble of cables for consumers.

USB-C ports can charge at up to 100 Watts, transfer data up to 40 gigabits per second, and can serve to hook up to external displays.

At the time of its approval, the commission said the law was expected to save at least €200 million (RM929 million) per year and cut more than a thousand tonnes of EU electronic waste every year.

"It's time for THE charger," the European Commission wrote on X.

"It means better-charging technology, reduced e-waste, and less fuss to find the chargers you need." – AFP



A view of wind turbines, part of the Indian Mesa Wind Farm, near Fort Stockton in Texas. – REUTERS/SPIC

## Turkiye central bank lowers key interest rate to 47.5%

**ANKARA:** Turkiye's central bank lowered its key interest rate last week, the first cut in nearly two years as it battles with double-digit inflation.

The bank's monetary policy committee decided to reduce the policy rate from 50% to 47.5%, with a statement citing improvement in "inflation expectations and pricing behaviour".

The last cut was in February 2023.

The central bank began to raise interest rates last year to battle soaring prices, after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dropped his opposition to orthodox monetary policy.

It has kept the main rate stable at 50% since March.

The decision signals the start of an easing cycle after eight months of steady policy.

The central bank said the decisiveness over its tight monetary stance "is bringing down the underlying trend of monthly inflation and strengthening the disinflation process".

In November, Turkiye's annual inflation rate slowed for the sixth month in a row, at 47.1%.

The central bank now expects inflation to reach 44% at the end of

2024, up from a previous estimate in August of 38%.

The bank said the level of the policy rate would be determined in a way to ensure the tightness required by the projected disinflation path, taking into account both realised and expected inflation.

This week, the central bank announced that it would hold fewer policy meetings next year.

"The committee will make its decisions prudently on a meeting-by-meeting basis with a focus on the inflation outlook," the bank said, adding it would "decisively use all the tools at its disposal in line with its main objective of price stability".

The bank "will make its decisions in a predictable, data-driven and transparent framework", it added. – AFP

# MARKET ROUND-UP: DECEMBER 27

## BURSA MALAYSIA

### Trade Statistic 27 Dec 2024



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

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

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

## Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,481.70 +102.17
FBM KLCI	1,628.14 +14.44
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	545.00 -0.47
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	174.67 +1.32
CONSTRUCTION	305.93 +4.51
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,041.90 +83.64
ENERGY	824.65 +2.47
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	541.16 +0.68
HEALTH CARE	2,378.95 +46.83
TRANSPORTATION	1,049.10 -0.96
PROPERTY	1,109.93 +11.83
PLANTATION	7,603.01 +61.90
FBMSHA	12,489.00 +135.60
FBMACE	5,358.17 +16.81
TECHNOLOGY	65.18 +0.27

TURNOVER: 2.869 bil VALUE: RM2.877 bil

## Bursa set to continue uptrend on window-dressing activities

YEAR-END window-dressing activities are expected to continue to drive Bursa Malaysia's uptrend this week, fuelled by positive sentiment, according to UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors Sdn Bhd.

Its head of investment research, Mohd Sedek Jantan, remained optimistic that the benchmark FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) could edge closer to the company's in-house 2024 target of 1,650 points, following the index's rally last week to close above the 1,620 resistance level.

"This expectation is underpinned by the anticipated return of foreign investors after the Christmas holidays, alongside positive factors such as an improving global economic outlook and potential easing of monetary policy," he told Bernama.

Mohd Sedek noted the recent strong performance was primarily driven by power and utility stocks, likely bolstered by year-end window-dressing activities by portfolio managers.

"Notably, the rally occurred without significant foreign investor participation, underscoring the resilience of domestic market drivers," he said.

For the holiday-shortened week just ended, the FBM KLCI was higher amid continuous buying interest, taking cues from the upbeat performance on Wall Street and regional markets.

On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the key index was up by 36.73 points to 1,628.14 compared to 1,591.41 in the previous week. Turnover tumbled to 9.72 billion units worth RM7.52 billion compared with 15.30 billion units worth RM13.97 billion in the previous week. Main Market volume slipped to 5.01 billion units valued at RM6.71 billion compared to 8.10 billion units valued at RM12.79 billion previously. ACE Market volume narrowed to 2.10 billion units valued at RM565.86 million versus 2.22 billion units valued at RM731.38 million in the week before.

## Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HM-R1	0.025	0.010	66.67	1,708,554
HSI-CWAM	0.065	-0.015	-18.75	1,415,172
HSI-PWB1	0.125	0.005	4.17	967,926
TWL	0.025	-	-	765,766
HSI-CYX	0.125	-0.015	-10.71	628,449
TENAGA-C2N	0.045	0.030	200.00	612,623
TENAGA-C2Q	0.090	0.020	28.57	610,216
VANZO	0.200	-0.005	-2.44	558,210
MYEG	0.965	0.015	1.58	523,065
HSI-CWAO	0.035	-0.010	-22.22	409,748
SNS	0.670	-	-	378,960
JCY	0.570	0.010	1.79	312,252
CUSCAP1	0.230	0.025	12.20	295,084
SUPERMX	1.280	0.050	4.07	294,708
HUBLINE	0.050	-0.005	-9.09	253,280
TOPGLOV	1.370	0.050	3.79	244,187
ECA	0.290	0.025	9.43	233,237
TENAGA-C2M	0.060	0.025	71.43	221,762
UEMS	1.020	0.040	4.08	211,305
EKOVEST	0.365	0.010	2.82	202,788



## Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
UTDPLT	31.340	0.740	6,102
TENAGA	14.740	0.560	170,251
HEIM	23.900	0.280	731
DLADY	30.240	0.260	57
BURSA	8.890	0.150	5,026
BYD-C32	0.160	0.145	62
XIAQMI-C32	0.750	0.125	500
EG	2.470	0.120	17,408
KLK	21.600	0.120	1,042
PICHEM	5.010	0.120	32,100
CIMB	8.150	0.110	77,394
EDARAN	1.810	0.110	7,656
IJM	3.010	0.110	69,076
KOSSAN	2.780	0.110	50,024
MFCB	4.470	0.100	6,337
PANAMY	17.600	0.100	105
EQBUS50	3.060	0.090	26
ORIENT	7.190	0.090	2,188
SDG	4.940	0.090	19,621
VSTEC5	4.030	0.090	4,999

## Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
BYD-C32	0.160	966.67	62
CHEATAH-WA	0.015	200.00	97,651
FBM KLCI-CQH	0.015	200.00	19,490
HSI-HZN	0.090	200.00	300
TENAGA-C2N	0.045	200.00	612,623
BORNOIL	0.010	100.00	15,537
CEB-CE	0.010	-	-
INARI-C2T	0.010	100.00	300
KANGER-WB	0.010	100.00	54,860
KGROU	0.010	100.00	32,998
PERMAJU-PA	0.010	100.00	4,012
WEGMANS-WC	0.010	100.00	2,002
ZENTECH	0.010	100.00	36,527
SIMEPROP-C35	0.045	80.00	10,309
FBM KLCI-CQJ	0.070	75.00	24,596
TENAGA-C2K	0.105	75.00	15,165
TENAGA-C2M	0.060	71.43	221,762
HM-R1	0.025	66.67	1,708,554
MLAB-WD	0.025	66.67	12,120
TENAGA-C2S	0.090	63.64	89,642

## World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	42,992.21	-333.59	-0.77
S&P 500 (US)	5,970.84	-66.75	-1.11
NASDAQ (US)	19,722.03	-298.33	-1.49
NYSE (US)	19,238.48	-126.02	-0.65
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	4,898.88	41.02	0.84
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,149.78	12.79	0.16
DAX (GER)	19,984.32	135.55	0.68
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	40,281.16	+713.10	+1.80
TOPIX (JPN)	2,801.68	+34.90	+1.26
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	20,090.46	-7.83	-0.04
CSI 300 (CHN)	8,201.03	-6.45	-0.16
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,400.14	+2.07	+0.06
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,404.77	-24.90	-1.02
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,201.80	+40.94	+0.50
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,520.08	+48.53	+0.57
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	78,699.07	+226.59	+0.29
FBM KLCI	1,628.14	+14.44	+0.89
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,771.63	10.18	+0.27
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	182.96	+0.91	+0.50%
WTI (US\$/BBL)	70.60	0.98	1.41
BRENT (US\$/BBL)	74.17	0.91	1.24
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,631.90	-22.00	-0.83
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	29.97	-0.42	-1.39
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	925.54	-14.21	-1.51
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	412.20	-0.55	-0.13
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	8,982.00	31.50	0.35
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	454.00	0.25	0.06
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	546.50	5.50	1.02
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	40.00	0.12	0.30
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	10,124.00	-903.00	-8.19
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	196.40	2.00	1.03

Closing, Dec 27

## Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	97.020	-0.520	84
HLIND	14.160	-0.280	485
SIMEPROP-C41	0.085	-0.255	1,315
PEIDAG	19.340	-0.240	779
ALLIANZ-PA	20.600	-0.200	65
HSI-PWB1	0.650	-0.140	8,200
RVIEW	3.060	-0.140	3
SCIENTX	4.440	-0.130	4,317
CITAGLB-WB	0.400	-0.120	100
NIKKEI-HI	0.365	-0.105	2,970
AJI	15.280	-0.100	241
AIRPORT	10.340	-0.100	9,412
FRONTKN	4.490	-0.090	15,015
SDG-C28	0.080	-0.070	100
YOCB	1.830	-0.070	235
PMETAL-C1J	0.040	-0.065	100
EUROSP	2.240	-0.060	107
LPI	12.640	-0.060	2,210
MUDA	1.100	-0.060	417
PIE	5.920	-0.060	1,175

## Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
FBM KLCI-HM6	0.010	-83.33	900
ASOCHIN-CG	0.010	-80.00	534
SIMEPROP-C41	0.085	-75.00	1,315
HSI-HZP	0.010	-66.67	2,860
MSC-CP	0.005	-66.67	1,000
PMETAL-C1J	0.040	-61.90	100
UCHITEC-CT	0.010	-60.00	900
BAIDU-C2	0.010	-50.00	10,300
HSI-HW9	0.005	-50.00	5,250
MI-C2I	0.015	-50.00	1,845
OCR-WE	0.005	-50.00	23,750
TM-C1P	0.010	-50.00	1,000
TWL-WE	0.005	-50.00	100
SDG-C28	0.080	-46.67	1
BCMALL	0.010	-33.33	27,773
HONGSENG	0.010	-33.33	16,618
MAHSING-C66	0.030	-33.33	3,000
MBSB-C72	0.010	-33.33	2,001
NEXGRAM-WD	0.010	-33.33	10,051
SAPNRG-WA	0.010	-33.33	11,910

# 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

**DISCLAIMER:** The information is extracted from stockbrokers' commentaries and research reports and do not represent the views or opinions of Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd. It is not a solicitation, recommendation or an offer to buy or sell the equities featured. Sun Media Corporation shall not be liable or responsible for any consequences resulting from usage of the information.

## MGS, GII yields set for modest rise amid global uncertainty

**KUALA LUMPUR:** US President-elect Donald Trump's policies are expected to heighten global economic uncertainty, potentially strengthening the greenback and exerting upward pressure on local bond yields.

In a note, Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd said expectations of a higher inflationary environment in the US, supported by the Fed's recent less dovish tone, add to the likelihood of rising local yields.

"Nonetheless, optimism surrounding the domestic economy remains intact, with the upcoming PMI data serving as a key indicator. A stronger reading could attract foreign inflows, offering some offset to the upward yield trajectory."

The Malaysian Government Securities (MGS) and Government Investment Issues (GII) yields displayed mixed movements last week, ranging from -1.6 to 1.5 basis points (bps).

The 10-year MGS declined by 1.6 bps, to settle at 3.82%, while the 10-year GII saw a slight drop of 0.4 bps, closing at 3.84%.

Kenanga said the 10-year MGS experienced a decline, largely attributed to a softer-than-expected US core PCE reading, which introduced uncertainty around US inflation conditions.

Domestically, a stable inflation rate of 1.8% maintained investor confidence, providing support to local yields.

However, foreign outflows totalling RM1.4 billion in the domestic debt market highlighted persistent global uncertainty, likely stemming from Trump's geopolitical manoeuvres.

Market experts noted that Trump's policy agenda presents both opportunities and challenges for various investment sectors.

While some industries may benefit from reducing regulatory constraints, others could face significant risks, including market volatility and disrupted global supply chains.

## Ringgit set to exhibit softness in thin trading this week

**THE** ringgit is set to exhibit softness this week during the last period of trading in 2024 and the start of 2025, with movements likely ranging between 4.47 and 4.50 against the US dollar.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes expects Asian currencies, including the ringgit, to face a cautious period as market participants navigate mixed signals and geopolitical concerns during the thin trading week.

He said the US dollar tends to weaken seasonally at this time, but with President-elect Donald Trump's tariffs on the horizon, there is an added layer of uncertainty.

"Locally, investors are also maintaining a cautious stance due to concerns over China's economic issues, particularly the record US\$411 billion special bond issuance slated for next year and its potential impact on consumer demand.

"This uncertainty has cast a shadow over the ringgit," he told Bernama.

Similarly, UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan anticipated a lower ringgit movement this week following a cautious approach expected from the Federal Reserve.

He said market expectations of only two US rate cuts in 2025 will support the greenback.

"Entering 2025, Asian currencies are expected to weaken against the US dollar in the first six months, driven by market reactions to Trump's re-election and anticipated trade tariffs.

"Since Trump's victory in early November, the US Dollar Index has rallied about 4% to 107.6, the highest level in two years, reflecting expectations of potential tariffs on US trade partners," he noted.

## Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5460	4.4110	4.4010
1 Australian Dollar	2.8440	2.7280	2.7120
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3400	3.2420	3.2340
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1510	3.0660	3.0540
1 Euro	4.7390	4.5850	4.5650
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5660	2.4710	2.4550
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3400	3.2420	3.2340
1 Sterling Pound	5.7010	5.5180	5.4980
1 Swiss Franc	5.0880	4.8730	4.8580
100 UAE Dirham	125.2200	118.7300	118.5300
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8840	3.6160	3.4160
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.7000	60.0600	N/A
100 Danish Krone	65.1200	59.9200	59.7200
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.1600	56.2100	56.0100
100 Indian Rupee	5.4200	5.0900	4.8900
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0290	0.0262	0.0212
100 Japanese Yen	2.8890	2.7960	2.7860
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.9000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	40.9200	37.6300	37.4300
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6600	1.5600	1.3600
100 Philippine Peso	7.9700	7.5100	7.3100
100 Qatar Riyal	126.0900	119.7000	119.5000
100 Saudi Riyal	122.4100	116.2100	116.0100
100 South Africa Rand	24.9800	22.5600	22.3600
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5900	1.4600	1.2600
100 Swedish Krona	42.4000	38.6000	38.4000
100 Thai Baht	13.9000	12.3200	11.9200

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

## Malaysia Economic Outlook Neutral



Source: Philip Capital Research

**MALAYSIA'S** economy has experienced its strongest growth since 2018. This momentum is expected to continue, fuelled by substantial FDI inflows, which also generate positive spillovers of domestic direct investment (DDI). Malaysia has achieved a record level of approved investments in 2023, with strong investment activity projected to persist into 2024.

Private investment is anticipated to remain a key driver of economic growth in the coming years with the further realisation of the approved investment. We forecast GDP growth of 5.1% in 2025, following an estimated 5.3% in 2024, marking the first time since 2014 that the economy has expanded by over 5% for two consecutive years. This commendable economic performance is likely to support the country's equity market.

The global economy was on track for steady growth in 2025, buoyed by monetary easing in advanced economies. However, the outlook has grown increasingly uncertain due to policy ambiguities under newly elected US President Trump. On several occasions, Trump has proposed imposing tariffs as high as 60% on Chinese goods and a blanket 10% tariff on all US imports. Such measures could reshape the global trade landscape, with Malaysia not spared from these potential economic repercussions.

Since the onset of the US-China trade war in July 2018, Malaysia's monthly total exports have risen by c.53%. Exports to the US have surged by nearly 150%, far outpacing the 34% growth in exports to China.

This trend underscores Malaysia's ability to seize on heightened US-China trade tensions, particularly in its trade with the United States, supported by trade-friendly policies and its strategic position in the global semiconductor supply chain.  
- Philip Capital Research, Dec 27

## Coastal Contracts Bhd Buy. Target price: RM1.67



Source: RHB Research, Bloomberg

**THE** group's wholly-owned subsidiaries, Coastal Solar and Pleasant Engineering, together with Bina HT as part of a consortium, have secured a letter of notification on acceptance of offer (LON) from the Energy Commission of Sabah. The consortium will develop a large-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) plant with a capacity of 15MWac on the east coast of Sabah, with COCO having an effective stake of 95%. The solar power purchase agreement (PPA) with Sabah Electricity will span 25 years, with the commercial operation date (COD) scheduled between 1 Apr 2027 and 30 Jun 2027.

While details of the PPA are yet to be finalised, management estimates the project's internal rate of return (IRR) to be around 10-12%. The higher IRR could be attributed to potentially better tariffs, as Sabah historically offered higher rates under the Large Scale Solar 2 (LSS2). The

general solar capex requirement is around MYR2-2.5m/MWdc, translating to a total investment of c.MYR45-56m for the 15MWac plant and funding is expected to be structured with an 80:20 debt-to-equity ratio. Based on these parameters, we estimate the project to generate earnings of MYR2-3m pa.

The group has been proactively building a dedicated team to support its transition into the RE sector, ensuring it has the expertise to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

Currently, its main income contributor is Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), which poses concentration risks should there be any adverse developments. This timely entry into the RE sector aligns well with the industry's growth trajectory, supported by robust initiatives introduced by the government. Additionally, the general >15-year PPAs also provide long-term income visibility.  
BUY with RM1.67 TP. - RHB Research, Dec 27

## Tune Protect Group Bhd Buy. Target price: RM0.48



Source: TA Research, Bloomberg

**TUNE** Protect achieved a performance turnaround with a net profit of RM5.9mn in 3Q24, compared to a net loss of RM9.8mn in 2Q24. This improvement was driven by i) a 5.0% QoQ increase in insurance revenue to RM100.2mn, primarily from the travel segment, particularly AirAsia and the Middle East, ii) better claims experience in the fire, engineering, cargo and PA segments, and iii) a lower expense ratio due to enhanced cost efficiency.

Overall, the group recorded a positive underwriting result of RM6.1mn in 3Q24, compared to an underwriting loss of RM4.9mn in 2Q24. As a result, the combined ratio improved to 93.9% (vs. 105.2% in 2Q24).

According to the General Insurance Association of Malaysia, the total net claims incurred ratio for the motor insurance class increased to 66.7% in 2023, up from 65.3% in 2022. Currently, we understand that Tune's motor loss ratio is higher than the industry average. As such, the group aims to rebalance its motor portfolio by focusing on more profitable sub-segments, such as mid-to high-sum-insured motor and motorcycles. This strategy would allow Tune to raise its average premium level to align more closely with the industry average.

In tandem with the review of Tune's business portfolio, the group will place greater focus on the travel business, which is its key competency. Thus far, the group has observed that tickets from its airline partners are increasingly being sold through indirect channels (39% pre-pandemic vs. 56% post-pandemic), corresponding with a relatively lower take-up rate (TUR).

Moving forward, Tune Protect plans to increase TUR through price optimisation in selected markets and the launch of new products. We expect TUR for international short-haul flight direct channels to increase to approximately 20% (up from 15% currently) in FY25, driven by new product launches such as the Tune Protect Travel Gadget and bundled ancillaries.  
Buy with RM0.48 TP. - TA Research, Dec 27



# the Sun **LYFE**

MONDAY | DEC 30, 2024

Editorial  
T: 03-7784 6688  
F: 03-7785 2625  
E: [lifestyle@thesundaily.com](mailto:lifestyle@thesundaily.com)

Advertising  
T: 03-7784 8888  
E: [advertise@thesundaily.com](mailto:advertise@thesundaily.com)

## Vocal histrionics

**Siti Nurhaliza live extravaganza**  
- P22



### WEEKLY FOCUS

**MONDAY**  
Technology and social media

**TUESDAY**  
Travel and leisure

**WEDNESDAY**  
Fashion and beauty

**THURSDAY**  
Home and living

**FRIDAY**  
Food and beverage

**INSIDE**

**p23**

Highlights of 2024 concert calendar

**p24**

*Absolute Elsewhere* confounds expectations

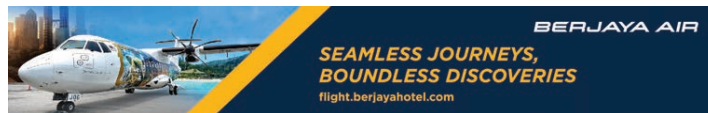
**p25**

Girl power

**p26**

*Kraven the Hunter* underwhelms but amuses

- PIC COURTESY OF UNIVERSEGATEWAY



# Spectacular night of **vocal** brilliance

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

» Judika, Siti Nurhaliza captivate fans at Stadium Merdeka

ON Dec 14, Stadium Merdeka transformed into a haven for music lovers as two vocal powerhouses, Judika and Datuk Seri Siti Nurhaliza, joined forces for "The Journey of Sound." With 24,000 fans in attendance, the concert was a stunning celebration of vocal mastery, nostalgia and heartfelt performances.

The event brought together two iconic voices from Southeast Asia, each showcasing their unique styles and immense vocal prowess. Fans experienced a rollercoaster of emotions, with songs that ranged from soaring ballads to energetic anthems. Every moment was proof of the transformative power of music, leaving an indelible mark on everyone who attended.

## Charismatic opening

The night began with an electrifying opening act by Faizal Tahir. Starting with a soulful acoustic rendition of *Mahakarya Cinta*, Faizal immediately drew the crowd in with his emotive delivery. Following this, he performed his iconic *Sampai Syurga*, which had fans singing along to every word. The medley of *Santai* and *OK* added an upbeat vibe, setting the right tone for what was to come.

Faizal's performance served as a powerful warm-up, igniting the energy in the stadium and preparing the audience for the main event. His effortless charisma and connection with the crowd made him a fitting prelude to the vocal extravaganza that followed.

## Bard and nightingale

Judika and Siti took the stage together, delivering a series of duets that exemplified their unmatched chemistry and vocal strength. Starting with *Kisah Ku Inginkan*, their voices blended smoothly, creating a hauntingly beautiful harmony that resonated throughout the stadium.

The duet of *Bukan Dia Tapi Aku* (led by Siti) and *Wajah Kekasih* (led by Judika) were highlights, showcasing their ability to interpret each other's songs with respect and individuality. The medley of *Setengah Mati Merindu* and *Nirmala* brought

Judika showcases his ability to connect deeply with his audience.



Siti's ability to evoke emotion with every note is why she remains Malaysia's most beloved artiste. — ALL PICS COURTESY OF UNIVERSE GATEWAY

together two iconic songs, leaving fans in awe of their vocal dynamics and range.

Their performance of *Fantasia Bulan Madu* was particularly memorable, with both artistes infusing the rock ballad with a new level of emotional intensity. Every duet felt like a masterclass in collaboration as they balanced each other's strengths to create unforgettable moments.

## Indonesia's vocal powerhouse

Judika's solo set was nothing short of mesmerising. Starting with *Bukan Rayuan Gombal*, he immediately captivated the audience with his powerful, emotive voice. Tracks such as *Sampai Kau Jadi Milikku* and *Jikalau Kau Cinta* showcased his ability to connect deeply with his audience, with many fans visibly moved during his performances.

The medley of *Mencari Alasan* and *Rindu Serindu Rindunya* brought a wave of nostalgia as Judika paid homage to timeless classics. His rendition of *Aku Yang Tersakiti* was another standout moment, with his soaring vocals and heartfelt delivery sending chills through the crowd.

Judika's energy and charisma were infectious, particularly during upbeat numbers such as *Mama Papa*



With 24,000 fans in attendance, the concert is a stunning celebration of vocal mastery, nostalgia and heartfelt performances.

*Larang*. Fans could not help but sing along and dance, their enthusiasm matching his on-stage intensity.

## Malaysia's queen of music shines bright

As Siti took the stage, the atmosphere shifted into one of awe and reverence. Opening with a medley of *Siti Situ Sana Sint* and *Ku Milikmu*, she reminded fans of her versatility and timeless appeal. Her rendition of

*Bukan Cinta Biasa* was a highlight, with her velvety vocals filling every corner of the stadium.

Siti's medleys were proof of her ability to weave together songs into cohesive, emotionally impactful performances. From *Diari Hatiku* and *Bicara Manis Menghiris Kalbu* to *Hati Kama* and *Ya Maulai*, each transition was smooth, showcasing her mastery over her vast repertoire.

The hauntingly beautiful *Balqis*



Siti's medleys is proof of her ability to weave together songs into cohesive, emotionally impactful performances.

had fans entranced while her performance of *Sejarah* closed her solo set on a high note, leaving the audience in awe of her vocal power. Siti's ability to evoke emotion with every note is why she remains Malaysia's most beloved artiste.

## Emotional journey for all ages

The concert was an emotional journey that resonated with fans of all generations. Whether it was the nostalgia of classic hits or the fresh energy of newer tracks, the music struck a chord with everyone in attendance.

The production was equally impressive, with stunning lighting and visuals that enhanced the performances. The interplay of vibrant lights and dramatic stage effects created an immersive atmosphere, adding another layer of magic to the night.

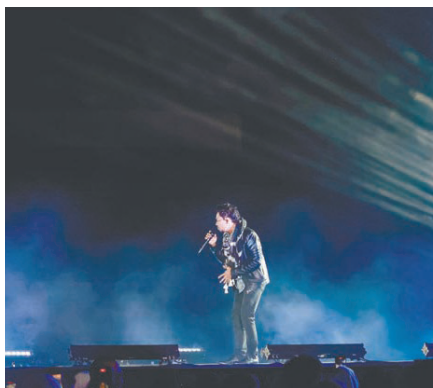
Judika and Siti took time to interact with the crowd, sharing personal stories and expressing heartfelt gratitude for their fans' unwavering support. These moments of connection added intimacy to the large-scale event, making every attendee feel like they were part of something special.

## Concert worth going

"The Journey of Sound" was a celebration of music's ability to unite, inspire and heal. Judika and Siti, two of Southeast Asia's most iconic voices, delivered a performance that was as emotionally stirring as it was technically flawless.

For those in attendance, the night was a reminder of why these two artistes are considered legends in their own right. Their combined energy, vocal prowess and genuine connection with their audience created an unforgettable experience that will be cherished for years to come.

As the final notes of the concert echoed through Stadium Merdeka, the audience was left with hearts full of emotion and memories of a night, in which music truly shone as the universal language of the soul.



Faizal's performance serves as a powerful warm-up before the main event.

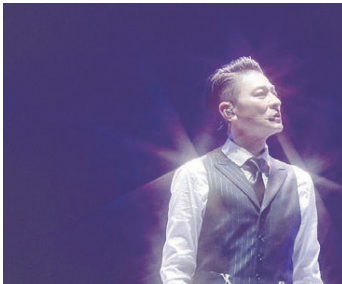
# Year of spectacular gigs

➤ Ranking 2024's best concerts by local, international artistes

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

AS 2024 comes to a close, it is clear that Malaysia's live music scene has reached extraordinary heights. From iconic legends to groundbreaking newcomers, concertgoers were treated to unforgettable performances that showcased immense talent and meticulous planning by organisers.

This list reflects some of the year's most memorable concerts, ranked by overall enjoyment, organisational excellence and the undeniable energy of the crowd. Let us dive into the concert highlights of 2024:



Andy Lau.

**Today... is the Day: Andy Lau Concert Tour 2024**

*Axiata Arena Bukit Jalil (Oct 24-27)*  
Andy Lau's concert was the pinnacle of live entertainment in 2024. Over four sold-out nights, Lau performed with unmatched energy, proving age is just a number. The dazzling stage effects, including a grand entrance on a five-metre elevated platform and visuals that transported fans to 1920s Shanghai, left the audience in awe. The emotional highlight was his promise to perform even at 80, leaving 40,000 fans inspired and deeply moved.



Siti Nurhaliza.

**Siti Nurhaliza: Love Is In The Sky**  
*Arena of Stars, Resorts World Genting (Aug 10-11)*

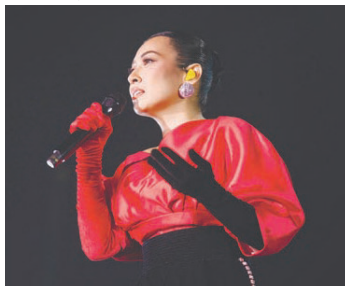
Datuk Seri Siti Nurhaliza brought elegance and emotion to the stage with her *Love Is In The Sky* concert. Performing to a crowd of 5,100, her angelic voice and timeless classics created a magical evening. Visual effects complemented her music, transforming the Arena of Stars into a celestial haven. This concert reminded everyone why Siti remains Malaysia's beloved music icon.



Ne-yo.

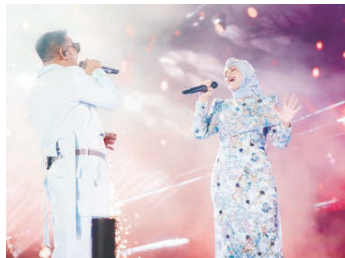
**Ne-yo: Live in Malaysia**  
*Plenary Hall, KLCC (Nov 9-10)*

Ne-yo's return to Malaysia was met with overwhelming enthusiasm, selling out two nights and attracting 6,000 fans. The three-time Grammy winner balanced nostalgic hits such as *Miss Independent* and *So Sick* with modern bops, creating an engaging blend of R&B magic. The crowd's energy, paired with Ne-yo's flawless choreography and velvety vocals, made this an unforgettable event.



Misha Omar.

**Misha Omar: Back to Basic Showcase**  
*Odeum at Jiospace, Petaling Jaya (Dec 21)*  
Misha Omar returned to the stage with her *Back to Basic Showcase*, a heartfelt performance that celebrated her 20-year career. With 2,000 fans in attendance, the intimate setting allowed for a personal connection between the artiste and her audience. Supported by nine musicians, Misha's 90-minute showcase was a soulful journey through her greatest hits, reminding fans why she remains a cherished vocalist.



Judika (left) and Siti.

**The Journey of Sound: Judika x Siti Nurhaliza**  
*Stadium Merdeka (Dec 14)*

Two powerhouses of Southeast Asian music, Judika and Siti joined forces for a spectacular night at Stadium Merdeka. Performing to a crowd of 24,000, the duo delivered stunning duets and solo performances that transcended borders. The concert's blend of cultural harmony and modern flair made it a monumental celebration of music and unity.



Fabio (right) and Aizat.

**Fabio Asher & Aizat Amdan: An Intimate Night**

*JioSpace, Petaling Jaya (Feb 24)*  
This intimate collaboration between Fabio Asher and Aizat Amdan offered a heartfelt evening for fans. With 30 songs performed, including memorable duets, the concert created an atmosphere of closeness and appreciation. Aizat's long-awaited return to a full-scale concert and Fabio's unique style made this event a standout moment early in the year.



Bring Me the Horizon.

**Bring Me the Horizon ft Babymetal**  
*Surf Beach, Sunway Lagoon (Aug 21)*

Metal fans rejoiced as Bring Me the Horizon and Babymetal delivered an explosive night of energy and sound. With 13,000 fans at Surf Beach, Babymetal's *Kawaii Metal* set the tone for an unforgettable evening. Bring Me the Horizon followed with a powerful two-hour performance featuring tracks from its latest album *Post Human: Nex Gen*, showcasing its evolution as genre pioneer.



Rayel.

**Find Your Harmony 2024: Pinkfish Arena**  
*Mega Star Arena, Kuala Lumpur (Nov 1)*

Trance music lovers experienced pure euphoria at Find Your Harmony 2024. Headlined by Andrew Rayel, the event also featured performances from Giuseppe Ottaviani, Billy Gillies and local duo Chukiess & Whackboi. The night peaked with Rayel debuting his alter ego Arisey and an exclusive back-to-back set with Ottaviani, making it a groundbreaking moment for Malaysia's trance scene.



Alan Walker.

**Alan Walker: Walkerworld Asia Tour Pt II**  
*KL Base, Sungai Besi (Nov 8)*

Alan Walker's Walkerworld Asia Tour Pt II brought an immersive EDM experience to KL Base. From stunning drone displays to collaborations with Sofiloud, Walker delivered a set that thrilled his fans. Tracks such as *Faded* and *Alone* kept the crowd on their feet while the visuals elevated the event into a full sensory spectacle.

**Looking ahead to 2025**

With 2024 setting a high standard for live music experiences, it is hard not to feel excited about what is to come. This year showcased not just the talent of artistes but also the dedication of organisers and the unrelenting passion of fans.

Here is to another year of amazing sounds!



Tangible copies of *Absolute Elsewhere* have been spotted in local stores retailing from RM70 onwards.

BY R.BALA

**N**EVERMIND pushing the envelope, how about completely ripping the parcel open and utterly bamboozling listener expectations?

Make no mistake. Blood Incantation's latest LP is absolutely the business, fully justifying the hype and buzz surrounding it. With just two tracks, *Absolute Elsewhere* has topped many a fan forum and online polls for album of the year. This is not just limited to extreme metal lists but it has even entered mainstream consciousness. For instance, *Metal Hammer* named it Album of the Year while *Decibel* ranked it at second. For good measure, even *Time* magazine ranked it seventh on its Top 10 albums of 2024!

This highlights the buzz around one of the most astounding LPs of the year and boy, does it deliver. Taking the band's love of progressive rock and melding it with the quintet's brooding death metal sound, they have upped the ante as far as progressive, technical metal is concerned.

Blood Incantation has taken the spirit of Voivod and mixed it with elements of Dream Theatre, Rush and not least Pink Floyd, creating an absolute magnum opus. While the likes of Death and Gorguts have elevated the technical death metal genre in the past, this is quite literally a giant leap forward in terms of vision and concept.

Blood Incantation has described the album as an imaginary soundtrack to a 1970s sci-film by Werner Herzog as played by a death metal band of the future. Each side of the LP contains



Blood Incantation was formed in Colorado, US in 2011. - PICS FROM FACEBOOK @BLOODINCANTATION

## Pushing boundaries

➤ *Absolute Elsewhere* justifies hype with concept album

just one 20-minute long track, split into "parts" or "tablets" (just like Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*), the tunes are completely immersive and invites repeated, consecutive listens. The complex time signatures are not there just for the sake of it but actually take the listeners on an epic psychedelic voyage. There is not one moment that is wasted on a pointless drum solo or extended guitar pyrotechnics. Instead, dedicated music fans will be entertained by an

almost seamless transition from metal, progressive and even ambient elements to constantly evoke surprise and awe.

The change in tempo, vibe and even mood within the same composition is quite simply breathtaking, swerving between cranium-crushing passages and melodic interludes with consummate ease and no small amount of stylistic nous. The album sucks listeners into a giant vortex of sound that is just remarkable in

its ability to switch between genres, conjuring images of deep space and volcanic eruptions in equal measures. Those who treat music as more than just background sound will absolutely love the compelling nature of this LP.

This might just be the breakout moment for the band, possibly even eclipsing Opeth's and In Flames's shift into mainstream success. This album is the proverbial bomb and certainly justifies the positive online feedback from fans and critics alike.

Produced by Arthur Rizk, *Absolute Elsewhere* was recorded in Hansa Tonstudio in Berlin and is released on the Century Media label. This cosmic masterpiece can be sampled on all major streaming platforms while physical copies were spotted at Kutu Berahak Records, with the compact disc retailing at RM70 while the vinyl edition is double that.

Acer Revo Box Mini-PC.



AOPEN QF18S.



Acer Vero PL2530i.



## Acer Malaysia redefines family entertainment

**IN** conjunction with the festive season, Acer Malaysia has introduced a range of devices designed to enhance connection, productivity and joy when loved ones gather to create cherished memories. The product lineup includes the compact Acer RB102 mini-PC with two projectors AOPEN QF18S and PL2530i projector.

### Compact power for home entertainment

The Acer Revo Box mini-PC brings families together with its compact design to offer beyond multimedia and streaming application. Measuring less than one litre and VESA-mountable, this mini-PC integrates into home setups, enabling daily task and family entertainment in any space.

Available in two variants with 13th Gen

Intel Core i7 and Intel Core i5 processors, the Revo Box provides performance beyond multimedia consumption, content sharing and internet connecting. Designed for convenient connectivity, the Revo Box features an intuitive I/O interface with USB Type-C, Type-A and RJ45 LAN ports as well as Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.0 allow families to stay connected. Available at Acer eStore, official stores on Shopee and Lazada as well as authorised Acer resellers nationwide, Acer Revo Box mini-PC with Intel Core i7 and Intel Core i5 retails at RM2,699 and RM2,049 respectively.

### Bringing families together

Acer also introduced the AOPEN QF18S and Acer PL2530i projectors to take entertainment

to the next level, delivering a bigger screen experience for large gatherings.

The AOPEN QF18S transforms family gatherings with its smart entertainment features, offering direct access to favourite shows and movies. Equipped with dual 5W speakers and Bluetooth connectivity, it also enables instant music sharing.

Additionally, its 13,000 Lumens LED light source and Auto Focus technology ensure crystal-clear visuals, eliminating setup complexities.

The Acer Vero PL2530i takes it a step further with its eco-friendly conscious credentials. Built on the Acer Earthion platform, it incorporates 50% post-consumer recycled plastic in the chassis and 100% recyclable packaging that utilise 85% recycled

paper. Its superior laser light source saves up to 50% more energy compared with traditional projectors, allowing families to enjoy entertainment while supporting environmental sustainability.

Both projectors feature FHD resolution, mercury-free lamps with 30,000-hour lifespan, and convenient wireless connectivity that allows families to create and share memorable moments.

The AOPEN Q18S and Vero PL2530i projectors will be available in Malaysia next year January, retailing at RM1,199 and RM3,999 respectively, with pre-orders available now at Acer eStore.

Acer's latest devices will take home entertainment to another level.



# Pop divas reign on airwaves

➤ Starlets who have dominated music this year with landmark releases

BY JOHN TAN

**T**HE music industry may still be male-dominated but 2024 was a great year for the ladies. Many in the sphere of popular music thrived, reaching new heights in their careers. Here are some standout female pop stars who dominated the airwaves and shattered records this year.



Swift is a certified billionaire after the success of the Eras tour.

– PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @TAYLORSWIFT

## Taylor Swift

2024 saw the end of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour. The tour raked in over US\$2 billion (RM8.9 billion) in revenue, making her shows the highest-grossing in history. As of this year, Swift is the first musician to become a billionaire solely from her music and performances. Apart from her tour, the 35-year-old also had commercial success with her eleventh album *The Tortured Poets Department*. Swift's album became the first to receive over 300 million streams on Spotify. It is also the best-selling album of 2024.



Grande has a Golden Globes nomination for her role in *Wicked*.

– PIC FROM FACEBOOK @ARIANAGRANDE

## Ariana Grande

This year saw the return of Ariana Grande. After a four-year hiatus, the former Nickelodeon star returned to music, releasing her seventh album *Eternal Sunshine*. She further solidified her dominance, returning to the big screen with her role in *Wicked*. Grande shone as the Good Witch Glinda.

She found success in both ventures, becoming the first artiste to have a number one song, album and movie in the US.



Eilish adds an Oscar to list of awards this year.

– PIC FROM FACEBOOK @BILLIEILISH

## Billie Eilish

Billie Eilish kicked off 2024 with her historic Oscar win, earning the accolade for Best Original Song for *What Was I Made For?* The 22-year-old then followed it up with the release of *Hit Me Hard and Soft*.

The album featured hits such as *Lunch*, *Birds of a Feather* and *Chihiro*. On its release day, the album became her most-streamed album on Spotify, receiving over 72 million streams. She is currently on her *Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour* in support of the album.



Rose releases her debut album this year.

– PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @ROSE

## Rose

This year marked a new chapter for Rose. After eight years in Blackpink, the Australian-born singer finally struck out on her own. While she did release an EP in 2021, this venture was a whole new move for Rose.

She released her debut album *Rosie* under a new music label. The release saw her collaborate with prominent artiste Bruno Mars on the record's lead single *APT*.

The single topped the charts in various countries, earning Rose numerous accolades.



Lisa has performed at MTV Video Music Awards twice.

– PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @LISA

## Lisa

Following suit is fellow member Lisa from Blackpink. Upon leaving her old music label, the 27-year-old joined RCA Records to release new music.

She has since released three singles: *Rockstar*, *New Woman* and *Moonlit Floor (Kiss Me)*. Her success as a solo artiste includes performing at the 2024 MTV Video Music Awards and Victoria's Secret Fashion Show.

Lisa is set to push the envelope further, teasing fans with the release of her debut album *Alter Ego* next February.



Carpenter is the opening act for Swift's mega-successful Eras tour.

– PIC FROM FACEBOOK @SABRINACARPENTER

## Sabrina Carpenter

After years in the industry, Sabrina Carpenter finally saw the fruits of her labour in 2024. Coming off as opening act on Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, the former Disney star rose to mainstream stardom upon releasing *Short n' Sweet*.

The album became the singer's first chart-topping LP. Its lead single *Espresso* shared the same success, reaching the summit on numerous musical charts.

The reception earned Carpenter six nominations at next year's Grammy Awards. She received nominations in major categories such as Album of the Year, Song of the Year and Record of the Year.



Tyla bags her first Grammy at 22 years old.

– PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @TYLA

## Tyla

Tyla has risen as the first South African global pop star. Her single *Water* made waves on TikTok, going viral after the hashtag #TylaWaterChallenge blew up on the platform.

The song then won Tyla the inaugural Grammy Award for Best African Music, making her the first South African artiste to take home the golden gramophone.

She further solidified her presence by releasing her self-titled debut album. Other highlights include making headlines for her Met Gala sand dress and performing at the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show.



Roan has opened for Olivia Rodrigo.

– PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @CHAPPELLROAN

## Chappell Roan

Chappell Roan took the world by storm with *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*. The singer gained traction for singles *Hot to Go!* and *Pink Pony Club*.

Her popularity skyrocketed with the release of *Good Luck, Babe!* – other career highs include performing at Coachella and earning Grammy nominations.

Similarly to Carpenter, Roan received six nominations for next year's Grammys. The 26-year-old earned nominations in categories such as Best New Artiste, Album of the Year and Record of the Year.



Beyoncé celebrates black artistes' contribution to the country genre with *Cowboy Carter*.

– PIC FROM FACEBOOK @BEYONCE

## Beyoncé

The veteran R&B artiste made waves with her latest record *Cowboy Carter*. Intended as a tribute to black musicians' contributions to the country and western genre, Beyoncé received 11 nominations at this year's Grammy awards.

It remains to be seen if the LP will receive the Album of the Year gong, an award that has thus far eluded the former Destiny's Child member.

The star-studded line-up on the album highlights Beyoncé's standing in the music industry with legends such as Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson and Stevie Wonder, who all contributed to *Cowboy Carter*.

But for now, she will just have to be content with being the artiste with the most Grammy's ever.

FOLLOW **theSun** ON INSTAGRAM  
 @thesundaily



SCAN ME

# Ambitious but flawed film

➤ This movie is Marvel's latest guilty pleasure

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

**D**IRECTED by J.C. Chandor, *Kraven the Hunter* attempts to dive deep into the origin story of Sergei Kravinoff (Kraven), one of Marvel's most iconic antiheroes. The film has all the ingredients for a stellar entry into Sony's Spider-Man Universe (SSU): a star cast, breathtaking cinematography and a promising start. But like a hunter who loses his prey, the movie gradually veers off course, becoming an over the top spectacle that is as perplexing as it is entertaining.



The film had all the ingredients for a stellar entry in SSU.

## Promising start with high-quality execution

The film begins with a bang, introducing viewers to Sergei, portrayed masterfully by Aaron Taylor-Johnson. The opening scenes establish a visceral, gritty tone that promises an intense character study. Taylor-Johnson's performance is magnetic, he brings a primal energy to Kraven that balances his inner turmoil and predatory instincts.

The cinematography by Ben Davis is equally impressive. Sweeping landscapes, shadowy interiors and action sequences are captured with finesse, creating a visually stunning experience.

The first act sets up a compelling story, exploring themes of familial conflict and personal vengeance. Russell Crowe delivers a deliciously menacing performance as Nikolai Kravinoff, Sergei's ruthless father while Ariana DeBose's Calypso adds intrigue and mysticism to the mix.

For a brief moment, *Kraven the Hunter* might deliver the dark, morally complex story fans have been craving.

## Gradual descent into chaos

But then, the wheels come off. By the second act, the film begins to buckle under the weight of its ambitions.

What starts as a taut thriller devolves into a mishmash of clunky dialogues, absurd plot twists and a questionable focus on secondary characters. Alessandro Nivola's Rhino is underutilised despite being hyped as a major villain and Fred Hechinger's Dmitri (aka Chameleon) oscillates between compelling and cartoonish.

The script struggles to balance the multiple subplots and the pacing becomes erratic. Scenes that should build tension feel rushed while others drag unnecessarily. The action, occasionally thrilling, starts to rely heavily on CGI-laden sequences that undermine the gritty realism established early on.

## Unintended comedy and baffling choices

What truly sets *Kraven the Hunter* apart, perhaps unintentionally, is how hilariously absurd it becomes. The film's script occasionally dips into melodrama, with characters



*Kraven the Hunter* is a film that teeters on the edge of brilliance before tumbling headfirst into absurdity. - ALL PICS COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT MALAYSIA

delivering dramatic lines that feel ripped from a soap opera. Crowe's thick accent adds an unexpected comedic layer to his otherwise intimidating presence and some of the action scenes cross the line from thrilling to outright ridiculous.

A standout moment involves a buffalo stampede that feels more suited to a nature documentary than a Marvel movie. These moments, while unintentional, inject the film with a campy charm that makes it hard to look away.

Here is where *Kraven the Hunter* unexpectedly edges out *Joker: Folie à Deux*. While both films aim for grit and emotional complexity, *Kraven* does not drown itself in its self-importance. Where *Joker: Folie à Deux* meanders with art-house pretensions, Kraven embraces its chaos, providing a fun, if not messy, ride.

## Flawed yet entertaining

Despite its many flaws, *Kraven the Hunter* manages to hold your attention. Taylor-Johnson's commitment to the role keeps the film grounded even as the plot spirals out of control. The action sequences, while over the top, are engaging enough to keep viewers on the edge of their seats.



Taylor-Johnson's (left) performance as Kraven is magnetic while Crowe delivers a deliciously menacing performance as Nikolai.

The film's R-rating allows for a level of brutality not often seen in Marvel adaptations, adding an extra layer of intensity to the fight scenes. While the gore occasionally feels gratuitous, it does set the film apart from its PG-13 counterparts.

For all its narrative missteps, the movie retains a certain energy that makes it enjoyable in a "so bad it is good" kind of way. It is the sort of film where you can laugh at its absurdity while still appreciating the effort that went into making it.

The third act descends into complete chaos, with a climax that feels rushed and overly convoluted. Plot threads are hastily tied up, leaving audiences with more questions than answers. However, the ambiguous ending provides plenty of fodder for fan theories, making it a conversation starter long after the credits roll.

At least *Kraven the Hunter* keeps its audience engaged until the end, unlike *Joker: Folie à Deux*, which spends its final moments wallowing in despair. If you are choosing between these two, go with the former's chaotic energy - you might leave confused but at least you will not leave bored.

## Lower your expectations

To fully enjoy *Kraven the Hunter*, it is essential to approach it with the right mindset. This is not a film to take seriously. Instead embrace its flaws, revel in its unintentional humour and appreciate the moments where it delivers on its potential.

*Kraven the Hunter* is a film that teeters on the edge of brilliance before tumbling headfirst into absurdity. A disjointed plot, outrageous action and unintentional comedy undermine its strong performances, stunning cinematography and promising premise.

Yet for all its flaws, it remains a fascinating watch that keeps viewers glued to the screen, if only to see what outrageous twist will come next.

If *Joker: Folie à Deux* is a film that drowns in its own misery, *Kraven the Hunter* is the wild, unhinged cousin who does not know when to quit. Come for Taylor-Johnson's magnetic performance, stay for the sheer spectacle of it all and leave wondering how such a chaotic film managed to be so entertaining.

*Kraven the Hunter* may not be the superhero movie we needed but it is certainly one we will remember - that alone is worth the admission fee.

**DIRECTOR:**  
J.C. Chandor

**CAST:**  
Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Ariana DeBose, Fred Hechinger, Russell Crowe

**E-VALUE**  
6

**ACTING**  
5

**PLOT**  
5



Taylor-Johnson's commitment to the role keeps the film grounded even as the plot spirals out of control.





**SEAMLESS JOURNEY WITH JOJO FLIGHT**

SELETAR SINGAPORE ⇌ REDANG ISLAND ⇌ SUBANG SKYPARK  
flight.berjaya.com



Man United's Amad Diallo (left) in action against Bournemouth. - REUTERS/SPIC

## Amad keen to 'make history' with Devils

**AMAD DIALLO** "wants to make history" with Manchester United as he aims to help Ruben Amorim turn around the club's fortunes.

These remain troubled times for United, who have taken only seven points from Amorim's first seven Premier League games in charge going into tomorrow's match at home to Newcastle.

But Amad has offered some cause for optimism with his recent form, highlighted by his dramatic late winner in the Manchester derby as United scored two late goals to win 2-1 at City earlier this month.

The 22-year-old Ivory Coast international has scored two goals and added six assists in the League this season, and has arguably been United's best player so far this term.

Alongside United's other young players,

Amad said he has his sights set on taking United back to the top.

"We are part of the project, we have so many young players for this club, especially Garna (Alejandro Garnacho), Kobbie (Mainoo), Joshua (Zirkzee), Rasmus (Hojlund), me, we are young players who want to make history for this club," Amad told MUTV.

"We want to do our best every game. Sometimes it cannot work, but you can see in the pitch we are very focused to do our best for this club, because we want to bring back this club to the level it was before.

"So, for the young lads, we just have to keep going, work hard and the most important thing is to listen to the old men, the old players, learn every day.

"We have now a new manager, he likes to

work with young players, and he brings a new system, so we just have to follow it and try to do our best every game."

Amad has proved his versatility in the early days of Amorim's reign, featuring both at right wing-back and in more attacking roles.

"In football this can happen," he added. "Don't be focused in only one position. Sometimes you can play as a defender, sometimes as a striker. Wherever the manager puts me I'm ready to fight for the team.

"I just want to play, right wing, number 10, anywhere. I say to the manager if you need me as a 'keeper I'm ready to do my best.

"I will fight for the team and for my teammates. I want to make history for this club." - The Independent

## Come and get me!

Ronaldo opens door to stunning City transfer

**CRISTIANO RONALDO** has risked the wrath of Manchester United fans by opening the door to a blockbuster move to Manchester City, backing under-fire boss Pep Guardiola to turn their season around.

When asked at the Globe Soccer Awards if he would give City a "helping hand" to turn around their season, the Portuguese superstar refused to rule out a sensational move to the Etihad.

"The football is like... you never know what is going to happen," Ronaldo said.

When the presenter pressed him for a clear answer, telling him "that's not a no!", Ronaldo laughed and refused to elaborate.

Guardiola previously turned down the chance to sign Ronaldo in 2021 when Ronaldo announced he would be leaving Juventus.

Instead, he returned to Old Trafford for a second stint and scored 27 goals in 54 games before his acrimonious exit in December 2022.

The Premier League champions are one of a few European clubs - along with Chelsea, PSG and his former club United - that could feasibly afford Ronaldo's wages.

However, there is nothing to suggest that they would entertain bringing in the Al-Nassr striker, who turns 40 in February.

The absence of Rodri in midfield has seen the champions unravel and with an ageing squad, Guardiola is in need for reinforcements and could make several moves in the market when the transfer window reopens on Jan 1.

Despite being snubbed in the past, it hasn't stopped Ronaldo from giving his support to Guardiola, who is in the midst of his worst run since taking over as City coach in 2016.

"I think the big teams, the big players they are smart enough to understand what is the problem, where is the problem," Ronaldo added.

"The teams have moments, good times, difficult times... and for example, City will pass through this moment. I'm sure 100 per cent they will be back.

"Guardiola is a very smart coach. He knows where the problem is coming from. They will be there like always."

Ronaldo and Guardiola have a checkered past from their time in Spain, with the former starring for Real Madrid as Lionel Messi's main rival and Guardiola coaching Barcelona until 2012.

But their relationship has improved over time, with Guardiola once labelling Ronaldo as "irreplaceable", before later expressing regret for not having more players of his calibre at the Etihad Stadium.

Ronaldo reciprocated not long after, hailing the Treble-winning manager as "a great coach" and admitted: "His teams are always at the top, and his football speaks for itself."

Ronaldo also Ruben Amorim to turn around Manchester United's fortunes by insisting the "storm will finish" at Old Trafford under his fellow Portuguese.

"He (Amorim) did a fantastic job in Portugal with my (former club) Sporting," said Ronaldo. "But the Premier League is a different beast, the most competitive league in the world.

"I knew that it would be tough and they will continue the storm. But the storm will finish and the sun will rise.

"Things crossed, it will be good with him and I hope the best for Manchester United because it is a club I still love." - Express Newspapers/The Independent

## Atalanta draw but keep Serie A lead



Lazio's Mattia Zaccagni (left) in action with Atalanta's Ederson during their Italian Serie A match yesterday. - REUTERS/SPIC

**ATALANTA** kept hold of top spot in Serie A yesterday after escaping Lazio with a 1-1 draw which kept Inter Milan at bay but ended their club-record league winning streak at 11 matches.

Marco Brescianini tapped home into an open goal with two minutes remaining to snatch a point from the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, where a passionate crowd thought a big win was coming their way.

Instead Atalanta will end a historic year a point ahead of Inter, who have a game in hand, after the champions briefly drew level on points with a 3-0 win earlier at Cagliari.

Europa League holders Atalanta will lead the league even if Napoli beat Venezia overnight and draw level on 41 points with Gian Piero Gasperini's side who have a significantly better goal difference than the 2023 champions.

Should two teams finish level at the top of Serie A come the end of the season they will face off in a single match to decide the destination of the

*Scudetto*, which Atalanta have never won.

"We struggled for long periods in the first half, but we were much better in the second," said Atalanta coach Gasperini.

"This year has been the best year in Atalanta's history, let's hope we can make 2025 the same."

Lautaro Martinez ended an eight-match scoring drought at Cagliari, netting the second in an engaging contest in Sardinia which Inter won with second half goals from the Argentine striker, Alessandro Bastoni and Hakan Calhanoglu.

Inter have won their last five in Italy's top flight, scoring 19 and conceding just once, a burst in form which has re-established Inter as favourites to retain the *Scudetto*.

"The most important thing is that Inter win. If I get a goal too, then that's a bonus," said Martinez.

"We work hard every day to win trophies and anyone who sets foot on the pitch will give their all for the team. We've just got to keep going and make 2025 like this year." - AFP

BY DAMIAN SPELLMAN

**EDDIE HOWE** wants even more from in-form Newcastle striker Alexander Isak.

The 25-year-old Sweden international took his goal tally for the season to 12 in the 3-0 Boxing Day win over Aston Villa at St James' Park, 10 of them in his last 10 Premier League games, after a challenging start to the new campaign.

Isak managed 25 goals in a black and white shirt last season to further justify the club record

£63 million (RM347m) the club paid to bring him to Tyneside from Real Sociedad during the summer of 2022, but as delighted as he is with his big-money signing, head coach Howe is confident there is even more to come.

Asked where the former AIK Solna frontman currently ranks in world football, he said: "My biggest thing with Alex is I am evaluating his game on a daily and weekly basis and I just want to try to push him for more.

"Everyone else can say where he is in the

pecking order of world football. His game is in a good place at the moment.

"My job is to not sit back and appreciate that, my job is to try and find areas he can improve, push him towards that and never stop pushing him.

"He has all the ingredients in there. Football never stops evolving and changing and he has to evolve with it.

"There is a lot more to come from him. Our job is to help him deliver that.

## Howe expects more from Newcastle striker Isak

# Chelsea boss lays down the law

BY ANDY SIMS

Maresca outlines Madueke's route back after being dropped

**C**HELSEA BOSS Enzo Maresca insists Noni Madueke is in contention to face Ipswich despite axing the England winger for the Boxing Day derby against Fulham.

Madueke was a surprise absentee from the Blues squad for Thursday's 2-1 defeat by their west London neighbours.

It was not the first time Maresca has dropped the 22-year-old. He was also left out against Aston Villa at



Chelsea's Noni Madueke (left) in action against Shamrock Rovers in the Conference League match on Dec 19, 2024. - REUTERS/SPIC

the start of the month after failing to impress the Italian boss in training.

Maresca pointedly named two goalkeepers on his bench instead of Madueke, and afterwards explained it was a "technical decision".

He added: "Sometimes we just take a decision and it's no more than that. Is he in contention for Ipswich? Yeah, for sure."

"The competition has to be higher, but not only for Noni Madueke. Also Renato Veiga was not in the squad and the reason is exactly the same for both of them."

"There is not any different reason, it's just a technical decision."

Former manager Mauricio Pochettino took aim at Madueke for his professionalism last season.

The Argentine criticised the 22-year-old for going out partying while injured and also for his late season spat over who would take a penalty against Everton.

In August, after a Europa Conference League goal against Servette, the England winger was reminded he must be more consistent in training.

And following a goal and an assist at Southampton this month Maresca suggested the former PSV Eindhoven man becomes too complacent.

Maresca has made it clear he will call out stars when their level is not high enough, adding that Madueke has responded well in the past.

After being dropped against Villa, Madueke returned to the starting line-up three days later at Southampton and scored in a 5-1 win.

"Very good, fantastic and he responded very good at that time so there is no more than that," added Maresca. "I expect the same this time, yeah, absolutely."

Madueke's short term future at Stamford Bridge looks secure given Mykhailo Mudryk's doping suspension.

However, a sale has been considered in the past - with Newcastle interested in the summer.

Should Maresca remain frustrated with his attitude, a move away cannot be ruled out at the end of the season.

The Blues boss is set to make further changes at Portman Road tomorrow (3.45am

Malaysian time) after Chelsea slipped to their first defeat since October against the Cottagers.

Cole Palmer's 12th goal of the season put the Blues ahead but late strikes from Harry Wilson and Rodrigo Muniz gave Fulham their first win at Stamford Bridge since 1979.

"For sure, after a game you need to go again, no matter the result, especially in this month," said Maresca.

"I think in December, we already played eight or nine games in 25 or 27 days so it's now important to recover the energy and go again on Monday. If we are going to make one, two or three changes we will see." - The Independent

**TOTO SPORTS TOTO RESULTS**

DRAW NO: 5903/2024 DATE: 29/12/2024 (SUN)  
 STM LOTTERY SDN. BHD.  
 1990100090 (8420D)

**TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

1st Prize **9497**  
 2nd Prize **8025**  
 3rd Prize **6992**

Special	Consolation
7144 8482	0835 8045
8850 0474	0353 5656
2779 1850	1823 0389
7444 9604	4296 5250
1309 4506	2998 4724

**4D JACKPOT**

Jackpot 1 **RM 5,214,097.84**

9497 8025	8025 9497
9497 6992	6992 9497
8025 6992	6992 8025

Jackpot 2 **RM 159,362.50**  
 Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

**4D Zodiac**

1st Prize **9497** +   
 2nd Prize **8025** +  
 3rd Prize **6992** + **RABBIT**  
 4th Prize **Special Prize** +  
 5th Prize **Consolation Prize** +  
 6th Prize **Any 4D drawn number**

**TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

**5D** 1ST **0 9 4 8 4**

2ND	4 2 0 4 3	4TH	9 4 8 4
3RD	4 6 3 5 4	5TH	4 8 4
		6TH	4 8 4

**6D** 1ST **0 6 5 8 4 8**

2ND	0 6 5 8 4	or	6 5 8 4 8
3RD	0 6 5 8	or	5 8 4 8
4TH	0 6 5	or	8 4 8
5TH	0 6	or	4 8

**TOTO GAMES GIVES YOU MORE WINNING CHANCES!**

**SUPREME 7/35** 15 23 24 38 51 57  
 Jackpot **RM 65,208,980.45**

**POWER 7/35** 16 17 19 22 26 34  
 Jackpot **RM 5,502,948.35**


**STAR 7/35** 3 18 26 30 36 50 + 35  
 Jackpot 1 **RM 2,167,571.20**  
 Jackpot 2 **RM 156,128.08**

**Toto 4D Jackpot 1 (i-System)**  
**RM 192,782**

**Toto 4D Jackpot 2**  
**RM 146,861**

**Toto 4D Jackpot 2 (i-System)**  
**RM 10,705 won on 28/12/2024!**

Visit [www.sportstoto.com.my](http://www.sportstoto.com.my) for eResults and more info.



**WINNING NUMBERS**  
 PAYMENT GUARANTEED IN FULL **damacai**

Draw Date: 29/12/24 (Sun) Draw No: 5850/24 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

**1+3D SUPER 1+3D**

1st Prize **2218**  
 2nd Prize **1628**  
 3rd Prize **5519**

Starters	Consolation
5583 6546	4222 3311
2426 7943	3172 4239
8459 3008	7244 0355
7169 2576	8410 6446
1549 1384	1421 0918

**1+3D**

Jackpot 1 **RM6,777,807.60**

2218 + 1628	1628 + 2218
2218 + 5519	5519 + 2218
1628 + 5519	5519 + 1628

Jackpot 2 **RM320,628.50**  
 Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

**3+3D**

1st Prize	Bonus	1st Prize Bonus
082 218 +	OX	RM1,071,146.80
2nd Prize	Bonus	2nd Prize Bonus
951 628 +	ROOSTIER	RM1,045,904.60
3rd Prize	Bonus	3rd Prize Bonus
115 519 +	RAT	RM1,541,506.00

Starters	Consolation
245 583 836 546	004 222 193 311
622 426 197 943	473 172 274 239
268 459 253 008	627 244 700 355
587 169 562 576	568 410 426 446
541 549 381 384	841 421 830 918

**3D**

1st Prize **218** 2nd Prize **628** 3rd Prize **519**

**3D**

Jackpot **RM871,506.20**

218 + 628 + 519	628 + 519 + 218
218 + 519 + 628	519 + 218 + 628
628 + 218 + 519	519 + 628 + 218

Winning combination matches the Top 3 Prizes in any order.

**HSSB 1+3D Jackpot 1 RM347,235.80 won on 28/12/2024!**

 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 Dia Ma Cai.

Pan Malaysian Pools Sdn. Bhd. (171698-07) [www.damacai.com.my](http://www.damacai.com.my)  
 dmcGO play anywhere: [www.dmcGO.com.my](http://www.dmcGO.com.my) or call 03-2333-2000

RESULTS & STANDINGS

**ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Brighton 0 Brentford 0, Arsenal 1 (Havertz 23) Ipswich Town 0.**

TOP 10	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	17	13	3	1	40	17	42
Arsenal	18	10	6	2	35	16	36
Chelsea	18	10	5	3	38	21	35
Nottm Forest	18	10	4	4	24	19	34
Newcastle	18	8	5	5	30	21	29
Bournemouth	18	8	5	5	27	21	29
Man City	18	8	4	6	30	26	28
Fulham	18	7	7	4	26	23	28
Aston Villa	18	8	4	6	26	29	28
Brighton	18	6	8	4	27	26	26

**SERIE A: Cagliari 0 Inter Milan 3 (Bastoni 54, Martinez 71, Calhanoglu 78-pen), Empoli 1 (Esposito 74) Genoa 2 (Badelj 46, Ekuban 68), Lazio 1 (Dele-Bashiru 27) Atalanta 1 (Brescianini 88), Parma 2 (Hemami 56-pen, Valenti 90+8) Monza 1 (Pereira 86).**

TOP 10	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Milan	17	12	4	1	45	15	40
Atalanta	17	13	1	3	42	19	40
Napoli	17	12	2	3	26	12	38
Lazio	17	11	1	5	32	24	34
Fiorentina	16	9	4	3	29	13	31
Juventus	17	7	10	0	28	13	31
Bologna	16	7	7	2	23	18	28
AC Milan	16	7	5	4	25	16	26
Udinese	17	7	2	8	21	26	23
Roma	17	5	4	8	23	23	19

BRIEFS

Muaythai tournament a big hit

THE Muaythai Rentap Pandan Madani Championship 2024, now in its third edition, has gained notable attention, attracting not only local exponents but also participants from overseas. According to event organiser Fairul Ezly Ramli, this year's championship includes competitors from Afghanistan, Iran, and Cambodia, all vying for five coveted championship belts. "This year marks a significant evolution of the tournament compared to previous editions, which were held behind closed doors. We're proud to welcome international exponents to elevate the level of competition," he told a press conference on Saturday. The event started yesterday, will feature 80 amateur fighters and 12 professionals, making it one of the largest editions yet.

Silambam team overall champions

MALAYSIAN silambam team bagged 12 gold medals to emerge overall champions at the Asian Open Silambam Championship in Qatar, over the weekend. Malaysia Silambam Association president Dr M. Suraess said six national exponents displayed splendid performances to deliver two gold each via the thanithiramai (individual artistic staff spinning) and poruthal (combat) categories at the Doha Sports Complex. Dr Suraess said hosts Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) finished second and third in the tournament that was also participated by representatives from India and Saudi Arabia.

FAM presidential race heats up

WHILE several prominent names are being speculated to contest the hot seat of Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) president, a corporate member has expressed interest in competing in the election congress on Feb 15. Former FAM Marketing and Social Responsibility head Sayf Ismail, 45, said that he is ready to contest as a wild card candidate, offering his expertise to lead the national football governing body with a different perspective as an 'outsider' to the sport. "FAM leadership does not necessarily have to come from 'insiders'; it can come from different sectors, which means bringing

OCM wants centralised venues for 2027 SEA Games

THE Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) wants competition venues to be centralised around Kuching when Sarawak co-hosts the 2027 SEA Games. OCM secretary-general Datuk Mohd Nazifuddin Najib (pic) said they do not want scattered venues like the recent Malaysia Games (Sukma) held across nine divisions in Sarawak in August. "Sarawak has requested to host the SEA Games opening ceremony and some sports like diving. However, we want events to be centralised in the same location because it would be challenging for other countries if the venues are too spread out," he told reporters. "We will prioritise what Kuching can host. Some sports, like sailing and track cycling, have limited venue options, so we will discuss further once the Malaysia SEA Games Organising

Committee (Masoc) is established," he added. Masoc is expected to be formed by mid-2025 to ensure Malaysia is ready to take over leadership of the Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF) after the SEA Games in Thailand from Dec 9-20 next year. Mohd Nazifuddin said OCM has also asked national sports associations (NSAs) to submit proposals regarding plans for the SEA Games in Thailand and Malaysia to determine the list of sports and additional events for the biennial games. "Only then can we decide whether to host those sports or not. Additionally, if the opening ceremony is held in Sarawak, we want the closing ceremony to be in Kuala Lumpur," he said.



Apart from Sarawak, Penang has also expressed interest in hosting snooker and billiards, while Johor is keen to host football. According to the SEAGF Charter and Rules, organisers can include additional sports besides the mandatory ones like aquatics and athletics, provided at least four countries participate. The final list of sports and events must be communicated to participating nations at least 15 months before the SEA Games begin. The dates for the 2027 SEA Games have not been determined yet. - Bernama



BURNLEY FC captain Josh Brownhill has addressed rumours about his nationality, taking to social media to clarify speculation linking him to Malaysia. The 29-year-old midfielder, a key figure at Burnley since 2020, has clarified that he is exclusively English. "Just wanted to address the situation of some rumours that have gone around. Unfortunately my only nationality is English and I am not Malaysian as some people may think. "I'm not quite sure how this has all started but do want to clear it up, but thanks for the support regardless. Thanks," he posted on his Instagram Story yesterday. Brownhill's comments are in response to a surge of social media speculation, where some fans mistakenly believed he had Malaysian roots, sparking rumours about his eligibility to play for the Harimau Malaya squad. The former Bristol City FC player also expressed his gratitude for the ongoing support from fans, even amidst the confusion. A steadfast presence in the heart of The Clarets' midfield, Brownhill is renowned for his leadership both on and off the pitch. Earlier, the Regent of Johor, Tunku Mahkota Ismail, the owner of Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) and a prominent figure in the local football scene, shared an Instagram

direct message exchange with Brownhill, urging him to clarify his nationality. On Friday, Tunku Mahkota Ismail also put an end to speculation that Australian football legend Tim Cahill will be part of the national team's revolution. In an Instagram story post, Tunku Mahkota Ismail clarified that former Everton midfielder is not the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Harimau Malaya squad. Instead, Cahill serves as his personal advisor for sports and international relations. "This guy @tim\_cahill is not the CEO of the Malaysian National team. He is my personal advisor for sports and international relations," he said in the post, which featured a picture of him with Cahill. Previously, many had speculated that Cahill would be involved in the move to revolutionise the Harimau Malaya through a special unit which, among others, is aimed specifically at monitoring the performance and management of the national football team. This came about when a photograph of Cahill posing with Tunku Mahkota Ismail, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and JDT CEO Alistair Edwards was uploaded on Tunku Mahkota Ismail's Facebook page in August. Tunku Mahkota Ismail also confirmed that the selection of a candidate for the national team CEO is nearing completion. - Bernama

Magnum Corporation Sdn Bhd (8272-D)  
**Winning Results**  
Full payment guaranteed

Draw No: 140/24 Date: 29/12/2024

**4D Classic**

1st Prize	7096
2nd Prize	1713
3rd Prize	5602

SPECIAL	CONSOlation
0125	9718
8442	4330
2690	4216
6562	2383
1937	8347
	8400
	6158

**4D Jackpot**

Jackpot 1 **RM5,997,377.87**  
PARTIALLY WON

7096 + 1713	7096 + 5602
1713 + 7096	1713 + 5602
5602 + 7096	5602 + 1713

Jackpot 2 **RM143,152.52**  
PARTIALLY WON

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

Play smarter. Get rewarded with MyMagnum 4D app!

**Magnum Life**

2 6 10 20 21 25 32 34  
+  
12 13  
Grand Prize  
RM1,000 EVERY DAY for 20 years  
2nd Prize  
RM1,000 EVERY DAY for 100 days

**Jackpot Gold**

Jackpot 1 **RM11,447,092.16**  
Jackpot 1 - Group 1 + Golden Number

Jackpot 2 **RM197,485.69**  
Jackpot 2 - Group 2 + Golden Number

GROUP 1	9 6 1 3 0 2
GROUP 2	9 6 1 3 0 OR 6 1 3 0 2
GROUP 3	9 6 1 3 OR 1 3 0 2
GROUP 4	9 6 1 OR 3 0 2
GROUP 5	9 6 OR 0 2
	OR 1 3
GOLDEN NUMBER	1 0

All Jackpot amounts stated above are for this Draw. Subject to T&Cs of the Scheme. Please visit to [www.magnum4d.my](http://www.magnum4d.my) for more info. THE BIGGER PLAY IS TO PLAY RESPONSIBLY.



# theSun Sports

MONDAY | DEC 30, 2024

Read theSun iPaper at [www.thesun.my](http://www.thesun.my)

Free access to iPaper PDF Download

or download theSun app from the App Store or Google Play.

SCAN ME

# Comfortably numb

Amorim enjoying 'danger' at Man United amid dismal form



Ruben Amorim

**RUBEN AMORIM** said he cannot be comfortable in his position as Manchester United head coach but likes the danger as his side's slump continues.

United suffered their third consecutive defeat when they lost 2-0 at Wolves on Boxing Day to leave Amorim with five losses in his last seven games.

And he believes that his transfer fee - United paid Sporting CP €11 million (RM50m) to meet his buyout clause and bring him to Old Trafford early - will not protect him from the sack.

The Portuguese said: "The manager of Manchester United cannot, no matter what, be comfortable and I know the business I am in.

"I know that if we don't win, regardless of if they pay the buyout or not, every manager is in danger and I like that.

"I like that because that is our job so I understand the question. You can say I am here a month, we have four trainings (sessions), but I am not winning. The reality is that and I am comfortable with that."

United host Newcastle tomorrow (4am Malaysian time) with Amorim admitting that the Old Trafford crowd could be worried because of their form.

He said: "We have to fight against everything because our supporters are always there but they are tired of this moment. Any play from Newcastle near our box is going to make the stadium nervous."

Amorim has to find a new captain with Bruno Fernandes suspended after his red card at Molineux, and while he did not confirm who will wear the armband, he paid tribute to former skipper Harry Maguire.

"He works really well," Amorim said. "He is focused on the job and he has no excuses, even if he has some tough moments, so in that department he is an example."

Despite these difficulties, Red Devils chiefs are expected to be patient with the young tactician as he remains committed to implementing his 3-4-2-1 formation.

This isn't the first time Amorim has faced such adversity, either. In 2018, he took charge of then-third-tier Portuguese side Casa Pia and threatened to resign after a poor start.

However, a switch to his now-favoured back-three formation turned his fortunes around.

European football expert Guillem Balague told *BBC Sport*: "His coaching career actually began with Casa Pia, then a third-tier club, where it almost

ended as soon as it had begun.

"He lost his first two games and, with his pride hurt and doubts setting in, he announced if he lost the third game he would quit.

"In the next match he changed the system and played a back three for the first time.

"The system worked and from then on he remained unbeaten at the club. He also felt he had found the formation that allowed him to produce the football he wanted - one invariably linked to the spectacle for the fans. From there, he never looked back as he went to Braga and then Sporting."

His innovative approach led Sporting to their first league title in nearly two decades in 2021, followed by another title win last season.

It is, therefore, unlikely that he will deviate from his footballing

philosophy, no matter how difficult things get at United.

After United's latest defeat, Amorim hit back at a reporter who compared his record to new Wolves boss Vito Pereira's, who has enjoyed instant success since taking over from Gary O'Neil this month with two victories.

The journalist probed Amorim by saying: "I know you said you don't know how long it will take but Wolves have just had a new manager in for a week with a new system - with your players, what do you think is missing?"

Amorim sharply responded: "New system? Wolves are playing a new system? They play the same system."

"Vitor Pereira worked the same system in Saudi Arabia. It was the same system, the same position. This squad was built for that system." - The Independent

