



**Be wary of overrated sway of influencers, public cautioned**

Idolised belief in such individuals could diminish ability to think independently and make informed choices: Expert

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# Rough ride for transport sector

Acute shortage of bus and lorry drivers creating challenges, with association urging govt to provide free training or financial aid for individuals to meet RM4,000 licensing costs.

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## Musa Aman sworn in as 11th Sabah governor

Former chief minister signs instruments of office witnessed by Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Sebli prior to taking oath of office.

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Musa signing the instruments of office, witnessed by Abdul Rahman, at Istana Seri Kinabalu in Kota Kinabalu yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC



## Ignorance not bliss when it concerns blood type

Lack of awareness among Malaysians serious issue as absence of information can lead to significant risks during medical emergencies and life-saving procedures, says haematologist.

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## Kedah targets six million tourists in 2025

**BUKIT KAYU HITAM:** More than 150 tourism events have been planned throughout the year to boost tourist arrivals in Kedah as part of the 2025 Visit Kedah Year.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor expressed confidence that the events would help the state achieve its target of six million tourist arrivals in 2025.

"We have published a booklet highlighting interesting places to visit in Kedah, which has been distributed to tourism industry players across the country.

"In collaboration with Tourism Malaysia, we are also promoting Kedah internationally. I hope 2025 Visit Kedah Year will mark the beginning of a significant increase in both domestic and international tourists visiting our state," he said yesterday after a reception to welcome tourists at the Bukit Kayu Hitam Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security Complex.

Muhammad Sanusi said international tourist arrivals from Thailand are expected to be a significant contributor due to its proximity.

He said the state government would collaborate with industry players in Thailand to attract more visitors and establish partnerships with authorities in southern Thailand across various sectors, particularly tourism. — Bernama

## Zikir performance under probe

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Federal Territory Islamic Religious Department has recorded statements from individuals who allegedly performed zikir in an unusual manner at a cemetery in Setapak, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar.

He said based on the statements of the individuals concerned, a report had been submitted to the Federal Territory Mufti Department.

"If it is found that the action is against the teachings of Islam, the religious department will submit a report to the Syariah Prosecution Department for further action," he said yesterday.

A 23-second video showing a group of individuals performing zikir in a loud and unusual manner at a cemetery in Danau Kota was widely circulated on social media on Dec 26, raising public concern. — Bernama

# Musa Aman sworn in as Sabah Yang di-Pertua Negeri

➤ Succeeds Tun Juhar Mahiruddin, who concluded tenure on Dec 31 after serving four terms since Jan 1, 2011

**KOTA KINABALU:** Tun Musa Aman took the oath of office as the 11th Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Sabah during a ceremony at Istana Seri Kinabalu yesterday.

Musa, accompanied by his wife Toh Puan Faridah Tussin, arrived at the ceremonial hall at 10.11am before taking the oath at 10.22am.

He then signed the instruments of office as Yang di-Pertua Negeri, witnessed by the Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Sebli.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor then made a congratulatory speech and pledge of allegiance. State Mufti Datuk Bungsu Jaafar recited prayers for the state's prosperity under Musa's leadership.

Also present were deputy chief ministers Datuk Seri Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, Datuk Dr Joachim Gunsalam and Datuk Shahelmei Yahya, Sabah State Assembly

Speaker Datuk Seri Kadzim M. Yahya and State Secretary Datuk Seri Safar Untong.

On Dec 17, Musa received his letter of appointment as Yang di-Pertua Negeri from His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur. His term began yesterday and will run until Dec 31, 2028.

Musa succeeds Tun Juhar Mahiruddin, who concluded his tenure on Dec 31 after serving four terms since Jan 1, 2011.

Meanwhile, Hajiji said Sabah would continue to thrive in peace, success and prosperity under

Musa's leadership.

Describing him as a unifying figure, Hajiji said Musa plays a vital role in fostering unity and harmony within Sabah's diverse society.

"The esteemed institution of the Yang di-Pertua Negeri will always be revered as a cornerstone of unity and a proud symbol of Sabah's sovereignty," he said at the ceremony.

Hajiji reaffirmed the state government's commitment to driving Sabah's development, ensuring the well-being and prosperity of its people.

He said Sabah recorded a significant increase in revenue, collecting nearly RM7 billion last year, thanks to effective financial management.

Hajiji attributed the achievement to the dedication and hard work of the state's leadership and civil service, Bernama reported.

"The government prioritises the people's welfare by implementing various programmes, initiatives and assistance, particularly for the needy and hardcore poor."

He said the advancements align with the goals of the Sabah Maju Jaya roadmap launched nearly four years ago.

"The government is committed to preserving Sabah's natural resources, safeguarding cultural heritage and traditions, maintaining unity and harmony as well as prioritising public safety to ensure the people's well-being."



**CELEBRATORY MOOD ...** Revellers gathered at KLCC in Kuala Lumpur to enjoy the fireworks display and usher in 2025 on Tuesday night. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

## Ministry to make cultural tourism national priority

**SIBU:** The Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry is preparing to introduce various cultural tourism programmes and activities in 2025, in line with the government's focus on making cultural tourism a national priority.

Its minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing said the cultural tourism industry has significant potential to stimulate economic growth and improve livelihoods by attracting more domestic and international visitors.

"Tourism Malaysia and its agencies have been entrusted with spearheading these programmes and activities," he said at the Motac Bersama Komuniti @ SibU event held at the Azman Hashim Community Sports Complex in SibU Jaya on Tuesday.

He said domestic tourism recorded 193.3 million visitors in the first nine months of 2024, a 21.8% increase from 158.7 million in 2023.

During the same period, domestic tourism spending rose to RM77.8 billion, a 27.2% increase from RM61.2 billion in 2023.

"International tourist arrivals from January to November 2024 reached 32.2 million, a 31.8% increase from 25.9 million in 2023."

Tiong said the ministry would launch a nationwide "Midnight Sales" initiative in collaboration with shopping malls.

"Special food promotions will also be introduced to showcase Malaysia's local delicacies at malls and other outlets."

As the ministry prepares to launch the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign, Tiong called on all stakeholders to collaborate to ensure its success. — Bernama

## M'sia-Uzbek MoU beneficial for both countries: Envoy

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia and Uzbekistan are following up on an MoU resulting from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's visit to the country in May, said Malaysian ambassador to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Ilham Tuah Illias.

He said among the matters listed in the MoU were the Islamic financial system, halal ecosystem, industry and trade.

"Through the MoU, it is hoped that more Malaysian goods and services can be brought into Uzbekistan.

"In terms of expertise, Uzbekistan is interested in learning from Malaysia the skills to produce

various patterns of gold products for personal adornment."

Ilham Tuah said Anwar's three-day official visit to Uzbekistan has opened up many areas for cooperation, especially economy, education, tourism and culture.

He said the premier's visit was followed by an official visit by Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov to Malaysia in July.

He added that the industrial sector in Uzbekistan, which is growing rapidly after 31 years of independence from the Soviet Socialist Republic, could use Malaysian palm oil to produce various products such as food and cosmetics.

On bilateral relations between Malaysia and Uzbekistan, Ilham Tuah said they were at their best and this could be seen when the Malaysian delegation was invited as an international observer for the Uzbekistan elections on Oct 27.

He said Malaysia, as the chairman of Asean in 2025, would also catalyse cooperation between Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

Uzbekistan was Malaysia's second largest trading partner among Central Asian countries in 2023, with total Malaysia-Uzbekistan trade reaching RM451.1 million.

On people-to-people relations, Ilham Tuah said there were currently

200 Uzbek students in Malaysia while 2,000 Uzbeks visited Malaysia in 2023.

A source from the Uzbekistan embassy in Malaysia said the number of Uzbeks visiting Malaysia increased to 13,000 from January to October 2024. Most of them visited the islands in Malaysia, especially Langkawi, since Uzbekistan has no coastline.

He added that Malaysians' interest in visiting Uzbekistan is also increasing, especially in destinations related to Islamic history such as the tombs of Imam Bukhari in Samarkand and Imam Tarmizi near the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan border. — Bernama

# Bus and lorry companies facing **shortage** of drivers

➤ Issue causing operational challenges and disciplinary problems among existing workers

■ BY HARITH KAMAL  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Bus and lorry services companies are grappling with a critical shortage of drivers, threatening their viability and sustainability, said Pan Malaysia Bus Operators Association president Datuk Mohamad Ashfar Ali.

He said the affected sector, which includes cargo lorries, express buses and transport vehicles for factory workers, students and tourists, is facing a shortage of about 5,000 drivers.

"For buses, many companies are struggling to provide a second driver for long-distance journeys."

On Dec 26 last year, the Road Transport Department (RTD) issued summonses to operators of 25 express and tour buses for failing to comply with the rule requiring a second driver. The summonses were issued during a special operation conducted at three toll plazas in Penang.

On April 5, Penang RTD director Zulkifly Ismail emphasised the importance of the

second driver requirement for express buses covering distances of over 300km or journeys exceeding four hours.

"This rule ensures drivers have adequate rest and reduces the risk of crashes. Companies that fail to adhere to this regulation will face action."

Mohamad Ashfar said the driver shortage has been a persistent problem and worsened due to several challenges.

"Most bus and lorry drivers in Malaysia are nearing retirement age or have left the service. Many are leaving for other sectors or migrating to Singapore, where better salaries are offered," he said, adding that high entry costs for aspiring drivers were also a barrier.

"Obtaining an e-licence, Public Service Vehicle Licence or Goods Driving Licence for operating heavy vehicles costs between RM4,000 and RM5,000. Potential drivers are deterred by these costs, making it harder to attract new talent to the profession."

He said the shortage has created operational challenges and disciplinary issues among existing drivers, who are aware of the difficulties employers face in replacing them.

"They often disregard employer directives and some even refuse to pay fines for offences, such as speeding, illegal parking and running red lights."

He urged the government and relevant authorities to provide financial assistance or introduce free training programmes for aspiring drivers, particularly those from the B40 group.

"The Transport Ministry initiated programmes to sponsor a limited number of individuals to obtain their licences. However, the efforts were insufficient.

"The government should consider offering free training for drivers to ease their financial burden, help produce more licensed professionals and create job opportunities."

He said such measures are crucial, given the critical role bus drivers play in ensuring passenger and road safety, as well as the contributions of lorry drivers to the economy.

Peninsular Malaysia Malay Express Bus Operators Association president Laili Ismail said: "Government support would resolve the driver shortage and allow for a selection of higher quality drivers who meet safety and performance standards."

He urged the government to assist bus operators struggling with rising costs, including fuel prices, maintenance and operating expenses.

He said uncontrolled cost increases have created unhealthy competition among bus operators, with many forced to lower ticket prices to attract passengers.

"They do this often without considering the long-term sustainability of their business. So, if the government does not step in to assist, many express bus operators would have to close. This would lead to thousands of employees and drivers losing their livelihood, while depriving the public of the convenience and connectivity that bus services provide."

## MCMC receives four licensing applications

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has announced that four major internet messaging and social media service providers have taken steps towards regulatory compliance by applying for licences to operate in Malaysia.

It said Tencent (WeChat) has been granted the Applications Service Provider Class licence, making it the first service provider to be licensed under the country's new regulatory framework.

"Following WeChat, ByteDance (TikTok) has obtained its licence. Telegram is in the final stages of the licensing process and is expected to secure its licence soon.

"Meta, which oversees Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, has initiated the process of obtaining licences to operate these platforms in the country, which is also expected to be completed soon," MCMC said in a statement yesterday.

X and Google, which operates YouTube, have yet to submit an application.

The statement said according to X, its user base in Malaysia has not reached the required threshold of eight million users.

MCMC is reviewing the user base as stated by X and will continue engagement sessions to assess its position.

On Google, it said issues were raised regarding YouTube's video-sharing features and its classification under the licensing framework.

It also said the commission will ensure YouTube and relevant platform providers that meet the licensing criteria are bound by their duties and responsibilities to adhere to the framework. – Bernama

## Ministers convey New Year wishes

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Cabinet ministers took to social media on New Year's Eve to convey greetings and wishes to Malaysians.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa expressed hope that the switch from 2024 to 2025 would not be a mere change in numbers but symbolise the chance to create more success, strengthen unity and bring meaningful change.

"Let us make it our goal for 2025 to have more effort to achieve higher dreams. Every small step could bring a big impact if we move together. Let us build a brighter, more inclusive future together for everyone to realise the Malaysia Madani dream."

Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu said: "We are faced with uncertain weather due to climate change, yet we have faced it with determination and unity, thanks to farmers, breeders, fishermen, industry leaders and Malaysians as a whole." – Bernama

## Malacca aims to keep up tourism momentum

**MALACCA:** The success of attracting 15 million visitors and generating RM12.68 billion in revenue during Visit Malacca 2024 must be sustained this year, said Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh.

He said maintaining the momentum is crucial, especially as Malacca has been chosen to host several international events.

"Various programmes will continue to be planned to promote Malacca as a preferred tourism destination, particularly leading up to World Tourism Day and the World Tourism Conference this year, followed by Visit Malaysia 2026.

"The momentum from 2024 must be sustained and enhanced to accommodate larger events this year and subsequently in 2026."

He said more than 200 tourism-related events were organised at national and international levels last year, covering cultural, artistic heritage, sports and religious sectors. – Bernama



Laili said government support for aspiring drivers would address the shortage while raising standards. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

## 160 illegal crossings detected at Thai border

**PASIR MAS:** A total of 169 illegal crossings along the Malaysia-Thailand border have been identified as requiring attention, said Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar.

He said the government aims to reduce and eventually close such illegal crossings or entry points.

"Border control measures need to be enhanced. It is important to reduce cross-border crime and smuggling activities.

"I urge that the installation of CCTV at the entry points be expedited and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology be implemented, as recommended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim."

He was speaking during the launch of the Malaysian Border Control and Protection

Agency pilot operation at the Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) Complex in Rantau Panjang yesterday.

He said the use of AI technology in border control strategy is critical.

"The use of AI technology, through the appropriate and optimal mechanisms, would help our officers monitor, assess, plan and enforce responses to any threat or challenges faced.

"For example, the coordination and analyses of data from CCTV and goods scanning machines at entry points equipped with AI technology would enhance the capability of officers in developing risk analysis."

Shamsul Azri said the proactive approach could assist border agencies in intercepting

potential threats before they occur, improving overall security at entry points.

He added that data driven by advanced AI algorithms, such as facial recognition and intelligent document processing, would streamline the process of inspecting individuals and goods.

"This scenario would indirectly ensure the clearance process for low-risk goods could be expedited.

"This is crucial for improving the competitiveness of ports and cargo terminals."

Earlier, he inspected the operations of the border agencies at the Rantau Panjang ICQS Complex and the level of Sungai Golok at the Malaysia-Thailand border. – Bernama

## Mhd Mohib Khouli Nazem teachings declared deviant

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The teachings of Mhd Mohib Khouli Nazem have been declared deviant and in direct conflict with Islamic faith, law and ethics, as well as the beliefs of *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah*.

The National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Muzakarah Committee chairman Datuk Dr Nooh Gadut said the decision was based on evidence and research findings that examined the content of his lectures, teachings, speeches, and digital media dialogues.

He said the deviations include claims that *Allah* must have a child, attributing human-like characteristics and forms to *Allah*, rejecting *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* beliefs, and alleging that its prominent scholars, including Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, Imam al-Shahrastani and Imam al-Ghazali share doctrinal similarities with the deviant Jahmiyyah sect.

"All individuals must avoid these teachings, beliefs, and interpretations. It is strictly prohibited to follow, believe, teach, propagate, practise or act as a supporter or agent of such ideologies," he said.

"Those involved are urged to sincerely repent," he said in a statement posted on the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) Facebook page.

Nooh added that the decision was reached during a committee meeting held from Sept 24 to 26 last year, specifically addressing the teachings of Mhd Mohib Khouli Nazem.

He also emphasised that Muslims must adhere to the *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* principles in creed, based on the methodologies of *Asy'ari* and *Maturidi* in *syariah*, guided by the *Shafii* school of thought, as well as other recognised schools such as *Hanafi*, *Maliki* and *Hanbali*.

"In terms of Sufism or ethics, they should follow the methodologies of Imam al-Junaid, Imam al-Ghazali, and other authentic and recognised Sufi practices."

He also urged state Islamic authorities and related agencies to take measures to prohibit the teachings of Mhd Mohib Khouli Nazem as these teachings threaten the faith of Muslims and disrupt societal unity and harmony.

He said Jakim, as the coordinating body, has submitted a legal opinion on the matter to the Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Shah in his capacity as the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs chairman.

The matter was subsequently presented at the 267th Conference of Rulers on Oct 23 and 24 last year.

"The Conference of Rulers has acknowledged the legal opinion, and state authorities may consider this decision to gazette *fatwa* in their respective states," Nooh said. – Bernama

## Taxation activity search service launched

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Inland Revenue Board (IRB) has launched a Tax Identification Number (TIN) search service for taxation activities provided under the Income Tax Act 1967.

The move is in line with an announcement by the government through Budget 2025.

The TIN search platform can be accessed through the MyTax Portal at <https://mytax.hasil.gov.my>.

In a statement yesterday, the IRB said individual taxpayers can conduct the TIN search by entering their identity card or passport number, while taxpayers in other categories can search by entering their business registration number or their names.

To facilitate the implementation of e-Invoices, the TIN search function is also provided through the MyInvois portal and MyInvois Application Programming Interface. – Bernama

## Defend and support Palestinian rights, Muslims urged

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Muslims are obligated to defend and uphold the rights of the Palestinian people and nation against all forms of oppression, aggression and occupation by the Israeli Zionist regime, said the Muzakarah Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia.

The decision was reached during its meeting held from Sept 24 to 26 last year to discuss the duty of defending Palestine against Israeli aggression.

Muzakarah Committee chairman Datuk Dr Nooh Gadut said Muslims must also support

the recognition of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions and human rights principles.

He emphasised the need for Muslims to unite in defending and liberating Masjid al-Aqsa.

"Boycotting is sanctioned in Islam, especially to defend and uphold the objectives of *maqasid syariah*. Such actions align with the demands of *jihad*, particularly in the context of wealth," he said in a statement posted on the Malaysian Islamic Development Department Facebook page.

Nooh said boycotting companies or entities with interests linked to the Zionist regime should adhere to specific guidelines, including the goal of pressuring these companies to change their policies, visions, missions and strategies regarding Palestine, and halting Israel's oppression.

He added that the boycott should target companies involved in colonial activities and aiding the Zionist regime, such as providing financial support or supplying computer equipment, machinery or tools used to destroy Palestinian property and lives. – Bernama

## 'Know own blood type to avoid potential life threat'

➤ Many remain unaware, which could lead to significant challenges during medical emergencies: Haematologist

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**PETALING JAYA:** A lack of awareness about one's blood type is emerging as a critical issue in the country, with a haematologist warning of potential risks during emergencies and life-saving procedures.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Hospital Internal Medicine and Haematologist senior consultant Assoc Prof Dr Bahariah Khalid said despite its importance, many Malaysians remain unaware of their blood type, which can lead to significant challenges during medical emergencies and patient blood management.

She said understanding blood type is vital, as it plays a critical role in patient blood management guidelines, particularly in cases of blood loss, regardless of the cause.

"The lack of awareness among Malaysians about their blood type is primarily attributed to existing medical practices, in which blood typing is not a routine procedure in clinics or hospital wards unless there is a specific need for a blood transfusion."

Bahariah said blood transfusions are required to be as compatible as possible with the patient's blood type or group in order to prevent the side effects of transfusion-related reactions.

She said the indications for blood typing or

grouping are largely for blood donation campaigns, during which donors are classified for auditing purposes and proper patient blood management practices.

"Blood typing is also crucial to identify suitable donors because blood banks sometimes announce shortages of specific blood types through direct communication or the mass media.

"Individuals with matching blood types can step forward to donate, provided they meet the eligibility criteria," she said.

Health Ministry Medical Development Division director Datuk Dr Mohd Azman Yacob said on average, the National Blood Centre requires 15,000 to 17,000 bags of blood each month to meet the needs of over 80 government and private hospitals in the Klang Valley.

Additionally, to treat 1,000 patients nationwide, an average of 2,000 to 2,200 bags of blood are needed daily.

According to the Health Ministry portal, as of December 2024, 42.1% of Malaysians have blood type O, while blood type A accounts for 25.4%, blood type B accounts for 26.8% and AB makes up 5.7%.

Bahariah said it is also important to note that alongside blood grouping, testing is also conducted to screen for harmful viruses, such as Hepatitis B and C, and retroviral infections, which include HIV and venereal diseases.

"Before a blood transfusion for patients

whose blood type is unknown, the most compatible donor red cells are used to ensure safety to prevent the potentially fatal consequences of receiving the wrong blood type," she said.

Bahariah stressed that the potential risks in emergencies when a person's blood type is unknown are severe and life-threatening, and that transfusing blood without knowing the recipient's type is never practised, as it can result in fatal outcomes.

"In emergencies, dealing with an unknown blood type is a nightmare. Besides, the antigen-antibody can react, causing clumping of the blood in vessels and vital organs, and leading to multi-organ failure and death.

"In the long run, the patient's body can start producing antibodies that attack the antigens on the donor blood cells that were incompatible, causing reaction and rejection using red blood cell destruction."

Bahariah said to address the lack of awareness, incorporating blood typing as part of routine health checks on individuals' 12th birthdays, and printing the information on their identification cards should be considered.

She urged hospitals, blood banks and the government to bridge the knowledge gap through expanded media campaigns, particularly on social media platforms, to reach the younger population.

"It is good to know your blood type, especially in emergencies, as it can help save your life or those of others, particularly if you have a rare type."



Bahariah said receiving the wrong blood type could cause antigen-antibody reaction, leading to multi-organ failure and death. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUNDAILY



# Public cautioned against inflated sway of influencers

➤ Excessive belief in such individuals could foster brain rot and diminish independent thinking: Lecturer

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**PETALING JAYA:** In today's digital age, the term "social media influencer" has been abused to the point that even those with just a few hundred followers are claiming to be just that.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Anthropology and Sociology senior lecturer Dr Velan Kunjuran said claiming to be an influencer depends on several factors.

"It involves not just follower count but engagement rate, content quality, niche authority and platform activity, with genuine influencers being classified into four categories based on their follower numbers."

He said nano-influencers have between 1,000 and 10,000 followers, micro-influencers have between 10,000 and 100,000, macro-influencers have between 100,000 and one million, and mega-influencers have over one million.

"Having such numbers is not enough either because the specific social media platform they are on plays a role in determining the requirements for genuine influencer status."

Citing Canadian-born American sociologist, social psychologist and writer Erving Goffman, who is considered by some as the most influential American sociologist of the 20th century, Velan expounded on the definition of an influencer.

He said Goffman's dramaturgical perspective defines influencers as front-stage performers who craft their public personas to resonate with audiences.

"Many social media influencers equate success with wealth, misleading younger audiences to devalue education and moral principles. This contributes to a form of false consciousness, and diverts individuals from deeper societal values and aspirations."

He said the aspirational lifestyles portrayed by some influencers drive their popularity, particularly with younger demographics, and cautioned that such

Velan said some 'internet personalities' face trust deficits due to unmet audience expectations or a lack of transparency. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN



portrayals often misrepresent reality or universal ideals.

"While some influencers participate in meaningful charitable initiatives, their numbers are limited. Decision-making should be anchored by personal values and critical reasoning rather than external influences."

He warned that excessive reliance on influencers could diminish the public's ability to think independently and make informed choices.

Velan said despite their large following, some influencers face trust deficits due to unmet audience expectations or a lack of transparency.

"Food reviewers might lose credibility if their endorsements fail to reflect the actual quality of the dishes they highlighted," he said, adding that trust relies on maintaining integrity and authenticity.

He said many individuals seek approval from influencers, often at the cost of personal growth and critical reflection, and cautioned that such dependency fosters brain rot, in which the relentless consumption of curated content stifles independent thinking.

He acknowledged that influencers could inspire innovation and support social causes but warned that over-reliance on them might strain interpersonal connections and

erode individuality.

"Public opinions revealed growing concerns about the ethics and authenticity of influencers, sparking discussions about their roles and responsibilities in society."

Student Amirul Zain, 23, said many influencers promote products they do not use or believe in, which makes them come across as dishonest.

"Sometimes, influencers do not make it clear that they are being paid to promote something, or exaggerate how good a product is. This kind of conduct is deceitful, damaging their credibility and harming the reputation of the brands they represent."

Marketing executive Sankari Vijayakumar, 24, said some influencers use manipulative strategies, such as staging photos or making exaggerated claims, to mislead their followers.

"This kind of behaviour not only sparks ethical concerns but also undermines the trust people have in them. For example, skincare products are promoted with highly edited or filtered 'before and after' pictures."

"The claimed results are dramatic but in truth, the images are digitally enhanced, staged under specific lighting or show effects achieved through unrelated treatments."

She said such misleading content erodes confidence when followers realise the reality does not match the claims.

## Man held over alleged threats on singer

**SIBU:** Police have arrested a man who is believed to be responsible for sending threatening messages via a social media platform to popular singer Nor Ashima Ramli, also known as Baby Shima.

Sibu district police chief ACP Zulkipli Suhaili said the 35-year-old truck driver was arrested at 9.15pm on Tuesday in Kota Sentosa, Kuching.

He said the suspect's phone was confiscated to facilitate the investigation and police applied for an order to remand him yesterday.

He also said police received a report on the alleged death threat at 11.31pm on Monday from Baby Shima, who is in Sibu for work-related matters.

Baby Shima, known for her hit song *Bujang Sarawak*, filed the report after encountering threatening comments on social media from an unknown individual.

"The case is being investigated under Section 507 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998," said Zulkipli in a media statement yesterday.

He asked the public to be responsible when making comments or uploading statements on social media platforms so as to not go beyond the limits and break the law.

Baby Shima lodged the report at the Sibu police station accompanied by Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing.

She was one of the guest artistes who performed at the New Year's celebrations organised by the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry at the Azman Hashim Community Sports Complex in Sibu Jaya on Tuesday. — Bernama

## Illegally anchored ship detained

**SHAH ALAM:** The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) detained a cargo ship for anchoring without permission about 26 nautical miles southwest of Sekinchan at 1.40pm on Tuesday.

Its Selangor director Kapt Abdul Muhaimin Muhammad Salleh said the ship was detained by an MMEA patrol boat conducting operations in Selangor waters after its presence was detected on its sea surveillance system.

"The ship is believed to have been travelling from Singapore to India with 22 male crew members, including the captain. All are Chinese nationals aged between 28 and 63 years, and possess valid identification documents."

"Inspections found that the captain failed to submit authorisation documents to moor (in Malaysian waters) and is suspected of having committed an offence under Section 491B(1)(l) of the Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1952."

He advised shipping operators to apply for permission from the Marine Department before anchoring in Malaysian waters. — Bernama

## Two nabbed, drugs seized after car chase

**JOHOR BAHRU:** Police arrested two individuals and seized drugs after a car chase from Jalan Tampoi in Taman Seri Bahagia near here to Simpang Renggam in Kluang on Tuesday.

Johor police chief Datuk M. Kumar said two policemen were injured while the 49-year-old local man and 38-year-old Singaporean woman driver were apprehended at 1.30am.

The incident occurred when a state south district police headquarters Narcotics Crime Investigation Division team spotted a suspiciously driven car during an *Ops Tapis* operation in Jalan Tampoi.

He said the policemen followed the suspects closely until Persiaran Alif Harmoni.

"When the team attempted to approach the vehicle for inspection, the driver suddenly sped off, ramming into two officers, causing them to

fall and sustain injuries on their hands."

Police instructed the suspects to stop the vehicle but the driver sped towards the Pasir Gudang Highway, he said in a statement yesterday.

The pursuit continued along the Iskandar Coastal Highway and the Second Link Expressway, with the suspects crashing through a toll gate at the Senai Utara Toll Plaza before entering the northbound North-South Expressway.

Patrol cars from district headquarters in Kulai and Kluang were mobilised to assist, intercepting the vehicle in Simpang Renggam at about 1.30am.

A search of the vehicle uncovered several packages believed to contain drugs.

He said acting on information from the arrests, police conducted two additional raids in Johor Bahru, seizing various drugs.

"In this operation, police seized an assortment of drugs, including *ganja*, *syabu*, ecstasy powder, heroin and nitrazepam pills, with an estimated value of RM54,831."

Initial urine tests on both suspects came back positive for methamphetamine. Background checks revealed the man has a history of drug-related and criminal offences, and is wanted in another case.

The suspects have been remanded until Sunday. Investigations are being carried out under Section 15(1)(a) and Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 and Section 307 of the Penal Code for attempted murder.

"The case is also being probed under Section 427 of the Penal Code for mischief and Section 186 of the Penal Code for obstructing public servants in the discharge of their duties." — Bernama

## Flood evacuees increase in Perak

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The number of flood evacuees in Kelantan and Johor remained unchanged as of yesterday morning while Perak recorded an increase.

In Kelantan, only one temporary relief centre remained open in Rantau Panjang, sheltering 31 evacuees from nine families at Sekolah Kebangsaan Gual Tok Deh.

The Department of Irrigation and Drainage said Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang was at 9.8m, which is above the danger level of 9m.

In Johor, state Disaster Management Committee chairman Tan Sri Dr Azmi Rohani said 69 evacuees from 17 families were housed at two centres in the Kota Tinggi district.

In Perak, the committee secretariat reported a rise to 399 evacuees from 86 families, compared with 52 evacuees from 11 families on Tuesday. — Bernama

## Singer upbeat about striding out in 2025

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Having spent a year steering her career independently without being under any recording company since parting ways with Warner Music Malaysia in December 2023, singer Kaka Azraff appears increasingly confident in charting her own path.

Acknowledging that it was not an easy decision to work independently, especially after being guided by a record label for over a decade, Kaka, 35, said she is drawing on her wealth of experience in the industry to move forward on her own.

The singer, a niece of Malaysia's rock queen Ella, also admitted that 2024 was a challenging year for her as she navigated the complexities of balancing her roles as a mother, daughter, singer and actress.

She said losing her mother, who was a source of strength for the *Bawaku Pergi* singer, and the breakdown of her marriage a few months ago have made her more mature as well as helped her to understand herself better.

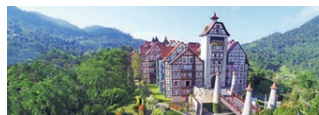
"I went through a lot (in 2024) but it also made me stronger. For 2025, I am more prepared to face the year with greater confidence," said Kaka, whose real name is Nor Atiqah Noor Azraff, when met recently at the launch of the "RockQueen" clothing brand by Ella.

Expressing gratitude for being surrounded by family members – including her aunts Ella and Jojie, whom she regards as mother figures – who support her during tough times, Kaka said she is eager to face 2025, sensing the positive energy of the new year.

The *Hilang* singer is also planning to release her first single this year under her own company, AAA Entertainment. The single will reflect her identity, featuring pop and R&B tunes.

"The sound will still be Kaka but this time, the new single will have more mature lyrics and storytelling. I'm handling everything on my own, and 2025 will teach me (even more) to be an artiste standing on my own feet.

"I'm excited but also nervous, it's a mix of emotions. But I feel the positivity. Moving independently gives me more freedom and ease in making decisions, and it's all up to me and my team," she said. – Bernama



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Syed Abu Hussin expressed hope that other parties would facilitate the expansion of the programme to more areas nationwide.

–BERNAMAPIC

## New Year treat for B40 group

► Bukit Gantang MP distributes 10 tonnes of fresh fish to residents in constituency

**BUKIT GANTANG:** Residents here are enjoying a New Year's treat as 10 tonnes of fresh fish are being distributed to 10,000 individuals at 31 selected locations within the parliamentary constituency until today.

Bukit Gantang MP Datuk Syed Abu Hussin Hafiz Syed Abdul Fasal said the distribution sites are located within the Changkat Jering, Kuala Sepetang and Trong state

constituencies, Bernama reported.

"For (Jan 1), around 7.5 tonnes of *ikan lolong* and *pelaling* were distributed at 25 locations at the Changkat Jering and Kuala Sepetang state constituencies. Another 2.5 tonnes will be distributed (on Jan 2) at six locations in the Trong state constituency.

"The implementation of this programme is aimed at reducing the cost of living burden for people in my constituency, most of whom are from the B40 group, including the *asnaf* and single mothers," he said during a live video call yesterday.

Syed Abu Hussin, who is also National Action Council on Cost of Living Task Force (Food Cluster) chairman, said the fish were sourced from fishermen in Kuala Kedah (Kedah), Kuala Perlis

(Perlis), Endau (Johor) and Kuantan (Pahang).

He added that the programme would continue to be implemented and expressed hope that more parties would lend their support to ensure its expansion to other areas nationwide.

"If I, as an MP, can implement a programme like this, I believe other larger organisations can also do so. It is not for personal gain, but the benefit of the people."

Resident Siti Aishah Juraimi, 65, said the programme had to some extent helped ease the cost of living burden.

"Some may see this free gift (one kg of *ikan kembung*) as a common offering. But for us, it means a lot as it helps ease my family's kitchen expenses.

"I hope such programmes continue and benefit more people

in the villages around this parliamentary constituency," said the Kampung Simpang Halt resident.

Another resident, Mohd Alif Azizi, 32, from Kampung Cheh, said he learnt about the programme through the official Facebook page of the Bukit Gantang MP four days ago.

The factory worker said such an opportunity should not be missed, particularly amid the rising cost of living.

"Previously, many programmes focused on selling goods at discounted prices. But this time, fresh fish is being distributed for free.

"Thank you to Datuk Syed Abu Hussin for always being committed to helping the people in this area, especially with daily necessities," he said.

# EDUCATION

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# Asean leaders wish for regional prosperity

## ➤ Group to chart new roles and directions

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Leaders across Southeast Asia extended their New Year greetings, urging their citizens to embrace optimism and unity while reiterating commitments to regional progress and global cooperation.

Malaysia officially assumed yesterday the Asean chairmanship under the theme "Inclusivity and sustainability".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said on Tuesday in his New Year address that a significant responsibility awaits Malaysia as it takes on the role of leading the region as the Asean chair.

He said the complexities of the global landscape demand Asean to chart new roles and directions.

"This is a major responsibility for Malaysia to mobilise all of its strengths and its entire team as a unified force and to ensure that this development remains sustainable," he said.

In Bandar Seri Begawan, Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah in his speech prayed that the new year would encourage all parties to shoulder their responsibilities with full

dedication and commitment to achieve more meaningful changes for themselves, their families, society and the country.

In the international arena, he said Brunei will continue to adhere to its foreign policy which emphasises balance in considering regional interests and economic development.

In Jakarta, President Prabowo Subianto invited the community to celebrate the New Year with joy and optimism, and he believes that Indonesia will rise.

"We face the new year with joy, optimism and the confidence that Indonesia will rise," Prabowo said.

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said he would outline the next steps of the Forward Singapore exercise in Budget 2025, which will be tabled in Parliament on Feb 18.

He noted that among other things, the government aimed to sharpen Singapore's economic competitiveness, create exciting opportunities and good jobs for Singaporeans and continue to cushion the impact of the cost of living.

Wong highlighted that 2025 also marks the 60th anniversary of Singapore's independence.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra extended her heartfelt New Year greetings to the nation, expressing wishes for happiness, prosperity and a brighter future for all Thais.

In a New Year message marking the beginning of 2025, Paetongtarn reaffirmed to the people that the government will work tirelessly to improve the quality of life for everyone.

In Vientiane, President Thongloun Sisoulith expressed his gratitude to the Lao people for their contributions and to international friends for their support and cooperation.

"Envisioning a world united in peace and harmony. (And) a prosperous and peaceful future for Laos and the global community," he said.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet wished the people to enjoy good health, peace, happiness and success.

In Hanoi, President Luong Cuong extended his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to all Vietnamese citizens and international friends for the New Year.

In Myanmar, State Administration Council chairman Min Aung Hlaing wished his people to nurture mutual kindness and work together for the benefit of the nation.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr urged Filipinos to adopt an introspective and growth-focused mindset as they welcome a new year.

He referred to the occasion as an opportunity "to learn from the lessons of the past and apply the wisdom gained to better oneself." - Bernama

## Korea ramps up air crash probe

**SEOUL:** The investigation into the crash of a South Korea passenger jet gathered pace yesterday as bereaved families began to prepare funerals after authorities formally identified the 179 victims of the country's worst air disaster.

The Transport Ministry said investigators had extracted the data from the plane's cockpit voice recorder and would convert it into an audio file, critical information to try to explain the few minutes that led up to the crash.

The investigation team is still working to extract the contents of the flight data recorder, which was found missing a key connector, the ministry said.

All 175 passengers and four of the six crew members were killed on Sunday when the Jeju Air jet belly-landed at Muan International Airport and slammed into an embankment at the end of the runway, where it burst into flames.

Two crew members, located near the tail of the Boeing 737-800, survived the disaster.

The government has declared a national mourning period until Saturday and the country scaled back New Year's celebrations.

The ministry said two more US officials arrived late on Tuesday to join a team of around two dozen investigators including from the US National Transportation Safety Board, Federal Aviation Administration and Boeing.

"They're also planning to start a visual investigation into the wreckage," said Deputy Civil Aviation Minister Joo Jong-wan.

Officials have said investigators were expected to examine whether a bird strike, landing gear failure or problems with control systems played a role in the disaster. - Reuters

## Myanmar population at 51.3 million

**YANGON:** Myanmar said its 2024 census found a population of 51.3 million, slightly less than 10 years ago, as the government prepares for promised elections amid unrest.

The census, which was held in October, will be used to compile voter lists for the elections planned for this year.

"I am striving to successfully organise a free and fair election, which is the ultimate goal of the State Administration Council," said council chairman Min Aung Hlaing.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since early 2021, when the military overthrew an elected civilian government and suppressed pro-democracy protests, sparking a rebellion.

Last month, Myanmar's foreign minister briefed neighbouring countries on the progress towards holding an election.

The population of 51.3 million for last year was down from a 51.5 million figure in the previous census in 2014, the reports said. The country's Rohingya minority was not included in either census.

The population figure was made up of 32.2 million people counted in the census and an estimate of 19.1 million people in areas that were inaccessible due to security and transport issues, the reports said. - Reuters



Revellers take part in the 'Celebrating Cambodia' parade in Phnom Penh on Tuesday. - REUTERS/PIIC

## Indochina countries celebrate bountiful year

**PHNOM PENH:** Fireworks, neon lights and music illuminated the skylines of Indochina's capitals as revellers celebrated the end of 2024 and welcomed the New Year in a festive style.

People from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar to Vietnam kept to the tradition of welcoming the New Year in great fervour.

Although their traditional New Year celebrations fall in April, many did not miss the parties wishing for a promising 2025.

There were grounds for jubilation in these countries as economies thrived and farmers enjoyed bountiful harvests and national unity prevailed.

Vietnam set a powerful tone as it entered the new year with all the hallmarks of a rising

economic powerhouse in Asean, thanks to its 1986 *Doi Moi* modernisation policy that catapulted the state-controlled centralised economy to an industrialised nation.

"The top priority in this new era is to successfully achieve the strategic goals, turning Vietnam into a developing nation with a modern industrial base," said Communist Party General Secretary To Lam.

In Cambodia, people filled the streets on New Year's Eve to "Celebrate Cambodia", to showcase the kingdom's unity, peace and stability.

Three days ago, Cambodians honoured the 26th anniversary of the "Win-Win Policy" initiated by former prime minister Hun Sen that ended the civil war in the 1990s and brought peace and

national unification.

Laos' capital, Vientiane, hosted its welcoming party. The nation continues to bask in pride after successfully hosting the 44th Asean Summit last October.

Myanmar did not miss out on the celebrations either. People gathered for the New Year countdown at Yangon's Secretariat landmark heritage site.

"Let us all work together so that 2025 becomes a year of victory for the people, reaching the democratic goal all citizens aspire to and make this a testament to our collective efforts," said State Administration Council chairman Min Aung Hlaing in his New Year address.

*Feng shui* grandmaster Han (known by only one name), who has been applying the art for over 20 years, said 2025 is under the influence of the Fire Element and it could be considered a "hot year".

"2025 will be a continuation of 2024. Fire also brings light and there can be a big shift in people's vision and consciousness.

"We can expect a shake-up in the global economy and politics. The world will be hit by crises, and conflicts will get worse and some will not be resolved until 2026.

"We will see more political chaos, so we need strong political leaders to lead countries," said Han, who was born in Cambodia and has Vietnamese and French ancestry. - Bernama



## Investigators vow to execute Yoon arrest warrant

**SEOUL:** South Korean investigators said yesterday they would execute an arrest warrant for Yoon Suk Yeol over his declaration of martial law by the deadline of Jan 6, as the impeached leader's supporters rallied outside his residence.

Supporters and opponents of Yoon, who was suspended from office by lawmakers over his attempt to subvert civilian rule last month, have been camped outside the compound where he has been holed up for weeks, fending off investigators' efforts to question him.

The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) requested the warrant after Yoon failed to report for questioning a third time, but it has been unclear whether they could execute it as the Presidential Security Service have previously refused to comply with search warrants.

CIO chief Oh Dong-woon said yesterday the warrant would be executed "within the deadline", which is on Monday.

"We aim for a smooth process without major disturbances, but we are also coordinating to mobilise police and personnel in preparation," he told reporters.

He also warned that anyone trying to block authorities from arresting Yoon could themselves face prosecution.

"We consider actions such as setting up barricades and locking iron gates to resist the execution of our arrest warrant as obstruction of official duties," he said.

Anyone doing this "could be prosecuted under charges of abuse of authority interfering with the exercise of rights and obstruction of official duties by special means", he said.

Yoon's legal team described the arrest order as "illegal and invalid" and applied for an injunction to nullify it, with Yoon's supporters rushing to defend him.

Outside the presidential compound in central Seoul yesterday, dozens of Yoon supporters hurled vitriol at police.

At one point, some attempted to break through a cordon and block a police bus from parking near the entrance, apparently mistaking it for the mobile force that may be dispatched to detain Yoon.

Police were sent to the area in large numbers and could be seen yelling at protesters to keep in line, but a route in and out of Yoon's residence remained clear. – AFP

# Taiwan president wants exchanges with China

## Lai laments lack of goodwill from Beijing

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said yesterday that he welcomed equal, dignified, healthy and orderly exchanges with China, but wondered whether there was goodwill from Beijing given what he said was their blocking of simple things like tourism.

Lai, who took office in May, has regularly offered talks with China but been rebuffed. China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and detests Lai as a "separatist". He says only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Speaking at a New Year's day news conference, Lai said China was blocking normal interactions with restrictions on Chinese tourists

visiting or students studying on the island, while similar bans do not apply to Taiwanese going to China.

"But I still want to stress this: Taiwan hopes to have healthy and orderly exchanges with China under the principles of reciprocity and dignity," he said.

Journalists should ask China why its citizens can freely travel to countries like the United States and Japan, but has all these controls when it comes to Taiwan, Lai said.

"Is this really showing goodwill towards Taiwan? Can't they treat everyone equally?"

Taiwan and China have repeatedly traded accusations about tourism and travel restrictions.

In June, Taiwan told its citizens not to go to China unless absolutely necessary, following a threat from Beijing to execute those deemed Taiwanese independence supporters.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his New Year's speech that no one can stop China's "reunification" with Taiwan.

Lai said that the greater the threat from authoritarian countries the more democracies should unite, and pointed to China and Russia's militaries operating together in the Indo-Pacific.

The cooperation between democracies needed to be on defence and security and strengthening the "democratic supply chain", he said.

"If that is not done properly, it will impact economies and industries for all countries, and the lives of people in democracies," Lai said.

"I really hope that in the New Year, democratic countries can be even more united, and achieve the aims of peace, democracy and prosperity."

Beijing claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory, and has said it will not renounce the use of force to bring it under its control.

China has intensified pressure on the democratic island in recent years, and has staged three rounds of major military drills since Lai came to power in May.

"Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family. No one can sever our blood ties, and no one can stop the historical trend of the reunification of the motherland," Xi said.

Xi's comments come just weeks before Donald Trump takes office in the United States.

Taiwan is a key point of contention between Beijing and Washington, which does not officially recognise Taiwan diplomatically but is its strategically and largest supplier of weapons. – Reuters/AFP



**BLAZE OF COLOUR ...** Fireworks light up the midnight sky over Victoria Harbour during New Year Day celebrations in Hong Kong yesterday. – AFP/IC

## Tintin, Hemingway among copyrights expiring this year

**NEW YORK:** From *A Farewell to Arms* to the cartoon character Popeye the Sailor, thousands of artistic works entered the public domain in the United States yesterday.

US copyright law expires after 95 years for books, films and other works of art, while sound recordings from 1924 will also be copyright-free.

By entering the public domain, the pieces can be copied, shared, reproduced or adapted by anyone without paying the rights owner.

This year's crop includes internationally recognised figures such as the comic character Tintin,

who made his debut in a Belgian newspaper in 1929, and Popeye the Sailor, created by cartoonist Elzie Crisler Segar.

Every December, the Centre for the Study of the Public Domain publishes a list of the cultural works that lose their copyright in the new year.

The centre, part of the Duke University School of Law in the southeastern US state of North Carolina, makes the list available on its website for anyone to peruse.

"In past years we have celebrated an exciting cast of public domain

characters: the original Mickey Mouse and Winnie-the-Pooh, and the final iterations of Sherlock Holmes from Arthur Conan Doyle's stories," centre director Jennifer Jenkins wrote on its website.

"In 2025 copyright expires over more aspects of Mickey from his 1929 incarnations, along with the initial versions of Popeye and Tintin."

Among the literary works entering the US public domain are the novels *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf and the first English

translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by the German author Erich Maria Remarque.

Films that will be in the public domain include *Blackmail*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and *The Black Watch*, the first sound film by Oscar-winning director John Ford.

Musical compositions published in 1929, such as *Bolero* by French composer Maurice Ravel and *An American in Paris* by George Gershwin, will lose their copyrights, though only recordings from 1924 or earlier will be in the public domain. – AFP

## BRIEFS 5 DEAD IN GERMANY FIREWORKS MISHAPS

**BERLIN:** Five people died across Germany and a police officer was seriously injured from accidents linked to the powerful fireworks Germans traditionally set off to celebrate the New Year. Germans celebrate the New Year with a particularly intense usage of fireworks, which spurs a recurrent debate about outlawing the most powerful devices, given the high number of injuries each year, as well as the pollution and noise they cause. Some 13 law enforcement officers were injured as a result of the accidents this year, including one seriously, police spokesman Florian Nath said. Some 330 people were detained in Berlin, police said, adding that contrary to previous years, "there were no major violence or incidents". – AFP

## 37,000 MIGRANTS CROSS CHANNEL

**LONDON:** The number of irregular migrants crossing the Channel to Britain in small boats in 2024 soared by a quarter compared with the previous year. Some 36,816 people made the dangerous journey last year, a 25% jump from the 29,437 who arrived in 2023, provisional figures from the Interior Ministry showed. The total, however, was still well below the record 45,774 arrivals in 2022. Last year's steep rise highlights the challenge facing Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has pledged to crack down on the arrivals. He scrapped the previous government's scheme to send the irregular migrants to Rwanda. He has pledged to smash the gangs of traffickers running the crossings and has signed agreements with foreign countries to co-operate on law enforcement. – AFP



# Israel destroying Gaza healthcare: UN report

➤ Concerns over compliance with international law

**ZURICH:** Israeli attacks on hospitals in Gaza have devastated the Palestinian enclave's health system and raised serious concerns about Israel's compliance with international law, the UN Human Rights Office said in a report.

The 23-page report, documenting attacks between Oct 12, 2023, and June 30, 2024, concluded that since the attacks on Oct 7, 2023, the conduct of hostilities in Gaza had had severe consequences on Palestinians' access to medical attention.

"The destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza, and the extent of killing of patients, staff and other civilians in these attacks, is a

direct consequence of the disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law," it said.

Daniel Meron, Israel's permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, described the report's data as fabricated. He said on X that Israel operates in accordance with international law, would never target innocent civilians, and accused Hamas of using Gaza hospitals for what he called "terror activity".

The Israeli military has accused Hamas of using hospitals as command centres for military operations and said that people Israel has detained at the facilities were suspected gunmen.

The UN report alluded to such arguments but said not enough information had been made public to substantiate them.

Israel has in the past few days conducted operations against hospitals in Gaza that drew criticism from the head of the World Health Organisation among others.

The report said deliberately directing attacks against hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are, provided they are not military objectives, would be war crimes.

It also warned that a systemic pattern of rights abuses against civilians could constitute crimes against humanity.

Israel has consistently rejected such suggestions.

The UN said that responding to its report, the Israeli government said its military had taken extensive measures to mitigate civilian harm and minimise disruption, including providing aid and evacuation routes, and setting up field hospitals.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said: "As if the relentless bombing and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza were not enough, the one sanctuary where Palestinians should have felt safe in fact became a death trap."

More than 45,500 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive. - Reuters



A field hospital is flooded following heavy rain in Khan Younis on Tuesday. - REUTERS/SPIC

## Airstrikes kill at least 17 Palestinians

**TEL AVIV:** Israeli airstrikes on al-Bureij refugee camp and Jabalia town in central and northern Gaza killed at least 17 Palestinians yesterday, the Palestinian news agency WAFA reported.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment although in a post on X, its Arabic spokesperson warned residents of al-Bureij earlier to evacuate ahead of an imminent strike against gunmen firing rockets from the area.

It also said that it killed Abd al-Hadi Sabah, who it accused of helping to lead the infiltration into Kibbutz Nir Oz on Oct 7, 2023.

The instruction to clear the al-Bureij camp has caused a new wave of displacement, although it was not immediately clear how many people were affected.

Israel says its almost three-month-old campaign in northern Gaza is aimed at preventing Hamas gunmen from regrouping. Its instructions to civilians to evacuate are meant to keep them out of harm's way, the military says.

Palestinian and United Nations officials say no place is safe in Gaza and that evacuations worsen the humanitarian conditions of the population.

According to the Palestinian civil defence, more than 1,500 tents sheltering displaced people across Gaza were flooded by heavy rains over the past two days, leaving people exposed to the cold, their belongings damaged.

Hundreds more tents experienced less severe flooding that still left displaced people unable to use them.

Much of the area around the northern towns of Beit Hanoun, Jabalia and Beit Lahia has been cleared of people and razed, fuelling speculation Israel intends to keep the area as a closed buffer zone after the fighting in Gaza ends.

WAFA said the military blew up residential blocks in Beit Lahia and in and around Jabalia, while tanks shelled parts of Gaza City and the al-Bureij camp.

Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced and much of the tiny coastal strip is in ruins. - Reuters

## Russian gas exports via Ukraine halted

**MOSCOW:** Russian natural gas exports via Soviet-era pipelines running through Ukraine to Europe were halted early yesterday as a transit deal expired and warring Moscow and Kyiv have failed to reach an agreement to continue the flows.

The shutdown of Russia's oldest gas route to Europe ends a decade of fraught relations sparked by Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014. Ukraine stopped buying Russian gas the following year.

"We stopped the transit of Russian gas. This is a historic event. Russia is losing its markets, it will suffer financial losses. Europe has already made the decision to abandon Russian gas," said Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko.

The stoppage of gas flows was expected amid the war, which started in February 2022. Ukraine has been adamant it would not extend the deal amid the military conflict.

Russia still exports gas via the TurkStream pipeline on the bed of the Black Sea.

TurkStream has two lines - one for the Turkish domestic market and the other supplying central European customers including Hungary and Serbia.

The European Union redoubled its efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy after the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine in 2022 by seeking alternative sources.

The remaining buyers of Russian gas via Ukraine such as Slovakia and Austria have also arranged alternative supply.

Moldova, once part of the Soviet Union, is among the countries worst affected. It says it will now need to introduce measures to reduce its gas use by a third.

Russia and the former Soviet Union spent half a century building up a major share of the European gas market, which at its peak stood at around 35%, but the war has all but destroyed that business for Gazprom.

The Yamal-Europe pipeline via Belarus has also shut and the Nord Stream route across the Baltic Sea to Germany was blown up in 2022. - Reuters

### BRIEFS TEL AVIV INTERCEPTS TWO PROJECTILES

**TEL AVIV:** Israel's military said two projectiles were fired from Gaza in the first minutes of the New Year, one of which was intercepted while the other landed in an open area. Alert sirens sounded around midnight in the western Negev, the Israeli military said, and "two projectiles were identified crossing from the central Gaza Strip into Israeli territory". The military said it has intercepted several rockets fired from northern Gaza in recent days. Since October, Israeli operations in Gaza have focused on the north, with officials saying the offensive aims to prevent gunmen from regrouping. - AFP

### W.H.O. EVACUATES 55 PATIENTS, 72 CAREGIVERS TO UAE

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organisation said 55 patients and 72 caregivers were evacuated from the Gaza Strip to the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday for specialised medical treatment. "Patients included those suffering from autoimmune and blood diseases, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, eye and renal issues, trauma injuries, neurological disorder and skin diseases. More than 12,000 patients still need medical evacuation outside Gaza," the WHO said. - AFP

### SOUTH AFRICA DEMANDS END TO HOSTILITIES

**NEW YORK:** South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called for the cessation of hostilities in Gaza and the release of hostages. He said his country has stood firm in support of the Palestinian people. "Just as we attained our freedom through the support and solidarity of many people and nations, we continue to stand in solidarity with the victims of injustice in other parts of the world," Ramaphosa said. - Bernama



COMMENT by Dr Manivannan Rethinam

**A**S Malaysia assumes the Asean chairmanship this year, we are presented with a remarkable opportunity to redefine our role in a complex global landscape.

Our nation's rich diversity, underpinned by a spirit of resilience, positions us uniquely to lead in shaping a future where progress, inclusivity, and sustainability coexist.

The theme, "Innovate Together, Lead Together", reflects Malaysia's aspiration to harness unity and collaboration to achieve shared prosperity.

As we chart this course, we embrace two complementary frameworks that will guide our nation's journey: the 5G model (governance, growth, globalisation, green commitment, generational equity) and the 4P model (purpose, people, planet, profit).

Together, these models form a Unified Development Framework, addressing both immediate challenges and long-term aspirations.

**Reinforcing governance with purpose**  
Governance lies at the heart of national progress.

It is here that "purpose", the cornerstone of the 4P model, plays an indispensable role.

As a nation, our purpose transcends economic goals - it is about fostering trust, ensuring inclusivity, and building institutions that stand resilient in the face of adversity.

Malaysia's leadership in Asean reflects our commitment to good governance. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

By governing with empathy and purpose, we uplift our people and inspire confidence in the global community.

**Growth for profit, but not at any cost**  
Economic growth is a key pillar of the 5G model, but it must align with profit that is sustainable and equitable.

Malaysia's economy, buoyed by the global recovery and technological advancements, is forecasted to expand steadily.

However, this growth must be inclusive, ensuring opportunities for all segments of society.

"Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all," noted former UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon.

Guided by this vision, Malaysia is embracing green technology, digital transformation and sustainable industries to create a thriving economy that balances profitability with responsibility.

# Pioneering unity, innovation and sustainability

**Globalisation with people at its core**  
As Malaysia strengthens its role on the global stage, the people element of the 4P model becomes indispensable.

Our nation is a tapestry woven from diverse cultures, ethnicities and beliefs.

This diversity is not a challenge but a competitive advantage, positioning us as a model of coexistence in a globalised world.

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation," remarked Mahatma Gandhi.

This is the essence of Malaysia's leadership during its Asean chairmanship, as we prioritise:

🔴 **Peacebuilding:** Advocating for regional stability and conflict resolution.

🔴 **Economic Integration:** Strengthening trade agreements that benefit all Asean members.

🔴 **Human Capital Development:** Empowering our youth and workforce through education and skills training to thrive in an interconnected world.

**Green commitment: Protecting our planet**  
Environmental sustainability is a non-negotiable priority.

The Green Commitment pillar of the 5G model complements the planet focus of the 4P model.

Malaysia's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 reflects our responsibility to future generations.

As Greta Thunberg reminds us, "You are never too small to make a difference."

With this spirit, Malaysia is:

🔴 Expanding renewable energy adoption, targeting 40% renewable energy capacity by 2035.

🔴 Promoting sustainable urban development and protecting biodiversity-rich areas such as the Belum-Temengor Rainforest.

🔴 Introducing policies to reduce plastic waste and incentivise eco-friendly businesses.

**Generational Equity: Building a legacy with impact**

Generational equity ensures that the



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim holds the ceremonial gavel as he shakes hands with Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, who handed over his country's chairmanship to Malaysia.  
- REUTERS/PC

*"This leadership role is an opportunity for Malaysia to exemplify unity, demonstrating how diverse nations can collaborate to overcome shared challenges."*

benefits of today's growth are shared equitably across present and future generations.

This aligns with the impact principle of the 4P model, which focuses on improving the quality of life for all Malaysians.

Key areas of focus include:

🔴 Expanding access to quality healthcare and education, especially in underserved regions.

🔴 Prioritising affordable housing and transportation to improve living standards.

🔴 Empowering grassroots communities to address local challenges through targeted initiatives.

As Nelson Mandela famously stated, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Our commitment to generational equity ensures that Malaysia's soul remains vibrant and compassionate.

**Asean chairmanship 2025: Leading with unity and vision**  
Malaysia's role as Asean chair this year provides a platform to advocate for:

🔴 **Regional Stability:** Resolving conflicts such as the South China Sea dispute through diplomacy and dialogue.

🔴 **Economic Resilience:** Strengthening the Asean Economic Community to promote inclusive growth.

🔴 **Environmental Collaboration:** Developing regional strategies to combat climate change and natural disasters.

This leadership role is an opportunity for Malaysia to exemplify unity, demonstrating how diverse nations can collaborate to overcome shared challenges.

As John F. Kennedy said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

**New Year wishes**

As we embrace the opportunities, let us welcome the New Year with optimism, determination and a collective spirit. May this year bring:

🔴 Peace to our region and the world, fostering dialogue and ending conflicts that threaten stability.

🔴 Economic prosperity that uplifts all Malaysians and strengthens our standing on the global stage.

🔴 Environmental renewal, as we work towards a sustainable and thriving planet for generations to come.

Let us step forward with courage and compassion, united by our shared vision for a brighter future.

Here's to a year filled with harmony, innovation, and progress for Malaysia and beyond.

*Dr Manivannan Rethinam is Majlis Gagasan Malaysia chairman.  
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## Heavy vehicle incidents a growing menace

**HEAVY** vehicle accidents have increasingly dominated media headlines, with incidents involving buses and trailers crashing into barriers or colliding with oncoming vehicles becoming alarmingly common on highways.

These accidents are more likely to result in fatalities compared to those occurring on federal, state, or municipal roads.

One of the key factors contributing to this trend is the higher speeds at which trailers, buses, and lorries travel on highways.

The danger is compounded when these vehicles carry heavy loads, generating significant momentum that worsens the impact of collisions.

Alarmingly, many trailers and lorries are

overloaded, exceeding the recommended weight limits.

Despite speed limit signs displayed on the back of these vehicles, such restrictions are often ignored, creating a dangerous combination of weight and speed that frequently results in tragedy.

Although some have called for stricter maintenance protocols for heavy vehicles, this alone does not address the severity of the issue.

A lorry or trailer may be serviced, inspected, and certified roadworthy, yet it can still pose a significant risk if overloaded and driven recklessly.

The root cause lies in the behaviour of drivers who are inconsiderate, impulsive, and

dismissive of traffic regulations.

Incidents of speeding heavy vehicles on highways are far too common.

It is not unusual to witness such vehicles overtaking others on the fast lane, tailgating smaller cars, honking, or flashing lights to force their way through.

Many are seen exceeding the speed limit of 110km/h or driving in lanes that are explicitly out of bounds for heavy vehicles.

Stricter enforcement measures are urgently needed to tackle this issue.

Heavy vehicles that exceed speed limits should be promptly fined and the installation of additional speed cameras on highways could help deter such behaviour.

Reintroducing flashlights on heavy vehicles, which activate when the vehicle exceeds its speed limit, would also serve as an effective deterrent.

Furthermore, speedometers in these vehicles could be adjusted to physically prevent them from surpassing their prescribed speed limits.

It is imperative to act swiftly to prevent further loss of innocent lives on our highways.

Without decisive action, these "monsters" will continue to pose a grave threat to road safety.

**Samuel Yesuiah Seremban**

# Saving the green lung of Putrajaya

COMMENT by Suzianah Nhazzla Ismail

**A**S Malaysia's administrative capital, Putrajaya was envisioned as a "Garden City," a sanctuary where urban living and nature harmoniously coexist.

It was built upon the rolling hills of Prang Besar, a land once abundant with lush vegetation and serene beauty. But today, that vision is fading.

Concrete structures now dominate spaces where greenery once flourished, and the heart of this city is losing its lifeblood.

Mature trees, the silent guardians of our well-being, are disappearing.

They shade us, purify our air, and cool our cities, yet they are often the first casualties of development.

In their place rise barren parking lots and towering buildings—offering convenience but erasing a legacy that cannot be replaced.

The urban fabric of Putrajaya has transformed drastically, with an increasing number of commercial buildings, bustling cafes, sprawling malls, and residential complexes emerging where greenery once thrived.

While these structures promise modernity, they come at a

significant cost.

The sun feels closer than ever, its scorching heat now untempered by the cooling shade of mature trees.

The urban heat island effect intensifies as the concrete jungle expands, replacing natural habitats that once balanced the environment.

Studies reveal that urbanised areas can be up to 7°C hotter than their greener counterparts—a stark reminder of the trade-offs we make in the name of development.

Each tree felled is more than just the loss of greenery, it is the loss of life—for us, for wildlife, and the soul of the city.

Different species of trees serve specific purposes, each uniquely contributing to the balance of our ecosystem.

Many of these trees were hundreds of years old, silent witnesses to history, providing shade and oxygen long before Putrajaya existed.

The loss of greenery also spells disaster for wildlife.

Every morning, as I walk among the trees that still stand, I am enveloped by the distinct, sweet scent of oxygen—a gift only nature can offer.

But this solace is fleeting. Monkeys, raccoons, and otters,

displaced from their habitats, now wander dangerously close to roads, often meeting tragic ends under the wheels of speeding vehicles.

With fewer trees come fewer bird species.

The melodic songs of these winged creatures grow quieter each year, leaving behind a haunting silence that echoes our negligence.

And it is not just the trees—our oceans, the lungs of our planet, are also under siege.

Seventy percent of the oxygen we breathe comes from the sea, with the remaining 30% from trees.

Yet both are being violated with impunity.

Pollution, contamination, and over-extraction choke our oceans, while relentless deforestation scars our lands.

Together, these acts deplete the air we depend on to survive.

If we continue down this path, the harmony between humans and nature will become nothing but a distant memory.

Despite these challenges, there is hope if we act decisively and urgently. Stricter zoning laws are needed to protect what remains.

Mature trees should not be discarded but relocated with care.

Community-driven initiatives, such as tree adoption schemes, can instil a sense of

collective responsibility.

The loss of greenery must not go unanswered.

Replanting efforts should focus on native species to revive ecosystems suited to our climate.

Expanding urban forests and creating green corridors will not only restore biodiversity but also reconnect us to nature.

These corridors, lifelines for wildlife, are equally lifelines for our humanity.

Development and conservation can coexist.

Vertical gardens, rooftop greenery, and tree-integrated designs must become the standard rather than the exception.

Low-impact development strategies can ensure growth without sacrificing the environment.

Education and engagement are equally critical.

Tree planting days, community workshops, and public campaigns can foster a deeper understanding of trees' vital role in our lives.

Modern technology, too, can serve as an ally.

Drones and sensors can monitor tree health, while carbon credit programmes incentivise reforestation.

When used wisely, these tools can amplify our efforts and bring us closer to a sustainable future.

Trees are more than ornamental features; they are the lifeblood of our environment, the keepers of our air, and the guardians of our climate.

Losing them is akin to losing a part of ourselves.

Each tree felled stands as a silent testimony to our negligence, while every barren space marks an opportunity lost.

Putrajaya was meant to embody balance—a green heart pulsing with life amid the progress of a nation.

As environmentalist Wangari Maathai once said, "The generation that destroys the environment is not the generation that pays the price. That is the problem."

Wildlife and the environment were the original inhabitants of Prang Besar before we transformed it into Putrajaya.

As we look toward 2025, let us dream together of a greener, more wildlife-friendly Putrajaya.

Let us honour the sacred heritage of this land and the vibrant life it once nurtured.

In saving the trees, we do far more than preserve their roots and branches; we protect the whispers of our past, the promises of a brighter future, and the fragile, irreplaceable bond that anchors us to the very heartbeat of this Earth.

Comments: [letters@thesundaily.com](mailto:letters@thesundaily.com)

## Encouraging freedom of speech, expression

COMMENT by Muzaffar Syah Mallow

**PEOPLE** should be encouraged to speak up, and their freedom and right to speak must be valued and protected at all times.

Freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental human right belonging to every individual across all countries.

Such basic freedoms should not be denied, curtailed or obstructed.

Instead, they should be embraced by all, as they bring numerous benefits to both society and the nation.

Freedom of speech and expression is the principle that supports an individual's or a community's right to express their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal action.

It is a cornerstone of basic human rights, as stipulated under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR) and recognised in international human rights law through the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR).

Article 19 of the UDHR states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In addition to international conventions, freedom of speech and expression is also protected under the Federal Constitution.

Article 10(1)(a) of the Constitution affirms: "Every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression."

These protections demonstrate that freedom of speech and expression is safeguarded by both international conventions and national laws.

No one should be denied these fundamental rights.

Every individual is unique in their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and perspectives.

These differences should be celebrated as they contribute to societal and national progress.

Instead of perceiving freedom of speech as a threat, we should recognise its positive impact.

Freedom of speech empowers individuals to protect their rights and interests, as well as those of others.

It acts as a shield against mistreatment and oppression.

Suppressing this fundamental right makes it difficult for individuals to stand up for themselves or others, potentially stifling the development of innovative ideas crucial for societal and national advancement.

While freedom of speech and expression is a basic human right, it is not absolute.

Article 19 of the UDHR acknowledges that the exercise of such freedoms carries "special duties and responsibilities" and may be subject to restrictions "for respect of the rights or reputation of others" or "for the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals".

Similarly, the Federal Constitution imposes certain limitations.

Article 10(2)(a) states: "Parliament may by law impose on

the rights conferred by paragraph (a) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality, and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or any Legislative Assembly or to provide against contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to any offence."

While such limitations exist, they should not be used as a pretext to discourage individuals from speaking or expressing their views.

Authorities should refrain from enacting excessive laws or excessively enforcing existing ones to suppress freedom of speech.

Differences in views should be resolved through discussions and debates, not through legal actions, arrests, prosecutions, fines or imprisonment.

Freedom of speech and expression is an invaluable right that must be upheld and encouraged.

Embracing diverse opinions and ideas fosters growth and innovation while protecting individuals from oppression.

While it is essential to recognise the limitations of this right, such restrictions should be applied judiciously and not as a tool to silence dissent.

By nurturing an environment where individuals feel free to express themselves, society and the nation can truly thrive.

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## Athlete mental health key to performance

**ATHLETES** are often admired for their physical prowess, incredible talent, and the fame and honour they bring to their countries.

However, despite their exceptional abilities, the demands of performance can take a significant toll on their mental health.

With international exposure and the constant glare of social media, these stressors are often magnified.

Even many top international athletes have been severely affected, sometimes to the extent of withdrawing from competition to seek therapeutic help.

In recent years, the involvement of medical professionals in sports organisations has provided critical therapy for athletes' mental health needs.

This support is increasingly recognised and valued.

Athletes across various sports frequently experience symptoms such as paralysing anxiety attacks and excessive fears.

Additionally, they often suffer from deeper depression than the general population.

Athletes face a unique culture of stressors and disorders, which can be exacerbated by the injuries they endure.

A 2019 study found that approximately 35% of elite athletes experience mental health concerns.

Key issues reported by athletes include feelings of burnout from constant competition, debilitating depression, and anxiety.

Malaysia's elite athletes operate under intense pressure, facing unrealistic expectations from coaches, sports associations, teammates and even themselves.

The relentless pursuit of perfection often takes a considerable toll on their mental and physical well-being.

Athletes require both physical and mental resilience to withstand the scrutiny of aggressive sports reporters and online "keyboard warriors".

Many coaches and mental trainers have banned athletes from using social media during major competitions to alleviate this additional stress.

Our national sports associations and independent players need increased awareness of the barriers to mental health treatment, including diagnosis, stigma and the availability of resources.

Elite athletes require comprehensive care that addresses their interconnected physical and mental health needs.

While the National Sports Institute plays a vital role, timely intervention by counsellors, physicians or psychiatrists is crucial.

To keep pace with the modern demands of athletics, Malaysia must support athletes from their school years through to professional levels with the latest advancements in sports science.

These include technologies that analyse talent and enhance performance, hyperbaric treatment for expedited injury recovery and innovative mental reinforcement techniques that give athletes a competitive edge.

We owe our athletes the best possible support to help them remain injury-free and perform at their peak.

By doing so, they can bring glory to Malaysia while preserving their physical and mental health.

**C. Sathasivam Sitheravellu**  
Seremban

# Modernising old buildings key to safety, sustainability

WITH urbanisation accelerating globally, the need to modernise ageing buildings has become increasingly critical.

According to the World Bank's projection, around 56% of the global population – approximately 4.4 billion people currently reside in cities. Notably, about 80% of the buildings that will exist in 2050 are already in place today.

This underscores the importance for building owners to establish long-term strategies that prioritise retrofitting and modernising existing buildings. This is key to enhancing occupant comfort and safety while reducing the building's environmental footprint. Such initiatives also improve the energy efficiency of structures while ensuring that these buildings meet current standards and regulations. Embracing a proactive approach can better help adapt to future demands and challenges in the built environment.

Some of Malaysia's earliest commercial buildings constructed after independence date back to the 1980s. For instance, the Dayabumi Complex, completed in 1984, is the first skyscraper built in the country.

With iconic structures like this continuing to age, the challenges they present are multifaceted, impacting safety and efficiency. As mentioned by the Composites Construction UK, the life expectancy of buildings made from reinforced concrete is between 60 to 80 years, meaning that many of these structures are nearing or have already surpassed their optimal lifespan.

We are seeing similar trends in the office space. According to JLL research, over 56% of the total office space in Greater Kuala Lumpur is over 15 years old. As the city progresses, the fate of its older buildings comes into question: should these structures be replaced with

modern ones or preserved? It all comes down to safety. This depends on several important variables, such as materials used during construction, previous maintenance records, structural soundness, and compliance with contemporary safety regulations.

Another aspect to consider is the impact of ageing infrastructure such as elevator systems. As elevators age, operational issues such as mechanical failures or power outages become more frequent and can disrupt service. Outdated elevator systems that no longer meet modern safety standards increase the risk of incidents, like sudden stops or entrapment, while electrical malfunctions can lead to injury.

Given that elevators typically have a lifespan of around 15 to 20 years, it is crucial for building owners to consider timely modernisation efforts. Ensuring elevators operate smoothly helps enhance the overall tenant experience and maintain a positive reputation for the property. While elevators are designed to withstand demanding conditions with regular maintenance, building owners must also explore strategies to extend their lifespan and achieve long-term cost savings.

As a leader in the elevator and escalator industry, KONE suggests two options for buildings owners who are considering modernising their elevator systems. The first is full replacement for systems that are outdated or frequently breaking down, to improve reliability and safety. Where full replacement is not feasible, we also offer modular modernisation, which involves upgrading specific components like the control system, hoisting machinery, and doors. This approach not only extends the lifespan of the elevator but also enhances its performance without requiring a complete overhaul.

Throughout this process, we collaborate closely with property owners, employing various models and prototypes for seamless integration with existing facilities.

Modernisation also enables building owners to achieve their sustainability goals. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, buildings contribute to approximately 40% of global energy, and emit around one third of greenhouse gas emissions.

While considering the overall impact of building operations, upgrading older elevators can in fact lead to energy savings of up to 70%. Regular preventive maintenance can also help address potential issues early.

KONE uses artificial intelligence-based analytics to support building owners and managers in optimising performance and prevent breakdowns, thereby enhancing energy efficiency and reducing operational costs. Around 20% of KONE's maintenance base presently uses these AI tools to evaluate equipment status, which have already increased fault detection by up to 80% and reduced overall faults by 40%. This has improved uptime and performance across various buildings.

As we focus on improving building operations, it is also important to prioritise the user experience and accessibility in these spaces. Modernising buildings is fundamentally about putting people first and making people flow within a structure and even cities easier and more efficient. For KONE, modernisation is more than just introducing new upgrades, it is about thoughtfully integrating advanced technologies to address the evolving needs of urban environments.

*This article is contributed by KONE Malaysia and Brunel managing director Teoh Tze Ping.*

## SP Setia's Teman shoplots in Setia Alamsari 90% booked

**SHAH ALAM:** SP Setia Bhd's verdant township of Setia Alamsari in Kajang which unveiled its Teman shoplots late last year, saw 90% booking on its launch due to it being surrounded by more than 80,000 residents, 10,000 homes and situated next to 6,000 apartment units.

Coined "Teman" in Bahasa Malaysia, which is directly translated as "Companion", the name signifies the shoplots to be a place to gather friends, residents and visitors, and to capture the essence of placemaking in the township.

SP Setia Bhd divisional general manager Koh Sooi Meng said, "We are thrilled with our recent launch – Teman – comprising 37 units in Setia Alamsari, which has gathered 90% bookings on the day itself. This is following the success of our previous, first launch of Emporia comprising 30 units of shops in Setia Alamsari."

With a total GDV of RM106 million, Teman shoplots will have a total of 37 units comprising 20 intermediate units with built-ups of 3,332 sq ft (and aptly priced at RM1.91 million onwards); 4 corner units with built-ups of 5,184 sq ft (priced from RM3.4 million).

The launch also include 12 semi-detached units with built-ups of 4,882 sq ft (priced from RM3.93 million onwards) and 1 single-detached unit with built-up of 5,531 sq ft (priced at RM6.22 million).

The 775-acre township of Setia Alamsari, which in total has a GDV of RM5.1 billion, and with a balance GDV of RM3.84 billion. Its masterplan consists of 10,000 residential units, commercial lands and an estimated 40,000 population upon completion, with eight thematic zones with different landscapes.

## E&O, Mitsui Fudosan top out RM900m Conlay in Kuala Lumpur

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Eastern & Oriental Bhd (E&O) in collaboration with Mitsui Fudosan Group, recently celebrated a major milestone in the construction of Conlay, its luxury 51-storey serviced residence with a topping-out ceremony.

The topping-out ceremony marked the completion of Conlay's structural framework, signifying that the building has reached its full height and remains on schedule for completion in the first quarter of 2025.

With an approximate GDV of RM900 million, Conlay features 491 meticulously designed units ranging from 743 sq ft one-bedroom apartments to spacious 1,335 sq ft two-plus-one-bedroom layouts. Each unit is designed with premium appliances and luxurious finishes, ensuring a refined living experience that blends modernity with comfort.

Designed by Kerry Hill Architects, a name synonymous with iconic resort and urban design, Conlay was conceived as a contemporary tropical tower that melds timeless elegance with cutting-edge modernity. With its striking fin-lined, picture-framed façade, the tower will stand out against the city skyline, providing residents with unobstructed panoramic views of Kuala Lumpur's landmarks.

E&O managing director Kok Tuck Cheong said the topping-out was an important step forward for the company and its vision for urban living.

"Conlay embodies E&O's commitment to



From left: Mitsui Fudosan (Asia) Malaysia Sdn Bhd senior managers (business and residential development) Keiko Imaeda and Khoo Kok Chen, Saito, E&O Bhd executive chairman Datuk Seri Tee Eng Ho, Kok, executive director Datuk Tee Eng Seng, and project director Michael Tan Hwee Hian.

hospitality and craftsmanship, seamlessly blending Kerry Hill's iconic design philosophy. It offers a sanctuary of elegance and balance,

where every detail is thoughtfully crafted for a refined urban lifestyle," he said.

Kok added that the project represented the

culmination of E&O's vision to create an oasis of luxury in the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

Strategically located, Conlay enjoys unparalleled connectivity and convenience. Situated adjacent to the Conlay MRT station, the development is within walking distance of the city's premier shopping and lifestyle district which includes landmarks Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, and the bustling Bukit Bintang area.

It is also near the Tun Razak Exchange, Kuala Lumpur's upcoming financial district, ensuring seamless access to key commercial and leisure hubs.

Mitsui Fudosan (Asia) Malaysia managing director Masayoshi Saito said "We are honoured to partner with E&O on Conlay, a development that showcases our confidence in its success and our dedication to exceptional urban living.

"By drawing on E&O's expertise in luxury living and hospitality, Conlay highlights the strength of our collaboration and our shared vision of creating iconic spaces for discerning residents," he said.

E&O also revealed that the company is currently exploring the incorporation of branded serviced residences for Conlay, aimed at redefining luxury living and offering an exclusive lifestyle experience to residents.

Kok said that the team has assessed several exciting options and is poised to make an announcement in the first quarter of 2025, adding yet another layer of distinction to their offerings.



# the Sun Biz & Finance

THURSDAY | JAN 2, 2025

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## Exchange Listing explores opportunities in Malaysia

➤ Firm keen to facilitate dual listings on US capital market

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK  
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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Exchange Listing LLC, an advisory firm based in Florida in the United States, is eyeing opportunities to facilitate dual listings on the US capital market for Malaysian companies.

CEO and founder Peter Goldstein (*pic*) said the firm is in discussions with potential partners and investors to establish cooperation for dual listings.

"One of the things that we're exploring is how to work with listed companies here for cross-listing or dual listing, so we don't take them away from the local market. This is a very underserved area, we're very interested in pursuing this," Goldstein told *SunBiz* in an exclusive interview while he was in Kuala Lumpur for a visit recently.

He said dual listing offers companies greater visibility and access to a global investor base while still supporting their local markets. "As an example, the SGX (Singapore Exchange) has a relationship with Nasdaq because there's less liquidity on the SGX, so they want the extra outside liquidity.

Everyone wins in such collaborations."

Goldstein said the US capital market provides transformational growth funding opportunities for companies at pivotal stages in their development.

"Rapidly growing companies often require additional capital to sustain and accelerate their growth. At these inflection points, where businesses have already proven their models and established a strong foundation, external resources become crucial to strengthening and extending their growth trajectory," he explained.

He added, "Just as humans evolve, companies need the right support at the right stage."

Goldstein stressed that capital is only one part of the equation. "Beyond capital, they seek guidance, expertise, and knowledge to navigate the next phase of their journey. This includes bringing in experienced advisors, directors, and other professionals to add value beyond funding."

Goldstein said they are looking for companies with proven business models needing capital to sustain growth.

"Technology-related sectors hold great potential. Fintech is particularly interesting, and Malaysia has strong capabilities in areas like AI and data centres, which align with the global growth trends," he said.

However, he added that industries with strong fundamentals - revenue growth, profitability and robust business metrics - are eligible for listing too.



Preparing companies for listing is a year-long process, focusing on financial metrics, governance and compliance. "But listing in the US boosts recognition, credibility, and governance standards, which are assets globally," Goldstein said.

He shared that more than 60% of new listings in the US in 2024 were foreign companies, with the majority from Southeast Asia. He expects the trend to grow, particularly in Malaysia and the Asia-Pacific region, over the next three to five years.

Goldstein said, "Transparency and education are key to ensuring companies are well-prepared for the process." He highlighted benefits for foreign private issuers in the US, such as less frequent financial reporting compared to domestic companies. This regulatory flexibility attracts foreign companies to US markets.

Micro-cap companies, with market capitalisations of US\$50 million to US\$300 million (RM223.7 million to RM1.3 billion), and small-cap companies, ranging from US\$300 million to US\$1 billion, can qualify for listing.

Key requirements include shareholder equity of at least US\$5 million and a public float value exceeding US\$15 million.

More than 20 Malaysian companies have listed as American Depositary Receipts on Nasdaq and the over-the-counter (OTC) exchange. Among them are Boustead Holdings Bhd (OTCPink), Genting Bhd (OTCPink), Emergem Corp (Nasdaq), Top Glove Corporation Bhd (OTCPink), Tenaga Nasional Bhd (OTCPink) and Malayan Banking Bhd (OTCPink).

## Data loss emerges as top cloud threat to Malaysian SMEs: ECloudvalley

■ BY AIMIE SHAZRIE  
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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysian small and medium enterprises continue to grapple with rising cybersecurity concerns as data loss emerges as the most critical cloud threat.

ECloudvalley country manager Sandy Woo (*pic*) said SMEs, which account for nearly 97% of businesses in Malaysia, remain highly vulnerable to this risk due to insufficient investments in cybersecurity infrastructure and expertise.

"According to recent insights, misconfigurations in cloud systems, ransomware attacks and account hijacking closely follow data loss as the top threats to SMEs. As businesses increasingly adopt cloud solutions to boost operational efficiency, these risks underscore the urgent need for enhanced cybersecurity strategies," she told *SunBiz*.

She said data loss can cripple businesses, leading to financial losses, reputational damage, and customer distrust. "For SMEs, which often operate with tighter margins and limited resources, recovering from such incidents can be particularly challenging," she added.

Many SMEs still underestimate the complexity of securing cloud environments, leaving them exposed to sophisticated cyberattacks, Woo said.

This is where cloud consulting companies such as eCloudvalley come in. As an AWS Premier Partner, eCloudvalley has the experience and expertise to help SMEs and enterprises navigate software and services challenges from end to end, ensuring that business data remains secure and resilient.

Woo said misconfigurations in cloud systems are another critical issue.

"Incorrectly set permissions or unsecured databases can provide cybercriminals with easy access to sensitive information. This highlights the importance of proper training and ongoing audits to minimise human errors, which remain a common entry point for breaches."

Ransomware attacks, while not new, continue to evolve and target SMEs disproportionately, Woo said. "Cybercriminals view smaller businesses as low-hanging fruit due to their typically weaker defences. A ransomware incident can paralyse operations, forcing businesses to either pay hefty ransoms or lose critical data altogether."

Account hijacking, driven by poor password hygiene and the absence of multifactor authentication, is also on the rise, Woo said. "This threat allows attackers to infiltrate systems and potentially compromise an entire network. SMEs are encouraged to adopt zero-trust policies, which limit access to critical resources based on verification, to mitigate such risks."

Despite the challenges, she said, there are viable solutions for SMEs to strengthen their cybersecurity posture. "Investing in affordable, scalable security tools tailored to cloud environments is important. Regular system updates, vulnerability assessments and employee training are equally essential in building a robust defence against emerging threats."

Woo noted that collaboration with cybersecurity service providers can also help SMEs bridge resource gaps.

Prioritising cloud security is no longer optional as Malaysian SMEs navigate their digital transformation journeys, she stressed.



## 'Asia-Pacific, Europe to lead bleisure travel growth'

■ BY JOHN GILBERT  
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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Bleisure travel, a trend that combines business travel with leisure activities, is poised for growth in 2025, fuelled by industries prioritising frequent business trips and a stronger focus on employee well-being.

Holiday Tours & Travels Sdn Bhd senior vice-president of finance, MICE, people and culture Amy Lee (*pic*) said, geographically, the company anticipates Asia-Pacific and Europe to continue leading the way in bleisure travel uptake.

She said cities in these regions are likely to remain popular due to their dual appeal as business hubs and leisure destinations.

Emerging markets in Southeast Asia and the Middle East could see growing interest, offering a blend of affordability, accessibility and unique cultural experiences.

"As companies adopt more flexible travel policies and prioritise employee well-being, bleisure travel is poised to become a more integral part of the business travel landscape. While growth will depend on broader economic and industry trends, the potential for this segment to expand remains strong as global connectivity and corporate travel will recover in the coming year," Lee told *SunBiz*.

She said the increasing focus on sustainability is driving demand for regional travel that is eco-friendly, cost-effective and less time-intensive.

Companies are prioritising work-life balance, with bleisure travel emerging as a tool to enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity. Further, advances in travel technology, such as real-time planning platforms, are making it easier to integrate business and leisure travel seamlessly.

Lee said that as global travel rebounds, bleisure is transitioning from a niche trend to a key element of corporate travel policies, aligning with employee preferences and boosting retention.

She added that the return of international travel and hybrid work models have driven a rise in bleisure travel, where business trips are extended for leisure or remote work in inspiring locations.

"Frequent travellers are seeking ways to recover from the stress of constant travel, prompting tailored programmes with wellness-focused accommodations, extended stays, and personalised leisure activities. Holiday Tours & Travel customises itineraries to balance productivity and well-being, aligning travel plans with the evolving needs of today's workforce," Lee said.

Despite the positive outlook, Lee said the evolving macroeconomic landscape, marked by fluctuating travel costs, volatile currency exchange rates, and persistent inflation, will undoubtedly influence bleisure travel in 2025. "Businesses are increasingly scrutinising

travel budgets, while employees remain keen on maximising work trips by incorporating leisure activities. This dual pressure calls for a delicate balance between cost management and delivering enriching travel experiences."

Holiday Tours & Travel recognises the growing demand for extended travel experiences that seamlessly combine business and leisure, Lee said.

"Our role is to curate destinations and design itineraries that meet professional requirements while offering enriching leisure opportunities, ensuring a balanced and fulfilling travel experience for our clients. We achieve this by leveraging our expertise in tailoring travel programmes to individual and corporate needs."

"For business travellers, we prioritise efficiency by selecting destinations with robust infrastructure, convenient transport options, and access to facilities that support productivity, such as high-quality meeting spaces and reliable connectivity," she said.

"Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, our focus remains on creating seamless, personalised travel experiences that balance professional productivity with personal enrichment. We are exploring ways to enhance traveller convenience and flexibility, ensuring that work commitments and leisure pursuits coexist effortlessly within a single journey," Lee said.



# Making Malaysia a global entertainment powerhouse

➤ SunStrong's Thousands of Years Media aims to inspire local industry while resonating on world stage

**PETALING JAYA:** Thousands of Years Media (ToYM), a recently launched venture by SunStrong Entertainment, aspires to redefine Malaysia's entertainment landscape and position the country as a global entertainment powerhouse.

Founder and CEO Jment Lim said that with a strategy focused on innovation, education and collaboration, the company envisions creating a model that inspires the local industry while resonating on the international stage.

"We are investing significant resources into this venture to position the model at the forefront. This will show others that we can create history for Malaysia, not just by following global trends, but by setting examples and making the country iconic," he said in an exclusive interview with *SunBiz*.

He emphasised ToYM's commitment to nurture local talent, integrate cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), and foster partnerships with both domestic and international stakeholders.

"The company is collaborating with international institutions to enhance education and production quality. This platform is not just about entertainment, it is about providing opportunities and bringing global expertise to Malaysia while nurturing home-grown talent," said Lim.

He said the company's blueprint includes creating jobs in creative and technology industries while driving Malaysia's global competitiveness in entertainment.

"Beyond profit, the company emphasises sustainability and community impact, aligning its growth with the nation's broader



Lim says Thousands of Years Media is poised to redefine Malaysia's entertainment narrative.

development goals. Our mission is to not only entertain but also to inspire and empower. We aim to make Malaysia the first choice for global entertainment investments," said Lim.

He noted that ToYM sees AI as a pivotal tool in closing the quality gap between Malaysia's entertainment offerings and those of global

giants such as Hollywood.

"AI can elevate production quality, but we need a stronger ecosystem. Right now, finding skilled programmers and technicians in Malaysia remains a challenge. That is why education is key. By partnering with global institutions, we aim to create a foundation for AI integration in entertainment."

Lim said ToYM is not just focused on immediate gains but has set its sights on long-term goals.

He revealed the company's ambition to achieve an initial public offering and ultimately become one of the world's top 100 companies. "This is a huge dream. It may not happen in this generation, but we are laying the groundwork for future generations to carry forward."

Furthermore, Lim highlighted Southeast Asia's potential as a hub for entertainment growth, driven by its diverse population and cultural ties. "Malaysia has always been the first choice for international collaborations, especially with China, because of our friendly culture and multilingual capabilities," he noted.

Despite these ambitions, Lim acknowledged the limitations of Malaysia's domestic market and the need to overcome technical and infrastructural challenges. "Our market is small and we lack advanced technical skills, but with the right collaborations and investments, we can scale globally," he said.

Lim's vision for ToYM underscores the belief in transformative power of entertainment.

"Entertainment can bring knowledge, improve lives and create positive energy. That is the kind of impact we want our work to have," he said.

With its focus on innovation, education, and collaboration, he said, ToYM is poised to redefine Malaysia's entertainment narrative, aiming not just to compete globally but to set a new benchmark for the industry.

## LYC Healthcare to list Cayman unit on Nasdaq

**KUALA LUMPUR:** LYC Healthcare Bhd (LYC) plans to list its subsidiary, LYC Healthcare (Cayman) Ltd (LYC Cayman), on the New York-based Nasdaq exchange.

In a Bursa Malaysia filing, the healthcare company said LYC Cayman plans to undertake an initial public offering (IPO) of new ordinary shares on Nasdaq.

"The offering size is expected to range between US\$5 million and US\$15 million, (RM22.3 million and RM67 million) subject to the full exercise of the overallotment option by underwriters. The IPO price will be at least US\$4 per share, with shares offered to third-party investors," it said.

The company also said that following the completion of an internal reorganisation, LYC Cayman would become the ultimate holding company for LYC's operating subsidiaries, HC Orthopaedic Surgery Pte Ltd (HCOS) and T&T Medical Group Pte Ltd (T&T).

Post-listing, LYC's stake in its operating subsidiaries, HCOS and T&T will dilute from 64.50% but remain above 50%.

"The proceeds from the IPO will be allocated as follows: approximately 50% for potential mergers and acquisitions, 20% for business expansion, and 30% for daily operations and working capital," it said.

The company said the rationale for the listing includes enabling the efficient allocation of resources to drive business growth in medical and surgical advisory services. It would also unlock the value of LYC's investment in the operating subsidiaries.

"Barring any unforeseen circumstances, the proposed listing is expected to be completed by the first half of 2025," it said.

UOB Kay Hian Securities (M) Sdn Bhd has been appointed as the principal adviser for the exercise. – Bernama

## Bursa tipped to onboard 50 new listings this year, FBM KLCI to reach 1,800 points

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's equity market delivered a commendable performance in 2024, earning a solid grade close to an 'A', with several key milestones achieved during the year, laying the foundation for the main index to reach 1,800 points this year, with 50 new listings anticipated.

The benchmark FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) ended 2024 with a 12.9% increase over the 52 weeks, making Bursa Malaysia the second-best performer in Southeast Asia, after Singapore.

In addition, the exchange recorded its highest-ever issuance of initial public offerings (IPO) and saw its market capitalisation exceed the RM2 trillion mark for the first time in May.

Focusing on individual stocks, 99 Speed Mart Retail Holdings Bhd surged 14% in its market debut, marking the largest IPO in seven years since Lotte Chemical Titan's listing in 2017. This was Bursa Malaysia's 34th IPO of the year, solidifying Malaysia's position as Southeast Asia's most active IPO market in 2024.

The most-traded stocks on Bursa Malaysia for the past 12 months include My EG Services,

Velesto Energy, Hong Seng Consolidated, Top Glove Corporation, and TWL Holdings, according to data from Bloomberg.

Year-to-date in 2024, 53.04 million of MyEG shares were transacted, followed by Velesto Energy (43.74 million), Hong Seng Consolidated (37.62 million), Top Glove Corporation (35.98 million) and TWL Holdings (35.46 million).



Bursa Malaysia achieved a significant milestone in 2024, with 55 IPO listed on the exchange – the highest number of listings recorded in the past 19 years, exceeding the initial target of 42 IPO.

These 55 IPO collectively raised RM7.42 billion in proceeds, marking a 107% increase from the previous year, and contributed a total market capitalisation of RM31.37 billion to Bursa Malaysia based on their IPO prices, reflecting a 130% growth compared to 2023.

This remarkable performance represents a 72% increase over the 32 IPO recorded in 2023.

The FBM KLCI reached its lowest point of the year at 1,453.10 on Jan 2, 2024, the first trading day of the year, and peaked at 1,678.80 points on Aug 30, 2024, a level not seen since December 2020.

The exchange's six-day winning streak from Dec 23 saw global funds net buy Malaysian equities worth US\$600,000 on Dec 30, the highest in one month, before the index closed the year higher by 0.28% or 4.65 points to 1,642.33.

Looking ahead, UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors' head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said the company has forecast the FBM KLCI to reach 1,800 points this year.

RHB Investment Bank Bhd projects the market bellwether to reach 1,820 points by the end of 2025, supported by a strong domestic macroeconomic outlook and improved corporate earnings.

Affin Bank Bhd anticipates the FBM KLCI to hit 1,850 points this year compared to an estimated 1,650 points for 2024, driven by sustained corporate earnings growth, while MIDF Research expects the key index to surpass 1,800 points in 2025, citing continued earnings growth.

However, mounting trade uncertainties and potential US policy shifts under President-elect Donald Trump could contribute to near-term uncertainty in the global equities market.

On IPO issuance, Bursa Malaysia is set to list 50 IPO this year, reviving the high level of public participation that was seen two decades ago. – Bernama

BRIEFS

### ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF PAYMENT FORM E-107D IS NOW MANDATORY

**PUTRA JAYA:** Electronic submission of Section 107D Payment Form (e-107D) is mandatory with effect from yesterday, the Inland Revenue Board (IRB) announced. The submission of payment information to agents, dealers, or distributors (resident individuals) under Section 107D of the Income Tax Act 1967 was previously done manually. In view of the mandatory implementation, taxpayers are required to submit Form CP 107D online using the e-107D method provided, the IRB said in a statement on Tuesday. According to the IRB, Section 107D tax deduction payments must be made electronically using a bill number. Payments can be completed either through the ByrHASIL platform or via the Financial Process Exchange through the ByrHASIL link. – Bernama

### BINTULU PORT SIGNS THIRD INTERIM AGREEMENT, GETS 12-MONTH EXTENSION

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Bintulu Port Holdings Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary, Bintulu Port Sdn Bhd (BPSB), has signed a third interim agreement (IA) with the Ministry of Transport and Bintulu Port Authority to extend its operation of Bintulu Port for an additional 12 months. Bintulu Port said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia that the extension will run from Jan 1, 2025 to Dec 31, 2025, or until the Declaration of an Area in the Bintulu District to be a Federal Port (Repeal) Act 2024 and the Bintulu Port Authority (Dissolution) Act 2024 come into effect, whichever is earlier. – Bernama

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Mah Sing Group Bhd is poised for robust growth in 2025, leveraging a strategic focus on its core residential property segment while capitalising on emerging opportunities in industrial developments, data centres, and manufacturing.

With a comprehensive strategy centered on its M Series residential offerings, industrial park expansion, and innovative diversification initiatives, Mah Sing is well-positioned to deliver long-term value to stakeholders while supporting Malaysia's economic resilience.

Founder and group managing director Tan Sri Leong Hoy Kum shared, "2024 has been a positive and rewarding year for Mah Sing, and I attribute this success to three keywords – 'resilience', 'diversification', and 'opportunity'. Resilience has been key as we navigated challenges like rising costs and economic uncertainties, ensuring we remained steadfast in delivering quality and value to our stakeholders. Diversification has empowered us to strengthen our portfolio beyond residential properties, with significant strides in industrial developments and data centre projects, aligning with Malaysia's push for a digital economy. Lastly, opportunity has defined our ability to seize emerging market demands. These three pillars have not only shaped our achievements in 2024 but have also positioned Mah Sing to continue creating sustainable growth and value as we move into 2025."

According to the latest FTSE Russell report from December 2024, Mah Sing's FTSE score has risen from 3.7 to 3.9, reflecting the company's strong commitment to sustainability and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices. Mah Sing is committed to sustainability across all its business segments.

The group, in a statement, said that it incorporates ESG considerations into its operations and developments, ensuring that its growth aligns with long-term sustainability goals.

In its industrial parks and residential developments, Mah Sing integrates green features, waste reduction practices, and renewable energy solutions, setting a benchmark for sustainable urban living and industrial ecosystems. The group's ESG-driven initiatives not only enhance its reputation but also align with global standards and investor expectations.

The residential property market is expected to remain resilient in 2025, driven by stable employment conditions, civil servant wage growth, and initiatives such as the flexible EPF

# Mah Sing poised for robust growth in 2025

► Property developer to employ diversified strategies across residential, industrial and data centre segments



The residential property market is set to remain strong in 2025, supported by stable employment, civil servant wage growth, and the flexible EPF Account 3 scheme. – MAH SING WEBSITE

Account 3 scheme. Affordable housing remains the core of Mah Sing's property development business. The group's M Series, offering homes priced below RM500,000, targets first-time buyers and middle-income earners.

Recognising the success of the M Series,

Mah Sing plans to pursue additional strategic land acquisitions to expand the offering and cater to growing demand. Government initiatives including tax incentives for first-home buyers announced in Budget 2025 are expected to further stimulate demand.

Mah Sing's industrial segment is set for substantial growth in 2025 with its industrial development, the MSS Business Park in Sepang. This development aligns with Malaysia's advantage in the "China Plus One" strategy, where global manufacturers are diversifying operations to reduce dependence on China. The industrial segment is anticipated to contribute to the group's earnings in the years ahead.

In response to the growing demand for cloud computing and data services, Mah Sing has ventured into the data centre business, marking a strategic diversification into a high-growth sector.

The group's partnership with Bridge Data Centres aims to develop a 300MW power capacity data centre at Mah Sing DC Hub@Southville City, with operations expected to commence in phases by 2026. This collaboration is part of a larger plan to establish Southville City as a regional data centre hub, with a total planned capacity of 500MW power capacity across 150 acres. The data centre segment not only enhances Mah Sing's recurring income streams but also underscores its commitment to sustainability through energy-efficient designs and infrastructure.

In addition to Southville City, Mah Sing is exploring data centre opportunities on a 42-acre site in Meridin East Township, Johor Bahru. The site offers a potential 300MW power capacity and presents a lucrative opportunity to unlock value from the group's landbank through land sales or joint ventures.

As Mah Sing enters 2025, its diversified growth strategy positions the group to navigate challenges while capitalising on opportunities in residential, industrial, data centre, and manufacturing segments. By maintaining a strong focus on disciplined execution, strategic landbanking, and innovative ventures, Mah Sing reaffirms its dedication to delivering sustainable value to its stakeholders.

## Impact of bird's nest export halt to China not known yet: MYMBN

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Bird's nest processor MYMBN Bhd has yet to fully quantify the financial impact of the suspension of bird's nest exports to China.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, the company acknowledged that the suspension has disrupted operations, supply chains, and revenue streams tied to the China market, one of its major export destinations.

To date, MYMBN is unable to fulfil orders worth approximately RM2.5 million due to the suspension.

"Regardless, the company continues to incur monthly overhead costs of approximately RM92,000 despite the suspension," it noted.

The company added that it has taken immediate steps to address the situation, including collaborating with regulatory bodies to resolve the issues behind the suspension and expedite its resolution.

Apart from that, MYMBN is exploring strategies to strengthen its presence in alternative markets to reduce dependency on China.

"The group's operational workflows are also being optimised to manage inventory and production levels efficiently while maintaining product quality," it said.

On Dec 26, MYMBN disclosed in a filing with Bursa Malaysia that it had received a

notice from Malaysia's Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) regarding the temporary suspension of bird's nest product exports to China, effective Dec 25.

The suspension was prompted by outbreaks of Newcastle Disease (ND) in Malaysia, as reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

However, the DVS in a separate statement, confirmed that no cases of ND have been detected on the premises or bird's nest products monitored by the department.

"Due to this export suspension, a total of 22 consignments weighing 1.769 tonnes and valued at RM7.23 million, involving 13 export companies have faced clearance issues at China's entry points," the DVS said.

The suspension was initiated at the request of China's General Administration of Customs (GACC), following reports of ND outbreaks in chickens and ducks in Malaysia between March and June 2024, as reported to WOAH, it said.

To address the issue, the DVS added it has submitted a comprehensive report to the GACC detailing the outbreak status and the measures taken to manage ND in Malaysia, of which the report also assures that bird's nest products exported to China are free from the disease. – Bernama

## CPO futures fall over Indonesia's biofuel scheme

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The crude palm oil (CPO) futures contract on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives closed lower on the last trading day of 2024, due to the upcoming implementation of Indonesia's biofuel programme in January, following the recent rally in CPO prices, a dealer said.

Indonesia's biofuel programme is a nationwide mandate to blend palm oil-based biodiesel with diesel fuel, aimed at reducing fuel imports, increasing domestic demand for palm oil, and cutting emissions.

Palm oil dealer David Ng said

that the slower pace of Indonesia's biofuel programme could hurt demand for CPO, which in turn, would exert pressure on its prices.

"Lower export estimates are also seen weighing on CPO prices.

"We see support at RM4,400 and resistance at RM4,600 per tonne," he told Bernama.

According to reports, Indonesia's plan to expand its biodiesel mandate looks likely to be implemented gradually.

At the close, the January 2025 contract dropped by RM64 to

RM4,861 per tonne, February 2025 lost RM97 to RM4,617 per tonne, and March 2025 fell by RM103 to RM4,448 per tonne.

April 2025 was down RM87 to RM4,305 per tonne, May 2025 slipped by RM65 to RM4,205 per tonne and June 2025 shed RM52 to RM4,140 per tonne.

Trading volume rose to 72,477 lots from 45,092 lots on Monday, while open interest eased to 239,495 contracts from 239,837 contracts on Dec 30, 2024.

The physical CPO price for January South fell RM80 to RM4,950 per tonne.

## Public Mutual declares RM99m payouts for 9 funds

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Public Mutual, a wholly owned subsidiary of Public Bank, has declared distributions amounting to more than RM99 million for nine funds for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024.

In a statement, the unit trust manager announced an annual gross distribution of 5.5 sen per unit for the Public Islamic Enhanced Bond Fund and 5 sen per unit for the PB Aiman Sukuk Fund.

It also declared an annual gross distribution of 4.75 sen per unit for both the Public Islamic Strategic Bond Fund and Public Strategic Bond Fund.

Meanwhile, the gross distribution is 1.25 sen per unit for the PB Mixed Asset Conservative Fund, 0.9 sen per unit for the Public Institutional Bond Fund, 0.8 sen per unit for the Public Savings Fund, and 0.2 sen per unit for the Public Islamic Growth and

Income Fund.

For the Public Islamic Savings Fund, which pays distributions semi-annually, the gross distribution is 0.15 sen per unit.

Public Mutual is Malaysia's largest private unit trust company, with more than 180 funds under its management.

It is also an approved private retirement scheme (PRS) provider, managing nine PRS funds. – Bernama



# Singapore Post names new CFO in executive overhaul

➤ Three staff, including CEO, dismissed for mishandling of whistleblower report on misconduct

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore Post has appointed the CFO of its Australia business as group finance chief, the company said, a week after dismissing its CFO and two senior executives for mishandling a whistleblower report.

Isaac Mah, who joined Singapore Post in 2019, most recently oversaw the sale of the company's Australia business to private equity firm Pacific Equity Partners.

The Temasek-backed company has said it will name a new group CEO in due course.

Singapore Post fired group CFO Vincent Yik last week, along with CEO Vincent Phang and its international business unit chief Li Yu, after they were found to be "negligent" in handling a whistleblower report.

The alleged misconduct reported by the whistleblower related to several employees who worked in the company's international

e-commerce logistics parcels business.

Shares of Singapore Post have dropped 5.4% since the company announced the dismissals last week.

Temasek is the largest shareholder of Singapore Post with a 21.75% stake in the company, followed by Alibaba Investment with a 11.21% stake, LSEG data showed.

Phang and Yik have indicated they will "vigorously contest" the termination of their employment.

They said in a joint statement on Tuesday that after the whistleblowing report was submitted, Singapore Post management did not take part in the investigation as set down in the company's whistleblowing policy.

Phang and Yik were asked for their views on the incident on March 11 and April 3 and responded accordingly based on

the facts provided to them at that time.

But they only became aware of the full facts on April 27 following investigations by the external forensics team, they added.

"A significant majority of the shipments in question were linked to destinations where there were known issues – such as conflict zones.

"It was therefore important to establish the financial impact prior to communicating with the customer as well as determining any wrong doing by junior staff members."

Phang and Yik added that the management was briefed on the external forensic team's "conclusive" findings.

The duo then agreed with and followed the instructions of the board.

"A settlement with the customer was then concluded that did not have a material financial impact," they said, adding that details of their full responses were submitted to the board on Nov 22.

Phang and Yik's statement did not disclose the identity of the customer. – Reuters

## China's net gold imports via HK hit seven-month high

**HONG KONG:** China's net gold imports via Hong Kong in November more than doubled from October, marking the highest level in seven months, Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department data showed.

The world's top gold consumer imported a net 33,074 metric tons in November, up 115% from 15,414 tons in October, its highest level since April 2024.

Total gold imports via Hong Kong were up 60% at 45.22 metric tons from October, posting its highest level in eight months.

China is the world's leading consumer of gold, and its purchasing activities can significantly influence global gold prices.

China's central bank resumed buying gold for its reserves in November after a six-month pause, according to official data.

"The People's Bank has started reporting fresh purchases and it could be that there has been some import for official sector purchases," said StoneX analyst Rhona O'Connell.

"More likely it is continued interest in bars and coins, and some improvement in jewellery demand."

Last week, gold dealers in China also started charging premiums for the first time in more than a month as consumers began stocking up for the upcoming Lunar New Year celebrations.

Gold exports from Switzerland rose in November due to a jump in supplies to India and some revival of deliveries to China and Hong Kong compared with October, Swiss customs data showed.

Spot gold has gained around 27% last year, hitting a record high of US\$2,790.15 on Oct 31 on the back of US Federal Reserve's interest rate easing and escalated tensions around the globe.

However, prices fell 3% in November after a post-election sell-off driven by Donald Trump's win.

The Hong Kong data may not provide a complete picture of Chinese purchases, as gold is also imported via Shanghai and Beijing. – Reuters



Montenegrin police officers escorting Kwon at the exit of a court in Podgorica. – AFP/IC

## Montenegro extradites crypto mogul to US

**PODGORICA:** Montenegro on Tuesday extradited to the United States the South Korean cryptocurrency specialist Do Kwon, who is also wanted by Seoul over his firm's multi-billion-dollar bankruptcy, officials said.

Do Kwon was "handed over to the competent law enforcement authorities of the United States of America and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)", Montenegro's Interior Ministry said in a statement.

He was extradited upon the decision of Montenegro Justice Ministry to face "criminal proceedings in the US for crimes of conspiracy to commit fraud", the statement added.

For months, Seoul and Washington have been seeking the South Korean's extradition for his suspected role in a fraud linked to his company's failure, which wiped out about US\$40 billion (RM179 billion) of investors' money and shook global crypto markets.

Last week, Justice Minister Bojan Bozovic issued a decision approving the extradition after a year and a half of court rulings and subsequent reversals over it.

Kwon's Montenegrin lawyers denounced the decision as contrary to European conventions on extradition, and said they will appeal to the country's constitutional court and to the European Court of Human Rights.

The crypto tycoon was arrested in March 2023 at the airport in Podgorica, the Montenegrin capital, while preparing to board a flight to Dubai, in possession of a fake Costa Rican passport.

Before his arrest in the tiny Balkan nation, he had been on the run for months, fleeing South Korea and later Singapore, before his company went bankrupt in 2022.

Montenegro had already deported Kwon's business partner – identified only by his initials J.C.H. – to South Korea in early February.

Terraform Labs created a cryptocurrency called TerraUSD that was marketed as a "stablecoin", a token that is pegged to stable assets such as the US dollar to prevent drastic fluctuations.

Do Kwon successfully marketed them as the next big thing in crypto, attracting billions in investments and global hype.

Media reports in South Korea described him as a "genius".

But despite billions in investments, TerraUSD and its sister token Luna went into a death spiral in May 2022.

Experts said Kwon had set up a glorified pyramid scheme, in which many investors lost their life savings.

He left South Korea before the crash and spent months on the run.

In January, Terraform Labs officially sought bankruptcy protection in the United States. – AFP

## Indonesia's president says VAT hike only on luxury goods, services

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto said an increase in value-added tax (VAT) rate by one percentage point to 12% from yesterday will apply only to luxury goods and services.

Prabowo said the decision should end speculation over which items and services would be affected by the VAT increase.

The government's decision also reversed an announcement by Finance Ministry officials last month.

Authorities at the time had said the VAT hike would apply across the board except for cooking oil sold under a government programme, sugar for industry and wheat flour, which would still be subject to an 11% VAT rate.

"Today, the government has decided that the increase of VAT rate from 11% to 12% will apply only to luxury goods and services that are the subject of luxury sales tax and are consumed by those with higher income, such as private jets, yachts and luxury homes," the president said.

Prabowo said the government will still move forward with planned support measures intended to soften the blow from the VAT hike, worth 38.6 trillion rupiah (RM10.7 billion), which include electricity discounts and other tax breaks. – Reuters



## Japan selects two groups for third offshore wind power round

**TOKYO:** Japan's Industry and Land Ministries selected two consortiums, one including energy major BP, as operators for two offshore wind blocks in a third major round of public auctions.

The results of this round of auctions, held under a law promoting development of wind power, were closely watched by domestic and international energy companies weighing the advantages of renewable exposure, industry analysts said.

Japan aims to accelerate offshore wind development as part of its decarbonisation strategy, targeting 10 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind farm deals by 2030, and up to 45 GW by 2040.

A consortium of JERA, Green Power Investment, and Tohoku Electric Power won the 615 megawatts (MW) wind farm on the southern side of the Japan Sea off Aomori prefecture, near Tsugaru city and the town of Ajigasawa.

Another consortium, including Marubeni, Kansai Electric Power, BP's unit BP IOTA, Tokyo Gas and local firm Marutaka secured the 450 MW wind farm off the coast of Yamagata prefecture near the Yuza town.

Both bottom-fixed projects are scheduled to begin operations in June 2030, with turbines supplied by Spain's Siemens Gamesa, a government statement said.

In a previous auction round, Spanish utility Iberdrola and Germany's RWE were among the winning consortiums of a separate offshore block.

Earlier this month, BP and JERA agreed to join forces to form one of the world's largest offshore wind operators, highlighting a trend of Japanese firms partnering with western players for expertise and growth, while foreign companies seek entry into Japan's expanding renewable energy market.

Japan's government conducted its third round of offshore wind tenders from mid-January to mid-July, as it strives to meet its 2050 carbon-neutral target.

A draft revised energy plan envisions renewables accounting for up to 50% of its electricity mix by fiscal 2040.

However, surging development costs, supply chain issues and inflation have weighed on the offshore wind sector. – Reuters

# AI learning apps marketed to schools across the world

➤ Governments rush to embrace the technology despite experts' doubts

**PARIS:** Apps infused with AI are being marketed to schools across the world and governments are rushing to embrace the technology, despite experts raising serious doubts.

The sector known as Ed Tech exploded during the Covid pandemic as schools closed to stop the spread of infection and millions of children were forced to learn in front of screens at home.

As demand dried up after schools reopened, Ed Tech startups tried to win back investment by adding AI to their products and marketing.

Tech titans like Microsoft, Meta and OpenAI have also spied an opportunity, promoting their AI products to schools or partnering with startups.

While many education ministries have announced plans to deploy AI apps, there are plenty of dissenting voices. The UN's education body Unesco eviscerated the record of online learning during Covid, saying the rapid rollout of tech solutions was a "tragedy" that had increased inequality and worsened learning outcomes.

Unesco's Manos Antoninis told AFP that AI might have some utility in education but right now it "seems

to be creating more problems than it is solving."

He cited concerns that companies were using data for commercial purposes, deployed biased algorithms and overall were less concerned with educational outcomes than with their bottom line.

"I think the unfortunate thing is that education has been used as a bit of a Trojan horse to access future consumers," he said.

During the pandemic boom in 2021, venture capitalists pumped more than US\$17 billion (RM76 billion) into Ed Tech.

But that has slumped to US\$3 billion this year, about the same as last year, according to analysts PitchBook.

But from North Carolina to South Korea it is a different story, where education officials have been encouraging teachers to use generative AI.

Britain has already rolled out a homework app called Sparx Maths that uses algorithms to tailor children's learning.

It recently announced a further multimillion-dollar outlay on AI programmes to "ease the pressure" on hard-working teachers by helping with lesson plans, marking and assessment.

The European Union supports several learning apps, and several EU countries have experimented with them.

China is a huge booster of AI in the classroom and has a national strategy for digitising education - its centrepiece being a national education platform of tools and online courses.

Yet the on-the-ground reality is often messy.

India boasted one of the liveliest startup scenes in the sector during the pandemic, including a firm called BYJU's which was once the world's most valuable Ed Tech startup.

Yet when schools in New Delhi were forced to close because of smog in November, there were no flashy apps to help.

"It is not feasible for them to take online classes," 29-year-old teacher

Vandana Pandey told AFP, saying many of her pupils had no smartphones or connectivity at home.

BYJU's has faced allegations of financial misconduct and only narrowly avoided bankruptcy in a recent court hearing.

In richer countries, the arrival of AI has received a tepid reception.

Only 6% of US secondary school teachers polled by Pew Research Center in May thought using AI in education would do more good than harm.

France announced it would roll out an AI-powered homework app called MIA in secondary schools last year, but quietly dropped the project as a political crisis rumbled on.

Many British parents are also not keen on Sparx Maths.

"Don't know a single child that likes it," said one user on the popular Mumsnet forum.

Another said the app "ruins any enjoyment of the subject" while a flood of other parents said their children "hated" the app.

Aside from grievances over individual apps, educators doubt whether many of these firms are aiming at the right target.

Almost all Ed Tech products promise to "personalise" education, often deploying AI to monitor a child's work and tailor workplans to suit their needs.

Officials from Britain to Beijing have lauded this goal.

But Antoninis said the rhetoric around personalisation "risks making us forget that a lot of learning is actually social, and children learn from interaction with each other."

Leon Furze, a former teacher who now works as a consultant focusing on generative AI in education, was also wary about personalisation.

"AI is touted as a solution to personalised learning, but it's a very specific kind of 'personal' which I think seems more like isolation."

Both Antoninis and Furze warned that technology was no panacea, rather it was a tool that could help in some limited situations.

The hard work, as ever, would be done by humans.

"Tech solutions aren't going to solve the bigger socio-economic, cultural, and political challenges being faced by teachers and students," said Furze. – AFP



Pupils attending a class at a computer coding training centre in Beijing. – AFP/IC

## Indian banks to stick with certificates of deposit

**MUMBAI:** Indian banks will continue to rely on certificates of deposit for meeting short-term cash needs in the next quarter amid tight liquidity conditions, after fundraising through these instruments rose 50% year-on-year in 2024.

Certificates of deposit (CDs) are debt instruments with maturities of less than one year issued by banks, and are efficient tools for short-term funding.

Fundraising through CDs has

become crucial for banks as deposit mobilisation has slowed, with several lenders lowering their deposit growth forecasts.

Rising competition for so-called bulk deposits has also pushed more lenders towards CDs.

Credit growth has outpaced deposit growth for most of the last three years, which could lead to an asset-liability mismatch, forcing banks to issue more CDs.

Banks issued CDs worth 12.23

trillion rupees (RM639 billion) in 2024 till Dec 27, data from information provider Prime Database showed.

The issuance is about 50% higher than in 2023, and over 80% higher versus 2022.

Average banking system liquidity turned to neutral last year, as the Reserve Bank of India focused on inflation management and kept a tight leash on cash conditions.

Average liquidity was in surplus during the previous two years.

The increase in CD issuances is primarily driven by the ongoing liquidity tightness.

Banks are rolling over CDs to manage redemption pressures and also leveraging them as a quicker funding tool to supplement deposit growth for supporting economic expansion.

"If liquidity deficit persists, it may elevate certificates of deposit

yields further," said Venkatakrishnan Srinivasan, founder and managing partner at debt advisory firm Rockfort Fincap.

The banks' reliance on CDs may continue in the last quarter of the fiscal year, as liquidity is expected to be tighter due to factors such as increased lending, asset-liability mismatches and higher statutory outflows, said Mataprasad Pandey, vice-president at financial advisory firm Arete Capital. – Reuters

## Drugmakers to raise US prices on 250 medicines

**NEW YORK:** Drugmakers plan to raise US prices on at least 250 branded medications including Pfizer Covid-19 treatment Paxlovid, Bristol Myers Squibb's cancer cell therapies and vaccines from France's Sanofi in 2025, according to data analysed by healthcare research firm 3 Axis Advisors.

Nearly all of the drug price increases are below 10% – most well below.

The median price increase of the drugs being hiked is 4.5%, which is in line with the median for all price increases last year.

The increases are to list prices, which do not include rebates to pharmacy benefit managers and other discounts.

Larger drug price increases were once far more common in the US but in recent years drugmakers have scaled them back after price hikes drew sharp criticism in the middle of the last decade.

"Drugmakers don't have much real estate any longer to increase prices over time, which means taking greater liberties on launch prices is really the only option they have in the face of expanded penalties for year-over-year price increases," 3 Axis president Antonio Ciaccia said.

A Reuters analysis of prices for new drugs found that pharmaceutical firms launched new US drugs in 2023 at prices 35% higher than in 2022.

The over 250 drug hikes represent an increase from Dec 29 in 2023 when drugmakers unveiled plans to raise prices on 140 brands of drugs.

Drug firms are also reducing some prices. Merck & Co plans to cut the list price of its diabetes drugs Januvia and Janumet "to align the list price more closely to the net price".

The US pays more for prescription medicines than any other country, and incoming President Donald Trump has vowed to lower drug costs by focusing on middlemen in the healthcare system.

More drug price increases are likely to be announced by other drugmakers over the course of January – historically the biggest month for drugmakers to raise prices.

Pfizer raised prices of the most drugs on the latest list – more than 60 drugs.

As well as a 3% hike on Paxlovid, the company raised prices on medicines including migraine treatment Nurtec and cancer drugs Adectris, Ibrance and Xeljanz between 3% and 5%.

Bristol Myers raised the price of its cancer cell therapies Abecma and Breyanzi by 6% and 9%, respectively.

The personalised blood cancer treatments can already cost close to US\$500,000.

Sanofi raised prices on around a dozen of its vaccines between 2.9% and 9%. – Reuters

## Roche has no plans for job cuts: CEO

**ZURICH:** Swiss pharmaceutical company Roche is not planning job cuts and its business is healthy, CEO Thomas Schinecker was quoted as saying by a Swiss newspaper.

Roche's share price has fallen far below peaks it scaled in April 2022 and the CEO was questioned about the company's staffing plans in the context of recent setbacks in its development of drugs to treat cancer, among other illnesses.

"The number of workers is constant to slightly increasing," Schinecker told the *NZZ am Sonntag* when asked if the company was planning layoffs.

"I can say with certainty that we have a very healthy business. And we don't have a growth problem either," he said, while noting that Roche's budget for research and development was stable and not growing.

Asked when Roche's planned anti-obesity drug would hit the market, Schinecker said it could be around 2029 or sooner.

Addressing the outlook more broadly for next year, particularly in light of the German economy's recent struggles, the Roche CEO said Europe still faced challenges.

"There's some economic growth in the US, but things are more difficult in China." – Reuters

# American farmers fret over Trump's deportation plans

## ➤ Sudden disappearance of workers could cause food shortages, stoke inflation

**FIREBAUGH:** Lifelong farmer Joe Del Bosque knows that America cannot live without immigrants, but he worries that many of his countrymen think it cannot live with them either.

"When they're needed, they welcome them. When they don't need them, they want to kick them out," the 75-year-old told AFP.

"Well, right now the country doesn't know that they do need some of these workers."

Farmers like Del Bosque, who grows cantaloupes and almonds in California, fear they could be at the sharp end of President-elect Donald Trump's promise to deport millions of non-citizens.

Economists agree that a mass expulsion could leave him and others like him without enough workers to harvest food – causing shortages and sending prices skyrocketing.

"He's talked about deportations. We don't know yet what that means," said Del Bosque.

"Does that mean everyone? We certainly hope that doesn't mean he's going to raid our farms, because without our people, our farms will come to a stop."

And it is not just arable farmers who are worried.

Rick Naerebout, executive director of the Idaho Dairy Producers Association, warns the sudden disappearance of skilled labourers could be "devastating" to the dairy industry.

"It would only take a couple days of

disruption and not being able to feed or milk our cows to where you would damage our industry beyond repair," he told AFP.

Around 2.4 million people work in farming in the United States, 44% of whom are undocumented, according to a survey by the Department of Labour.

University of Michigan economist David Ortega said – despite what some politicians say publicly – it is widely acknowledged in official circles that the entire system is heavily dependent on illegal workers.

"These are individuals that perform essential, very labour-intensive tasks like planting and harvesting.

"Many of them fill critical roles that many US-born workers are either unable or unwilling to perform."

Farm work is hard, and often done in a difficult environment – summer temperatures in California can top 40°C, while winters in places like Idaho are routinely below freezing.

This reality stands in stark contrast to claims by nationalist politicians like Trump that these immigrants are "stealing" American jobs.

Naerebout said it is a common – and frustrating – fallacy.

He says one contractor last year advertised to fill thousands of roles.

"They had fewer than 30 domestic applications for 6,000 jobs.

"Only 12 of those individuals resulted in an interview, and only two resulted in a hire, and those two that got hired didn't make it to harvest.

"Americans don't want these jobs."

Such details were absent on the campaign trail, where Trump rallies painted migrants only as a problem for the United States, a source of crime and overcrowding that need to be sent packing.

The rhetoric was popular with voters, especially in rural areas, many of whom cited

immigration as a key reason for supporting Trump.

California dairy farmer Tom Barcellos says he is convinced that – despite Trump's promise to carry out the largest deportation in US history – common sense will prevail when the Republican takes office on Jan 20.

"I've been to (Washington) DC many times. I've been to (California state capital) Sacramento many times.

"Those that have the power know we're not going to go raid agriculture, because that's the food source for Americans, and they don't want to raise the cost any more than it needs to be."

For Naerebout there is a desperate – and long overdue – need to move past the political posturing and work out a way forward.

"We've been frustrated for, you know, 20 years trying to find a pathway forward to reforms at a national level, and both (Democrats and Republicans) are at fault.

"We as an industry wonder if there's lack of political will to solve the problem because the problem presents itself as a great political fundraiser and stump speech."

Del Bosque says he hires around 200 workers during harvest season and finds the process frustrating.

Migrants who try to do things legally get bogged down in a bureaucracy that have no understanding of the needs of the workers or the industries that need to employ them.

"A lot of our fresh fruits and vegetables need to be picked by hand.

"If Americans value that kind of food in their diet, they need to consider that we have to have a reliable workforce to have a reliable food supply." – AFP



Two undocumented workers from Honduras and a supervisor clear dead almond trees at Del Bosque Farms in Firebaugh, California. – AFPIC

## Siemens reviewing majority stake in Healthineers

**MUNICH:** Siemens AG is reviewing its majority stake in medical technology subsidiary Healthineers, the German technology group's chief financial officer Ralf Thomas told the *Handelsblatt* newspaper.

The synergies with the manufacturer of MRI machines and laboratory systems are not great enough to justify a capital commitment of €45 billion (RM210 billion), Thomas told *Handelsblatt*, referring to how much Siemens' 75% equity stake is worth.

"We are evaluating the economic opportunities for Siemens AG in the healthcare sector. We will then derive from this how instrumental Healthineers is as an investment. And then we will draw a conclusion from that," he said, adding that the results will be presented at a capital markets day at the end of 2025.

Siemens AG spun off the Erlangen, Germany-based subsidiary in 2018 and floated it on the stock exchange.

Until now, Siemens had maintained it

would keep the majority stake in Siemens Healthineers.

However, Thomas recently held out the prospect of selling around 5% in the foreseeable future to finance the takeover of US software company Altair.

Thomas said he remained committed to the Mobility train division, which investors have repeatedly called to be spun off.

"The business is in good hands with us. I don't see any need for us to part with it." – Reuters

THE business landscape has transformed rapidly in the last year and a large part of this is driven by the rise of generative AI. The technology has not only dominated strategic conversations and earning reports but also reshaped stakeholder engagement across industries.

AI is poised to surpass even cloud computing and the internet as a transformative technology. It has profound impacts on how businesses navigate issues such as the ongoing skills gap, as well as their sustainability and security journeys.

The launch of the National AI Office positions Malaysia to fully leverage this transformative power.

Here are six key trends we see defining Malaysia's business landscape in 2025, with AI at the helm.

#### AI continues to take centre stage, but not without harsh reality checks

It's been more than a year since artificial intelligence (AI) became the dominant theme of the business world. The pressure to deploy it is relentless, with nearly all companies in Cisco's 2024 AI Readiness Index reporting a heightened urgency to implement AI solutions over the past year.

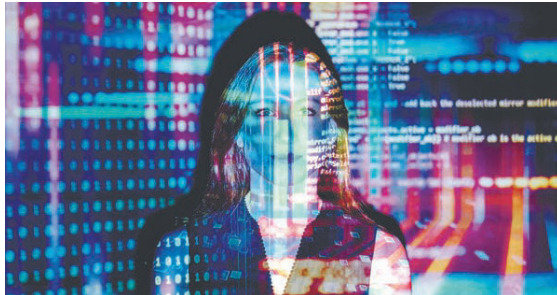
However, only 14% of companies in Malaysia are fully ready to capture AI's potential, as reality sets in on what is needed to succeed. The primary challenge remains infrastructure readiness, with gaps in compute, data centre network performance, and cybersecurity, amongst other areas. Only 29% of companies have the necessary GPUs to meet current and future AI demands and the capabilities to protect data in AI models with end-to-end encryption, security audits, continuous monitoring, and instant threat response.

Many Malaysian businesses are choosing off-the-shelf AI solutions rather than building these from scratch, focusing on the return on investment and business impact. This is where leveraging plug-and-play AI infrastructure like Cisco's AI PODs, which offer infrastructure stacks tailored for specific AI use cases, provides companies a flexible starting point without added complexity.

#### As AI becomes more accessible and ubiquitous, guardrails and data governance will become a key area of focus

As AI systems become more integrated into everyday life, discussions will focus on the responsible use, compliance, data

# Rise of generative AI in reshaping business landscape



AI is set to surpass cloud computing and the internet, revolutionising business challenges like skills gap, sustainability and security. — PEXELS PIX

protection, and anti-discrimination laws and AI quality standards.

Collaboration between public and private sectors is essential to establish standards and regulations that promote innovation and enhance AI safety. As outlined in the National AI Roadmap 2021-2025, Malaysia aims to develop ethical AI practices, focusing on transparency, accountability, and the responsible use of AI technologies. This supports the global effort to address ethical and misinformation challenges while preserving AI's transformative power.

As companies operate across multiple jurisdictions, there will be pressure to align data storage and processing with local data sovereignty laws. The next generation of privacy laws will drive transparency, fairness, and accountability in data collection, cross-border data flows, and compliance.

#### Cybersecurity moves to machine scale and networks will move from connecting to also protecting everything

Networks will no longer just be used to connect but also protect as the threat landscape expands. Social engineering attacks becomes easier with the vast data shared online, and supply chain attacks will pose problems, given the complicated web of technology suppliers that many businesses use in their operations.

Advances like quantum computing will further complicate the landscape, pushing cybersecurity to move at machine scale.

The network will emerge as a crucial pillar in managing workloads and serving as both the first and last line of security defence, especially against lateral movement attacks that infiltrate deeper into systems.

AI will transform security by assisting security teams and simplifying tool management, augmenting human insights, and automating complex workflows. Innovations that infuse security into the fabric of the network like Hypershield, will enhance threat detection and response, allowing lean teams to update and patch systems efficiently.

Securing not just businesses but also their partner ecosystems is the next security frontier. As hyper-distributed defenses and federated data become standard, leveraging networks will enable companies to become self-defending, digitally resilient enterprises. The cybersecurity bill will be crucial in strengthening national resilience against cyber threats by setting stricter regulations and promoting public-private collaboration, providing a framework for businesses to enhance security and protect critical infrastructure.

#### Companies will need help to balance sustainability and growth in an AI-powered era

The race to AI will continue to accelerate, leading to higher power consumption levels, which will impact carbon emissions across all scopes. By 2027, AI usage is expected to consume as much water as New Zealand. In a world where net-zero goals and carbon emission reductions target loom large, companies must balance sustainability with the growth opportunities that AI brings.

To achieve this balance, businesses will seek partners offering energy-efficient products and solutions or help them adopt circular business models aligned with their net-zero timelines. AI will unlock efficiencies, heralding a new era of energy networking with software-defined networking capabilities and direct current (DC) micro grids, enhancing energy efficiency while delivering increased visibility, insights, and automation. Power over Ethernet is another innovation, delivering data centre power to devices over copper ethernet cabling, eliminating the need for separate power supplies and outlets.

Advancements in materials and design also help balance sustainability needs. Cisco's Silicon One chip exemplifies this by performing tasks efficiently with less hardware, reducing power consumption and electronic waste. Takeback and reuse programmes for end-of-use hardware will be crucial.

#### Humans and AI will co-exist in the next generation workforce

The future of work is not about a choice between humans and machines; rather both will coexist to get work done. AI will move from just helping with tasks to becoming a key part of the future workforce, helping to address skills shortages across various roles. Increased mobility of talent, and extremely diverse populations coming into the workplace will help to relieve some of those pressures from the pressing talent shortage in the technology sector.

This will also translate into benefits at work. Employees who can harness AI for their work will outperform others who do not use AI, achieving better quality of work, productivity, and efficiency. Possessing the right skillsets to leverage AI will be crucial to any technical and non-technical role.

Initiatives like the Cisco Networking Academy, which provides digital skills training including cybersecurity, are crucial in bridging the digital skills gap. As technology continues to advance, it is vital to persistently upskill, stay relevant, and leverage the latest innovations.

#### A thriving workplace will rely on the value the office brings to work and the foundation of trust it builds

Returning to the office should be a magnet, not a mandate. The future of work will be tech-driven, with roles evolving like the shift from fax to email, enabling remote connections.

Work will happen in tech-enabled spaces and people will naturally seek the flexibility that technology brings to their personal lives in their work routines. This shift will raise questions about the value that the physical office will add to work. As employees shift their mindset from coming to the office to do heads-down work to using this as an opportunity to connect, innovate and collaborate with their teams, employers need to cultivate an environment that supports this type of work.

Whether it's about the type of work, the location it's performed, or who it's done by, trust is a crucial element at every stage of the process. Employers must trust that they have hired the right people for the right roles, and they will deliver the goals set for them. Likewise, employees must trust that their efforts will be recognised and rewarded by their employers, with opportunities for growth and development.

*This article is contributed by Cisco Malaysia managing director Hana Raja.*

## Universal automation can help Malaysia's manufacturing digitalise

SINCE 2010, the number of Malaysian companies focusing on factory automation has doubled, with the top 10 firms now boasting a combined valuation exceeding RM25.8 billion, according to Malaysian Investment Development Authority.

Automation has proven to be a game-changer, reshaping how industries approach operation scalability, production optimisation, engineering efficiency, and sustainability. It is especially important for Malaysia's manufacturing sector, which is projected to grow by 4.5% next year, according to the recent Economic Outlook 2025 report from the Finance Ministry.

With the rise of Industry 4.0 or Smart Factory technologies, manufacturers around the world are also increasingly adopting Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics to create more interconnected and intelligent systems that optimise resource management and enhance decision-making processes. To support local manufacturer's growth, the Malaysian government has set a target to convert 3,000 factories into smart factories by 2030 under the

New Industrial Master Plan 2030.

However, the manufacturing sector faces unique hurdles in embracing digital transformation. According to industry experts, one of the challenge lies with IT. Many legacy systems may include outdated or unnecessary software licenses that are no longer relevant in today's digital landscape. The drive towards sustainability adds another layer of complexity.

With environmental concerns at the forefront and regulations in place, manufacturers are compelled to weave sustainable practices into the very fabric of their operations. This shift is not merely about compliance; it's about securing a competitive edge and ensuring viability in a market that increasingly values environmentally conscious practices.

Enter universal automation — a transformative approach that revolutionises the integration of digital technologies in manufacturing. This strategy employs a modular, plug-and-produce software ecosystem, reminiscent of an app store for industrial

applications, which significantly simplifies the adoption of the best available solutions. This not only enhances operational flexibility but also reduces overhead costs, positioning universal automation as a key enabler in the digital transformation of manufacturing.

Universal automation simplifies the integration of new technologies into existing systems, offering a seamless approach that allows manufacturers to enhance their operational frameworks without the need for a full-scale overhaul. This streamlined integration preserves existing investments while accelerating the adoption of innovative practices.

By embracing this software-defined approach, the industrial sector can overcome the limitations of traditional, closed automation systems. This shift fosters greater adaptability, allowing companies to innovate and evolve more rapidly in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global environment.

Universal automation also directly addresses the prevalent skills gap in the industry. By

introducing user-friendly interfaces and streamlined processes, these systems reduce the reliance on highly specialised training, allowing existing employees to upskill and adapt to new technologies more effectively.

Driving sustainability through universal automation is one of its standout benefits, particularly its potential to significantly enhance energy efficiency. By optimising the operational dynamics of machines and systems, universal automation ensures that energy consumption is minimised, reducing the environmental footprint associated with manufacturing processes.

Universal automation is not about replacing the human workforce but enhancing it, fostering an environment where technology and human ingenuity coexist to propel the manufacturing sector towards a more efficient, sustainable, and innovative future.

*This article is contributed by Schneider Electric Malaysia industrial & process automation business vice-president Ng Wei Jie.*

# Keep going forward, remain humble

▶ Marriott International market vice-president for Malaysia George Varughese (*pic*) speaks to *SunBiz* on his journey and achievements in the hotel business

**SUCCESS:  
THE INSIGHT STORY**

**How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?**

My life experience has been a journey of continuous learning and adaptation. Growing up in Malaysia, and working across various countries like Austria, Germany, the US, China, Australia, and Thailand has given me a diverse cultural perspective. Each country taught me something unique about hospitality, people management, and business operations. The international exposure and the challenges I faced from many hotel openings have honed my leadership skills, making me adaptable, resilient, and innovative.

**What traits do you look for in your talent or how do you decide who is right for a job?**

At Marriott International, we look for passionate individuals who are dedicated to their craft and those who work best within a team. Traits like adaptability, having a positive attitude, and embodying a spirit of service are greatly valued. We emphasise cultural fit, ensuring that our associates understand Marriott's core values. With initiatives like the Be Bus campaign under Marriott Bonvoy, we seek individuals who are eager to grow, willing to embrace challenges and contribute to the community. Our associates are driven by a shared purpose – a commitment to delivering exceptional guest experiences.

Additionally, Marriott International has been named one of Fortune's 100 "Best Companies to Work For" for 26 years in a row, reflecting our promise to continuously cultivate a people-first culture. Our people brand, "Be", focuses on three distinct pillars: begin, belong, and become. This initiative

aims to empower associates to fulfil their career goals and foster inclusive values. "Be" has been launched globally across Marriott's extensive portfolio, highlighting opportunities in various roles – from hotel operations and food and beverage to sales, marketing, and tech roles. We offer competitive pay, benefits, flexible scheduling, and opportunities for personal and professional growth to ensure our associates are well-supported within their careers.

**How do you think the industry you are in will evolve in the future?**

The hospitality industry is constantly evolving, and at the moment, we foresee a significant shift towards sustainable and personalised experiences. Guests are becoming more environmentally conscious, and there will be a growing demand for eco-friendly practices. At Marriott International, we are proactively addressing these trends through several key initiatives.

For example, Marriott Bonvoy recognises the importance of preserving ocean health. Thus we encourage innovative solutions related to marine life including protecting their habitats, implementing effective waste management and recycling processes, and supporting local economies that do so.

As part of our "Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction" platform, Marriott International also focuses on responsible seafood procurement. Aiming to responsibly source 95% of our top 10 priority categories including seafood by 2025, we include sustainability and traceability practices into our procurement processes, taking in considerations for environmental and social aspects such as bycatch reduction, ecosystem impacts, resource efficiency, and regulatory compliance. Due to environmental concerns, species like

the Bluefin tuna, are banned from our venues, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (life below water).

In addition to sustainability, businesses that leverage technology are positioned to thrive in the future. At Marriott International, technology plays a pivotal role in enhancing guest experiences, from seamless check-ins to personalised services.

**We all know about the industrial revolution, are we in for a technological revolution? What are your thoughts on this?**

Absolutely, we are already in the midst of a technological revolution, and its impact on the hospitality industry has been significant. At Marriott International, we utilise technology to improve operational efficiency and further enhance guest experiences.

For instance, in Malaysia, we have implemented digital solutions to streamline booking processes, personalise guest experiences, and optimise operational tasks. From mobile check-in and keyless entry to personalised recommendations and contactless payment options, we aim to provide guests with convenient experiences tailored to their preferences. Through these innovations, we are able to meet the expectations of tech-savvy travellers and create memorable experiences for them.

A key initiative would be the electrification of our transport system. By the end of 2025, we plan to install more than 400 EV chargers in nine markets. In Malaysia, we signed a MoU with Leading Innovative Technologies & Systems (LiTS) to install and operate public electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in all participating Marriott Bonvoy Hotels and Resorts. We've completed about 40% of the process and are working towards 100% completion by the end of 2024 or early 2025. This initiative not only caters to the growing demand for eco-friendly practices but also supports our commitment to sustainability and reducing our

carbon footprint.

Behind the scenes, we utilise artificial intelligence (AI) in various aspects of our business operations. AI aids in decision-making processes, enhances marketing strategies, and addresses customer and operational pain points. For example, AI-driven personalisation allows us to tailor recommendations and services to individual guest preferences, improving their overall experience and building stronger guest loyalty.

While we embrace these technological advancements, our approach remains centred on enhancing human interaction, as the essence of hospitality lies within personal connections. Technology serves to augment these experiences, making them more efficient and enjoyable.

**How has mentorship made a difference in your professional life?**

Mentorship has been instrumental in my career at Marriott International, where I have had the privilege of being guided by some of the best in the industry. These mentors provided invaluable guidance, support, and insights, helping me navigate challenges and seize opportunities. They instilled in me the importance of leadership, integrity, and continuous learning, which accelerated my growth and inspired me to mentor others. This has fostered a culture of professional development and excellence within our teams. Marriott's "people-first culture" has created an environment that has enabled me to achieve my career and personal goals as a global hotelier.

**What do you want to accomplish in the next five years?**

In the next five years, we aim to elevate the performance and reputation of our properties in Malaysia, focusing on several key areas. Our goal is to offer unforgettable journeys that fuel our guests' pursuits, open doors to wanderlust and discovery, and deepen connections to people, places, and passions.

Marriott Bonvoy is continually expanding its footprint globally, and in Malaysia, we currently operate almost 50 properties across 18 brands. Our plan is to grow to more than 60 operating hotels and resorts in the coming years, spanning from Langkawi to Johor Bahru, and Perhentian Islands to various destinations in East Malaysia. Beyond enhancing our portfolio, this expansion is expected to create employment opportunities for Malaysians, contributing to the local economy and community development.

We are honoured to have a long history of doing business in Malaysia, and we are committed to engaging with the local communities and cultures. With the upcoming Visit Malaysia Year campaign in 2026, we are positioned to be a major contributor to Malaysia's growing economy.

**What is the best piece of advice you have ever received on your career?**

The best piece of advice I have ever received is to lead with empathy and integrity. Understanding and valuing people, whether they are guests or associates, is crucial in hospitality. Leading with empathy builds strong, motivated teams, while integrity ensures trust and respect. This guidance has helped me navigate challenges, build meaningful relationships, and achieve sustainable success. As Mr Marriott reminds us, "success is never final". Keep moving forward and stay humble.

**Who is your most-admired business leader and why?**

I greatly admire Marriott International executive chairman and board chairman Bill Marriott. His visionary leadership, commitment to excellence, and dedication to the principles of hospitality are inspiring. Bill Marriott's ability to adapt to changing times while staying true to the core values of the company has played a crucial role in Marriott's growth and success. His focus on people, community service, and innovation are the qualities I strive to emulate in my own leadership journey.



## Is the sun setting on the coal industry?

**COAL** mining and coal power plants are already a sunset industry sector affecting many nations reliant on coal production and coal power plants. While many alternatives are being peddled, the underlying capital investment to overhaul infrastructures as well as maintaining palatable economic situation for nations with high coal reliance is an uphill task.

In fact, back in 2011, we have objected the government's move to increase coal energy use in our energy mix as the demand for coal has risen at that time due to high natural gas price and increase on new coal power plants' up globally. Such increased reliance will not bode well for price stability and sustainability in the long run. These concerns that we have raised were not looked into seriously and few years after that, it started to give negative impacts to Malaysia in terms of cost and sustainability. The underlying

issues for coal are generation efficiency and its high green house gas (GHG) emissions.

According to news reports, it is also reported that Indonesian coal mining sector under reported its coal mine methane (CMM) emissions in the overall emission data. Methane has about 30 times the global warming potential over 100 years. Peninsular Malaysia's reliance on Indonesian coal for its energy mix has also risen from 50% to around 70%.

A lot of approaches were introduced by the coal sector especially power generation for the past few decades. This includes moving away from conventional power generation and increasing generation efficiency by deploying super critical and ultra super critical coal power plants that pushed generation efficiency above 50% which also means lower fuel cost and

lesser pollution.

These growths in coal sector did not manage to portray a positive image and more ludicrous ideas were also floated. A decade ago, there was proposal from the government to use Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) to reduce coal power plants' GHG emissions. We objected to this approach as there was nothing scientific about it and it was not an actual solution. In simple terms, CCS and CCUS is like storing GHG in used empty bottles and place them in boxes and hid away from people – where it is not solving any GHG emission or climate change problems. Hence, why should we pay high price for something that is not an actual solution?

Lately, with the Net Zero gung-ho, coal sector will face difficulties to get borrowing from financial market and

eventually making it a sunset industry. At the same time, while there are not many options being put on the table for baseload replacement, many nations are still scrambling to manage the sudden shift away from coal to meet their development targets and protecting their economic interests.

Here in Malaysia, we still lack of proper roadmap to meet the baseload replacement and failed to address intermittency risk posed by renewable energy (RE). The RE sector is passing the intermittency risk management cost to tariff for consumers to shoulder.

Finding new technological solutions that are reliable is a vital move as global risks for energy resources, technology adoption as well as final energy utilisation are very fluid. We are lucky not to deploy CCS or CCUS for coal power plants a decade ago as the long term cost impacts of "a not real solution" will haunt us when

we exit the coal power generation mix in coming decade.

Recently, there have been news reports on CCS and CCUS having a comeback mission to Malaysia. Science is very clear. CCS and CCUS are mainly storage and it does not solve the GHG emission or climate change problems. The fundamental question that we all must ponder is, if CCS and CCUS become a certified "not real solution" for climate change in near future like what happened to coal sector, who will bear the cost for wrong investments? Where do we draw the line?

*This article was contributed by Piarapakaran S, president of the Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (Awer), a non-government organisation involved in research and development in the fields of water, energy and environment.*



# the Sun **LYFE**

THURSDAY | JAN 2, 2025

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## Misha Omar live

Trip down memory lane - P22



### WEEKLY FOCUS

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-PIC COURTESY OF DOUBLE M PRODUCTIONS



BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

**M**ISHA Omar marked her return to the stage with Back to Basic Showcase at JioSpace in Petaling Jaya recently. With an audience of 2,000 fans, the Dec 21, 2024 showcase was a celebration of her 20-year career, filled with nostalgia, powerful vocals and heartfelt moments. Organised by Double M Productions, the event felt more like a reunion than a concert, with Misha connecting deeply with her fans in an intimate setting that amplified the emotional resonance of the evening.

This 90-minute performance, directed by industry veterans Jennifer Thompson and Datuk Syafinaz Selamat, served as a reminder of why Misha remains one of Malaysia's golden voices. From start to finish, the showcase radiated warmth, authenticity and a genuine appreciation for her loyal fans.

#### Nostalgic journey through two decades of hits

The showcase began with an electrifying medley of *Cinta Adam dan Hawa* and *Sembunyi*, setting the stage with a burst of energy. Fans were immediately captivated as Misha's voice, powerful and emotive as ever, filled the hall. The arrangement breathed new life into the beloved tracks, reminding the audience why these songs remain iconic to this day.

She transitioned smoothly into slower ballads such as *Dedebu Cinta* and *Pulangkan*, demonstrating the depth of her vocal abilities. The haunting beauty of her voice drew audible gasps from the crowd, many of whom sang along, their voices blending harmoniously with hers. The reimagined arrangements of older songs such as *Halaman Cinta* added a fresh dimension to her classics, showcasing Misha's versatility and creativity.

Her medley of viral songs such as *Masing-Masing*, *Peluang Kedua* and *Semalam* provided a contemporary twist, reflecting her ability to remain relevant in an evolving music scene. These performances resonated particularly well with younger fans, proving Misha's appeal transcends generations.

#### Show for fans, by fans

What set this showcase apart was Misha's connection with her audience. Throughout the night, she bridged the gap between artiste and fan, creating an intimate and inclusive atmosphere. Between songs, Misha shared anecdotes, from her journey in music to reflections on her personal life and career. Her banter, filled with humour and sincerity, made the audience feel like



Misha's voice captivates fans.  
- PICS COURTESY OF DOUBLE M PRODUCTIONS

## Triumphant return to her roots

➤ Misha Omar's vocal brilliance delights fans in nostalgic celebration

they were part of an exclusive conversation.

Misha's interaction with the crowd extended beyond words. At one point, she stepped off the stage and made her way to the audience at the back of the venue, creating unforgettable moments for those who might not have expected such close interaction. Singing directly to fans, she locked eyes with them, held their hands and even shared the microphone for impromptu singalongs. These moments of connection were pure magic, leaving fans visibly moved – their tears and smiles reflecting the overwhelming joy and gratitude of being part of such an intimate and personal experience.

Her duet with Hariz Fayahet, an emerging artiste for *Die with a Smile*, showed her commitment to supporting young talent, further endearing her to the audience. It was proof of her generosity and dedication to nurturing the next generation of artistes.

#### Celebration of vocal mastery

The evening was a masterclass in vocal excellence, with Misha's voice shining brightest during emotive ballads such as *Bunga-Bunga Cinta* and *Sampai Bila*. The clarity, strength and control in her delivery reminded fans why she is often hailed as one of Malaysia's finest vocalists.

Misha's ability to switch between tender moments and powerful crescendos was on full display, leaving the audience in awe. Her vocal director Syafinaz played a key role in ensuring every note was executed flawlessly while the nine-piece band, led by music director Ayop Azril, provided accompaniment. The live instrumentation added depth and richness to every performance, enhancing the overall experience.

#### Personal and interactive affair

Back to Basic Showcase was about rekindling the bond between Misha and her fans. The venue's intimate layout allowed for close interactions, creating a personal experience rarely seen in large-scale performances.

Fans were delighted when Misha performed a medley of pop classics such as *Oops! I Did It Again* and *Bye Bye Bye*, sharing how these songs influenced her during her school days. This playful segment showcased her lighter side, earning laughter and cheers from the crowd.

Her performance of *Ku Impikan*, complete with dance and rap-infused rock arrangement, injected youthful energy into the showcase, demonstrating her willingness to experiment and evolve while staying true to her roots.

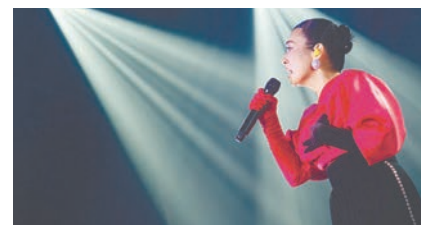
The encore, featuring the timeless



With 2,000 fans in attendance, the showcase is a celebration of her 20-year career.



Her duet with emerging artiste Hariz shows her commitment to supporting young talents.



The clarity, strength and control in her delivery is why she is one of Malaysia's finest vocalists.

*Semoga Abadi*, served as the perfect closing act. Fans sang along passionately, their voices filling the hall in a moving tribute to Misha's legacy.

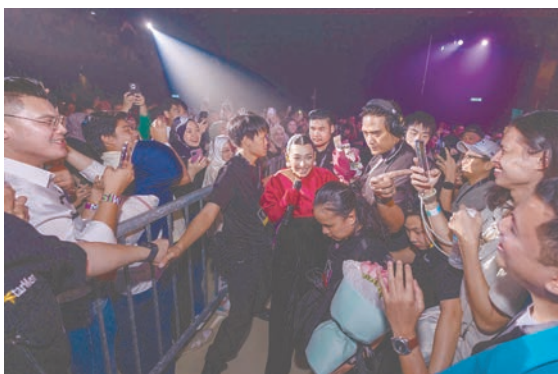
#### Moment to remember

Misha's Back to Basic Showcase was a celebration of two decades of artistry. The event's title encapsulated its essence: a return to the basics of music – connection and authenticity.

For longtime fans, the showcase was a nostalgic journey through the soundtrack of their lives. For newer fans, it was an introduction to the

enduring magic of Misha. The combination of powerful vocals, reimagined classics and heartfelt interactions created an unforgettable experience that left the audience longing for more.

As the night came to an end, it was clear Misha had succeeded in delivering not just a performance but a memory, proof of her enduring place in Malaysia's music history. Back to Basic Showcase was a triumphant reminder that while music trends may come and go, true talent and authenticity remain timeless.



Misha's interaction with the crowd extends beyond words.

# Partnering to support healthy living

► KL Wellness City rewards RM15,000 AirAsia ticket vouchers to purchasers of Nobel Healthcare Park

■ BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

**W**ELLNESS and healthcare-focused hub KL Wellness City (KLWC) recently celebrated its ongoing partnership with AirAsia by presenting complimentary flight ticket vouchers worth RM15,000 to purchasers of units within The Nobel Healthcare Park in Bukit Jalil.

This gesture, following the AirAsia complimentary Air Ticket Campaign, served as a reward to purchasers who have supported KLWC's vision of holistic living.

The collaboration highlights KLWC offering benefits to its purchasers while reinforcing AirAsia's status as the preferred airline for the KLWC community. The initiative further solidifies KLWC's leadership in the wellness and healthcare development sector, setting new standards for wellness living.

KLWC executive director (branding and sales & marketing) Datuk Seri Dr Vincent Tiew said this campaign is its way of rewarding purchasers not only with a promising, wellness-centric investment but also with the opportunity to embark on a dream vacation, creating moments of joy and fulfilment along the way.

Due to the good response to the campaign, KLWC has extended the initiative by an additional three months, allowing buyers to redeem tickets for flights throughout 2025. Purchasers of Medical Suites, Wellness Suites, Retail Suites or Business Suites are entitled to this incentive.

## Mental wellness through travel

The partnership with AirAsia aligns



Tiew says the campaign rewards buyers with the opportunity to embark on a dream vacation.

with KLWC's core belief that mental wellness is an important component of healthy living.

During a press conference, Tiew emphasised the importance of taking breaks and relaxing to maintain a balanced lifestyle.

"Holidays and relaxation play an important role in promoting mental health. At KLWC, we believe in advocating for regular breaks to rejuvenate and reconnect. Our own team-building trip to Kota Kinabalu reminded us of the importance of stepping back to recharge and foster teamwork," he said.

By offering complimentary flight vouchers, KLWC encourages its buyers to take a breather, whether for themselves or their loved ones, as part of their wellness journey.



Buyers with their AirAsia vouchers. – PICS BY KLWC

## KLWC events

KLWC also revealed its upcoming Exclusive Hole-In-One Challenge this Sunday, a golf tournament open to invited guests. The grand prize is a Wellness Suite worth RM366,000, along with other attractive prizes for the top five winners who putt closest to the pin.

Additionally, KLWC is gearing up for its Chinese New Year (CNY) launch event next Thursday, which invites the public to experience CNY and learn about the wellness initiatives underway at KLWC. This celebration will feature traditional delicacies, fun activities and a lucky draw with prizes, including the

iPhone 16. KLWC continues to redefine the future of wellness living, offering developments and a lifestyle encompassing medical care, healthcare, wellness and fitness.

## Buyers share their perspectives

KLWC's new approach and unique concept have impressed many buyers. Mohd Aminuddin, one of the purchasers of a Wellness Suite, shared his motivation for choosing KLWC as his investment.

"I have always been drawn to holistic medicine and a healthy lifestyle. KLWC's concept of integrated wellness aligns with my values. Plus, its location is ideal,

outside the hustle of central KL but still convenient."

Another buyer Teo Bee Bee, who also purchased a Wellness Suite alongside her sister-in-law, praised the development of the project.

"What attracted us was how well-planned the project is. Healthcare is the most important factor for us. Having everything in one place makes it so much easier, especially when dealing with health needs."

With its complete ecosystem encompassing medical care, healthcare and fitness, KLWC is redefining the future of wellness living for its community.

# How to choose tiles for smaller living spaces

■ BY R.BALA

**TILES** remain a popular choice among Malaysian home dwellers given the local weather. These ceramic fixtures allow for cooler indoors, besides creating a visual appeal for your home.

With more people opting for smaller living spaces (due to cost and availability), selecting the correct type of tile is paramount. This is because the correct tile selection can greatly influence the spatial perception of smaller studio units.

Here are a few useful tips to consider when selecting tiles for a condominium or an apartment suite:

## Choosing right colours

Always bear in mind light hues are good at making spaces larger and airier. This is because they reflect light which enhances the sense of space. Pick a shade that will go well with the rest of the room fittings, not just the furniture but also the blinds and curtains. Either that or play safe and just opt for a neutral white. Even then



Contrasting colours can make for visually interesting spaces.

there are a multitude of choices.

## Size matters

Choosing large tiles can make a space look infinitely larger by having fewer grout lines. Big tiles also provide a more unified look across the wall and floor space, expanding the room visually. Aligned with a simple pattern, it can transform a



Tiles can elevate smaller living spaces to look bigger than they are.

– PICS BY PEXELS

room, giving it a different vibe.

## Textural options

This is very much down to individual preference. A glossy finish can reflect light, adding depth and openness to your room while matte tiles offer a subtle, soothing elegance. Will the space have a lot of items or will there be plenty of open floor and wall

spaces? Again, choose with the furnishings in mind.

## Shading it right

Light coloured tiles will make a room feel bigger by creating a fresh and open visual impact. Tiles with a darker shade can be used to create accents in a room and to enhance a cosy vibe. A clever mix of both shades can add a

touch of colour, adding depth without making the space seem small or claustrophobic.

## Shiny or matte

Glossy tiles will have the effect of bouncing light around a room, visually expanding the area. Matte finish tiles will absorb light, giving the room a much softer feel, accentuating comfort and cosiness. When choosing, bear in mind the amount of lighting available to each room, whether natural or artificial.

## Keeping it clean

Some colours will show the dirt very easily. Shiny black tiles will require constant wiping down to ensure it has the desired effect on a space. White tiles will show foot and palm prints and will similarly need constant attention. Go for matte finishes if ease of maintenance is a priority.

Choose wisely and tiles will enhance your home to no end, not to mention being a robust and lasting option. With proper care and maintenance, tiles should last for many years and suited to different styles.



New experiences keep things interesting, presenting new challenges.



Exploring the unknown can unlock hidden talents.

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

# Leap of faith

## ► Power of trying new things

**L**IFE often feels like a well-worn path, with routines that provide comfort and predictability. While familiarity has its place, staying in your comfort zone too long can limit growth and self-discovery. Trying new things, be it an activity, skill or experience, opens the door to endless opportunities for personal enrichment. Stepping into the unknown might feel intimidating but the rewards it brings are well worth the effort.

### Broadening perspectives

Exploring new activities or ideas introduces you to perspectives you may have never considered. Whether it is tasting exotic cuisines, learning a new language or visiting an unfamiliar place, these experiences expand your worldview. They foster an understanding of different cultures, traditions and ways of thinking. Over time, they cultivate empathy and adaptability, enabling you to connect better with people from diverse backgrounds and appreciate the richness of the world. A broadened perspective not only enriches your personal life but also enhances professional interactions, making you more effective in a globalised environment.

### Conquering fear

Fear often prevents us from trying new things but confronting it is where true growth happens. Every small step outside your comfort zone diminishes the power of fear. For instance, trying a new sport or attending a social event alone may seem daunting at first but each experience chips away at insecurities, proving you are capable of more than you realise. Overcoming fear also inspires a sense of accomplishment that boosts self-confidence. Each triumph makes facing future challenges less overwhelming, showing you that fear is merely a stepping stone to achieving your potential.

### Uncovering hidden talents

Many people discover their passions or talents by accident, simply by trying something new. From painting and coding to cooking, countless hobbies and skills lie dormant until you give them a shot. These

discoveries can boost self-confidence, provide an outlet for creativity and even lead to life-changing opportunities. For example, what starts as a casual interest in photography could blossom into a side hustle or even a fulfilling career. The journey of uncovering hidden talents enriches your life by offering new ways to express yourself and achieve personal growth.

### Breaking monotony

New experiences add variety and excitement to life, breaking the monotony of routine. A mundane week can feel revitalised by something as simple as trying a different workout or exploring a new hiking trail. Novelty keeps you engaged and brings joy, making life feel more dynamic and rewarding. The small changes you introduce into your routine might even inspire larger transformations over time, helping you stay motivated and enthusiastic about your day-to-day life.

### Boosting mental well-being

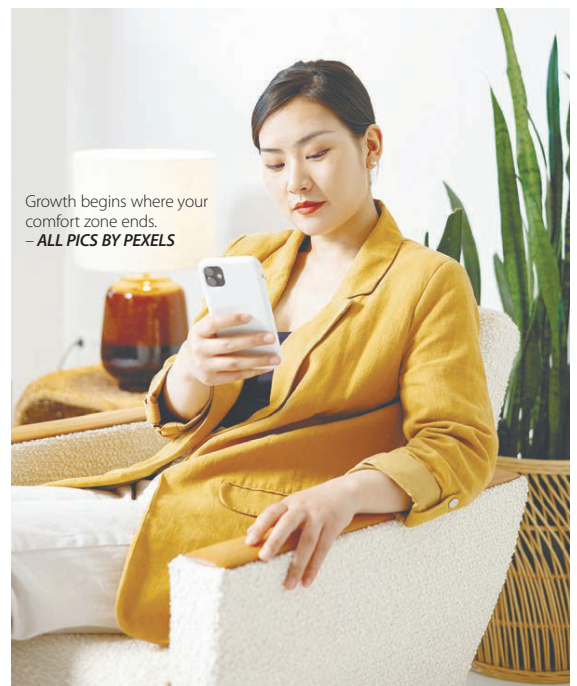
Studies show learning and engaging in new activities releases dopamine, the “feel-good” chemical in the brain. Beyond the initial excitement, these experiences prevent stagnation, which can contribute to feelings of stress or anxiety. Trying something unfamiliar fosters a sense of accomplishment, which in turn builds self-esteem. Activities, such as picking up a musical instrument or learning a craft, create an uplifting cycle of progress and satisfaction. Novelty keeps the mind active, enhancing memory and cognitive function, which is especially beneficial as we age.

### Creating lasting memories

Memorable moments are often tied to novel experiences. It can be your first time travelling solo, attending a live concert or taking up an unexpected hobby, these moments stand out amid the blur of everyday life. They enrich your personal story, becoming milestones you can look back on with pride and joy. The thrill of something new regardless of how big or small, creates emotional resonance, making those experiences all the more significant. Trying new things also ensures your

Growth begins where your comfort zone ends.

— ALL PICS BY PEXELS



life story remains vibrant, filled with diverse chapters that reflect growth.

### Fostering creativity

Novelty ignites creativity by challenging the brain to process unfamiliar stimuli. Trying new things introduces fresh ideas, pushing you to think outside the box. For example, taking an art class might inspire you to approach problem-solving differently at work. These creative sparks are not limited to artistic fields, everyone benefits from innovative thinking, which can lead to better decision-making and adaptability. Activities such as learning a musical instrument, experimenting in the kitchen or engaging in hands-on projects enhance imagination and ingenuity, adding value to personal and professional pursuits alike.

### Strengthening relationships

Trying new things with others fosters connection and strengthens bonds. Either by taking a dance class with a friend or travelling with family, shared experiences create lasting memories and deepen relationships. Engaging in new activities together builds trust, camaraderie and shared understanding. For couples, trying something novel can reignite the

spark in a relationship while for friends, it can uncover mutual interests that bring you closer. These moments of collaboration enrich your social life, adding joy and meaning to your relationships.

### Inspiring others

When you embrace new experiences, you inspire those around you to do the same. Your willingness to take risks and learn from failures can encourage friends, family or colleagues to step outside their own comfort zones. Sharing your experiences, whether through storytelling or social media, can spark curiosity in others and motivate them to pursue their own adventures. As you grow and thrive, your journey becomes a source of inspiration, proving change and exploration are essential for a fulfilling life.

Life's beauty lies in its unpredictability and the opportunities it offers to explore the unknown. Every time you step out of your comfort zone, you open yourself to a world of possibilities. So, take the leap. The next new thing might just change your life for the better.



Trying new things brings fresh joy to life.

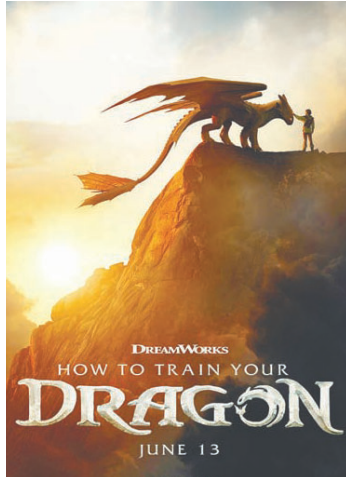


BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

**A**FTER closing the curtains for 2024, the movie world is abuzz with anticipation for 2025's lineup. From daring remakes to imaginative sci-fi, this year promises something for everyone.

Here is a guide to five must-watch movies slated for 2025 and three sensational hits you can catch now in cinemas.

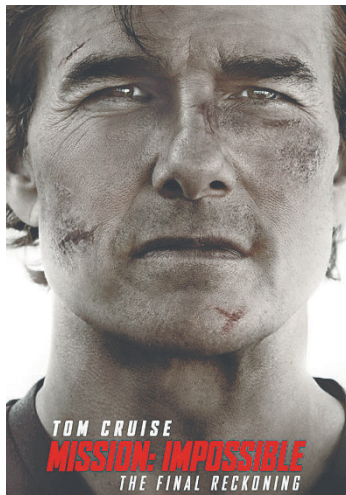
#### Five highly anticipated movies of 2025:



Directed by DeBlois, *How to Train Your Dragon's* retelling of Hiccup and Toothless's bond promises an enriching experience. — ALL PICS FROM IMDB

#### How to Train Your Dragon

The beloved animated tale that taught us dragons are not all fire and fury get a stunning live-action makeover. Directed by Dean DeBlois, this retelling of Hiccup and Toothless's extraordinary bond promises a visually spectacular and emotionally rich experience. Set on the Viking Isle of Berk, the film explores themes of friendship, courage and challenging tradition. With Gerard Butler reprising his role as Stoick the Vast and a talented new cast, this epic adventure is a must for fans old and new.



Director McQuarrie raises the stakes with the new movie.

#### Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning

Tom Cruise returns as Ethan Hunt for one final adrenaline-fueled mission in this eighth instalment of the *Mission: Impossible* series. Following the jaw-dropping stunts of *Dead Reckoning Part One*, director Christopher McQuarrie raises the stakes as Hunt and his team face their most dangerous adversary yet. With a star-studded cast, including Hayley Atwell and Simon Pegg, this action-packed finale is a heart-pounding conclusion fans would not want to miss.

# Celebrating films in 2025

► Live-action remakes, sci-fi adventures, iconic adaptations that are set to dazzle this year



*Wicked: For Good* continues Elphaba and Glinda's journey.

#### Wicked: For Good

The enchanting Land of Oz comes alive in the second part of this two-film adaptation of the Broadway smash hit *Wicked*. Directed by Jon M. Chu, the sequel continues Elphaba and Glinda's journey, exploring the events that lead to their iconic roles as the Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda the Good. Featuring Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande and Michelle Yeoh, this musical fantasy promises dazzling visuals, heartfelt performances and an unforgettable soundtrack.



Based on Ashton's novel, *Mickey 17* leads to a thrilling battle of identity and survival.

#### Mickey 17

Sci-fi fans, prepare for a mind-bending journey! *Mickey 17*, based on Edward Ashton's novel, follows Mickey Barnes, an expendable worker tasked with dangerous missions on an ice-covered planet. When one version of Mickey unexpectedly survives, he faces a new iteration of himself, leading to a thrilling battle of identity and survival. This intriguing tale of cloning and colonisation is one to watch for its blend of existential themes and sci-fi action.



Starring Momoa and Black, *A Minecraft Movie* sees four misfits thrust into the Overworld.

#### A Minecraft Movie

Block-building fun takes centre stage in this live-action adaptation of the globally popular game. Starring Jason Momoa and Jack Black, this quirky adventure sees four misfits thrust into the Overworld, a pixelated land of creativity and danger. With zombies, piglins and a quest to save the realm, this film promises a blend of humour, heart and nostalgia for Minecraft fans and newcomers alike.

#### Three movies you can watch in cinemas now:



*Kraven the Hunter* mixes family betrayal, personal redemption and thrilling hunts.

#### Kraven the Hunter

Sony's gritty addition to its Marvel universe follows Sergei Kravinoff, a vigilante with animalistic powers. Starring Aaron Taylor-Johnson, this action-packed origin story mixes family betrayal, personal redemption and thrilling hunts. As Kraven faces off against enemies such as Aleksei "Rhino" Sytsevich, viewers are treated to a gripping tale of morality and vengeance.



*Mufasa: The Lion King* explores Mufasa's bond with his brother Taka.

#### Mufasa: The Lion King

Disney revisits the Pride Lands in this heartfelt prequel to *The Lion King*. Narrated by Rafiki, the story explores Mufasa's rise from an orphan to king and his bond with his brother Taka (Scar). Featuring commentary from Timon and Pumbaa, this visually stunning film adds depth to the beloved legacy of Simba's family. It is a roaring good time for audiences of all ages.



*Sonic the Hedgehog 3* comes with high-speed chases, witty banter and an unlikely alliance.

#### Sonic the Hedgehog 3

Sonic and his pals, Tails and Knuckles, face their toughest challenge yet in *Shadow the Hedgehog*. With high-speed chases, witty banter and an unlikely alliance with Dr Robotnik, this action-comedy delivers pure entertainment. The addition of Gerald Robotnik and Shadow's mysterious origins adds an exciting layer to this fun-filled adventure.

Whether you are diving into cinemas now or counting the days until 2025's cinematic wonders arrive, there is no shortage of thrilling stories to experience.

From the soaring dragons of Berk to the enchanting magic of Oz, these films promise to make this year unforgettable.

# SuJu Yesung to play solo KL gig

► *It's Complicated* show will be held on April 12

**K**-POP star Yesung is set to perform in Kuala Lumpur on April 12, returning to Malaysia for his first solo concert.

The 2025 Yesung Concert [*It's Complicated*] in Asia tour will see the Super Junior (SuJu) lead vocalist perform at Zepp Kuala Lumpur.

The singer will sing tracks from his latest mini album *It's Complicated*, such as *It's Complicated*, *There She Goes Again*, *Easy*, *Beautiful Paradox* and *Curtain*.

Fans can expect a good time as the concert promises to highlight Yesung's unique vocals and

emotional charm.

The latest mini album, released on Nov 5 last year, topped the iTunes Top Album charts in various countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Taiwan and Macau.

To show his appreciation to his fans, the singer will be holding concerts in some of the countries as part of his tour.

Yesung first debuted as a member of SuJu in 2005, serving as the group's lead vocalist. The group became an influential force in the late 2000s and early 2010s, receiving success for tracks such as *Sorry*, *Mr Simple* and *Bonamana*.

In 2016, Yesung kicked off his solo career, releasing his first EP *Here I Am*. He followed it up with several releases, including two studio albums and six other EPs, making him among the most successful solo acts from the group.



Yesung is the main vocalist of K-pop boy band SuJu.



Hiroiyuki Sanada won Outstanding Lead Actor in a Dramatic Series for *Shogun* at last year's Emmys. — AFP/PPIC

## Demand for Japanese content booms post-*Shogun*

**FUELLED** in part by the success of TV hit *Shogun*, foreign studios are hungry for quality Japanese content and local creators are adapting to meet demand.

Fans of Japanese *manga* and *anime* cartoons have often criticised foreign adaptations that are unfaithful to the original material.

But *Shogun*, based on the 1975 novel by Australian-British writer James Clavell, broke the mould when the period drama series (mostly in Japanese and hailed for its authenticity) won 18 Emmy awards September last year.

Other recent Japanese works have also become worldwide hits.

Franco-US-Japanese show *Drops of God*, based on a *manga* of the same name, won best drama series at the International Emmy Awards in November last year.

Netflix's 2023 adaptation of the *manga* superhit *One Piece*, starring Mexican actor Inaki Godoy as the lead, was hailed by viewers and critics alike and will return for a second season.

More adaptations of major *manga* and *anime* hits are in the works, including *My Hero Academia* and *Naruto*.

"Demand from Western markets is clearly increasing," said Tiffcom managing director Kaori Ikeda.

Tiffcom is the content trade fair affiliated with the Tokyo International Film Festival.

But Japanese companies lack "know-how" when it comes to things such as negotiating rights, she said.

So Tiffcom has organised Tokyo Story Market, a space to facilitate networking and

meetings between international producers and Japanese publishers.

**Avoid problem of whitewashing**

Foreign studios are also getting better at avoiding some of the pitfalls of the past, such as the 2017 film version of the *manga* *Ghost in the Shell* starring Scarlett Johansson.

Critics accused the movie, whose main actors except Takeshi Kitano were all non-Japanese, of whitewashing.

Similarly, the 2017 supernatural thriller *Death Note* was panned for veering too far from the original *manga*.

"*Manga* authors are highly respected and fan communities are very vigilant," said *Drops of God* producer Klaus Zimmermann.

His adaptation takes some liberties, such as starring a French actor as one of the main characters, but Zimmermann insisted it was developed in collaboration with the authors of the original *manga*.

"It was about finding the spirit of the *manga* so as not to distort it," he said.

The *manga*'s publishing house Kodansha rights negotiator Yuki Takamatsu said the process of adapting *Drops of God* was amazing.

"Everyone was open to tackling those challenges together. At every step, everyone was understanding about how we should do it," he said.

Past failures were in part down to publishers struggling to communicate their wishes to foreign producers, who in turn lacked a proper understanding of

*manga* and *anime*, Takamatsu said.

"Just 15, 20 years ago, most of the enquiries we received from those big studios were like, 'hey, I know *Dragon Ball*, do you have *Dragon Ball IP*?'"

"But nowadays especially since Covid, the producers in their 30s, 40s, watch anime with their kids on Netflix or Amazon and then reach out," Takamatsu said.

**Japanese TV goes global**

Japanese broadcasters have also become better and better (at) presenting and marketing their content abroad, said Broadcast Program Export Association of Japan (BEAJ) executive director Makito Sugiyama.

This includes their participation at global events such as Mipcom in Cannes, an annual trade show for the television industry, Sugiyama said.

Japanese broadcasters have long had success selling show concepts abroad, such as *America's Funniest Home Videos*, known in Britain as *You've Been Framed*.

Now, some Japanese dramas are also finding a wider echo abroad.

Nippon TV's original drama *Mother* became a hit thanks in part to its Turkish remake and has been broadcast in around 50 countries.

Western viewers have overcome their initial reluctance to watch series with Asian actors, BEAJ chief executive Masaru Akiyama believes.

"They have got used to it, they do not care anymore. They want to see, they want to feel the stories."

He added that *Shogun* was a game changer for Japan. Ikeda echoed the same sentiment and said a samurai story with such attention to historical detail can become mainstream entertainment is proof of the potential of Japanese content. — AFP







BY JONATHAN VEAL

**E**RLING HAALAND is looking forward to taking his mind off football for a few days after Manchester City ended a five-game winless run with victory at Leicester.

The Norwegian striker was on the scoresheet along with Savinho as City gave boss Pep Guardiola success in his 500th game in charge.

Haaland, who scored after a four-game drought, has this week celebrated the birth of his first child and will make use of a rare six-day break before the next game against West Ham.

"It's always a relief to score. It's been a difficult time," he told the club's official website. "Now it's New Year, so don't think too much about football.

"It's five or six days until the next game, I think it's

# Haaland ends drought

Norwegian relieved to break the duck after four goalless matches

the longest time I think in a pretty long period, so now we can rest a little bit and then we go again on the 4th.

"It's important to look ahead. We have to keep going and stay positive and focus on the right things."

Haaland's header at the King Power came from Savinho's cross and put City 2-0 up after the Brazilian had opened the scoring in the first half with his first goal for the club.

Guardiola praised the winger, who has had an indifferent start to life at the Etihad Stadium.

"He's a guy who can play on both sides, today he finally scored a goal," Guardiola said. "He has

an incredible ability and quality he's proven in that period.

"He arrived in the six months when the team isn't in the best moment than maybe he expected, compared with the past.

"He makes one action fine, second fine, third miss it, four mistake, five mistake, the sixth try again and try again and try again. And until the end he tries.

"He's had a lot of chances but the moment you score one or two, you'll score a lot. I'm really pleased for him for the game, the goal, the assist for Erling."

Leicester remain in the bottom three after a fourth

loss in a row, but they troubled City and missed big chances at key moments in the game.

Ruud van Nistelrooy was taking the positives.

"There are two ways to look at results," the former Manchester United striker said. "You can look purely at results: when you win, you're great, when you lose, you're bad.

"But we want to develop our players in the game model and when things come off on the pitch on a day like this against a great side as a manager and coaches and the squad you feel you are developing something and that is a nice feeling.

"But the best feeling is to collect points." - The Independent

**TOTO SPORTS TOTO RESULTS**  
DRAW NO: 5905/2025 DATE: 01/01/2025 (WED)  
STM LOTTERY SDN. BHD.  
19690100099 (84202)

**TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

1st Prize	0966
2nd Prize	3253
3rd Prize	3972

Special	5127	2226
	2688	4924
	3658	2497
	0852	7068
	8551	0840
Consolation	7931	9733
	3969	8087
	1165	1361
	0245	2828
	5687	0314

**4D JACKPOT**

Jackpot 1 **RM 7,032,516.09**

0966	3253	3253	0966
0966	3972	3972	0966
3253	3972	3972	3253

Jackpot 2 **RM 172,731.24**  
Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

**4D Zodiac**

1st Prize	0966	+ TIGER
2nd Prize	3253	
3rd Prize	3972	
4th Prize	Special Prize	
5th Prize	Consolation Prize	
6th Prize	Any 4D drawn number	

**TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

5D 1ST	2 9 5 8 6
2ND	3 9 0 5 1
3RD	1 4 7 5 9
4TH	9 5 8 6
5TH	5 8 6
6TH	8 6

6D 1ST	5 9 1 2 8 7
2ND	5 9 1 2 8   or   9 1 2 8 7
3RD	5 9 1 2   or   1 2 8 7
4TH	5 9 1   or   2 8 7
5TH	5 9   or   8 7

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**STAR 7/69** 1 7 19 24 32 35 + 48  
Jackpot 1 **RM 2,250,828.22**  
Jackpot 2 **RM 176,942.34**

Toto 4D Jackpot 2 **RM 282,514**  
Toto 4D Jackpot 2 (i-System) **RM 34,738**  
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Wayne Rooney. - REUTERS/PICTIC

## Rooney has five options for next job

**WAYNE ROONEY** was relieved of his duties at Plymouth on New Year's Eve, with the Devon team cut two points adrift at the bottom of the Championship table at the halfway point of the campaign.

*Express Sport* takes a look at the five options Rooney may be keen to explore for his next role.

### Boss in League One

Rooney has harmed his reputation as a manager during ill-fated spells with Birmingham and Plymouth over the last 14 months and may not be given the opportunity to manage in the Championship again until he can prove himself at a lower level. He may therefore have to accept a role in League One, where he will be under slightly less scrutiny.

### Boss in Saudi Pro League

Rooney may decide to get away from England and experience life in another country for a few years. There will surely be a club in the Saudi Pro League who would be willing to offer him a huge pay packet to get him to the Middle East. Liverpool icon Steven Gerrard is currently out there managing El-Ettifaq and could put his former international teammate in contact with the right people to start the ball rolling.

### England coaching role

If Rooney wants to step away from the demands of club football, he could attempt to get a role as an England coach. The former striker bagged 53 goals in 120 appearances for the Three Lions during his playing days and has plenty of knowledge to offer England's current crop of players.

### Pundit for Sky Sports/BBC

Plenty of ex-players have turned their back on management to work as pundits, with the likes of Alan Shearer and Gary Neville opting to swap the touchline for the television studio. Rooney has appeared on *Sky Sport* and the *BBC* to offer his expert thoughts in the past and would be welcomed back with open arms if he wanted to return to either channel.

### Reality TV star

Rooney may want to take a break from football altogether for the time being and could decide to follow his wife Coleen into reality TV. Mrs Rooney finished second on *I'm a Celebrity* last month and her husband revealed he would also consider featuring on the show if he isn't working.

*Express Newspapers*

## TOUCHLINES

**LIVERPOOL** have turned down an approach from Real Madrid to sign England rightback Trent Alexander-Arnold, 26, in January.

**JUVENTUS** and Napoli are interested in signing Manchester United's 23-year-old Netherlands striker, Joshua Zirkzee.

**MANCHESTER UNITED** have no budget to reinforce their squad in January and would have to sell first before buying to comply with profit-

ability and sustainability and Financial Fair Play rules.

**EGYPT** winger Mohamed Salah, 32, and Netherlands defender Virgil van Dijk, 33, are both expected to extend their Liverpool stays by two years.

**LIVERPOOL** are open to selling Uruguay striker Darwin Nunez, 25, and have identified Inter Milan and France forward Marcus Thuram, 27, along with Newcastle's Sweden striker Alexander Isak, 25, as potential replacements.

**WINNING NUMBERS damacai**  
PAYMENT GUARANTEED IN FULL  
Draw/Date: 01/01/25 (Wed) Draw/No: 5852/25 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

**1+3D SUPER1+3D**

1st Prize	3501
2nd Prize	4052
3rd Prize	0346

Starters	3964	5842	6588	1853	5773	4874	4649	5892	1368	4289
Consolation	8724	7024	2361	9329	9170	7959	1755	4664	4523	8019

**3+3D**

Jackpot 1	RM3,058,167.40
3501 + 4052	4052 + 3501
3501 + 0346	0346 + 3501
4052 + 0346	0346 + 4052
Jackpot 2	RM100,000.00

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

**3+3D Bonus**

1st Prize	923 501 + HORSE	1st Prize Bonus	RM50,000.00
2nd Prize	624 052 + ROOSTER	2nd Prize Bonus	RM1,045,904.60
3rd Prize	560 346 + RAT	3rd Prize Bonus	RM1,541,506.00

Starters	533 964	675 842	556 588	801 853	595 773	884 874	804 649	325 892	771 368	084 289
Consolation	278 724	657 024	842 361	329 329	959 170	167 959	501 755	744 664	164 523	668 019

**3D**

1st Prize	501
2nd Prize	052
3rd Prize	346

**3D Jackpot**

Jackpot	RM620,512.40
501 + 052 + 346	052 + 346 + 501
501 + 346 + 052	346 + 501 + 052
052 + 501 + 346	346 + 052 + 501

Winning combination matches the Top 3 Prizes in any order.

**1+3D Jackpot 2 RM100,000 won on 31/12/2024!**

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# BAM to finalise Bin Shen's replacement

**THE** Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) is expected to conclude the search for a new men's doubles head coach in two weeks' time.

Its acting president Datuk V. Subramaniam said they are scrutinising a few candidates, including a local coach, to replace Tan Bin Shen, who will end his service after the Malaysia Open 2025, which will be held from Jan 7-12.

"Our team is looking at it very carefully before we can finalise the new men's doubles head coach. We are trying to do it as early as possible.

"If everything goes well, even during the Malaysia Open next week we will announce," he said when contacted yesterday.

Last month, BAM announced that Bin Shen would step down on Jan 13 to end his four-year service.

The former national player played a key role in raising the standards of several national men's doubles pairs, including helping Aaron-Wooi Yik win Malaysia's first world title in 2022.

The 40-year-old coach will be serving the Hong Kong national team under former world No. 1 men's singles player Wong Choong Hann starting in February, alongside two other Malaysian coaches, Jeremy Gan and Loh Wei Sheng.

Subramaniam was tight-lipped when asked whether veteran Indonesian coach Herry Iman Pierngadi, better known as Herry IP, could be BAM's choice to spearhead the men's doubles department.

"Nothing is finalised yet. It is not on me but it will be a collective decision by our team. We want to hire a coach who not only clicks with the players but also builds strong ties with the BAM management," he added.

A comment by Indonesian men's doubles player Mohammad Ahsan on Herry IP's New Year post on Instagram sparked speculation on Tuesday, that the latter could be heading to Malaysia.

Ahsan wrote, "Remember to invite me if you are going to eat Musang King (durians)," to which Herry IP replied, "Sure, Bro Aman." - Bernama

# Give Friend a chance

Effendi urges fans to give Canadian time to elevate Harimau Malaya's performance

**L**OCAL football fans have been urged to give former Canadian national player Robert Douglas Friend the opportunity to prove his credibility as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Harimau Malaya squad.

Local football observer Effendi Jagan Abdullah said he was somewhat disheartened by the reactions of some fans who seem to question the appropriateness of appointing the individual also known as Rob Friend.

"We must be patient and cannot immediately push the button. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day, so give him time.

"His CV is quite impressive, but people are questioning it on social media, especially by stating that Canadian football is not the best. We need to give him a chance and support him; there's no need to think negatively all the time; otherwise, we'll never succeed," he told *Bernama*.

Effendi acknowledged that despite Rob Friend's extensive experience in Canadian football, he faces the challenge of adapting to the local football scene to elevate the national team's performance.

He said the first hurdle Rob Friend might encounter upon starting his duties at Wisma FAM in Kelana Jaya is adjusting to the mentality and work methods here, which differ from his experiences in Western countries.

He also hopes that the former Borussia Monchengladbach player can play a role in boosting Harimau Malaya's performance over the next three years.

He emphasised that focus should be placed on setting more realistic targets, such as aiming to win the Asean Cup first, followed by competing in the Asian Cup, and eventually achieving the mission of qualifying for the World Cup in the future.

Meanwhile, local sports analyst Mohd Sadek Mustafa wants to see the wisdom of the former Borussia Monchengladbach forward in collaborating with local clubs to release players for the national team.

"His major challenge will be dealing with club teams' reluctance to release their players for matches outside the Fifa calendar, as seen in the last two Asean Cup campaigns," he said.

Mohd Sadek also hopes that the former LA Galaxy player can work together with national head coach Peter Cklamovski from Australia and national U-23 head coach Mohd Nafuzi Zain in revolutionising grassroots development.

Hailing from Rosetown, Saskatchewan, Rob Friend, who will turn 44 this month, brings an impressive portfolio through his involvement in football management and administration since retiring as a player in December 2014.

He began as a managing partner at DRG Investment Group, a real estate investment and management company, from 2014 to the present.

From 2017 to 2021, he served as the founder of Toca Football Canada, a specialised soccer training technology company, and successfully exited after the company's capital increased to US\$150 million (RM670m).

He is also a managing partner at SixFive Sports Fund, an investment body in professional football and infrastructure through club ownership, stadiums and training facility development, from 2019 to the present.

Among his significant involvements is co-founding the Canadian Premier League (CPL) and increasing the league's value to US\$300m (RM1.34 billion) within six years.

Additionally, he has led the top management of two CPL clubs, serving as CEO and co-founder of Pacific FC from 2019 to 2022, and as president and co-founder of Vancouver FC from 2022 to the present. - Bernama



## I'm ready for the World Cup: Li Jane

**FRESH OFF** an electrifying 2024 season, national keglar Sin Li Jane is raring to 'roll' her red-hot form into the 2025 campaign.

Li Jane, who enters the new season with an impressive collection of titles last year including the Asian champion, acknowledged that she is in her prime to blaze the lane in the 2025 World Cup in Kowloon, Hong Kong, from Jan 5-14.

"So far the preparation has been going well and I'm ready for the World Cup," she told *Bernama*.

Apart from aiming to shine in the women's singles event, the 32-year-old also hopes to replicate her last edition's success of a podium finish in the women's team category.

The 2014 and 2018 women's singles runner-up helped Malaysia down the United States 3-2 to strike bronze, the country's first medal in the women's team event, introduced in the last edition in Australia two years ago.

In the meantime, the top Asian bowler described her 2024 campaign as nothing short of remarkable.

Among Li Jane's impressive accolades was the historic achievement as the first Asian bowler to be named the Professional Women's Bowling Association (PWBA) Tour Player of the Year in the United States.

This came after her success in winning four titles in the US Women's Open, Tour Championship, Bowlers Journal Rockford Open and Greater Nashville Classic.

Asked about her secret to success, the right-handed bowler said it was due to her skill and unwavering determination.

"I just work hard and when you are ready everything will fall in place," she said.

Apart from Li Jane, the national women's squad includes reigning world champion Natasha Mohamed Roslan, Siti Safiyah Amirah Abdul Rahman and Gillian Lim.

Former world champion Muhammad Rafiq Ismail will spearhead the national men's squad alongside Timmy Tan, Tun Hakim Tun Hasnul Azam and Ahmad Muaz Mohd Fishol. - Bernama

## BRIEFS

### Haikal-Hon Jian's to miss Malaysia Open debut

**THE** country's upcoming men's doubles player, Muhammad Haikal Nazri and Choong Hon Jian will miss their debut at the 2025 Malaysia Open. Muhammad Haikal sustained a hip injury earlier this month. The development was confirmed by the country's men's doubles head coach, Tan Bin Shen, while informing that the national pair is also expected to miss the Indonesia Masters 2025 from Jan 21-26 and the Thailand Masters 2025 (Jan 28-Feb 2). "He (Haikal) has done a scan and has a muscle tear. So you have to

wait for the decision from the specialist on how to treat this injury, whether it is necessary to rehab or surgery. For me, it is a loss because he will not only miss the Malaysia Open but other tournaments in January," he said when met recently. Meanwhile, based on the draw for the Malaysia Open 2025, the country's two main pairs, Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Mohd Rumsani and Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik will be drawn separately and will only meet each other if they advance to the final.

### Puma becomes Harimau Malaya's official apparel partner

**SPORTSWEAR** brand Puma is the official

apparel and jersey partner of the national football team, Harimau Malaya, effective yesterday. The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) said this strategic partnership marks a significant milestone for Malaysian football, bringing together the association's dedication to the sport and Puma's legacy of innovation and excellence on and off the pitch. "Further details of the partnership between FAM and Puma will be unveiled at a launch event to be announced soon," it said in a statement. Meanwhile, the statement said that FAM and Puma expressed their heartfelt gratitude to Nike, the official apparel and jersey partner of Harimau Malaya for the past 18 years, from Jan 2007 to Dec 2024.

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**4D Classic**

1st Prize	2621
2nd Prize	9334
3rd Prize	6317

SPECIAL	4245	1947	
5481	8285	0919	9894
1345	1993	7005	0803
2245	3263	4775	9302
9332	8580	3010	7632
		2593	5991

---

**4D Jackpot**

Jackpot 1 **RM7,610,229.75**  
PARTIALLY WON

2621 + 9334	2621 + 6317
9334 + 2621	9334 + 6317
6317 + 2621	6317 + 9334

Jackpot 2 **RM155,579.82**  
PARTIALLY WON

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

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2 32

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RM1,000 EVERY DAY for 100 days

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**Jackpot Gold**

Jackpot 1 **RM11,601,397.52**

Jackpot 1 - Group 1 + Golden Number

Jackpot 2 **RM240,950.57** PARTIALLY WON

Jackpot 2 - Group 2 + Golden Number

GROUP 1	2 1 3 4 1 7
GROUP 2	2 1 3 4 1 OR 1 3 4 1 7
GROUP 3	2 1 3 4 OR 3 4 1 7
GROUP 4	2 1 3 OR 4 1 7
GROUP 5	2 1 OR 1 7
	OR 3 4
GOLDEN NUMBER	0 6

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SCAN ME

# Grim reality

*Amorim's critical error has accelerated Man Utd's relegation battle*

BY RICHARD JOLLY

**I**T normally takes two years for a Manchester United manager's reign to descend into crisis. It has only taken two months for Ruben Amorim to reach that point.

A fifth defeat in six League games prompted the head coach who left Sporting CP second in the Champions League to warn that United are at risk of dropping into the Championship.

This might be a relegation battle. "It is one of the worst moments in the history of our club, and we have to accept that," he said.

"I think our club needs a shock." Which they are getting. This may be the worst kind of shock therapy.

Since Amorim arrived, only Leicester and Southampton have taken fewer points. But for the Amad-inspired comeback in the Manchester derby, it would be six straight League losses.

Newcastle only won 2-0 at Old Trafford but it might have been many more. The gulf between teams who finished side by side in the table in the last two seasons is now wider than the gap between Casemiro and Eriksen.

Perhaps it falls upon Amorim to prick United's bubble of delusion. When he was lured from Sporting, they had a 100% record in the Portuguese league for one. Now United have lost five Premier League matches in December alone.

Amorim is not trying to dodge the blame. "I am responsible," he said.

And yet it may not have been an exercise in false modesty.

"It's also my fault in this moment because I think the team is not improving," he added. They are getting worse.

"We don't have a lot of time to train the base of the way we want to play," he said.

But that, in turn, reflects on his attempt to remodel the team. He has introduced a system that leaves United undermanned in the middle of the pitch, which was glaringly apparent when the mobile Casemiro and Christian Eriksen were the central pair against Newcastle.

He automatically plays with three centrebacks, but



Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim. - REUTERS/PIC

United have still conceded 11 goals in their last four games.

He is wedded to 3-4-3. Who, in his squad, prefers it? Mason Mount does, but he is injured. Harry Maguire and Rasmus Hojlund might. But surely no one else.

An obstinate refusal to compromise, to use players in their best positions, has made United still worse. Which, given how bad they were under Ten Hag, is an achievement of sorts.

Like Ange Postecoglou, like Russell Martin, Amorim has persisted with a philosophy, rather than reacting to a reality. Factor in errors in selection and too often Amorim's United have had the wrong players and the wrong tactics.

Some have been underused, Alejandro Garnacho and Marcus Rashford

included. The Mancunian has not played a minute in United's last four games, not been in the squad for three of them. They have lost all four, failing to score in the three League matches.

If there has been a need to rotate, to get to know the players, Amorim erred with his weakened team at Tottenham as United exited the Carabao Cup, when it might have been a route back into Europe.

There probably won't be one via the FA Cup, with United away at Arsenal, or the Premier League. But then, if Amorim's grim warnings are correct, they have greater concerns. They thought they were hiring one of the best managers in Europe. They have now suffered six defeats in a month for the first time since 1930.

Which is an indictment of Amorim. He has the smile and the style. He came with plenty of confidence but seems to have underestimated the Premier League and overestimated his ability to turn these players into his team. The job risks being too big for him.

"We have a lot of problems," he said. Relegation would be one few foresaw. A few weeks into the Amorim era, United have made the designer manager and have made a complete mess. - The Independent

