



Concern over car-free plan for Jalan Bukit Bintang

Closing area to private vehicles may increase traffic volume on surrounding roads, says UTM professor.

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49 varsities closed in 4 years

Private higher education institutions face mounting challenges, including lengthy delays in accreditation of new courses, financial constraints and intense competition for enrolment.

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More than 400,000 students have registered for the SPM 2024 written examination, which commenced yesterday and will continue until Feb 6. - BERNAMAPIC

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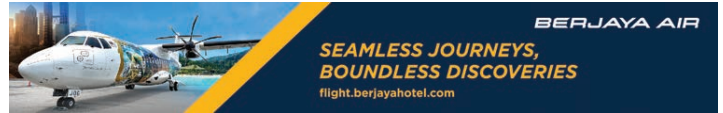
SPM attendance rate recorded at 97%

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek optimistic figure would improve further as ministry yet to confirm status of another 10,000 candidates.

'Rise in deviant Islamic practices alarming'

Academic calls for strong action from authorities, attributes problem to misinterpretation of *Quran* and *Sunnah*.

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Alternative arrangements for exams in flood-prone states

BATU PAHAT: The Education Ministry has identified 133 alternative centres for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination across six states in the event of flooding, said its director-general Azman Adnan yesterday.

He said the move aims to ensure that the exams could proceed in states frequently affected by floods, such as Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Pahang, Johor and Sabah.

He added that the respective state education departments would activate *Ops Payung* to assist candidates and exam personnel impacted by the disaster.

"The ministry will ensure that candidates are placed in schools with hostels as a contingency measure during floods, similar to arrangements made during the oral tests recently.

"If the designated exam centre is affected by floods, we will transfer candidates to the identified alternative centres."

He was speaking at a media conference after observing the first day of the SPM written exams at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tinggi Batu Pahat yesterday.

Azman also said the SPM exams in Johor on Monday would proceed as scheduled despite the replacement holiday in conjunction with the shift to a Saturday-Sunday weekend.

He said written exams for English Paper 1 and 2 and *Tasawwur Islam* would be held, with 49,980 candidates sitting for the exams. — Bernama

DPM: Review of 12MP initiatives vital to serve rural areas

PUTRAJAYA: Initiatives under the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) must undergo a comprehensive review to evaluate achievements, address shortcomings and enhance services for rural communities, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

The rural and regional development minister emphasised that the step is vital as the nation moves towards the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP), which requires bolder and more radical planning.

"Honesty is the best policy. We must be brave enough to accept the truth, acknowledge our weaknesses and rectify any mistake.

"The KPIs we set each year must be based on public satisfaction because we are here to serve them and their future," he said when delivering a New Year message at the Rural and Regional Development Ministry yesterday.

Ahmad Zahid added that the Rural Development Policy Action Plan 2030 and the ministry's Strategic Plan 2025 would also be reviewed to ensure that their implementation aligns with the focus of 13MP.

He said Universiti Kuala Lumpur has been tasked with conducting a comprehensive study on public satisfaction regarding the provision of basic needs, facilities and efforts to stimulate the socio-economic development of rural areas. — Bernama

SPM 2024 attendance rate hits 97%: Fadhlina

PUTRAJAYA: The attendance rate of candidates for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 2024 has reached 97%, said Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek.

She said the Education Ministry is still updating the data, as approximately 10,000 candidates have yet to confirm their attendance for the annual examination.

A total of 402,956 candidates have registered for the SPM 2024 written examination, which commenced yesterday and will continue until Feb 6. It is being held at 3,000 centres nationwide.

"We hope this attendance rate can be further improved," she told a media conference here.

Fadhlina said there are special needs candidates in every state, including two 63-year-old candidates in Negeri Sembilan.

She said deputy minister Wong Kah Woh, Education director-general Azman Adnan, ministry secretary-general Datuk Rujii Ubi

▶ A total of 402,956 candidates registered for written examination being held at 3,000 centres nationwide until Feb 6

and state education department directors are also on the ground to observe the examination operations and the welfare of students, including those taking exams in hospitals and detention centres.

Fadhlina said 5,780 volunteer examination personnel, including retired teachers, have been appointed to assist throughout the examination period.

She said the ministry is also keeping a close eye on preparations and the appointment of volunteers to prevent incidents such as exam paper leaks.

Fadhlina said the appointment of volunteers fulfils the ministry's

target of having at least 20% of such staffing in each state.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar conveyed his best wishes to all candidates.

"Best wishes to all students sitting for the SPM. May you be granted good health, calmness and ease in answering the questions perfectly. I pray for your success," he said in a post on his Facebook page.

Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu said in a post on his Facebook page, "this is the time to showcase the effort, dedication and

determination you have poured into your learning journey. Consider this examination a step towards achieving your dreams and a brighter future.

"Stay healthy, remain calm during the examination and trust your abilities. Remember, success is not solely measured by results but also by the effort you have made."

He also prayed for the candidates' outstanding achievements and that *Allah SWT* would bless their efforts and perseverance.

Clear weather in most states eased candidates' journeys to attend the examination, although certain areas in Kelantan, Johor and Perak are still affected by floods, Bernama reported.

A check found that most students arrived early to attend briefings before entering examination halls to sit for the *Bahasa Melayu Kertas 1*, which began at 8.15am.



Loke inspecting the new Putrajaya RTD office after its opening yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

Discounts on three types of RTD summonses

PUTRAJAYA: The Road Transport Department (RTD) is offering a special flat-rate compound fee of RM150 for three types of offences for a six-month period starting yesterday, said Transport Minister Anthony Loke.

He said the special compound payment covers certain types of RTD summons notices, namely Summons 53A (AwAS Summons) for speeding violations or running red lights captured by the AwAS camera system, Notice 114 (Interview Notice) and Notice 115 (Sticker Summons Notice by RTD).

"Payment for this special offer can be made through various channels, including RTD counters and kiosks, public portals and the MyJPJ app," he said at the launch of the department's new office here yesterday.

Loke said the special compound payments cannot be made via MyEG or Pos Malaysia.

"The regular compound rate for these three notices is usually RM300. We are introducing this special compound rate for six months, starting Jan 3, to allow people to settle their outstanding summonses.

"There are two million outstanding AwAS summonses, and there are restrictions for those who do not settle them. This six-month special rate encourages individuals with unpaid summonses to pay them promptly.

"If they fail to settle these summonses, they will be unable to renew their driving or motor vehicle licences," he said. — Bernama

RTD offices to be upgraded in phases

PUTRAJAYA: All Road Transport Department (RTD) offices nationwide will be upgraded in phases with a new, more customer-friendly concept, said Transport Minister Anthony Loke.

He said the initiative was essential to improve the agency's service quality.

He said the Transport Ministry could not provide the estimate for it yet.

"We will focus on completing the Putrajaya office first, but there are two or three locations that are always congested, and these will be prioritised.

"We are also considering opening another office in Nilai to ease congestion in areas like Bangi, Kajang and others, as we know the Bangi RTD office is one of the busiest as it is located in a shop lot."

He was speaking at the launch

of the new Putrajaya RTD office yesterday.

"Since this is a new initiative, our approach is to demonstrate our capability to convince the Finance Ministry before requesting funding," he said.

Earlier in his speech, Loke said the new RTD office in Putrajaya offers more modern and conducive facilities, with a larger capacity to accommodate customers. — Bernama

Private universities facing multiple challenges

➤ Authorities need to help boost public confidence by speeding up accreditation approvals, assist institutions offer niche programmes: Association

■ BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: Private higher education institutions (PHEI) in Malaysia have boomed over the years, thanks to the quota system and limited seats in public universities, especially for high-demand courses such as medicine, engineering and technology.

However, National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin told *theSun* that PHEI face challenges in quality and credibility, as lengthy accreditation processes delay new courses, and institutions failing to meet standards risk losing public confidence.

Higher Education Ministry statistics show that the number of PHEI fell from 437 in 2020 to 388 in 2023, or 49 institutions shutting down in the last four years.

"Many of these PHEI struggled under the weight of financial constraints as they receive little to no government aid despite their crucial role in reducing the burden on public universities."

Teh said other key factors that drove students to private institutions include the growing middle class, 3+0 programmes introduced after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and partnerships with renowned overseas universities that made private education appealing.

"PHEI evolved from offering diplomas to becoming an integral part of the country's tertiary education system through online learning, micro-credentials (a series of courses that culminate in a digital badge from an accredited university), and technical and vocational education and training programmes to meet Industry 4.0 demands.

"Their growth came with challenges such as intense competition among PHEI, compounded by an oversupply of seats and affordability due to rising operational costs and a declining birth rate, which reduced the pool of prospective local students."

To compensate for the local shortfall,



To compensate for local shortfall, international students were sought to make up 14% of enrolments to sustain the sector. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

international students were sought to make up 14% of PHEI enrolments to sustain the sector, and achieve a target of having 250,000 international students by the end of 2025.

"Most international students come from China, Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Middle East, and only licensed PHEI are able to recruit them. They were drawn to the country due to course affordability, English-medium instruction and cultural ties."

Teh said while the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) ensures that academic programmes meet high standards, the lengthy accreditation process often delays the introduction of new courses, affecting the quality and credibility of PHEI to offer state-of-the-art programmes.

"Balancing compliance with innovation is essential. Institutions that fail to meet standards or student requirements risk (eroding) public confidence.

"So, there is an urgent need for the authorities to speed up approvals and help PHEI innovate by offering niche and industry-required programmes, even through micro-credentials and flexible learning options.

"The increasing demand for online education and emerging fields, like artificial intelligence and renewable energy, presents new avenues for institutions to differentiate themselves," he said.

Teh added that government initiatives, such as promoting public awareness about accreditation and supporting collaborative efforts, could also bolster the PHEI sector. Strengthening industry connections and integrating advanced technologies are also key to staying competitive.

He urged students and parents to verify the accreditation status of programmes through the MQA portal.

"While the majority of programmes are accredited, new or specialised courses may still be pending approval.

"Public awareness about accreditation is particularly important in the context of online and distance learning models. Unregistered entities offering foreign qualifications can create confusion, potentially leaving students with unrecognised credentials," he said.

Teh said the contributions of PHEI to the national economy and skilled labour development cannot be understated, but its future hinges on addressing financial and regulatory challenges, fostering innovation and maintaining high standards of education.

"The sector has the potential to thrive once again by adapting to market demands and leveraging growth opportunities.

"With stronger government support and a focus on quality, PHEI can continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's educational and economic landscape."

Digital upgrade for Malacca trishaws

MALACCA: All Malacca trishaws will undergo digital transformation to give each of the tourist attractions a unique identity while enhancing service and management standards.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh said licensed trishaws would be assigned unique identification numbers and QR codes to ensure the safety of both passengers and riders.

He said the move also enables passengers and tourists to easily submit complaints or suggestions for continuous service improvement.

"I'm confident that this new system would help the state government curb the rise of illegal trishaws, commonly referred to as 'Ali Baba'.

"The initiative will be implemented under Budget 2025 by gazetting by-laws for trishaw riders through the Malacca Historic City Council, making it one of the first local authorities in Malaysia to implement such measures," he said during the 2025 Malacca Trishaw Riders Appreciation Ceremony on Wednesday night.

Ab Rauf added that new regulations, including designated operational zones, would be introduced to streamline the management of licensed trishaws.

"There will be five zones, namely Dataran Sungai Melaka, Stadthuys Building, Melaka Historical Vehicle Park, Medan Samudera and Menara Taming Sari.

"Licensed trishaws will rotate among these zones every three months, allowing authorities to monitor their operations," he said. — Bernama

Additional electric train services for CNY

KUALA LUMPUR: Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) will provide two additional Electric Train Service (ETS) schedules for the KL Sentral-Padang Besar route and return trips in conjunction with the Chinese New Year celebrations.

In a statement yesterday, KTMB said tickets for the additional service will go on sale today at 10am, for travel between Jan 17 and Feb 16.

"The additional trains will operate for 19 days, offering 630 seats daily, including business class facilities, with 11,970 seats available.

"The train will depart from KL Sentral at 5pm, arriving in Padang Besar at 10.20pm.

"Meanwhile, the train from Padang Besar will depart at 11.05am, arriving in KL Sentral at 4.30pm," it said.

KTMB added that the initiative aims to meet high passenger demand and help ease traffic congestion during festive seasons.

The public can purchase tickets via the KTM mobile app or at www.ktmb.com.my for cashless transactions.

For further inquiries, passengers may contact the KTMB call centre at 03-9779 1200 or visit its official social media pages. — Bernama

UMK develops hub for polar science data

KOTA BHARU: Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), through its Institute of Artificial Intelligence and Big Data (AIBIG), has introduced PolarBytes, a pioneering data repository platform aimed at advancing climate change research in the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

UMK AIBIG director Dr Muhammad Akmal Remli said PolarBytes was developed in collaboration with the Sultan Mizan Antarctic Research Foundation. The platform, which is accessible at <https://polarbytes.umk.edu.my/>, consolidates polar research data for public use.

"This platform serves as a dedicated repository, focusing on four core research areas, namely biodiversity, climatology, diseases and molecular biology.

"Our goal is to harness artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data technologies to analyse and access polar data more systematically and

efficiently," he said in a statement yesterday.

Muhammad Akmal said PolarBytes offers free access to meticulously curated polar datasets, accelerating research and learning for international institutions and higher education organisations.

The platform aims to facilitate data science and AI research related to Antarctica, including climate change, molecular biology and the prediction of microbial presence in polar specimens.

"PolarBytes was designed as a one-stop hub for polar science data, ensuring easy access while saving researchers valuable time and effort. Every dataset undergoes rigorous quality and validation checks using advanced machine learning technology.

"The platform also features sophisticated data visualisation tools, enabling users to analyse and interpret information with greater

precision," he said.

In addition, PolarBytes offers Application Programming Interfaces (API) to support software development and research. These API streamline data integration into existing systems, removing the need for complex technical expertise, Muhammad Akmal said.

"PolarBytes is the first polar science data repository to include API, making it a comprehensive and user-friendly platform."

He said the development of PolarBytes reflects the institute's commitment to pushing the boundaries of AI, Big Data and machine learning for the benefit of global education and research.

"By providing free access to high-quality data, PolarBytes not only supports polar science research, but also enables more informed decision-making in the field of polar studies," he said. — Bernama

Bidding for FG series vehicle plates open

PUTRAJAYA: Transport Minister Anthony Loke yesterday announced the launch of the special Putrajaya vehicle registration numbers under the FG series.

He said bidding for the numbers would be conducted via the JPJeBid system until Jan 6.

"This initiative will not only boost the revenue of the Road Transport Department (RTD) but also provide an opportunity for individuals to own special registration numbers," he said.

Earlier, Loke launched the RTD new office here as part of key initiatives to enhance the department's service quality.

"This opening symbolises change, not just in terms of infrastructure but also in our responsibility to ensure that its services become more efficient, responsive and aligned with needs of the people," he added. — Bernama



Aviation sector records sustained growth: Mavcom

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's aviation sector continues to demonstrate sustained recovery and growth, with air passenger traffic reaching eight million in November 2024, marking a robust 15.8% year-on-year (y-o-y) increase compared with November 2023.

In a statement yesterday, Malaysian Aviation Commission (Mavcom) executive chairman Datuk Seri Saripuddin Kasim highlighted that passenger traffic in November reflected the consistent recovery trend observed throughout 2024.

He attributed the y-o-y growth primarily to a

surge in international travel, bolstered by the launch of new routes and expanded seat capacity.

Domestic air passenger traffic rose by 10.9% y-o-y to 3.8 million passengers in November 2024, accounting for 47.5% of total air passenger traffic.

Meanwhile, international air passenger traffic increased by 20.7% y-o-y to 4.2 million passengers.

Saripuddin noted that the growth was evenly distributed between the Asean and non-Asean regions, with each contributing

2.1 million passengers.

Malaysia's major airports also posted strong y-o-y growth in November 2024 across both domestic and international routes.

Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport recorded the highest y-o-y growth at 42.1%, followed by KL International Airport at 18.2%, Penang International Airport at 13.2%, Senai International Airport at 14.9%, Langkawi International Airport at 8.1%, Kuching International Airport at 9.7% and Kota Kinabalu International Airport at 12.8%.

From January to November 2024, cumulative

passenger traffic reached 88.3 million, putting Malaysia on track to meet Mavcom's full-year passenger traffic forecast of 95.4 million to 97.6 million passengers.

Saripuddin expressed confidence that the positive momentum would continue into the coming months.

He reiterated the commission's commitment to fostering a sustainable and resilient aviation industry that drives economic growth, enhances service quality and protects consumer rights. - Bernama

'Alarming' rise in deviant Islamic practices

➤ Academic urges authorities to address misinterpretations and protect true teachings of religion

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: An academic has described the rise of deviant Islamic practices in Malaysia as "alarming" and has called for stronger action from the authorities to address the issue.

International Islamic University Malaysia Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies assistant professor Dr Abu Hafiz Salleh Hudin was commenting on a recent online video showing a group in Danau Kota, Setapak, engaging in *zikir* (a remembrance prayer) at a cemetery.

The video showed the prayer being performed in an unusually loud and unconventional manner, sparking concern among the Muslim community.

Abu Hafiz noted that this was not the first incident of its kind, attributing such occurrences to a lack of adherence to the true teachings of Islam.

"There have been numerous cases like this in the past. True Islamic teachings are derived from the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, which are the two primary sources of guidance for Muslims," he said.

"If we examine it closely, we will find no evidence or practices from the Prophet Muhammad or his companions that align with such deviations during their time," he added.

Abu Hafiz asserted that many Muslims justify deviant practices by misinterpreting the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, describing this as the root of the problem.

Federal Territories deputy mufti Sahibus Samahah Jamali Mohd Adnan said the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department (Jawi) is investigating the *zikir* incident.

He also stressed the importance of proper etiquette on being at cemeteries, urging visitors to avoid actions that might cause confusion, misunderstanding or affronts to Islam.

"Islam teaches its followers to uphold respect, etiquette and rules, including when visiting burial grounds, as a sign of respect for the resting places of Muslim remains," he said.

Abu Hafiz criticised the practices seen in the video as inappropriate, warning that deviant teachings could have significant and harmful effects on Islam.

"Misunderstanding leads people away from true teachings and they begin to accept deviations as the mainstream. This creates

confusion as the actual teachings of Islam may then be perceived as deviant," he said.

He emphasised the need for the authorities to ensure understanding of Islamic teachings is firmly rooted in the *Quran* and *Sunnah*.

"If the authorities are ineffective in addressing such issues, problems will arise, necessitating stronger enforcement. The authorities must review and tackle deviant or borderline-deviant teachings in society. Without such measures, the situation will deteriorate," he said.

Abu Hafiz also urged caution among Muslims, stressing that addressing the root causes of deviant teachings is essential.

"Islamic education plays a crucial role, but it cannot operate in isolation. As an educator, I can teach my students and create awareness, but my influence is limited.

"I lack the jurisdiction to take further action. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the authorities. If they fail to act decisively, we will continue to witness cases like the cemetery incident and the spread of deviant practices across the country."

On Dec 29, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar urged all parties to refrain from speculating on the incident.

He advised the public to allow Islamic religious authorities to handle the matter and confirmed that Jawi has been instructed to conduct a thorough investigation.

RM500 aid for residents affected by floods

ALOR SETAR: The Kedah government has announced RM500 in aid for each head of household affected by the floods in November, including those who were unable to relocate to temporary relief centres.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor said the total number of eligible households is still being verified.

For those who did not evacuate, confirmation will need to be obtained from the Village Community Management Council chairman and the village head.

The RM500 aid will be distributed once the final figures are confirmed, with the process expected to be completed by the end of this month. - Bernama

Conference on global tech, governance

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) will host the International Regulatory Conference (IRC) 2025 on Jan 7 and 8, marking a significant milestone in global discussions on technology and governance.

Themed "Leaping into the Quantum Frontier: Regulation and Innovation in the Tech Era", the two-day event will take place at the Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur.

It aims to explore the evolving digital landscape, focusing on cutting-edge technologies and regulatory frameworks essential for addressing the challenges and opportunities of the modern era. - Bernama

Rapid KL achieves historic milestone with record ridership

KUALA LUMPUR: Rapid KL marked the start of the year with a historic achievement, handling about 1.5 million passengers on Dec 31, 2024, the highest daily ridership in its history.

In a statement, Prasarana Malaysia Berhad (Prasarana) reported that the figure represented a 30% increase compared with Rapid KL's average daily ridership in 2024.

The surge was attributed to high visitor turnout at popular New Year Eve celebration venues, including KLCC, TRX, Lalaport, Bukit Bintang, Pasar Seni and Sunway.

Records indicate that rail services accounted for 1.27 million passengers, with the Kajang Line recording the highest ridership, at 368,018 passengers.

It also said 207,266 passengers used bus services, including the Demand Responsive Transit (DRT).

Prasarana group president and

CEO Mohd Azharuddin Mat Sah credited the success to meticulous planning and coordination with authorities such as police, event organisers and related agencies.

He also commended the efforts of about 3,000 dedicated frontline staff who worked tirelessly until the end of operations on the day.

"The achievement of this new record motivates Rapid KL to continue striving to provide excellent and efficient services to all public transport users," he said.

He added that Rapid KL remains committed to enhancing user experience and introducing new initiatives in 2025, including the procurement of electric buses and DRT vans as well as the opening of the Shah Alam Line.

Mohd Azharuddin also expressed gratitude for the continued support of commuters throughout the past year. - Bernama



Mohd Azharuddin credited the achievement to meticulous planning and coordination with authorities, and the dedication of frontline staff. - AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

Pedestrian-only zone proposal for Bukit Bintang

► Plan raised after traffic monitoring showed gridlocks during peak hours: Police

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
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PETALING JAYA: A hub for locals and tourists, Jalan Bukit Bintang may transform into a pedestrian-only zone as authorities consider closing the area to private vehicles.

On Dec 29, Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Rusdi Mohd Isa said the proposal emerged after close city traffic monitoring showed that gridlocks occurred in the area during peak hours.

He said the causes of traffic congestion in Jalan Bukit Bintang include vehicles stopping or parking indiscriminately and pedestrians crossing at non-designated areas.

"Other contributing factors include taxi and e-hailing drivers stopping to pick up or drop off passengers, and street performers attracting large crowds."

Experts said the move should be implemented after due diligence, planning and coordination.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Research Institute for Sustainable Environment director Prof Dr Muhammad Zaly Shah said the primary concern with closing the road to private vehicles is the potential increase in traffic volume on surrounding roads.

"With traffic management strategies, these challenges could be mitigated. Installing additional CCTV cameras to monitor crowd density and enforcing traffic regulations are vital to maintaining order in Jalan Bukit Bintang.

"Having more and highly visible foot constables to patrol the area would ensure public safety as crowded places tend to introduce petty thieves and pickpockets."

He said installing physical barriers at road entrances to prevent unauthorised vehicles from entering could ensure effective enforcement, especially during high traffic periods when violations are likely to occur.

He also said since the area is well served by various modes of public transport, with stations being within walking distance, closing it to private vehicles could be a practical solution to alleviate traffic congestion.

"The closure of roads to vehicular traffic is safer as pedestrian-vehicle conflict is removed.

"It is important that authorities communicate with business owners there to explain the plan and

reassure them that it would not affect their businesses."

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Geotechnics and Transportation Department Assoc Prof Dr Siti Asmah Hassan said from a road safety perspective, closing a key stretch of Jalan Bukit Bintang to vehicles would lower the risk of pedestrian-related road crashes.

Journal of Public Health Medicine records in 2018 showed that there were over 500 pedestrian fatalities in the country annually.

She said this accounted for about 7% of traffic-related deaths, adding that reducing or removing vehicles from the equation could lower the risk for pedestrians in high foot traffic areas such as Bukit Bintang.

"While closures could improve safety within the pedestrian area, there might be spillover effects in the surrounding roads as increased foot

traffic often extends into neighbouring streets and sidewalks.

"Traffic that typically passes through Jalan Bukit Bintang may shift to parallel roads, increasing collision risks there. Traffic rerouting must be done intelligently."

She said it is essential to plan special access routes for emergency services to maintain swift response times.

She suggested installing additional road crossing facilities, signages, pathways and lighting so that the closure could accommodate people who gather or pass through adjacent areas.

"To ensure the effectiveness of the plan, a public awareness campaign is vital, informing road users of the closure rules. Penalties, fines and specific regulations for delivery and emergency vehicle access must also be communicated."



Muhammad Zaly said since the area is well served by various modes of public transport, closing it to private vehicles could be a practical solution to alleviate traffic congestion. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

Flood situation unchanged in three states

KUALA LUMPUR: The flood situation in Kelantan, Perak and Johor remained unchanged as of 8am yesterday.

In Perak, 307 evacuees from 59 families were still sheltered at a temporary relief centre at Dewan Kampung Asli Chinggun in the Muallim district.

The state Department of Irrigation and Drainage reported that the water level at Sungai Perak in Pasang Api, Bagan Datuk remained above danger levels, recorded at 3.11m.

In Kelantan, the number of flood evacuees remained at 38 individuals from 10 families, housed at Sekolah Kebangsaan Gual Tok Deh in Rantau Panjang.

According to the Public Infobanjir portal, Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang was at a warning level of 8m, compared with 9.39m recorded on Wednesday.

In Johor, the number of evacuees remained at 69 people from 17 families, housed at Sekolah Kebangsaan Gembut and Balai Raya Kampung Perpat in the Kota Tinggi district.

State Disaster Management Committee chairman Tan Sri Dr Azmi Rohani said the water level at the Sungai Simpang Kanan station in Parit Belemam, Batu Pahat remained at the alert level, with a reading of 2.31m. — Bernama

Reports received on deaths of concertgoers

SHAH ALAM: Selangor police have confirmed receiving reports regarding the deaths of four local individuals who attended a concert in Bandar Sunway on Tuesday.

Selangor police chief Datuk Hussein Omar Khan said the reports on the victims, including two women aged between 20 and 40, were lodged by the University Malaya Medical Centre.

He said post-mortem examinations were conducted on Wednesday but the cause of death is pending laboratory investigation.

"No external injuries were found and the cases have been classified as sudden death.

"Investigations are ongoing to determine if there are criminal elements or poisoning involved in the deaths," he said in a statement on Wednesday.

Those with information are urged to contact investigating officer Sgt Mohd Ridzal Puat at 03-5638 2122 or the district control centre at 03-7862 7222. — Bernama

Teens punished with squats for reckless cycling

KUALA LUMPUR: A group of 21 individuals aged between 14 and 17 were caught riding bicycles recklessly during a roadblock in Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah on Tuesday as part of Operation New Year's Eve 2025, and were disciplined with a series of *ketuk ketampi* (squats).

Kuala Lumpur Traffic Investigation and Enforcement Department chief ACP Mohd Zamzuri Mohd Isa said the teenagers were engaging in competitive behaviour and riding

modified bicycles that lacked essential safety features, such as brakes, bells and lights.

He said their actions violated the Road Traffic Rules LN 165/59, which could result in the confiscation of their bicycles under Section 112 of the Road Transport Act 1987.

"A senior department officer and a Road Transport Department officer opted to issue a stern warning and discipline the teenagers by requiring them to perform squats as a form

of deterrence."

The teenagers then shook hands with the officers and apologised. They were warned against further reckless behaviour and instructed to return home immediately.

Mohd Zamzuri said a video of the incident has been widely spread on social media, garnering widespread praise from netizens for the approach taken by the officers.

"This approach serves as a warning to the teenagers involved,

discouraging them from repeating such offences. Efforts such as this help raise awareness and enhance understanding of road safety laws."

He urged young people to avoid reckless behaviour on the roads, while emphasising the importance of safety.

"Parents and guardians must play a proactive role by monitoring their children to ensure they do not engage in activities that violate the law." — Bernama

Six-year-old girl dies after being trapped in legs of folding table

NIBONG TEBAL: A six-year-old girl died after being trapped between the legs of a folding table at her home in Taman Seri Putera here on Wednesday.

The incident occurred at 4.15pm when the victim was playing alone in the backyard. Her mother and siblings

were inside the house.

Upon realising what had happened, the mother sought help from neighbours to take the child to a hospital.

The girl was pronounced dead while receiving treatment at the Parit Buntar Hospital in Perak.

Penang police chief Datuk Hamzah Ahmad said the case is being investigated under Section 31(1) of the Child Act 2001.

In a separate case, police confirmed that a decomposed body found in Banting on Dec 28 has been identified as that of missing teenager Yap Xin

Yuan, Bernama reported.

Selangor police chief Comm Datuk Hussein Omar Khan said the identity was confirmed after a DNA test matched the girl with her mother.

"Three suspects who were detained, including the victim's boyfriend, are under remand until

Sunday. We will likely apply to the court to extend it," he said, adding that the motive for the murder has yet to be ascertained.

It was previously reported that the body found in Banting was believed to be linked to a 15-year-old girl who had gone missing in late December.

Study finds milk not linked to body weight increase

KUALA LUMPUR: Long-term consumption of whole milk and milk fat does not significantly increase body weight or blood lipid burdens, a new study on mice by Chinese researchers showed.

The study, conducted by researchers from a food and nutrition institute under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs at Tsinghua University, and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS), was recently published in the journal *iMeta*.

Milk is a dietary staple for more than six billion people globally, making it one of the most widely consumed foods.

Earlier research suggested diets high in saturated fats could increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. But more recent findings indicate that dairy fats may not contribute to this risk, leaving the long-term effects of milk fat consumption on lipid metabolism still unclear.

To explore this further, researchers conducted a seven-week experiment on mice, dividing them into two groups – one fed on a normal diet and the other given a high-fat diet. Both groups received daily doses of either 15ml of whole milk or 0.5ml of milk fat – an amount equivalent to a human consuming over two litres of milk or 100gm of milk fat daily for five years.

The results showed that neither whole milk nor milk fat significantly affected body weight or blood lipid burdens in the mice, regardless of their diet type.

"This research addresses long-standing concerns about whole milk and milk fat," said Wang Jiaqi, a researcher at CAAS.

"It also offers valuable insights for the food industry and global nutrition policies, and maximises food resource efficiency."

The findings contribute to understanding the long-term effects of whole milk and milk fat on blood lipid health, Wang added. – Bernama-Xinhua

Shaping career in ceramic craftsmanship

➤ Acquired passion in art proves profitable for Perak entrepreneur

KUALA LUMPUR: While many of his peers remained unemployed or joined the gig economy due to limited options that match their qualifications or interests, Muhammad Luqman NulHakim Mohd Sa'ya, 29, has staked his future in ceramic craftsmanship.

He chose to focus on creating ceramic products, following in the footsteps of his father Mohd Sa'ya Mat Jahari, who has been in the industry for over three decades.

"I went into this field because I had few options and no other skill. In the beginning, I wasn't particularly passionate about ceramic art," he said recently.

However, his perspective changed when he learnt ceramic craft at Institut Kraf Negara in Rawang, Selangor.

"We were taught how to produce handmade ceramic products. When I saw the result of the clay in my hands that turned into a vase, I was filled with pride."

Muhammad Luqman said he did not look back after completing his diploma in 2019, and went full on into ceramic craftsmanship.

As the eldest of three siblings, he joined his father's ceramic business, Ayas Seramik, in Perak.

"To improve my skills, I learned from my father and others who have been in this trade for many years."

Without witnessing the process of crafting ceramic items such as vases or other containers, including



Muhammad Luqman and Mohd Sa'ya examining some of the finished products at their work premises in Perak. – BERNAMAPIC

labu sayong (a traditional water pitcher), one might assume that it is not difficult to produce.

In reality, creating these handmade items requires skill and meticulous attention to detail.

He said some products, such as small vases and table lamps, are made using moulds. For larger pieces, he relies entirely on handcrafting techniques.

"The amount of clay used depends on the size of the product. For a medium-sized vase, I need 10kg of clay, 5kg for the base and the rest for extensions. For larger vases, we use two techniques, throwing and pinching.

Throwing involves shaping the clay upwards while pressing it, whereas pinching shapes the clay by squeezing it, Bernama reported.

"First, we knead the clay for the base. The kneaded clay is placed on

a rotating potter's wheel, on which we shape it into the base. We use a centering technique by creating a hole in the centre of the clay with our fingers and then gradually widening it to about 20cm.

"Next, using the throwing technique, we raise the walls of the base," he said, adding that throughout this process, both the clay and hands need to be moistened frequently.

"After completing the base, we knead the clay for the extensions. The clay is shaped into long strips and then coiled onto the base. Using the pinching method, we attach the coiled clay to the base and with the throwing technique, we raise the walls or sides further."

This process is repeated until the vase is fully formed. It is then dried at room temperature for about five to seven hours, depending on the

weather, followed by firing in a kiln for five to eight hours.

Muhammad Luqman added that for a three-foot vase, he uses 70kg of clay and requires four days to complete it, while a two-foot vase takes about two days.

In a month, he can produce about seven large vases, earning between RM7,000 and RM9,000.

"The prices of the products range from RM200 to RM1,500, depending on their size, shape and decoration.

"Response has been very good, and most of the customers who place orders are art studio operators, colleges, universities, entrepreneurs, local residents as well as those from outside Perak."

The young artisan believes the field has immense potential, as demand for ceramic craft is not confined to the domestic market.

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FBI probes 'terrorist links' in New Orleans truck attack

► 15 people killed, says coroner

NEW ORLEANS: A US army veteran with an Islamic State flag and "hellbent" on carnage steered a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year revellers in New Orleans on Wednesday, killing at least 15 people and wounding dozens, officials said.

The FBI identified the attacker as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old US citizen from Texas. He appeared to have been a real estate agent working in Houston and had served as an IT specialist in the military.

Officials said they were searching for accomplices but gave few details.

Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick described Jabbar as a "terrorist", while the FBI said "an ISIS flag was located in the vehicle," using another name for the Islamic State group, and saying it was investigating his links with such organisations.

US President Joe Biden, describing the attack as "despicable", said Jabbar had posted videos online hours before "indicating that he was inspired by ISIS".

Officials said a manhunt was under way, with FBI agent Alethea Duncan warning that authorities "do not believe that Jabbar was solely responsible".

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry said: "We're hunting some bad people down."

An FBI spokesman said 15 people had been killed, citing the New Orleans coroner's office.

Police said the incident began around 3.15am (5.15pm in Malaysia) near Bourbon Street in the heart of the French Quarter, packed with people celebrating the start of 2025.

The suspect drove a white Ford F-150 electric pickup into a group of pedestrians, then exited and was killed in a shootout with police - two of whom were wounded. Two homemade bombs were found and

neutralised, the FBI said.

"This man was trying to run over as many people as he possibly could," Kirkpatrick told reporters.

Driving at "very high speed" and in a "very intentional" manner, "he was hellbent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did," Kirkpatrick said.

The wounded officers were in stable condition and Kirkpatrick said they would recover.

The Pentagon said Jabbar had served in the army as a human resources specialist and an IT specialist from 2007 to 2015, and

then in the army reserve until 2020.

He deployed to Afghanistan from February 2009 until January 2010, an army spokesperson said.

Biden said that law enforcement agencies were also investigating any possible links between the attack and the explosion later on Wednesday of a Tesla Cybertruck outside a hotel owned by US President-elect Donald Trump in Las Vegas that killed one person.

"Thus far, there's nothing to report on that score," he said, as police in Las Vegas said they believed it was an "isolated" incident.

The vehicles in the two incidents were both rented through the popular car-sharing app Turo.

The sheriff in Las Vegas said that was a "coincidence ... that we have to continue to look in to".

A spokesperson for the app, used by millions of people in the United States, said they were working with law enforcement.

"We do not believe that either renter ... had a criminal background that would have identified them as a security threat," the spokesperson said.

In the small hours of the year's first day, revellers were celebrating in the French Quarter, renowned for its bars, restaurants, jazz history and Mardi Gras parties.

Bystander Zion Parsons said the revelry turned into a scene of horror. - AFP



FBI agents examining the site of the truck attack in New Orleans. - REUTERS/PI

Philippines recovers submarine drone

MANILA: A submarine drone suspected to be from China was recovered in waters off the central Philippines, police said yesterday, warning of "potential national security implications".

Three fishermen found the drone on Monday around 9km off the coast of San Pascual in Masbate province, a police report said.

The Philippines and China have for years clashed over maritime rights in the South China Sea as well as possession of reefs and islets.

China claims almost the entire sea, brushing off rival claims from other countries and an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

The yellow drone marked "HY-119" was found floating at sea before being turned over to authorities, said regional police director Andre Dizon.

It was about 2m long and torpedo-shaped with fins.

"Based on our open-source research in the internet ... HY-119 refers to a Chinese underwater navigation and communication system," Dizon said.

"It has an antenna and an eye that can be used for viewing. This can be used for monitoring and reconnaissance." - AFP

Taiwan political cartoonist dies

TAIPEI: Taiwanese political cartoonist Lin Kuei-yu, whose satire was hailed for helping the island transition from one-party dictatorship to democracy, has died, his wife said yesterday. He was 65.

Lin, whose pen name was Yufu, or Fisherman, succumbed to liver cancer on Monday, his wife Chen Wen-shu said.

"He had countless fans who admired, cared for, and loved him deeply," Chen said.

"We are deeply grateful to everyone who has supported him over the years."

Regarded as a "pioneer of political commentary", Lin began publishing cartoons in the early 1980s when Taiwan was still under authoritarian rule, the Central News Agency (CNA) said.

After Chiang Ching-kuo lifted martial law in 1987, Lin created the first cartoon of the then president, depicting him as "Moses who parted the sea", CNA said.

Chiang was the son of former president Chiang Kai-shek, whose nationalist forces fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communist forces.

Lin, who wore several professional hats including writer and television host, once said he wanted his epitaph to be "cartoonist".

"Cartoonist is eternal, something can be passed on to future generations," Lin was quoted by Taiwan Comic Base, an incubator for comic artists, as saying.

"The others are temporary. Cartoonist is the one I want to engrave on my epitaph." - AFP

Cybertruck explodes outside Las Vegas hotel

LAS VEGAS: A Tesla Cybertruck exploded in flames outside the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas on Wednesday, killing the driver and injuring seven others, and the FBI was investigating whether the blast was an act of terrorism.

Videos taken by witnesses inside and outside the hotel showed the vehicle exploding and flames pouring out of it, as it sat outside the hotel.

The incident occurred just hours after a man drove a truck into crowds of New Year's Day revellers in New Orleans, killing 15.

The Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas is part of the Trump Organisation, the company of President-elect Donald Trump.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk was a key backer of Trump in his 2024 presidential campaign and is also an

adviser to the incoming president.

"Obviously a Cybertruck, the Trump hotel - there's lots of questions that we have to answer," Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahon said at an afternoon press conference.

He told a later news conference that the back of the truck contained gasoline and camping fuel canisters, as well as "large firework mortars".

FBI special agent in charge Jeremy Schwartz later told reporters that it was not yet clear whether the blast was an act of terrorism.

"I know everybody's interested in that word, and trying to see if we can say, 'Hey, this is a terrorist attack.' That is our goal, and that's what we're trying to do," Schwartz said.

He said that the FBI had identified the person driving the vehicle, which

had been rented in Colorado, but was not yet ready to publicly identify the driver.

Musk said the blast was unrelated to the Cybertruck itself.

"We have confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself. All vehicle telemetry was positive at the time of the explosion," Musk said in a post on X.

Telemetry involves the automatic collection of data from remote sources, transmitting it back to a central source so it can later be analysed.

He said earlier the "whole Tesla senior team" was investigating the blast, adding: "We've never seen anything like this."

A person was found dead inside

the 2024 model-year Cybertruck and seven people sustained minor injuries from the explosion, McMahon said.

Las Vegas firefighters responded four minutes after the vehicle fire was reported and extinguished it.

Two of the injured were transported to hospitals with minor injuries.

The Trump Hotel was evacuated after the incident and visitors were moved to another hotel.

In New York, revellers were injured in a mass shooting late on New Year's Eve but no deaths were reported, a detective at the New York Police Department said.

An investigation into the incident at a nightclub on Tuesday evening was under way, the detective said.

Users took to social media expressing their shock. - Reuters

Unrepentant Yoon issues defiant message

SEOUL: Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol remained defiantly inside his residence resisting arrest for a third day yesterday after vowing to "fight" authorities seeking to question him over his failed martial law bid.

The embattled leader issued the bungled declaration on Dec 3 that led to his impeachment and has left him facing arrest, imprisonment or, at worst, the death penalty.

Supporters and opponents of Yoon have since camped outside his presidential residence, while members of his security team have blocked attempted police raids.

Yoon has remained unrepentant as the crisis has rolled on, issuing a defiant message to his support base days before an arrest warrant expires on Monday.

"The Republic of Korea is in danger due to internal and external forces threatening its sovereignty, and the activities of anti-state elements. I vow to fight alongside you to the very end to protect this nation," he said in a statement passed around to protesters.

Yoon said he watched the hundreds-strong protest on Wednesday evening on a YouTube live stream.

Lawyer Yoon Kab-keun said the impeached leader remained inside the presidential compound.

"The president is at the (official presidential) residence," the lawyer said.

Opposition lawmakers were quick to condemn Yoon Suk Yeol's defiant message as inflammatory, with Democratic Party spokesperson Jo Seoung-lae calling him "delusional" and accusing him of trying to incite clashes.

The suspended president's legal team has filed for an injunction to block the warrant and described the arrest order on Wednesday as "an unlawful and invalid act".

Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) chief Oh Dong-woon warned that anyone trying to block authorities from arresting Yoon Suk Yeol could themselves face prosecution.

Along with the summons, a Seoul court issued a search warrant for his official residence and other locations, a CIO official said.

The presidential security service's official stance has been to treat the warrants with due process.

It remains unclear how many guards are stationed with him but they have blocked searches of his office and residence.

They have cited two articles in South Korea's Criminal Procedure Act that prohibit seizure from locations where official secrets are stored, without consent of the person in charge. - AFP

S. Korea police raid Jeju Air, airport over crash tragedy

Boeing 737-800 inspections to focus on landing gear

MUAN: South Korean police yesterday raided the offices of Jeju Air and the operator of Muan International Airport as part of the investigation into the fatal crash of a Boeing 737-800 plane that killed 179 people.

The flight was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea on Sunday when it issued a mayday call and belly-landed before slamming into a barrier, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants pulled from the burning wreckage.

Authorities carried out search and seizure operations at the Muan airport where flight 2216 crashed, a regional aviation office in the southwestern city, and Jeju Air's office in the capital Seoul.

South Korean and US investigators, including from Boeing, have been combing the crash site since the disaster to

establish a cause, with both black boxes found and decoding work ongoing.

"In relation to the plane accident ... a search and seizure operation was conducted at three locations," police said in a statement.

Police said the search warrant was issued, and Yonhap reported it was approved on charges of professional negligence resulting in death, citing officials.

South Korea has also announced it will inspect all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by its carriers, focusing on the landing gear, which appears to have malfunctioned during the Sunday crash.

South Korea's acting president, Choi Sang-mok, said yesterday that "immediate action" must be taken if that investigation uncovered any issues with the aircraft model.

Authorities have previously said 101 aircraft of the same model were in operation with six airlines.

"As there's great public concern about the aircraft model involved in the accident, the Transport Ministry and relevant agencies must conduct a thorough inspection of operation maintenance, education, and training," Choi said yesterday.

"If any issues are found during the inspection, please take immediate corrective action."

The accident is the worst-ever aviation disaster on South Korean soil.

South Korean authorities have completed the initial extraction of data for the cockpit voice recorder, but the flight data recorder was damaged and was to be sent to the United States for analysis, officials said Wednesday.

Officials initially pointed to a bird strike as a possible cause of the disaster, and have since said the investigation was also examining a concrete barrier at the end of the runway.

Dramatic video showed the plane colliding with it before bursting into flames.

The Land Ministry said in a statement that the country's airports were also being inspected "to evaluate the installation locations" around their runways.

As the investigation continued, families travelled to the crash site to pay their respects on Wednesday and some returned the following day with cardboard boxes to collect their loved ones' belongings.

A monk yesterday led prayers close to the crash site, while inside the airport, the stairs were covered in colourful post-it notes left by mourners.

Relatives also left flowers and food near the site including *tteokguk* - rice cake soup traditionally enjoyed in South Korea on New Year's Day - as they said their goodbyes, many in tears.

Local media reported on a handwritten note, seemingly written by the pilot's brother, that was placed alongside *gimbap* - a popular Korean dish - and a drink cup near the crash site.

"I feel heartbroken when I think about the struggles you faced alone (in your last moments)," it read.

"You were truly amazing and did so well, so I hope you can now find happiness in a warm place. Thank you, and I'm sorry."

On Wednesday, hundreds of people queued up to pay their respects at an airport memorial altar set up to honour the victims.

So many people came to the memorial that the queue stretched for hundreds of metres and the local cell phone network was overloaded, local media reported. - AFP



BOUNTIFUL WELCOME ... Aymara indigenous people in Pomata, southern Peru celebrate *Roscasiri* (Bread Festival), during the change of local authorities, by decorating new office holders with bread and fruit. - AFP/PPIC

'Hackers breached US Treasury sanctions office'

WASHINGTON: Hackers breached the US Treasury office that administers economic sanctions, the *Washington Post* reported on Wednesday, identifying targets of a cyberattack Treasury disclosed earlier this week.

Citing unnamed US officials, the *Washington Post* said hackers linked to the Chinese government compromised the Office of Foreign

Assets Control and the Office of Financial Research and also targeted the office of US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

The department earlier this week disclosed in a letter to lawmakers that hackers stole unclassified documents in a "major incident". It did not specify which users or departments were affected.

Asked about the paper's report,

Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said the "irrational" US claim was "without any factual basis" and represented "smear attacks" against Beijing.

He said China "combats all forms of cyberattacks" and did not directly address the *Washington Post*'s reporting on specific targets.

The Treasury Department did not immediately respond to requests for

comment on the newspaper report.

The *Washington Post* quoted its sources as saying that a top area of interest for the Chinese government would be Chinese entities that the US government may be considering designating for financial sanctions.

The Treasury letter earlier this week said hackers compromised third-party cybersecurity service provider BeyondTrust. - Reuters

FIJI PROBES AIR CREW RAPE CASE

SUVA: Police are investigating allegations of theft and sexual assault on two Virgin Australia crew members on New Year Day. The alleged attacks took place in the nightclub area of the city of Nadi, home to the international airport, Deputy Prime Minister Viliame Gavoka said. "A suspect has been questioned," he said. The crew members are set to return home this week. Virgin Australia has sent representatives to Fiji to provide support for the affected staff. Gavoka said such attacks can happen anywhere and Fiji was not "immune". "We, as always, remind tourists to exercise caution in nightclub areas and late at night." - AFP

FALLEN OBJECT PART OF LAUNCH VEHICLE

WASHINGTON: The Kenya Space Agency identified a large metal object that fell from space earlier this week as a separation ring from a rocket launch. It assured the public that the object posed no threat to safety. The object, weighing over 450kg, landed in Mukuku Village, Makueni County, in southern Kenya on Monday. Separation rings from rocket launches are designed to either burn up upon re-entering the Earth's atmosphere or land in the ocean or unoccupied area. The agency said this was an "isolated case" and would be dealt with under International Space Law. - Bernama

Police chief, deputy among 11 killed in airstrike

➤ Israel threatens to intensify attacks

GAZA STRIP: Gaza's civil defence agency said yesterday that an Israeli airstrike killed at least 11 people, including the chief of the territory's police force.

"Eleven people were killed, including three children and two women, and 15 were injured after the occupation aircraft bombed a tent housing displaced people in the Al-Mawasi area, west of Khan Younis city in the southern Gaza Strip," Gaza's civil defence agency said.

Among those killed early yesterday were police chief Mahmud Salah and his deputy Hussam Shahwan, said agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal.

The Hamas-run Interior Ministry condemned the killing of the two police officers, saying "they were performing their humanitarian and national duty in serving our people."

"By committing the assassination, the occupation continues to spread chaos in the (Gaza) Strip and deepen the human suffering of citizens," the ministry said, adding that "the police force is a civil protection force that works to provide services to citizens."

Nearly 15 months of war have devastated Gaza's infrastructure and institutions, leading aid agencies to warn of the breakdown of social order.

The ministry said Mahmud spent 30 years in the police force and was appointed its chief six years ago.

The Israeli military said it had conducted an intelligence-based strike in Al-Mawasi, just

west of the city of Khan Younis, and eliminated Hussam, calling him the head of Hamas security forces in southern Gaza. It made no mention of Mahmud's death.

Saleem Abu Subha, a Gaza ambulance driver, described the scene of the strike, saying: "We immediately went to the place and found the injured lying on the ground, most of them children, as well as two women."

"About 10 tents were damaged, and scattered fires were visible."

On Wednesday, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened that Israel would intensify its strikes on Gaza if Hamas continued to fire rockets into Israel.

Renewed rocket fire from Gaza in recent days has caused little damage and the rockets have been fired in far fewer numbers than in the early stages of the war, but they are a political blow for Israel. – AFP

Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli strike inside the Gaza Strip on Wednesday. – REUTERS/SPIC



Palestinian Authority suspends Al Jazeera broadcasts

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority has ordered the suspension of broadcasts by Qatar-based Al Jazeera across the Palestinian territories, accusing the network of incitement.

Al Jazeera is already banned from broadcasting from Israel amid a long-running feud with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

In September, armed and masked Israeli forces also raided the Al Jazeera office in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, saying it was "used to incite terror". The military issued an initial 45-day closure order, prompting the Palestinian Foreign Ministry to condemn "a flagrant violation" of press freedom.

On Wednesday, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa said "Al Jazeera's insistence on broadcasting inciting content and reports characterised by misinformation, incitement,

sedition and interference in Palestinian internal affairs" led to its suspension.

An Al Jazeera employee confirmed that the network's office in Ramallah had received a suspension order on Wednesday.

"The specialised ministerial committee, comprising the ministries of culture, interior and communications, has decided to suspend broadcasts and freeze all activities of the Al Jazeera satellite channel and its office in Palestine," Wafa reported.

"The decision also includes temporarily freezing the work of all journalists, employees, crew and affiliated channels until their legal status is rectified due to Al Jazeera's violations of the laws and regulations in force in Palestine," it said.

The network condemned the decision in a statement, saying it "aligns with Israeli

occupation practices targeting its media teams".

It accused the Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control in the West Bank, of "attempting to deter Al Jazeera from covering escalating events in the occupied Palestinian territories" including in Jenin and its refugee camp.

Palestine Authority security forces have been engaged in weeks of deadly clashes with gunmen in Jenin, in the northern West Bank.

Later on Wednesday, the channel aired images of what appeared to be Palestinian security officers entering the network's office in Ramallah and serving the suspension orders.

Hamas, the rivals of Fatah, which dominates the Palestine Authority, condemned the ban on the network. – AFP

Saudi Arabia executes six Iranian traffickers

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia said it has executed six Iranian nationals for drug smuggling, prompting Tehran to summon the Saudi ambassador.

The Saudi Interior Ministry said the six Iranian nationals were arrested and charged with smuggling hashish into the kingdom, according to SPA news agency, and were given the death sentence.

The statement did not mention when the executions were carried out.

In response, Tehran summoned Saudi Arabia's envoy in Tehran to "strongly protest" the executions, Iranian media reported.

"A note of strong protest from Iran, highlighting the incompatibility of this action with the overall judicial cooperation between the two countries, was conveyed to him. The necessity of providing an adequate explanation on this matter was emphasised," Iranian media reports said.

Under a deal brokered by China in 2023, Tehran and Riyadh re-established relations after years of hostility that had threatened stability and security in the Gulf and helped fuel conflicts in the Middle East, from Yemen to Syria.

Saudi Arabia carried out at least 338 executions last year, sharply up on the 170 recorded in 2023 and the highest number in decades.

Human rights group Amnesty International, which has been documenting executions in the kingdom since the 1990s, has said the previous highs were 196 in 2022 and 192 in 1995.

Convicted drug traffickers made up at least 117 of those put to death last year.

There has been a flurry of executions of convicted drug traffickers since the kingdom ended a moratorium on the use of the death penalty for drug offences two years ago.

In 2023, the authorities launched a highly publicised anti-drugs campaign involving a series of raids and arrests.

Saudi Arabia has become a major market for the addictive psychostimulant captagon, which was produced in huge quantities in Syria during the civil war.

In September, more than 30 Arab and international human rights groups denounced the "sharp increase" in executions of people convicted on drug charges. – Reuters/AFP

BRIEFS

MONTENEGRO MOURNS AFTER GUNMAN KILLS 12

CETINJE: Montenegro began three days of national mourning yesterday after a gunman went on a rampage after opening fire at a village restaurant, killing 12 people, including two children. "Twelve people were killed, of whom two were children," prosecutor Andrijana Nastic told reporters in the southern town of Cetinje, raising the previous toll of at least 10 from Wednesday's attack. The 45-year-old gunman died after shooting himself in the head when he was surrounded after an hours-long manhunt, police said. The killing spree started in Bajice, a village near Cetinje. The victims were killed at five different locations, with the first four in the restaurant, the prosecutor said. Police said the two dead children were aged 10 and 13. – AFP

ONE KILLED IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE BOMB ATTACK

KYIV: A Russian bomb attack on Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region has killed one person. Russia fired 11 guided aerial bombs on the village of Stepnogorsk, just a few kilometres from the frontline, on Wednesday. "A five-storey building was destroyed. A man was killed. Rescuers removed his body from under the rubble," Zaporizhzhia governor Ivan Fedorov said on Telegram. The strike comes amid an escalation in aerial attacks, including Russian drone strikes on the centre of Kyiv that killed two people in the early hours of New Year Day. Ukraine fears a possible renewed Russian offensive towards the regional capital of Zaporizhzhia, 35km from the frontline. – AFP



Is the world playing tricks on you?

HAVE you ever experienced that eerie feeling of *deja vu*, not with a situation but with a uses that word?

You learn a new word, for instance, "petrichor" (the earthy scent after rain), and suddenly, it seems like every article you read and every podcast you listen to uses that word.

Or perhaps you stumble upon an obscure band from the 70s, and their music starts popping up everywhere, from the supermarket speakers to your friend's curated playlist.

You may even start noticing a particular car model, a vibrant shade of teal, or a specific breed of dog appearing with surprising frequency in your daily life.

This is not some grand conspiracy or a glitch in the matrix. It is your brain playing a fascinating trick on you, a cognitive bias known as the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon or the frequency illusion.

This phenomenon describes our tendency to notice something more often after learning about it for the first time, leading us to believe that its occurrence has suddenly increased. However, in reality, it is not that the thing itself has become more prevalent; it is our awareness of it that has been heightened.

Our brains are constantly bombarded with information, far more than we can consciously process. To cope with this overload, our brains have evolved to filter information, prioritising what seems relevant and filtering out the rest.

When you learn something new, especially if it is intriguing or unusual,

your brain essentially flags it as "important". This heightened awareness makes you more likely to notice it in your environment.

Imagine your brain as a complex search engine. When you learn about something new, it is like typing a new keyword into the search bar. Suddenly, your brain starts highlighting all the results related to that keyword, making you feel like it is everywhere.

This is further reinforced by confirmation bias, another cognitive quirk where we tend to favour information that confirms our existing beliefs. So, when you see that rare car model again, it confirms your newfound belief that it is "suddenly everywhere", solidifying the illusion.

For instance, when learning a new language, acquiring new vocabulary often leads to noticing those words and phrases in conversations, books and movies, reinforcing learning and creating the illusion that they are more common than they actually are.

This phenomenon is also evident in consumer behaviour, where marketers capitalise on it through targeted advertising; after browsing for a product online, you may start seeing advertisements for it everywhere.

Similarly, in social awareness, learning about a specific issue, like animal welfare, can make you more attuned to related news stories, documentaries and discussions. While this heightened awareness can be beneficial in motivating action, it is important to recognise that the frequency illusion may amplify the perceived prevalence of the issue.



MIND THE MIND
BY DR PRAVEENA RAJENDRA

"Our brains are constantly bombarded with information, far more than we can consciously process. To cope with this overload, our brains have evolved to filter information, prioritising what seems relevant and filtering out the rest."

Understanding the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon can be a powerful tool in navigating daily life. One of the first steps to harnessing its potential is to develop critical thinking skills.

When you notice something that seems to be everywhere all of a sudden, pause and reflect on whether it truly is more common or if it is your brain filtering information in a new way. This simple habit can help you distinguish between actual trends and cognitive biases, ensuring that your decisions are based on reality rather than perception.

You can also leverage this phenomenon for personal growth, particularly in learning. For example, if you are acquiring a new skill or studying a subject, immersing yourself in related materials and experiences can amplify your learning.

The more you expose yourself to a topic, the more your brain will notice and connect relevant information, creating a self-reinforcing loop that accelerates your understanding and retention.

At the same time, it is crucial to maintain perspective. The Baader-Meinhof phenomenon can sometimes distort your perception of reality by making one aspect of a topic appear more dominant than it is.

This is especially important when exploring complex or controversial issues. Being aware of this bias can prompt you to actively seek out diverse viewpoints, helping you form a balanced and informed opinion rather than being swayed by a perceived prevalence that may not reflect the whole picture.

Finally, do not shy away from

questioning the information you encounter.

If you find yourself bombarded by advertisements for a product, buzz surrounding a trend or widespread discussions about an idea, take a moment to assess whether it is genuinely as popular as it seems or if the frequency illusion is influencing your perception.

By doing so, you can make more deliberate and thoughtful choices, avoiding the pitfalls of cognitive bias while staying informed and open-minded.

Recognising and addressing the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon equips you with a sharper, more nuanced view of the world and empowers you to turn awareness into meaningful action.

The Baader-Meinhof phenomenon is a fascinating reminder that our perception of the world is not always an accurate reflection of reality. By understanding this cognitive bias, we can become more discerning consumers of information, more effective learners and more critical thinkers.

So, the next time you feel like the universe is trying to tell you something through repeated occurrences, remember the frequency illusion and approach the situation with a healthy dose of skepticism and a curious mind.

Dr Praveena Rajendra is a certified mental health and awareness practitioner specialising in narcissistic abuse recovery. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Under One Roof

Strive for healthy and strong family, not perfection

Q: I get frustrated watching other families that seem so perfect. They remind me of a sitcom *The Brady Bunch* – loving parents, happy children, and no real problems. Am I missing something?

Focus on the Family Malaysia: We have all looked at family, co-workers or friends on social media and thought, "Wow, that family has got life all figured out". However, the truth is – they don't.

We all wear a public face that shows us in our best and happiest times while the rest is kept private. Parents do not snap pictures of their children when they bring home bad grades from school. They do not pose for selfies when they lose their patience or when arguing with one another.

We doubt you record, much less post/share, those less-than-perfect moments either, and neither do your family and friends.

Many of those smiling children on Facebook and Instagram probably talk back to their parents or lie to get out of trouble. And I am sure those mums and dads snap at their children from time to time instead of patiently listening.

That "perfect" meal recipe probably took several tries before it was post-worthy, and behind those neat photos, there is likely laundry

piling up and toys scattered all over. Perfect families do not exist. If they did, we could not tell you how to become one, and that is fortunate because the goal is not perfection; it is a family that is healthy and strong.

That means mum, dad and the children love each other and handle their problems with patience and respect. Anybody can work towards that.

Q: My nine-year-old son struggles with new situations, whether it is starting a new school year or going to camp. New people and places always make him uneasy. How can I help him cope better?

Focus on the Family Malaysia: New social situations tend to make some children apprehensive, especially if they are filtering the situation through a negative lens. Children need three foundational things to help them face new situations with a more positive viewpoint.

☞ **They need to belong:** Many children spend a lot of emotional energy trying to fit in with a certain group of children because they think they will gain a sense of belonging. However, genuine belonging means being a part of something, not just doing things to fit in. Talk to your child about his insecurities and about other children's opinions of what is



We all wear a public face that shows us in our best and happiest times while the rest is kept private.

"cool" and what is not.

Help him recognise that most of his peers also carry an "emotional backpack" full of insecurities. Guide him in discovering places where he can feel – or already feels – a sense of belonging, even with his own "baggage". Remind him of the safety that begins from belonging within a family.

☞ **They need to feel they have worth:** Many children who are anxious in new situations are afraid of messing up or being ridiculed.

They dread having their imperfections being exposed or not having control. Affirm your son's worth even with his unique imperfections. He is a one-of-a-kind worthwhile person to know.

☞ **They need to feel that they are good at something:** We all crave the confidence that comes from knowing we excel at something. Guide your child through an honest inventory of his skills and talents. Encourage him to continue discovering what he is good at or could be good at with

effort. Show him how those things matter when in a new environment.

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



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WEDNESDAY

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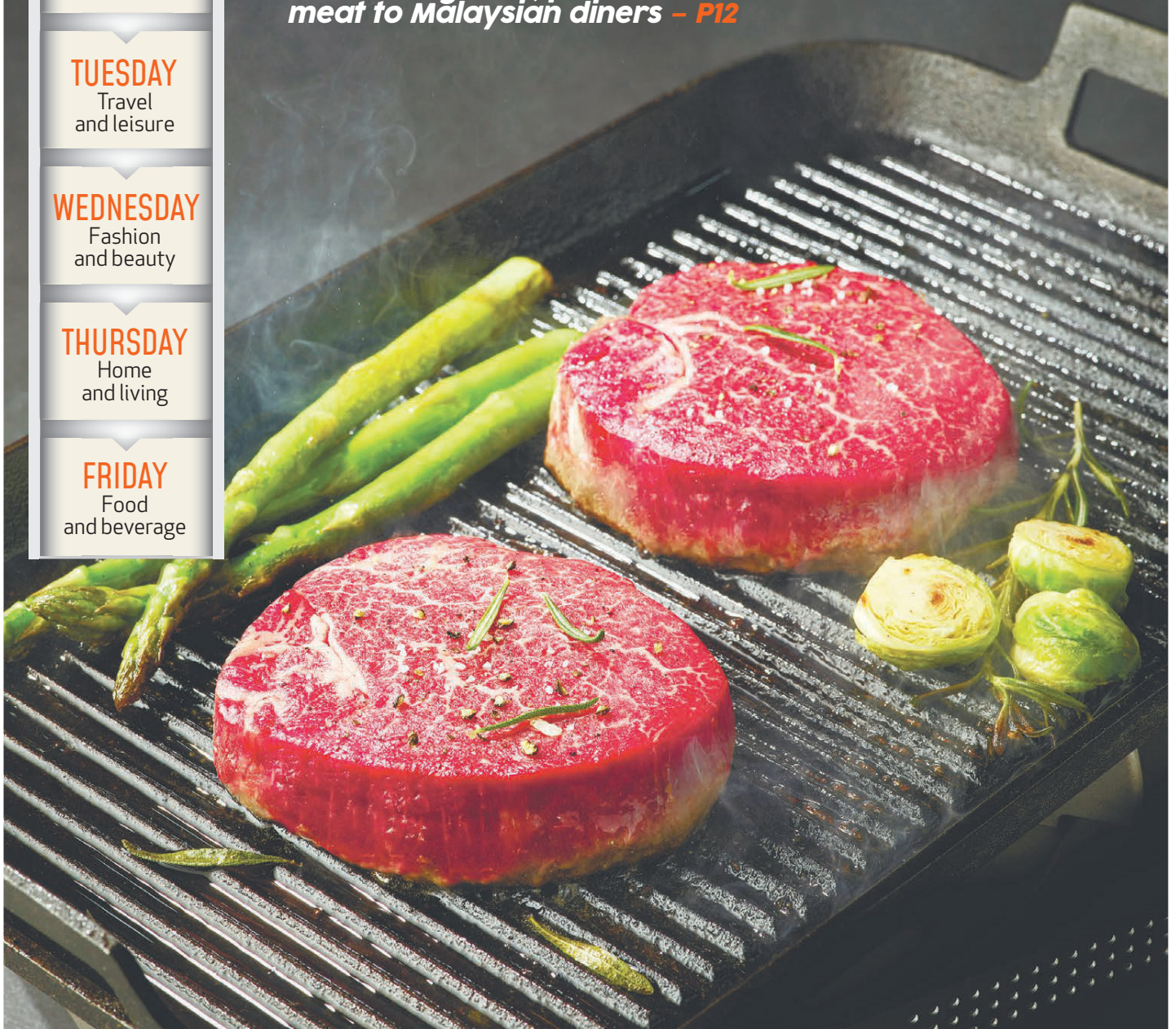
Home and living

FRIDAY

Food and beverage

Hanwoo beef

Introducing rare, premium Korean meat to Malaysian diners - P12



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BY JOHN TAN

Beefing it up

► Premium halal MiGyeongSan Hanwoo beef arrives in Malaysia

FOR the last decade, the *Hallyu* wave has had a strong cultural influence in Malaysia. Like many others globally, Malaysians are hooked on various aspects of the South Korean culture.

South Korean cuisine, in particular, has found a strong footing as local gastronomes are fond of delicacies such as *kimchi*, *bibimbap* and Korean fried chicken. Their cravings are expected to grow as Korea's premium beef MiGyeongSan Hanwoo has made its debut in Malaysia.

Rare and premium beef

MiGyeongSan Hanwoo is a rare variety of Korean premium beef. The meat is said to be produced by young Hanwoo heifers who have never calved and are fed a controlled diet.

This, in turn, results in exceptionally tender meat with a finer grain and more delicate texture compared with beef from older cows or steers. Its tenderness and marbling reigns superior too, having a rich marbling of intramuscular fat that adds juiciness and a luxurious, buttery flavour.

As such, its meat is prized by connoisseurs in South Korea. So much so it is known as a national "cultural asset", representing the finest of South Korea's culinary culture.

It boasts the highest grade on the country's beef grading system, having a Grade 1++ certification for its marbling from the South Korean government.

Historic Malaysian milestone

For the first time, the MiGyeongSan Hanwoo beef has been introduced outside of South Korea. With the help of marketing agency Plan New founder Olivia Lee-Lepinoy, Malaysia is the first country to receive the exclusive halal version of MiGyeongSan Hanwoo beef.

Lee, who was formerly a trained chef, was inspired to carry out the introduction out of her sheer passion for the delicacy. Though she initially had drawbacks, she was confident that Malaysians would share her adoration upon the right introduction.

"I opened my company in Malaysia, January 2023. But during the initial stages, I heard many saying the Hanwoo beef would not work in Malaysia, (maybe) because they



Hanwoo beef is known for its high marble content.

were not exposed to the right grade of meat.

"So, I focused on bringing the best quality, showcasing the quality and richness of the Hanwoo beef to Malaysians," said the culinary expert who has worked with Michelin-starred restaurants.

Plus, she is aware of Malaysians' love for food. Realising the local appetite for various cuisines, Lee launched several initiatives such as the MiGyeongSan Hanwoo masterclass. The session was led by Michelin-recognised chef Yoon Wonsuk.

The chef, who is listed in Seoul's Michelin Guide and 50 Best Recognised Korean barbecue specialist *Byeokje Galbi*, guided participants on ways to prepare the delicacy.

"I have loved Korean beef for 43 years. I have always wanted to cook Korean beef outside my home country and that became a reality. It

is like a dream come true," proclaimed Yoon.

Korean beef with local flavours

Similarly to Lee, Yoon is confident that Malaysians would take delight in the Hanwoo beef, considering the similarities of recipes between Malaysia and South Korea.

"I have eaten a lot of Malaysian food and it is similar to Korean food. Both of them have a lot of similarities in recipe with each other such as *sambal* and *gochujang*."

"So, I thought if I introduced the Korean beef here, Malaysians would like it. They will be able to make their own recipe with the beef."

When asked what dishes would blend well, he noted *rendang* as the ideal candidate to pair with the Hanwoo beef.

"Based on my experience, *rendang* would go well with the beef. Its taste would complement the richness of the Hanwoo beef."

To indulge in the richness, one would be required to grill the meat. Yoon believes equipment such as the non-smoke grill will do the trick. Not only will it prevent the smoke from creating a hassle, it will also draw the flavours out.

"The second thing is that right after the grilling, resting is important. So, if you have a warmer, not necessarily the fancy one and some candles, you can serve the beef as hot as it is."

Maintaining standards

Now that it is being made more accessible, one would wonder if its increased exposure could affect the quality in the long run. After years of being a rare delicacy, will its standard remain as it is?

Lee assures so, noting she is dedicated to maintaining the quality

and prestige of the Hanwoo beef.

"I aim to keep the quality. I am not selling a lot. I am not working with the quantity. I want to work with quality. That is why I am currently focusing on marketing it to the premium market."

"This beef is known for its quality. So, I aimed to maintain it that way. Otherwise, it does not make sense for me to sell it."

New traditions

Lee and Yoon expressed hope that Malaysians will embrace Hanwoo beef. Lee, who is working on implementing new promotional initiatives, wishes for local foodies to include the delicacy in their festive celebrations.

"During celebrations, such as New Year gatherings, I hope Malaysians would go to restaurants to enjoy Hanwoo beef. They could give the beef as presents too as we have hampers in Culina. I also hope to work with more chefs to spread the knowledge on how to prepare the beef," concluded Lee.

As for Yoon, he wishes for local foodies to enjoy and share his love for the delicacy.

"I hope Malaysians will take the opportunity to indulge in this beef, and savour the taste and health benefits. This is because if you compare the Korean beef, it has much more nutrients, well-balanced fats and protein."

"That is why it gives a deep flavour. Since I have travelled the world and tried various kinds of beef, I personally think this beef is the best of the best."

The MiGyeongSan Hanwoo beef is now available in limited quantities at Culina Kuala Lumpur in Four Seasons Shoppes. With a variety of cuts, MiGyeongSan Hanwoo prices start at RM31.30 per 100g at the butchery section.



Lee firmly believes local foodies will embrace the rich flavours of Hanwoo beef.



Hanwoo beef is deemed a cultural asset in South Korea.



Grilling draws out flavours inherent in the Hanwoo beef.



Yoon is listed in Seoul's Michelin Guide.



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There's always something new at Legoland Malaysia

► Theme park constantly refreshes offerings, attractions to maintain its drawing power

BY AIMIE SHAZRIE
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PETALING JAYA: Legoland Malaysia Resort constantly looks at introducing something new every year to boost tourism not only in Johor but in the country, Legoland Malaysia Resort divisional director CS Lim said (*pic*) when outlining the park's strategy to keep visitors engaged and make return trips.

Legoland Malaysia, which opened its doors in 2012, has been a key player in boosting domestic tourism in Johor, continuously evolving with new offerings. Over the last 12 years, the theme park has expanded with major additions such as the Water Park and Legoland Hotel in 2013, and Sea Life Malaysia in 2019.

From their Miniland model display in 2014, to their Ninjago Live Show in 2015, to the launch of Lego 4D Movie in 2016 and the VR Roller Coaster in 2017, Legoland Malaysia has been consistent in delivering innovative experiences, Lim said.

"Even after the pandemic, we managed to refresh and add new attractions, like Miniland Amazing Malaysia, where guests are invited to discover Malaysia in Lego bricks, and new themed hotel rooms like the Lego Friends Room," he said in an exclusive interview with *SunBiz*, stressing the park's resilience during challenging times.

Looking ahead, Lim said Legoland Malaysia is preparing to unveil more attractions in 2025, including a refreshed Singapore Miniland to reflect the city's changing skyline.

"At Legoland Malaysia, we are always looking into the future. In 2025, we are excited to unveil a new version of our popular family activity, Build & Test, where visitors can bring their imaginations to life with Lego bricks. There is always something new and exciting for our visitors," said Lim, teasing on future developments in Legoland.

On the role of theme parks in boosting local economies, he said theme parks such as Legoland Malaysia contribute significantly to the local economy, creating jobs and supporting businesses.

"We attract both domestic and international tourists, and work closely with the state and Malaysian tourism bodies to promote Johor as a must-visit destination. This collaboration has helped put Johor on the map as one of Malaysia's most visited states," he remarked.

In 2023, Tourism Malaysia reported a 42.7% increase in domestic tourist arrivals to Johor.

Commenting on this, Lim said Legoland Malaysia's contribution to this growth is undeniable.

"Many of our visitors come from domestic markets, but we also attract tourists from neighbouring countries like Singapore, Indonesia, and even further afield from places such as Hong Kong and Australia," he noted, stating that this international pull is a significant factor in the park's success, complementing the rise in domestic tourism.

Lim said Legoland Malaysia has not only tapped into the domestic market but has also implemented strategies to sustain this growth.

"Our core DNA is learning through play, and we focus on creating premium family experiences that encourage bonding. Families can ride together, build together, and explore the wonders of Lego. This unique family-centered approach sets Legoland Malaysia apart from other attractions."

To boost awareness, Lim said, Legoland Malaysia launched a competition back in 2022, called the Legoland School Challenge, encouraging primary and secondary school students across Malaysia to compete in Lego building. The competition expanded across Asean in 2023 and to the whole of Asia last year.

"We also travel across Malaysia with our Legoland School Bus, bringing the Lego experience to schools and encouraging students to participate in our Lego building challenges. These efforts have significantly increased visitor numbers from farther regions in Malaysia, including Terengganu and Kedah," he added.

While Legoland Malaysia remains a key player in attracting tourists to Johor, Lim said, it also contributes directly to the local economy.

"Almost 99% of our staff are Malaysians, with the majority from Johor. We prioritise sourcing from local vendors. One example of this is the park's collaboration with local suppliers for wallpaper, and carpets and other materials for the themed Lego Friends rooms," he added.

Sustainability is also becoming a significant focus for Legoland Malaysia, Lim disclosed. "Sustainability is not just important, it is a must. As the park looks to the future, we are actively considering ways to incorporate eco-friendly practices into their operations, aligning with broader environmental goals. With a commitment to innovation and sustainability, Legoland Malaysia will continue to drive tourism growth while contributing to the nation's economy," he said.

Research houses project favourable year for ringgit, Bursa Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: Research houses are predicting 2025 to be another strong year for the ringgit and Bursa Malaysia, with the ringgit holding steady and the local stock market showing promising growth.

Kenanga Investment Bank (Kenanga IB) expects the ringgit to end the year at RM4.45 against the US dollar, helping draw attention to the Malaysian market, and Bursa Malaysia's barometer index (FBM KLCI) at 1,840 points.

"The first quarter will contain the element of wait-and-see, as a cautious Asean stock market recently reflects the uncertainty on how tariff threats will play out, compounded with higher United States policy rate expectations.

"These two conditions resemble 2018, but this time, Malaysia is better placed in terms of its fundamentals amid structural themes and has been relatively insulated," it noted.

Kenanga IB said despite the uncertainty, investors may gravitate towards earnings and outlook visibility. It forecast the consumer sector to enjoy the minimum wage tailwind that dovetails with tourism growth.

"Structurally, artificial intelligence/data centre plays offer demand visibility from global big-tech capex ramp-up.

"We also screen for names that offer good dividend yields at a reasonable valuation, as we believe that investors will likely hunt for value after the recent FBM KLCI pullback. Banks would fall under such a description."

Kenanga IB said petrochemicals and metals could be more volatile but could profit from demand growth such as China's stimulus.

Likewise, planters and gloves sectors should see a strong quarterly earnings cadence.

Meanwhile, Public Investment Bank (PIVB) expects the ringgit to average around RM4.45-4.55 in 2025 as the US Federal Reserve remains cautious on further rate cuts, and the FBM KLCI to end at 1,700 points.

"In our view, the more pressing issue is the unsustainably high US national debt. The market is pricing in higher risk premiums for the US Treasury, making it costlier for the US to borrow more.

"At more than 120% of gross domestic product (GDP), the cost of raising more debt has outweighed its benefit in stimulating the economy, as there would be less funding available to finance productive investments," it said.

It noted that given a high budget deficit of over 6% of the nation's GDP, the US Department of Government Efficiency is aiming to cut US\$2 trillion in government spending, but this may lead to the unfavourable effect of job loss in the public sector.

"While the US dollar is not likely to be replaced as the world's reserve currency anytime soon, its dominance has eroded in recent years from 70% in 2001 to 58% currently.

"Bond yield is expected to remain elevated, suggesting a stronger US dollar and hence, a weaker ringgit in 2025," PIVB said.

The investment bank expects President-elect Donald Trump's policy measures to kick in in the second quarter, impacting global trade and the US economy towards the second half of 2025.

"With the market being a trading-oriented one, we believe market-beating opportunities would come from a bottom-up approach and buying on weaknesses in a heightened risk premium environment, where any announcement of unfavourable policy measures could trigger a kneejerk reaction in the global market.

"We favour companies that rely more on domestically-driven growth and less on the export markets," it added. - Bernama

'Social media licensing enhances accountability'

KUALA LUMPUR: The licensing requirement for social media and internet messaging services with at least eight million registered users in Malaysia, effective Jan 1, is deemed capable of enhancing platform accountability, according to experts.

IT service management specialist at Pertamina Digital Bhd, Dr Sashi Kumar Tharmalingam, said licensing allows service providers to operate more responsibly in controlling content with negative elements and preventing cyberbullying activities.

"Data privacy and security will also be improved as licensed platforms are more compliant with data protection laws like Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA), ensuring better management and protection of user data.

"Market practice regulations will also prevent monopolistic behaviour, ensure fair competition among social media platforms, and encourage the growth of local social media platforms within a more regulated environment," he told Bernama.

He added that the Application Service Provider Class (ASP(C)) licence mandated under the Act could also regulate the dissemination of sensitive content related to

race, religion, or royalty.

Sashi Kumar said the initiative provides clear channels for authorities to collaborate with social media service providers in investigating and proactively addressing arising issues. He added that the licensing will facilitate quicker removal of unlawful content.

Security and political analyst from the Centre for Media and Information Warfare Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Dr Noor Nirwandy Mat Noordin, concurred, saying the government's measure is crucial to tackle challenges in the digital social media ecosystem, such as issues related to radicalisation, subversion, and threats to unity, especially involving vulnerable groups such as children.

"This is a forward-thinking step as many other countries, including Canada, Australia, the United States and others, also have exclusive laws for their social media operators. Some of them have even gone further by restricting social media accounts to individuals aged 16 and above," he said.

Elaborating, Noor Nirwandy said social media algorithms often amplified negative posts, making vulnerable groups easy targets, and thus social media operators should bear responsibility.

"This responsibility ensures they collaborate in addressing issues related to criminal offences, social misconduct, or governance within the countries they operate in.

"Countries must possess dominant authority to ensure social media platforms comply with regulations. This does not conflict with human rights ... many developed nations are doing the same to protect social media users and safeguard national security, including preserving social behaviour and national identity," he said.

Financial adviser Munirah Musthpar said the government's initiative to mandate the licence for social media and internet messaging services is timely given the increasingly alarming content on these platforms, particularly concerning children.

She said this measure will help regulate risky content, such as pornography, cyberbullying and scams, ensuring safer social media use, especially among children.

"This licensing requirement will also make service providers more accountable for their services and more proactive in detecting inappropriate content before it is disseminated without control," the mother of two said.



Foong (left) and Johan.

Foong is KPMG Malaysia managing partner, Johan non-exec chairman

PETALING JAYA: Foong Mun Kong has assumed the role of managing partner at professional services firm KPMG Malaysia effective Jan 1.

The milestone follows a seamless transition from Datuk Johan Idris' successful tenure as managing partner, who now takes on the role of non-executive chairman, providing strategic counsel to support the firm's continued growth.

Foong brings more than 30 years of experience in audit and assurance, having previously served as the firm's head of audit. He currently serves as vice-president of the Malaysian Institute of Certified Public Accountants, a council member of the Malaysian Institute of Accountants, and is a member of the MFRS Application and Implementation Committee of the Malaysian Accounting Standards Board.

Johan said, "This transition heralds an exciting new chapter for KPMG in Malaysia. Building on the solid foundation we have laid together and guided by an unwavering commitment to quality and trust, I am confident that KPMG will continue to scale new heights of success."

Foong said, "It is an honour to lead KPMG in Malaysia alongside this exceptional team of leaders. Together, we have the building blocks in place to uphold the quality, integrity, and trust that define us and shape a future-ready KPMG – to deliver long-term value and positive impact to the clients and communities we serve."

Potential RM1.7b annual boost for local equity market

➤ Additional inflows could come from mandatory EPF contributions for non-citizen workers: AmInvestment Bank

KUALA LUMPUR: AmInvestment Bank Bhd projects that mandatory Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions for non-citizen employees could channel up to RM1.7 billion in additional annual inflows into Malaysia's equity market.

According to its Sector Report, the estimate is based on the presence of 2.5 million foreign workers, a minimum monthly wage

of RM1,700, combined employee and employer EPF contributions of 11% and 13%, respectively, and the assumption that 14% of EPF assets would flow into domestic equities, as indicated in the 2023 annual report.

The report states that the proposed EPF contribution rate for non-citizen employees with a new contract of employment is 11% for employees and 12-13% for employers, depending on salary compensation.

For employees with an existing contract of employment, the contribution rate is proposed to start at 2%, increasing in phases until it is on par with the contribution rate of Malaysian employees within six years.

The implementation of this initiative is subject to amendments to the EPF Act 1991.

Additionally, Prime Minister

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has called for government-linked investment companies to reduce overseas investments and focus more on the domestic market, further helping the cause.

"Assuming the split between domestic and foreign equities is maintained, we estimate net inflows to domestic equities of RM17-23 billion, compared to the past five-year average of RM2 billion (between 2018 and 2023).

"This assumes annual inflows to equities of RM30-40 billion (based on historical trends) and that the domestic equity market share is maintained at 57% (2023 levels)," it said.

AmInvestment noted that the domestic equities market grew at a compound annual growth rate of 1% year-on-year (y-o-y) between 2018 and 2023, significantly lagging the fund management industry's 6% y-o-y

growth in assets under management.

"This lag was primarily driven by increased investments overseas, as the domestic share of the equities market fell by 17 percentage points to 57%, between 2018 and 2023," it said.

Implying a high base, AmInvestment said the broader market delivered its best annual return in 14 years in 2024, particularly in sectors such as technology and plantations, due to tariff-driven supply chain realignment and expectations of stronger crude palm oil prices caused by supply tightness.

"We believe structural interest in data centres will persist, underlying our positive outlook for the construction and property sectors. Sectors that we are neutral on should not be entirely ignored, as pockets of opportunities exist within selected mini-themes," it added. – Bernama

EPIC wins 5-year contract from Petronas Carigali

KUALA TERENGGANU: Eastern Pacific Industrial Corporation Bhd (EPIC) through its subsidiary EPIC OG Sdn Bhd (EOGSB) has secured a five-year contract from Petroleum Nasional Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary Petronas Carigali Sdn Bhd.

EPIC group CEO Muhtar Suhaili said the contract covers the provision of Pan Malaysia maintenance, commissioning and modification and hook-up and commissioning services for Package A2 (Peninsular Malaysia Asset – Gas).

"The company is proud to have won a contract from Petronas Carigali which reinforces our longstanding

commitment to delivering top-tier services in the oil and gas sector. This accomplishment not only strengthens our position as a key player in Malaysia's energy industry but also aligns with our goals of sustainable growth and long-term partnerships to support the nation's energy needs," he said in a statement yesterday.

Muhtar said the contract, which will be in effect until September 2029 with a three-year extension option followed by two additional years, positions EOGSB in a strategic position for sustainable growth and long-term cooperation in the

national oil and gas sector.

He said EOGSB also has an excellent track record in handling large-scale and complex oil and gas maintenance projects for which the company was previously awarded the Pan Malaysia maintenance, construction and modification contract for Package B2 by ExxonMobil Exploration and Production Malaysia Inc.

He said the contract worth RM500 million had lasted for six years including one year extension, starting from 2018 until 2024.

"In addition to the major contract, EOGSB has recently been appointed as a panel contractor for the Petronas

Downstream Operating Units for construction and modification works (CMW) for three years with an option to extend for one year and another year thereafter, covering the East Coast, West Coast, and Southern regions of Malaysia.

"The CMW package clearly proves the company's ability in efficiently managing high-value projects across multiple regional operations.

"With these recent contracts wins, EPIC is strategically primed to further solidify its presence within Malaysia's energy landscape and reinforcing the nation's energy security," he said. – Bernama

Maybank IB expects Brent crude prices to average US\$70 per barrel in 2025



An oil platform in the North Sea. Maybank IB says oil markets may see a supply surplus as Opec and its allies may unwind production cuts. – AFPIC

KUALA LUMPUR: Maybank Investment Bank Bhd (Maybank IB) expects Brent crude oil prices to be volatile and weaker this year, averaging at US\$70 (RM313) per barrel compared to US\$80 per barrel last year.

In a note yesterday, it said oil markets may see a supply surplus as the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (Opec+) may unwind production cuts.

The investment bank cited the United States Energy Information Administration's Short-Term Energy Outlook report for November 2024, which stated that Opec+ producers may execute their plan to increase output by 2.2 million barrels per day over an 18-month period, starting in April 2025.

"However, any spike in geopolitical tension could raise war premiums on crude oil prices in fear of a supply disruption as we saw during the Russian-Ukraine crisis – where oil prices increased by approximately 50% (Brent: US\$80 per barrel to US\$120 per barrel)," it added.

For Malaysia, Maybank IB said a potentially lower Petronas capital expenditure (capex) spending means that many domestic-centric upstream oil and gas services and equipment (OGSE) names may see slower growth in 2025 after Petros has been officially appointed as the sole gas aggregator for Sarawak.

"Under a Petronas capex deferral scenario, we expect this to impact OGSE names with exposure in the exploration and development sub-segments – mainly offshore support vessels, offshore fabrication, drilling rigs and hook-up and commissioning," it said.

Overall, Maybank IB has maintained its positive call on the sector, favouring defensive midstream companies with Dialog as its top pick.

Additionally, it favours floating production storage and offloading players which are poised to ride on the global deep and ultra-deepwater capex investments, naming Bumi Armada as its top pick. – Bernama

Cuktech enters Malaysian market

➤ Clean energy company launches lineup of premium power banks catering to wide range of charging needs

KUALA LUMPUR: China-based Cuktech, a clean energy and advanced charging solutions, has made its entry into the Malaysian market by providing Malaysian consumers and businesses access to

high-performance charging products including cutting-edge power banks and chargers, while contributing to the adoption of clean energy ecosystem and services. Cuktech has achieved significant milestones,

including shipping over 150 million power banks and 20 million chargers globally. Utilising advanced Cuk circuit technology for efficient and low-ripple DC-DC power conversion, Cuktech is set to enhance the portable power experience for users across Malaysia.

Cuktech is launching a lineup of premium power banks in Malaysia, catering to a wide range of charging needs. Including the CUKTECH 30, a powerful 40,000mAh power bank with a staggering 300W output for

ultimate versatility including dual USB-C, USB-A, and 20W wireless charging.

The CUKTECH 20 offers a 25,000mAh capacity and 210W output with PD3.1 fast charging, making it perfect for laptops and high-powered devices. The CUKTECH 15 provides a versatile 20,000mAh capacity with 150W output ideal for smartphones, laptops, and tablets. The CUKTECH 10 is a sleek and compact 10,000mAh power bank with 100W output and a

built-in TFT display for real-time charging insights.

"Malaysia is the perfect launchpad for Cuktech's vision of sustainable and advanced charging solutions," said a representative. "Malaysia presents tremendous opportunities for growth, and we are excited to partner with Shopee Malaysia as our launch platform to empower Malaysian consumers and businesses with our cutting-edge products that will help bring portable power needs."



From left: BrandLaureate adviser Prof Dr Uchol Kim, Rakuten Trade deputy CMO Tracy Anne Leong, Mise, Tengku Datuk Dr Hishamuddin Zaizi Tengku Bendahara Azman Shah Al-Haj, and BrandLaureate world president Prof Dr KK Johan.

Rakuten Trade wins Digitech Award for digital trading solutions

KUALA LUMPUR: Rakuten Trade, a fully digital broker, has once again raised the bar in the fintech space by clinching the BestBrands Awards 2024 for Fintech-Digital Investments & Trading Solutions at the DigiTech Awards 2024.

The award acknowledges Rakuten Trade as a trailblazer in adapting to change and actively shaping the landscape of innovation and digital transformation.

According to CEO Kazumasa Mise, "This recognition reflects the trust and loyalty of our clients and partners. As we approach our 8th year in Malaysia, we remain reminded of our humble commitment to enhance customer value, to always adapt to the ever-evolving market landscape, and our position as the preferred platform for local retail investors. In 2025, Rakuten Trade's strategic roadmap

focuses on innovation and customer centricity, aiming to drive further disruption and set new standards in the digital trading space."

As of Dec 31, 2024, Rakuten Trade has nearly 300,000 activated accounts and has facilitated over RM150 billion worth of trades. Additionally, clients' assets under administration sit near RM5 billion, underscoring the company's robust platform and customer base.

Sunway REIT completes acquisition of Kluang Mall

PETALING JAYA: Sunway Real Estate Investment Trust (Sunway REIT) has completed the acquisition of Sunway Kluang Mall (formerly known as Kluang Mall), Sunway REIT Management Sdn Bhd.

Sunway Kluang Mall, located in the heart of Johor connects to major towns such as Johor Bahru, Muar, and Batu Pahat and provides connectivity to other parts of Peninsular Malaysia through major highways and railways.

The mall is presently 99% occupied with over 130 tenants. The retail mall offers a diverse array of retail offerings including international and homegrown brands, food and beverage outlets, as well as entertainment and lifestyle services. Anchored by Pacific Hypermarket & Department Store, the mall's extensive offerings such as health and beauty services, cinema and bowling centre enhance the overall retail experience.

The mall is expected to be yield-accrative to Sunway REIT's portfolio with an estimated initial Net Property Income yield of 7%.

Sunway REIT Management Sdn Bhd CEO Clement Chen said, "We are pleased to end the year with the completion of another acquisition. This fortifies Sunway REIT's portfolio as one of the leading REIT in Malaysia. We strategically expanded our presence in Johor, which is a high-growth state and magnet for investment."

He said they see opportunities to boost the mall through tenancy, management, and asset improvements to drive growth.

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KSI: M'sian GDP growth to moderate to 4.9% this year

➤ Institute says estimate takes into account domestic policies, external challenges

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's economic growth is expected to moderate to 4.9% in 2025, slightly above the official target range of 4.5% to 5.5%, taking into account the impact of domestic policies and external challenges, said KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific (KSI).

The independent think tank noted that the global economy faces uncertainty under US President Donald Trump's second term.

KSI explained that Malaysia benefited from Trump's previous protectionist policies, but as an open economy, the new tariff threats could affect the local economy, both directly and indirectly.

"Nevertheless, domestic demand will remain the primary driver of growth. Private consumption will be supported by a stable labour market, a 7 to 15% increase in civil service pay, revisions to the minimum wage, and the withdrawal of flexible Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Account 3 funds.

"Private investment will benefit from the spillover effects of ongoing approved investments and a favourable financing environment," it said in its *Economic Report, End of Year 2024*.

For 2024, KSI forecasts GDP growth of 5.2%.

Public investment is expected to moderate in 2025, given the flat development budget allocation compared to 2024.

Ongoing infrastructure projects and the launch of the Gear-Up programme, amounting to RM25 billion in 2025, along with government-linked investment companies (GLICs) and government-linked companies (GLCs) committing RM120 billion in domestic direct investment (DDI) over the next five years, should support government investment activities.

Public consumption is expected to grow faster, reflecting increased operating expenditure from Budget 2025, it added.

Regarding the labour market, the unemployment rate is projected to reach 3.2% by the end of 2025, supported by job creation driven by healthy domestic demand and ongoing investments.

The gig economy, accounting for 18.5% of the workforce or 3.1 million people as of October 2024, is expected to continue its growth, fuelled by advancements in digitalisation and shifting workforce preferences.

On the monetary front, Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) is expected to keep the Overnight Policy Rate (OPR) unchanged at 3.00% throughout 2025.

Unlike its global counterparts, BNM has limited room to cut its policy rate due to domestic price pressures, such as the minimum wage increase, the rationalisation of the RON95 fuel subsidy, and the expansion of the Sales and Services Tax (SST).

With a stable outlook for the OPR in 2025, mortgage rates are expected to remain steady, keeping the property market positive.

The residential property market showed strong performance in the first half of 2024, with the total number and value of residential

property transactions increasing by 6.1% and 10.4% year-on-year, respectively.

Notably, the number of overhang units improved, decreasing to 21,968 as of September 2024, down from 25,816 at the end of 2023.

Meanwhile, KSI projected that the FBM KLCI would fluctuate between 1,650 and 1,750 points, supported by steady domestic economic recovery, stable oil prices, growth in the technology and financial sectors, positive government policies, strong corporate earnings, an appreciating ringgit, and rising foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign portfolio inflows.

"Virtuous investment cycles will be the key theme in 2025," it said.

Key drivers for the market and stock performance in 2025 are expected to include positive consumption spending, acceleration in infrastructure spending, structural reforms aimed at fiscal sustainability, state government economic initiatives, re-industrialisation, and AI-driven growth.

The market is likely to be boosted by mergers and acquisitions in the banking and technology sectors, as well as IPOs in the healthcare, telecommunications and consumer sectors.

The ringgit is expected to appreciate if global oil prices remain high and Malaysia benefits from increased foreign investment and robust trade demand.

"The ringgit could strengthen to around RM3.90 to RM4.00 against the US dollar," it said.

However, KSI cautioned that global financial stress, capital outflows, or rising global interest rates could weaken the ringgit, with potential downside risks towards RM4.30 or more against the US dollar. - Bernama

Etiqua Life Insurance names new CEO

KUALA LUMPUR: Etiqua Life Insurance Bhd (ELIB) has announced the appointment of Leong Su Yern as its new CEO, effective Jan 1, 2025.

In a statement yesterday, the insurance company said that in her new role, Leong will report directly to Etiqua Insurance and Takaful Group CEO Kamaludin Ahmad, who has been serving as interim CEO of ELIB following the retirement of Paul Low in December 2023.

Kamaludin said Leong will drive ELIB's strategic, financial, and operational growth to maximise shareholder value while prioritising customer interests.

"In addition, she will oversee sustainable growth strategies, ensure regulatory compliance, and manage risk.

"We also look forward to seeing her commitment to innovation, digital transformation, and the development of a future-ready workforce integrated into the company's operations while embedding sustainability in both operations and investment strategies to ensure long-term growth," he said.

ELIB said that Leong brings over 23 years of experience in the insurance industry and is a dedicated fellow of the Society of Actuaries. With more than 18 years in leadership roles, she has consistently driven strategic growth and operational excellence.

"Leong joined Etiqua in 2013 as head of pricing for life and family products, where she ensured regulatory compliance and developed pricing strategies for both ELIB and Etiqua Family Takaful Bhd.

"In 2022, she served as chief product officer at Maybank Ageas Holding Bhd before being assigned to ELIB to oversee sales channels as general manager in 2023," it said.

ELIB added that Leong's leadership has driven substantial project successes, including achieving agency manpower growth of over 40% in 2024 and fostering a productive, bionic agency force grounded in ethical practices and long-term success. - Bernama

MITEC hosted over 650 events and welcomed more than four million visitors in 2024.



Remarkable performance by Mitec in 2024

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (Mitec), owned by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) and managed by Qube Integrated Malaysia Sdn Bhd, has closed 2024 on an extraordinary note.

Serving as a key driver of economic growth, Mitec hosted over 650 events and welcomed more than 4 million visitors, contributing over RM1 billion to Malaysia's business tourism sector and creating over 57 000 job opportunities.

This achievement underscores Mitec's role as a premier venue for international conferences, exhibitions, and meetings.

In 2024, MITEC's achievements reached new heights with its recognition as the "World's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre" at the World Travel Awards 2024.

This accolade underscores Mitec's unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation in the business tourism industry, cementing its reputation as a global scale.

Mitec enhanced its food and beverage offerings in 2024, delighting visitors with the

introduction of De Heritage, which features authentic Malaysian dishes such as nasi lemak, lontong, soto ayam, and nasi briyani.

The centre also launched Sweetz Gelato & More, serving handcrafted gelato, decadent pastries, warm waffles, and desserts for all tastes.

Complementing these innovations, Mitec unveiled its hydroponic garden, providing sustainable, fresh greens for its culinary offerings.

This "farm-to-table" initiative reflects Mitec's dedication to sustainability, alongside the installation of hydration stations across the venue to reduce plastic waste and promote eco-friendly practices.

Mitec introduced several new features in 2024 to elevate the visitor experience:

➤ **Oval Garden:** A beautifully landscaped outdoor space crafted for intimate conferences and banquets, offering a refreshing open-air alternative.

➤ **Garden Terrace:** This sophisticated indoor area is perfect for cocktail receptions and exclusive VIP gatherings, set amidst lush greenery.

➤ **Upgraded Business Centre:** Designed with flexibility in mind, the newly enhanced Business

Centre features additional private rooms available for on-demand bookings, supporting Mitec's role as a business hub.

Mitec prioritised inclusivity and community empowerment in 2024 through impactful partnerships.

Collaborating with Khazanah, Mitec supported SDG 4: Quality Education, offering 16 graduates valuable industry experience to prepare them for the workforce. MITEC also partnered with the Power Women Summit, advancing gender equality, leadership, and empowerment through panel discussions, networking sessions, and skill-building workshops.

Mitec also launched the Mitec Preferred Card, a loyalty initiative to reward clients and strengthen partnerships.

Additionally, the introduction of an accredited panel programme set new benchmarks for event quality and security, ensuring only preferred contractors and qualified service providers meet the highest standards of safety, professionalism, and compliance.

PTP handles record 12.25m TEUs in a single year

KUALA LUMPUR: MMC Corp Bhd's 70%-owned unit, Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP), has become the first container terminal in Malaysia to handle over 12.25 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in a single year in 2024.

This surpassed its previous record of 11.2 million TEUs in 2021, solidifying PTP's position as Malaysia's largest transhipment hub.

PTP chairman Tan Sri Che Khalid Mohamad Noh said the record-breaking performance underscores PTP's indispensable role in global supply chains and underscores the dedication, resilience and hard work of the PTP team.

"By seamlessly handling such substantial container volumes, we have consistently delivered exceptional services to our valued customers and partners, contributing to Malaysia's economic growth and reaffirming PTP's position as one of the world's most efficient and high-volume container terminals," he said in a statement yesterday.

PTP CEO Mark Hardiman added that PTP aims to sustain this momentum and achieve even greater milestones in 2025 and beyond.

"We have made extensive preparations for the future, focusing not only on port asset upgrades and infrastructure enhancements but also on advancing our environmental, social and governance agenda, strengthening safety policies and driving our digitalisation strategies.

The 12 millionth TEU was recorded at about 7pm on Dec 23, 2024. - Bernama

Indonesia's palm oil B40 delay causes market uncertainties

JAKARTA: Indonesia has yet to implement a higher mandatory blend of biodiesel planned for Jan 1 as industry participants await the technical regulations for the rollout, causing confusion among palm oil traders.

The government had pledged to mandate 40% mix of palm oil-based fuel in biodiesel from Jan 1, known as B40, from a 35% blend currently in force.

The plan for higher biodiesel blend by the world's biggest palm oil producer helped send the benchmark palm oil contract in Malaysia nearly 20% higher in 2024 due to expectations

of lower Indonesian palm oil exports.

As of yesterday, Indonesian state energy firm Pertamina, which operates the country's largest petrol station network, and biodiesel producers group APROBI said they were waiting for the relevant official decrees before selling the fuel.

"Once the regulation has been issued, there will be time to transition for the sale. At the moment we have prepared Plaju and Kasim refineries for processing of B40," Pertamina spokesman Fadjr Djoko Santoso said.

Members of APROBI cannot draw contracts

for biodiesel distribution without a decree from the government, secretary-general Ernest Gunawan said.

Edi Wibowo, director of bioenergy at the Energy Ministry, said yesterday that he was awaiting further instructions for B40, without providing more details.

Palm oil industry watchers had expected the rollout of the policy to be gradual.

Meanwhile, palm oil traders are waiting for the official volume of biodiesel that Indonesia will allocate to fuel retailers to gauge how much exports will be affected.

Indonesian officials have previously said the country plans to allocate 15.62 million kilolitres of palm oil-based fuel for B40 in 2025.

Meanwhile, analysts are concerned about plans to only subsidise B40 for non-industrial use, which represents less than half of the country's demand.

"There are hurdles for the bullish sentiments as the participants are still not convinced over the fate of the Indonesian B40 biodiesel policy success," said Anilkumar Bagani, head of research at Mumbai-based vegetable oil broker Sunvin Group. – Reuters

Singapore economy grows 4%, beating expectations

► City-state is starting year in sweet spot, says economist

SINGAPORE: Singapore's economy grew 4% in 2024, its fastest annual pace since exiting the pandemic, accelerating from an expansion of 1.1% in 2023 and 3.8% in 2022, preliminary government data showed yesterday.

Gross domestic product (GDP) rose 4.3% in the fourth quarter from a year earlier, according to advance estimates from the Trade Ministry, above a median forecast of 3.3% in a Reuters poll of economists.

On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis, GDP expanded 0.1% in the October-December period.

Maybank economist Chua Hak Bin said "Singapore is starting the year in a sweet spot, with growth on a high and inflation at

below 2%."

"Shifting supply chains to Southeast Asia and front-loading of shipments ahead of potential higher US tariffs will continue to drive manufacturing growth in the first half of 2025," Chua said.

The Trade Ministry said in November it expected growth of 1% to 3% in 2025.

OCBC economist Selena Ling said the cautious forecast was realistic given current external headwinds and "is likely due to Trump 2.0 tariffs and also possibly the fading of front-loading activities".

However, she said growth is unlikely to slow too significantly in 2025.

"Assuming tariffs don't impact Singapore directly, the 1% year-on-year floor should hold. My baseline is still about 2% given higher base".

November's annual inflation rate of 1.9% was the lowest in almost three years, creating room for the central bank to ease monetary policy at its January review, though analysts believe it might wait until later in 2025 to assess the impact of

incoming US President Donald Trump's policies.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said in his New Year's message that geopolitical tensions such as the war in Ukraine and violence in the Middle East would continue to influence Singapore's economy, along with higher living costs.

"While global inflation has moderated, price levels have not fallen, much less returned to pre-pandemic levels.

"Across many countries, cost of living pressures continue to weigh heavily on families and communities.

"People feel a deep sense of angst and anxiety about the future."

Singapore was "not immune from these global mood shifts and pressures," Wong said.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore held policy steady at its October review as data showed the pace of activity picking up.

Its next review is due before the end of the month. – Agencies

Macau casino revenue tops official estimate

BEIJING: Casino revenues in Macau, the world's biggest gambling hub, soared by nearly a quarter in 2024 but still came in short of pre-pandemic levels, underlining the need for the former Portuguese colony to diversify its economy.

Gaming revenue last year reached 226.8 billion patacas (RM127 billion), up 23.9% from 2023, according to data published by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau on Wednesday.

That topped the government's estimate of 216 billion patacas, but trailed the 292.5 billion patacas logged in 2019.

Notably, revenue fell 2% in December, the only month registering a year-on-year decline in 2024.

The drop coincided with tighter security surrounding a three-day visit by China President Xi Jinping to mark a quarter century of Beijing's rule.

Macau returned to Chinese rule on Dec 20, 1999, governed under the same "one country, two systems" system as nearby Hong Kong.

During his trip, Xi urged Macau to have the "courage" to diversify its economy by establishing new industries and better connecting with the mainland's national developing strategies.

That includes increased economic integration with the Greater Bay Area, a region in the Pearl River delta linking cities such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

To boost its global competitiveness, Xi said Macau should further promote cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries and actively participate in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious infrastructure plan aimed at boosting trade between China and the rest of the world.

Macau, a special administrative region of China, is the only place in the country where gambling is legal. Its economy is heavily reliant on casinos, which contributes about 80% of tax revenues.

But China's long-term anti-corruption drive has reined in gambling revenues from the high-roller VIP sector, which were further depressed during the pandemic years when strict travel restrictions sharply curtailed visits from mainland tourists. – Reuters

Alibaba to sell Sun Art stake for HK\$12 billion

BEIJING: China's Alibaba Group Holding Ltd said on Wednesday it had agreed to sell its majority stake in supermarket chain Sun Art Retail Group to Chinese private equity firm DCP Capital for HK\$12.298 billion (RM7.08 billion).

The 78.7% share represents holdings held by Alibaba subsidiaries, according to a filing to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Alibaba paid US\$3.6 billion for a controlling stake in Sun Art in 2020 in the hope of further leveraging its digital presence to support Sun Art's hundreds of hypermarkets in China.

The disposal of the stake comes after an 85% jump in Sun Art's shares in Hong Kong in the past year, which easily beat an around 20% rise in the main Hang Seng Index.

The e-commerce giant is also selling its Chinese department store unit Intime even if it books a loss from the deal.

The stake sales are part of Alibaba's reshuffling of its business portfolio to focus on its core e-commerce operations. – Reuters

A view of the city skyline in Singapore. – REUTERS/PIC





Investors hope for US stock market trifecta

➤ Expected solid economy, corporate profit growth boost 2025 equity sentiment

NEW YORK: Investors are expecting more gains for the US stock market in 2025 after two straight standout years, fuelled by a solid economy supporting corporate profits, moderating interest rates and pro-growth policies from incoming President Donald Trump.

The benchmark S&P 500 was up 23.31% in 2024, even with a recent speed bump, marking its second-straight year of gains exceeding 20%, lifted by megacap tech stocks and excitement over the business potential of artificial intelligence.

The index soared 53.19% over the last two years, the biggest two-year percentage jump since 1998.

Investors are more confident about the economy than this time a year ago, with consumers and businesses having absorbed higher interest rates and the Federal Reserve now lowering them – albeit by not as much as hoped.

Corporate profits are also expected to be strong, with S&P 500 earnings per share projected to rise 10.67% in 2025, according to LSEG.

On the other side of the ledger, inflation remains stubborn, and Wall Street is wary of a rebound that could lead the Fed to change course on its easing cycle.

Indeed, stocks pulled back sharply last month after the central bank projected fewer rate cuts next year as it braced for firmer inflation.

Such prospects could become more likely if Trump implements tariffs on US imports that lead to higher consumer prices.

Stock valuations, meanwhile, are around their steepest levels in more than three years, leaving greater potential for turbulence.

“We’ve been on quite the tear coming off the lows back at the end of 2022. It’s been pretty eye-watering,” said Garrett Melson, portfolio strategist at Natixis Investment Managers.

“Animal spirits are certainly running pretty wild right now, but you might need to temper that a little bit as you start to move through the year,” said Melson, who thinks the stock market could still produce solid gains of around 10% in 2025 if not the returns of the prior two years.

Wall Street firms are mostly projecting gains for the market this year, with S&P 500 year-end targets ranging from 6,000 to 7,000 points.

The index ended 2024 at 5,881 on Tuesday. Optimistic investors can point to a bull market that is neither old nor over-extended by historic measures.

The current bull market for the S&P 500 that began in October 2022 is less than half as long as the average length of the 10 prior ones, according to Keith Lerner, co-chief investment officer at Truist Advisory Services.



Traders working on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on the last day of trading for 2024.

– AFP/IC

The S&P 500’s roughly 64% gain during this latest run trails the 108% median gain and 184% average rise of the prior bull markets, according to Lerner.

“If you zoom out a little bit, yes, we have a lot of gains, but if you look at a typical bull market, it suggests that we still have further gains to go.”

Other historic signs also bode well.

The S&P 500 has gained an average of 12.3% following the eight instances of back-to-back 20% annual gains since 1950, according to Ryan Detrick, chief market strategist at Carson Group, compared to a 9.3% overall average increase over that time.

The index increased six of the eight times. Bolstering the upbeat sentiment is the prevailing sense on Wall Street that the economy has weathered the rate hikes the Fed implemented starting in 2022 to quell inflation.

A Natixis Investment Managers survey conducted in recent weeks found 73% of institutional investors said the US will avoid a recession in 2025. That is a sharp turnaround from a year ago, when 62% projected such a downturn in the coming year.

Citigroup’s economic surprise index, which measures how economic data performs versus expectations, has been solidly positive for the past two months, another rosy sign for investors.

Adding to expectations of a solid economy, Trump is expected to pursue an agenda that includes tax cuts and deregulation that supports growth.

“We’re leaving 2024 on pretty good footing, and we think there is some re-acceleration in

2025,” said Sameer Samana, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

“Markets tend to front-run the economy, so they will position for that economic re-acceleration sooner rather than later.”

However, stocks are also leaving 2024 at elevated valuations – the S&P 500 was trading at 24.82 times expected earnings over the next 12 months, according to LSEG. That is well above its long-term average of 15.8, and not far from the 22.6 level it reached earlier this month, its highest since early 2021.

Investors maintain that valuations can stay high for long periods and do not necessarily indicate imminent declines. But future gains may rest more on earnings growth, while higher valuations could make stocks more easily rattled by any disappointments.

Risks include policy uncertainty such as Trump’s expected push to raise tariffs on imports from China and other trading partners.

Higher tariffs could hurt corporate profits and increase inflation.

The pace of inflation has fallen dramatically since hitting 40-year highs in 2022, but remains above the Fed’s 2% target.

The latest reading of the consumer price index found a 2.7% annual inflation rate.

“How low we can get rates is really going to be dependent on how low we can get inflation,” said Michael Reynolds, vice president of investment strategy at Glenmede.

Glenmede is recommending investors take a neutral posture on overall portfolio risk, including for equities.

“Investors should be what I would call cautiously optimistic,” Reynolds said. – Reuters

Citigroup, BofA exit Net-Zero Banking Alliance

NEW YORK: US banks Citigroup and Bank of America said on Tuesday they are exiting the Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA), a group of global banks that have pledged to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

They follow Wells Fargo and Goldman Sachs, which both left the alliance last month.

Financial firms, historically criticised for their connections to the fossil fuel industry, have made efforts to incorporate net-zero standards more prominently into their operations.

However, they have begun scaling back on some initiatives to avoid irking Republican policymakers who are opposed to limiting the financing of fossil fuels.

Citi said it had made progress toward its own net-zero goals and decided to leave the NZBA.

BofA, in an e-mailed statement to Reuters, said: “We will continue to work with clients on this issue and meet their needs.”

The NZBA aims to bring down carbon emissions from the lending and investment portfolios of its members to zero on a net basis by 2050.

Last month, BlackRock, Vanguard and State Street were sued by Texas and 10 other Republican-led states, which said the large asset managers violated antitrust law through climate activism that reduced coal production and boosted energy prices. – Reuters

Hungary officially denied a billion euros of EU funds

BUDAPEST: Hungary has officially been denied €1 billion (RM4.62 billion) of European Union funds that had been frozen because of corruption, the EU said, the first time the bloc has enforced such a move.

Brussels in 2022 began “conditional” proceedings against Hungary, seeking to block disbursements because of alleged infringements linked to public procurement as well as a lack of control and transparency.

Budapest did undertake reforms that allowed some funds to be unblocked, but a total of €19 billion remain frozen.

Under timelines laid out in the EU’s conditionality regulation, “the first tranche of suspended commitments”, which amounted to €1.04 billion, expired at the end of 2024 without the suspension being lifted.

That meant that Hungary lost that funding.

In July, the European Commission concluded in a report that Hungary did not meet EU democratic standards, notably on corruption, political financing, conflicts of interest and media independence.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban has promised to fight to protect money “that is ours”. – AFP

Mexico unveils new tariffs, Shein and Temu may be in crosshairs

MEXICO CITY: Mexico’s tax authority SAT issued new tariffs on Tuesday, which it said will strengthen the surveillance of goods from Asia, a measure that could impact popular online retailers like Shein and Temu.

Goods that enter Mexico via courier companies originating from countries that do not have an international treaty with Mexico will be subject to a duty of 19%, SAT said in a statement shared with reporters.

Mexico does not have an international treaty with China, where Shein and Temu are based.

Goods entering via courier companies from Canada and the US, which are part of the United States-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA), will be subject to a 17% duty if the value is greater than US\$50 but does not exceed US\$117.

A 19% duty will also apply to goods that exceed US\$1 from other countries that have international treaties with Mexico, SAT said.

The tax authority said the tariffs will strengthen the “fight against abusive practices”.

Previously, countries were not required to pay duties on goods of those values,

according to a SAT spokesperson.

The new measures, which went into effect on Wednesday, come amid a slew of new tax guidelines that impact e-commerce companies, including a Dec 19 decree by the administration of President Claudia Sheinbaum that increased import duties to as much as 35% on a swath of clothing, including dresses and shirts, home goods like blankets and curtains, as well as tents and awnings.

Officials said last month that the move was aimed at preventing the importation of some products that evaded taxes, guaranteeing a

level playing field for Mexican companies and protecting sector jobs.

Some industry experts have said the decree could mark a major disruption of Mexico’s IMMEX programme that allows foreign companies to import goods into Mexico tax-free for manufacturing, assembly or packaging for direct sale to US shoppers.

E-commerce powerhouses Shein and Temu, which compete with US retailers like Walmart and Amazon, could be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of higher tariffs. – Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: JANUARY 2

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 2 Jan 2025



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

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

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

Bursa Indices		
INDEX		CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,536.50	-48.93
FBMVKLCI	1,632.87	-9.46
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	550.24	+0.75
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	174.13	-2.32
CONSTRUCTION	308.82	+0.36
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,060.40	-109.60
ENERGY	830.42	+7.49
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	544.29	+0.49
HEALTH CARE	2,380.78	-16.69
TRANSPORTATION	1,056.91	-10.28
PROPERTY	1,125.46	-8.26
PLANTATION	7,623.43	-25.63
FBMSHA	12,549.70	-40.79
FBMACE	5,432.10	+51.66
TECHNOLOGY	65.15	+0.17
TURNOVER: 2.640 bil		VALUE: RM1.967 bil

Bursa ends first trading day of 2025 on weak note

BURSA Malaysia's benchmark index ended the first trading day yesterday on a subdued note due to profit-taking activities following the year-end rally in the early part of the week and in line with most regional markets.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI declined 9.46 points or 0.58% to 1,632.87 compared with Tuesday's close of 1,642.33.

The market was closed on Wednesday for the New Year holiday. The index had initially opened 1.01 points lower at 1,641.32 and moved between 1,629.23 and 1,641.32 throughout the day.

The broader market was negative, as decliners outpaced gainers 580 to 449, while 496 counters remained unchanged, 830 were untraded and 11 suspended.

Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd equity research vice-president Thong Pak Leng said amid geopolitical tensions, Asia's risk-off atmosphere showcased traders' cautious approach as they begin reallocating assets for 2025.

He expects the benchmark index was unable to maintain the 1,635 support level, and anticipated further consolidation until new catalysts arise.

"As such, we anticipate the FBM KLCI to trend within the range of 1,625-1,635 towards the weekend," he told Bernama.

Among the heavyweights, CelcomDigi and SD Guthrie added three sen to RM3.65 and RM4.98 respectively, Petronas Gas strengthened 26 sen to RM17.94, MISC rose two sen to RM7.62, IHH Healthcare was flat at RM7.30, Maybank shed six sen to RM10.18, and Public Bank slipped two sen to RM4.54.

For active stocks, Velocity Capital climbed 1.5 sen to 6.5 sen, SNS Network was four sen higher at 70 sen, Winstar Capital increased 7.5 sen to 71 sen, MYEG was flat at 96 sen, and Hubline inched down half-a-sen to five sen.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
VELOCITY	0.065	0.015	30.00	809,130
SNS	0.700	0.040	6.06	757,583
HSI-PWB1	0.130	0.015	13.04	752,614
HSI-CWA2	0.095	-0.030	-24.00	694,748
HSI-CWAZ	0.070	-0.025	-26.32	672,207
HSI-CYX	0.055	-0.035	-38.89	590,276
VANZO	0.205	-0.010	-4.65	538,012
WINSTAR	0.710	0.075	11.81	408,079
HSI-CYY	0.130	-0.075	-36.59	322,374
MYEG	0.960	-	-	300,908
HSI-PWBG	0.075	0.020	36.36	279,665
3REN	0.405	0.025	6.58	265,458
HUBLINE	0.050	-0.005	-9.09	265,233
HSI-CWAM	0.025	-0.020	-44.44	254,220
YTL-C79	0.015	-0.010	-40.00	247,641
JCY	0.575	0.010	1.77	236,829
GENTINGC3H	0.035	0.005	16.67	224,360
HSI-PWBH	0.190	0.045	31.03	217,126
SIMEPROP	1.630	-0.060	-3.55	211,902
LWSABAH	0.980	0.085	9.50	210,767



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
HEIM	24.760	0.640	6,627
DLADY	30.720	0.540	523
PETDAG	19.600	0.280	746
PEIGAS	17.940	0.260	2,813
KEYFIELD	2.350	0.170	35,054
VITROX	4.170	0.160	28,334
HSI-PWBX	0.870	0.130	1,200
TM	6.770	0.120	28,185
CHINTEK	8.390	0.110	20
HSI-PWB1	0.450	0.105	9,817
CARLSBG	20.760	0.100	384
MMAAG-WC	0.360	0.095	8,690
LWSABAH	0.980	0.085	210,767
ALLIANZ	20.740	0.080	287
CANONE	2.380	0.080	60
KERJAYA	2.290	0.080	24,284
UMS	2.190	0.080	10
HSI-PWDK	0.470	0.075	852
WINSTAR	0.710	0.075	408,079
HSI-PWBW	0.360	0.070	8,116

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DAYANG-C40	0.010	100.00	3,000
EAH	0.010	100.00	1,122
KGROU	0.010	100.00	5,205
WPRTS-C26	0.140	100.00	1,428
MAXLAND-WB	0.015	50.00	151
MTRONIC	0.015	50.00	210,764
TXCD-PA	0.030	50.00	2,518
YB-WA	0.015	50.00	7
HIL-WB	0.170	41.67	40
ECOWLD-C37	0.070	40.00	3,060
VITROX-C6	0.070	40.00	3,935
MSM-C2	0.055	37.50	200
HSI-PWBG	0.075	36.36	279,665
MMAAG-WC	0.360	35.85	8,690
DNONCE-WB	0.020	33.33	1,000
GCB-C12	0.020	33.33	680
HENGYUANC58	0.020	33.33	509
LIONIND-WA	0.020	33.33	611
MAHSING-C69	0.020	33.33	5,000
PETDAG-C11	0.040	33.33	250

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA [US]	42,544.22	-29.51	-0.07
S&P 500 [US]	5,881.63	-25.31	-0.43
NASDAQ [US]	19,310.79	-176.00	-0.90
NYSE [US]	19,097.11	+19.18	+0.10
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	4,882.24	-13.74	-0.28
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,177.51	+4.49	+0.05
DAX [GER]	19,954.10	+44.96	+0.23
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	39,894.54	-386.62	-0.96
TOPIX [JPN]	2,784.92	-16.76	-0.60
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	19,623.32	-436.63	-2.18
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,820.40	-114.51	-2.91
SH SE COM [CHN]	3,262.56	-89.20	-2.66
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,398.94	-0.55	-0.02
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	181.73	+0.10	+0.06
ASX 200 [AUS]	8,201.24	+42.10	+0.52
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,464.95	+44.44	+0.53
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	79,870.13	+1362.72	+1.74
FBM KLCI	1,632.87	-9.46	-0.58
STRAITS TIMES INDEX [S'PORE]	3,793.57	+5.97	+0.16
WTI [US\$/BBL.]	71.97	+0.25	+0.35
BRENT [US\$/BBL.]	74.91	+0.27	+0.36
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	2,651.20	+10.20	+0.39
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	29.75	+0.50	+1.72
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	912.70	+5.15	+0.57
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	401.80	-0.85	-0.21
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	8,768.00	-142.00	-1.59
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	458.50	+6.25	+1.38
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	551.50	+3.25	+0.59
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	40.36	+0.06	+0.15
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	11,675.00	+168.00	+1.46
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	193.80	-3.70	-1.87

As at 5pm, Jan 2

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
MPI	25.300	-0.600	1,110
HLFG	18.140	-0.360	495
PCHEM	4.860	-0.310	74,524
SGBHD	0.300	-0.300	100
EQBMID	1.055	-0.200	1
TENAGA	14.760	-0.180	91,674
HLIND	14.140	-0.160	305
APOLLO	6.550	-0.150	84
HLBANK	20.420	-0.140	1,782
UTDPLT	30.940	-0.140	6,523
FAREAST	3.520	-0.130	90
HSI-CWAL	0.155	-0.130	2,158
CHINAETF-MYR	4.550	-0.130	715
HSI-CWCJ	0.525	-0.125	29,050
KLK	21.680	-0.120	3,993
HSI-CY9	0.265	-0.105	18,005
HSI-CWA7	0.420	-0.100	4,356
IDEAL	3.900	-0.100	10
HSI-CWAK	0.255	-0.095	120
HSI-CWAW	0.300	-0.095	86,606

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
ANCOMNY-CK	0.005	-50.00	600
CFM-WA	0.005	-50.00	300
CTOS-C12	0.005	-50.00	3,977
EKOVEST-C58	0.005	-50.00	2,420
GENM-C22	0.015	-50.00	1
HSI-CWAO	0.010	-50.00	190,814
KANGER-WB	0.005	-50.00	70
MAXIS-C50	0.010	-50.00	150
SGBHD	0.300	-50.00	100
YTLPOWR-C59	0.005	-50.00	2,920
ZENTECH	0.005	-50.00	4,850
HSI-CWAL	0.155	-45.61	2,158
HSI-CWAM	0.025	-44.44	254,220
A50CHIN-H95	0.085	-43.33	27
HSI-CWAN	0.030	-40.00	3,121
HSI-CWAU	0.015	-40.00	10
YTL-C79	0.015	-40.00	247,641
HSI-CYX	0.055	-38.89	590,276
FBMKLCI-HA4	0.105	-38.24	5
HSI-CYY	0.130	-36.59	322,374

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

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

Compiled by SunBiz Team

DISCLAIMER: The information is extracted from stockbrokers' commentaries and research reports and do not represent the views or opinions of Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd. It is not a solicitation, recommendation or an offer to buy or sell the equities featured. Sun Media Corporation shall not be liable or responsible for any consequences resulting from usage of the information.

S&P: Malaysia's December manufacturing PMI declines

KUALA LUMPUR: The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Malaysia Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 48.6 in December 2024 from 49.2 in November, with cost increases at their slowest pace in over four-and-a-half years, since June 2020.

A PMI reading above 50 indicates overall growth from the previous month, while a reading below 50 signals contraction.

S&P Global said December's drop was the sharpest since March 2023, reflecting muted trends in the Malaysian manufacturing sector as the year ended.

"Positively, input price inflation slowed sharply in the month and was the weakest in the current 55-month sequence of rising input costs, contributing to only a fractional increase in output charges," it said in a statement yesterday.

Commenting on the performance, S&P Global Market Intelligence economist Usamah Bhatti said the final round of 2024 PMI data suggested that demand conditions in the Malaysian manufacturing sector remained subdued in December, as production and new order inflows moderated at modest rates.

"That said, the data are still consistent with the GDP growth seen in the third quarter of the year continuing, albeit at a softer pace," he said.

According to Usamah, December's PMI data showed that firms opted to work through existing orders in the absence of new order growth, while also scaling back employment, purchases, and stock holdings.

Positively, he noted that inflationary pressures softened sharply in December, with average cost burdens rising at the slowest pace since the sequence began in June 2020, and charges only raised fractionally in response. – Bernama

Ringgit softens on continuous demand for greenback

THE ringgit finished lower against the US dollar on the first trading day of the year yesterday on continuous demand for the greenback due to concerns over the US Federal Reserve's potential decision to cut interest rates in 2025.

At 6pm, the ringgit slid to 4.4760/4810 against the US dollar from Tuesday's close of 4.4690/4745.

Markets were closed on Wednesday for New Year's Day.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid told Bernama that in addition to the anticipation of smaller rate cuts by the Fed, market sentiment will continue to be influenced by concerns over the potential economic policies of the second Donald Trump administration.

Besides, he said, the US Dollar Index also rose 0.33% to 108.487 points as demand for the US dollar continued to remain elevated. The ringgit closed mostly higher against other major currencies.

It slipped versus the Japanese yen to 2.8546/8580 from Tuesday's close of 2.8529/8566, but appreciated against the British pound to 5.5869/5932 from 5.6095/6164 previously and strengthened vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6336/6387 from 4.6549/6606.

Meanwhile, the local note traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It weakened versus the Singapore dollar to 3.2859/2898 from 3.2824/2867 at the previous close and slid versus the Philippine peso to 7.73/7.75 from 7.70/7.72.

However, the ringgit firmed against the Thai baht to 13.0530/0744 from 13.0566/0830 on Tuesday and was higher vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah at 276.2/276.7 compared with 276.9/277.5 previously.

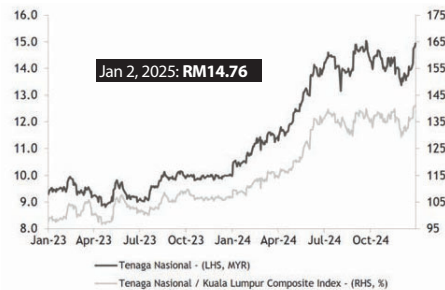
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5520	4.4090	4.3990
1 Australian Dollar	2.8350	2.7150	2.6990
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3330	3.2290	3.2210
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1610	3.0710	3.0590
1 Euro	4.7180	4.5560	4.5360
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5570	2.4580	2.4420
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3330	3.2290	3.2210
1 Sterling Pound	5.7040	5.5110	5.4910
1 Swiss Franc	5.0520	4.8300	4.8150
100 UAE Dirham	125.4000	118.6700	118.4700
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8890	3.6140	3.4140
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.7800	60.0200	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.8500	59.5600	59.3600
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.2100	56.1600	55.9600
100 Indian Rupee	5.4000	5.0600	4.8600
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0293	0.0264	0.0214
100 Japanese Yen	2.8950	2.7970	2.7870
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.0200	37.6500	37.4500
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6600	1.5600	1.3600
100 Philippine Peso	7.9500	7.4800	7.2800
100 Qatar Riyal	126.1500	119.7600	119.5600
100 Saudi Riyal	122.3900	116.1800	115.9800
100 South Africa Rand	25.0100	22.5700	22.3700
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.6000	1.4600	1.2600
100 Swedish Krona	42.3800	38.5000	38.3000
100 Thai Baht	13.8800	12.2800	11.8800

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Tenaga Nasional Bhd

Hold. Target price: RM14.00



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

ON Dec 26, Tenaga announced a new base tariff of 45.62sen/kWh for Regulatory Period 4 (RP4; 2025-27), 14% higher from RP3 (39.95sen/kWh). The revised tariff schedule is still being finalised and is proposed to only take effect in 2H25. The potential under-recoveries in 1H'25 would be funded by the Industry Fund (KWIE). Consumer tariffs (including ICPT surcharges) are thus unchanged in 1H'25 (from 2H'24).

Based on subsequent press releases and reports, the notable RP4 base tariff parameters include: 1) coal price of US\$97/t (from US\$79/t in RP3), 2) gas price of Tier 1: RM24-35/mmBTU; Tier 2: RM46/mmBTU (from Tier 1: RM24-30/mmBTU; Tier 2: RM33/mmBTU), 3) cumulative base capex of RM26.554 billion (from RM20.555 billion), 4) regulatory WACC of 7.3% (unchanged). Tenaga also disclosed a contingent capex of RM16.267 billion which was not included in the base tariff derivation based on press reports.

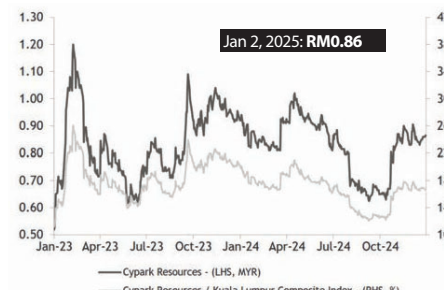
It is unclear for now what the conditions are for deployment of the contingent capex, and how the recovery mechanism would work and be funded (perhaps from RE exports). Demand growth assumptions are also pending. Tenaga disclosed it has been shortlisted under the LSS5 programme to develop a 500MW solar farm in Kedah. We expect the earnings impact to be immaterial assuming RM2 billion capex and single-digit IRR.

There are several risk factors for our earnings estimates, price target, and rating for Tenaga. Regulatory developments, such as the determination of regulated returns, have direct impact on earnings. Changes in electricity demand patterns or plant outages could also result in loss of earnings for Tenaga.

HOLD with RM14 TP. – Maybank Investment Bank, Jan 2

Cypark Resources Bhd

Hold. Target price: RM0.87



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

RE and WTE revenues were QoQ higher in Q2 by 21% and 13% respectively, on higher contribution from a newly completed LSS3 project in Terengganu (for the RE ops; COD on June 9, 2024) and insurance compensation (for the WTE ops) for a fire incident in end-Apr 2024. Profit wise, RE ops recorded a pre-tax profit of RM24 million, mainly due to a RM30 million reversal of provision. WTE ops pre-tax loss narrowed to RM8 million due to the insurance compensation. Group tax was exceptionally high in Q2 due to one-off de-recognition of deferred tax assets of RM7 million.

We expect its LSS2 projects in Kelantan to obtain COD in Jan/Feb 2025 which will enable scheduled and confirmed payments from Tenaga Nasional for the sale of electricity. As for its WTE ops, the plant has resumed operations on Oct 29, 2024, after a period of unscheduled downtime and upgrading works that began in April 2024.

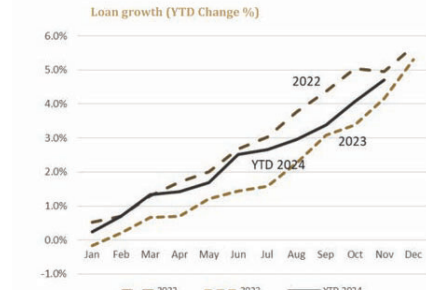
We now forecast RM54 million core net loss in FY25E (previously -RM26 million) on adjusting for higher tax and financing costs. We however raise our EPCC job win forecasts for FY26/27 to RM300 million p.a. (from RM150 million p.a.; none for FY25) on better EPCC win prospects from the NETR projects. This leads to higher FY26/27 core net profit by +42%/+39% respectively. We expect turnaround in FY26/27E due to optimal performance at WTE.

Cypark Resources is pioneering developer and provider in renewable energy, green tech & environmental services, and waste management & WTE.

HOLD with RM0.87 TP. – Maybank Investment Bank, Jan 2

Banking Sector

Overweight



Source: TA Research, Bank Negara Malaysia

TOTAL loans and advances grew 5.8% YoY (vs 6% in October 2024) in November 2024. By segment, consumer loans expanded by 6.3% YoY (+0.5% MoM), while the business loans grew at 5.3% YoY (+0.8% MoM), vs an increase of 5.4% in October 2024. Overall, loan growth expanded by 4.7% YTD, vs 4.2% in November 2023.

Business loans grew by 3.6% YTD, compared to an increase of 2.6% YTD in November 2023. YoY, loans for Working Capital increased by 5.9%. By sector, loans for Education, Health, & Others and Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing continued their downward trends with a 3.2% and 4.6% YoY decline. Meanwhile, loans for Mining & Quarrying turned around to increase by 0.3% YoY during the month. Elsewhere, all other segments experienced YoY growths. In descending order, growth was led by Water Supply, Sewerage & Waste (14.3% YoY), Accommodation & Food Services (+11% YoY), Finance, Insurance, & Business Activities (9.9% YoY), Wholesale and Retail Trade (8.1% YoY), Transportation & Storage (+2.3% YoY), Information & Communication (+4.4% YoY), Manufacturing (+3.6% YoY) and Construction (+3.6% YoY), and Electricity, Gas, Steam & Air (+2.3% YoY).

Total consumer loans accelerated by 6.3% YoY (+0.5% MoM). Residential Mortgages, which account for a sizeable chunk (around 64%) of total consumer loans, continued to support growth in the segment, increasing at a decent pace of 7% YoY (November 2023: +7.3% YoY). Loans for the purchase of passenger cars also climbed at an encouraging rate of 8.8% YoY (November 2023: +9.7% YoY), while the yearly drawdowns for credit cards and loans for personal uses broadened by 8.2% YoY (November 2023: +11.7% YoY) and 3.8% YoY (November 2023: +5.3% YoY), respectively. – TA Research, Jan 2

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

Exploring new diners

THE Malaysian dining scene continues to thrive with the opening of several new and unique restaurant concepts, each bringing something special to the table. From inclusivity-focused cafes to international culinary brands expanding their footprint, here are six newly launched restaurant locations that are making waves.

At the forefront of these launches is Starbucks Malaysia, celebrating its 26th anniversary with an addition to its signing outlet (deaf outlet) lineup.

Starbucks Malaysia: Pioneering inclusivity in Johor

Starbucks Malaysia has once again set the benchmark for inclusivity with the launch of its fourth signing store in Permas City, Johor on Dec 17 last year. The signing outlet concept, first introduced in 2016, is an innovative initiative to empower the deaf and hard of hearing community by creating accessible job opportunities and fostering inclusive customer experiences.

The new outlet builds on the success of the signing stores in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Sarawak, with the Permas City location being the first in the southern region.

The store also celebrates the promotion of Mohd Akmal, a long-time deaf partner, to the role of outlet supervisor. His journey, from barista at the first signing outlet in Bangsar Village II to leading a team at Permas City, shows Starbucks's commitment to nurturing talent within the deaf community.

Adding a creative flair, the Permas City signing outlet features an artwork by deaf artist Wong Jia Yaw, titled *The Colours of Joy*. This piece celebrates the resilience and creativity of deaf culture, with vibrant colours and sign language elements symbolising connection and growth.

As part of its anniversary, Starbucks Malaysia is offering ongoing discounts for persons with disabilities cardholders nationwide. Exclusive activities and promotions at the Permas City outlet include a

➤ Starbucks leads in inclusivity with its fourth signing outlet



The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf in Penang has a drive-in concept.

free Tall Americano for visitors who sign "Starbucks" in Malaysian sign language.

Fuiyoh! It's Uncle Roger: Expanding across Klang Valley

Fuiyoh! It's Uncle Roger continues to captivate food enthusiasts with the opening of its second and third outlets in MyTown Shopping Centre and IPC Shopping Centre on Dec 15 and 16 last year, respectively. The



The new Starbucks Malaysia outlet is the first in the southern region.

restaurant, known for its signature *wok hei* flavours, has introduced a revised pricing structure with affordable offerings.

The menu has expanded to include new items such as gourmet chicken sausages and deep-fried prawns, promising to delight customers. Beyond Klang Valley, the brand has ambitious plans, with upcoming outlets in Johor Bahru and Penang as well as aspirations to expand to countries such as India and the Philippines.

Shake Shack: Avo-lovers rejoice at Sunway Pyramid

Shake Shack has opened a second location at Sunway Pyramid on Dec 19 last year. The launch introduced the exclusive Avocado Menu, featuring the Avocado Burger and Avocado Chicken, celebrating fresh ingredients and premium flavours.

The outlet also offers frozen custard creations such as Cleopatra's Dream (RM15) and The Golden Rule (RM15), inspired by local culture. With vibrant murals by Malaysian artist Jaemy C and opening day activities, Shake Shack at Sunway Pyramid blends global charm with local flair.

Tim Hortons signature outlet: Crafting coffee moments at Sunway Pyramid

Canadian coffee chain Tim Hortons has launched its first premium Signature Store in Malaysia at Sunway Pyramid.

The menu features signature lattes



Canadian coffee chain Tim Hortons launches its first premium signature outlet in Malaysia at Sunway Pyramid.

and iced cappuccinos such as maple cinnamon latte (starting at RM13) alongside Malaysian-inspired items such as the butterscotch ondeh-ondeh iced cappuccino (starting at RM12) and sambal chicken grilled cheese wrap (RM12).

The outlet also collaborates with Mercy Malaysia through its Tims for Good MY initiative, donating proceeds from specific menu items to support local communities.

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf: A drive-in cafe in Penang

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf Malaysia marked its 200th cafe opening at Caltex Batu Maung in Penang, with a unique drive-in concept. Customers can enjoy premium handcrafted beverages such as the Black Forest Mocha Ice Blended (from RM18.90) and Double Chocolate Peppermint Latte (from RM16.90) with convenience.

The cafe also introduces the MyCBTL app, offering personalised promotions and smooth ordering. Opening promotions, such as a free Polar Bean Bunny with a RM100 spend, add to the festive atmosphere.

Sephora Cafe: Where beauty meets desserts

Sephora Malaysia introduces its first cafe in Southeast Asia at Fahrenheit88, blending beauty and indulgence. Open until May 31, the Sephora Cafe offers treats such as the Flower Bloom petit gateaux (RM22) and the Sephora Special doughnut (RM12), crafted in collaboration with



The chic outdoor setting complements Sephora's brand experience.

Trio Bakehouse. The chic outdoor setting complements Sephora's brand experience, making it a perfect stop for beauty enthusiasts.

From inclusive initiatives such as Starbucks's signing store to the culinary creativity of Shake Shack, Malaysia's dining scene continues to evolve with exciting new concepts. These openings reflect not only the growth of the food and beverage industry but also a deep commitment to inclusivity, quality and community engagement. Whether you are in Johor, Klang Valley or Penang, there is a fresh dining experience waiting to be explored.



The launch of Shake Shack in Sunway Pyramid introduces the Avocado Menu, which was rolled out citywide yesterday.



Fuiyoh! Its Uncle Roger, known for its signature *wok hei* flavours, introduces a revised pricing structure.

Your weekend horoscope



ARIES
March 20 – April 19
This weekend, you may feel a burst of energy. You may feel ready to conquer your fears and the world. Channel that fiery passion and fearlessness into creative projects or outdoor adventures. Embrace spontaneity and seize unexpected opportunities. Just remember to pace yourself and prioritise rest to avoid burnout.



TAURUS
April 20 – May 20
This weekend is all about indulging in your senses. Treat yourself to a massage, meal or a relaxing soak in the bath. You deserve to enjoy the little treats in life. After all, you earned it considering all your hard work and dedication this week. As for your relationships, be sure to nurture them. Take time to catch up with your loved ones.



GEMINI
May 21 – June 20
Your quick wit and intellectual curiosity will be on full display this weekend. Engage in stimulating conversations, exploring new ideas and connecting with people. You may just meet people who share your interests. Just remember to stay present and avoid getting distracted by too many things at once.



CANCER
June 21 – July 22
This weekend calls for some introspection. It is time to do some reflection on your inner world. Spend time connecting with yourself by engaging in activities that bring you peace and tranquillity. Do not be afraid to get in touch with yourself. The journey may just help you discover something instrumental about yourself.



LEO
July 23 – Aug 22
Your charisma and confidence have never been more on point. You may feel extra confident and charismatic. So, take the centre stage, whether it is at a social gathering or a creative endeavour. Embrace your playful side and enjoy the spotlight. You may just surprise yourself with what you could achieve this weekend. Just remember to be mindful of others' feelings.



VIRGO
Aug 23 – Sept 22
Your practical nature and attention to detail may be vital this weekend. Whether it be your friends or family, someone may require your help to overcome an obstacle in their life. Be sure to put your good organisational skills to use. As for yourself, take this time to organise your space. Be sure to clear any pending tasks. Do not forget to schedule time to relax.



Mufasa trades on its predecessor's success to lure in audiences. - PIC FROM FACEBOOK @DISNEYSTUDIOS

Mufasa, Sonic 3 score big at box office

► Family-friendly films attract audiences during Christmas, New Year's holidays

THE holiday weekend in North America saw two films battling for box-office supremacy and both emerging with a claim to first place.

Disney's animated drama *Mufasa: The Lion King* prevailed in the five days from Christmas Day through Sunday with an estimated take of US\$63.8 million (RM281 million), industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

But Paramount's action comedy *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*, which booked US\$59.9 million for that same holiday period, came out on top for the traditional Friday-through-Sunday stretch, edging the Disney film by US\$38 million to US\$37.1 million.

Analyst David A. Gross said the weekend generated big, although not record-breaking box office numbers, adding that the next seven days should be excellent.

New vampire flick *Nosferatu* from Focus Features also posted impressive numbers, with US\$40.3 million for the five-day period and US\$21.2 million for the three-day weekend.

Gross called that an excellent opening for a new horror film, a remake of the 1922 silent classic inspired by the 1897 novel *Dracula*, and noted critics' reviews are outstanding.

The ensemble cast includes Bill Skarsgard, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Willem Dafoe, Nicholas Hoult and Lily-Rose Depp.

Universal's musical fantasy *Wicked*, starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, earned US\$31.7 million for five days (US\$19.5 million for three) as the magical world of *Oz* slipped one spot to fourth place. Its global earnings now stand at US\$634 million.

Disney's animated *Moana 2* had an estimated US\$28.3 million in ticket sales for five days (US\$18.2 million for three), slipping one spot but holding on to top-five status for the fifth week.

Meantime, Searchlight Pictures's *A Complete Unknown*, with Timothee Chalamet portraying an enigmatic and young Bob Dylan during the dizzying years that propelled the singer-songwriter from anonymity to world fame, took



Sonic the Hedgehog 3 scores big at the box office during the holiday season in North America.

- PIC FROM FACEBOOK

@SONICTHEHEDGEHOGFANS

in a solid US\$23.3 million for five days (US\$11.6 million for three). Dylan himself has described Chalamet as a brilliant actor. - AFP

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- *Babygirl* (US\$7.2 million for five days, US\$4.4 million for three)
- *Gladiator II* (US\$5.9 million, US\$4.2 million)
- *Homestead* (US\$5.3 million, US\$3.2 million)
- *The Fire Inside* (US\$4.3 million, US\$2 million)



LIBRA
Sept 23 – Oct 22
This weekend is all about finding harmony and the right balance in your relationships. Be sure to check in with your loved ones and mull over your time with them. If you are currently in a bad spot with anyone important, take time to sit down and iron out your misunderstandings. It is time to put your diplomatic skills to use.



SCORPIO
Oct 23 – Nov 21
Your intensity and passion might be at an all-time high this weekend. Do not be afraid to embrace your desires and pursue your goals with unwavering determination. Your bucket list may just thank you! For your personal relationships, connect with someone who ignites your soul. Strengthen your bond with them. They may have been longing for you to connect with them again.



SAGITTARIUS
Nov 22 – Dec 21
Adventure calls for you this weekend. You may feel a strong desire to explore your adventurous spirit. Go ahead and explore new places, try new things and expand your horizons. Embrace spontaneity and go with the flow. You may just learn something new and instrumental that could help you navigate life better.



CAPRICORN
Dec 22 – Jan 19
Your ambition and discipline will be your guiding stars this weekend. Set realistic goals, create a plan and take concrete steps towards achieving them. The sky is the limit. Anything is possible if you put your mind to it. After all, you have proven your capabilities and strength by achieving significant milestones in the past.



AQUARIUS
Jan 20 – Feb 18
Your unique perspective and independent spirit may just shine this weekend. Be sure to put yourself out there and connect with like-minded individuals. Engage in stimulating conversations with them and contribute your thoughts. They may just appreciate and thank you for your input, inspiring them to embrace a new school of thought.



PISCES
Feb 19 – March 20
Your empathy and creativity may be heightened this weekend. It would be ideal to channel them in your creative endeavours. Be it art or music, spend time to express yourself creatively. With friends and family, nurture your relationships with them by lending a shoulder for them to lean on. They may just be in need of someone to talk to. But, be cautious that you do not become an emotional garbage can.

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

PEANUT butter is a staple in kitchens worldwide, loved for its creamy texture and nutty richness. This humble spread offers endless possibilities. With its high protein content and ability to pair with sweet and savoury ingredients, peanut butter can transform simple meals into filling meals. Here, we explore five creative ways to enjoy peanut butter throughout your day.

Peanut butter-banana smoothie bowl

Ideal for breakfast, this smoothie bowl is a wholesome, energising start to your day. Packed with fruits, protein and healthy fats, it is a treat that is as nutritious as it is delicious.

Ingredients

2 frozen bananas
2 tablespoons of peanut butter
½ cup of Greek yoghurt (or any plant-based alternative)
¼ cup milk of choice
Toppings: sliced bananas, granola, chia seeds and a drizzle of peanut butter

Instructions

1. Blend the frozen bananas, peanut butter, Greek yoghurt and milk in a blender until smooth.
2. Pour the mixture into a bowl.
3. Top with sliced bananas, granola, chia seeds and a drizzle of peanut butter.
4. Serve immediately and enjoy the creamy, refreshing goodness.

Peanut butter & veggie wraps

Looking for a quick and healthy lunch option? These wraps are a fantastic combination of peanut butter's creamy richness and fresh vegetables' crisp texture.

Ingredients

2 large whole-grain tortillas
4 tablespoons of peanut butter
½ cucumber, julienned
1 carrot, julienned
½ red bell pepper, sliced
1 cup of spinach leaves
1 tablespoon of sesame seeds (optional)



A fresh and nutritious wrap lunch on the go.



A creamy and energising smoothie bowl start to your day.

— PIC FROM YOUTUBE @FORKETTI FOOD

Nutty delights

► Creative ways to enjoy peanut butter

Instructions

1. Spread two tablespoons of peanut butter evenly across each tortilla.
2. Arrange cucumber, carrot, bell pepper and spinach leaves in the centre of the tortilla.
3. Sprinkle sesame seeds over the veggies for added crunch and flavour.
4. Roll the tortilla tightly to form a wrap.
5. Slice diagonally and serve immediately or pack for a convenient on-the-go meal.

Peanut butter noodles

This dish is a dinner game-changer! Combining the *umami* of

soy sauce with the nuttiness of peanut butter, these noodles are a quick and flavour-packed option for busy evenings.

Ingredients

200g noodles (spaghetti, ramen or rice noodles)
3 tablespoons of peanut butter
2 tablespoons of soy sauce
1 tablespoon of sesame oil
1 teaspoon of honey (or maple syrup for a vegan option)
1 garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon of grated ginger
2 tablespoons of water (to thin the sauce)
Optional toppings: chopped peanuts, spring onions, sesame seeds

Instructions

1. Cook the noodles according to the package instructions and set aside.
2. In a bowl, whisk together peanut butter, soy sauce, sesame oil, honey, garlic, ginger and water until smooth.
3. Toss the noodles in the sauce



(Right) A quick and indulgent peanut butter-chocolate mug cake to satisfy cravings.

(Left) A savoury, umami-packed noodles for dinner.



Peanut butter-glazed chicken for a gourmet meal.

— PICS FROM PINTEREST

- until evenly coated.
4. Serve warm, topped with chopped peanuts, spring onions and sesame seeds for added texture and flavour.

Peanut butter-glazed chicken

For dinner, this unique peanut butter glaze elevates chicken to a gourmet level. The right balance of savoury and sweet flavours makes this dish an instant crowd-pleaser.

Ingredients

4 chicken thighs or drumsticks
3 tablespoons of peanut butter
2 tablespoons of soy sauce
1 tablespoon of honey
1 teaspoon of sriracha (optional for heat)
1 clove garlic, minced
1 teaspoon of lime juice

Instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 190°C (375°F).
2. In a bowl, mix peanut butter, soy sauce, honey, sriracha, garlic and lime juice to form a glaze.
3. Brush the chicken pieces generously with the glaze.
4. Place the chicken on a lined baking tray and bake for 25–30 minutes or until cooked through.
5. Serve with steamed rice or roasted vegetables for a complete meal.

Peanut butter-chocolate mug cake

End your day with a sweet treat that is ready in minutes! This decadent mug cake combines chocolatey richness with peanut butter's comforting creaminess for those late-night cravings.

Ingredients

4 tablespoons of all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons of sugar
1 tablespoon of cocoa powder
1 teaspoon of baking powder
2 tablespoons of milk
1 tablespoon of peanut butter
1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
A pinch of salt

Instructions

1. In a microwave-safe mug, mix flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking powder and salt.
2. Add milk, peanut butter, oil and vanilla extract to the dry ingredients and stir until smooth.
3. Microwave on high for one to two minutes, or until the cake has risen and is set in the centre.
4. Let it cool for a minute before digging in with a spoon.

By incorporating peanut butter into these creative recipes, you can explore its full potential and step up your everyday meals. So, grab that jar of peanut butter and start cooking!





the Sun Motoring

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Is the GT worth buying?

Latest Peugeot 408 is more expensive than its siblings, being priced at RM30k more

BY KESHY DHILLON

IT WOULD be cliché to start an article about Peugeot by mentioning its past. Plenty has been written already, and many already know that the brand has been in Malaysia for a while, and if its current form is any indication, Peugeot is here to stay.

We shall not mention anything about its past distributors and dealers either, nor shall we talk about the issues owners have had with spare parts in the past. Plenty has been said about that as well and there are plenty of articles on those topics on Google.

The grille on the GT is painted in its body colour. →



The 1.6-litre engine is economical yet powerful. ↓



The GT gets Matrix LED headlights.



The 20-inch wheels look great.

Peugeot is now official represented in Malaysia via the Stellantis Group, which is the brand owner, custodian and manufacturer of Peugeot cars, not only in Malaysia but globally as well.

That basically means that Peugeot and its fans have never been in a better place.

Heading the charge for the refreshed Peugeot brand in Malaysia is a trio of variants for the 408 model – the entry-level Allure which is priced at RM146,055, after that is the Premium and that is priced at RM166,055 and then comes the GT, priced at RM196,055.

We have driven the Premium and were already quite impressed by it, and later we drove the GT and because the Premium already ticks all the boxes, we were wondering if the GT truly is worth RM30,000 more.

So that is what we want to explore in this article.

Who are its competitors?

Being a C-segment contender, the 408 goes

up against the likes of the Honda Civic, Toyota Corolla Altis, Mazda 3 sedan and even the Proton S70, because Proton insists to position the S70 in the same, ultra competitive segment as the brands mentioned above.

The 408GT, which is the topic of this article, is the most expensive in the segment. The top spec variant of the hugely popular Honda Civic for example costs just RM167,900, a full RM28,155 cheaper.

Mazdas are known to be quite expensive in Malaysia as well, but even the most expensive 3 sedan is priced at RM165,000. The top of the line Corolla Altis on the other hand costs RM147,800.

So you really have to love the 408 GT to be able to justify buying it over some of its competitors.

Why pick the GT over the cheaper variants?

It is difficult to justify spending RM30,000 more for a variant that has somewhat the same body style, same engine and largely the same interior. But once you start diving into the details and spending time poking and prodding around the interior of the GT, you will start notice something's that stand out and hopefully be able to help you justify the price premium to your significant other.

But before we dive inside, let us take a moment to talk about what the exterior has to offer.

The two biggest distinguishing factors from the outside are firstly the 20-inch Monolithe wheels which look fantastic to say the least, but



The dash is minimalistic yet futuristic.



Steering wheel looks odd but feels great.



Nappa leather adorns most surfaces.



Not visible here, but the GT also gets a panoramic roof.



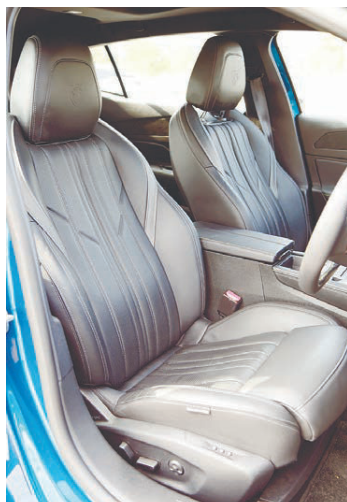
Rear seats can be cramped for tall passengers.



Boot space is decent.



No spare wheel for the GT, just a tyre repair kit.



The electronic seats are arguably the best in its segment.

sport chrome grilles, but the GT gets a swanky one that is painted in body colour and gracefully merges into the bodywork of the car.

On top of that, the GT also gets matrix LED headlamps with a 3D LED tail lamp. Talking about the tail, the GT too unfortunately comes with a bulbous rear bumper that is finished in untreated plastic and is quite an eye sore. To this writer's eyes at least.

And the other problem with untreated plastic besides being unsightly, is that scratches will tend to stick out and are difficult to repair.

What's inside?

The interior of the 408 was one of its biggest attractions when the car was first launched. Marred only by the weirdly shaped steering wheel that feels good in your hands but hinders the view of the instrument cluster ahead.

You could obviously adjust the seat, but you end up sitting too low or too high. Why Peugeot has insisted on continuing with the oblong shaped steering wheel for the past decade when there have been plenty of complaints is beyond us. May they see the light with the next model.

The dash is minimalistic yet high tech, and the software does taking some getting used to but it is not overly complicated. The instrumentation for the GT is almost the same as its siblings; a 10-inch instrument cluster but the GT gets a 3D quartz version and a 10-inch infotainment screen.

However, the GT also gets configurable i-Toggle controls that is set just under the infotainment screen. This lets you program

shortcuts to key controls such as air-conditioning controls, camera setting, seat controls and others. It is a clever method of giving you quick access without having to navigate layers of menu.

The one thing that we particularly like about the 408 are the seats, and that is something that we have raved about in our review of the Premium variant as well. The GT also gets those brilliant seats, but they come wrapped in premium Nappa leather instead.

And the GT also benefits from electronic seats for passenger and driver, which also come with memory and massage function. That is what the RM30,000 premium gets you.

Topping off the interior is a fantastic 10-speaker Focal sound system, while the cheaper 408's make do with a regular six-speaker system.

In terms of spaciousness though, taller passengers will find themselves more comfortable in the front seat than at the back. And that is putting it simply.

How does it drive?

They say that you must always listen to your elders, and if there is one thing that I have heard my elders tell me repeatedly is that Peugeot's always drive well. And they still do.

The suspension is brilliant, and we salute how Peugeot has managed to find the perfect balance of comfort and control.

On the highways, the 408 absorbs and isolates the road from the cabin. In the corners, the suspension keeps the car settled with minimal body roll, giving the driver the confidence needed

to keep the car steady and centered in its lane, particularly when navigating high speed corners.

The engine is the same across all variants - the PureTech 1.6-litre, turbocharged, four-cylinder engine makes 218PS and 300Nm of torque across the range. All that power is channeled to the front through a smooth-shifting eight-speed transmission.

The powerplant is efficient and yet powerful as well. The turbo lag can be noticeable at times but switching it to Sport mode solves that, so if you are the type that like to carve across corners when the mood arises, you will like how the car handles and delivers its power.

Is it worth RM30k more?

The real question here is, if you can afford it, then why not? The GT has a lot of nice tech and toys that hopefully the next owner of the car will appreciate as well.

This writer loves a good sound system, and an interior wrapped in Nappa, so yes that is one thing good about the interior.

Having electronic seats all around is also a great thing and adds a touch of premiumness to a car positioned to take on the Civic and Corolla Altis.

But RM30,000 is understandably a lot of money, but as we said - why not?

Specifications

- Engine:** 1.6-litre, 4-cylinder, turbocharged
- Power:** 218hp@5750rpm
- Torque:** 300Nm@2000rpm
- Transmission:** 8-speed automatic
- Price (as tested):** RM196,055
- We like:** Design, drive, interior
- We don't like:** Rear bumper

may will set you back a pretty penny when it comes time to replace the tyres. Just for the record, the other variants roll on 18-inch wheels.

And then there is the body work, particularly the grille. The Allure and Premium variants

Overwhelming response

Proton e.MAS 7 receives 2,500 bookings after launch



THE Proton e.MAS 7, Malaysia's first national electric vehicle (EV), has over 2,500 bookings, reflecting the nation's growing enthusiasm for sustainable mobility.

Announced by PRO-NET, a subsidiary of Proton, the achievement underscores the strong demand for innovative and eco-friendly transportation solutions in Malaysia.

The e.MAS 7 marks Proton's bold entry into the EV market, setting the stage for a transformative shift in the country's automotive landscape.

Available in two variants – Prime and Premium – the Proton e.MAS 7 delivers impressive performance and range.

Equipped with 49.52kWh and 60.22kWh battery packs, the EV offers a WLTP range of up to 410km.

It also supports advanced charging capabilities, including 11kW AC charging and DC fast charging of up to 100kW.

Priced competitively, the e.MAS 7 starts at RM109,800 for the Prime variant and RM123,800 for the Premium variant.

As part of an exclusive launch offer, the first 3,000 customers receive an RM4,000 rebate, reducing the prices to RM105,800 and RM119,800 for the respective variants.

Developed locally with the expertise of Proton's engineering team, the Proton e.MAS 7 combines innovation, practicality, and affordability.

It is designed with Malaysian motorists in mind, offering a dynamic

driving experience while integrating modern features such as a comprehensive EV charging map accessible through the Proton e.MAS App.

This map enhances convenience for users by providing details about charging stations nationwide, ensuring a seamless journey for EV owners.

Customers interested in the Proton e.MAS 7 can make their bookings at any of the 30 Proton e.MAS dealerships nationwide or through the Proton e.MAS website.

The dedicated Proton e.MAS App further streamlines the ownership experience, allowing users to explore the EV's features, book appointments, and locate charging stations effortlessly.

To celebrate the launch, Proton is offering a special Launch Power Pack for the first 3,000 customers. The package includes a complimentary 7kW home charger, a V2L adaptor, five years of unlimited internet data, a six-year unlimited mileage vehicle warranty, and an eight-year/160,000km high-voltage battery warranty.

Customers also benefit from a special financing rate of 1.98% through Proton Commerce, alongside a trade-in rebate for existing Proton owners.

The success of the Proton e.MAS 7 represents a significant step forward for Proton and Malaysia's automotive industry.

Modern revival of classic icon

VOLKSWAGEN has revived its legendary Type 2 Microbus as the all-electric 2025 ID.Buzz, blending nostalgic charm with contemporary technology.

First launched in 1950, the original Type 2 was a cultural icon symbolising peace and good vibes, with its three rows of seats offering space for up to nine passengers. Fast forward over 50 years, and its successor is making waves as a modern EV.

The ID.Buzz is significantly heavier than its predecessor, weighing in at 2,800kg – a notable 680kg more than the Honda Odyssey.

Despite its heft, the EV offers two powertrain options: a rear-wheel-drive version with 282hp and an all-wheel-drive (AWD) variant delivering 335hp.

The ID.Buzz can accelerate from 0 to 100kph in just 5.5 seconds. However, its 86kWh battery provides a modest range of 376km for the rear-wheel-drive version and 372km for the AWD model, falling short compared to some competitors.

The ID.Buzz captures the essence of its retro roots with its slanted windshield, oversized VW logo, and sliding side doors.

For the North American market, the vehicle is larger than its European counterpart, offering three rows of seats and accommodating seven passengers. Opting for second-row captain's chairs reduces the capacity to six.

With a starting price of US\$59,995 (RM280,000), the ID.Buzz is costlier than rivals such as the Kia EV9.

The latter not only offers a greater range of up to 500km but also provides seating for seven at a lower price point, making the ID.Buzz's pricing is a consideration for prospective buyers.

Volkswagen is betting on the ID.Buzz's nostalgic appeal and



customisation options to stand out. Buyers in North America can select from interior themes like Dune, Copper, and Moonlight, while exterior personalisation is available through a

collaboration with Wrapmate, offering unique wraps to suit individual styles.

While the 2025 Volkswagen ID.Buzz may not excel in performance or range, its retro-inspired design and innovative customization options are likely to attract fans of the original Type 2 Microbus.

Combining a legacy of peace and good vibes with modern EV technology, the ID.Buzz represents a stylish leap into the future for a cherished classic.

Big three explore synergy collaboration

NISSAN, Honda and Mitsubishi have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to explore Mitsubishi Motors' potential involvement in the business integration being planned between Nissan and Honda.

This collaboration aims to amplify synergies across the companies, enhancing their collective competitiveness in the evolving automotive landscape.

The discussions build on the foundational MOU signed by Nissan and Honda in August 2024, which focused on leveraging synergies in electrification and vehicle intelligence.

Mitsubishi Motors has been actively participating in the framework established by this partnership and is now considering formal involvement in the joint holding company envisioned by Nissan and Honda.

The potential integration underscores the companies' commitment to adapting to rapid shifts in the automotive industry, including the push for electrification and digital transformation. Mitsubishi Motors aims to finalise its decision on participation by January 2025.

The integration of Nissan, Honda, and Mitsubishi Motors envisions a strategic collaboration designed to harness their collective expertise and achieve transformative objectives.

By working together, the three automakers aim to accelerate advancements in vehicle electrification, autonomous driving technologies, and intelligent systems.

This unified approach to innovation is expected to position them as leaders in the rapidly evolving automotive landscape.

Through the optimisation of resources, the alliance plans to streamline operations across research and development, manufacturing, and supply chains.

By pooling their capabilities, the companies intend to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and increase overall productivity. This synergy is anticipated to foster a more agile and competitive operational framework.

This collaboration represents a strategic step toward consolidating resources, achieving shared objectives, and redefining mobility solutions for the next generation of vehicles.

World's fastest roadster

THE Bugatti Mistral, a stunning roadster powered by a quad-turbocharged W-16 engine, reached an extraordinary top speed of 454kph, surpassing the 2016 record set by the Hennessey Venom GT Spyder at 427.4kph.

The speed run took place at the Automotive Testing facility in Papenburg, Germany, with Bugatti's test driver Andy Wallace at the helm.

Entering the straightaway at 200kph from the banking, Wallace pushed the Mistral to its limit, achieving a remarkable speed on the 4km track. While longer stretches like the Ehra-Lessien test track could have provided even more room to push the Mistral further, the Papenburg facility proved sufficient for this historic feat.

The Mistral, named after the

powerful wind of southern France, is an engineering masterpiece. It shares its DNA with the Chiron Super Sport 300+, the first road-legal car to break the 482kph barrier in 2019. Powered by a quad-turbocharged 8.0-litre W-16 engine, the Mistral produces a staggering 1,578hp – 100 more than the standard Chiron – and delivers power to all four wheels via a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission.

The Mistral's design pays homage to Bugatti's rich legacy while incorporating elements from exclusive models.

Bugatti is limiting production of the Mistral to just 99 units, each priced at US\$5 million (RM23 million). This exclusivity and the car's unparalleled performance cement its status as a collector's dream.

With the Mistral's record-breaking



performance, Bugatti concludes the Chiron era on a high note as it prepares for its next chapter with the Tourbillon.

Now under the Rimac umbrella, Bugatti continues to set new benchmarks in the hypercar world, blending cutting-edge technology

with timeless luxury and performance.

This achievement not only underscores Bugatti's engineering prowess but also serves as a fitting farewell to one of the most iconic internal combustion engines in automotive history.

USA advance ... as holders Germany crash at United Cup

ELENA RYBAKINA'S Kazakhstan dumped defending champions Germany out of the United Cup on Wednesday while top seeds USA beat China to reach the semifinals.

In Sydney, women's world No. 2 Iga Swiatek led Poland into the last eight by winning a rematch of her 2023 French Open final against the Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova.

Britain also progressed to the quarterfinals with Katie Boulter's dominant 6-2, 6-1 victory over Australia's Olivia Gadecki

The upset in Perth sent the Kazakhs into the semifinals of the 18-nation tournament. Sixth-ranked Rybakina earned the first point for Kazakhstan, with the 2022 Wimbledon champion hammering Laura Siegemund 6-3, 6-1.

In Wednesday's other quarterfinal, 2023 winners United States beat China thanks to singles rubber wins by Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz.

World No. 3 Gauff beat Zhang Shuai 7-6 (7-4), 6-2, and Fritz then put the tie beyond the Chinese with a 6-4, 6-4 defeat of Zhang Zhizhen.

"Coco did such a good job putting us ahead and giving me the chance to come out and put us through," said Fritz.

"There was a little bit of pressure because I didn't want to be the one who loses it for the team after Coco won all her matches this week. I played a really solid match. Really happy with it."

Five-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek scored a battling victory over Muchova, coming out on top 6-3, 6-4 after teammate Hubert Hurkacz was upset in three sets by Tomas Machac.

Swiatek returned to partner Hurkacz and outlast Muchova and Machac in the deciding mixed doubles 7-6 (7-3), 6-3 to keep their tournament alive.

"Honestly, I love playing against Karolina because she always brings precision and intensity and a little bit of a different game than most of the girls," Swiatek said.

"So for sure it's a challenge. I'm happy that even though I lost my serve when I thought it's going to be easier, I'm happy that I got my intensity even higher in the last two games to break again." - AFP

Djokovic eases into Bl quarters

TOP SEED Novak Djokovic reached the quarterfinals at Brisbane International, an ATP 250 event, with his 20th career win over Gael Monfils yesterday.

Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam winner, defeated Monfils 6-3, 6-3 to keep his preparation for the Australian Open on track. World No. 7 Djokovic converted all three break points he earned to seal the victory in an hour and 12 minutes.

Monfils, the 38-year-old Frenchman, is yet to beat his Serbian counterpart in a professional tennis match. The duo met for the first time at the US Open in 2005.

"We have been playing for many years. I have known Gael since I was 15. We played quite a bit at juniors and on Tour and have had a good score against him but we have had some incredible battles," Djokovic said.

"He is one of the best, if not the best, athlete in our sport over the years. Incredible flexibility, agility and speed."

The 37-year-old Djokovic takes on big-serving American Reilly Opelka for a place in the semifinals as he chases his 100th singles title.

The Australian Open, where Djokovic is a 10-time champion, begins from Jan 12 in Melbourne. - Agencies

322 Notices

PERISYTIHARAN JUJUAN DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO. PA-38-1101-2024

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DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SELATAN MELAKA DALAM NEGERI PULAU PINANG. PENGULANGAN SYARIKAT NO. PA-28NCC-181-12/2024

Dalam perkara di bawah Akta Syarikat, 2016

Dan

Dalam perkara di bawah Seksyen 465 (1)(e), Seksyen 465 (1)(h) dan Seksyen 466 (1)(a) Akta Syarikat, 2016

Dan

Dalam perkara di bawah kaedah-kaedah (Pengulangan) Syarikat 1972

ANTARA

CS Panel Sdn Bhd (No. Syarikat: 201201036111 (1102053-D)) ...Pempetisyen

DAN

Vinotar (M) Sdn. Bhd. (No. Syarikat: 201101022735 (950874-P)) ...Responden

KLAM PETSIFYEN

NOTIS ADALAH DENGAN IN DIBERI bahawa suatu Petyen atau petyen yang berdaftar dengan Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang pada 05/03/2025 jam 9.00 pagi.

DAN bahawa Petyen tersebut dirangka supaya dikemukakan kepada Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang pada 05/03/2025 jam 9.00 pagi.

DAN mana pihak pemynting atau pemynting Syarikat tersebut yang bermat untuk menyokong atau menentang sesuatu perintah mengikut Petyen tersebut boleh hadir dengan tujuan itu secara peribadi atau melalui peguambanya pada masa bidaan dan sesalinan Petyen tersebut akan dibekalkan oleh pihak yang bertanggungjawab di bawah ini kepada mana-mana pemynting atau pemynting Syarikat tersebut yang berdaftar dengan Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang.

Peguamcara Pemynting

PERINGATAN - Sesiala yang ingin hadir pada perbicaraan Petyen tersebut hendaklah menyampaikan, akan menghantar dengan pos, kepada Tuan Wong-Choo & Mohd. Nur yang dinamakan di atas suatu notis berbilang tentang namanya sebagai, Notis tersebut mestilah menyenaraikan nama dan alamat pihak berkenaan atau peguamcaranya, jika ada. Notis hendaklah disampaikan, akan jika dihantar dengan pos, hendaklah dihantar dalam pengembaran, supaya sampai kepada pihak yang dinamakan di atas sebelum jam 12.00 tengah hari pada 04/03/2025. (RUUKAN NO. WCMN/BM/CPSS/2024-480/VMSB (TKYK))

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INAL KIARA SDN. BHD. (IN LIQUIDATION) (RECEIVERS AND MANAGERS APPOINTED) (REGISTRATION NO.: 19940104002 (32708-V)) MALAYSIA

Dalam perkara di bawah Akta Syarikat, 2016

Dan

Dalam perkara di bawah Seksyen 465 (1)(e), Seksyen 465 (1)(h) dan Seksyen 466 (1)(a) Akta Syarikat, 2016

Dan

Dalam perkara di bawah kaedah-kaedah (Pengulangan) Syarikat 1972

ANTARA

CS Panel Sdn Bhd (No. Syarikat: 201201036111 (1102053-D)) ...Pempetisyen

DAN

Vinotar (M) Sdn. Bhd. (No. Syarikat: 201101022735 (950874-P)) ...Responden

KLAM PETSIFYEN

NOTIS ADALAH DENGAN IN DIBERI bahawa suatu Petyen atau petyen yang berdaftar dengan Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang pada 05/03/2025 jam 9.00 pagi.

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IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT SHAH ALAM (COMMERCIAL DIVISION) COMPANIES (WINDING UP) PETITION NO. BA-28NCC-662-10/2024

In the matter of Section 465 (1)(e) read with Section 466 (1) of the Companies Act, 2016

And

In the matter of the Companies (Winding Up) Rules 1972

And

In the matter of P.E. SETIA CONSTRUCTION SDN. BHD. (Company No. 0560666W/200203100303)

BETWEEN

TAN CHENG SIANG (NRIC No. 8306011-0-1725) [Trading under the name and style of JO TAN TRADING (Company No. 201303241597 / 002263655-X)] ...PETITIONER

AND

P.E. SETIA CONSTRUCTION SDN. BHD. (Company No. 0560666W/200203100303) ...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovesaid company by the High Court was on the 25th day of October 2024, presented by Tan Cheng Siang (NRIC No. 8306011-0-1725) (Trading under the name and style of JO TAN TRADING (Company No. 201303241597 / 002263655-X))

to the High Court sitting at the Court of Appeal, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor

and the said Petition is directed to be heard before the High Court sitting at Shah Alam at 9 a.m. on the 10th

Brutal reality

United face losing £900m in humiliating FFP blow

ADDIDAS has the power to terminate its kit deal worth £900 million (RM5 billion) with Manchester United if the club suffers a shock relegation from the Premier League, according to reports.

The Red Devils have incredibly entered the conversation after losing five of their last six league matches while struggling to adapt to Ruben Amorim's demands.

Following Monday's 2-0 loss to Newcastle United at Old Trafford, Amorim admitted that he had only overseen four training sessions with his first-team squad since replacing Erik ten Hag in November.

The hectic winter fixture schedule has left the 39-year-old using games to instil his philosophy, heavily impacting results at the dawn of his project.

He also raised eyebrows by claiming that United were in a battle to avoid relegation to the Championship as they languish in 14th, seven points above the bottom three after 19 games.

"That is really clear that United are at risk of relegation. It's one of the most difficult moments in the history of Man Utd, and we have to address it with honesty," Amorim told *Sky Sports*.

"When you have these kinds of

moments, especially in the big clubs, it's really hard to turn things around, especially when you don't have a lot of time to train the basics, to cope with the difficult moments.

"So we have to acknowledge our position, the way you see the league, everybody can beat everybody. So we have to engage and focus on surviving."

Should Amorim fail to overturn fortunes in his first season and the unbelievable outcome does occur, the consequences would be hugely damaging.

According to *The Telegraph*, under the terms of United's 10-year agreement with Adidas, the German sportswear giant has the option to rip up the contract.

Adidas can trigger the brutal clause if United drop out of England's top flight but would have to give one full season's notice.

It's claimed there is also the option of cutting the payments in half to £45m (RM253m) for as long as the Red Devils are absent

from the Premier League.

A 10-year extension was signed in July 2023, replacing the previous agreement worth £750m (RM4.2b), which includes a £10m (RM56m) deduction if United fail to qualify for the Champions League again this season.

A United statement read: "This clause has been amended to state that a £10 million deduction will be applied for each year of non-participation in the Uefa Champions League, commencing from the 2025-26 season."

United have also previously confirmed: "Our revenue from the sale of products, media rights, tickets and hospitality would fall considerably if our men's first team were relegated from, or otherwise ceased to play in, the Premier League, the Champions League, the Europa League or the Conference League."

"Relegation from the Premier League or a general decline in the success of our men's first team, particularly in consecutive seasons, may negatively affect our ability to attract or retain talented players and coaching staff, as well as supporters, sponsors and other commercial partners, which would have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations, financial condition and cash flow." - Express Newspapers

Leeds, Burnley held to draws as Sunderland blunt Blades

ENGLISH CHAMPIONSHIP leaders Leeds had to settle for a 1-1 draw with Blackburn following a frantic finish to their New Year's Day clash at Elland Road.

Pascal Struijk looked to have won the game for the hosts with an 88th-minute penalty but Danny Bath's last-gasp equaliser rescued a point for playoff contenders Rovers.

"It was definitely not our best game today," said Leeds manager Daniel Farke.

"I think the lads looked a bit tired," added Farke, who also gave "credit" to Rovers.

With the top two at the end of the season guaranteed automatic promotion, second-placed Burnley missed the chance to gain ground in a goalless draw at home to Stoke.

To make matters worse for the Claret, Hannibal Mejbri was sent off for a stamp in the closing minutes.

Wilson Isidor revived Sunderland's promotion bid with a valuable winner in the 2-1 victory over third-placed Sheffield United.

Fourth-placed Sunderland are now two points behind the top two in the race for an automatic place in the Premier League.

Plymouth's first game since Wayne Rooney stepped down as manager ended in a 2-2 draw with Bristol City thanks to Julio Pleguezuelo's stoppage-time equaliser.

Alex Gilbert's stoppage-time strike lifted fifth-placed Middlesbrough to a 1-0 victory over struggling Hull at the MKM Stadium.

Portsmouth climbed out of the bottom three with a 4-0 win at home to Swansea thanks to goals from Josh Murphy, Paddy Lane, Ryley Towler and Colby Bishop at Fratton Park.

Cardiff held on for a 1-1 draw against Coventry after the sending-off of Callum Robinson while QPR continued their climb away from the relegation zone with a 3-1 win over playoff contenders Watford.

Oxford maintained their winning start under Gary Rowett with a 1-0 victory at Millwall in Alex Neil's first game in charge of the Lions.

Josh Windass scored a spectacular goal from inside his own half in Sheffield Wednesday's 4-2 defeat of Derby, with Barry Bannan, Djeidi Gassama and Anthony Musaba also on target for the Owls.

Marcelino Nunez scored the only goal as Norwich won 1-0 at Luton and West Brom defeated Preston 3-1. - AFP



Rashford responds to 'ridiculous' speculation over MU future

BY ANDY HAMPSON

MARCUS RASHFORD has described the latest speculation concerning his future at Manchester United as "ridiculous". A report claimed the United striker had met with a leading sports agency to try to hasten a move away from Old Trafford.

This comes after the 27-year-old said in an interview last month he was ready "for a new challenge" after falling out of favour under new boss Ruben Amorim.

But Rashford, who is currently represented by his brother Dwayne Maynard, wrote on Instagram: "Been a lot of false stories written over the past few weeks, but guys this is getting ridiculous - never met with any agency and don't have any plans to..."

Rashford was omitted from four successive matchday squads last month, starting with the derby against Manchester City, before being an unused substitute for Monday's defeat by Newcastle.

He has struggled for form in what has been a difficult campaign for United, scoring just four times in the Premier League.

Amorim insisted after the Newcastle defeat that he was not attempting to make a point by leaving Rashford unused despite his side failing to register in the 2-0 loss.

"I think about the team," the Portuguese manager explained. "You think a lot about Marcus. I think about the team. When I'm there I'm not making a point. I just want to win the game."

"And you can feel it, I'm talking about the idea and the fight for relegation. Do I want to make a point during a game? No, I just want to win the game." - The Independent

322 Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR
IN THE STATE OF WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN, MALAYSIA (COMMERCIAL DIVISION)
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. WA-28NCC-1199-12/2024
In the matter of Section 465(1)(a), (c), (e) and (h) of the Companies Act 2016
And
In the matter of THE STUDIO BY CTRLSHIFT SDN BHD [Company No. 201801023491 (1285511-W)]
BETWEEN
THE STUDIO BY CTRLSHIFT PTE LTD [Singapore Company No. 2018219790] - PETITIONER
AND
THE STUDIO BY CTRLSHIFT SDN BHD [Company No. 201801023491 (1285511-W)] - RESPONDENT
ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION
NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the above-named Company by the High Court was, on the 16th day of December, 2024 presented by the Petitioner, THE STUDIO BY CTRLSHIFT PTE LTD AND that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the High Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur at Commercial High Court 10 at Kuala Lumpur Courts Complex, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim, 50000 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan at 9.00 o'clock, in the morning, on Tuesday, 6th May 2025; and any creditor or contributory of the said Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.
The Petitioner's address of service is at 18 Soon Lay Way, #05-95, Tradehub 21, Singapore 609966.
The Petitioner's solicitors is Messrs. LOW & PARTNERS of No. 5, Jalan SS 21/23, Damansara Utama, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan.
Dated the 26th day of December 2024.
T.T.
Messrs. Low & Partners
For and on behalf of the Petitioner
NOTE- Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovesigned solicitors, Messrs. Low & Partners, notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovesigned solicitors not later than 12.00 o'clock noon on Monday, 5th May 2025.
This ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION is filed by Messrs. Low & Partners of No. 5, Jalan SS 21/23, Damansara Utama, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, solicitors for the abovesaid Petitioner. Tel: 03-7729 9295 Fax: 03-7729 9296 Ref: LP/SL/1453/07/24/WK/DC/CLY. WK/DC

Thomas capable of year like Scheffler had in '24

EVEN though he is 2½ years removed from his latest PGA Tour victory, Justin Thomas remains a confident player.

The 31-year-old University of Alabama alumnus enters the season-opening event, The Sentry at Kapalua, Hawaii, this week, eyeing a career-best year.

"I still fully believe that I can have a year like Scottie (Scheffler) just had," Thomas said yesterday, referring to the world's No. 1 player who won seven times in 2024, including the Masters and the Tour Championship. "... I think I would be doing myself a disservice if I

didn't think I could at least do that. I have a lot of faith and capability in my game, and I feel like I'm working on the right things."

The most recent victory for Thomas was the second major win of his career, at the 2022 PGA Championship. His best year in terms of wins was 2017, when he captured five events, including the PGA Championship.

"I underappreciated (winning) then, for sure," he said. "I truly felt like I was going to win multiple times every season pretty much, until I lost it a little bit. It is, it's just so hard to win out here..."

Naturally, the better player that you are, you can get away with more mistakes, but come the end of the week on Sunday, you have to win the golf tournament.

"Winning it in different places can happen differently. You can maybe get it given to you a little bit more than other times, but you still have to do a lot of things correctly and hit the shots and make putts when you need to to win."

"And, yeah, I was fortunate where I was doing it quite often and, I mean, I still feel like I'm fully capable and expect to do that more, but I definitely felt like it

was, it should have happened regularly kind of thing."

In the 2024 season, Thomas competed in 20 events and had his best results at the start and end of the year. He began with a tie for third at The American Express and a tie for sixth at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, and he closed the campaign with a tie for second at the Zozo Championship.

Thomas missed out on selection for the US team that competed in the Presidents Cup, which he admits is motivation as he strives to make the Ryder Cup team this year. - Field Level Media



De Bruyne's City future still unresolved

BY RICHARD JOLLY

KEVIN DE BRUYNE will be able to discuss a summer move to a foreign club later this week after revealing that contract talks with Manchester City have not yet resumed.

The midfielder said last month that he put talks on hold after he was injured in September, which led him to spend two months on the sidelines, after initial talks about an extension before the season started.

And the 33-year-old, whose current deal expires in June, will be allowed to enter into conversations with clubs from outside England from New Year's Day.

De Bruyne confirmed there has been no movement between him and City, saying: "No. Nothing yet."

Manager Pep Guardiola praised De Bruyne for his performance in Sunday's (Dec 29, 2024) 2-0 win at Leicester, when he returned to the starting 11 after two games on the bench.

He said: "I said many times there are no doubts about Kevin when Kevin is fit. He was one of the most impactful players in the history of City and the Premier League but sometimes he didn't feel well in the recent past and sometimes he needs physicality to feel good, like everyone."

De Bruyne admitted he is still troubled by the abdomen injury that interrupted his season.

"It's pubis. It's a bit of everything," he said. "It's not nice but there's not a lot you can do about it, just wait. I hope to get better now."

When he returned in November, Guardiola only used him as a substitute because he still felt pain.

De Bruyne then began four games in a row before coming out of the side and he admitted he is not sure how far off his best physical condition he is.

"I don't know," he added. "It's hard to say. With the injury I had, I took a while and then I had four games in ten days which was hard. I'm happy for today."

City had only won once in 13 matches before the victory at Leicester and De Bruyne said the worst run of his managerial career had an impact on Guardiola.

"I think obviously he was a bit more down than usual, but I don't think it was a lot of difference," he said. "You can't change yourself after having a bad moment." - The Independent

Jesus stars again

... as Arsenal close gap on Liverpool

ARSENAL closed the gap on Premier League leaders Liverpool to six points as Gabriel Jesus extended his hot-streak in a 3-1 win at Brentford yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side were rocked by Bryan Mbeumo's first half goal at the Gtech Community Stadium.

But Arsenal refused to be blown away on a wet and windy evening in west London as Jesus equalised before the break.

It was the Brazilian's sixth goal in his last four games after he scored just once in his first 20 matches this season.

Mikel Merino and Gabriel Martinelli netted in quick succession soon after halftime to ensure Arsenal moved into second place above Nottingham Forest.

"We won in a difficult stadium against a good opponent. The record they have here is incredible and when you go 1-0 down it makes it even harder," Arteta said.

"Especially when you go a goal down early in the game it becomes a mountain to climb, but we remained patient.

"We had to manage the situation emotionally. We were very clinical in the box. Jesus's form is very important."

Excluding their 5-1 rout of Crystal Palace, the Gunners had spluttered through their last four league games with lacklustre draws against Fulham and Everton followed

by a narrow win over Ipswich.

But Arsenal's first Premier League game of 2025 provided compelling evidence that they are ready to compete in the title race with Liverpool, who have a game in hand on the north Londoners.

Runners-up to Manchester City for the last two seasons, Arsenal are unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions, a revitalising run that now includes four successive wins.

"We can only win our next match and see what happens. It's not in our hands," Arteta said of chasing Liverpool.

With Bukayo Saka sidelined for several months due to a hamstring injury, 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri made his first league start for Arsenal.

Kai Havertz was absent after scoring Arsenal's winner against Ipswich but Jesus ensured the German was not missed. - AFP

Brentford's Sepp Van den Berg (left) fights for the ball with Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus during their English Premier League match. - AFP/IC



Five talking points at the midway point of the Premier League season

LIVERPOOL have one hand on the Premier League title as 2024 draws to a close, while it was a first half of the season to forget for Manchester City and Manchester United.

A season of unexpected twists has featured Nottingham Forest making an astonishing surge to second place, with United and Tottenham wallowing in the bottom half of the table.

AFP Sport looks at five takeaways at the midway point of the 2024/25 campaign:

No Klopp, no problem for Liverpool

The emotional departure of Jurgen Klopp, who earned legendary status on Merseyside for winning the Premier League and Champions League during his near nine year-stint in charge, had dampened expectations of a title challenge before the campaign began.

But Klopp had crucially rejuvenated his squad before passing the reins to Arne Slot, who has made a near flawless start.

The former Feyenoord boss has won 23 of his 27 matches in all competitions, which also includes a 100 percent record to top the Champions League and progress to the League Cup semifinals.

Mohamed Salah has been the catalyst with 17 goals and 13 assists in 18 Premier

League games.

Even speculation over the futures of Egypt forward Salah, captain Virgil van Dijk and England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, who are all out of contract at the end of the season, has not derailed Liverpool's rampant run.

Arsenal, nine points back, appear their most serious challenger, but Liverpool are well on course to match Manchester United's record of 20 English top-flight titles by May.

Man City's fall from grace

City's run of two wins in their last 14 matches has been the story of the season so far, with Pep Guardiola admitting their record streak of four consecutive titles will not extend to a fifth.

The defending champions are 14 points off the top, down in sixth and look in need of an overhaul if they are to return to their former glories.

The loss of Ballon D'Or winner Rodri to a season-ending knee injury in September has been pivotal to City's collapse, while Guardiola's defence has been ravaged by injuries.

Now they face a fight just to extend their 14-year run of qualifying for the Champions League.

Forest lead surprise packages

Forest only secured survival on the final day of last season but are enjoying a dream campaign under Nuno Espirito Santo.

Famous victories at Anfield and Old Trafford have been the highlights as the two-time European champions have their eyes on a return to the Champions League next season for the first time in 45 years.

Only Arsenal and Liverpool have conceded fewer goals, while journeyman New Zealand striker Chris Wood has joined Salah, Erling Haaland, Cole Palmer and Alexander Isak in the race for the Golden Boot.

The struggles of the traditional giants has also opened the door for other unlikely contenders for Europe. Bournemouth sit sixth, with Fulham in eighth.

Man Utd sink to new depths

Much has changed at Old Trafford over the past 12 months, but results have only got worse.

Since buying a minority stake in the club, Jim Ratcliffe has implemented a new sporting structure off the field, sacked manager Erik ten Hag and overseen another expensive spending spree in the transfer market.

United's eighth-placed finish last season

was their worst for 34 years.

After 19 games they are 14th and closer to the relegation zone than the top four, with just seven points separating them from the bottom three.

United have lost four successive games in all competitions and five of their last six league matches, including their last three at home.

Ruben Amorim has won just twice in the league since arriving from Sporting Lisbon in the worst start of any new United manager in nearly 100 years.

Promoted trio in trouble

For just the second time in the history of the Premier League, all three promoted sides were relegated last season.

That feat is on course to be repeated with Southampton, Ipswich and Leicester ending the year in the bottom three.

The trend raises concerns over the growing gulf between the Premier League, which boasts the world's most lucrative TV revenue streams, and the second-tier Championship.

Southampton's return of six points is on course to break Derby's unwanted record from 2007/08 as the worst team in Premier League history.

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Brentford 1 (Mbeumo 13) Arsenal 3 (Jesus 29, Merino 50, Martinelli 53).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	18	14	3	1	45	17	45
Arsenal	19	11	6	2	38	17	39
Nottm Forest	19	11	4	4	26	19	37
Chelsea	19	10	5	4	38	23	35
Newcastle	19	9	5	5	32	21	32
Man City	19	9	4	6	32	26	31

CHAMPIONSHIP: Burnley 0 Stoke 0, Cardiff 1 Coventry 1, Hull 0 Middlesbrough 1, Leeds 1 Blackburn 1, Luton 0 Norwich 1, Millwall 0 Oxford 1, Plymouth 2 Bristol City 2, Portsmouth 4 Swansea 0, QPR 3 Watford 1, Sheffield Wednesday 4 Derby 2, Sunderland 2 Sheffield United 1, West Brom 3 Preston 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leeds	25	15	7	3	45	16	52
Burnley	25	13	10	2	30	9	49
Sheff Utd	25	15	6	4	34	16	49
Sunderland	25	13	8	4	38	22	47
Mid'boro	25	11	7	7	42	31	40
West Brom	25	9	12	4	31	20	39
Blackburn	24	11	6	7	28	22	39
Watford	24	11	4	9	34	34	37
Sheff Wed	25	10	6	9	36	38	36
Bristol City	25	8	10	7	32	30	34
Norwich	25	8	9	8	41	36	33
Swansea	25	9	6	10	29	29	33
Millwall	24	7	8	9	22	21	29
Coventry	25	7	8	10	33	35	29
QPR	25	6	11	8	27	33	29
Preston	25	6	11	8	27	33	29
Derby	25	7	6	12	31	34	27
Oxford	24	7	6	11	27	39	27
Stoke	25	6	8	11	24	32	26
Luton	25	7	4	14	26	42	25
Portsmouth	23	5	8	10	30	40	23
Hull	25	5	7	13	22	33	22
Cardiff	24	5	7	12	24	39	22
Plymouth	24	4	7	13	24	53	19

BRIEFS

THT eye treble in 2025

ARMED with a mix of young and experienced players, the Terengganu Hockey Team (THT) is seeking to secure all three titles up for grabs in this season's Malaysian Hockey League (MHL). Head coach Mohd Harfizi Baharom said the team's goal is to make up for last season's disappointment when THT finished runners-up in the Charity Shield, TNB Cup and league. He was confident that the Turtles could achieve their target this year, aided by two experienced imports from South Korea and South Africa. "This year, we will strive to bring back all three trophies to Terengganu after missing out last year. We were disappointed as we were on track for a treble but missed several golden opportunities. Insyaallah, in 2025, the players are ready to rise from disappointment and reclaim the treble we won in 2023," he said. THT will feature 39 players this season, including two imports and seven new faces, as they prepare for the MHL, which kicks off on Jan 4.

Roy King remains focused

NATIONALS badminton player, Yap Roy King intends to continue competing in two categories, namely men's doubles and mixed doubles, just like he did before. Despite having an encouraging season in the men's doubles category with Wan Arif Wan Junaidi, the 24-year-old player believes he still has the qualities to compete in the mixed doubles. Meanwhile, Roy King said he may be paired with other players temporarily following Valeree Slow's knee injury. However, Roy King admitted that he still does not know who will be his temporary partner for the mixed doubles action.



Natasha.
- BERNAMAPI

Duncan to oversee Harimau Malaya's players fitness

THE restructuring of Harimau Malaya, the national football team, continued to gain momentum as the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) appointed another foreign sports expert. The National body announced the appointment of Australian sports scientist Dr Craig Duncan, renowned for his extensive experience and expertise in human performance, as the national team's Head of High Performance and Sports Medicine, effective this month. In a statement, the governing body for football said Duncan will oversee areas related to high performance, including physical fitness, recovery, sports science, nutrition, sports psychology, and staff development. "As one of Australia's leading sports scientists, Craig's innovative and holistic approach to player management has enabled high-performing teams to maximise their performance while reducing injury rates among professional athletes," FAM said. The statement said Duncan envisions creating

a world-class framework for sports science and sports medicine to enable Malaysia's senior, junior, and women's teams to achieve sustained success while fostering a high-performance culture across all levels. "He aims to integrate advanced sports science and medical practices across all national teams and Malaysian football leagues; enhance player performance, recovery, and resilience through standardised protocols; educational programmes; and cutting-edge technology. "With these plans, we hope to prepare our national teams with the best physical and tactical readiness, prioritising high-performance aspects in Malaysian football," FAM added. Earlier, FAM announced another Australian, Peter Cklamovski, as the head coach of the national squad while naming Canada's Rob Friend as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Harimau Malaya on Tuesday. Duncan has been the CEO of Performance Intelligence Agency for 15 years since 2009 and

served as Head of Sports Science at Football Federation Australia (FFA) for four years from 2014 to 2018, during which time the Socceroos won the 2015 Asian Cup. Holding a PhD in Sports and Exercise Science from the University of Sydney and a Master's Degree in Leadership from Deakin University, Duncan has also been a Senior Exercise and Sports Science Lecturer at Australian Catholic University (ACU) since 2013. He has been an advisor at Elite Performance Partners since 2021 and oversaw the high-performance program for Iran's team when they reached the semifinals of the 2019 Asian Cup. Duncan has also worked with Sydney FC when they won the A-League Championship, with Western Sydney Wanderers as they became the first Australian team to win the AFC Champions League in 2014, and with the New South Wales team that ended their championship drought in the State of Origin series in 2014 and 2018. - Bernama

Azizulhasni yet to decide

Pocket Rocketman will give his answer on presence in Podium Programme after Umrah

A DECISION on whether national track cycling ace Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang will remain in the Podium Programme this year, is expected to take another two weeks to unfold. Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) President Datuk Amarjit Singh said, Mohd Azizulhasni has yet to confirm his decision to the MNCF and National Sports Council (NSC) as of yesterday. "I think previously he mentioned that he would like to meet the Youth and Sports Minister (Hannah Yeoh) to discuss about this. So we are waiting for that to happen. "I am also told that, next week Datuk Azizulhasni will be leaving to perform Umrah, and I believe if any meeting is going to take place, it will only take place once he is back. So everything is KIV (keep in view) till the next two weeks or so," he said when contacted. Previously, MNCF and the NSC agreed to retain the 2017 keirin world champion in the Podium Programme for 2025, with the NSC had given him till last Tuesday (Dec 31) to confirm his interest to remain in the programme, just like all other national athletes. Despite missing the deadline, the Tokyo 2021 Olympics silver medalist and Rio 2016 bronze

medallist, can still join the Podium Programme on a later date with payment of salary beginning from the date he signs the contract. Mohd Azizulhasni, who will turn 37 on Sunday, still keeps mum on his future with the national team since his last race at the Paris 2024 Olympics, in August. At the Paris

Olympics, the Pocket Rocketman was disqualified from the men's keirin event's first round for overtaking the derny (motorbike pacer), before the derny left the track, while he was relegated in the 1/8 finals of the sprint event. Apart from monthly salary, athletes under the Podium Programme are eligible for other benefits including sports science, medical and Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions. - Bernama

Azizulhasni Awang.
- BERNAMAPI



Natasha eyes early 'strike' at World Cup

WITH the 2025 World Cup fast approaching, national kepler Natasha Mohamed Roslan is setting her sights on a strong start to the new season while pursuing a clear and ambitious goal. The World Cup, scheduled from Jan 5-14 at the newly built Top Bowl Tenpin Bowling Centre in Kai Tak Sports Park in Kowloon, Hong Kong, is more than just another tournament. The venue will also host the 2025 World Championships from Nov 24-Dec 6, giving Natasha an invaluable opportunity to adapt to the environment and conditions ahead of her title defence later this year.

While her primary aim is to bring home a medal from the World Cup, the 28-year-old views the competition as an ideal warm-up for the World Championships. "Playing there will give us insights into the environment, including the temperature - whether it's warm or cold - which affects aspects like thumb grip size," she told Bernama during a recent training session. Natasha will compete in the women's singles and team events alongside Asian top bowler Sin Li Jane, Siti Safiyah Amirah Abdul Rahman and Gillian Lim. On the men's side, Malaysia will field a formidable lineup, including former world champion Muhammad Rafiq Ismail, Timmy Tan, Tun Hakim Tun Hasnul Azam and Ahmad Muaz Mohd Fishol.

Natasha said the team event was her priority as everyone would be able to share a podium finish and return home happily. Despite the inevitable pressures of a new season, Natasha remains focused on maintaining her momentum. "The pressure is always there, especially with others targeting the World Championships, but I will do my best," she said. Reflecting on 2024, Natasha described it as a remarkable year. She was crowned 2023 Sportswoman of the Year at the National Sports Award in June, named 2023 Selangor Sportswoman in October, and received the Ahli Keagamaan Sukan Selangor award during the 99th birthday celebrations of the Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, last month. - Bernama



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SCAN ME

BY SIMON PEACH

GARETH SOUTHGATE fell agonisingly short of glory as England manager but his transformational work with the national team has earned him a knighthood in the New Year Honours list.

No manager since Sir Alf Ramsey won the 1966 World Cup has enjoyed as much success in charge of the men's team, with the 54-year-old leading them to back-to-back European Championship finals.

England's first continental showpiece ended in an excruciating Wembley penalty shoot-out loss to Italy and three years on was compounded by a heartbreaking 2-1 loss to swashbuckling Spain.

July's Berlin finale proved Southgate's 102nd and final match in charge of a country he led at four major tournaments and sparked a remarkable turnaround in having taken charge at their nadir.

England reached the World Cup semifinals just two years on from their Euro 2016 humiliation against Iceland, with the manager helping to restore the team's credibility as they became regular tournament contenders.

Southgate not only took the team within touching distance of glory on the field but led by example off it, resulting in his OBE being upgraded to a knighthood for services to football.

The merits of that honour are sure to be debated, just as so many of his decisions were during his eight-year stint at the England helm.

Few knew what it meant to represent the national team better than Southgate, who went to four tournaments as a player, won 57 caps and had a career-defining night at Euro 96.

The scars from that crucial semifinal spot-kick miss in a shoot-out loss to Germany at Wembley deeply impacted the introverted kid who spent his formative years in Crawley.

Born in Watford to Clive and Barbara in 1970, he credits his upbringing for shaping him into the person, and coach, he became.

Another defining factor is his drive to prove people wrong, which Southgate first had to do after receiving a setback aged 13.

Knocked sideways by Southampton's decision to release him, he dug in determined to prove them wrong and was picked up by

Rise a knight

Southgate's quiet leadership carried England to back-to-back Euro finals

Gareth Southgate.
- REUTERS/SPIC



Crystal Palace, where he impressed.

The centreback enjoyed his time in the midlands, with a League Cup win the highlight, before making a £6.5 million (RM36.5m) move in 2001 to Middlesbrough and captaining them to their first major trophy.

Boro were agonisingly close to adding to the 2004 League Cup triumph as Steve McClaren's side lost the Uefa Cup final two years later - a match that brought the curtain down on an impressive playing career.

McClaren took over England after that European run and eyebrows were raised when Southgate succeeded him at Boro, especially as the freshly retired defender did not have the requisite Uefa Pro Licence qualification.

Southgate was relieved of his duties that October and has not managed a club since, spending time doing TV work before joining the Football Association as head of elite development in February 2011.

Southgate played a part in the "England DNA" model and succeeded former teammate Stuart Pearce as U-21s boss in 2013, overseeing victory in the Toulon tournament in 2016.

He stepped out of his comfort zone and into the limelight when Sam Allardyce departed, initially on a temporary basis, to change the course of English football.

The former defender fostered an impressive togetherness and team spirit, thanks in no small part to his willingness to back and stand alongside his players on societal issues such as racism.

England's run to the World Cup semifinals in 2018 helped the national team reconnect with the country. They even won a penalty shootout.

Back-to-back Euros finals followed either side of a frustrating 2022 World Cup quarterfinal exit to eventual runners-up France as England enjoyed unparalleled consistency on the biggest stages.

Southgate is in no rush to return to management after leaving the England post in July and has even suggested his next job could be away from football.

While his next step is unsure, the gratitude for his work with England was made clear with this knighthood. - The Independent



USA advance

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Jesus stars again

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Azizulhasni yet to decide

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