



Unique initiative for mutual economic growth

Malaysia, Singapore to work together to promote both nations and attract investments, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Report on
page 2

'Ketum has significant medicinal potential'

Traditionally used for its analgesic, antidepressant and anti-anxiety effects and to reduce fatigue, 'controversial' plant could be valuable economic asset if exported, say academics.

Report on
page 4

His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong at Istana Negara yesterday.
—BERNAMAPIC



Ugly face of illegal cosmetics

Unapproved products brought in by unregistered sellers through dubious import processes may contain banned substances that cause damage to kidneys, nerves and skin.

Report on
page 3

New Bill enables more secure, streamlined data sharing

KUALA LUMPUR: The Data Sharing Bill 2024 is critical as it will enable federal government agencies to share data and strengthen the governance structure within the data-sharing ecosystem, said information technology infrastructure and operations professional Sarkunarajah Shanmugam.

He said with the passing of the Bill, he foresees that the public-private collaboration would also be enhanced where there would be a well-connected data infrastructure.

"This means the private sector will be able to operate against a single source of proof, deliver a well-defined outcome and deliver the intended value of public and private sector

collaborations," he said during Bernama TV's *Bernama World* programme on Monday.

The Data Sharing Bill 2024, which was passed by Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara last month, aims to make data sharing among public sector agencies in Malaysia more secure and streamlined.

Its objective is to establish a clear source of authority to regulate and implement data-sharing laws, enhance the effectiveness of delivery by public sector agencies and improve the efficiency of data-sharing management.

It is also intended to set up a systematic, focused governance structure within the data-sharing ecosystem, Bernama reported.

Sarkunarajah highlighted an important issue about who has access to data, which is whether it is a federal agency that owns the data or an external entity requesting access to it.

"Properly managing access is critical in ensuring both data security and data integrity. How do we ensure data integrity throughout the lifespan of the data itself?"

"Another question is data storage. How do we keep it secure and safe from bad actors?"

He said transparency in government agencies is crucial as people want to know where and how their information is shared.

Sarkunarajah added that changing the mindset and shifting the culture within federal

agencies to establish trusted data sharing is important, especially in the context of IT infrastructure and talent availability.

He said while technical aspects like infrastructure development and recruiting talent may be relatively manageable, cultural change in government organisations can take time.

"This is because the initiative will need some agencies to change or adapt to new processes and technologies, as well as train and upgrade employee skill sets."

He also expressed optimism that there would be interest and growth in the data and data analytics talent pool in the country, with SMEs participating in data-sharing initiatives.

M'sia, S'pore ink special economic zone agreement

► Unique initiative to see both nations work together as a team to promote and attract investments, says PM

PUTRAJAYA: The Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) is a unique initiative where two countries work together as a team to help promote both nations and attract investments, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said both Malaysia and Singapore are governed by politically stable administrations with clear economic policies aimed at attracting investments.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said both governments are also selective in ensuring that investments align with future demands.

That, by itself, is a great incentive for businesses other than financial incentives and infrastructure provided via the collaboration, he said during a joint media conference with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong yesterday, in conjunction with Wong's two-day official visit to Malaysia.

Wong said the initiative provides a message

for investors to look at the complementarities of Johor and Singapore and the many advantages in the entire JS-SEZ ecosystem.

He said there are many strengths that can be harnessed from both sides that would enhance its value proposition and make JS-SEZ much more competitive and attractive for businesses to operate from.

"On the Singapore side, we have engaged with many of our businesses, and they are very keen to do more out of Johor. We already have existing incentives for businesses that want to expand overseas.

"So Singaporean businesses can tap into those incentives, market readiness programmes and grants in order to expand and operate in Johor that are synergised with their operations in Singapore."

Wong added that the greater potential of JS-SEZ is about both nations working together to attract new investments globally as well as to

market and promote the economic zone as a combined destination in Johor and Singapore for investors.

"Hopefully, this will allow both of us to attract even more global investments to our respective countries - enhance the pie, expand the pie and create more jobs for both our peoples."

Earlier, Anwar and Wong witnessed the exchange of the joint agreement between Malaysia and Singapore on JS-SEZ along with six other MoUs and one letter of intent (LoI).

The MoUs involve the field of carbon capture and storage, cooperation in cooperative approaches under Article 6 (paragraph 2) of the Paris Agreement and cooperation in the field of urban development.

Another MoU is on cooperation in the fields of social welfare, women, persons with disabilities, family, children and community development.

Others include one on preventing and combating transnational crimes and another on cooperation in the field of higher education.

The LoI between the Singapore International Foundation and Yayasan Guru Tun Hussein Onn deals with the Malaysia-Singapore English Volunteers Programme.

Home Ministry bans six publications

KUALA LUMPUR: The Home Ministry issued a prohibition order, effective Dec 19, against six publications deemed potentially harmful to morality, under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (Act 301).

The ministry listed the titles as, *A Million Kisses In Your Lifetime* by Monica Murphy, *Lose You To Find Me* by Erik J. Brown, *Punal* by Asyraf Bakti, *Scattered Showers* by Rainbow Rowell, *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* by Razieli Reid and *What If It's Us* by Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera.

"The Prohibition Order under Act 301 is based on the principle of control and prevention to avert potential threats or harm. At the same time, it aims to raise public awareness about publications that are undesirable and unsuitable for general readership.

"The prohibition of these publications aligns with subsection 7(1) of Act 301, which strictly bans the printing, importing, reproduction, publishing, sale, production, circulation, distribution or possession of these six titles that may harm morality in Malaysia," the ministry said in a statement.

It also cautioned the public that under subsection 8(2) of Act 301, it is an offence to print, import, produce, reproduce, publish, sell, distribute, circulate, offer for sale or possess prohibited publications for any purpose.

It said convicted individuals may face imprisonment of up to three years, a fine not exceeding RM20,000 or both.

"The government remains committed to regulatory measures and enforcement related to printing presses and publications, particularly to prevent the spread of elements, ideologies or movements that contradict local socio-cultural values. These efforts align with the applicable legal provisions to safeguard harmony and collective well-being." - Bernama



DIGITAL FUTURE ...

Communications Minister Fadhil launching the International Regulatory Conference 2025 themed 'Leaping into the Quantum Frontier: Regulation and Innovation in the Tech Era' in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him are (from left) Deputy IGP Datuk Seri Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, Communications Deputy Minister Teo Nie Ching and the ministry's secretary-general Datuk Mohamad Fauzi Md Isa. - BERNAMAPIC

No M'sians affected by Nepal earthquake

KUALA LUMPUR: The Foreign Ministry has confirmed that no Malaysian has been reported as affected by the 6.5 magnitude earthquake that struck approximately 84km from Lobuche, Nepal yesterday.

The ministry, in a statement, urged Malaysians in Nepal to remain vigilant, adhere to safety guidelines issued by local authorities and exercise caution in the aftermath of the earthquake.

It also encouraged them to register on the E-Konsular platform and stay in close contact with the Malaysian Embassy for updates and assistance.

For consular assistance, Malaysians can contact the Malaysian Embassy in Kathmandu at Bakhundole-3, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, call +977-1-5445680 or +977-1-5445681 for general inquiries, or +977-9801008000 for emergencies.

They may also email mwkathmandu@kln.gov.my for general assistance or kathmandu@imi.gov.my for immigration matters. - Bernama

Ministry staff urged to play role as ambassadors

PUTRAJAYA: Staff of the Human Resources Ministry and its agencies have been encouraged to act as ambassadors by promoting the ministry's services and disseminating accurate information to the public.

Human Resources Minister Steven Sim emphasised that staff should be ready to assist in addressing public concerns, including relaying information about specific cases to the relevant departments.

"So, as ambassadors, we should promote the ministry's services, help elevate its reputation, and provide information to the public, even if the matter falls outside our jurisdiction or department.

"Imagine 15,000 staff providing explanations and guidance. I am confident that by the end of this year, we will be recognised as the best and most outstanding ministry," he said during his ministry New Year address yesterday.

Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Abdul Rahman Mohamad and secretary-general Datuk Azman Mohd Yusof were also present at the event, Bernama reported.

Sim reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to strengthening human capital development, protecting worker rights and enhancing the national workforce competitiveness, in line with the aspirations of the Madani Economy framework.

Penang clarifies LRT project land use issue

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang government has dismissed claims that the land in Sungai Pinang, currently being developed for the Penang Light Rail Transit (LRT) Mutiara Line project station, was previously intended for low and medium-cost housing.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow clarified that the land in question had been initially designated for a school, not housing development.

Discussions regarding the matter had already taken place with the State Education Department.

"Once the LRT station is built, the remaining land would not be large enough to accommodate a school and this has been discussed," he said after the Civil Service Assembly at Dewan Seri Pinang yesterday.

Chow's remarks came in response to a query from Penang Gerakan, which had sought clarification on whether the land was originally earmarked for housing or other purposes.

He also confirmed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is scheduled to launch the Penang LRT Mutiara Line project at Sungai Pinang on Jan 11. – Bernama

RM12m illegal cosmetics seized from 2021 to 2024

■ BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The Health Ministry seized RM12 million worth of illegal cosmetics in 1,333 raids conducted from 2021 to November 2024.

Its spokesperson said: "In the same period, we received 204 handovers of illegal cosmetics valued at RM3.2 million that were confiscated by police and the Customs Department.

"The Pharmacy Enforcement Division also took down 2,144 advertisements of (unapproved) or (banned) cosmetic products in popular e-marketplaces.

"Of the number, 645 advertisements were removed in 2024, which is an increase from the 624 removals in 2023 and 386 in 2022."

The spokesperson said imported pharmaceutical products are required to undergo quality control testing, with manufacturers responsible for

▶ Online sellers of such products use fake accounts or foreign shipping routes to evade detection: Expert

releasing compliant batches.

Product registration holders must submit samples of traditional and pharmaceutical products for testing at recognised National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) panel laboratories before registration is approved.

"While the ministry implements strict regulations to ensure imported pharmaceutical and cosmetic products meet high safety and quality standards before reaching consumers, some non-compliant drugs and cosmetic products continue to be available on the market."

Aesthetic dermatology expert and founder of a supplements company Dr Lim Ing Kien said consumers

must check the NPRA notification number on product packaging as it indicates that the product has been approved by the ministry.

"Some illegal cosmetics suppliers or distributors have merely inserted a number to evade detection. To minimise risks, consumers should only buy products from reputable pharmacies or authorised retailers and verify the product status on the NPRA website."

He said the use of banned substances in cosmetics could lead to severe health issues, including organ damage and allergic reactions.

Banned substances include mercury, which is harmful to the kidneys, nerves and skin, or steroids, which require a medical prescription

due to potential side effects.

Other banned substances include tretinoin, a prescription-only acne and anti-ageing medication, antifungal medication such as ketoconazole, and high-dose hydroquinone, which could cause skin darkening and irritation.

He said illegal or unregulated cosmetic products are sustained through online marketplaces that are hard to monitor due to sellers hiding behind fake accounts or using foreign shipping routes to evade detection.

"Unregulated import channels allow products to bypass official checks while mislabelling enables items containing prescription-only ingredients to be sold as cosmetics."

He said limited enforcement resources complicate monitoring, given the high volume of goods entering the country, and stressed the need for stricter inspections and more random sample testing.

Lim said proactive online surveillance involving the government, marketplaces and payment providers could help shut down rogue sellers while encouraging whistleblowers and imposing heavy penalties for repeat offenders could curb the illegal trade.

He also said educating retailers and pharmacies is vital to ensure product safety since monitoring illegal cosmetics is challenging due to limited ministry resources and the large number of brands and online shopping platforms.

According to him, complaints often serve as starting points for the ministry to act while proactive monitoring could improve with artificial intelligence-based web crawlers and additional funding.

He added that providing easy access to product verification via user-friendly websites or apps, in which barcodes can be scanned or notification numbers checked, would empower consumers to make safer purchasing decisions.

"Instead of chasing fast results or relying on miracle cures, we should focus on long-term, science-backed approaches to skincare and health."

"Authorities should take proactive measures by investing in more resources, technology and surveillance to prevent harmful products from reaching consumers," he said.



Lim urged consumers to check the NPRA notification number on product packaging as it indicates that the product has been approved by the ministry. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

Telegram granted social media service provider licence

KUALA LUMPUR: Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil announced that Telegram has been granted an Application Service Provider (ASP) C Licence to operate in Malaysia.

He said Telegram successfully obtained the licence from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) on Jan 2, becoming the third service provider to be licensed under the requirements for internet messaging and social media platforms.

"Meta, which operates Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, is still in the process of submitting several

documents before obtaining its licence. However, we expect the process to be completed in the near future," Fahmi said at a press conference following the exchange of documents for the Malacca Digital Village Initiative agreement between MCMC and the Malacca state government on Monday.

The event was attended by Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh, Communications Ministry secretary-general Datuk Mohamad Fauzi Mid Isa, MCMC chairman Tan Sri Mohamad Salim Fateh Din and State Secretary Datuk Azhar Arshad.

Tencent (WeChat) was the first internet messaging and social media service provider to receive the ASP (C) licence, followed by ByteDance (TikTok).

Regarding Google's licensing, Fahmi said MCMC is continuing its engagement with the company and stressed that action would be taken for any violations of communications laws.

"For example, scam and deepfake videos or online gambling content on YouTube could result in action for non-compliance and breaches of laws in our country.

"The law remains in force, and we are continuing discussions because YouTube claims it is not a social media platform. However, features like YouTube Shorts resemble elements of TikTok, which is part of the ongoing discussions that will take time," he said.

On the licensing process for the X platform, Fahmi said MCMC is still addressing the matter.

He explained that X had previously reported that its number of users in Malaysia had not yet reached the eight-million threshold required for licensing.

Commenting on the Malacca Digital Village Initiative, Fahmi highlighted its role as the first project in Malaysia to modernise the home address system in 623 traditional villages using QR codes.

The initiative, developed in collaboration with MCMC, aims to improve access to data and enhance public services. Fahmi expressed optimism that the initiative would positively impact Malacca and serve as a model for other states to develop a more inclusive and competitive digital ecosystem. – Bernama



BLISSFUL
ESCAPE AMIDST NATURE
berjyahotel.com

BERJAYA
LANGKAWI RESORT
MALAYSIA

Call to harness healing power of 'controversial' ketum

➤ Correctly used, plant has medicinal potential for pain relief, mental health and boosting energy: Researcher

BY HARITH KAMAL
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: *Ketum* or *kratom*, which is a plant with a controversial reputation in Malaysia due to its intoxicating effect, holds significant medicinal potential, said Universiti Sains Malaysia Centre for Drug Research researcher Assoc Prof Dr Zurina Hassan.

She said *ketum* has therapeutic value, particularly in treating pain, aiding mental health and boosting energy levels.

"*Ketum* has been traditionally used for its analgesic (pain-relieving), antidepressant and anti-anxiety effects, and helps reduce fatigue.

"The plant contains mitragynine, a psychoactive compound that interacts with opioid receptors in the brain. At low doses, *ketum* acts as a stimulant, while at higher doses, it works as a sedative, similar to morphine."

Zurina said *ketum* has long been used in rural communities as an energy booster to improve productivity. However, she warned that improper use can lead to harmful effects.

"Excessive use of *ketum* can lead to anorexia, depression, addiction and physical dependence.

"Anything that's abused is dangerous, and *ketum* is no exception. But when used correctly, it is safe and could be integrated into medical practice."

She said *ketum* has been used in replacement therapies to treat addiction to opioids and stimulants by easing withdrawal symptoms, and reducing reliance on more harmful substances. However, dosage control is essential.

Her colleague and senior lecturer, Assoc Prof Dr Darshan Singh Mahinder Singh, said media focus on misuse of *ketum* has overshadowed its benefits.

"The negative publicity over *ketum* is largely due to its association with drug abuse. This has led to calls for stricter regulations and has created fear, with some people perceiving *ketum* as just another illicit drug.

"*Ketum* is only risky when mixed with other



Darshan said *ketum* could be a valuable economic asset if exported as it would allow the plant to be used as medicine while generating income for farmers. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

substances to enhance its 'euphoric' effects. On its own, it is not harmful. The danger lies in misuse or combining it with other substances."

Darshan called for more balanced media coverage and suggested that positive coverage on the benefits of *ketum* could help correct current misconceptions.

He also said the legal framework surrounding *ketum* is complex.

"While its use is regulated under the Poisons Act 1952, and recent amendments to the Drug Dependents (Treatment and Rehabilitation) Act 1985 allow its use to rehabilitate those dependent on drugs, the cultivation of the plant itself remains unregulated.

"*Ketum* cultivation is legal but distributing it is illegal. This loophole fuels abuse and worsens negative perceptions of the plant. Hence, better regulation is needed to prevent misuse and highlight its potential benefits."

Darshan also stressed the importance of more research, public education and a comprehensive regulatory framework to harness its potential and minimise risk.

"*Ketum* should be regulated, not banned, as it has potential as a medical and harm reduction prescription for those addicted to more dangerous substances.

"Creating a task force to oversee *ketum* cultivation and prevent its illegal distribution, together with better regulation of farms, is crucial to ensure its responsible use."

Darshan also suggested that *ketum* could be a valuable economic asset if exported. This will allow the plant to be used as medicine while generating income for farmers.

"Rural farmers, impacted by fluctuating commodity prices, could benefit from the sale of *ketum*."

"We should move beyond the controversy surrounding *ketum* and explore ways to regulate its cultivation and export."

He said Malaysia could sell quality *ketum* leaves while simultaneously conducting research and development to create products for pain relief and to address opioid abuse.

On Aug 25, 2024, Kedah Agriculture, Plantation and Transportation Committee chairman Dzowahir Ab Ghani expressed hope that the federal government would approve the state's proposal to legalise *ketum* exports.

Similarly, in April 2023, former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin suggested allowing the export of *ketum* to countries such as the US, which he said has a potential US\$1 billion (approximately RM4.5 billion) *ketum* industry.

Joint move to ensure success of 'Kampung Digital' initiative

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has entered into a strategic partnership with the Malacca state government through the Kampung Digital Malacca (KDM) Initiative agreement.

In a statement, MCMC said the initiative was a strategic move aimed at ensuring all premises in Malacca were equipped with a complete and systematic address.

"The agreement will serve as a catalyst for the development of more sustainable technology and digital infrastructure in Malacca, bringing significant benefits to the local community," it said.

According to MCMC, the Kampung Digital initiative was the first in Malaysia to use QR codes, aimed at modernising the home address system in 623 traditional villages in Malacca and improving access to public service data.

The project has also received recognition from the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia and granted a logo trademark, establishing it as a digital village model nationwide.

The statement said through the initiative, MCMC would provide technical support in addition to sharing information and data for the implementation of the National Address System (NAS).

"The NAS will serve as a single, authoritative and centralised system for managing more than 12 million addresses across the country through collaboration with various parties.

"The collaboration between MCMC and the Malacca government through this initiative is crucial, and it is hoped that it will continue to be strengthened."

MCMC said the project would not only have a positive impact on Malacca but is also expected to serve as a model for other states in building a more inclusive and competitive digital ecosystem.

The KDM initiative agreement document exchange ceremony between MCMC chairman Tan Sri Mohamad Salim Fateh Din and Malacca state secretary Datuk Azhar Arshad held yesterday was witnessed by Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh.

Also present were Malacca State Science, Technology, Innovation and Digital Communications Committee chairman Datuk Fairul Nizam Roslan, MCMC managing director Datuk Mohd Ali Hanafiah Mohd Yunus and MCMC deputy managing director Datuk Zulkarain Mohd Yasin. — Bernama

Home-based classes for razed school pupils

MANJUNG: Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil Ladang Ayer Tawar pupils will undergo home-based teaching sessions for eight days following a fire that broke out at the school on Monday.

Perak Human Resources, Health, Indian Community Affairs, and Integration Committee chairman A. Sivanesan said the home-based sessions involving 32 pupils will be implemented from today until next Friday.

"We are also waiting for a full report from the Fire and Rescue Department and the Public Works Department regarding safety issues and damage that occurred," he said after visiting the school yesterday.

Also present were Beruan MP Datuk Ngeh Koo Ham as well as Astaka and Pantai Remis assemblymen Jason Ng Thien Yeong and Wong May Ing.

In the incident, the 87-year-old school building was almost 70% destroyed in the fire involving three classrooms, a science laboratory, a store room and a canteen. — Bernama

Probe 'questionable' land takeover, MACC urged

IPOH: The Sungai Tumboh Development Cooperative has lodged a report with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), alleging abuse of power following the eviction and invasion of land cultivated by the cooperative in Seri Iskandar in an incident on Sept 27 last year.

Its chairman Zainudin Norhan claimed that as a result of the land invasion and eviction, which also caused the destruction of crops, the cooperative, which is made up of small scale oil palm farmers, could no longer continue cultivating the land that had been worked on for over a decade.

"There is a possibility of an under-the-table transaction related to the ownership of the land we were cultivating because an amount of RM4 million was deposited into the cooperative's account before the invasion.

"It was said to be compensation provided by

a third party (developer). Yet we, the board members and other members of the cooperative, never agreed to any such arrangement.

"We request that MACC investigate how the incident could have occurred," he said outside the Perak MACC office on Monday.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Humanitarian Organisation secretary-general Datuk Hishamuddin Hashim said the organisation has also called for an investigation by MACC into the land invasion and eviction, which was alleged to have occurred without any notice or court order.

"The 1,052ha land was granted to the Perak State Development Corporation, and there should have been a reasonable resolution between the corporation and the cooperative, but that did not happen.

"The cooperative, which consists of 400

families, had also convened a meeting with the corporation, but no solution was reached. So, how could it have been handed to a third party?"

Zainudin said the eviction and destruction of crops were allegedly based on 'an agreement' signed by the previous cooperative leadership with the developer.

"The cooperative board members claim they never agreed to the eviction, and there was no special meeting held to discuss the matter.

"However, the developer claimed that an agreement was signed and compensation was paid to the cooperative. But who signed the agreement on behalf of the cooperative?"

He added that the cooperative had been offered a replacement area, but it was rejected because the new land was unsuitable for oil palm cultivation as it was swampy. — Bernama

Airlines facing rise in incidence of in-flight thefts

➤ Perpetrators usually operate alone or in small groups of up to four and steal valuables from carry-on luggage: Police

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: In-flight theft is a growing problem that airlines are facing, regardless of which company is operating the flight.

Last month, Selangor police chief Datuk Hussein Omar Khan said 267 in-flight thefts aboard passenger aircraft were reported to KL International Airport authorities since 2022, resulting in the arrest of 30 foreigners.

"In 2022, we recorded 33 such cases. This jumped to 88 in 2023, and for the first 10 months of 2024, 146 cases were reported.

"Those behind the thefts usually operate alone or in small groups of up to four people aboard flights within Malaysia and the region. They steal the valuables of passengers from their carry-on luggage, including credit cards, jewellery, cash and wallets."

Considering its growing incidence, crime analyst Datuk Shahul Hamid Abd Rahim warned passengers to stay vigilant during long-haul journeys and on flights when the lights are dimmed.

"Such conditions create ideal opportunities for in-flight theft, which is unique in that it combines opportunistic

criminal behaviour with vulnerabilities in passenger habits and airline procedures."

He said under certain circumstances, perpetrators act with minimal risk of detection, especially when lights are dimmed during night flights or rest periods, providing cover for thieves to operate unnoticed.

He also said passengers often unintentionally make mistakes that increase their vulnerability to theft during flights.

"One common error is keeping wallets, passports and electronics in overhead bins rather than keeping them in a bag under the seat, where they would be more secure.

"Compacency during long flights, especially by assuming the airline will handle all security measures, also puts belongings at risk."

Shahul Hamid said staying alert during critical moments, such as boarding, disembarking and mealtime, is crucial as it is then that distractions are common.

He said certain passengers are more likely to be targeted by thieves during flights due to specific characteristics or behaviours, including business travellers, elderly or inexperienced travellers, distracted passengers, and those who look affluent.

"Motivations for in-flight theft often stem from psychological and situational factors. Economic pressure could drive some individuals to commit theft out of financial hardship or desperation, particularly during long-haul international flights in which high-value items are likely to be found.

"Thieves exhibit specific behavioural patterns and may identify targets during boarding or in-flight by observing passengers with expensive luggage or those leaving their

belongings unattended."

He stressed that airlines should enhance security measures while passengers should adopt proactive steps to safeguard their belongings.

"While these crimes underline the importance of vigilance, they do not necessarily signal failures in aviation security.

"The increasing number of cases may point to gaps in in-flight monitoring systems or insufficient crew training to identify and respond to suspicious behaviour."

A Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia (CAAM) spokesperson told *theSun* that under Malaysian law, in-flight theft is treated as a serious offence and perpetrators may face penalties such as fines, imprisonment or both, depending on the severity of the case.

"Police are the main agency tasked to oversee the enforcement and investigation involving criminal cases while CAAM regulates and oversees civil aviation operations in Malaysia, ensuring compliance with safety and security standards."

The spokesperson said while in-flight thefts fall under airline operational responsibilities, CAAM collaborates with stakeholders to establish guidelines that enhance the overall security of air travel.

"Although CAAM has not issued specific directives to address in-flight thefts, our broader security regulations require airlines and airports to adopt comprehensive measures to ensure passenger safety, which includes protection of personal belongings."

CAAM also encourages airlines to provide comprehensive training for cabin crew to handle in-flight security issues, including theft prevention and detection.



Shahul Hamid stressed that passengers should adopt proactive steps to safeguard their belongings. — SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THE SUN

Pilot loses RM1.3m to fraudulent investment scheme

SHAH ALAM: A pilot has suffered over RM1.36 million in losses after falling victim to an investment scam promoted via Instagram.

Selangor police chief Datuk Hussein Omar Khan said the 50-year-old man began participating in the investment scheme in October.

He said the victim, seeking quick profits, was sent a link to the UVKXE app and taught how to use the platform.

"The victim was not promised specific returns but was encouraged to invest as much as possible to reap various benefits and

high returns.

"He made cash transfers between October and December last year amounting to RM1,366,885 through 34 transactions to 10 different accounts."

He said the victim received only one payout of RM4,300 from the total amount invested.

He added that the scammer instructed the victim to withdraw money from the app by pressing the "withdrawal" icon and entering the desired amount, which would supposedly be credited to the victim's account within 24 hours.

"However, after pressing the icon, no funds were deposited into his account. Realising he had been scammed, the victim lodged a police report."

Police have opened an investigation under Section 420 of the Penal Code.

Hussein advised the public to be vigilant against investment offers on social media platforms that promise unrealistic returns, particularly those involving financial or investment apps not approved by Bank Negara or the Securities Commission Malaysia. — Bernama

Two dead after lorry plunges into ravine

KUANTAN: Two men were killed when the lorry they were travelling in skidded and plunged into a ravine at Km42.1 of the East Coast Expressway headed towards Kuantan on Monday.

Pahang Fire and Rescue Department Operations and Rescue Division assistant director Mohd Salahuddin Isa said his team received an emergency call in relation to the incident at 8.15pm.

He said a team from the Bentong Fire and Rescue station was deployed to the location and a search and rescue operation was conducted to extricate the victims who were trapped in the driver and passenger section.

"The operation involved two tracker dogs from the K9 Unit before the department used rescue equipment to extricate the victims from the lorry," he said in a statement yesterday.

Mohd Salahuddin said the first victim was extricated at 7.47am yesterday, followed by the second victim at 9.30am.

Both victims were pronounced dead by Health Ministry personnel and their bodies were handed over to police for further action. — Bernama

Man falls victim to online love scam

JOHOR BAHRU: A delivery man has lost RM63,826 after falling victim to a love scam orchestrated by a woman he had known for only 20 days.

Johor police chief ACP Raub Selamat said the 28-year-old victim claimed to have met a woman known as Leong through the WeChat app.

"The incident occurred in August last year. The woman, who is believed to be a local, asked the victim for financial help to cover her mother's medical expenses as she was ill.

"She also threatened to end the relationship if the victim failed to meet her demand. The victim made 16 online money transfers to a bank account from Aug 25 to Nov 16, 2024," he said in a statement.

He added that the victim then asked to meet the woman and her family but she kept avoiding meetings, offering various excuses.

"Disappointed with her actions, the victim conducted an internet search and discovered that her profile picture on WeChat was of a famous Hong Kong actress. The victim filed a police report, believing he had fallen victim to an online love scam." — Bernama

GOF foils attempt to smuggle pig carcasses

KOTA BHARU: Three local men were arrested on suspicion of smuggling nearly 2,000kg of pig carcasses, estimated to be worth RM165,696, in Kampung Tasek Kwong, Lubok Stoi in Rantau Panjang on Saturday.

Southeast Brigade General Operations Force (GOF) commander Datuk Nik Azhan Nik Ros Nik Ab Rahman said the suspects, aged between 30 and 44, were apprehended at 2.30pm.

He said an inspection of their lorry found pig carcasses without valid documentation from the Veterinary Services Department, adding that the carcasses are believed to have been headed for the local market.

Nik Azhan said the case is being investigated under Section 36(1) of the Animals Act 1953.

In a separate case, he said GOF personnel arrested a 44-year-old Thai man at a roadblock in Serongga, Rantau Panjang on Saturday for attempting to smuggle grocery items estimated to be worth RM28,600.

He said the man was arrested at 8.30am after GOF members found suspected smuggled grocery items without valid documentation in his vehicle.

He added that the case is being investigated under Section 4(1) of the Food Act 1983. — Bernama



Impact of declining fertility rate

➤ Decreased births could cause labour shortage, slower economic growth and pressure on care systems for aged population

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is facing a demographic transformation due to a continuous decline in fertility rates.

According to Statistics Department data, live births decreased by 12.3% to 100,645 in the third quarter of 2024 compared with 114,764 in the same period the year before.

Similarly, the total fertility rate declined from 2.1 children per woman aged 15 to 49 in 2010 to 1.7 in 2023, well below the replacement level of 2.1.

According to experts, the trend carries profound implications. This is because a shrinking younger population due to falling fertility rates could lead to labour shortage, slower economic growth and increased pressure on social welfare systems to

support an ageing population.

A health expert attributes the decline to a range of factors, including rising living costs, delayed marriage, urbanisation, shifting gender roles and evolving career aspirations among women.

National Population and Family Development Board Reproductive Health Unit head Dr Wan Hilya Munira Mustapha opined that a key driver of the demographic shift is the rising cost of living, particularly in urban areas, which poses huge financial challenges in raising children.

"For example, in economically-driven regions like the Klang Valley, a household with one child spends about RM6,420 per month, while families in Alor Setar (Kedah) spend

around RM5,130. These figures cover essential expenses such as housing, education, healthcare and daily necessities."

She also said many young couples were choosing to delay or even forgo parenthood altogether due to the stagnant wage growth and limited support for childcare and family welfare.

Beyond economic concerns, societal shifts have also played a significant role in altering family dynamics, one of the most notable changes being the trend of delayed marriage, Bernama reported.

"The average age of marriage for Malaysian women has increased from 23.5 years in 1980 to 28.1 years in 2020. This delay in marriage has a direct impact on childbearing as women who marry later often have fewer children due to the reduced reproductive window," she said.

The reasons for this delay include women prioritising higher education and career advancement, and seeking financial stability and personal growth before committing

to marriage and parenthood.

"While these developments reflect progress in gender equality and personal autonomy, they also pose challenges to population growth as fewer children are born per household."

She added that health concerns, particularly subfertility and infertility, further compound the issue.

Globally, infertility affects approximately one in six couples and Malaysia is no exception. According to National Population and Family Development Board data, 60% of sperm analyses conducted between 2010 and 2019 revealed abnormalities, highlighting a significant rise in fertility issues among Malaysian couples.

Fertility issues often require medical intervention, which can be costly and emotionally taxing, putting additional pressure on couples who wish to have children.

On concerns that declining fertility rates is reshaping the demographic landscape, in line with the Statistics Department's

projections that 17.3% of the population will be aged 60 and above by 2040, Wan Hilya said policy reforms are needed to encourage higher birth rates and promote balanced family sizes.

"The current initiatives from the government could be leveraged, especially those related to financial incentives for parents such as tax benefits, childcare subsidies and paid parental leave, to ease the financial burden of raising children. Complementary measures like affordable housing, quality education and accessible healthcare would create a family-friendly environment."

She also emphasised the importance of family planning and access to contraceptive methods.

"Family planning enables individuals and couples to make informed choices about when and how many children to have, contributing to healthier outcomes for mothers and children while reducing high-risk and unplanned births. It also ensures the family's well-being and economic stability."

Double celebration treat in Penang

■ BY T.C. KHOR
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang Miaohui annual event themed "Penang Lang! Let's Celebrate" is back again, with the streets around Armenian Park coming alive during its "lighting ceremony" on New Year's Day.

It is also in conjunction with the Spring Festival celebrations, which will begin on the eve of Chinese New Year on Jan 28 and run for 15 days.

Speaking at the event hosted by the Penang Clan Association Committee, Chinese consul-general to Penang Zhou Youbin commended the 26th annual Penang Miaohui event as "one of the grandest and most iconic festivals in Penang".

Zhou said the Spring Festival, more commonly known as Chinese New

Year, is the oldest and most important traditional festival in Chinese culture.

He also said the festival embodies the Chinese pursuit of peace, harmony and unity.

"It is also a symbol of Chinese culture that is universally recognised and appreciated by the world," Zhou said during his speech.

Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow launched the event. Also present were Deputy Finance Minister Lim Hui Ying and Penang Chinese Clan Council chairman Ho Swee Choon.

Chow urged the younger generation to participate in the Miaohui celebrations to understand their cultural roots and continue traditions in innovative ways.

"The successful holding of Penang Miaohui is an example

of the cooperation between the government and the private sector," he said.

Zhou added that celebrating the Chinese New Year and enjoying the Miaohui heritage fair is not only a festive occasion but also a tribute to the mutual understanding, tolerance and unity among the people of Penang.

He drew parallels between the qualities of the upcoming Year of the Snake such as resilience, flexibility and ingenuity – all symbolising vitality – and the flourishing China-Malaysia relationship.

Zhou also highlighted that the strategic guidance and "practical cooperation" of the leaders between China and Malaysia across various sectors continues to deepen, with the Belt and Road Initiative achieving



(From left) Penang state exco for tourism and creative economy Wong Hon Wai, Lim, Chow and Ho during the event launch. – T.C. KHOR/THESUN

fruitful results.

"The inheritance and development of Chinese culture in Malaysia is the best portrayal of the deepening of cultural exchanges between the two countries," he said.

Zhou also praised Malaysia's multicultural settings, in which Chinese culture thrives alongside

other ethnic traditions. He highlighted the shared values of openness and tolerance as key factors to achieving harmony and civility.

"A single flower does not make spring, but a hundred flowers bloom in spring. As long as we uphold openness and inclusivity, we can achieve harmony among civilisations."

ENJOY A SEAMLESS READING EXPERIENCE.

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



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



Ship suspected of damaging sea cable goes dark

TAIPEI: A Chinese-owned cargo ship suspected of damaging a subsea telecoms cable off Taiwan has stopped transmitting its location on the high seas.

The Cameroon-flagged vessel was supposed to sail to South Korea after it was briefly detained by Taiwan's coast guard on Friday on suspicion of dragging its anchor over an international subsea cable northeast of the island.

Taiwan has asked South Korean authorities for assistance in the investigation into the ship after rough seas prevented them boarding the vessel.

A senior coast guard official said *Shunxing39's* automatic identification system signal, which is used to broadcast a vessel's location, was now turned off.

"It is illegal, but it has left our jurisdiction," the official said.

The captain of the *Shunxing39* told the coast guard that the ship had been "dragging anchor", but Taiwanese authorities had no "clear evidence" to prove the vessel had damaged the cable.

"Without boarding, we cannot confirm it, we only have photos and videos," the official said.

Seven Chinese nationals were crew members of the vessel owned by Jie Yang Trading Limited, a company registered in Hong Kong.

The company's listed director is Guo Wenjie, who has a Guangdong address, the Hong Kong Companies Registry shows. – AFP

Divers race to reach trapped miners

GUWAHATI: Indian search teams including military divers worked yesterday to reach several coal miners trapped underground after water flooded the shaft a day earlier.

Nine men are reported to be trapped in the mine, with a rescue report saying three bodies had been spotted.

Locals said at least 27 workers had entered the mine on Monday morning in the Dima Hasao region of India's northeastern state of Assam, with many managing to escape as gushing waters swamped the pit workings.

State Minister Kaushik Rai said more than 100 rescuers including soldiers were working to reach the trapped men.

India's military said that troops "including divers, sappers, medical teams and support staff swiftly responded" to try to bring the miners out.

Images released by the military showed divers in scuba kit being lowered into a deep shaft in a metal bucket.

"The source (of water) was internal. They (the miners) probably hit some water channel and water came out and flooded it," said district police chief Mayank Kumar. – AFP/Reuters

New warrant sought to arrest impeached president Yoon

SEOUL: South Korean anti-graft investigators refiled yesterday for a new court-ordered arrest warrant for impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, whose failed martial law bid threw the country into turmoil.

The former star prosecutor has refused questioning three times over a bungled martial law decree last month.

As anti-graft officials seek a new warrant from the same court that issued the first order, Yoon remains holed up in his residence surrounded by hundreds of guards preventing his detention.

"The Joint Investigation Headquarters refiled a warrant with

the Seoul Western District Court to extend the arrest warrant for defendant Yoon," the Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) said in a statement late on Monday.

"Details regarding the validity period cannot be disclosed," the CIO said after the initial seven-day warrant expired.

If investigators are able to detain Yoon, he would become the first sitting president in South Korean history to be arrested.

There was no comment by investigators or the Seoul court on the new warrant being approved.

However, CIO deputy director Lee Jae-seung told reporters

yesterday that the likelihood the court would not grant an extension was "very low".

Yoon is being investigated on charges of insurrection and, if formally arrested and convicted, faces prison or, at worst, the death penalty.

His lawyers repeatedly said the initial warrant was "unlawful", pledging to take further legal action against it.

Yoon's lawyers have argued the CIO lacks the authority to investigate, because insurrection is not included in the list of offences it can investigate.

But the likelihood for the reissued

warrant to be accepted was "quite high", said Yun Bok-nam, president of Lawyers for a Democratic Society, who is not involved in the investigation.

But it may take longer than expected for the warrant to be issued again.

"In the previous instance, it took quite a long time ... almost a day and a half," Yun said.

The CIO is a relatively new force – nearly four years old – with fewer than 100 staff who are yet to prosecute a single case.

"They have no experience with arrests, let alone arresting the president," Yun said. – AFP

Tibet quake kills at least 95

► Tremors felt in Nepal, Bhutan and India

BEIJING: A magnitude 6.8 earthquake rocked the northern foothills of the Himalayas near one of Tibet's holiest cities yesterday, Chinese authorities said, killing at least 95 people and shaking buildings in neighbouring Nepal, Bhutan and India.

The quake hit at 9.05am (9.15am in Malaysia), with its epicentre located in Tingri, a rural Chinese county known as the northern gateway to the Everest region, at a depth of 10km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Centre. The US Geological Service

put the quake's magnitude at 7.1.

At least 95 people had been killed and 130 injured on the Tibetan side, Xinhua news agency reported.

Southwestern parts of China, Nepal and northern India are frequently hit by earthquakes caused by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

A magnitude 7.8 tremor struck near Kathmandu in 2015, killing about 9,000 people and injuring thousands in Nepal's worst ever earthquake. Yesterday's epicentre was around 80km north of Everest, the world's highest mountain and a popular destination for climbers and trekkers.

Winter is not a popular season for climbers and hikers in Nepal, with a German climber the lone mountaineer with a permit to climb Mount Everest. He had already left the base camp after failing to reach the summit, Lilathar Awasthi, a Department of Tourism official, said.

Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority said the tremors were felt in seven hill districts bordering Tibet.

The impact of the quake was felt across the Shigatse region of Tibet, home to 800,000 people. The region is administered by Shigatse city, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said all-out search and rescue efforts should be carried out to minimise casualties, properly resettle the affected people, and ensure a safe and warm winter.

Villages in Tingri, where the average elevation is around 4,000-5,000m, reported strong shaking during the quake, which was followed by dozens of aftershocks

with magnitudes of up to 4.4.

Crumbled shop fronts could be seen in a video on social media showing the aftermath from the town of Lhatse, with debris spilling out onto the road.

There are three townships and 27 villages within 20km of the epicentre, with a total population of around 6,900, and more than 1,000 houses have been damaged, Xinhua reported.

Local government officials were liaising with nearby towns to gauge the impact of the quake and check for casualties, and China closed the Everest region to tourists after the quake.

The Tingri tremor was caused by a rupture in what is known as the Lhasa block in an area under north-south compression and west-east stress, CCTV reported, citing Chinese experts.

Since 1950, there have been 21 earthquakes of magnitude 6 or above in the Lhasa block, the largest of which was the 6.9-magnitude quake in Mainling in 2017, according to CCTV.

Mainling is in the lower reaches of Tibet's Yarlung Zangbo river where China is planning to build the world's largest hydropower dam.

Tremors were also felt in Nepal's capital Kathmandu some 400km away, where residents ran from their houses.

"The bed was shaking and I thought my child was moving the bed ... I didn't pay that much attention but the shaking of (a) window made me understand that it's an earthquake," said Kathmandu resident Meera Adhikari.

The quake also jolted Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, and the northern Indian state of Bihar which borders Nepal. – Reuters



A fallen motorcycle lies amid debris on a road in Lhatse County in Shigatse city, Tibet yesterday. – AFP/PPIC

New Singapore law aims to guard against foreign interference

SINGAPORE: The city-state introduced legislation yesterday to safeguard clans and business associations linked to racial groups against foreign interference.

If passed, the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Bill will allow a "competent authority" to designate such organisations as "race-based entities".

The organisations would then have to disclose foreign and

anonymous donations, affiliations and their leadership composition.

The government can also impose a restraining order to stop an entity from accepting donations from a foreign principal, prohibit anonymous donations or require the entity to return or dispose of donations.

In a media statement, the Home Affairs Ministry said: "Singapore is vulnerable to external actors exerting malicious foreign influence to exploit

race or undermine our racial harmony, to achieve their agenda. Organisations that promote the interests of a racial group or subgroup are potential entry points for such influence."

Singapore's resident population is 74% Chinese, 13.6% Malay and 9% Indian; 3.3% is classified as others.

Last year, Singapore designated businessman Chan Man Ping Philip as a "politically significant person" for

activities that advanced the interests of an unspecified foreign group.

A naturalised citizen of Singapore, Chan had attended the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing and told local media the overseas Chinese community should form an "alliance" and "tell the China story well".

Chan has ties to Hong Kong, where he was born, and he was the president

of the Hong Kong Singapore Business Association.

The proposed legislation will also allow the home affairs minister to issue restraining orders against individuals involved in "content that prejudices the maintenance of racial harmony in Singapore".

The Bill must be read twice more in parliament, including a vote, and be presented to the president for approval. – Reuters



Winter storm wreaks havoc across US

➤ Mercury could sink below seasonal norms

WASHINGTON: A major storm system that blanketed a large swathe of the central and eastern United States in snow and ice – disrupting travel for millions and contributing to at least five deaths – was headed offshore yesterday, forecasters said.

Over 2,300 US flights were cancelled on Monday, with thousands more delayed amid the winter storm, tracking website FlightAware showed, compounding similar air travel headaches from the day before.

Nearly 200,000 residents remained without power from Missouri to Virginia as frigid temperatures settled in on Monday night, according to Poweroutage.us, another tracking site.

The National Weather Service (NWS) said the event, the country's first major winter storm of the year, "will be quickly exiting eastward into the western Atlantic," adding

that some small snowfall accumulations would continue at some mountainous and mid-Atlantic areas.

Behind the storm, there was expected to be frigid temperatures for days, with cities such as Kansas City expecting windchills of -17°C.

The mercury could sink tens of degrees below seasonal norms on the US Gulf Coast.

In Washington, several inches of snow did not hinder Congress from meeting to certify Donald Trump's election victory, four years to the day after his supporters stormed the US Capitol to try to overturn his 2020 loss.

President Joe Biden was closely monitoring the severe weather and ready to support affected states, a White House spokesman said.

Many residents of the US capital, where federal offices and schools were closed due to the storm, spent the day outside enjoying the semi-rare snow day, with hundreds even taking part in a mass snowball fight.

As the storm tracked eastward, it brought blizzard conditions to Kansas and Missouri, while parts of Kentucky and elsewhere

received dangerous coatings of ice, turning highways into ice rinks and downing trees.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol reported two weather-related fatalities, and said it had responded to over 1,000 stranded motorists.

In Kansas, two people were killed after the vehicle they were travelling in spun out on a highway, while another person was killed after colliding with an out-of-control tractor trailer, the state's highway patrol reported.

Videos from Kansas showed cars skidding off ice-coated highways and tractor trailers jack-knifing.

The system was also blasting chilly winds across the Great Lakes into New York.

Fresh on this storm's heels, forecasters warned that another weather system was threatening to wreak more havoc later in the week, potentially bringing a rare major snowstorm to Texas as it heads east.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said he had activated state emergency response resources ahead of the "severe winter weather", which forecasters say could bring heavy snow to the Dallas metropolitan area. – AFP

COLOURS IN MOTION ...

Artistas (artists and sculptors) perform with traditional floats during the 'Blacks and Whites' carnival parade in Pasto, Colombia, on Monday. The carnival has its origins in Andean, Amazonian and Pacific cultural expressions, and it celebrates the ethnic diversity in the region and was proclaimed by Unesco as an intangible cultural heritage in 2009. – AFP/ICC



Trudeau to step down 'in coming months'

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday said he would step down in the coming months after nine years in power, bowing to pressure from lawmakers alarmed by his Liberal Party's miserable showing in pre-election polls.

A subdued Trudeau, among the most prominent progressive leaders in the world, told a press conference that he would stay on both as prime minister and Liberal leader until the party chooses a new chief within months.

"This country deserves a real choice in the next election, and it has become clear to me that if I'm having to fight internal battles, I cannot be the best option in that election," Trudeau said.

He also announced parliament would be prorogued, or suspended, until March 24.

That means an election is unlikely before

May at the earliest, so Trudeau will remain in charge, at least initially, of dealing with the threat of crippling tariffs once Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20.

The next election must be held by Oct 20 and polls show voters angry over high prices and a shortage of affordable housing will elect the opposition Conservatives and hand the Liberals a resounding defeat, no matter who leads the party.

In recent weeks, unhappy Liberal lawmakers openly called on Trudeau to quit after his finance minister resigned and accused him of "political gimmicks" to win back voters.

"I am not someone who backs away from a fight, particularly when a fight is as important as this one is," Trudeau told reporters outside his residence.

"But I have always been driven by my love

for Canada, and it has become obvious to me with the internal battles that I cannot be the one to carry the Liberal standard into the next election."

Trudeau, 53, took office in November 2015 with a message of hope and "sunny ways" and won re-election twice, becoming one of Canada's longest-serving prime ministers and winning plaudits from progressives for his focus on gender parity policies.

But his popularity started dipping two years ago as prices of groceries and housing rose after 2020, and his fortunes never recovered.

An Ipsos Canada poll released on Dec 22 showed the Conservatives had 45% support among decided voters, with the Liberals and the left-leaning New Democrats at 20% each. Such a result on election day would mean a huge Conservative victory. – Reuters

Yellen raises 'concern' over cyberattack

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen raised concerns on Monday to Beijing about "malicious cyber activity" by state-sponsored actors, days after her department reported a breach.

The incident happened in December and resulted in access to some of its workstations and unclassified documents.

In a virtual meeting with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng, Yellen "expressed serious concern about malicious cyber activity by state-sponsored actors", the Treasury said.

Yellen also flagged the impact of such issues on the US-China relationship.

But Beijing has rejected accusations that a state-sponsored actor was behind the cyberattack, calling the claims "groundless".

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said previously that Beijing "has always opposed all forms of hacker attacks, and we are even more opposed to the spread of false information against China for political purposes".

Yellen's talks with He come shortly before the United States is due to see a change in leadership, with Donald Trump returning to the White House later this month.

Trump's first presidential term saw Washington engage in an escalating tariff war with Beijing. – AFP

Rival parties form plane crash task force

SEOUL: South Korea's ruling and opposition parties agreed yesterday to form a joint parliamentary task force to investigate the Jeju Air plane crash that left 179 people dead.

The Boeing 737-800 plane was flying from Thailand to Muan in South Korea on Dec 29 carrying 181 passengers and crew when it belly-landed at an airport and slammed into a barrier.

With the exact cause of the crash still unknown, yesterday's unity move for a joint task force came after weeks of political turmoil, kicked off when President Yoon Suk Yeol briefly declared martial law last month.

"Our People Power Party and the Democratic Party decided to establish a special committee," the ruling party said in a statement.

It would "discuss the investigation into the causes" and provide support to grieving families of the dead, it said.

The opposition Democratic Party also confirmed it had "agreed" to form a joint probe team with the People Power Party to look into the tragic case. – AFP

Every Australian equal on the beach: PM

SYDNEY: Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday waded into a debate over the use of portable cabanas to reserve prime spots on beaches, saying the practice was "not on" and against the country's egalitarian spirit.

Portable gazebo-like beach cabanas, which usually take up more space than umbrellas and offer shade, have become increasingly popular.

But photos of dozens of empty cabanas on beaches posted on social media in recent weeks have sparked online and media debate, with some calling the act "un-Australian", while others lauded the ingenuity.

"One of the great things about Australia, unlike some parts of the world (where) you have got to pay to go to the beach. Here, everyone owns the beach," Albanese said during an appearance on *Today*, one of the country's most popular breakfast television shows.

"It's a place where every Australian is equal. And that's a breach of that principle, to think that you can reserve a little spot as yours." – Reuters

UAE in talks with US, Israel on provisional Gaza govt

► Temporary governance, peacekeeping mission among issues discussed

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates has discussed with Israel and the United States about taking part in a provisional administration of post-war Gaza until a reformed Palestinian Authority is able to take charge, according to people familiar with the talks.

The discussions, reported by Reuters for the first time, included the possibility of the UAE and the United States, along with other nations, temporarily overseeing the governance, security and reconstruction of Gaza after the Israeli military withdraws and until a Palestinian administration is able to take over, a dozen foreign diplomats and Western officials told Reuters.

The UAE is a close security partner of the US and, unlike most Arab governments, has diplomatic ties with Israel. The diplomats and officials said this provides the Gulf

state with some leverage over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

After more than a year of war, Israel remains reluctant to outline its own vision for Gaza and the international community has struggled to formulate a viable plan, said the sources, who asked not to be identified because the conversations were private.

The diplomats and officials stressed the ideas that had emerged from the UAE talks lacked detail and had not been distilled into a formal, written plan nor adopted by any government.

In the behind-the-scenes talks, Abu Dhabi is advocating for a reformed Palestinian Authority (PA) to govern Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem under an independent Palestinian state, the sources said – something that Israel

has publicly opposed.

"The UAE will not participate in any plan that fails to include significant reform of the Palestinian Authority, its empowerment, and the establishment of a credible roadmap towards a Palestinian state," a UAE official told Reuters.

"These elements, which are currently lacking, are essential for the success of any post-Gaza plan."

The PA was established three decades ago under the 1993-1995 Oslo Accords, signed by Israel and Palestinians, and given limited authority over the West Bank and Gaza. It still exercises some governance in the Israeli-occupied West Bank but was run out of Gaza in 2007 by Hamas after a brief civil war.

A US State Department spokesperson said there had been talks with several partners, including the UAE, on options for governance, security and reconstruction, and that various draft proposals, plans and ideas had been put forward by partners.

"These have been deliberative discussions that continue, as we seek

the best way forward," the spokesperson said, declining to comment further on "private diplomatic conversations".

The Israeli prime minister's office declined comment for this story. The Palestinian Authority did not respond to Reuters' questions.

In addition to reforming the PA, four of the diplomats and Western officials said that Emirati officials had suggested the use of private military contractors as part of a post-war peacekeeping force in Gaza. The other sources confirmed they were briefed on what they described as Emirati post-war proposals, which included the use of such forces.

The diplomats and Western officials said any deployment of such contractors would spark concerns among Western nations. Private military contractors have faced accusations of torture, human rights abuses, and use of excessive force, among other allegations, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The UAE official did not respond to questions about the use of military contractors. – Reuters

Exemption for Syria sanctions

DAMASCUS: The US on Monday issued a sanctions exemption for transactions with governing institutions in Syria for six months in an effort to ease the flow of humanitarian assistance.

The exemption, known as a general licence, also allows some energy transactions and personal remittances to Syria until July 7. The action did not remove any sanctions.

The US Treasury said the move sought "to help ensure that sanctions do not impede essential services and continuity of governance functions across Syria, including the provision of electricity, energy, water, and sanitation".

While Monday's move "authorises transactions with institutions ... even if a designated individual has a leadership role in that governing institution," it does not permit any transactions involving military or intelligence agencies. – Reuters

Al Jazeera office closure extended

RAMALLAH: Israeli authorities renewed a closure order for Al Jazeera's Ramallah office in the occupied West Bank yesterday, days after the Palestinian Authority suspended the network's broadcasts for four months.

Israeli soldiers posted the extension order yesterday morning on the entrance of the building housing Al Jazeera's offices in central Ramallah, a city under full Palestinian Authority security control.

The extension applies from Dec 22 and lasts 45 days.

In September, Israeli forces raided the Ramallah office and issued an initial 45-day closure order.

At the time, staff were instructed to leave the premises and take their personal belongings.

The move came months after Israel's government approved a decision in May to ban Al Jazeera from broadcasting from Israel, also closing its offices for an initial 45-day period, which was extended for a fourth time by a Tel Aviv court in September. – AFP

Allow safe passage of aid convoys, Tel Aviv told

NEW YORK: The UN's World Food Programme on Monday accused Israel of firing on one of its aid convoys in the Gaza Strip, saying at least 16 bullets hit the clearly marked vehicles but no staff were injured.

Condemning the "horrifying" and "unacceptable" incident, the WFP called again for "all parties to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilian lives, and allow safe passage for humanitarian aid".

The "clearly marked WFP convoy was shot at by Israeli forces near the Wadi Gaza checkpoint, putting the lives of our staff at tremendous risk and leaving the vehicles immobilised," the agency said in a statement.

"The convoy, consisting of three vehicles carrying eight staff members, came under hostile fire despite having received all of the necessary clearances from Israeli authorities. At least 16 bullets struck the vehicles," it said.

"Thankfully, no staff members were injured in this terrifying encounter."

The Israeli army said it had received reports of shots being fired at the convoy, without specifying the origin.

"The incident was reviewed, operating procedures have been clarified, and findings from the inquiry will be analysed," it said in a statement.

Gazans face dire conditions after

15 months of war, with humanitarian agencies repeatedly warning not enough aid was reaching Palestinians in need due in part to looting as well as Israeli restrictions.

In Ramallah, the Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces killed two people yesterday in separate raids in the northern West Bank, while the military said it had targeted a "... cell".

One Palestinian was killed in the town of Tammun, and another in the village of Talouza, the Ramallah-based ministry said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said its teams had transported the body of an 18-year-old from Tammun who was killed "as a result of shelling," and

that five other people were severely injured during the Israeli raid.

The body was taken to the Turkish Hospital in the nearby city of Tubas, where the director identified the deceased as Suleiman Qutaishat.

The Red Crescent said the other Palestinian was killed in an Israeli raid around the village of Talouza, near Nablus, and was 40 years old.

Residents in the area identified him as Jaafar Dababshe, who they said was shot dead by Israeli forces in front of his house.

The Israeli army said on its Telegram channel: "An air force aircraft targeted a cell in the Tammun area early yesterday." – AFP

West trying to smother Russia, says Orthodox patriarch

MOSCOW: The patriarch of Russia's Orthodox Church, celebrating Christmas alongside Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin, said yesterday that the Western world despised Russia and its "alternative path of civilised development".

Orthodox Christians in Russia celebrate Christmas on Jan 7, according to the Julian calendar.

Patriarch Kirill, an enthusiastic backer of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, blessed icons and crosses that were to be engraved with the president's initials and sent to servicemen in the 34-month-old war in Ukraine, Russian news agencies quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying.

Russia presents a challenge to powerful countries not because of its nuclear capabilities or strength, Kirill said, according to the news agencies.

"They hate us because we are offering a different, alternative path of civilised development," he said at Christ the Saviour cathedral, which was rebuilt on the site of a swimming pool in the 1990s after Soviet dictator

Josef Stalin levelled it in the 1930s.

The West was in moral collapse, he said, but Russia showed the world how to blend science, culture, education and faith.

"Physically, they cannot smother us, though they try through different types of slander and the creation of blocs of some sort intended to weaken Russia. Nothing will work because God is with us," he said.

Putin has looked to the church for support in Ukraine and denounced what he sees as a decline in Western morals, including the movement to protect gay and transgender rights.

In his Christmas message, Putin praised the church for "strengthening the institution of the family, the upbringing of young people and the affirmation of moral ideals".

Before the cathedral ritual, Putin attended the church of St George the Victorious with veterans of the Ukraine conflict, at the Poklonnaya Hill war memorial complex.

Ukraine, which has had its own independent church since 2018, has



Putin attending Christmas service at St George Church yesterday. – AFP/IC

moved its Christmas celebration to Dec 25, though a minority has maintained allegiance to a church with historic links to Moscow.

Meanwhile, Putin expressed his condolences to President Xi Jinping over a devastating earthquake in Tibet.

"Russia shares the grief of those who have lost relatives in this natural disaster," Putin told Xi in a message posted by the Kremlin. – Reuters

COMMENT by Dr Manivannan Rethinam

Shielding children from online predators

IN the boundless expanse of the digital world, a silent predator lurks, targeting the most vulnerable among us – our children. Social media, often hailed as a space for creativity, connection and learning, has become a double-edged sword. While it brings opportunity, it also harbours grave dangers.

The recent plea by IGP Tan Sri Razarudin Husain for parents to closely monitor their children's online activities underscores the urgency of addressing this growing crisis.

This is not merely an issue of concern; it is an urgent call to action. Safeguarding children from online exploitation must transcend rhetoric to become a national priority.

Every parent, educator, policymaker and community member must unite to shield our future generations from harm.

Dark reality

Online predators are no longer a distant fear; they are an immediate, insidious threat. Using social media platforms as their hunting ground, they exploit the innocence and curiosity of children.

With flattery, gifts, and fake friendships, these predators groom their victims, laying a path to irreversible trauma.

In Malaysia, the statistics are sobering. According to the Disrupting Harm in Malaysia report – a collaborative effort by Ecpat International, Interpol, Unicef (United Nations Children's Fund) and their networks of national and global partners, facilitated locally by Unicef Malaysia's country office, with support from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry – 4% of children aged 12 to 17 who use the internet have faced explicit online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

This seemingly small percentage translates to thousands of young, fragile lives permanently scarred. Alarming, cases of teenagers unknowingly engaging in risky behaviour, such as sharing explicit images in exchange for money or validation, are on the rise.

These figures are not just numbers. Each represents a child – a life disrupted, a family

devastated and a future potentially derailed.

Role of parents and guardians

Parents and guardians are the first line of defence in this battle. While the digital landscape may feel overwhelming, there are actionable steps every parent can take:

➔ **Foster open communication:** Children must feel safe sharing their online experiences. Encourage conversations without judgement or fear of punishment.

➔ **Educate about online risks:** Teach children the dangers of sharing personal information or engaging with strangers. Awareness is the first step to prevention.

➔ **Utilise parental controls:** Take advantage of built-in tools on devices and platforms to monitor and restrict access to inappropriate content.

➔ **Set clear boundaries:** Define rules about screen time, acceptable behaviours and safe platforms. Consistency and clarity are key.

Compassion for victims

For victims of online exploitation, the consequences are profound and long-lasting. The psychological toll often manifests in anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues, sometimes persisting well into adulthood. Society's role must be one of empathy and support.

Accessible counselling services, peer support groups and public awareness campaigns are essential to helping victims rebuild their lives. Silence and stigma must give way to understanding and action.

Government and community interventions

Malaysia has made notable progress in tackling online exploitation. The Online Safety Bill 2024, a landmark piece of legislation, was passed by the Dewan Rakyat on Dec 11, 2024 and the Dewan Negara on Dec 16, 2024.

The bill is now awaiting Royal Assent and will become law upon being gazetted. Once operational, it will mandate a "duty of care" for digital service providers to protect children and other users from online harms.

Collaborative initiatives with Unicef and other organisations have already fostered impactful public awareness campaigns.

The police has intensified efforts to combat cybercrimes, rescuing victims and bringing perpetrators to justice.

In recent years, the police have reported a significant increase in the number of online predator cases investigated, reflecting the growing threat and the authorities' commitment to addressing it.

However, these commendable actions must be supported by continuous investment, policy updates and community participation.

For instance, MCMC has launched initiatives like *Klik Dengan Bijak* (Click Wisely) to promote digital literacy and safe online practices among children and parents.

Collective responsibility

Protecting children from online predators is a shared mission. Educational institutions should incorporate digital literacy into their curricula, empowering students to navigate the online world safely.

Technology companies must prioritise child safety, enforcing stringent detection and reporting mechanisms for exploitation. Communities must cultivate vigilance, offering children safe spaces and the reassurance that they are protected.

Call to action

The internet holds incredible promise but its darker underbelly poses a grave risk to our children. The responsibility to safeguard their innocence cannot rest on a single entity – it is a collective duty.

Let us pledge to act with urgency, empathy and determination. By fostering awareness, promoting open dialogue and building robust safeguards, we can create a digital environment where our children can explore, learn, and thrive without fear.

The safety of our children is not negotiable. It is a moral imperative that demands our unwavering commitment. Together, we can and must make the digital world a safer place for the next generation.

Dr Manivannan Rethinam is chairman of Majlis Gagasan Malaysia.
Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Bans will not fix everything

THE recent ban on junk food advertising on public transport in South Australia raises an important question for Malaysia: Are we relying too much on bans and restrictions as a default response to societal challenges?

Australia offers a cautionary tale of what happens when bans snowball into overreach. From tobacco controls to social media curbs and now junk food advertising, their approach risks excessive government interference in citizens' choices and business operations.

While framed as promoting the public good, such measures often come at a high cost – eroding personal freedoms and stifling economic growth.

Malaysia seems to be treading a similar path. From tobacco restrictions under Act 852 to talks of regulating social media, the trend towards over-regulation is unmistakable.

The rationale is always the same: safeguarding public health, safety or social order. But are outright bans the best way to solve our societal challenges?

Take tobacco restrictions as an example. While these measures aim to curb smoking rates and protect youth, they risk fuelling the illicit cigarette market.

Similarly, regulating social media platforms could stifle innovation and curtail freedom of expression, threatening Malaysia's burgeoning digital economy.

Bans also often fail to tackle root causes. Obesity, for instance, will not be solved by banning junk food advertisements. A more comprehensive solution involves expanding access to affordable, healthy food, enhancing education and promoting active lifestyles.

Tobacco control would similarly benefit from harm-reduction strategies rather than outright prohibitions. Industries such as advertising, media, and small-scale businesses often bear the brunt of such measures.

Policies that penalise compliance with existing laws discourage investments, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

Malaysia can learn from Australia's experience and adopt a more balanced, evidence-based approach. Let us not fall into the trap of thinking bans are a one-size-fits-all solution to complex problems.

Zainul Abdul Karim
Johor Bahru

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

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



Hinduism's link with quantum physics

WHAT is Malaysia's New Year resolution? If we have not set a common goal for all people to achieve, it is time to focus on improving multifaith understanding in line with the first and leading principle of the *Rukunegara*. The first principle says "Belief in God" – but probably less than 20 persons out of 34 million understand its true meaning.

Recitation of the *Rukunegara* in schools and government programmes implies full agreement that belief in God is the highest state of Malaysian citizenry.

As all religions profess belief in God, no religion should be considered as having inferior teachings compared with another.

Yet we copiously use the warring term "conversion" to describe the act of a person who steps out of one religion to embrace another. When persons convert, they renounce faith in their previous religion. It is a dangerous word because it has military significance.

Conversion was deployed as a backup tactic to weaken the enemy's ranks during wars between nations that professed different religions.

Conversions often demoralised the enemy by breaking communal or religious unity.

A conquered population may also convert to avoid persecution, secure better treatment or receive full rights. This weakened the enemy's morale and manpower by reducing their numbers.

When someone moves from one religion to another, the right approach is to call it a transfer, just like a company employee transferring to another department. The employee remains loyal to the same CEO although now reporting to another head of department. Respect for the previous boss is maintained.

While there are valid social reasons for wanting a transfer to another religion, conversion is different as it is akin to resignation, wherein a person joins a competitor within the same industry and pledges to break all previous ties.

Meaning of conversion

What does "conversion" mean? Think of a block of ice that has melted. This is a conversion from a lower state to a higher state, and there are crucial differences between these two states. A fish trapped in water that freezes into ice will die; a fish trapped in ice that is instantly thawed will be revived and continue living in the water. It is a difference between life and death.

When someone converts by

renouncing a previous religion to embrace another, is that person jumping from spiritual death to spiritual life? Over the past two years, as reported in mass media, the courts of law had to deal with appeals stemming from 16 cases of childhood conversions that occurred without the consent of both parents. Such conversions pit one religion against another.

Lying hidden behind these cases is the key issue: despite accepting the *Rukunegara*'s first principle, almost all Malaysians believe their own religion is truer than other religions. We need to ask ourselves: When persons change their religion, are they switching their loyalty to another God? Have they been persuaded to believe that the God of their previous religion is false?

Does the *Rukunegara* say "Belief in God" or "Belief in the True God"? What are the false Gods? There are only three according to Buddhist teaching: *loba*, *dosa* and *moha* (greed or lust, ill will or hatred, and ego or delusion), and all are human created.

When you show ill will towards another religion, desire to convert people away from it, and feel proud upon success, you are by such feelings and actions worshipping the three false Gods of *loba*, *dosa* and *moha*. As 13 of the 16 cases of childhood conversion involve the Hindu faith, it is obvious that many religious activists believe conversion removes a Hindu child from the worship of false Gods.

To clear misconceptions that undermine national unity, here is a concise brief about Hinduism: The best source of authority on Hindu teachings is the collection of scriptures known as the *Vedas*, which contain descriptions of many *Devas*.

The Sanskrit word *Deva* has for too long been misleadingly translated as "God" in dictionaries, giving the false impression that Hinduism upholds belief in many Gods.

Devas are celestial personifications of natural forces and phenomena. Each *Deva*, embodied in a stone image, depicts some external aspect or internal attribute of nature. The practice 4,000 years ago was to teach environmental care and inner potency using intricately crafted stones as instruction manuals, just as medieval Europeans used fairy tales to convey teachings.

In the *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad*, a questioner asks: "How many Gods are there?" Teasingly the reply comes: "Three and three hundred, three and three thousand." The questioner persists: "How many Gods are there really?" The answer,



Recitation of the *Rukunegara* in schools and government programmes implies full agreement that belief in God is the highest state of Malaysian citizenry. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

still a teaser: "Thirty-three." Again and again, the questioner persists. And the crisp answers come rapidly, "six" then "three" then "two" then "one and a half" and finally the correct answer: "one."

What is the intention behind such a drawn-out reply? The *Vedas* instructs listeners to embrace diversities as all natural forms and forces are manifestations of a great underlying unity. As it says in the *Isoanishad*: "He who sees unity in all diversities is beyond all illusions and bereavements, is beyond all losses and gains."

The questioner finally asks: "Who is the one God?" The answer: "He is Brahman and they call him That." This use of two contrasting pronouns "He" and "That" informs believers that God can be experienced in two contrasting ways – as personal reality manifested to humans or as non-personal unmanifest reality.

You may relate to God as a personal being to whom you offer worship because He creates the universe. Just as a Proton manufacturer draws up specifications for the car, God bestows divine laws for our guidance.

Religions have different codes of divine law and different conceptions of this personal God to fit the cultural background of the civilisations in which they are embedded.

However, you may also perceive God as non-being. "All this world is pervaded by Me in My unmanifest aspect" (*Bhagavad Gita*). From the *Kathopanishad*: "It is seen in every form of the universe. It alone is the only truth, the One without a second."

What does "the only truth, the One without a second" mean? To monotheistic preachers, it means there is just one true God and just

one true religion (theirs, of course). But what this *Vedic* assertion means is that God is the one and only substantial reality. Unlike a car that exists apart from its creator, the universe is not a second reality apart from God. The universe is merely an apparent or illusory reality with no substance.

The universe is a thought of God

Here is a divinely awesome statement from *Srimad Bhagavata* that presages by 3,500 years the latest discoveries of quantum physics, the most advanced science today: "The objective world, a second existence distinct and different from the subject, seems to exist but it has no such separate existence. Such existence as it has, is like that of the contents of a dream or of a reverie, which are entirely based on the dreamer's mind, and do not exist apart from that mind."

Says the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Deluded by the three modes of *Maya*, people in this world are unable to know Me, the imperishable and eternal." *Maya* is God's power to make the illusory universe appear real. The three modes of *Maya* are *tamas* (mass), *rajas* (energy) and *sattva* (information). *Sattva* refers only to quantum information that runs all natural processes.

We know from atomic physics that the solidity of matter is an illusion generated by electrons whirling at 1,320km per second within a mostly empty atom.

Imagine the blades of a ceiling fan whirling at such speed. The fan will appear like a motionless solid ball hanging from the ceiling. But quantum physics has discovered that the protons, electrons and neutrons in atoms are illusory too as they arise from different patterns of quarks.

Quarks are the only true

particles, and they too have no real existence. How do quarks form? The fundamental substrate of the universe is just a quantum information wave. An inherent disequilibrium in the substrate causes vibration. The vibration creates ripples that become a wave.

Wherever there are excitations of the wave, at those spots the wave surges and compresses into peaks. Every peak takes on the form of a quark. As it is merely the peak point of a wave compression, the quark returns to its wave-form, with decompression of the peak.

The *Vedas* goes beyond quantum physics in asserting that the real essence of the universe is God. "All this universe indeed is an expression of Your thought" (*Shrimad Bhagavata*). Just as a person and his thoughts are one, the quantum wave and God are one. This oneness binds everything together just as quarks exist in a web of relationships, with each an integrated part of the whole.

A religion that has found support in quantum physics is at the very least the equal of whichever religion you think is the best.

Nevertheless, there are valid social reasons for transfers from one religion to another within the boundaries permitted by Malaysian law. These reasons include marriage as spouses need to be completely aligned, to be with a circle of friends, to enjoy lifestyle enhancements such as personal and family life network support, as well as to ensure children get weekend moral classes and participate in non-harmful activities. But transferees must continue to honour their previous religions.

Joachim Ng champions interfaith harmony. Comments: letters@thesunday.com



"A religion that has found support in quantum physics is at the very least the equal of whichever religion you think is the best."

Paragon Globe secures multiple GreenRE certifications

JOHOR BAHRU: Property developer Paragon Globe Bhd (PGB) has achieved multiple GreenRE certifications for its projects, further solidifying its commitment to sustainability.

Paragon Platinum Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of PGB, has obtained the Bronze Provisional GreenRE Certification for Desa 27 Plot 3 and Plot 4. Additionally, Paragon Bizhub Sdn Bhd, another PGB subsidiary, has also secured the Silver Provisional GreenRE Certification for its workers' hostel, namely PGB Hostel at Pekan Nenas Industrial Park.

Desa 27, a 27-acre freehold industrial development located in Desa Cemerlang, showcases PGB's innovative approach to sustainable industrial spaces. Featuring five plots of detached factories with a design-and-build concept, Desa 27 empowers tenants to customise their facilities while adhering to green building standards.

"These GreenRE certifications underscore our commitment to creating environmentally responsible developments that meet the needs of modern businesses," said PGB executive chairman Datuk Sri Edwin Tan Pei Seng.

"Desa 27 is a prime example of how we integrate sustainability into our projects, enhancing value for our tenants and contributing to a greener future for Malaysia."

ESG principles and floods

KOTA BHARU: To achieve a sustainable future and create synergy for meaningful change in Malaysia, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had urged all stakeholders, including businesses, communities, and individuals, to actively adopt Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles beyond mere compliance.

He emphasised the need for a mindset shift among all parties in the country's effort to achieve net-zero emissions.

Dean of the Faculty of Bioresources and Food Industry at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Prof Dr Hafizan Juaahir, told Bernama that to empower ESG principles in addressing floods, authorities must promptly implement long-term plans, including constructing integrated drainage systems in urban and rural areas, ensuring connectivity to main rivers.

Professor Zulkifli Yusop, senior fellow of the Centre for Environmental Sustainability and Water Security, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, said critical buildings and infrastructure such as hospitals, fire stations, Tenaga Nasional Bhd substations, water treatment plants, and temporary evacuation centres should be located in areas with lower flood risks or constructed with flood-proof specifications.

Empowering greener future for Malaysia

NGC Energy unveils Solar PV System Programme in move towards sustainability

KUALA LUMPUR: In a significant move towards sustainability, NGC Energy has unveiled its Solar PV System Programme, positioning itself as a leader in the renewable energy sector.

NGC Energy, recognised as the second-largest LPG supplier in Malaysia based on pre-Covid data from KPDN, continues to lead in innovative energy solutions.

With solar power gaining traction as one of the most reliable and cost-effective energy sources, NGC Energy's initiative reflects the growing demand for cleaner alternatives, both in Malaysia and worldwide.

As countries strive to meet carbon

reduction targets, renewable energy is rapidly becoming an essential part of the global energy landscape. Solar energy, in particular, has emerged as a powerful solution, harnessing the sun's energy to generate electricity with minimal environmental impact. For Malaysian businesses and households, switching to solar offers not only significant cost savings but also a meaningful contribution to reducing the nation's carbon footprint.

"With rising energy costs and increasing environmental concerns, the need for clean, affordable energy has never been greater. Solar power provides an efficient and sustainable solution to meet those needs," says NGC Energy CEO Julianna Kamaruddin.

NGC Energy's Solar PV System Programme has already made strides in reducing carbon emissions, with a projected annual reduction of 358 metric tonnes of CO₂ by 2024. To contextualise the impact of solar energy compared to traditional sources, solar power

offsets 20 times the emissions of coal and 12 times that of natural gas.

Solar panels are advanced technology systems that convert sunlight into electricity. These panels vary in size and capacity depending on installation needs. For residential installations, smaller rooftop panels are typically used, while industrial facilities often require larger arrays to meet higher energy demands.

Financially, solar installations bring significant long-term benefits. Residential setups can result in yearly savings ranging from RM3,000 to RM12,000, depending on system capacity and usage.

A standard 1-kWp system could save RM550-RM680 annually, translating to RM5,500-RM6,800 over a decade. Installation costs for residential solar systems generally range between RM18,000 and RM40,000.

The government has introduced several initiatives to accelerate the adoption of solar power, offering financial incentives through the Green Investment Tax Allowance

(GITA) and Solar For Rakyat Incentive Scheme (SolaRIS) programmes.

These incentives reduce the upfront costs of solar installations, making solar power more accessible to homeowners and businesses. Through Net Energy Metering (NEM) 3.0, customers can even sell excess electricity back to the grid, maximising their investment in solar energy.

The solar energy market in Malaysia is projected to grow at an annual rate of 2.22% from 2024 to 2029.

The government's National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) outlines an ambitious target to increase solar energy capacity from 4% to 58% by 2050.

NGC Energy has also launched an internal programme to equip its employees' homes with solar panels, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability. "At NGC Energy, we believe in leading by example," said Julianna.

"By embracing solar power ourselves, we're demonstrating our commitment to a sustainable future and inspiring others to do the same."

Looking ahead, NGC Energy plans to expand its solar initiatives and explore new opportunities in the renewable energy market.

"As we continue to innovate and expand our offerings, our vision remains clear: to build a sustainable energy future for Malaysia and beyond," said Julianna.

CIMB and Gentari ink MoU to drive green mobility

KUALA LUMPUR: CIMB Group Holdings Bhd and clean energy solutions provider Gentari Sdn Bhd via Gentari Green Mobility Sdn Bhd have entered into a strategic memorandum of understanding (MoU) to drive green mobility and value chain decarbonisation across Asean.

Through this collaboration, CIMB and Gentari will offer a range of value-added services to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles (EV) in Malaysia.

In addition, CIMB will deliver targeted financing solutions to Gentari's customers, facilitating their decarbonisation efforts and fostering low carbon practices within the sector, supporting national and regional climate ambitions.

CIMB Malaysia and CIMB Bank Bhd CEO Gurdip Singh Sidhu said: "CIMB is pleased to be partnering with Gentari in driving green mobility solutions and value chain decarbonisation as part of our shared commitment to a just transition in the region. This partnership signifies a major milestone in CIMB's broader commitment to achieving Net Zero by 2050, while emphasising our dedication to environmental stewardship at all levels, which include empowering individual customers to make greener choices and supporting SMEs in their decarbonisation efforts."

"With CIMB's strong foundation in sustainable finance, we believe we can offer solutions that not only drive the clean energy transition but also

create real, measurable impact. Together, we will work towards practical and scalable initiatives that help tackle climate challenges, while supporting national and regional sustainability agendas," he added.

Gentari operates the largest licensed direct current (DC) charging network in Malaysia, with over 175 DC charging points (CPs) out of close to 1,000 charging points across Malaysia, Thailand, and India.

It has deployed over 3,600 EVs through its Vehicle-as-a-Service (VaaS) offerings across the region.

Through the Gentari Go app, users can access a network of over 5,000 roaming chargers across the region via partnerships with various charging point operators. Gentari is

currently offering selected CIMB customers 50% off at EV charging stations in Malaysia via Gentari Go from now until Jan 15, 2025.

Gentari deputy CEO Shah Yang Razalli, who is also CEO of Gentari Green Mobility, remarked: "This collaboration with CIMB is a significant step towards Gentari's goal of becoming a leading green mobility partner in Asia Pacific, enabling us to expand our network of stakeholders to make EV adoption more affordable and accessible."

At the same time, CIMB's targeted financing solutions not only enable Gentari's partners to implement decarbonisation measures at scale but are also an opportunity for businesses to optimise their green energy ecosystem potential via the Gentari Go platform."

CIMB will play a pivotal role in advancing sustainability adoption among small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) within Gentari's value chain, providing growth-oriented, green banking solutions that enable these businesses to scale faster, contributing to the national target of 10,000 public EV charging stations by 2030.

To further strengthen support across Gentari's value chain, vendors will gain access to CIMB's SMEBizReady value-based financing for capital expenditure, working capital as well as funding requirements for automation and digitalisation initiatives. In addition, they can leverage CIMB's GreenBizReady™ programme for capacity building, and gain access to complimentary tools and incentives such as sustainability-linked financing rebates of up to 0.5%.



From left: Gentari Green Mobility chief customer officer Aliah Nasreen Abdullah, Shah, Gurdip and CIMB head of sustainability Malaysia Tania Davina at the signing ceremony.



CGS International expands services to capitalise on Malaysia's role as Asean Chair

KUALA LUMPUR: CGS International Securities Malaysia Sdn Bhd is expanding its services in 2025 to capitalise on Malaysia's role as Asean Chair and the China+1 strategy, as businesses seek alternatives in the global supply chain amid geopolitical shifts.

CGS International deputy CEO Alan Inn Wei Loon said now CGS International has expanded its capabilities to include investment banking, and securities lending. "...and soon, private equity, ensuring our clients have access to efficient capital, innovative financing, and sustainability advisory services tailored to their needs," he said in his speech at CGS International 17th Annual Malaysia Corporate Day 2025 yesterday.

The firm has diversified its product and service offerings to cater to institutional, corporate, retail, and high-net-worth clients across all risk appetites.

"This makes us the perfect partner for investment banking deals in public and private markets across Asean as companies continue to pursue the China+1 strategy," he said.

Inn said with 15 million customers across 15 countries and regions, it has been leveraging its network to connect clients, businesses and policy makers across different markets as well as with its parent company and stakeholders in China.

"Through our links, we have been able to facilitate B2B, B2G and G2G discussions. To date, we have been the convener of more than 100 meetings and conferences and signed three memorandums of understanding.

"From providing clients with early access to deals and policy discussions to helping them source capital and investments, CGS International has been positioning ourselves as the go-to financial services provider with unique Chinese expertise," he added.

Inn said Asean has enjoyed positive relationships with all economic blocs and global economies due to its ability to navigate sensitivities, facilitate trade and serve as a key player in the global supply chain since its inception in 1967.

"The intensification of the China+1 strategy due to the unrelenting geopolitical tensions have created even more opportunities for Asean."

He said Malaysia must quickly capitalise on these openings – whether in manufacturing, technology, healthcare, green technology, infrastructure, and more.

"We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to capture. As Asean Chair, Malaysia is in a prime position to utilise its political stability and diversity to intensify intraregion cooperation to capture opportunities as countries and businesses seek alternatives in their supply chains, investments or to source or raise capital," he added.

CGS International Securities Malaysia's parent organisation is China Galaxy Securities, one of China's leading securities firms. - by **HAYATUN RAZAK**

MAHB privatisation – decide quickly, says Loke

■ BY **HAYATUN RAZAK**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of Transport (MoT) hopes that the decision-making process for privatising Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) will move more quickly.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook said the ministry is looking forward to seeing the deal materialise.

"MAHB can take a faster approach and quicker decision-making to invest and expand Malaysia's aviation capabilities," he said during a fireside chat at CGS International Securities Malaysia Sdn Bhd's 17th Annual Malaysia Corporate Day 2025 yesterday.

Loke stressed Malaysia views aviation as a primary driver of economic growth.

"We see aviation as a strategy to bring economic growth to different areas. Malaysia is not just focusing on KLIA. It also targets regional

➤ Transport ministry is looking forward to seeing the deal materialise

airports such as Penang, Johor, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Sabah, Sarawak and smaller secondary airports as drivers of local economic growth.

"So, we need investment. We need to have capital expenditure (capex). In the past, airport capex was purely funded by the government," he said, adding that previously MAHB only operated the airports and did not allocate capex due to the operating model.

The operating agreement has been revised to enable MAHB to make capex decisions.

"There are mechanisms for capex approval, such as the airport development fund and the investment recovery model, which allow certain capex to be recouped. These measures in the operating agreement will enable MAHB to

fund airport expansions fully. This is something the MoT is committed to supporting," Loke said.

This model allows airports with potential upgrades or expansion to submit proposals to the MoT, which are then brought to Cabinet for policy approval, he added.

Loke said that every year, during the budget debate, members of parliament from various states request airport expansions in their constituencies.

"However, it is challenging for the MoT or the Ministry of Finance (MoF) to prioritise which airports to fund. Occasionally, by-elections in specific areas may influence decisions to prioritise or expand certain airports, but this approach is not sustainable," Loke said.

MoT supports the privatisation

of MAHB and the increased involvement of Khazanah Nasional, the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and the consortium – to enable faster decision-making regarding capex and investments.

Loke cited Penang as an example of this model's success.

"That's why we saw Penang take off. We also obtained Cabinet approval for Kota Kinabalu using the same recovery model. These are steps to drive airport expansion forward. We aim for passenger and cargo growth in all airports," he said.

Penang is in high demand due to the semiconductor industry, and Senai, positioned for growth, was highlighted as a key cargo hub.

"Kota Kinabalu is another important cargo hub. Sabah is rich in fisheries, but we have not capitalised on this potential due to logistical limitations. Expanding capacity and ensuring investments can fulfil demand that will drive growth," Loke said.

On Monday, Gateway Development Alliance (GDA), the consortium proposing to privatise MAHB, extended the deadline for accepting its takeover offer by a week. According to a filing with Bursa Malaysia, the new deadline is Jan 17. The initial deadline was today.

"Save for the extended closing date, all other details, terms and conditions of the offer as set out in the offer document, including the offer price (RM11 per MAHB share) and the acceptance condition (90% of the total issued MAHB shares) remain unchanged," it said.

Sovereign wealth fund Khazanah (with a 33.248% equity interest) and the EPF (7.859%) currently own 41.107% of MAHB.

De Chat: The Madani Government's Outlook on Critical Infrastructure Requirements especially relating to the Transport Sector and Critical Bottlenecks



Loke speaking at the fireside chat while CGS International Securities Malaysia director Tan Sri Shahril Ridza Ridzuan looks on.

Johari: We support Indonesia's commitment to B40 biodiesel mandate

■ BY **AIME SHAZRIE**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia backs the Indonesian government's commitment to proceed with the B40 biodiesel mandate in 2025 despite its recent postponement.

Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani said the initiative has supported the palm oil industry significantly, as domestic biodiesel consumption eases pressure on the global market.

"Indonesia produces approximately 48 million metric tons of palm oil annually, and nearly 25% is utilised for biodiesel production.

"Malaysia should be grateful for Indonesia's substantial contribution to the global palm oil

market," he told reporters at the signing of a memorandum of collaboration (MoC) between FGV Holdings Bhd and the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB).

He also highlighted the positive impact of Indonesia's decision on global palm oil prices.

"Consider the implications if biodiesel were not utilised. 25% of Indonesia's production would flood the global market, exerting downward pressure on prices. Indonesia is currently at the B40 biodiesel usage level, far ahead of Malaysia, which is still at B10," he added.

Earlier reports indicated that the Indonesian government has yet to implement the higher biodiesel blend mandate, initially planned for Jan 1. The delay is due to industry participants awaiting technical details

of the new regulations, causing uncertainty among palm oil traders.

Indonesia pledged to mandate a 40% palm oil-based fuel blend in biodiesel, known as B40, starting Jan 1, up from the existing 35% blend.

The collaboration between MPOB and FGV aims to drive transformation by empowering smallholders whose success is fundamental to the industry's growth and stability. This will ensure full compliance with sustainability standards, secure a greener and more responsible future for palm oil production, and revolutionise the palm oil industry through the adoption of technologies that will enhance productivity and efficiency.

Johari said this initiative aligns with Malaysia's goal of meeting the rising global demand for sustainable

palm oil products, driven by regulations such as the European Union Deforestation Law.

"Malaysia currently exports 15 million metric tons of palm oil annually, with 1.5 million hectares of plantations managed by smallholders. Enhancing traceability is critical to ensuring continued market access and premium pricing for Malaysian palm oil," he noted.

FGV, which operates 66 palm oil mills and procures fruit from independent smallholders, will integrate intermodal traceability systems into the MPOB's Intelligent Management System.

Johari said this collaboration will ensure that Malaysia's palm oil supply chain meets stringent sustainability benchmarks, which is critical for accessing international markets.



Investment sentiment moderates

➤ MSIA survey shows 44% of semiconductor and E&E companies optimistic about outlook for the first quarter of 2025

KUALA LUMPUR: Some 44% of domestic semiconductor, electric and electronic (E&E) companies are optimistic about their investment outlook for the first quarter of 2025 (Q1'25), a survey conducted by the Malaysia Semiconductor Industry Association (MSIA) showed.

According to latest findings in the MSIA E&E/Semiconductor Quarterly Pulse Survey for the fourth quarter of 2024, these companies show slightly reduced investment optimism compared to earlier quarters, recording 52% in Q3'24 versus 58% in Q2'24.

As for business outlook, 44% of companies are optimistic about their performance in Q1'25, reflecting continued positive sentiment. However, this represents slightly lower optimism compared to previous quarters, with 53% in Q3'24 and 60% in Q2'24.

The survey indicated that for the

12 months in 2025, 66% of companies demonstrated optimism regarding the overall outlook, consistent with trends observed in previous quarters. There is uncertainty in the short term, but companies are more optimistic in the medium to long term, the survey showed.

MSIA's ongoing survey aims to assess the sentiment, trends, challenges, and opportunities within Malaysia's E&E/semiconductor industry every quarter.

In terms of business performance, 37% of companies reported improvement in Q4'24 compared to Q3'24. However, overall performance remained weaker than in previous quarters, with 46% in Q3'24 and 39% in Q2'24.

On hiring trends, 72% of companies are recruiting engineers

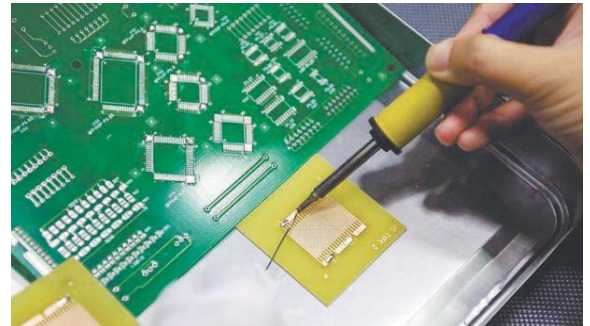
and technicians in Q1'25, reflecting a continued positive hiring sentiment from previous quarters, the survey showed.

In terms of challenges and opportunities, the MSIA survey showed the semiconductor industry in Q4'24 continued to face talent shortages and market competition as primary hurdles, consistent with previous quarters. Supply chain disruptions and the escalating US-China chip war have also become more pronounced.

To overcome these challenges, companies are focusing on expanding into new markets, implementing cost-reduction initiatives, investing in new technologies, and increasing market share.

Touching on exploring US-China semiconductor policies and impacts, the MSIA survey noted that 57% of domestic companies see opportunities for Malaysia if there are continued escalation in the US-China chip war. It noted that Malaysia should diversify its semiconductor markets, its supply chain and focus on talent development to remain competitive and resilient if there are continued escalation in the US-China chip war.

MSIA president Datuk Seri Wong Siew Hai said 2024 marked a pivotal



MSIA's survey shows that 2025 will present challenges for the Malaysian semiconductor industry, including talent shortages, market competition and external geopolitical pressures. —BERNAMAPIC

year for Malaysia with the launch of the National Semiconductor Strategy (NSS).

He added this strategic initiative underscores Malaysia's commitment to staying ahead of global competition. It focuses on Malaysia's capability and expertise in key areas such as IC design, semiconductor equipment, and advanced packaging.

"MSIA has been a proactive partner in supporting the NSS, exemplified by the establishment of the MSIA Advanced Technology Equipment Cluster, an

industry-driven effort to enhance Malaysia's technological edge.

"The survey results reveal that 2025 will present notable challenges for the Malaysian semiconductor industry, including talent shortages, market competition, and external geopolitical pressures. Despite these headwinds, the industry remains steadfast and prepared, leveraging innovation, collaboration, and strategic planning to turn challenges into opportunities and maintain its competitive edge," he said.

Keyfield to acquire platform supply vessel for US\$17.6m

PETALING JAYA: Keyfield International Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary, Keyfield Offshore Sdn Bhd, has entered into an agreement to acquire a five-year-old Dynamic Positioning 2 platform supply vessel (PSV) to be renamed as Keyfield Gratitude which will be deployed in Keyfield's vessel chartering business for its customers to transport materials and equipment between shore and offshore platforms. It has an accommodation capacity of 59 persons.

Keyfield Gratitude will be acquired from Sinocommerce Harbour Engineering Co Ltd for a cash consideration of US\$17.6 million (RM79.22 million), which will be funded via Keyfield's sukuk proceeds.

In addition, Keyfield expects to incur about US\$2 million of its own internal funds for additional capital expenditure to bring Keyfield Gratitude back to Malaysia and to get it ready for operations.

Keyfield group CEO and executive director Datuk Darren Kee said, "Since obtaining our PSV SWEC Code and our panel contractor contract in November 2022 and April 2024 respectively, we have been invited to bid for PSV chartering contracts. We believe that Gratitude will make an excellent addition to our fleet as it can be utilised to fulfil such invitations to bid. Furthermore, it fits well with our business expansion strategy to broaden our service offerings to our customers as outlined in our IPO prospectus."

Maybank IB positive on oil and gas, sees bright spots in global FPSO market

KUALA LUMPUR: The price of Brent crude oil is expected to be lower at an average of US\$70 per barrel in 2025 amid a supply surplus environment, as forecast by the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

In a note yesterday, Maybank Investment Bank Bhd (Maybank IB) said the weaker forecasted average price, compared with last year's US\$80 per barrel, was attributed to the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (Opec+) executing their plan to increase output by 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) over 18 months from April 2025.

"This could lead to an inventory build-up in 2025 and put some

downward pressure on oil prices," it said.

Maybank IB said the EIA, via its Nov 2024 Short-Term Energy Outlook report, projected a net crude oil surplus in 2025 with global production at 104.66 million bpd, slightly eclipsing consumption at 104.36 million bpd.

"This results in an average surplus of 0.3 million bpd in 2025," it said.

On a sectoral basis, Maybank IB maintained a positive stance on the oil and gas sector but is selective to the defensive midstream space and floating production, storage and offloading vessel (FPSO) names such as Dialog Group Bhd and Bumi Armada Bhd.

"We see bright spots in the global FPSO market as Norway-based

independent energy research company Rystad Energy estimates that deepwater (125-1,500 metres) and ultra-deepwater (greater than 1,500 metres depth) will spearhead offshore liquids production growth at an estimated compound annual growth rate of 2.2% and 8.0% each from 2024-2030," it said.

Maybank IB said that Rystad also projected a total of 64 FPSO awards from 2025-2030, averaging 10-11 jobs per year.

"Yinson Holdings Bhd and Bumi Armada are beneficiaries of this golden upcycle.

"However, on home ground, the transition of gas trading responsibilities and control to Petroleum Sarawak Bhd

(Petros) from Petrolim Nasional Bhd (Petronas) could impact the national oil company's revenue and free cash flows," it said.

Maybank IB noted that a Petronas capital expenditure deferral is possible as a significant portion of its trading revenues has been lost.

"Consequently, further exploration and production works projects may be deferred until both parties mutually achieve a resolution.

"We expect this to impact oil and gas services and equipment players with exposure in the exploration and development sub-segments — mainly offshore support vessels, offshore fabrication, drilling rigs & hook-up and commissioning," it added. — Bernama

JS-SEZ will transform real estate scene: Juwai IQI CEO

PETALING JAYA: This week's signing of the agreement to create the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) is a landmark development that will transform real estate markets in Malaysia and Singapore, according to Juwai IQI Co-founder and group CEO Kashif Ansari (pic).

"Depending on how much the two countries commit to the SEZ, we expect it to drive new foreign direct investment, manufacturing activity, tourism, and real estate activity in Johor. That growth will have spillover effects for the rest of Malaysia, spreading the benefits more widely," he said.

In a positive scenario, he noted Johor would experience more rapid economic growth, resulting in an

estimated 0.5% to 0.9% to gross domestic product (GDP) growth and this can contribute RM20 billion in the short run and can exceed RM30 billion to RM50 billion.

He remarked that this is in line with the forecast projected in the latest report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which forecasts Malaysia's 2025 GDP at RM2.245 trillion (US\$488.25 billion).

"Based on the premise that massive FDI is coming over here mostly from China and the US," said Kashif.

He is of the view that the SEZ will begin to attract more businesses and individuals to Johor. "Greater activity will increase demand in the residential, office, industrial, and logistics real estate markets and

boost prices for developable land. We can see the impact on real estate transaction volume and values has increased. However, you could expect to see a further reduction in the residential overhang in Johor. Homeowners could benefit from value growth. And commercial and industrial real estate markets could benefit from increased demand," he added.

Kashif said there will be huge impact on and increase in real estate transaction volume and values.

"New and greater opportunities are on the horizon with the launch of amazing projects that have been met with great response. These projects fit the pricing and location criteria and preference of the market, making them highly desirable," he said.

"When you have a near-seamless flow of goods, people, and businesses between Johor and

Singapore, both economies will accelerate. Companies won't have to choose to locate in either Malaysia or Singapore, because the JS-SEZ will give them the advantages of both countries plus additional incentives."

Singapore will provide capital, technology, and expertise, while Malaysia will contribute a highly skilled workforce, renewable energy, land, and other resources, Kashif said.

By reducing the cost of transport and taxes, he added, the SEZ will allow firms to grow more quickly, hire more workers, and take risks they otherwise could not.

"One big-ticket infrastructure item is riding on the success of the new special economic zone. If the SEZ is successful, it will give momentum to those who want to relaunch the high-speed rail project connecting Singapore and Malaysia," Kashif said.



KUALA LUMPUR: Mechanical and electrical (M&E) engineering service provider, CBH Engineering Holding Bhd, has been oversubscribed by 34.21 times ahead of its listing on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd.

CBH through its subsidiaries is principally involved in providing electrical engineering services for electricity supply distribution systems as well as providing mechanical engineering works for building systems.

CBH has a diverse project portfolio spanning data centres, commercial properties such as substations, shopping complexes, hotels, and office towers, as well as industrial properties, including manufacturing plants, warehouses, and high-rise residential buildings.

As at Nov 25, 2024, CBH has an unlisted order book of RM203.7 million and a tender book totalling RM559.7 million.

CBH's IPO entails a public issue of 298 million new ordinary shares (issue shares) at an issue price of RM0.28 per share, representing 15.8% of the enlarged share capital with RM83.4 million expected to be raised. Additionally, there is an offer for sale of 188.1 million existing shares (offer shares), representing 10% of the enlarged share capital, by

ACE Market-bound CBH's IPO oversubscribed 34 times

➤ Group's listing entails 298 million new shares at 28 sen each, raising RM83.4m, or 15.8% of enlarged share capital

way of private placement to selected bumiputra investors approved by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry of Malaysia (Miti).

In respect of the 94.1 million issue shares allocated to the Malaysian public, CBH has received a total of 24,992 applicants for 3,311,432,200 issue shares with a value of approximately RM927.2 million, representing an overall subscription rate of 34.21 times.

For the bumiputra portion, 12,175 applications for 1,275,836,900 issue shares were received, representing an overall subscription rate of 26.13 times.

As for the selected investors by way of private placement, 12,817 applications were received for 2,035,595,300 issue shares, resulting in an oversubscription rate of 42.29 times.

The 28.4 million issue shares made available for application by the eligible directors and employees, as well as persons who have contributed to the success of the group have been fully subscribed.

In respect of the private placement, the 47 million issue shares and 188.1 million offer shares allocated to selected bumiputra investors approved by Miti as well as

128.5 million issue shares allocated to selected investors have been fully placed out.

Notice of allotment will be posted to all successful applicants by Jan 14. Managing director Cheah Boon Hwa said, "The positive response to our IPO reflects the market's strong confidence in CBH's potential and capabilities. This achievement marks a pivotal moment as we channel the proceeds to enhance our financial capacity, broaden our expertise, and scale up to handle larger, higher-valued projects. With Malaysia's M&E engineering sector poised for robust growth, we are committed to delivering exceptional engineering solutions that meet the evolving demands while driving innovation and raising industry standards."

From the RM83.4 million to be raised from the IPO, CBH has allocated RM38.5 million (46.2%) towards the

procurement of equipment and components for future projects.

In addition, RM18.5 million (22.2%) is allocated as payment to subcontractors for future projects, RM17.3 million (20.7%) is earmarked as bank guarantees for future projects, RM3.5 million (4.1%) towards the recruitment of engineers and other personnel, and the remaining RM5.7 million (6.8%) will be used towards listing expenses.

CBH is scheduled to be listed on the ACE Market of Bursa Securities on Jan 16. Upon listing, CBH will have a market capitalisation of about RM526.7 million based on the issue share price of RM0.28 per share and the enlarged share capital of 1,880.9 million shares.

Mercury Securities Sdn Bhd is the principal adviser, sponsor, sole underwriter and sole placement agent for the IPO exercise.



This limited-time initiative aims to empower local entrepreneurs with the capital to grow and succeed in a challenging market. —BERNAMAPIX

Funding Societies and foodpanda team up to support Bumiputera merchants

KUALA LUMPUR: Funding Societies, Southeast Asia's largest unified small and medium enterprise (SME) digital finance platform, has extended its partnership with Delivery Hero (M) Sdn Bhd (fka Foodpanda (M) Sdn Bhd) to offer exclusive financing for Bumiputera merchants. Eligible foodpanda merchants can access financing up to RM100,000 at a competitive 2% annual rate with a flexible financing tenor of up to 24 months. This limited-time initiative aims to empower local entrepreneurs with the capital to grow and succeed in a challenging market.

Funding Societies Malaysia country head Chai Kien Poon remarked, "The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM) reported that Malaysia's services sector achieved a total revenue of RM2.3 trillion in 2023, an 8.4% increase from RM2.1 trillion in 2022. Despite this growth, sub-sectors such as food and beverage (1.4%) have yet to recover to their pre-pandemic (2019) revenue levels. To support these businesses, particularly MSMEs, access to cash

flow is crucial. We are hopeful that this partnership between Funding Societies and foodpanda can better assist and scale underserved, creditworthy SMEs in this industry."

Furthermore, he added they are confident that this affordable financing can help food sellers to better restock supplies and prepare for upcoming seasonal growth amidst a potential surge in staple vegetable costs as a result of the recent floods and ahead of the festive season.

"We are thrilled to extend our partnership with Funding Societies to offer this exclusive financing opportunity to our Bumiputera merchants. At foodpanda, we believe in empowering our merchants with the tools and resources they need to thrive in today's challenging market. This initiative not only provides access to much-needed capital at an affordable rate but also reinforces our commitment to supporting local entrepreneurs, especially as they prepare for the upcoming festive season. Together, we aim to

drive meaningful growth and resilience for our foodpanda merchant community," said foodpanda Malaysia managing director Tan Ming Luk.

Under this offer, Bumiputera SMEs can apply for syariah-compliant financing with just two initial documents: identification documents (for directors and the company) and six months of bank statements. The application is fully digital, with decisions provided within days.

To be eligible for this financing, merchants must be registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia as either a sole proprietorship, a partnership, a private limited company (non-subsidiary of listed companies), or an unlisted public limited company with at least 30% Malaysian ownership; have the Sijil Akuat Status PMKS from SME Corp Malaysia; is a Bumiputera-owned company; have company directors between 18 and 40 years old; have been in operation for at least six months; and have a minimum annual revenue of RM60,000.

EA Technique, Vestigo Petroleum reach amicable understanding

KUALA LUMPUR: EA Technique (M) Bhd (EATech), a Bursa Malaysia Main Market-listed prominent marine transportation and offshore storage company, has reached an amicable understanding with Vestigo Petroleum Sdn Bhd (VPSB) on matters related to past contractual arrangements.

In a statement yesterday, the company said that the fulfilment of obligation under the mutually agreed arrangement between VPSB and EATech reinforces EATech's operational continuity and resolves past contractual arrangements.

"The cash inflow from the fulfilment of obligations provides an immediate boost to the company's liquidity, supporting its endeavour to drive the execution of its strategic turnaround plan. This also aligns with the company's ongoing efforts to enhance financial stability and foster sustainable growth," it added.

EATech said that the positive outcome of this resolution reflects the strong professional relationship between EATech and VPSB, reaffirming VPSB's position as a strategic ally to the company's in Malaysia's maritime and energy sectors.

Commenting on the agreement, EATech executive director Datuk Wira Mubarak Hussain Akhtar Husin said: "Vestigo and EATech have both demonstrated shared commitment through this resolution and remain dedicated to fostering strong, collaborative relationships. Most importantly, we aim to support each other in unlocking greater potential within the industry. This pursuit of mutual understanding highlights our focus on establishing a lasting partnership as we continue to enhance our capabilities and explore future opportunities."

This resolution allows EATech to fully focus on its core business areas, including marine transportation, offshore storage, and port marine services. With sustained financial strength and a clear strategic direction, EATech is poised to capitalise on opportunities across its diverse portfolio while maintaining robust relationships with its partners and stakeholders.



US Steel, Nippon Steel sue Biden administration

➤ They allege outgoing US president unlawfully blocked Japanese firm's US\$14.9b bid, separate action filed against USW president, rival Cleveland-Cliffs and CEO

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden unlawfully blocked Nippon Steel's US\$14.9 billion (RM67 billion) bid for US Steel through a sham national security review, the companies alleged in a lawsuit filed on Monday.

The companies want a federal appeals court to overturn Biden's decision to scuttle the deal so they can secure another shot at approval through a fresh national security review unfettered by political influence.

The lawsuit alleges Biden prejudiced the decision of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS) which scrutinises foreign investments for national security risks, and violated the companies' right to a fair review.

The merger had become highly politicised ahead of the November US presidential election, with Democrat Biden and Republican President-elect Donald Trump pledging to kill it as they wooed voters in the swing state of Pennsylvania where US Steel is headquartered. United Steelworkers (USW) union president David McCall opposed the tie-up.

Trump and Biden both asserted the company should remain American-owned even after the Japanese firm offered to move its US headquarters to Pittsburgh, where the US steelmaker is based, and promised to honour all agreements between US Steel and the USW.

Biden sought to kill the deal to "curry favour with the USW leadership in Pennsylvania in his bid for re-election," the companies allege.

"As a result of President Biden's undue influence to advance his political agenda, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States failed to conduct a good faith, national security-focused regulatory review process," the companies said in a statement.

A White House spokesperson defended the review, adding, "President Biden will never hesitate to protect the security of this nation, its infrastructure, and the resilience of its supply chains."

The lawsuit, which echoes claims the



Hashimoto speaking at a press conference at Nippon Steel's headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. — REUTERS/SPIC

companies made in a Dec 17 letter to CFIUS seen by Reuters, shows the companies are making good on their threats of litigation.

"We can't back down after being treated unreasonably. We will fight back thoroughly," Nippon Steel vice-chair Takahiro Mori told *Nikkei* on Monday.

Mori said the CFIUS review process lacked integrity as the Japanese company received no written feedback on the proposed national security agreement.

The prospects of the lawsuit, which also names US Attorney General Merrick Garland and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, are unclear. Yellen oversees CFIUS. Courts generally give great deference to CFIUS to define national security, experts say.

The Justice Department declined to comment and the Treasury Department did not respond to a request for comment.

Trump said in a post on his social media platform on Monday: "Why would they want to sell US Steel now when tariffs will make it a much more profitable and valuable company?"

Nippon Steel's partnership with US Steel aligns with Trump's vision of strengthening US

manufacturing, Nippon Steel CEO Eiji Hashimoto told reporters yesterday in Tokyo.

"If we win the case and CFIUS reopens the review ... we will explain once again that this acquisition is beneficial to the United States," Hashimoto said. "And I am sure we will be able to gain the understanding."

The companies also filed a second lawsuit against rival bidder Cleveland-Cliffs, its CEO Lourenco Goncalves and the USW's McCall "for their illegal and coordinated actions" aimed at preventing the deal.

They argue Cliffs, Goncalves and McCall colluded to allow Cliffs to "monopolise the domestic steel markets" by thwarting any other attempts to buy US Steel.

Goncalves said in a statement on Monday that "Nippon Steel and US Steel continue to play the blame game in a desperate attempt to distract from their own failures. Today's lawsuits against the US government, the USW, and Cleveland-Cliffs represent a shameful effort to scapegoat others for US Steel's and Nippon Steel's self-inflicted disaster."

McCall said the USW would "vigorously defend against these baseless allegations." — Reuters

US adds Tencent, CATL to list of Chinese companies allegedly aiding Beijing's military

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK: The US Defence Department said on Monday it has added Chinese tech giants including gaming and social media leader Tencent Holdings and battery maker CATL to a list of firms it says work with China's military.

The list also included chip maker Changxin Memory Technologies, Quectel Wireless, drone maker Autel Robotics, and China's largest shipping company Cosco Shipping Holdings, according to a document published on Monday.

Two entities owned by Chinese state-owned oil major China National Offshore Oil Corporation were also listed, CNOOC China Ltd and CNOOC International Trading.

The annually updated list of Chinese military

companies, formally mandated under US law as the "Section 1260H List", designated 134 companies, according to a notice posted to the Federal Register.

While the designation does not involve immediate bans, it can be a blow to the reputations of affected companies and represents a stark warning to US entities and firms about the risks of conducting business with them. It could also add pressure on the US Treasury Department to sanction the companies.

Tencent said in a statement that its inclusion on the list was "clearly a mistake." It added: "We are not a military company or supplier. Unlike sanctions or export controls, this listing has no impact on our business."

CATL, the world's largest electric vehicle battery maker, also called the designation a mistake, saying it "is not engaged in any military-related activities".

A Quectel spokesperson said the company "does not work with the military in any country and will ask the Pentagon to reconsider its designation, which clearly has been made in error."

The Chinese embassy in Washington said it opposed the move and urged the US to correct its "discriminatory practices", adding that China would safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its own firms.

The other companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment. — Reuters

BRIEFS

EXXONMOBIL TAKES CALIFORNIA AG AND ENVIRON GROUPS TO COURT

NEW YORK/HOUSTON: ExxonMobil filed a lawsuit on Monday against California Attorney General Rob Bonta and several environmental groups, court records show, accusing them of defaming and disparaging the oil giant's advanced plastics recycling initiatives. Filed in federal court in Beaumont, Texas, the lawsuit accused Bonta of acting in concert with a law firm called Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, LLP that has ties to IEJF, an Australian non-profit controlled by billionaire Fortescue founder Andrew Forrest's company Minderoo Foundation. Fortescue competes with Exxon in low-carbon solutions and the energy transition sector, the lawsuit said. Cotchett had recruited US environmental groups as plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Exxon, and also contributed to Bonta's political campaign, Exxon said. The company is asking for undisclosed damages and a retraction of what it called defamatory statements. — Reuters

KKR CONSIDERS SELLING JAPAN'S SEIYU SUPERMARKET: NIKKEI

TOKYO: US private equity fund KKR is considering selling supermarket chain Seiyu in a deal that could worth several hundred billion yen, the *Nikkei* business daily reported yesterday. The bidding process for the sale of shares has begun, and major retailers including Aeon, Don Quijote owner Pan Pacific International Holdings and Trial Holdings, as well as an investment fund or funds have submitted bids, *Nikkei* said without citing sources. KKR owns 85% of Seiyu and Walmart the remaining 15%. The *Nikkei* said Walmart's stake was also likely to be sold, and that the final buyer would be decided by around February, the newspaper reported. KKR, Aeon and Pan Pacific International declined to comment. Trial Holdings had no immediate comment when contacted by Reuters.

Phillips 66 strikes US\$2.2b deal to buy EPIC NGL assets

HOUSTON: US oil refiner Phillips 66 said on Monday it will acquire various pipelines and distribution systems from Ares-backed pipeline operator EPIC NGL in an all-cash deal for US\$2.2 billion (RM9.9 billion), as it seeks to prop its natural gas liquid bet.

NGLs include a group of hydrocarbons extracted from natural gas in a processing plant, and are used as feedstocks in petrochemical plants, for heating, cooking and various other applications.

The deal would see Phillips 66 acquiring EPIC Y-Grade GP, and EPIC Y-Grade, and its various subsidiaries, which is expected to be immediately accretive to earnings per share, it said in its statement.

Phillips 66 has been betting big on NGLs, after previously saying it expects NGL output to grow faster than crude oil by the end of the decade, supported by demand from petrochemical makers.

"This transaction optimizes our Permian NGL value chain, allows Phillips 66 to provide producers with comprehensive flow assurance and is expected to deliver attractive returns in excess of our hurdle rates," said Phillips 66 CEO Mark Lashier.

The company said it does not expect to increase its 2025 capital programme after the deal, in connection to EPIC NGL's process of increasing its pipeline capacity. — Reuters

Global crude exports dip as trade routes shift again

➤ New refineries and pipelines alter dynamics in industry

HOUSTON: The volume of global crude exports in 2024 declined 2%, the first fall since the Covid-19 pandemic, shipping data showed, due to weak demand growth and as refinery and pipeline changes reshuffled trade routes.

Global crude flows have been roiled for a second year by war in Ukraine and the Middle East, with tanker shipments rerouted and suppliers and buyers split into regions. Middle East oil exports to Europe declined and more US oil and South American oil went to Europe. Russian oil that formerly went to Europe has been redirected to India and China.

These shifts have become more pronounced as oil refineries have shut in Europe amid continued attacks on Red Sea shipping. Middle Eastern crude exports to Europe tumbled 22% in 2024, ship tracking data from researcher Kpler showed.

The shift in oil flows "is creating

opportunistic alliances," said Adi Imsirovic, an energy consultant and former oil trader, citing closer relationships between Russia and India, China and Iran that are reshaping oil trade.

"Oil is no longer flowing along the least cost curve, and the first consequence is tight shipping, which raises freight prices and eventually cuts into refining margins," said Imsirovic.

The US with its surging shale production has been a winner in the global oil trade. The country exports 4 million barrels per day, boosting its share of global oil trade to 9.5%, behind Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Trade routes have also been reshuffled by startup of the massive Dangote oil refinery in Nigeria, expansion of Canada's Trans Mountain pipeline to the country's west coast, falling oil output in Mexico, a brief halt in Libyan oil exports, and rising Guyana volumes. In 2025, suppliers will keep grappling with

falling fuel demand in major consuming centers such as China. Also, more countries will use less oil and more gas, while renewable energy will keep growing.

"This kind of uncertainty and volatility is the new normal - 2019 was the last 'normal' year," said Erik Broekhuizen, a marine research and consulting manager at ship brokering firm Poten & Partners.

Changes in oil demand forecasts have pulled the rug out from historical long-term oil market growth assumptions, Broekhuizen said.

"In the past, you could always say that there will be healthy long-term demand growth, and that solves a lot of problems over time. That can't really be taken for granted anymore," he said, citing weaker demand in China and Europe.

China's imports fell about 3% last year with gains in electric and plug-in hybrid cars, and growing use of liquefied natural gas in its heavy trucking. In Europe, lower refining capacity and government mandates to reduce carbon have shaved crude imports by about 1%. - Reuters



Oil tankers are seen anchored in New York Harbour in May 2022. Oil trade routes have been reshuffled by startup of the Dangote refinery in Nigeria, expansion of Canada's Trans Mountain pipeline, falling oil output in Mexico, a brief halt in Libyan oil exports and rising Guyana volumes. - REUTERS/PIC

Indonesia welcomes announcement on BRICS entry

JAKARTA: Indonesia yesterday welcomed Brazil's announcement that it had become a full member of BRICS, a bloc of developing economies increasingly seen as a counterweight to the West.

The Brazilian foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday that Southeast Asia's most populous country "shares with the other members the will to reform the institutions of global governance and contribute positively to cooperation within the Global South".

Brazil, which holds the rotating presidency of the grouping in 2025, said Indonesia's bid to join the bloc had been approved during a summit in 2023 in Johannesburg.

Indonesia in turn said it "welcomes" the announcement of its inclusion.

"This achievement shows Indonesia's increasingly active role in global issues and

commitment to strengthening multilateral cooperation to create a global structure that is more inclusive and fair," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement yesterday.

BRICS was created in 2009 by founding members Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa joined the following year.

The bloc was expanded again last year with Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates becoming full members.

Indonesia sees its BRICS membership as "a strategic step to improve the collaborations and cooperation with other developing nations, based on the principle of equality, mutual respect, and sustainable development," the Jakarta statement said.

It also expressed Indonesia's "gratitude to Russia", the 2024 BRICS chair, "for its support and leadership in facilitating Indonesia's

joining", as well as to Brazil.

During its presidency, Brazil aims to boost cooperation between countries of the "Global South" and reform multilateral institutions.

One of the objectives, according to the government of left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is the "development of means of payment" to facilitate trade between member countries.

During the last BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, in November 2024, member nations discussed boosting non-dollar transactions and strengthening local currencies.

This raised the ire of US President-elect Donald Trump, who threatened the group's members with "100 percent tariffs" if they undercut the US dollar.

This year's BRICS summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro in July. - AFP

Thai shippers keep 2025 export forecast, call for rate cut

BANGKOK: Thailand's exports are expected to rise 1% to 3% in 2025, unchanged from a previous forecast, with trade wars and geopolitical issues a major risk, the national shippers' council said yesterday.

For 2024, the group expects export growth of 4.5% to 5%, up from a 4% rise projected earlier.

Exports, a key driver of Thailand's economy, rose 8.2% in November from a year earlier and increased an annual 5.1% in the first 11 months of 2024.

"Exports in 2024 should be somewhat worry-free ... but 2025 is more exciting as there are many risk factors," council chairman Chaichan Chareonsuk told a press conference.

"The trade war is certainly the main risk. The geopolitical war is not over yet," he added.

Exports might increase 1% to 2% in the first quarter of 2025 but US President-elect Donald Trump's policies would need to be monitored, Chaichan said.

Council vice-chairman Suparp Suwanpi-

molkul said the group was hoping Thailand's central bank would cut interest rates in the first quarter to help ease the interest burden of smaller businesses.

"The baht may also be too strong if we don't cut interest rates," he added.

On Monday, the central bank said maintaining interest rates was a robust policy amid high uncertainty, but it was ready to adjust the policy if the economic outlook changed. - Reuters

China's residential foreclosures increase in 2024

BEIJING: The number of foreclosed homes in China rose in 2024 from the previous year, a private-sector survey showed yesterday, heightening concerns about mortgage delinquencies amid a property slump and uneven economic growth.

The number of repossessed homes up for auction stood at 370,000 in 2024, up from 364,000 in 2023, the report from China Index Academy, an independent real estate research firm, said.

A total of 117,000 repossessed homes were successfully sold with the total value of transactions at 163.6 billion yuan (RM100.6 billion), a 1.9% year-on-year decrease.

Total foreclosures, including commercial, residential and industrial properties, land, garages and parking spaces, totalled 768,000 units, a slight 0.9% decrease from 2023, the survey showed.

The majority of foreclosed homes were found in tier-three and tier-four cities, with a total of 63,871, according to the company. There were 45,997 foreclosed homes in tier-two cities and 6,994 in tier-one cities.

The number of foreclosures has been gradually rising since 2020 and continued to rise in 2024, the firm said in a separate report last year.

Since 2021, a severe property crisis triggered by a government-led initiative to curb indebted developers has eroded consumer wealth and household spending.

Policymakers are optimistic that the recent loosening of fiscal and monetary settings will drive a turnaround in the property market, which has been a drag on the broader economy. - Reuters

Indian car dealers' sales in December unexpectedly decline

NEW DELHI: Indian car dealers clocked a surprise 2% drop in sales in December, with high year-end discounts boosting demand only for a handful of showroom owners, a dealers' body said yesterday.

Sales dropped to 293,465 units in the month from 299,351 units last year, according to data from the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (Fada).

At the start of December, about 80% of Fada's members had said in an online survey that they expected sales to be flat to higher for the month, recovering from a 14% drop in November.

However, demand failed to pick up in the final week of the month, which often accounts for 30-40% of a dealership's sales, Fada president CS Vigneshwar told Reuters.

"While some dealers benefited from year-end schemes and expanded product ranges, overall demand remained subdued," Vigneshwar said in a press release.

Dealers have struggled with tepid demand in the latter half of 2024 following two years of strong growth, forcing them to increase discounts.

Nonetheless, carmakers sales to dealers increased last month, most notably at market leader Maruti Suzuki, which reported a discount-driven rebound in small-car sales.

The demand for Mahindra & Mahindra's sport utility vehicles remained strong. Hyundai India's sales dipped, while Tata Motors' increased slightly.

Fada said the average time a car stayed in a showroom, or inventory days, receded to 55-60 days in December from 65-68 days in November as manufacturers moderated dispatches. Still, the level is below the Fada-recommended 21 days.

Inventory levels are an indicator of demand. High inventory levels have forced automakers to slow sales to dealers and offer higher discounts.

Fada expects new launches, including those of electric vehicles to spur demand this year, but said manufacturers should "carefully manage their supplies in line with market demand." - Reuters



US transport chief says Boeing must do more after 737 MAX 9 incident

WASHINGTON: The outgoing US transportation secretary said on Monday that Boeing has more to do and its efforts to improve its culture are unfinished after a door panel missing four key bolts flew off a new 737 MAX 9 in mid-air in January 2024.

"There were real deficiencies ... there is much more to do," Pete Buttigieg told Reuters in an interview. "I think the culture change at Boeing is something that is a real work in progress and the only way to fully assess it will be to see they can consistently improve results."

Last week, the outgoing head of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said tougher oversight of Boeing would continue indefinitely after the incident in which a door panel missing four key bolts flew off the new 737 MAX Alaska Airlines plane at 16,000ft.

The Jan 5, 2024 incident prompted FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker to cap production at 38 737 MAX planes per month and temporarily ground 170 airplanes. The incident exposed serious safety issues at the US planemaker and contributed to the departure of its then-CEO Dave Calhoun.

Whitaker last February ordered Boeing to implement a safety and quality improvement plan and previously acknowledged prior oversight "was too hands off." Whitaker has said it could take five years for Boeing to fully fix its culture.

Boeing on Friday released an update on its safety and quality efforts, saying it has instituted new random quality audits and significantly reduced defects in 737 fuselage assembly at supplier Spirit AeroSystems by increasing inspection points and implementing a customer quality approval process.

Nvidia unveils robot tech, Toyota deal and gaming chips

SAN FRANCISCO: Nvidia on Monday took the wraps off new products such as artificial intelligence (AI) to better train robots and cars, souped-up gaming chips and its first desktop computer, as it expounded upon its potential to expand its business.

At CES 2025, a major annual tech conference in Las Vegas, CEO Jensen Huang laid out how the world's second-most valuable firm is bringing technology that powers its lucrative data centre AI chips to consumer PCs and laptops.

He also introduced what Nvidia calls Cosmos foundation models that generate photo-realistic video which can be used to train robots and self-driving cars at a much lower cost than using conventional data.

By creating so-called "synthetic" training data, the models help robots and cars understand the physical world similar to the way that large language models have helped chatbots generate responses in natural language.

Users will be able to give Cosmos a text description that can be used to generate video of a world that obeys the laws of physics. This promises to be much cheaper than gathering data as it is done today such as putting cars on the road to

gather video or having humans teach robots repetitive tasks. Cosmos will be made available on an "open licence," similar to Meta Platforms Llama 3 language models that have become widely used in the tech industry.

"We really hope (Cosmos) will do for the world of robotics and industrial AI what Llama 3 has done for enterprise AI," Huang said.

Bank of America analyst Vivek Arya said it remained to be seen whether the robotics push would significantly boost Nvidia's sales.

"The challenge in our view is making the products reliable enough, cheap enough and pervasive enough to spawn credible business models," Arya said in a note to clients. "From that perspective robotics could remain another cool but niche opportunity such as metaverse or autonomous cars."

Huang also unveiled new gaming chips that use Nvidia's "Blackwell" AI technology, which

has helped propel its sales in data centres.

The chips, which Nvidia calls its RTX 50 series, aim to give video games movie-like graphics, especially in a field known as "shaders," which can help images like a ceramic teapot look more realistic by adding imperfections and fingerprint smudges to its surface.

The new chips can also help game developers generate more accurate human faces, an area where players are apt to notice even slightly unrealistic features. The chips will range in price from US\$549 (RM2,475) to US\$1,999, with top models arriving on Jan 30 and lower-tier models coming in February.

Ben Bajarin, CEO of technology consultancy Creative Strategies, said the new gaming chips should help boost Nvidia sales in the short term.

Huang also showed off its first desktop computer called Project

DIGITS - albeit a computer designed for computer programmers rather than regular consumers.

Costing US\$3,000 and running an Nvidia operating system based on Linux, it will feature the same chip at the heart of the company's data centre offerings but paired with a central processor built with help from Taiwan's MediaTek.

The chips will come in a smaller package that can be used by individual software developers to test their AI systems quickly. The desktop will be available in March.

Nvidia also said Japan's Toyota Motor will use its Orin chips and automotive operating system to power advanced driver assistance in several models. It did not give details about the models. Toyota's shares were up 1.7% in late Tokyo trade.

Huang expects automotive hardware and software revenue of US\$5 billion in fiscal 2026, up from an expected US\$4 billion this year.

CES, formerly the Consumer Electronics Show, runs Jan 7-10.

Nvidia's stock closed at a record high of US\$149.43 on Monday, bringing its valuation to US\$3.66 trillion and making it the world's second-most valuable listed company behind Apple. - Reuters

Who's winning Consumer Electronics Show's autonomy race? Not cars

LAS VEGAS: This week's Consumer Electronics Show (CES) unveils major new autonomous transport products for farms, boating and construction sites, highlighting a yawning gap with autos, where scalable driverless technology is further away.

The group of offerings include autonomous tractors, construction dump trucks and boats that dock themselves, as well as a robotic golf cart that doubles as an AI-enhanced super caddy.

That these products are already poised for commercialization betrays the sophistication needed for autonomous road travel even if firms like Google-backed Waymo are making some headway.

On roads, "the complexity of the problem multiplies significantly," said Barry Lunn, CEO of sensor company Proviso.

The machine learning challenge for cars amounts to "the hardest AI challenge in human history," Lunn said.

The difficulty reflects the array of unpredictable factors that can interfere with road transport, such as unexpected maneuvers by fellow drivers, pedestrians or falling branches.

These conditions, known in tech circles as "edge cases," are present in every kind of autonomous transport, even if they seem uniquely difficult for cars.

In marine transport, edge cases can involve poor light or rainy

conditions, said David Foulkes, CEO of Brunswick, a boat building company.

These dynamics, as well as the presence of salt and other deposits in a marine environment can interfere with key hardware.

At CES, Brunswick is showcasing the autonomous docking system on the *Boston Whaler*, a 40-foot luxury boat that uses six stereo cameras that are derived from military drone technology.

Brunswick saw little upside in broad use of autonomy because recreational boaters relish the experience of driving but docking is the one area where boaters "appreciate additional help," said Foulkes.

"Just like every other autonomy system, you kind of spend 20% of your time on the main use cases and then all the rest on the edge cases," said Foulkes, who worked at Ford for 18 years.

Learning system

In agriculture, technologists also face distinct complications.

Willy Pell, CEO of Blue River Technology, which is owned by John Deere, said the company discovered that lights on tractors attracted insects at night, which can interfere with key sensor equipment.

"A moth weighing less than a single ounce would bring our 40,000 pound machine to a halt," Pell said at a news conference Monday. "It was a software bug in all senses of the word."



While companies are making progress with car autonomy on public roadways, mainstream adoption is still a long way off. - PEXELS PIX

Three years ago at CES, Deere unveiled a driverless tractor that could be operated from a smart phone.

Whereas the original machine could only perform very narrow tasks such as preparing soil for planting, this year's "second generation" model uses many additional cameras to drive faster and perform more tasks.

The system includes thousands of real-world experiences, reflecting "years and years of farming across these different edge cases," Pell said.

The 188-year old agricultural equipment maker is also presenting an autonomous battery-run lawn mower for landscaping, an autonomous dump truck for construction sites and an autonomous diesel orchard tractor.

Looming questions

When it comes to car autonomy on public roadways, companies are making progress but still not close to mainstream adoption.

Waymo, which now operates commercial robotaxi service in three US cities, recently faced a novel security challenge after female riders in San Francisco were harassed by another vehicle that followed the robotaxi, according to a December *Washington Post* report.

Waymo, which served four million autonomous rides in 2024, plans to add its service to other US cities and Tokyo in its first international foray. The company's co-CEO Tekedra Mawakana will headline a keynote

later this week at CES.

Other big autonomous players at CES include the Amazon-owned Zoox and car companies such as Mercedes-Benz and BMW, which have received approval from the German government for autonomous driving in very limited situations.

While major player Tesla is not at CES, some exhibitors are preparing for the day when today's driver is able to tune out the road.

"Consumers are looking at cars as another environment where you want to be relaxed or enjoy yourself," said Jeff Jury, senior vice-president at Xperi, which sells multimedia technology in cars. - AFP

MARKET ROUND-UP: JANUARY 7

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 7 Jan 2025

Participation

- Retail**
Net (in RM million): -38.31 **18.83%**
- Institutions**
Net (in RM million): 144.63 **41.67%**
- Foreign**
Net (in RM million): -106.32 **39.50%**

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

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

[iPacOnline](#) [@ipaconline1972](#) [Inter-Pacific Securities](#) [iPac TV](#)

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.

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,546.80 +25.68
FBM KLCI	1,629.79 +4.32
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	544.89 -2.04
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	175.19 +0.68
CONSTRUCTION	329.61 +11.25
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,036.60 +62.35
ENERGY	858.72 +3.45
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	538.12 -4.74
HEALTH CARE	2,341.91 -49.90
TRANSPORTATION	1,057.89 +2.36
PROPERTY	1,143.56 -1.65
PLANTATION	7,608.80 +45.58
FBMSHA	12,553.80 +16.50
FBMACE	5,465.97 -29.10
TECHNOLOGY	65.82 +1.11

TURNOVER: 3.910 bil VALUE: RM3.295 bil

Bargain-hunting lifts FBM KLCI but broader market lower

THE FBM KLCI recovered from Monday's losses to close higher yesterday, driven by bargain-hunting amid the positive momentum on Wall Street overnight and most regional markets.

At 5pm, the market bellwether increased 4.32 points or 0.26% to 1,629.79 compared with Monday's close of 1,625.47.

The index opened 0.97 of-a-point lower at 1,624.50 and moved between 1,624.50 and 1,634.27 throughout the day.

However, the broader market was negative with losers outpacing gainers 614 to 490, while 537 counters were unchanged, 712 untraded and 10 others suspended.

Turnover improved to 3.91 billion units valued at RM3.29 billion against Monday's 3.47 billion units valued at RM2.66 billion.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said optimism in the local market was further boosted by the formalisation of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ), signed earlier yesterday by the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore.

Additionally, he said local and regional markets are expected to remain buoyant following the People's Bank of China's (PBOC) announcement of its intention to adopt a moderately loose monetary policy in 2025.

Among the heavyweights, Gamuda added 34 sen to RM5.20, Petronas Dagangan gained 22 sen to RM20.04, Public Bank was flat at RM3.65, while Petronas Gas and QL Resources were two sen lower at RM17.76 and RM4.68 respectively.

For active stocks, Bumi Armada rose two sen to 68.5 sen, Nantogate soared 19 sen to RM2.95, Sime Darby Property was up four sen to RM1.73, while Zen Tech and Talam Transform were flat at 1 sen and 2.5 sen respectively. - Bernama

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-PWB1	0.125	0.020	19.05	2,230,705
HSI-CWAZ	0.055	-0.010	-15.38	2,082,787
VELOCITY	0.080	-	-	1,332,796
GAMUDA	5.200	0.340	7.00	785,288
HSI-CWAM	0.015	-0.010	-40.00	580,793
TENCENT-C43	0.150	-0.045	-23.08	574,327
99SMART-CQ	0.045	-	-	533,662
HSI-CWA2	0.075	-0.015	-16.67	465,333
TOPGLOV	1.320	-0.040	-2.94	416,669
JCY	0.570	-	-	399,996
HSI-CYY	0.085	-0.035	-29.17	398,579
SUPERMX	1.220	-0.070	-5.43	391,987
HSI-CWAO	0.010	-	-	373,208
TAWIN	0.020	-0.005	-20.00	327,324
ARMADA	0.685	0.020	3.01	326,420
NATGATE	2.950	0.190	6.88	325,574
MYEG	0.980	0.005	0.51	317,655
ZEN TECH	0.010	-	-	305,554
TALAMT	0.025	-	-	287,943
GAMUDA-C2S	0.220	0.070	46.67	285,895



STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
MPI	25.800	0.700	1,909
GAMUDA	5.200	0.340	785,288
DGO	2.350	0.320	133,240
NPC	2.600	0.300	130
PETDAG	20.040	0.220	1,421
SUNCON	5.120	0.220	46,385
NATGATE	2.950	0.190	325,574
PIE	6.470	0.170	8,948
GAMUDA-C2F	0.940	0.165	799
AIRPORT	10.640	0.160	11,480
KESM	3.890	0.150	1,711
GAMUDA-C2L	0.715	0.140	4,546
GAMUDA-C2N	0.600	0.135	4,003
SDG	5.050	0.130	59,699
SUNWAY	4.800	0.130	117,852
MCCEMENT	4.970	0.120	4,223
RVIEW	3.180	0.120	116
GAMUDA-C2T	0.270	0.115	214,706
MFCB	4.690	0.110	7,741
ALLIANZ-PA	21.020	0.100	16

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DGO-C12	0.070	180.00	278,892
GAMUDA-C2Q	0.135	107.69	80,782
CHEETAH-WA	0.010	100.00	7,782
CFM-WA	0.010	100.00	996
DGO-C11	0.030	100.00	35,986
FBMKLCI-HM8	0.010	100.00	100
JADI-WB	0.010	100.00	5,163
OCR-WE	0.010	100.00	3,285
PCEM-C09	0.010	100.00	2,507
PENTA-C44	0.010	100.00	2
TWL-WE	0.010	100.00	11
YTLPOWER-C58	0.010	100.00	600
GAMUDA-C2P	0.150	87.50	2,708
GAMUDA-C2T	0.270	74.19	214,706
ITRONIC-WA	0.015	50.00	1,135
JAKS-WC	0.015	50.00	515
JIANKUN-WB	0.015	50.00	2
SCBUILD	0.015	50.00	8,299
SUNCON-C22	0.030	50.00	60,143
GAMUDA-C2S	0.220	46.67	285,895

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	42,706.56	-25.57	-0.06
S&P 500 (US)	5,975.38	+32.91	+0.55
NASDAQ (US)	19,864.98	+243.30	+1.24
NYSE (US)	19,261.42	+7.13	+0.04
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	4,978.17	-8.47	-0.17
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,219.48	-30.18	-0.37
DAX (GER)	20,192.84	-23.35	-0.12
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	40,083.30	+776.25	+1.97
TOPIX (JPN)	2,786.57	+30.19	+1.10
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	19,447.58	-240.71	-1.22
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,796.11	+27.14	+0.72
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,229.64	+22.72	+0.71
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,492.10	+3.46	+0.14
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	181.33	-0.04	-0.02
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,285.09	+27.65	+0.33
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,542.89	+26.36	+0.31
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	78,167.94	+202.95	+0.26
FBM KLCI	1,629.67	+4.20	+0.26
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,822.95	+1.11	+0.03
WTI (US\$/BBL)	73.31	-0.25	-0.34
BRENT (US\$/BBL)	76.1	-0.20	-0.26
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,653.80	+6.40	+0.24
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	30.80	+0.21	+0.69
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	948.34	+10.76	+1.15
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	418.70	+2.55	+0.61
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	9,003.00	126.50	1.43
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	453.50	-4.25	-0.93
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	535.75	-4.75	-0.88
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	40.16	-0.17	-0.42
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	11,377.00	+139.00	+1.24
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	184.80	-1.50	-0.81

As at 5pm, Jan 7

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	95.800	-0.680	629
F&M	26.580	-0.420	1,101
ARKA	1.590	-0.260	10
TENAGA	14.320	-0.260	76,473
NIKKEI-HJ	0.795	-0.215	1,056
HLIND	13.700	-0.180	1,417
KOSSAN	2.680	-0.150	56,634
MFLOUR-CJ	0.025	-0.125	1,000
AJI	15.100	-0.100	230
ALLIANZ	20.860	-0.100	226
CVIEW	1.630	-0.090	133
IJM-C91	0.070	-0.080	5,256
SUPERMX-C4L	0.380	-0.080	5,293
HSI-CYW	0.280	-0.075	610
GENTING	3.800	-0.070	80,542
HARTA	3.880	-0.070	32,454
IHH	7.200	-0.070	77,341
KEYFIELD	2.360	-0.070	9,813
LTKM	1.270	-0.070	2,712
LYSAGHT	2.680	-0.070	3

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
MFLOUR-CJ	0.025	-83.33	1,000
TENCENT-C42	0.005	-83.33	11,555
HSI-CWA3	0.030	-53.85	450
IJM-C91	0.070	-53.33	5,256
HSI-CWAN	0.010	-50.00	85
HSI-CWAO	0.005	-50.00	16
HSI-HZW	0.005	-50.00	9,532
JCY-C17	0.005	-50.00	2,500
KGROUP	0.005	-50.00	8,507
MI-C21	0.010	-50.00	1,100
SAPNRG-WA	0.005	-50.00	3,088
WEGMANS-WC	0.005	-50.00	5,702
YTLPOWER-C56	0.005	-50.00	10,183
HSI-CWAF	0.035	-41.67	873
HSI-CWAM	0.015	-40.00	580,793
TENAGA-C2N	0.025	-37.50	45,550
BCMALL	0.010	-33.33	61,951
CMSB-C55	0.010	-33.33	223
INARI-C2N	0.010	-33.33	6,000
TIMECOM-C5	0.020	-33.33	5,000

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.

Local REIT sector set for strong performance in 2025: RHB IB

KUALA LUMPUR: RHB Investment Bank Bhd (RHB IB) expects the Malaysian Real Estate Investment Trusts (M-REIT) sector to continue performing well in 2025, driven by strong fundamentals and a stable macroeconomic outlook.

In a note yesterday, the bank highlighted that occupancy rates for REITs under its coverage have reached high levels, with REIT's managements largely signalling healthy rental reversions ahead. "Although market sentiment has shifted towards slower interest rate cuts in 2025, we believe the downward trajectory would still support REITs' valuations over the medium term," it said.

RHB IB shared that the dividend yield spread between the Bursa Malaysia REIT Index (KLREI) and the 10-year Malaysia Government Securities currently stands at +160 basis points, aligning with the historical mean.

On retail assets, the bank noted that the growth rate of new retail space supply in Kuala Lumpur is expected to decelerate over the next two years, potentially improving occupancy rates.

"Retail spending is also likely to remain strong, supported by a higher minimum wage, civil service pay hike, and a recovering tourism industry," it said.

The bank also highlighted opportunities for inorganic growth, driven by positive sentiment and the sizeable listing of new REITs, which could attract increased interest and facilitate asset acquisitions.

"These acquisitions are likely to be funded via a combination of debt and equity with minimal dilutive effects," it said.

In 2024, the KLREI gained 12%, slightly trailing the FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI's 13% rise during the same period. - Bernama

Ringgit ends higher against US dollar on technical rebound

THE ringgit rebounded from recent losses to close higher against the US dollar yesterday.

At 6pm, the ringgit bounced to 4.4850/4900 against the greenback from Monday's close of 4.5090/5135.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid noted that from a technical standpoint, the ringgit is oversold, which might have enticed traders to buy the local currency.

"Also, the US Dollar Index (DXY) has continued to retreat to below 108 points and is currently hovering around 107.905 points. Still, market sentiments remain edgy as to how Trump 2.0 economic policies will look like, especially on import tariffs by the US and how this would translate into inflation and the US Federal Reserve's reaction (to it)," he told Bernama.

The ringgit closed mostly lower against other major currencies.

It strengthened versus the Japanese yen to 2.8458/8492 from Monday's close of 2.8583/8614 but weakened against the British pound to 5.6341/6403 from 5.6250/6306 and fell vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6756/6808 from 4.6695/6742.

The local note traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It climbed against the Thai baht to 13.0045/0258 from 13.0194/0308 at the previous close and was higher vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah at 277.7/278.2 compared with 278.3/278.7 previously.

The ringgit went up marginally versus the Singapore dollar to 3.2983/3022 from 3.2989/3025 and appreciated against the Philippine peso to 7.71/7.72 from 7.73/7.75 on Monday.

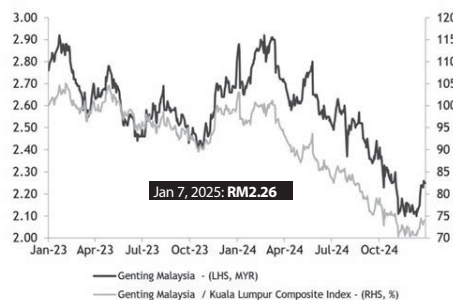
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5790	4.4430	4.4330
1 Australian Dollar	2.8730	2.7570	2.7410
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3530	3.2550	3.2470
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1890	3.1020	3.0900
1 Euro	4.5790	4.6040	4.5840
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5920	2.4950	2.4790
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3530	3.2550	3.2470
1 Sterling Pound	5.7350	5.5510	5.5310
1 Swiss Franc	5.0900	4.8720	4.8570
100 UAE Dirham	126.1400	119.5800	119.3800
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8480	3.5820	3.3820
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.9600	60.2900	N/A
100 Danish Krone	65.4100	60.1700	59.9700
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.5300	56.5500	56.3500
100 Indian Rupee	5.4300	5.1000	4.9000
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0293	0.0265	0.0215
100 Japanese Yen	2.9000	2.8070	2.7970
100 New Taiwan Dollar	15.0000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.5900	38.2200	38.0200
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6700	1.5700	1.3700
100 Philippine Peso	8.0100	7.5400	7.3400
100 Qatar Riyal	127.0000	120.5600	120.3600
100 Saudi Riyal	123.3100	117.0600	116.8600
100 South Africa Rand	25.5300	23.0500	22.8500
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5900	1.4600	1.2600
100 Swedish Krona	42.7200	38.9000	38.7000
100 Thai Baht	13.8000	12.2400	11.8400

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Genting Malaysia Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM2.73



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

WE visited Resorts World Genting (RWG) on Dec 30, 2024 after hearing talks that the Circus Palace and Hollywood mass gaming floors have reopened. Recall that they were closed for renovation in Feb 2024. Alas, both mass gaming floors remain closed although it does appear to us that renovations are underway. GENM informed us that they will reopen eventually but a date has not been set yet. Instead, there were signs pointing us to another mass gaming floor called Genting Casino.

The other Genting Casino is divided over 2 areas with 2 themes. 1 is similar to Sky Casino while the other is traditional Chinese. It has a lot of lower yielding slot machines and electronic tables but we understand that margins are higher as fewer staff are required. Only 36 conventional tables were deployed. Minimum table bets ranged from RM10 to RM100. There were no smoking lounges which is negative for length of play as gamblers have to leave the casino to smoke.

Over at Sky Casino, we notice that the crowd was thin as the year end school holidays had just ended. Minimum table bets ranged from RM25 to RM100. It appears to us that most conventional tables that were placed on the first floor before have been replaced with lower yielding but higher margin slot machines and electronic tables to manage staff costs post-peak season. Positively, there were smoking lounges as this will not force gamblers to leave the casino to smoke.

BUY with RM2.73 TP. - Maybank Investment Bank, Jan 7

Kerjaya Prospek Group Bhd

Market Perform. Target price: RM2.21



Source: Kenanga Research

KERJAYA announced that its wholly owned subsidiary, Kerjaya Prospek (M) Sdn Bhd has been awarded a RM256.4 million contract by sister company E&O for building works for a proposed development in Elmina West, Shah Alam, Selangor. The project, which covers over three phases, includes the construction of 360 units of 3-storey terrace houses, alongside a clubhouse, landscaping works and other related infrastructure. The contract works will start in Jan 2025 with a construction period of 26 months.

We are positive on this first job win for FY25 of RM256.4 million, against our FY25 job replenishment assumption of RM1.8 billion (and management's target of RM1.5 billion). Its current total outstanding order book stands at RM4.2 billion which will keep them busy for the next three years. Meanwhile, its current tender book of RM4 billion comprises RM2 billion building jobs (70% are RPT) and RM2 billion industrial job including data centre and logistic warehouse jobs.

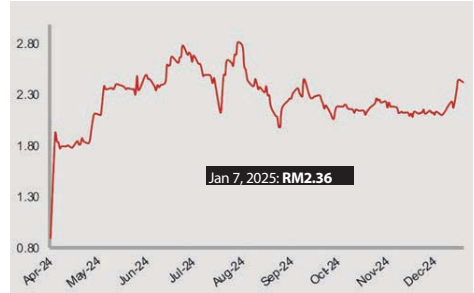
We continue to like KERJAYA for: (i) its innovative and hence high-margin formwork construction method (10% net margin), (ii) its lean and hands-on management team with a strong execution track record, (iii) its strong earnings visibility underpinned by a sizeable outstanding order book and recurring orders from related companies (such as E&O, KPPROP) of at least RM1 billion a year.

Risks to our call include: (i) further deterioration in the prospects for building jobs, (ii) rising input costs, and (iii) liquidated ascertained damages (LAD) from cost overrun and delays.

MARKET PERFORM with RM2.21 TP. - Kenanga Research, Jan 7

Keyfield International Bhd

Outperform. Target price: RM3.18



Source: Kenanga Research

KEYFIELD has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the acquisition of a DP2-enabled platform supply vessel (PSV), Keyfield Gratitude, for US\$17.6 million (RM79.2 million which also includes RM9 million rectification costs). Built in 2019, the vessel accommodates 59 crew members. The acquisition price is deemed fairly valued at market price as compared to the 2016-built DP2 PSV listed for sale which is going for US\$14 million before potential retrofitting costs. Funding for the acquisition is unlikely to be an issue, as the group has bolstered its financial position with a RM200 million Sukuk Wakalah issuance in December 2024.

The vessel which is China-built, will require approval from Jabatan Laut Malaysia to be permanently Malaysia-flagged, with delivery expected by February 2025 and operational readiness by June 2025 after rectification works. Based on market rates, a DP2-enabled PSV could generate RM100,000/day in revenue, implying an earnings boost of RM3.6 million at 50% utilisation. This translates to a 1.5% increase in projected earnings, which would subsequently lead to a 1.5% uplift in our TP. While this acquisition is a positive development for KEYFIELD, we remain conservative and exclude potential contributions from the vessel until a charter is secured.

The group took delivery of Keyfield Itqan (formerly known as Belait Barakah), a 152-pax accommodation work barge, on July 3, 2024 and the vessel is currently being prepared for deployment. Keyfield Aulia (a second-hand AHTS vessel) was also added to the company's fleet after being delivered on 13 August 2024.

OUTPERFORM with RM3.18 TP. - Kenanga Research, Jan 7



the Sun **LYFE**

WEDNESDAY | JAN 8, 2025

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

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



WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and social media

TUESDAY

Travel and leisure

WEDNESDAY

Fashion and beauty

THURSDAY

Home and living

FRIDAY

Food and beverage

Golden ages of Chinese style

CNY collection pays tribute to art, literature of imperial dynasties
- P22

INSIDE

P23

Five things to look out for in 2025

P24

Influencer spreads body positivity

P25

Red carpet glamour at Golden Globes

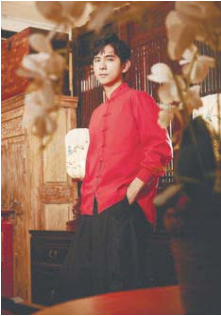
P26

Celebrating Malaysian indie music

FOLLOW **theSun** ON YOUTUBE
[/theSunMedia](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)



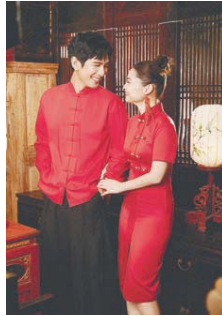
LYFE' LOOKBOOK



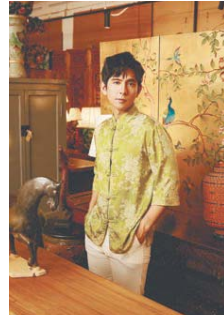
Curtis Fu giving royalty vibes in a red samfu.



Jmie Fu in Sheng Yi qipao top and Jing Ming songket ma mian skirt.



A poetic romance in matching red ensembles.



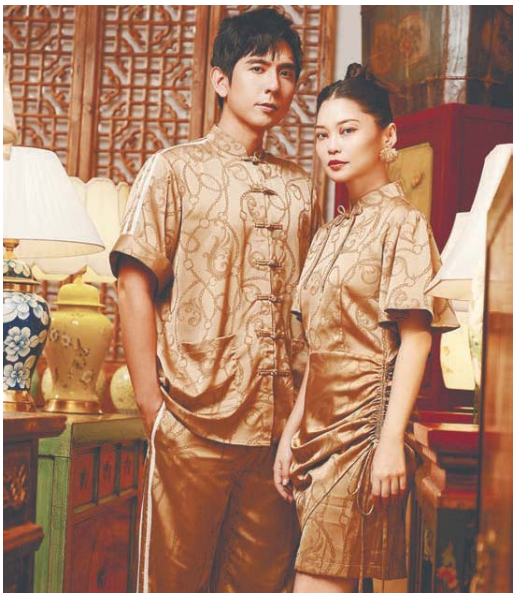
Curtis wears RSVP unisex Wan Jun Tang Shirt.



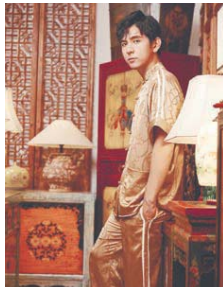
Jmie in RSVP Ke Rou qipao vest top and Ke Roy pencil skirt.



Curtis (left) and Jmie honour tradition with grace in vogue.



Jmie (right) and Curtis, clad in golden jacquard ensembles, exude royal romantics often depicted in poems.



Curtis in the unisex Hui Jun Tang Shirt.



Jmie radiates elegance in the Hui Jun dress.

Dynastic chic

► MAGlifestyle showcases Lunar 2025 collection, inspired by Song Tang empires

CLOTHING brand MAGlifestyle's Lunar 2025 collection is inspired by the refined aesthetics of the Tang and Song dynasties. This collection harmoniously fuses art, poetry and ceramics, reinterpreting these timeless influences for the modern era. Drawing energy from The Five Elements (*Wuxing*) and their symbolic colours white, green, black and the vibrant hues of red and yellow, the collection radiates vitality and positivity. Intricate embroideries and prints of natural and auspicious motifs bring vividness and subtle elegance to the designs, achieving a seamless balance between tradition and contemporary style. The collection's highlight is an asymmetrical mandarin-collar qipao crafted in luxurious velvet adorned with

shimmering sequins. This piece comes in a bold colour palette and modern silhouette, offering a striking reinterpretation of classic Chinese attire. Materials such as Tencel, jacquard and *songket* are incorporated into the collection, creating a variety of silhouettes suitable for family sets. The collection also reimagines mandarin buttons with intricate designs such as metallic green bamboo, jade, tangled crystals and floral petals, infusing the pieces with sophistication and seasonal charm. For the first time, MAGlifestyle debuts its men's collection within the Lunar New Year series. Featuring vibrant colours, this new line is designed to exude confidence and complement the women's collection, celebrating unity and brilliance during the festive season.



Kid Inn wears unisex Mei Xiang Tang shirt with floral prints.



Yvonne Chua wears Mei Xiang cheongsam.



Serving couple goals in black and pink ensembles with floral prints.



Rock up as a power couple to your reunion dinner in matching striped ensembles for a casual and festive vibe.



Inn is effortlessly chic in a unisex Ling Long Tang shirt.



Chua stuns in the Ling Long cheongsam.

Five things to look out for **this year**

➤ From football to Trump's second term, 2025 is set for major plot twists

FROM the second stint in the White House for Donald Trump to a turbo-charged football calendar, here are five things to watch in 2025:

➤ Trump 2.0

On Jan 20, Trump will be inaugurated as 47th US president, 11 weeks after his win in the election against Democrat Kamala Harris.

The Republican's swearing-in ceremony in front of the US Capitol in Washington comes four years after the attack on the seat of US democracy by Trump supporters, who did not accept he lost the 2020 election.

Trump's return, at the age of 78, comes despite four indictments and a criminal conviction as well as after a campaign that also included two failed assassination attempts on him.

With a list including vaccine sceptic Robert F. Kennedy Jr as health secretary and Elon Musk co-heading a department of government efficiency, there is concern at what his second term could mean for the US and the world.

He has vowed to Make America Great Again, retreating from multilateralism in favour of



Climate change is set to be at the forefront of attention in 2025.

Trump has captured the White House for the second time. - PIC FROM FACEBOOK @DONALDJTRUMP

power politics.

In late December the president-elect pledged to "stop the transgender lunacy" on day one of his presidency and to immediately begin "the largest deportation operation in American history" of illegal migrants.

➤ Climate

Could 2025 be the year when our greenhouse gas emissions stop their steady climb around the world?

Researchers are pointing to signs from the world's biggest polluter China, responsible for 30% of global emissions, in which fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions are projected to tick up only marginally this year.

Global Carbon Project Glen Peters said overall CO2 emitted by burning coal, oil and gas across the world could peak in the next

few years.

This carbon pollution is the main driver of increasingly dangerous climate change.

But even if there is a peak, think tank E3G Ignacio Arnoniz Velasco said countries cannot afford to relax, and should quickly decrease their emissions to aim for carbon neutrality.

➤ Football frenzy

In 2025, the question of football overkill and player burnout will likely dominate amid a supercharged calendar.

There is the expanded 32-club World Cup awaiting players in the summer, when usually they would have had time to recover from national leagues.

And this coming after a particularly busy season that sees an extended Champions League, the leading European club competition,



in a new format.

All this is part of a trend in football to ramp up the number of high-profile matches. The next World Cup in 2026 will welcome a whopping 16 more countries, resulting in 104 games rather than 64.

The spectre of Saudi Arabia will also loom large as the host of the 2034 World Cup pumps more money into the game, with potentially transformative consequences.

Other controversies likely to cause sparks include the continued use of VAR technology, currently locked in a love-hate relationship with players, fans and pundits.

➤ Kumbh Mela

The largest gathering of humanity on the planet will take place from Jan 13 to late February when 400 million are expected to attend a spectacular Hindu festival on India's sacred riverbanks.

Held every three years, rotating between four different holy places, the Kumbh Mela takes place at the site where the holy Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers meet.

Classified by Unesco as intangible cultural heritage, the mega-festival will involve a makeshift city in the northern city of Prayagraj. The last time the festival took place there, in 2013, it drew 120 million people. About 36 people died in a stampede.

Hindus believe taking a dip in Sangam, the confluence of the rivers, will cleanse them of their sins and help them attain moksha,

setting them free from the cycle of birth and death.

➤ Oasis and BTS comebacks

On one side, the grisly bad boys of Britpop and on the other, the revolutionary boy band of K-pop.

Both Oasis and BTS are set to return in 2025, much to the delight of their fans, after stints off the stage for very different reasons.

Led by the Gallagher brothers Liam and Noel, Oasis will return after a high-profile bust-up in 2009, one of many, that led to a 15-year split.

The British band behind *Wonderwall* and *Champagne Supernova*, songs that achieved anthem status in the 1990s, are set to go embark on a world tour kicking off in Britain and Ireland then heading to North and South America.

In the initial scramble to buy tickets from official sites, many fans who missed out sought alternative sources, leading to a landslide of ticket scams.

It will be a different vibe in South Korea, where wildly popular K-Pop boy band BTS promises to reunite in June after its seven members finish their mandatory military service.

It is a comeback that millions of fans and an entire multibillion dollar industry have been waiting for.

Experts said the megastars' return to performance and public life could lift South Korea's cultural exports juggernaut even higher. - AFP

The Club World Cup has made the football calendar even more packed in 2025. - PIC FROM FACEBOOK @VINICIUSJR



Kumbh Mela festivities will begin on Jan 13 onwards. - PICS BY PEXELSPIC



Fans eagerly await the return of BTS. - PIC FROM FACEBOOK @BTS

SURROUNDED by racks of colourful dresses and blazers in China's manufacturing hub of Guangzhou, plus size clothing brand owner and influencer Amanda Yao is on a mission to promote body positivity.

She is part of a small but growing number of women in China challenging restrictive beauty standards, including thinness, pale skin and childlike features.

Online, a frequently circulated saying claims there are no good women over 50k, while recent social media challenges have women squeezing into children's clothes or showing off the coins they can stack on their collarbones.

Yao makes fashionable, high-end clothing for plus-size women, offering a vibrant contrast to the poorly cut offerings normally available in "slimming" dark colours.

"I want my customers to have clothes that express who they are inside rather than soulless pieces that exist only to make them look thinner," the 35-year-old proclaimed.

When it comes to clothing, most Chinese retailers focus on smaller sizes and think larger people do not need fashion and beautiful clothes, Yao said.

"But we have work, we have families, we have respectable lives and we also need some fancy clothes sometimes."

To promote her online store, Yao posts pictures of her outfits on the Instagram-like Xiaohongshu app, often sporting leggings and tight-fitting workout tops she wears to climb the hills near her office.

"Reject body anxiety. So, what if I wear a strappy top and have big arms?" wrote Yao to her more than 15,000 followers.

Yao openly talks about weighing 100kg on her social media.

Embracing colours

Yao began selling plus size clothing four years ago after returning to China from the UK, where she had worked for several years.

"I found it especially hard to buy clothing here."

Items ordered online often failed to match the sellers' photos and Yao grew sick of ugly clothes.

In her Guangzhou office and showroom this month, Yao showed off a Chinese-style pink silk jacket from her brand Yue Design while modelling a bright green cardigan and skirt set.

"I never post photos of myself wearing black online," Yao said.

By avoiding the colour traditionally recommended for larger women, she has also encouraged some of her customers to embrace brighter, more cheerful designs.



While clothing options for plus-size shoppers remain limited, some Chinese brands have taken steps to be more inclusive in the recent years. – AFPPIIC

Changing perceptions

Chinese plus-size influencer spreads body positivity through fashion

While clothing options for plus-size shoppers remain limited, some Chinese brands have taken steps to be more inclusive in the recent years.

Lingerie brand Neiwai and loungewear company An Action a Day have featured larger models in their ads, though most of their items only cater to women up to 70kg.

Body scrutiny

Aside from Yao, other influencers in China have found an audience eager for their posts about self-acceptance and photos of themselves enjoying clothing and food, despite the pressure to diet.

On Xiaohongshu, the hashtag "reject body anxiety" appears in nearly 200,000 posts.

But, this is still a marked deviation from most body image content on Chinese social media.

One recent popular format involves someone posting a photo of themselves and asking viewers for makeover tips.

These posts often draw extreme scrutiny from commenters who pick on people for flaws as specific as having a square jaw rather than the "ideal" pointed chin.

With constant exposure to idealised body types, people start to conflate the meaning of their own worth with what they look like, explained Stephanie Ng, who runs Hong Kong-based mental health organisation Body Banter.

That has dangerous consequences, including extreme dieting and eating

disorders, Ng said.

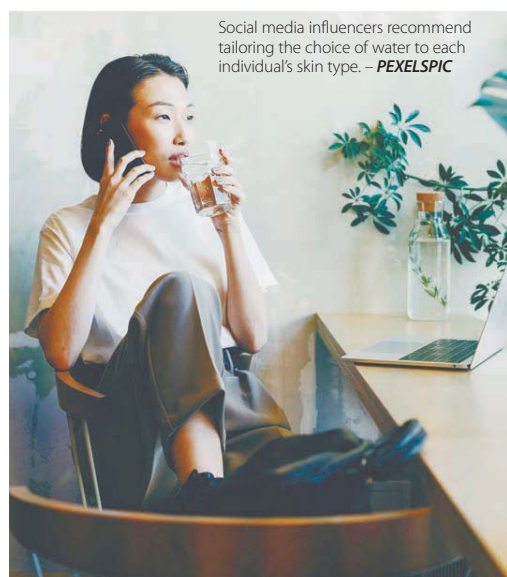
There is little official data on eating disorders in China but the prominent Shanghai Mental Health Centre reported an increase from eight such patients in 2002 to 3,000 in 2021, according to state broadcaster CGTN.

Although Yao has built a loyal following, her posts can also attract cruel comments.

"Daring to post an ugly photo showing your ring-shaped torso fat does not equal confidence," one commenter wrote under one of Yao's workout posts.

She said the criticism has only made her more determined.

"I want to help women who are feeling self-hated to look at themselves in a new way," she said. – AFP



Social media influencers recommend tailoring the choice of water to each individual's skin type. – PEXELSPIC

Mineral water is latest beauty hack in China

AS we all know, water is the key to well-hydrated skin. And this beauty hack is all the rage among young people in China. Some of them are even abandoning expensive cosmetics in favour of mineral water for good skin.

Over the past few months, Wahaha water has been enjoying popularity in the country. The reason? It is said to be beneficial for the skin.

Many people in China are extolling the virtues of this brand of bottled water on social networks, using the hashtags #WahahaMianmo and #WahahaChunjingshui, according to media reports.

Some even shared tutorials showing internet users how to make face masks using cotton discs soaked in this mineral water. Some of these videos have racked up millions of views.

Wahaha water is one of the cheapest on the market, at just 2 yuan (RM1.22) a bottle.

"In the current economic climate, if

there is a way to get great results with little expenditure, everyone will surely be willing to experiment," explained 20-year-old student Sun Zhongwei.

A large proportion of China's young people live on limited means as a direct consequence of the economic slowdown caused by the pandemic.

Many struggle to find a job that matches their skills and continue to live with their parents for lack of means. As a result, young people are on the lookout for all kinds of ways to save money.

Some look to home-cooked meals, made from cheap ingredients, while others eat in community canteens that usually cater for seniors.

This quest for savings is also spreading to beauty and personal care, prompting young Chinese individuals to opt for alternatives that are more affordable and safer.

Indeed, consumers are increasingly attentive to the quality of the cosmetics they use, with several

reports revealing the presence of harmful chemical substances in many creams, serums and lotions.

"The abundance of brands of varying quality in the skincare market has led some consumers to doubt the safety and ingredient transparency of traditional products, prompting them to opt for Wahaha mineral water, which is seen as a simple, controllable and a widely trusted alternative," said Beijing's University of International Business and Economics professor Sun Jin.

Nevertheless, not all Chinese skincare enthusiasts are impressed with Wahaha water. Some internet users consider it ineffective on their skin while others find it too harsh. For this reason, some influencers recommend tailoring the choice of water to each individual's skin type.

Whether it is just hype or a real beauty revolution, there is no doubt that in China bottled water can become a cultural phenomenon. – ETX Studio



American reporter Zuri Hall in an all-white dress with a short train.

British model Cara Delevingne sparkles in a blue Gucci number.

US actress Angelina Jolie in McQueen Spring 2025.

Challenger's Zendaya wears an orange Louis Vuitton satin gown.

American pop diva Ariana Grande in vintage Givenchy gown.

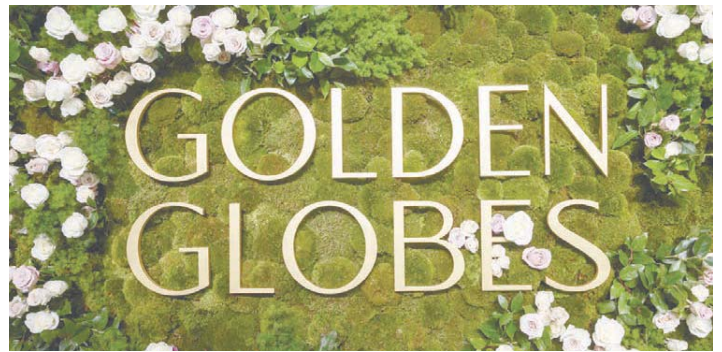
Mexican actress Eiza Gonzales in a metallic gold Gucci dress.



South African actress Thuso Mbedu in a metallic silver, floor-length gown.

LYFE'S LOOKBOOK

Golden red carpet



Golden Globes is an annual film gala that kicks off the 2025 award season.

- ALL PICS FROM AFP

THE sweeping wins of *Shogun*, *Wicked*, *Emilia Perez* and *The Brutalist* at the Golden Globes on Monday morning drew gasps online as it beckons a new era of storytelling that finds the right balance between cinematic grandeur and modern filmmaking.

As brazen moviemakers shake up the set, Hollywood thespians, on the other hand, brought glam and personality to the award show's red carpet.

The red carpets dazzle did not stop there as these darlings and studs of movie city also brought their A-game to the inaugural 2025 WWD Style Awards on Saturday.

From Selena Gomez in a custom Prada gown to Quinta Brunson in a cobalt blue Carolina Herrera gown, here are some of the best red carpets' appearances from *theSun's* lookbook.



US actor Nicholas Chavez in a burgundy fitted suit.



Shogun's star Anna Sawai stuns in an all-white custom Dior dress.



US actor Adrien Brody in a three-piece Thom Browne tuxedo.



US actress Kathryn Newton wears a fun dual-coloured, sequined dress.



American singer Katherine McNamara in an all-black ensemble.



Model Harry Goodwins bring cowboy chic to WWD Style Awards.



WWD editor-in-chief Jenny B. Fine in a butterfly motif pink dress.



A WWD Style Awards attendee looking suave in a tweed suit.



Australian actress Leila George in a mini dress with cut-outs.



Markle launched the lifestyle brand American Riviera Orchard in March last year. – AFP/PIIC

Meghan Markle's lifestyle show to premiere on Netflix

MEGHAN Markle, Duchess of Sussex and wife of British Prince Harry, will launch her new lifestyle and cooking show on Netflix next Wednesday, she announced last week on social media.

"I have been so excited to share this with you! I hope you love the show as much as I loved making it," she wrote on Instagram.

Netflix released a trailer for *With Love, Meghan*, an eight-episode series in which the *Suits* star will share tips on cooking, gardening, crafting, flower arranging and hosting.

Guests will include celebrated chef Alice Waters, actress Mindy Kaling and close friend Abigail Spencer, one of Markle's *Suits* co-stars. Harry.

"Beyond grateful for the support – and fun!" In March 2024, Markle launched the lifestyle brand American Riviera Orchard.

Since stepping away from official royal duties in early 2020, Harry and Markle have been cut off from the royal purse, which nudged them to develop their own sources of income.

Their partnership with Netflix yielded the much-talked-about *Harry & Meghan*, a six-episode docuseries launched in December 2022.

In April, the couple, who live in California, announced Markle's lifestyle show and a second series on the world of professional polo. Harry is a long-time polo enthusiast.

They are now estranged from the royal family after the couple's infamous interview with Oprah Winfrey and Harry's book *The Spare*, which both provided insights about their time and struggles as working royals.

Last year, Harry briefly went to the UK for the coronation of his father King Charles III and again after the monarch was diagnosed with cancer.

Upon news in March that Catherine Middleton, Princess of Wales, was also battling cancer, Harry and Markle said: "We wish health and healing for Kate and the family." – AFP



Calling for Malaysia's alternative talents

➤ *The Anugerah Lagu Indie 2024* is open for submissions

INDIE musicians across Malaysia are invited to submit their original tracks to *The Anugerah Lagu Indie 2024*, which is now open for submissions.

The genres or categories being contested are pop, rock and hip-hop. The top 30 from each category (a total of 90 songs competing for a cumulative prize pool of RM36,000) will be selected and announced between March 24 and 30 this year.

To qualify for ALI24, songs must adhere to three criteria. Submissions that do not meet the criteria will be disqualified at the discretion of the organiser, whose decision is final.

➤ **Authenticity**
Lyrics and music must be original works. Demo versions are not accepted.

➤ **Released in 2024**
Songs must have been released between Jan 1 and Dec 31 last year on platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, Deezer, Apple Music, SoundCloud, Bandcamp or on radio.

➤ **Independent label affiliation**
Songs must not be associated with major recording companies (those with substantial annual sales and in-house publishing, distribution and marketing



ALI celebrates the creativity and talent of Malaysia's indie music scene. – PEXELSPIC

capabilities). Songs linked to independent (indie) labels are allowed. Indie labels are defined as smaller entities operating without significant backing or in-house divisions.

The submission deadline is set for Feb 15. Since its inception in 2019, *Anugerah Lagu Indie* (ALI) has become a key platform for celebrating the creativity and talent of Malaysia's indie music scene.

ALI honours artistry, serving as a launchpad for emerging musicians to propel their careers.

Over the past five years, the platform has highlighted groundbreaking talent, with past winners achieving significant industry recognition.

As ALI celebrates its fifth anniversary, it continues to foster a community of independent artistes, accelerating their journey to success.

Swedish thrash metal royalty

■ BY R.BALA

FORMED in 1990 in Trolhattan, Sweden, The Crown is the very definition of "band otai" (veteran scenesters). Peddling a furious amalgam of melodic death and thrash metal influences, the band has been consistent in its output since its inception.

The Crown has been responsible for some genre classics such as *Hell is Here* (1999), *Crowned Unholy* (2002) and *Possessed 13* (2003), cementing its reputation as one of the best bands to come out of Sweden. Given the Scandinavian nation's rich metal history, which includes luminaries such as Entombed, Dismember and Unleashed, that is saying something.

So a dozen albums in, does the new



Crown of Thorns is the band's 12th full-length release.



The Crown was formed in Trolhattan, Sweden.
– PICS FROM FACEBOOK @THECROWN OFFICIAL

LP deliver?

Crown of Thorns (the band's original moniker incidentally), offers plenty of headbanging moments, most notably on *Howling at the Warfield* and *Gone to Hell*. The latter track starts with a fabulously groovy but heavy bass line that will have listeners mimicking playing air four-strings whilst throwing devil horn signs.

The Agitator has the band wearing its classic metal influences on its sleeve as it speeds up the Judas Priest and Iron Maiden templates while *The Storm that Comes* has a distinct Viking vibe to it.

As expected from this band, the pace is permanently stuck on warp speed with nary

a ballad or slower tempo tune in sight. It is full on pedal-to-the-metal from start to finish as the band aims to pummel listeners into submission with a combo of killer riffs and searing vocals that is just the right side of legible.

The Crown may offer nothing new but there are plenty of catchy moments that will keep long-time fans and newbies entertained. A worthy addition to its canon with listeners assured of a thrashing good time. *Crown of Thorns* is released on the Metal Blade label and is available to stream on all major platforms. Physical copies have been spotted at Varmt Stahl Helvete Records, with the vinyl retailing at RM140.



302 Jobs WE ARE HIRING! HR & ADMIN POSITIONS: (Executive / Senior / Assistant Manager) Job Description: Maintain HR records, including employee files, salaries and benefits information. Handle employee attendance records, payroll and claims.

322 Notices IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR (COMMERCIAL DIVISION) COMPANIES (WINDING-UP PETITION No. WA-2842C-106B-11/2024)

322 Notices DALAM MAHKAMAH ALMAJESTRET DI KUALA KUBU BHARU (DALAM NEGERI) SELANGOR DARUL BERSIH GUAMAN NO: BF-A72NCVC-262-11/2024

302 Jobs WE ARE HIRING! 1 MEDIA SALES EXECUTIVE / ACCOUNT MANAGER Job Description: Building and sustaining strong working relationship with advertising agencies and clients. New business development and business retention.

302 Notices 2 MEDIA SALES REPRESENTATIVE / AGENT (FREELANCE) Requirement: Minimum 1 year sales experience in classified ad, print and digital advertising. Those without sales experience but with media advertising knowledge can apply.

322 Notices 0701AJ02C4000036 SIASATAN 2 LAMPIRAN B KANUN TANAH NEGARA Saman Kepada Pengadai Supaya Hadir Dalam Siasatan Di Bawah Seksyen 261

JADUAL TANAH DAN KEPENTINGAN Table with columns: Mukim, No. Lot/Petak/P.T., Jenis dan No. Hakmilik, Bahagian Tanah (jika ada), No. Berdaftar *Pajak/Pajakan kecil (jika ada), No. Berdaftar Gadaian (jika ada)

322 Notices NOTICE NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTARY WINDING UP OF LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP (Section 50(4)(a) of the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2012)

322 Notices DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI KUANTAN DALAM NEGERI PANANG DARUL MAKMUR, MALAYSIA SAMAN PERALIHAN NO: CA-240CC-261-11/2024

322 Notices DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI IPOH DALAM NEGERI PERAK DARUL RIJAZUAN PETISYEN PERCARAIAN NO: AA-33-199-07/2024

322 Notices 1. PARWATHY A/P SUBRAMANIAM (NO K/P: 740615-05-8194) 2. SASANTHI A/P RAMANI (NO K/P: 651146-05-5015) PLANTIF-PLANTIF



Battle for No. 1

Hamilton, Leclerc tipped for 'showdown' at Monaco GP

BY ALEX PATTLE

THE Monaco Grand Prix could be the "showdown" that decides the hierarchy between Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc at Ferrari, according to former car designer Gary Anderson.

Hamilton will join Leclerc at Ferrari for the 2025 Formula 1 season, having inked a multi-year deal before the 2024 campaign.

The move marks the end of the Briton's 11-year spell with Mercedes, with whom Hamilton won seven drivers' titles.

The 39-year-old replaces Carlos Sainz at Ferrari, with Leclerc having been the de facto No. 1 at the team over the last few years.

And ahead of the 2025 season, many fans have wondered whether Hamilton will usurp Leclerc in that role, or whether

the Monegasque will retain his spot. Hamilton has the pedigree, while Leclerc, 27, has the greater form in recent years - six race wins since 2021, compared to Hamilton's two.

For Anderson, a pundit and former F1 car designer, Leclerc's home grand prix in Monaco could prove decisive.

"For Charles (Leclerc), there won't be the same family-team atmosphere that Sainz brought to Ferrari," wrote Anderson for *The Race*.

"Yes, they had their battles, but resolved most of them amicably.

"With Hamilton, a seven-time champion, joining it, could be completely different.

"Ferrari has already backed him to the hilt in paying him way more than Leclerc, and I think it will do the same - back Hamilton - for the first part of the season at least, which could rile Leclerc.

"I think Monaco will be the showdown: both are good there but Leclerc is exceptional."

Hamilton is a three-time winner at the Monaco Grand Prix, which is scheduled for May 25 this year, while Leclerc finally won the race last season.

The 27-year-old won from pole, having failed to do so in 2021 and 2022.

Last week, Hamilton spoke for the first time since he officially became a Ferrari driver and declared he could not be more excited for the season ahead.

"I could not be more excited for the year ahead. Moving to Scuderia Ferrari, there's a lot to reflect on," Hamilton wrote on *LinkedIn*.

"Here's to 2025 - a year of embracing new opportunities, staying hungry, and driving forward with purpose. Let's make it one to remember. *Andiamo* (Let's go)." - *The Independent*

India gazes into life without dynamic duo Virat, Rohit

INDIA contemplated Test cricket without Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma yesterday after the star duo again failed to fire in the bruising series defeat to Australia.

With out-of-form skipper Rohit missing, the visitors were down by six wickets in the fifth and final Test on Sunday in Sydney to lose the series 3-1.

Fresh from a 3-0 home whitewash to New Zealand, the defeat sparked renewed debate in India about the future of the team and in particular two of its stalwarts.

India's next Test assignment is their tour to England in June-July, when the visitors will play five matches and selectors will have to make a call on Virat and Rohit.

"I think the next 8-10 days are crucial for Indian cricket to take a good, honest look at itself," former captain Sunil Gavaskar told news channel *India Today*.

"Most importantly, the star culture has to end. Total commitment to Indian cricket is non-negotiable.

"We don't need players who are partly here and partly elsewhere. It's time to stop pampering anyone."

Virat and Rohit have been criticised for not participating in domestic matches to improve their faltering form, a decision that irked many pundits including Gavaskar.

"The cricket board needs to stop acting like admirers and put their foot down," the batting great said.

"They must tell the players that Indian cricket comes first. It's either a full commitment to Indian cricket or other priorities."

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar did not mince his words.

"When to retire is up to the player," he wrote on social media.

"But how long to play is up to the selectors." - AFP



South Africa's Temba Bavuma. - AFP/ICC

Proteas' run of success just the start: Bavuma

CAPTAIN Temba Bavuma said there was something special brewing in South Africa's Test team after they won their seventh match in a row, beating Pakistan by 10 wickets at Newlands yesterday, and they could now look forward to the World Test Championship final.

Only once before in their history have South Africa won more Tests in succession, when they claimed nine victories on the trot between 2002 and 2003.

Their recent wins have come against West Indies and Bangladesh (two away), and Sri Lanka and Pakistan (two each) at home. Some have suggested it has been a gentle run of fixtures, but Bavuma believes the team have other gears to go through.

"As much as we have got the success, I don't think we are a well-oiled machine," he told reporters.

"We have seen in certain moments of the game that we have let it go too much in the opposition's favour and it has taken some form of brilliance

from us to bring it back.

"When you speak about the special factor within the team, it is our ability to find a way (to win). We are still on a journey and not close to playing 100%.

"But there is something special brewing within the team and it will be scary when we are firing on all cylinders."

The World Test Championship final will be played at Lord's from June 11-15 against arguably South Africa's greatest cricket foes, Australia.

"We'll prepare as well as we can, probably more mentally than anything," Bavuma said.

"We will stay true to what we have been doing as a team. We will have to adjust to the conditions in England and the opposition, but we will go out and fight.

"We are motivated by winning. We have an opportunity to do something special for the country.

"Everyone will run through a brick wall to make sure we get on the right side of the result." - Reuters

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF KOTA TINGGI KAOLIN SDN. BHD.

(Company No. 200801039148 (840498-4))

(In Members' Voluntary Winding Up)

At a General Meeting of the Members of the abovementioned Company, duly convened and held at #01-25, Jalan Austin Perdana 2/22, Taman Austin Perdana, 81100 Johor Bahru, Johor on 7 January 2025, the following Special Resolution was duly passed:-

"That the Company be wound up voluntarily pursuant to Section 498(1) (b) of the Companies Act, 2016 and that TAN ENG KWEE of #01-25, Jalan Austin Perdana 2/22, Taman Austin Perdana, 81100 Johor Bahru, Johor, be and is hereby appointed as Liquidator for the purpose of such winding up with all powers given by Section 456 of the Companies Act, 2016.

And that the Liquidator be indemnified by the Company against all costs, charges, losses, expenses and liabilities incurred in or sustained by him in the execution and discharge of his duties as Liquidator and in relation thereto."

TAN ENG KWEE
Director
Dated this 8 January 2025

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF KOTA TINGGI KAOLIN SDN. BHD.

(Company No. 200801039148 (840498-4))

(In Members' Voluntary Winding Up)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Creditors of the abovementioned Company, which is being voluntarily wound up, are required within 30 days of this notice to send in their names and addresses with particulars of their debts and claims, and the names and addresses of their solicitors (if any) to the undersigned Liquidator at #01-25, Jalan Austin Perdana 2/22, Taman Austin Perdana, 81100 Johor Bahru, Johor and if so required by notice in writing from the said Liquidator, are, by their solicitors or personally, required to come in and prove their debts and claims at such time and place as shall be specified in such notice, or in default thereof, they will be excluded from the benefit of any distribution made before such debts or claims are proved.

LEE EWE HOCK
Liquidator
Wisma Golden Eagle Realty
11th Floor, South Block
No 142-A, Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: +60 3 2702 5222

Dated this 8 January 2025

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF AEWANUSIH SDN. BHD.

(Registration No. 201001033194(917117-H))
(In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)

At a General Meeting of the Members of the abovementioned Company, duly convened and held on 11 January 2025, the following resolutions were duly passed:-

"That the company will be liquidated by way of members' voluntary winding up."

NG THUNG CHEW
Chairman
Dated this 8th day of January 2025

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF AEWANUSIH SDN. BHD.

(Registration No. 201001033194(917117-H))

(In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Creditors of the abovementioned Company, which is being wound up voluntarily, are required on or before 10th February 2025 to send in their names and addresses with particulars of their debts or claim and the names and addresses of their solicitors (if any) to the undersigned, the Liquidator of the said Company; and if so required by notice in writing from the said Liquidator, are, by their solicitors or personally, to come and prove their debts or claims at such time and place as shall be specified in such notice, or in default thereof they will be excluded from the benefit of any distribution made before such debts or claims are proved.

LEE EWE HOCK
Liquidator
Wisma Golden Eagle Realty
11th Floor, South Block
No 142-A, Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: +60 3 2702 5222

Dated this 8th day of January 2025

322 Notices

PERISYHTARAN JUJUAN DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO: BA-38-3254-10/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1985 Dan Dalam perkara mengenai Gadaihan Perseharahan No: 001sc15344/2021 bertarikh: 03/03/2021 ke atas semua bahagian tanah yang dipanggil di bawah GRN 222446, LOT 21887, Mukim BANDAR COUNTRY HEIGHT, Daerah ULU LANGAT, Selangor

ANTARA
GUNMA DEVELOPMENT SDN. BHD. (No. Syarikat : 308561-M) ... PLAINTIFF
DAN
CHEW PICK CHING (No. Kad Pengenalan : 50039089964) ...DEFENDAN

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di SHAH ALAM mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 11 Ogos 2023 dan 2 September 2024, adalah dengan ini diisytiharkan bahawa Timbalan Pendatar/Penolong Kanan Pendatar Pusat Operasi eLelong di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA
LELONG AWAM
Pada Hari Isnin, 3 Februari 2025, Pada Jam 9:00 pagi,
SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG DARUL MAKMUR

NOTA: Bakal pembeli adalah dinasihatkan agar membuat carian Hakmilik secara rasmi di Pejabat Tanah dan memeriksa semua langgaman, bebann serta memononil hasil dengan tepat hartanah tersebut sebelum jualan dilakukan.

Sila layari https://elelong.khakimam.gov.my/biddeverb

BUTIR-BUTIR HAKMILIK:
No. Hakmilik : GRN 222446
No. Lot : LOT 21887
Mukim/Daerah/Negeri : BANDAR COUNTRY HEIGHT / ULU LANGAT / Selangor
Pegangan : Hakmilik Kekal
No. Petak/No. Tingkat/No. Bangunan :
Keluasan Tanah : 19899.000000000000 kaki persegi
187.0000000000 meter persegi
CHEW PICK CHING
RUMAH Berkembar
TJAD
Makanan / Lain-Lain
Kawasan Rizab
Kaveat
LOKASI DAN PERHAL HARTANAH:
Hartanah tersebut adalah GRN 222446, LOT 21887, BANDAR COUNTRY HEIGHT, DAERAH ULU LANGAT, NEGERI SELANGOR yang bersebelahan pos di 23, JALAN KUDALARI, 43000, KAJANG, Selangor.

HARGA RIZAB:
Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "persembahan sedia ada" bertakluk kepada satu harga rizab sebanyak RM 5,454,000.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: LIMA JUTA EMPAT RATUS LIMA PULUH EMPAT RIBU SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang dilampirkan. Pembida yang berminat hendaklah memdepositkan 10% daripada harga rizab dalam bentuk Bank Draft di atas nama GUNMA DEVELOPMENT SDN. BHD. 1 HARI BEKERAJA sebelum tarikh lelong awam. Baki harga belian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada GUNMA DEVELOPMENT SDN. BHD. dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (20) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk but-butir selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:-

Firma Guaman : SHARIF & KHOO
Alamat : NO.6, JALAN TUNGU HAKSAN
70000, NS, NY
No. Telefon : 06-7611257
No. Fax : 06-7635431
No. Rujukan : SK/CA/129/21

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF TRISTANA MALAYSIA SDN. BHD.

(Registration No. 202201019271(1464968-X))
(In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)

At a General Meeting of the abovementioned Company duly convened and held on 1st January 2025, the following resolutions were duly passed:-

"That the company will be liquidated by way of members' voluntary winding up."

REBECCA JUN KING
Chairman
Dated this 8th day of January 2025

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF TRISTANA MALAYSIA SDN. BHD.

(Registration No. 202201019271(1464968-X))

(In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Creditors of the abovementioned Company, which is being wound up voluntarily, are required on or before 10th February 2025 to send in their names and addresses with particulars of their debts or claim and the names and addresses of their solicitors (if any) to the undersigned, the Liquidator of the said Company; and if so required by notice in writing from the said Liquidator, are, by their solicitors or personally, to come and prove their debts or claims at such time and place as shall be specified in such notice, or in default thereof they will be excluded from the benefit of any distribution made before such debts or claims are proved.

LEE EWE HOCK
Liquidator
Wisma Golden Eagle Realty
11th Floor, South Block
No 142-A, Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: +60 3 2702 5222

Dated this 8th day of January 2025

Gauff in superb form for latest campaign

COCO GAUFF will begin her Australian Open campaign on a high next week, after riding a roller-coaster 2024 to claim her maiden WTA Finals title and deliver the United Cup to the Americans in pristine form.

It has been a remarkable turnaround for the 20-year-old, who only a few months ago appeared to be in a tailspin.

She exited early from Toronto and Cincinnati and her New York title defence ended in the fourth round with a staggering 19 double faults.

But she flipped the script only weeks later, parting ways with coach Brad Gilbert before beating US Open semifinalist Karolina Muchova to win the China Open in October, as she told reporters she had changed her mindset.

"I'm realising more and more each day that tennis is not a measure of my value as a person. I think the more you realize that, the more relaxed these tournaments become," said Gauff.

"I'm still going to experience pressure. It's easier said than done."

That cool calm was on display at November's WTA Finals, where she overcame her key antagonist Iga Swiatek – with the Pole having triumphed in all but one of their 12 prior meetings – and the world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka en route to the final.

She kept her nerve to come back from a set down against the Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen and offered a cheeky message on social media after hoisting the trophy: "Safe to say I beat the bad season allegations."

Gauff showed no sign of letting off the gas in the New Year, as she skipped Auckland – a tournament she won twice before – to kick off her season at the United Cup, reasoning that the team event offered a higher level of competition.

She got just that, as she faced Swiatek again in a highly anticipated final showdown on Sunday and rose to the occasion, winning in straight sets. She told reporters in Sydney that it was one of the best performances of her career.

"Obviously this start of the season gives me a lot of confidence," said Gauff. "I feel like when I'm playing confident tennis, I'm playing great tennis. I definitely feel confident going into AO." – Reuters

I'll be good, says bruised Swiatek ahead of Australian Open

FOR Iga Swiatek, whose confidence has been shaken by slipping to world No. 2 and more so by serving a one-month doping ban around the WTA Finals in November, the 2025 Australian Open may be the most defining tournament of her career so far.

"I'll be good," the 23-year-old Swiatek, who wants to dominate women tennis once again, said in response to her loss to American Coco Gauff in Sunday's United Cup final, trying to dispel concerns about an apparent issue with her left thigh ahead of the Melbourne Grand Slam.

Swiatek won five titles in 2024, including a third straight French Open prior to the

suspension, but the tally trails that of her six and eight titles in the two previous seasons.

After having tussled all year with the Australian Open defending champion, the big-hitting Aryna Sabalenka, she now lags behind the Belarusian by 1,536 points in the WTA rankings.

Although Swiatek leads Gauff 11-3 in their meetings, the loss at the United Cup was the second straight defeat to the American, who is showing signs of mastering her answers to the Pole's heavy forehand.

After her tumultuous last season that was also marked by public backlash following the acceptance of her doping suspension, things can

only get better in 2025 for the introverted Swiatek, Polish sports media say.

Swiatek herself said in a recent interview with Tennis Insider Club that she was changing her attitude away from allowing tennis to be her whole life.

"I'm trying to enjoy life a little more," she said. "You have to balance it out."

On Sunday, she said she was happy with her performance at the United Cup where for the first time ever she defeated her longtime nemesis Elena Rybakina on a hard court.

"I pushed myself to the limits of my abilities," she said. "I knew I had nothing to lose." – Reuters

Sabalenka eyes hattrick

... but red-hot Coco and Polish world No. 2 Iga lurk Down Under

WORLD NO. 1 Aryna Sabalenka is gunning for a third consecutive Australian Open crown but will face a stiff challenge from Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff and last year's runner-up Zheng Qinwen.

Sabalenka won the Brisbane International on Sunday but the headline was in Sydney where a red-hot Gauff beat Swiatek in the United Cup final in a statement victory.

The 20-year-old American Gauff bounced back impressively from parting with coach Brad Gilbert to win the WTA 1000 in Beijing and the WTA Tour Finals to end 2024.

The world No. 3 again looked in prime form as she inspired the US to victory over Poland in the mixed-teams event and confidence is high heading into Melbourne.

"Honestly, before every Grand Slam I have the belief that I can win," said Gauff, who triumphed at the 2023 US Open for her only major title so far.

"And especially after the US Open, I proved that I could do it. I definitely have belief that I can win."

The United Cup was Swiatek's first event since it was revealed she had served a one-month doping suspension.

The world No. 2 has never shone at Melbourne Park, only progressing beyond the fourth round in 2022, when she was upset by Danielle Collins in the semifinals.

The Pole also appears to be carrying a niggling left thigh injury that needed strapping during the week, but she brushed off any fears after the United Cup final.

"I was just tired," the 23-year-old said. "You know, the volume at the beginning of the tournament especially has been pretty big. But honestly, it's all good."

Sabalenka is the woman to beat in Australia after the best season of her career in 2024, capped by being

named WTA Player of the Year last month.

The Belarusian will be the first woman to win the Australian Open three years in a row since Martina Hingis in 1999 should she go all the way.

The 26-year-old showed she was in the mood with a romp to the trophy at the season-opening Brisbane International, dropping only one set.

"Mentally, physically, I'll be ready to go at the Australian Open," she said. "I definitely feel confident in my game."

The victory continued her superb form from 2024 where she reached seven finals and won four tournaments.

She recaptured the No. 1 ranking from Swiatek, who had mysteriously pulled out of the WTA's Asian swing citing "personal matters".

Only later was it revealed Swiatek had been absent because of a one-month ban for testing positive for a banned heart medication. She denies knowingly doping.

China's Zheng had a stellar 2024 including winning Olympic gold but she goes into the first Grand Slam of the year without playing a warm-up event.

Other fancied players, Jasmine Paolini, Mirra Andreeva and two-time Melbourne champion Naomi Osaka have all shown glimpses of their best form to begin the season.

Teenage sensation Andreeva, a semifinalist at Roland Garros in 2024, is expected to figure at the sharp end of Grand Slams this season.

One current Grand Slam champion will be absent, however, as Wimbledon winner Barbora Krejčíková of the Czech Republic has pulled out with a back injury. – AFP



Aryna Sabalenka celebrates with the Brisbane International trophy on Sunday. – AFP/IC

WORLD NO. 1 Aryna Sabalenka will be hot favourite to secure an Australian Open hattrick, having won the past two years at Melbourne Park.

In-form Coco Gauff and Iga Swiatek are her biggest threats, but Zheng Qinwen could be primed for a Slam breakthrough after a stellar 2024, while emerging talent Mirra Andreeva could upset some top names.

Here are five women to watch at the first Grand Slam of the year starting on Sunday:

Aryna Sabalenka

The Belarusian comes into the Australian Open on the back of the best year of her career in which she won the US Open as well as retaining her Melbourne Park crown. The powerful 26-year-old also won in Cincinnati and at the WTA 1000 at Wuhan, her fourth title of the year, which helped her unseat Iga Swiatek as world No. 1. The defending champion is unbeaten in Melbourne since 2022, when she lost in the third round to Marketa Vondrousova. Sabalenka began 2025 by winning the Brisbane International, dropping only one set on the way to the title.

Five women to watch

Iga Swiatek

The 23-year-old Pole won her fourth French Open last year but ended 2024 under a doping cloud after serving a one-month ban. News of the saga only emerged in late November but Swiatek made a confident return in the mixed-teams United Cup in Sydney last week as Poland reached the final, losing only one of her five singles matches – to Coco Gauff. Swiatek's Australian Open record is patchy and she has only progressed beyond the fourth round once, in 2022, when she was stunned by Danielle Collins in the semifinals.

Coco Gauff

Arguably the hottest player in women's tennis right now, Gauff has enjoyed a stunning few months after struggling with her serve and forehand in the wake of winning the US Open in 2023. After parting with coach Brad Gilbert, Gauff won the WTA 1000 in Beijing and the WTA Tour Finals



working with the little-known Matt Daly as she rescued a faltering year in superb style. The 20-year-old world No. 3 began her 2025 campaign with a run to the final of the United Cup where she beat Swiatek 6-4, 6-4 in the final.

Zheng Qinwen

The 22-year-old enjoyed a breakthrough 2024, beating Swiatek on her way to winning Olympic gold in Paris and claiming three WTA titles. "Queen Wen" ended the year at a career-high number five after claiming the Pan Pacific Open title in Tokyo. She then reached the championship match at the WTA Tour Finals in Riyadh, where she was edged

in a final-set tiebreak by Gauff. Zheng came close to becoming only the second Chinese player after Li Na to win a Grand Slam singles crown when she was beaten in the Australian Open final by Sabalenka a year ago. With a powerful serve and heavy forehand, Zheng could again emerge as Sabalenka's closest challenger on Melbourne's hard and fast courts.

Mirra Andreeva

The Russian may be only 17 but driven by the fearlessness of youth she showed last year she can win on every surface. The world No. 15 possesses a fine array of shots and a tactical nous that belies her age. She won a maiden WTA title in Iasi, Romania, in July. With seasoned coach and former Grand Slam winner Conchita Martinez in her corner, Andreeva's trajectory would appear to be relentlessly upward. She beat Sabalenka on her way to a maiden Slam semifinal at Roland Garros but the world No. 1 turned the tables in the semifinals in Brisbane last week, although the Belarusian's 6-3, 6-2 win was a lot closer than the scoreline suggested. – AFP



Flick in a fix

... as Olmo situation overshadows Barca's bid for Super Cup glory

BARCELONA coach Hansi Flick is hoping to win the first silverware of his reign this week in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia but the Dani Olmo registration debacle rumbles on firmly in the foreground.

Holdovers Real Madrid, also the reigning Spanish and European champions, are favourites for the trophy, after thrashing Barcelona 4-1 in last season's final.

Ernesto Valverde's Athletic Bilbao face Barca in the first semifinal tomorrow (3am Malaysian time) looking to win it for the first time since beating the Catalans in the 2021 showpiece, qualifying this season as Copa del Rey winners.

Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid tackle last season's Copa runners-up Real Mallorca in Friday's (3am) second semi, with the final set for Sunday in Jeddah at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium.

Barcelona named Olmo, and young forward Pau Victor who is similarly unable to play, in their travelling party to head to the Gulf state.

Until they hear otherwise from Spain's top sports court (CSD), neither Olmo or Victor can play for the rest of the season in any competition.

Barcelona said at the weekend they would take their case to the CSD after two attempts to renew the duo's licenses were rebuffed by courts, while La Liga and the Spanish football federation have rejected Barcelona's registration attempts.

Both playmaker Olmo, Barcelona's marquee summer signing, and Victor were given short-term licenses at the start of the season as the financially-struggling Catalans wrangled their way around La Liga's stringent budget controls when defender Andreas Christensen suffered an injury, offering a loophole.

"Everyone wants Olmo and Pau back with us. That's all I can say. We were very involved in preparing for this game. We can't do anything about the situation," Flick said.

"The team has tried to isolate itself from these issues. We have to be professional and respond on the pitch."

Defender Ronald Araujo is in the squad after making his comeback from injury during a 4-0 win over Barbastro in the Copa del Rey on Saturday, which Olmo and Victor were forced to miss.

"It's left a bad taste because they are our

teammates... we hope the club can resolve the issue," said Araujo.

"We now have to turn our attention to the clash against Athletic."

Despite leading La Liga for a lengthy stretch, a string of poor results in November and December sunk Barcelona into third place.

Stopping the rot with even a minor trophy would give a needed morale boost for a flagging side.

Despite a poor start to the season Ancelotti's side have maneuvered their way into first place and also won the Uefa Super Cup in August.

Star summer arrival Kylian Mbappe seems to be finding his footing and with the in-form Jude Bellingham and Vinicius Junior, Madrid's attacking trident marks them out as favourites.

Brazilian winger Vinicius was sent off in his team's 2-1 win at Valencia on Friday in La Liga but is expected to feature in Saudi Arabia with a league ban likely – although if issued a more severe penalty could also miss the tournament.

Ancelotti said Vinicius was sorry after his red card and that he has "improved so much that he is the best player in the world". – AFP

Perfect start for new Milan boss Conceicao

SERGIO CONCEICAO capped an incredible first week at AC Milan by lifting the Italian Super Cup yesterday, wrapping up a period which included two comeback wins, fighting a fever, picking up an injury and smoking a cigar in the dressing room.

Conceicao replaced the sacked Paulo Fonseca as manager last Monday and, despite suffering with illness and a high temperature, he took his place on the bench to lead Milan to a 2-1 semifinal win over Juventus on Friday.

Milan came from a goal down to beat Juventus but things looked decidedly worse in yesterday's final when they found themselves two goals down to their local rivals Inter Milan after conceding a goal either side of halftime.

"The team has character, it managed to win games against two great teams in the end," Conceicao told *Mediaset*.

"At half-time the coach has to change certain things, that's why they pay me."

Conceicao's side again showed their fighting spirit, pulling back to 2-2 and, with the game in added time and heading for penalties, Tammy Abraham netted a dramatic winner.

The Milan players and staff celebrated with a visibly emotional Conceicao at the final whistle but the manager picked up an injury and needed treatment on the bench before rejoining his team.

"Emerson Royal made a red card tackle on me," Conceicao said with a laugh.

"I'm very happy for the players because it wasn't easy, we had little time to work on the details that were important to me."

"The credit is all theirs because they absorbed my indications. There is still a lot of work but with humility we can do well in the Champions League and in the league."

After the win over Juventus, Conceicao had said that he was not a nice person, and did not smile much, but in the dressing room after lifting the Super Cup, the manager danced while smoking a cigar as the celebrations continued.

"At the end of the game the players immediately told me that I had to smoke a cigar; they knew that I do this ritual when I lift a title," Conceicao told a press conference.

"It's my 13th title as a coach; I'm happy and it has a special flavour for me." – Reuters



AC Milan's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Italian Super Cup final yesterday. – AFP/PPIC

Teen Guler scores twice as Real cruise into Copa last 16

TEENAGER Arda Guler scored twice yesterday as Real Madrid cruised past fourth-tier Deportivo Minera to reach the last 16 of the Copa del Rey.

Federico Valverde netted a volley after just five minutes before Eduardo Camavinga doubled Real's lead eight minutes later, heading home from Fran Garcia's cross.

Valverde then turned provider for Turkey winger Guler, who made it three on 28 minutes with a left-footed strike into the bottom corner, before Luka Modric's low drive found the back of the net after the break.

Guler added a fifth just before full-time, turning home from Garcia's square ball.

This was Carlo Ancelotti's side's first match in the tournament this season as they missed the first two rounds because of their participation in the Spanish Super Cup.

Speaking to the media after the full-time whistle at the Estadio Cartagonova, Ancelotti paid tribute to veteran midfielder Modric, calling him "a gift for football".

"Modric is a gift for football and even more for those who can enjoy him up close," Ancelotti said as he heaped lavish praise on the Croatian.

"For me, he is a great captain, also because of the way he prepares [for] this kind of game as if it was a final. He's an example for the

youngsters."

While 19-year-old Guler found the net twice, Endrick was unable to score despite having several chances, and could not fully make the most of a rare start for *Los Blancos*.

Ancelotti, however, was content with the Brazilian's performance and believes that the goals will come for the 18-year-old.

"Endrick's game was very good. He's going to score goals," he said. "Endrick's movement in the box was very good, he had a lot of chances."

Real Madrid are 20-time Copa del Rey champions but were knocked out in the last 16 last season by Atletico Madrid. – Agencies

SHORTS

Lopetegui's West Ham future in doubt

BY ANDY SIMS

WEST HAM boss Julen Lopetegui's position looks under serious threat while technical director Tim Steidten is staying away from the training ground as the club's problems deepen.

There are reports that former Brighton and Chelsea boss Graham Potter has been lined up to replace Spaniard Lopetegui until the end of the season. West Ham have declined to comment.

The Hammers did say that Steidten, 45, is absent from their Rush Green HQ as he is focusing on the January transfer window which opened last week.

But the situation has echoes of last season, when the German's relationship with then boss David Moyes became strained towards the end of his tenure.

Lopetegui's position as Hammers head coach was plunged back into doubt following consecutive heavy defeats by Liverpool and Manchester City, while Steidten is a known admirer of Potter.

But Steidten is also under the spotlight having led the club's summer recruitment drive, which has so far proved a major disappointment.

West Ham spent around £130 million (RM715m) on nine new players, but are languishing in 14th in the Premier League.

The £27m (RM149m) signing of 31-year-old Germany striker Niclas Fullkrug from Borussia Dortmund has reaped just two goals while two new centrehalves, Nice loanee Jean-Clair Todibo and £40m (RM220m) Maximilian Kilman, have failed to stem the flow of goals against.

The Hammers face a tough FA Cup third-round trip to Aston Villa on Saturday (4am Malaysian time) before home league matches with Fulham and Crystal Palace.

QPR extended Luton's losing run

MORGAN FOX'S fortunate winner for QPR extended Luton Town's losing run to four matches and cranked up the pressure on manager Rob Edwards.

Michael Frey gave the hosts the lead with a goal that should have been ruled out for handball before Hatters centreback Mark McGuinness equalised with a powerful header in the final action of the first half.

Luton began the second period well but could not add to their tally and went behind as Ilias Chair's wayward effort deflected off the heel of Fox and cruelly wrong-footed keeper Thomas Kaminski to roll into an empty net.

McGuinness missed a golden opportunity to bring his team level again in stoppage time as his header just glanced the top of the crossbar on its way over.

"It was an important win for us but I would say despite some challenges and suffering at the end it was deserved," QPR manager Marti Cifuentes told *BBC Sport*.

"We started the game really well, the way we played encouraged me a lot. We took the lead and it was very disappointing to concede that goal before halftime. We know Luton are one of the best teams at set-pieces."

"The goal was a bit lucky but when I look at the chances we created before and after we deserved it. We suffered a bit at the end because we didn't get the third goal. But it's credit to the players."

"Now we have to keep going. There is no room for complacency."



MALAYSIA OPEN 2025

RESULTS (round of 32)

Men's singles
Leong Jun Hao vs **Lu Guang Zu (CHN)**
17-21, 21-16, 13-21

Men's doubles
Goh Sze Fei vs **Daniel Lundgaard (DEN)**
Nur Izzuddin vs **Mads Vestergaard**
15-21, 21-9, 18-21

Women's doubles
Jia Yi Fan (CHN) vs **Go Pei Kee**
Zhang Shu Xian vs **Teoh Mei Xing**
Match suspended

Mixed doubles
Hoo Pang Ron vs **Lu Ming Che (TPE)**
Cheng Su Yin vs **Hung En-Tzu**
26-28, 21-14, 22-24

Dejan F. (INA) vs **Wong Tien Ci**
Gloria Emanuelle vs **Lim Chiew Sien**
21-12, 21-13

Hiroki M. (JPN) vs **Tan Kian Meng**
Natsu Saito vs **Lai Pei Jing**
22-20, 21-10

*All results at press time

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Wolves 0
Nottingham Forest 3 (Gibbs-White 7, Wood 44, Awoniyi 90+4).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	19	14	4	1	47	19	46
Arsenal	20	11	7	2	39	18	40
Forest	20	12	4	4	29	19	40
Chelsea	20	10	6	4	39	24	36
Newcastle	20	10	5	5	34	22	35
Man City	20	10	4	6	36	27	34
Bournemouth	20	9	6	5	30	23	33
Aston Villa	20	9	5	6	30	32	32
Fulham	20	7	9	4	30	27	30
Brighton	20	6	10	4	30	29	28
Brentford	20	8	3	9	38	35	27
Tottenham	20	7	3	10	42	30	24
Man Utd	20	6	5	9	23	28	23
West Ham	20	6	5	9	24	39	23
Crystal Palace	20	4	9	7	21	28	21
Everton	19	3	8	8	15	25	17
Wolves	20	4	4	12	31	45	16
Ipswich	20	3	7	10	20	35	16
Leicester	20	3	5	12	23	44	14
Southampton	20	1	3	16	12	44	6

CHAMPIONSHIP: QPR 2 Luton 1.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leeds	26	15	8	3	48	19	53
Burnley	26	14	10	2	31	9	52
Sheff Utd	26	16	6	4	36	17	52
Sunderland	26	14	8	4	39	22	50
Mid'boro	26	11	8	7	43	32	41
West Brom	26	9	13	4	32	21	40

COPA DEL REY (Round of 32): Deportivo Minera 0 Real Madrid 5 (Valverde 5, Camavinga 14, Guler 28, 88, Modric 55).

ITALIAN SUPER CUP (Final): Inter Milan 2 (Martinez 45+1, Taremi 47) **AC Milan 3** (T. Hernandez 52, Pulisic 80, Abraham 90+3).

No home comfort

... as shuttlers, including No. 1 pair, crash out in first round of Malaysian Open

MALAYSIA OPEN 2025 debutants Leong Jun Hao (men's singles) and Hoo Pang Ron-Cheng Su Yin (mixed doubles) and professional men's doubles pair Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Rumsani crashed out in the opening round at the Axiata Arena in Bukit Jalil yesterday.

Jun Hao blew hot and cold en route to a 17-21, 21-16, 13-21 first-round loss to world No. 16 Lu Guang Zu of China in the season-opening Badminton World Federation (BWF) World Tour Super 1000 tournament.

World No. 29 Jun Hao admitted that it proved to be too tall an order for him.

"Perhaps, he (Guang Zu) is more experienced and he did well, especially during the crucial points. In the third game, I gave away easy points, making life more difficult for myself," he said.

National singles head coach Kenneth Jonassen said Jun Hao has the right foundation to go far despite the first-round exit in his maiden home badminton championships.

The Dane said Jun Hao could hold his head up high after putting up a fighting display before succumbing to Guang Zu.

"I think this is Jun Hao's first Malaysia Open... yet, he dealt with his emotion quite well after losing the first game as he closed out the second in great style.

"Then, in the third game, he didn't get off to a good start and that proved crucial.

"But I see the foundation of moving on and a quiet maturity in his overall game.

"A little bit more experience is needed, but the foundation is there, which I'm really pleased with," he told reporters.

Jonassen was also quick to dismiss the notion that pressure from competing in the first Malaysia Open was a contributing factor in Jun Hao's opening-round defeat.



Malaysia's Leong Jun Hao in action against China's Lu Guang Zu (not pictured) at the 2025 Malaysia Open in Bukit Jalil yesterday. - **BERNAMAPIC**

"I wouldn't say that pressure was an overall issue. Maybe 5% of it... so, he could play 100% freely, but nobody really plays freely in a first-round match... you need time to settle in," he said.

Meanwhile, Pang Ron-Su Yin, could only rue a missed opportunity after going down fighting 26-28, 21-14, 22-24 to Taiwan's Ming Che Lu-Hung En-Tzu.

Pang Ron was gutted at failing to capitalise on their commanding seven-point leads as well as missing five match-point opportunities en route to losing the first game.

"In the first game, we led by a lot but they fought back gallantly. After losing the first game, we were a bit shaken, mentally," he said.

Malaysia's mixed doubles camp suffered a double blow when the professional pair of Wong Tien Ci-Lim Chiew Sien were also shown the exit by Indonesia's fifth-seeded Dejan Ferdinansyah-Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja, who won 21-12, 21-13.

In the men's doubles, Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin's hope for a dream Malaysia Open 2025 start were dashed yesterday.

The third seeds endured a surprising defeat to unseeded Daniel Lundgaard-Mads Vestergaard 15-21, 21-9, 18-21 in 52 minutes during their first-ever meeting against the Danes.

Meanwhile, professional mixed doubles duo Tan Kian Meng-Lai Pei Jing also made an early exit, losing to the Japanese duo Hiroki Midorikawa-Natsu Saito.

Earlier, two opening-day ties - Malaysian's Goh Pei Kee-Teoh Mei Xing vs China's Jia Yi Fan-Zhang Shu Xian and India's H.S Prannoy vs Canadian Brian Yang - had to be delayed due to a leaking roof at the Axiata Arena. - **Bernama**

'Four major C'ships best platform for national riders'

THE 2025 Asian Track Cycling Championships (ACC 2025) and the Asean Track Series (President Cup) 1, 2 and 3 will be the best platforms for Malaysian riders to vie for points offered in the UCI (International Cycling Union) calendar.

Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) president Datuk Amarjit Singh said this was because the Feb 21-27 ACC 2025 and the Asean Track Series (President Cup) 1, 2 and 3 (Jan 13-20) will be held at the National Velodrome in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan.

"I'm certain they are already familiar with racing on home ground. On top of that, they will also have the home support.

"So, I hope our riders will use these four championships to collect as many UCI points as possible," he said in a statement issued by the MNCF yesterday.

Amarjit, who is also a UCI executive committee member, hopes that riders like Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom and Nurul Izzah Izati Mohd Asri can produce

outstanding performances although these championships are being held so early in the year.

Amarjit, also the Asian Cycling Confederation vice-president, expects cyclists from Japan, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Hong Kong and Iran to provide an acid test to the local riders.

He said the achievements of Malaysian riders at the ACC 2025 and the Asean Track Series (President Cup) 1, 2 and 3 could also be used as a yardstick ahead of the 2025 Thailand SEA Games in Bangkok.

"I hope we can clinch all the (SEA Games) medals on offer in Bangkok. I know we can achieve this if we all work hard," he said.

For the record, world track cycling ace Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang bagged two gold medals in the keirin and sprint events at ACC 2023.

However, the Pocket Rocketman, as Azizulhasni is dubbed, is not expected to compete in ACC 2025 as he focuses on completing his studies. - **Bernama**

Team Gavin win inaugural Albatross Cup

TEAM GAVIN powered their way to an emphatic 14-8 victory over Team Danny in the inaugural Albatross Cup at Seri Selangor Golf Club yesterday.

Made up of Malaysia's leading professionals, the two 12-man teams are captained by the nation's current and former No. 1 golfers, Gavin Green and Danny Chia, respectively.

Heading into the final day singles with a 6-4 lead from yesterday's fourball and foursomes matches, Team Gavin needed 52 points from the 12 matches to secure the win.

Despite early morning rain which delayed the start of play by 45 minutes, the spirits of the players were not dampened as they displayed great skill and fiery passion in each match.

The large final victory margin did not truly reflect the closely-fought contest, which came down to the last three matches on the course. The winning point was secured by Casper Loh, who beat Nor Heikal Hadi 3&2 in a battle of budding young talents.

Other prominent matches included rising professional Marcus

Lim of Team Gavin against veteran Chia himself, with close to 30 years separating the two players in terms of age. Lim, who is 24, prevailed 2-up but not before a tough fight by the 52-year-old Chia.

"I am really proud of my players and how they stepped up over the last two days.

"Each and every one of them is a class act and I am privileged to have them in my team," said Green, who won his singles match against Ervin Chang 4&3.

"I would like to thank everyone who has volunteered their time and effort to make this event a success, and of course our sponsors such as Seri Selangor Golf Club, MST Golf, F&N, Go In Full and NPG," he added.

Chia was magnanimous in defeat, saying: "We did our best today but unfortunately were unable to turn things around. It was a great event, and I would like to congratulate Gavin and his players on a well-deserved victory.

"I would also like to thank my team for their amazing effort and Seri Selangor for providing us with such a great golf course."



Read **theSun** iPaper at www.thesun.my
 Free access to iPaper PDF Download
 or download **theSun** app from the App Store or Google Play™.

SCAN ME



Title contenders?

Nuno not interested in League table after Forest move within six points of top

BY JONATHAN VEAL

NOTTINGHAM FOREST boss Nuno Espirito Santo says he will not look at the Premier League table until the end of the season despite his side opening the door to a surprise title challenge with a 3-0 win at Wolves.

Goals from Morgan Gibbs-White, Chris Wood and Taiwo Awoniyi earned a sixth successive Premier League win and moved them six points behind leaders Liverpool.

Arne Slot's men visit the City Ground next Wednesday (4am Malaysian time) in a clash which is likely to decide whether Forest could challenge for the title.

But Nuno is not even contemplating the idea of addressing that prospect.

Asked whether or when he will look at the League table, he replied: "Maybe the end of the season, I will take a look. At the end of the season, I will take a look, I will promise you guys."

Nuno added when asked if his side were in a title race: "We play Luton in the FA Cup at the City Ground next, which is huge for us. It is a good chance for us."

"I'm sorry to not answer your question directly, but this is the reality. We must prepare well for that game."

"The FA Cup is important and it is a good chance for us in terms of the squad."

"We can give minutes to players, because it is a very long season and we need all the players to have minutes. They need to have fitness and rhythm. So first, Luton."

Forest are the only team to beat Liverpool in the Premier League this season and should they do the double over Slot's side, it will be more than just a statement of intent.

"If they beat Liverpool they are in the title race," said former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher on Sky Sports.

"What I would say right now is if the Champions League goes to the top five positions they have got one hell of a chance."

Forest have racked up six consecutive top-flight wins for the first time since 1979 when they managed the feat across two seasons when Brian Clough was in charge - a fitting achievement as



Monday marked 50 years since the Forest great was appointed at the City Ground.

"It means a lot for us because Brian Clough is a legend of the club," the Portuguese added.

"You can see it all over Nottingham, in our stadium and in our training ground, references to Brian Clough. That can only inspire us."

"But we have to keep on going. Our happiness is based on how the players are working together; this is what makes us really proud and happy."

Forest fans are now daring to dream about a return to Europe for the first time since the 1995-96 season, with Champions League qualification now a realistic possibility.

"It would be absolutely incredible," said goalscorer Gibbs-White. "There will be a few fans who might be able to experience it twice."

"To be able to give them that opportunity again is what we

really want to do as a club."

Wolves, missing talisman Matheus Cunha, remain in trouble at the other end of the table, losing under new boss Vitor Pereira for the first time, with three missed chances in the first half proving costly.

Cunha was joined on the sidelines by a host of other players, with Pereira focusing on the positives.

"I think we did what was possible to do," he said. "We faced a lot of problems this week, different problems, injury problems."

"In the end we played with 11 players and 11 players that were giving everything to get another result."

"I'm happy with the players, I am proud of them because they tried everything."

"I can't say to anybody that they didn't run, they didn't fight, they didn't try their best."

"In the end 3-0 is a heavy result but we must understand why it happened and if you understand why it happened we know what we must work on to improve this." - The Independent/Agencies