



Double whammy from mould growth

Condition not only compromises structural integrity of buildings but also poses threat to respiratory health: Expert

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Anwar on five-day working visit to UK

Trip aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and exploring new initiatives in trade and investment between both countries.

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Drowning second most common accidental death among children

Important to have early swimming lessons as life-saving skill, says Paediatric Association of Malaysia.

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The Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations said the impending fare hike would add to the burden of families already grappling with financial strain. - SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THE SUN

Action needed on school bus fare hike

Govt urged to intervene with subsidies, tax relief or grants to offset costs, although issue deemed outside jurisdiction of Transport Ministry.

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LONDON: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is on a five-day working visit to the United Kingdom (UK), Malaysia's third largest trading partner in Europe, starting today.

Malaysian High Commissioner to the UK and Northern Ireland Datuk Zakri Jaafar said Anwar's visit is at the invitation of his counterpart Keir Starmer, who has been in office since July last year.

Zakri said the visit is the first by Anwar since becoming prime minister and is expected to strengthen bilateral relations between both nations.

He said it would be utilised to explore new initiatives in trade and investment following the UK's participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Anwar, who arrived here from Abu Dhabi, was accompanied by Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir and Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

Zakri said Anwar would meet Starmer today at No 10, Downing Street, and the two leaders are expected to discuss various bilateral issues as well as the situation in Myanmar and Palestine.

He said the government, led by

PM on five-day working visit to UK

➤ Trip expected to strengthen bilateral relations, explore new initiatives in trade and investment between both countries

Starmer, has suspended the sale of some weapons to Israel and requested accelerated humanitarian aid to Gaza and the West Bank.

He added that on Thursday, Anwar would meet Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle.

Zakri said Malaysia would also use the opportunity to discuss the focus and direction of Malaysia's Asean chairmanship.

He added that as of November 2024, total trade between the two countries amounted to RM15.3 billion.

Zakri said Malaysia's total exports to the UK have decreased by 4% to RM7.83 billion compared with the

previous year while total imports decreased by 3.4% to RM7.47 billion, with the total trade balance in favour of Malaysia, at RM225.3 million.

He said both parties would witness the exchange of a MoU between the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry and the UK Department for Business and Trade.

Zakri said Anwar would also continue efforts to attract investments through a round table meeting with captains of industry in the UK, involving 40 local companies, Bernama reported.

He added that Anwar would hold an engagement session with CEOs of GLICs and attend the

InvestMalaysia programmes organised by Bursa Malaysia, the launch of a solar farm project by TNB Malaysia and a product launch by YTL Group UK.

"All these programmes are among efforts to highlight the country's ability to realise the aspirations of the Madani Economic Framework."

He will also visit the Battersea Power Station, which is Malaysia's largest investment involving public funds in Europe, deliver a special public lecture titled "The Adaptive Edge: Malaysia's Global Strategy in an Uncertain Era" at the London School of Economics (LSE) and inaugurate the Malaysian Auditorium there.

The auditorium was named the Malaysian Auditorium in appreciation of the efforts by the LSE Malaysian Branch alumni, who are constantly active in community affairs in Malaysia and the UK.

'Prosecute those misusing halal logo'

PUTRAJAYA: Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar has instructed the Islamic Development Department to collaborate with the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry to take enforcement action and prosecute those misusing the halal logo.

He said in a statement that the misuse of the halal label on products is a serious offence.

"The Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) reminds all parties not to misuse the halal logo on any product.

"Misusing the halal label constitutes an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 2011, specifically the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011."

Mohd Na'im expressed regret over a recent incident at a 24-hour retail outlet at Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, where "ham and cheese" products without halal certification were sold.

"The Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) will not compromise on issues involving public integrity and interest. All parties are urged to consult the department and state Islamic religious authorities on halal related matters."

Earlier, the Islamic Development Department had confirmed that the "ham and cheese" product sold at the university's premises did not have halal certification.

In a separate statement, Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry Enforcement Director-General Datuk Azman Adam said a probe had been initiated against a sandwich bread factory in Sunway Damansara suspected of misusing the halal logo, Bernama reported.

The case is being investigated under Paragraph 4(1) of the Trade Descriptions Act 2011 and deals with an offence under Paragraph 8(a) of the Trade Descriptions (Certification and Marking of Halal) Order 2011.

Aid distribution to start today

KUALA LUMPUR: The distribution of the Sumbangan Asas Rahmah aid starting today will see an increase in allocations for it as well as the Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah assistance, to a historical level of RM13 billion compared with RM10 billion in 2024.

The aid will be increased to RM2,100, compared with RM1,200 in 2024 for eligible households recorded in the eKasih system.

"Recipients will receive RM100 monthly via the recipient's MyKad for January to March, with the amount increasing to RM200 per month from April onwards," the Finance Ministry said yesterday.

It said 5.4 million Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah recipients would also receive additional assistance beginning April. - Bernama

UAE visit fruitful, says Anwar

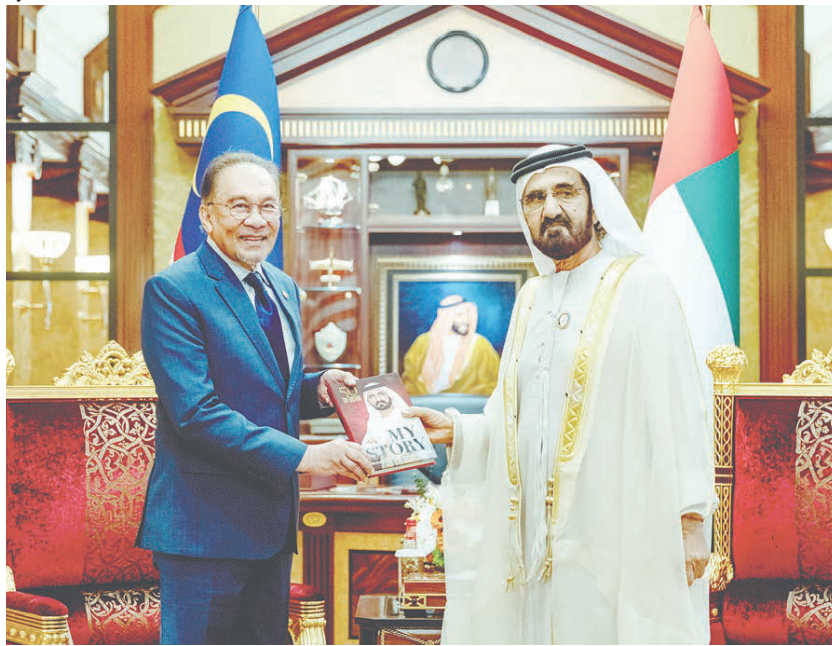
KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said long-term investments involving healthcare, airport operations and energy sectors are expected following his working visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Anwar, who was on a three-day visit to the UAE, said in a post on X that the strong synergy between Malaysia and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (Adia) reflects confidence in the country's potential for sustainable economic growth.

Anwar wrote: "Adia comes together with other global investment partners to explore investment opportunities in Malaysia.

"It is not impossible for long-term investments to be injected, including in the healthcare, airport operations and energy sectors."

During the visit, Anwar met Adia managing director Sheikh Hamed Zayed Al Nahyan, Mubadala CEO Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak and Masdar CEO Mohamed Jameel Al Ramahi. - Bernama



Anwar receiving a book from UAE Vice-President and Premier Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Al Maktoum in Dubai yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC

Urine tests at concert venues deemed impractical

KAJANG: The proposed implementation of urine tests at concert venues is impractical and difficult to carry out, said National Anti-Drug Agency director-general Datuk Ruslin Jusoh.

He said this is because urine screening to detect drug abuse cannot be done carelessly and takes time to complete.

"We can conduct random tests, and concerts are hardly held in a hall, but in big stadiums.

"For us to carry out the tests for everyone present is not practical," he

said at the agency's monthly assembly at its headquarters.

Ruslin added that the agency is more focused on increasing its presence and enforcement efforts, as well as promoting anti-drug prevention campaigns at concert venues.

"Perhaps, on the tickets themselves we can include an anti-drug logo, and also run an anti-drug campaign before concerts begin.

"I will meet event organisers to find the best solution. We do not want this industry to be associated

with drugs, although only a small number of people use them."

Ruslin said the number of drug abuse cases as of September 2024 showed a 31.6% increase, with 169,691 offenders, compared with the same period in 2023.

He said individuals aged between 19 and 39 formed the majority of those involved in drug abuse, comprising 53.8% of the total detected.

"The most commonly abused drug, accounting for 70%, is Amphetamine Type Stimulants

(synthetic drugs) such as methamphetamine, ecstasy and syabu, followed by opiate-type drugs."

Ruslin added that drug and substance abuse continues to be a serious issue that needs to be addressed more effectively.

"The increase in synthetic drug abuse cases also requires a more aggressive and innovative approach."

He said the agency is drafting an Anti-Drug Communication Plan to widely disseminate accurate anti-drug messages. - Bernama

Call to address **rising** school bus fares

► Fomca CEO urges govt to intervene with subsidies, fare caps and monitoring mechanism

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
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PETALING JAYA: The Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) has urged the government to take immediate action to address the increase in school bus fares expected next month.

Its CEO Saravanan Thambirajah called on relevant authorities to take decisive steps, including introducing subsidies for school bus services to ease the burden on B40 families and implementing a cap on fare hikes.

On Jan 8, Gabungan Persatuan Bas Sekolah Malaysia president Mohd Rofik Mohd Yusof announced that school bus fares are expected to increase by RM5 to RM10 per student for the upcoming 2025/2026 academic session in February.

Saravanan said the rates were determined through mutual agreements between parents and operators, without government involvement.

He also proposed tax relief or grants for bus operators to offset operational costs, ensuring fair and affordable transport for students nationwide.

"We understand the challenges faced by school bus operators, including increased operating costs such as fuel, maintenance and wages.

"However, fare hikes should be fair and transparent, striking a balance between the needs of operators and the financial capacity of parents. While the rise in costs is understandable, the timing and impact of the hike on families,

especially during periods of economic uncertainty, should be evaluated," he said.

"Many families are already grappling with financial strain and this hike will add to their burden."

On Friday, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said the ministry has no authority to prevent the increase in school bus fares as the matter does not fall under its jurisdiction.

Saravanan said Fomca views the ministry's lack of control over school bus fares as a significant governance gap that must be addressed.

"While school bus service providers operate privately, transport to school is a critical component of ensuring access to education, particularly for (underprivileged) families. It cannot be left entirely to market forces.

"The ministry also cannot fully distance itself from an issue that directly impacts education and family welfare," he said.

Saravanan urged the ministry to acknowledge its indirect

responsibility for ensuring equitable access to school transport as part of its broader mandate to promote affordable and sustainable public transport.

He said failure to address the issue would exacerbate the country's significant educational challenges, such as the 10,000 students who dropped out of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exams this year.

"Although the ministry may not directly control fares, it has the tools and authority to facilitate solutions that benefit all stakeholders, especially (underprivileged) families.

"The ministry should view this as part of its commitment to Sustainable Development Goals - SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) - and work towards long-term systemic solutions," he added.

Saravanan also advocated greater transparency in determining school bus fares.

"Operators should clearly communicate cost breakdowns and

reasons for increases to parents to avoid misunderstandings or disputes," he said.

He called for a monitoring mechanism to ensure fare hikes are justified, noting that the rising cost of school transport disproportionately affects students from lower-income households and could worsen dropout rates.

"Parents should request clear, itemised justifications for fare increases from bus operators and compare rates among available options. If parents feel the hike is excessive, they can report the matter to relevant authorities such as the Land Public Transport Agency," he said.

Saravanan added that existing guidelines under the agency require school bus operators to register and adhere to fair practices.

However, he said enforcement of these regulations must be strengthened to prevent exploitation during fare negotiations and to ensure compliance.

Economy minister heads list of award recipients

SEREMBAN: Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli topped the list of 555 recipients of Negeri Sembilan state awards and medals in conjunction with the 77th birthday of the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan Tuanku Muhriz Ibrahima bin Almarhum Tuanku Munawir yesterday.

The Pandan MP was awarded the Darjah Seri Setia Negeri Sembilan Yang Amat Cemerlang, which carries the title "Datuk Seri".

Five individuals received the Darjah Dato' Paduka Negeri Sembilan, which carries the title "Datuk", including Summit Ascent Holding Limited CEO Datuk Chua Ming Huat and Negeri Sembilan state assembly speaker Datuk M.K. Ibrahim Abd Rahman.

Three members of the Negeri Sembilan state executive council also received the award, namely Mustapha Nagoor, Nooruznita Begum Mohd Ibrahim and Tengku Zamrah Tengku Sulaiman.

S. Sheranjiv, trustee of Yayasan Munarah, was awarded the Darjah Setia Tuanku Muhriz Yang Amat Gemilang, which also carries the title "Datuk". - Bernama



Rafizi receiving the award from Tuanku Muhriz. - BERNAMA/PI

RM41 million allocated for 'Kelantan Bersih' campaign

KOTA BHARU: The Kelantan government has approved an allocation of RM41 million for local government authorities in the state to intensify the "Kelantan Bersih" campaign this year.

State Local Government, Housing, Health and Environment Committee chairman Hilmi Abdullah said the allocation was increased from RM28.6 million last year, in line with rising maintenance costs for various infrastructures.

"We have upgraded many places of interest, so maintenance costs have also increased, in addition to the existence of recreational parks. We aim for every district to have a recreational park, in line with the national policy for open spaces to be maintained for the benefit of the public," he said.

He was speaking during the presentation of appointment letters to 288 local council members by Menteri Besar Datuk Mohd Nassuruddin Daud at the Kota Darulnaim Complex on Monday. - Bernama

Community service penalty option for littering offences

TELUK INTAN: The courts will have the authority to determine specific community service punishments for individuals found guilty of minor littering offences, said Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming.

He said offenders may be required to perform tasks such as cleaning drains, sweeping streets or washing public toilets, with the minimum duration of service set at two hours.

"We (the ministry) leave the punishment up to the court's discretion. For example, if the court orders four days of service, the offender will have to sweep the streets for four days. The ministry is only amending existing legal provisions," he told a press conference after launching new machinery for the Teluk Intan Municipal Council at its office building on Monday.

Nga emphasised that while increasing fines, such as RM300 or RM500, may not be effective in deterring offenders, imposing community service would have a greater impact.

"Raising fines may not work as offenders can simply pay and repeat the offence. However, when required to do community service, offenders will realise the consequences of their actions and will be less likely to litter again," he said.

In November last year, Nga said an amendment to the law for implementing community service punishments for minor littering offences was expected to be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat in March.

He added that the amendment would be part of revisions to the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007, Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974 and the Local Government Act 1976. - Bernama

Malaysia to reassess nuclear energy as potential power source

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia will review its nuclear energy undertakings as a potential power source, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.

Fadillah, who is also Energy Transition and Water Transformation minister, said Malaysia's growing energy demand - driven by industrial requirements, data centre expansions and the adoption of electric vehicles - requires the nation to explore all potential solutions.

"Our decision on nuclear energy will be based on informed findings and the guidance of international standards, ensuring it aligns with

Malaysia's unique needs and circumstances.

"Nuclear energy, recognised globally as one of the cleanest energy sources, is one option we are considering. At COP28, more than 20 countries committed to tripling their nuclear power generation, highlighting its relevance," he said at the Asean Workshop on Sustainable Development 2025 at Sunway University yesterday.

Fadillah said Malaysia is carefully studying the viability of including nuclear power in its energy mix.

He said to this end, his ministry has commissioned studies through

MyPower Corporation, supported by findings from the Malaysian Nuclear Agency.

"These studies focus on advanced nuclear technologies, safety measures, security, regulatory frameworks and stakeholder engagement, particularly with the public.

"Malaysia remains fully committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. A key focus in this endeavour is the decarbonisation of our energy sector, as it is one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions," he said.

Fadillah added that achieving

net zero carbon emissions requires balancing environmental preservation with energy security.

"This involves ensuring that energy is not only affordable but also equitably distributed to all users.

"In this context, Malaysia has developed a comprehensive power development plan. This plan incorporates a diverse energy mix, including hydro, biomass and solar energy.

"We are also focusing on energy efficiency and technological advancements, such as battery storage systems and hydro-based technologies," he added. - Bernama



Double threat from unassuming mould growth

➤ Prolonged exposure to spores could reduce lung function while decay and rot effect destabilise buildings

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: Experts have warned that mould growth on buildings poses a dual threat, compromising both structural integrity and respiratory health.

Universiti Malaya Faculty of Built Environment Assoc Prof Sr Dr Norhayati Mahyuddin told *theSun* that mould could lead to rot and decay, weakening a building's structure over time if left untreated.

"Mould often grows in hidden spaces, such as inside walls and under floors, making damage difficult to detect until significant deterioration occurs. This is primarily due to poor moisture management and inadequate ventilation.

"It weakens materials as it thrives on organic substances, such as wood, insulation and drywall. Over time, this could result in structural issues, such as warping timber, sagging floors or even collapse.

"The severity of damage depends on factors such as the type of mould, moisture levels and the duration of its growth. Even small amounts of mould could cause significant harm."

She said modern buildings are more prone to mould issues due to poor natural ventilation and the use of synthetic materials that trap moisture, making it easier for mould to grow.

"In contrast, older homes, particularly rural houses, typically experience fewer mould problems due to better ventilation, with large windows, high ceilings and crawl spaces that promote airflow.

"Traditional materials, such as wood and clay, allow moisture to escape, reducing dampness, while modern synthetic materials tend to trap moisture.

"Older homes are less airtight, allowing them to breathe whereas modern airtight buildings, designed for energy efficiency, could trap moisture indoors, especially in areas such as bathrooms and kitchens."

Despite these advantages, she cautioned that older homes could develop mould problems if they are poorly maintained or affected by water damage.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Specialist Centre (UKMSC) internal medicine consultant and respiratory physician Assoc Prof Dr Ng Boon Hau warned that mould exposure, especially indoors, could have serious consequences on respiratory health.

"Mould spores, when airborne, could be



Kuan said Malaysia's tropical climate makes moisture control a constant challenge and creates ideal conditions for mould growth. — AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

inhaled and trigger symptoms in people with asthma, such as coughing and shortness of breath. Prolonged exposure could worsen asthma and reduce lung function over time."

His colleague, Assoc Prof Dr Andrea Ban Yu-Lin emphasised that long-term mould exposure could lead to chronic respiratory conditions.

"The severity of the effects depends on factors such as the duration and intensity of exposure, the type of mould and individual health conditions. For people with asthma, prolonged exposure could worsen symptoms and lead to other allergic conditions.

"Untreated mould exposure could result in bronchiectasis, a serious condition in which airways become permanently damaged, severely impairing lung function."

Dr Nik Nuratiqah Nik Abee, also from UKMSC, urged the public to be aware of the symptoms of mould exposure.

"Symptoms that worsen in damp or mouldy places but improve when leaving suggest mould as the cause. Persistent issues should raise concern."

With over 20 years of experience in building repair and rectification based in Kuala

Lumpur, certified mould remediation contractor Kuan You Wai said Malaysia's tropical climate makes moisture control a constant challenge and creates ideal conditions for mould growth.

"Our region experiences consistent rainfall and sunshine throughout the year, creating ideal conditions for mould growth.

"Areas with higher moisture levels, such as bathrooms, kitchens, unshaded exterior walls, drain surfaces and laundry rooms, are particularly vulnerable to mould due to increased moisture, making them more prone to mould growth."

He stressed the need for proactive mould prevention, adding that the wind could carry mould spores from external walls into homes through doors, windows and other openings.

"Regular plumbing maintenance is essential for preventing dampness, which is crucial to maintaining indoor air quality and overall environmental health in the long term.

"Proper design, quality control during construction and routine maintenance are key to effective moisture control, preventing microbial contamination and ensuring the long-term health of a building."

RM100m to empower Indian entrepreneurs

SUNGAI BULOH: Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development Deputy Minister Datuk Seri R. Ramanan has announced that a RM100 million allocation through Tekun Nasional would enhance the economic empowerment agenda for the Indian community.

He said RM50 million would be channelled through the Spumi Goes Big financing scheme while the remaining RM50 million would be channelled via the Indian Community Entrepreneur Development Scheme.

He added that both initiatives are expected to benefit nearly 5,000 Indian entrepreneurs this year.

Ramanan also said the initiatives would help the entrepreneurs expand their businesses amid challenging economic conditions.

"The Indian Community Entrepreneur Development Scheme was allocated RM30 million (under Budget 2025) but the prime minister has directed me to focus on Indian community matters by expanding initiatives this year.

"Tekun, through its internal funds, will inject an additional RM70 million, increasing the total allocation to RM100 million this year, which is the highest amount for the Indian community since 2008."

Ramanan was speaking at a special press conference held in conjunction with the Pongal celebration yesterday.

He said Indian entrepreneurs interested in securing financing could submit their application via the Tekun Nasional website or visit any Tekun office.

"Under the scheme, Tekun offers loans of between RM1,000 and RM50,000 to eligible applicants while Spumi Goes Big provides financing of between RM50,000 and RM100,000, with an approval process of less than 14 days," he said.

The Sungai Buloh MP said since the initiative was launched in 2008, over RM500 million has been disbursed to 26,804 Indian entrepreneurs nationwide, Bernama reported.

Last year, RM58.9 million was allocated to 1,863 Indian entrepreneurs under the Indian Community Entrepreneur Development Scheme while the Spumi Goes Big scheme, launched the same year, supported 287 entrepreneurs with RM12.6 million.

"This initiative demonstrates the government's concern and commitment to ensuring no one is left behind in the nation's economic progress. I hope the Indian community would seize this opportunity to improve their living standards and contribute to the country's economic development."

He urged entrepreneurs who have secured financing to make regular payments to sustain the initiative and benefit more entrepreneurs in the future.

"When Tekun uses internal funds, the repayment must be proper because if we do not repay that funding, we are depriving the next borrower of the opportunity (to secure funds)."

Varsity students develop sweet corn food products

JERTIH: Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin Food Technology students have developed 13 innovative food products using sweet corn, showcasing the potential for diverse downstream products from the crop.

Its Faculty of Bioresources and Food Industry dean Prof Dr Hafiz Juahir said the creations by 13 student groups were based on crops cultivated at its Besut campus farm under the New Food Product Launch Day 2025 programme.

"This annual programme involves final-year Bachelor of Food Technology students who create *halal* food products based on crops grown on the university farm. Last year, students created products based on sweet potatoes."

He said among the products made were sweet corn-flavoured *hailam* noodles, corn-flavoured cheese, *kaya* spreads, carbonated drinks, creamed corn, instant noodles, corn *tempeh* flakes and corn-flavoured confectionery with caramel corn filling.

"Other creations include vegan corn meat, corn silk oat tea drinks, crispy corn nougats and corn snacks."

He said the programme also imparted entrepreneurial skills, with the university providing guidance through the Community Production Kitchen programme to help bring their creations to market.

The Jalan-Jalan Noodle group, which created sweet corn-flavoured *hailam* noodles with broth made from boiled sweet corn cobs, emerged as

the first-place winner.

Team leader Chong Hong Hui, 24, said their product stood out as there was no instant *halal* noodle product in the market, especially *halal*-certified ones, and it could even be consumed with just cold water.

"We spent three months conducting research from various perspectives to develop this product and are thrilled to be named the first-place winners after evaluation by multiple external agencies." — Bernama

'Important for children to learn how to swim'

➤ Activity can help save lives as drowning second on list of injury-related deaths after road crashes, says association

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: Drowning remains as one of the leading causes of death among children in Malaysia, said The Malaysian Paediatric Association executive committee member Dr Selva Kumar Sivapunniam.

Referring to the Statistics Department findings, he said drowning is No. 2 on the list of injury-related deaths after road crashes.

Thus, Selva Kumar emphasised the importance of early swimming lessons for children starting from age four.

"Swimming is more than just a leisure activity, it is a critical life-saving skill that everyone should learn.

"The American Academy of Paediatrics supports swimming lessons as an additional safeguard against drowning, recommending them for children as young as one year old.

"Certain regions in Malaysia are particularly prone to child drownings, especially during the monsoon season from November to March. The east coast states of Terengganu and Kelantan report the highest drowning rates.

"Rural and semi-urban areas with rivers and natural water bodies, along with urban homes with unfenced pools and unsupervised beaches, pose significant risks."

Selva Kumar said to further address this public health concern, a comprehensive National Drowning Prevention Strategy should be developed.

"This approach could include public awareness campaigns, integrating swimming lessons into



Darshini said swimming equips individuals with essential safety knowledge, builds confidence and significantly reduces the risk of drowning. — SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THESUN

school curriculums, partnerships with NGOs and private sectors, and improved data collection to enable targeted interventions," he said.

According to the department, between 2017 and 2021, there were 591 drowning fatalities among children aged 0-14, with an average of 10 children dying each month.

Boys comprised 74% of the fatalities, and drowning occurs three to four times more often involving boys. The highest fatalities are seen among boys aged 10 to 14.

Swimin12 Swim School CEO Darshini Balakrishnan also stresses the importance of swimming as a life skill.

"Swimming is not just a sport, it's a vital skill that benefits children and adults alike. It builds gross motor skills, improves coordination, and enhances emotional resilience."

Darshini, who is also chief inclusion programme lead for special needs said children with special needs, such as those with autism, ADHD, or other conditions, are particularly vulnerable.

"Drowning is a leading cause of

death among children, and those on the spectrum face three times the risk compared with neurotypical children.

"Exposure to water, whether during family vacations or social outings, is common. Knowing how to stay afloat or survive in water is an essential skill," Darshini said.

She added that children with special needs often have a natural attraction to water but may not recognise its dangers.

"Swimin12's inclusion swim programme addresses this with a specialised curriculum tailored to children with autism, ADHD, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, blindness, deafness, mobility limitations, and more," she said.

She also emphasised that it is never too late to learn to swim.

"Our oldest student is 86, and we frequently have clients over 50 joining us for therapy, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, or preparing for triathlons."

The programme at Swimin12 begins lessons for children at around four years old, when they are more

capable of understanding instructions and improving motor coordination.

For younger children, especially toddlers and babies, swimming lessons focus on survival skills and water safety.

"Swimming equips individuals with essential safety knowledge, builds confidence, and significantly reduces the likelihood of tragic accidents," said Darshini.

Recognising the severity of the situation, the government has initiated measures to address the issue.

In early 2023, the Youth and Sports Ministry launched free swimming lessons for children aged three to 12 from low-income (B40) families.

This programme aims to instil water safety awareness and provide basic swimming skills. In collaboration with the Swimmers and Swimming Coaches Association Malaysia, the initiative targets 720 children across eight states, namely Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Sabah, Sarawak, Kelantan, Kedah, Johor and Pahang.

Commercial crimes record RM95m losses

KUANTAN: Pahang police chief Datuk Seri Yahaya Othman said 2,263 investigation papers had been recorded involving commercial cases in Pahang with losses amounting to RM95 million in 2024.

"The value showed an increase of 59% compared with 2023, and a total of 1,776 arrests were recorded last year. A total of 929 investigation papers were successfully charged in court, thus achieving the key performance indicator of the set charge of 53.1%," he said at the monthly assembly of the Pahang police contingent headquarters here on Monday.

He said the Pahang Criminal Investigation Department (CID) recorded a success last year when it registered a case resolution percentage of 61.28%, with Pekan district topping the list at 80.65%.

"There was also a drop in the violent crime index, following the decline in the number of cases to 387, from 409 in 2023.

"This showed the Pahang CID is on the right track to ensuring the state's security is at the optimal level," he said.

Commenting on the performance of the Narcotics Crime Investigation Department, he said a total of 12,466 cases with 13,814 total arrests for various drug offences was recorded last year.

"The total value of drugs seized shows an increase of RM7 million compared with 2023, while the total value of assets seized (during drug raids) is estimated at RM1.8 million.

"The Pahang Traffic Investigation and Enforcement Department recorded 419 cases of fatal accidents, a decrease of 25 cases compared with the previous year," he said. — Bernama

Trader held for having fake firearms

KUANTAN: A trader suspected of possessing 47 imitation firearms for online sale was detained at a house in Inderapura here on Jan 2.

Pahang police chief Datuk Seri Yahaya Othman said the 35-year-old man was released on police bail after being remanded for a week.

"The suspect was arrested during a raid where we seized 47 replica firearms believed to be intended for online sale.

"We believe the replica firearms were imported.

"They resemble real firearms despite being toys," he said after the monthly assembly at the Pahang police contingent headquarters here on Monday.

Yahaya said checks showed that the man had no criminal record, and the case has been referred to the deputy public prosecutor for further action.

The case is being investigated under Section 36(1) of the Firearms Act 1960, he said. — Bernama

400 victims urge action over RM104m investment fraud

KUALA LUMPUR: Nearly 400 victims of an investment fraud are urging the Labuan Financial Services Authority (Labuan FSA) to take stringent action against a company believed to be running an illegal foreign exchange (Forex) investment scheme, causing investors to lose more than RM104 million.

A group of more than 50 victims were present at the Labuan FSA office compound here yesterday, urging the authority to not only impose liquidation action on the company as was done in 2023, but also to investigate and punish it under criminal procedures.

One victim identified only as Tan, 33, who started investing with the company after being invited by a friend since 2016, questioned how the company could easily obtain a licence and managed to dupe investors into investing millions of ringgit.

"I received returns from the company throughout the period I invested, but since 2023 the company had failed to provide returns. When asked, it gave various excuses," he said at the Labuan FSA office here on Monday.

Another victim, Datuk Danny Goh, 57, who claimed to have suffered

losses of RM10 million after investing with the company since 2018, was disappointed that no action had been taken to bring the company to justice despite several police reports being made nationwide since September last year.

"I really hope strict action would be taken against the company that has been operating since 2016 so it could serve as a warning to others and make the community aware of this matter," he said.

The Malaysian International Humanitarian Organisation secretary-general Datuk Hishamuddin Hashim said the

organisation, which represents the victims, had received complaints not only in this country, but also from Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei.

"This Forex trading is not allowed to be promoted to the public as it can only be carried out by companies licensed by Bank Negara Malaysia.

Hishamuddin said although Labuan FSA has acted to dissolve the Labuan-based company, his party is urging that action be taken according to criminal procedures including the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001. — Bernama



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Change of scene for photographer

➤ New venture into cafe business driven by passion and potential in broad appeal of coffee culture

TUMPAT: Although he ran a stable photography business specialising in taking pictures of newborns, Tuan Azizi Tuan Mat's thirst for new challenges led him to open a cafe.

Two months ago, the 37-year-old father of four opened G Coffee in Bandar Baru Tumpat. His bold decision was driven by a passion for coffee and also the potential he saw in the growing cafe culture, a trend that resonates with people of all ages whether in urban or suburban areas.

Tuan Azizi said his dream of owning a cafe existed for a long time but he lacked confidence to open one as he had to focus on his family and photography work.

"I finally decided to open a cafe because apart from wanting to challenge myself, I realised that continuing long-term as a photographer might be difficult since my business relies heavily on my photography skills.

"With a physical business like a cafe, I have something I can pass down to my children," he said, adding that he would continue offering his services as a photographer until his cafe business has stabilised.

Tuan Aziz said he learned the art of coffee-making informally, relying on YouTube tutorials and guidance from friends experienced in the field, Bernama reported.

"I started learning to make coffee nearly seven years ago, from manual methods like the Moka Pot and French

Press to using commercial machines like Breville.

"I also went on coffee-hunting trips to taste various types of coffee crafted by other entrepreneurs to learn and gain insights," he said, adding that in 2021, when the Movement Control Order was in force, he sold bottled coffee from home.

The mechanical engineering graduate from Universiti Teknologi Mara said he invested about RM60,000 in his cafe, the money mainly used for renovating the premises and purchasing the necessary equipment.

Nearly 90% of the remodelling works, such as painting and cementing, were done by him.

"There's a difference between running a photography business and managing a cafe. Photography is on a smaller scale, I handled it alone and my clientele was small. But with a cafe, I have to consider factors like staff costs and customer management, which pose new challenges for me," he said, adding that he operates his cafe with the help of six workers.

Offering more than 30 types of coffee using Brazil Cerrado coffee beans, his cafe also features over 20 Western dishes, priced between RM4 and RM28.

"Some of the most popular coffee choices include Matcha Strawberry, Matcha Onde-Onde and Caramel Latte Ice, while my signature Western dishes include Crispy Fried Chicken Chop, Mashed Potato, Spicy Seafood Aglio Olio and Smash Burger."



Anwar and Chow presenting the aid items to recipients at the event.
- T.C. KHOR/THESUN

Foundation presents aid to B40 individuals, households

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

BUKIT MERTAJAM: In a welfare initiative to support underprivileged communities, Koperasi Khazanah Usahawan Berhad (Ko-Khawan), through its charitable arm Yayasan Muhibah Malaysia, conducted a large-scale aid distribution programme at the Seberang Perai City Council last Saturday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who was accompanied by Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow, presented the contributions to B40 recipients.

The initiative was aimed at alleviating the burden of educational and household expenses, with essential school supplies for 2,000 students and daily necessities for 6,500 families distributed.

Primary and secondary school students and orphans received a complete set of school supplies, including school bags, uniforms

and stationery, while each family received about RM100 worth of groceries and basic household necessities.

More than 6,000 guests and aid recipients were also treated to dinner, during which a lucky draw was held.

In a statement, chairman of both Ko-Khawan and Yayasan Muhibah Malaysia Datuk Eng Yee Koon highlighted the Madani government's commitment to supporting underprivileged communities and improving their living standards.

He said welfare assistance to students could help alleviate poverty related challenges, which could sometimes hinder academic achievements.

Yayasan Muhibah Malaysia, established in 2024, has 300 members. The organisation focuses on charitable works, assisting various underprivileged groups, such as orphans, single parents and students from the B40 group.

Last year, it provided

education related assistance to 1,000 students nationwide, including computers, tuition fees and online learning programmes.

"We are not just providing material aid but also love and hope. Malaysians need to recognise that the underprivileged should not be forgotten and must be supported," he said.

The event marked the fourth and final engagement in Anwar's full-day trip to Penang last Saturday. He first launched a groundbreaking ceremony for the Mutiara LRT project at Lebu Sungai Pinang 1 in the morning, followed by a visit to Jit Sin Private Secondary School, during which where he announced an allocation of over RM20 million for 63 Chinese independent schools nationwide.

He later launched the new South Wing of KPH Penang Specialist Hospital in Bukit Mertajam, where he cautioned hospitals against raising prices indiscriminately.

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Thaksin bullish on legalising online gambling

➤ Thai govt working on identification system

BANGKOK: Thailand's political heavyweight Thaksin Shinawatra believes Southeast Asia's second largest economy should push to legalise online gambling, which he said could net the government as much as 100 billion baht (RM13 billion) in annual revenues.

Although without a formal role in government, the former prime minister, 75, is one of the most influential figures in Thai politics and is widely seen as a power centre behind the premiership of his 38-year-old daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

Speaking at an event in Bangkok late on Monday, just hours after the Thai Cabinet

approved a draft law to legalise casinos, Thaksin said the government was coming up with ways to control access to, and tax revenue from, online gambling.

"Online gambling has two to four million Thai users with savings of 300 billion baht and gains and losses of about 500 billion per year," said Thaksin.

"If we can tax 20% ... we would get more than 100 billion per year," he said.

While most forms of gambling are illegal in Thailand, it is hugely popular and successive governments led or backed by Thaksin have pushed to legalise it to create jobs and boost tourism, arguing huge sums of money are being lost that can be turned into state revenue.

The government was working on an identification system to control access to online gaming that would prevent underage

use and allow the monitoring of gambling addicts, Thaksin said.

"We would have like a passport to control who can play," he said, without elaborating.

Thaksin also made a push for Thailand's financial institutions to be more open to cryptocurrency, citing Donald Trump's pro-crypto stance, including his appointment of crypto deregulation advocate Paul Atkins as the head of the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

He said the Thai SEC need to have more digital approach, like "allowing trade of stablecoin, or coin that are backed by assets".

The Thai government is already looking to allow using crypto as a form of payment, with the resort island of Phuket a possible site for a pilot, he said.

"There will be no risk, it is just another currency in the world," Thaksin said. – Reuters

Confluence of holy rivers draws ascetics

PRAYAGRAJ: Scores of Hindu ascetics charged into the water of holy rivers in northern India yesterday during the first "royal bath" of the Maha Kumbh Mela, or Great Pitcher Festival.

The "royal bath" is a key part of the event, held every 12 years in the city of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, significant because Hindus believe it confers salvation from the cycle of birth and death, in addition to absolution of sins.

The dip by the ascetics signals the start of the ritual, watched by thousands of devotees.

Earlier, to chants and the beat of drums, the ascetics had moved in procession towards the water, standing atop decorated trucks, riding horses or walking.

Nearly 15 million people had taken a ritual dip at the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical, invisible Saraswati when the festival, expected to attract more than 400 million people, began on Monday.

The Kumbh originates in a Hindu belief that four drops of the nectar of immortality fell to earth, one in Prayagraj, during a battle between the god Vishnu, known as the Preserver, and demons to possess a golden pitcher holding the elixir.

More than 150,000 tents have been set up to accommodate visitors and 40,000 police officers deployed to ensure the event runs smoothly.

The budget for the festival is estimated to be US\$800 million (RM3.6 billion). – Reuters



Hindus taking a dip at the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers. – AFP/PIA

Huge vessel scares fishermen at disputed shoal

MANILA: The Philippines accused China yesterday of intimidating its fishermen at a disputed shoal, and normalising an "illegal presence", after Beijing sent its largest coast guard vessel into Manila's maritime zone.

The move comes against the backdrop of rising tension between the Philippines, a US treaty ally, and Beijing during the past two years, stemming from their overlapping claims in the busy waterway of the South China Sea.

The Philippines has protested this month against the entry of Chinese vessels in its 370km exclusive economic zone (EEZ), including the 165m-long ship 5901, last spotted 143km off the western province of Zambales.

Jonathan Malaya, a spokesperson for the Philippines' National Security Council, reiterated a call for Beijing to withdraw from Manila's waters the "monster ship" he said was

deployed to intimidate its fishermen around Scarborough Shoal.

"We were surprised about the increasing aggression being showed by the People's Republic of China in deploying the monster ship," Malaya told a press conference.

"It is an escalation and provocative," Malaya said, calling the presence of the vessel "illegal" and "unacceptable".

"It is also a clear attempt to intimidate our fishermen and deprive them of their legitimate livelihood."

China's embassy in Manila said the shoal, which it calls *Huangyan Dao*, is China's territory, and its actions are in "full accordance with the law".

"It is fully justified," the embassy said in a statement.

Since China seized the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 after a standoff with the Philippines, its

coast guard ships have maintained a constant presence to patrol the area.

But China's recent actions have become more concerning because its coast guard vessels moved closer to the Philippine coast, Malaya said.

The Philippine coast guard said it had sent two of its largest vessels to drive away the ship whose presence, its spokesperson said, aimed to normalise China's "illegal deployment" of coast guard vessels in Manila's EEZ.

China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, a strategic shipping conduit for about US\$3 trillion (RM13.5 trillion) of annual commerce, overlap with the EEZs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

In 2016, an international tribunal ruled China's claims to large swathes of the disputed waterway had no basis. – Reuters

Russian PM visits Hanoi to deepen ties

HANOI: Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin arrived in Vietnam yesterday for a two-day visit aimed at deepening ties between the two long-standing allies.

The trip comes half a year after President Vladimir Putin travelled to Hanoi, where Vietnam's then-president To Lam indicated a desire to boost defence cooperation with Moscow, its main arms supplier for decades.

Mishustin was scheduled to meet Lam – now Communist Party general secretary and the country's top leader – as well as Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

They are expected to discuss "important cooperation projects in the fields of energy and industry ... creating momentum to promote relations between Vietnam and Russia," the Vietnamese government's official newspaper said yesterday.

On Monday Alexey Likhachev, general director of Russia's nuclear giant Rosatom, was in Hanoi, where he said he was ready to help Vietnam build nuclear power plants, according to the Vietnamese government.

Vietnam wants to restart nuclear power plans to meet its rapidly expanding energy needs.

Russia has been Vietnam's main arms supplier for decades, accounting for more than 80% of imports between 1995 and 2023, but orders have dropped off in recent years as international sanctions related to the Ukraine conflict have intensified.

No defence deals were announced during Putin's visit in June, but the two sides said in a joint statement that their defence and security cooperation was "not directed against any third country" and contributed to "peace, stability and sustainable development" in the region.

Putin told reporters during the visit, which came as Western powers stepped up sanctions aimed at constraining Russia's war in Ukraine, that both sides had "identical or very close" positions on key international issues.

The two nations have been close allies since the days of the Cold War. – AFP

Japan hosts Chinese military delegation

TOKYO: Japan said yesterday a Chinese military delegation was on a rare exchange visit as the Asian neighbours attempt to thaw frosty ties ahead of Donald Trump's return as US president.

Members of the Eastern Theatre Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army were visiting their Japanese counterparts and senior Japanese defence officials from Monday through Friday, Japan's top government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi said.

The trip was organised after the Japanese and Chinese defence ministers met in November in Laos on the sidelines of a regional defence gathering, where they agreed to increase exchanges among troops, Hayashi said.

"For the first time in five years, this resumes exchanges among troops," he told a regular press briefing.

"The promotion of mutual understanding and trust through frank communication at commanders' level will contribute to the building of constructive and stable relations between Japan and China.

"We think this visit contributes to the peace and stability of the region," Hayashi said.

The PLA Eastern Theatre Command echoed the view.

"This visit will help enhance understanding and mutual trust between the two sides, and promote defence exchanges between China and Japan," it said in a statement.

Japan and China have been trying to patch up relations strained by territorial and historical disputes as well as other issues.

To ease tensions, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visited his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in December.

Japanese ruling lawmakers were also visiting China this week for meetings with senior Communist Party officials. – AFP



Strong winds threaten to fuel monstrous wildfires

Residents sue water department over dry reservoir

LOS ANGELES: Firefighters here braced for high winds yesterday, gusts that could fuel two monstrous wildfires that have already levelled entire neighbourhoods, killed at least two dozen people and burned an area the size of Washington DC.

A red flag warning was in effect on Monday as dry, dangerous Santa Ana winds picked up speed. Gusts could hit 120kph, said David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Centre.

More than 8,500 firefighters attacked the fires from the air and on the ground, preventing the conflagrations at either end of Los Angeles from spreading.

"This setup is about as bad as it gets. We are not in the clear," said Los Angeles City Fire Chief Kristin Crowley.

Officials said California state authorities were pre-positioning firefighting crews in Los Angeles and nearby counties that were also under elevated fire danger.

Highlighting the risks, a new small but fast moving fire erupted in scrubland in the bed of the Santa Clara River in Ventura County, northwest of Los Angeles. Ground crews and several helicopters were working to contain what had been dubbed the Auto Fire, which was burning near a golf course.

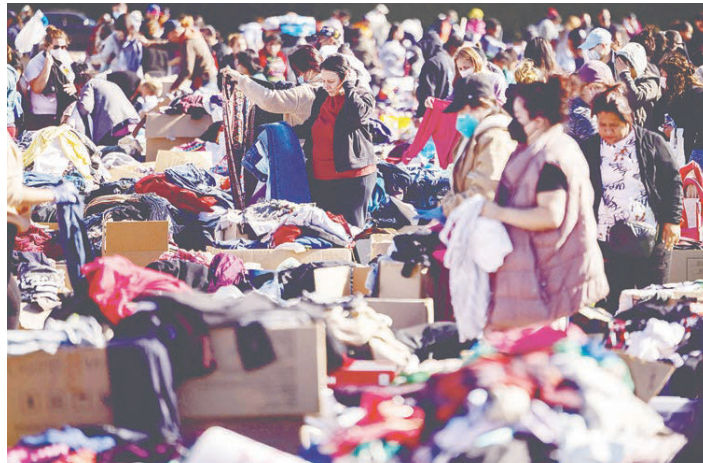
The two main wildfires erupted last week, fuelled by hurricane force winds bringing dry air from inland deserts.

At least 24 people have died in the fires, according to the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner.

The wildfires have destroyed or damaged more than 12,000 structures, turning entire neighbourhoods into smouldering ash and piles of rubble.

As of Monday, more than 92,000 people in Los Angeles County were under evacuation orders – down from 150,000 – while a further 89,000 faced evacuation warnings.

The Palisades Fire, which wiped out upscale communities on the western flank of Los Angeles, burned 96sq km and was 14%



Evacuees picking clothes at a donation centre in Santa Anita Park in Arcadia. – AFP/IC

contained, a figure representing the percentage of the fire perimeter that firefighters have under control.

The Eaton Fire in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains east of the city consumed another 57sq km and was 33% contained, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) reported.

A third fire of 3.2sq km north of town was 95% contained and three other fires in the county have been fully brought under control in recent days.

The Eaton Fire damaged the Altadena home of Lorraine Bryan, 63, and destroyed two other dwellings on her property. She said she worries about getting additional doses of insulin that she needs to manage her diabetes.

Deputies are finding human remains every day as they search through burned out parts of Altadena, where the Eaton Fire first ignited, said Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna.

"It is a very grim task," Luna said, adding that he expected the confirmed death toll to rise.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has said the firestorm could rank as the most devastating

natural disaster in US history. It is already the costliest wildfire in terms of insured losses.

Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman on Monday said 10 people have been arrested in connection with the fires. Nine people were arrested for residential burglaries of fire-stricken areas. One other person was arrested for arson, for allegedly attempting to set a tree on fire in the city of Azusa, about 32km northeast of downtown Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was sued on Monday on claims that it failed to properly manage water supplies critical to fighting the deadly Palisades Fire, a court filing showed. Residents who sued allege the department should have maintained water in a nearby reservoir, which was dry at the time the fire first erupted last Tuesday.

With thousands of homeowners facing costly rebuilding, large banks including JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America have announced plans to ease mortgage repayment conditions for those affected. Insurers are looking at historic losses. – Reuters

BRIEFS

FLIGHT TRAINER FIGHTS EXTRADITION TO U.S.

SYDNEY: An ex-US Marine pilot accused of illegally training China's military has launched an 11th hour bid to fight his extradition from Australia to the United States. Daniel Edmund Duggan was arrested in Australia in October 2022 at the request of the US government, which accuses him of breaking arms control laws. It alleges he illegally trained Chinese military pilots between 2010 and 2012, after he left the Marines. Duggan has denied the charges. His lawyers launched a legal appeal on Monday in Australia's Federal Court to appeal his extradition, his wife Saffrine said in a statement. – AFP

MYSTERY BALLS CLOSE NINE SYDNEY BEACHES

SYDNEY: Authorities closed nine Sydney beaches yesterday after mysterious white and grey balls washed up along the coast. Beaches closed until further notice included tourist hotspots Manly and Dee Why. "So far, most samples identified are marble-sized with a few larger in size," the city's Northern Beaches Council said. The local government said it was alerted to the debris by the Environment Protection Authority, and was helping the state agency to collect test samples. "The council is organising the safe removal of the matter and is inspecting other beaches," it said. – AFP

Yoon no-show at impeachment trial

SEOUL: South Korea's Constitutional Court opened the impeachment trial of President Yoon Suk Yeol yesterday over his failed martial law bid, but quickly adjourned the first hearing after the suspended leader did not show up.

Yoon's Dec 3 power grab plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades, after he directed soldiers to storm parliament in an unsuccessful attempt to stop lawmakers voting down his suspension of civilian rule.

He was impeached soon after and suspended from duty, but has gone to ground in his residence since, refusing summonses from investigators probing him on insurrection charges and using his presidential security team to resist arrest.

The trial's first of five hearings began at 2pm (1pm in Malaysia) but lasted just minutes with Yoon not in attendance, said the court spokesperson.

Although his failure to attend, which his team have blamed on purported safety concerns, forced a procedural adjournment, the hearings will continue without Yoon, with the next set for tomorrow.

Additional hearings are already scheduled for Jan 21, Jan 23 and Feb 4.

The court's eight judges will decide mainly two issues, whether Yoon's martial law declaration was unconstitutional and whether it was illegal – either of which could prove grounds to uphold his impeachment.

Six of the eight judges must vote in favour of Yoon's impeachment for him to be removed from office.

The National Assembly legal team told reporters in front of the court before the trial began yesterday that there were "overwhelming reasons for the immediate dismissal" of Yoon.

The court has up to 180 days from Dec 14, when it received the case, to make its ruling. – AFP

Election saved Trump from conviction: Report

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump would have been convicted for his alleged effort to overturn the 2020 election result if he had not been elected four years later, said a report by then special counsel Jack Smith released yesterday.

The US Department of Justice's "view that the Constitution prohibits the continued indictment and prosecution of a president is categorical and does not turn on the gravity of the crimes charged, the strength of the government's proof, or the merits of the prosecution, which the Office stands fully behind," the report said.

"Indeed, but for Mr Trump's election and imminent return to the presidency, the (Special Counsel's) Office assessed that the admissible evidence was sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction at trial."

Trump, who returns to the White House on Jan 20, had been accused of conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding – the session of Congress called to certify President Joe Biden's election win but which was attacked on Jan 6, 2021 by a mob.

Smith, who was special counsel appointed to investigate Trump, dropped the federal criminal case against the incoming leader after he won November's presidential election.

Soon after the report's overnight release, Trump hit back on his Truth Social platform, calling Smith "deranged", and adding that he "was unable to successfully prosecute the political opponent of his boss."

Trump's attorneys had earlier urged US Attorney-General Merrick Garland not to release the report, calling the plan to release it "unlawful, undertaken in bad faith, and contrary to public interest."

Smith's report details Trump's alleged efforts to persuade state-level Republican lawmakers and leaders to "change the results" of the 2020 election.

"Mr Trump contacted state legislators and executives, pressured them with false claims of election fraud in their states, and urged them to take action to ignore the vote counts and change the results," according to the report released by the Department of Justice.

"Significantly, he made election claims only

to state legislators and executives who shared his political affiliation and were his political supporters, and only in states that he had lost."

In addition, the report alleges Trump and co-conspirators planned to organise individuals who would have served as his electors, if he had won the popular vote, in seven states where he lost – Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – "and cause them to sign and send to Washington false certifications claiming to be legitimate electors."

"They used the fraudulent certificates to try to obstruct the congressional certification proceeding," the report said.

The special counsel office concluded that "Trump's conduct violated several federal criminal statutes and that the admissible evidence would be sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction."

Judge Aileen Cannon dismissed a separate case against Trump last year but charges are still pending against two of his former co-defendants.

Smith left the justice department last week, days after submitting his final report. – AFP



Displaced Palestinians filling up water containers in Khan Younis. — AFP/IC

TEL AVIV: Key mediator Qatar said negotiations for a Gaza truce and hostage release deal were in their "final stages" yesterday, adding that it was hopeful an agreement could be reached "very soon".

Qatar, Egypt and the United States have stepped up efforts to broker a ceasefire to enable the release of hostages held in Gaza since Oct 7, 2023.

On Monday, US President Joe Biden said a deal was "on the brink" of being finalised, just days before the inauguration of his successor, Donald Trump.

Yesterday, Qatar Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said negotiations were in their "final stages".

"We do believe that we are at the final stages ... certainly we are hopeful that this would lead very soon to an agreement," Ansari said, adding "until there is an announcement ... we shouldn't be over-excited about what's happening right now".

"We have reached a point where the major issues that were preventing a deal from happening were addressed," he told a news conference.

Ninety-four hostages are still held in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel's military offensive in Gaza has killed 46,645 people.

Gaza truce talks in 'final stages': Qatar

➤ Major stumbling issues addressed

A source briefed on the Doha negotiations said earlier the heads of Israel's intelligence agencies, the Middle East envoys for the incoming and outgoing US administrations and Qatar's prime minister had been due at the talks.

"Mediators will hold separate talks with Hamas," the source said.

Qatar said later the talks were being held at the "highest level".

Sources close to the talks and Israeli media said the first phase of a deal would see 33 Israeli hostages released, while two Palestinian sources close to Hamas said Israel would release about 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange.

An Israeli government official

said that "several hundred terrorists will be released" as part of the first phase of the deal.

Israeli media also reported yesterday that under the proposed deal, Israel would be allowed to maintain a buffer zone inside Gaza during the implementation of the first phase.

Successive rounds of negotiations had failed to end the deadliest war in Gaza's history.

On Monday, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said a truce deal could be finalised this week.

"I'm not making a promise or prediction, but it is there for the taking and we are going to work to make it happen," he said.

Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, however, warned on Monday he would oppose any deal that stopped the war.

"The proposed agreement is a catastrophe for Israel's national

security," Smotrich said on X.

An outspoken member of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition, Smotrich has repeatedly opposed halting the war in Gaza.

His comments came amid rising calls by Israelis, particularly families of hostages held in Gaza, to reach an accord that would bring their loved ones home.

Among the key sticking points in the talks have been disagreements over the permanence of any ceasefire and the scale of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian territory.

Other points of contention include the return of displaced Gazans to their homes, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Palestinian territory and the reopening of border crossings.

Netanyahu has firmly rejected a full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. — AFP

Ukraine hits key Russian sites, sparks fires

MOSCOW: Ukraine launched dozens of drones at Russia yesterday, sparking fires at a gas storage site and damaging industrial facilities far from the frontline.

The barrage forced schools in the southwestern Saratov region to close, while at least nine airports in central and western Russia temporarily halted traffic.

The head of Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation, Andriy Kovalenko, said five Russian cities had been targeted.

Moscow and Kyiv have upped strikes on one another ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration next week, as both sides seek to gain the upper hand in potential negotiations to settle the conflict.

In the energy-rich region of Tatarstan, a drone hit a gas storage tank, sending flames and thick smoke billowing towards the sky near the city of Kazan.

Tatarstan local media said a liquefied gas storage base was hit.

In the Saratov region, about 500km southwest of Kazan, a "massive drone attack" damaged two industrial sites.

Firefighters had only the day before managed to put out a blaze at an oil depot in the city of Engels, which was hit by a Ukrainian drone strike on Jan 8.

Ukraine regularly hits military and energy sites in Russia, part of what it calls "fair" retaliation for Russian strikes on its territory since Moscow sent troops into its neighbour in February 2022. — AFP

BRIEFS

POLICE MINISTER THREATENS TO QUIT

TEL AVIV: Israeli Police Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir threatened to quit Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government if he agrees to a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal. Ben-Gvir urged Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to join him in a last-ditch attempt to prevent a ceasefire deal, which he described as a dangerous capitulation to Hamas. "This move is our only chance to prevent (the deal's) execution, and prevent Israel's surrender to Hamas, after more than a year of bloody war, in which more than 400 IDF (Israel Defence Forces) soldiers fell in the Gaza Strip." — Reuters

U.S. DESTABILISING CAUCASUS: KREMLIN

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said yesterday that Russia values its relations with Armenia and that the United States, which is set to sign a strategic partnership agreement with Armenia, had never played a stabilising role in the region. An ex-Soviet republic, Armenia has been an ally of Russia but in recent years the country has forged closer ties with the West. "The United States is trying to pull new countries into its wake," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. Washington, he said, "has never played a stabilising role in the South Caucasus — one could even say the opposite". — Reuters

Mechanical failure led to Leicester helicopter crash

LONDON: Mechanical failure caused a helicopter flying the owner of Leicester football club to crash, the opening day of an inquest was told on Monday.

Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha and four others died when the Thai billionaire's personal helicopter crashed shortly after taking off from the Premier League team's King Power Stadium following a match in October 2018.

An inquest at Leicester City Hall is also examining the deaths of the aircraft's pilot, Eric Swaffer, his partner Izabela Lechowicz, and passengers Nusara Suknamai and Kaveporn Punpare.

Mark Jarvis, the principal inspector at Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch, told the inquest a duplex bearing on the tail rotor became "seized and locked" before the helicopter crashed.

"Our conclusion was that the pilot had done everything in his power to try to avoid and correct the situation.

"The helicopter was out of control. The only control the pilot had was on the rate of descent of the helicopter during extremely disorientating conditions," said Jarvis.

"The pilot took quick action and took the only actions he could do and continued to try and take those actions. The pilot did everything

possibly expected of him."

In a tribute read to the court by the lawyer for Srivaddhanaprabha's family, he was described as "a good man with a good heart".

The family said: "The pain his death caused is immeasurable."

The family statement also paid tribute to his role in reviving Leicester's fortunes and bankrolling their shock Premier League title triumph in 2016 after the club were 5,000/1 rank outsiders to be crowned champions at the start of that season.

Catherine Mason, the coroner presiding over the hearing, had told the jury earlier on Monday that the role of an inquest in English law is

simply to determine the facts over how someone died, rather than make rulings on individual guilt or innocence.

"Nobody is on trial here," she said. "An inquest does not decide matters of criminal or civil liability," said Mason, who also said the hearing was expected to last for between two and three weeks.

The family of Srivaddhanaprabha announced last week they had launched a £2.15 billion (RM11.8 billion) legal action against the manufacturers of the helicopter, in what is reported to be the largest fatal accident claim in English history. — AFP

COMMENT by Dr Cherish How

Importance of integrity and politeness in security

THE security industry, often perceived as merely a protective force, plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony within communities.

However, the success of security personnel goes beyond their ability to enforce rules or respond to threats. It also hinges on the qualities of integrity and politeness, which foster trust and enable effective communication in conflict resolution.

A recent personal experience underscored the importance of these qualities, which are not always present in the industry.

A few months ago, I had an unpleasant encounter with security personnel at my apartment complex. A friend visiting me for the first time was mistakenly given a drop-off pass instead of a visitor parking pass by the security guard.

Unaware of the mistake, she parked her car, only to find it clamped when she returned. When she tried to explain the situation, the guards were dismissive, with one insisting, "You said drop-off!" while another mocked her, saying, "Do you know how to read simple English? The pass says drop-off!"

Not only were the guards' comments impolite but they also reflected a lack of empathy, disregarding the possibility that visitors may not be familiar with the language or even be illiterate.

In trying to resolve the issue, we requested the CCTV footage to understand what had happened. However, our request was denied, and the next day, we were told the footage lacked audio, making it impossible to verify the conversation.

This experience left us questioning whether the incident was a genuine mistake or an attempt to take advantage of the situation.

This situation highlighted the crucial role of politeness and integrity,

which, when missing, can escalate minor misunderstandings into bigger issues.

This incident also brings to mind a troubling case that made headlines last year. In early November, two local security guards were arrested for their alleged involvement in the disappearance of a bag containing over RM1 million.

This incident cast a shadow on the integrity of security professionals and raised questions about the ethical standards within the industry.

It served as a stark reminder that security guards, who are often trusted to protect and safeguard valuables, must adhere to the highest standards of honesty and professionalism.

However, it would be unfair to paint all security personnel with the same brush. Not every security guard embodies a lack of integrity or professionalism.

A prime example of this occurred recently when a Nepali security guard found a suitcase containing a substantial sum of money. Without hesitation, he handed the suitcase over to the authorities, explaining that the money never crossed his mind as he was simply fulfilling his duty.

His act of honesty and professionalism reflected the integrity that all security guards should strive to uphold. Such acts of moral fortitude not only demonstrate professionalism but also inspire confidence in the security industry as a whole.

Integrity and politeness, when combined, can significantly elevate the security industry. These qualities are not merely optional or supplementary, they are fundamental to the role of a security guard.

Security guards are often the first point of contact in public spaces, and their interactions with individuals can set the tone for how people perceive safety and order in a given

environment. It is, therefore, essential that they exhibit respect, professionalism and understanding in their daily work.

Training in technical skills, such as conflict resolution and legal procedures, is important but these competencies must be complemented by a genuine commitment to integrity and politeness.

A security guard who treats others with respect and fairness not only fosters a safer environment but also builds trust within the community. It is crucial that the industry recognises these qualities as central to its mission, not just as auxiliary elements of an organisation's success.

When integrity and politeness are embedded within the security profession, the industry's reputation improves, and its value to the community is greatly enhanced.

A security guard's ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts with empathy and uphold ethical standards will ultimately contribute to a more harmonious and respectful society. In turn, this will strengthen the public's trust in security services and ensure that their role extends far beyond that of rule enforcers, positioning them as pillars of community stability.

Ultimately, the security industry must acknowledge that its role goes beyond enforcing rules and regulations. By making integrity and politeness core components of their training and practice, security personnel can contribute to a more respectful and harmonious environment, proving that these qualities are not merely auxiliary but essential to the success of the industry.

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LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Need for dedicated, free, 24-hour child helpline

DEDICATED child helplines are invaluable, providing children with a safe, non-judgemental space to speak with trained counsellors about their concerns and a wide range of issues.

Critically, child helplines offer a lifeline to abused children seeking help and rescue. Trained call counsellors can also offer guidance on a range of issues, including family problems, peer relationships and mental health. In addition, these helplines collect valuable data that can inform policy and improve practices.

The 15999 Childline, launched in 2010 by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry with support from the Childline Foundation Malaysia, was the country's first free, 24-hour helpline for children. Staffed by trained professionals, it was originally known as the Talian Nur hotline.

In 2015, the Talian Nur hotline was expanded and rebranded as Talian Kasih, broadening its scope to include issues such as abuse, domestic violence, juvenile problems, poverty, support for single mothers, individuals with disabilities, welfare assistance and counselling services.

A notable feature of the current Talian Kasih is its WhatsApp number, which allows individuals who are deaf to express their concerns. However, while Talian Kasih serves an important role, its broad scope may dilute the support available for children. A non-dedicated helpline leads to a higher call-volume, staff requiring training and potentially less effective support for children.

Suhakam and the Child Rights Coalition Malaysia have previously called for the restoration of the Talian Nur child helpline to ensure children's safety. In response to the lack of a dedicated child helpline,

other civil society organisations, such as Buddy Bear Childline, have launched their own helplines for children and young people.

To improve the quality of civil service helplines, we should establish two separate lines: one for general welfare and adult issues, and another dedicated solely to children. The child and teenage helpline should be staffed by trained professionals with experience in addressing psychosocial issues, including child abuse.

The helpline should have multilingual staff to serve all regions. It must be child and teenager-friendly, with the capacity to respond swiftly to urgent situations involving violence. Collaboration between the Welfare Department and civil society organisations, under the Child Act 2001, would ensure effective support nationwide.

The dedicated, free, 24-hour child helpline must be widely advertised across all media and educational institutions to ensure children are aware of the service.

Children, especially boys, may take time to express serious concerns, often calling multiple times before speaking up. "Drop calls" should not be dismissed as pranks but treated with seriousness.

A dedicated helpline for children should undergo regular, transparent audits by an external team to assess service quality, responsiveness, staff capability, children's awareness and feedback from users.

Datuk Dr Amar-Singh HSS
Consultant Paediatrician
Child-Disability Activist
Datin PH Wong
Childline Foundation
Co-Secretariat Child Rights Coalition Malaysia

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Are we ready to go cashless?

COMMENT

By Muiz Zulkifli, Izzul Islam and Dr Velan Kunjumarar

AS we move into a new year, the world continues its shift towards a cashless society, a trend that is not new. However, today's technological advancements offer a fresh perspective on the global and national implications of this change.

The latest innovation in cashless technology, such as palm scanning developed by companies like Tencent in China and Amazon in the United States, demonstrates how seamless transactions can be completed through biometric palm scans.

With the rapid growth of this technology, Malaysia is not far behind in exploring how its implementation could transform the landscape of financial digitalisation. Given the growing number of digital transactions across the country, Malaysia is no stranger to adopting new technologies, thanks to the adaptable lifestyle of its people.

According to Statista, the transaction value in Malaysia's digital payment segment is projected to reach US\$42.02 billion (RM188 billion) by 2028, reflecting a growth rate of 10.92% between 2024 and 2028.

However, the question is whether Malaysia is ready to apply such innovations in terms of technological and social development or is simply pursuing a status of progress.

Examining Malaysia's current cashless payment landscape, digital payments have shown an increase in popularity with the existence of various mobile wallet payment mediums, such as Touch 'n Go eWallet, MAE, Boost and many more.

According to the Adyen Index report in October 2024, 63% of Malaysians actively use digital payment facilities. Mobile e-wallets are being developed not only by banking and financial institutions but also by state governments, such as Sarawak, which has taken the initiative to develop mobile wallets through S



Malaysia's journey towards cashless development holds great promise, fuelled by community adaptation and trust in financial institutions, locally and globally. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Pay Global to encourage the use of digital payments among its people.

Despite the initiatives carried out by various parties, there are still constraints and obstacles in adopting digital payments, especially for rural communities and small business owners.

According to the National Scam Response Centre data report, victims of fraud in Malaysia suffered losses of RM371 million from October 2022 to August 2024. Some businesses still prefer cash payments because they are often unfamiliar with cashless transactions and lack awareness of the benefits these transactions offer.

Similarly, some urban businesses remain hesitant to adopt digital payments due to concerns about fraud, limited internet connectivity and a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of digital payment methods.

Ongoing concerns about digital fraud are also widening the social and economic gap between

urban and rural communities. As a result, promoting digital literacy is essential to educating and empowering the community.

The introduction of new technology, such as palm detection, has the potential to benefit Malaysia. From a security and privacy perspective, this method can help reduce theft and fraud while increasing trust and confidence among users, particularly in rural areas.

It is important to emphasise that digital literacy requires greater attention. The implementation of such technology naturally raises concerns about the privacy of individuals' biometric data.

Relevant stakeholders must be aware of several factors that could pose obstacles to the development of these technologies, such as privacy risks, infrastructure costs and social inequality.

In the current social context, rural residents

and the elderly are at risk of being left behind due to limited access to knowledge and infrastructure, which can deepen the digital divide.

Public trust plays a crucial role in shaping the generation that adopts digital finance. It is important to recognise the role of the government and financial institutions in addressing this issue.

Bank Negara Malaysia and local banks must drive parallel policies to ensure data protection and equitable access to the community.

Collaboration with technology companies to conduct phased pilot programmes can enhance transparency.

The Madani government, through Budget 2025, has demonstrated its commitment to digitalisation by allocating RM85 million to combat cybercrime, especially fraud and deception.

In addition, the government has also allocated a budget of RM10.5 million as one of the digitalisation and automation initiatives to bridge the digital gap for rural communities.

In conclusion, Malaysia's journey towards cashless development holds great promise, fuelled by community adaptation and trust in financial institutions, locally and globally.

Digital literacy should begin in schools while the adoption of new technologies like palm scanning will depend on addressing concerns around privacy, accessibility and building user trust.

A holistic approach involving the government, businesses and society can bridge the gap, ensuring technology benefits all sectors. With collective effort, Malaysia has the potential to lead the Asean region in biometric payments. It is hoped that the initiatives introduced through Budget 2025 will be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Muiz Zulkifli, Izzul Islam and Dr Velan Kunjumarar are from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

COMMENT

By Eric S. Margolis

Hail the new king

THIS exciting week, the man who would be king of everything made his first pronouncements.

Greenland should be purchased by the United States. Canada should sell itself to the US. The Gulf of Mexico should be renamed "Gulf of America".

Donald Trump has started a scramble of imperial rebranding. France wants the return of what was called the Louisiana Purchase.

"We sold it too cheap in 1803 to the United States for only US\$15 million (RM67.6 million) because we bankrupted ourselves financing the American Revolution against the perfidious Brits. We want it back – with interest. We also want parts of Quebec seized by the US. *Vive la France!*"

Not to be outdone, Spain and Mexico have joined in a class action suit to demand that the United States hand back the parts of northern Mexico and California it grabbed in the 1840s.

Mexico was forced to give up over 55% of its land to the Americans. The late French nationalist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen whom I interviewed in the 1980s told me: "You Americans stole California from Mexico. Now they are taking it back through immigration". *A bon mot*, as the French would say.

Spain has laid claims to California,

which it once ruled. Spain also wants back the Philippines and Cuba. Holland wants back Manhattan and the upper Hudson Valley. I attended a fine Dutch school in New York City founded in 1635.

Germany wants back its former colonies of Samoa and the Marshall Islands. Russia demands China return the great naval base at Port Arthur (Lushan). Beijing also wants Moscow to return vast regions of Siberia, occupied in the 19th century when China was weak.

India, Pakistan and China all have large counterclaims in the Karakoram and Himalayas. Trump could resolve these festering issues among nuclear-armed nations once he figures out where they are.

As for darkest Africa, don't even ask. Trump has called these places "shit holes" and he is not far off the mark.

Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is busy trying to turn little Albania into another St Tropez. There is also talk he may be planning the same fate for the Gaza Strip, once he figures out what to do with its inhabitants, almost 50,000 of whom have been killed and another 100,000 wounded by US weapons donated by the confused old dotard, Joe Biden.

It would be nice not to have

Israel's ultra-right hawks and their Wall Street money men running the US presidency and Congress.

What we need is some re-blooded real estate guys. They know how to solve just about any problem by building condominiums and casinos. They also know how to make piles of debt vanish into thin air. And to transform underused real estate, like Greenland, into useful, income-producing investments.

Historic relics like the Panama and Suez canals need to be renamed "Trumpways" and put under the control of the New York Port Authority.

Britain, now run by losers and pervers, in Trump's view, would make a dandy candidate for inclusion as the 51st state with Canada or a new 52nd state.

True, most Canadians do not want to be part of the US but offer them a tax cut of 50% and send in the New York City police department, which is larger than the Canadian Army, and their tune will change.

Besides, Trump knows a lot about Canada from watching Fox TV. Canada will learn to love King Donald.

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LETTERS

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Offer health-focused programmes for seniors

AS Malaysia's senior population grows, it is essential to provide accessible resources and programmes in public facilities that promote daily physical activity, mental stimulation and social engagement.

Research highlights the benefits of exercise, including improved bone density, muscle preservation, weight loss, enhanced balance and flexibility, increased confidence and mental clarity. Regular physical activity can also help prevent dementia and other health issues. It also boosts the overall immune system.

Getting adequate sleep, taking vitamins and consuming diet-rich food are crucial for seniors. Public parks and facilities should be well-maintained to prevent hazards, with proper lighting and occasional police patrols for security.

Senior exercise groups in Taman Awam regularly practice *Tai Chi*, *Chi Kong*, stretching and brisk walking, followed by tea at a *warung*. Social interaction is also key to seniors' well-being. Some countries have senior centres offering daily activities like games,

music, exercise classes, arts and crafts and seminars.

A programme to upskill and reskill senior professionals would benefit seniors and the community, tapping into a wealth of experience and creating a reliable, hardworking workforce.

Age-friendly employment policies, flexible working and retirement options can promote lifelong learning and foster a multigenerational workforce.

The Human Resources Ministry should collaborate with the government and private sector to encourage the recruitment of senior workers.

Commercial businesses in Malaysia, like Kedai Kopi Raju, already offer benefits to seniors, such as free breakfasts and entertainment. This fosters community engagement and appreciation.

As Malaysia's senior population grows, it is important for communities to work together to ensure seniors have healthy, happy and productive golden years.

C. Sathasivam Sitheravellu
Seremban

Commercial real estate poised for resilient 2025

➤ Knight Frank Malaysia says ESG principles increasingly shaping investment strategies

KUALA LUMPUR: Knight Frank Malaysia released the Malaysia Commercial Real Estate Investment Sentiment Survey (CREISS) 2025, shedding light on pivotal trends and opportunities in the nation's commercial real estate market.

Based on insights gathered from industry leaders and stakeholders, the report provides a comprehensive outlook for 2025, highlighting resilience, growth potential, and the evolving role of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) considerations.

As Malaysia's commercial property landscape evolves, data centres and industrial/logistics emerge as the most resilient and promising sectors for 2025.

These sectors are buoyed by increasing demand for cloud computing, e-commerce growth, and Malaysia's position as a regional trade hub.

The survey predicts these sub-sectors will outperform, with notable contributions from Johor's burgeoning data centre developments and the continued expansion of Klang Valley's industrial landscape.

A brighter outlook is projected for the retail and hospitality sub-sectors, bolstered by rising consumer spending and tourism recovery.

In 2024, Malaysia welcomed 22.5 million tourists as of November – a clear indication of growth momentum for 2025. Industry players foresee improved rental and occupancy rates in these sectors, underscoring their recovery potential.

Despite the central bank maintaining the OPR at 3.00% throughout 2024, key challenges persisted, including rising interest rates, inflationary pressures, financing difficulties,

and increasing construction costs driven by geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions.

Rising building vacancy rates due to hybrid work trends and a supply-demand gap, along with fiscal challenges, further strained the commercial real estate landscape.

The retail sector also faced declining sales due to brand boycotts, while risks anticipated for 2025, such as rising costs, tenant demand shifts, and regulatory changes, are expected to exacerbate concerns.



In 2024, 48% of respondents expanded their portfolios in the industrial/logistics sector, driven by government policies like New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP 2030) and National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), while 39% maintained theirs.

Rail developments like MRT and LRT spurred transit-oriented growth, with 44% expanding portfolios. In hospitality and office sectors, most maintained portfolios (77% and 57%), though 27% downsized office assets. Retail saw mixed activity: 46% maintained, 36% expanded, 11% downsized, and 7% exited, with sales projected to grow 3.9% amid economic resilience and a strong labour market.

CREISS 2025 highlights the growing importance of ESG in real estate, with a focus on energy efficiency, green certifications, and sustainable practices as businesses adapt to regulatory changes and investor demands.

The introduction of carbon tax policies in Budget 2025 emphasises the need for ESG-aligned investments. About 34% of respondents say their organisations have fully embraced ESG, while 66% have partially integrated it, focusing on key issues in their decision-making and reporting.

"ESG is no longer a choice but a necessity for real estate players to remain competitive in a rapidly changing landscape. This sentiment is echoed by 91% of our survey respondents who recognise ESG's critical role in their investment strategies," said Group managing director Keith Ooi.

Meanwhile, research and consultancy

executive director Amy Wong (pic) said: "The findings of the CREISS Report 2025 underline a transformative period for Malaysia's commercial real estate market.

"While challenges persist, the opportunities presented by sectors such as data centres, industrial/logistics, and ESG-aligned developments are significant. These insights will undoubtedly serve as a valuable resource for industry stakeholders."

The report identifies Klang Valley and Johor are set to lead commercial real estate investments in 2025.

Klang Valley remains Malaysia's central business and economic hub, while Johor, strategically located near Singapore, continues to draw interest in data centres and industrial/logistics. The Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) and increasing land acquisitions for data centre projects highlight Johor's growing appeal.

Despite challenges like rising construction costs and a tenant-driven market, 91% of respondents remain optimistic about Malaysia's commercial real estate market in 2025, with 34% planning to increase their investments. Nevertheless, 75% view the FDI outlook as favourable, supported by RM254.7 billion in approved investments during 9M2024, a 10.7% increase from 2023. Malaysia's economy shows positive momentum with 5.2% GDP growth and a 3.3% unemployment rate during the same period.

CREISS 2025 serves as a strategic tool for stakeholders, offering actionable intelligence to navigate opportunities and challenges in the year ahead. Knight Frank Malaysia will soon release the Real Estate Highlights 2H2024 (REH 2H2024) publication, which will offer a comprehensive half-year review of the Malaysian property market to complement the forward-looking insights of CREISS 2025.

"Our CREISS 2025 emphasises our dedication to equipping stakeholders with the insights they need to thrive in a dynamic market. By bridging forward-looking trends with actionable intelligence, we aim to empower informed decision-making and drive sustainable growth in Malaysia's commercial real estate landscape," added Ooi.

CelcomDigi's innovative focus

PETALING JAYA: Following its merger, CelcomDigi Bhd has demonstrated notable progress, especially in its environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives.

According to Kenanga Research, the telecommunications company has embraced a forward-thinking and adaptive ESG strategy to navigate the fast-changing landscape effectively.

"The company has stayed ahead of emerging trends, risks and opportunities by leveraging real-time data and market insights to fine-tune its priorities.

"This approach ensures that its ESG efforts align with current demands and critical challenges, thereby amplifying its positive contributions," the report highlighted.

One of the main strategies post-merger involved enhancing operational efficiency by eliminating redundancies in infrastructure assets and locations.

"This resulted in an 8% reduction in power consumption within its pilot cluster, alongside a 12% boost in overall efficiency. The company is also scaling up its adoption of green energy in alignment with its commitment to the Science-Based Target Initiative (SBTI)," the report noted.

CelcomDigi is one of eight publicly listed Malaysian companies to commit to SBTi, a globally recognised framework for setting corporate net-zero targets.

Unlike traditional offset-based approaches, the SBTi requires clear near-term, long-term, and net-zero emission reduction targets.

Using 2023 as its baseline year, CelcomDigi aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050, with plans to finalise its emission reduction goals by 2025.

As a provider of internet and digital services, CelcomDigi is prioritising trust to drive business sustainability in an increasingly connected world.

The company has introduced a comprehensive four-pronged ESG strategy, with a key focus on promoting inclusive and secure digital access.

"One notable initiative is the formation of a national anti-scam coalition in collaboration with CyberSecurity Malaysia, the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation, and the Royal Malaysia Police.

"Additionally, it has partnered with the Ministry of Education to digitise the Adaptive E-Learning Smart Students Assessment curriculum," the report added.

Beyond sustainability, CelcomDigi emphasises a strong governance framework and a high-performance culture as integral elements of its ESG strategy.

MSPO 2.0 reinforces M'sian leadership in sustainable palm oil production

KUALA LUMPUR: The implementation of Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) Standard MS2530:2022 (MSPO 2.0) reinforces Malaysia's leadership in sustainable palm oil production and strengthens its position in the global markets, said the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC).

The MSPO 2.0 officially comes into effect on Jan 1, 2025, and introduces stricter guidelines for sustainability, traceability, and ethical practices in palm oil production.

MPOC CEO Belvinder Kaur Sron said implementing the enhanced MSPO 2.0 would enable the council to more effectively promote the sustainability and quality of Malaysian palm oil, bolstering its reputation internationally.

"MSPO 2.0 introduces stricter measures to prevent deforestation,

safeguard high conservation value areas, and address key environmental concerns. By incorporating smallholders into sustainable supply chains and improving traceability, the standard creates a more inclusive and resilient framework," she told Bernama recently.

Belvinder noted that these improvements not only enhance sustainability but also market access, as stakeholders increasingly demand products that meet rigorous environmental and social standards.

"MSPO 2.0 aligns seamlessly with international sustainability benchmarks, including the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).

"Its enhanced traceability mechanisms and environmental, social and governance (ESG)-focused principles ensure that Malaysian palm

oil meets the expectations of environmentally conscious consumers and regulators worldwide," she said.

Belvinder said this would not only preserve existing market access but also strengthen Malaysia's ability to expand into new markets, showcasing its commitment to sustainability and quality.

"By ensuring compliance with global standards and addressing consumer concerns around sustainability, MSPO 2.0 strengthens Malaysia's market position and facilitates access to premium markets such as the European Union (EU) and North America," she added.

According to Belvinder, the enhanced certification enables the palm oil industry to make a meaningful contribution to both national and global sustainability objectives by tackling issues such as

deforestation, biodiversity conservation, and labour rights,

"The strengthened standards also support MPOC's efforts to position Malaysian palm oil as a globally recognised sustainable and high-quality product, facilitating greater market access and driving long-term growth for the industry," she said.

Meanwhile, National Association of Smallholders Malaysia (NASH) president Adzmi Hassan is hoping that the implementation of MSPO 2.0 will further strengthen the price of palm oil and provide some premium to the commodity.

He also anticipates that the government, through the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), will continue supporting smallholders in obtaining MSPO 2.0.

"Currently, the government is supporting smallholders for MSPO

1.0, so I hope (the government) through MPOB will continue this initiative," he said.

Adzmi opined that increasing palm oil fresh fruit bunches (FFB) prices to RM1,100-RM1,200 per tonne would motivate smallholders to produce more sustainable palm oil going forward, aligning with the MSPO 2.0 standard.

According to the Ministry of Plantations and Commodities (MPC), approximately 4.94 million hectares or 87.4% of palm oil plantations in Malaysia, and 407 of the 446 palm oil mills have been certified under the MSPO standard as of April 2024.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani, said 151,152 smallholders, covering 542,215 hectares or 66%, have also obtained certification during the same period. – Bernama



Cautious **recovery** for manufacturing

► Malaysian sector faces external risks and volatile commodity prices but domestic resilience, supportive policies and tech advancements will provide solid foundation for growth in 2025, say experts

BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's manufacturing sector is poised for a cautious recovery in 2025 as global trade dynamics and geopolitical shifts influence market trends.

While Malaysia's manufacturing sector faces external risks such as geopolitical tensions and fluctuating commodity prices, experts agree that domestic resilience, supportive policies, and technological advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and semiconductors will provide a solid foundation for growth.

Berjaya Mutual Bhd chief investment officer Datuk Dr Nazri Khan said Malaysia's role as Asean Chair in 2025 would enhance its manufacturing exports and trade competitiveness.

"Regional trade agreements will

allow Malaysia to shape policies, increase total trade, and boost competitiveness, particularly in manufactured goods. However, the global trade landscape is becoming increasingly complex," Nazri told SunBiz.

He projects global semiconductor growth to be between 10% and 15% in 2025.

Supporting this optimism, Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid highlighted a projected 4.7% growth rate for Malaysia's manufacturing sector in 2025, supported by balanced contributions from export-oriented and domestic-oriented activities.

"Sectors like electrical and electronics, particularly semiconductors, are expected to benefit from AI-driven demand for high-powered microchips," he said.

Despite external risks from geopolitical tensions and US policy shifts, he noted that Malaysia's domestic resilience remains a strong pillar for growth. "Policies such as the National Energy Transition Road-map, National Semiconductor Strategy and the 13th Malaysia Plan are expected to bolster the manufacturing ecosystem," he remarked.

Elaborating on AI-driven demand, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai underscored the rise of AI and the surging demand for semiconductors as key drivers to drive significant growth in manufacturing industries, particularly in export-oriented sectors within developing economies.

"This anticipated boom will not only reshape global supply chains but also bolster opportunities in logistics and advanced manufacturing, positioning semiconductor production as a critical growth engine in the year ahead," he said.

Touching on rubber gloves, Malaysian Rubber Glove Manufacturers Association president Oon Kim Hung said the industry is emerging from a challenging period marked by overstocking and plummeting average selling prices (ASP).

"However, the oversupply situation is easing, with ASP showing signs of improvement. Malaysian exports stand to benefit from the US tariff on Chinese goods, though competition from China remains intense. The sector's direction will also hinge on geopolitical developments in the Middle East and the US economic policies under the Trump administration," he said.

Oon predicts demand for rubber gloves will pick up by late February 2025 as US orders gain momentum.

He noted, however, that cost pressures will remain a concern for manufacturers in 2025, driven by fluctuating raw material prices influenced by the recovery of China's economy and the delayed implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

"While the EUDR delay offers temporary relief, its eventual enforcement could push demand for sustainable rubber and impact material costs," he said. Oon said Malaysian manufacturers are well-prepared to manage such challenges, barring unexpected spikes in raw material prices. "The government's incentives for digital transformation and green technologies are also critical to fostering industry growth, provided policies are implemented pre-

dictably and with adequate consultation with stakeholders."

He said labour shortages continue to pose challenges despite the rubber glove industry achieving high levels of automation, with 85% of production lines now automated.

"Manufacturers have reduced workforce needs drastically, from 9.7 workers per million gloves in 2008 to just 2.0 workers now."

The industry's investments in robotics and AI to optimise production processes further, ensuring resilience in the face of workforce constraints, Oon said.

Malaysia University of Science and Technology Prof Emeritus Dr Barjoiy Bardai highlighted the implications of Indonesia joining the BRICS group as a full member, which could divert focus from frameworks such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

"Malaysia must balance its strategies between these global trends while maintaining its leadership in Asean. This dual focus poses a significant challenge in shaping regional trade policies and retaining competitiveness in manufacturing," Barjoiy said.

Malaysia's average CPO price in 2024 9.7% higher than in previous year

KUALA LUMPUR: The average crude palm oil (CPO) price surged by 9.7% to RM4,179.50 per tonne last year from RM3,809.50 per tonne in 2023, according to Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

Likewise, he said, the monthly average CPO price reached its peak at RM5,119.50 per tonne in December 2024 while the daily average price peaked at RM5,333.50 per tonne on Dec 6, 2024.

"This significantly increased total oil palm products export revenue by 15.1% to RM109.3 billion in 2024 from RM94.9 billion in 2023," he said in his speech at the opening of the Palm Oil Economic Review and Outlook Seminar 2025 here yesterday, which was delivered by Deputy Minister Datuk Chan Foong Hin.

Johari said total exports of palm oil and palm-based products for 2024 rose to 26.66 million tonnes compared to 24.49 million tonnes in 2023, an increase of 8.9% or 2.17 million tonnes.

The Malaysian palm oil industry produced 19.3 million tonnes of crude palm oil in 2024, an increase of 4.2% compared with 18.55 million tonnes in 2023, Johari said.

The outlook for the palm oil industry in Malaysia remains positive, as supply and demand remain stable with the expected recovery from labour shortages.



Chan (left) speaking at a press conference after the Palm Oil Economic Review and Outlook Seminar 2025 yesterday. On the right is Malaysian Palm Oil Board chairman Datuk Mohamad Helmy Othman Basha. — BERNAMAPIC

At a press conference, Chan said the Ministry of Plantation and Commodities aims to focus on mechanisation and automation to overcome the tight labour supply for the palm oil industry.

He said the industry needed to have a transition period in over-coming the issue as the government does not plan to rely on foreign labour.

Chan said the need for an exception on foreign labour quota depends on the urgency and the industry's feedback. "The one-time exception for the quota was given for around 60,000 workers last year,

but for this year it depends on the industry feedback whether it's urgent or not."

Meanwhile, according to a joint statement, the Malaysian Palm Oil Board has partnered with the Netherlands embassy and the British High Commission in Malaysia to launch the National Initiative for Sustainable and Climate-smart Oil Palm Smallholders 2 (NISCOPS 2).

NISCOPS is a government-to-government initiative that focuses on improving smallholders' livelihood and tackling climate change. — Bernama

'Technology, R&D among key ingredients for food security'

KUALA LUMPUR: Precision technology, robotics and digitalisation coupled with research and development (R&D) are vital ingredients for Malaysia to achieve food self-sufficiency, especially in rice production, as it continues to grapple with rising costs and production inefficiencies.

Food security expert Datin Paduka Prof Fatimah Mohamed Arshad (pic) said the advent of robotics, connectivity and technology, alongside digital tools and applications, offers immense potential to transform agriculture.

In an interview following her appearance on Bernama TV's The Nation hosted by Elane Abdullah on Monday, Fatimah highlighted that Malaysia's food productivity falls short, which jeopardises the country's food security.

Citing padi cultivation, Fatimah, who is a research fellow at the Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Studies at University Putra Malaysia, said while laboratory studies suggest yields of six to eight tonnes per hectare, "structural problems and climate change prevent us from achieving this".

"Therefore, Malaysia needs robust R&D, government support, infrastructure development, and timely interventions.

"With the advent of robotics, connectivity, and technology as well as digital tools, we must develop applications and instruments to

enhance efficiency and reduce costs to improve production," she said.

Fatimah said Malaysia heavily depends on imported inputs for almost all agricultural items, including fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides, machinery, and even paddy harvesters, which actually are 20-year-old wheat harvesters from Holland.

"These are not designed for rice harvesting, making them inefficient, especially when used on small farms," she said.

The food security expert highlighted that this over-reliance on imported agricultural inputs, coupled with global inflation and supply chain disruptions, has left Malaysia's food production system vulnerable.

"When you import, you also import inflation," she said, pointing out how rising input costs have heavily impacted local farmers' production capabilities.

Fatimah expressed concern that Malaysia's achievement in food security could be categorised as "moderate" but relatively weak in the resiliency against crisis for most food, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Malaysia must prioritise putting its house in order with a clear focus on improving the performance of its food security," she said.

Fatimah said that a reduction in imports and the achievement of self-sufficiency and food security are of paramount importance. — Bernama



MPOB looks forward to more palm oil collaborations

➤ Board says Malaysia's Asean chairmanship an opportunity to strengthen tie-ups within region and with key global markets

PUTRAJAYA: The palm oil trade is a cornerstone of Asean's economic activity, and Malaysia is committed to leveraging regional frameworks such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Asean's free trade agreements with countries such as South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) director-general Datuk Ahmad Parveez Ghulam Kadir said these agreements are expected to boost intra-Asean trade while ensuring a steady, sustainable supply of palm oil raw materials.

"We aim to enhance market access across the region through these agreements, ensuring that Asean remains competitive in the global palm oil trade," he told Bernama.

Ahmad Parveez said as Malaysia leads Asean this year, the country is positioning the palm oil sector at the heart of regional economic growth.

He said the Asean chairmanship offers an opportunity to strengthen collaboration not only within the region, but also with key global markets, particularly the United States and the

European Union.

This engagement, he said, is vital to addressing geopolitical challenges such as the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, which have disrupted global trade flows.

"By fostering closer ties within Asean and with external partners, Malaysia aims to ensure that the palm oil sector continues to be a major contributor to the region's economic resilience.

"Our focus goes beyond trade; we are committed to promoting policies that support the sustainable production and trade of palm oil," he said, adding that these efforts also align with Asean's broader goals of enhancing food security and fostering a unified palm oil sector across the region.

Ahmad Parveez said Malaysia's leadership in promoting sustainability is also at the forefront and the country is advocating for the harmonisation of sustainability standards across Asean.

"The Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil certification, which sets a high benchmark for responsible production, could serve as a model for other Asean nations. This move would address key global concerns such as deforestation, carbon emissions, and ethical labour practices.

"By establishing consistent sustainability measures, we can enhance the credibility of palm oil as a responsibly produced commodity and align Asean's palm oil trade with global expectations," he emphasised.

In addition, the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries plays a significant role in amplifying Asean's collective voice. As founding members, Malaysia and Indonesia

work closely to advocate for fair policies, ensuring that palm oil-producing nations are represented on the global stage.

Moreover, the inclusion of smallholders in the global supply chain is a priority for Malaysia, with efforts to improve their participation in trade through regional collaborations.

Ahmad Parveez also highlighted the importance of innovative technologies to boost productivity while safeguarding the environment.

"Through innovation, we can achieve higher yields without requiring additional land, achieving a balance between growth and environmental preservation," he stressed.

Additionally, Malaysia is spearheading discussions within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, which focuses on empowering smallholders and addressing trade barriers.

A memorandum of understanding is expected to formalise deeper collaboration in the palm oil sector.

Asean's relationship with dialogue partners such as China, India, Japan and the European Union (EU) remains key to shaping the future of the palm oil trade.

Through initiatives such as the Joint Working Group on Palm Oil, Asean countries and the EU are working together to ensure that palm oil is produced sustainably and that the challenges related to the Sustainable Development Goals are addressed transparently.

"With these collaborations, Asean can remain a competitive and responsible supplier of palm oil in global markets while advancing its sustainability agenda," he concluded.

AirAsia MOVE names Manfredi Lefebvre D'Ovidio as chairman

PETALING JAYA: AirAsia MOVE, the online travel agent platform of Capital A Bhd, has appointed Manfredi Lefebvre D'Ovidio as executive chairman, effective immediately, succeeding Datuk Kamarudin Meranun.

Kamarudin will remain actively engaged as a director in AirAsia MOVE, along with Tan Sri Tony Fernandes as strategic adviser in the capacity of Capital A's CEO.

Kamarudin said: "We are thrilled about having Manfredi onboard, as he is a true visionary who has a deep understanding of the travel ecosystem. His global perspective and passion for innovation will be invaluable as AirAsia MOVE continues to lead in redefining travel in the digital age. It's been an incredible journey, and I'm excited to see where AirAsia MOVE will go under his chairmanship.

"With decades of experience in the global travel industry and luxury hospitality, Manfredi brings with him a wealth of knowledge and strategic insights, and his leadership in Abercrombie & Kent Travel Group and his influence on the broader luxury and personalised travel sector position him as a dynamic force to drive MOVE's next chapter of growth."

D'Ovidio said, "I am excited to take on this new role at AirAsia MOVE, a company that has already transformed how people across Asean experience travel. The digital transformation of travel is just beginning, and I look forward to leveraging my experience to lead such an innovative travel platform into the next phase of innovation and growth. As chairman, I plan to focus on enhancing the user experience, driving personalised solutions, and fostering new partnerships to ensure AirAsia MOVE remains at the forefront of travel innovation."

Guan Chong invests in Ivory Coast cocoa ingredients firm

PETALING JAYA: Guan Chong Bhd, the world's fourth-largest cocoa grinder, is strengthening its presence in the global chocolate supply chain by acquiring a 25% stake in an Ivorian cocoa ingredients producer for €28.1 million (RM130.1 million) from Conseil Du-Café-Cocoa (CCC), the Coffee-Cocoa Council of Ivory Coast.

The group through subsidiary GCB Cocoa Singapore Pte Ltd, signed a share sale and asset contribution agreement to acquire the stake in Transcao Côte d'Ivoire (Transcao CI) from CCC. The purchase consideration for the acquisition will be satisfied by cash funded via internally generated funds and banking facilities.

With the acquisition of the stake in Transcao CI, Guan Chong will jointly manage the operations of two cocoa grinding factories in Abidjan and San Pedro. The current combined capacity of these factories is 80,000 tonnes a year.

Guan Chong managing director and CEO Brandon Tay Hoe Lian said: "The acquisition of Transcao CI is a key step in GCB's growth strategy, reinforcing our position as a global leader in the chocolate supply chain. It also underscores our commitment to supporting Ivory Coast's vision, alongside CCC, in advancing the country's strategy for industrialising its cocoa sector."

"This partnership between GCB and CCC signifies the Ivorian council's confidence in our four decades of expertise in the cocoa processing business. United by a shared vision, we are committed to harnessing our strengths to deliver premium Ivory Coast cocoa ingredients to customers across the globe.

"Looking ahead, we are dedicated to shaping a stronger and more sustainable future for the cocoa industry and the communities it supports. Simultaneously, GCB remains steadfast in addressing the challenges of high



From left: Coffee-Cocoa Council chief financial officer Seydou Abdou and general manager Yves Brahimia Koné; Guan Chong commercial director Elsa Tay See Min, chief financial officer and executive director Hia Cheng; and Coffee-Cocoa Council managing director Cheick Traore.

cocoa bean prices, ensuring the resilience and sustainability of our operations spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, the United States, German, and the United Kingdom."

Guan Chong will act as a strategic partner to support Transcao CI's development and implementation strategy of its operations. Transcao CI is principally involved in cocoa processing; manufacturing and distributing of finished products.

The RM130.1 million payment for the 25% stake in Transcao CI consists of two parts, RM35.3 million for share sale and RM94.8

million for asset contribution.

Transcao CI is a private limited company incorporated in Ivory Coast, with the majority of its shareholding held by the CCC, a government regulator responsible for the regulation and development of Ivory Coast's cocoa and coffee sectors. CCC oversees Ivory Coast's annual cocoa bean production of approximately 2 million tonnes, which accounts for around 40% of the global supply.

Transcao Negoce is a private limited company holding a minority shareholding in Transcao CI, and a subsidiary of CCC.

Mah Sing confident US AI chips curbs won't affect tie-up with BDC

PETALING JAYA: Mah Sing Group Bhd remains confident that the United States' proposed restrictions on artificial intelligence chip exports, which classify Malaysia as a Tier 2 country, will not hinder its collaboration with Bridge Data Centres (BDC) or the broader growth of Malaysia's digital infrastructure sector.

To address these challenges and gain exemptions from imposed quotas, Mah Sing said, companies in Tier 2 countries have the opportunity to obtain validated end-user designations, provided they comply with US standards on security, cyber resilience and human rights.

"This compliance not only ensures uninterrupted access to critical technologies but also strengthens Malaysia's position as a trusted partner for global technology leaders. Mah Sing's partner BDC is primarily owned by Bain Capital, a US-based firm. We will continue to monitor developments to ensure full compliance and mitigate potential risks," it added.

Mah Sing and its BDC partner have established two joint ventures to expand their data centre hub at Mah Sing DCHub@Southville City to 300MW power capacity. The first phase is slated to commence operations in 2026. The entire hub has the potential to support a 500MW power capacity.

Furthermore, Mah Sing's 42-acre land at Meridin East township in Johor Bahru is positioned for future development, capable of supporting an additional 300MW power capacity.

"The Malaysian technology sector has consistently demonstrated resilience and ingenuity. Through strong collaboration among industry players, we believe Malaysia will navigate these challenges successfully, driving sustained growth and innovation in the global digital economy," said Mah Sing.

'Reforms key to a more resilient, vibrant economy'

KUALA LUMPUR: Reforms are crucial steps to transform Malaysia into a more resilient and vibrant economy capable of adapting to domestic and global challenges.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said while these reforms may lead to higher prices over the short term, mitigation plans are in place.

This would be executed via cash transfer programmes such as Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah and Sumbangan Asas Rahmah, early school assistance, which would benefit students, regardless of income level.

"Should the government deliver the reform agenda, it would greatly improve their credibility in managing their finances. This would translate into positive reviews from the Credit Rating Agencies," he told Bernama.

Mohd Afzanizam believes these mitigation plans will also ensure that

targeted segments of society are supported and can thrive during this transition period.

The restructuring of government finances, the strengthening of key sectors such as education and healthcare, and attracting foreign investments are reforms aimed at creating an economy that is more competitive, inclusive, and equitable for future generations, he said.

Malaysia could see an upgrade in its sovereign rating, currently at A-/A3/BBB+, if reforms remain consistent and their results tangible.

Furthermore, he said these reforms are expected to attract more foreign investments, with investors purchasing more financial assets such as equities and bonds.

Putra Business School's Master of Business Administration programme director and associate professor Ahmed Razman Abdul Latif said although the

cost of living is expected to rise, the increase may be insignificant.

He also noted that the allocation for Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah has been increased, resulting in greater fiscal support for lower-income households.

However, he emphasised the need for monetary system reform, particularly to strengthen and protect the ringgit.

One such approach could involve Bank Negara Malaysia introducing a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), a sovereign cryptocurrency based on blockchain technology.

Linking the CBDC to a basket of commodities could shield it from speculation and market sentiment, which currently affects the ringgit.

"A stable CBDC could enhance the rakyat's purchasing power," he said.

Ahmed Razman said rising transportation, energy, and housing costs are critical issues that require immediate attention.



Reforming finances, strengthening sectors like education and healthcare, and attracting foreign investments are steps aim to build a stronger, fairer economy for the future. — UNSPLASH PIX

Harvest Miracle rights issue oversubscribed by 20.24%

➤ Group to strengthen financial foundation, fund Antara Genting project and moneylending expansion with proceeds raised

KUALA LUMPUR: Harvest Miracle Capital Bhd had an exceptional success of its rights issue, which was oversubscribed by 20.24%, securing the maximum proceeds of RM98.43 million. This investor confidence underscores a significant step in the group's strategy to enhance its business competitiveness for sustained growth.

With the RM98.43 million proceeds raised, Harvest Miracle aims to fortify its financial foundation and ensure effective management of its strategic initiatives. A significant portion of the funds is earmarked for the Antara Genting project in the property investment segment and the expansion of the group's moneylending business.

As of Nov 28, 2024, the Antara Genting project has reached 80% completion. The group has also paid RM197.08 million (80% of the total consideration of RM246.35 million). With the proceeds from this rights issue, amounting to RM49.27 million, the outstanding balance will be fully settled, ensuring the project is paid in full and poised for timely delivery.

Meanwhile, the allocation of RM45.89 million to the moneylending segment will enable the group to offer financing solutions to a broader range of customers. These include

personal financing, working capital, business start-ups, real estate purchases, project financing, equipment financing and more, with or without collateral.

In addition, Harvest Miracle is also venturing into the supply chain business through the incorporation of Miracle Nexus Supply Sdn Bhd as part of the group's broader strategic roadmap.

This new subsidiary will provide end-to-end supply chain solutions including sourcing, procurement, warehousing, and last-mile fulfilment, with a particular focus on building materials. With its own clay brick manufacturing business, the group will be able to create a downstream synergy with the new supply chain operations, strengthening its ability to meet the growing demand for building materials driven by infrastructure projects and private sector developments.

These supply chain services will be seamlessly integrated with the group's moneylending arm, which will offer flexible financing options with extended financing periods. This synergy ensures that property developers and construction companies not only benefit from streamlined logistics but also

gain access to critical financial support tailored to their capital needs.

"Miracle Nexus is designed to address the surging demand for high-quality building materials particularly in Johor, our homegrown base, leveraging our expertise and regional insights to optimise our competitive advantages," the company stated. By bridging gaps in the supply chain and financing, Miracle Nexus aims to drive value creation, operational efficiencies, and enhanced market accessibility for its clients.

Strategic initiatives like the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and the RTS Link have cemented Johor's status as a key economic hub with robust connectivity and significant investment appeal. By 2030, the JS-SEZ is projected to contribute RM117.1 billion annually to Malaysia's economy and create 20,000 skilled jobs through 100 high-impact projects. Coupled with Johor's thriving property, construction, and data centre sectors, this economic momentum offers immense potential for Miracle Nexus.

"Capturing a modest share of these industries, Miracle Nexus is positioned to potentially generate an estimated revenue of up to RM5.86 billion, further solidifying its strategic importance within the group's portfolio. With tailored solutions, efficient sourcing, and innovative financial options, we aim to empower property developers and other key stakeholders to focus on delivering exceptional projects while we manage the complexities of the supply chain," the company emphasised.

Malaysia's 2025 growth seen steady at 5%, ringgit outlook favourable

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's growth in 2025 is expected to remain steady at 5%, supported by domestic demand and improving business sentiment.

The Standard Chartered Global Research team has revised their growth forecast for 2024 to 5.2% from 4.8% due to strong growth momentum in the first three quarters of the year.

In their 2025 economic outlook report Reverberations, the team expects global economic growth to be broadly flat in 2025, slowing slightly to 3.1% from 3.2% in the previous year. Following the US presidential election, the global economy is preparing itself for new policy announcements from the new White House administration, including significant tariffs on key US trading partners such as China.

Observers believe the new White House administration's pro-growth and protectionist policies are likely to be inflationary for the US, with consequences for the rest of the world. However, based on his previous term, the actual policies of the Trump administration may be less extreme than campaign rhetoric.

With China likely to bear the brunt of US tariff policy, Asia's small open economies could be hit by the spillover in the short term – including trade-reliant economies such as Malaysia. Over the medium term, the region is expected to continue to attract strong foreign direct investment as investors seek to diversify their operational capacity and tap new markets.

Despite continued subsidy rationalisation next year, the Standard Chartered Global Research team expects inflation to remain manageable at 2.2% in 2025 versus 1.9% in 2024 given lower-than-expected inflation year-to-date last year. As such, the team maintains its view that Bank Negara Malaysia will keep the policy rate unchanged at 3% and any hiking decision by the central bank will be reactive rather than pre-emptive.

Meanwhile, the ringgit is likely to slightly outperform regional currencies in the near term as fundamental remain supportive. However, as Malaysia is trade-reliant and exposed to China's growth, any negative US-led trade policies may pose a risk to the currency in 2025.

Domestic confidence in the ringgit has improved in 2024. In fact, the Malaysian ringgit was one of the rare few currencies which gained against the USD in 2024. Domestic fundamentals remain positive.

Bursa's Q4 net profit likely to decline on lower DATV: AmlInvestment

KUALA LUMPUR: Bursa Malaysia Bhd's net profit for the fourth quarter (Q4) ended Dec 31, 2024, is expected to be weaker than that in Q3'24 due to a lower daily average trading value (DATV) for the securities market, according to AmlInvestment Bank Bhd.

It said that Q4'24 DATV (of on-market transactions) for equities slipped to RM2.6 billion from RM3.6 billion in Q3'24.

"We expect the Q4'24 earnings to be RM64 million – down 25.4% quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q) – contributed largely by lower securities market trading revenue.

"This is expected to bring the core 12-month 2024 net profit to RM306 million, up 37% year-on-year (y-o-y)," the investment bank said in a note yesterday.

It projected Bursa Malaysia's operating

revenue for the 12 months to rise by 124.5% to RM738 million, supported by improved securities and derivatives trading revenue.

Bursa Malaysia is scheduled to release its financial results for Q4'24 on Jan 27.

The bank said all headline financial key performance indicator targets for FY24 are expected to be met.

"Looking ahead, domestic liquidity and pipeline for initial public offerings in the securities market remain healthy. Nevertheless, challenges continue to be seen on foreign fund inflows due to the elevated interest rates in the US supporting a strong US dollar.

"Besides, there remain uncertainties on the impact of US trade and fiscal policies," said the bank, which maintained its "hold" call on Bursa Malaysia with an unchanged target price of

RM9.10 per share.

On Bursa Malaysia's derivatives market, the bank noted that the quarterly daily average contracts (ADC) traded rose by 18.1% q-o-q to 107,000 contracts in Q4'24 contributed by a higher ADC traded for crude palm oil futures, partially offset by a drop in ADC for FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI futures.

"With the continued volatility in the market, ADC traded rose to 92,106 in FY24 versus 72,896 in FY23," it said.

It noted that foreign funds outflow of RM7.8 billion cumulatively from the securities market was recorded in Q4'24, compared with an inflow of RM4.4 billion in Q3'24.

The bank said 2024 saw an outflow of foreign funds from the securities market totalling RM4.2 billion. — Bernama



China mulling possible sale of US TikTok to Musk: Report

➤ Video-sharing platform faces American law requiring imminent Chinese divestment

NEW YORK: Chinese officials are exploring a potential sale of TikTok's US operations to billionaire Elon Musk as the video-sharing platform faces an American law requiring imminent Chinese divestment, Bloomberg News reported on Monday.

The report, citing anonymous people familiar with the matter, outlined one scenario being discussed in Beijing where Musk's social media company X would purchase TikTok from Chinese owner ByteDance and combine it into the platform formerly known as Twitter.

The report estimated the value of TikTok's American operations at between US\$40

billion (RM180 billion) and US\$50 billion.

Although Musk is currently ranked as the world's wealthiest person, Bloomberg said it was not clear how Musk could execute the transaction, or if he would need to sell other assets.

The US government passed a law last year that requires TikTok's ByteDance to either sell the wildly popular platform or shut it down. It goes into effect on Sunday – a day before President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The US government alleges TikTok allows Beijing to collect data and spy on users and is a conduit to spread propaganda.

China and ByteDance strongly deny the claims.

TikTok has challenged the law, taking an appeal all the way to the US Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments last Friday.

At the hearing, a majority of the conservative and liberal justices on the nine-member bench appeared sceptical of arguments by a lawyer for TikTok that forcing a sale was a violation of First Amendment free speech rights.

Bloomberg characterised Beijing's consideration of a possible Musk transaction as "still preliminary," noting that Chinese officials have yet to reach a consensus on how to proceed.

It said it was not clear how much ByteDance knew of the Chinese government planning.

TikTok did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment, but a representative was cited by Variety as saying: "We can't be expected to comment on pure fiction."

Musk is a close ally to Trump who is expected to play an influential role in Washington in the coming four years.

He also runs electric car company Tesla, which has a major factory in China and counts the country as one of the automaker's biggest markets.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to enact new tariffs on Chinese goods, which would expand a trade war begun in his first term and which was largely upheld, and in some cases supplemented, by outgoing President Joe Biden. – AFP

Indian state rations Kingfisher beer

HYDERABAD: India's biggest beer-consuming state is rationing supplies of Kingfisher, one of the country's most popular brands, after Heineken-controlled United Breweries last week suspended its sales in a dispute over prices.

States in India, the world's eighth-biggest alcohol market by volume, individually regulate pricing of alcohol products, which are major contributors to their tax revenue.

Alcohol is bought by the state government and then supplied to shops in Telangana, where officials are rationing supplies to deter hoarding and tackle shortages, three retailers said.

"Today we got a notification from our depot that there is no Kingfisher beer stock anymore," Madhusudhan Rao, a liquor store owner in Hyderabad city, told Reuters on Monday.

United Breweries, which brews the popular Kingfisher brand, last week cited delayed payments and a lack of government approval for higher prices since 2019/20, which had damaged its finances, for halting sales to Telangana.

The move is the latest sign of stress in India's US\$45 billion (RM202 billion) alcohol market, with companies including Diageo, Pernod Ricard, AB InBev and Carlsberg together demanding some US\$466 million in unpaid dues.

They are also battling regulatory challenges including antitrust investigations.

Telangana state said last week that United Breweries had suspended supplies as a "tactic" to press for price increases and a panel was deciding on such requests.

Officials in Telangana, where some depots are running out of beer, did not respond to a request for comment on Monday.

Another liquor store owner in Hyderabad, Purushottam, said some outlets had 10 days of Kingfisher beer stock remaining, while others only enough for two days.

Outlets and depots in Telangana will only have stock of United Breweries products for around two weeks, an industry source with direct knowledge of the matter said.

United Breweries, India's biggest beer company, accounts for 70% of the state's beer market, where 60 million 12-bottle cases are sold each year.

The Brewers Association of India said the beer prices companies charge in Telangana are around 300 rupees per case, whereas in Maharashtra they get around 500 rupees a case. – Reuters



A man walking outside CATL's battery cell production facility in the China city of Ningde. – REUTERS/SPIC

CATL hires banks for H1 Hong Kong float: Sources

HONG KONG: Chinese battery giant CATL has hired banks, including JPMorgan and Bank of America, to work on a Hong Kong listing, in what could be one of the city's largest offerings in 2025, two people with knowledge of the deal said.

China International Capital Corp (CICC) and China Securities Co (CSC) have also been appointed to work on the float, the sources said, declining to be named as the information is confidential.

The offering size for CATL's potential Hong Kong listing has not been finalised, sources said, adding it will likely be in the billions of dollars given the Shenzhen-listed company's market cap.

CATL, with a market cap of US\$150 billion (RM 676 billion), did not immediately respond to Reuters comment.

Bank of America and JPMorgan declined to comment. CICC and CSC did not immediately respond to Reuters comment.

The company is targeting the first half for the float, said the two sources.

The planned float in the Chinese offshore market comes amid rising geopolitical tensions as the US last week added Chinese tech companies including CATL and Tencent Holdings to a list of firms it says work with China's military.

CATL's Hong Kong listing plan also comes as

the city has seen a surge of new offerings in recent weeks, with increasing interest for a second listing from China's A-share companies that are seeking to tap into overseas liquidity.

Hong Kong stock exchange officials in closed-door meetings with banks discussed how to fast-track such second listings, Reuters reported in December, citing sources.

Bloomberg on Monday first reported the battery maker is poised to hire the four banks.

CATL was planning to raise at least US\$5 billion in Swiss global depository receipts in 2023, but the plan was eventually scrapped after Beijing regulators raised concerns over the large scale of the offering. – Reuters

First REIT approached by healthcare chain for Indonesia assets

JAKARTA: Singapore's First REIT said it had been approached by CVC Capital Partners-backed Indonesian healthcare chain Siloam to take over its portfolio of hospital assets in Southeast Asia's largest economy.

PT Siloam International Hospitals Tbk, also known as Siloam, is already the existing operator and tenant of the Indonesian hospital assets it is interested in.

In a filing to the Indonesian stock exchange, the firm said it had submitted a preliminary non-binding proposal to acquire the Indonesian portfolio, but did not disclose any financial details.

First REIT said it has decided to initiate a review to assess the approach from Siloam.

The deal, if it happens, is expected to have a positive impact on Siloam and is in line with its business expansion plans and strategies, the company said.

CVC Capital Partners, a Luxembourg-based private equity firm, had in August agreed to buy an additional 45% stake in Siloam from billionaire Mochtar Riady's cash-strapped Lippo Karawaci for US\$1 billion (RM4.5 billion). – Reuters

US tightens grip on AI chip flows across the globe

➤ New rules go beyond China, set export quotas for about 120 countries

NEW YORK: The US government said on Monday it would further restrict artificial intelligence chip and technology exports, divvying up the world to keep advanced computing power in the United States and among its allies while finding more ways to block China's access.

The new regulations will cap the number of AI chips that can be exported to most countries and allow unlimited access to US AI technology for America's closest allies, while also maintaining a block on exports to China, Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Unveiled in the final days of outgoing President Joe Biden's administration, the lengthy new rules go beyond China and are aimed at helping the United States maintain its dominant status in AI by controlling it around the world.

"The US leads AI now – both AI development and AI chip design, and it's critical that we keep it that way," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said.

The regulations cap a four-year Biden administration effort to

hobble China's access to advanced chips that can enhance its military capabilities and seek to maintain US leadership in AI by closing loopholes and adding new guard rails to control the flow of chips and global development of AI.

While it is unclear how President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration will enforce the new rules, the two administrations share similar views on the competitive threat from China.

The regulation is set to take effect 120 days from publication, giving the Trump administration time to weigh in.

New limits will be placed on advanced graphics processing units (GPUs), which are used to power data centres needed to train AI models.

Most are made by Santa Clara, California-based Nvidia, while Advanced Micro Devices also sells AI chips.

Major cloud service providers such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon will be able to seek global authorisations to build data centres.

Once approved, the cloud

providers would no longer need export licenses for AI chips, allowing them to build data centres in countries that cannot import enough chips because of the US-imposed quotas.

Shares of all three companies were down about 1%.

To obtain a stamp of approval, authorised companies must abide by stringent conditions and restrictions, including security requirements, reporting demands and a plan or track record of respecting human rights.

Until now, the Biden administration had imposed sweeping restrictions on China's access to advanced chips and the equipment to produce them, updating the controls annually to tighten restrictions and capture countries at risk of diverting the technology to China.

Because the rules alter the landscape for AI chips and data centres around the world, powerful industry voices criticised the plan even before it was published.

Nvidia on Monday called the rules "sweeping overreach" and said the White House would be clamping down on "technology that is already available in mainstream gaming PCs and consumer hardware".

Data centre provider Oracle argued earlier this month that the rules would hand "most of the

global AI and GPU market to our Chinese competitors".

The restrictions do not apply to gaming chips.

The rules impose worldwide licensing requirements on advanced chips, with exceptions, and also set controls for what are known as "model weights" of the most advanced "closed-weight" AI models.

Model weights help determine decision making in machine learning, and are generally the most valuable elements of an AI model.

The regulation divides the world into three tiers.

About 18 countries, including Japan, Britain, South Korea and the Netherlands, will essentially be exempt from the rules.

Some 120 other countries, including Singapore, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, will face country caps.

And arms-embargoed countries like Russia, China and Iran will be barred from receiving the technology altogether.

In addition, US-headquartered providers likely to receive global authorisation such as Amazon Web Services and Microsoft will be allowed to deploy only 50% of their total AI computing power outside the United States, no more than 25% outside of the Tier 1 countries and no more than 7% in a single non-Tier 1 country. – Reuters

J&J buys neurological drugmaker for US\$14.6 billion

NEW YORK: Johnson & Johnson said on Monday it will buy neurological drugmaker Intra-Cellular Therapies for US\$14.6 billion (RM65.8 billion), its biggest deal in at least two years, boosting its presence in the market for brain disease treatments.

The deal is meant to help J&J boost its growth in the drugs and medical devices businesses after it spun off the consumer health unit in 2023.

The company's blockbuster psoriasis drug Stelara is also set to face competition from several biosimilar versions in the US this year.

The announcement comes as the industry gathers for its annual premium conference, JPMorgan Healthcare Conference, in San Francisco.

Healthcare dealmakers expect a resurgence of deals exceeding US\$10 billion due to the potential for less antitrust scrutiny under President-elect Donald Trump.

J&J has offered to buy each share of Intra-Cellular for US\$132.

J&J would gain access to Intra-Cellular's already-approved therapy, Caplyta, to treat schizophrenia and depressive episodes associated with bipolar disorder in the United States.

Intra-Cellular is also seeking an expanded regulatory approval in the US for Caplyta as an add-on therapy for major depressive disorder.

Johnson & Johnson will also gain access to Intra-Cellular's experimental therapy, ITI-1284, being developed for the treatment of generalised anxiety disorder and Alzheimer's-related psychosis and agitation. – Reuters

Lululemon, American Eagle log strong sales

NEW YORK: Several apparel retailers including Lululemon, Abercrombie & Fitch and American Eagle raised their holiday-quarter sales targets on Monday, helped by demand for heavily discounted products, even as margins took a beating at some firms.

The 2024 holiday season was earmarked by early and steep discounts from retailers including Target and Amazon to cater to cost-conscious shoppers who have held out for big deal events to shop for electronics and apparel.

The apparel category had the highest discount rates in the US at about 33% this holiday season, according to data from Salesforce, as apparel makers compete with newer brands and online wares.

This could take a toll on margins for the current quarter, which typically ends in January.

Abercrombie's shares fell about 11% before the bell as the company kept its fourth-quarter margin forecast intact, even as it raised its sales growth target to between 7% and 8%.

Lululemon, which has focused on introducing new colours and styles to its portfolio to allow for more full-price selling, bumped up its margin and profit forecasts along with its sales target.

"It's a mixed shopping bag. Lululemon did better than expected as they were able to fend off lower-priced copycats," said Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management.

Similarly, American Eagle lifted its



A shopper walking out of a Lululemon Athletica store in New York. – REUTERS/SPIC

operating profit target, and quarter-to-date comparable sales were up in low single digit, ahead of its earlier forecast of a 1% rise.

Department store operator Nordstrom raised its annual forecast last week on the back of robust sales during the holidays as deep discounts

on apparel and home decor items helped attract deal-hunting customers to its outlets.

On the other hand, Macy's continued to struggle to drum up demand at its namesake stores, and said it expects fourth-quarter net sales to be at or slightly below the

low-end of its previously issued range of US\$7.8 billion (RM35 billion) to US\$8 billion.

"Macy's has probably summed up the sentiment around holiday shopping pretty well when they said they were expecting a cautious but engaged shopper," Jacobsen said. – Reuters

Goldman Sachs plans new unit to sharpen focus on financing: WSJ

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs is planning to form a new group that will combine three divisions of its global banking and markets unit, to enhance its focus on financing deals and making loans to corporations, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Monday.

The new unit will be called Capital Solutions Group, plans for which will be unveiled on Monday, the report said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The Wall Street giant has ambitions to become one of the biggest players in the increasingly competitive world of financing, the report added.

The unit will include the team that provides investment banking services to private equity firms, the global financing group that finds investors to provide capital for deals and a big chunk of what the company calls its fixed income, currency and commodities financing team, the report said.

The bank did not immediately respond to a request for comment. – Reuters

Starmer plans to turn UK into 'AI superpower'

➤ Premier pledges to take pro-growth and pro-innovation approach to regulation

LONDON: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he wanted to make the UK an artificial intelligence "superpower", promising to take a pro-innovation approach to regulation, make public data available to researchers and create zones for data centres.

Starmer, whose Labour government is expected to have little choice but to cut spending after borrowing costs jumped, said he wanted to put AI at the heart of his ambition to grow the economy.

The government says the technology could increase productivity by 1.5% a year, worth an extra £47 billion (RM257 billion), annually over a decade.

"Britain will be one of the great AI superpowers," he said on Monday at University

College London, noting that the country was already the European leader for AI investment.

"We're going to make the breakthroughs, we're going to create the wealth, and we're going to make AI work for everyone in our country."

Countries across the world are competing to become AI hubs, while balancing the push for growth with the need for some restrictions on the technology.

The world's sixth-largest economy, Britain is only behind the United States and China, when measured by indicators such as AI investment and patents, according to Stanford University.

Starmer said Britain would chart a "pro-growth and pro-innovation" course on regulation.

"I know there are different approaches around the world but we are now in control of our regulatory regime so we will go our own way on this," he said, referring to Britain's departure from the European Union in 2020.

"We will test and understand AI before we regulate it to make sure that when we do it, it's proportionate and grounded."

Britain would put public data, such as

information from its state health service, into a "National Data Library", where it would be accessible to researchers subject to trusted copyright rules, he said.

The government would also adopt all the 50 recommendations set out in the report *AI Opportunities Action Plan* by venture capitalist Matt Clifford, Starmer said.

This includes making it easier to build data centres by accelerating planning permission and giving them energy connections.

The first such centre will be built in Culham, Oxfordshire, home to Britain's Atomic Energy Authority.

Britain's economy badly needs fresh momentum after Labour government's highest tax-raising budget since 1993 has dented business confidence and the Bank of England estimated last month that the economy did not grow in the last quarter.

Starmer said AI had the power to transform the lives of people, including speeding up planning consultations, helping small businesses, and reducing bureaucratic burdens for doctors and teachers. - Reuters



Starmer delivering his speech at the Manufacturing Futures Lab at University College London. - AFP/IC

India halts trade with US-sanctioned Russian companies

NEW DELHI: Indian refiners have stopped dealing with US-sanctioned oil tankers and entities but the country does not expect disruption to Russian crude supplies during a two-month wind-down period, a government source said on Monday.

The US Treasury on Friday imposed sanctions on Russian oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegaz and insurers Ingosstrakh and Alfastrakhovanie Group, targeting revenue Moscow has used to fund its war with Ukraine.

Washington also sanctioned 183 vessels used for transporting Russian oil while allowing a winding down of some energy related transactions by March 12.

India will allow Russian oil cargoes booked before Jan 10 to discharge at ports in line with sanctions parameters, the official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

"In the next two months we do not anticipate major problems because the ships that are in transit will come through."

"Going forward, it's early days yet to anticipate the impact, how discounts shape up, if somebody is willing to sell below the US\$60 price cap," he said.

The official said Russia could offer deeper discounts to India to meet the US\$60 a barrel price cap imposed by Group of Seven countries in 2022 to be able to use western tankers and insurance.

"If we get Russian crude from a non-sanctioned entity which is below the price cap, I am sure we will be happy to look at it," the Indian government official said, adding that Indian banks will seek certificates of origin for Russian crude to ensure transactions do not involve sanctioned entities.

"We are the third-largest consumer. Russia will find ways to reach us," the official added. - Reuters

Heathrow Airport reports record number of passengers in 2024

LONDON: London's Heathrow on Monday announced it welcomed a record-high number of passengers last year to Europe's busiest airport, with air travel having recovered from the turbulent Covid years.

A total 83.9 million people travelled through the airport in 2024, up three million compared with the previous high in 2019 or one year before the pandemic struck.

Heathrow said 2025 "is off to a strong start" as it forecasts a slight increase to 84.2 million passengers this year.

The airport in December unveiled plans to invest £2.3 billion (RM12.6 billion) over the next two years to upgrade the hub.

Heathrow experienced its busiest December on record last month, with more than seven million passengers, it added Monday.

"On what is normally one of the quietest days for travel, Christmas Day also saw a record 160,000 passengers," it said. - AFP

Spain to hike taxes on holiday rentals

MADRID: Spain plans to raise taxes on holiday rentals so that they pay "like a business", Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday, as residents of the country's main cities grappled with soaring rents.

"It isn't fair that those who have three, four or five apartments as short-term rentals pay less tax than hotels or workers," Sanchez said.

The measure would be based on a new European Union directive on value-added tax for digital platforms, he said.

Spanish hotels now pay a reduced 10% VAT rate, which is included in the bill.

Housing has become a major issue in Spain as it struggles to balance promoting tourism, a key driver of its economy, with concerns over high rents due to gentrification and landlords shifting to more lucrative, short-term tourist rentals, especially in urban and coastal areas.

Sanchez also promised tougher measures to combat fraud around such rentals, without going into details.

Last month, authorities opened an investigation into Airbnb for failing to delete thousands of misleading rental offers from its platform.

In addition, landlords in high-rent areas who keep their rents in line with an official price index will get a 100% exemption for the tax on that income.

Sanchez said the government will promote the construction of social housing and cede two million square metres of residential land to a newly created public housing agency.

However, Sanchez's minority government faces a constant struggle to pass any bill in a fragmented Parliament.

His Socialist Party's housing proposals have drawn criticism from both the right - which

labels them as too interventionist - and hard-left allies, who accuse the centrist Socialists of being too tame with abusive landlords.

"The government's duty is to prioritise residential use of housing and prevent speculative and touristic uses from expanding in a totally uncontrolled manner at the cost of residents," Sanchez said.

Last year, the Bank of Spain recommended that authorities intervene in the rental market, as the high proportion - compared to other EU countries - of households overstretching to pay their rents could lead to "adverse economic and social effects".

Several protests have taken place amid rising anger from citizens who feel they are being priced out of the Spanish market as renting becomes more frequent in a country traditionally made up of homeowners. - Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: JANUARY 14

Bursa Trade Statistic

14 JAN 2025

Participation

Retail (18.29%) Net (in RM mil.)		Institution (40.63%) Net (in RM mil.)		Foreign (41.08%) Net (in RM mil.)	
+98.68		+149.20		-247.89	
Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)
547.92	449.23	1182.09	1032.89	995.77	1243.65

Preliminary status (Excluding Trade Amendments) | Final data, refer to Bursa website

Need Some Ideas?
Our Monthly Trader's Talk will be held Every 1st Monday of the Month Live webinar with Q&A

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

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

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Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,116.90 -62.30
FBMKLCI	1,576.46 -9.13
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	530.22 +2.10
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	167.06 -1.40
CONSTRUCTION	301.83 -6.19
FINANCIAL SERVICES	18,762.80 -70.30
ENERGY	833.02 -2.77
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	534.51 +5.77
HEALTH CARE	2,222.42 -16.10
TRANSPORTATION	1,043.25 -0.91
PROPERTY	1,105.60 -3.90
PLANTATION	7,399.36 -43.50
FBMSHA	12,053.50 -57.30
FBMACE	5,260.58 +14.55
TECHNOLOGY	61.04 -0.52

TURNOVER: 3.451 bil VALUE: RM2.725 bil

Bursa ends at intraday low on late selling of selected stocks

BURSA Malaysia failed to sustain the buying momentum seen most of yesterday to end at an intraday low on late selling of selected utilities and plantation heavyweight counters, amid a mixed performance in regional peers.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI fell 9.13 points, or 0.57%, to 1,576.46 from Monday's close of 1,585.59.

The benchmark index, which opened 7.38 points higher at 1,592.97, moved between 1,576.46 and 1,599.43 during the trading session.

The broader market was negative with decliners leading gainers 588 to 400, while 529 counters were unchanged, 842 untraded, and 17 suspended.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said the index had opened higher, reflecting initial strength and hinting at a recovery from the declines accumulated over the past week.

"However, the momentum waned as the session progressed, reflecting continued caution among investors. Nonetheless, signs of a rebound emerged as bargain hunters capitalised on undervalued blue-chip stocks.

"This cautious optimism reflects the market's underlying resilience, but also its vulnerability to external pressures such as global economic challenges and geopolitical uncertainties," he told Bernama.

Among heavyweights, Maybank jumped 12 sen to RM10.20, while CIMB shed 13 sen to RM7.97, Public Bank fell five sen to RM4.40, Tenaga dropped eight sen to RM13.82, and IHH slipped two sen to RM7.08.

As for the active stocks, TWL Holdings, Velocity Capital and EA Holdings were flat at three sen, eight sen and half-a-sen respectively, MYEG slid one sen to 93.5 sen while Harvest Miracle added one sen to 19.5 sen.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWA1	0.125	0.015	13.64	1,303,900
HSI-PWB1	0.110	-0.025	-18.52	1,159,608
MYEG-C7Z	0.060	-0.090	-60.00	1,024,647
MYEG-C7C	0.030	-0.030	-50.00	994,550
HSI-PWB5	0.100	-0.035	-25.93	983,008
MYEG-C8A	0.170	-0.005	-2.86	800,000
MYEG-C6R	0.160	0.005	3.23	799,085
TWL	0.030	-	-	781,449
VELOCITY	0.080	-	-	758,450
EAH	0.005	-	-	671,889
MYEG	0.935	-0.010	-1.06	522,812
HM	0.195	0.010	5.41	510,539
NATGATE	2.350	0.020	0.86	509,755
ITL	2.180	-0.120	-5.22	447,242
ITRONIC	0.045	0.010	28.57	436,102
ALIBABA-C41	0.095	0.010	11.76	434,748
YTLPOWR	3.810	-0.190	-4.75	412,376
SET	0.370	-0.005	-1.33	402,290
HSI-PWB4	0.065	-0.015	-18.75	378,195
YTLPOWR-C64	0.045	-0.010	-18.18	331,919



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
BLDPLNT	11.980	0.700	11
PETDAG	19.520	0.260	2,317
SHH	1.480	0.230	91
NESTLE	92.700	0.200	666
FGN	26.800	0.120	246
MAYBANK	10.200	0.120	199,735
HLIND	13.380	0.100	797
AXIATA	2.330	0.090	71,706
SBAGAN	5.550	0.090	34
MCEMENT	4.840	0.080	2,562
PPB	12.180	0.080	3,738
QL	4.580	0.070	17,645
HSI-CWCJ	0.430	0.065	138,936
BNASTRA	1.850	0.060	10,227
CARLSBG	20.340	0.060	1,253
EITA	0.730	0.060	7,313
INNO	1.640	0.060	2,387
YTL-HE	0.300	0.060	2,770
SUPERMX-C4F	0.165	0.055	31,701
XIAOMI-C32	0.720	0.055	56

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
ALIBABA-C40	0.025	400.00	2,200
KGROU	0.010	100.00	53,226
PARLO-WA	0.010	100.00	1,010
YTLPOWR-C59	0.010	100.00	15,846
AXIATA-C1F	0.025	66.67	9,770
TECHBASE-WB	0.025	66.67	38
MAYBANKCIM	0.040	60.00	73,551
HONGSENG	0.015	50.00	107,258
HSI-CWA3	0.015	50.00	200
HSI-CY1	0.030	50.00	63,579
IOICORP-C62	0.015	50.00	501
SUPERMX-C30	0.165	50.00	31,701
VS-C87	0.015	50.00	3,001
GCB-C9	0.080	45.45	1
AXIATA-C11	0.035	40.00	3,075
TXCD-PA	0.035	40.00	342
HSI-CY9	0.095	35.71	239,664
AEDN-C31	0.020	33.33	80
FOCUS	0.020	33.33	10,811
ITRONIC-WA	0.020	33.33	235,790

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	42,297.12	+358.67	+0.86
S&P 500 (US)	5,836.22	+9.18	+0.16
NASDAQ (US)	19,088.10	-73.53	-0.38
NYSE (US)	19,047.33	+84.32	+0.44
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	5,005.39	+51.18	+1.03
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,226.94	+2.75	+0.03
DAX (GER)	20,275.90	+143.05	+0.71
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	38,474.30	-716.10	-1.83
TOPIX (JPN)	2,682.58	-31.54	-1.16
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	19,219.78	+345.64	+1.83
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,820.54	+98.03	+2.63
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,240.94	+80.19	+2.54
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,497.40	+7.84	+0.31
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	175.71	-2.16	-1.21
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,231.00	+39.08	+0.48
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,471.81	+39.94	+0.47
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	76,627.81	+297.80	+0.39
FBM KLCI	1,576.46	-9.13	-0.58
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,783.43	-8.27	-0.22
WTI (US\$/BBL.)	78.72	-0.10	-0.13
BRENT (US\$/BBL.)	80.81	-0.20	-0.25
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,683.90	+5.30	+0.20
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	30.35	+0.04	+0.14
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	959.33	+3.06	+0.32
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	434.60	+2.05	+0.47
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	9,094.50	3.00	0.03
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	475.25	-1.25	-0.26
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	545.25	+0.25	+0.05
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	45.78	-0.21	-0.46
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	10,928.00	+358.00	+3.39
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	194.20	+3.10	+1.62

As at 5pm, Jan 14

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
KLK	20.640	-0.460	1,718
ALLIANZ-PA	20.620	-0.400	73
SUNCON	4.350	-0.340	39,792
PIE	5.730	-0.270	8,346
MPI	23.220	-0.240	1,531
SUNWAY	4.250	-0.240	197,971
HLBANK	19.900	-0.200	9,284
SUNWAY-PA	4.210	-0.190	486
YTLPOWR	3.810	-0.190	412,376
BURSA	8.500	-0.170	17,397
HLFG	17.900	-0.160	501
ALLIANZ	20.360	-0.140	460
VSTEC	3.740	-0.140	6,986
CIMB	7.970	-0.130	97,453
YTL	2.180	-0.120	447,242
IJM	2.870	-0.110	118,253
HSI-PWB1	0.575	-0.105	2
SUNWAY-C23	0.515	-0.105	150
GAMUDA-C2N	0.420	-0.100	1,062
PERSTIM	2.200	-0.100	100

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWA5	0.010	-88.24	12,255
NIO-C10	0.005	-83.33	400
MYEG-C7B	0.005	-75.00	1,300
IJM-C93	0.005	-66.67	1,307
SUNCON-C22	0.005	-66.67	6,993
YTL-C93	0.005	-66.67	10,487
YTLPOWR-C61	0.005	-66.67	11,198
YTL-C97	0.015	-62.50	11,033
MYEG-C7Z	0.060	-60.00	1,024,647
BURSA-C91	0.015	-57.14	8
TENAGA-C2L	0.025	-54.55	520
SUNWAY-C30	0.055	-54.17	720
DNEX-C34	0.005	-50.00	1,000
DRBHCOCM3E	0.005	-50.00	2,000
FBMKLCI-CQJ	0.005	-50.00	7,350
IJM-C89	0.010	-50.00	4,200
INARI-C2W	0.005	-50.00	1,000
KANGER-WB	0.005	-50.00	3,400
MI-C23	0.010	-50.00	8,703
MYEG-C7C	0.030	-50.00	994,550

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

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

Compiled by SunBiz Team

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Tariff-free access to UK for M'sian products expected under CPTPP

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian products, particularly palm oil, are expected to benefit from tariff-free access in the UK under the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade agreement.

Malaysian High Commissioner to the UK and Northern Ireland Datuk Zakri Jaafar said this is possible because the UK formally joined the CPTPP last December.

"Under this framework, tariff for products by member countries will be reduced to zero. This means it will be easier for palm oil from Malaysia to enter the UK," he told a press conference with Malaysian media in London.

Zakri said this when asked if the palm oil tariff issue will be on the agenda during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's five-day visit to the UK beginning today.

Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani is among three ministers accompanying Anwar.

Malaysia ratified the CPTPP in October 2024, joining Peru, Japan, Singapore, Chile, New Zealand and Vietnam in ratifying the agreement.

According to reports here, more than 99% of current UK goods exports to CPTPP member countries will be tariff-free once the deal comes into effect.

CPTPP is an Asia-Pacific trade bloc made up of 11 countries plus the UK. The 11 original members are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

On whether Malaysia will discuss a future free trade agreement with the UK, Zakri said there was no need for that as CPTPP has a similar agreement. - Bernama

Ringgit ends steadies around 4.50 against US dollar

THE ringgit steadied at around 4.50 level against the US dollar at the close yesterday as market participants await the US Producer Price Index report.

At 6pm, the ringgit gained slightly to 4.5035/5100 against the greenback from Monday's close of 4.5080/5120.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said the US Dollar Index (DXY) dropped to 109.445 points yesterday as news of a gradual hike in tariff by US President-elect Donald Trump's economic team may have provided a slight relief to market sentiments.

"Having said that, market sentiments will continue to be guarded as the US Federal Reserve (Fed) might keep the Fed Fund Rate steady in the upcoming Federal Open Market Committee on Jan 28-29 as the US economy remains resilient," he told Bernama.

At the close, the ringgit was mostly lower against other major currencies.

It fell vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6201/6268 from 4.5964/6004 on Monday, declined against the British pound to 5.4839/4918 from 5.4592/4640 yesterday, but advanced versus the Japanese yen to 2.8510/8553 from 2.8706/8733.

The local note traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It slid versus the Thai baht to 12.9500/9739 from 12.9440/9618 at the previous close and was little changed vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah at 276.7/277.3 from 276.8/277.2 on Monday.

The ringgit also depreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.2889/2939 from 3.2788/2822 and was flat at 7.68/7.70 versus the Philippine peso compared to yesterday's 7.68/7.69.

Exchange Rates			
FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5640	4.4250	4.4150
1 Australian Dollar	2.8400	2.7220	2.7060
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3310	3.2310	3.2230
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1720	3.0830	3.0710
1 Euro	4.6850	4.5280	4.5080
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5670	2.4690	2.4530
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3310	3.2310	3.2230
1 Sterling Pound	5.5840	5.4010	5.3810
1 Swiss Franc	5.0140	4.7980	4.7830
100 UAE Dirham	125.7200	119.1000	118.9000
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8350	3.5680	3.3680
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.6700	59.9700	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.3700	59.1700	58.9700
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.2500	56.2500	56.0500
100 Indian Rupee	5.3600	5.0200	4.8200
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0290	0.0262	0.0212
100 Japanese Yen	2.9030	2.8070	2.7970
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.0400	37.7100	37.5100
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6700	1.5600	1.3600
100 Philippine Peso	7.8900	7.4300	7.2300
100 Qatar Riyal	126.5300	120.1200	119.9200
100 Saudi Riyal	122.8700	116.6400	116.4400
100 South Africa Rand	24.9100	22.4900	22.2900
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5900	1.4600	1.2600
100 Swedish Krona	41.9000	38.1100	37.9100
100 Thai Baht	13.7500	12.1800	11.7800

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Gamuda Bhd Target price: RM5.46



Source: Kenanga Research

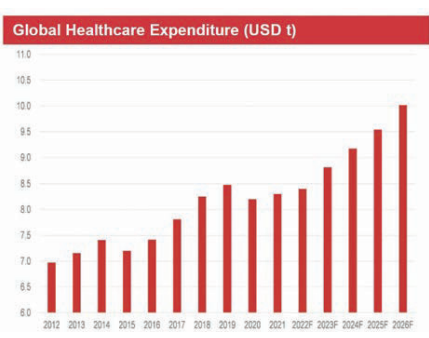
GAMUDA announced that its 60%-owned SRS Consortium Sdn Bhd (SRS) has been awarded the Penang LRT Mutiara Line Project's Package 1 from MRT Corp for RM8.32 billion. This job package involves civil work with 23.7km railway viaduct from Komtar to Island A of the Penang South Reclamation project, and 19 elevated stations, one provisional station in Island A and one depot. PM Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim officiated the groundbreaking ceremony last Saturday (Jan 11), and the project duration is over 72 months. The other shareholders of SRS are Loh Phoy Yen Holdings Sdn Bhd and Ideal Property Development Sdn Bhd which each own 20% stake in SRS.

According to Transport Minister, the tender for the Package 2, which runs from the Macallum Station in George Town to the Penang Sentral Station in Seberang Perai, is expected to be called in July with the award to be announced by early next year. The tender process for Package 3, which is the turnkey system and rolling stock contract, is ongoing with the final pitch deadline on April 14.

While this contract award is highly expected and long overdue, we are positive as SRS is able to start construction immediately and hence job claim. In addition, Transport Minister mentioned that he did not discount the possibility of SRS bidding for the remaining two packages. With this contract win which is worth RM5 billion for 60% stake, GAMUDA has secured a total of RM13.76 billion new job YTD in FY25 (FYE: July) against our FY25 new job wins assumption of RM14.5 billion, and elevated its outstanding order book to a new high of RM37 billion. This project is expected to fetch 8% pre-tax profit margin.

OUTPERFORM with RM5.46 TP. - Kenanga Research, Jan 14

Healthcare Overweight



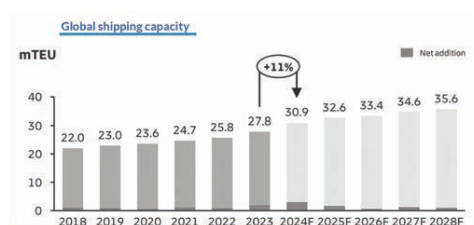
Source: Kenanga Research, WHO, various

GLOBAL healthcare expenditure is projected to grow at a CAGR of 3.5% to reach US\$10 trillion by CY26, underpinned by rising affluence and aging populations. The demand for healthcare, a basic necessity, is inelastic despite high inflation. Another key driver is rising chronic diseases across the globe. According to WHO, almost half of the global healthcare expenditures (US\$4 trillion) will be spent on three leading causes of death, namely: (i) cardiovascular diseases, (ii) cancer, and (iii) respiratory diseases.

Looking into 2025, IHH plans to add >4,000 beds (+30%) over the next five years across Malaysia, India, Türkiye and Europe. It expects earnings drag to gradually ease in Türkiye (the return of foreign patients), Singapore (nurse shortages resolved) and Hong Kong (economies of scale). IHH expects its earnings momentum to accelerate, underpinned by revenue intensity and rising demand in 2HFY24. We believe IHH has greater exposure to medical tourism by virtue of its vast overseas markets.

We like IHH for its pricing power as the inelastic demand for private healthcare services allows providers such as IHH to pass on the higher cost amidst rising inflation, and its presence in multiple markets, i.e. Malaysia, Singapore, Türkiye and Greater China. The share price performance of IHH has lagged its peers such as KPJ and SUNWAY. We consider the under-performance unwarranted. IHH trades at 13x EV/EBITDA discount compared to 20x that Columbia Asia paid for Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care. - Kenanga Research, Jan 14

Transportation Neutral



Source: Drewry, DHL

DESPITE maintaining a positive outlook on Malaysia's exports in 2025, the RHB Economics team remains cautious on short-term volatility, specifically on potential protectionist policies implemented by the US under the Donald Trump-led administration ahead. While any direct impact on Malaysia's export sector from US protectionism may be minimal, significant indirect effects could arise through China - as Malaysia is a key supplier within China-centric supply chains.

While full recovery of air passenger movements in 2024 is unlikely, 11'24 passenger numbers have improved to 93% of pre-pandemic levels, from 78% in 2023. Hence, we anticipate 2025 air passenger numbers for Malaysia to rise by 20% to 113.0m, exceeding pre-pandemic levels of 105.3 million passengers. Regardless, the MAHB privatisation process is still advancing, with a delisting expected in Q1. Despite the independent advice circular deeming the offer unfair, it provides shareholders an exit at the highest price MAHB has ever traded.

The Red Sea crisis remains, resulting in shippers continuing to avoid the affected zone and opting to take a longer route around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. Although shippers have adjusted to using the longer route, freight rates are still higher YoY. Fitch Ratings expects container transport volumes to rise by 3% in 2025, which will be more than offset by the supply growth of 5% leading to declining rates. This was further supported by Drewry's expectation of increased global shipping capacity of 11% YoY in 2024, followed by another 5.5% YoY rise in 2025. However, we think ocean freight rates should remain elevated above pre-pandemic levels in the near term, mainly due to potential frontloading as a result of tariffs imposed by the US as well as increased demand in anticipation of the upcoming Lunar New Year. - RHB Research, Jan 14



the Sun **LYFE**

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Miss Muscle

From beauty pageant winner to gym owner - P22

WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and social media

TUESDAY

Travel and leisure

WEDNESDAY

Fashion and beauty

THURSDAY

Home and living

FRIDAY

Food and beverage

-PIC COURTESY OF CHASE MCMILLAN

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Detox tips for gut health

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p26

Squid Game 2 breaks record



BY JOHN TAN

Beauty meets brawn

➤ Kimberley Leggett on venturing into fitness, bodybuilding after Miss Universe

IT has been over a decade since Kimberley Ann Estrop-Leggett was crowned Miss Universe Malaysia, defeating 19 other contestants.

The Penang native then went on to represent Malaysia at Miss Universe 2012, which she describes as a surreal experience.

"Just like anyone, I was inspired by the women in the pageants. They were all beautiful and intelligent. They all had intellectual jobs as some of them were lawyers and engineers.

"I thought of them as triple threats. I always wanted to be like them, wanted to emulate that for myself in some regard. So, in a way, it was a dream," recalled Leggett in an exclusive interview with *theSun*.

But since her pageant win, her life has been far from glamorous. While other beauty queens pursued careers in entertainment, Leggett, now 31, decided to pursue her passion for fitness after getting a degree in nutrition.

"When I was younger, I was a chubby kid. I struggled with body image issues. Miss Universe was more of a challenge for me in that sense.

"For me, to achieve that physique that I had always admired of other people, to achieve that for myself was such a groundbreaking moment for me. I then fell in love with the process, which inspired me to help other people achieve that too," said the now fitness coach and bodybuilder.

Debunking stereotypes

This pursuit, however, took some adjustments. Given her tenure as Miss Universe Malaysia, beauty pageant fans were surprised as they were expecting her to maintain a particular look.

"Fans of beauty pageants are more about the skinny model look. So, for them, it was a shock factor as there is a mentality that muscular is not feminine. So, that is a myth I need to dispel because it is not the case."

Her family and friends, on the other hand, were not surprised. Instead, they were astonished by her decision to participate in Miss Universe Malaysia back in 2012.

"I was always sporty when I was growing up. My friends, in fact, found it surprising when I joined Miss Universe Malaysia as I was a tomboy.



Leggett competing at Miss Universe in 2012 at Las Vegas.

relationship with food and her body. Not only was she previously uncomfortable in her own skin, but she also struggled with food.

"I was always the person that was sitting on the side and not being in the pool during parties. I did not want to be in swimwear. I also did not have a good relationship with food. I used to binge at home and was a closet eater behind the scenes," she confessed.

Even during her pageant days, she succumbed to various unhealthy methods to reach her desired look, which took a toll on her health.

"Miss Universe helped me to achieve a goal I wanted. But I

My mother actually had to push me to dress up and be more presentable.

"So, for me to join the pageant was contrary to how I presented myself on a daily basis. In that sense, it made more sense for me to be a fitness trainer and bodybuilder than to be a beauty pageant queen."

Healthier outcomes

Now that she has ventured into fitness, Leggett has never felt more fulfilled and healthier. For one, she has a better



Leggett made her debut as a competitive bodybuilder recently. - PIC COURTESY OF DALLAS OLSEN

would say it was not necessarily done in a way that is healthy, nor one that I would recommend. I did it the wrong way. I under-ate and overdid the exercises, leading me to a place that was unhealthy.

"I lost my menses and my cycle for three to four years after that. I had all the symptoms that came with under-eating and almost essentially having an eating disorder. Yet, I was praised for how I looked."

Fortunately, she no longer practises those habits as she has equipped herself with a holistic and healthier outlook on her physique.

"I now know what is right and what is wrong for my body. I eat more than I probably ever ate. I also look very healthy and different to how I looked at Miss Universe. So, I have definitely come a long way."

Current endeavours

Leggett has been committed to educating her clients on healthier

approaches to reaching their fitness goals. Instead of depriving themselves of food, she advocates for her clients to adopt a combination of healthy habits.

From eating a well-proportioned diet to sleeping and exercising regularly, Leggett is passionate about curating a robust and sustainable plan for her clients.

Aside from coaching, she has kept herself busy with her bodybuilding aspirations, making her professional debut recently at a competition in Australia.

"I was placed in the top five. I was hoping for a top three or a win. I hope to achieve that at some point."

"Either next year or the year after, I am looking at doing the world championship. The end goal is to be a world champion at some stage. That is definitely my goal in the near future."

Life outside fitness

Her resolutions this year include activities besides fitness as well. Considering the amount of time she spends in the gym, she aims to explore her identity outside fitness.

"I hope to enjoy some parts of life outside competing and bodybuilding. The thing with bodybuilding, it takes away months of your life when you are dedicated to the sole goal."

"You do not think and do anything else. So, I hope to live in the moment a little bit, go on holidays and enjoy other parts of life," said the former beauty queen.



Leggett and partner Nic McWilliams own a gym. - PIC COURTESY OF KIMBERLEY LEGGETT



Leggett trains three to four times a week in the gym. - CHASE MCMILLAN PIC

BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

AS brands kick off 2025 with ambitious campaigns, they are turning to some of Asia's most compelling personalities to tell their stories. From e-commerce giants tapping into the vibrant energy of rising entertainment groups, to health food companies partnering with respected veteran actresses and sports equipment makers joining forces with Olympic-bound athletes, this year's brand partnerships reflect a diverse cross-section of Asian talent.

The carefully curated collaborations span multiple industries and demographics, with each ambassador bringing their unique appeal to their respective brands. Whether it is through high-energy livestream shopping events, wellness education initiatives or campaigns celebrating milestone anniversaries, these partnerships are set to shape consumer engagement throughout the year, particularly during the festive Chinese New Year (CNY) season.

Most notably, these collaborations extend beyond mere promotional activities, with many ambassadors actively integrating their partnered brands into their professional lives and personal routines.

Shopee

For this year's CNY sale, Shopee has announced performing artist group 3P will be its brand ambassadors for the Shopee CNY Sale throughout the month until Jan 30.

Consisting of Danny Lee, Caven Tang and Kevin Ong, 3P can be seen on Shopee Live today at 8pm for a festive celebration filled with dance performances, interactive game shows, giveaways and exclusive festive CNY deals, such as 88% off lowest price guaranteed, free shipping with no minimum spend and *Huat! The Fortune*, a game show in which shoppers can watch and win RM8,888 angpows daily.

Shopee has also engaged D00nuts and SteadyGang for special CNY hits, along with influencers Gladish Chan, Elaine Chuah and Mika Chan who will unveil exclusive health and beauty, fashion and lifestyle deals on Shopee Live until Jan 25.



Known for his pedigree in acting, Kim is the latest face of Prada.



3P is joining Shopee's CNY festive sales campaign.

Stars align for brands

Asian faces lead major recent campaigns



Tan (left) and Thinaah embody Sharp's new 'Live Mighty' campaign.



Yim is Nattome's new brand ambassador.

Nattome
Rolling out its latest gut health foods with black sesame, Nattome has inked a collaboration with Hong Kong actress Michelle Yim as its brand ambassador to champion the company's advocacy of gut health.

As the face of the brand, Yim will share digestive wellness insights via educational reels and headline the launch of the new Nattome's black sesame beverage, which has now become a staple of her daily health and wellness regime.

Yim is full of gratitude, having completed filming a TV series in Malaysia and China, to high ratings and positive feedback. She also performed in a cultural exchange Cantonese opera in Singapore to much success.

In her new role as Nattome Brand Ambassador, Yim looks forward to helping create the awareness of gut health and counts

on Nattome stomach foods to sustain her energy and vitality as she surges forward with a busy 2025 ahead.

Sharp
Commemorating its 40th anniversary in Malaysia, Sharp Electronics has launched its Sharp 40 Live Mighty campaign and Double Sincerity Service Upgrade programme. The initiatives serve to highlight Sharp's commitment to enriching Malaysian lives through advanced Japanese technology and exceptional service standards.

To do so, Malaysia's top women's doubles badminton pair, Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan, have been appointed as ambassadors for the campaign as their resilience and outstanding achievements are in line with Sharp's advocacy for bold living and embracing life's infinite possibilities while

overcoming challenges.

Sharps also sees the duo's relentless pursuit of excellence and ability to inspire others as a demonstration of what it means to "Live Mighty".

Prada

One of South Korea's most renowned actors with a career across drama series and film, Kim Soo-hyun has been announced as Prada's latest brand ambassador.

Known for his versatility, Kim recently starred as Baek Hyun-woo in the record breaking 2024 drama *Queen of Tears*, which earned its status as Netflix's standout K-drama of the year.

His on-screen roles, including the protagonist in *My Love from the Star*, among others, have solidified his name as a key figure in the Korean film industry.

Lemon is top natural ingredient for detox

LOOKING to bring back balance to your dietary routine after a full-course meal? Could the lemon detox diet be what you are looking for?

Combining benefits for the immune system and detoxifying properties, this regimen is based on regular consumption of lemon juice and a balanced diet. Read on to discover the principles of this method and its benefits for cleansing the body and boosting your vitality at the start of the new year.

Inspired by the recommendations of naturopath Stanley Burrough, known for his "master cleanse", this regime combines regular consumption of lemon juice with a balanced diet.

The small, yellow citrus is among the fruits richest in vitamin C (more than 29mg per 100mg). This vitamin contributes to the proper functioning of the immune system and helps reduce fatigue. It is therefore a source of vitality but this zesty fruit is also known to cleanse the body and is even said to be beneficial in fighting hangovers. These many virtues make lemon a great ally in the aftermath of the festive season.

How does the lemon detox work? The lemon detox falls

into the category of lower-calorie diets. It operates on the principle of reducing the number of calories taken into the body while consuming lemon juice at regular intervals.

Following this diet involves incorporating lemon juice into meals as a kind of condiment. Red meat, cream and fried foods are prohibited on this regime. During this detox, your plate will be exclusively composed of foods rich in good fat, such as avocado, egg and salmon and whole foods, such as rice, pasta or legumes.

It is a diet that can be combined with exercise as long as the diet remains balanced and does not cause deficiencies.

The World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week (at least one-half hour per day). For more intense activity, this time should be divided by two.

Experts recommended following the lemon detox for 15 to 21 days.

Obviously, this method can work differently from one person to another. The most important thing is to listen to your body and of course, consult a health professional. – ETX Studio



Experts recommend following the lemon detox for 15 to 21 days. – ALL PICS BY PEXELS



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SCAN ME



A full comprehensive beauty routine comprises makeup removal, skin cleansing and moisturising.

Rejuvenate your skin

► How to get radiant complexion

DULL complexion, dry texture and blemishes leave its mark on your skin.

But, do not panic! A health regime, combining a balanced diet and a targeted beauty routine, can help you get your radiant complexion back. Here are a few simple and effective tips for healthier complexion.

It is by no means essential to detox but it can be a good way to reset for anyone who feels the effects of excesses.

As we know all too well, increased consumption of fat, sugar and alcohol as well as a lack of exercise and sleep can cause skin damage.

Dull and dry skin is a phenomenon accentuated by temperature variations. Blemishes can also be an issue. But, a few simple steps can help remedy the situation.

Put healthy eating on menu

While some people might opt for a strict detox, involving just fruit, vegetables and juices, it is often sufficient to return to your former habits in order to restore

skin radiance.

The first step is to reduce fat, sugar and alcohol intake – something that you have probably already done or will do, naturally. But to optimise the results, it can be advisable to add fruits and vegetables with antioxidant properties to your diet – or those that help eliminate toxins and stimulate digestion.

When it comes to vegetables, choose celery, artichoke, cabbage (in all its forms), watercress, chicory, beet, broccoli and leeks.

Note that black radish, cooked or in the form of a supplement, is a great partner for tackling digestive disorders and to cleanse the body. It is an excellent food for a detox as long as you respect the recommended doses.

For fruit, citrus fruits have the power to help regulate digestion and are rich in vitamin C, an essential ally of the skin. Kiwis are also good for a detox of this type as are red berries – although it is better to choose fruit that is in season.

In addition, try drinking a glass of warm water (or room temperature water) with lemon in the morning to help detoxify the skin.

Full beauty routine

Beyond diet, late nights and fatigue

lead many to skip the makeup removal step, increasing the risk of blemishes.

This risk is even greater for individuals who love elaborate makeup looks that can prevent the skin from breathing.

Makeup removal, skin cleansing morning and night, with a chemical peel and a detoxifying mask once a week, plus daily moisturising, are among the essential steps of a full and comprehensive beauty routine.

But, certain beauty allies can also help you regain a fresh and radiant complexion more quickly. This is true for purifying treatments, but also of facial saunas and massage tools that will help eliminate signs of fatigue.

Other tips, which may already be part of your daily routine, can help your skin look its best. Drinking plenty of water is recommended for glowing skin – some say 1.5 litres but it really depends on the colour of your urine (light yellow for good hydration).

Similarly, any form of exercise is beneficial for the skin as is letting it breathe by considerably reducing the amount of makeup you wear for a few days.

All in all, it should not be too difficult to get healthy, glowing skin. – ETX Studio



Over 30 food stalls and trucks provide quick bites for visitors who attended the event.



The games played at the *theSun* x PETRONAS Primax 95 with Pro-Drive booth.



PETRONAS Malaysia Open 2025 ends with a success after massive turnout.

BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

Fans flock to badminton finals

▶ PETRONAS Malaysia Open 2025 closes strong despite local exit

ON the final day of the PETRONAS Malaysia Open 2025, crowds began pouring in an hour or so before the final matches began at the Axiata Arena in Bukit Jalil. Though numbers were admittedly lower than the previous days, possibly due to Malaysian athletes not making it past last Saturday's matches, badminton fans turned up nonetheless.

Many were drawn to the activities and attractions outside the venue in between and during the matches.

At *theSun* x PETRONAS Primax 95 with Pro-Drive booth in the Foodfest area, visitors were rather slow to show up, but once a crowd formed, curious onlookers flocked to it too.

Visitors at the booth had three choices of games to play to win custom, limited PETRONAS merchandise:

➡ **Pedal power bike challenge**

Participants hopped on stationary bikes and pedalled their hearts out to generate electricity, leading onlookers to cheer. Some tried harder than others and were rewarded with exclusive merchandise from the prize pool.

➡ **Steady hand buzz wire**

Next to the pedal bikes was the intimidating metal contraption of the buzz wire maze. A classic precision game, participants had to summon the best level of concentration and control they had to carefully guide their wand through the long, intricate wire maze without making contact.

For most of the participants, this was the second-hardest game, as their rod often touched the wire, causing a bell to ring.

➡ **Ball maze balance**

This game required participants to be dexterous. A test of skill and patience, they had to guide a ball with impeccable balance from one end of a maze to the other, where a single wrong tilt would spell failure and invite a restart.

The three games were meant to represent elements of PETRONAS Primax 95 with Pro-Drive's smooth and frictionless driving experience.

Elsewhere, closer to the entrance of Axiata Arena was the PETRONAS Pavilion, which had more activities for visitors.

Within the orange "booth", PETRONAS hosted a variety of games such as interactive badminton, multi-touch game, eCrossminton and a reaction challenge. The Pavilion also had an area for Mesra Rewards and a



The Pavilion has various activities for visitors. – ALL PICS BY ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

Exclusive merchandise at *theSun* x PETRONAS Primax 95 with Pro-Drive booth.



The PETRONAS Pavilion is set up right outside Axiata Arena.

PETRONAS Shop for visitors to get their hands on various goodies.

In between all the badminton excitement and PETRONAS activities, an area was cordoned off for visitors and foodies to recharge.

There were about 34 stalls and food trucks that offered a myriad of food items and icy beverages. Pizza Hut and Texas Chicken food trucks were present as well as stalls offering Malaysian, Hong Kong and South Korean delicacies.

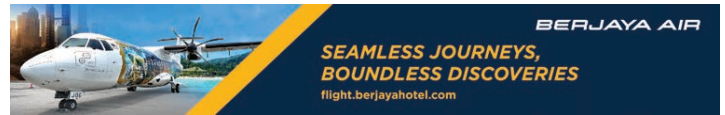
With fine weather on the final day of the PETRONAS Malaysia Open 2025, it was a great time for everyone who came by.

PETRONAS Malaysia Open 2025 results

In the Men's Singles, China's Shi Yu Qi triumphed in the finals while the Men's Doubles had South Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae coming out on top. Meanwhile, South Korea saw another win with An Se Young clinching the Women's Singles win as Japan's Yuki Fukushima and Mayu Matsumoto sealed the Women's Doubles final match. Finally, for the Mixed Doubles, Thailand's Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran overcame their challengers from China.



Participants with their merchandise.



WHEN it comes to TV shows, Netflix is determined to succeed. The second season of the South Korean series *Squid Game* has scored over 126 million views in record time, a feat never before achieved on the platform.

Season 2 of *Squid Game* scores record-breaking debut on Netflix

➤ South Korean hit series garners 126.2m views in just 11 days

In just four days, *Squid Game* delivered a breathtaking performance. The second season racked up 68 million views, making it the biggest launch ever on the streaming platform, the US media giant revealed on its official website.

The show maintained this momentum into its first full week of availability, drawing another 58.2 million views to take first place in the Top 10 non-English shows available on Netflix in 91 countries.

In just 11 days, the series' second season had racked up an impressive 126.2 million views. No other Netflix show has managed that feat within that length of time, making it a new record for the platform.

To put these figures into perspective, the first season of *Squid Game* scored 265.2 million views in its first 91 days online. With 126.2 million views already accumulated for the second season, only 139 million views remain to be achieved in 80 days for this new season to overtake the first. Given the show's growing popularity on social media, this goal seems entirely achievable.

The excitement surrounding the long-awaited launch of the show's second season has rekindled interest in the first one too. Despite being released on Netflix in 2021, Season 1 accumulated an additional 13.6 million views,



Squid Game's second season is on track to overtake its first in viewership. – PIC FROM FACEBOOK @NETFLIX

enabling it to take second place in the Top 10 most-watched non-English shows on the platform for the week of Dec 30, 2024, to Jan 5

this year. This success is certainly no accident. After a three-year wait between seasons, Netflix has

pulled out all the stops to promote the show's return, notably by offering rewards in its free video game (under certain conditions) –

also available on the streaming platform – as well as a surprise for fans on Google Search. – ETX Studio

Mandopop veteran Chyi Yu to stage solo concert in Malaysia

TAIWAN'S veteran songstress Chyi Yu will perform in Malaysia on April 26, marking her first live appearance in the country after seven years.

The 66-year-old singer will make her comeback at the Mega Star Arena in Kuala Lumpur at 8pm as part of her Chyi Yu Forever Splendor 2025 Live Concert in Kuala Lumpur.

Fans can look forward to her delivery of classic after classic, such as *Huan Yan*, *Chuan Ge*, *Meng Tian*, *Jiu Yue De Gao Gen Xie* and *Tian Xia You Qing Ren*. These memory-evoking numbers will tug at concertgoers' heartstrings, along with her renditions of English-language folk songs such as *Stories*, *Whoever Finds This, I Love You* and *Angel*.

Dubbed the "voice of an angel", Chyi debuted in 1979 and is known for her soft and ethereal voice, packaged in folk, classical and pop sounds. Her ever-popular hits, including *Gan Lan Shu* and *Fei Niao Yu Yu*, resonate with listeners across generations.

Through her music, she has built an enduring legacy for herself in the Mandopop sphere. She has won numerous



Chyi's concert in Malaysia will be her first in the country after seven years.

accolades such as the Golden Melody Awards, Golden Tripod Awards and Chinese Music Media Awards.

Organised by SunStrong Entertainment, tickets for the concert are priced from RM288 to RM788.



The Los Angeles fires have torched several iconic filming locations. – AFP/IC

Los Angeles fires halt filming of several TV shows

THE show will not go on in Hollywood. The spectacular fires ravaging Los Angeles and the surrounding area have forced several TV productions, such as *Abbott Elementary* and *Grey's Anatomy*, to suspend filming. Even awards ceremonies, including the Oscars, are being affected by these devastating fires.

As wildfires continue to ravage homes and other properties on the US West Coast, several TV shows have been forced to suspend filming and Warner Bros studios has had to close its doors. One halted production is *Abbott Elementary*, the Quinta Brunson comedy on ABC. Other shows affected include the *Suits* spin-off, *Suits: LA* (due in February on NBC), *Ted* (starring Seth MacFarlane, airing on Peacock), as well as *NCIS*, *NCIS: Origins* on CBS, *The Neighborhood* and *Poppa's House*.

The cult shows *Grey's Anatomy* and *Doctor Odyssey* on ABC as well as Jimmy Kimmel's talk show will also have to take a break from filming, as will the drama series *All Americans*, airing on The CW, and the medical series *The Pitt*, which launched last Friday on Max with Noah Wyle (*ER*).

Unfortunately, some iconic filming locations have gone up in flames. Such is the case for Palisades Charter High School, famous for having served as the setting for Brian De Palma's *Carrie*, Danny Steinmann's *Savage Streets*, and Mark Waters' 2003 movie *Freaky Friday*, starring Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis.

In addition to the series productions on hold, the devastating fires have also impacted several Hollywood award ceremonies. Scheduled for this Sunday in Santa Monica, the Critics Choice Awards have now been postponed to Jan 26. "This unfolding tragedy has already had a profound impact on our community. All our thoughts and prayers are with those battling the devastating fires and with all who have been affected," Critics Choice Association CEO Joey Berlin said in a statement.

The movie world's most prestigious awards ceremony, the Oscars, has been affected too. Originally scheduled for Friday, the announcement of this year's nominations has been postponed to Sunday. The voting window was therefore extended to 5pm yesterday. – ETX Studio

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Malaysian Paper

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322 Notices

NOTICE IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT 2016
AND
IN THE MATTER OF PRIMA CONDOMINIUM SDN. BHD.
(Company Registration No: 198001011194 (64980-7))
(In Members' Voluntary Winding Up)
NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the abovementioned Company will be held at Wisma Laxton, 9-3 Jalan Desa, Taman Desa, 58100 Kuala Lumpur on Monday, 17th February 2025 at 09.00 a.m. for the following purposes:

1. To receive the Liquidator's Statement of Account showing the manner in which the winding up has been conducted, the property of the Company has been disposed of and to hear any explanation that may be given by the Liquidator.
2. To determine the manner in which the books, accounts and documents of the Company and of the Liquidator shall be disposed of.

Dated this 15th January 2025
Wang Heng Boon
Liquidator
Kuala Lumpur

Note:
A member entitled to attend and vote in this meeting is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote in his stead. The instrument appointing such a proxy must be deposited at the office of the Liquidator, Wisma Laxton, 9-3 Jalan Desa, Taman Desa, 58100 Kuala Lumpur not less than 48 hours before the time of the meeting.

322 Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT SHAH ALAM IN THE STATE OF SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA COMPANIES (WINDING UP) NO. BA-28NCC-613-12/2024

In the matter of Section 464(1)(b) and Section 465(1)(e) of the Companies Act 2016.

IN THE MATTER OF HANGAL ENERGY BERHAD (Company No. : 200801015549 (816839-K))
BETWEEN
THINKAT ADVISORY SDN BHD (Company No. 1219502-A) ...PETITIONER
AND
HANGAL ENERGY BERHAD (Company No. : 200801015549 (816839-K)) ...RESPONDENT
ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Petition for the Winding-Up of the abovementioned Company by the High Court was on the 28th day of December, 2024 presented by Thinkat Advisory Sdn Bhd. And that the said Petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Shah Alam on the 14th day of April, 2025 at 9.00 a.m. and any creditor or contributory of the said Company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said Petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his Counsel for the purpose and a copy of the Petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said Company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is C-2/4, Plaza Damas, 60, Jalan Sri Hartamas 1, Sri Hartamas, 50480 Kuala Lumpur.

The Petitioner's solicitors is Messrs Yusuf Khan & Fong of No. 97B, Jalan Gasing, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Messrs Yusuf Khan & Fong Solicitors for the abovementioned Petitioner

NOTE - Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the abovementioned Messrs Yusuf Khan & Fong, Advocates & Solicitors, No. 97B, Jalan Gasing, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan notice in writing of his intention to do so. The Notice must state the name and address of the person or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm and must be signed by the person or firm or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovementioned not later than twelve (12) o'clock noon on the 13th day of April, 2025.

This Advertisement of Petition is issued by Messrs. Yusuf Khan & Fong, solicitors for the abovementioned Petitioner whose address for service is at No. 97B, Jalan Gasing, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Tel : 7551590 & Email : yusufkhanfongkstan@yahoo.com. (Ref. : TASB/5813/SL/24 (LH))

322 Notices

PERISTYHARAN JUJUAN DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO: PA-38-1239-11/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1965
Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Gabungan Perserahan No: 0799S202100086/ bertarikh: 23/12/2020 ke atas semua baki-baki tanah yang dipanggil di bawah Hakmilik Strata No. Hakmilik Geran 44922/M/15/35, Lot 1813 Seksyen 2, Mukim Bandar George Town, Daerah Timur Laut, Pulau Pinang
Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Aturan 83 Kaedah-Kaedah Mahkamah, 2012

ANTARA
Public Bank Berhad (No. Syarikat: 6463-H) ... PLAINTIFF
DAN
Tham Woi Kit (No. Kad Pengenalan: 96101275601) ... DEFENDAN

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya di Pulau Pinang mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 12 Jun 2023 dan 18 Disember 2024, adalah dengan ini diisytiharkan bahawa Timbalan Pendaftar/Pemohon Kanan Pendaftar Pusat Operasi e-LELONG di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA
LELONG AWAM
Pada Hari Khamis, 13 Februari 2025, Pada Jam 11:00 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 langganan, bebanan serta mengenai gasti dengan agensi hartanah tersebut sebelum jualan lelongan dijalankan.

Sila layari <https://lelong.hakmilik.gov.my/bidderweb>

BUTIR-BUTIR HAKMILIK:

No. Hakmilik : Hakmilik Strata No. Hakmilik Geran 44922/M/15/35
No. Lot : Lot 1813 Seksyen 2
Mukim/Daerah/Negeri : Bandar George Town / Timur Laut / Pulau Pinang
Pegangan : Hakmilik Kekal
No. Petak/No. Tingkat/No. Bangunan : 35 / 5 / M1
Keluasan Tanah : 710.0000000000 kaki persegi
Keluasan Bangunan : 65.0000000000 meter persegi
Pemilik Berdaftar : Tham Woi Kit
Syarat Nyata : Petak ini hendaklah digunakan untuk tujuan rumah tangga sahaja.
Seksyen/Kepentingan : Tiada
Bebanan / Lain-Lain : The subject property is presently charged to Public Bank Berhad vide Presentation No. 0799S202100086 registered on 5th January 2021
Kawasan Rizab :
Alamat : NO. 27, 1ST & 2ND FLOOR JALAN MALJU JAYA, PUSAT PERKHIDMATAN MALJU JAYA, 14000, PG, MY
No. Telefon : 04-5388855
No. Faks : 04-5388855
No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-HL-2023-067/TWK(RS/J)

Final curtain call for Gypsy King?

TYSON FURY has, not for the first time, announced his retirement from the boxing ring. But is this really the end of the road for the "Gypsy King"?

The towering 36-year-old British heavyweight called it a day yesterday, just weeks after his second straight defeat by Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk in Saudi Arabia.

"Hi everybody, I'm going to make this short and sweet," he said in a post on social media, apparently filmed inside a vehicle.

"I'd like to announce my retirement from boxing, it has been a blast, I've loved every single minute of it."

Fury enjoyed two stints as the heavyweight world champion and retires with a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw. That is if he stays retired.

Fury has previously announced his exit on a number of occasions, most recently in April 2022. But they all turned out to be short-term absences from the ring and many pundits are sceptical that this really is the end.

Fury's promoter, Frank Warren, told the BBC Fury had become a "world star".

"If you look at some of the fights he's had, he's not been in one fight that hasn't been exciting," he said.

Fury's retirement appears to mean he will not take on another former world champion, Anthony Joshua, in a long-anticipated all-British showdown.

Joshua said at the weekend a fight with Fury "has to happen this year".

Yesterday, Joshua's promoter, Matchroom's Eddie Hearn, said he doubted that Fury was

Former world heavyweight champion Fury retires from boxing again

really gone for good.

The two-time heavyweight world champion, who stands six feet nine inches tall was born three months premature in Manchester in 1988, weighing just half a kilogram.

He was named after American boxing great Mike Tyson while his "Gypsy King" nickname comes from his Irish Traveller roots.

Fury turned professional in 2008 before becoming the British and Commonwealth champion with victory over Derek Chisora three years later.

In 2014, he beat Chisora again, this time for the European and WBO international heavyweight titles. Fury became a global name in November 2015 when he defied the odds to end Wladimir Klitschko's decade-long heavyweight reign with a unanimous decision to take the WBA, IBF and WBO belts.

But his joy proved to be short-lived.

He ended up spending two-and-a-half years outside the ring, during which he battled depression, drink and drug problems, ballooning to more than 178kg.

Fury tested positive for banned steroid nandrolone in February 2015 but blamed the result on eating uncastrated wild boar. He was cleared to fight again in December 2017 by UK Anti-Doping after accepting a backdated two-year ban. - AFP

INSIDE EDGE

Nortje back in Proteas squad

FAST bowler Anrich Nortje was yesterday named in South Africa's 15-man squad for the Champions Trophy one-day international tournament in Pakistan next month. Nortje, 31, has not played in a 50-over match since September 2023 when he suffered a stress fracture. He came back to be South Africa's most successful bowler in the T20 World Cup last June but has not played an international match since the final against India in Barbados. He turned down a Cricket South Africa contract in order to play T20 franchise cricket. Nortje had been due to play in white-ball matches against Pakistan last month but suffered a broken right toe while batting in the nets. Coach Rob Walter said he was confident Nortje would be in peak physical condition for the Champions Trophy. "He was at our camp in Pretoria bowling really quickly," said Walter. "He was super-fit and super-energised to be playing for South Africa again and it was just one of those unfortunate circumstances."

Shreyas to captain Punjab

INDIAN batsman Shreyas Iyer has been named captain of Indian Premier League team Punjab Kings for the upcoming edition of the lucrative T20 tournament. Shreyas, a title-winning captain with Kolkata Knight Riders last season, was picked by Punjab for US\$3.17m (RM14.5m) as the second-most expensive buy in the IPL auction in December. The 30-year-old Shreyas said he was excited to re-union with Australian great and new Punjab coach Ricky Ponting, after the two previously worked together with Delhi Capitals. Shreyas said he was "honoured" to be named as skipper. "I am looking forward to working again with coach Ponting," Shreyas said in a statement. "The team looks strong, with a great mix of potential and proven performers", he added. "I hope to repay the faith shown by the management to deliver our maiden title."

Medvedev survives AO fright

Russian world No. 5 destroys net camera in huge scare against Thai wildcard

DANIIL MEDVEDEV destroyed his racket and a net camera in a mid-match meltdown as he survived a huge scare against Thai wildcard Kasidit Samrej to reach the Australian Open second round yesterday.

The frustrated Russian whacked his racket five times into the net after dropping serve in the third set before rallying to claim the match 6-2, 4-6, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 in the afternoon sun at Rod Laver Arena.

The tantrum earned fifth seed Medvedev a code violation for racket abuse and held up play before the fourth set as staff swept up debris from the court.

In the end, the racket rage was probably a net benefit for Medvedev, who used the pause between sets to regroup before steamrolling the world No. 418 Thai in the final sets.

"I know that I play better when I play more tennis so I was like, 'Why play one-hour-30 (minutes), minimum three hours to feel my shots better,'" joked last year's finalist.

"Second and third set I couldn't touch the ball. Full power, everything in - I didn't know what to do.

"He plays like this every match, life can be good, money, girls, casino, whatever. I wish he can play like this every match."

The first Thai in a men's Grand Slam main draw since Danai Udomchoke qualified for the 2012 Australian Open, Samrej appeared a complete mismatch on paper, having never played an ATP Tour-level match outside of Davis Cup.

But after a nervous start, giving up the first game with a double fault, the 23-year-old was a revelation.

Though nicknamed "Boom" in Thailand, Samrej worked his way into the match with splendid touch, landing drop shots from virtually anywhere to repeatedly outpoint one of the game's most dogged hustlers.

He also showcased serious firepower, with a bazooka forehand fired down the line earning two set points in the second set.

The plucky Thai took the set blasting down the same line, earning a "thumbs-up" from an impressed Medvedev.

Medvedev was soon fresh out of encouragement for his emboldened opponent, however. The Russian had three break points in

the seventh game but Samrej saved all of them, two with drop shots and the third with a deft drop volley.

Soon it was Medvedev scrambling on serve, and after double faulting to give up two break points then drop the game, Medvedev went on his racket-smashing rampage.

Riding a wave of underdog support from the crowd, Samrej blew two out of four set points with botched drop shots on serve but finally broke through with a cracking forehand down the line.

Although a set down and completely rattled, Medvedev re-emerged with his game-face on to put the match back on level terms as Samrej called for pickle juice to treat cramp.

Having regained the momentum, there was no stopping the Russian in the fifth set.

He served out the set to love and will face American qualifier Learner Tien for a place in the third round.

"At the end of last year, this match I probably would have lost it," said Medvedev, a three-times runner-up at Melbourne Park.

"Now it's a new year and new energy... So I'm happy to win this match." - Reuters

TRAMLINES

Rybakina eases past wildcard Jones

ELENA RYBAKINA overpowered Emerson Jones 6-1, 6-1 in the first round of the Australian Open yesterday after the much-anticipated Grand Slam debut of the local teenager turned into one-sided showcase for the world No. 7.

The best first serve in women's tennis was on full display on Margaret Court Arena as Rybakina summoned up 11 aces and quickly snuffed out the three break points earned by the 16-year-old Australian.

"She has a great future and many more years on tour, but I am pretty happy with my performance," the 25-year-old Rybakina said on court.

"I watched a bit of her matches, of course... I think she is very talented and has a great future ahead of her."

Wildcard Jones was a finalist in juniors at the Australian Open and Wimbledon last year and is seen by some as a potential successor to former world No. 1 Ash Barty.

Rybakina has been criticised at times for being slow on her feet but the sixth seed did not have to move much in a match dominated by short rallies.

The Kazakh will face another teenage wildcard, American Iva Jovic, in the second round.

Osaka distracted by LA wildfires

TWO TIME champion Naomi Osaka avenged last year's loss to Caroline Garcia at the Australian Open on Monday but admitted it was difficult to focus on the match considering her home is in danger of being burnt down by the wildfires that have devastated Los Angeles.

"I was watching the fire map and the fire is three blocks from my house," said Osaka, who has an 18-month-old daughter.

"So, I had someone go and get my daughter's birth certificate because I didn't know what would happen if that burned down. Sending all my love to LA.

"It is really difficult for me because I think it's tougher because I find now my home is more of a home because I have memories with my daughter.

"There's so many things, keepsakes and stuff like that. Obviously you can't hoard them all when you're asking them to go to your house and just grab stuff."

Osaka admitted that she did find it difficult to fully concentrate on the match, but said that it could also be a motivating factor going forward.

Monfils downs Perricard in epic match

FRENCH VETERAN Gael Monfils battled through a five-set thriller to topple young countryman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard at the Australian Open yesterday as he enjoys a late-career resurgence.

The flamboyant 38-year-old became the oldest singles champion in ATP Tour history when he swept to victory at the Auckland Classic on Saturday.

He kept the momentum going against Mpetshi Perricard, 21, raising his arms in celebration after a 7-6 (9-7), 6-3, 6-7 (6-8), 6-7 (5-7), 6-4 victory over 3hrs 46mins in the first round.

Monfils won the first two sets and should have wrapped it up in the third, when he had two match points against a player with one of the game's most lethal serves.

But Mpetshi Perricard, who has risen from 205 in the world at the start of 2024 to his current 30, fought back.

Ultimately, Monfils' experience paid off, keeping his cool to reach the second round in Melbourne for a 17th time.

Rusty Raducanu advances despite wayward serve

A rusty Emma Raducanu said her serve felt like it had a mind of its own at times yesterday as she racked up 15 double faults in a 7-6(4), 7-6(2) first-round victory over Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova at the Australian Open.

The 22-year-old Briton, who has dealt with a string of injuries since capturing her only Grand Slam title at the 2021 US Open, returned to action for the first time since November with her win over the 26th seed at Melbourne Park.

Raducanu has often struggled to get going after returning from spells away from the game but she was surprised by how her serve misbehaved, with one of her double faults coming as she held a 30-0 lead when serving for the match.

"Honestly, I'm not sure what I changed in my serve today. I think it had a mind of its own. I'll be sure to reflect, look at that and come back to you," she told reporters.

"In the first set I was hitting a lot of good first serves. I hit a few aces. At the same time I was hitting a double fault. I was quite of accepting that, Okay, I'm at least going for it.

"As the balls got heavier, it was a lot more difficult. As more kept coming, it wasn't easy to refocus, but I knew even if I was down, I have great returns."

Raducanu, who missed five



tournaments on the WTA's Asian swing with sprained ligaments in her foot before missing a tune-up event in Auckland with a back problem, was pleased that was able to grind out the win.

"It was good to be able to rely on other parts of my game today that I know are quite strong, as well," added Raducanu, who also sent down nine aces.

"I'm just proud I didn't let it affect me too much and let the match run away from me."

Raducanu next faces 23-year-old American Amanda Anisimova, another player who has been exposed to the spotlight at a young age after reaching the French Open semifinals in 2019.

"I know she's a big ball-striker," Raducanu said.

"I practiced with her a couple times. She likes to dictate. So I think it's going to be a big challenge for me." - Reuters



Emma Raducanu in action during her first round match against Ekaterina Alexandrova (not pictured). - REUTERS/PI

Fritz confident of Slam success after Australian Open demolition job

TAYLOR FRITZ said he was "very confident" about making a Grand Slam breakthrough after dropping just five games to blitz into the Australian Open second round yesterday.

The world No. 4 wasted little energy to swat aside fellow American Jenson Brooksby, who is on the way back from a doping suspension, 6-2, 6-0, 6-3.

Fritz, who is looking to build on a memorable 2024, will next play Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin in Melbourne.

"I think the general goal right now is to have just big results at the big tournaments. I would like to win a big title this year," said Fritz, fresh from

helping the United States win the United Cup.

"I would really want to be in another Slam final - obviously the goal is to win - but just another opportunity at winning a Slam."

Fritz powered into his first major final last year at the US Open, before losing to top-ranked Jannik Sinner.

He also made the title match at the ATP Finals in 2024, again losing to the Italian.

But it has been more than two decades since an American man made the final in Australia, when Andre Agassi won the title in 2003.

"I'd say my confidence is, like, I don't know, it's pretty high, like an eight," said Fritz, who made the

quarterfinals in Melbourne last year.

"I think sometimes when you're playing really good at the end of the year, that off-season almost a little bit kills the momentum.

"But I've been playing pretty well since the start of the year. There's no reason for me not to be very confident."

Fritz added: "It's never easy playing that first match in a Slam, there are some nerves, so I did a really good job shaking them off early and playing really solid.

"I work really hard and I think a lot of that is shown in how I have been able to keep making improvements in the later stages of my career." - AFP

January transfers need a spark

Rashford says he's open to a new challenge – but who can afford his astronomical wages?

BY MIGUEL DELANEY

AS a sign of how constrained this January window might be, one mid-level Champions League club briefly considered whether a move for Marcus Rashford might be possible.

There was a feeling his comments about leaving Manchester United could lead to a knock-down price... only for their interest to almost immediately be knocked down. The plan to try and enquire about a £30 million (RM165m) deal didn't even get off the ground.

The gap to what United would actually want, which is understood to be beyond £60 million (RM330m), shows how it might take an awful lot to get this market going.

One circular problem sums up everything. Most Premier League clubs want to do significant business but PSR (Profit and Sustainability Rules) has left highly-paid squads with little headroom, and those in Europe just don't have the money to spend.

Many of the latter are still struggling after Covid, especially when the English competition inflates the wage race.

As a consequence, almost everyone needs to sell first, but there are few buyers to make

that happen. That is the set-up for stagnation, and a market that simply won't move.

Manchester United are a grand illustration of this, as virtually every player has to prove themselves to Ruben Amorim.

The club leadership would like to immediately start a huge overhaul of their squad, but it is going to be more difficult than ever to move high-paid players on in a constricted market.

United may have to take a wage hit on some loan deals, but the problem is that the club are at a point now where they want a properly clean slate. Temporary deals don't quite cut it to do what they want to do.

Hence there's the contradiction of a star like Rashford looking one of their few sellable assets, at the same time that many people in football describe his total cost – in terms of asking price and wage – as making him "close to unsellable".

He may have to look abroad, in the hope that giants such as Bayern Munich, Paris Saint-Germain or Juventus revive previous interest. Barcelona, who were hugely keen on Rashford half a decade ago, had to battle to re-register Dani Olmo. That's a sign of business outside England.

There are some exceptions to all this, including Crystal Palace, as well as two of the wealthiest clubs in Liverpool and Manchester City. The latter just raise another issue, though.

City's movements over the past few windows have brought in a lot of income, leaving them with a considerable budget for 2025. They would like to make a number of deals, especially amid recent difficulties with a small squad.

The problem that City have got is that it's not exactly a good time for anyone to commit to the club. Some previous targets have already privately confided that the Premier League hearing weighed over their thinking.

There is the possibility that City could be relegated through points deduction or expelled. Even if the case doesn't come to something so drastic, a question many in the market are asking is why anyone would run the risk of going there so close to the outcome?

City of course insist on their innocence. In the meantime, one of the few clubs who can spend may struggle to spend.

Market insiders consequently believe that it will probably take one big sale to unlock the

window, and spark the kind of chain reaction that releases clubs to spend. Someone would need a big influx of cash to go.

Agents believe that could instantly turn the market from one that is quiet into one that is extremely hectic. Virtually every club feels they have gaps, after all.

It's still true that January isn't the best time to do business, given what selling clubs seek to charge, and the general sense of everything being more frantic.

If clubs are bringing in a starter or senior player, they would much prefer to make calmer decisions in the summer.

Some are prepared to play it safe in mid-table rather than take a risk for that very reason, even if they would never admit this outwardly.

The January market has become, in the words of numerous contacts, a very "risk-averse environment". That is at least unless the right deal becomes available.

This is a vignette of the window: few being willing to commit, everyone waiting to see what happens elsewhere.

That might go right until the end of the window. The only change will be if that single big deal goes through. – The Independent

Bruno all praise for Garnacho

MANCHESTER UNITED'S Bruno Fernandes was full of praise for Alejandro Garnacho as the Red Devils navigated past Arsenal in a thrilling FA Cup encounter.

Ruben Amorim's men secured their place in the fourth round on Sunday, with Fernandes breaking the deadlock before the game's tide shifted dramatically.

United faced an uphill battle after Diogo Dalot received his marching orders for two yellow cards.

Gabriel Magalhães then levelled for Arsenal, followed by the gripping drama of Martin Odegaard's contentious penalty, which was impressively saved by United's Turkish stopper Altay Bayindir.

Despite the limelight surrounding the penalty save and his own crucial role, Fernandes made sure to leave space in the spotlight for Garnacho, acknowledging the young starlet's contribution.

The youngster had assisted Fernandes earlier, and following that goal, Fernandes celebrated by hugging Garnacho and gesturing appreciatively towards him, encouraging the huge away following to get behind their talented youngster.

Previously, Fernandes had given Garnacho encouragement after he netted against Leicester but restrained from celebration.

Garnacho seemed hesitant to bask in the glory due to belief he'd lost support amongst fans.

However, Fernandes offered words of wisdom during a BBC interview: "Garnacho scored a banger but didn't celebrate like he should because he thinks he has lost faith from some fans."

"I told him people will always moan, but lots of people like you and enjoy what you do."

"I told him to celebrate, it was something special. He is a special player, we have difference-makers. They are the ones who win us games."

Garnacho's future at Old Trafford remains uncertain amid interest from Atletico Madrid and Napoli.

Despite being dropped from the squad earlier this season, Garnacho has received recent praise from manager Amorim.

"I really love my players and I want to keep them, especially the talented ones. I am really happy with Kobbie (Mainoo). He's improving, as well as with Garna (Garnacho)."

This season, Garnacho has made 29 appearances for United, scoring eight goals and providing four assists. His contract with the Red Devils runs until 2028. – Express Newspapers

United star receiving loan interest from Spurs

BY MIGUEL DELANEY

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR are interested in a loan move for Marcus Rashford and have investigated whether a deal may be possible.

There is a growing feeling that the 27-year-old has played his last game for Manchester United, amid increasing market movement, and Ruben Amorim merely saying "we'll see" in response to questions on that on Sunday.

That hasn't yet translated into much interest from Premier League clubs, with only West Ham having previously looked at the possibility, although it is understood that Tottenham have also considered the idea and that there have been informal talks.

Any such deal is nevertheless considered to be highly unlikely, due to

the prospective structure of the offer and a current belief that Rashford is far likelier to go abroad.

The player is known to be earning over £300,000 (RM1.65m) a week, and Spurs' current wage structure means they will not go to that figure.

Any move would only be possible if United contributed a significant part of his salary and that is already seen as unlikely.

The Old Trafford hierarchy are aware that interested clubs will seek to leverage wage negotiations on any loan due to the need for Rashford to move, but the legitimate European interest does mean they have a stronger hand in talks.

Both AC Milan and Juventus are looking at Rashford, but it is Borussia Dortmund who are currently seen as offering one of the most attractive options.

The forward is friends with Jadon Sancho, who enjoyed a resurgent period at the Bundesliga club last season, after enduring similar issues at Old Trafford.

Barcelona also have a long-standing interest in Rashford, going back seven years, but the difficulty in getting Dani Olmo registered due to La Liga's financial controls means any deal is impossible in January.

There is some hope that can change in June, and such considerations are also why any move this January is almost certain to be a loan rather than anything permanent. – The Independent

Pep confident

BY ANDY HAMPSON

PEP GUARDIOLA is backing himself to find the solution should captain Kyle Walker leave Manchester City this month.

The veteran right-back has told the club he wants to move and play the final years of his career abroad.

The 34-year-old has been integral to City's success under Guardiola, helping the team win 17 trophies – including six Premier League titles and the Champions League – in his eight years at the Etihad Stadium.

He would leave a void but, while City may not have a ready-made replacement available, Guardiola is confident in the resources he does have – and his ability to make the most of them.

"I'm so clever," the City manager said. "I'm so talented a manager to find the

of finding Walker replacement

right solution."

Asked if he thought he had the players to take over from Walker, he said: "Yes."

Youngster
R i c o

Lewis is the obvious alternative having impressed in the position previously and indeed been preferred to Walker in recent weeks.

Walker has not started since the Dec 15 loss to Manchester United after fitness issues were followed by a poor run of form.

He was then left out of the matchday squad for Saturday's FA Cup tie against Salford altogether having expressed his desire to leave.

Other options would include centrebacks John Stones and Manuel Akanji, although both have had injury problems this season, and even midfielder Matheus Nunes.

Walker has been linked with AC Milan and the club would not stand in his way should a suitable offer be received for a player who is contracted until summer 2026.

In the meantime he will continue to train as normal, however, and could come back into the reckoning for the champions' trip to Brentford on Tuesday.

Guardiola said at a press conference: "Listen, Kyle is our player right now. That's all. We have the option."

"What's going to happen, I don't know. Stay – we'll be happy. If he has to leave, it will happen. I don't want to add anything else." – The Independent



Kyle Walker

SIDENETTING

Millwall dash Dagenham's FA Cup dreams

MILLWALL dispatched National League Dagenham and Redbridge 3-0, thanks in part to Mihailo Ivanovic's unconventional finish, to reach the FA Cup fourth round yesterday. Dagenham and Redbridge were the last remaining non-league side in the competition but the four-tier gulf between the teams showed at The Den. Ivanovic opened the scoring by heading in when the ball was on the floor after a goalmouth scramble. Millwall were looking for their first win since Alex Neil took charge and finally got the second goal to put the tie to bed when Casper De Norre volleyed in. Raess Bangura-Williams then slotted home the third after a jinking run to score on his professional debut. Millwall's reward is a trip to Leeds in the fourth round.

Havertz's wife calls for respect

THE wife of Arsenal forward Kai Havertz has shared screenshots of "shocking" abuse she received on social media, including threats to the couple's unborn child, after the Gunners' FA Cup defeat by Manchester United. Havertz missed a penalty in Arsenal's shootout loss at the Emirates on Sunday before Sophia Havertz – who is expecting her first child with the Germany international – reposted two messages she had received on Instagram. Arsenal have reported the abuse to the police and are working with a specialist data firm to try to identify the culprits. "For anyone to think it's okay to write something like this is so shocking to me. I hope you are so ashamed of yourself," Sophia Havertz wrote as she shared one of the direct messages to her half a million followers. Turning to another highly abusive message, she added: "I'm not sure what to even say but please guys, be more respectful. We are better than this."

Maresca 'ashamed' over Chilwell treatment

CHELSEA boss Enzo Maresca has admitted to feeling 'shame' over Ben Chilwell's situation at Stamford Bridge, with the England defender having been frozen out of the first-team picture. Chilwell has only played one half of football for the Blues this season, making his only appearance of the campaign against Barrow in the Carabao Cup. It was reported in the summer that he had been deemed surplus to requirements, but Chelsea were unable to find a buyer and he ended up staying in west London. Quizzed on Chilwell's situation, Maresca admitted that he was not proud of the way the defender has been treated. "He has been top, I have to say that," said the Chelsea boss. "Very professional, works hard. I feel shame because of that situation but in terms of behaviour, he has been very good." Asked to explain why Chilwell has not been getting any chances, Maresca replied: "First of all, because it's my choice. I can see Malo Gusto or Reece James or (Marc) Cucurella doing a different kind of job in the game. I think Chilwell is a top full-back doing that job up and down, but I struggle to see Ben doing different kinds of things."

Nuno keeping Forest grounded

Manager will not let team get distracted by title talk

NOTTINGHAM FOREST boss Nuno Espirito Santo warned that too much praise is not good for his players.

Liverpool manager Arne Slot said on Monday that Forest are in the title race given Nuno's men are in third place, just six points off the top of the table.

Forest have won their last six League games and are the only side to have beaten Liverpool in the League this season when they met at Anfield in September.

That run of form has fuelled talk of the two-time European champions following the example of Midlands rivals Leicester, who shocked the football world to win the title as 5000/1 outsiders in 2015/16.

Nuno, though, is wary of believing the hype surrounding Forest.

"Nothing changes in our approach," the Portuguese coach said yesterday. "When we do things good we should be pleased, but too much compliments can distract us, so we don't want to pay too much attention."

"It was the beginning of the season (the victory at Anfield), maybe it was a surprise, but it was a long time ago, many things have changed."

"No one in this room could ever predict what is happening. It is the ambition and desire to do things well and the hard work of the players and commitment."

Even if an audacious title challenge proves beyond Forest, they are well on course to return to

the top level of European football for the first time since 1980.

A top-four finish would guarantee Champions League football next season, with fifth place also likely to be enough due to a strong start from English clubs in European competition this term.

And Nuno believes his squad can get even better in the final 18 League games of the campaign.

"We are improving through the competition, I truly believe the more time the players spend together the better they can play together," he added.

"I see a good group of people, more than players, that want to do things together. This is important, the togetherness, this is what I really value."

On the 70 occasions that teams have earned 40 points or more from their first 20 games in a Premier League campaign, only four sides have failed to finish inside the top four at the end of the season.

Since 2000, the average points needed to win the Premier League has been 89.2, with 81.6 for second, 74.5 for third, 69.5 for fourth and 65.6 for fifth.

Despite that, British sports analytics company Opta still gives Forest 0% chance of winning the title and only 0.7% of finishing second, which contrasts with the confidence within the squad.

Maguire provides reality check for Devils

HARRY MAGUIRE has issued a stern message to his Manchester United teammates, insisting they cannot dwell on their FA Cup triumph over Arsenal as the Premier League table is still a source of shame for the club.

Despite Ruben Amorim's team pulling off an unexpected win on penalties against Arsenal, after Diogo Dalot's red card left them with 10 men, and securing a 2-2 draw at Liverpool, Maguire knows that a couple of good results don't make a season.

The England defender is painfully aware that being in the fourth round doesn't change the fact that a glance at the League table is a humiliating sight for United.

With just six victories from 20 matches, United sit uncomfortably in 13th place, and Amorim has acknowledged the threat of relegation.

Maguire is adamant that the current situation is far from satisfactory.

"Obviously, we've had four tough away games under this manager and I

feel like in all four, Arsenal (twice), Manchester City and Liverpool, we've competed in all of them.

"I think it's important that we stick together. But we also have to realise that we are still where we are in the League table."

"We've got big games coming up, and we can't rest because the league table, to look at, is embarrassing. So we've got kick on from this."

"We know we can perform in these big games, but we've got to maintain our consistency."

This year it has been really poor. We've got experienced players who've had good careers."

"We all have belief that we should

be a lot higher in the table. We know

that. To be sat

where we are in

the Premier

League, it's

nowhere near

good enough

for this squad.

But it's down to

us to change it."

Havertz

struggled under

ex-managers Ralf

Rangnick and Erik ten Hag before nearly leaving Old Trafford, Maguire has since found his form with the help of new manager Ruben Amorim.

The former United captain explained: "I'm 31 now, coming up to 32 in a couple of months, but I'm getting back to that level."

"There's no doubt I had a tough year in my third season when Ralf took over."

"I wasn't at my best. I knew that. I knew I needed to find something to stay at this club, because it demands high standards, and I feel like I've found something."

"Mentally and physically I feel good. Ruben's given me confidence and belief that they want me at the club and part of this project."

"And I'm happy to be here. I want this club to be back fighting for titles and not fighting where we are in the table right now." – The Independent



Moyes backs Everton to beat Premier League drop

DAVID MOYES insisted yesterday he had jumped at the chance to manage Everton for a second spell and was confident of extending the club's 71-year stay in English football's top-flight.

The Scot, 61, enjoyed great success during his first 11-year stint at Goodison Park from 2002 to 2013, a period including a fourth place Premier League finish in 2005 and a FA Cup final appearance in 2009.

Everton have fallen on harder times since he departed for a short-lived reign as Alex Ferguson's successor at Manchester United.

The Toffees have battled relegation for the past three seasons and sit just one point above the bottom three ahead of the first match of Moyes' return against Aston Villa tomorrow (3.30am Malaysian time).

The Liverpool club's new owners, the American-based Friedkin Group, sacked Sean

Dyche last week and have turned to Moyes in a desperate attempt to maintain Premier League survival ahead of a move to a 53,000 capacity stadium next season.

"They want to get us back on track and we all know we need a bit of a sticking plaster at the moment and we have to try to make that work," said Moyes at a pre-match press conference.

"A couple of weeks (ago) I didn't think there was any chance Everton could be in a relegation fight, I thought they would be strong enough to get out of it."

"I've come into the seat and I'm going to back that and say I believe we will be strong enough to stay away from it (relegation)."

"But I'm not kidding myself or anyone else, we need everyone behind us, we need the players playing better, scoring more goals, if we are going to make that happen."

Moyes was sacked by United after less than a season at Old Trafford and ill-fated spells at Real Sociedad and Sunderland followed.

He rebuilt his reputation, however, during two spells at West Ham.

After leading the east London club out of relegation trouble in the 2017/18 season, he returned in 2019 for a five-year stint that led the Hammers into Europe three times and ended a 43-year wait to win a trophy by lifting the Europa Conference League in 2023.

"I've come very close to coming back (to Everton) on maybe three or four occasions," said Moyes. "I've had talks, and for whatever reason it's fallen through."

"It used to be that going back was no good, but I did that at West Ham, and we went on to win a European trophy. So we're back on the journey again." – AFP

Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin rise to world No. 2

PROFESSIONAL men's shuttlers Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin Rumsani continue to prove their dominance as Malaysia's top pair by climbing one spot to second place in the latest Badminton World Federation rankings.

The pair amassed 85,916 points, surpassing their Chinese rivals Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang, who dropped to third with 85,818 points.

Denmark's Kim Astrup and Anders Skaarup Rasmussen remain at the top with 95,003 points.

Badminton Association of Malaysia-backed men's doubles pair Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik also improved their standing by climbing one spot to fifth in the world with 82,065 points.

Malaysian players also shone in the mixed doubles category, with Chen Tang Jie-Toh Ee Wei and Goh Soon Huat-Shevon Lai Jemie each moving up two spots to third (76,390 points) and fourth (75,070 points) in the rankings respectively.

However, professional men's singles player Lee Zii Jia dropped two places to eighth in the world with 79,016 points. He has withdrawn from the recent Malaysia Open, ongoing Indian Open and coming Indonesia Masters due to a right ankle ligament injury sustained during the 2024 World Tour Finals.

In the women's doubles, Malaysia's Pearly Tan and M. Thinaah slipped one spot to seventh in the world with 74,943 points. South Korea's Baek Ha Na and Lee So Hee lead the rankings with 101,216 points. — Bernama



National women's singles shuttler K. Letshanaa. — BERNAMA FILEPIC

Letshanaa unfazed by Remy's criticism

NATIONAL women's singles shuttler K. Letshanaa respects coaching director Remy Mainaky's public criticism of her and pledges to train harder to achieve her goals in badminton.

Letshanaa, 23, who is ranked world No. 59, said it is crucial to stay focused as she embarks on a new chapter this year by setting a more realistic goal to be a better player.

"I think I have to stay focused on my training. What I need to do, how to give my best and how to achieve my goals and dreams.

"This is what I'm thinking in my mind and the comment (by Remy) doesn't affect me.

Just focus on the things that I have to focus on and keep going," she told reporters at Academy Badminton Malaysia in Bukit Kiara yesterday.

When asked about the presence of new national singles head coach Kenneth Jonassen, Letshanaa said she has had several conversations with the Danish badminton legend and feels that their discussions have been smooth and productive.

She expressed her admiration for Jonassen's coaching style, describing him as an understanding and approachable mentor who takes the time to listen to his players.

"I am going to the Indonesia Masters then Thailand next week but my first

Selangor born shuttler vows to stay focused on her goals

tournament that coach Jonassen will follow is Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships (BAMTC) in February," she said.

Remy had criticised female players in the national squad, saying they tend to make excuses, are unwilling to make sacrifices and often complain of exhaustion during training.

He said despite her strong physique, Letshanaa often complained of leg pain and requested for lighter training sessions.

Meanwhile, Jonassen acknowledged that it will take time and effort to elevate the status of the women's singles team.

"I think our highest ranked player (women's singles) is around 57 or 59, so the goal is to develop these young girls into top 30 players. It's a long-term objective but that's the goal.

"I came with a plan that I believe can lead us in that direction, and hopefully a little faster. But I'm talking to all stakeholders and then we'll come up with a very detailed plan of how to move forward," he said.

Jonassen said it is vital for him to gather input from all parties as he does not believe in implementing changes without fully understanding the underlying issues.

The Badminton Association of Malaysia appointed Jonassen as the head coach in November last year with the primary goal of developing players capable of winning a gold medal at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. — Bernama

RESULTS & STANDINGS

FA CUP (3rd round): Millwall 3 Dagenham & Redbridge 0.

LA LIGA: Real Sociedad 1 (Kubo 51) Villarreal 0.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
A. Madrid	19	13	5	1	34	12	44
Real Madrid	19	13	4	2	43	19	43
Barcelona	19	12	2	5	51	22	38
A. Bilbao	19	10	6	3	29	17	36
Villarreal	19	8	6	5	34	31	30
Mallorca	19	9	3	7	19	21	30

SERIE A: Monza 2 (Curiia 44, Maldini 63) Fiorentina 1 (Beltran 74-pen).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	20	15	2	3	32	12	47
Inter Milan	18	13	4	1	46	15	43
Atalanta	19	13	3	3	43	20	42
Lazio	20	11	3	6	34	28	36
Juventus	19	7	12	0	31	16	33
Fiorentina	19	9	5	5	32	20	32

FA CUP 4TH RD DRAW

Manchester United vs Leicester, Leeds United vs Millwall, Brighton & Hove Albion vs Chelsea, Preston North End or Charlton Athletic vs Wycombe Wanderers, Exeter City vs Nottingham Forest, Coventry vs Ipswich, Blackburn vs Wolves, Mansfield Town or Wigan vs Fulham, Birmingham vs Newcastle, Plymouth Argyle vs Liverpool, Everton vs Bournemouth, Aston Villa vs Tottenham, Southampton vs Burnley, Leyton Orient or Derby vs Manchester City, Doncaster vs Crystal Palace, Stoke vs Cardiff.

Matches to be played across the weekend of Feb 8.

Record field for Junior Golf Championship

THE Selangor International Junior Golf Championship continues to scale new heights with a record field of 127 leading juniors from 14 countries set for this week's fourth staging of the prestigious event.

Taking place at Seri Selangor Golf Club from tomorrow to Saturday, the high-weighted World Amateur Golf Ranking event is open to players aged between 12 and 18.

They will compete over 54 holes in separate boys' and girls' divisions, each featuring individual and team events.

This year's field includes players from Australia, Bangladesh, China, Chinese Taipei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and, for the first time, Hong Kong China and Japan.

They will join their Malaysian counterparts at Seri Selangor in what promises to be an exciting showcase of regional junior talent.

The Malaysian players will be representing championship organisers UUM International School Melaka (UUMISM), the PKNS Golf Academy, Selangor state, the Malaysian Golf Association (MGA) and the MGA's National Junior Development Program.

The championship will once again offer the boys' individual champion a coveted spot in the following week's PKNS Selangor Masters, which is the season-opener for both the 2025 Asian Development Tour and domestic Professional Golf of Malaysia Tour, also to

be played at the challenging Seri Selangor course.

For the first time, the leading Malaysian in the boys' individual standings will also earn a start in the PKNS Selangor Masters.

The 2024 championship was played in June and saw the teams from South Korea and China (Hainan) dominating at Seri Selangor.

Byun Jiyoung won the girls' individual title by three shots and led the Korean team to a runaway triumph in the girls' team event, while Shijun Jing of China (Hainan) claimed the boys' individual title, also by three shots, and led his team to top place in the boys' team event.

Malaysia-based Korean Bae Eunhyung (WAGR 667), representing PKNS Golf Academy, can also be expected to contend having finished fourth in 2024. She is the reigning Malaysian Junior Open champion.

UUMISM founder and director David Jeong was elated at how much the championship has grown in a relatively short time span.

"This is the fourth time our school has organised the Selangor International Junior Championship since January 2023, and it continues to grow significantly.

"The event has gained a stellar reputation as a platform for junior golfers to showcase their talent, attracting more participants every year.

"This year, the number of participants has reached a record high, demonstrating the event's popularity and the enthusiasm of young golfers to compete," said Jeong.

SHORTS

Arvind excited about 2025 MHL debut

THE youngest player in the 2025 Malaysian Hockey League (MHL), Arvind Zachary Steven, is ready to rub shoulders with the big boys in the national league.

The 15-year-old striker might make his MHL debut with newcomers Matador in their opening match against Nurinsafi Sporting at the Bertam Hockey Stadium in Penang today.

Speaking to *Bernama*, the SMK Bukit Bandaraya Form Three student expressed excitement about being part of the team and the league at such a young age, having taken up hockey at the age of seven.

"Definitely, it will be tough to play against the experienced and best players in the country, as well as a few imports. But I believe I will be able to perform with the support of my coaches and teammates.

"I might play my first game tomorrow if the coach gives me the opportunity. Hopefully, I can play well, perform in the league and maybe even score a few goals," he said.

Malaysia keen to host ATBC in 2028

MALAYSIA have expressed interest in hosting the 2028 edition of the Asian Tenpin Bowling Championships (ATBC).

Malaysian Tenpin Bowling Congress (MTBC) secretary-general Maradona Chok confirmed that the Asian Bowling Federation (ABF) was notified of Malaysia's intention last September.

"We haven't received a response from the ABF yet; I believe the decision won't come within the next one or two years," he told *Bernama* recently.

Malaysia have hosted the ATBC twice, in 1972 and 1986.

Should Malaysia be picked to host the event in 2028, it would be the biggest bowling tournament held in the country since the World Championships in 2003, Maradona said.

"Our goal is to bring a major event to Malaysia every year to raise the profile of the sport and promote the country," he said.

Even though they have the financial capacity to host the ATBC, Maradona said that they still need to secure sponsors for the competition.



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SCAN ME

'We will do it'

Fernandes promises to 'deliver' more positive results for United

MANCHESTER UNITED captain, Bruno Fernandes, promised to "deliver" more positive results for the team following their penalty shootout victory over Arsenal in the FA Cup third round on Sunday.

Fernandes scored the opening goal at the Emirates Stadium before Arsenal defender Gabriel equalised after Diogo Dalot had been sent off in the second half.

United played 60 minutes with 10-men against the Gunners and came through extra-time to force a shootout which they won 5-3 after Joshua Zirkzee's decisive winner.

Speaking yesterday, Fernandes explained how manager Ruben Amorim makes the players believe in their style of play and how they can turn their poor form around.

"It's really easy when you don't get results, when you don't get performances to start disbelief in everything you've been doing," Fernandes told *Sky Sports*.

"That's a good thing about the team is that we

kept belief on what we are doing, how we are training and where we want to go as a team and what we want to improve as a team.

"Every time you lose, or something goes wrong everyone has an opinion on what you should do differently.

"Obviously, the manager has his own idea, and he really believes in this, so there is no way that he makes you not believe it.

"Even in games where you concede a goal or have a setback, he just wants us to understand that the things we are doing will result if we do them in the right way. That's the most important thing."

United are currently 13th in the Premier League with six wins from their 20 games this season and Fernandes has promised to deliver more consistency going forward.

He added: "We just have to understand that if we can keep this level, this performance, and most importantly these results the fans will be behind us.

"We can deliver, they have seen it, we have to

prove that we can deliver every three days. We will do it, and we need them to be behind us to do it."

Fernandes also revealed the team's desire to get to the latter stages of the FA Cup again this season and their goal of winning the trophy for a second year running.

"We know how big Arsenal is and how big the rivalry between the clubs is," Fernandes said of Sunday's win.

"For us it was just about getting through to the next round as we know we want to get to the end of this competition.

"It is really important for the club, and we saw last season the feeling of winning and we want to repeat it. We know to repeat that you have to beat the best teams, we did it yesterday and hopefully we'll keep doing it."

In related news, Manchester United have been warned that they could be subject to a Football Association (FA) investigation, and possible points deduction, if they are found guilty of failing to control their players during the FA Cup victory over Arsenal.

Tempers flared in the second half between the two clubs when on-field referee Andy Madley awarded a penalty to Arsenal for a foul on Kai Havertz by defender Harry Maguire.

Gabriel Magalhaes and Maguire were both booked but it appeared that Manuel Ugarte used his head towards an opposition player in the aftermath but that was not spotted by the on-field officials.

Former top-flight referee Keith Hackett told *Football Insider* via *Manchester Evening News* that both clubs would be fortunate if they avoided an investigation and punishment moving forward.

"The mass confrontation which may have also seen a player headbutting an opponent will be the subject of an investigation by the Football Association," he explained.

"I have no doubt that both teams will be charged for failing to control their players.

"The question that we can ask - if VAR was in operation this would have been reviewed and the result may well have secured a different outcome." - The Independent

