



Urgent need to tackle food security
M'sia must focus on building resilience by diversifying staple crop production, investing in research to develop climate-adaptive crops, and strengthen policies that protect farmers, says academic.

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Govt ordered to adjust pension

High Court judge allows ex-civil servant's judicial review application, and orders Public Service Department and government to pay arrears to retirees within three months.

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M'sia, UK to benefit from CPTPP pact: PM

Agreement critical vehicle to expand, facilitate investment and trade between two countries, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

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Early CNY cheer for elderly

Over 3,000 senior citizens receive *ang pows*, mini hampers, and mandarin oranges from STM Lottery Sdn Bhd.

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British Prime Minister Keir Starmer greets Anwar outside 10 Downing Street in central London ahead of their meeting on Wednesday. - AFP/PICT





M'sia, UK to benefit from CPTPP accord: PM

➤ Agreement facilitates trade and investments, allows tariffs for products by member countries to be reduced to zero

LONDON: The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade agreement will be a critical vehicle to expand and facilitate trade and investment between Malaysia and the United Kingdom (UK), said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"I expressed my appreciation to the UK premier for successfully entering the CPTPP agreement. It takes serious political commitment on the part of the UK and Malaysia, focusing on economic fundamentals in the interest of both nations to promote free trade," he said on Wednesday.

Malaysia ratified the CPTPP in October 2024, joining Peru, Japan, Singapore, Chile,

New Zealand and Vietnam in doing so, while the UK formally joined last December. Under this framework, tariffs for products by member countries will be reduced to zero.

Anwar was speaking at the launch of the YTL Group's Brabazon New Town development in Bristol, the largest city in the Southwest of England.

The Bristol Brabazon development is set to transform the historic Filton Airfield site into a Copenhagen-inspired project that will allow people to access the essential services they need, which are workplaces, schools, shops, public transport, healthcare and green spaces, within a 15-minute radius of their home.

Besides the 6,500 high-quality sustainable homes, it will also house three new schools and an urban park, the largest to be built in the Southwest in over 50 years.

He said by participating in overseas ventures, Malaysian businesses could deepen their global market ties, contributing to Malaysia's aspirations of expanding its trade footprint through international frameworks such as the CPTPP.

Anwar, who is here on a five-day working visit, is 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.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and the UK are quite optimistic about securing a settlement on the issue of Palestine and Gaza as soon as possible.

Anwar said the matter was discussed during his meeting with his counterpart, Sir Keir Starmer, at No. 10 Downing Street on Wednesday, Bernama reported.

"We discussed the resolution of the Palestine and Gaza issue, with the final (resolution) of them achieving the two-state solution. But prior to that, an immediate ceasefire," he told the media after the meeting.

Anwar's criticism of Western countries' lack of action against Israel's atrocities in Gaza has garnered support from prominent figures across various fields globally.

The government led by Starmer, which came to power six months ago, has suspended the sale of certain weapons to Israel and called for accelerated humanitarian aid to Gaza and the West Bank.

Harmony parade to celebrate unity

KUALA LUMPUR: A harmony parade to celebrate the ethnic diversity and unity in this country will be held on Feb 15 and 16, said National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang.

He said the parade would be held at night at Dataran Merdeka in conjunction with Federal Territories Day and the World Interfaith Harmony Week (annually held in the first week of February).

"I hope this programme will have a comprehensive and significant impact on our society with the involvement of various agencies and followers of different religions," he said on Bernama TV's *Ruang Bicara* programme on Wednesday.

He said among the main initiatives of the National Unity Ministry are the Unity Ecosystem, the *Madani* Harmony Initiative, the Exploration of the *Rukun Negara* and the Socio-Cultural Community.

Meanwhile, commenting on the Kanowit fire on Wednesday afternoon that destroyed the Paulus Yan Longhouse in Sungai Buan, Aaron, who is also Kanowit MP, said he sympathised with the 88 residents of the longhouse.

He said he would channel assistance through the Student Volunteer Foundation and the Kanowit MP's office. - Bernama

'Investors free to invest in any state'

KANGAR: The unity government under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim does not restrict investors from investing in states governed by opposition parties, said the prime minister's political secretary Datuk Azman Abidin.

He said the federal government does not dictate where investors should invest, as it is up to the investors to choose the state that suits them.

He added that if investors feel that Perlis is suitable and they can get the required cooperation, they could invest in Perlis, or likewise in any other state.

He was speaking to the media after representing Anwar to hand over Ihsan *Madani* contributions to the needy from the Kangar parliamentary constituency at the Royal Malaysia Police senior officers hall on Wednesday.

Azman said the government, through the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation and the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry, would act as facilitators to assist investors who wish to invest in any state in the country, including opposition-ruled ones. - Bernama



TOWARDS BETTER VISION ...

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek observing Health Minister Datuk Seri Dzulkefly Ahmad putting a pair of free spectacles on a pupil at Sekolah Kebangsaan Putrajaya Precinct 9(2) under a programme to correct the eyesight of Year 1 pupils in the B40 and M40 groups. - BERNAMAPIC

RM12b allocated for beefing up defence assets

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of RM12 billion has been allocated to the Malaysian Armed Forces for the acquisition of assets to enhance the country's defence capabilities this year, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin.

He said among the major asset acquisitions approved this year are 105-millimetre cannons, surface-to-surface missiles for the *KD Jebat* frigate and three units of Medium Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Aerial System.

He said the ministry would ensure that the construction of other important assets, such as the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) 1, which is now 96.52% complete and has commenced Harbour Acceptance Test and Sea Acceptance

Test, would progress as scheduled.

"LCS2 has also been launched and is undergoing work requirements, while LCS3 is in final preparations for its planned launch in January 2026.

"As for the construction of the second batch of littoral mission ships, work progress for all three ships is expected to reach 13.8% overall by June 2025," he said when delivering the minister's 2025 New Year Message at Wisma Perwira yesterday.

Also present were Armed Forces Chief Jen Tan Sri Mohammad Ab Rahman, Deputy Defence Minister Adly Zahari and the ministry's Secretary-General Datuk Lokman Hakim Ali.

Mohamed Khaled said the construction of

FA-50M (Block 20) light fighter aircraft acquired from Korea Aerospace Industries has reached 48% progress, with the first two aircraft to be received by the country in October 2026.

The ministry signed a contract to procure 18 FA-50M light fighter aircraft worth approximately RM4 billion in 2023.

Mohamed Khaled added that the ministry would receive two maritime patrol aircraft in June and September 2026 for monitoring the country's maritime areas.

He said the plan to increase the capabilities of the armed forces assets is among the 10 main focuses outlined in the ministry's 2025 plan to ensure that the country's defence system meets current needs and challenges. - Bernama

Fewer M'sian couples marrying in Thailand

NARATHIWAT: The number of Malaysian couples getting married in southern Thailand has dropped following stricter border controls, including the closure of illegal crossing points along Sungai Golok since last December.

Narathiwat Islamic Religious Council deputy president Abdul Aziz Che Mamat said the number of Malaysian couples coming to marry had fallen from four or five couples a day to just one or two, Bernama reported.

He said previously, around 50 Malaysian couples married there each month, but this has now decreased by 40%.

"Although couples can cross legally at the Muhibbah Bridge with complete passport documents, many still choose illegal crossings.

"Despite the passport requirement, some Malaysian couples are willing to face fines imposed by their home states' Islamic councils."

Plans to boost public confidence in government

KUALA LUMPUR: Five key plans under the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2024-2028 are expected to boost public confidence in the government's commitment to establish Malaysia as a prosperous, corruption-free nation.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said these sub-strategies are instrumental in driving Malaysia towards achieving a top 25 ranking in the Corruption Perception Index by 2033.

The sub-strategies include enhancing governance and internal audit functions within the public service; introducing the Border Control and Protection Agency Act 2024; improving the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course; implementing the Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strengthening Module; and fostering education on integrity and ethical practices.

On Wednesday, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar chaired a discussion in Putrajaya focusing on planning and media strategies to enhance public awareness on governance and anti-corruption initiatives under NACS 2024-2028.

The session reviewed policies adopted during National Governance Special Cabinet Committee meetings last year, Bernama reported.

The five key agencies spearheading the implementation of the initiatives are the Public Service Department, the National Audit Department, the Higher Education Ministry, the Education Ministry and the Home Ministry.

East Coast Rail Link track installed ahead of schedule

KOTA BHARU: The installation of the 400km East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) track from Maran in Pahang to Kota Bharu in Kelantan has been completed two and a half months ahead of schedule, according to Malaysia Rail Link CEO Datuk Seri Darwis Abdul Razak.

"This will speed up the construction of the electrification system, signalling and telecommunications for the 43.86km stretch in Kelantan," he told reporters after inspecting the work on Wednesday.

On ticket prices, he confirmed that the Transport Ministry would announce the fares at the appropriate time.

"Transport Minister Anthony Loke has said ticket prices would be reasonable."

The 665km ECRL project would connect the east coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang to Selangor on the west coast.

The line from Kota Bharu to Gombak Terminal is set to be completed in December 2026 and operational by January 2027. – Bernama

Retail prices of RON97 and diesel increase by five sen

KUALA LUMPUR: The retail price of RON95 will remain at RM2.05 per litre while the price of RON97 will increase from RM3.33 to RM3.38 per litre from Jan 16 to 22.

The Finance Ministry said the retail price of diesel in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan will remain at

RM2.15 per litre while in Peninsular Malaysia, it will rise from RM3.03 to RM3.08 per litre for the same period.

It said the increase in global oil market prices has prompted the government to increase the retail prices of RON97 and diesel.

"The retail price of diesel in Peninsular Malaysia remains lower than the floating price set on June 10, 2024, which was RM3.35 per litre."

The prices are determined using the Automatic Pricing Mechanism formula based on the weekly retail

price of petroleum products.

The ministry said the government would continue to monitor global oil price movements and adjust the retail prices of RON97 and diesel accordingly while maintaining price stability. – Bernama

Calls to address growing food insecurity in Malaysia

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
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► Floods causing vegetable supply shortage and price hikes: Farmers' association

PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia grapples with the aftermath of floods that have destroyed over 100ha of farmland in December, experts are calling for measures to address growing food insecurity.

Federation of Vegetable Farmers Association president Lim Ser Kwee said vegetable farms in Johor, Malacca, Perak, Kelantan and Terengganu were damaged by the floods, resulting in a shortage of supply and increased prices of between 50% and 80%.

He said the crops affected included *sawi*, spinach, cucumber, tomatoes and lady's fingers.

Universiti Utara Malaysia School of International Studies Assoc Prof Dr Bakri Mat said the floods are a

reminder of how climate-related disasters could disrupt food security.

"In the short term, the destruction of farmland has led to a sharp drop in domestic agricultural supply, particularly vegetables.

"Such supply chain disruptions create immediate food insecurity, particularly for low-income communities that struggle to afford inflated prices."

He said such a situation is concerning when viewed from a national security perspective as Malaysia imports a significant proportion of its vegetables, and over-reliance on global markets amplifies vulnerability to price volatility and supply shocks.

"The challenge is compounded by the risk of losing skilled farmers, who might abandon agriculture due to recurring losses.

"Malaysia must focus on building resilience by diversifying food production, investing in research to develop climate-adaptive crops and strengthening policies that protect smallholder farmers."

Bakri said climate-related incidents highlight the need for proactive disaster preparedness in Malaysia's agricultural sector.

He urged the government to focus on improving early warning systems, localised disaster response and infrastructure development.

"Malaysia needs to enhance its

meteorological capabilities and develop digital platforms that provide real-time alerts to farmers through apps or SMS. This could raise awareness among farmers and help them prepare mentally and physically to reduce the overall impact of disasters."

He said financial relief is a critical priority and implementing accessible climate insurance schemes, such as index-based insurance, could provide farmers with immediate assistance.

"Providing micro-loans designed for disaster-hit farmers could empower them to rebuild and reinvest in their livelihoods, helping them to recover from losses and adapt to climatic conditions."

He said the rising frequency of extreme weather calls for a complete overhaul in agricultural practice, including better water management and agro-ecological zoning to ensure the crops that are planted suit each region's climate and soil.

Taylor's University Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management senior lecturer Dr Salini Devi Rajendran said food security challenges are intertwined with climate change and systemic inefficiencies.

"The urgency of addressing food security is highlighted by Malaysia's 2.6% year-on-year increase in food prices as of November 2024, the highest increase since December 2023."

She said long-term solutions to prepare agricultural supplies remain inadequate.

She also said farmers remain vulnerable to extreme weather events, leading to frequent yield losses and supply disruptions.

"Agriculture remains the backbone of the economy and a critical element of our national identity.

"The unpredictable nature of climate factors are threatening food production and distribution, underscoring the need for resilient and sustainable food systems."



Bakri said climate-related incidents highlight the need for proactive disaster preparedness. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

No cuts to Early Schooling Aid, says ministry

KUANTAN: The Education Ministry has said no cuts would be made to the Early Schooling Aid distributed to primary and secondary school students by any party, including the Parent-Teacher Association.

Its deputy secretary-general (management) Datuk Ahmad Suhaimi Endut said the ministry was aware of parental concern regarding

the matter, following several submitted complaints.

"The main objective of this government aid is to assist parents and guardians in making early school preparations for their children. Some parents have raised concerns that the aid could be reduced by the school or association.

"With the assurance of the

ministry, we have instructed that the aid not be cut and be fully utilised."

He was speaking at a press conference after the mock cheque presentation ceremony for the cash aid at the State Education Department auditorium here yesterday, Bernama reported.

He said RM39.13 million has been allocated under the programme by

the government to be distributed to 260,904 primary and secondary school students in Pahang.

"The estimated number of recipients in 2025, including from schools under and not under the ministry, is over 5.2 million students, with approved allocations totalling RM791.25 million.

"Additionally, RM723.16 million has

been allocated for schools under the ministry nationwide, benefitting 4.82 million students, with Pahang receiving RM39.13 million."

The programme, which was first introduced in 2012 as a one-off cash aid, has been extended to Form Six students, benefitting more than 100,000 students, with a financial implication of about RM15 million.

Search intensifies for mother bear, cub in villages

JERTIH: The Terengganu Department of Wildlife and National Parks is intensifying efforts to capture a mother bear and its cub, which have been spotted roaming around Kampung Beting Lintang in recent days.

Its director, Loo Kean Seong, said the department has received three complaints from villagers since Nov 3 last year.

"Previously, we set traps twice in the village, but to no avail. We then moved the traps to Kampung Gong Batu, about 1km from this village, believing the two bears had strayed there.

"On Wednesday afternoon, we set the traps again in Kampung Beting Lintang after being informed about the presence of the bears, which were detected wandering in the area a few days ago," he said when contacted by Bernama.

Loo said the same bears are believed to have ravaged a stingless bee (kelulut) farming project at Sultan Zainal Abidin University last year.

Earlier, the wildlife game of hide-and-seek intensified after pictures of an adult black bear and its cub wandering in the village were shared in a Facebook post.

Meanwhile, Kampung Beting Lintang Village Development and Security Committee chairman Abd Wahab Ab Rahman said the bears' presence in recent days has caused unease among villagers.

"The villagers are worried because the animals appear during the day and could pose a threat as they go about their daily routines or while children are playing," he said.

STM Lottery launches annual *ang pow* donation campaign

➤ Initiative aims to spread festive cheer, support senior citizens in need through acts of kindness, community care

BY HARITH KAMAL
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: STM Lottery Sdn Bhd launched its 38th annual Chinese New Year Ang Pow Donation Campaign at Berjaya Times Square yesterday, aiming to spread festive cheer to over 19,000 senior citizens across Malaysia.

Its CEO Nerine Tan said the six-day campaign, which will be held in 50 cities and towns nationwide, aims to support elderly citizens in need by providing *ang pous*, mini hampers and mandarin oranges.

Similar to last year, over 3,000 senior citizens were invited to participate in the campaign at the same venue yesterday.

"This campaign reflects the company's commitment to bringing joy and relief to the elderly, spreading the joy of Chinese New Year to senior citizens across Malaysia.

"Since its inception in 1988, it has reached 474,550 senior citizens and contributed over RM26.95 million in aid. By the end of last year, the



Nerine (right) with Lim (second from right) during the campaign at Berjaya Times Square, Kuala Lumpur yesterday.
— ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

campaign had accumulated RM25.6 million in total funds.

"However, this initiative is about more than numbers – it's about creating a legacy of kindness and compassion through Sports Toto. It reflects our ongoing dedication to giving back to the community and supporting those who need it most," she said.

The campaign is part of STM Lottery's Helping Hands programme, which integrates corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives into its operations.

Employees also volunteer their time for meaningful causes.

Recipients in this year's campaign include residents of *Rumah Charis, Rumah Orang-Orang Tua Ampang Kampung Baru, Rumah Orang-Orang Tua Seri Setia* and the Malaysian Association for the Blind, all based in Kuala Lumpur.

Tan said the STM Lottery team will conduct donation drives across the nation over the next five days, with 10 locations operating simultaneously each day.

"Our team has volunteered their time and effort to pack and distribute essential items, including basic food necessities, to ensure the campaign runs smoothly.

"This campaign is a celebration of care, compassion and community values that lie at the heart of STM Lottery and our Helping Hands programme.

"By inviting senior citizens and residents of local charity homes to join us, we reaffirm our belief that Chinese New Year is a time to connect, share and cherish the bonds that unite us,"

she said.

Deputy Finance Minister Lim Hui Ying, who was the guest of honour, praised STM Lottery for its efforts to assist senior citizens and support charity homes.

She highlighted the importance of such initiatives, particularly as Malaysia prepares for its status as an ageing nation by 2030.

Lim said the government has taken proactive steps to address the needs of senior citizens, including increasing the monthly aid for the elderly from RM500 to RM600 and expanding tax reliefs for medical check-ups, vaccinations and treatments.

"These initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to ensuring the well-being of senior citizens and reducing inequalities, particularly for those with limited means, regardless of their background," she said.

She also commended the Sports Toto initiative, noting its alignment with the government's vision.

"The Chinese New Year donation initiative by Sports Toto is highly commendable, and I would like to congratulate Sports Toto. Their CSR efforts are inspiring.

"I hope Sports Toto will continue organising this campaign in the coming years and serve as an example for other corporate companies to support society, especially during festive seasons," she said.

Beyond festive donations, STM Lottery also supports various social sustainability projects, including food bank initiatives, environmental conservation campaigns and the development of national sports and sports sponsorships.



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Malaysia to host Mini Maha at Asean summit

PUTRAJAYA: The Agriculture and Food Security Ministry will organise a mini Malaysia Agricultural, Horticulture and Agrotourism Exhibition (Mini Maha) in conjunction with the 47th Asean Summit.

Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu said the event would be held at the Malaysian Agriculture Exposition Park (Maeps) in Serdang, serving as a strategic platform to enhance agro-sector cooperation and relationships among Asean member states.

"This event aims to attract foreign investments, boost exports of local agricultural products and reinforce Malaysia's leadership in food security within the Asean region," he said during a media briefing at the ministry yesterday.

Mohamad added that Asean delegates

would be given a comprehensive tour of the Mini Maha exhibition, which will showcase Malaysia's agricultural advancements.

"The ministry has traditionally been less involved in Asean initiatives due to its ministerial-level engagements with Asean counterparts. However, we are directly participating in this event to underline our commitment," he said.

Malaysia is set to host over 300 Asean-related meetings, programmes and summits throughout the year under the theme "Inclusivity and Sustainability".

The country has previously chaired Asean in 1977, 1997, 2005 and 2015.

Reflecting on the success of the Maha 2024 exhibition, Mohamad highlighted its significant achievements during its run at Maeps, Serdang, from Sept 11 to 22. — Bernama

Plea to expedite pension adjustments allowed

➤ High Court judge orders the PSD and government to pay arrears to retired civil servants within three months

KUALA LUMPUR: The High Court here allowed a pension increase for retirees based on their final salary according to the 2016 Public Service Department (PSD) Circular, effective January 2022.

In allowing a judicial review by retired civil servant Aminah Ahmad, Judge Datuk Amarjeet Singh ordered the PSD and the government to pay the arrears within three months from yesterday.

Federal counsel M. Kogilambigai, representing the respondents, applied orally for a stay of the ruling but was dismissed.

The judge, however, ordered her to file a formal written application for a stay, so the court could fix a date for a hearing.

Aminah, who retired as a civil servant with the Foreign Affairs Ministry, filed the judicial review application on Jan 12 last year in her capacity and on behalf of 56 retired members of the public service.

She was seeking a mandamus order to compel the respondents to expedite the pension adjustments to the qualifying amount following the formula contained in Sections 3 and 6 of the Pensions Adjustment

Act 1980 (PAA 1980) before amendments were made under Sections 3 and 7 of the Pensions Adjustment Act (Amendment) 2013 (PAA 2013).

Aminah also sought an order for the respondents to pay the pension arrears within 14 days, in addition to a declaratory order stating that the failure to pay violates the Federal Constitution.

Under the old scheme, the retiree's pension is revised based on the prevailing salary of incumbent civil servants in that grade. However, the 2013 amendment was introduced based on a flat rate of 2% annual increment.

Aminah initially lost her case at the High Court in 2020. She then appealed to the Court of Appeal, which decided in her favour. The government and the PSD director-general obtained leave to appeal in 2022, Bernama reported.

On June 27, 2023, the Federal Court affirmed the Court of Appeal's decision that declared the amended pension null and void, and the five-member bench also dismissed the appeal by the government and PSD

director-general to overturn the appellate court's decision.

On Feb 29 last year, the court allowed Aminah to proceed with the judicial review after the Attorney-General's Chambers did not object to the application.

Meanwhile, Amarjeet in his judgment yesterday ruled that the circular had the effect of making salary revisions for government servants, and under the Pensions Adjustment Act 1980, government pensioners are entitled to pensions corresponding to the revision of their salary.

"An order of mandamus is granted compelling the (PSD) director-general to make corresponding adjustments for the purpose of computing the pensions in favour of the entitled pensioners.

"In view of the decision of the Federal Court (that dismissed the government and PSD's appeal) the backdate pension is to be paid beginning January 2022 (the date of the Court of Appeal's decision that allowed Aminah's appeal) until the next salary revision.

"The backdated payment is to be paid to the entitled pensioners within three months from today (Thursday). No order as to costs," said Amarjeet.

Aminah is represented by counsel Datuk Shukor Ahmad, Datuk Baljit Singh Sidhu and Gurpreet Singh.

Muhyiddin's cases to be jointly heard

KUALA LUMPUR: The Sessions Court here allowed an application by the prosecution for the four charges of abuse of position and three money laundering charges facing former prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to be tried together.

Judge Azura Alwi allowed the application because it met the criteria under Section 165 of the Criminal Procedure Code as the charges involved a series of acts involving the same transaction and individual.

Deputy public prosecutor Datuk Wan Shahrudin Wan Ladin said they will produce 30 witnesses for the trial.

The court set Feb 18 for mention. Meanwhile, the court revoked an application by Muhyiddin to withdraw the money laundering charges against him.

Muhyiddin, 77, as the prime minister (at the time) and Bersatu president, was charged with using his position to obtain RM232.5 million in bribes from Bukhary Equity Sdn Bhd, Nepturis Sdn Bhd, Mamfor Sdn Bhd and Datuk Azman Yusoff for his political party.

He was charged with committing the offence at the Prime Minister's Office, Bangunan Perdana Putra, Federal Government Administration Centre in Putrajaya between March 1, 2020 and Aug 20, 2021.

He also faced two charges of receiving money from illegal activities amounting to RM195 million from Bukhary Equity Sdn Bhd, which was deposited into Bersatu's CIMB Bank account.

The offence was committed at CIMB Bank Menara KL branch, Jalan Stesen Sentral between Feb 25 and July 16, 2021 and between Feb 8 and July 8, 2022. – Bernama

M'sian probed over drug smuggling

SINGAPORE: A 21-year-old Malaysian man is under investigation in Singapore for attempting to smuggle drugs worth over S\$169,000 (RM556,570) into the country, including over 4.6kg of cannabis, on Tuesday, authorities said yesterday.

The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said a total of about 4,648g of cannabis, 542g of "ice" and 250 Erimin-5 tablets were found concealed in various parts of the man's motorcycle during a stop at the Woodlands checkpoint.

ICA officers discovered a black bundle in the front fairing of the motorcycle before alerting the CNB for further checks on the Malaysia-registered vehicle.

"The drugs could potentially sustain about 970 addicts for a week. Investigations are ongoing," they said in a joint statement.

Under Section 7 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1973, individuals who import or export more than 500g of cannabis or 250g of methamphetamine into or from Singapore may face the death penalty. – Bernama

Police hunt for escaped detainee

TANGKAK: Police are searching for a detained local man who escaped custody at about 1.30pm on Wednesday.

Tangkak District police chief Supt Roslan Mohd Talib identified the suspect as Mohd Saifulnizam Zakaria, 38, from No. 122, Kampung Padang Lalang.

"Mohd Saifulnizam, who is about 170cm tall, slim, and has a dark complexion, is being investigated under Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952."

He said police have launched *Ops Tutup*, including the K9 Unit, at all entry and exit points in Tangkak and neighbouring districts.

Roslan added that the incident is being investigated under Sections 223 and 224 of the Penal Code. – Bernama



HEAVY TASK ... Kuala Lumpur City Hall workers chopping and removing parts of a tree that crashed onto Jalan Pudu yesterday morning. The incident had caused traffic to be blocked on both sides of the road. – **BERNAMAPIC**

Man held for hurting, threatening wife with knife

KUALA LUMPUR: A local man was arrested for allegedly hitting and pointing a knife at his wife at an apartment in Ampang near Selangor on Sunday.

Ampang Jaya district police chief ACP Mohd Azam Ismail said the 45-year-old man was arrested yesterday at Jalan Ampang Mewah, Ampang at 10.30pm.

He said the suspect's wife, who is a kindergarten teacher, lodged a police report after a disagreement occurred when she accused her husband, who was drunk at the time, of having an affair with another man.

"The suspect then hit and kicked his wife's back. The suspect also pointed a knife at his wife, which was witnessed by their son.

"Examination by medical officers found that

the victim suffered soft tissue injury on the neck, while a urine test showed that the suspect was negative from any drug abuse.

"He also had no past (criminal) record," he said in a statement.

Mohd Azam added that the suspect was remanded for three days beginning from Wednesday, and the case was being investigated under Sections 323 and 506 of the Penal Code for intentionally causing injury and criminal intimidation.

Meanwhile, a local man was arrested after he was suspected of being involved in a beating incident where a man was seriously injured at Jalan Pandan Indah, Ampang last Saturday.

Mohd Azam said the suspect was arrested

on Monday in front of the Ampang Jaya District police headquarters.

He said the victim's adoptive mother, received a call from the Ampang Hospital to inform that her 42-year-old adopted son was admitted to the red zone of the hospital.

The victim was later sent to Kuala Lumpur Hospital for further treatment and is in stable condition.

"The motive is believed to be due to an old grudge as the victim had injured the suspect last year," Mohd Azam said in a separate statement.

He added that the suspect was remanded for five days from Tuesday, and the case was being investigated under Section 326 of the Penal Code. – Bernama



Trailblazing female mechanic smashes industry stereotypes

➤ Khairin Qisstina, 20, takes on automotive world, proving women can excel in male-dominated field

IPOH: At just 20 years of age, Khairin Qisstina Mohamad Syakirin is challenging stereotypes as a mechanic in a male-dominated industry.

Armed with a Malaysian Skills Diploma in automotive technology, she confronts scepticism head-on.

"Can you really fix my car?" is a question she hears often but instead of letting it deter her, it fuels her determination to prove her skill and expertise.

"I've learnt that being a mechanic requires resilience and the ability to remain calm when dealing with customers," she told Bernama in a recent interview.

Khairin Qisstina is the sole female mechanic at MTH Autohaus & Accessories in Taman Pengkalan Jaya.

Standing 165cm tall with a slim build, she understands why customers might question her capabilities.

"It's true my physical strength doesn't match that of men, but I don't let that be an excuse to give up. Beyond my passion for this field, I'm also fulfilling the wish of my late elder brother, who was deeply interested in the automotive industry," she said.

Fondly known as Khai, she credits her late brother Muhammad Aqil Khairin for sparking her interest



Khairin Qisstina is the sole female mechanic at MTH Autohaus & Accessories in Taman Pengkalan Jaya. — **BERNAMAPIC**

in the field.

"My passion began when I was nine years old, as I was often exposed to information about luxury cars and models by my late brother. He aspired to pursue a career in the automotive industry," she said, adding that her brother died over five years ago at the age of 18 due to meningitis.

A year after his passing, Khairin Qisstina continued her education at Kolej Vokasional Lebu Cator, earning the Malaysian Vocational Certificate (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional) before pursuing diploma-level studies.

The second of five siblings, she underwent industrial training at her current workplace before being offered a permanent position by her employer.

"It's challenging to prove we are on par with the strength and agility

of men. However, I'm grateful for colleagues who are supportive and always willing to guide me," said Khairin Qisstina, who has been a full-time employee at the workshop for just two months.

Born in Ipoh, Perak, Khairin Qisstina said one of the toughest tasks she faces is removing gearboxes from vehicles, particularly Proton models, as the process can take three to four hours due to the weight of the components.

"My colleagues are a great help in this regard," she added, noting that her expertise lies in engine repairs for imported cars, especially Volkswagen and BMW models.

Meanwhile, MTH Autohaus & Accessories owner Mohamad Zaini Ashari, 53, said Khairin's attitude and discipline were key factors in her being hired as a permanent employee.

"From April to October last year, Khai underwent industrial training at our workshop. During that time, I observed that she was not only diligent but also frequently sought advice from other mechanics when facing issues with vehicles under repair.

"That's what makes Khai stand out. Perhaps through this opportunity, I can give her the career experience she needs to excel further," he said.

Mohamad Zaini also said negative perceptions of women in this field are unwarranted and that support is vital for their success.

"Nowadays, many jobs don't differentiate between men and women. What matters most is passion, diligence and a willingness to learn. These traits ultimately determine a person's success," he said.

Old buses transformed into a cafe at Boss Bus Camp

IPOH: Five decommissioned buses have been creatively repurposed into unique and cosy dining spaces.

Each bus is equipped with air conditioning, with interiors minimally altered to retain the original seating and driver's chairs.

Outside, a bus-stop structure has also been converted into a dining area.

To make the experience at Boss Bus Camp more memorable, customers are given an old bus ticket as a souvenir after their meal.

The one-of-a-kind eatery, located at Jalan C. M. Yusuff in Taman Chateau, is run by Mohd Ikram Mohadom, 35, who aimed to preserve memories of his parents from the era of the old bus services.

"The idea of using these old buses as dining spaces was inspired by a bus cafe I saw in Klebang, Malacca," he said when interviewed by Bernama recently.

He added that the initiative also made use of nearly 0.4ha of previously idle land.

"I purchased these old buses from several companies. If they aren't repurposed, they would simply be discarded," he said.

The premises, which began operations last October, offers a distinctive dining experience for people of all ages and backgrounds.

"Our operating hours are 5pm to midnight, Wednesday to Sunday. We also provide a spacious car park and go-kart facilities for visitors who enjoy more active pursuits," he said.

When asked about the menu, Mohd Ikram said the cafe serves a mix of Western dishes and seafood-based meals.

"The seafood is sourced from local fishermen in Lumut. We also use organic chicken for our fried chicken, and the portions are generous," he said.

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JAPAN 'MEGAQUAKE' PROBABILITY UP TO 82%

TOKYO: A Japanese government panel said it has raised its estimated probability of a "megaquake" to 82% in the next 30 years. Such a jolt could potentially have a devastating 8-9 magnitude, trigger colossal tsunamis and kill several hundred thousand people. The Earthquake Research Committee said it has increased its estimate of the probability to 75-82% from 74-81%. It concerns what is known as a subduction megathrust quake along the Nankai Trough, an 800km undersea gully running parallel to Japan's Pacific coast. Over the past 1,400 years, megaquakes in the trough have occurred every 100 to 200 years. The last recorded one happened in 1946. — AFP

TAIWAN TIGHTENS PROTECTION OF CABLES

TAIPEI: Taiwan's navy will be on standby to help protect the island's undersea telecoms cables and deal with suspicious vessels. "If there are any suspicious vessel movements in the area where undersea cables are distributed, we will coordinate with the coast guard to monitor them," Defence Minister Wellington Koo said. "Once such a situation is discovered, the coast guard will go out first. If the coast guard needs the navy's support, I think we will also go out and coordinate immediately." — AFP

Yoon avoids fresh questioning

SEOUL: South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol refused to appear for fresh questioning by investigators yesterday, a day after his dramatic arrest over a failed martial law declaration.

The Constitutional Court also opened its second hearing in a trial that will decide whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment, following the dawn raid that made him the country's first-ever sitting president to be detained.

The former star prosecutor, who faces charges of insurrection, was questioned for hours on Wednesday but exercised his right to remain silent before being moved to a detention centre.

Investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) were to resume Yoon's questioning yesterday, but his legal team told them he would not attend.

"President Yoon's representatives informed the CIO through his legal counsel that there is 'no change in his position', indicating his intent not to appear," the CIO said in a statement.

Lawyer Yoon confirmed to AFP the embattled leader would not attend, without specifying the reason, but said it was for health reasons.

"President Yoon is not well and fully explained his position yesterday so there is nothing more to be interrogated about," Yoon Kab-keun said.

Officials were trying to secure a new warrant that could hold him for longer than 48 hours.

If investigators successfully obtain that warrant, they are expected to be given a 20-day extension to the leader's detention to allow time to formalise an indictment against him.

South Korea's opposition Democratic Party celebrated Yoon's detention, while the parliament speaker said it was time to stabilise the country after weeks of turmoil.

But Yoon's lawyers have filed for a review of the arrest warrant. — AFP

Rescuers evacuate thousands after Mount Ibu erupts

Maluku volcano triggers highest alert

TERNATE: Hundreds of islanders have been evacuated, with thousands more awaiting their turn following increased volcanic eruptions in eastern Indonesia.

Mount Ibu on the remote island of Halmahera in North Maluku province erupted on Wednesday, sending a column of smoke up to 4km into the sky.

The volcano's alert status was raised to the highest level by

Indonesia's Geological Agency, prompting local authorities to call for the evacuation of 3,000 people living nearby.

As of yesterday morning, 517 residents from the village closest to the volcano had been evacuated, with the remaining residents scheduled to be moved later in the afternoon.

"The evacuation shelters have been prepared by the local administration, and today a thorough evacuation will be conducted for all residents in six villages," said a spokesman of local disaster management agency, Irfan Idrus.

He said evacuations began on Wednesday but were delayed due to administrative and logistical issues.

Rainfall since yesterday morning further hampered the process, he said.

According to an AFP reporter, residents were still carrying out their daily activities in their villages as lorries prepared for evacuation.

"Of course, there is some fear and concern, but we are used to the eruptions," 32-year-old resident Rista Tuju said.

"In a week, eruptions could happen three to four times, but the biggest ones occurred this week," she said.

She said she hoped the volcano would calm down soon so the village community could resume their daily lives.

Mount Ibu has shown a significant increase in volcanic activity since last June, following a series of earthquakes.

In the first weeks of January, the volcano erupted nine times.

Residents living near Mount Ibu and tourists have been advised to avoid a 5-6km exclusion zone around the volcano's peak and to wear face masks.

As of 2022, around 700,000 people were living on Halmahera island. — AFP



A woman and child look on as Mount Ibu erupts on Tuesday. — AFP/IC

Bollywood star Saif out of danger after surgery

MUMBAI: Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan was stabbed repeatedly by an intruder at his home here yesterday, but doctors treating him said he was out of danger after surgery.

Khan, 54, was "on the path to complete recovery" after receiving stab wounds on his spine, neck and hand, the doctors told reporters.

"He sustained a major injury to the thoracic spinal chord due to a lodged knife in the spine. Surgery was performed to remove the knife and also repair the leaking spinal fluid," said Nitin Dange, one of the doctors operating on Khan.

Khan was attacked just after midnight when he tried to stop the intruder, believed to be a burglar, from entering his apartment in the upscale neighbourhood of Bandra, police said.

A female employee at the apartment was also attacked and was being treated.

Khan is the son of India's former cricket captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and actress Sharmila Tagore. He is married to actor Kareena Kapoor, and his daughter from a previous marriage, Sara, is also a Bollywood actor.

Police have identified the perpetrator and launched a search for him, senior police official Dikshit Gedam said. "The accused attempted to enter through a fire escape. It appears to be a robbery attempt."

Khan, who has featured in more than 70 films and television series, is a regular on the red carpet. He and Kapoor have two young sons and are one of Bollywood's most well-known couples.

Khan has acted in several notable films and series, including *Sacred Games*, Netflix's first Indian

production, which released in 2018. Film stars and opposition leaders called for police to beef up security measures in the city.

"If such high-profile people with ... security can be attacked in their homes, what could happen to common citizens?" said Congress Party spokesperson Clyde Crasto.

Actor and filmmaker Pooja Bhatt also called for a greater police presence in the suburb.

"The city, and the queen of the suburbs, have never felt so unsafe," she said, using a popular description for the trendy Bandra area. — Reuters



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Biden warns of 'oligarchy' in dark farewell speech

► Now it's your turn to stand guard, Americans told

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden urged Americans on Wednesday to stand guard against a "dangerous" oligarchy forming under Donald Trump as he delivered a dark farewell address before stepping down next week.

In a primetime speech from the Oval Office at the end of his single term in office, he warned of an ultra-wealthy "tech industrial complex" that he said could gain unchecked power over the American people.

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms," the 82-year-old Democrat said.

Biden began his speech by touting the legacy of his four years in office, saying it may take time to feel the benefits but that the "seeds were planted" for Americans in the future.

But he soon turned to painting a series of dangers that he said were facing the United States, which clearly referred to billionaire Trump's close ties to the world's richest man, Elon Musk, and other tech tycoons.

Biden warned there was a "dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people" with "dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked".

He then lashed out at social media firms, with Musk having turned X into a right-wing megaphone and Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg ending fact-checking operations in the US as he courts Trump.

"Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation," said Biden.

"The free press is crumbling. Editors are disappearing. Social media is giving up on fact checking. The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit."

He recalled a stark warning issued by president Dwight Eisenhower in his own farewell address in 1961 about the dangers of an out-of-control military industrial complex.

"I'm equally concerned about the potential rise of a tech industrial complex."

He also cautioned over the rise of AI, saying that America must take the lead over China on



Biden and Harris go for a hug after his address on Wednesday. — REUTERSPIC

the transformative technology.

Biden finished by sounding a valedictory tone at the end of a 50-year political career that has seen the former senator mount several failed presidential bids before becoming Barack Obama's vice-president, and finally rising to the top himself.

"It's been the highest honour of my life to lead you as commander in chief," said Biden.

Signing off as Trump returns for a second term on Monday, Biden told Americans: "Now it's your turn to stand guard."

In emotional scenes, First Lady Jill Biden,

son Hunter and Vice-President Kamala Harris were in the Oval Office as Biden delivered his political swansong.

After the speech, Biden kissed and hugged family members including his young grandson Beau.

But the dark address was a stunning shift in tone from Biden, who had largely toned down his criticisms of his rival after the election in pursuit of what he called a smooth transition.

Instead, America's oldest ever president has spent much of his final months in office trying to burnish his legacy. — AFP

Delhi spook faces legal action

NEW DELHI: A panel investigating Washington's accusations of Indian involvement in a foiled murder plot on US soil against an activist had recommended legal action against an unnamed person.

The US has been pushing India to look into the Justice Department's claim that an unnamed Indian intelligence official directed plans to assassinate dual Canadian-American citizen Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in 2023.

The Home Ministry said on Wednesday that the committee had looked into activities of "some organised criminal groups, terrorist organisations, drug peddlers, etc, who undermined the security interests of both India and the US".

India has said little publicly since announcing in November 2023 it would investigate the claims, and has separately continued a diplomatic dispute with Canada over the June 2023 assassination of another activist.

The committee has "recommended legal action against an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the inquiry", the ministry said in a statement.

It did not elaborate further on the identity of the person, but said the committee also asked for legal action to "be completed expeditiously".

The US welcomes "this constructive first step and looks forward to seeing legal action taken in the Indian system", White House National Security Council spokesperson Sean Savett said.

The US Department of Justice had charged Vikash Yadav, an ex-Indian intelligence official, with leading the 2023 plot to murder Pannun. The US indictment was unsealed in October.

A lawyer representing Yadav declined to comment on the report. — Reuters

Red flag wildfire warnings expire

LOS ANGELES: Red flag warnings advising of extreme wildfire danger expired across the Los Angeles area late on Wednesday, but forecasters warned that dry and windy conditions persist, and that the threat of blazes remained.

The National Weather Service said the respite for fire-ravaged Los Angeles will be short, with high chances for renewed Red Flag warnings — when ideal fire conditions of high winds and low humidity dominate — starting again on Sunday.

Some 6.5 million people remained under a critical fire threat, after the fires consumed an area nearly the size of Washington, DC, resulting in at least 25 deaths so far.

Firefighters on Wednesday confronted persistently strong and dry winds fuelling two giant wildfires that have terrified Los Angeles for eight days, testing the resolve of a city upended by the worst disaster in its history.

Officials urged residents to remain vigilant and be prepared to evacuate at a moment's notice. "Be prepared to leave," County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath said.

The fires have damaged or destroyed more than 12,000 homes and other structures, and forced as many as 200,000 people from their homes. Some 82,400 people were under evacuation orders and another 90,400 faced evacuation warnings as of Wednesday, County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Entire neighbourhoods have been levelled, leaving smoldering ash and rubble.

Some 8,500 firefighters from the western United States, Canada and Mexico have kept the fires in check for three days. — Reuters

China cheated its way to power, says Trump nominee

WASHINGTON: Marco Rubio, Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of state, charged on Wednesday that China cheated its way to superpower status and vowed to cast aside the "liberal world order" long promoted by the United States.

Rubio faced fellow senators at a confirmation hearing that, other than expected interruptions by protesters, was set to be among the least contentious appearances for Trump's motley array of nominees.

The longtime hawk opened by taking aim at China, which President Joe Biden called a competitor but nevertheless sought to engage.

Rubio rejected a key tenet of Biden's foreign policy — prioritising a rules-based, US-led "liberal world order" — in favour of Trump's belief in "America First".

"The postwar global order is not just obsolete; it is now a weapon being used against us," Rubio said.

"We welcomed the Chinese Communist Party into this global order. And they took advantage of all its benefits. But they ignored all its obligations and responsibilities.

"Instead, they have lied, cheated, hacked and stolen their way to global superpower status, at our expense."

While highlighting China, Rubio's remarks said that in "Moscow, Tehran and Pyongyang, dictators sow chaos and instability."

He also said that the next US administration would seek "bold diplomacy" with a goal of ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Rubio called for a foreign policy driven solely by whether decisions make the United States safer, stronger and more prosperous.

"While America often continued to prioritise the 'global order' above our core national interests, other nations continued to act the way countries always have and always will, in what they perceive to be in their best interest."

Rubio, the son of working-class Cuban immigrants, would become the first Hispanic and first fluent Spanish speaker to be the top US diplomat.

Little controversy surrounds Rubio, a three-term senator generally well-liked by his colleagues and known for his ease in public appearances.

He clashed bitterly with Trump when he challenged him for the 2016 nomination — with the future president mocking him as "Little Marco" — but he has come back into good graces.

He is expected to get to work quickly, with sources saying preparations are under way for an immediate four-way meeting on Tuesday in Washington with Rubio's counterparts from the Quad: Australia, India and Japan.

The Quad has long been seen by China as a US-led platform for the four democracies to encircle it, despite Quad leaders' denials. — AFP

DOHA: Israel intensified strikes on Gaza hours after a ceasefire and hostage release deal was announced, residents and authorities in the Palestinian enclave said, and mediators sought to quell fighting ahead of the truce's start on Sunday.

The complex ceasefire accord between Israel and Hamas, which controls Gaza, emerged on Wednesday after months of mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US and 15 months of bloodshed that devastated the coastal territory and inflamed the Middle East.

The deal outlines a six-week initial ceasefire with the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, where tens of thousands have been killed. Hostages taken by Hamas would be freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

At a news conference in Doha, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said the ceasefire would take effect on Sunday. Negotiators are working with Israel and Hamas on steps to implement the agreement, he said.

"This deal will halt the fighting in Gaza, surge much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, and reunite the hostages with their families after more than 15 months in captivity," US President Joe Biden said.

His successor, Donald Trump, takes office on Monday and claimed credit for the breakthrough in Gaza.

Israel's acceptance of the deal will not be official until it is approved by its security Cabinet and government.

The accord was expected to win approval despite opposition from some hardliners in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government.

While people celebrated the pact in Gaza and Israel, Israel's military escalated attacks after the announcement, the civil emergency service and residents said.

Heavy Israeli bombardment, especially in Gaza City, killed 32 people late on Wednesday, medics said. The strikes continued early yesterday and destroyed houses in Rafah in southern Gaza, Nuseirat in central Gaza and in northern Gaza, residents said.

There were no reports of Hamas attacks on Israel.

A Palestinian official close to the ceasefire negotiations said mediators were seeking to persuade both sides to suspend hostilities ahead of the ceasefire going into effect.

In social media posts, some Gaza residents urged Palestinians to exercise extra caution in the belief Israel could step up attacks in the next few days to maximise gains before the ceasefire starts.

Nevertheless, news of the ceasefire deal sparked jubilation in Gaza, where Palestinians have faced severe shortages of food, water, shelter and fuel. In Khan Younis, throngs clogged the streets amid the sounds of horns as they cheered, waved Palestinian flags and danced.

"I am happy. Yes, I am crying, but those are

Israel, Hamas agree on ceasefire

➤ Occupying force escalates attacks on Gaza

tears of joy," said Ghada, a displaced mother of five.

In Tel Aviv, families of Israeli hostages and their friends likewise welcomed the news, saying in a statement they felt "overwhelming joy and relief (about) the agreement to bring our loved ones home."

Hamas called the pact "an achievement for our people" and "a turning point".

If successful, the ceasefire will halt fighting that has razed much of heavily urbanised Gaza, killed over 46,000 people and displaced most of the tiny enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million.

With 98 Israeli hostages remaining in Gaza, phase one of the deal entails the release of 33 of them, including all women, children and men over 50. Two American hostages, Keith Siegel and Sagui Dekel-Chen, were among those to be released in the first phase, a source said.

The agreement calls for a surge in

humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross said they were preparing to scale up their aid operations.

"A ceasefire is the start - not the end. We have food lined up at the borders to Gaza - and need to be able to bring it in at scale," said World Food Programme executive director Cindy McCain.

Biden and Trump both claimed credit for the deal that was months in the making but was helped across the line by a Trump emissary.

Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff was in Qatar along with White House envoys for the talks, and a senior Biden administration official said Witkoff's presence was critical to reaching a deal after 96 hours of intense negotiations.

Biden said that the two teams had "been speaking as one".

Negotiations on implementing the second phase of the deal will begin by the 16th day of phase one, and this stage was expected to include the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

The third stage is to address the return of all remaining dead bodies and the start of Gaza's reconstruction. - Reuters



Palestinians at a street market in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. - REUTERS PIX

US issues fresh round of sanctions against Russia

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday imposed hundreds of sanctions targeting Russia, seeking to increase pressure on Moscow in the Biden administration's final days and protect some sanctions previously imposed.

The US State and Treasury departments imposed sanctions on over 250 targets, including some based in China, taking aim at Russia's evasion of US sanctions and its military industrial base.

As part of the action, the Treasury imposed new curbs on almost 100 entities that were already under sanctions, potentially complicating any future efforts to remove the measures.

Russia's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Treasury said Washington was imposing fresh sanctions on almost 100 critical Russian entities - including Russian banks and companies operating in Russia's energy sector - that were previously sanctioned. It said the move increases secondary sanctions risk for them.

The new sanctions are issued under an executive order that a senior Treasury official said requires Congress to be notified before any of the actions can be reversed.

It was unclear how Donald Trump, who succeeds President Joe Biden on Monday, will approach the issue of sanctions on Russia. Trump has been friendly towards Russian President Vladimir Putin in the past and said on Monday that he would aim to meet quickly with him to discuss Ukraine.

When asked about his strategy to end the war, Trump told Newsmax: "Well, there's only one strategy and it's up to Putin and I can't imagine he's too thrilled about the way it's gone because it hasn't gone exactly well for him either."

Washington also took action against a sanctions evasion scheme established between actors in Russia and China, targeting regional clearing platforms in the two countries that it said have been working to allow cross-border payments for sensitive goods.

The Treasury said several Russian banks under

US sanctions were participants.

"China firmly opposes any illegal unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction," said Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington.

"The normal economic and trade exchanges between China and Russia should not be interfered with or disrupted, and should not be used as a tool to smear and contain China."

Also hit with sanctions on Wednesday was Keremet Bank, a Kyrgyzstan-based financial institution the Treasury accused of coordinating with Russian officials and a bank identified by the United States as circumventing sanctions.

The US State Department also imposed sanctions on Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe.

It is shut down but needs external power to keep its nuclear material cool and prevent a meltdown.

The sanctions will not affect its operations, Russian news agencies reported on Wednesday. - Reuters

Glimmer of hope amid dire humanitarian crisis

KUALA LUMPUR: The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been hailed by some as a step towards ending the bloodshed and offering a glimmer of hope for Gaza, while others remain sceptical, warning that it may not lead to lasting peace.

Senior Researcher at the Hashim Sani Centre for Palestine Studies at Universiti Malaya, Prof Dr Mohammed H. Alaqad, said the ceasefire was a temporary pause rather than a solution to the conflict.

According to Alaqad, a Palestinian himself, Hamas' decision to agree to the ceasefire was not a sign of weakness but rather a step to protect the people of Gaza, who have endured relentless bombings, destruction and hardship.

"Hamas made this decision to protect the people, not because they're pressured by anyone. Our people in Gaza have suffered enough."

"This ceasefire is a moment to breathe and to let our people heal. This is not surrender, it's a calculated move," he said.

Hospitals are overwhelmed and the blockade continues to suffocate the population.

"As long as the blockade remains, our people are still suffocating."

"Rebuilding Gaza's infrastructure requires more than a few days of quiet."

"Homes, schools, and hospitals are in ruins. Electricity is scarce, clean water is limited and every day of this siege makes survival harder."

He called for the urgent lifting of the blockade.

"Our people deserve more than temporary aid, they deserve justice, freedom and a future without oppression."

He said that while countries like Egypt and Qatar may have played a role in brokering the ceasefire, Hamas makes decisions based on the needs of the people, independent of foreign influence.

"Resistance is rooted in the right to liberate our land and preserve our dignity," he said, noting that Qatar's support is aimed at rebuilding Gaza rather than dictating Hamas' actions.

"Every time we've agreed to a ceasefire, hoping the world would finally step in and force real change, we've been met with lies and broken promises."

"If they think this ceasefire means we've given up, they're wrong. We are more determined than ever." - Bernama

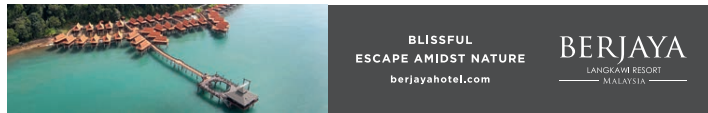
BRIEFS

IRAN HAILS PALESTINIAN 'RESISTANCE'

TEHRAN: Iran supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hailed Palestinian "resistance" after a Gaza ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas was announced. "Today, the world realised that the patience of the people of Gaza and the steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance forced the Zionist regime to retreat," a post on his account on X said, adding that Israel was "defeated". - AFP

CHANCE TO PROMOTE DE-ESCALATION: CHINA

BEIJING: China welcomes the Gaza ceasefire deal and hopes relevant parties can take it as an opportunity to promote de-escalation in the Middle East. China also hoped the agreement will be effectively implemented so as to achieve a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, its Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said. - Reuters



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Drop the pounds with a little help

Q: I know I have gained some weight, and despite trying numerous diets, I cannot seem to lose even a few kilograms. It is really discouraging and affects how I feel about myself. Should I just accept that I will never succeed?

Focus on the Family Malaysia: We understand how you are feeling.

The reason for weight gain is simple: we consume more calories than our bodies can use. With larger portion sizes and the prevalence of fast food and late-night meals like *mamak* suppers in Malaysia, it is easy to see how we end up gaining weight. We also tend to be less active than previous generations.

While weight gain is understandable, the effects of exercise and proper nutrition are just as predictable. To start, we need to increase our activity levels and cut back on time spent in front of screens. Something as simple as walking for 30 minutes a day can make a big difference.

Exercise does not have to be strenuous, just get moving. When it comes to nutrition, keep it simple. Instead of following fleeting diets, make food choices that you can stick with over the long haul.

But here is the bigger question: If good health is straightforward, why is it so hard to lose weight? The truth is, changing bad habits is

tough. That is why having strong support is crucial. Research shows that those with strong community support are more likely to not only lose weight but keep it off.

What is the secret to shedding those unwanted kilograms? A little grit – and a lot of encouragement from people you trust and who want to see you succeed. Do not go at it alone.

Q: My husband and I are so busy that it feels like our lives are running us, not the other way around. We are worried about how this is affecting our parenting, especially since we are often drained by the time we get home. How can we address this?

Focus on the Family Malaysia: You are not alone – our whole culture runs at a non-stop pace. As parents, it is up to us to hit the pause button and regain perspective as well as shift our mindset. This requires being intentional.

Being intentional means deliberately prioritising how you spend your time and energy. It is about recognising the importance of establishing boundaries and learning to say “no” to some things so that you can focus on what matters most – your children.

It is about understanding what recharges you. For example, use your lunch break to work out, read a book or even take a quick nap.

Finding a balance will help you recharge and strengthen your ability to parent effectively.

Parenting does not require perfection but it does demand intentionality when it comes to managing your:

⌚ **Time:** We all have limited time but your schedule is yours to manage. Small adjustments can add up and make a significant difference.

🎯 **Attention:** What you focus on matters. While it is easy to give attention to a child’s whining or misbehaviour, try to also highlight their acts of kindness or requests to play. Be intentional about where you direct your attention to strengthen your relationship.

🚧 **Boundaries:** What are you modelling for your children? What can you say “no” to in order to say “yes” to your family?

Intentionality takes time and energy – both of which can be short in supply. But by adjusting your priorities, you can regain control of your life and see a positive shift in your parenting.

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



Research shows that those with strong community support are more likely to not only lose weight but keep it off.

COMMENT

Internet’s Wild West reality

THE idea of rules and regulations may not necessarily sit well with all of us. After all, they involve a degree of restriction of freedom.

At the same time, how can a society function without regulations? They are needed to ensure health and safety standards, quality control in many technical fields and even safeguard liberty.

Without regulations, the internet is like the Wild West – an environment where outlaws can prosper. That is why it is important to adopt social media licensing laws and hold tech giants accountable when they provide an avenue for the unscrupulous to rip away a pensioner’s lifetime savings.

I urge Malaysia to take a leaf from Australia’s playbook. On Jan 3, Financial Services Minister Stephen Jones drafted a law that would impose massive fines and compensation of up to A\$50 million (RM130.30 million) on tech giants, banks and telcos for failing to protect scam victims.

This is part of Australia’s Scam Prevention Framework designed to hold them accountable.

One trigger for this was that Australians were losing more than A\$2.7 billion a year to scammers, with losses originating from social media platforms increasing substantially.

Under this proposed law, the companies will have to show that they introduced additional checks and balances to prevent funds from being transferred as part of the scam.

This is also relevant in the local context, with the implementation of the Social Media Licensing Framework, which saw four major social media and messaging

platforms come on board with the licensing, effective from Jan 1.

In supporting its implementation, Petaling Jaya MP Lee Chean Chung highlighted that he had assisted many scam victims and that it was a widespread problem that needed to be addressed.

“Total financial losses under #ScamVictimSupport has exceeded RM10 million while some still suffer post-scam traumas after years. Simply put, we need the platforms to take more accountability and responsibility to improve safety and security in the digital world,” he said earlier this month.

It is encouraging to see the participation of WeChat, Telegram, TikTok and Meta in this initiative although there remain two notable companies that have yet to comply with the licensing applications and requirements.

Kota Malacca MP Khoo Poay Tiong also backed the move by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), saying that the framework addressed pressing challenges, including online safety, content regulation and the ethical use of social media platforms while safeguarding users’ freedom of expression.

He called on Google, as the parent company of YouTube, to engage constructively with the MCMC to resolve any outstanding concerns.

Meanwhile, Segamat MP Yuneswaran Ramaraj, a third backbencher, urged social media platform X to apply for the mandatory licensing based on goodwill, after the platform stated it had not met the minimum threshold of eight million users.

In 2023 alone, over 34,000 online

scam cases in Malaysia resulted in financial losses exceeding RM1.2 billion.

Senior citizens and pensioners are particularly vulnerable as they are a group that often have large savings and are not familiar with technology.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) also pointed out recently that as cryptocurrencies gain prominence as an alternative to traditional currencies, they have also become a new tool for criminals to facilitate illegal activities.

On Jan 4, MACC Chief Commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki said corruption is evolving from traditional methods to more sophisticated operations, including the use of digital technologies and cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum, to conceal financial trails.

As such, several MACC officers have undergone specialised training in cryptocurrency investigations, in addition to the commission establishing close collaboration with the Digital Forensic Working Group and Interpol to bolster its efforts.

The truth is that if the relevant authorities do not move to clamp down on the many unchecked digital avenues that facilitate cybercrimes, they will continue to thrive in our country.

Like it or not, rules and regulations are needed to safeguard Malaysians from criminals who use the online world as a vehicle for their crimes.

Martin Vengadesan is a veteran editor and consultant with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com



The delay in the Aerotrain’s return highlights the urgent need for change.

Aerotrain delay highlights urgency for MAHB privatisation

I REFER to recent reports on the indefinite delay of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport’s (KLIA) Aerotrain services, which were initially set to resume by the end of the month. This delay has drawn criticism from Transport Minister Anthony Loke.

The delay comes in the context of plans to privatise Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB), which operates 39 airports in the country. MAHB is nearing a 90% acceptance threshold for its takeover by the Gateway Development Alliance (GDA), a move I hope will proceed.

KLIA, once a national pride, has seen its global ranking drop from the second-best airport in 2001 to 71st place.

The delay in the Aerotrain’s return, alongside deteriorating facilities like dirty washrooms and long immigration queues, highlights the urgent need for change.

Competing airports, such as

Singapore’s Changi and Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi, have invested heavily in modernisation, leaving KLIA and others behind.

The RM11-per-share offer by GDA is fair to shareholders and provides an opportunity to rebuild MAHB without burdening taxpayers.

The consortium, including the Employees Provident Fund, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and Global Infrastructure Partners, has the financial and technical expertise to turn things around.

Privatisation is crucial to restoring KLIA’s global standing, especially with Malaysia chairing Asean.

World-class airports will enhance tourism, business and investment. The challenges facing MAHB are longstanding, and I hope this deal provides the much-needed solution for Malaysia’s airports to once again lead the region.

Vijaya Kumaran



the Sun **LYFE**

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Gift of giving

Change it up with curated
CNY presents - P12



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Goodness
of noodles



GIFTING GUIDE

BY **EE ANN NEE**

USHER in the Year of the Snake with delightful gift assortments and hampers, consisting of festive food and drinks. Whether you are gifting family, friends or business partners, these snacks are made to impress, offering delicious bites during this Chinese New Year (CNY) season.

Kinohimitsu

Kinohimitsu's CNY Gift Packs offer a diverse range of options for differing budgets and preferences. Each pack carries a unique name and significance, adding a touch of personalisation in expressing one's feelings and intentions behind each gift pack.

To enhance the gift-giving experience, this versatility extends for customers to customise corporate gift packs, allowing businesses to tailor them as they see fit to better strengthen relationships and create lasting impressions.

Among its range of CNY Gift Packs, the God of Fortune Fatt is a representation that prosperity comes from a harmonious balance of health and happiness in body and mind - a gift that carries the weight of a thousand wishes that express your regard for the wellness of your loved ones. The Chinese cultural belief is that grand gestures and larger gifts are symbols of generosity and sincerity, which are associated to good fortune and blessings for both parties.

St Regis Kuala Lumpur

The hotel welcomes the Year of the Snake with the grace of tea blossoms, integrating the tradition of Chinese tea into its offerings this CNY. Guests can select from a range of signature traditional items, including *nian gao*, premium Da Hong Pao Chinese tea, artisanal sauces and handcrafted cookies.

Led by executive pastry chef Graff Kwok, the pastry team elevates the collection with a selection of chocolates and cakes infused with tea flavours. Among the highlights are the Beau-tea cupcakes, presented in The St Regis Kuala Lumpur's Chinese tea cup, adorned with designs symbolising CNY greetings, and the Prosperity Tea Pot Cake, a creation incorporating the flavours of Hojicha and Long Jing tea, with hand-painted floral designs crafted by its chefs. The collection also includes the bonbons, featuring earl grey, jasmine, pu'er and the local *teh tarik*, each blending the



Kinohimitsu God of Fortune Fatt Gift Pack (RM148 for two). - **KINOHIMITSUPIC**



Oversea Restaurant's confectionaries.

CNY gift ideas

➤ Festive food treats to celebrate season of togetherness, prosperity

essence of tea into delightful treats.

Until Feb 12, these items from the House of Fortune collection can be purchased individually or packaged in the hotel's red trunks - inspired by the brand's founder John Jacob Astor IV's love for travel. Whether for family, friends, loved ones or corporate gifting, the gift awaits you at The Drawing Room Boutique.

Sunway Resort Hotel

Explore a variety of *yee sang* options in CNY packaging, each featuring traditional and innovative toppings to symbolise abundance and good fortune.

Choose from salmon & jellyfish *yee sang*, snow pear & jellyfish *yee sang* or the vegetarian-friendly fruity *yee sang*. Personalise your platter with additional toppings such as salmon, jellyfish, premium soft-shell crab and Bo Chui crackers, allowing you to tailor your *yee sang* to your heart's desire. Prices range from RM98 to RM128 for medium and RM168 to RM198 for large, ensuring there is an option for every celebration.

For those seeking sweet indulgences, a range of traditional and modern sweet treats are available. Delight loved ones with homemade artisanal peach-shaped pineapple tarts, a luxurious orange & apricot cake or a selection of

premium cookies to suit every preference.

Oversea Restaurant

The restaurant's assortment of confectionery is worth considering. Baked fresh for each festive season, these treats come in packaging that is for gifting or for enjoying at home during family gatherings. Delight in jars of cookies like pineapple yoghurt cookies (RM33.90), pineapple ball (RM39.90) for your snacking pleasure. For an extra touch of golden, fluffy goodness, you can also enjoy egg rolls (RM28.80) and Oriental muffins (RM39.80) - all of which make wonderful festive gifts for this joyous occasion.

Royce

Royce's chocolate collection features a collection of gift assortments and hampers, bringing a touch of sweetness to reunions and celebrations.

The Royce 2025 CNY Collection line-up includes:

- Royce Sweets Osechi (RM300)
- Two-tiered box of chocolates and baked sweets for gifting or family gatherings. Inspired by Osechi, the traditional Japanese New Year bento meal, this box contains 49 confections. Wrapped in paper adorned with a traditional Mizuhiki



Nian Gao Fortune Gift Trunk (RM308) by St Regis Kuala Lumpur.

knot design, it offers a sophisticated touch to your New Year celebrations.

- CNY Red Collection (RM300)

Adorned in festive New Year paper featuring plum blossoms and a Mizuhiki knot - symbols of love, affection and friendship - this collection includes 10 varieties and 78 pieces of Royce chocolates.

➤ Royce Variety Assortment (RM170)

This gift set features a selection of 28 individually wrapped bestsellers, presented in a red box. The vibrant red packaging, adorned with a contemporary cacao pod motif, exudes timeless charm and versatility.

➤ Nama Chocolate "Oolong Tea" (RM55)

This creation features smooth milk chocolate blocks, infused with the floral aroma of premium Oolong tea and a subtle hint of gin. Each piece is dusted with Japanese Oolong tea chocolate powder, offering a unique sensory experience. The harmonious blend of Oolong tea and rich milk chocolate provides a refreshing aftertaste for indulgence.

All-time favourites such as CNY Nutty Bar Chocolate (RM80), CNY Pure Chocolate "Sweet & Milk" (RM55), CNY Baton Cookies "Hazel Cacao" (RM55) and CNY Potatochip Chocolate "Original" (RM55) are also packaged to celebrate the season.

The 2025 Royce CNY Collection is available in Royce boutiques nationwide and online until Feb 12.



Royce CNY hamper Fortune assortment.



Yee sang gifting option by Sunway Resort Hotel.



'Asean growth set to stay on course during Malaysia's chairmanship'

PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia holds the Asean chairmanship in 2025, Asean is poised to maintain its growth trajectory despite challenges posed by global economic uncertainty, said Maybank Investment Bank.

Group chief economist Suhaimi Ilias said leveraging robust regional collaboration and forward-looking economic policies, member states including Malaysia and Singapore, continue to attract foreign direct investment and drive sustainable development.

"The recent establishment of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) exemplifies this resilience. With a focus on fiscal incentives, dedicated funds, and cross-border cooperation, the JS-SEZ aims to foster innovation and enhance trade opportunities.

"This strategic collaboration underpins Asean's efforts to adapt to shifting global dynamics while maximising regional potential," he said at the Maybank Investment Bank 2025 Outlook virtual media briefing recently.

Suhaimi noted that Asean's economic frameworks emphasise diversification and value-added industries, ensuring adaptability to external shocks.

He said enhanced education and skills development programmes within the region are also reinforcing Asean's growth momentum.

"By cultivating a skilled workforce, member states are addressing labour market demands, thereby strengthening regional competitiveness. The focus on talent development within initiatives like the JS-SEZ underscores Asean's long-term commitment to sustainable economic progress," he added.

The strategic vision of Asean continues to yield promising results, with the region maintaining strong investor confidence, according to Suhaimi. "Despite global headwinds, the bloc's ability to innovate, collaborate, and leverage its unique strengths positions it as a leading economic powerhouse in the years ahead," Suhaimi said.

Asean's growth resilience is further supported by its deepening integration into global value chains, he noted.

The economist also said Asean's commitment to sustainability is becoming a key driver of its economic momentum. - by **AIMIE SHAZRIE**

Simplified R&D tax incentive system in the works

■ BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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PUTRAJAYA: A significant simplification of the nation's research and development (R&D) tax incentives, alongside reformation of the grant system, will be included in the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP), according to Economy Minister Datuk Seri Rafizi Ramli.

He said the changes aim to address long-standing concerns about the complexity and accessibility of existing mechanisms supporting innovation and business growth.

"The new R&D tax incentive framework will streamline processes, removing unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that have deterred businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, from fully benefiting from such schemes.

"The focus is on making the system user-friendly, ensuring that businesses can easily understand and claim these incentives," Rafizi said at a 13MP engagement session with industry players yesterday.

In addition to the tax incentive reforms, a comprehensive overhaul of the grant system will be included

➤ Grant framework will also be overhauled under 13th Malaysia Plan to ensure businesses fully benefit from such schemes: Rafizi

in the plan, Rafizi disclosed.

"This initiative seeks to reduce the layers of complexity that currently hinder businesses from accessing critical funding. By simplifying application processes and eligibility criteria, the government aims to foster a more inclusive and efficient allocation of resources."

Rafizi said the reforms are part of a broader strategy to enhance the nation's competitiveness in the global market while ensuring that public resources are effectively utilised.

"The new measures will include clearer guidelines and improved communication with stakeholders, ensuring businesses understand how to navigate the updated systems. The goal is to build trust and confidence among businesses that these incentives and grants can

deliver meaningful support," he explained.

Rafizi said businesses and industry groups have long advocated for such reforms, pointing to the barriers posed by overly complicated processes. "These updates are expected to alleviate frustrations and encourage broader participation across sectors."

The government will release further details on the implementation timelines and specific changes to the R&D tax incentives and grants soon.

Despite allocating more than RM1 billion annually for R&D, Rafizi noted, there remain significant gaps in translating research into market-ready innovations.

He shared that his ministry, alongside the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, is working on a comprehensive plan

to also enhance R&D commercialisation, and foster collaboration among academia, public institutions and the private sector.

"This initiative, expected to be presented to the Cabinet within the next few months, will play a crucial role in positioning Malaysia as a leader in high-value industries and global competitiveness," he added.

Furthermore, Rafizi said, the 13MP will not only focus on reforming R&D tax incentives and the grant system but also address broader systemic challenges to strengthen the country's economic structure.

"We are taking a sector-specific approach to economic reform, including energy transition plans under the National Energy Policy. These reforms aim to create a robust foundation for Malaysia's economic growth and its ability to adapt to global changes."

The minister said one key focus is optimising Malaysia's supply chain and logistics system, pointing out that inefficiencies in the supply chain, such as the high logistical costs of moving goods across regions unnecessarily, have hindered economic efficiency.

"By investing in infrastructure, data systems, and regulatory frameworks, the government plans to enable regional distribution systems that minimise costs and improve transparency in pricing. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to streamline the movement of goods and ensure consistency in the supply chain," he added.

Rafizi also said SMEs face challenges in scaling up and integrating into larger value chains.

"Efforts to strengthen the SME sector will focus on addressing structural barriers and creating opportunities for growth, ensuring that SMEs continue to drive innovation and economic resilience," he added.



Rafizi speaking at the 13MP engagement session in Putrajaya yesterday. - **BERNAMAPIC**

Liew: US's Tier 2 designation of M'sia unlikely to impact existing data centres

■ BY **HAYATUN RAZAK**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's position as a Tier 2 nation under the United States' new artificial intelligence (AI) chip export restrictions is unlikely to impact existing data centres, said Deputy Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Liew Chin Tong.

He also said Malaysia will engage with the incoming Trump 2.0 administration in the US to understand the extent of the regulation.

"As far as we understand, it has no impact on the existing data centres.

But what sort of impact you will have on future arrangements, we will wait and see," he told reporters at the CEO Series 2025 Rehda's Annual Property Developers Conference yesterday.

Besides waiting to engage with the incoming US administration, Liew said, the government will engage with internal stakeholders.

"Noting that Malaysia is together with many other countries in Tier 2, there are ways to deal with it," he said.

The outgoing Biden administration has introduced a directive aimed at maintaining the United States' leadership in AI technology by enforcing

restrictions on AI chip exports.

Under the regulation, countries are categorised into three tiers: Tier 1 nations, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, enjoy unrestricted chip access; Tier 2 nations, including Malaysia and Singapore, face certain limitations; and Tier 3 nations, like China and Russia, are completely barred from accessing US chip technology.

The directive aims to prevent Tier 3 nations from circumventing restrictions by using cloud computing services in other regions. To address this, US companies are restricted to

deploying only 50% of their computing power abroad, with tight caps on allocations to Tier 2 countries.

In his address, Liew said Malaysia's industrial parks have become too much of a real estate play, which is not helpful for the nation.

With the cost of hiring foreign workers rising, he stressed the need to retain local talent.

"Instead of building CLQs (company-leased quarters) for foreign workers, we want to see more decent housing for young Malaysian engineers."

Liew said industrial parks can play

a constructive role to bridge the pay gap between Malaysia and Singapore.

"Say we pay Malaysians 50% of Singapore pay but housing in industrial parks is very affordable, it is almost equal to two-thirds of Singapore pay too," he added.

The Rehda Institute CEO Series 2025 aims to drive Malaysia's real estate sector and economy forward. Rehda Institute said the conference delved into Malaysia's 2025 economic outlook, the impacts of Budget 2025 on real estate and the economy, and the role of digital disruption in the construction and real estate sectors.

Ecoscience launches EcoPlasma.Ho solution

➤ Innovative effluent treatment system tackles issues resulting from palm oil milling suitable for other industries too

PETALING JAYA: Integrated palm oil milling services provider Ecoscience International Bhd (EIB) yesterday launched an innovative effluent water treatment solution called Eco-Plasma.Ho.

The cutting-edge technology addresses the challenges of palm oil mill effluent (POME) – wastewater generated during palm oil milling that requires effective treatment before being discharged into watercourses due to its highly polluting properties.

Eco-Plasma.Ho tackles pollutants that are not effectively removed by traditional biological wastewater treatment methods, enabling more sustainable and effective wastewater management practices. It is a patent-pending water treatment solution developed by EIB in collaboration with its Singapore partner, GreenRay Group.

The solution adopts the Pulsed Plasma Advanced Oxidation Process that utilises non-thermal wet plasma technology to generate hydroxyl radicals within water. These highly reactive radicals effectively break down a wide range of contaminants – such as metalloids, industrial pollutants, organic compounds, and harmful micro-organisms – into harmless compounds.

Unlike conventional methods, Eco-Plasma.Ho operates without additional chemicals or biological agents. This enables it to achieve zero liquid discharge or minimum liquid discharge, ensuring minimal rejection water to zero harmful byproducts are produced. As such, the treated water can be safely reused for various purposes, including cooling towers in chemical and power plants, process water in manufacturing, and boiler feedwater.

This versatility extends the benefits of Eco-Plasma.Ho beyond palm oil mills and refineries to diverse industries, including oleochemical, semiconductor, chemical,



From left: EIB executive director Thing Jin Suan, Wong and chairman Datuk Tan Yee Boon unveiling the Eco-Plasma.Ho effluent treatment solution.

petrochemical, food and beverage, and general industrial sectors.

EIB managing director Wong Choi Ong said, “The palm oil industry consumes substantial amounts of water during crude palm oil extraction, with half of it discharged as POME. It is estimated that between 50 million and 75 million m3 of POME is generated annually in Malaysia. This effluent, rich in solids, oil, and organic content, poses a threat to water quality if not properly treated.

“To address this critical challenge, we are proud to introduce Eco-Plasma.Ho, a sustainable wastewater treatment solution that effectively neutralises pollutants while minimising environmental impact.”

He added that Eco-Plasma.Ho has demonstrated its efficacy and is currently operational in several key industries. A leading Johor-based oil palm plantation company is one of the early adopters for its proof-of-concept POME polishing plant.

Additionally, Wong said, the solution has been successfully implemented in diverse settings, including an oilfield plant in China, a

real estate development in Singapore for its chilled water system, and a glove manufacturing facility in Malaysia, showcasing its versatility and effectiveness in managing industrial wastewater.

The launch of Eco-Plasma.Ho represents a key milestone in the group’s expansion into environmental and energy efficiency businesses. The innovation reinforces EIB’s position as an integrated service provider, capable of delivering fully functional and sustainable palm oil facilities. Furthermore, it aligns with the evolving needs of customers who are increasingly prioritising sustainability-focused solutions.

“Sustainability is a core focus for EIB. Further to our involvement in constructing the world’s first TG2 Black Pellet Plant, which transforms oil palm empty fruit bunches into valuable resources, Eco-Plasma.Ho demonstrates our commitment to advancing green practices.

“Notably, Eco-Plasma.Ho is both cost-effective and energy-efficient, offering a low-maintenance, eco-friendly alternative for wastewater management,” Wong said.

UEM Lestra, ESR Group sign green electricity supply deal under CRESS

PUTRAJAYA: UEM Lestra Bhd and ESR Group Ltd signed a green electricity supply agreement via third-party access under the Corporate Renewable Energy Supply Scheme (CRESS) yesterday.

In a statement, the Ministry of Energy Transition and Water Transformation (Petra) said that under the arrangement, UEM Lestra, as a renewable energy generator, will supply green electricity through the utility company’s grid system to ESR Group Ltd at an agreed rate and period.

Petra said the exchange of documents for the green electricity supply deal was held during the launch of the MyEnergyStats Portal by the Energy Commission, witnessed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof yesterday.

“The green electricity supply agreement between the two companies is one of the earliest to be successfully signed since the CRESS programme implementation on Sept 20, 2024.

“Besides UEM Lestra and ESR Group, TNB Renewables Sdn Bhd also signed a green electricity supply agreement with Bridge Data Centre for the supply of 400 megawatts of green electricity supply through third-party access previously,” the ministry said.

It said CRESS represents the government’s initiative to provide options for and broaden access to green electricity supply to interested consumers of electricity, enabling corporate companies in Peninsular Malaysia to meet their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments via the electricity supply aspect.

The ministry said several improvements will be made to the current CRESS programme starting March 1, 2025, to strengthen its implementation and enhance access to green electricity supply.

“This includes opening the scheme to existing electricity consumers who wish to obtain green electricity supply directly from renewable energy generators and maintaining the set System Access Charge for three years based on the regulatory period of the Incentive Based Regulation,” it said. – Bernama

Jetro: Sentiment among Japanese businesses in M’sia continues to improve

KUALA LUMPUR: Business sentiment among Japanese companies in Malaysia has improved for the fourth consecutive year, even as competition intensifies, according to the Financial Year 2024 Survey by the Japan External Trade Organisation Kuala Lumpur (Jetro).

In a statement, Jetro said Malaysia’s profitability rate exceeds the Asean average, with the expected operating profit margin for 2024 at 70.8%, and the nation stands out as the only major Asean country to record consistent growth over the past four years.

According to the survey, 48.9% of the companies plan to promote local human resource development and employment and are mulling on expanding their business in the post-Covid era.

The Survey on Business Condition of Japanese Companies Operating Overseas Asia/Oceania Edition involved Japanese companies operating in 20 countries and regions, conducted from Aug 20-Sept 18, 2024.

“The operating profit outlook for 2025 shows that the percentage of companies expecting an improvement has increased in all countries compared to 2024, with Malaysia’s forecast showing a slight increase to 41.9%.

The survey also revealed that the percentage of companies considering business expansions in the next one to two years remains at 48.9%. – Bernama

Sunway Iskandar to fully adopt GreenRE standards

PETALING JAYA: Sunway Iskandar Sdn Bhd (SISB), the southern arm of Sunway Property, has formalised a partnership with GreenRE, Malaysia’s leading green building certification body through a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that establishes SISB as the first developer in Johor to adopt GreenRE standards comprehensively.

The MoU reinforces Sunway Property’s commitment to shaping greener urban ecosystems and delivering thriving, sustainable communities.

At heart of the SISB’s green initiatives is Sunway City Iskandar Puteri (SCIP) – Sunway’s largest township to date, spanning over 2,000 acres with more than 30% completed.

The MoU outlines a shared commitment to integrating sustainability throughout SCIP’s development. By adopting green design principles, sustainable construction methods, and environmentally responsible building operations, SISB will continue to set the standard for green development in Johor.

Based on GreenRE’s regularly updated rating tools, the developer will ensure its projects adhere to the latest sustainability standards, driving innovation and resilience.

“As developers, we understand the depth of our responsibility towards sustainable development. Our developments are already GreenRE certified, and today’s partnership reinforces our unwavering commitment to building communities that flourish,” said Sunway City Iskandar Puteri CEO Gerard Soosay.

“Moving forward, we strive towards GreenRE certifying the township as a whole – establishing SCIP as Johor’s largest township to achieve this milestone. Not only will these efforts align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, but they also ensure a healthier, greener future for all who call SCIP home,” he added.

A GreenRE spokesperson said, “This partnership with Sunway City Iskandar Puteri represents a significant step in advancing

sustainable development in Malaysia. By providing industry-standard certifications, we empower developers to adopt green building practices that reduce environmental impact while creating vibrant, livable spaces. We look forward to supporting SCIP as it paves the way for greener, smarter townships.”

In line with the agreement, SCIP will provide building performance data to GreenRE, supporting its ongoing research and development initiatives. The collaboration will foster innovation in sustainable building practices, advancing Malaysia’s green agenda. GreenRE will also provide specialised workshops and technical support to equip Sunway Iskandar Sdn Bhd’s project teams with the expertise to design, construct, and operate sustainable developments.

The partnership aligns with Sunway Group’s Green Building Policy (2022) and Green Township Policy (2023), which mandate that all new developments and townships from 2025 onwards must be green-certified.



F&NHB chairman Tengku Syed Badarudin Jamalullail (eight from left), and Lim (seventh from left), with board of directors at the 63rd AGM at Sime Darby Convention Centre.

F&N's FY24 revenue hits record RM5.25b

➤ Group sees growth in sales and profit as it moves forward with its expansion plans

PETALING JAYA: Fraser & Neave Holdings Bhd (F&N) achieved a record full-year revenue of RM5.25 billion in FY24 covering the period from Oct 1, 2023 to Sept 30, 2024, up 4.9% from FY23, boosted by higher domestic sales by Food & Beverages Malaysia (F&B Malaysia) and Food & Beverages Thailand (F&B Thailand), and exports to Cambodia.

Group operating profit for FY24 increased by 10.4% to RM709.5 million from the previous year. Meanwhile, group profit after tax increased by 0.4% year-on-year to RM544.3 million despite higher tax expenses.

F&N CEO Lim Yew Hoe remarked, "The group's performance in FY24 reaffirms our resilience in a fast-evolving environment. We achieved robust profits and maintained a strong cash position despite the higher start-up costs for new ventures. Our continued strategic investments and

cost optimisation initiatives have enabled us to sustain healthy growth momentum while navigating external challenges in the global marketplace."

He added their efforts across the year included a keen focus on identifying opportunities to capture value from existing operations for the benefit of the group and their stakeholders.

"By strategically leveraging opportunities, we have further strengthened relationships with shareholders, customers, partners, employees, and the community," Lim added.

He said halal packaged foods is a key pillar in their strategy to drive both top and bottom-line growth.

"Our continuous efforts to create synergies within the group, including streamlining and standardising operations following the acquisition of Sri Nona and Coccoland in FY22 have improved profit margins, enhanced operational efficiency, and enabled more effective decision-making processes. Beyond products, we also aim to be thought leaders in the halal space, collaborating with stakeholders like Halal Development Corporation Bhd to raise awareness of the quality and diversity of our halal offerings," he added.

Lim underscored the group's balanced focus between growth initiatives in agriculture and its traditional businesses. "We are equally committed to investing in our core businesses as part of our long-term growth strategy."

"Other than our new dairy manufacturing plant in Cambodia's Suvannaphum Special Economic Zone to bolster our presence, other new capital expenditures to complement existing operations and capture future value include a new carbonated beverages and drinking water line in Butterworth, and a new sterilised milk filling and packing line in Pulau Indah."

Shareholders at the 63rd annual general meeting on Wednesday approved a final single-tier dividend of 33 sen per share (2023: 33 sen per share) for the financial year ended Sept 30, 2024, bringing the total dividend for FY24 to 63 sen per share (FY23: ordinary dividend of 60 sen per share and an additional special dividend of 17 sen per share), amounting to RM231.1 million (2023: RM282.4 million).

The final dividend amounting to approximately RM121 million (FY23: RM183.4 million) is scheduled to be paid on Feb 10, 2025.

HDC aims to increase Malaysia's halal exporters to 2,443 in 2025

KUALA LUMPUR: Halal Development Corporation Bhd (HDC) targets 2,443 halal exporters from Malaysia this year, compared to 1,600 as of December 2024.

HDC is a central agency advancing Malaysia's halal ecosystem under the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry.

Its CEO Hairol Ariffein Sahari said HDC will continue to intensify efforts to identify potential local companies in the halal sector.

He said that Malaysian companies face challenges in becoming halal exporters, including the lack of a "halal compliance manager" responsible for developing halal operational frameworks, the ability to identify potential halal markets, and a "wait-and-see" attitude.

"Such companies must also have market intelligence to ensure they have a clear direction and strategy in the halal economy, as well as guidance on exporting their products internationally," Hairol Ariffein told reporters after hosting an exclusive media briefing to the editors, focusing on the halal economy and its significance to Malaysia yesterday.

He noted that over 200,000 local companies are now engaged in halal-related business activities.

As of December last year, only 9,162 companies across various segments held halal certification from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim).

Of these 9,162 companies, only 1,600 are halal exporters, which is still considered low compared to the global halal market demand, which now exceeds US\$3 trillion (RM1.3 trillion), said Hairol Ariffein.

Touching on Malaysia's Asean chairmanship this year, HDC

chairman Khairul Azwan Harun said Malaysia would assist other member countries in developing halal ecosystems in their countries, in addition to improving bilateral trade between Malaysia and Asean counterparts.

"In Asean, we have more than 650 million people. We must grab this opportunity for the 10 Asean member countries to benefit from the halal economy. We should not let other countries outside Asean profit exponentially from the halal market," he said.

Khairul Azwan added that in line with Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean this year, HDC would collaborate with agencies such as the



—BERNAMAPIX

Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation and Jakim to continue promoting Malaysia's halal products to other countries.

The agency stated that it is committed to focusing on halal innovation excellence this year, crucial for making Malaysia a global leader in the halal economy.

This commitment is part of the Halal Industry Master Plan 2030, which outlines strategic initiatives to enhance growth and competitiveness in the halal sector.

HIMP 2030 emphasises the importance of promoting six key halal sectors including food, cosmetics and personal care, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, tourism, and modest fashion, to strengthen Malaysia's halal economy. — Bernama

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Data centre expansion and imperative of cybersecurity

➤ Investments made by tech giants highlight strategic significance of Malaysia

PETALING JAYA: The data centre sector in Malaysia is growing rapidly, establishing the country as a major participant in the global digital infrastructure industry, said Palo Alto Networks Malaysia country manager Sarene Lee (*pic*).

She also said that the recent significant investments made by tech giants such as Nvidia, Amazon Web Services (AWS), and Microsoft highlight the strategic significance of Malaysia within the Asean region.

"This surge in data centre development is not only boosting economic growth but also establishing Malaysia as a leader in the AI and cloud computing revolution.

"The country has become a preferred destination for data centre investments, driven by strategic advantages such as competitive energy pricing, an abundance of affordable industrial land, and a supportive policy environment," she said.

Initiatives like the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) and the National Digital Network (Jendela) further underscore the nation's commitment to fostering a robust digital ecosystem, Lee remarked.

At the same time, she noted that it emphasises the pressing need for stronger cybersecurity measures to safeguard Malaysia's rapidly growing digital infrastructure.

"The intersection of AI, cloud computing, and data centres presents both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges. As these technologies rapidly evolve, they drive innovation and efficiency but also expand the potential attack surface for cyber threats. The exponential growth in data volumes and the increasing sophistication of AI models necessitate a paradigm shift in cybersecurity approaches."

In response to these emerging risks, she added Malaysia has introduced a comprehensive cybersecurity bill.

This legislation aims to bolster the country's digital defences and is poised to set new regional standards for cybersecurity practices. For companies operating in Malaysia's blossoming data centre sector, this development underscores the need to proactively implement cutting-edge security protocols and ensure compliance with impending regulatory requirements.

To address these challenges, she pointed out that organisations should consider the following capabilities as they develop their AI strategies:

- Counter AI with AI innovation: As threats from malicious AI increase, companies must deploy AI-powered security measures to detect and neutralise attacks in real-time, including sophisticated web-based threats, zero-day threats, command-and-control attacks and DNS hijacking attacks.
- Secure AI by Design: Building AI systems with security from the ground up ensures protection from the design phase to deployment, minimises



data exposure, and enhances compliance with regulations.

➤ Simplify and Optimise with GenAI: Generative AI 'Copilots' can empower security teams with enhanced threat detections, automating security measures, actionable insights, and guided actions, improving efficiency and response times.

By adopting these strategies, Lee said organisations can safeguard their operations and contribute to a more secure and resilient digital ecosystem, further enhancing Malaysia's appeal as a trusted hub for data centre investments.

"As Malaysia cements its position as a regional data hub, the imperative for robust cybersecurity measures grows in tandem with the sector's expansion. The recently passed cybersecurity bill represents a crucial step towards creating a safer digital ecosystem, setting the stage for Malaysia's data centres to power the digital economy securely and sustainably.

"However, legislation alone is insufficient; organisations must adopt a proactive stance, leveraging cutting-edge technologies like AI and machine learning to fortify their defences.

"As the data centre sector continues to grow, driven by investments in AI, cloud computing, and digital transformation, the synergy between technological advancement and security will be critical," said Lee.

By embracing a holistic approach to cybersecurity, she said Malaysia not only protects its blooming data centre industry but also enhances its reputation as a trusted digital hub on the global stage.

BMW retains position as top premium EV provider

KUALA LUMPUR:

BMW Group Malaysia closed 2024 with another remarkable show of business performance with over 13,500 units of BMW, MINI and BMW Motorrad vehicles delivered – 66% of which were locally assembled.



The group also retained its position as number one premium electric vehicle (EV) provider with over 2,700 electrifying units of BMW, MINI and BMW Motorrad vehicles delivered – accounting for 20.5% from all of its deliveries for the year, adding to a total of nearly 33,000 units of electrified BMW Group Malaysia vehicles on the road to date.

Amidst the group's 2024 performance, the BMW brand saw through the deliveries of over 10,500 premium vehicles over the year, while MINI, Malaysia's most compact premium automotive brand recorded over 1,400 vehicle deliveries. Meanwhile, BMW Motorrad, delivered over 1,600 premium motorcycles – a performance on par with that of 2023.

At the group's 2025 business briefing, managing director Benjamin Nagel (*pic*) said: "The past year has been an extraordinary one for us at BMW Group Malaysia, one defined by successes and initiatives that reflect our commitment to innovation, excellence, and leadership in the premium automotive space.

"From reaffirming our commitment to Malaysia's local automotive industry, with the expansion of our BMW Group Regional Parts Distribution Centre, to solidifying our position as the number one premium electric vehicle provider in Malaysia for another year with over 2,700 electric vehicles delivered across our BMW, MINI, and BMW Motorrad portfolios, every milestone is a testament to the trust our customers and partners place in us."

Over 2,450,000 vehicles were delivered across the BMW Group portfolio worldwide in 2024.

The recorded a significant growth of 13.5% in its fully-electric segment, after seeing through the successful delivery of over 426,000 fully-electric vehicles (including Rolls-Royce).

Globally, BMW and MINI also achieved double-digit growth in their fully-electrified vehicles, with over 368,000 (+11.6%) and 56,000 (+24.3%) units delivered respectively, contributing to 17.4% of overall BMW Group deliveries – maintaining the group's growth trajectory for fully-electric vehicles.

Market capitalisation of listed developers in JS-SEZ doubles

BY HAYATUN RAZAK
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The market capitalisation of public listed property development companies in the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) has doubled, reflecting strong private sector confidence in JS-SEZ, said Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) Institute.

Rehda Institute chairman Datuk Jeffrey Ng Tiong Lip said Johor's business momentum will continue to thrive, with its property market poised for significant growth, especially compared to Singapore's property prices.

"Malaysia looks well-poised to capitalise on the growth opportunities from the JS-SEZ in 2025," he said at the CEO Series 2025 of Rehda's Annual Property Developers Conference yesterday.

Ng said Johor's infrastructure investments and the influx of FDI will benefit not just Johor but the broader Malaysian economy.

"The SEZ is anticipated to create 20,000 high-value jobs by 2027, positioning Johor as a

gateway for global investment into Asean, which will have a positive spillover effect on the overall economic development."

In addition, he said Johor Forest City's designation as a Special Financial Zone (SFZ) brings additional tax incentives, including a reduced corporate tax rate of 15% for qualified investors and businesses.

"These policies are designed to attract global corporations and family offices, reinforcing Johor's role as a potential hub for international investment."

However, he said there is the need for greater collaboration between Malaysia and Singapore's private sectors.

"Singaporeans are familiar with the Malaysian market, and their buyers are well-versed in our property landscape. For government policies to succeed, the private sector must work together.

"Forming bilateral joint ventures or business consortiums with Singaporean partners, especially in SEZs or beyond Johor, will drive business future growth and expansion."

Ng also commented that Malaysia's property

market is entering an upcycle, supported by a recovering property landscape.

After stagnation between 2014 and 2023 following the removal of the Developer Interest-Bearing Scheme (DIBS) in 2014, Ng said the market is now showing clear signs of recovery.

"Between 2014 and 2023, we saw slower launches, more stock overhang, and fewer units launched. In 2023, the market started to recover again, and now it's clear that we are entering an upcycle with positive prospects for the future."

On challenges that remain, Ng pointed to rising material costs and labour shortages that continue to exert pressure on the real estate sector.

"Data shows that construction material costs have increased by an average of 8% annually over the past three years, requiring innovative procurement solutions."

Additionally, he stressed that the real estate industry must proactively incorporate ESG principles, emphasising renewable energy adoption, sustainable building designs, and inclusive urban planning.

Bintai Kinden secures Bursa approval for regularisation plan

PETALING JAYA: Bintai Kinden Corporation Bhd (BKCB), a mechanical and electrical (M&E) engineering services specialist, medical device manufacturer and facilities operator, announced that Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd granted approval for the company's proposed regularisation plan.

This marks a significant milestone in BKCB's journey towards financial recovery and

achieving upliftment from its Practice Note 17 (PN17) status.

The proposed regularisation plan encompasses the issuance of 244.0 million new shares through a private placement, the issuance of up to 146.4 million shares through the exercise of options under a granting of options scheme, and additional shares amounting to 15.0% of the company's issued

shares through an Employees' Share Option Scheme (ESOS).

These measures aim to strengthen BKCB's financial position by raising fresh capital, incentivising key talent, and aligning the company with Bursa's listing requirements.

BKCB managing director/CEO Datuk Tay Chor Han said "The approval of our proposed regularisation plan is a pivotal moment for BKCB

as it allows us to move forward with a clear strategy for financial recovery and growth. This plan strengthens our balance sheet, enhances shareholder value, and provides a foundation for long-term stability.

"We remain committed to fulfilling the conditions set forth by Bursa and ensuring the successful execution of the plan, with the ultimate goal of achieving upliftment from PN17 status."

TAIPEI: Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co logged record quarterly profit yesterday and said it expects robust revenue growth in the first three months of the year as demand surges for chips used in artificial intelligence processing.

While business is booming, TSMC does face headwinds from US government technology restrictions on China with Joe Biden's administration saying this week it would further restrict AI chip and technology exports.

Though Taiwan and other close American allies will be allowed unlimited access to US AI technology, further curbs could impact demand from clients.

President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration, which has threatened broad import tariffs, also brings much uncertainty.

TSMC CEO C.C. Wei said he believes that American export controls on AI chips for China were a manageable issue for the company.

Wei said TSMC is currently applying for special permits for clients who might be subject to the

TSMC logs record quarterly profit

► Company believes AI chip curbs on China a manageable issue

curbs, adding he is confident that the permission will be granted.

He did not elaborate.

Asked about TSMC's discussions with the current and next US administrations, he added: "Let me assure you that we have a very frank and open communication with the current government and the future one also."

He did not give details.

The world's largest contract chipmaker, whose customers include Apple and Nvidia, posted a 57% jump in net income to T\$374.68 billion (RM51 billion) for the quarter ended Dec 31, a record high for any quarter and in line with estimates.

Revenue climbed 39% from the same period a year earlier.

It expects similar revenue growth in the current quarter of about 37% to US\$25 to US\$25.8 billion, maintaining its bullish outlook for AI demand.

For all of 2025, it expects revenue growth roughly midway between 20% and 30%.

TSMC, which is building new fabs in the United States, Japan, Germany and Taiwan, said it expects its capital spending for this year to be between US\$38 billion and US\$42 billion, an increase of as much as 41%.

Plans for all its overseas fabs are on track, it said.

The AI boom has helped drive up the price of shares in TSMC, Asia's most valuable company, with its Taipei-listed stock soaring 81% last year, compared with a 28.5% gain for the broader market.

The stock closed up 3.8% yesterday ahead of the earnings call. – Reuters

Philippine minister says no need to hike rice imports

MANILA: The Philippines sees no need to increase rice imports for now although there are concerns about the prices businesses are charging consumers for the national staple, the agriculture minister said yesterday.

Francisco Tiu Laurel said the government would consider a recommendation from the national price council to declare a "food emergency" and release buffer stocks to help bring down retail prices.

"The current level of prices is extraordinary," Tiu Laurel told a briefing, adding it was due to profiteering.

"There's no need to increase rice imports. We just have to temper the businessmen to make their prices reasonable while still maintaining profitability."

The Philippines is expecting to import around 4.3 to 4.5 million metric tons of rice this year, lower than 2024's 4.7 million metric tons.

The annual rate of increase in rice prices in the Philippines hit a 15-year high of 24.4% in March last year, but has since moderated to 0.8% in December, helping keep overall inflation for 2024 within the government's 2% to 4% target.

Last year, the Philippines lowered tariffs on rice and extended existing tariff cuts on some other commodities to combat inflation and ensure ample supply. – Reuters

Pakistan lowers EV charging tariff by 45%

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will cut the power tariff for operators of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations by 45% as part of the ongoing reform of the energy sector designed to boost demand, Energy Minister Awais Leghari said on Wednesday.

A sustained economic crisis has slashed power consumption, leaving the South Asian nation with excess capacity that it still needs to pay for under decade-old contracts with independent power producers.

"The success of the new policy depends on how the international community lives up to its commitment to catalysing adoption through green financing for such initiatives," the minister told Reuters, referring to up to US\$10 billion (RM45 billion) worth of commitments made after 2022's devastating floods that are yet to be fully realised.

The government is also planning to introduce financing schemes for e-bikes and the conversion of two- and three-wheeled petrol vehicles, he said.

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved a reduced tariff of 39.70 rupees (RM0.63) per unit, down from 71.10 rupees previously, which will be in place within a month.

The minister said the government expects an internal rate of return of more than 20% for investors in the sector. – Reuters



Traders working on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. – AFP/IC

Stocks up with US rate cuts back in view

SINGAPORE: Stocks rose yesterday and the dollar softened as easing core US inflation kept potential rate cuts by the Federal Reserve on the table, while the yen hit a one-month high on growing expectations the Bank of Japan could raise rates next week.

European stock futures pointed to a subdued open after the pan-European STOXX 600 clocked its strongest daily performance in four months on Wednesday.

STOXX 50 futures and UK FTSE futures were 0.3% higher.

Investor focus in Europe will be on luxury firms and chipmakers following strong earnings from Cartier Jewellery owner Richemont and AI chipmaker Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co.

On Wall Street on Wednesday, all three major indexes registered their

biggest daily percentage gains since Nov 6 – the day after the US presidential election.

Asian stocks followed suit yesterday, with MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan up 1.2%.

The relief rally in risk assets stemmed from a benign US inflation report that showed the consumer price index rose in line with expectations at an annual rate of 2.9% in December, while core inflation, which excludes food and energy prices, rose by 3.2%, below forecasts for 3.3%.

Investors were encouraged by the inflation reading, particularly since data released on Tuesday showed that US producer prices had increased moderately in December.

"This report supports the view that the pricing out of rate cuts this

year has gone a bit too far, and when the data turns lower again ... some extra easing will be put back on the table," said Kyle Chapman, FX markets analyst at Ballinger Group.

The inflation report led traders to price close-to-even odds the Fed would cut interest rates twice by the end of this year.

That took some steam out of the dollar against most currencies, with the dollar index, which measures the greenback against six other units, at 109.07.

"We anticipate a shallow FOMC easing cycle, although we think short-term hawkishness is overdone," said Eric Robertsen, Standard Chartered's global head of research and chief strategist at a media roundtable in Singapore.

"We see a higher USD, though the path is expected to be volatile," said

Robertsen, noting that US economic strength will be tested if tariffs imposed by the incoming administration lead to weaker growth in other regions.

Japan's yen remained on the charge, hitting its highest in nearly a month after comments from Governor Kazuo Ueda as traders priced in a more than 70% chance the Bank of Japan will raise interest rates next week.

"While we expect the normally cautious Ueda to wait for clarity on US trade policy and confirmation of strong wage growth until the BOJ's March meeting, we acknowledge a hike is possible next week," said Joseph Capurso, head of international economics at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

The yen was last slightly stronger at 156.22 per dollar while the euro was steady at US\$1.0285. – Reuters

Meta to lay off 3,600 'low performers'

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta plans to dismiss approximately 3,600 employees identified as low performers and replace them with new hires, according to an internal memo reported by Bloomberg.

The company, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, confirmed to AFP that CEO Mark Zuckerberg's decision will affect 5% of its workforce.

Meta had approximately 72,400 employees as of September.

"I've decided to raise the bar on performance management and move out low-performers faster," Zuckerberg said.

The CEO said the performance-based cuts are intended to ensure that the company has the "strongest talent" and is able to "bring new people in".

Performance-based dismissals are a common practice among major US corporations.

Microsoft announced similar cuts last week affecting less than 1% of its workforce, *Business Insider* reported.

The layoffs come amid broader changes at Meta, in advance of Donald Trump returning to the White House on Jan 20.

Zuckerberg has recently aligned more closely with conservative ideas and political figures, including having dinner meetings with Trump and nominating a Republican as Meta's head of public affairs.

Last week, Zuckerberg announced the end of the company's US fact-checking programme that aimed to combat misinformation on its platforms.

The programme had faced criticism from conservative voices who viewed it as censorship. – AFP

Dutch govt to expand export controls on semicon equipment

AMSTERDAM: The Dutch government on Wednesday said it would expand its export controls on advanced semiconductor equipment from April 1, which chip equipment company ASML said it did not expect to impact its business.

Dutch national export licence requirements for semiconductor equipment were first introduced in 2023 under pressure from the US to limit shipments to China, and they have since been expanded several times.

The latest measures will require companies to seek export licences for a "very limited" number of technologies such as measuring and inspection equipment, the Dutch Trade Ministry said in a statement announcing the changes.

ASML said in response it did not see them having any additional impact on the guidance the company issued in December, when the US government announced new restrictions on semiconductor exports to China affecting chip equipment firms.

Details of the rule changes published in the country's state legal newspaper on Wednesday showed the licensing requirements now include technologies used to find tiny defects in wafers, and systems that improve measurements after deposition and etching – steps that are repeated frequently in the chipmaking process.

A spokesman for the Trade Ministry said minor changes to the rules due to technical developments will happen occasionally. – Reuters

TikTok prepares for US shutdown from Sunday

WASHINGTON: TikTok plans to shut US operations of its social media app used by 170 million Americans on Sunday, when a federal ban is set to take effect, barring a last-minute reprieve, people familiar with the matter said on Wednesday.

The *Washington Post* reported President-elect Donald Trump, whose term begins a day after a ban would start, is considering issuing an executive order to suspend enforcement of a shutdown for 60 to 90 days. The report did not say how Trump could legally do so.

The law signed in April mandates a ban on new TikTok downloads on Apple or Google app stores if Chinese parent ByteDance fails to divest the site.

Users who have downloaded TikTok would theoretically still be able to use the app, except that the law also bars US companies starting Sunday from providing services to enable the distribution, maintenance, or updating of it.

The Trump transition team did not have an immediate comment.

Users in many other countries may find app unavailable, court filing states

Trump has said he should have time after taking office to pursue a "political resolution" of the issue.

"TikTok itself is a fantastic platform," Trump's incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz told Fox News on Wednesday. "We're going to find a way to preserve it but protect people's data."

The *New York Times* separately reported that TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew has been extended an invitation to attend Trump's inauguration and sit in "a position of honour".

A White House official said President Joe Biden has no plans to intervene to block a ban in his final days in office if the Supreme Court fails to act and added Biden is legally unable to intervene absent a credible plan from ByteDance to divest TikTok.

However, a NBC report later said the Biden administration has been weighing options to keep the social media platform available to users beyond Sunday, in a bid to defer the decision to Trump, who will be inaugurated on Monday.

"Americans shouldn't expect to see TikTok suddenly banned on Sunday," an administration official told the broadcast network.

If it is banned, TikTok plans that users attempting to open the app will see a pop-up message directing them to a website with information about the ban, the people said.

"We go dark. Essentially, the platform shuts down," TikTok lawyer Noel Francisco told the Supreme Court last week.

The company also plans to give users an option to download all their data so that they can take a

record of their personal information, the sources said.

The US Supreme Court is currently deciding whether to uphold the law and allow TikTok to be banned on Sunday, overturn the law, or pause the law to give the court more time to make a decision.

Shutting down TikTok in the US could make it unavailable for users in many other countries, the company said in a court filing last month, because hundreds of service providers in the US help make the platform available to TikTok users around the world – and could no longer do so starting Sunday.

TikTok said in the court filing an order was needed to "avoid interruption of services for tens of millions of users outside the US."

TikTok had said the prohibitions would eventually make the app unusable, noting in the filing that "data centres would almost certainly conclude that they can no longer store" TikTok code, content or data. – Reuters



Scholz talking to staff as he tours the Opel plant in Ruesselsheim, Germany. – REUTERS/PIC

German economy shrinks again amid political crisis

BERLIN: Germany's economy shrank for a second straight year in 2024, official figures showed on Wednesday, with little hope of a speedy recovery as Europe's traditional powerhouse is also mired in political crisis.

Gross domestic product in Europe's largest economy fell 0.2% last year, according to preliminary figures from federal statistics agency Destatis, after a 0.3% contraction in 2023.

Germany has faced a perfect storm, with high energy costs battering its manufacturing sector,

demand weak in China and other key export markets, and the economy facing deep-rooted structural problems including a shortage of skilled labour.

Destatis president Ruth Brand said the economy suffered under both "cyclical and structural pressures" last year.

"These include increasing competition for the German export industry on key sales markets, high energy costs, an interest rate level that remains high, and an uncertain economic outlook," she said.

Preliminary data also showed

that the economy had contracted 0.1% in the final quarter of last year compared to the previous quarter.

Fears are growing that the economy will struggle to get back on its feet this year, due in part to the political crisis at home.

Following the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, Germany is heading for early polls on Feb 23, which is expected to be followed by a period of paralysis before a new coalition emerges.

The data released on Wednesday – in line with most forecasts, including from the government will be further

bad news for Scholz, who has been criticised for failing to reboot the economy and already faces an uphill battle to win re-election.

US President-elect Donald Trump's threat to hit imports into the world's top economy with tariffs is adding to jitters for German exporters.

In December, the German central bank slashed its growth projection for 2025 to a meagre 0.2% from a previous estimate of 1.1%.

The last time Germany recorded two straight years in the red was 2002-2003, when it was still seen as the "sick man" of Europe. – AFP

MARKET ROUND-UP: JANUARY 16

Bursa Trade Statistic

16 JAN 2025

Source: Bursa Malaysia, Inter-Pacific Research

Participation

Retail (17.71%)		Institution (40.26%)		Foreign (42.03%)	
Net (in RM mil.)		Net (in RM mil.)		Net (in RM mil.)	
+109.66		+102.50		-212.16	
Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)
614.97	505.31	1324.99	1222.49	1223.64	1435.81

Preliminary status (Excluding Trade Amendments) | Final data, refer to Bursa website

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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	11,925.00	-26.60
FBMKLCI	1,555.54	-6.58
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	522.81	-1.38
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	165.35	-0.70
CONSTRUCTION	277.03	-10.30
FINANCIAL SERVICES	18,735.30	+68.41
ENERGY	831.48	+9.69
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	523.75	-3.68
HEALTH CARE	2,191.81	+16.51
TRANSPORTATION	1,034.58	-3.24
PROPERTY	1,067.15	-4.47
PLANTATION	7,336.38	-33.60
FBMSHA	11,762.70	-66.30
FBMACE	5,158.94	+7.74
TECHNOLOGY	60.06	+1.04

TURNOVER: 3.571 bil **VALUE: RM3.157 bil**

Bursa succumbs to heavy selling by foreign investors

BURSA Malaysia gave up early gains to end at an intraday low yesterday due to massive foreign selling, and bucking the regional trend in the process.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI slipped 6.58 points, or 0.42%, to 1,555.54 from Wednesday's close of 1,562.12.

The benchmark index opened 10.49 points higher at 1,572.61 and rose to an intraday high of 1,576.57 in the early session before succumbing to selling pressure to hit an intraday low of 1,555.54 at closing.

Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd equity research vice-president Thong Pak Leng said the key regional indices ended higher following a positive cue from Wall Street overnight.

He said the US consumer price index for December rose by 0.4%, aligning closely with forecasts, while the US Federal Reserve's key underlying measure showed slower-than-expected growth, reigniting discussions about potential US rate cuts.

"Domestically, the FBM KLCI has dropped into the oversold territory following the recent heavy sell-off by foreigners.

"We reckon this provides an opportunity for bargain hunters to accumulate stocks, particularly the blue chips at cheaper prices. We anticipate the benchmark index to trend within the range of 1,550-1,560 towards the weekend," he told Bernama.

Among the heavyweights, Maybank was flat at RM10.14, while Public Bank eased one sen to RM4.39 and Tenaga lost 38 sen to RM13.12. CIMB soared 14 sen to RM7.99 and IHH increased one sen to RM7.11.

Of the active stocks, newly-listed CBH Engineering added 5.5 sen to 33.5 sen with 393.05 million shares transacted. TWL Holdings and Velocity Capital were unchanged at 2.5 sen and eight sen respectively.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
CBHB	0.335	0.055	19.64	3,930,532
HSI-CWA1	0.145	0.020	16.00	1,341,167
TWL	0.025	-	-	1,207,786
HSI-PWB1	0.085	-0.020	-19.05	1,179,230
HSI-PWB4	0.050	-0.015	-23.08	836,787
GAMUDA	4.260	-0.190	-4.27	802,911
MNHLDG	0.990	-0.050	-4.81	481,303
VELOCITY	0.080	-	-	479,973
SCBUILD	0.005	-0.005	-50.00	424,462
ECOWLD	1.860	-0.040	-2.11	399,395
NATGATE	2.230	-0.070	-3.04	381,019
SUNCON	3.580	-0.320	-8.21	352,574
MYEG	0.920	0.030	3.37	346,681
HSI-PWBH	0.105	-0.060	-36.36	345,077
SIMEPROP	1.470	-	-	328,127
SET	0.365	-0.005	-1.35	320,887
HSI-CWAY	0.085	-	-	299,052
HSI-CY9	0.135	0.030	28.57	296,801
GENTINGC3L	0.035	-0.005	-12.50	291,527
HSI-PWBF	0.080	-0.015	-15.79	286,076



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
PETDAG	19.200	0.380	2,352
MPI	22.740	0.180	1,711
VITROX	3.880	0.160	15,662
AJI	14.900	0.140	240
ARKA	1.800	0.140	184
CIMB	7.990	0.140	137,436
UWC	2.790	0.130	30,318
KEYFIELD	2.390	0.120	17,656
LPI	12.720	0.120	518
INARI	2.740	0.110	73,220
ALLIANZ	20.000	0.100	222
MI	2.150	0.100	18,476
SP500-C48	0.365	0.100	1,003
CANONE	2.350	0.090	195
FRONTKN	4.090	0.090	24,661
HLBANK	20.080	0.080	5,112
DKSH	4.910	0.070	37
KOSSAN	2.360	0.070	104,578
CHINAETF-MYR	4.510	0.070	59
YSPSAH	2.250	0.070	61

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
EAH	0.010	100.00	652
FBMKLCI-CQ0	0.010	100.00	170
MAHSING-C69	0.010	100.00	7,000
MYEG-C7H	0.010	100.00	3,940
OCR-WE	0.010	100.00	8,821
PHB	0.010	100.00	63,062
SIME-C86	0.020	100.00	150
SKPRES-WB	0.020	100.00	5,042
INARI-C2Y	0.035	75.00	8,150
PBBANK-CIL	0.025	66.67	40,279
BJFOOD-CL	0.065	62.50	1,240
UWC-C8	0.065	62.50	9,338
AEDN-C31	0.015	50.00	20
ARMADA-C91	0.015	50.00	5,400
DAYANG-C41	0.015	50.00	8,000
HSI-CWAF	0.030	50.00	406
HSI-CWAV	0.015	50.00	1,000
OMESTI-WC	0.015	50.00	9,174
TOPGLOV-C4J	0.150	50.00	5
YTL-C91	0.015	50.00	1,053

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	43,221.55	+703.27	+1.65
S&P 500 (US)	5,949.91	+107.00	+1.83
NASDAQ (US)	19,511.23	+466.84	+2.45
NYSE (US)	19,422.71	+246.06	+1.28
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	5,084.12	+51.81	+1.03
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,348.08	+46.95	+0.57
DAX (GER)	20,689.75	+35.07	+0.17
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	38,572.60	+128.02	+0.33
TOPIX (JPN)	2,688.31	-2.50	-0.09
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	19,522.89	+236.82	+1.23
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,800.38	+4.35	+0.11
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,236.03	+8.91	+0.28
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,527.49	+30.68	+1.23
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	177.24	+0.76	+0.43
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,326.96	+113.69	+1.38
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,569.13	+112.31	+1.33
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	76,950.63	+226.55	+0.30
FBM KLCI	1,555.54	-6.58	-0.42
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,804.39	+31.81	+0.84
WTI (US\$/BBL)	79.98	-0.06	-0.08
BRENT (US\$/BBL)	81.89	-0.14	-0.17
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,729.80	+12.00	+0.44
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	31.85	+0.31	+1.00
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	945.92	+3.18	+0.34
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	441.90	+3.00	+0.68
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	9,167.50	13.50	0.15
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	476.25	-2.50	-0.52
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	541.75	-5.25	-0.96
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	45.91	-0.36	-0.78
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	10,821.00	-130.00	-1.19
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	197.10	+1.20	+0.61

As at 5pm, Jan 16

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
F&N	25.560	-0.640	1,615
NESTLE	92.480	-0.500	176
UTDPLT	30.580	-0.500	3,898
TENAGA	13.120	-0.380	166,420
SUNCON	3.580	-0.320	352,574
SUNCON-C11	0.585	-0.300	50
HSI-PWBQ	0.500	-0.225	148
HLIND	12.980	-0.200	770
GAMUDA	4.260	-0.190	802,911
GAMUDA-C2N	0.250	-0.170	815
GESHEN	3.770	-0.170	1,164
IJM	2.550	-0.160	250,374
BIPORT	6.000	-0.150	30
GASMSIA	4.100	-0.150	11,133
MAHSING-C60	0.185	-0.140	220
MBMR	6.040	-0.130	3,389
PANAMY	17.240	-0.120	68
SP500-H51	0.405	-0.120	7,604
HSI-PWBV	0.155	-0.115	19,999
FBMKLCI-CQV	0.040	-0.110	800

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
TOPGLOV-C4N	0.005	-91.67	1,000
TENAGA-C2K	0.005	-83.33	1,050
FBMKLCI-CQV	0.040	-73.33	800
CMSB-C52	0.005	-66.67	1,000
SIME-C85	0.010	-66.67	160
MNRB-CH	0.015	-62.50	4,000
SIMEPROP-C37	0.010	-60.00	2,670
YINSON-C36	0.015	-57.14	21,500
MYEG-C6Z	0.020	-55.56	800
BORNOL	0.005	-50.00	11,428
EDGENTA-CR	0.005	-50.00	6,700
FBMKLCI-CQP	0.100	-50.00	10
GTRONIC-C34	0.005	-50.00	1,700
HSI-PWBG	0.020	-50.00	41,132
IJM-C86	0.005	-50.00	99,602
MRCB-CIL	0.010	-50.00	3,452
SCBUILD	0.005	-50.00	424,462
SUNCON-C19	0.030	-50.00	54,599
SUNCON-C24	0.020	-50.00	37,180
TOPGLOV-C4U	0.075	-50.00	34,995

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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CBH Engineering fetches 17.9% premium in ACE Market debut

KUALA LUMPUR: Mechanical and electrical engineering service provider, CBH Engineering Holding Bhd, debuted on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd.

At the opening bell, the CBH's share price opened at 33 sen, with a premium of 17.9% over the issue price of 28 sen, with an opening volume of 48.2 million shares. This debut followed an initial public offering (IPO) oversubscription of 34.2 times, reflecting strong investor confidence in CBH's business operations and potential for growth.

Managing director Cheah Boon Hwa said that their modest beginnings three decades ago have evolved into a leading name in mechanical and electrical engineering, driving progress and innovation across Malaysia's key industries.

"With RM83.4 million raised from the IPO, alongside an unbilled order book of RM203.7 million and a tender book of RM559.7 million, we have a solid foundation. Combined with our proven track record, this gives us the confidence to secure even more high-value projects in the future, especially from global clients," he added.

On the financial front, CBH's revenue grew from RM67.6 million in the financial year ended Dec 31 (FY) 2021 to RM208 million in FY 2023, representing a 2-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 75.4%. Meanwhile, net profit grew from RM3.6 million to RM33 million from FY 2021 to FY 2023, reflecting a 2-year CAGR of 203.8%.

CBH recently announced its unaudited third quarter (Q3'24) and nine months financial performance for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024.

In Q3'24, CBH registered a revenue of RM42.2 million and net profit of RM8.7 million. For 9MFY 2024, revenue stood at RM187.8 million, with net profit at RM31.1 million, reflecting a net profit margin of 16.5%.

Ringgit weakens against dollar on lack of buying momentum

THE ringgit eased against the US dollar at the close yesterday on lack of buying momentum.

At 6pm, the ringgit depreciated to 4.5005/5050 against the greenback from Wednesday's close of 4.4970/5010.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes said after opening stronger due to the milder US' Consumer Price Index print, the 3% headline inflation has forex traders debating whether the US Federal Reserve (Fed) could even consider rate cuts this year.

"Although bond and stock markets have recovered, the spillover to the forex market has been relatively weak.

"This muted response is likely tied directly to the ongoing Donald Trump tariffs threat on China, keeping forex traders in a state of flux," he told Bernama.

Innes said the overarching question casting a shadow over the markets is whether Trump would embody the "Deal Maker in Chief" or revert to his "Tariff Man" persona.

"This uncertainty keeps traders vigilant, constantly assessing shifts in the policy landscape," he added.

At the close, the ringgit was mostly higher against other major currencies.

It advanced vis-a-vis the euro to 4.6283/6329 from Wednesday's close of 4.6364/6405, appreciated against the British pound to 5.4888/4943 against 5.4949/4998 on Wednesday, but fell versus the Japanese yen to 2.8914/8945 from 2.8656/8685.

Meanwhile, the local note was traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It appreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.2906/2941 from 3.2909/2943 but was lower against the Philippine peso at 7.68/7.69 from 7.67/7.68.

Exchange Rates			
FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5670	4.4270	4.4170
1 Australian Dollar	2.8660	2.7470	2.7310
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3400	3.2390	3.2310
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1850	3.0950	3.0830
1 Euro	4.7100	4.5520	4.5320
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5820	2.4830	2.4670
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3400	3.2390	3.2310
1 Sterling Pound	5.5990	5.4150	5.3950
1 Swiss Franc	5.0430	4.8220	4.8070
100 UAE Dirham	125.8100	119.1600	118.9600
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8220	3.5690	3.3690
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.7300	60.0000	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.7000	59.4700	59.2700
100 Hongkong Dollar	59.2900	56.2700	56.0700
100 Indian Rupee	5.3700	5.0400	4.8400
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0290	0.0262	0.0212
100 Japanese Yen	2.9250	2.8280	2.8180
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.4500	38.0600	37.8600
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6700	1.5600	1.3600
100 Philippine Peso	7.9200	7.4500	7.2500
100 Qatar Riyal	126.6400	120.2200	120.0200
100 Saudi Riyal	122.9800	116.7500	116.5500
100 South Africa Rand	25.2400	22.7800	22.5800
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5900	1.4600	1.2600
100 Swedish Krona	42.2700	38.4400	38.2400
100 Thai Baht	13.8100	12.2300	11.8300

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Bursa Malaysia Bhd Neutral. Target price: RM8.80



Source: RHB Research, Bloomberg

SECURITIES average daily value (SADV) traded fell to RM2.9 billion (-24% QoQ, +6% YoY) in Q4'24. We think the weakness stemmed from uncertainties surrounding the US economy and profit-taking, particularly from foreign investors. We also observed some diversion in trade flows towards China, following the country's announcement of expansionary policies to stimulate the economy. On the other hand, the derivatives market enjoyed elevated trades of CPO futures, thanks to the strong rally in the underlying commodity's prices. Derivatives average daily contracts (DADC) traded stood at 107k for the quarter – the highest quarterly level ever achieved for BURSA.

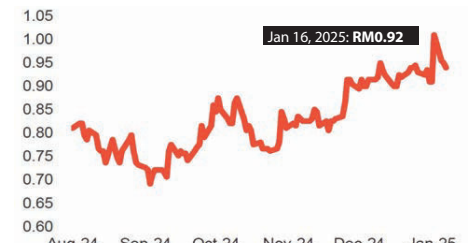
For the year, SADV amounted to RM3.44 billion, up 50% YoY on strong investor confidence and a resilient local economy. Save the exceptionally strong Covid-19 years of 2020 and 2021, the 2024 SADV was the highest on record. Elsewhere, DADC surged 26% YoY to 92k, another record high for BURSA. The exchange also saw 55 new listings in 2024, surpassing the previous high of 40 IPOs in 2006. The new listings accounted for over RM30 billion in total market capitalisation, beating the bourse's target of RM13 billion for the year.

Given the above items, we think BURSA could post total income of RM200-210 million in Q4'24. Assuming opex for the quarter amounts to RM100 million (48-50% CIR) and a 26% effective tax rate (as at 9M'24), this translates to a quarterly PAT of RM75-85 million, or up 26-43% YoY (QoQ: -4 - +9%).

We believe Bursa Malaysia could post a Q4'24 net profit of RM75-85 million when it announces results on Jan 27 – which would place the exchange comfortably ahead of its FY24 targets. However, we expect the recent market weakness to persist in 2025, leading to negative earnings growth for the year.

NEUTRAL with RM8.80 TP. – RHB Research, Jan 16

Cloudpoint Technology Bhd Outperform. Target price: RM1.17



Source: PublicInvest Research

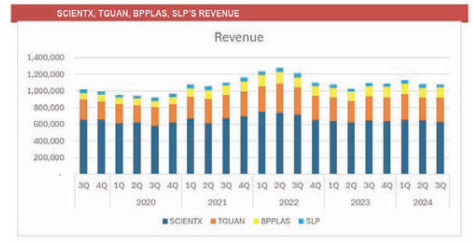
WE came away from Cloudpoint Technology meeting last week with management guiding an exciting outlook as it aims to maintain the strong growth momentum this year, driven by i) a strong orderbook (RM133.6 million), ii) diversification of customer base through ServiceNow software, and iii) the availability of more data centre jobs.

Riding on the Johor's data centre boom, the group has managed to bag contracts ranging from RM4-10 million from hyperscalers for various job scopes such as power installation, liquid cooling, cabling and containers. We understand that the group is currently in talks with 2 new data centre operators on the uninterrupted power supply and Generative AI Assist platform solutions. It has also received an invitation from an automotive player to participate in a data centre project. Meanwhile, the results of the first Elmina data centre cabling tender will be known by the end of 1Q 2025 as it is required to be completed by Sept 2026. We believe the group stands a good chance as it has received positive feedback with regards to its technical submission, and there are only 3 shortlisted participants in this cabling project. Based on our estimates, this RM100 million contract could potentially contribute additional 20-25% to our FY25-26 earnings forecasts.

Following a contract win from a local bank last month, the group has now become the largest System Integrator in Malaysia for ServiceNow software, which is a specialist in internal workload automation. Currently, there are three banks adopting the ServiceNow software, and it plans to promote the AI agent ServiceNow platform to other industries, namely, oil and gas, telco and utilities sectors.

OUTPERFORM with RM1.17 TP. – PublicInvest Research, Jan 16

Plastic Packaging Overweight



Source: Kenanga Research

CONCERNS on the environment over plastics are shifting the focus towards managing plastic waste rather than eliminating plastics altogether, given their essential role during the Covid-19 pandemic which had reinforced the usefulness of plastic in personal protective equipment (e.g. safety overalls, face covers or syringes), packaging/storing essentials such as medicine or food economically yet safe from contamination and facilitating deliveries of online shopping. This has led to increased circular economy initiatives and sustainable packaging solutions. Investments in innovative packaging are crucial for reduced waste collection, sorting, and recycling.

Companies like BPPLAS and TGUAN have been gaining traction with their nano stretch films, while SLP is seeing increased customer interest in its machine direction-oriented PE mono films. SLP is also actively promoting its sustainable packaging solutions in Asean countries, capitalising on the demand for recyclable materials by SE Asian manufacturers from customers in Europe or the US. In aggregate, these firms are growing at a pace of 7% CAGR profit growth over the next two years, outstripping the industry growth outlook. The global packaging market is also set to grow at around 4% CAGR to reach US\$1.4 trillion by 2028 with flexible plastics likely to grow faster at 5% CAGR, outpacing metal, glass and even slightly ahead of paper-based packaging. The demand for flexible packaging is driven mainly by its durability, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness. The OECD Environmental Directorate projects that plastic packaging usage will triple by 2060 from current levels.

Our sector top pick is TGUAN, whose share price, we believe, has been adversely affected by the knee-jerk reaction to forex. Under our coverage, we have two more stretch film players, namely BPPLAS and SCIENTX (MP; TP: RM4.15), which are also developing innovative packaging solutions. – Kenanga Research, Jan 16



Frelon putting finishing touches on a dish at the Plant-based Treasures for Charity event.



The vegan version of the French dish beef bourguignon, made with lion's mane mushroom.

From waste to wonderful taste

French chef shows every part of plant ingredient can be utilised

BY STAMARAI CHELVI

ONE of the ways to reduce food waste is to creatively use every part of an ingredient.

As we all know, fruits, vegetables and nuts are packed with nutrients. They are often used in cooking, but their unwanted bits - skin, shell, stem, leaves, seeds and roots - end up in the rubbish bin.

However, with a bit of clever thinking, these underappreciated parts can be used to make sauces, broth or even chips.

Sunway Le Cordon Bleu executive chef and cuisine chef instructor Stephane Frelon, who has 35 years of culinary experience and worked in restaurants in France and Canada, uses every part of an ingredient, ensuring it does not go to waste.

"I use everything from A to Z from a vegetable. For example, from soybeans, we extract soy milk, tofu, and tempeh, while the dry leftover parts, we can cook or transform into meat substitutes," said Frelon.

From hazelnut, oil is extracted, whereas skin and crumble can be turned into something edible.

The chef, who hails from Tours, France, held a cooking demonstration during a plant-based culinary workshop at Sunway's Le Cordon Bleu last Saturday to showcase and share creative ideas. He cooked a vegan version of the

French dish beef bourguignon, made instead with lion's mane mushroom.

The result was an exquisite dish with wonderfully curated textures.

The lion's mane mushroom, a substitute for beef, was complemented with smoky beetroot, soft potato and a rich red sauce.

"As a chef, we need to educate the students. We can create seven items on a plate from one ingredient, such as beets or pumpkins," he said.

But these items - whether broth, sauce, or crispy crackers - need not be "super fancy".

According to Frelon, by educating culinary students about the need to

reduce waste, he hopes to spread the message to the public.

Beyond cooking, the chef is an advocate of reducing food wastage. He openly pondered about how grocery stores handled leftover fruits and vegetables.

"What do they do with their waste? We don't know," he said.

Frelon suggested that unwanted or unsold produce be sent back to farmers as food for pets or farm animals, thus reducing food wastage.

Malaysia does not lack in options when it comes to vegan and vegetarian ingredients. Frelon said Malaysians as well as other Southeast Asians have access to a huge variety of plant-based food.

The chef, who has lived in Malaysia for some time, loves *laksa*, *rendang* and, surprisingly, durian.



Frelon with his culinary masterpiece after the demonstration.



Roti canai is king of the heap when it comes to Malaysians' favourite takeaway order. - PINTERESTPIC

Roti canai, nasi goreng top list

FOR the second year in a row, *roti canai* has claimed the top spot as the most-ordered dish on Foodpanda Malaysia while the ever-popular *nasi goreng kampung* followed closely at second place in 2024.

It is no surprise that *roti canai* has become the "most-loved" dish, playing a role in Malaysia's breakfast culture and honoured on Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2024.

As for beverages, Malaysia's love for Milo, an ultimate comfort drink, has grown stronger than ever, with over 700,000 cups ordered, which could fill up 24 swimming pools. For generations, the chocolate malt drink has remained a staple, as it is more than just a beverage. It is a warm hug in a cup and

the ultimate pick-me-up.

Meanwhile, interest in household staples surged, with over 500,000 loaves of bread and more than 160,000 cartons of eggs ordered from Pandamart, Foodpanda's mart. Whole chicken and enoki mushrooms also emerged as pantry essentials this year, consistently sought after by homes across the country.

In 2024, the delivery platform expanded its offerings, onboarding over 24,000 new restaurants across Malaysia. McDonald's, KFC and Marrybrown continued to dominate as the top three overall restaurants.

Its first end-to-end halal-certified delivery service Bekal by Foodpanda continued to grow, with over 23 million deliveries in 2024.



Your weekend horoscope



ARIES
Mar 21 – April 19
This weekend, you will find yourself reflecting on your personal and professional relationships. Recent events have highlighted the importance of balancing your ambitions with emotional well-being. It is an ideal time to assess whether your current partnerships support your goals or if adjustments are needed.



TAURUS
April 20 – May 20
This weekend encourages you to embrace change and step out of your comfort zone. A desire for innovation in your life has been sparked. Whether it is exploring a new hobby, meeting new people or considering a different approach to a long-standing issue, now is the time to act. Trust your instincts and be open to unexpected opportunities.



GEMINI
May 21 – June 20
This weekend focus on deepening your emotional connections. The recent time has brought underlying feelings to the surface, offering an opportunity to address and heal past wounds. Engaging in conversations with loved ones can strengthen bonds and provide clarity. Be honest about your needs and listen actively to others.



CANCER
June 21 – July 22
This weekend is a time for self-reflection and personal growth. Consider journaling or meditating to gain deeper insights into your desires and aspirations. Letting go of outdated beliefs or habits will make space for new experiences that align with your true self. In relationships, setting healthy boundaries is crucial.



LEO
July 23 – Aug 22
You are encouraged to focus on your inner world. The recent cosmic shifts have highlighted the importance of introspection and self-care. Taking time to rest and recharge will enhance your creativity and vitality. Engage in activities that bring you joy and allow for self-expression. In your social circles, be open to new connections.



VIRGO
Aug 23 – Sept 22
This weekend brings a focus on your social life and community involvement. The recent full moon has illuminated the importance of your connections and the support they provide. Consider reaching out to friends or participating in group activities that align with your interests. Collaborative efforts can lead to meaningful achievements and personal satisfaction.



The sequel to this successful film is due to be released on Nov 21. – PIC FROM FACEBOOK @WICKEDMOVIE

Streaming success

➤ After raking it in theatres, *Wicked* triumphs on VOD

SINCE its theatrical release, *Wicked* has captured the hearts of audiences worldwide. But the movie has also gone down a storm on video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, raking in an impressive sum in its first week of availability.

According to figures revealed by Universal, *Wicked* earned US\$26 million (RM117 million) on its first day of VOD availability in the US and Canada. In one week, this figure climbed to US\$70 million. This is a new record for a Universal film, even surpassing the US\$44 million earned by *The Super Mario Bros Movie* in its first week on VOD in 2023.

The success of *Wicked* on VOD is due in part to the movie's distribution model. Available for purchase (US\$30) and rental (US\$20), the film attracted a large audience on Dec 31 last year while it was still playing in theatres. Universal has succeeded in maximising its revenues thanks to this hybrid strategy.

Studios reportedly retain around 80% of revenues generated by digital platforms, compared with 50% of box-office returns. According to *Variety*, Universal retained around 65% of ticket sales for *Wicked* in theatres.

New strategy involving theatres and streaming
Universal has been a pioneer in experimenting with streaming releases of its movies. In March 2020, the studio broke convention by releasing *Trolls World Tour* simultaneously in theatres and on VOD, raking in around US\$100 million in just a few weeks.

Since then, Universal has adopted a strategy of 17 days of theatrical exclusivity for smaller films and five weekends for blockbusters, before making them available on VOD. To date, this approach has generated more than US\$1.5 billion in VOD sales, *Variety* revealed.

Wicked has already grossed more than US\$680 million at the global box office since its theatrical release in November. The film, directed by Jon M. Chu and starring Ariana Grande, Cynthia Erivo, Jeff Goldblum, Michelle Yeoh and Jonathan Bailey, recounts the origins of the characters from *The Wizard of Oz*. It became the sixth-biggest hit of 2024 worldwide and achieved the best launch for a Broadway adaptation in box office history.

With two more months of exclusivity on VOD platforms before its arrival on NBCUniversal's streaming service Peacock, *Wicked* promises to continue enchanting audiences.

And there is more to come, since the movie's sequel *Wicked: For Good*, which continues the story recounted in the musical, is slated for release in theatres on Nov 21. – ETX Studio

Movies becoming more violent: Study

ACCORDING to a US study, violence is increasingly present in movies, even in films where crime is not the main theme.

A study entitled *Trends of Violence in Movies During the Past Half Century*, published in the scientific journal *Jama Paediatrics*, investigated the presence of violence in movie productions over the past 50 years by analysing movie subtitles.

The researchers examined dialogue from over 160,000 English-language films produced between 1970 and 2020, focusing on the use of verbs such as "kill" or "murder" in screenplays.

"Our findings suggest references to killing and murder in movie dialogue not only occur far more frequently than in real life but are also increasing over time. This is more evidence that violence is a bigger part of the movies we watch than ever before," explained the study's lead author Babak Fotouhi.

Far from being confined to action films and thrillers, "murderous verbs" are also present in all film genres, the study pointed out.

"Characters in non-crime movies are also talking more about killing and murdering today than they did 50 years ago. Not as much as characters in crime movies and the increase has not been as steep. But it is still happening. We found increases in violence (across all genres)," said study co-author Brad Bushman.



According to the study, 'murderous verbs' were also present in all film genres. – PEXELSPIC

While these "murderous" terms are mostly used by male characters, female characters are increasingly beginning to adopt this language.

On social networks, "female rage" content is captivating internet users for its representation of female anger in movies and TV shows. On TikTok, #femaleage has accumulated more than 100,000 posts and there are also thousands on Instagram. These messages are often praised for their authenticity. – ETX Studio



LIBRA
Sept 23 – Oct 22
This weekend your career and public life take centre stage. The recent events have brought attention to your aspirations and the steps needed to achieve them. Reflect on your goals and consider if your current path aligns with your true passions. Engaging in networking or seeking mentorship can provide valuable guidance.



SCORPIO
Oct 23 – Nov 21
This weekend invites you to broaden your horizons and seek new experiences. Whether it is planning a trip, enrolling in a course or exploring a new philosophy, embracing the unknown will lead to personal growth. In relationships, open communication is key. Sharing your thoughts and feelings honestly will deepen connections.



SAGITTARIUS
Nov 22 – Dec 21
This weekend, focus on your financial and emotional investments. It is an opportune time to assess your commitments and ensure they align with your values and goals. Engaging in open discussions about finances or emotional needs can lead to greater harmony and understanding in your relationships.



CAPRICORN
Dec 22 – Jan 19
This weekend emphasises your partnerships and close relationships. Reflect on the balance of give-and-take and consider if adjustments are needed to foster mutual respect and support. Engaging in honest and compassionate conversations can strengthen bonds and lead to collaborative success.



AQUARIUS
Jan 20 – Feb 18
It is the ideal time to reflect on your personal goals and set fresh intentions. Conversations with loved ones may reveal important insights, so stay open and honest. You are encouraged to review past decisions while creative ideas could spark professional growth. Prioritise self-care and seek new experiences that inspire you.



PISCES
Feb 19 – March 20
This weekend highlights emotional clarity and creativity. Now is an ideal time to nurture relationships and express feelings openly. Your imagination is heightened, use it for creative projects or problem-solving. Stay grounded by setting clear boundaries and focusing on personal growth. Reflect through journaling or mindfulness and trust your intuition to guide you toward deeper connections.

Noodle nirvana

➤ Exploring five iconic dishes from Asia

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

NOODLES are a beloved comfort food across Asia, bringing people together with their rich flavours and satisfying textures. Here are five noodle recipes for you to recreate in your own kitchen.

Chilli crisp noodles

A dish originating from China, chilli crisp noodles is a dish that combines spice, crunch and umami. It is a good selection for those who crave bold, unapologetic flavours.

Ingredients

200g wheat noodles
2 tablespoons chilli crisp (store-bought or homemade)
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon vinegar
1 teaspoon sesame oil
Spring onions and sesame seeds for garnish

Instructions

1. Cook the noodles according to package instructions and set them aside.
2. In a heated pan, add sesame oil and saute the minced garlic until aromatic.
3. Toss in the chilli crisp, soy sauce and vinegar, stirring well to combine.
4. Add the cooked noodles and toss until coated evenly in the sauce.
5. Garnish with spring onions and sesame seeds before serving.



Pad see ew's balance of sweet and savoury makes it a universal favourite. – PIC FROM YOUTUBE @RECIPEIN EATS

Pad see ew (Thai stir-fried noodles)

Pad see ew is a beloved street food classic in Thailand. Its name translates to "stir-fried soy sauce noodles" and its smoky, caramelised flavours are simply irresistible.

Ingredients

200g flat rice noodles
100g chicken or tofu
1 egg
2 tablespoons dark soy sauce
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
1 teaspoon sugar



Chilli crisp noodles is a great choice for quick meals that do not compromise on flavour. – PIC FROM YOUTUBE @RECIPEIN EATS

1 clove garlic, minced
Handful of Chinese broccoli

Instructions

1. Prepare the noodles according to package instructions.
2. Heat oil in a pan and fry the minced garlic until fragrant.
3. Add chicken or tofu and cook until browned.
4. Push the protein to one side of the pan and crack an egg, scrambling it gently.
5. Toss in the noodles, soy sauces and sugar, mixing well.
6. Add the Chinese broccoli and stir-fry until tender.



Hokkien mee is best enjoyed piping hot with a squeeze of lime to cut through the richness. – PIC FROM YOUTUBE @NYONYA COOKING

Hokkien mee

Hokkien mee is a Malaysian noodle dish with a rich history. The combination of prawn stock and caramelised soy sauce creates a heavenly experience in every bite.

Ingredients

200g yellow noodles
100g prawns
50g chicken, sliced
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
1 teaspoon light soy sauce
1 clove garlic, minced
200 ml prawn or chicken stock
Chives and lime for garnish

Instructions

1. Blanch the yellow noodles in boiling water, then drain and set aside.

2. Heat oil in a wok and saute the garlic until golden.
3. Add prawns and pork belly, cooking until fragrant and slightly crispy.
4. Pour in the stock and bring to a simmer.
5. Toss in the noodles and soy sauces, mixing until well-coated and heated through.
6. Garnish with fresh chives and lime before serving.



Laksa's creamy and spicy profile makes it a favourite among noodle enthusiasts worldwide. – PIC FROM YOUTUBE @PAILIN'S KITCHEN

Laksa noodles

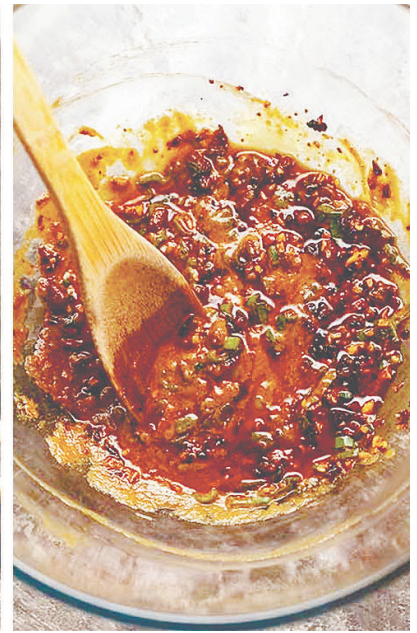
Laksa is a gem of Southeast Asia, renowned for its creamy, spicy coconut broth and medley of fresh herbs.

Ingredients

200g rice vermicelli
2 tablespoons laksa paste
400 ml coconut milk
200 ml chicken or seafood stock
100g prawns or shredded chicken
Bean sprouts, boiled egg and coriander for garnish

Instructions

1. Cook the rice vermicelli according to package instructions and set aside.
2. In a pot, heat the laksa paste until fragrant.
3. Add the coconut milk and stock, stirring to combine. Let it simmer for five minutes.
4. Add prawns or chicken and cook until done.
5. Divide the noodles into bowls, pour over the laksa broth and top with garnishes.



Char kuey teow's signature wok hei ('breath of the wok') is what makes it truly special. – PIC FROM YOUTUBE @MEL COOKING JOURNEY

Char kuey teow

Char kuey teow is a wok-fried noodle dish with a smoky, charred aroma that epitomises Malaysian street food.

Ingredients

200g flat rice noodles
100g prawns
1 Chinese sausage, sliced
1 egg
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
1 teaspoon light soy sauce
1 clove garlic, minced
Handful of bean sprouts and chives

Instructions

1. Heat a wok until smoking hot, then add oil and minced garlic.
2. Add prawns and sausage, stir-frying until golden.
3. Push the ingredients to one side, crack an egg and scramble it.
4. Add the noodles and soy sauce and stir-fry until well-combined and slightly charred.
5. Toss in the bean sprouts and chives, giving it a quick stir before serving.

Noodles are versatile, making them ideal for experimenting with different flavours. So, try these dishes at home to embark on your own Asian noodle adventure.



theSun Motoring

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Bold & beautiful

KIA EV9 unlike anything else on the road

BY KESHY DHILLON



WHEN thinking of an angle for this review, there was one song that kept coming to mind, the classic *Anything you can do (I can do better)*, that was composed by Irving Berlin for the 1946 Broadway Musical *Annie Get Your Gun*.

If you have never heard of it, try searching for it on *YouTube* and that should set the tone for the rest of this article.

Over the years, there have been many iterations of the song, and it was popularised in car culture nearly two decades ago in a Mercedes-Benz video advertisement.

The video featuring Lewis Hamilton, Fernando Alonso and Mika Hakkinen showcased the three Formula One legends duelling against each other in a series of challenges.

Fast forward to today and the song once again comes to mind to describe the current automotive scenario, particularly the electric vehicle (EV) segment.

US president-elect Donald Trump himself would not deny that the segment is dominated by Chinese marques.

And while the world argues over how the Americans, Japanese and Europeans are going to keep up, the South Koreans have been silently churning out cars that not only impress with their technology but also offer stunning designs.

The KIA EV9 you see sprawled on these pages is one such stunner from South Korea. It may not look like it when seen in photos, but it is a massive car, about the size of the latest generation Range Rover.

And it is quite imposing as well, with a neck crumpling presence everywhere it goes since not many have seen one on our roads.

We love it, sort of

In terms of design, it will not look out of place in a *Star Wars* movie. In fact, while Chinese cars and Tesla have started to look the same with their front and rear lightbars and gigantic infotainment



The LED Small Cube Projection headlights look otherworldly.

systems inside, there is nothing else quite like the KIA EV9.

But you have to wonder why it has not become an instant sensation among the wealthy.

Yes, the wealthy. Because the EV9 is priced at RM370,000 for the seven-seater variant and RM375,000 for the six-seater. So, you can't expect regular folks to be flocking to it.

The price is one of the few thorns on its side because when it comes to spending that amount of money, most Malaysians would still pick a European brand over a Korean, to make a statement at the next family gathering that you have "arrived in life." Nothing makes a statement better than a European marque.

So, this means then that the EV9 sits in a very peculiar spot. It is way too expensive for the regular Joe, and for those who can afford it, well they either do not want to spend that much on a KIA or would rather spend it on a luxury marque.

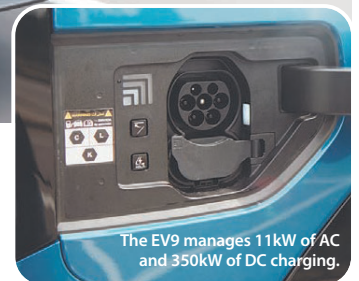
Except for a few oddballs to whom I am grateful to because if it wasn't for them we



Rear lights look equally as stunning as the front.



Door handles tuck neatly into the body when on the move.



The EV9 manages 11kW of AC and 350kW of DC charging.



The side view mirrors are replaced with cameras.



21-inch wheels look really good.

wouldn't have such cars in Malaysia.

So, what is it about the EV9 that we love?

Apologies for getting distracted, but the EV9 is a stylish machine and that's the first thing we like



Digital side view monitors take some getting used to.

about it. It makes you go wow the first time you see it. It makes the cooks in a Chinese restaurant come out just to look at it. I can personally testify to that.

There's a saying that goes, "if you don't look back at your car after you have parked it, you bought the wrong car," and I just could not stop staring at it though I am far from buying one.

How KIA has made seemingly straight lines and vast empty spaces look this good may be beyond most of us non-designers, but we can collectively breathe a sigh of relief that the automotive world can still churn out such good-looking cars.

Then there is the interior. KIA has again shown that they are not followers of the herd. There are no gargantuan infotainment screens inside, just one that measures in at a regular 12.3-inch and another of equal proportions for the instrument cluster.

And thankfully there are still physical controls for everything from the air-conditioning to the radio. You can even adjust the air-conditioner blowers manually, just as you always could before some brands started over engineering them. The rear passengers get a set of air-conditioning controls and their own sunroof as well.

The interior space and seats deserve their own special mention.

Considering the size of the car, it should come as no surprise that interior living space is vast.

It is also comfortable for the kids and shorter adults in the third row, which positions the EV9 as a capable option for large families.

The seats themselves could put more expensive cars to shame in terms of comfort. They are so good that there's an entire section dedicated to the seats in the EV9's specification sheet.

The driver's side seat gets a massage function which turns on after an hour of driving while the seat itself is adjustable in multiple ways.

Both driver and passenger seats also have a feature called Premium Relaxation, this is where the seat can recline in such a way that it almost feels like you're in a hammock.

So, what are the other thorns you may ask?

After raving about the seats, I must say that the mesh headrests for the front two seats are unbecoming for a car of this price range, like they were taken from the office chairs of KIA's design centre.

The other thing that I am particularly concerned about are the digital side view monitors. Instead of using regular mirrors, KIA has chosen to use cameras instead. They protrude out awkwardly and look weird.

On top of that, monitoring the sides of the car can take some getting used to as well because you can never gauge the distance. It is already difficult to tell the distance with a mirror, what more a monitor.

And what more, we have thousands of motorcyclists to share the road with daily and the occasional swipe with a handlebar does happen. One must wonder how much it would cost to replace the camera.

But what about the powertrain?

That responsibility falls on dual motors, one for each axle, which effectively makes the EV9 an all-wheel-drive SUV.

Providing juice to the motors is a 99.8kWh battery pack that gives the car 380hp, 700Nm of



The dashboard looks good and feels good.



14-speaker Meridian sound system is simply fantastic.



Physical controls which we are thankful for.



There's generous sitting space everywhere.

torque as well as a WLTP range of 505km.

But after spending a couple of days with the EV9, we returned the car with an average energy usage of 21.4kWh, that gave the car a real-world range of 466km.

Energy usage gets higher on the highway and that drops the range like an anchor, which is typical of EV's. So, to sustain a decent range, driving between 90-100kph was the only way, which is a shame.

As for charging, the EV9 supports an 800V electrical architecture which allows for ultra-fast

charging. To recharge, the car can take 350kW of DC charging which lets the car hit 80% state of charge from 10% in just 24 minutes.

While that may be impressive, the EV9 is only capable of 11kW of AC charging, and that is the real kick in an otherwise great show because it will need 10 hours and 30 minutes to hit 100% from near zero.

So why do we like it so much?

While the car may not be able to go very far and

in all honesty would have greatly benefited from 22kW AC charging, it is still a great car to drive.

Refinement levels are arguably at near Rolls-Royce levels at regular speeds. The car does not come with adaptive suspension which is available in some other markets, but the MacPherson struts and Multi-Links do a fantastic job nonetheless.

The fact that it does not come with the more expensive adaptive suspensions means that long term ownership may be easier on the pocket, so that may just be a good thing.

We also like its versatility as a family car, offering space and comfort for all three rows.

And ensuring the car remains safe in all situations are multiple levels of technologies ranging from Forward Collision-Avoidance Assist systems to Smart Cruise Control.

But the real star is of course the one thing that we have been harping about all along, its design, which particularly stands out in the colour you see here, Ocean Blue.

Is it worth it?

Well, that would depend on which side of the divide you stand on. If you like nice cars and don't mind the badge they come with then for sure the EV9 is worth it.

But if you are the type that is concerned about making a statement, just keep in mind that the KIA badge has come a long way from its Spectra days.

Specifications

Motor: Permanent Magnet Synchronous Motor

Power: 380hp

Torque: 700Nm

Battery: 99.8kWh Lithium-Ion

Price (As tested): RM369,668 (7-seater)

We like: Design, refinement, features.

We don't like: No 22kW AC charging.

New Civic bound to turn heads

Facelift 2025 model starts from RM134,000

HONDA MALAYSIA has officially launched the New Civic, a sophisticated addition to the C-segment sedan market that combines bold design, advanced technology, and exceptional performance.

With features like Google Built-In and a hybrid powertrain, the New Civic reflects Honda's commitment to innovation and excellence.

Speaking at the unveiling, Honda Malaysia's managing director and CEO, Mr. Hironobu Yoshimura, highlighted the company's 2024 success, including over 81,600 units sold, securing an 11th consecutive year of leadership in the

non-national passenger vehicle segment.

He noted that the Civic holds an impressive 81% market share in the non-national C-segment, emphasising its strong customer support and trust.

The New Civic, he added, is poised to elevate this legacy by delivering an exceptional driving experience through advanced powertrains and seamless connectivity.

The car's design exudes confidence and modernity, with distinctive updates across its lineup. The e:HEV RS variant features body-coloured grille extensions, lower grille garnishes, and striking 18-inch matte grey alloy

wheels, while the Petrol RS showcases sporty black-painted grille accents.

A sleek black taillight extension across all variants enhances its contemporary aesthetic, and RS models now include a new RS emblem, underscoring their sporty appeal.

Performance is at the core of the New Civic's appeal, with two powerful and efficient powertrain options.

The e:HEV RS variant is powered by a 2.0L hybrid engine that produces 184PS and 315Nm of torque, paired with an Electric Continuous Variable Transmission (e-CVT) for superior hybrid performance.

Meanwhile, the Petrol RS variant

features a 1.5L VTEC turbocharged engine generating 182PS and 240Nm of torque, offering a thrilling and dynamic driving experience.

Safety remains a top priority in the New Civic, with the Honda Sensing suite now standard across all variants.

The New Civic also offers a refined and quiet driving experience, especially in the e:HEV RS variant, which combines Active Noise Control and Active Sound Control to reduce external noise while enhancing engine sound. This advanced noise management system ensures a serene yet exhilarating drive, supported by features like Remote Engine Start for added convenience.

Available in vibrant colours,

including the new Canyon River Blue Metallic alongside Platinum White Pearl, Ignite Red Metallic, Meteoroid Gray Metallic, and Crystal Black Pearl, the New Civic offers both style and practicality.

The pricing begins at RM167,900 for the e:HEV RS, RM149,900 for the Petrol RS, RM144,900 for the V variant, and RM133,900 for the E variant.

Honda Malaysia has set a target of selling 1,000 units monthly, aiming to maintain its leadership in the Non-National C-segment market.

With its advanced features, bold design, and exceptional performance, the New Civic is set to solidify its position as a top choice for Malaysian drivers.



Mazda6e BEV unveiled for Europe

MAZDA Motor Europe has officially introduced the Mazda6e, a revolutionary Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV), at the Brussels Motor Show 2025.

Scheduled for release in June 2025, the Mazda6e represents the brand's entry into the midsize BEV segment, specifically tailored for European consumers.

The Mazda6e serves as the European iteration of the Mazda EZ-6, which was first showcased at the Beijing Auto Show in April 2024. This innovative BEV is a product of Mazda's long-standing partnership with Changan Automobile Co., Ltd, a collaboration spanning over two decades.

Combining Mazda's iconic design philosophy and craftsmanship with Changan's advanced expertise in electrification and intelligent cabin technologies, the Mazda6e sets a new standard for electric mobility in the European market.

Designed under the "Authentic Modern" theme, the car boasts a sleek coupe-inspired silhouette with clean, flowing lines that highlight its modernity and electric innovation.

Every detail reflects Mazda's commitment to craftsmanship while incorporating unique EV-specific elements to emphasise its futuristic appeal.

The driving dynamics have been meticulously refined to achieve Jinba



Ittai, Mazda's hallmark sense of oneness between driver and car.

Precision-tuned braking and responsive handling ensure a deeply engaging and intuitive driving experience.

Incorporating cutting-edge technologies, the Mazda6e elevates safety and convenience.

The car is equipped with an electric powertrain, and two battery options: an 80kWh unit providing a range of 552km and a 68.8kWh variant delivering up to 479km on a single charge, catering to diverse customer needs.

Mazda remains steadfast in its commitment to the human-centric approach, striving to deliver the "Joy of Driving" while enhancing everyday life with meaningful experiences.

Locally assembled Mini hits the streets

MINI MALAYSIA, part of the BMW Group, has officially launched the new Mini Countryman S ALL4, a locally assembled petrol-powered addition to the Mini family.

This expansion of the iconic Mini lineup brings a versatile, sporty SUV designed for both urban living and outdoor adventures.

The introduction reflects Mini's ongoing commitment to offering vehicles that cater to diverse lifestyles while maintaining the brand's distinct charm.

The Mini Countryman S ALL4 stands taller and longer than its predecessor, with a robust design that retains Mini's signature style.

The exterior features an upright profile, widened track, and a compact bonnet complemented by 20-inch Windmill Spoke wheels.

LED headlights with adjustable light signatures and upright LED taillights enhance visibility and aesthetics. Six fresh colour options, including Smokey Green and Chili Red, ensure a bold and expressive presence on the road.

Equipped with a 2.0-litre turbocharged engine, the car produces 204 hp and 300Nm of



torque. Paired with the next-generation ALL4 all-wheel-drive system, it accelerates from 0 to 100kph in just 7.4 seconds and reaches a top speed of 228kph.

Advanced suspension systems ensure the brand's signature go-kart handling, offering both agility and comfort.

The Mini Countryman S ALL4 comes with a five-year roadside assistance program covering towing, accident support, and replacement vehicle services.

A standard two-year warranty can

be extended for long-term peace of mind. Mini Malaysia also simplifies maintenance with an online service scheduling system and flexible financing options through BMW Group Financial Services Malaysia.

The Mini Countryman S ALL4 is priced at RM259,000, or RM270,000 with an extended warranty and service package.

Customers can explore financing plans with monthly instalments starting from RM2,338. Bookings and inquiries can be made through Mini Authorised Dealerships or online.

No manual option for new Carrera S

PORSCHE has unveiled the 2025 911 Carrera S, an exciting addition to the iconic 911 lineup.

Positioned between the 911 Carrera and the Carrera GTS T-Hybrid, the new Carrera S boasts significant performance upgrades and enhanced standard features, delivering an exhilarating driving experience and exceptional value. Available in both Coupe and Cabriolet variants, the 911 Carrera S redefines sportiness and sophistication.

At the heart of the 911 Carrera S lies a re-engineered 3.0-litre twin-turbocharged six-cylinder boxer engine. Producing 480PS and 530Nm of torque, the engine delivers 30 PS more than its predecessor, achieving performance levels previously



reserved for the Carrera GTS of earlier generations.

The Carrera S accelerates from 0 to 100kph in a blistering 3.3 seconds and reaches a top speed of 308kph. Power is seamlessly delivered to the wheels via an eight-speed Porsche dual-clutch transmission (PDK).

The 911 Carrera S stands out with a host of standard performance-enhancing features.

Optional upgrades include the Porsche Ceramic Composite Brake (PCCB) system, PASM sports suspension with a 10-mm-lowered ride height, and rear-wheel steering.

The Carrera S benefits from refined suspension kinematics and improved damper hydraulics, enhancing both agility and high-speed stability.

The Carrera S retains the timeless design of the 911 family while introducing subtle refinements.

The exterior features the classic 911 silhouette with sporty accents, while the interior seamlessly blends driver-focused ergonomics with premium materials. Customers can choose from a variety of customisation options to make their Carrera S uniquely theirs.



322 Notices

PERISTIHARAN JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG
PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO: PA-38-1180-10/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1965
Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Gadaian Perseorahan No. 07982021005205 (bertarikh 13/02/2021) ke atas semua bahagian tanah yang tertera di bawah Hakmilik rasminya No. Hakmilik Geran 78881/M18/16/322, Lot 10090, Mukim 13, Daerah Timur Laut, Pulau Pinang

Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Aturan 83 Kaedah-Kaedah Mahkamah, 2012

ANTARA
Public Bank Berhad (No. Syarikat : 6463-4) ...PLAINTIF

Wong Seok Luan (No. Kad Pengenalan : 761108075458) ...DEFENDAN

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 18 Mei 2023 dan 5 Disember 2024, adalah dengan ini dinyatakan bahawa Timbalan Pendaftar/Penolong Kanan Pendaftar Pusat Operasi e-Lelong di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA
LELONG AWAM
Pada Hari Selasa, 4 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 bangunan, bebahan serta mengenai pasli dengan lesen baratan tersebut sebelum jualan lelongan dijalankan.

Sila layari <https://lelong.kahakiman.gov.my/bidderweb>

BUTIR-BUTIR HAKMILIK:
No. Hakmilik : Hakmilik Strata No. Hakmilik Geran 78881/M18/16/322
No. Lot : Lot 10090
No. Mukim / Daerah / Negeri : 13 / Timur Laut / Pulau Pinang
Pegangan : Hakmilik Pajakan
No. Patah/No. Tingkat/No. Bangunan : 322 / 16 / M18
Keluasan Tanah : 710.0000000000 kaki persegi
65.0000000000 meter persegi
Pemilik Berdaftar : Wong Seok Luan
Syarat Nyata : Petak ini hendaklah digunakan untuk tujuan rumah tinggal sahaja
Sekatan Kepentingan : 1. A private caveat lodged by Public Bank Berhad vide Presentation No. 07982021000838 registered on 29th January 2021. 2. The 99-year leasehold interest in the subject property is presently charged to Public Bank Berhad vide Presentation No. 087752021005205 registered on 12th March 2021. 3. A private caveat lodged by Tan Kok Wai vide Presentation No. 07982021001895 registered on 16th March 2021.
Bebahan / Lain-Lain : 1. Nombor Peris: 07982021000838 Kawat Persendirian Atas Petak oleh Public Bank Berhad No. Syarikat: 6463-4 diadatkan pada 29 Januari 2021. 2. Nombor Peris: 07982021001895 Kawat Persendirian Atas Petak oleh Tan Kok Wai diadatkan pada 16 Mac 2021.

LOKASI DAN PERHAL HARTAHANA:
Hartanah tersebut adalah Three-bedroom apartment yang berlatar pos di No. 6-16-02, Lengkok Angsana, Mukim 13, 11500, Ayer Itam, Pulau Pinang.

HARGA DIBAR:
Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "seperlimana sedia ada" tertakluk kepada satu harga ruzab sebanyak RM 277,020.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: DUA RATUS TUJUH PULUH TUJUH RIBU DUA PULUH SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang dilampirkan. Pembida yang bermata hendaklah mendeposikan 10% daripada harga ruzab dalam bentuk Bank Draft di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD 1 HARI BERSILA sebelum tarikh lelong awam. Baki harga balian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (120) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk but-butir selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:

Firma Guaman : WONG-CHOOI & MOHD NOR
Alamat : NO. 27, 1ST & 2ND FLOOR
JALAN MAJU JAYA
PUSAT PERNIAGAN MAJU JAYA, 14000, PG, MY
No. Telefon : 04-5398855
No. Fax : 04-5398855
No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-HL/2023-025/WSI(R/S/)

322 Notices

PERISTIHARAN JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG
PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO: PA-38-1179-10/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1965
Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Gadaian Perseorahan No. 25230/2004 (bertarikh: 24/08/2004) ke atas semua bahagian tanah yang dipanggil di bawah PN 2331/M1/1/116 (dahulunya dikenali sebagai Hakmilik Strata No. Berdaftar: Pajakan Negeri HBN 47/M1/1/116, Lot 8017, Mukim 12, Daerah Barat Daya, Pulau Pinang

Dan
Dalam perkara mengenai Aturan 83 Kaedah-Kaedah Mahkamah, 2012

ANTARA
Public Bank Berhad (No. Syarikat : 6463-4) ...PLAINTIF

Multi-Audio Electrical Sdn Bhd (No. Syarikat : 200001027291(528986-M) ...DEFENDAN

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di Pulau Pinang mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 1 November 2023 dan 3 Disember 2024, adalah dengan ini dinyatakan bahawa Timbalan Pendaftar/Penolong Kanan Pendaftar Pusat Operasi e-Lelong di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA
LELONG AWAM
Pada Hari Selasa, 4 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 bangunan, bebahan serta mengenai pasli dengan lesen baratan tersebut sebelum jualan lelongan dijalankan.

Sila layari <https://lelong.kahakiman.gov.my/bidderweb>

BUTIR-BUTIR HAKMILIK:
No. Hakmilik : PN 2331/M1/1/116 (dahulunya dikenali sebagai Hakmilik Strata No. Berdaftar: Pajakan Negeri HBN 47/M1/1/116)
No. Lot : Lot 8017
No. Mukim / Daerah / Negeri : 12 / Barat Daya / Pulau Pinang
Pegangan : Hakmilik Pajakan
No. Patah/No. Tingkat/No. Bangunan : 16 / 1 / M1
Keluasan Tanah : 485.0000000000 kaki persegi
46.0000000000 meter persegi
Pemilik Berdaftar : Multi-Audio Electrical Sdn Bhd
Syarat Nyata : Petak ini hendaklah digunakan untuk tujuan kedai sahaja.
Sekatan Kepentingan : Tanah yang diberi milik ini tidak boleh dipotong, gredah, milik, cacar, pajak, pajak kecil atau dengan apa-apa urusan sebarang pun dipusatkan dengan tidak kalendaran bertulis daripada Pihak Berkuasa Negeri.
Bebahan / Lain-Lain :
Keluasan Rizab :
Kaveat :

LOKASI DAN PERHAL HARTAHANA:
Hartanah tersebut adalah A unit of shoplot yang berlatar pos di No. 1-1-12, Persiaran Mayang Pagar 2, Bandar Bayan Baru, 11950, Bayan Lepas, Pulau Pinang.

HARGA DIBAR:
Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "seperlimana sedia ada" tertakluk kepada satu harga ruzab sebanyak RM 225,000.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: DUA RATUS DUA PULUH LIMA RIBU RIBU SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang dilampirkan. Pembida yang bermata hendaklah mendeposikan 10% daripada harga ruzab dalam bentuk Bank Draft di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD 1 HARI BERSILA sebelum tarikh lelong awam. Baki harga balian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (120) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk but-butir selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:

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No. Fax : 04-5398855
No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-HL/2023-164(A1)/MESSR(R/S/)

Swiatek books date with Raducanu

IGA SWIATEK romped into a third-round showdown with Emma Raducanu at the Australian Open yesterday.

Women's second seed Swiatek raced past world No. 49 Rebecca Srnakova 6-0, 6-2 while Britain's Raducanu reached the third round for the first time in Melbourne by beating Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 7-5.

"Well for sure it's going to be a tough one," Swiatek, a five-time Grand Slam winner but never a Melbourne champion, said as she sized up Raducanu.

"Emma can play great tennis. We all know that."

Raducanu is seeking to claw up the rankings after an injury-hit 2024 and return to the form that brought her a shock US Open crown in 2021 as a qualifier.

"It will be a very good match for me," said

the 22-year-old.

"It's an opportunity to test my game, see where I'm at."

Former US Open champion Raducanu is relishing a clash free of external pressure when she faces the Pole tomorrow.

"Swiatek is a top player, she's been really consistent over the last quite a few years", Raducanu said.

"So it's going to be a match for me where I feel like I don't really have much expectation externally."

"I think you always have the pressure that you put on yourself to perform to your best ability, which is not really going to change, but that's every match."

"I'm looking forward to going out there and testing my game against the best, because ultimately, you play tennis, and you live for

these matches. It's going to be a great buzz of adrenaline."

"I think I'll probably just take it easy tomorrow," she said. "I'll probably have a light hit. Nothing crazy."

"I've played a lot of tennis today and two days ago, so I don't think I need to overdo it on the practice court. Just to keep the body ticking over a little bit and just recover really."

In other matches, Elena Rybakina, the sixth seed and former Wimbledon champion, powered past American wildcard Iva Jovic in straight sets.

Emma Navarro will face Ons Jabeur next after battling through three sets to beat China's 108th-ranked Wang Xiyu.

Fourth seed Jasmine Paolini faces Renata Zarazua of Mexico to round off the action on Rod Laver Arena. - AFP/Reuters



Jannik Sinner in action during his second round match against Tristan Schoonkate (not pictured). - REUTERS/PI

Ice-cool Sinner

WORLD NO. 1 Jannik Sinner dropped a set for the first time in 14 matches yesterday before surging back to keep his Australian Open title defence on track.

The Italian top seed had no answers at the start against Australian wildcard Tristan Schoonkate, ranked 173, but found his groove to win 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-3 on centre court.

It was his 16th consecutive victory in an ominous sign for next opponent Marcos Giron in round three.

The American punched his ticket by beating Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry, who was the last person before Schoonkate to take a set off Sinner.

That was back in late September at the Shanghai Masters. Since then, Sinner had won 29 consecutive sets.

"It's always tough to play against a player I don't know very well. I felt like he was serving really well, playing much better in the beginning than I was," said Sinner.

"But I am still very happy with my performance. You can never take things for granted so very glad to be in the next round."

"It was a very tough match. I can improve, yes," he added.

Earlier, Taylor Fritz swept through to a third-round clash against Gael Monfils with a brutal display of power hitting and has dropped just eight games

Italian drops rare set en route to AO third round, Fritz warning

in the tournament so far.

The American fourth seed was untouchable on Margaret Court Arena, swatting aside Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 in 82 minutes.

Fritz only gave up five games to blitz past Jensen Brooksby in the first round and has spent barely three hours on court.

"Always feels great to come out and play a match like that," said Fritz, last year's US Open finalist who is yet to drop his serve in his pursuit of a first major crown.

"I played well in my first round too so I'll be high on confidence going into the third round."

The supremely talented Fonseca has been tipped for the top by Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic.

But having stunned ninth seed Andrey Rublev in straight sets in the first round, the teenager went down fighting, Sonego pulling through 6-7 (6-8), 6-3, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 to disappoint the vocal Brazilian fans.

Sonego's reward is a clash against Hungary's Fabian Marozsan, who took down 17th seed Frances Tiafoe, also in five sets.

Australia's main hope Alex de Minaur dismantled American Tristan Boyer in three sets and 13th seed Holger Rune battled past Matteo Berrettini in four. - AFP/Reuters



Taylor Fritz. - REUTERS/PI

SHORTS

'I had 10 minutes'

EVA LYS'S bags were packed and her flight booked. But now the German is into the third round of a Grand Slam for the first time after making the most of her second chance at the Australian Open.

The 23-year-old "lucky loser" defeated France's Varvara Gracheva 6-2, 3-6, 6-4 yesterday in the second round, falling onto her back on court after sealing victory.

"I don't think I have any words to describe it yet," Lys, who is ranked 128th in the world, said.

It has been a whirlwind few days for Ukraine-born Lys.

She lost in the final round of qualifying in Melbourne last week, her hopes of making the

first major of the year seemingly over.

But she hung about on the off-chance that another player would drop out and 13th seed Anna Kalinskaya did just that on Tuesday, suddenly giving Lys another Australian Open life.

She duly defeated home player Kimberly Birrell in straight sets in the first round of the main draw.

"I found out about it 10 minutes before the match so I didn't have time to get nervous," Lys, who lost in the first round at the Australian Open two years ago, said.

"So no warm-up, no anything. Maybe that's the key for the next match."

Fritz donates LA fire victims

AMERICAN world No. 4 Taylor Fritz said Thursday he will donate his US\$82,000 (RM369,246) first-

round prize money from the Australian Open to help victims of the Los Angeles wildfires, calling the devastation "insane."

Fritz, who lives in California, made the gesture after reaching the Melbourne third round by beating Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0.

"I just want everyone to obviously stay safe, it's just insane what has happened," said the 27-year-old.

"I'm going to be donating my first-round prize money to LA wildfire relief funds."

"It's really the least I can do. Southern California is my home and LA was my home for a long time."

"I'm just doing what I can possibly do to help and I would encourage anyone else who can donate to help because a lot of people really need it."

PSG squeeze through, Lyon shocked

TWO LATE goals from Bradley Barcola and Goncalo Ramos spared the blushes of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain who booked their place in the last 16 of the French Cup with a nerve-jangling 4-2 win at fifth-tier Espaly yesterday.

There was no such reprieve for Lyon, however, who were sent crashing out when they were beaten 4-2 on penalties by another fifth-tier team Bourgoin-Jallieu.

With Espaly moving the game to the Stade Marcel-Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand, home of the far more famous rugby team, PSG struggled from the start, conceding a goal in the third minute to Kevis Gjeci.

The Parisians levelled through Warren Zaire-Emerly eight minutes before half time before Desire Doue put the champions in front in the 67th minute.

That should have been it but Maxence Fournel equalised for the part-timers four minutes later, raising the prospect of a penalty shootout lottery.

Barcola, however, broke Espaly hearts, when he put PSG ahead in the 88th minute with Ramos sealing their passage four minutes later from the penalty spot.

PSG coach Luis Enrique congratulated his

opposite number Lionel Vaillant and his team but criticised the quality of the pitch.

"I'm not looking for excuses but we played on a rugby pitch, with the ball bouncing all over the place," he said.

"We need to be able to play everywhere and we're delighted that this competition exists, but for everyone's sake, the conditions need to be better."

Lyon were the side that lost to PSG in last season's final but Pierre Sage's side spluttered through the 90 minutes against Bourgoin-Jallieu which finished 2-2, before they failed completely in the shoot-out.

Lyon are the first Ligue 1 side to be knocked out by a team from the fifth tier since Bordeaux lost to Ile Rousse in 2014.

"We showed neither pride nor honour," said Lyon coach Sage.

"We're going to have to face up to the shame in front of those close to us, the people who love the club and our directors. It's almost a tragedy."

The heroes for Bourgoin-Jallieu were Mehdi Moujety, who scored both goals for the semi-professionals in normal time, and goalkeeper Ronan Jay who saved two penalties in the shoot-out. – AFP

Sane hits brace as Bayern thump Hoffenheim

LEROY SANE scored a goal in each half as Bayern Munich thumped Hoffenheim 5-0 at home yesterday to restore their four-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga table.

Bayer Leverkusen's 1-0 home win over Mainz on Tuesday had drawn Xabi Alonso's defending champions within one point, but Bayern had no mercy against a listless Hoffenheim.

Former Manchester City winger Sane, who is looking to impress with his contract expiring in the summer, put the hosts in front six minutes in after a clever exchange of passes with veteran Thomas Muller.

Harry Kane created Raphael Guerreiro's 12th-minute goal, threading a pass to the Portuguese who beat Hoffenheim and Germany goalie Oliver Baumann.

Kane added a goal of his own midway through the opening half, converting from the spot after a handball in the box.

The England captain has now converted 27 straight penalties for club and country dating back to his miss against France in the World Cup quarterfinals in Qatar in 2022.

Sane got his second three minutes after

half-time, tapping in a Mathys Tel cross from close range amid more poor Hoffenheim defence.

Serge Gnabry got on the scoresheet after 66 minutes to bring up Bayern's fifth, his first league goal since September.

Elsewhere, Stuttgart came from a goal down at home to beat fellow Champions League participants RB Leipzig 2-1 and climb behind the Saxons to fifth on the table.

Benjamin Sesko gave Leipzig the lead after just 10 minutes, sliding in a Xavi Simons assist to score for the fifth league game in a row.

Five minutes into the second half, a superb long Deniz Undav cross found an unmarked Jacob Bruun Larsen, who headed Stuttgart level.

Undav created another 10 minutes later, pushing Leipzig into a desperation clearance only for Nick Woltemade to hammer home.

In the German capital, Union Berlin's poor run continued with a 2-0 loss to Augsburg while Heidenheim salvaged a 3-3 draw at Werder Bremen. – AFP

Teen stars for Barcelona

Yamal drives dominant Catalans past Betis into Copa del Rey quarters

LAMINE YAMAL put on a spectacular show as Barcelona sailed into the Copa del Rey quarterfinals with a dazzling 5-1 victory over Real Betis yesterday.

Atletico Madrid joined them in the last eight with a 4-0 win at second division Elche, their 15th consecutive triumph across all competitions.

Barca's 17-year-old starlet Yamal scored and helped create two more goals as Hansi Flick's side ran riot at the Olympic Stadium.

Gavi sent Barcelona ahead early on, with Jules Kounde, Raphinha, Ferran Torres and Yamal helping the Catalans rack up an impressive win.

After winning the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia last weekend by thrashing Real Madrid, Barca came into the cup clash with restored confidence, having stuttered in the final weeks of 2024.

"We have to continue like this," said Barca defender Pau Cubarsi, also 17, who came through the club's youth academy with Yamal.

"I've been enjoying watching him for many years, now the whole world is, and he deserves it all."

Gavi said after the game Yamal was the best player in the world after former Barca forward Lionel Messi, and Flick also praised the winger.

"Gavi's very emotional, so I say also yes (he's the best)," joked Flick.

"You can see it, in great matches you see big talent and he showed it many many times, he's on a good (path)."

Yamal, who shone for Spain as they won Euro 2024 last summer, has nine goals and 13 assists across all competitions for Barcelona this season.

Flick described his team's triumph as a "great



Real Betis' Johnny Cardoso (left) in action with FC Barcelona's Raphinha. – REUTERS/SPIC

performance" that provide the fans with a "very beautiful" match.

"What was the result? For us, it was important, after the great victory against in the Super Cup, to see the whole team together, and it is good to see how we played today, with a great performance from the start.

"We controlled the match, and it's very nice and good to see how we did it," he said.

"I am very happy with the situation. I hope the fans are too; I felt it today. I was surprised when I saw the lights from the phones, the atmosphere was incredible, so I really enjoyed it, it was great," he admitted.

Atletico coach Diego Simeone rested some of his regular starters, including Antoine Griezmann, as his team ran out comfortable winners at Elche to continue their winning streak.

Alexander Sorloth struck twice for the *Rojiblancos* in the first half, and the visitors were further bolstered when Elche's Nico Fernandez was sent off early in the second half.

Rodrigo Riquelme extended Atletico's lead with a fine strike from distance and Julian Alvarez rounded off the rout.

"I'm happy with the effort of the boys who had less minutes, they were working well and I knew they would respond in the same way," Simeone said.

"The rival was doing very well, with many virtues in attack, but we were able to take them to the game we wanted and from there our speed created opportunities.

"We played a very good game, very serious and with his expulsion the game was already gone for good." – AFP/Agencies

INTER MILAN missed the chance to take charge of the Serie A title race yesterday after being held to a 2-2 home draw by Bologna.

A win would have moved reigning champions Inter one point behind league leaders Napoli with a game in hand, and they looked to be doing so when Lautaro Martinez fired the hosts ahead on the stroke of halftime from Federico Dimarco's perfect low cross.

But Emil Holm's wildly deflected finish in the 64th minute gave Bologna – who also took a 15th-minute lead through Santiago Castro but were quickly pegged back by Denzel Dumfries – a fully deserved draw at the San Siro and left Inter three

points behind Napoli.

"We played well... their equaliser came from a big deflection and we had chances to win it. We're disappointed to not get the three points but you can only respect our opposition tonight," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi.

"Despite some numerical difficulties, the lads put in a great performance. We had many situations (but) we could have done better, like their two goals which were both deflections.

"However, I saw an excellent team against a physical opponent."

Bologna had beaten Inter in two of their previous four competitive meetings, so Matteo Darmian aimed to take the positives.

"When we go on the pitch we want to take the victory, especially at home," said Inter defender Darmian.

"We take a point in a positive way, having made 44 points in the first 19 games is an important result."

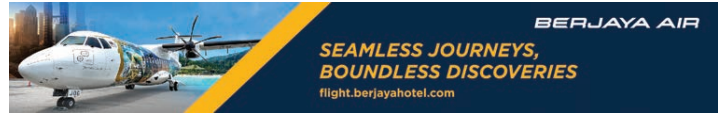
Inter's title defence hits curb

Bologna meanwhile are firmly in the race for Champions League qualification as Vincenzo Italiano continues to get good performances out of his new team.

"It's a good point after a really good display, it's a real point of pride to leave the San Siro without defeat," said Italiano to DAZN.

"We leave here with our heads held high because we managed to put out on the pitch what we'd planned."

Bologna, who reached Europe's elite club competition under Thiago Motta last season, are six points behind fourth-placed Lazio but with a game in hand against AC Milan still to play. – AFP



Ruud at 'lowest moment' since taking charge of Foxes

■ BY SUNNY BADWAL

LEICESTER boss Ruud van Nistelrooy says the 2-0 defeat to Crystal Palace was a big blow to the spirit in the camp after they suffered their sixth consecutive defeat.

The Foxes missed a host of chances and were punished seven minutes after the break when Jean-Philippe Mateta rounded Jakob Stolarczyk to slot home his sixth league goal of the season.

And with 12 minutes left Eberechi Eze's

dinked free-kick was finished emphatically by Marc Guehi as Palace extended their unbeaten run in away league games to five.

Van Nistelrooy admitted yesterday's loss was the lowest his side have felt during his brief time in charge.

"We kept spirits up after five losses and we will do it after today's loss," he said.

"There's hope there, the spirit is there in the team, but today is a big blow.

"It was I think the lowest that we've felt so far in my spell because today we had high hopes

of proving ourselves with points and a performance.

"These games are decided in both final thirds. We are able to create but we have to start finishing them. We are doing a lot well but in the key moments, we are not there to pull the trigger.

"We are responsible to give the hope back to the fans, it is our responsibility."

Palace manager Oliver Glasner was pleased with the outcome but admitted the performance was not up to scratch.

"We are very pleased with the result, with the three points and clean sheet," he said.

"We are not really happy and satisfied with the performance, especially in the first half. We were lucky it was a draw at half-time.

"Big credit to the players that they could adjust it at half-time but I still think it was not our best performance.

"I didn't know exactly that we have conceded the fewest goals in the Premier League in away games. This is crucial and it helps us." – The Independent

SHORTS

Virgil laughs off wobble talk

VIRGIL VAN DIJK has played down suggestions that Premier League leaders Liverpool are having a wobble after they drew 1-1 against Nottingham Forest to stay six points clear at the summit.

Liverpool captain Van Dijk said recent results were due to the strength of the opposition, rather than their own failures.

Asked about his side's disappointing run, which included a 2-2 home draw with lowly Manchester United, he said: "So we are in a crisis now?"

"It only confirms the Premier League is a very tough league where you play against opponents who are very good.

"Every game is tough. We have to find a way to win and I think if we play like we did in the second half and keep fighting, keep trying, keep finding opportunities then I am very confident we will score goals as well like we have been doing all season.

"In games sometimes things don't always go your way. That's life, that's part of being a football player."

Title defence is over: Foden

PHIL FODEN admitted Manchester City's bid to win a fifth successive Premier League title is over after the troubled champions drew 2-2 at Brentford.

Sixth-placed City are languishing 12 points behind leaders Liverpool and Foden conceded they will have to focus on finishing in the top four rather than winning another title.

"The title? Yeah, yeah, it's done for sure, it's done," the England forward said.

"We know. We're not stupid. So we've got to aim for top four, that's the next target now and then obviously Champions League as well. So it's not as if the season has gone.

"But we've got to be realistic, haven't we? The performances have not been good enough to get up there.

"The top four is our aim now and then see where we can be in the other trophies. We can't dwell on it. We've got to try and aim for the top four now and make things right."

Foden said City are trying to learn the lessons of their dismal decline, which has come as a huge shock to Pep Guardiola's team after a dynastic run of six titles in seven seasons.

"Like you said, I've not been in this situation before where I've lost this many games and been in this situation," said Foden, whose side return to action at struggling Ipswich on Sunday.

Alexander the Great

Howe praises 'class' of Isak as goalscoring run continues

■ BY DAMIAN SPELLMAN

EDDIE HOWE hailed Alexander Isak's quality after seeing the Sweden international fire Newcastle into the Premier League's top four.

Isak became the first Magpies player to score in eight successive Premier League games as he took his tally for the season to 17 – 16 of them in his last 16 games – with a double in Wednesday night's 3-0 win over Wolves.

Head coach Howe said: "It's an incredible achievement. This is the hardest league in the world to score in against very good defences, especially with the fixture list that we've had, so to have that level of quality that he's shown – and today's goals were very different in how they've come about.

"The second goal will be underestimated, the finish, because it looks easy. It certainly wasn't, but that's his quality and his class because he always has that split-second extra to place his finish just down to the attributes and the technical ability he has.

"If you look at a lot of his goals, a lot of his goals have come from crosses recently where he's in the right place at the right time.

"Goalscoring is an art form, it's about being in the right positions, but he also then has the technical quality to finish in a calm way and not a lot of players can do that."

If there was an element of good fortune about Isak's 34th-minute opener, which was deflected past wrong-footed keeper Jose Sa by defender Rayan Ait-Nouri, his clinical finish from Bruno Guimaraes' inch-perfect through-ball which made it 2-0 was of the highest quality.

Isak then turned provider to allow Anthony Gordon to cement the points with his effort surviving a lengthy VAR check, and a disappointing night for the visitors was compounded when defender Santiago Bueno saw a consolation strike ruled out for handball after a review.

A club record-equalling ninth win on the trot sent Newcastle into the top four, but left

Howe demanding even more.

He said: "There has to be more to come and that's the

challenge that we have to pose to the players because today wasn't perfect, the last 20 minutes wasn't great.

"We need to keep growing, we need to keep evolving because the challenges only get harder and stronger.

"That will be my message to the players. We'll endeavour to do the work to try to find the extra gears that we need to."

Opposite number Vitor Pereira left Tyneside bemoaning the chances which went begging in an at times impressive display.

Pereira said: "Analysing the game, I think the result doesn't express what happened in the game.

"I think the difference between them and my team was when they got the chances, they scored. We had maybe five, six, I don't know, clear chances to score and we didn't.

"Of course if we don't score and we concede, we lose some confidence to play. But at the end, I'm proud of my players, proud of my team."

Meanwhile, Pereira confirmed that want-away midfielder Mario Lemina had been left behind after telling him he did not feel mentally ready to play.

He said: "I can't bring a player that has come to me and said that he didn't feel mentally in condition to help the team. With this commitment, I cannot bring him." – The Independent



Newcastle's Alexander Isak celebrates after scoring against Wolves. – REUTERS/SPIC

I'm no magician, says new Toffees boss Moyes

■ BY CARL MARKHAM

NEW Everton manager David Moyes admits he is not a magician and will have to turn to the transfer market to solve their goalscoring problem after a suffering a double blow in his first match back in charge at Goodison Park.

After losing 1-0 to Aston Villa on his return after nearly 12 years away there was more bad news for the Scot with on-loan striker Armando Broja likely to be sent back to Chelsea as his ankle injury will sideline him for at least three months.

With goals hard to come by – this was the 11th time this season and ninth occasion in the last 11 League games they had failed to score – Moyes desperately needs reinforcements up

front and Broja's departure would at least free up a place for another loan signing.

"Ultimately it is not just this one game tonight, it has been other games and I think it is there for everybody to see," he said.

"It's not something I've just come in and said, 'We're not quite good enough at finishing'. By the way, I can't 'magic' all that to change, I just can't do it.

"I can see Sean (Dyche) got in a great group of players with their attitude and commitment but we are desperately needing to add some quality in certain areas, mainly to create and craft goals and finish as well.

"We are needing to get those levels up. The situation the club has been in it has probably not

been able to go to a level of player in the market which might make the difference.

"We do need to add to the squad if we can but we just have to be careful we don't go too much (due to profitability and sustainability rules) but we will try to see what we can do – definitely."

Aston Villa boss Unai Emery was delighted to have ended their poor run away from home.

"Very important today to win, we have broken our barren spell in the last matches we played away in the Premier League," he said after his side secured their first away win in six attempts.

"Today the result was very important. I think we deserved to win and it is very important for our confidence." – The Independent

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Everton 0 Aston Villa 1 (Watkins 51), Leicester 0 Crystal Palace 2 (Mateta 52, Guehi 78), Newcastle 3 (Isak 34, 57, Gordon 74) Wolves 0, Arsenal 2 (Solanke 40-og, Trossard 44) Tottenham 1 (Son 25).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	20	14	5	1	48	20	47
Arsenal	21	12	7	2	41	19	43
Nottm Forest	21	12	5	4	30	20	41
Newcastle	21	11	5	5	37	22	38
Chelsea	21	10	7	4	41	26	37
Man City	21	10	5	6	38	29	35
Aston Villa	21	10	5	6	31	32	35
Bournemouth	21	9	7	5	32	25	34
Fulham	21	7	9	5	32	30	30
Brentford	21	8	4	9	40	37	28
Brighton	20	6	10	4	30	29	28
West Ham	21	7	5	9	27	41	26
Tottenham	21	7	3	11	43	32	24
Crystal Palace	21	5	9	7	23	28	24
Man Utd	20	6	5	9	23	28	23
Everton	20	3	8	9	15	26	17
Ipswich	20	3	7	10	20	35	16
Wolves	21	4	4	13	31	48	16
Leicester	21	3	5	13	23	46	14
Southampton	20	1	3	16	12	44	6

CHAMPIONSHIP: Blackburn 3 Portsmouth 0.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leeds	26	15	8	3	48	19	53
Burnley	26	14	10	2	31	9	52
Sheff Utd	26	16	6	4	36	17	52
Sunderland	26	14	8	4	39	22	50
Blackburn	26	12	6	8	31	23	42
Mid'boro	26	11	8	7	43	32	41

SERIE A: Inter Milan 2 (Dumfries 19, Martinez 45+1) Bologna 2 (Castro 15, Holm 64).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	20	15	2	3	32	12	47
Inter Milan	19	13	5	1	48	17	44
Atalanta	20	13	4	3	44	21	43
Lazio	20	11	3	6	34	28	36
Juventus	20	7	13	0	32	17	34
Fiorentina	19	9	5	5	32	20	32

BUNDESLIGA: Bochum 1 St Pauli 1, Stuttgart 2 RB Leipzig 1, Bayern Munich 5 Hoffenheim 0, Werder Bremen 3 Heidenheim 3, Union Berlin 0 Augsburg 2.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Munich	17	13	3	1	53	13	42
B. Leverkusen	17	11	5	1	41	23	38
E. Frankfurt	17	10	3	4	40	24	33
RB Leipzig	17	9	3	5	29	24	30
Stuttgart	17	8	5	4	32	26	29
Mainz	17	8	4	5	30	21	28

COPA DEL REY (Round of 16): Almeria 2 Leganes 3, Pontevedra 0 Getafe 1, Barcelona 5 Real Betis 1, Elche 0 Atletico Madrid 4.

FRENCH CUP (Round of 32): Bourgoin-Jallieu 2 Lyon 2 (Bourgoin win 4-2 on pen), Brest 2 Nantes 1, Cannes 2 Lorient 1, Quevilly Rouen 2 Angers 3, Stade Briochin 1 Annecy 1 (Stade win 4-3 on pen), Thaon 2 Strasbourg 2 (Strasbourg won 5-3 on pen), Toulouse 2 Laval 1, Troyes 1 Rennes 0, Espaly 2 Paris Saint-Germain 4.

Friend here for the long run

New Harimau Malaya CEO looking to create lasting legacy

NEW national football team chief executive officer (CEO) Robert Friend said he is not here for short-term success but is hoping to create a lasting legacy for Harimau Malaya.

Friend, who officially began his duties at Wisma FAM on Wednesday, had described Harimau Malaya as a “sleeping giant”, and said there are a lot of tools already in place here and is excited to work on growing the game in the country.

However, the former Canada international is very curious why the national team is ranked 132nd in the world and why the youth team failed to qualify for the Asian Cup.

“Right now I am still in discovery phase... We need to understand the reasons. I think we have

a lot of questions, from there we can start building plans, strategy and figure it out how we can bring long-term strategy.

“I am here to build a lasting sustainable model, which takes time. It is like building a house, we need to lay the foundation because, if you don’t build the foundation, it is not going to last.

“I am here to find the answers and work with all stakeholders for a successful football team and hopefully, one day see Malaysia in the World Cup, that’s my dream,” he said in a video shared in Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) social media.

Having short, medium and long-term goals, Friend admitted that, the outcome of the match against Nepal in the 2027 Asian Cup third

round qualifiers on March 25 will be crucial in kick starting his ambitions.

The 44-year-old believes a positive result in the qualifiers can build the momentum for Harimau Malaya to reach future goals.

Friend, who has vast experience in football management and administration since his retirement as player in December 2014, said the main reason for him to take up the job was the Regent of Johor, Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim’s vision and leadership for the national team.

He believes the combination of his expertise with that of the national head coach Peter Cklamovski, and head of high performance and sports medicine Dr Craig Duncan can steer Harimau Malaya towards greater success. - Bernama



The national bowling squad arrived at KLIA after winning two gold and two silver medals at the 2025 World Cup in Kowloon, Hong Kong on Wednesday. - BERNAMAPIC

Opponent’s ‘intimidating’ gaze motivates Li Jane

AFTER being named Best Player of the Year in the United States Professional Women’s Bowling Association (PWBA) Tour last year, national bowler Sin Li Jane views the ‘intimidating’ gaze from her opponents as a positive sign to motivate her in continuing to thrive in the challenging sport of bowling.

Li Jane, 33, who will be competing in the Europe Tour full season for the second time this year expressed her desire to explore more opportunities and push herself further in the sport.

“When I played in the recent World Cup, I could feel that they panicked when they saw me. While we are competitors, we’re also friends, so in a way, it’s a good thing because it brings fierceness to the competition.

“After this, there are many more tournaments and I’ll be doing the Europe tour again. For me, winning or losing isn’t something I can control because in every competition, there’s always a winner and a loser and only one champion. Personally, I just want to deliver a good performance,” she said when met at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) yesterday.

When asked how she felt about helping the women’s team upgrade their medal from bronze to silver at the 2025 World Cup, she said it was one of the most competitive tournaments she had experienced with all players fighting until the very last ball.

“For me, even though it was a new venue, the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong didn’t feel unfamiliar because I’m already used to playing on different lanes.

“This year, in November, there will be the World Championships at the same venue, but the oiling pattern hasn’t been announced yet. It will likely be released about a month before the event,” she said.

On Tuesday, the women’s squad led by Asia’s No. 1 Li Jane alongside Natasha Mohamed Roslan, Siti Safiyah Amirah Abdul Rahman and Gillian Lim lost 195-214, 222-211, 176-198, 220-210, 180-211 to the United States in the final of International Bowling Federation (IBF) World Cup.

In 2022, the women’s team secured a bronze medal after overcoming the United States 3-2 in the medal playoff. - Bernama

BRIEFS

Ridwan still cautious in sprint event

YOUNG national track cyclist Muhammad Ridwan Sahrom is not yet comfortable as the replacement in the sprint event following the absence of Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang at the 2025 Asian Track Cycling Championships (ACC) next month. Muhammad Ridwan said he is aware that it is not an easy task to take on the responsibility but is optimistic that it could be proven through hard work in several tournaments before the ACC2025 opens. Earlier, the cyclist recorded a positive start to 2025 after emerging as the bronze medalist in the men’s elite sprint event at the Asean Track Series (President’s Cup) 1 held at the National Velodrome in Nilai, on Tuesday. “I hope that’s how it is (filling the vacancy in ACC2025) but I can’t be too confident because in sprint events, all kinds of things can happen. Anyone can fill the vacancy that exists. I will just try to train as hard as I can and focus on getting that slot,” he said when met recently. The Asean Track Series President’s Cup 2 and 3 will take place on Jan 18-19 and 22-23 respectively.

400 cops on hand to provide security for TFC- JDT clash

POLICE will mobilise 400 officers and men to provide security throughout the first semifinal match of Malaysia Cup at Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium (SSMZA), Gong Badak, tonight. Kuala Terengganu district police chief ACP Azli Mohd Noor said this was to ensure smooth traffic around the stadium as well as the match between Terengganu FC (TFC) and Johor Darul Ta’zim (JDT) which is expected to be attended by tens of thousands of spectators. He said police would conduct strict checks at the stadium entrance to ensure spectators are not carrying dangerous items or equipment. In addition, Azli said the public are not to park vehicles and block the road or path at the main gate (grand stand) of SSMZA.

Turtles won’t ‘park the bus’ against Southern Tigers

TERENGGANU FC (TFC) will not resort to “parking the bus” in front of goal in the first leg of the Malaysia Cup semifinals against Johor Darul Ta’zim (JDT) at the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium (SSMZA) in Kuala Nerus today (9pm).

The head coach of the Turtles, Badrul Afzan Razali, emphasised the importance of scoring goals against the Southern Tigers in a two-legged format, especially when playing at home.

However, he reminded his players to adhere to the planned strategies and avoid simple mistakes that could expose their defence.

“We acknowledge the tough challenge of facing the giants, JDT. But that’s no excuse to fear or give up before the battle begins.

“I urge the players to give their best performance. Use the advantage of the first leg at home to secure goals as a cushion for the return leg

at the Sultan Ibrahim Stadium (SSI) on Feb 1,” he told Bernama.

Meanwhile, Badrul Afzan expressed relief as nimble winger Muhammad Akhyar Abdul Rashid will be available for today’s match after signing a permanent contract with TFC until the 2026/27 season.

However, at the same time, he said that the Turtles’ defence will be slightly weakened with the

absence of Muhammad Azam Azmi Murad, who is sidelined due to an ankle injury.

“Ivan Mamut is also unavailable as he is still undergoing rehabilitation, while Safawi (Muhammad Safawi Rasid) remains tied to JDT.

“But I trust our local players to perform well. Their performance and quality have been proven in previous matches,” he said, adding that he already has a clear idea of the starting lineup. - Bernama



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SCAN ME

Mother's love an inspiration to Ata

The saying that "A mother's love lasts forever" rings true as Anita Mohamed Ali (right), 62, who is battling pancreatic cancer, finds strength and happiness in the success of her daughter, national bowler Natasha Mohamed Roslan, the first Malaysian woman to win a title at the International Bowling Federation (IBF) World Cup.

For Anita, nothing gives her more joy than seeing her fourth child, affectionately known as "Ata", end the country's 53-year drought in the women's category at the 2025 IBF World Cup.

"She called recently and told me to stay strong because she wants to win many more times after this. *Insyallah*, my prayers will always be with her," Anita said when met at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) on Wednesday.

Natasha bagged a gold medal in the women's event and silver in the women's team event at the 2025 IBF World Cup.

BERNAMAPIC

EPL FIXTURES

All matches at 11pm
Malaysian time unless stated.

TOMORROW
Newcastle vs Bournemouth (8.30pm)
Brentford vs Liverpool
Leicester vs Fulham
West Ham vs Crystal Palace

SUNDAY
Arsenal vs Aston Villa (1.30am)
Everton vs Tottenham (10pm)
Man United vs Brighton (10pm)
Forest vs Southampton (10pm)

MONDAY (12.30am)
Ipswich Town vs Man City

TUESDAY (4am)
Chelsea vs Wolves

Teen stars for Barca

Story on page 29

Alexander the Great

Story on page 30

'Sensational' Gunners

Arsenal reignite Premier League title hopes after comeback win over Spurs

MIKEL ARTETA hailed Arsenal's sensational display after they bounced back from recent cup disappointment to win 2-1 at home to Tottenham and reignite their Premier League title hopes.

Arsenal dominated the opening exchanges but failed to make a number of set-pieces count and were hit by sucker-punch in the 25th minute when a deflected effort by Spurs captain Son Heung-min found the bottom corner.

It failed to rock the Gunners, who had been knocked out of the FA Cup by Manchester United on Sunday and lost 2-0 at home to Newcastle last Tuesday, with their seventh corner able to produce a leveller after 40 minutes when Gabriel's header went in off Tottenham forward Dominic Solanke.

Leandro Trossard completed the turnaround soon after and, while the visitors enjoyed the majority of possession after the break, Arsenal produced a trademark resolute defensive display to close the gap on League leaders Liverpool to four points - albeit the Reds have one match in hand.

"Very proud of the team, I think we were sensational," Arteta insisted.

"It was a good test to see after two big performances and not get rewarded in two different competitions you have to play the biggest game of the season for

our people, in those conditions.

"It's a test of attitude, what we are made of, the courage that we have. We really cared only about a result or the performance and how much we can do in terms of what is required in the game to be better than the opposition and I think we played from minute one with and without the ball to hurt them.

"I think we fully deserved to win the game and I think we made a lot of people really happy but really proud to see a team that behaves the way they have played again."

Recent League draws with Brighton and Everton had damaged Arsenal's League aspirations, especially with Liverpool previously in

imperious form.

However, Arne Slot's men have dropped points in each of their last two fixtures in the division and Arteta bristled when it was put to him that some had suggested the Gunners may have been out of the race.

He added: "Yeah we are (in the race), because it's so much to play for and we can see how difficult it is for every team to win.

"The result gives us the chance to enjoy the moment, instead of momentum because the momentum start tomorrow to prepare Aston Villa in three days."

Ange Postecoglou refused to make any excuses after his depleted Tottenham team tasted defeat for an 11th time in the Premier League this term.

While Spurs have battled with a spate of unavailability during the last two months, with eight players sidelined for this fixture, the 59-year-old did not shy away from the fact their display at the Emirates was not good enough.

"Not good enough, especially the first half. Way too passive, allowed Arsenal to take control of the game," Postecoglou admitted.

"Really disappointed with the way we, both with and without the ball, allowed them to dictate the tempo and paid a price for it. The second half was a little bit better but nowhere near good enough.

"There's no magic cure. You've got to get up tomorrow, work hard and go into Sunday (at Everton) and prepare to go into battle and turn around our fortunes and our season. There's nothing magical that's going to change it.

"There's always reasons for all these things to happen. The reality is that our results and our form in the League has been nowhere near good enough. That needs to change."

After about his team's recent defeats, Postecoglou added: "Of course they hurt me... Not acceptable. Too many losses this year. Too many games getting away from us. It needs to stop.

"Yeah we could have got something but that is kind of irrelevant to the point that we were nowhere near the levels we needed to be at today." - The Independent/Express Newspapers

