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Asian central banks start pushback as Fed shift hits currencies

BY MARCUS WONG
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): Central banks across Asia face a difficult decision after the Federal Reserve's hawkish cut — stage a costly fight back against dollar strength, or stand by and watch their currencies falter.

The Federal Reserve's signal that inflation concerns are back on the agenda led to a sharp sell-off in currencies across Asia on Thursday, pushing the Indian rupee to a new all-time low against the greenback and the Korean won to its weakest level since the financial crisis. The *Bloomberg* Asia Dollar Index dropped around 0.4%.

The moves have reignited questions about how far central banks across Asia are willing to go to defend their currencies — and how much impact their moves will have. Indonesia's central bank said on Thursday that it was intervening to push back against a sell-off in the rupiah, while the People's Bank of China used its daily reference rate to support the yuan.

"It is hard to fight the higher dollar move against Asian currencies when it is primarily dollar driven, which means regional central banks would have to play defence and try to smooth out depreciation pressure to try to keep an orderly FX market," said Wee Khoon Chong, a strategist at BNY in Hong Kong.

Bloomberg's Asia currency index has lost almost 4% this year, as the election of Donald Trump and shifting expectations of Fed policy have encouraged a shift to dollar assets.

The latest sell-off in Asia was fuelled by the Fed's so-called hawkish cut, when a reduction in interest rates was followed by remarks that made clear the central bank is still worried about inflation. The median Fed policymaker forecasts now sees just a half-percentage point of reductions next year, half of what was expected in September.

The Bank of Japan stood pat at its own monetary policy meeting on Thursday, with a lone dissenter calling for an increase in rates. BOJ governor Kazuo Ueda is attempting a so-called normalisation following years of ultra-loose monetary policy, but the central bank has made clear it is willing to wait for the right moment to hike rates.

The Japanese yen declined as much as 1.3% against the dollar.



Central bank pushback

Central banks in Asia have taken different approaches to containing dollar bulls over the past few months. While Bank Indonesia has been vocal about its interventions, the Reserve Bank of India has preferred to operate quietly, using a mix of offshore and onshore trades to bolster the rupee without public confirmation. Other central banks have used public statements to try to influence sentiment.

The People's Bank of China ramped up its support for the yuan on Thursday by setting a daily reference rate that was significantly stronger than the average in a *Bloomberg* survey. The so-called fixing, which limits moves in the onshore yuan by 2% on either side, is at its strongest level relative to the forecast since July.

"The PBOC will continue to restrain the upside pressures on dollar-yuan for now, but I think the exchange rate will break to new highs in 2025 on the outbreak of a second US-China trade war," said Alvin T Tan, head of Asia FX strategy at RBC Capital Markets.

Chinese state banks sold the dollar in the onshore market at the open and hardly offered to buy the greenback, according to traders. The traders asked not to be identified as they are not allowed to comment on the foreign-exchange market.

The dollar rally has complicated a widespread shift to monetary easing in Asia, with central banks across the region cutting rates this year. Weaker currencies tend to raise the price of imports to a country, fueling domestic inflation. Further rate cuts could also put more pressure on currencies as investors look elsewhere for returns, exacerbating the impact of dollar strength.

"Asian central banks may need to focus on defending their currencies rather than cutting rates to support their domestic economies," said Marcella Chow, global market strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management, adding that central banks were still likely to maintain their easing bias.

Rosmah acquitted in RM7.1 mil money-laundering and tax evasion case

BY TARANI PALANI
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor has been granted a full acquittal in her RM7.1 million money-laundering and tax evasion case.

This comes after the High Court allowed Rosmah's application to strike out all 17 charges she faces in this trial.

High Court judge K Muniandy ruled that the charges were bad in law. In reading out his brief grounds for about half an hour, the judge addressed the money-laundering and tax evasion charges separately.

In this trial, Rosmah faces 17 charges involving RM7.1 million transferred into her personal bank account between 2013 and 2017. The first 12 charges involve purported money-laundering offences while the other five are alleged tax evasion offences.

Rosmah was charged on Oct 4, 2018 of committing the offences. Her trial started on Aug 24 last year, with two prosecution witnesses taking the stand. But the trial was held up after she filed the application to strike out the charges two weeks later, on Sept 6.

Wife of former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Rosmah has previously been found guilty of soliciting and receiving bribes in the graft case involving the implementation of solar hybrid system in 369 rural schools. Convicted in 2022 and sentenced to 10 years in jail and fined RM970 million, she is in the midst of appealing that case.



Money-laundering charges

In his decision on Thursday, Muniandy said the prosecution did not specify the key elements of a money-laundering offence. In gist, he said a money-laundering offence needs to identify proceeds of an unlawful activity and transactions that show "placement, layering and integration".

"The transaction involving money laundering is not disclosed. The conduct of the accused is not disclosed in the charges. The monies referred to in the charges do not reveal a transaction as envisaged under [the Anti-Money Laundering Act]. What is unlawful activity is also not disclosed.

"But the proceeds of unlawful activity have appeared from nowhere. Without those elements, what is available on the charge is only an act of deposit of a sum of monies into the bank account, which by itself is not an offence known in law," he said.

In the first eight money-laundering charges, she is accused of committing the offence by directly engaging in a transaction involving proceeds of unlawful activities amounting to RM1.1 million that were deposited into her account.

In the ninth to 12th counts, she is accused of directly engaging in 227 transactions involving proceeds of unlawful activities totalling RM6 million, which were also deposited into her account.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 4

Rosmah celebrates acquittal: 'This is what I call justice'

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor has pronounced the court's decision to acquit her of all 17 charges in her money-laundering and tax evasion case as "justice".

Speaking to the press following the court's decision on Thursday, she expressed her gratitude to God, her lawyers and the High Court judge K Muniandy.

"I feel very grateful and thank God, everything is over. Today, we have received a full acquittal and I would like to thank all my lawyers who have worked hard since day one. They have told me that there is no basis for all these charges but you'll never know.

BY TARANI PALANI
theedgemalaysia.com

"And I also want to thank the judge who made the right decision and this is what I call justice. This is the kind of justice that everybody should have. You should not play around with justice. Not only to us but to the public, to the masses. That's all I want to say now," she said.

Rosmah, who turned 73 on Dec 10, also said that this was not just a belated birthday gift for her but also for her imprisoned husband, former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

In this case, Rosmah is represented by a team of lawyers including Datuk Firoz Hussein Ahmad Jamaluddin, Amer Hamzah Arshad, Rajivan Nambiar and Reza Rahim, among others. The prosecution team is lead by Ahmad Akram Gharib, who took over following the late Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram's passing.

Read the full story

Read also: NGOs urge PM to announce clear timeline for separation of AG-PP's powers after Rosmah's acquittal

PAC proceedings also review procurement proposals and govt projects — Mas Ermieyati

Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Public Accounts Committee (PAC) proceedings do not imply that every project or procurement under investigation involves leakage, waste, or misconduct, said its chairman Datuk Mas Ermieyati Samsudin.

Instead, she said that PAC also plays a role in reviewing proposals for procurement or government projects.

"This is a role that PAC must play as a Parliamentary Select Committee, and as a mechanism for checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches," she said in a statement on Thursday.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook has questioned on Wednesday (Dec 18), the appropriateness of the PAC investigation into the procurement of electric multiple units (EMU) trains, given that the project is still in the planning stage, and no contracts have been finalised.

Mas Ermieyati emphasised that PAC believes the procurement of the EMU trains needs to be clarified in more detail, so that the public understands why the government chose a 30-year lease model, worth over RM10 billion.

She pointed out that this is not the first time PAC has initiated proceedings by inviting a ministry to provide clarification before the government makes any decisions, including signing contracts.

"Previously, many had suggested that PAC often starts investigations into procurement or government financial governance issues, only when they have already become problematic," she concluded.

No charges filed in 1BestariNet tender investigation, says MACC

BY EMIR ZAINUL
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has announced that no charges will be filed against any parties involved in the 1BestariNet project tender under the Ministry of Education (MOE).

The decision was made following instructions from the deputy public prosecutor (DPP), who concluded that there was no evidence of criminal wrongdoing in the tender process, MACC said in a statement on Thursday.

MACC initiated an investigation into the issue in September. The probe, led by the commission's governance investigation division, scrutinised governance aspects and financial claims within the contract between YTL Communications Sdn Bhd and the MOE.

MACC's announcement confirms YTL Power International Bhd's (KL:YTLPOWR) statement on Wednesday that MACC had cleared its 60%-owned subsidiary YTL Communications of any wrongdoing in connection with the 1BestariNet project.

Shares of YTL Corporation Bhd (KL:YTL) and YTL Power soared in early trades on Thursday. In the first 15 minutes of trading, YTL gained nearly 9% or 19 sen to RM2.33, while YTL Power rose nearly 8% or 28 sen to RM3.94.

At 3.18pm, YTL shares were up further by 26 sen, or 12.15% at RM2.40, while YTL Power extended its gains by 29 sen, or 7.92% at RM3.95. Both counters were among the top 10 active stocks on Bursa Malaysia at the time of writing on Thursday.

Calls for re-engagement between MOE and YTL

In its Thursday statement, MACC said it was directed by the DPP to submit a comprehensive report after its investigation to the MOE, including recommendations for improvements.

A key recommendation it made was the reopening of negotiations between the MOE and YTL Communications to address and resolve any outstanding issues related to the agreed-upon tender contract.

The 1BestariNet project, a large-scale initiative to provide internet connectivity to schools nationwide, was awarded to YTL Communications in 2011, after an open tender for a 15-year service contract to be implemented in phases. The scope of work included providing a total learning solution comprising internet connectivity, security, and virtual learning environment.

YTL Communications, however, only undertook the first two phases of the 15-year project, which concluded in end-June 2019. YTL Power claimed that the project was certified by the ministry as with the two phases successfully completed at the end of the contract period on June 30, 2019.

In July 2019, YTL Communications claimed that the MOE had breached its contractual obligations after appointing Telekom Malaysia Bhd (KL:TM), Celcom Axiata Bhd, and Maxis Bhd (KL:MAXIS) as providers of interim internet services for the remaining second half of 2019, when YTL Communications had offered to do so for free.

Under the ministry's June 27, 2019 announcement, the three telecommunication companies were to replace YTL Communications for the period July 1 to Dec 31, 2019.

On Sept 4, 2024, Bernama, citing a source, reported that MACC had launched an investigation into payment claims related to the 1BestariNet service tender, and that the graftbuster raided several government offices, as well as the office of YTL Communications.

According to the report, the investigation was centred on claims involving false details related to RM2.7 billion in payments, as well as other criminal elements under the MACC Act 2009.

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Tax evasion charges

As for the tax evasion charges, the court said there was an overlap with the first 12 charges which accounts for multiplicity.

Muniandy also said that failure to file a tax return is only a punishable offence once all avenues under the Income Tax Act 1967 have been exhausted. This was not done in Rosmah's case.

In the 13th to 17th counts, she is charged with engaging in money laundering by failing to file a tax return on the sum that was deposited into her account as required under the Income Tax Act.

This includes that the income tax assessment has to be raised by the Director General of the Income Tax Department, followed by an appeal process. The Special Commissioner of Income Tax will make a final determination of the tax payable, after which one can still file a judicial review over that decision in the courts.

The judge also added the public prosecutor had framed the 13th to 17th charges under the assumption that the monies were "taxable" income.

Prosecution to appeal

Muniandy also noted there have been numerous postponements in the case since 2019.

Deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib said the prosecution will appeal the decision.

Pentamaster, partner to privatise HK-listed unit; confirms *The Edge* report

BY ANIS HAZIM
theedgemalaysia.com



KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Pentamaster Corp Bhd (KL:PENTA) on Thursday proposed to privatise its 63.9%-owned Hong Kong-listed Pentamaster International Ltd (PIL) with a partner in an exercise that would raise its stake to 71%.

The announcement confirms *The Edge Malaysia*'s report on Dec 9, quoting a market observer, that the Penang-based automated test equipment company was mulling to take PIL private.

The exercise entails Main Market-listed Pentamaster and partner Puga Holdings Ltd acquiring a 7.1% and 29% stake, respectively, in the HK unit, at HK$0.93 per share (RM0.54), a premium of 16.25% to its last traded price of HK$0.80 (RM0.46) before its trading suspension on Dec 4.

The HK-listed PIL will also issue a special dividend of HK$0.07 per share (RM0.04) to its shareholders totalling HK$168 million, and cancel its shares not held by Pentamaster at HK$0.93 per share, to pave the way for the privatisation.

This means PIL's minority shareholders will get HK$1 per share upon exiting the company, leaving Pentamaster with a 71% stake and Puga with a 29% stake in PIL.

At HK$0.80 per share, PIL was trading at historical price-to-earnings ratio (PER) of 8.79 times.

The 7.1% additional stake acquisition at HK$0.93 per share will cost Pentamaster HK$158.47 million (RM91.8 million) and values PIL at HK$2.23 billion (RM1.29 billion) or trailing PER of 10.8 times, based on 2.4 billion outstanding shares in the company. Pentamaster itself last traded at a historical PER of 41.8 times.

Pentamaster said it intends to use its internal resources to fund the acquisition. As at end-September, Pentamaster's cash stood at RM466.73 million, with no borrowings in the company.

The deal provides Pentamaster International's other shareholders "with an opportunity to monetise their investments at a significant premium to the market price", Pentamaster said.

They can also "fully realise their investments during a period when the Pentamaster International shares have experienced consistently low trading volumes over a prolonged period", it added.

A look at Pentamaster and PIL's latest financial statements reveals that PIL is the main contributor to Pentamaster's earnings.

For the first nine months ended Sept 30, 2024 (9MFY2024), PIL's net profit stood at RM88.8 million, down 18% from a year earlier, on the back of a 5.8% decline in revenue to RM492.18 million.

Pentamaster, meanwhile, posted a 25.4% year-on-year drop in net profit to RM51.05 million for 9MFY2024 on the back of a 5.8% decline in revenue to RM492.18 million.

The other shareholders of PIL are Fidelity International with a 5.06% stake, its employees (4.53%) and a public float of 25.04%. Pentamaster co-founder and executive chairman Chuah Choon Bin holds 1.11% equity interest in PIL and a 19.7% stake in Petamaster.

Pentamaster's shares, which surged to a three-month high on Dec 4 after PIL's stock was suspended, settled nine sen or 2.18% higher at RM4.21 on Thursday, giving the group a market capitalisation of RM3 billion.

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MRCB confirms withdrawal from Berjaya-led HSR consortium

BY JUSTIN LIM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd (KL:MRCB) has confirmed it has withdrawn from a Berjaya-led consortium which is bidding for the multi-billion-ringgit Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high-speed rail (HSR) project.

In a filing, MRCB said the group issued a notice of termination to consortium partner Berjaya Rail Sdn Bhd to terminate the teaming agreement for the submission of a non-binding conceptual proposal to MyHSR Corporation Sdn Bhd in relation to the project.

The statement came after Berjaya Group announced MRCB's decision to exit the consortium on Wednesday. In a statement, Berjaya cited MRCB's withdrawal as a reason to "pursue other strategic opportunities."

"We remain steadfast in our mission to deliver a world-class HSR system that will transform regional connectivity and economic development for Malaysia and to help the nation's successful transition towards green mobility in the form of the high-speed rail," said Berjaya Corp Bhd (KL:BJCORP) founder and adviser Tan Sri Vincent Tan.

With MRCB's departure, the consortium comprises Berjaya Land Bhd's (KL:BJLAND) 70%-owned Berjaya Rail Sdn Bhd, government-owned Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd, IJM Corp Bhd (KL:IJM) and technical partners Deutsche Bahn, Hitachi Rail and Hyundai Rotem.

The remaining 30% of Berjaya Rail is owned by Johor princess Tunku Tun Aminah Sultan Ibrahim, the only daughter of Malaysia's King, Sultan Ibrahim. According to Berjaya Corp's latest annual report, Tun Aminah is also chairman of Berjaya Rail.

The *New Straits Times* on Wednesday quoted Transport Minister Anthony Loke as saying that the Cabinet is set to make a policy decision on the project by end-December or early January next year, prior to restarting talks with Singapore.

The news has pulled MRCB's shares to a four-month low of 49 sen on Thursday, after it fell as much as 2.5 sen or 4.85%.

At the closing bell, the stock pared some losses to close at 49.5 sen, still down by two sen or 3.88%. At 49.5 sen, the stock was valued at RM2.21 billion. MRCB currently trades at a 15.4 times trailing price-earnings (P/E) ratio.

Shares in Berjaya Land, meanwhile, ended one sen or 3.17% higher at 32.5 sen, valuing the company at RM1.63 billion.

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THE EDGE



Indonesian arm of Mr DIY climbs on market debut

BY STEFANNO SULAIMAN & YANTOULTRA NGUI

Reuters

JAKARTA/SINGAPORE (Dec 19): The Indonesian arm of Malaysia-based home improvement retailer Mr DIY Group (M) Bhd (KL:MRDIY) shook off a wobbly start to rise on its stock market debut on Thursday.

The listing came against the backdrop of broad weakness in Asian stocks after the US Federal Reserve cautioned it would ease the pace of rate cuts in the coming year. Bond yields rose and the dollar was perched near a two-year high on Thursday.

Shares of Daya Intiguna Yasa, the sister company of Mr DIY, opened at 1,550 rupiah, 6% lower than its initial public offering (IPO) price of 1,650 rupiah a share, before sliding as much as 24.8% to 1,240 rupiah on the Jakarta stock exchange.

The stock recovered to be 9% higher by the midday break at 1,800 rupiah a share, outperforming the local benchmark stock index's 1.63% fall. It increased as much as 15.2% to 1,900 rupiah.

Daya Intiguna Yasa offered 10% of its equity, or up to 2.52 billion shares, raising 4.16 trillion rupiah (US$257.6 million or RM1.15 billion) in the IPO.

It plans to use the majority of the IPO proceeds to repay a bank loan, followed by launching more stores and for working capital, according to its IPO prospectus.

The company has more than 900 stores across Indonesia since opening its first in 2017, its website showed.

Its net profit surged 253% to 534.22 billion rupiah in the first six months of this year from 151.19 billion rupiah in the same period a year ago, its prospectus showed.

Daya Intiguna Yasa's IPO followed the listing of Adaro Andalan Indonesia earlier this month, which soared 20% on its debut day. A positive debut by Daya Intiguna Yasa could also bode well for upcoming listings in Indonesia.

IPO proceeds raised in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's biggest economy, dropped 83% to US$616.2 million this year from US$3.55 billion in 2023, LSEG data showed.

The decline came against the backdrop of Indonesia's elections and leadership transition this year.

CIMB Niaga Sekuritas and Mandiri Sekuritas are the IPO's underwriters.

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ES SUNLOGY BHD



***(From left)*: ES Sunlogy Bhd non-independent non-executive director Datuk Keh Chuan Seng, ES Sunlogy managing director Khor Chuan Meng, ES Sunlogy executive director Chu Kerd Yee, M&A Securities Sdn Bhd MD Datuk Bill Tan, and M&A Securities head of corporate finance Gary Ting Hua Tai at the underwriting agreement signing ceremony on Thursday.**

ES Sunlogy signs underwriting agreement with M&A Securities for IPO exercise

Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Mechanical and electrical (M&E) engineering services solutions provider ES Sunlogy Bhd has entered into an underwriting agreement with M&A Securities Sdn Bhd for ES Sunlogy's upcoming initial public offering (IPO) on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia.

It said in a statement on Thursday that the listing exercise involves the public issue of 140 million new shares, representing 20% of ES Sunlogy's enlarged share capital of 700 million shares, and an offer for sale of 70 million shares, representing 10% of the enlarged share capital.

"Out of 140 million, 35 million shares will be made available via public balloting to the Malaysian public, 17.5 million shares via pink form allocations for eligible directors, employees and persons who have contributed to the success of ES Sunlogy and its subsidiaries; and 87.5 million reserved for Bumiputera investors approved by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (Miti)," it said.

Meanwhile, ES Sunlogy managing director Khor Chuan Meng said the underwriting agreement signing ceremony marks a significant corporate milestone for the company, as it embarks on its IPO journey.

"With a solid track record in delivering high quality M&E engineering services, and a growing portfolio of renewable energy projects undertaken, we are well positioned to capitalise on the growing demand for sustainable M&E engineering solutions.

"The proceeds to be raised from this IPO will enable us to further strengthen our technical capabilities and expand our existing project portfolios, while also allowing us to grow our footprint in the generation and sales of renewable energy," he said.

He noted that based on independent market research, sectors such as commercial, residential, industrial, solar and data centres are demonstrating a rising need for energy-efficient and sustainable solutions, positioning the company to effectively meet these customer demands.

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Winstar eyes sales growth amid China tax shift, LSS5 opportunities

BY SANKITA JAYANANDAN
theedgemalaysia.com

SHAHRIN YAHYA/THE EDGE



(From left) Winstar Capital Bhd board of directors (BOD) member Ong Hang Ping, TA Securities Bhd corporate finance head Ku Mun Fong, Winstar Capital BOD member Charlie Chow Kian Hung, Winstar Capital executive director (ED) Lee Yong Zhi, Winstar Capital chairman Tengku Loreta Tengku Datuk Setia Ramli Al-Haj, Winstar Capital ED/CEO Vincent Chua Boon Hong, Winstar Capital vice chairman Chua Nyok Chong, Winstar Capital BOD members Datuk Mastura Mohd Yazid, Beh Oi Siew, Low Suet Ann and Datuk Kenny Low, and TA Securities dealing ED Datuk Hamzah Mohd Tahir at Winstar Capital's ACE Market trading debut on Bursa Malaysia on Thursday.

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Aluminium products maker Winstar Capital Bhd (KL:WINSTAR) is expecting sales to grow in 2025, with the removal of China's export tax rebates for aluminium products, and the upcoming implementation of the fifth iteration of Malaysia's large scale solar programme (LSS5).

On Dec 1 this year, China removed the tax incentives not only for aluminium, but also copper, and certain oils and fats. It also lowered the rebate rates for refined oil, photovoltaic products and batteries from 13% to 9%. China introduced its tax rebate system in 1985 to make Chinese products more competitive in international markets.

The removal of China's export tax rebates for aluminium is expected to significantly benefit Winstar, whose share price jumped over 40% on its ACE Market debut on Thursday.

"China's aluminium products will now sell at higher prices without the rebates, which will make Winstar's offerings more attractive to buyers," said Vincent Chua Boon Hong, non-independent executive director and chief executive officer of Winstar.

Winstar is also actively pursuing opportunities in Malaysia's burgeoning solar photovoltaic (PV) market, and an announcement on Winstar's involvement in LSS5 projects is expected in January 2025, Chua said.

The company aims to capture a 5% share of the local market for LSS5 solar PV mounting structures, excluding installation services. It currently holds a 2.75% market share of the estimated RM3.2 billion market.

To support its growth ambitions, Winstar is expanding its production capacity by adding four new aluminium extrusion lines. This will increase annual capacity from 6,705 tonnes to 15,285 tonnes, with the first two lines expected to be operational by the second quarter of 2025, and the remaining two by mid-2026.

"The new extrusion lines are expected to deliver about 10% higher capacity compared to existing ones, with reduced manpower requirements and fewer operational challenges," Chua added.

Winstar's current production capacity utilisation hovers around 75%. However, the company acknowledges that 100% utilisation is unlikely due to the varying weight and complexity of different aluminium profiles.

The company remains focused on its solar panel business, which operates on a purchase-order basis with daily orders averaging RM1 million. This approach helps mitigate risks associated with recent price fluctuations in the solar market.

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Winstar rises over 45% on ACE Market debut

BY SANKITA JAYANANDAN
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Aluminium products maker Winstar Capital Bhd (KL:WINSTAR) shares rose 45.7% on its ACE Market trading debut on Thursday.

Winstar opened 14 sen higher at 49 sen versus its initial public offering (IPO) price of 35 sen apiece. The stock jumped as high as 56.5 sen, before giving up some gains to settle at 51 sen at market close, giving the company a market capitalisation of RM148 million.

The fifth most actively traded stock of the day as well as the seventh biggest gainer, Winstar saw 82.36 million shares traded.

The IPO raised RM25.9 million — RM19.79 million for the company via the issuance of new shares, and RM6.09 million for its selling shareholders. The listing offered investors up to a 25.5% stake in the company.

Backed by renewable energy firm Sunview Group Bhd (KL:SUNVIEW), Winstar set aside 14.5 million shares for the Malaysian public under its IPO, which was oversubscribed by 80.17 times.

"We plan to install four additional aluminium extrusion lines with a combined capacity of 8,580 tonnes per annum, which is expected to increase Winstar's total manufacturing operating capacity from the current 6,705 tonnes per annum to 15,285 tonnes per annum," said non-independent executive director and chief executive officer Vincent Chua Boon Hong in a statement.

"We target to install the first two new aluminium extrusion lines by the second quarter of 2025, with the remaining two new aluminium extrusion lines by the second quarter of 2026," he added.

Post-IPO, Winstar executive vice chairman Chua Nyok Chong's shareholding will be reduced to 26.02% from 36.18%, after selling nearly nine million shares under the offer for sale, while Boon Hong's stake is trimmed to 8.63% from 12%.

Sunview's shareholding in Winstar is diluted to 24.15%, from 30%.

Winstar reported a net profit of RM3.31 million or 1.42 sen per share for the third quarter ended Sept 30, 2024 (3QFY2024). Revenue for 3QFY2024 totalled RM58.76 million.

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Aeon Credit's 3Q profit down 27% on associate's loss, higher interest expense

BY IZZUL IKRAM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Aeon Credit Service (M) Bhd (KL:AEONCR) reported a 27.44% drop in net profit for the third quarter ended Nov 30, 2024 (3QFY2025), primarily dragged by a share of its associate's loss and increased interest expense.

Net profit for the quarter fell to RM62.07 million from RM85.55 million in 3QFY2024, despite a 15.51% increase in revenue to RM562 million from RM486.51 million, according to the consumer financing firm's bourse filing on Thursday. No dividend was declared for the quarter.

Aeon Credit's bottom line was significantly impacted by the share of loss incurred by its 50%-owned Aeon Bank (M) Bhd, amounting to RM15.18 million. It jointly owns the digital bank with its Japanese parent, Aeon Financial Service Co Ltd.

Higher interest expense also contributed to the decline in profitability. Interest expense increased to RM108.28 million from RM90.04 million in the previous year, reflecting a rise in borrowings that paralleled the increase in net financing receivables from RM11.15 billion to RM12.9 billion. The nominal value of borrowings at end-November 2024 stood at RM10.47 billion, up from RM8.67 billion at the end of November last year.

Despite these challenges, Aeon Credit's non-performing loans ratio improved to 2.42% from 2.73% due to effective credit management and continuous monitoring of underperforming portfolios.

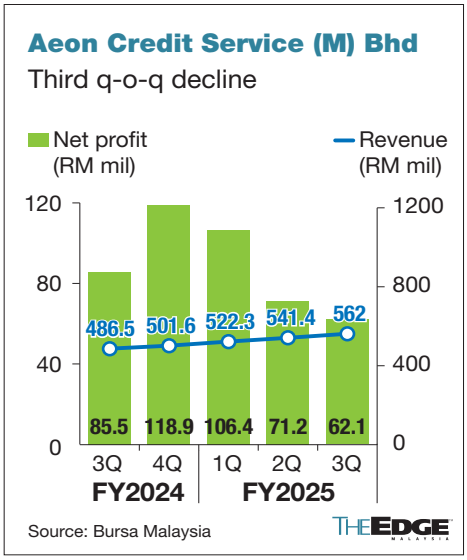
However, the ratio of total operating expenses against revenue increased to 71.1% from 68.6% in the previous year, primarily due to higher impairment losses on financing receivables, which rose to RM215.31 million from RM182.82 million.

For the first nine months ended Nov 30, 2024 (9MFY2025), Aeon Credit's net profit declined 21.45% to RM239.64 million from RM305.1 million, even as revenue rose 15.22% to RM1.63 billion from RM1.41 billion.

Aeon Credit is cautious as it moves into the final quarter of the financial year ending Feb 28, 2025 (FY2025), saying it will maintain prudence, prioritise growth of quality assets and closely monitor credit risks within its financial portfolios.

It also aims to leverage the strength of the Aeon group of companies operating in Malaysia to expand its customer reach by establishing a more integrated ecosystem.

Shares in Aeon Credit closed one sen or 0.16% higher at RM6.10 on Thursday, giving the company a market capitalisation of RM3.11 billion.



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UWC profit jumps 49%, revenue near doubles on higher semiconductor orders

BY JUSTIN LIM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): UWC Bhd's (KL:UWC) net profit rose 49.2% to RM6.5 million in the first quarter ended Oct 31, 2024 (1QFY2025) from RM4.35 million a year ago, lifted by increasing orders from the semiconductor industry.

Contributions from its acquired subsidiaries, MCE Technologies Sdn Bhd (MCET) and MCT (Thailand) Co Ltd, also add to the earnings.

Earnings per share came in higher at 0.59 sen in 1QFY2025, from 0.4 sen in 1QFY2024, the Penang-based integrated engineering solutions provider said in a bourse filing.

Quarterly revenue almost doubled to RM89.42 million, from RM45.46 million a year ago.

No dividend was declared for the quarter under review.

Last year, UWC acquired a 51% stake in MCET and 100% equity interest in MCT (Thailand), which is a wholly owned subsidiary of MCET, for S$2.72 million (equivalent to RM9.32 million), cash. Both companies are principally engaged in the metal stamping and manufacturing of tools and fixtures.

On its prospects, UWC said the front-end semiconductor industry is experiencing improvement in demand, particularly for the system level and performance testers. It has won multiple projects and orders have been loaded from front-end customers.

The group is also undertaking production capacity expansion to cater for its existing core business and new front-end semiconductor engineering business and electric vehicles projects.

It is expected to complete the first phase of the clean room for its front-end semiconductor business by January 2025 and full completion of the three–storey clean room building by end-March 2025.

After hitting a multi-year low of RM1.76 in Sept this year, UWC's share price has rebounded.

The stock closed up four sen or 1.37% to RM2.97, bringing it a market capitalisation of RM3.27 billion. AskEdge data showed that UWC currently trades at a over 200 times trailing price-earnings (P/E) ratio, which is the highest among its peers.

UWCBERHAD.COM.MY



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United Malacca 2Q profit more than doubles to highest in four years

BY SYAFIQAH SALIM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): United Malacca Bhd's (KL:UMCCA) net profit more than doubled for its second quarter of August-October, driven by higher average crude palm oil (CPO) and palm kernel (PK) prices.

The group, which has operations in both Malaysia and Indonesia, recorded a net profit of RM30.92 million for the quarter ended Oct 31, 2024 (2QFY2025) — up 125% from RM13.72 million in 2QFY2024. It is the group's highest quarterly profit in four years since 2QFY2021, when it recorded a net profit of RM36.1 million on a revenue of RM143.85 million.

Revenue for 2QFY2025 jumped 26.9% to RM183.44 million from RM144.51 million in 2QFY2024, its bourse filing showed. Earnings per share rose to 14.74 sen from 6.54 sen. No dividend was declared.

The group's Malaysian operations posted a plantation profit of RM37.3 million in the quarter, up 54% from RM24.1 million in the same quarter last year.

The improved performance was driven by higher average CPO prices, which rose to RM4,112 per tonne from RM3,758 per tonne a year earlier, and an increase in PK prices to RM2,646 per tonne from RM2,001 per tonne. Lower unit production costs also contributed to the stronger performance.

Similarly the Indonesian operations in Kalimantan recorded a plantation profit of RM4.5 million, rebounding from a plantation loss of RM500,000 in the same quarter last year.

For the first six months of FY2025 (6MFY2025), the group's net profit surged 170% to RM44.21 million from RM16.4 million a year earlier as revenue increased by 23.84% RM347.32 million from RM280.46 million.

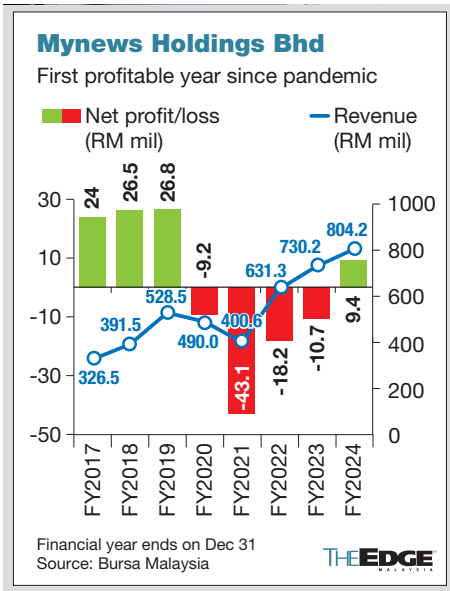
United Malacca expects FFB production to rise in its FY2025, thanks to better age profile and improvement in operational efficiency. "Assuming CPO prices remain at the current level, the group expects satisfactory results for FY2025," it said.

United Malacca shares slipped 10 sen or 1.92% to close at RM5.10 on Thursday, translating into a market capitalisation of RM1.09 billion.

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Mynews plans more new stores after 4Q profit jumps nearly fourfold as sales climb

BY EMIR ZAINUL
theedgemalaysia.com





KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Mynews Holdings Bhd (KL:MYNEWS) reported a significant jump in net profit to RM3.76 million for the fourth quarter ended Oct 31, 2024 (4QFY2024), a nearly fourfold increase compared to RM947,000 in the same period last year. This marks the fifth consecutive profitable quarter for the convenience store operator.

Revenue for the quarter grew by 12% year-on-year to RM208.44 million, up from RM186.16 million previously, driven by a combination of increased store count and improved in-store sales.

Mynews, which operates convenience store chains under brands such as myNEWS, CU and WHSmith, attributed the improved performance to the addition of 29 new outlets during the year and enhanced operational efficiency.

Despite these gains, higher administrative and selling expenses partially offset the profit increase, primarily due to the increased scale of operations.

For the full financial year ended Oct 31, 2024 (FY2024), Mynews returned to profitability with a net profit of RM9.38 million, a significant turnaround from a net loss of RM10.7 million recorded in FY2023.

Full-year revenue grew 10.1% to RM804.2 million, supported by the expansion of its store network. Earnings per share for FY2024 stood at 1.25 sen, a reversal from a loss per share of 1.52 sen in the prior year.

Looking ahead, the group plans to continue its expansion strategy by opening new stores throughout Malaysia, including standalone Maru Coffee outlets. This move signifies its entry into the coffeehouse business segment to capitalise on the growing coffee market.

To date, Mynews has a total of 644 stores, comprising 482 myNEWS stores (including 34 SUPERVALUE outlets), 141 CU stores, 20 WHSmith stores and one Maru Coffee outlet.

Shares of Mynews rose 0.5 sen or 0.73% to close at 69 sen on Thursday, resulting in a market capitalisation of RM517.7 million. Year-to-date, the counter has seen a gain of more than 30%.

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Mah Sing acquires Johor land from S P Setia for RM157 mil

BY LUQMAN AMIN
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Property developer Mah Sing Group Bhd (KL:MAHSING) has acquired 5.99 acres of land in Taman Pelangi, Johor, from S P Setia Bhd (KL:SPSETIA) for RM156.8 million to develop a premium serviced apartment project.

Mah Sing's wholly owned subsidiary Dsara Sentral Sdn Bhd has signed a sale and purchase agreement with Pelangi Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of S P Setia for the acquisition of two parcels of land for the proposed development, according to its filing with Bursa Malaysia on Thursday.

Mah Sing said the premium serviced apartment, to be named as M Grand Minori, will have a gross development value (GDV) of RM1.5 billion. The land is located 3km from the upcoming Johor-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link's Bukit Chagar Station.

"The development is aimed at a diverse range of buyers, including first-time homeowners, upgraders from nearby established townships, Malaysians working in Singapore, Singaporeans, and other foreign buyers and registration of interest is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2025," Mah Sing said in a statement.

Mah Sing intends to fund the costs and expenses related to the proposed acquisition and the proposed development through a combination of internally generated funds and bank borrowings.

"The exact funding mix will be decided by the management at a later stage after taking into consideration the group's gearing level, interest costs as well as internal cash requirements for its business operations," it added.

This marks Mah Sing's sixth land acquisition in 2024, bringing the total GDV of all six acquisitions to RM5.8 billion. In Johor alone, Mah Sing acquired three parvcels of land that includes the 100.4 acres of land, named M Tiara 2 in April, followed by the December acquisition of 59.12 acres for M Tiara 3.

Mah Sing's founder and group managing director Tan Sri Leong Hoy Kum said the group rationale for expanding in Johor came as it saw "strong demand for properties", fuelled by spillover interest from Singapore due to its proximity and relatively affordable property prices.

"Additionally, ongoing infrastructure projects, such as the RTS Link, and the government's commitment to enhancing Johor's economy, create a promising environment for growth," Leong said.

"With our strong brand recognition in the region, we are confident that this is the right time to further expand our presence, as improved connectivity and a booming property market provide excellent development opportunities," he added.

In a separate filing, S P Setia said the land disposal will help the group to optimise and rebalance its land bank and move towards an asset-light structure and achieve an efficient capital structure.

Post-disposal, S P Setia still owns a substantial remaining undeveloped land bank of approximately 1,123 acres in the Southern Region, which is poised for further development in the next 10 years, it said.

"The group's primary focus is to develop its landbank in the Southern Region into industrial estates which will comprise upcoming eco-industrial parks, and township developments," it added.

Shares in Mah Sing traded unchanged at RM1.77 during the market noon break on Thursday, valuing the company at RM4.53 billion. Year-to-date, the stock has surged over 115%.

Meanwhile, shares in S P Setia traded one sen or 0.74% higher at RM1.36, giving it a market capitalisationn of RM6.8 billion. The stock has appreciated over 70% so far this year.

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Malacca Securities advises Southern Steel shareholders to approve share issuance to Green Esteel

BY ANIS HAZIM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Malacca Securities Sdn Bhd has advised minority shareholders of Southern Steel Bhd (KL:SSTEEL) to vote in favour of the company's proposed issuance of new shares to Singapore-based steel firm Green Esteel Pte Ltd.

The independent adviser opined that the proposal is "fair and reasonable", according to Southern Steel's circular to shareholders on Thursday.

This issuance, which will raise approximately RM315.86 million for Southern Steel, provides "a degree of certainty" of the fundraising, Malacca Securities said.

It also lauded the impending plant upgrades from the fundraising, as well as synergies between Southern Steel and Green Esteel, who will emerge as a 50.1% shareholder post-issuance.

The equity fundraising — together with a proposed private placement to raise RM64.15 million — would let Southern Steel avoid paying an estimated RM19.22 million annual interest expense that would otherwise be incurred from debt fundraising, it added.

That said, Malacca Securities highlighted the steep discount of the issuance, which is 55.8% cheaper than Southern Steel's net asset per share at end-June, and the dilution of about 60.28% for existing Southern Steel shareholders.

"We recommend you vote in favour of the ordinary resolution pertaining to the proposed exemption to be tabled at the forthcoming EGM (extraordinary general meeting) [scheduled for Jan 3, 2025]," Malacca Securities said.

Southern Steel is issuing 752.06 million shares at 42 sen apiece for a total of RM315.86 million to Green Esteel, who seeks to maintain Southern Steel's Main Market listing status.

After completion of the proposed issuance of shares, Southern Steel also planned to undertake a private placement of up to 152.74 million new shares to third-party investors at an issue price of 42 sen per placement share, representing up to 10.18% of the enlarged issued capital. This will raise proceeds of up to RM64.15 million.

Shares of Southern Steel settled unchanged at 51.5 sen on Thursday, valuing the group at RM307.10 million. The counter has dropped 22% year-to-date.

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Smile-Link major shareholder seeks removal of external auditor amid financial reporting delays

BY EMIR ZAINUL
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Smile-Link Healthcare Global Bhd, a LEAP Market-listed dental services provider, said its major shareholder has proposed to remove its external auditors, Messrs HLB Ler Lum Chew, following significant delays in the company's financial reporting, which have led to trading suspensions and regulatory scrutiny.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, the dental outfit said Smile Link Resources (M) Sdn Bhd, holding 46.36% in the company, had on Dec 12 issued a special notice calling for an extraordinary general meeting (EGM).

The agenda includes the removal of the current auditors pursuant to Sections 276 and 277 of the Companies Act 2016.

Notably, Messrs HLB Ler Lum Chew has not made any representations regarding this proposed removal, the filing read.

This proposed removal of auditors comes after Smile-Link failed to submit its annual audited financial statements for the period ended June 30, 2024, by the deadline on Oct 30.

The company attributed the delay to an outstanding audit fee of RM180,000, which it was unable to settle, resulting in the auditors withholding the release of the financial results.

The company, however, did not elaborate on the reason for not being able to settle the outstanding audit fee.

Consequently, Bursa Malaysia suspended the trading of Smile-Link's shares on Nov 8, due to the company's non-compliance with financial reporting requirements.

The suspension will remain in effect until the necessary statements are submitted, with the exchange warning of potential delisting if compliance is not achieved within six months.

"The proposed removal of auditors are conditional upon approval being obtained from the shareholders at the forthcoming EGM of the company," Smile-Link said in the filing.

"A circular to shareholders containing the details of the proposed removal of auditors together with the notice of EGM will be dispatched to the shareholders of Smile-Link in due course," it added.

Smile-Link reported a net loss of RM4.17 million in the six months ended June 2024, contributing to an 18-month cumulative net loss of RM4.04 million. Revenue for the six months period amounted to RM14.31 million, bringing the 18-month period top line to RM49.66 million.

The company cited increased costs in dental products, imported materials, overheads, and logistics, alongside restructuring expenses related to its dental clinics, as factors impacting its financial performance.

Following the dismal results, Smile-Link explained that it was currently restructuring and relocating its unprofitable clinics, while flagging manpower costs increases.

Smile-Link is present in eight states — Kedah, Penang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, Sarawak and Kuala Lumpur, with a total of 56 dental clinics and one dental centre.

Shares of Smile-Link was last traded at 13 sen, giving it a market capitalisation of RM32.8 million.

No EGM will be held until notice is issued and court rules on suits, says SMI

BY CHOY NYEN YIAU
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 18): South Malaysia Industries (KL:SMI) insisted again on Wednesday that no extraordinary general meeting (EGM) of the company will take place on Jan 9, amid ongoing clashes between two shareholder groups vying for control of SMI.

This comes a day after Velocity Capital Sdn Bhd, which had called the EGM on behalf of Target 1 Sdn Bhd — the largest shareholder with a 30.67% stake — placed an advertisement in the *New Straits Times* notifying shareholders of the EGM.

In a bourse filing, SMI said it deemed the advertisement as "misleading the public and shareholders" and clarified that no official EGM notice has been circulated to shareholders as required under Section 321 of the Companies Act 2016 and the company's constitution.

SMI further noted that the Securities Commission Malaysia (SC) has yet to respond to its request for a review of the decision granting consent for the appointment of six new non-independent directors, while several related lawsuits and injunctions are still pending court decisions.

The company thus emphasised that no valid EGM will take place on Jan 9, until a proper notice is issued to shareholders and the courts have ruled on the outstanding suits and injunctions.

Target 1, along with Honsin Apparel Sdn Bhd and HiQ Media (M) Sdn Bhd — which collectively control a 50.05% stake in SMI — entered into a collaboration agreement on Aug 20 to jointly exercise their voting rights and gain control of SMI's management and subsidiaries, triggering the mandatory takeover offer at 45 sen per share.

Honsin and HiQ Media are 100%- and 51.91%-owned, respectively, by Techbase Industries Bhd (KL:TECHBASE).

A week later, Mah Sau Cheong, who holds a 7.65% stake in SMI, filed an interim injunction to block the offer, citing alleged manipulation of SMI shares, a claim he made in a lawsuit against SMI, Techbase and YB Ventures Bhd (KL:YB) in July 2024.

On Nov 22, Velocity Capital, on behalf of Target 1, called for an EGM to appoint six new directors, including former Perak police chief Datuk Mior Faridalathrash Wahid, She Pei Sze, Lee Keng Fatt, Datuk Sok One Esen, Ho Pui Hold and Leong Weng Loong. Velocity also filed a lawsuit seeking to restrain SMI and its board from disrupting the EGM or appointing new directors until the EGM is concluded.

SMI's board subsequently requested a review from the SC regarding the appointment of the six directors before the takeover offer documentation was circulated.

On Tuesday, Mah filed another interim injunction to block both the EGM and the takeover offer, pending the outcome of his complaint with the SC. He also sought to prevent any resolution related to board appointments or removals during this time.

SMI owns Menara SMI, a 15-storey office tower on Lorong P Ramlee in Kuala Lumpur, and operates 2,230 car park bays in Kelana Square and 1,227 bays in Zenith Corporate Park, Kelana Jaya.

SMI shares closed unchanged at 40 sen on Wednesday, giving the company a market value of RM83.98 million.

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US Fed's hawkish pivot 'slightly negative' for Malaysian market, analysts say

BY IZZUL IKRAM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): The US Federal Reserve's (US Fed) intent to adopt a slower pace of interest rate easing in 2025 is expected to prompt slight downward pressure on the domestic market, analysts said.

The US' central bank concluded its final monetary policy meeting of 2024 with a widely expected 25 basis points (bps) cut, putting the Federal Funds Rate (FFR) at 4.25-4.5% on Wednesday.

More pertinently, the US Fed gave out hawkish signals amid raised inflation estimates for 2025 at 2.5% in the world's largest economy, from its initial projection of 2.1%, against its 2% target.

The ringgit fell as much as 1.03% against the US dollar in the early session Thursday. The local currency last traded at 4.5055. *Bloomberg*'s mean consensus forecast stood at 4.46 against the greenback prior to the Fed announcement.

Looking at the domestic market's reaction, the FBM KLCI was down for the majority of Thursday, falling as much as 0.55% to 1,590.83 points, but recovered to close steady with a 0.03% gain to 1,600.09.

Across the wider market, decliners led gainers with 693 stocks in the red while 369 stocks traded higher. Some 540 counters traded were unchanged.

"We expect markets to react slightly negatively over the near term repositioning for lesser FFR cuts in 2025," Apex Securities head of research Kenneth Leong told *The Edge*.

Leong explained that the US Fed's slower rate cuts suggest a wider-than-expected yield differential between the FFR and Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) overnight policy rate (OPR), supporting the US dollar.

"Consequently, foreign funds are expected to remain in net selling on Bursa Malaysia with funds flowing back to the US," he added.

Consensus forecast for US interest rate now pegs three 25 bps cuts to 3.5-3.75% by end-2025, versus a prior forecast of four 25 bps cuts to 3.25-3.5%. In response to the news, Asian markets slipped while the US dollar index ascended to a two-year high.

BNM's OPR stands at 3%, deriving a 125-150 bps differential from the FFR.

The OPR is expected to stay pat at 3% throughout 2025, according to economists' consensus forecast. BNM is set to hold its next monetary policy meeting on Jan 23-24, while the US Fed's next meeting is on Jan 28-29.

Meanwhile, Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd vice-president of research Thong Pak Leng attributed Thursday's downward sentiment to "panic selling".

Separately, Areca Capital Sdn Bhd CEO Danny Wong underlined the importance of treading cautiously and observing the progress of inflation in the US.

"The US job market seems resilient, and though prices may still be in a bubble, inflation is now under control. But 2025 has its own challenges in view of [President-elect Donald] Trump's America First policy," Wong said.

"It is likely another data-driven decision, with both sides of the view to affect market sentiment," he added, expecting one or two 25 bps cuts to the FFR in 2025.

Regardless, Wong concluded that the uncertainty is unwelcome by the market. "However, with the right stock selections, where we will focus more on those sectors and stocks with clearer catalysts and earning visibility, we look forward to seeing another good year."

In view of a stronger US dollar, Apex Securities' Leong named export-oriented sectors such as technology, gloves and plantation to be beneficiaries.

Looking at economists' views, MIDF Research maintained its expectation for the US Fed to carry out two cuts in 2025, while acknowledging the latter's "cautious" stance amid renewed inflation expectations.

UOB Research, separately, reiterated its projection of three 25 bps cuts to the FFR, taking the position that it was premature to shift its projections as it awaits clarity in Trump policies early next year.

Trump, who drummed up import tariffs and protectionist policies in his election campaign, is set to return to the White House as president in January 2025.

Since winning the US presidential election in November 2024, Trump has announced various proposed policy moves, including higher trade tariffs, tax incentives towards reshoring manufacturing and production, and mass deportation of migrant workers.

Govt's proposed DRG payment system may face challenges — HLIB

BY YU JIEN LIM
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): The government's proposal to introduce a Diagnostic-Related Group (DRG) payment system to regulate private healthcare costs may face significant challenges and feasibility issues, according to Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB).

The research house noted that this transition diverges from global practices, raising concerns about its feasibility within Malaysia's private healthcare framework.

"We believe the benefits of the payment system could not be fully achievable within the existing private healthcare system," said HLIB in a report on Thursday.

Citing the World Bank and the World Health Organisation (WHO), HLIB noted that the DRG system is primarily designed for national health insurance (NHI) programmes that offer "standardised" services.

"In such systems, participating hospitals are typically public or non-profit private entities, which may receive subsidies to manage cost overruns," said HLIB.

In contrast, Malaysia operates a private health insurance (PHI) model, where benefits and coverage vary significantly based on premiums paid.

According to HLIB, this discrepancy could be unfair for those paying higher premiums to receive the same level of care as those with lower premiums.

HLIB also noted that cost structures among Malaysia's private hospitals vary widely, influenced by factors such as room configurations, staff-to-patient ratios, and adoption of advanced medical technologies.

Hence, a standardised payment model under the DRG system could incentivise hospitals with higher operating costs to cut corners, discharge patients prematurely, or selectively admit low-cost cases, the research house warned.

Analysts cautioned that while the DRG system aims to standardise pricing and control medical inflation, its adoption could lead to unnecessary costs borne by taxpayers without delivering the intended benefits.

Read the full story

Direct intervention to eradicate hardcore poor in 10 poorest districts under 13MP — Rafizi

Bernama

KOTA KINABALU (Dec 19): The government will implement direct intervention measures to eradicate hardcore poor in 10 of the districts with the highest poverty rates in the country, eight of which are in Sabah, under the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP).

Economic Affairs Minister Rafizi Ramli said the measures include developing sustainable economic activities that will enable residents to generate incomes and to raise them from the hardcore poverty level.

He also stressed that efforts to eradicate hardcore poverty should not be fully dependent on transfers of cash every month from government departments or agencies.

"Obviously the 13MP will focus on districts with hardcore poor, especially eight districts in Sabah, we have our new framework according to districts, we focus on generating incomes for residents.

"Previously, a large part of the macro approach (to eradicate poverty) did not differentiate between poorest districts and others. For 13MP, we have a specific strategy to directly intervene in the poorest districts," he said at a media conference after attending a 13MP engagement session with the Sabah state government, which was also attended by Deputy Chief Minister III Datuk Shahelmey Yahya representing Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Lotus Circular buys two waste recycling firms controlled by its major shareholder for RM100 mil

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Main-Market listed Lotus Circular Bhd (KL:LOTUSCIR) is acquiring two waste recycling companies — Earthwise Resources Sdn Bhd and Expert Resources Management Sdn Bhd — controlled by its director and major shareholder Datuk Wong Sak Kuan for RM100 million. Lotus Circular will pay for the acquisitions with a combination of cash — RM35.01 million, sourced from the company's internal funds or bank borrowings — and new shares, according to its bourse filing on Thursday. The two target companies have a combined cumulative profit guarantee of RM16 million in the two fiscal years 2025 and 2026. On completion of the acquisitions, Wong's stake in Lotus Circular, including his stake in LESB, will increase to 57.31%, although he is seeking exemption from having to make a mandatory offer for the remaining shares. — *by Syafiqah Salim*

Daughter of Aset Kayamas founder is now Kanger's largest shareholder

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Chai Woon Yun, daughter of Aset Kayamas founder Tan Sri Datuk Chai Kin Kong, has become the largest shareholder of Kanger International Bhd through a private placement. She subscribed for 122.32 million shares through a private placement on Dec 13, raising her total direct shareholding to 152.32 million shares, representing a 17.23% stake. Woon Yun is the former managing director of Permaju Industries Bhd (KL:PERMAJU). The other substantial shareholder in Kanger is executive director Wu Wai Kong, who holds 5.79% direct and 0.02% indirect stake in the company. Kanger has announced a few acquisitions in recent years involving Antara Genting Highlands Resort Suites, a development by Aset Kayamas. In November 2023, Kanger announced the acquisition of 15 proposed serviced apartment units in Tower A of the resort for RM19.77 million. This came after an earlier deal in 2021, when Kanger purchased 126 serviced apartments located on Levels 30 to 45 in the same tower for RM142.87 million. — *by Syafiqah Salim*

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Uzma secures RM44 mil Kedah solar farm construction sub-contract

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Uzma Bhd (KL:UZMA) has been awarded a sub-contract by Samaiden Sdn Bhd, a unit of Samaiden Group Bhd (KL:SAMAIDEN) for the development of a 13.42 megawatt AC (MWac) solar photovoltaic plant in Sungai Petani, Kedah. The contract, secured on a lump sum fixed price basis, encompasses the development of the solar generating facility, including interconnection and other works as outlined in the agreement with Tenaga Nasional Bhd, Uzma's filing read. The project's commercial operation date is set for Aug 30, 2025, it added. Uzma's new energy segment, which covers both rooftop solar and solar farm installations as well as electricity sales from solar farm owned by the company, posted operating profit of RM39,000 on revenue of RM2.57 million in the quarter ended September (1QFY2025). That represented 1.2% of the RM207.89 million group revenue recorded in the quarter, its past filing showed. — *by Adam Aziz*

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Vestland bags RM70 mil office construction job in KL

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): Construction company Vestland Bhd (KL:VLB) said on Thursday that it had secured a RM70 million contract to build a 59-storey office building along Jalan Mayang, Kuala Lumpur. The contract was awarded to Vestland's wholly-owned subsidiary Vestland Resources Sdn Bhd (VRSB) by Sg Besi Construction Sdn Bhd, it said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia. "The design and build works to be carried out under the contract comprise the design, approval, construction, completion, testing and commissioning of one block of 59-storey strata offices and related facilities," it said. The latest win marks Vestland's third contract year-to-date, with contract value totalling about RM544.16 million. — *by Anis Hazim*

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GreenRE



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TROPICANA CORPORATION BERHAD

Third judge takes over 1MDB's US$346 mil suit against Rosmah and Singaporean woman

BY HAFIZ YATIM
theedgemalaysia.com

THE EDGE FILE PHOTO



KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): High Court judge Wan Muhammad Amin Wan Yahya has taken over a civil suit against former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, and a Singaporean woman, Shabnam Naraindas Daswani, involving the purchase of luxury goods using funds allegedly diverted from 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

The lawsuit, filed by 1MDB, SRC International Sdn Bhd, and nine other companies, seeks to recover approximately US$346 million (RM1.63 billion) in luxury goods allegedly purchased for Rosmah using funds diverted from the companies.

Last month, judge Leong Wai Hong recused himself from the case due to his former firm's involvement in 1MDB's main suit against Najib and other former directors and staff of the company.

Rosmah had applied to recuse another High Court judge, Adlin Abdul Majid. Adlin had refused to recuse herself but was later transferred to a different division.

Muhammad Amin, who took over the case on Dec 19, was appointed as Judicial Commissioner in 2020 and confirmed as a High Court judge in January 2023.

The case revolves around Rosmah's alleged purchase of about 12,000 pieces of jewellery and luxury handbags from 48 vendors in 14 countries using funds allegedly diverted from 1MDB and its then subsidiary SRC. The companies claim that the transactions were part of a larger fraud scheme to transfer funds out of Malaysia and into offshore jurisdictions.

During case management before Muhammad Amin on Thursday, 1MDB and the companies sought leave to produce an additional affidavit from financial fraud investigator Richard Templeman regarding an alleged concealment of fraud against them.

The plaintiffs, who are seeking an injunction against Rosmah to bar her from removing those valuables, claimed they had received new information and documents from vendors in several countries that are relevant to their case.

The lawsuit seeks various remedies, including the recovery of the luxury goods, a declaration that Rosmah had breached her fiduciary duties or trust, and an order to freeze Rosmah's assets. Shabnam, who is also accused of purchasing or procuring luxury goods for Rosmah, is another defendant in the case.

Lawyer Villasha Anbalagan, from Messrs Lim Chee Wee and Partners for 1MDB, said Muhammad Amin fixed Feb 7 next year as case management for both parties to update on the status of the suit. Villasha also confirmed that both parties have agreed not to file any applications to recuse the judge.

Separately on Thursday, Rosmah was granted an acquittal on 17 counts of money laundering and tax evasion.

She had previously been convicted by the High Court of soliciting and receiving bribes related to a solar hybrid project for rural schools in Sarawak. Sentenced to 10 years in jail and fined RM970 million, she is appealing that case.

Background to this case

This US$346 million civil suit against Rosmah and Shabnam was filed in June this year.

According to the statement of claim, the companies claimed that the funds used to purchase the luxury goods were monies from 1MDB and SRC that were fraudulently transferred out of Malaysia to entities registered in offshore jurisdictions with no connection to the companies' investment objectives. Those transactions, they said, served only to act as a conduit for diverting funds to obscure final destinations.

The plaintiffs are seeking several remedies:

i. a recovery of the luxury goods, their traceable proceeds, and a declaration that Rosmah received them for no consideration, alleging that it is a breach of her fiduciary duties or trust;
ii. an alternative amount of US$346.01 million (approximately RM1.632 billion) to compensate the plaintiffs for the cost of the luxury goods she received as a result of the breach; and
iii. a court order to freeze Rosmah's assets to the sum of US$346.01 million.

Shabnam, also known as Natasha Mirpuri, is named as defendant alongside Rosmah for having purchased or procured the luxury goods for her.

The lawsuit follows a failed forfeiture application by authorities after a highly publicised raid on a condominium owned by OBYU Holdings Sdn Bhd at Pavilion Kuala Lumpur in May 2018. The police seized over 12,000 pieces of jewellery, several hundred handbags and watches during the raid.

After obtaining the forfeiture application cause papers, the plaintiffs and liquidators began their investigation and initiated discovery applications against vendors in Hong Kong, the US, and the UK.

It was reported in June that Rosmah had given her undertaking not to dispose of the 12,000 luxury items at issue in this suit.

Read also: PAS chief under probe over comment on Batu Puteh, says IGP



Political funding bill must be introduced, says C4 amid Sabah mining licence corruption controversy

BY KONG ZHI ANN
theedgemalaysia.com

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): The Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4 Center) has called for an urgent introduction of a Political Funding Bill following what it described as the controversy over alleged corruption in the Sabah state administration.

In a statement, the organisation referred to comments by Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor that political parties and politicians do accept donations.

The issue of political donations resurfaced amid videos alleging Sabah assemblypersons of soliciting bribes in exchange for granting of mining licences.

C4 said Hajiji's comments "expose a fundamental deficiency in Malaysia's political system" as there is an "inherent corruption risk" in how political parties obtain financing, the statement read.

"It is common knowledge that patronage is a key feature of the Malaysian political system.

"The sheer cost of elections and the pursuit of power create inherent incentives for political parties to seek financial support from the business elite, who are then indirectly rewarded with political favours and lucrative business opportunities.

"Despite the clear corruption risks arising from this relationship, the practice of political donations and the various ways in which political parties raise funds remains unregulated," C4 said.

The organisation also questioned why a Political Funding Bill has not been introduced "despite years of promises".

"It is clear that powerful political parties benefit from the status quo, having already established strong patronage links in the private sector.

"This reluctance to reform the system is only strengthened when a party or coalition wins an election, enabling access to powerful government machinery that can be wielded in their favour," said C4.

"C4 Center reaffirms previous calls for the government to introduce and table a Political Funding Bill that guarantees transparency, through mandatory reporting requirements as to the amount of donations received by political parties.

"The Bill must also place a hard limit on the amount political parties receive from private individuals, while completely doing away with corporate donations as they represent a significant risk area for the proliferation of money politics," it added.

Putrajaya urged to hasten creation of 'Anti-Ali Baba' law

Bernama



KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 19): The Senate's Special Select Committee on Social and Community Affairs (JKPK HESM) has urged the government to expedite the formulation of the Anti-Ali Baba Act to tackle the growing issue of foreigners' dominance in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The committee chairman, Senator Datuk Dr Mohd Hatta Md Ramli, said that the activities of foreign nationals monopolising SMEs have hurt economic opportunities for locals, adding that prompt improvements must be implemented.

"People have complained that our businesses (owned by locals) are being taken over by foreigners who should not be allowed to run businesses.

"Therefore, we need to ensure that the relevant ministries, perhaps the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living or the Attorney General's Chambers, draft the Bill as soon as possible," he told reporters at the Parliament building on Thursday, where he presented the committee's report on the dominance of foreign nationals in the SME sector.

Dr Mohd Hatta said the report is based on the committee's findings from several proceedings involving witnesses and field visits, including a joint operation to check foreign business activities in Kuala Lumpur north on July 1.

"Through the proceedings and field visits, the findings of the JKPK HESM are that local authorities lack the power to carry out the process to identify foreign workers who do not have complete documentation. Additionally, it was found that the modus operandi of foreign nationals is becoming increasingly sophisticated and frequently changes, making it more difficult for enforcement agencies to detect," he said.

He said that enforcement agencies and departments are facing a shortage of manpower, finances and logistics to effectively carry out operations and enforcement to check businesses registered to locals but were handed over, leased or rented to foreigners.

In addition to the Anti-Ali Baba Act, Dr Mohd Hatta said that the JKPK HESM also made several recommendations, including urging the government to review existing laws so that the power to inspect, investigate and arrest foreigners be integrated and delegated to enforcement agencies, with the Immigration Department acting as the coordinator.

Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli reportedly said that the government was conducting a study to establish the legal framework for the Anti-Ali Baba Act.

REUTERS



Bank of England keeps rates steady, policy split widens

BY DAVID MILLIKEN & SUBAN ABDULLA
Reuters

LONDON (Dec 19): The Bank of England kept its main interest rate unchanged at 4.75% on Thursday but policymakers became more divided about whether rate cuts were needed to tackle a slowing economy.

Three of the BoE's nine-person Monetary Policy Committee — deputy governor Dave Ramsden and external members Swati Dhingra and Alan Taylor — voted for a quarter-point rate cut to 4.5%.

Economists polled by *Reuters* had expected only one MPC member to vote for a cut.

But BOE governor Andrew Bailey said the central bank needed to stick to its existing "gradual approach" to cutting rates.

"With the heightened uncertainty in the economy we can't commit to when or by how much we will cut rates in the coming year," he said.

Economists polled by *Reuters* last week forecast the BOE would cut rates four times next year, but financial markets have scaled back their expectations sharply in response to faster than expected wage growth and only see up to two cuts.

The BOE has been less willing to cut rates than either the US Federal Reserve or the European Central Bank, reducing rates by just half a percentage point this year.

Official figures on Wednesday showed British consumer price inflation rose to 2.6% in November — the highest in the Group of Seven rich economies by a small margin, and slightly higher than the BOE itself had forecast last month.

"Headline inflation is expected to continue to rise slightly in the near term," the BOE said.

However, the central bank also cut its growth forecast for the final quarter of this year to zero from a 0.3% forecast just six weeks ago.

Britain's economy contracted in September and October — the first back-to-back monthly falls in output since 2020 — according to official data last week and business sentiment has tumbled since finance minister Rachel Reeves announced a £25 billion (RM141.9 billion) tax hike for employers in her Oct 30 budget.

MPC members who backed keeping rates on hold said it remained "particularly uncertain" whether these higher costs would be passed on to consumers through higher prices or lead to job losses and slower pay growth.

"Recent developments added to the argument for a gradual approach to the withdrawal of policy restrictiveness, while eschewing any commitment to changing policy at a specific meeting," they said.

The three MPC members who voted to cut rates said a "very restrictive" policy stance risked pushing inflation too far below its 2% target in the medium term and creating an unduly large amount of spare capacity in the economy.

Read also: Riksbank cuts rate by quarter point with easing nearing end

South Korean won hits 15-year low as hawkish Fed, domestic politics weigh

BY JIHOON LEE & YENA PARK
Reuters

SEOUL (Dec 19): The South Korean won dropped to its weakest level in 15 years on Thursday, weighed down by risk-averse sentiment after the US Federal Reserve's cautious stance on more interest rate cuts, as well as domestic political uncertainty.

The won was quoted at 1,448.9 per dollar in onshore trade as of 0518 GMT, after opening the session at 1,453.0 per dollar, 0.96% lower than the previous day and the weakest since March 16, 2009.

The US central bank cut interest rates on Wednesday, as expected, but Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said more reductions in borrowing costs now hinged on further progress in lowering stubbornly high inflation.

REUTERS



US central bankers now project they will make just two quarter-percentage-point rate reductions next year, half a percentage point less than anticipated in September, with higher projections of inflation for the first year of the new Donald Trump administration.

The hawkish stance pushed up the dollar and added to downward pressure on the won, which had already been weighed down by domestic political turmoil after impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law attempt earlier this month.

Taking into account the negative economic impact of the Dec 3 martial law order, the Bank of Korea flagged on Wednesday downside risks to its economic growth forecasts for this year and next year.

So far in December, the won has weakened 3.9% against the dollar, extending losses for a third consecutive month.

WORLD

BOJ keeps ultra-low rates, gives few clues on when it might hike

BY LEIKA KIHARA & SATOSHI SUGIYAMA
Reuters

REUTERS



TOKYO (Dec 19): The Bank of Japan (BOJ) kept interest rates unchanged on Thursday and its governor offered few clues on how soon it could push up borrowing costs, sending the yen and bond yields tumbling on fresh doubts over the near-term chances of a rate hike.

As widely expected, the nine-member board maintained its short-term policy rate at 0.25% in a sign policymakers preferred to tread cautiously amid uncertainty over US president-elect Donald Trump's economic plans.

But hawkish board member Naoki Tamura dissented and proposed, unsuccessfully, to raise interest rates to 0.5% on the view that inflationary risks were building.

The BOJ's meeting concluded hours after the US Federal Reserve cut interest rates but signalled a more cautious path of easing next year, sending global stocks sharply lower.

BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda reiterated the central bank's resolve to keep raising rates from their current very low levels if the economy and prices move in line with its forecasts.

Asked why the BOJ stood pat, Ueda told a news conference that the bank preferred to await data on whether wages would retain their upward momentum next year, and to gain more clarity on Trump's economic policies.

"Taken together, the likelihood of Japan's economy moving in line with our forecast is heightening. But we'd like one notch more information to believe we can raise interest rates. That includes the sustainability of wage increases," he said.

Investors widely interpreted his remarks as diminishing the chance of a rate hike at the BOJ's next meeting in January. The dollar rose to ¥157.075, up 1.4% on the day and its highest since July.

"There's a chance the BOJ might wait until March, given he stressed the need to scrutinise next year's wage negotiations," said Junki Iwahashi, senior economist at Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Bank.

Ueda said the BOJ would not necessarily need to wait for a particular event or piece of data to hike rates, although it could take its time as Japan's underlying inflation remained moderate. The rise in import prices, a key contributor to inflation that has been blamed in part on the weak yen, was slowing, he added.

The yen has been languishing in recent months near its lowest in 30 years as Japanese interest rates lag other major economies. Market players have pointed to yen weakness as a key reason for the BOJ to hike rates or get more hawkish in its communications.

Taiwan raises growth forecast, keeps interest rates unchanged

BY LIANG-SA LOH & YIMOU LEE
Reuters

REUTERS



TAIPEI (Dec 19): Taiwan's central bank held its policy interest rate unchanged on Thursday while raising its growth estimate for the year, but flagged risks for next year from trade policies from the incoming Trump administration in the US.

The central bank left the benchmark discount rate at 2%, where it has been since March, in a unanimous decision at a quarterly board meeting.

All 33 economists in a *Reuters* poll had predicted the central bank would keep the rate unchanged.

The central bank has chosen to chart its own path and not to follow the lead of the US Federal Reserve, which on Wednesday cut its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point.

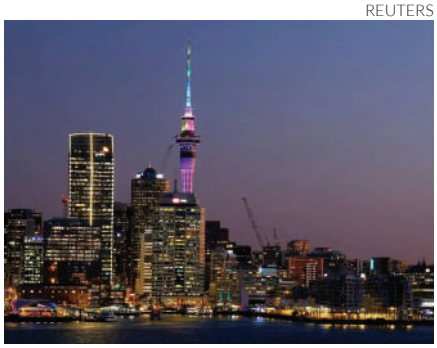
Taiwan's central bank raised its 2024 estimate for economic growth to 4.25% from a forecast of 3.82% in September, and predicted growth of 3.13% in 2025, compared with the prior prediction of 3.08%. Taiwan's economy grew at its slowest pace in 14 years in 2023.

In a report released by the central bank after its quarterly rate setting meeting, it said uncertainties in US trade policy had greatly increased and it was advisable to be "cautious" for possible changes in the global trade landscape.

Trump, who takes office on Jan 20, has threatened across the board import tariffs.

Taiwan's tech-focused economy, home to the world's largest chipmaker TSMC, has powered ahead thanks to demand from companies such as Nvidia for artificial intelligence applications.

REUTERS



New Zealand sinks into recession, more rate cuts coming

BY WAYNE COLE
Reuters

SYDNEY (Dec 19): New Zealand's economy sank into recession in the third quarter as activity dived far more sharply than expected and output in the prior quarter was slashed, a dire result that cements the case for more aggressive rate cuts.

The shock news sent the local dollar to a fresh two-year low of US$0.5614, having already shed 2.2% in the wake of a hawkish easing from the US Federal Reserve.

Markets added to wagers the Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) would slice rates further, having already cut by 125 basis points to 4.25%. Swaps now implied a 70% probability of a 50-basis-point cut in February, and rates were seen declining to 3.0% by the end of 2025.

Thursday's data showed gross domestic product dived 1.0% in the September quarter from the prior quarter, dwarfing market forecasts of a 0.2% contraction.

The June quarter was revised to show a fall of 1.1%, and two straight quarters of decline is the technical definition of recession. Setting aside the pandemic, this was the largest two-quarter decline since the painfully deep downturn of 1991.

"It was dramatically worse than anyone had expected," said Abhijit Surya, an economist at Capital Economics.

"Given the dire state of the economy, we now think risks are tilted towards a larger 75bp cut in February," he added. "We're more convinced than ever that the Bank will cut rates below neutral, eventually to 2.25%."

The outcome was way beyond the 0.2% drop forecast by the RBNZ, and came just two days after New Zealand's Treasury had predicted a fall of only 0.1%.

Hong Kong central bank cuts interest rate tracking Fed move, banks follow

Reuters

HONG KONG (Dec 19): The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) on Thursday cut its base interest rate charged via the overnight discount window by 25 basis points to 4.75%, tracking a move by the US Federal Reserve.

Major Hong Kong banks followed with reductions, but some at a smaller magnitude. HSBC cut its Hong Kong dollar best lending rate by 12.5 basis points to 5.25% and Bank of China (Hong Kong) lowered its Hong Kong dollar prime rate to 5.25% from 5.375%.

"The future path of rates remains highly uncertain going into 2025," HSBC's Hong Kong CEO Luanne Lim said in a statement.

"HSBC has decided to lower its Hong Kong dollar deposit and lending rates following another US rates cut, bringing a cumulative reduction of 62.5 basis points since this September," she added.

Hong Kong's monetary policy moves in lock-step with the US as the city's currency is pegged to the greenback in a tight range of 7.75-7.85 per dollar.

BLOOMBERG



Philippines cuts rate, signals more in early 2025 amid risks

BY ANDREO CALONZO & DITAS LOPEZ
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): The Philippine central bank lowered its policy rate by a quarter point and signalled it may continue easing early next year, while joining policy makers in Indonesia and Thailand in warning of growing global risks.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas cut its overnight target reverse repurchase rate to 5.75% on Thursday, as expected by 22 of 24 economists in a *Bloomberg* survey. One predicted a half-point reduction, while one expected no change.

At a briefing in Manila, Governor Eli Remolona signalled the central bank expects to continue reducing borrowing costs in 2025, possibly in its next meeting, but downplayed previous comments that rates could potentially decline by 100 basis points next year.

"In our discussion today, there was a sense that maybe 100 basis points over 2025 would be too much, but zero would also be too little," Remolona said. "We have to see what the data says."

The central bank also lowered the key rate by 25 basis points in its August and October meetings, thanks to inflation that has remained within the central bank's 2%-to-4% goal for the past four months. Slower economic growth last quarter likewise gave the BSP reason to further lower borrowing costs.

US GDP revised up to 3.1% on stronger consumer spending, exports

BY MATTHEW BOESLER
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): The US economy expanded at a faster pace in the third quarter than previously estimated, owing in part to stronger consumer spending and exports.

Gross domestic product increased at a 3.1% annualised rate in the third quarter, the third estimate of the figures from the Bureau of Economic Analysis showed Thursday. That compared to a previous projection of 2.8%. Consumer spending was marked up to a 3.7% pace from 3.5%.

Exports expanded by 9.6% in the July-to-September period, up from 7.5% in the prior estimate. That was entirely due to services.

The numbers reinforce the notion that the economy is still powering ahead despite expectations among forecasters for an eventual slowdown. The report comes just a day after the Federal Reserve triggered a stock-market sell-off by signalling a slower pace of interest-rate cuts in 2025, in part premised on recent stronger-than-expected economic data.

The report also showed one of the Fed's preferred inflation metrics — the personal consumption expenditures price index, excluding food and energy — was marked up slightly to 2.2%. November PCE data is due Friday.

Other components that make up GDP like business and residential investment, as well as government spending, were revised higher.

BLOOMBERG



US weekly jobless claims fall more than expected

BY LUCIA MUTIKANI
Reuters

WASHINGTON (Dec 19): The number of Americans filing new applications for jobless benefits fell more than expected last week, consistent with a gradual cooling in labour market conditions.

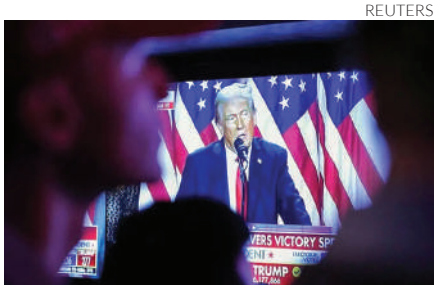
Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 22,000 to a seasonally adjusted 220,000 for the week ended Dec 14, the Labor Department said on Thursday. Economists polled by *Reuters* had forecast 230,000 claims for the latest week.

Claims have entered a period of volatility, which could make it challenging to get a clear view of the labor market. A range of indicators including claims and job openings suggest that conditions are much looser than they were before the Covid-19 pandemic, but the labour market is slowing in an orderly fashion.

A jump in the unemployment rate to 4.3% in July from 3.7% at the start of the year saw the Federal Reserve kicking off its policy easing cycle with an unusually large half-percentage-point interest rate cut in September.

On Wednesday, Fed chair Jerome Powell told reporters that the "downside risks of the labour market do appear to have diminished." The US central bank on Wednesday cut its benchmark overnight interest rate by 25 basis points to the 4.25%-4.50% range. It projected only two rate cuts next year, down from the four it had forecast in September, citing continued economic resilience and still-elevated inflation.

REUTERS



Dealmakers eye US$4 tril-plus M&A haul in 2025 on Trump boost

BY ANOUSHA SAKOUI, ANIRBAN SEN & KANE WU
Reuters

LONDON/NEW YORK/HONG KONG (Dec 19): Bankers expect global deal volumes to surpass US$4 trillion (RM18 trillion) next year, the highest in four years, buoyed by US President-elect Donald Trump's promise of less regulation, lower corporate taxes and a broadly pro-business stance.

The total value of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) rose 15% from last year to total US$3.45 trillion as of Dec 19 this year, according to Dealogic data, recovering from a decade-low of about US$3 trillion during the same period last year.

Top dealmakers expect a more deal-friendly antitrust enforcement in the US next year to unshackle tie-ups that were put on hold under the Biden administration. Trump recently named Andrew Ferguson to replace Lina Khan as the chair of the Federal Trade Commission, appointing a current Republican member of the agency who is expected to ease up on policing of large corporate mergers.

"Setting aside 2021, next year could be one of the best of the last 10 years because there wasn't a lot of volatility in volume over the last decade. If global M&A volumes are up 15% or 20% next year, it wouldn't be a surprise to us at all," said Jay Hofmann, co-head of M&A for North America at JPMorgan Chase.

M&A volumes in the United States climbed 10% to US$1.55 trillion so far this year, while Europe and the Asia-Pacific saw a 22% and 11% jump respectively, with volumes hovering around the US$800 billion mark.

Read the full story

Bitcoin tests US$100,000 after Fed spurs worst drop since September

BY SUVASHREE GHOSH
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): Bitcoin briefly sank below US$100,000 (RM450,441) as the US Federal Reserve's cautious outlook for interest-rate cuts hurt speculative investments.

The largest digital asset hit US$98,760 at one point on Thursday — about US$10,000 shy of the record high set earlier this week — before retaking the six-figure level. Tokens such as ether and meme-crowd favourite dogecoin also struggled.

Fed officials lowered borrowing costs for a third straight time, but reined in the number of reductions they expect in 2025. Fed chair Jerome Powell said more progress is needed on inflation before further loosening monetary policy.

The result of the Fed meeting shouldn't have surprised investors watching "the recent run of warm US inflation and activity data," IG Australia Pty Ltd market analyst Tony Sycamore wrote in a note. "However, it has served as the catalyst to wash away some of the speculative excesses that flowed into risk assets, including stocks and bitcoin, following the US election," he said.

The Fed decision lifted a dollar gauge, while weighing on global stocks and bonds. A spat over a funding bill added to nerves by raising the risk of a partial US government shutdown. US equity futures wavered on Thursday.

BLOOMBERG



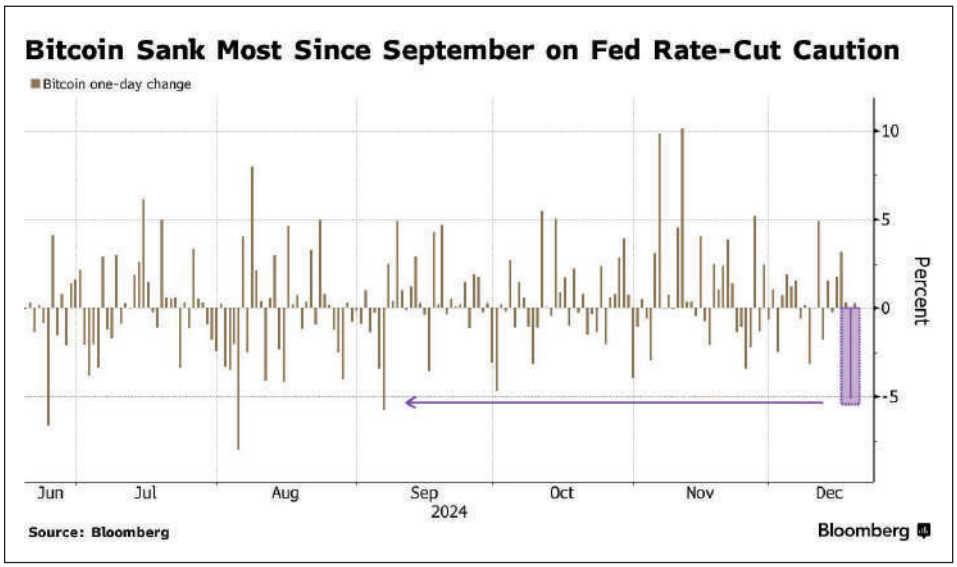
Bitcoin is up roughly 50% since the US vote on Nov 5, buoyed by President-elect Donald Trump's vow to unfetter crypto from regulatory shackles. The Republican has also backed the idea of creating a national stockpile of the token.

"All signs point to a good floor and outlook for bitcoin", even if some traders were disappointed about the Fed meeting and took profits, said Paul Veradittakit, a managing partner at Pantera Capital.

Trump's embrace of crypto has overshadowed warnings about stretched momentum and the lack of any traditional valuation tethers. US President Joe Biden's outgoing administration imposed a clampdown on the industry, in the wake of a market rout in 2022 that exposed risky practices and fraud.

Sean McNulty, director of trading at liquidity provider Arbelos Markets, reported a post-Fed pick up in demand for options to hedge against bitcoin declines. A retreat into the low US$90,000s is possible for a very short period, according to Zann Kwan, chief investment officer at the Revo Digital Family Office.

Bitcoin changed hands at US$101,280 as of 5:52am on Thursday in London.



Losses from crypto hacks jump to US$2.2 bil in 2024 — report

BY MEDHA SINGH
Reuters

(Dec 19): Funds stolen by hacking cryptocurrency platforms surged 21% from a year ago to US$2.2 billion (RM9.9 billion) in 2024, a report from blockchain analysis firm Chainalysis showed on Thursday.

The hacking amount exceeded US$1 billion for the fourth straight year and the number of incidents rose to 303 from 282 in 2023, it said. Hackers had stolen US$1.8 billion in 2023.

The rise in crypto heists comes as bitcoin jumped 140% this year to surpass US$100,000 mark, drawing institutional participation and backing from US President-elect Donald Trump.

"As the digital asset market booms, it is typical to see the illicit use of crypto grow in tandem," Chainalysis' cybercrimes research lead Eric Jardine said.

"Countering the proliferation of these crimes — especially fraud — will undoubtedly be a key challenge for the industry in the new year."

Compromises to private key that controls access to users' assets accounted for the majority of stolen crypto this year with most of the attacks targeting centralised platforms, the report said.

Among the most notable hacks are the theft of more than US$305 million from Japan's crypto exchange DMM Bitcoin in May and the loss of US$235 million from India's WazirX in July.

Crypto hacking linked to North Korea more than doubled from a year ago to a record high of US$1.3 billion in 2024, Chainalysis said.

Cryptocurrency allows North Korea to circumvent international sanctions, the United Nations has said. The country routinely denies involvement in cyber hacking or crypto heists.

WORLD

Indonesia to hike crude palm oil export levy to 10%

BY BERNADETTE CHRISTINA
Reuters

JAKARTA (Dec 19): Indonesia will increase its export levy for crude palm oil (CPO) to 10% from the current 7.5% to finance higher biodiesel subsidies, its chief economic minister said on Thursday.

The levy will be implemented once the relevant finance ministry regulation has been issued, Airlangga Hartarto said.

Indonesia, the world's top palm oil producer, collects levies to help subsidise its mandatory biodiesel programme, in which bio-content will be increased to 40%, called B40, starting Jan 1 from the current 35%.

The higher blend is expected to increase the subsidy requirement.

BPDPKS, the agency in charge of collecting and managing the palm oil funds, estimated in November that increasing the mandatory blend of biodiesel to 40% would increase the subsidy requirement by 68%.

"There will be funding from BPDPKS ... First, we will increase the levy to 10%," Airlangga said when asked about the subsidy financing.

Palm oil currently costs around US$400 per metric tonne more than crude oil.

THE EDGE FILE PHOTO



Indonesia currently imposes a 7.5% levy for CPO exports, while the levy for more refined palm oil products is charged at between 3% and 6% of the reference price.

Airlangga did not elaborate on the new levy rates for refined palm oil products.

Palm oil group Gapki is concerned a higher levy will reduce the competitiveness of Indonesian exports, chairman Eddy Martono said.

"Compared to Malaysian palm oil, ours is more expensive due to levy, export tax and the domestic obligations. These are all burdensome," he said.

The benchmark palm oil contract in Kuala Lumpur, which fell as much as 3.58% earlier on Thursday, pared most of its losses after Airlangga's comment. It was trading 0.33% lower at 0937 GMT.

A senior official at the energy ministry said the government planned to allocate 15.62 million kilolitres of unblended biodiesel to fuel retailers next year, up from 13.4 million kilolitres allocated for B35 this year.

Indonesia president pledges to pardon 'corrupters' who return what they stole

BY ANANDA TERESIA
Reuters

JAKARTA (Dec 19): Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has said he might pardon people who engaged in graft if they return what they stole, underlining his commitment to tackle corruption.

Speaking before hundreds of Indonesian university students in Cairo on Wednesday during his visit to Egypt, Prabowo said he would implement a plan to retrieve ill-gotten gains in the coming weeks or months.

"Hey you corrupters, or those who feel that you have stolen from the people, if you return what you stole, we might forgive you. But please return it," Prabowo said.

He did not give details on his plan, but said his government might provide ways for wrongdoers to discreetly return what was stolen.

REUTERS



Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto: As long as you pay your obligation, abiding by the law, then we will look to the future, we will not bring up what happens in the past.

Prabowo took office in Oct 20 and vowed to eradicate corruption and introduce a "realistic" approach to preventing it by increasing wages of state officials entrusted with large budgets.

Experts have highlighted a slowdown in Indonesia's anti-corruption drive during the 10-year administration of his predecessor, Joko Widodo.

Prabowo also warned any Indonesian who received incentives offered by the state to "pay their obligation". It was not immediately clear what he was referring to.

"As long as you pay your obligation, abiding by the law, then we will look to the future, we will not bring up what happens in the past," he said, without elaborating.

Indonesia under Widodo had a tax amnesty programme where the government provided opportunities for individuals to declare obligations or assets they had not paid tax on, in a move aimed at boosting tax compliance.

Indonesia's law minister did not immediately respond to a request for clarification about Prabowo's plans.

Prabowo's amnesty idea follows his decision last week to pardon about 44,000 prisoners — about 30% of the prison population — from drug offenders to activists convicted of defamation and people jailed in the restive province of Papua for criticising the government.

REUTERS



A man checks his phone near an Apple logo outside its store in Shanghai, China. Apple is said to be in talks with Tencent and TikTok owner ByteDance about integrating their artificial intelligence models into iPhones sold in China.

Apple in talks with Tencent, ByteDance to roll out AI features in China — *Reuters*

BY LIAM MO & BRENDA GOH
Reuters

BEIJING (Dec 19): Apple is in talks with Tencent and TikTok owner ByteDance about integrating their artificial intelligence (AI) models into iPhones sold in China, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

The US firm started the rollout of OpenAI's ChatGPT into its devices this month, part of the Apple Intelligence product that allows its Siri voice assistant to tap the chatbot's expertise including on user queries about photos and documents such as presentations.

ChatGPT is not available in China and the country's regulatory requirements mandate that generative AI services obtain government approval before public release, forcing Apple to seek local partners for its AI features at a time when its market share in the country is declining.

Apple's discussions with Tencent and ByteDance on using their AI models are at a very early stage, said the sources, who declined to be named as the talks are not public.

ByteDance declined to comment, while Apple and Tencent did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

A successful partner for Apple's AI services in China could be a major winner in the country's increasingly crowded AI field where dozens of large language models have been launched by large tech firms as well as startups.

They include ByteDance's Doubao, Tencent's Hunyuan and search engine giant Baidu's Ernie.

Apple and Baidu have reportedly been in talks about using the latter's AI model in China, but The Information this month reported the discussions faced setbacks due to technical issues, including disputes over using iPhone user data to train AI models.

Baidu did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

The absence of AI capabilities in the latest iPhones sold in China has become a major setback for Apple, as it faces declining market share in the world's biggest smartphone market due to growing competition from domestic brands including Huawei.

Huawei, which returned to the high-end market in August with a phone using a Chinese-made chip, launched its Mate 70 series last month featuring AI capabilities powered by its proprietary large language model.

Apple briefly fell out of China's top five smartphone vendors in the second quarter before recovering in the third quarter. The US company's smartphone sales in China still slipped 0.3% during the third quarter from a year earlier, while Huawei's sales surged 42%, according to research firm IDC.

Apple close to winning Indonesian approval to end iPhone 16 ban

BY FARIS MOKHTAR
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): Apple Inc is close to getting Indonesia to lift its ban on iPhone 16 sales, after President Prabowo Subianto gave his approval for the government to accept a US$1 billion (RM4.5 billion) investment from the US tech giant, according to people familiar with the matter.

Indonesia warmed to Apple's proposal after Prabowo was briefed on it over the weekend at a meeting that discussed the tug-of-war between the government and Apple, the people said, asking not to be identified discussing talks that were private. The country prohibited the sale of Apple's flagship device last month, saying Apple had failed to comply with domestic content requirements for smartphones and tablets.

At the meeting, Prabowo greenlit the government to accept Apple's proposal and urged his cabinet to obtain more investments in future, the people said.

The US technology giant secured Prabowo's approval based on its expanded investment plans, which Apple had presented to the government in an official written proposal. An added key aspect is that one of Apple's suppliers will set up a plant producing AirTags on the island of Batam, the people said.

The plant is expected to employ around 1,000 workers initially and Apple has chosen Batam, about a 45-minute ferry ride from Singapore, because of its free-trade zone status, which exempts companies from value-added and luxury taxes, as well as import duties, the people said.

The plant will eventually account for 20% of global production of AirTags — a device that allows users to track their luggage, pets or other belongings.

Another part of the US$1 billion investment will go toward setting up a plant in Bandung, about three hours southeast of Jakarta, to make other types of accessories, as well as funding Apple academies in the Southeast Asian nation, which equip students with tech skills like coding.

WORLD

Southeast Asian stocks to offer shelter amid Trump threat — analysts

BY AUDREY WAN & EDUARD GISMATULLIN
Bloomberg

(Dec 19): Global investors are looking to Southeast Asia for some shelter, as they brace for uncertainties surrounding Donald Trump's trade policies, boosting prospects for the region's stocks in the coming year.

The US president-elect's targeted tariff plan for China is likely to accelerate a shift in global supply chains and foreign direct investment that may favour the region, analysts said. Meanwhile, economies with less trade exposure may fare better on growth, and domestic spending in some markets is anticipated to be robust.

While the regional benchmark MSCI Asean Index has slightly underperformed the wider Asia gauge this year, and most countries are seeing foreign outflows, funds are betting that investors will return next year. More investments into the region's infrastructure and budding sectors, including data centres and green energy, will bode well for corporate profit growth.

"Domestically driven markets like Indonesia and the Philippines stand out for their relative stability, supported by strong consumption and policy flexibility," making them well-positioned as stable options for investors, said Mohit Mirpuri, an analyst at SGMC Capital Pte Ltd.

The MSCI Asean gauge has gained 7.7% this year. The measure may rise as much as 14% to 780 by the end of 2025 from Wednesday's closem if a bullish scenario emerges, according to JPMorgan Chase & Co's estimates.

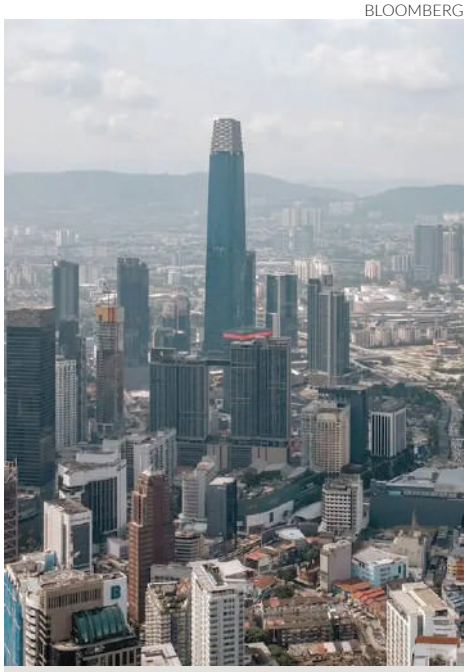
Global funds have sold stocks in Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam on a net basis this year. While the US Federal Reserve cut benchmark interest rate for a third consecutive time, it signalled greater caution over how quickly it can continue reducing borrowing costs, which may affect flows.

But the outlook for foreign flows may gradually improve, as the region will benefit "tremendously" from spillover effects of the US-China tension, said Vicki Chi, a portfolio manager for Asian equities at Robeco Hong Kong Ltd, who remains overweight on Asean markets.

Developing Asean banks, whose net interest margins are seen as more independent from global interest rate moves, and information technology-related shares are among Chi's main picks.



BLOOMBERG



While export-dependent countries may be more impacted by a trade war, ongoing policy reforms in Malaysia and strong government spending in Vietnam will likely help prop up growth. A recovery in tourism and strong domestic demand are expected to benefit Thailand. In Singapore, high-yielding assets will keep investors interested.

While export-dependent countries may be more impacted by a trade war, ongoing policy reforms in Malaysia and strong government spending in Vietnam will likely help prop up growth. A recovery in tourism and strong domestic demand are expected to benefit Thailand.

In Singapore, high-yielding assets will keep investors interested.

"We have seen a lot of interest from Chinese companies trying to invest in Asean, not solely to diversify manufacturing capacity exposure but also tapping into domestic demand," said Kenglin Tan, a portfolio manager at Manulife Investment Management HK Ltd.

Valuations are also tilted in Southeast Asia's favour. The MSCI gauge is trading at 13.5 times forward earnings, compared to the five-year average of 14.6 times.

To be clear, multiple headwinds remain. A slowdown in global demand will weigh on the region's exports, while a stronger dollar due to any pause in the Federal Reserve's easing policy will impact flows into emerging markets.

Still, growth for most countries is expected to be resilient, underscored by Maybank Research's estimate that Asean gross domestic product will expand 4.7% next year.

"We urge investors to increase allocation to Asean," said Nirgunan Tiruchelvam, head of consumer and internet at Singapore-based Aletheia Capital.

WORLD

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS



Myanmar's army-appointed Foreign Minister Than Swe attends a six-country informal consultation on the situation in Myanmar, in Bangkok, Thailand on Thursday. Than Swe outlined a political roadmap and progress on election preparations, including a population census and registration of 53 political parties.

Myanmar's junta pushed election plan in talks with neighbours

BY PANU WONGCHA-UM
Reuters

BANGKOK (Dec 19): The top diplomat of Myanmar's ruling junta briefed neighbouring countries on its plans to hold an election next year amid an escalating civil war, including potentially inviting foreign poll observers, Thai officials said on Thursday.

Thailand is hosting two separate regional meetings on Myanmar this week, the first involving the war-torn country's five neighbours, including China, Bangladesh and India, followed by one on Friday of some members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) regional bloc.

In Thursday's meeting, the junta's foreign minister Than Swe outlined a political roadmap and progress on election preparations, including a population census and registration of 53 political parties, said Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa.

"He said there is an intention to invite foreign [election] observers, such as from neighbouring countries," Maris told reporters, referring to Than Swe and providing details of a rare explanation to the international community by the Myanmar junta.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since early 2021 when its military overthrew an elected civilian government and cracked down on ensuing pro-democracy protests, triggering a nationwide armed rebellion that has grown in strength.

Despite being battered on multiple frontlines, contending with a collapsing economy and dozens of political parties banned, the junta is pushing to hold an election in 2025 — an exercise that has been widely derided as a sham by its critics.

The reaction of Myanmar's neighbours to the junta's election plan was "positive overall", Thai foreign ministry spokesman Nikorndej Balankura said, underlining that all countries wanted a swift solution to the crisis.

"The foreign minister of Myanmar said that it has an open door for inclusive political dialogue," Nikorndej said.

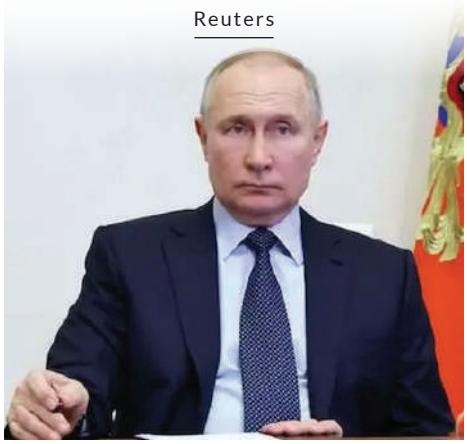
Although Myanmar's neighbours emphasised the need for continued engagement with the junta, Thai officials said the Asean bloc's 'Five Point Consensus' peace plan will remain central to regional efforts to end the conflict.

A group of Asean members, including current chair Laos, Thailand and Malaysia, which will take over the bloc's chairmanship in 2025, will meet in Bangkok on Friday.

"Tomorrow's discussion will be a discussion at the Asean level," Maris said, "Laos is chair and I will report to the meeting the result of this meeting."

Putin says Russia is moving closer to achieving goals in Ukraine

BY VLADIMIR SOLDATKIN & ANDREW OSBORN
Reuters



MOSCOW (Dec 19): President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russian forces were moving towards achieving their primary goals on the battlefield in Ukraine and touted what he said was the invincibility of Russia's new hypersonic missile.

Fielding questions on state TV during his annual question and answer session with Russians, Putin said Moscow's forces were advancing along the whole of the battle front.

"I must say that the situation is changing dramatically... There is movement along the entire front line. Every day," he said.

Western and Russian military analysts say Russia is advancing in eastern Ukraine at the fastest pace since 2022, taking village after village and threatening strategically important cities such as Pokrovsk, a major road and rail hub.

"Our fighters are reclaiming territory by the square kilometre every day," Putin said.

He said the fighting was complex, so it was "difficult and pointless to guess what lies ahead... (but) we are moving, as you said, towards solving our primary tasks, which we outlined at the beginning of the special military operation".

"Everyone is fighting, literally heroically. And they are fighting right now. Let us wish them all...good luck, victory and to return home," he said.

Discussing the continued presence of Ukrainian forces in Russia's Kursk region, Putin said Kyiv's troops would definitely be forced out, but declined to say exactly when that would happen.

Putin also touted what he said was the invincibility of the 'Oreshnik' hypersonic missile which Russia has already test- fired at a Ukrainian military factory, saying he was ready to organise another launch at Ukraine and see if Western air defence systems could shoot it down.

"There is no chance of shooting down these missiles," said Putin.

Read also: Putin denies Russian defeat in Syria, says he plans to meet Assad

MARKETS

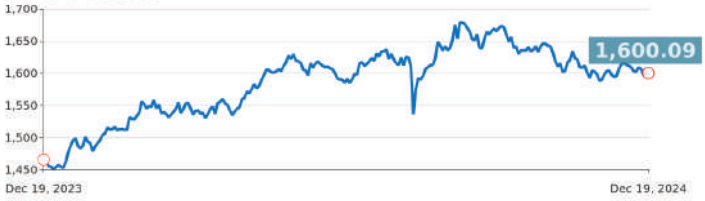
CPO RM 4,512 ▼-17.00 OIL US$ 73.35 ▼-0.04 RM/USD 4.5055 RM/SGD 3.3152 RM/AUD 2.8132 RM/GBP 5.7050 RM/EUR 4.6914

Top 20 active stocks

NAME	VOLUME (MIL)	CHANGE (RM)	CLOSE	YTD CHANGE (%)	MARKET CAP (RM MIL)
YTL CORP BHD	89.01	0.410	2.550	34.92	28,154.1
WINSTAR CAPITAL BHD	82.36	0.160	0.510	–	147.9
YTL POWER INTERNATIONAL BHD	71.33	0.420	4.080	60.63	33,501.8
TOP GLOVE CORP BHD	58.41	0.020	1.400	55.56	11,216.5
SUPERMAX CORP BHD	51.16	0.020	1.240	31.91	3,159.2
MYEG SERVICES BHD	49.69	-0.005	0.940	15.34	7,078.6
BUMI ARMADA BHD	31.48	0.000	0.660	33.33	3,912.4
PESTECH INTERNATIONAL BHD	24.67	0.000	0.185	-43.08	428.8
MALAYSIAN RESOURCES CORP BHD	24.05	-0.020	0.495	11.24	2,211.4
CAPITAL A BHD	23.41	-0.015	0.945	14.55	4,089.5
CARLO RINO GROUP BHD	23.36	-0.015	0.215	–	210.2
TALAM TRANSFORM BHD	23.15	0.000	0.025	66.67	118.1
HONG SENG CONSOLIDATED BHD	23.09	0.005	0.015	-40.00	76.6
GENETEC TECHNOLOGY BHD	20.37	0.060	1.230	-47.88	965.4
TANCO HOLDINGS BHD	20.19	0.030	1.840	211.86	4,042.1
CIMB GROUP HOLDINGS BHD	18.78	0.020	8.040	40.15	86,246.1
DAGANG NEXCHANGE BHD	18.66	-0.010	0.385	-3.75	1,336.7
YNH PROPERTY BHD	17.82	-0.025	0.555	-86.94	293.3
CAREPLUS GROUP BHD	17.06	-0.005	0.265	-37.65	202.4
HPMT HOLDINGS BHD	16.24	-0.025	0.285	-18.57	93.6

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 Source: Bloomberg

FBM KLCI



World equity indices

	CLOSE	CHANGE	CHANGE (%)
DOW JONES	42,326.87	-1,123.03	-2.58
S&P 500	5,872.16	-178.45	-2.95
NASDAQ 100	21,209.31	-791.77	-3.60
FTSE 100	8,199.11	-98.81	-1.21
AUSTRALIA	8,168.22	-141.15	-1.70
CHINA	3,370.03	-12.18	-0.36
HONG KONG	19,752.51	-112.04	-0.56
INDIA	79,218.05	-964.15	-1.20
INDONESIA	6,977.24	-130.64	-1.84
JAPAN	38,813.58	-268.13	-0.69
KOREA	2,435.93	-48.50	-1.95
PHILIPPINES	6,395.60	-73.48	-1.14
SINGAPORE	3,762.88	-16.74	-0.44
TAIWAN	22,932.25	-236.42	-1.02
THAILAND	1,377.53	-21.42	-1.53
VIETNAM	1,254.67	-11.33	-0.89

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 * Based on previous day's closing Source: Bloomberg

Top gainers (ranked by %)

NAME	CLOSE	CHANGE (%)	VOLUME ('000)	YTD CHANGE (%)	MARKET CAP (RM MIL)
EA HOLDINGS BHD	0.010	100.00	13,095.5	0.00	64.5
HONG SENG CONSOLIDATED BHD	0.015	50.00	23,088.4	-40.00	76.6
WINSTAR CAPITAL BHD	0.510	45.71	82361.2	–	147.9
FOCUS DYNAMICS GROUP BHD	0.020	33.33	405.4	33.33	127.4
SMTRACK BHD	0.020	33.33	21.3	-60.00	26.4
G3 GLOBAL BHD	0.025	25.00	1,771.3	0.00	94.3
MAXLAND BHD	0.075	25.00	209.8	-46.43	120.3
SENTORIA GROUP BHD	0.030	20.00	11,051.7	-66.67	18.4
TWL HOLDINGS BHD	0.030	20.00	9,160.3	0.00	187.6
YTL CORP BHD	2.550	19.16	89,008.6	34.92	28,154.1
NUENERGY HOLDINGS BHD	0.560	16.67	20.1	-24.32	105.8
OCR GROUP BHD	0.035	16.67	1,112.4	-33.71	70.2
ARTRONIQ BHD	0.080	14.29	7,043.0	-90.75	32.6
AHB HOLDINGS BHD	0.045	12.50	1,648.9	-65.38	33.5
INGENIEUR GUDANG BHD	0.045	12.50	549.6	-65.38	68.2
THRIVEN GLOBAL BHD	0.145	11.54	1,496.4	38.1	79.3
YTL POWER INTERNATIONAL BHD	4.080	11.48	71,328.1	60.63	33501.8
D'NONCE TECHNOLOGY BHD	0.050	11.11	42.8	-64.29	43.4
OVERSEA ENTERPRISE BHD	0.050	11.11	60.0	-16.67	113.4
PNE PCB BHD	0.050	11.11	5.0	-41.18	28.0

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 Source: Bloomberg

Top losers (ranked by %)

NAME	CLOSE	CHANGE (%)	VOLUME ('000)	YTD CHANGE (%)	MARKET CAP (RM MIL)
MMM GROUP BHD	0.070	-26.32	37.9	-26.32	21.8
METRONIC GLOBAL BHD	0.015	-25.00	275.3	0.00	23.0
XIDELANG HOLDINGS LTD	0.015	-25.00	300.1	-40.00	31.7
TA WIN HOLDINGS BHD	0.020	-20.00	11,175.7	-50.00	71.2
ANNUM BHD	0.050	-16.67	15.1	-47.37	11.4
MAJUPERAK HOLDINGS BHD	0.195	-15.22	83.1	-41.79	55.5
ALAM MARITIM RESOURCES BHD	0.030	-14.29	1,631.7	0.00	46.0
PDZ HOLDINGS BHD	0.040	-11.11	671.3	-20.00	23.5
IVORY PROPERTIES GROUP BHD	0.045	-10.00	60.0	-43.75	22.1
RENEUCO BHD	0.045	-10.00	2,434.4	-79.55	51.4
EONMETALL GROUP BHD	0.290	-9.38	1369.3	-40.21	88.4
MENTIGA CORP BHD	0.435	-9.38	2.1	-37.86	30.5
OMESTI BHD	0.145	-9.38	2,192.8	-50.00	78.4
HANDAL ENERGY BHD	0.055	-8.33	5337.7	-54.17	22.6
HUBLINE BHD	0.055	-8.33	5,907.2	37.50	235.9
HPMT HOLDINGS BHD	0.285	-8.06	16,235.3	-18.57	93.6
JOE HOLDING BHD	0.120	-7.69	33.1	-33.33	36.7
JHM CONSOLIDATION BHD	0.440	-7.37	5,515.2	-38.89	266.6
KNM GROUP BHD	0.065	-7.14	647.5	-27.78	262.9
MALAYAN UNITED INDUSTRIES BHD	0.065	-7.14	2,263.4	8.33	209.7

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 Source: Bloomberg

Top gainers (ranked by RM)

NAME	CLOSE	CHANGE (RM)	VOLUME ('000)	YTD CHANGE (%)	MARKET CAP (RM MIL)
YTL POWER INTERNATIONAL BHD	4.080	0.420	71,328.1	60.63	33,501.8
YTL CORP BHD	2.550	0.410	89,008.6	34.92	28,154.1
AYER HOLDINGS BHD	7.560	0.360	13.3	12.00	565.9
HONG LEONG INDUSTRIES BHD	14.400	0.240	113.1	64.00	4,600.4
BATU KAWAN BHD	20.140	0.160	27.8	-2.23	7855.8
WINSTAR CAPITAL BHD	0.510	0.160	82361.2	–	147.9
FRONTKEN CORP BHD	4.460	0.140	3,512.3	37.65	7,056.4
CARLSBERG BREWERY M BHD	20.740	0.100	267.9	7.57	6,341.2
KPJ HEALTHCARE BHD	2.460	0.100	12,172.8	70.83	10,736.2
PETRONAS GAS BHD	17.500	0.100	517.1	0.57	0.0
WESTPORTS HOLDINGS BHD	4.500	0.100	3,732.5	23.29	15,345.0
KOTRA INDUSTRIES BHD	4.490	0.090	19.6	-7.04	665.9
PENTAMASTER CORP BHD	4.210	0.090	1,580.5	-8.48	2994.6
NUENERGY HOLDINGS BHD	0.560	0.080	20.1	-24.32	105.8
ORIENTAL HOLDINGS BHD	7.190	0.080	311.9	13.59	4,459.7
SUNWAY CONSTRUCTION GROUP	4.540	0.080	904.2	134.02	5,853.7
EG INDUSTRIES BHD	2.300	0.070	1683.4	53.33	1,045.4
ALLIANZ MALAYSIA BHD	20.480	0.060	8.6	11.06	3677.6
GENETEC TECHNOLOGY BHD	1.230	0.060	20,366.0	-47.88	965.4
LTKM BHD	1.300	0.060	5.4	7.63	186.0

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 Source: Bloomberg

Top losers (ranked by RM)

NAME	CLOSE	CHANGE (RM)	VOLUME ('000)	YTD CHANGE (%)	MARKET CAP (RM MIL)
NESTLÉ (MALAYSIA) BHD	97.000	-2.000	94.5	-17.52	22,746.5
PETRONAS DAGANGAN BHD	19.860	-0.380	376.2	-9.07	19,730.0
MALAYSIAN PACIFIC INDUSTRIES	26.000	-0.280	234.1	-7.80	4,911.7
PPB GROUP BHD	11.880	-0.240	1,399.2	-17.96	16,900.5
SCIENTEX BHD	4.300	-0.200	1,354.0	12.86	6,692.0
UNITED PLANTATIONS BHD	33.140	-0.160	612.2	90.38	13,746.0
CHIN TECK PLANTATIONS BHD	7.860	-0.140	10.0	7.56	718.1
MISC BHD	7.360	-0.140	2,995.1	0.96	32,853.2
TENAGA NASIONAL BHD	13.940	-0.140	13,128.9	38.84	81,032.5
KESM INDUSTRIES BHD	3.410	-0.120	326.0	-51.77	146.7
MALAYAN CEMENT BHD	4.840	-0.120	1122.7	14.42	6474.2
PETRONAS CHEMICALS GROUP BHD	4.700	-0.110	2539.5	-34.36	37600.0
SAM ENGINEERING & EQUIPMENT	4.190	-0.110	606.6	4.96	2836.6
BINTULU PORT HOLDINGS BHD	6.000	-0.100	4.3	16.73	2760.0
UNITED MALACCA BHD	5.100	-0.100	1.4	0.79	1,069.8
BERMAZ AUTO BHD	1.590	-0.090	10,020.6	-28.11	1,859.3
GUAN CHONG BHD	3.860	-0.090	1730.3	110.93	4533.6
SUNGEI BAGAN RUBBER CO MALAYA	5.300	-0.090	50.7	64.88	492.5
DUTCH LADY MILK INDUSTRIES BHD	30.220	-0.080	3.0	30.48	1934.1
HONG LEONG BANK BHD	20.060	-0.080	430.1	6.14	43,484.4

Data as compiled on Dec 19, 2024 Source: Bloomberg