

ESTABLISHED 1845

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THE lawsuit was filed overseas to recover assets stolen from the sovereign wealth fund. 1MDB claims that Amicorp Group and its CEO facilitated fraudulent transactions amounting to more than US\$7 billion.

OTHER COURT STORIES

- **Hannah Yeoh loses defamation suit against ex-top cop Musa Hassan**
- **Organised crime trial of GISB CEO, 21 others transferred to High Court**

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Hot FM hits the airwaves from Balai Berita

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'It feels like coming back from the dead'

TWO Penang fishermen, who were adrift for six days after their boat's engine failed, recount their ordeal upon reuniting with loved ones.



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NST LEADER

Catastrophe in Khartoum

A reflection of a world gone terribly wrong

SUDAN, once the largest country in Africa before it split into Sudan and South Sudan, is facing the danger of another split as two avaricious generals carve the country up for themselves. The civil war that began in April last year as a result of clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by General Mohamed Hemedti, has led to a devastating humanitarian crisis. Burhan and Hemedti joined forces to topple then president Omar al-Bashir in a coup on April 11, 2019 to become the president and vice-president of the country. The irony is Hemedti, a brigadier-general by courtesy of Bashir, was his trusted head of palace security. Power may corrupt but the greed for power corrupts even more. Catastrophe is what has been happening in the land of the two Niles, now reduced to the size of France. Bashir will be remembered for the first split; the greedy generals for the second.

One estimate says of the 48 million people of Sudan, half have fled their homes, with media reports saying close to three million people are housed in overstretched refugee camps across the borders. Unicef rightly calls the Sudan conflict a children's crisis. Children, too, in the millions have fled their homes. In Unicef's estimate, about 14 million children are affected by the displacement, of whom one million have sought refuge in neighbouring Chad, Ethiopia, Egypt and South Sudan.

Isn't there a way to bring this national catastrophe that threatens to grow into a regional cataclysm to an end? There is, but two things must be made to happen before any sense of normalcy can return to Sudan. One, Burhan and Hemedti must be compelled to go. They have killed too many civilians, both during their brief rule after the overthrow of Bashir and during the more than a year of civil war. It is hard to tell how many have died in the civil war since it began, but one media report in August advanced a conservative number: 150,000. Two, outside powers, both near and far, must stop supplying weapons to SAF and RSF. It's common knowledge that nations near and far are either supplying weapons to both or allowing them to pass through the borders. Once arms dry up, Burhan and Hemedti would be forced to give up their power chase. Elections can then be called to return the country to civilian rule. We would be tempted to recommend the two generals to be tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes, but the ICC has lost all credibility. So has the international justice system. The ICC's one rule for the West and one rule for the rest is the epitome of hypocrisy. The United Nations Security Council? That is a graveyard for justice, not its maternity ward. Burhan and Hemedti must be tried by Sudan's own legal system. Justice must be the goal, not vengeance as it often is the case with regime change. As for the meddling foreign powers, we say this: remember, by fanning a civil war you are choosing to stand on the wrong side of history.

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NEWS / Nation

SUMBANGAN TUNAI RAHMAH

STR AID SHOWS GOVT CARES, SAYS EXPERT

Set up endowment fund to make scheme sustainable, says economist

KUALA LUMPUR

THE Madani government's Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah (STR) cash aid programme is a meaningful effort to help people face cost-of-living challenges.

Malaysia University of Science and Technology economist Professor Dr Barjoyai Bardai said the government's commitment is evident in the 2025 Budget, which increased STR and Sumbangan Asas Rahmah (Sara) allocations to RM13 billion from RM10 billion previously.

"While people require various forms of other assistance, STR is a much-anticipated initiative to improve their wellbeing and also brings hope that the government cares and is committed to their needs."

"However, it is not enough as the living cost for a family is more than RM3,000 per month."

"However, when this aid supplements household income, STR becomes a meaningful



Professor Dr Barjoyai Bardai



Dr Noor Nirwandy Mat Noordin

amount that can ease their burden," he said.

Barjoyai said STR should continue to support people's livelihoods, but the government must establish a sustainable mechanism to implement the aid without burdening the nation's finances.

He proposed setting up a social security institution to oversee an endowment fund that could generate an annual income, to ensure sufficient funds without relying on the government's annual budget.

Fellow of Psychological Operations at the Centre for Media and Information Warfare Studies at Universiti Teknologi Mara Dr Noor Nirwandy Mat Noordin said STR was crucial to uplift the people's economic circumstances.

"STR also reinforces the people's trust in the government's

ability to implement targeted subsidies and shape a more structured economic plan."

When tabling the 2025 Budget on Oct 18, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said 4.1 million households would receive Sara of RM100 per month next year.

The figure is an increase from 700,000 households this year.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said Sara would be credited to recipients' MyKad starting April 2025 and can be used to buy essential items — such as food, medicine, school supplies and hygiene products — at more than 600 supermarkets and retail outlets nationwide.

The additional RM3 billion allocation raises the maximum amount households can receive to RM4,600, up from RM3,700.

Bernama

TO DISCUSS ASEAN ISSUES

Prabowo postpones Anwar meeting due to fever

KUALA LUMPUR: Yesterday's meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has been postponed as the Indonesian leader is unwell with a fever.

Anwar said in a Facebook post yesterday that he had wished Prabowo a speedy recovery.

Both leaders were to meet in Langkawi to discuss Asean matters ahead of Malaysia's chairmanship of the bloc next year.

"My family and I have arrived in Langkawi to receive a visit from my friend, Prabowo, today.

However, last night (Sunday) he requested to postpone the meeting for a few days due to fever."

"I pray that President Prabowo recovers soon so we can continue with the bilateral meeting," Anwar wrote.

Anwar is also scheduled to meet former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Langkawi on Thursday.

"Insya-Allah on Dec 26, I am also scheduled to meet Thaksin to talk about the Asean agenda for the wellbeing of this region," he added.

On Dec 16, Anwar announced



Prabowo Subianto

that Thaksin had been appointed a member of the informal advisory group to Malaysia's Asean chairmanship in 2025.

He said Malaysia required statesmen like Thaksin to share expertise and ideas on regional issues.



Season's Greetings and Happy New Year

May the lessons of the year inspire us to welcome the year ahead with an open heart and mind.



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'POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT'

BUMI CONTRACTORS GET RM15B IN HIGHWAY PROJECTS

Deputy minister says more companies given contracts compared with last year

BANGI

UP to the third quarter of the year, highway projects awarded to Bumiputera contractors from Grades G1 to G7 have reached RM15.09 billion, nearly matching the RM15.10 billion allocated to the group last year.

Deputy Works Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan said of the total, RM335 million was awarded to 1,631 G1 Bumiputera companies this year, compared with RM333 million received by 1,585 G1 Bumiputera companies recorded last year.

"This reflects an increase in the participation of Bumiputera companies in highway projects, highlighting their capability and commitment to contributing to the country's infrastructure development," he said after the Bumiputera Contractors Association with Highway Concessionaires Matchmaking Programme at the Malaysian Highway Authority (LLM) building here yesterday.



Deputy Works Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan officiating at the Bumiputera Contractors Association with Highway Concessionaires Matchmaking Programme at the Malaysian Highway Authority (LLM) building in Bangi, Selangor, yesterday. With him are Malaysian Highway Authority director Datuk Sazali Harun (second from right) and Works Ministry deputy secretary-general Datuk Mohd Sakeri Abdul Kadir (third from left). BERNAMA PIC

The matchmaking programme aimed to increase the participation of Bumiputera contractors in highway projects.

Present were Works Ministry deputy secretary-general Datuk Mohd Sakeri Abdul Kadir and LLM director-general Datuk Sazali Harun.

In an immediate response, Malaysian Bumiputera Contractors Association president Datuk Azman Yusoff commended the government and concessionaires for their continued support.

"This is a very positive development, and we believe concessionaires will continue to assist Bumiputera contractors."

"They are well aware of the capacity of G1 contractors, whose completed projects have been of significant value," he said.

Azman expressed optimism about the future, especially with the recent approval of the Works Ministry's budget, which was expected to result in more projects next year.

He also outlined key areas to enhance the capacity of Bumiputera contractors.

Calling for reasonable pricing, faster tender processes, improved access to financial assistance and the enhancement of technical expertise, he said: "Ensure project offers are aligned with fair and reasonable prices, and accelerate the project tendering process to avoid delays."

"There should also be increased access to financial aid, including digital banking solutions, and better expertise within agencies like the Public Works Department to expedite project completion," he added. **Bernama**

RM150 ASSISTANCE

Parents: Aid for Form 6 students will ease burden

KUALA LUMPUR: Parents, especially those from the B40 group, said the decision to extend the Early Schooling Aid (BAP) of RM150 to Form 6 students starting next year will ease their financial burden.

Speaking to the *New Straits Times* today, father-of-three G. Gopal said the assistance meant a lot to his family as it would benefit two of his children.

The 58-year-old office administrator at a government agency said his eldest daughter had just joined the workforce, and his eldest son was going to Upper Six next year. His youngest would be sitting for his Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia soon, he added.

"This announcement comes as a relief for parents like me, who make just enough for the family. My son can use the aid money to buy himself more revision books ahead of his exams."

"I believe this aid would also benefit my youngest boy, if he does well and gets offered to do Form Six," said Gopal, a single father for the past six years.

He added that revision books were not cheap.

Gopal said with his retirement not far away, he had to be prudent in his spending.

He also thanked the Education Ministry for extending the aid to Form Six students.

Yesterday, Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek said the extension of the school aid programme was expected to benefit over 100,000 students.

She said that the BAP would be disbursed to Form 6 students in February and new students would receive theirs in July.

She said the BAP for Form 6 students reflected the Madani government's concern towards easing the financial burden of parents and guardians as they prepared for their children's schooling needs.

Another parent, Fauziah Hamid from Kajang, also shared Gopal's view about the expensive revision books.

She added that the aid could also be used to pay for tuition classes, if needed.

The aid is expected to cost the government an additional RM15 million for almost 100,000 Form Six students.

FILED ON DEC 20

1MDB sues Amicorp, CEO for over US\$1b

It accuses them of facilitating fraudulent transactions of more than US\$7 billion

KUALA LUMPUR

1 MALAYSIA Development Bhd (1MDB), the former sovereign wealth fund, is suing corporate services provider Amicorp Group and its chief executive officer, Toine Knipping, for over US\$1 billion.

The suit, filed on Dec 20, accuses Amicorp of facilitating fraudulent transactions amounting to over US\$7 billion between 2009 and 2014.

The claims focus is on allegations of fraudulent trading, dishonest assistance in breaches of fiduciary duty and conspiracy to commit unlawful acts, according to a statement released yesterday.

The legal action, which is being

brought in the British Virgin Islands against eight Amicorp entities, is part of a global effort to recover assets stolen from 1MDB. Amicorp is alleged to have played a crucial role in laundering the stolen funds allegedly through a global network spanning Singapore, Barbados, Curacao, Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands.

1MDB alleged that Amicorp provided access to the global financial system via Amicorp Bank, a bank registered in Barbados.

It is alleged that Amicorp provided fund entities and banking services to allow for the repeated cycling of assets through the claimants, such as to fraudulently lay a paper trail, giving the impression that 1MDB's assets had been invested and generated returns when in fact they had been misappropriated.

The suit seeks to hold Amicorp accountable for its role in the misappropriation of 1MDB's assets and to recover the stolen funds.

"We are bringing this action to seek justice for the role we allege Amicorp played in facilitating the laundering and ultimate dissipation of billions of dollars in stolen funds."

"We allege this was achieved through the creation of structures designed to purposefully obscure the theft, and that Amicorp deliberately and knowingly created complex structures to mask the stolen monies as assets and make them difficult to trace," a spokesman for the 1MDB board.

"There is, in our view, strong evidence to suggest that Amicorp — at the highest levels — knew it was involved in a dishonest and illegal money laundering scheme designed to transfer large sums of cash away from its intended beneficiary — the people of Malaysia."

Amicorp has faced regulatory action and fines in multiple countries for compliance failures and breaches of anti-money laundering laws.



Malaysia Development Bhd's action against Amicorp Group and its chief executive officer is part of a global effort to recover the former's stolen assets. REUTERS PIC

1MDB and its units are represented by Baker & Partners (BVI) Ltd, Tom Smith KC of South Square Chambers and James Bailey of 7 King's Bench Walk.

Lim Chee Wee Partnership, of Kuala Lumpur, acts as global coordinating counsel for all 1MDB-related asset recovery efforts.

The Malaysian court on Dec 11 granted the government's application to prevent PetroSaudi International Ltd and its director, Tarek Obaid, from accessing US\$340 million tied to 1MDB.

The funds were kept in a client account at a law firm in the United Kingdom.

It was reported that the High Court on Oct 30 ordered former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who co-founded and chaired 1MDB's advisory board until 2016, to enter his defence for all corruption charges involving the former sovereign wealth fund.

Najib, 71, is facing four charges of using his position to obtain bribes totalling RM2.3 billion from 1MDB funds and 21 charges of money laundering involving the same amount.

For the 21 charges of money laundering, he is accused of committing the offences between March 22, 2013, and Aug 30, 2013.

FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS

Universiti Malaysia Pahang to open country's first TVET grad school

PEKAN: Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMP-SA) will open the Graduate Engineering and Technological Business School (GET-BS) next year, which is the first Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduate school in the country.

The GET-BS will emphasise technology and engineering in its programmes.

UMP-SA acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr Aida Mustapha said the school, established under the university's Industrial Management Faculty, would produce future business leaders who embraced technological transformation and innovation, as well as sustainability and social responsibility.

"The GET-BS will offer academic programmes, training, research and consultation with a focus on sustainable business innovation and advanced TVET."

"The curriculum will be integrated with environmental, social and governance principles to strengthen the high-tech ecosystem management."



Professor Dr Aida Mustapha

"GET-BS students will get to interact with UMP-SA researchers, the industry and community."

"At GET-BS, advanced TVET will include management and entrepreneurial skills to manage the high-tech ecosystem, human resource, stakeholders and community," she said yesterday.

UMP-SA Deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic and international) Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Ziad Sulaiman said the Malaysian Technical University Network's (MTUN) advanced TVET 2030 initiative provided a framework for technical universities like UMP-SA to steer higher education towards flexibility, innovation and technology integration.

"UMP-SA is confident that GET-BS will ensure academic excellence and develop the country's human capital, in line with the aspirations of MTUN's advanced TVET 2030 initiative," he said.

"This strategic investment not only aims to meet current industry demands, but also to prepare graduates to face the challenges of an ever more complex world."



No Electricity Tariff Increase for All Customers in Peninsular Malaysia

Targeted Electricity Subsidies for the period 1 January to 30 June 2025

The Imbalance Cost Pass-Through (ICPT) rebate and surcharge rates for domestic and non-domestic customers remain unchanged.

The Fourth Regulatory Period (RP4) under the Incentive-Based Regulation (IBR) framework will be implemented from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2027, with the current electricity tariff schedule continuing from 1 January to 30 June 2025.

ICPT CHARGES FOR DOMESTIC CUSTOMERS (TARIFF A)



Total energy usage per month in kWh

ICPT CHARGES FOR NON-DOMESTIC CUSTOMERS



*Based on a comparison of ICPT charges for 1 July to 31 December 2024 **Consists of Street Lighting, Neon & Floodlights, Individual Street Lighting and Individual Compound Lighting

Learn more about ICPT and how it is calculated at <https://myelectricitybill.my>

<https://www.st.gov.my>

SPEECH AT FORUM

YEOH LOSES DEFAMATION SUIT AGAINST EX-IGP MUSA

No clear evidence of malice as Musa based statements on academic analysis, rules court

RAHMAT KHAIRULRIJAL
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THE High Court yesterday dismissed Hannah Yeoh's defamation suit against former top cop Tan Sri Musa Hassan over a speech he delivered at a forum at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) four years ago.

Judicial commissioner Arziah Mohamed Apandi made the decision after ruling that the youth and sports minister failed to prove the statements were defamatory.

The court said the plaintiff failed to establish two essential elements of defamation, namely that the statements as a whole referred to her and that the defendant was responsible for their publication.

"There was no clear evidence of malice, as the defendant based his statements on academic analysis, spoke within the context of broader national security concerns and had no control over the publication of his remarks."

"The defendant was merely an invited speaker with no knowledge that the forum would be broadcast and only learned of the Facebook Live streaming at the end."

"He had no control over its publication," said the court.

The court said the constitutional right to freedom of expression must be robustly protected, particularly regarding matters of public interest and statements made on privileged occasions.

"While responsible speech is important, public figures must expect and tolerate robust criticism and debate about their public statements and activities," the court added.

The court also awarded RM40,000 in cost to the defendant.

Yeoh's lawyer Lim Wei Jiet said they would file an appeal at the Court of Appeal soon.

Based on the lawsuit filed on July 3, 2020, Yeoh claimed that Musa gave a speech at a forum titled "Current Issues Discourse on the Hat Yai Peace Agreement 1989: Did the CPM Surrender?"

The statements alleged that the plaintiff wrote her book to turn Malaysia into a Christian nation, had links with evangelists and Jews to damage Islam and Malaysia, and put her personal interests above national interests.

The DAP lawmaker claimed that the statements in the speech were untrue, distressing, false, incorrect and baseless, as well as premeditated, made with malicious intent, tarnished her reputation, defamed her and destroyed her reputation.

"The statements were made at a forum discussing national security issues, where the defendant spoke as the former inspector-general of police about perceived security threats."



Hannah Yeoh



Tan Sri Musa Hassan

BID FOR GAG ORDER

GISB case transferred to High Court

SELANGOR: The High Court will hear an organised crime case involving Global Ikhwān Services and Business Holdings Sdn Bhd (GISB) chief executive Nasiruddin Mohd Ali, his wife Azura Md Yusof and 20 others.

This followed Sessions Court judge Lailatul Zuraidda Haron @ Harun's decision to allow deputy public prosecutor Norinna Bahadun's application to transfer the case.

Defence lawyer Datuk Rosli Kamaruddin did not object to the transfer request.

"However, for the court's record, the accused Azura and Nasiruddin have been held in

solitary confinement — Nasiruddin at Sungai Buloh Prison and Azura at Kajang Prison — for more than a month.

"We will file an application with the Home Ministry, supported by the police, to revoke the solitary confinement order and request their placement in regular cells. We ask that this be recorded by the court," Rosli said.

Another defence lawyer, Najib Zakaria, said they would also file a



Nasiruddin Mohd Ali

gag order application at the High Court to prevent public discussions about the case, which could interfere with proceedings.

On Oct 23, all the accused were charged with being members of an organised crime group, GISB.

The accused, aged between 27 and 72, were charged under Section 130V(1) of the Penal Code, which provides for a minimum of five years and a maximum of 20 years' imprisonment upon conviction.



Police escorting some of the men accused of being members of the Pacific Siva gang at the Sessions Court in Butterworth yesterday. NSTP PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

'PACIFIC SIVA' GROUP

16 alleged gang members detained under Sosma

BUTTERWORTH: Sixteen alleged Pacific Siva organised crime group members have been detained under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma).

The 16, who have allegedly been part of the gang for the past eight years, are M. Subramaniam, 44; G. Tilagarajan, 36; M. Kesavan, 39; N. Sharvin, 26; T.S. Ligen Kumar, 26; M. Dineswaren, 24; P. Kirubaakaran, 23; G. Meheskumar, 27; M. Janagesh, 28; R. Logeswaraaj, 30; K. Hendry, 44; M. Sivasankaran, 37; M. Partiben,

29; S. Arunan, 32; S. Denneswaran, 28; and V. Alagis, 31.

When the charge was read out jointly in Tamil before Sessions Court judge Nor Azah Kasran, all the accused merely nodded to indicate they understood the charge.

This was because the case was framed under Sosma, which falls under the jurisdiction of the High Court.

According to the charge sheet, 14 of the accused, aged between 23 and 44, were alleged to have committed the offence between

June 2016 and Nov 26, 2024.

The remaining two accused, aged 32 and 44, were alleged to have committed the offence between February 2019 and Nov 26, 2024.

Deputy public prosecutors Yazid Mustaqim Roslan and Lina Hanini Ismail prosecuted, while 13 of the accused were represented by their respective lawyers.

The court fixed Feb 7 for mention to complete the documents to transfer the proceedings to the High Court.

PUBLIC SERVICE REMUNERATION SYSTEM

YEAR-END CHEER FOR SARAWAK CIVIL SERVANTS

Salary adjustment takes effect this month

KUCHING

THIS year's Christmas celebration holds a special meaning for civil servants in Sarawak as their first adjusted salary under the Public Service Remuneration System (SSPA) takes effect this month.

Many expressed gratitude for the new adjusted salary and also the Special Financial Assistance (BKK) of two months' salary by the state government — which was also given this month — describing the dual financial boost

as a special Christmas gift.

Gabriel Rommy, 26, who is with the Sarawak Public Communications Unit, said: "With this salary increase, I can buy Christmas decorations. Last year, we didn't celebrate Christmas as we were grieving the loss of my father."

"We also renovated our house recently. This salary increase helps us cover extra expenses, such as decorations, making the atmosphere more lively and meaningful for us as a family."

Grace John Lee, 32, who works at the Sarawak Premier's Department, said the salary increase had provided much-needed relief, particularly amid the rising cost of living.

She said the adjustment also benefited her three siblings, who are also civil servants.

"Last year, we pooled our re-

sources to buy ingredients and cooked together in preparation for the open house. However, this year, with the salary increase, we decided to make the most of this blessing by opting for catering services for the open house."

"This not only saves time but will also allow us to focus on welcoming and attending to our guests," she said.

Under SSPA, officers in the implementing, management and professional groups will receive a phased salary adjustment of 15 per cent — eight per cent in Phase 1 starting this month, and seven per cent in Phase 2 starting January 2026.

The top management group, however, will receive a salary adjustment of five per cent, with four per cent in Phase 1 and three per cent in Phase 2. **Bernama**



FESTIVE SPIRIT

A. Rosalind (left) and A. Regina decorating their Christmas booth in Sungai Pari, Buntong in Perak yesterday. **BERNAMA PIC**

Do they know it's Christmas?

Bob Geldof & Midge Ure

For thousands of children in need, the answer is probably no.

So if this is the season for giving, why not bring some cheer to their lives?

Today, we ask you to pick a children's charity of your choice, look into your hearts and consider what you can give.

You may know of orphanages and shelters which need money, books, furniture or equipment.

Or simply your time to teach kids to read, sing and learn new skills.

Some shelters have programs for volunteer participation.

If you are already a regular donor, do call upon family or friends so they may do likewise.

Some suggestions on where you can start, should you need any:

Suriana.org offers protection for child victims of abuse, urban poverty and human trafficking.

Hati.my is a non-profit which lists Malaysian charities, non-governmental organisations and underprivileged communities.

There is no perfect time to give, but there are perfect reasons to.

invictusblue

This advertisement is in memory of the late Gerald Miranda, Invictus Blue Sdn Bhd. INVICTUSBLUE.COM/MS

MORE ACTION NEEDED

Expert: High scam rate affects investors' confidence

KUALA LUMPUR: The government must intensify efforts to curb online scams because they can affect trade and tourism, as well as derail Malaysia's efforts to become a foremost investment destination.

Graymatter Forensics Advisory Sdn Bhd managing principal Raymon Ram said online scams had become very "lucrative" for crime syndicates.

This was not good for the economy as no investor would want to do business where the rate of scams was very high. He said this to Bernama after Bernama TV's *The Nation* programme last week on the topic "The Economic Fall-out of Scams".

Graymatter Forensics Advisory is a boutique firm specialising in financial forensics and fraud risk management.

He said the losses from online scams amounted to three per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), equivalent to RM54 billion.

Raymon lauded the government's efforts in tackling the root cause of such scams, including encouraging victims to report to the National Scam Response Centre (NSRC).

The authorities were also taking steps to freeze mule accounts owned by students, including foreigners, who gave scam syndicates control of their bank accounts.

Bank Negara Malaysia statistics showed "that fraud is our main issue and the root causes of fraud are mule accounts", he said.

Mules reportedly sold access to their accounts for RM500, which are used to accept money scammed from victims.

"So, investor confidence needs to be boosted by showing the rate

of recovery, which will show we are attending to these problems," he said.

The Finance Ministry told the Dewan Negara on Dec 19 that up to September, about 22,000 scam cases, involving losses of over RM147 million, were reported to NSRC.

"Over 43,000 suspected mule accounts were identified for action from financial institutions to block multiple layers of transactions used to hide illicit funds," the ministry told the upper house.

Raymon said the Covid-19 pandemic had pushed people towards the digital economy.

"But for people to triumph in the digital economy, it must be built on trust (and) if we see the rates of scams still going up, we would not be able to lead the change in the region," he said.

He said losses from scams were almost equal to the amount of investments in major sectors like healthcare or infrastructure.

He said organised crime rings were focused on online fraud as there was less chance of being caught and that scams had evolved into transnational crime, contributing to the outflow of funds.

"Most of these scams are (operating) in areas that are being set up as special economic zones for scams. They're outside of Malaysia, like in border towns of Myanmar and Cambodia."

He urged small- and medium-scale enterprises to be vigilant in protecting customer information and their funds.

He said artificial intelligence had led to an increase in online scams as it allowed voices and images to be faked to dupe victims. **Bernama**



Raymon Ram



HOLIDAY RUSH

Kuala Lumpur's Terminal Bersepadu Selatan (top) and Kuala Lumpur International Airport Terminal 2 are packed yesterday as travellers take advantage of the school holidays and Christmas break to go on vacation or return to their hometowns. NSTP PIX BY ASWADI ALIAS



FEWER THAN 150 IN THE WILD

STUDY ON DECLINING TIGER POPULATION

Focus will be on areas prone to human-tiger conflict, says Perhilitan chief

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THE Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan) has initiated a study on the critically endangered Malayan tiger, whose wild population is believed to number fewer than 150.

Perhilitan director-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim said the department monitored the Malayan tiger in its habitat, focusing on areas prone to human-tiger conflicts.

The tiger's low population has prompted government intervention, with the prime minister presiding over the National Task Force for Malayan Tiger Conservation (MyTTF), established after a cabinet meeting in 2021.

"MyTTF is a collaboration be-



A tourist taking a picture of a Malayan tiger at Zoo Negara in Ampang, Selangor. NSTP FILE PIC

tween federal and state governments to address this critical situation," said Kadir.

The task force had been assigned to coordinate national policies, legislation and conservation strategies.

The Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry had implemented long-term conservation measures to protect Malayan tigers through

Perhilitan.

But recent deaths of tigers have highlighted the urgent need for more conservation efforts.

In June, authorities discovered a tiger carcass in Kelantan's Sungai Dabong, while another tiger died in a road accident on the North-South Expressway in Perak in July.

Kadir urged the public to report crimes involving wildlife.

LOST AT SEA

MISSING DUO 'BACK FROM THE DEAD'

Two Penang fishermen adrift for days feared the worst when storms struck their boat

AUDREY DERMAWAN
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MUHAMMAD Ikmal Hakimi Ismail and his fellow fisherman, Nor Hasrul Abdullah, felt all hope was lost when their boat drifted into international waters after encountering engine problem last Monday.

After drifting for more than 90 hours, Ikmal Hakimi and Nor Hasrul, aged 22 and 25, respectively, were ready to die at sea, especially when storms struck their boat on the first and fourth day.

"Many things went through our minds, but we just persevered and *tawakal* (placed our trust in Allah)."

"Nobody thought we would make it out alive. At one point, we even told ourselves, 'This is it', especially when the storm hit us on the fourth day."

"But we are so grateful to make it back safe and alive. It feels like coming back from the dead," he said.

The fishermen were reported missing after their boat began drifting off the waters of Kerachut, Kuala Sungai Pinang, near George Town, on Dec 16.

They were later found safe in Aceh waters on Sunday and were reunited with their families at 8am yesterday.

Recalling their ordeal, Ikmal Hafiz said their nightmare began when their fishing net became entangled last Monday.

He said their engine encountered a



MPB group managing director Rafiq Razali (fourth from left) officiating at the opening ceremony of Hot FM studio in Balai Berita, Bangsar, yesterday. PIC BY HOT FM

STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

Hot FM opens new studio in Balai Berita

KUALA LUMPUR: Media Prima Bhd's (MPB) radio station Hot FM officially opened its new studio at Balai Berita, Bangsar, here yesterday.

The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art technology in audio broadcasting, marking a milestone for the popular radio network.

MPB group managing director Rafiq Razali officiated at the ceremony, alongside Bekpes Hot FM segment presenters Khairi Jamaluddin, Johan and AG Azmeer.

Others present were Media Prima Audio chief executive officer Nazri Noran and Media Prima Television Network and Primeworks Studios chief executive officer Nini Yusof.

During the launch, Rafiq extended his

best wishes to Hot FM.

"Congratulations to Hot FM. I am pleased to inaugurate the new Hot FM studio today (yesterday)," he said.

Hot FM network content director Raja Nadia Salwana Raja Hisham expressed hope that the new studio would boost morale and provide inspiration.

"We hope that this new studio will inspire us to continue working hard and deliver the best for our loyal listeners."

"We also hope it sparks extraordinary ideas and creativity for Hot FM listeners. Other Media Prima Audio radio networks will follow suit in stages," she said.

MPB's television networks began full operations at Balai Berita on Oct 21, after more than three decades at Sri Pentas in Bandar Utama.



Muhammad Ikmal Hakimi Ismail (left) and Nor Hasrul Abdullah giving thanks on the deck of the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency ship upon returning to Batu Maung in Penang yesterday. NSTP PIC BY MIKAIL ONG

problem as they tried to pull in the net.

"We called our *towkay* for help, and he said he would send someone over. I also called my mother to tell her what had happened. That was the last time we could use our handphone," he said.

Their hopes dwindled as days passed and the view of land began to disappear. By the fourth day, they could only see the vast ocean, unlike the clear view of Teluk Bahang when their boat engine broke down.

On the fifth day, Ikmal Hafiz said they began seeing cargo ships again and thought they were near Penang Port.

"Little did we know that we had drifted into Indonesian waters. It was then that some Indonesian fishermen spotted us and brought us with them," he said.

On the first day, he said he ate some

bread with Nor Hasrul's packed rice.

"After that, we ate the *ikan temenung* and *cencaru* we caught and drank sea water. I even vomited twice because the raw fish tasted horrible."

Tensions also flared between the two survivors due to the fear and stress.

"We even pushed one another off the boat. That's how disoriented we were," he said.

Southwest police chief Assistant Commissioner Sazalee Adam said police received information about the duo's discovery at 9am on Sunday.

Page 1 pic: Fishermen Muhammad Ikmal Hakimi Ismail (left) and Nor Hasrul Abdullah looking relieved while speaking to the media at the Batu Maung shipyard in Penang yesterday.

	PRAYER TIMES					
	SUBUH (am)	SYURUK	ZUHUR	ASAR (pm)	MAGRIB	ISYAK
Melaka	5:58	7:12	1:13	4:37	7:12	8:27
Penang	6:10	7:22	1:21	4:43	7:14	8:29
K. Lumpur	6:03	7:14	1:16	4:38	7:13	8:28
Johor Baru	5:50	7:04	1:07	4:31	7:07	8:22
Kuantan	5:56	7:10	1:10	4:33	7:07	8:22
Ipoh	6:07	7:18	1:18	4:41	7:13	8:28

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MORE ARRESTS EXPECTED

2 MEN HELD OVER SALE OF DRUGS IN ANGPOW PACKETS

Ecstasy was supplied to partygoers at nightclubs for RM150-RM200 per packet

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POLICE have dismantled a drug ring supplying partygoers at nightclubs in the state with Ecstasy packed in alien-themed angpow packets, following the arrest of two men.

Police also seized drugs worth about RM210,721.

The suspects had been selling the drugs for between RM150 and RM200 per angpow packet. They featured a design resembling a US\$100 bill, with the image of Benjamin Franklin replaced by an alien.

The duo's illicit operations were uncovered after police detained a 33-year-old man acting suspiciously at a petrol station in Taman Pelangi here on Dec 21.

A stash of drugs was found in the vehicle during an inspection. The man led police to his rented house in the same neighbourhood, which he shared with his 40-year-old housemate.



Johor Baru (South) Assistant Commissioner Raub Selamat (centre) with the seized items during a press conference at the Johor Baru (South) police headquarters yesterday. NSTP PIC BY ISKANDAR ISHAK

The latter was arrested after police discovered narcotics in the house. Both have prior criminal and drug-related records and tested positive for methamphetamine and ketamine.

Johor Baru (South) Assistant Commissioner Raub Selamat said the syndicate was believed to have been active since October.

The rented house was used to

repack and store drugs for distribution.

"Investigations revealed the drugs were sold to partygoers at entertainment outlets," Raub said at the district police headquarters here.

In total, police seized 1.2kg of Ecstasy powder, Erimin 5 pills, and ketamine. They also confiscated a Perodua Myvi, a set of house keys and RM120.

Investigations are ongoing to trace the source of the drug supply.

Raub said more arrests of suspected syndicate members were expected.

The case is being investigated under Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act (1952), which carries the death penalty or life imprisonment upon conviction.

PLEADED NOT GUILTY

Groom-to-be among 6 charged with sexual assault on teen

MUAR: A man, 23, set to get engaged this Saturday and another scheduled to marry next year were among six people jointly charged at the Sessions Court here yesterday with committing physical sexual assault against a teenager five years ago.

Hafsyal Sufian Kamaluddin and Muhammad Azizi Shamsor Kamar, 23, along with four others, pleaded not guilty when the charges were read to them before Judge Sayani Mohd Nor.

Also charged were Azizi's twin brother, Muhammad Azizan, as well as Muhammad Asraf Rosli,

23; Muhammad Hafize Abd Rahim, 21; and Muhammad Amirul Aiman Sharrol, 21.

According to the charge sheet, all of the accused were charged with committing the offence against the girl, who was 16 at the time of the incident, in a house in Tangkak between 1.30am and 2am on Jan 20, 2019.

Deputy public prosecutors Daniah Munir and Diyana Najihah Muhamad Fauzi prosecuted while all of the accused were not represented.

Earlier, the prosecution proposed bail of RM20,000 for each



All six men were charged with sexually assaulting the girl, who was 16 at the time of the incident, in a house in Tangkak, Johor, on Jan 20, 2019. NSTP PIC BY ALIAS ABD RANI

of the accused and requested the court to impose two additional conditions.

The court granted bail of RM10,000 with one surety for each accused. The court ordered the six accused to report to the nearest police station once a

month and prohibited them from contacting the victim or prosecution witnesses.

The case has been set for mention on Jan 27 to facilitate the submission of documents and the appointment of lawyers for all of the accused.

DUPED

2 people lose over RM500,000 to scams

JOHOR BARU: Two individuals in Johor have fallen victim to online investment scams, losing a combined total of over RM500,000.

A technician, 44, lost RM172,000 after being lured with a fake investment opportunity promising a 400 per cent return.

The man was contacted on Nov 2 by a woman who claimed to be an investment agent, adding him to a WhatsApp group called Malaysia Saham VIP.

He was instructed to download the CapMax app and provide his personal and banking details.

Between Nov 5 and Dec 13, he made 13 online cash transfers to seven different bank accounts.

When he tried to withdraw his profits, he was told to pay RM620,000.

When he attempted to contact the woman, he found she had blocked him and removed him from the group.

Realising he had been scammed, he filed a report.

Johor Baru (South) police chief Assistant Commissioner Raub Selamat said promises of quick, lucrative returns were a red flag.

"Verify investment opportunities with the Securities Commission and avoid sharing personal or banking details with unverified parties," he said.

Meanwhile, a 64-year-old man lost nearly RM330,000 to a scam after encountering an advertisement on Facebook promoting an investment scheme offering up to 10 per cent returns a day.

He was directed to a WhatsApp chat, where a woman explained the "scheme" to him.

Convinced, he made 23 online transfers to seven bank accounts between Nov 22 and Dec 20.

Johor Baru (North) police chief Assistant Commissioner Balveer Singh said the man sensed something was amiss when he was asked to make additional payments to withdraw his profits, to which he refused.

"Realising he had been scammed, he lodged a police report on Sunday.

"Efforts to identify the bank account holders, believed to be mule accounts, are underway."

He added that the case was being investigated under Section 420 of the Penal Code for cheating.

LIFE & TIMES

Sibling revelry

SIBLING musical duo Martin Looi and Lav Looi have announced their latest collaborative project, 'Wrapped in Harmony', a fresh take on holiday classics that combines the elegance of the violin with Lav's soulful vocals.

This eight-track album is a hybrid of instrumental arrangements with the violin as the focal point, blended with Lav's distinct voice on select tracks, breathing new life into timeless songs.

With 'Wrapped in Harmony', Martin and Lav deliver unique arrangements of beloved Christmas classics, reimagined with modern pop stylings.

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Listeners will be enchanted by renditions of songs like 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas', 'Silent Night' and 'Hallelujah', featuring Martin's violin work and Lav's vocals on several tracks.

The duo also revisit their previous release of 'The Christmas Song' and adds the energetic 'Santa Tell Me', a nod to contemporary holiday tunes.

Taking three months to complete, 'Wrapped in Harmony' is the product of careful song selection and meticulous production.

Martin shares that Tchaikovsky's 'The Nutcracker' is his personal favourite on the album, allowing him to return to his classical roots and exploring a modern flair.

"Our goal with this album is to spread the holiday spirit and put a little bit of ourselves into each piece," says Lav.

"It was challenging and a little scary to rearrange songs that people already love and know so well as I feel like there is already an expectation for these classic songs to sound a certain way, but I had fun with them while maintaining the core elements, and I can't wait to share them and I'm curious about the reception," she adds.

Available on all streaming platforms from this month, 'Wrapped in Harmony' invites listeners to a festive celebration of familiar and refreshingly new music.

STRING PASSION

At 25, Malaysian violinist Martin effortlessly fuses classical training with a modern twist.

Whether gracing prestigious events or collaborating with artistes like Joe Flizzow and Jaclyn Victor, his musical finesse mirrors his sharp style. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 12**



Martin Looi and Lav Looi deliver unique arrangements of beloved Christmas classics with 'Wrapped in Harmony'. PIX COURTESY OF MARTIN LOOI

YouTube works with Hollywood to track down celebrity deepfakes

CELEBRITY deepfakes are proliferating on social networks. It's a growing scourge, and one against which YouTube — together with the help of a number of celebrities — has decided to tackle with the launch of a new tool.

YouTube has announced a partnership with the leading entertainment and sports agency, Creative Artists Agency (CAA), to track down deepfakes. The video streaming platform has announced that a handful of celebrities will soon be testing a new technology "designed to identify and manage artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content that features their likeness, including their face, on YouTube at scale", the platform said in

a blog post.

The idea is simple: to improve the tool by adapting its needs according to the feedback of participants, whose names have not yet been revealed. However, YouTube has said participants will include sports personalities from the NBA and NFL, as well as award-winning actors and actresses. The test phase for this technology will begin early next year.

With this tool, the platform aims not only to find deepfakes more easily, but also to facilitate their removal from the Internet.

"In addition to surfacing AI-generated content that depicts their likeness, this tool will provide easy access to submit requests for removal through our privacy complaint process," the streaming site said.

And this is just the beginning. The American giant has already announced a number of new products that will be unveiled over the coming year.

"Importantly, this is the first step of a larger testing effort. Over the next few months, we'll announce new testing cohorts of top YouTube creators, creative professionals, and other leading partners representing talent."

With the rise of AI, many entertainment professionals have highlighted the pitfalls of such technology, which can easily replace actors. For example, a deepfake of the actor Tom Cruise caused confusion on TikTok in 2021.

Female artistes have also fallen victim to pornographic deepfakes, such as Taylor Swift and members of K-pop groups.



YouTube is developing a tool to detect celebrity deepfakes on the video streaming platform. PICTURE CREDIT: ETX DAILY UP

FROM Snow White to Cinderella to Sleeping Beauty, Disney princesses may have met their Prince Charming, but they're not living in the best of health. So reports a study published in the Christmas edition of the 'British Medical Journal', in which experts call on Disney to review the well-being of its heroines so that they can start living "healthily ever after".

A research team, led by Sanne van Dijk of the University of Twente in the Netherlands, has studied the famous Disney princesses to determine the extent to which their lifestyles expose them to health risks. From loneliness to infectious diseases, respiratory problems and psychological disorders — medically speaking — these fairytale heroines are far from enviable.

Take Snow White, for example. Although she is considered "the fairest in the land", her social isolation predisposes her to cardiovascular disease, anxiety and depression. While her encounter with the Seven Dwarfs offers her a semblance of respite from the dangers of solitude, the famous poisoned apple offered by her stepmother may well cost Snow White her life. Proof that the popular saying "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" doesn't always ring true.

The loneliness of Jasmine, the heroine of 'Aladdin', is no less worrying. A recluse in her palace in Agrabah, the princess has only her tiger, Rajah, for company. Loyal and protective the animal may be, but this four-legged companion is a potential carrier of zoonotic diseases, not to mention the

Disney heroines not so healthy

risks associated with the tiger's natural predatory instincts.

A similar situation is faced by Belle, who, by living with the Beast, also runs the risk of exposing herself to severe infectious diseases, such as brucellosis and rabies.

For Cinderella, the danger comes from... dust. Relegated to the role of servant by her stepmother, the young woman inhales clouds of dust every day, making her particularly vulnerable to chronic lung disease.

As if that weren't enough, the fairy godmother's magic wand, which generously scatters microplastic-like glitter, is only likely to make her respiratory health worse.

RISKS OF DIABETES AND ALOPECIA

The study authors are also concerned about the fate of Aurora, Pocahontas and Mulan.

Sleeping Beauty's prolonged sleep after pricking her finger on a spindle increases her risk of diabetes, obesity and muscle atrophy.

As for Pocahontas, viewers see her jump off a cliff at the beginning of the Disney animated film, under the worried gaze of her friend, Nakoma.

A spectacular feat, but potentially fatal, as researchers estimate the height of the plunge at more than 250m.

Mulan, meanwhile, is under intense



In Disney's animated film, Mulan is under intense family pressure to marry, which must weigh heavily on her mental health. PICTURE CREDIT: ETX DAILY UP

family pressure to marry, which is likely taking its toll on her mental health.

And what about Rapunzel?

By using her long golden hair as a rope, she runs the risk of seriously weakening it. As a result, she could suffer from traction alopecia, a condition that causes scalp pain, headaches

and, worst of all, permanent loss of her precious hair.

Not without a hint of irony, van Dijk and colleagues believe that Disney should pay more attention to the well-being of its princesses.

"Disney must consider interventions to overcome these health chal-

lenges, including mindfulness and psychotherapy, training on cohabitation with animals, and personal protection measures against infectious agents and toxic particles," the researchers write in their paper. "Only then can Disney princesses start living healthily ever after."



Internationally renowned

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Armed with an audio engineering degree from the Australian Institute of Music, Martin's upcoming hit harmoniously combines the timeless allure of the violin with contemporary pop.

As he refines his sound, Martin stays true to his first love — the violin.

Last year, he released an instrumental EP, titled 'Sugary'.

"It is a five-track masterpiece that weaves classical sophistication with contemporary hip-hop and pop influences, promising an extraordinary musical experience," he says.

With a musical journey that commenced at the tender age of 5, Martin's mastery of the violin in this EP serves as a testament to his evolution as an artiste.

It features three original compositions that showcase his signature style of fusing the timeless elegance of the violin with the pulsating rhythms of modern beats.

In August, he ascended the Sky Box at KL Tower, 300m above the city while playing the national anthem 'Negaraku' on his acoustic violin to mark the National Day celebration.

VERSATILE TALENT

His elder sister Lav, 30, is a Spain-based music producer, vocalist and artiste hailing from Melaka.

She started playing classical piano at 4 and attended the Berklee College of Music, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in contemporary writing and production.

Her experience in international music production and songwriting has led her through North America, Europe and Asia, where she has worked as a composer, producer and recording engineer for several renowned music studios, including Dead Room Records and Grand Theft Records.

Her original compositions and vocal contributions have been used in commercials for major brands, including KFC, Gojek, Pizza Hut, Lazada and L'Oréal.

Lav's talent and love for music later brought her to Berklee Valencia, where she completed a master's degree in scoring for film, TV and video games.

Since her graduation, she has continued to work as a session vocalist and pianist, composer and producer for artists.

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Violinist Martin Looi effortlessly fuses his classical training with a modern twist, while his sister, Lav Looi, is a session vocalist and pianist, composer and producer.



Macau's gaming boom began in 2002 when authorities ended the monopoly of late tycoon Stanley Ho and brought in multinational casino operators known as concessionaires. PICTURE CREDIT: AFP

Macau struggles to evolve

IN the shadow of the Grand Lisboa, the Macau casino world-famous for its "golden lotus" design, fashion boutique owner Suzanne Leong wonders if the economic miracle that initially made her fortune has now cast her aside.

The Chinese casino hub once again tops the world in gaming revenue in 2024 as visitors return after the Covid-19 pandemic, but residents like Leong point to a huge disparity in which parts of the economy are bouncing back.

As Macau celebrates 25 years under Beijing rule this week, many feel more urgently than ever that the city needs to diversify its economy — something Beijing has demanded for years to underwhelming results.

"To truly make Macau a place that does not run on casinos, it's not easy to find a way. But if we don't try now, there will only be fewer (options)," Leong, 51, said.

"Because I really love Macau, I feel panicked."

Born and raised in the former Portuguese colony, Leong belongs to a population that became China's richest from two decades of wealth

spilling out of casinos.

But shifting consumer habits among locals and tourists have led her to believe those days are gone for good.

Leong's regulars are tightening purse strings while Chinese tourists are now more likely to eat from lunchboxes outside her shop instead of coming in to spend.

Compared with the store's heyday, earnings this year have fallen 90 per cent.

"Macau may look prosperous, but many restaurants and retailers are suffering," she said. "Nobody knows what to do."

'EASY WINS'

Macau's gaming boom began in 2002 when authorities ended the monopoly of late tycoon Stanley Ho and brought in multinational casino operators known as concessionaires.

The city — the only place in China where casino gambling is allowed — took less than five years to surpass Las Vegas in gross gaming revenue and consistently stayed ahead aside from a Covid-era dip.

In Vegas, gaming-related taxes

have accounted for around 35 per cent of government revenue in recent years. But for Macau, the latest figure stood at 81 per cent.

"Since at least a decade ago, the central government had hoped that Macau's economy would diversify, but it didn't budge," said Leong Meng-u, a politics academic at the University of Macau.

"With gaming, the money comes too easily. (Macau) basically didn't have to do much for a robust income."

That partially changed when Chinese President Xi Jinping came into power.

Xi's anti-corruption drive brought an end to Macau's lucrative junket industry, which enticed wealthy gamblers from China's mainland with perks like VIP rooms and credit lines.

The city's six casino operators managed to renew their licences in 2022 only after they pledged to invest in other sectors, with US\$14.9 billion earmarked for projects such as theme parks and conference venues.

Xi, who will visit Macau this week, will probably "want to see for him-

self what non-gaming, hard investment has eventuated" said Ben Lee, managing partner of consultancy IGamiX.

City officials have even designated six historic areas for revitalisation — one for each concessionaire — though Lee said the operators would prefer "easy wins", as non-gaming ventures typically bring paltry returns.

"The casinos are rational economic entities. They will only do as little as they think they can get away with."

'CATCH THE MOMENT'

Now two years into their 10-year concessions, operators have developed a steady rhythm of concerts, conferences and sporting events, including a deal with the NBA to host pre-season games.

Aside from boosting tourism, city officials — including Macau's next leader Sam Hou-fai — have picked a range of sectors to become new economic drivers.

But the government's messaging is "sometimes muddled", said Vitaly Umansky, a gaming expert at Seaport Research Partners.

"[The government] would like other industries to start developing" but it would be "very, very difficult" for Macau to compete in proposed fields like financial services, technology and Chinese medicine, he said.

Growing those sectors would likely require foreign talent, and there is a "consensus in the business community [that]... Macau needs to move faster and make bolder moves" on that front, said Jose Carlos Matias, director of 'Macau Business' magazine.

While much remains to be done, Matias said he would not bet against the house.

"The doomsayers have been constantly proven wrong when it comes to Macau."

Having endured an "extremely tough" year, boutique owner Leong said she had no plans to close her business.

"We have to understand the present moment and adapt well. I think about my children and ask, what can they do to catch the moment?" she said.

"I won't leave Macau. I want to see it get better and better." AFP



MissAlvy. PIC COURTESY OF
ROCKETFUEL ENTERTAINMENT

MissAlvy debuts as singer with single 'Terpikat'

POPULAR social media influencer and actress Alwynna Joanna Joseph, better known as MissAlvy, has taken a bold step into the music industry with her debut single 'Terpikat'.

Known for her charming personality and acting talent, MissAlvy rose to fame unintentionally.

"I started sharing photos and videos just for fun, and before I knew it, my follower count grew.

"Acting opportunities soon followed and now, music feels like another dream comes true," she said in a statement.

MissAlvy, who currently plays the lead role of Siew May in the drama series 'Kelas Tahanan Cikgu Hiragi', shared that music has always been

close to her heart.

"Although I began as an influencer and actress, music has been part of my life since childhood," she said.

MissAlvy added that she was grateful to Rocketfuel Entertainment, which produced the single, for giving her this golden opportunity.

She said her new song draws inspiration from the familiar yet thrilling feeling of having a crush.

"It's about the excitement and butterflies you get when you secretly like someone but don't know how to express it.

"I think many people can relate to that mix of happiness and hesitation," she said.

Combining fun, upbeat pop with EDM influences, 'Terpikat' aims to appeal to today's younger listeners.

The creative process, which took nearly a year, allowed MissAlvy to contribute personal ideas to ensure the song truly reflected her emotions.

"I wanted something that spoke to my soul. The recording process was so satisfying because it turned out exactly as I envisioned," she said.

As she embarks on this new artistic journey, MissAlvy remains committed to giving her best.

"I'm still learning and exploring different genres. I hope 'Terpikat' captivates listeners and brings me closer to my fans."

'Terpikat' is now available on all major streaming platforms.



Dukes captures hearts with 'Benci Jadi Cinta'

RISING indie rock band Dukes' latest single, 'Benci Jadi Cinta', is a collaboration with Alternate Records and renowned producer Jipie.

The song explores a love story that begins with hatred but blossoms into something beautiful — offering a theme that resonates with listeners.

'Benci Jadi Cinta' is also the soundtrack for TV3's vertical digital drama of the same name.

Starting Dec 9, the 20-episode drama, exclusively available on the TikTok Drama Sangat platform, features daily two-minute episodes at 12pm. Starring Syahmie Thsaqef and Harissa Adlynn, the series offers lighthearted entertainment with a fresh storyline and undeniable chemistry, perfectly capturing the attention of today's viewers.

Reflecting on the collaboration, Dukes said working with Jipie was a meaningful experience.

"He understood our vision perfectly, patiently guiding us and helping us overcome challenges throughout the recording process."

The band, comprising Ziyad

(vocals), Rayyan (guitar), Jimbo (guitar), Umar (bass) and Cheng (drums), acknowledged that 'Benci Jadi Cinta' presented unique challenges.

The song's faster tempo, intricate guitar arrangements, and layered backing vocals made it complex to record and perform live.

"But the result is a unique blend of classic and modern rock with an upbeat rhythm. Plus, being our first OST track makes this achievement even more special."

Jipie, well known for his work with Pesawat and Meet Uncle Hussain since 2005, commended Dukes' passion and willingness to experiment.

"Despite the challenges, we completed production in just three days."

"Dukes' talent is exceptional, and I hope 'Benci Jadi Cinta' will resonate with young listeners and contribute to reviving Malaysia's rock music scene," he said.

Dukes expressed their excitement to share 'Benci Jadi Cinta' with fans, thanking listeners for their support. The single is now available on Spotify, iTunes, YouTube Music, and other streaming platforms.



Malaysian indie rock band Dukes. PIC COURTESY OF ALTERNATE RECORDS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

How Malaysia can ensure an impactful chairmanship of Asean

MALAYSIA'S chairmanship of Asean next year comes at a pivotal moment of economic recovery following the pandemic, increasing geopolitical tensions, and worsening environmental crises.

Malaysia's previous contributions to Asean lay the groundwork for its upcoming leadership.

Since Asean's establishment in 1967, Malaysia has been instrumental in shaping the organisation's priorities.

Notably, during its 2015 chairmanship, Malaysia facilitated the establishment of the Asean Community, which integrated the bloc's three pillars: political-security, economic and socio-cultural.

This achievement reflected Malaysia's vision of a cohesive and integrated Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, Malaysia's commitment to Asean's core principles of neutrality, regional stability and inclusive growth has been evident in its policies and initiatives.

The current regional landscape presents challenges and opportunities for Malaysia's chairmanship.

Economically, Asean is poised to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, with a projected gross domestic product growth of 4.9 per cent this year, driven by trade, in-



SIMON HUTAGALUNG

vestment and digital transformation.

Asean's total trade volume reached US\$3.5 trillion in 2024, underscoring the bloc's economic vitality. However, persistent non-tariff barriers and uneven economic development among member states hinder deeper integration.

Geopolitically, tensions in the South China Sea and the escalating United States-China rivalry pose risks to regional stability.

The increase in naval incidents in disputed waters highlights the urgent need for a unified Asean response.

Additionally, the unresolved crisis in Myanmar continues to challenge Asean's credibility and cohesion.

Southeast Asia is increasingly vulnerable to climate change too, contributing to 11 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and experiencing over 50 major natural

disasters this year.

Rising sea levels and extreme weather events jeopardise livelihoods, highlighting the need for collective action.

As Malaysia assumes the chairmanship next year, it has a significant opportunity to tackle these urgent issues through strategic initiatives.

Economic integration will be a primary focus, with Malaysia poised to leverage its leadership to advance the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest free trade area that can serve as a platform for reducing trade barriers and fostering economic cooperation.

By advocating for harmonised standards and improved digital connectivity, Malaysia can promote Asean's digital economy, projected to contribute US\$1 trillion to regional GDP by 2030.

Initiatives like the Asean Digital Innovation Fund, aimed at supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises in adopting new technologies, could boost economic growth and inclusivity.

On the geopolitical front, Malaysia's leadership will be pivotal in navigating major power dynamics and addressing regional security concerns, especially on

the South China Sea dispute.

Malaysia can also use its chairmanship to advocate for a unified Asean by hosting a regional summit to foster greater understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.

On Myanmar, the stagnation in implementing the Five-Point Consensus, designed to address the political and humanitarian crisis, has weakened Asean's credibility.

Thus, a proactive engagement with stakeholders, including the Myanmar military and opposition groups, can revitalise Asean's role as a mediator and advocate for peace and stability in Myanmar.

On climate change, Malaysia can lead initiatives to promote a green agenda in the region, plus addressing food security through regional cooperation could mitigate the impacts of climate-related disruptions.

Enhancing disaster preparedness and response mechanisms will strengthen Asean's resilience to natural disasters, protecting lives and livelihoods.

Social and cultural initiatives will play a prominent role during Malaysia's chairmanship.

Promoting education exchange programmes and strengthening regional cultural identity through preservation initiatives can foster

greater unity and mutual understanding among Asean's diverse populations.

Celebrating Asean's cultural diversity through initiatives such as an Asean Cultural Heritage Year could promote regional solidarity and pride.

Malaysia's leadership will be bolstered by data-driven strategies and collaborative efforts.

Asean's economic performance, including a trade volume of US\$3.5 trillion and a growing digital economy, lays a strong foundation for advancing integration.

Geopolitical realities, such as increased investments from China (US\$25 billion this year) and the US (US\$15 billion this year), emphasise the need for balanced engagement.

Important environmental data, highlighting significant greenhouse gas emissions and natural disaster occurrences in the region, underscores the urgency of sustainability initiatives.

By aligning its agenda with these realities, Malaysia can ensure a pragmatic and impactful chairmanship, advancing the bloc's progress amid complex challenges.

The writer is a retired Indonesian diplomat

'NEW SOCIAL MEDIA BULLY'

Musk used misinformation to help kill a congressional spending bill

MELISSA GOLDIN

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump's billionaire ally, Elon Musk, played a key role in killing a bipartisan funding proposal that would have prevented a government shutdown, railing against the plan in a torrent of more than 100 X posts that included multiple false claims.

The X owner, an unelected figure, not only used his outsized influence on the platform to help sway Congress, he did so without regard for the facts and gave a preview of the role he could play in government over the next four years.

"Trump has got himself a hand-ful with Musk," John Mark Hansen, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, said in an email.

"Trump's done this kind of thing before, blowing up a bill at the last minute. This time, though, it looks like he was afraid of Musk upstaging him."

"Now there's a new social media bully in town, pushing the cham-

pion social media bully around."

Hansen added: "We'll see what Musk's influence is when he runs up against reality — like when he proposes cutting off 'wasteful' spending for other people but not NASA contracts for Space-X."

Musk's objections to the 1,547-page omnibus bill included misinformation about congressional salaries, federal funding and public health preparedness, among other topics.

He alleged that the plan included a 40 per cent raise for lawmakers. But the maximum pay increase possible through the proposal would have been 3.8 per cent, according to the Congressional Research Service.

One way that members of Congress can receive a pay raise is through automatic adjustments that go into effect unless denied by law.

Most members make US\$174,000 a year after their last increase of 2.8 per cent in 2009. Congressional leadership is the exception, with the Speaker of the House earning

the most at US\$223,500 annually.

The rejected bill struck a section from a previous appropriations act that denied members of Congress this automatic pay raise.

A maximum increase of 3.8 per cent would have bumped their annual salary by about US\$6,600, to approximately US\$180,000 annually.

Musk also shared a post from another user that falsely claimed the bill provided US\$3 billion in funding for a potential new stadium for the NFL's Washington Commanders, commenting: "This should not be funded by your tax dollars!"

The bill included a provision to transfer control of the land that houses RFK Stadium from the federal government to the District of Columbia.

That transfer is necessary to pave the way for the Commanders to possibly build a new stadium though the team is still considering other locations.

However, no such funding is provided by the bill.

It states, in fact, that the federal

government "shall not be responsible for payment or any costs or expenses" that the District of Columbia incurs after the transfer is complete aside from responsibilities related to specific environmental issues.

District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser addressed false claims about the stadium's funding on Thursday, calling them "frustrating".

"There are no federal dollars related to the transfer of RFK and in fact, the legislation does not require or link at all to a stadium," she said at a press conference.

Bowser added that she has reached out to the Trump administration to correct misinformation about this issue.

In a third post, Musk incorrectly claimed that "We're funding bioweapon labs in this bill!"

The plan provided funds for up to 12 regional biocontainment research laboratories, not facilities for creating bioweapons.

Some members of Congress expressed dismay that Musk had dis-

seminated misinformation about the bill.

"I love you Elon but you need to take 5 seconds to check your sources before highlighting bottom feeders looking for clicks," Rep. Dan Crenshaw, a Texas Republican, wrote on X.

In a hastily convened Thursday evening vote, the House rejected a new Trump-backed bill whittled down to 116 pages, with the bill failing 174-235.

Dozens of Republicans joined Democrats in opposition.

The House finally approved a third spending deal Friday evening, and the Senate followed suit early Saturday.

President Joe Biden planned to sign it into law.

Trump led Republicans into the longest government shutdown in history in his first term during the 2018 Christmas season, and interrupted the holidays in 2020 by tanking a bipartisan Covid-relief bill and forcing a do-over.

The writer is from AP

WORLD

EVACUATION ORDER

ISRAEL ORDERS HOSPITAL'S CLOSURE

Hospital staff say they lack ambulances to move

CAIRO

ISRAEL ordered the closure and evacuation on Sunday of one of the last hospitals still partly functioning in a besieged area on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip, forcing medics to search for a way to bring hundreds of patients and staff to safety.

The head of the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahiya, Husam Abu Safiyya, told Reuters via text message that obeying the order to shut down was "next to impossible" because there were not enough ambulances to get patients out.

"We currently have nearly 400 civilians inside the hospital, in-

cluding babies in the neonatal unit, whose lives depend on oxygen and incubators. We cannot evacuate these patients safely without assistance, equipment, and time," said Abu Safiyya.

"We are sending this message under heavy bombardment and direct targeting of the fuel tanks, which if hit will cause a large explosion and mass casualties of the civilians inside," he said.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on Abu Safiyya's remarks. It said on Friday it had sent fuel and food to the hospital and helped evacuate more than 100 patients and caregivers to other Gaza hospitals, some in coordination with the Red Cross, for their own safety.

Abu Safiyya said the military had ordered patients and staff to be evacuated to another hospital where conditions are even worse. Photos from inside the hospital showed patients on beds crammed into corridors to keep them away from windows.

Hamas released a video on Sunday that it said had been filmed in



Smoke rising as people stand in a tent camp for displaced people, after an Israeli attack, in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, on Sunday. REUTERS PIC

Reuters could not immediately verify those images.

Israel says its operation around three communities on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip — Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Jabalia — is targeting Hamas resistance fighters. Palestinians accuse Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate the area to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Hamas released a video on Sunday that it said had been filmed in

northern Gaza. It showed fighters positioned in blown-out buildings and in piles of wreckage, clad in civilian clothing and firing projectiles at Israeli forces.

The Israeli military said on Sunday forces operating in Beit Hanoun had struck Hamas fighters and infrastructure. Hamas and the allied Islamic Jihad group said they caused casualties among Israeli soldiers.

Separately, Israel allowed the

Catholic bishop of Jerusalem, the Latin patriarch, into Gaza on Sunday, according to a statement on the Latin Patriarchate website after Pope Francis said on Saturday that the patriarch had not been allowed in.

Elsewhere, Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip killed at least 29 Palestinians, eight of them — including some children — at a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza City. **Reuters**

to return."

Syria's nearly 14-year civil war killed more than half a million people and displaced more than half its population, with many fleeing to neighbouring countries, including three million in Turkey.

Saudi Arabia is also in direct contact with Syria's new authorities, having supported the opposition to Assad for years during Syria's civil war. Riyadh will send a delegation to the country soon, Syria's ambassador in the Saudi capital said. **AFP**

ENDING 'NEGATIVE INTERFERENCE'

Syria's new leader says all weapons to come under 'state control'

DAMASCUS: Two weeks after seizing power in a sweeping offensive, Syria's new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa on Sunday said weapons in the country, including those held by Kurdish-led forces, would come under state control.

Sharaa spoke alongside Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, after meeting with Lebanese Druze leaders and vowing to end "negative interference" in the neighbouring country.

Ankara-backed rebels played a key role in supporting Sharaa's

group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which headed a rebel alliance that seized Damascus on Dec 8, toppling longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

During a press conference with Fidan, Sharaa said Syria's armed "factions will begin to announce their dissolution and enter" the army.

"We will absolutely not allow there to be weapons in the country outside state control, whether from the revolutionary factions or the factions present in the SDF area", he added, referring to the

Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Sharaa traded in the olive-green military shirt he sported just days ago for a suit and tie during his meetings on Sunday at the presidential palace.

He also said "we are working on protecting sects and minorities from any attacks that occur between them" and from "external" actors exploiting the situation "to cause sectarian discord."

"Syria is a country for all and we can coexist together," he added. That sentiment was on display

at the colourfully-lit Christmas market in Damascus, where Batoul al-Law, a dietitian, said there were more Muslims than Christians.

"We have always celebrated both Christian and Muslim holidays together," she said, but "you feel that people are now happier and more comfortable."

Turkey's Fidan said sanctions on Syria must "be lifted as soon as possible." He called for the international community to "mobilise to help Syria get back on its feet and for the displaced people

CRITICAL WATERWAY

TRUMP IN PANAMA CANAL ROW

Incoming president draws sharp rebuke from Panamanian leader over bid to assert control

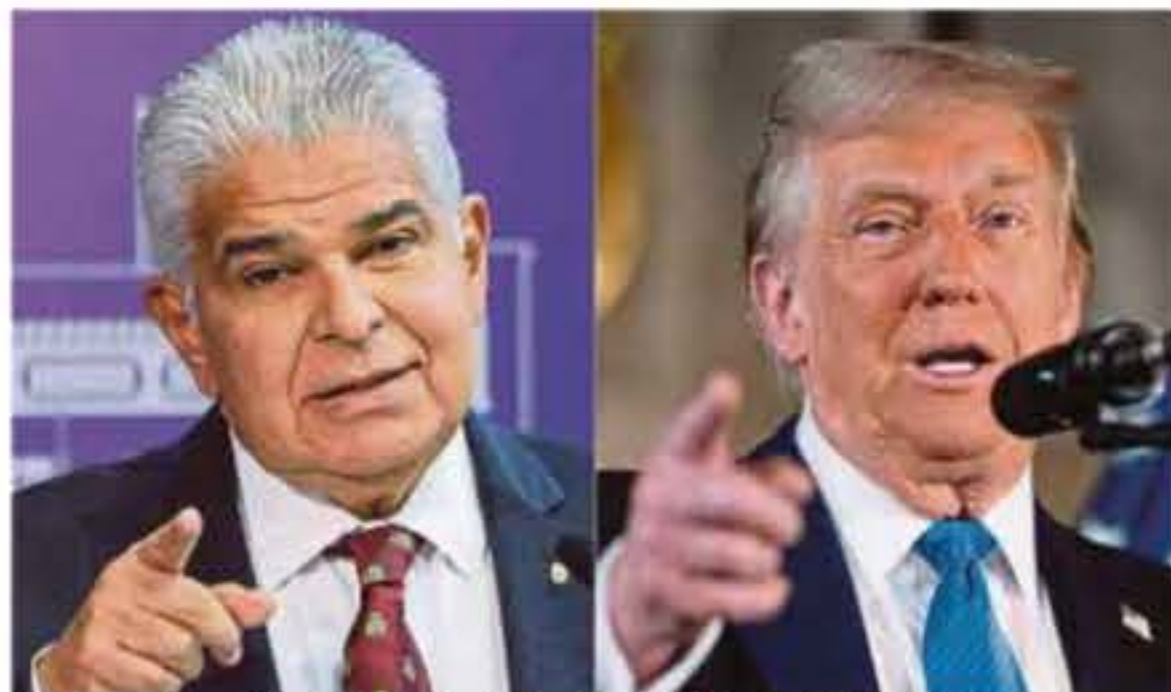
WEST PALM BEACH

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump threatened to reassert United States control over the Panama Canal on Sunday, accusing Panama of charging excessive rates to use the Central American passage and drawing a sharp rebuke from Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino.

Speaking to a crowd of supporters in Arizona, Trump also said he would not let the canal fall into the "wrong hands", warning of potential Chinese influence on the passage.

After the event, he posted an image on Truth Social of an American flag flying over a narrow body of water, with the comment: "Welcome to the United States Canal!"

"Has anyone ever heard of the Panama Canal?" Trump said at AmericaFest, an annual event or-



Panama President Jose Raul Mulino (left) and United States President-elect Donald Trump

ganised by Turning Point, an allied conservative group. "Because we're being ripped off at the Panama Canal like we're being ripped off everywhere else."

Trump's comments were an exceedingly rare example of a US leader saying he could push a sovereign country to hand over territory.

They also underlined an expected shift in US diplomacy under Trump, who has not historically shied away from threatening allies and using bellicose rhetoric when dealing with counterparts.

"It was given to Panama and the

people of Panama, but it has provisions," Trump said of the canal, which was once owned by the US but was handed over to Panama decades ago.

"If the principles, both moral and legal, of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, quickly and without question."

In a recorded message released by Panama's President Mulino on Sunday afternoon, the nation's leader said Panama's independence was non-negotiable and that China had no influence on

the canal's administration. He also defended the passage rates Panama charged, saying they were not set "on a whim".

China does not control or administer the canal, but a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison Holdings has long managed two ports located on the canal's Caribbean and Pacific entrances.

The US largely built the canal and administered territory surrounding the passage for decades. But the US and Panama signed a pair of accords in 1977 that paved the way for the canal's return to full Panamanian control. The US handed over control of the passage in 1999 after a period of joint administration.

"Every square metre of the Panama Canal and the surrounding area belongs to Panama and will continue belonging (to Panama)," Mulino said in his statement, which was released on X.

Trump then responded to Mulino: "We'll see about that!"

The waterway, which allows up to 14,000 ships to cross per year, accounts for 2.5 per cent of global seaborne trade and is critical to US imports of autos and commercial goods by container ships from Asia, and for US exports of commodities, including liquefied natural gas. **Reuters**

FLYING SCHOOL INSTRUCTOR

Australia to extradite former US Marine for training Chinese pilots

SYDNEY: Australia's Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said yesterday he had approved a United States extradition request for former US Marines pilot Daniel Duggan, who faces charges including breaking US arms control law by training Chinese military pilots to land on aircraft carriers.

Duggan, 55, a naturalised Australian citizen, was arrested by Australian Federal Police in a rural town in New South Wales state in October 2022, shortly after returning from China, where he had lived since 2014.

Duggan's lawyers have argued in court there is no evidence the Chinese pilots he trained were military, and he was no longer a US citizen at the time of the alleged offences. He renounced his US citizenship in 2016 at the US embassy in Beijing, backdated to 2012 on a certificate, they said.

Dreyfus said he had determined Duggan should be extradited to the US to face prosecution, after a New South Wales magistrate in May found him eligible for surrender.

"Mr Duggan was given the opportunity to provide representations as to why he should not be surrendered to the US. In arriving at my decision, I took into consideration all the material in front of me," Dreyfus said.

Duggan, who has six children in Australia and has been held in prison since his arrest, was not available for comment.

Duggan's family was "devastated" by the decision, after receiving a letter from the government saying he will be extradited between Dec 30 and Feb 17, his wife Saffrine said in a statement.

"The family and Dan's lawyers are now considering their legal



Former United States Marine Corps pilot Daniel Duggan was arrested by Australian Federal Police in a rural town in New South Wales state in October 2022. AP PIC

options, including requesting specific reasons for the government's decision."

The allegations centre around a flying school in South Africa where Duggan worked part time as a flying instructor more than 12 years ago, the statement said.

"Dan maintains his innocence and denies the allegations made against him, which were not considered a crime in Australia," it added.

An indictment unsealed by the District of Columbia court showed Duggan faces four charges, and alleges he travelled between Australia, the US, China and South Africa between 2009 and 2012, when he was contracted by a Chinese national to provide services to a Chinese state owned company, including evaluations of Chinese military pilot trainees and instruction on landing on aircraft carriers. **Reuters**

IN BRIEF

Musk, for president? Trump says no

WASHINGTON: Could Elon Musk, who holds major sway in the incoming Trump administration, one day become president? On Sunday, Donald Trump answered with a resounding no. "You know why he can't be? He wasn't born in this country," Trump said of the Tesla and SpaceX boss, who was born in South Africa. The US Constitution requires that a president be a natural-born US citizen. Trump was responding to criticism portraying the tech billionaire as "President Musk" for the outsized role he is playing in the incoming administration.

Woman set ablaze on NY subway dies

NEW YORK: Police arrested a man they said set a woman on fire while she appeared to be asleep on a New York City subway train on Sunday morning, killing her. The woman, who has not been identified, sat motionlessly aboard a stationary F train at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue subway station in Brooklyn at 7.30am when an unknown man calmly approached her and used a lighter to set her clothes on fire, the New York Police Department said. There was no interaction before the attack and police did not believe they knew each other.

Seven dead in Mexico light plane crash

MEXICO CITY: At least seven people died when a light aircraft crashed Sunday in a heavily forested area of Jalisco in western Mexico. The aircraft, a Cessna 207, was flying from La Parota in the neighbouring state of Michoacan. Jalisco Civil Protection said the crash site was in an area that was difficult to access. Initial authorities at the scene "reported a preliminary count of seven people dead", who haven't been identified yet. "A fire was extinguished and risk mitigation was carried out to prevent possible additional damage." **Agencies**

TO PROTECT MARITIME INTERESTS

MANILA TO BUY U.S. TYPHON MISSILE SYSTEM

US Army left it in Philippines after this year's joint drills

MANILA

THE Philippine military yesterday said it plans to acquire the United States Typhon missile system to protect its maritime interests, some of which overlap with regional power China.

The US Army deployed the mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines earlier this year for annual joint military exercises with its longtime ally, and decided to leave it there despite criticism by Beijing that it was destabilising to Asia.

Since then, it has been used by Philippine forces to train for its operation.

"It is planned to be acquired because we see its feasibility and its functionality in our concept of archipelagic defence implementation," Philippine Army chief Lieutenant-General Roy Galido said at a news conference.

"I'm happy to report to our fellow countrymen that your army is developing this capability for the interest of protecting our sovereignty," he said, adding the total number to be acquired would depend on "economics".

The presence of the US missile launcher in the northern Philippines had angered Beijing, whose navy and coast guard have engaged in escalating confrontations in recent months with the Philippines over disputed reefs and waters in the South China Sea.

Beijing claims almost the entire South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis.

As a rule, it takes at least two or more years for the Philippine military to acquire a new weapons system from the planning stage, Galido said, adding it was not yet budgeted for next year.

It took five years for Manila to take delivery of the BrahMos cruise missile last year, he added.

The land-based "mid-range capability" Typhon missile launcher, developed by US firm Lockheed Martin for the US Army, has a range of 480km, though a longer-range version is in development.

Galido said Typhon would enable the army to "project force" outwards up to 370km, which is the limit of the archipelago nation's maritime entitlements under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun warned in June that the Typhon deployment was "severely damaging regional security and stability." AFP

SELF-GOVERNING STATE IN FREE ASSOCIATION

New Zealand rejects Cook Islands passport plan

WELLINGTON: New Zealand has rejected a proposal by the Cook Islands, a self-governing nation in free association with the larger Pacific country, to allow the creation of its own passports and citizenship, but said it could discuss independence.

A spokesman for New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters, in a statement on Sunday, said a separate passport, citizenship and membership of the United Nations are only avail-

able to fully independent and sovereign countries.

As such, the Cook Islands could access these things while it remains in free association with New Zealand and would need to become fully independent for it to do so, the spokesman said.

"If the goal of the government of the Cook Islands is independence from New Zealand, then of course that's a conversation we are ready for them to initiate," the spokesman said.



A drone view of a coast guard ship that was carried about 5km inland to the city centre of Banda Aceh during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. REUTERS PIC

20 YEARS ON

Indonesia tsunami survivor still waits for missing son

BANDA ACEH: In front of Saudah's house on Indonesia's Sumatra island lie two damaged coast guard ships, washed ashore by a tsunami 20 years ago and a daily reminder that her youngest son has yet to come home.

Saudah, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, believes Muhammad Siddiq, who was 6 when the Indian Ocean tsunami struck on Dec 26, 2004, is still alive and has not given up hope that he might one day return.

The deadly wave, triggered by a 9.1-magnitude quake, killed some 230,000 people along the coasts of more than a dozen countries, including India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, making it one of the deadliest disasters in recorded history.

More than half the dead were in Aceh, the province on Sumatra's northern tip where Saudah and her family live.

Now 64, Saudah can still remember the rumbling of the earth and her neighbours running out of their homes in panic. She remembers holding on to Siddiq, shouting at her seven other children to run to the mosque.

"I did not run. I laid down holding Siddiq tight and I thought it



Saudah, a survivor of the Indian Ocean tsunami, showing a picture of her son, Muhammad Siddiq, in Banda Aceh recently. REUTERS PIC

was just a wind. I prayed to God and asked Him: 'What is happening?' Saudah recalled.

"Then I came back to my house when suddenly I saw the wave approaching like a snake."

Holding Siddiq, she ran. She only let him go when they reached the mosque, but by then the giant wave had caught up with them. They were swept away by the water and separated.

In the aftermath, Saudah was reunited with only six of her children — Siddiq and one of her daughters were never found.

The daughter is thought to have been buried in a mass grave. Some survivors told the family they saw Siddiq among the 500,000 displaced in the disaster, and Saudah's husband says Siddiq has appeared in his dreams, saying he is alive.

The family is holding on to that hope, praying Siddiq will find his way to their new house, where their old house once stood.

"We keep searching for him, and I always post his picture on social media," said Saudah's son Femi Malisa, 42.

"If he is still alive, I wish for him to come home." Reuters

OPPOSITION'S FUNDING LAWS

'SPENDING CUTS MAY HIT TAIWAN'S SECURITY'

Opposition passes legislation to shift spending from central govt to local municipalities

TAIPEI

TAIWAN'S cabinet warned yesterday the island's security might be at risk after opposition parties passed laws that will require cuts in government spending, including defence, at a time when China has ramped up military activity nearby.

Taiwan's opposition parties, which hold a majority in parliament, last week passed legislation to shift spending from the central government to local municipalities, a move strongly contested by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and

thousands of protesters.

The legislation will "seriously weaken the central government's financing," Finance Minister Chuang Tsui-yun told a media briefing yesterday, adding the government might need to increase debt-financing.

To meet the new funding requirements, the central government will need to cut 28 per cent from a major section of its budget proposal for next year that included T\$294.5 billion of the overall defence budget, the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics said.

The legislation could "seriously crowd out the defence budget" Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said on Facebook over the weekend, adding Taiwan's combat capacity might be "hit deeply".

"What is in jeopardy are the national security and the safety of

the 23 million Taiwanese people."

The cabinet in August proposed a 7.7 per cent year-on-year rise for defence spending to T\$647 billion, a record high for Taiwan as the island adds more fighter jets and missiles to strengthen deterrence against a rising threat from Beijing.

China has ramped up its military pressure to assert those claims, which Taipei strongly rejects.

The government will resort to "every possible administrative remedy" allowed by the constitution to preserve the budget, cabinet spokesperson Michelle Lee told reporters, without elaborating.

She said the cabinet might need to recompile the budget proposal for next year, which is awaiting parliamentary approval.

Reuters

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Reuters

MARTIAL LAW COUNSEL

S. Korean opposition threatens to impeach acting president

SEOUL: South Korea's main opposition party threatened yesterday to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo if he failed to proclaim a law to launch a special counsel investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed bid to impose martial law.

Prime Minister Han has taken over from the suspended Yoon, who was impeached on Dec 14 and faces a Constitutional Court review on whether to oust him.

With a majority in parliament, the opposition Democratic Party passed a bill this month to appoint a special counsel to pursue charges of insurrection, among others, against the conservative Yoon and to investigate his wife.

The party, which has accused Han of aiding Yoon's martial law attempt and reported him to police, said it would "immediately initiate impeachment proceedings" against the acting president if the legislation was not promul-

gated by today.

"The delays show that the prime minister has no intention of complying with the constitution, and it is tantamount to admitting that he is acting as a proxy for the insurgent," Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae told a party meeting, referring to Yoon.

Han's office could not be reached for comment. He has said he had tried to block Yoon's martial law declaration, but apologised for failing to do so.

Park also accused Yoon of hampering the Constitutional Court trial by repeatedly refusing to accept court documents.

A joint investigative team including police and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials has made a second attempt to call Yoon in for questioning on Dec 25, though it was unclear whether he would appear. Reuters

FED UP

Japanese hot spring town limits day-trippers

TOKYO: A Japanese hot spring town popular for its photogenic snowy scenes began limiting entry to day-trippers yesterday in a trial to tackle overtourism during winter.

Ginzan Onsen, a remote town in northern Yamagata region, draws around 330,000 visitors each year.

Many share photos online of its old-fashioned buildings blanketed in snow and illuminated by lamplight that create a nostalgic atmosphere.

However, authorities in Ginzan Onsen, as in more famous destinations such as Kyoto and Mount Fuji, have become fed up with a rise in road problems, quarrels and other nuisances.

From yesterday, only people staying at local hotels will be allowed to enter the town after 8pm, while those wishing to visit between 5pm and 8pm will need a reservation.

Japan has seen a record influx of foreign tourists this year as the weak yen swells a post-pandemic travel boom.

"Traffic jams have sometimes been caused by cars getting stuck in the snow, because travellers were driving with normal tyres" instead of with snow tyres, said Takayuki Saito, head of commerce and tourism for the municipality of Obanazawa, where the town is located.

"We've also heard of cases of emergency vehicles not being able to reach" Ginzan Onsen due to congestion, Saito said.

Driving there "can be dangerous with poor visibility in snowstorms" in winter, he said.

Until the end of February, day-trippers will be asked to park at a tourism centre two kilometres away and pay for a shuttle bus.

The official website for Ginzan Onsen said the trial had been launched after years of debate, adding that authorities were hoping to maintain a good relationship with visitors.

When heavy traffic recently stopped an ambulance, "an emergency service team made it to the scene by running, but it was truly a life-and-death situation," the site said.

"Some visitors are verbally abusive" when officials come to help cars stuck in snow, according to the site, which it described as "unbearable". AFP



SANTA SCALES NEW HEIGHTS

Guatemalan firefighter Hector Chacon, dressed as Santa Claus, waves before rappelling down the Las Vacas bridge to deliver toys to children in the Jesus de la Buena Esperanza neighbourhood in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on Sunday. REUTERS PIC






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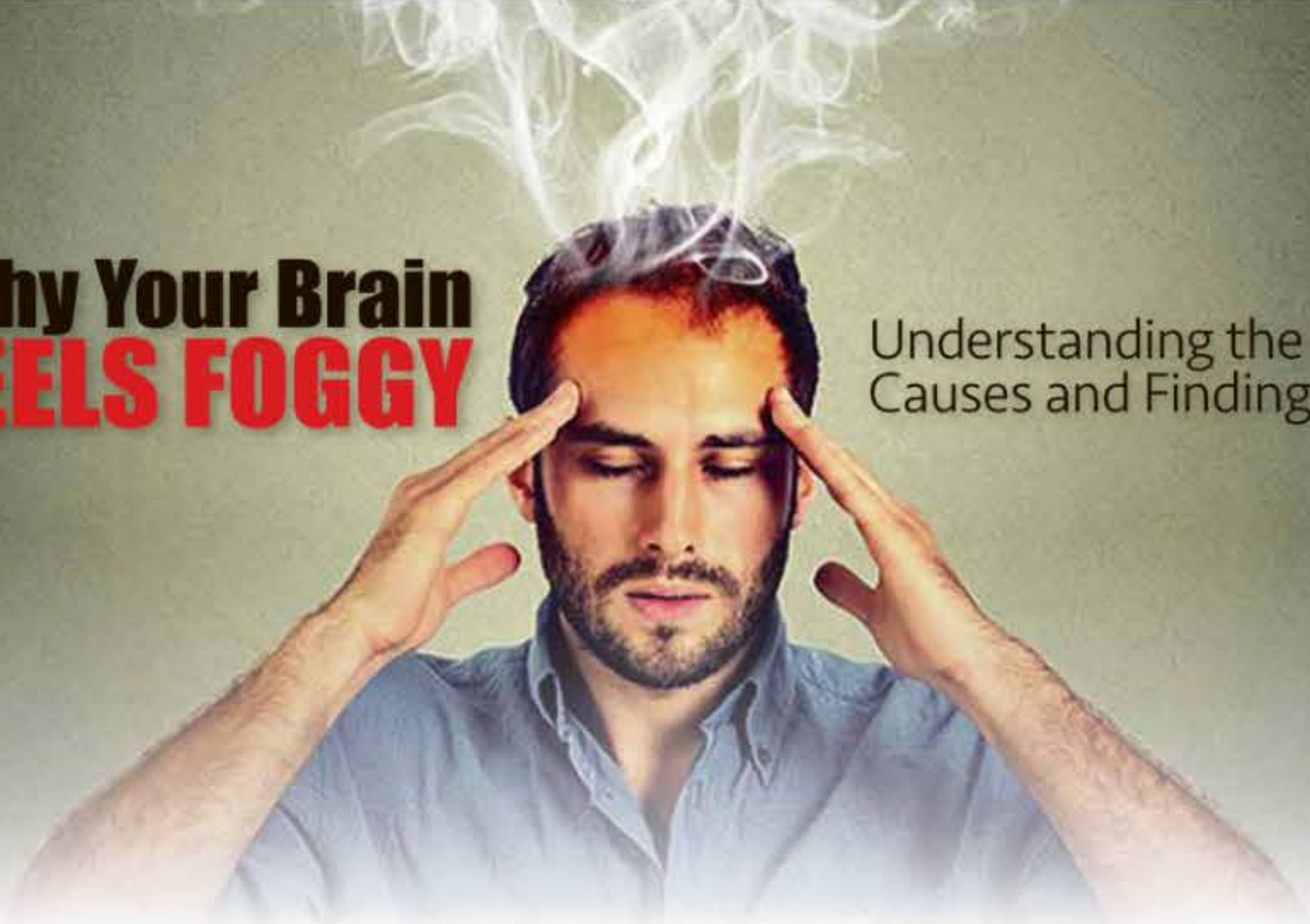
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**Why Your Brain
FEELS FOGGY**

Understanding the
Causes and Finding Relief

BRAIN fog is a term used to describe a mental state where one feels confused, unable to focus, and experiences difficulty thinking clearly or making decisions.

This condition does not refer to a specific disease or mental disorder, but rather to a symptom or sign of a decline in cognitive function. Brain fog often causes individuals to feel mentally fatigued, even though their body does not feel physically tired, and it can affect various aspects of daily life.

Common symptoms associated with brain fog include difficulty concentrating, forgetting routine tasks, and experiencing prolonged confusion. People experiencing brain fog may also have trouble remembering names, dates, or newly learned information. This condition can lead to decreased productivity and impact one's quality of life, especially in work or educational settings.

There are various factors that can contribute to brain fog. One of the main causes is excessive stress and anxiety. When a person is under high pressure, the brain functions less efficiently, causing thinking processes to slow down and become unclear. In addition, insufficient or poor-quality sleep is another factor that often contributes to brain fog. Adequate sleep is essential for brain recovery, and lack of it can disrupt mental function. Other factors contributing to



brain fog include poor nutrition. Deficiencies in essential nutrients such as vitamin B12, omega-3 fatty acids, and other minerals can interfere with brain function. Hormonal imbalances also play a role, particularly in women experiencing hormonal changes during menopause or thyroid issues. Certain conditions, such as diabetes or depression, as well as side effects from medications, can also cause this condition.

Furthermore, some individuals who have recovered from illnesses like COVID-19 report experiencing brain fog as part of the long-term effects



after recovering from the virus. This condition, known as "long COVID," can persist for months after an individual has recovered from the infection.

Treatment for Brain Fog

There is no specific treatment for brain fog, as managing this condition involves addressing the underlying causes contributing to it. Lifestyle changes aimed at improving overall health can help reduce the symptoms of brain fog. Some changes include:

- Improving sleep patterns
- Managing stress
- Adopting a balanced diet
- Staying hydrated
- Reducing alcohol and caffeine intake
- Limiting screen time
- Engaging in regular physical activity

Conclusion

In conclusion, brain fog is a condition that can affect a person's quality of life, but it does not always indicate a serious underlying disease. However, if the symptoms of brain fog persist or worsen, it is important to consult a doctor to determine the underlying cause and receive appropriate treatment. By managing the contributing factors, such as reducing stress, improving sleep, and maintaining a healthy diet, brain fog can be alleviated, and quality of life can be restored.

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(Incorporated in Malaysia)

NOTICE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") of Paragon Union Berhad ("PUB" or the "Company"), which will be held as a virtual meeting at the Broadcast Venue at Board Room, Lot 14, Jalan CJ 1/1, Kawasan Perindustrian Cheras Jaya, Batu 11, 43200 Cheras, Selangor Darul Ehsan ("Broadcast Venue"), through live streaming and online remote voting using Remote Participation and Voting ("RPV") facilities at <https://paragon-egm.digerati.com.my> (Domain registration number D1A119533) provided by Digerati Technologies Sdn Bhd in Malaysia on Thursday, 9 January 2025 at 10:30 a.m. or at any adjournment thereof, for the purpose of considering and if thought fit, passing with or without modification the resolutions as set out in this notice.

ORDINARY RESOLUTION

PROPOSED NEW SHAREHOLDERS' MANDATE FOR RECURRENT RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS OF A REVENUE OR TRADING NATURE ("PROPOSED NEW SHAREHOLDERS' MANDATE")

"THAT approval be and is hereby given to PUB Group, to enter and give effect to the recurrent related party transactions of a revenue or trading nature (hereinafter to be referred to as "Recurrent Transactions") with the related parties as set out in Section 2.4 of the circular to shareholders of the Company dated 24 December 2024 ("Circular") which are necessary for the Company's day-to-day operations subject further to the following:

(i) the Recurrent Transactions contemplated are in the ordinary course of business and are carried out on an arm's length basis on normal commercial terms of PUB Group on terms no more favourable to related parties than those generally available to the public and are not, in the Company's opinion, detrimental to the minority shareholders of the Company;

(ii) the Proposed New Shareholders' Mandate is subject to annual renewal and any authority conferred by the Proposed New Shareholders' Mandate shall only continue to be in force until:

(a) the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting ("AGM") of the Company following the forthcoming EGM of the Company at which the Proposed New Shareholders' Mandate is approved, at which time it will lapse unless by a resolution passed at the general meeting the mandate is again renewed;

(b) the expiration of the period within which the next AGM of the Company is required by law to be held pursuant to Section 340(2) of the Companies Act 2016 (the "Act") (but shall not extend to such extensions as may be allowed pursuant to Section 340(4) of the Act); or

(c) it is revoked or varied by resolution passed by the shareholders in general meeting,

whichever is earlier.

AND THAT the Directors of the Company be and are hereby authorised to do all acts and things to give full effect to the Recurrent Transactions contemplated and/or authorised by this resolution, as the Directors of the Company, in their absolute discretion, deem fit."

By Order of the Board

LIM TONG LANG (MAICSA 7045482) (SSM PC NO. 202208000250)
LIN WEN THENG (MAICSA 7073397) (SSM PC NO. 202308000441)
Company Secretaries
Kuala Lumpur
24 December 2024

Notes:-

1. Please refer to the Administrative Guide for the procedures to register, participate and vote remotely at this EGM using RPV Facilities provided by Digerati Technologies Sdn. Bhd. in Malaysia via its portal website at <https://paragon-egm.digerati.com.my>.

2. A member entitled to participate and vote at the meeting is entitled to appoint up to two (2) proxies to participate and vote remotely in his stead. Where a member appoints two (2) proxies, the appointment shall be invalid unless he specifies the proportions of his shareholdings to be represented by each proxy. A proxy may but need not be a member of the Company. A proxy appointed to attend and vote at a meeting of a Company shall have the same rights as the member to speak at the meeting.

3. Where a member is an exempt authorised nominee which holds ordinary shares in the Company for multiple beneficial owners in one securities account ("omnibus account"), there is no limit to the number of proxies which the exempt authorised nominee may appoint in respect of each omnibus account it holds.

4. If the member is a corporation, the Proxy Form must be executed under its seal or signed by an officer or attorney so authorised.

5. The instrument appointing a proxy must be deposited at the office of Share Registrar of the Company, situated at B-21-1, Level 21, Tower B, Northpoint Mid Valley City, No. 1, Medan Seyod Putra Utara, 59200 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan not less than forty eight (48) hours before the time fixed for holding the meeting or any adjournment thereof.

6. In respect of deposited securities, only members whose names appear on the Record of Depositors on 31 December 2024 (General Meeting Record of Depositors) shall be eligible to attend, speak and vote at the meeting or appoint proxy(ies) to attend and/or vote on his/her) behalf.

225	Auctions	225	Auctions	225	Auctions	225	Auctions
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PERISYTIHARAN JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG
Tarikh / Masa Lelangan : 13hb Januari 2025, 11.00 Pagi

No Pelaksanaan
PA-38-1114-10/2024

No Hakmilik / No Lot
Hakmilik Strata Pajakan
Negeri No.2206/M/5/583 /
Lot 9115

Plaintiff
AmBank (M) Berhad

Defendan
Muhammad Afdhal Bin Abdul Shukor

Pegumcara
Lalchand & Nawawi
(Tel : 05-7820099)

Harga Rizab : **RM 144,000.00**

Rumah Pangsa Dua (2) Bilik Tidur Unit Tepi
Alamat : No.F4-07, Desa Permai Indah, Lorong Helang 3, 11700, Gelugor, Pulau Pinang .
Keluasan : 570.00 kaki persegi / 53.00 meter persegi

Pembiida perlu mendaftar dilaman web
<https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/bidderweb/home/detail/59296>
dan membuat serahan bayaran sebanyak 10% daripada harga rizab sebagai deposit dalam bentuk Bank Draft atas nama Plaintiff
sebelum-lewatnya (1) hari sebelum tarikh lelangan.
Sila rujuk Perisytiharan Jualan untuk cara-cara serahan.

Untuk sebarang pertanyaan, sila hubungi syarikat yang dilantik oleh Plaintiff
EHSAAN AUCTIONEERS SDN. BHD.
No. Tel : 03 - 2161 6649 H/P: 010 2161 147
www.ehsanauctioneers.com

PERISYTIHARAN JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI MELAKA
PERILAKSANAAN NO. MA-38-544-10/2024
AKAN MENJUAL SECARA LELANG AWAM
PADA HARI RABU, 22 JANUARI 2025, PADA JAM 11:00 PAGI,
SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT
OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG
DARUL MAKMUR

Sila layari: <https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/bidderweb>

HARGA RIZAB: RM 234,000.00

Plaintiff
Hong Leong Bank Berhad

Defendan-Defendan
Tan Choon Leong & Tee Pui Fen
No Hakmilik / No Lot
Mukim/Daerah/Negeri
1,540.00 kali persegi

Defendan-Defendan
Pajakan Negeri 5211 / Lot 2692
Batu Berendam / Melaka Tengah / Melaka

Rumah Teres Satu Tingkat (Unit Tengah)
No. 44, Jalan Chengal 4, Taman Merdeka,
Batu Berendam, 75350, Hang Tuah Jaya, Melaka

Pegumcara : Thomas Ong Leong & Assoc (Tel:03-77841833)

Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "sepertimana sedia ada" terutamanya kepada satu harga rizab dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan seperti mana yang dicetak didalam Perisytiharan Jualan seperti dipautkan berikut
<https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/bidderweb/home/detail/59067>
Pembida perlu mendaftar dilaman web
<https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/bidderweb> dan membuat serahan bayaran sebanyak 10% daripada harga rizab sebagai deposit dalam bentuk Bank Draft atas nama Plaintiff
sebelum-lewatnya (1) hari sebelum tarikh lelangan.
Sila rujuk Perisytiharan Jualan untuk cara-cara serahan.

Untuk sebarang pertanyaan, sila hubungi syarikat yang dilantik oleh Plaintiff
EHSAAN AUCTIONEERS SDN. BHD.
No. Tel : 03 - 2161 6649 H/P: 016 2161 047
www.ehsanauctioneers.com

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024

225	Auctions	225	Auctions	225	Auctions	225	Auctions
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NOTIS JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM

Harga Rizab **RM 1,500,000.00**

No. Perlaksanaan
BA-38-1883-07/2024

No. Hakmilik / No. Lot
HS(D) 320480 / PT 3076

Plaintif
Maybank Islamic Berhad

Defendan
Nor Azmah Binti Mohd Salleh

Pegumcara
Yong & Rakan-Rakan
(Tel : 03-33427207)

Sebuah Rumah Teres Lot Tengah Dua (2)Tingkat
• Alamat : No. 47, Jalan Senator U1/72B, Temasya Legasi, Seksyen U1, 40150 Shah Alam, Selangor
• Keluasan Tanah : 153.30 Meter Persegi / 1,650.00 Kaki Persegi

Tarikh / Masa Lelangan : 13 Januari 2025, 9:00 pagi
SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG DARUL MAKMUR

* Semua hartanah lelangan diatas akan dijual terutakuk kepada syarat-syarat jualan seperti mana yang dicetak didalam Perisytiharan Jualan.
* Pembida boleh mendapatkan Perisytiharan Jualan, panduan pendaftaran dan bayaran 10% deposit di pautan seperti berikut:
<https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/BidderWeb/Home/Detail/59640>

Untuk sebarang pertanyaan, sila hubungi syarikat yang dilantik oleh Plaintiff:
NG CHAN PAU & CO SDN BHD • Call/Whatsapp : **03-2162 3333** • Website : www.ngchanmau.com

PERISYTIHARAN JUALAN
DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI SHAH ALAM

Harga Rizab **RM 288,684.00**

No. Perlaksanaan
BA-38-3048-10/2024

No. Hakmilik / No. Lot
H.S.(D) 26976 / PT 24648

Plaintif
Maybank Islamic Berhad

Defendan
Mohd Izuyam Bin Mohd Suri

Pegumcara
TK Ooi & Nadira
(Tel : 03-20319988)

Rumah Teres Dua Tingkat (Unit Tengah)
• Alamat : No. 3, Lorong Cakera Purnama 12/30, Seksyen 12, 42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor
• Keluasan Tanah : 130.10 Meter Persegi / 1,400.00 Kaki Persegi
• Sekatan Kepentingan : Tanah ini boleh dipindahkan, dipajak atau digadai setelah mendapat kebenaran Pihak Berkuasa Negeri

Tarikh / Masa Lelangan : 21 Januari 2025, 9:00 pagi
SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG DARUL MAKMUR

* Semua hartanah lelangan diatas akan dijual terutakuk kepada syarat-syarat jualan seperti mana yang dicetak didalam Perisytiharan Jualan.
* Pembida boleh mendapatkan Perisytiharan Jualan, panduan pendaftaran dan bayaran 10% deposit di pautan seperti berikut:
<https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/BidderWeb/Home/Detail/59407>

222	Legal	222	Legal	222	Legal	222	Legal
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(CM) 30/12/2024
DALAM MAHKAMAH SESYEN DI KUALA LUMPUR
DALAM NEGERI WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN KUALA LUMPUR
Guaman No. WA-A52M-6356-10/2024

ANTARA

ALLIANCE ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD
(NO. SYARIKAT : 200701018870) PLAINTIF

DAN

ONG KAH HOO
(NO. K/P : 941005-08-6357) DEFENDAN

NOTIS

Dalam perkara Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan bertarikh 30/10/2024 dan Perintah Mahkamah yang bertarikh 29/11/2024,
Kepada:

ONG KAH HOO
PARC3, 5 JALAN PUDU PERDANA,
TAMAN PERTAMA,
56100 KUALA LUMPUR

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa satu Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan telah dikeluarkan oleh Mahkamah Sesyen di sini terhadap kamu untuk anakguam kami ALLIANCE ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD, beralamat di Tingkat 2, Menara Multi-Purpose, Capital Square, 8 Jalan Munshi Abdullah, 50100 Kuala Lumpur dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan yang bertarikh 30/10/2024 diseatikan kepada Defendan secara penyampaian ganti iaku dengan menampilkan sesaliran Perintah Untuk Penyampaian Ganti, Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan di atas Papan Nota Mahkamah Sesyen Kuala Lumpur dan di alamat Defendan iaku di 29 LALUAN KLEBANG 31, TAMAN KLEBANG PERDANA, 31200 CHEMOR, PERAK dan dengan mengiklankan di dalam akhbar harian tempatan "New Straits Times" di mana cara penampakan dan pengiklanan tersebut seharusnya disalurkan sebagai penyampaian yang berkesan ke atas dan Defendan selama Tujuh (7) hari selepas tarikh terakhir bagi penampakan dan pengiklanan tersebut dan kos pemohonan ini menjadi kos di dalam kausa.

Sekiranya kamu sebagai Defendan berhajat untuk membatalkan Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan tersebut, kamu mestilah dalam tempoh Tujuh (7) hari selepas penyampaian Writ ini ke atas kamu sebagai Defendan, termasuklah hari penyampaian itu, memasukkan kehadiran, dengan menamatkan memorandum kehadiran di Mahkamah.

ADALAH DIMAKLUMKAN bahawa Tarikh Pengurusan Kes yang akan dilaksanakan secara e-Review telah ditetapkan pada 30/12/2024 jam 09.00 pagi dan boleh diakses melalui <https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/detail/59640>. Sekiranya kamu sebagai Defendan tidak dapat menghadiri pengurusan kes secara e-Review, sila hadir ke Mahkamah Sesyen, Kompleks Mahkamah Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim, 50506 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan dan sila maklumkan kepada pihak kami akan kehadiran kamu pada atau sebelum Tarikh Pengurusan Kes tersebut.

Kamu sebagai Defendan harus memastikan bahawa Memorandum Kehadiran telah dimasukkan dalam tempoh masa yang dinyatakan di atas.

AMBIL PERHATIAN JUGA bahawa jika kamu sebagai Defendan gagal memasukkan kehadiran dalam tempoh masa seperti mana yang dinyatakan di dalam Writ tersebut, maka Penghakiman Ingkar akan dimasukkan kehadiran terhadap kamu sebagai Defendan.

Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan tersebut boleh diperiksa oleh kamu atas permohonan di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh pada 29 November 2024.

Tt

Pegumcara bagi pihak Plaintiff

Notis disediakan oleh Tetuan Goh & Partners, Pegumcara Plaintiff yang beralamat di Block C-6-1 Megan Avenue II, No 12 Jalan Yap Kwan Seng, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.
Tel : 03-21668300 Fax: 03-21668300
Ref No. : GP/AIS/PF/17492-24 (8801)
No. Akaun : 62010056243024/Zura

(CM) 31/12/2024
DALAM MAHKAMAH SESYEN DI KUALA LUMPUR
DALAM NEGERI WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN KUALA LUMPUR
Guaman No. WA-A52M-6356-10/2024

ANTARA

ALLIANCE ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD
(NO. SYARIKAT : 200701018870) PLAINTIF

DAN

ANJALIDEVI A/P ARUMUGAVEL
(NO. K/P : 781020-08-5568) DEFENDAN

NOTIS

Dalam perkara Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan bertarikh 30/10/2024 dan Perintah Mahkamah yang bertarikh 29/11/2024,
Kepada:

ANJALIDEVI A/P ARUMUGAVEL
29 LALUAN KLEBANG 31,
TAMAN KLEBANG PERDANA,
31200 CHEMOR, PERAK

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa satu Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan telah dikeluarkan oleh Mahkamah Sesyen di sini terhadap kamu untuk anakguam kami ALLIANCE ISLAMIC BANK BERHAD, beralamat di Tingkat 2, Menara Multi-Purpose, Capital Square, 8 Jalan Munshi Abdullah, 50100 Kuala Lumpur dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan bahawa Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan yang bertarikh 30/10/2024 diseatikan kepada Defendan secara penyampaian ganti iaku dengan menampilkan sesaliran Perintah Untuk Penyampaian Ganti, Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan di atas Papan Nota Mahkamah Sesyen Kuala Lumpur dan di alamat Defendan iaku di 29 LALUAN KLEBANG 31, TAMAN KLEBANG PERDANA, 31200 CHEMOR, PERAK dan dengan mengiklankan di dalam akhbar harian tempatan "New Straits Times" di mana cara penampakan dan pengiklanan tersebut seharusnya disalurkan sebagai penyampaian yang berkesan ke atas dan Defendan selama Tujuh (7) hari selepas tarikh terakhir bagi penampakan dan pengiklanan tersebut dan kos pemohonan ini menjadi kos di dalam kausa.

Sekiranya kamu sebagai Defendan berhajat untuk membatalkan Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan tersebut, kamu mestilah dalam tempoh Tujuh (7) hari selepas penyampaian Writ ini ke atas kamu sebagai Defendan, termasuklah hari penyampaian itu, memasukkan kehadiran, dengan menamatkan memorandum kehadiran di Mahkamah.

ADALAH DIMAKLUMKAN bahawa Tarikh Pengurusan Kes yang akan dilaksanakan secara e-Review telah ditetapkan pada 31/12/2024 jam 09.00 pagi dan boleh diakses melalui <https://e1elong.kehakiman.gov.my/detail/59640>. Sekiranya kamu sebagai Defendan tidak dapat menghadiri pengurusan kes secara e-Review, sila hadir ke Mahkamah Sesyen, Kompleks Mahkamah Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim, 50506 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan dan sila maklumkan kepada pihak kami akan kehadiran kamu pada atau sebelum Tarikh Pengurusan Kes tersebut.

Kamu sebagai Defendan harus memastikan bahawa Memorandum Kehadiran telah dimasukkan dalam tempoh masa yang dinyatakan di atas.

AMBIL PERHATIAN JUGA bahawa jika kamu sebagai Defendan gagal memasukkan kehadiran dalam tempoh masa seperti mana yang dinyatakan di dalam Writ tersebut, maka Penghakiman Ingkar akan dimasukkan kehadiran terhadap kamu sebagai Defendan.

Writ dan Pernyataan Tututan tersebut boleh diperiksa oleh kamu atas permohonan di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh pada 29 November 2024.

Tt

Pegumcara bagi pihak Plaintiff

Notis disediakan oleh Tetuan Goh & Partners, Pegumcara Plaintiff yang beralamat di Block C-6-1 Megan Avenue II, No 12 Jalan Yap Kwan Seng, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.
Tel : 03-21668300 Fax: 03-21668300
Ref No. : GP/AIS/PF/17470-24 (8796)
No. Akaun : 620100562237022/Zura

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024 . NewStraitsTimes

SPORT 35

FOOTBALL

MBAPPE BACK FROM 'BOTTOM'

Striker on target as Real Madrid climb to second in La Liga

MADRID

KYLIAN Mbappe said he had bounced back from hitting rock bottom after helping Real Madrid thrash Sevilla 4-2 on Sunday to move second in La Liga above stuttering rivals Barcelona.

After Atletico Madrid beat Barca on Saturday to claim top spot at Christmas, Carlo Ancelotti's side also took advantage with a comfortable home win which leaves them a point behind the leaders.

Madrid coach Ancelotti said ahead of Sevilla's visit that Mbappe's adaptation period had ended following his summer switch from Paris Saint-Germain and the French forward proved the coach right with a strong performance and his 14th goal of the season across all competitions.

Fede Valverde also netted a brilliant effort from range, with Rodrygo Goes and Brahim Diaz on the scoresheet for the hosts too, the latter assisted by a clever Mbappe pass.

Isaac Romero and Dodi Lukebakio scored for Sevilla, although they were thoroughly outplayed on veteran defender Jesus Navas' final game for the club.

"I think that we know each other better, my arrival changed a lot of things, and now, as the coach said, the adaptation is over and I

Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe and Sevilla's goalkeeper Alvaro Fernandez (left) vying for the ball during their La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Sunday. AFP PIC

feel very good in the team," Mbappe told Real Madrid TV.

"We can see on the pitch that I click better with my teammates and now we're all playing better."

Mbappe, back after a brief absence with a thigh injury, scored for Madrid in midweek as they won the Intercontinental Cup.

It was welcome relief for the forward after missing two penalties in recent weeks against Liverpool and Athletic Bilbao, as well as suffering crit-

icism for his form.

"I know I've got much more in my legs than I'm showing, but in the last games I've played better," Mbappe added.

"The Bilbao game was good for me, I hit the bottom, I missed a penalty and it was a moment to realise that I have to give everything for this shirt and show my personality."

Ancelotti said: "I think (Mbappe) has been self-critical, he's come out of a situation that

could have been complicated for him," Ancelotti told reporters.

"Yesterday I said his adaptation period was over, today he showed it, sometimes I'm not wrong."

The coach said Madrid had found their footing after struggling at times in the first half of the season.

"We're running a bit more, playing with more intensity, we're doing things well again, as we have to do — they've been complicated months." **AFP**

Atalanta fight back to take top spot in Serie A, Roma hit five

MILAN: Atalanta surged back to the top of the Serie A standings with a Charles De Ketelaere-inspired 3-2 win at home to Empoli on Sunday, while inconsistent Roma thrashed Parma 5-0.

De Ketelaere was twice on target for Atalanta in the topsy-turvy encounter — his second goal proving to be the winner with just four minutes left on the clock.

Ademola Lookman was also on the scoresheet to ensure Gian Piero Gasperini's side won their 11th consecutive match in the league and leapfrogged Napoli back into top spot for the Christmas period.

"It's been a wonderful year, we're sorry it's ending, let's hope that 2025 will be just as good," Gasperini told DAZN.

"It won't be easy, but beyond the results I'm very happy with the spirit that there is in this team."

The reigning Europa League champions restored their two-point buffer over Napoli, who had moved a point ahead of them following their 2-1 win at Genoa on Saturday.

Charles De Ketelaere

"Today we suffered a bit, but always after goals we reacted and tried to win," said De Ketelaere.

"It's December and it's not even over yet, we are happy where we are but every game is difficult and we continue."

Roma bounced back from last weekend's surprise 2-0 loss at Como, which had left Claudio Ranieri's side within two points

of the drop zone, to thump Parma in the Italian capital.

Paulo Dybala hit a brace, with goals also coming from Alexis Saelemaekers, Leandro Paredes and Artem Dovbyk as Roma moved to 10th place.

"The most important thing was the points. We had to show that the team seen against Como was not the real Roma, we had to do more," Saelemaekers told DAZN.

Parma remain one point above the drop zone in 16th spot.

Venezia climbed off the bottom of the table with a vital 2-1 home win over fellow strugglers Cagliari.

The result leaves Cagliari 18th on 14 points, one ahead of Venezia, with Monza propping up the standings with 10 points after defeat at home to Juventus.

Juventus maintained their unbeaten status in Serie A by seeing off the bottom side 2-1 thanks to first-half strikes from Weston McKennie and Nicolas Gonzalez.

The Old Lady remain sixth on 31 points as they won for the first time in the league since early November following four consecutive draws. **AFP**

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund scored three goals in a devastating five-minute spell to beat Wolfsburg 3-1 and end the year in the top six of the Bundesliga.

Dortmund came into this game without a win in their previous three league outings, but produced some stylish attacking moments to blow Wolfsburg away on the road.

Dutchman Donyell Malen got things moving, turning in Ramy Bensebaini's corner from close range.

The visitors doubled their lead through the impressive young German star Max Beier, who met Julian Brandt's through ball with a sublime first-time finish with the outside of his right foot.

Beier turned provider just two minutes later, cutting back a low cross for an unmarked Brandt to find the bottom corner.

Wolfsburg were stunned, having conceded in the 25th, 28th and 30th minutes and the rest of the contest was a damage limitation exercise for Ralph Hasenhuetl's side, although they pulled one back in the second half through Denis Vavro.

Dortmund had Pascal Gross sent off just after the hour, but it

didn't threaten to derail a win that keeps them within two points of third place.

"In the first half we played really well, had very good positional play and kept moving forward with determination," said Dortmund coach Nuri Sahin.

"In the second half we allowed the opponent back into the game completely unnecessarily and you have to defend. Then you get a red card, which is totally unnecessary."

On a good weekend for the teams from Germany's Ruhr region, Bochum beat relegation rivals Heidenheim 2-0 for their first victory of the Bundesliga season.

Rooted in last place in the table, Bochum took an early lead courtesy of striker Moritz Broschinski, whose expert low volley was reward for Ibrahima Sissoko's quality cross from the right.

Bochum, who brought in veteran coach Dieter Hecking last month in the hope of igniting their season and saving them from relegation, appeared the hungrier of the sides.

When the second goal came, it was no less than Bochum deserved. **AFP**



Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim gesturing on the touchline during their Premier League match against Bournemouth at Old Trafford on Sunday. AFP PIC

'SICK AND TIRED'

Amorim despair as Red Devils slump to dismal defeat

MANCHESTER

MANCHESTER United boss Ruben Amorim took responsibility for his team's undoing in a depressing 3-0 loss to Bournemouth on Sunday that saw thousands of frustrated fans head to the exits well before the final whistle.

Dean Huijsen, Justin Kluivert and Antoine Semenyo scored to keep United 13th in the table, the first time they have been in the bottom half at Christmas in Premier League history.

"It is my responsibility to coach them," Amorim said.

"Of course we want to improve. In this moment, everything is so hard, a club like Manchester United to lose 3-0 at home, it's really tough for everybody.

"And of course the fans are re-

RESULTS

PREMIER LEAGUE			
EVERTON	0 0	CHELSEA	
FULHAM	0 0	SOUTHAMPTON	
LEICESTER	0 3	WOLVES	
MAN UTD	0 3	BOURNEMOUTH	
TOTTENHAM	3 6	LIVERPOOL	

ally disappointed and tired. You can feel it in the stadium, and I understand that, but we have to face it."

Conceding from set pieces has become a theme of United's woe-ful season and the issue reared its head again on Sunday when Huijsen headed home from a corner kick in the 29th minute.

It was the 17th goal that United have conceded from set pieces in the Premier League in 2024, the most by them in a single calendar year in the league's 32-year history.

"Without conceding nothing to the opponent, and then one set piece makes us more nervous, all the stadium, I felt it since the first

Bournemouth boss: Too early to celebrate

MANCHESTER: Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola was pleased with his team's 3-0 victory at Manchester United on Sunday that saw them move up to fifth place, but said it is far too soon to get excited about their position in the Premier League.

Dean Huijsen headed home a first-half corner kick before Justin Kluivert, from the penalty spot, and Antoine Semenyo put the game out of reach with two goals within two minutes early in the second half for the Cherries' second consecutive 3-0 win at Old Trafford.

After their 12th-place finish in the Premier League last season, the Cherries are three points from the top four in their third successive season back in the top flight.

"Everything is very close," Iraola said.

"We were playing United, if they beat us they would be have been above us. You know, it's a matter of now, in this next week, we could be behind them.

"This win will not disappear, but is not enough for anything. We have to add a lot of points. So, we go again week by week, game by game. I don't think now so early it makes sense to look much to the standings.

"I value the 28 points. I think the amount of points we have is good. At Christmas, it is a good amount."

Bournemouth are unbeaten in their last five league matches, and the fact their 3-0 win was identical to their result last season at United's so-called "Theatre of Dreams" had visiting fans jubilantly singing "It's happening again" in the game's dying minutes.

The victory was no walkover however, Iraola said, praising his goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, who kept a clean sheet despite seven United shots on target.

"Kepa's performances have helped us this year," the manager said of the Spaniard. "I think he is confident and, in a very young defensive line, we need players with experience.

"It is an important win for us. We won 3-0, but it was more difficult than it looks when you see 3-0. I think we have been quite solid. It was a mature performance.

"I am happy that we were more clinical today, we scored from a set play. I think it was a solid performance, not amazing but it was solid. We kept playing the same way and pushing until the end." **Reuters**

Maresca happy as Chelsea drop points in Everton draw

LIVERPOOL: Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca insisted he was "absolutely happy" despite his side losing ground in the Premier League title race following a goal-less draw away to Everton on Sunday.

The Blues could have leapfrogged Liverpool into top spot with victory at Goodison Park before the leaders kicked off at Tottenham Hotspur later in the day. But instead Chelsea saw their eight-match winning run end as they failed to score for the first time since October.

And with Liverpool winning 6-3 in an extraordinary encounter in north London, it meant Chelsea ended the day in second place — four points behind the Reds and having played a game more than the table-toppers.

Maresca, speaking before Liverpool's victory was confirmed, said: "I am absolutely happy. I just said to the players I am more happy today than I was after the Brentford game (which they won

2-1 last weekend).

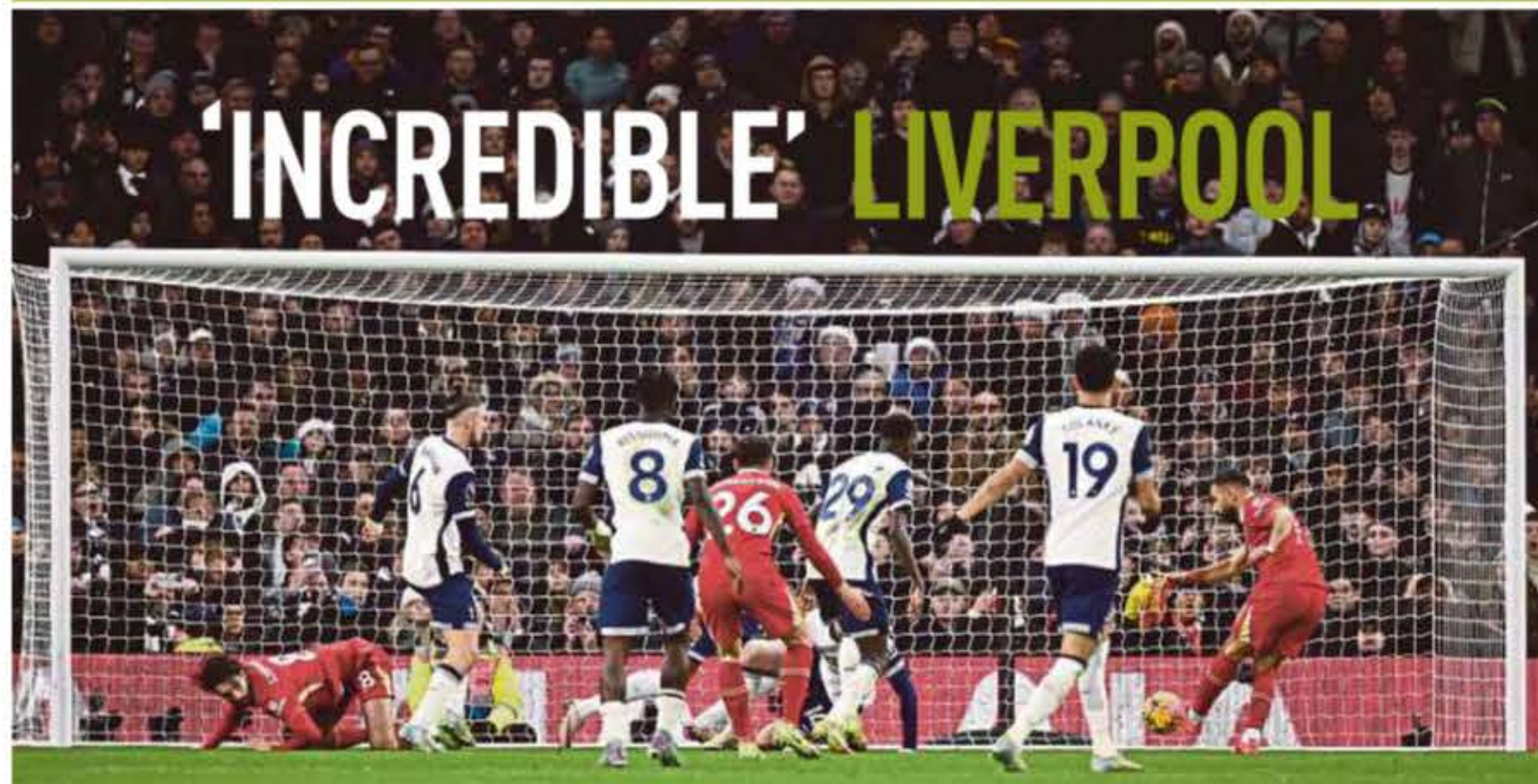
"The reason why was I was quite worried about this game: tricky game, tricky stadium, tricky team."

He added: "Defensively they are top, they are one of the five best teams in Europe in terms of clean sheets so you struggle to create chances against them.

This was Everton's first match since the Friedkin Group completed their takeover of the Liverpool club, with new executive chairman Marc Watts among the Goodison crowd on Sunday.

This was struggling Everton's second successive goalless draw following last week's 0-0 at Arsenal but Toffees boss Sean Dyche, out of contract at the end of the season, knows it is wins alone that will impress the club's US-based owners.

Everton have won just three of their 16 league matches so far this season, with the Toffees four points above the relegation zone. **AFP**



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (right) scores against Tottenham during Sunday's Premier League match at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, London. REUTERS PIC

Slot warns: 'No room for complacency' after six-goal thrashing of Tottenham

LONDON

ARNE Slot urged "incredible" Liverpool not to step off the gas after the Premier League leaders thrashed Tottenham 6-3 to move four points clear at the top of the table.

Slot claimed Liverpool's goal-spree in north London on Sunday ranked as their best away performance since he arrived from Feyenoord to replace Jurgen Klopp in the close-season.

Mohamed Salah was the catalyst with two goals and two assists, while Luis Diaz also bagged a brace alongside strikes from Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai.

Slot's side have won 21 of their 25 games in all competitions this

term, a remarkable run that leaves them in pole position to win the title for the first time since 2020, while also competing for the Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup.

But despite their blistering form, Liverpool's concession of two late goals to Dejan Kulusevski and Dominic Solanke was frustrating to Slot, who called on his team to stay focused until the end of every game.

"It was very good. Maybe it was our best performance away from home, although I really like what I saw from Man United as well," Slot said in reference to the 3-0 win at Old Trafford in September.

"Until the 60th to 65th minute, I really enjoyed what I saw. Of course we were caught one time in

bringing the ball out from the back and it immediately led to a goal for Tottenham.

"I think if we would have gone into the dressing room with a 2-1 (half-time) lead, that would not have done justice to all the chances we had. That is why I was quite happy with the fact we scored for 3-1.

"Then 4-1, 5-1, incredible display, but then you also saw, no matter how much quality players you have, if they think they don't have to run any more in this league and especially against Tottenham, because they are so good with the ball as well, they immediately start to create."

Liverpool were assured of top spot at Christmas before kick-off when second-placed Chelsea were

held to a goalless draw by Everton.

But, despite their lofty position, Slot who won the Dutch title with Feyenoord, refused to contemplate a Liverpool march to the trophy in the second half of the season.

"Of course it means something because you always prefer to be where we are at the moment than to be in another position in the league table, but you know just as well as I know — because I have won the league once — how hard it is to win it," he said.

"I didn't expect Chelsea to drop points today as well, so it can happen in every game and that's what makes this league so special.

"That's why so many people want to see it and why we play at Christmas time." **AFP**

I can't just flick a switch and change style, says Spurs boss

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou said there is no easy fix for his injury-hit side after a 6-3 defeat at home to leaders Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday.

Once again, the London club proved great entertainment but that was little consolation to fans who have seen them concede nine goals in their last two home league games.

They also showed their chaotic side in a 4-3 League Cup win over Manchester United in midweek, after which Postecoglou took issue with some pundits who questioned his tactics.

In reality, a three-goal deficit masked the gulf between Tottenham and Liverpool on Sunday,

but Postecoglou once again came out fighting in some spiky post-match interviews.

In one, his patience appeared close to snapping when he was asked whether there were other reasons apart from a lengthy injury list as to why his side were down in 11th place in the table heading in to Christmas.

Tottenham started against Liverpool without first-choice goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario, centre backs Micky van de Ven and Cristian Romero, left backs Ben Davies and Destiny Udogie and forward Richarlison.

"You know what? I'm just going to stop answering these questions," the Australian told *BBC Sport*.

"If people can't see the obvious I'm not going to point it out. Look, make of it what you want, yes we're conceding goals.

"If you want to discount the fact we're missing a goalkeeper, two centre backs and a left back as well and that hasn't coincided with what we're doing ... I don't know what to say anymore."

According to Opta, Tottenham's Premier League games under Postecoglou average 3.6 goals per game, the highest for any manager taking charge of at least 50 games in the competition.

Some are now suggesting that Postecoglou is more interested in style than substance and while Spurs fans still sung his name on Sunday, many took to social me-

dia or radio phone-ins to criticise him for Tottenham's fragility.

"If people want me to change my approach, it's not going to change. We are doing it for a reason, we are doing it because we think it will help us to be successful," he told reporters.

Postecoglou said last month that if his side were 10th at Christmas no one would be happy, confidently predicting that they would have climbed the table by the festive period.

But that is now the reality. Asked whether he was feeling under pressure, he said: "I'm not sure what you mean by pressure. I'm not happy about where we are in the table. I'm not sure about pressure in what sense?" **Reuters**

Salah happy wherever career ends after inspiring Liverpool rout

LONDON: Mohamed Salah dropped another hint that his future could lie away from Liverpool as the Egypt star said he would be happy "wherever I am going to end my career" after starring in Sunday's 6-3 demolition of Tottenham.

Salah scored twice and provided two assists in the goal-spree in north London as Liverpool moved four points clear at the top of the Premier League.

The 32-year-old is the first Premier League player to bag at least 10 goals and 10 assists before Christmas, while his brace also took him into fourth place on Liverpool's all-time list of scorers with 229 in all competitions.

Salah's immense value to Arne Slot's team is clear, but Liverpool have been unable to persuade the forward to sign a new contract as speculation mounts about his future.

With Salah's current deal expiring at the end of this season, he will be free to sign a pre-contract agreement with a foreign club from January.

Having already made several comments earlier this season about this potentially being his last campaign with Liverpool, Salah once again made a cryptic reference to his future.

"It's great to achieve that at such a big club, but the most important thing is that we won the game. Wherever I am going to end my career I am happy about it," Salah told *Sky Sports*.

Salah added that there was "no update" on his contract situation, but Slot will surely be desperate to extend his talisman's seven-year stay on Merseyside after he took his goal tally to 18 in all competitions this term.

With Salah to the fore, Liverpool have won 21 of their 25 games in all competitions since Slot replaced Jurgen Klopp as manager.

"I didn't think about it before the game but I'm glad I have done it, something that makes me proud, I'll keep working hard," Salah said of reaching double figures in goals and assists this season.

Salah was less happy with Liverpool's defending against Tottenham, adding: "We were quite good in front but I think we need to improve defensively as a team.

"Conceding three goals is quite hard. It's quite good the result and hopefully we just keep going." **AFP**

SILAT

GOLDEN MILESTONE FOR THAMARAJ

Exponent becomes first Malaysian Indian world champion

FADHLI ISHAK
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PENCAK silat exponent Thamaraj Vasudevan struggled to contain his emotions after clinching a historic victory at the World Championships in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on Sunday.

The 29-year-old from Sungai Petani became the first Malaysian Indian to win a silat world title, defeating Uzbekistan's Khudoyberdiev Diyorbek in the men's open category two final (over-110kg).

"I cannot describe how happy I am after winning the final," said Thamaraj, speaking from Abu Dhabi yesterday.

"It was definitely my goal to win the gold medal with the support of

my family, friends and coaches. They helped me achieve this incredible milestone."

Thamaraj, a relative newcomer to the sport, thanked the Malaysia National Silat Federation (Pesaka), the National Sports Council and the National Sports Institute for their backing.

The national exponents had a successful outing in Abu Dhabi, winning six gold, nine silver and four bronze medals in the senior category.

The gold medals were won by Abdul Latif Maxzakir (men's category H), Danial Azray-Danial Azrol (seni ganda), Ahmad Fauzan (solo creative), Thamaraj, Nor Farah Mazlan (women's category A) and Siti Shazwana Ajak (category D).

The silver medals were won by

Khairi Adib Azhar (men's category A), Firdaus Latib (open category one), Nor Ainum Mokhtar (women's category E), Ummi Mashitah (category C), Nurshafiqah Norwan (category G), Nur Syafiqah Hamzah (senitunggal), NurShahida Sharim-Nur Sarafana Hikma Jailani (seni ganda), Siti Nur Khairunnisa Hail-Nurhaizatul Farisha-Asma Nazri (seni regu) and Nur Inatha Khairuniyah (solo creative).

The bronze medals were won by Hazim Ahmad (men's category C), Khairul Shaddad Ardi (seni tunggal), Muhammad Syafiq-Mohd Juned-Sazzlan Yuga (seni regu) and Nur Nabilla Hartono (women's category H).

The national junior team also did well in Abu Dhabi, winning five gold, four silver and four bronze.

Pesaka backs Thamaraj for long-term success

MALAYSIA National Silat Federation (Pesaka) believes newly crowned world champion Thamaraj Vasudevan has the potential to contribute to the national team for at least the next five years.

Thamaraj, 29, from Sungai Petani, made history on Sunday by defeating Uzbekistan's Khudoyberdiev Diyorbek in the men's open category final at the World Championships in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

He is the first Malaysian Indian to claim a world title in silat.

Pesaka secretary-general Bibi Aishah Golbal Shah praised Thamaraj, a relative newcomer to the sport, for stepping up to secure gold for Malaysia.

"Thamaraj has only been in the national team for about a year and a half.

"He previously competed in taekwondo for the Armed Forces before switching to silat," said Bibi yesterday.

"He won the silat national title

in 2022, which led to his inclusion in the national team. He then claimed silver medals at the Asian Championships in 2023 and again this year.

"We challenged him to raise his game and target gold at the World Championships, and he delivered by creating history."

Bibi believes Thamaraj has a bright future and will excel in the sport.

"I believe he can represent the country for another five or six years and achieve more victories," she said.

"His open category is for fighters weighing over 110 kilograms, and currently, few in this category can match him.

"He is taller and more muscular than his competitors."

However, Bibi noted that the men's open category will not feature at next year's Thailand SEA Games.

Pesaka, she added, is hoping to push for its inclusion in the 2027 Malaysia Sea Games. **Fadhli Ishak**

YEARENDER / BOWLING

Keglers on a roll in 2024

MALAYSIAN bowling soared to unprecedented heights in 2024, crowned by a historic Asian Championships triumph that perfectly marked the Malaysian Tenpin Bowling Congress' (MTBC) golden jubilee.

In September, the national team shattered records, clinching an extraordinary haul of eight gold, five silver and four bronze medals at the Asian Championships.

The feat eclipsed Taiwan's 8-2-3 tally set in 2004 and sealed Malaysia's second overall title, following their 2019 breakthrough in Kuwait.

Spearheading the campaign were Rafiq Ismail and Sin Li Jane.

Rafiq captured four golds — men's singles, trios (with Hafiz Zainuddin and Syafiq Ridhwan Abdul Malek), all-events and masters.

Li Jane matched his achievement with three titles — women's doubles (with Natasha Roslan), all-events, and masters.

Their remarkable performances propelled both to the top of the Asian rankings in December.

The triumph also validated the team's bold selection policy of blending youth with experience.

Rising stars Izz Naquiddin and Shaqem Izwan Teh earned their spots over established names like Timmy Tan and Ahmad Muaz Fishol.

The gamble paid off when debutant Shaqem partnered Tun Hakim Tun Hasnul Azam to claim the men's doubles gold.

Sin Li Jane's meteoric rise continued on the PWBA Tour between May and August.

She made history as the first Malaysian and Asian to be crowned PWBA Player of the Year, securing four titles, including two majors — the US Women's Open and Tour Championship.

Victories at the Bowlers Journal Rockford Open and Greater Nashville Classic brought her career PWBA title count to five, following her 2017 Lincoln Open breakthrough.

The success extended across international events.

On home soil, Hafiz Zainuddin and Gillian Lim claimed maiden Malaysia Open titles in May against a competitive field.

Rafiq reclaimed the Thailand



National bowlers, coaches and officials celebrating their victory at the Asian Championships in Bangkok in September. PIC FROM MTBC

Open crown in August — his second since 2015 — while Nur Syazwani Sahar secured third in the women's category.

More podium finishes followed through Rafiq and Nora Lyana Nastasia Norkamal (third at the Singapore Open), Nora (third at the Hong Kong Open) and Tun Hakim (third at the Emir Cup, Qatar).

In February, Hafiz and Ahmad Muaz claimed silver and bronze respectively at the DIBC-Delta Open in Dubai.

The future of Malaysian bowling looks bright, with emerging talents making a mark.

At the Asian Junior Championships in June, the Under-18 squad clinched three golds, two

silvers and three bronzes to finish as overall runners-up.

Wan Zarif Ikram (boys' Masters), the girls' team (Intan Nor Edryana, Nur Ainul Hayat, Adelia Nur Irwan and Afifah Kamilia) and Afiahq (all-events) delivered the golden haul.

In July, Adelia, Hazirah Ramli, Adania Redzwan and Anis Hanani Romzi created history at the World Youth Championships in Incheon, securing Malaysia's first-ever girls' team gold by defeating Singapore.

These feats built on the legacy of the late Datuk Dr. P. S. Nathan, who died on Sept 22 at 90.

Nathan, the longest-serving president of any national sports association, established a frame-

work that continues to thrive.

The National Sports Council has endorsed an expanded youth programme for 2025, increasing the capacity from nine boys and six girls to 10 boys and 12 girls.

Malaysia faces a packed 2025 calendar, beginning with the World Cup in Hong Kong in January.

Key events include defending the Malaysia Open in April, the World Cup (Sweden, June), the Asian Junior Championships (Qatar, July) and the Asian Youth Championships (Malaysia, August).

The year will conclude with the World Championships in Hong Kong and the Sea Games in Thailand. **Tan Ming Wai**

For more stories and results, log on to www.nst.com.my

BADMINTON

WILL REXY PICK BOE, HERRY OR FLANDY?

Coaching director confident of finding Bin Shen's replacement

REPORTS BY FAIZAL SALIM
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NATIONAL coaching director Remy Manaiy (pic) will face a tough decision when he returns from his holiday.

He must decide on a new men's doubles coaching lineup following the departures of Tan Bin

Shen and Poh Chai Boon from the BA of Malaysia (BAM).

Renowned doubles coaches Mathias Boe, Herry Iman Piernagadi and Flandy Limpele are currently available after leaving their respective roles with the Indian, Indonesian and Hong Kong BAs.

BAM confirmed on Friday that Bin Shen will not extend his con-

tract when it expires on Jan 13, ending his tenure after five years.

During this time, he guided Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik to two Olympic bronze medals (Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024) and a world title in 2022.

Bin Shen will join the Hong Kong BA.

Chai Boon, who has been with



BAM interim president Datuk V. Subramaniam (sitting left) and F&N Beverages Malaysia Sdn Bhd chief marketing officer Leong Wai Yin during a partnership extension signing ceremony between the national body and 100PLUS at Academy Badminton Malaysia in Bukit Kiara yesterday. Also present were BAM secretary-general Kenny Goh (standing left) and F&N Beverages Malaysia Sdn Bhd managing director Jordan Ng. NSTP PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

BAM seek input from players on new doubles coach

AARON Chia-Soh Wooi Yik have been consulted by the BA of Malaysia (BAM) in its search for a new national men's doubles coach following Tan Bin Shen's decision to leave the association.

Bin Shen, whose contract expires on Jan 13, has opted not to renew his tenure and is expected to join the Hong Kong BA.

The incoming coach faces a tough task, as Bin Shen guided world No. 6 Aaron-Wooi Yik to two Olympic bronze medals at Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, as well as the world title in 2022.

Aaron revealed he first heard about Bin Shen's departure after the recent World Tour Finals in Hangzhou, China.

"I don't want to say too much because coaches come and go. We respect and accept his decision," Aaron said during a partnership extension signing ceremony between BAM and 100PLUS at the Academy Badminton Malaysia in Bukit Kiara yesterday.

"I think he has his goals to achieve. We will wait for the new coach to be appointed and move forward."

Aaron also confirmed that BAM had sought input from players regarding Bin Shen's replacement.

"It is not my place to say anything. Let BAM announce it when the time comes, as the new coach will not only be working with us

but also with the other pairs," he said.

"I hope the new coach can further improve the men's doubles department and nurture the younger pairs in the team."

Meanwhile, Wooi Yik highlighted Bin Shen's influence on his career.

"He has been coaching us for five years. I have learned a lot from him, and he has helped us become one of the best pairs in the world," said Wooi Yik.

When asked if winning the Malaysia Open would be a fitting farewell for Bin Shen, Wooi Yik replied: "It is always our goal to win every tournament we compete in."



BAM for 15 years, will also leave when his contract expires at the end of the month.

He has signed with Y Ying, a Chinese sports brand, and will collaborate with TRS Badminton Academy.

Despite their departures, Remy

is confident about the future, pointing to the availability of top coaches such as Boe, Herry and Flandy.

Boe, a former world No. 1 with Carsten Mogensen, played a key role in the rise of India's Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty.

Under Boe's guidance, the pair won gold at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, the Hangzhou Asian Games and were instrumental in India's historic Thomas Cup triumph in 2022.

Meanwhile, Herry, better known as Herry IP, ended his 25-year stint with the Indonesian national team recently.

The 62-year-old has produced several world and Olympic champions, including Tony Gunawan-Candra Wijaya and Hendra Setiawan-Markis Kido.

Flandy, who coached BAM's men's doubles team from 2020 to 2022, is credited with the rise of Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Rumsani, who are now ranked world No. 3.

Remy, who will decide on the new coaching lineup after his holiday, has assured that Bin Shen's departure will not disrupt the national squad.

Subramaniam: Coaches leaving for better offers is 'common'

THE BA of Malaysia (BAM) remains unperturbed by the departure of several established coaches in recent years, with interim president Datuk V. Subramaniam attributing the trend to individuals receiving better offers.

However, critics have raised concerns over BAM's ability to retain coaching talent, warning that such losses could jeopardise Malaysia's hopes of securing their first Olympic gold medal at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

The latest to depart is national men's doubles coach Tan Bin Shen, who has opted not to extend his contract, which expires on Jan 13.

BAM had earlier decided to release his assistant, Poh Chai Boon.

In October, former world champion Hendrawan ended his 15-year tenure with BAM to join Indonesia's PB Djarum club.

It is understood that Datuk Tey Seu Bock, who has been with BAM since 2002, is exploring other opportunities and may also

leave.

When asked about the spate of departures, Subramaniam said BAM is not concerned.

"This happens everywhere. When individuals get better offers, they will move on," he said after a sponsorship extension ceremony at the Academy Badminton Malaysia in Bukit Kiara yesterday.

"It does not mean BAM is not the right place. If that were the case, why would foreign coaches want to come here?"

"Sometimes, coaches want to venture out and gain new experiences. We are not worried about this, it is quite common."

Subramaniam confirmed that BAM is actively searching for a replacement for Bin Shen.

"We have several candidates on the list. Discussions will be held to identify and hire the most suitable candidate."

"Our goal is to hire the best coach who is loyal and disciplined. He must also be dedicated to developing players and elevating them to the next level."

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SPORT

HERRY, BOE
OR FLANDY?

HERRY Iman Pierngadi, Mathias Boe and Flandy Limpele are the candidates on BAM's list to replace the outgoing Tan Bin Shen as the national men's doubles head coach.

» FAIZAL SALIM REPORTS ON PAGE 39

Christmas joy for Reds

LIVERPOOL extend their lead at the top of the Premier League after scoring six in a nine-goal thriller against Tottenham Hotspur, but manager Arne Slot does not want his players to get carried away.

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Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrating after scoring against Tottenham Hotspur during Sunday's Premier League match in London. AFP PIC



Thamaraj Vasudevan (second from left) on the podium at the World Championships in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. PIC FROM NSC

From taekwondo to
silat world champion

THAMARAJ Vasudevan becomes the first Malaysian Indian silat world champion in Abu Dhabi, remarkable for an exponent who has been in the national team for about 18 months after dropping his ambition to become a taekwondo star.

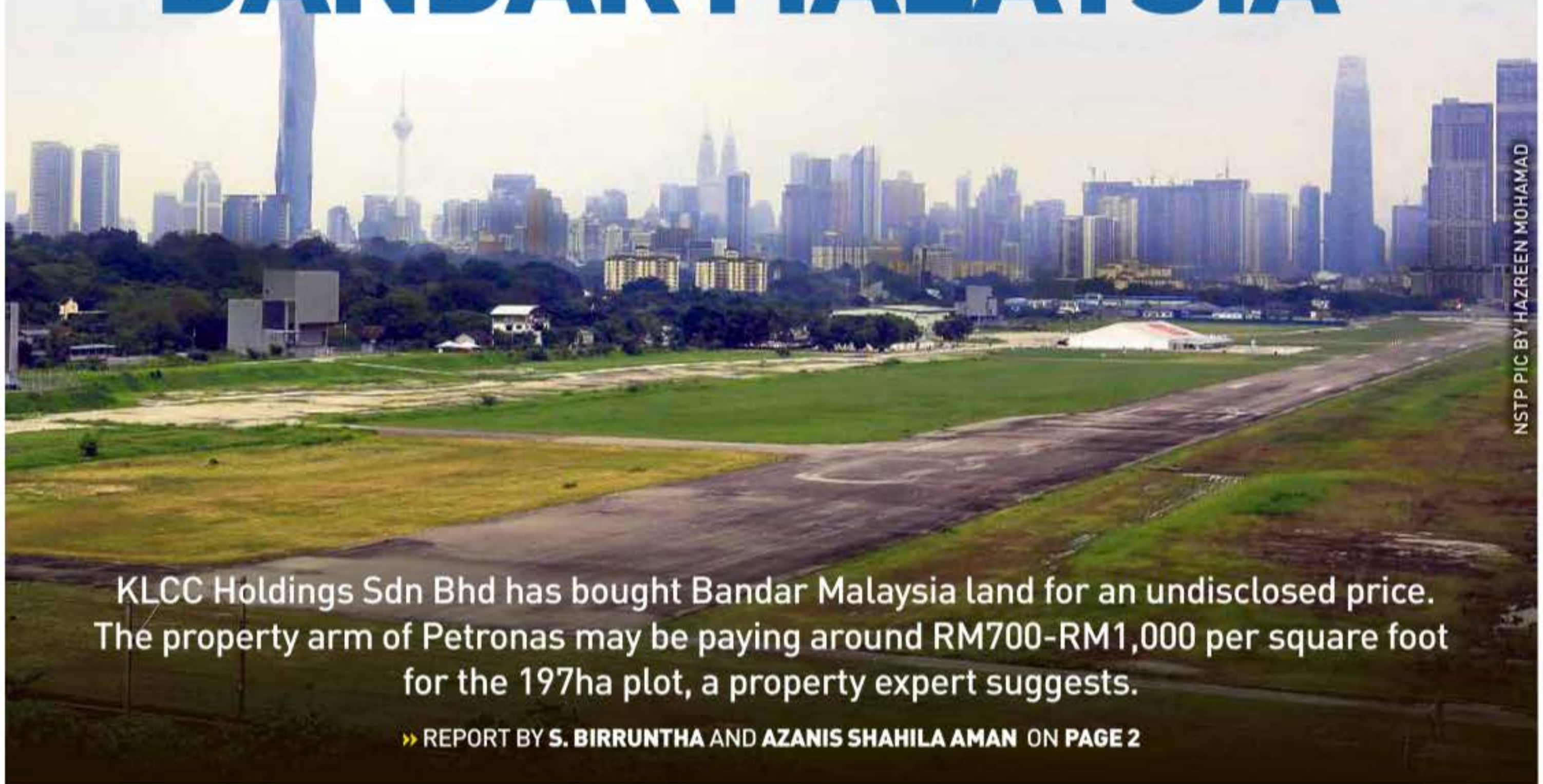
» FADHLI ISHAK REPORTS ON PAGE 38

BAM BOSS UNPERTURBED BY COACHES LEAVING NATIONAL BODY » PAGE 39

BUSINESS TIMES

WORLD MARKETS FBM KLCI (Dec 23) **+4.79** (1,596.20)  STI (Dec 23) **+32.40** (3,752.33)  DJIA (Dec 20) **+498.02** (42,840.26)  FTSE (Dec 20) **-20.71** (8,084.61)  Exchange Rate (Dec 23) **US\$1 = RM 4.486** Brent Oil **US\$73.72*** *AT PRESS TIME

REVIVAL OF BANDAR MALAYSIA



NSTP PIC BY HAZREEN MOHAMAD

KLCC Holdings Sdn Bhd has bought Bandar Malaysia land for an undisclosed price. The property arm of Petronas may be paying around RM700-RM1,000 per square foot for the 197ha plot, a property expert suggests.

» REPORT BY S. BIRRUNTHA AND AZANIS SHAHILA AMAN ON PAGE 2

Regional magnet

MALAYSIA is closing 2024 as Southeast Asia's leading data centre hub with US\$23.3 billion in investments.

» REPORT BY DIYANA ISAMUDIN ON PAGES 4-5

Faulty component identified in Malaysia Airlines' A330neo

» PAGE 7

Risks stack up for the global economy in 2025

» PAGE 8

NSTP PIC BY EFFENDY RASHID

IN BRIEF

CIMB and Gentari sign MoU

CIMB Group Holdings Bhd and clean energy solutions provider Gentari Sdn Bhd, via Gentari Green Mobility Sdn Bhd, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to drive green mobility and value chain decarbonisation across Asean. CIMB and Gentari will offer value-added services to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles in Malaysia. CIMB will deliver targeted financing solutions to Gentari's customers, facilitating decarbonisation efforts and fostering low carbon practices within the sector.

SP Setia projects well-received

BOTH commercial and residential offerings by SP Setia Bhd at Setia EcoHill, Setia EcoHill2 and Setia Mayuri saw commendable take-ups and handovers. Pines Avenue at Setia EcoHill 2 comprises 14 units of two-storey shops with built-ups of between 2,988 sq ft to 4,421 sq ft and prices starting from RM1.3 million. It is set for completion by October 2027. Baris Place 2 at Setia Mayuri comprises 16 units of two-storey shopplots with built-ups ranging from 3,172 sq ft to 4,054 sq ft and prices starting from RM1.5 million. The French-inspired bungalows of Reineville at Setia EcoHill had their handover and Owners Appreciation Day on Sunday.

AmInvest announces income distribution

AMINVEST has declared income distribution for 32 unit trust funds and wholesale funds from July to September this year. The total net income distribution declared was RM142.8 million, encompassing conventional and syariah-compliant funds across various asset classes. AmInvest is the brand name for the fund management business of AmFunds Management and AmIslamic Funds Management Sdn Bhd.

BANDAR MALAYSIA

'KLCCH MAY BE PAYING UP TO RM1,000 PSF FOR 197_{HA} PLOT'

This is lower than TRX and Kuala Lumpur City Centre land, says expert

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PETROLIAM Nasional Bhd's (Petronas) property arm, KLCCH Holdings Sdn Bhd (KLCCH), may be paying RM700 to RM1,000 per square foot (psf) for the 197ha Bandar Malaysia, said a property expert.

This is much lower than the land in Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) and Kuala Lumpur City Centre which cost more than RM2,000 psf, according to CCO & Associates (KL) Sdn Bhd executive director Chan Wai Seen.

"Some land with high plot ratio (at TRX and KLCC) can go above RM4,000 psf," Chan told *Business Times*.

KLCCH yesterday announced that it signed the sale and purchase agreement with Bandar Malaysia Sdn Bhd (BMSB) and Bandar Malaysia Land Sdn Bhd on Oct 4 to take over the land for an undisclosed amount.

The planned development of



An artist's impression of Bandar Malaysia in Jalan Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur. PIC FROM BANDAR MALAYSIA SDN BHD WEBSITE

the land, located at the site of the former Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Jalan Sungai Besi, will add to the country's most iconic developments under KLCCH.

It will be developed into an international business hub and a livable and inclusive city.

KLCCH is the master developer of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre area. It also manages KLCC Park.

Over the weekend, a business weekly reported that the Finance Ministry was in the midst of selling Bandar Malaysia to KLCCH Property Holdings Bhd, a listed unit of Petronas, for RM12 billion.

KLCCH Property, earlier yesterday, denied the report and said it was not a party to the deal.

KLCCH is the holding firm for

the KLCC Group.

It owns 65 per cent of the shares in the KLCC Stapled Group, which includes KLCC Property and the KLCC Real Estate Investment Trust.

The announcement by KLCCH Holdings also came a little over a week after BMSB terminated its theme park deal with Singapore-listed Sim Leisure Group Ltd.

Bandar Malaysia terminates theme park deal with Sim Leisure

KUALA LUMPUR: Bandar Malaysia Sdn Bhd (BMSB) has terminated a deal with Singapore-listed Sim Leisure Group Ltd to develop an adventure theme park in Bandar Malaysia.

Theme park developer and operator Sim Leisure had announced in November last year that it would be opening an adventure park with 70 games and activities, as well as 200 themed accommodations for guests at the site.

In a filing with the Singapore stock exchange, Sim Leisure said its subsidiary, Sim Leisure Escape, received a notice of termination on Dec 16 from BMSB.

The announcement was dated Dec 19.

As a result of the termination, the company said all intellectual property rights granted to BMSB under the agreement will be revoked.

"Additionally, BMSB is obligated to refund Sim Leisure Escape the RM350,000 security deposit within 30 days of the termination notice," it said. Sim Leisure is also seeking compensation for all the capital expenditures it has invested to

date, although the exact amount has not been specified.

It said Sim Leisure Escape also put up an advance payment of RM1 million upon signing the agreement, which was meant to be offset against minimum guarantees or other payments due to the owner.

"Since the theme park's operations have yet to commence, BMSB is required to repay this advance payment in full following the termination." According to Sim Leisure, the

INFO BOX
RM1m

Advance payment made by Sim Leisure Escape upon signing the deal

81 SEN TARGET PRICE

NO CHANGE TO 'BUY' CALL ON MYNEWS

Company earnings likely to more than double next year, says RHB Research

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RHB Investment Bank Bhd (RHB Research) expects a 122 per cent growth in MyNews Holdings Bhd's earnings for the financial year ending Oct 31, 2025, which will be driven by the anticipated turnaround of its convenience store CU and the solid performance of MyNews' food processing centre (FPC) and WHSmith.

It said in a note that the company is focusing on driving growth through expansion in fi-

nancial year 2025, targeting between 80 to 100 new outlets nationwide comprising 60 per cent MyNews and 40 per cent CU.

Meanwhile, the first Maru Coffee outlet, which opened in fourth quarter ended Oct 31, 2024, is performing well.

MyNews plans to open 20 more Maru Coffee outlets in financial year 2025.

"Gross profit margin (GPM) expansion (2.6 percentage points to 37.6 per cent in financial year 2024) is expected to be sustainable following the consolidation of MyNews and CU management teams.

"With increased volume from



MyNews Holdings Bhd is targeting to open 80 to 100 new outlets in financial year 2025. NSTP PIC BY MOHAMAD SHAHRIL BADRI SAALI

the outlet expansion, we forecast GPM to reach 38 per cent in financial year 2025," RHB Research said.

It also expects MyNews FPC's turnaround to be driven by higher volume from outlet expansion, while WHSmith continues to im-

prove, supported by the rebound in tourist arrivals.

The firm added that MyNews' effective tax rate in financial year 2025 could normalise at 24 per cent, in line with the pre-pandemic average during profitable years, as CU is expected to

achieve a turnaround in financial year 2025.

RHB Research kept its "buy" call on MyNews and maintained its target price at 81 sen a share.

MyNews' shares traded at 67.5 sen on Friday, valuing the company at RM506.5 million.

RM1.07b IN OUTFLOWS

Foreign investors extend selling streak on Bursa

KUALA LUMPUR: Foreign investors extended their selling streak on Bursa Malaysia for the ninth consecutive week, registering outflows of RM1.07 billion last week.

MIDF Research said they recorded net selling every day of last week.

The highest outflow was recorded on Tuesday at RM368 million.

This was followed by Friday (RM235.2 million), Monday (RM176.3 million), Wednesday (RM150.2 million) and Thursday (RM135.4 million).

The sectors with the highest net foreign inflows were property (RM42.6 million), technology (RM40.2 million) and plantation (RM29.4 million).

The sectors that recorded the highest net foreign outflows were financial services (RM500.5 mil-

lion), healthcare (RM168.9 million) and utilities (RM160.5 million).

Conversely, local institutions continued to support the local bourse for the ninth consecutive week, with net purchases totalling RM1.05 billion in domestic equities.

Malaysian retailers turned net buyers of domestic equities, recording RM13.8 million in net purchases after four consecutive weeks of net selling.

The average daily trading volume increased across all investor categories last week.

Malaysian retail investors and foreign investors recorded double-digit increases, rising by 10.2 per cent and 20.9 per cent respectively.

Malaysian institutional investors saw a more modest increase of 5.7 per cent.

RM1.20 AND RM1.40 TARGET PRICES

'Neutral' and 'hold' ratings on Top Glove

KUALA LUMPUR: Public Investment Bank Bhd (PublicInvest) remains cautious about the average selling price (ASP) trends for rubber gloves.

The firm said the anticipated decline in raw material prices in the first half of 2025 could prompt Top Glove Corp Bhd to maintain flat or marginally lower pricing to prioritise market share.

"Nevertheless, we believe this will be mitigated by a higher sales volume driven by the United States tariff hike on China medical gloves effective next month" it said in a note yesterday.

PublicInvest believes Top Glove is on track to expand its production capacity by 6.7 per cent to 64 billion pieces annually, underpinned by a sequential improvement in sales volume.

Overall, the firm maintained a "neutral" call on Top Glove, with a higher target price of RM1.20.

Top Glove reported a net profit of RM5.5 million in the first quar-

ter of financial year 2025, compared to a net loss of RM57.7 million in the same period last year, mainly driven by a higher sales volume and ASPs.

After stripping out non-operating items, the group's first quarter of 2025 core net loss stood at RM21.9 million.

PublicInvest noted that the results came in below both the firm's and consensus estimates.

"The discrepancy in our forecasts was due to higher-than-expected operating costs.

"We maintain our financial years 2025-2027 earnings forecasts, as we foresee raw material prices trending downward in the first half of 2025, giving room for better margins," it said.

CIMB Securities Sdn Bhd considers Top Glove's first quarter of 2025 results to be within its expectations, projecting the group to record significantly stronger results in financial year 2025.

This is supported by a more conducive operating environ-

ment, leading to further increases in sales volume and ASPs.

The firm also expects Top Glove to post stronger quarter-on-quarter results in the remaining quarters of financial year 2025, followed by a 132 per cent year-on-year rise in core net profit in its financial year 2026 forecast.

"Demand for Malaysian-made gloves are expected to be driven higher by quality concerns with China-made gloves and the depletion of global Covid-19 pandemic-era stockpiles prompting more restocking activities by customers."

With its first quarter of financial year 2025 results in line with expectations, CIMB Securities made no changes to the group's financial years 2025-2027 earnings per share estimates.

However, the firm downgraded the stock to a "hold" from "buy", with a target price of RM1.40 as it believes that the recent rise in share price had largely priced in Top Glove's improved prospects.

DRIVEN BY IMPROVED ECONOMIC GROWTH, SALES EXPECTATIONS

SME Sentiment Index for H2 shows growing optimism

KUALA LUMPUR: SME Bank's biannual survey on small and medium enterprise (SME) sentiment shows growing optimism among businesses.

The SME Sentiment Index for the second half of this year showed an uptick among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), the third consecutive increase.

The index rose to 55.8 points in the second half from 54.7 in the first half.

SME Bank said MSMEs' optimism is mainly driven by improved economic growth and business sales expectations as well as expansion plans and hiring of more workers.

The index gauges MSMEs' view of the business environment, which can be a yardstick of the overall economy.

The SME Sentiment Index survey, conducted between August and November, had 1,485 respondents.

SME Bank said the score aligns with other forward-looking indicators, such as the Statistics Department's Business Tendency Survey, which predicts favourable business conditions in the coming months.

Among the respondents, 63 per cent of large businesses see economic expansion, compared with 50 per cent of micro businesses.

This is a reversal from the first half where large businesses were the most pessimistic while micro businesses were relatively optimistic.

This shift is attributed to robust domestic demand and improvement in international trade, with merchandise trade volume projected to grow by 3.0 per cent year-on-year in 2025, up from an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2024.

Micro businesses remain the most

keen to tap foreign markets, with 20 per cent expressing a desire to expand internationally.

Among sectors, the accommodation industry is the most optimistic, with 72 per cent expecting growth, which aligns with the steady tourism recovery.

From January to September, Malaysia welcomed 18.4 million tourists, up from 14.5 million during the same period in 2023.

A higher allocation of RM1.4 billion in the 2025 Budget for maintaining tourist attractions is expected to boost the sector.

"We foresee the tourism sector to fully recover in 2025 as improving household disposable income would also lend support to greater domestic tourism activities," said SME Bank.

About 68 per cent of SMEs in the mining space are also optimistic about 2025.

Businesses in 13 of states and federal territories expect economic growth, with Negri Sembilan and Pahang recording the highest at 72 per cent, while Kelantan showed the most caution, with 49 per cent anticipating an economic slowdown.

Meanwhile, businesses are facing mounting cost pressure, with 87 per cent anticipating rising costs in the next six to 12 months, up from 79 per cent in the previous survey.

Large and medium-sized businesses, in particular, are the most affected by labour costs, while smaller businesses are more sensitive to raw material price hikes.

The mining quarrying and chemical manufacturing industries are most concerned over rising costs, followed by health activities at 96 per cent, accommodation at 93 per cent and food manufacturers at 91 per cent.

The hiring landscape shows a cautious yet optimistic outlook, as 49 per cent of MSMEs are looking to increase their hiring over the next six to 12 months compared to 37 per cent in the previous survey, while 43 per cent choose to maintain their current workforce level.

SME Bank concluded that it is confident with MSMEs' resilience as they continue to show great potential in becoming the country's key pillars of growth and stability.

SEA-5 DATA CENTRE OPPORTUNITY INDEX

MALAYSIA RANKED FIRST AGAIN

It has outperformed regional peers with annual take-up of 429MW in the first 10 months of this year, says Knight Frank report

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MALAYSIA has strengthened its position as Southeast Asia's leading digital hub, attracting a total of RM141.72 billion in digital investments in the first 10 months of this year.

This was a threefold increase from RM46.2 billion in the same period in 2023.

These investments are expected to create 41,078 jobs, said Knight Frank Malaysia at the release of its Data Centre Research Report 2024 yesterday.

The report said Malaysia has once again topped its Southeast Asia 5 (SEA-5) Data Centre Opportunity Index, having recorded a significant annual take-up of 429 megawatts (MW) to outperform regional peers.

Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam make up the SEA-5 market.

The strong demand can be attributed to the significant take-up in Johor and the improved take-up in the Klang Valley.

As of end-2024, the country hosts 54 operational data centres offering a

504.8MW capacity, with Johor leading in IT capacity and the Klang Valley remaining a core market. Emerging hubs include Sarawak, Negri Sembilan and Kedah.

Malaysia's sustained leadership in the SEA-5 market is attributed to its efforts to enhance digital infrastructure, investor-friendly policies, and substantial investments from global tech giants, driven by strategic investments from tech giants like Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, Google and Oracle, totalling US\$23.3 billion.

Knight Frank Malaysia group managing director Keith Ooi said the nation's strategic efforts in digital infrastructure are a blueprint for the region and also a call for global players to seize this opportunity.

"The country's commitment to technological innovation and sustainability makes it a preferred destination for data centre investments and a model for economic resilience," he said in a statement.

Executive director of research and consultancy Amy Wong said the country's position at the top of the index for two consecutive years underscores its regional leadership in the data centre industry.

According to Knight Frank Malaysia, the government's proactive measures, including the Green Lane



NSTP PIC BY EFFENDY RASHID

Pathway and the Corporate Renewable Energy Supply Scheme, are instrumental in shaping a resilient data centre ecosystem.

By significantly reducing timelines for electricity supply and promoting renewable energy adoption, these initiatives enhanced infrastructure readiness and reflect the country's commitment to sustainability and technological advancement.

Juwai IQI co-founder and group chief executive officer Kashif Ansari said the influx of RM141.72 billion in

data centre investments this year has boosted demand for industrial and commercial land in Johor and the Klang Valley, where prices have climbed as much as 20 per cent.

"The construction of data centres boosted demand for contractors, suppliers and skilled labour, which has further energised the property and construction sectors," he told 'Business Times'.

Ansari said growth in the data centre market next year will push land prices higher.

Beyond the demand for the land

that data centres sit on, he said the influx of capital and new jobs will also drive indirect demand in the office and residential markets.

"Data centres are a golden opportunity for Malaysia. They create good jobs, boost asset values, cause a boom in related businesses, and deliver income to the government via taxes.

"Once operational, the typical large data centre pays annual wages of RM35 million and supports RM146 million of annual economic activities, and pays RM4.9 million in government taxes and fees," he added.

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Higher Education director-general Datuk Prof Dr Azlinda Azman speaking via video call at the symposium on the 'Tropical Karst Landscape: Challenges for Conservation and Sustainable Use' yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

STEWARDSHIP OF TROPICAL LIMESTONE

Consortium marks milestones with scholarships and grant

KUALA LUMPUR: YTL Cement Bhd, in collaboration with the Higher Education Ministry, has highlighted the continued progress of the University-Industry Research Consortium (UIRC).

Launched in October 2023, the initiative brings together leading universities and industry partners to enhance knowledge and stewardship of tropical limestone karst landscapes.

The universities are Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

A symposium yesterday on "Tropical Karst Landscape: Challenges for Conservation and Sustainable Use" showcased key milestones, including the announcement of six UIRC scholarship recipients and the introduction of the UIRC Young Researcher Industrial Grant.

The event also provided a platform to review student research and facilitate knowledge exchange between scholars and industry

experts.

YTL Cement executive director Datuk Hamidah Maktar, who is also co-chairperson of UIRC, said the progress report from January until now highlights several achievements.

"Among them are six scholarship recipients from the first cohort, upcoming UIRC industry grants to be awarded, and three university roadshows that have engaged 400 students and lecturers."

Higher Education director-general Datuk Prof Dr Azlinda Azman said the symposium is the first programme organised under the UIRC.

"It also aims to gather ideas and produce research on tropical limestone, which is critically important as it is a key natural heritage of our country," she said.

Four UIRC scholarships were awarded by YTL Cement and two came under the ministry's MyBrain 2.0 scholarship programme.

The UIRC also introduced the Young Researcher Industrial Grant of up to RM30,000 per project for early-career academics.

BEING FINALISED

'Bursa has CEO succession plan'

KUALA LUMPUR: Bursa Malaysia Bhd yesterday announced it is embarking on succession planning for its chief executive officer (CEO) following reports that Datuk Muhamad Umar Swift is planning to leave the stock exchange regulator.

Media reports over the weekend named RHB Bank Bhd's managing director of group wholesale banking, Datuk Fad'l Mohamed, as his replacement.

Bursa Malaysia said in a short-ly worded announcement that it

has in place a talent development and succession plan which considers both internal and external candidates as potential future leaders of the company.

"In this respect, the board of Bursa Malaysia, through its Nomination and Remuneration Committee, is currently embarking on CEO succession. An announcement will be made by the company when the matter is finalised," it said.

Umar joined Bursa Malaysia on Feb 11, 2019.



NSTP PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL REPORTING STANDARDS

Bursa Malaysia updates sustainability reporting

address sustainability-related risks and opportunities, strengthen business resilience and attract investors by making corporate disclosures more accessible and comparable.

Under the new rules, listed issuers must include their sustainability statements in annual reports, prepared in accordance with the IFRS sustainability disclosure standards.

Additionally, issuers must disclose metrics and targets demonstrating their performance on sustainability-related risks and opportunities over

the past three financial years.

These disclosures are to be presented in a prescribed format, alongside a statement confirming whether the sustainability reports have been reviewed internally or assured externally by recognised standards.

The implementation will be phased to accommodate varying levels of readiness among companies with large issuers on Bursa's Main Market.

Those with a market capitalisation of RM2 billion or more, will adopt the

IFRS sustainability disclosure standards from the reporting period of Jan 1 next year.

Other Main Market issuers will follow suit in 2026, while issuers on the ACE Market will transition by 2027.

During the transitional phase, companies will benefit from relief measures, focusing initially on climate-related disclosures for two to three financial years, depending on market tier.

In addition to sustainability reporting enhancements, Bursa

introduced several complementary measures.

Among others, listed issuers must hold general meetings either in person or in hybrid formats from March next year to encourage

greater shareholder participation.

From Jan 2, 2025, listing advisers will be required to be identified in public documents issued by listed issuers, bolstering accountability within the advisory process.



NSTP FILE PIC

SME BANK

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

NESTLE EXPANDS PROJECT RELEAF

Over 100 students, teachers join volunteers in tree-planting efforts

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NESTLE (Malaysia) Bhd has expanded its Project RELeaf, a reforestation initiative, to educate and cultivate green values among schoolchildren.

More than 100 students and teachers joined Nestle Cares volunteers in tree-planting efforts and interactive activities during the launch of the programme at SK Abaka in Tawau, Sabah.

Chief executive officer Juan Aranols said the company was committed to shaping a sustain-

able future for the people and planet.

As part of Nestle's Forest Positive strategy, through Project RELeaf, and previously Project Rileaf, the company has planted three million trees to date.

"This marks our positive progress towards our goal of planting four million trees across Malaysia by the second or third quarter of 2025, as well as contributing to the national 'Greening Malaysia' campaign, which aims to plant 100 million trees."

Nestle said with the support of partners Yayasan Sime Darby, SD Guthrie Bhd and the Tropical Rainforest Conservation & Research Centre, the programme

engaged preschool and primary school students to plant native tree species, such as Ketapang, Jambu Air, Taisai Paya, Simpung, Sentang and Obah Jangkang, in the vicinity of their schools.

These species were carefully selected to boost local biodiversity and promote ecological balance, while also contributing to the greening of the school area.

According to Nestle, a highlight of the RELeaf programme was its six interactive learning stations, designed to engage students in meaningful environmental education.

Participants took part in demonstrations on planting and caring for trees, learnt about native species through trivia games and discovered the critical role trees play in generating oxygen and supporting wildlife, it added.



A Nestle Cares volunteer sharing insights on the importance of trees in combating climate change and supporting biodiversity at the launch of Project RELeaf at SK Abaka in Tawau recently. PIC FROM NESTLE MALAYSIA

PUBLIC RELATIONS

11 inducted into IPRM's accreditation fraternity

KUALA LUMPUR: The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) has inducted 11 PR practitioners into its prestigious accreditation in public relations (APR) fraternity.

They were selected based on their education, experience and contributions to the global PR body of knowledge.

"We hope to spread awareness of this accreditation process, which can recognise and honour the remarkable achievements of PR professionals in Malaysia."

"Our goal is to set a benchmark for quality and ethical practice, ensuring that our members are recognised for their expertise and contributions to the field," said IPRM vice-president Doris Lim.

Since its establishment in 1962, IPRM has been a cornerstone in



The accreditation in public relations process was judged by a panel of assessors led by accreditation chairman Professor Dr Syed Arabi Idid (right). PIC FROM IPRM

the advancement of PR professionalism, setting the benchmark for best-of-breed PR practices and accreditation.

Public Works Department Sarawak corporate communication manager for Pan Borneo Highway Sahrein Maloh said the accreditation in PR is crucial for PR practitioners as it validates their expertise, boosts professional credibility and showcases a commitment to ethical and strategic communication practices.

"Pursuing APR certification not only enhances career prospects but also fosters continuous professional development, ensuring practitioners stay adept in navigating the evolving landscape of PR," said Maloh.

The APR process was judged by a panel of assessors led by PR droyen and accreditation chairman Professor Dr Syed Arabi Idid.

The candidates demonstrated a high level of understanding of PR in diverse roles in corporate, government and non-governmental organisation campaigns through their case studies and PR insights, and research-based PR articles.

"This documented information adds significantly to PR body of knowledge, both local and global, that can help navigate the younger generation of PR practitioners looking to upskill their competency and boost their careers in the PR industry," said Syed Arabi.

ENERGY AGENDA

Mitsubishi Power, Sarawak eye hydrogen ecosystem collaboration

KUALA LUMPUR: Mitsubishi Power and the Sarawak government have held discussions on opportunities for collaboration and initiatives to bolster Sarawak's hydrogen ecosystem.

Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Openg highlighted the vital role of innovation and technology in advancing the state's energy agenda.

"Hydrogen is set to play a transformative role in the global energy landscape, and Sarawak is committed to being at the forefront of this evolution."

"Working with Mitsubishi Power and witnessing ongoing research and development in the field are instrumental to unlock the full potential of hydrogen and influence sustainable growth for our region."

Mitsubishi Power, a power solutions brand of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd (MHI), welcomed Abang Johari to its Takasago hydrogen park in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan.

This visit marked a pivotal step in strengthening ties between the hydrogen ambitions of Sarawak,

Malaysia and industry-leading hydrogen technologies from Mitsubishi Power.

Established in 2022, Takasago hydrogen park integrates the development, demonstration and verification of hydrogen production, storage and utilisation technologies at a single location.

MHI senior general manager of GTCC business division of energy systems, Takuya Murase, said: "As Sarawak advances its plans to establish a hydrogen-driven economy, Mitsubishi Power is committed to providing technological expertise and support."

"Our discussion during this visit reaffirms the tremendous opportunities to drive cleaner energy solutions and advance the energy transition in the region."

As part of its ongoing support for Sarawak's energy development, Mitsubishi Power recently supplied a 500-megawatt hydrogen-ready gas turbine for the Miri CCGT power plant by Petroleum Sarawak Bhd.

The project broke ground in November.



Malaysia Aviation Group, the parent of Malaysia Airlines, unveiled the A330neo on Dec 19. NSTP PIC BY NABILA ADLINA AZAHARI

FAULTY COMPONENT IDENTIFIED

'PART REPLACEMENT IN PROGRESS'

Rolls-Royce working closely with Malaysia Airlines to solve issues

KUALA LUMPUR

ROLLS-ROYCE spokesperson said Malaysia Airlines' newly delivered Airbus A330neo has a faulty component, and replacement of the component is currently in progress.

"We're working closely with Malaysia Airlines to resolve the technical issues; our initial troubleshooting identified a faulty

component, and replacement of that part is in progress," they said in a statement on Sunday.

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), the parent of Malaysia Airlines, unveiled its new wide-body aircraft, the A330neo powered by Rolls-Royce Trent 7000 engines, with much fanfare on Dec 19.

Days later, however, it had to ground the aircraft due to technical issues.

Business Times on Sunday reported that Malaysia Airlines had to ground the brand-new Airbus A330neo for at least 48 hours after it identified three technical issues, which it attributed to poor quality of work from the factory.

An Airbus spokesperson said the company is ready to support Malaysia Airlines with the technical help around their new aircraft.

BY AUGUST 2026

Honda and Nissan to discuss merger, set up holding company

TOKYO: Honda and Nissan agreed to explore a merger and set up a joint holding company, they said yesterday, which would create the world's third-largest automaker and signals a massive shift in an industry under tremendous upheaval.

The two companies would aim for combined sales of 30 trillion yen and operating profit of more than three trillion yen through the potential merger, they said in a statement.

They aimed to wrap up talks around June and set up a holding company by August 2026, at which time both companies' shares would be delisted.

The consolidation would create the world's third-largest auto group by vehicle sales after Toyota and Volkswagen, as legacy carmakers face growing challenges from Tesla and Chinese rivals.

Honda, Japan's second-biggest automaker after Toyota, has a market capitalisation of more than US\$40 billion, while third-ranked Nissan is valued at about US\$10 billion.

Honda will appoint the majority of the holding company's board, it said.

The merger would mark the biggest reshaping in the global auto industry since Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and PSA merged in 2021 to create Stellantis in a US\$52 billion deal.

Combining with Mitsubishi Motors would take the Japanese group's global sales to more than 8 million cars.

The current No. 3 group is South Korea's Hyundai and Kia.

Honda and Nissan have been exploring ways to bolster their partnership, including a merger, Reuters reported last week.

The two companies said in March they were considering co-operation on electrification and software development. They agreed to conduct joint research and widened the collaboration to Mitsubishi Motors in August.

Last month, Nissan announced a plan to cut 9,000 jobs and 20 per cent of its global production capacity after sales plunged in the key China and United States markets. Honda also reported worse-than-expected earnings due to declining sales in China.

In a separate online press conference with the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan yesterday, former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn said he did not believe the Honda-Nissan alliance would be successful, added that the two automakers were not complementary.

Ghosn is wanted as a fugitive in Japan for jumping bail and fleeing to Lebanon. His 2018 arrest for financial wrongdoing pitched Nissan into a crisis.

French automaker Renault, Nissan's largest shareholder, is open to a deal and would examine all the implications of a tie-up, sources have said.

Taiwan's Foxconn approached Nissan about a bid, but the Japanese company rejected it, sources have told Reuters.

Foxconn decided to pause the approach after it sent a delegation to meet with Renault in France, Bloomberg News reported on Friday.

Shares in Honda ended the day up 3.8 per cent, Nissan rose 1.6 per cent and Mitsubishi Motors gained 5.3 per cent after the news reports on the details of the planned merger, while the benchmark Nikkei was up 1.2 per cent. Reuters

BLOW FOR NEW GOVERNMENT

UK economy flatlined in third quarter

LONDON: British economic output failed to grow in the third quarter, official figures showed, adding to the signs of a slowdown at the start of the government of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) yesterday lowered its estimate for the change in gross domestic product (GDP) output

to 0.0 per cent in the July-to-September period, down from a previous estimate of 0.1 per cent.

It also cut its estimate of growth in the second quarter to 0.4 per cent from a previous 0.5 per cent.

Starmer and his finance minister Rachel Reeves took power in early July, warning of the poor state of the economy before announcing tax increases for em-

ployers in a budget on Oct 30.

The Bank of England last week forecast that the economy will show zero growth in the fourth quarter, but kept borrowing costs on hold because of the risks still posed by inflation.

The ONS said there was no growth in the services sector in the third quarter. A 0.7 per cent increase in construction was off-

set by a 0.4 per cent fall in production.

Bars and restaurants, as well as legal firms and advertising, were among the weakest sectors in the three months to the end of September, it said.

The data showed no growth in living standards, and households dipped into their savings although they remained high by

historic standards.

The ONS said Britain's current account deficit shrank to £18.1 billion in the third quarter from £24 billion in the April-to-June period.

The Reuters poll of economists pointed to a shortfall of £22.5 billion.

Sterling was little changed after the ONS data. Reuters

2025 OUTLOOK

RISKS STACK UP FOR GLOBAL ECONOMY

Uncertainty looms with potential Trump tariffs and geopolitical conflicts

NEW YORK

NO sooner had the global economy started to put the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic behind it than a whole new set of challenges opened up for 2025.

This year, the world's central banks were finally able to start lowering interest rates after largely winning the battle against inflation without sparking a global recession.

Stocks hit record highs in the United States and Europe and Forbes declared a "banner year for the mega wealthy" as 141 new billionaires joined its list of the super rich.

But if this was supposed to be good news, someone forgot to tell voters. In a bumper election year, they punished incumbents from India to South Africa, Europe and the US for the economic reality they were feeling: a merciless cost of living crisis brought on by cumulative post-pandemic price

rises. For many, it might get tougher in 2025. If a Donald Trump presidency enacts US import tariffs that spark a trade war, that could mean a fresh dose of inflation, a global slowdown or both. Unemployment, currently near historic lows, could rise.

Conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, political logjams in Germany and France, and questions over the Chinese economy further cloud the picture. Meanwhile, rising up the rank of concerns for many countries is the cost of climate damage.

Why it matters

According to the World Bank, the poorest countries are in their worst economic state for two decades, having missed out on the post-pandemic recovery. The last thing they need are new headwinds — for example, weaker trade or funding conditions.

In richer economies, governments need to work out how to counter the conviction of many



The Frankfurt Stock Exchange in Germany. Stocks hit record highs in the United States and Europe this year. REUTERS PIC

voters that their purchasing power, living standards and future prospects are in decline. Failure to do so could feed the rise of extremist parties already causing fragmented and hung parliaments.

New spending priorities beckon for national budgets already stretched after Covid-19, from tackling climate change to boosting armies to caring for ageing populations. Only healthy economies can generate the revenues needed for that.

If governments decide to do what they have been doing for years — simply piling on more debt — then sooner or later they run the risk of getting caught up in a financial crisis.

What it means for 2025

As European Central Bank (ECB) president Christine Lagarde said in her press conference after the ECB's final meeting

of the year, there will be uncertainty in abundance in 2025.

It is still anyone's guess whether Trump will push ahead with tariffs of 10-20 per cent on all imports, rising to 60 per cent for Chinese goods, or whether those threats were just the opening gambit in a negotiation. If he goes ahead with them, the impact will depend on what sectors bear the brunt, and who retaliates.

China, the world's second-largest economy, faces mounting pressure to begin a deep transition as its growth impetus of recent years runs out of steam. Economists say it needs to end an over-reliance on manufacturing and put more money in the pockets of low-income citizens.

Will Europe, whose economy has fallen further behind that of the US since the pandemic, tackle any of the root causes — from lack of investment to skills shortages? First it will need to resolve po-

litical deadlocks in the two biggest euro zone economies, Germany and France.

For many other economies, the prospect of a stronger dollar — if Trump policies create inflation and so slow the pace of Federal Reserve rate cuts — is bad news. That would suck investment away from them and make their dollar-denominated debt dearer.

Finally, add in the largely unknowable impact of conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East — both of which may have a bearing on the cost of energy which fuels the world's economy.

For now, policymakers and financial markets are banking on the global economy being able to ride all this out and central bankers completing the return to normal interest rate levels.

But as the International Monetary Fund signalled in its latest World Economic Outlook: "Brace for uncertain times". **Reuters**

DEAL TO BE FINALISED IN H2 OF 2025

News Corp agrees to sell Foxtel to DAZN for A\$3.4b

SYDNEY: News Corp has agreed to sell its Australian cable television unit Foxtel to British-owned sports network DAZN for A\$3.4 billion including debt, cutting the Murdoch-controlled media empire's exposure to a business upended by streaming platforms.

News Corp will gain a board seat and hold a 6.0 per cent stake in DAZN, a London-headquartered global streaming platform available in North America, Eu-

rope and Asia which is backed by Ukrainian-born billionaire Len Blavatnik.

DAZN is a broadcasting partner for Italy's Serie A, Spain's LaLiga, Germany's Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1. It competes against traditional TV and satellite channels, and provides access to a range of sports content over its streaming platform.

The valuation on Foxtel represents seven times its 2024 earnings before interest, tax, depre-

ciation and amortisation, News Corp said in a statement.

As part of the deal, shareholder loans valued at A\$578 million outstanding will be repaid in full and Foxtel's current debt will be refinanced at closing.

Foxtel, launched by News Corp in 1995, has weighed on the media giant's profits for years as people who pay monthly subscriptions for its broadcast content switched to cheaper streaming options like Netflix.

It tried to diversify by adding its own streaming services like Kayo, which livestreams Australian Football League and the National Rugby League games to win back the sports broadcasting market share.

News Corp chief executive Robert Thomson said the deal would allow the company to focus on its core operations of Dow Jones, digital real estate and book publishing.

News owns 61.4 per cent of on-

line real estate platform REA Group and is the parent company of publisher HarperCollins.

The deal is due to be finalised in the second half of 2025 and is subject to regulatory approval, News Corp said. Given the overseas ownership of DAZN, the transaction needs to be cleared by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB).

FIRB did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters. **Reuters**