

NEW STRAITS TIMES

ESTABLISHED 1845

PP413/09/2012 (030687) | MAY 11, 2022 | WEDNESDAY | RM2.00

PIC BY EFFENDY RASHID

TEST OF SUITABILITY

MEDICAL grads must take a unified screening test before undergoing housemanship, says the MMA, to ensure they are prepared for the hardships. Parents should also not pressure disinterested children to be doctors.

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Collapsed irrigation canal cuts water supply to 80,000 Kedah households

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NST LEADER

What's up, doc?

How doctors fail housemen in their charge

DOCTORS are trained to save lives. But some senior members of the profession, in Malaysia strangely, seem bent on driving the lives out of the junior ones in their charge. Yes, in just the last two years, two housemen had ended their lives. The latest being on April 17, just two weeks after reporting for work as a houseman in a Penang hospital. Should we be surprised? No. We love to wait for things to boil over before we act. And if the authorities do act, they shy away from telling the people what really happened. We hope this time the Health Ministry and the police tell it as it is. People need to know the truth. Besides, truth is the best of all preventions. Don't go thinking that two is a small number. One life lost is one too many. Also, this isn't just this April's story. Toxicity in public hospitals is perhaps as old as the medical institutions in Malaysia. Well, almost. Even specialists get abused by medical directors, though such incidents are few and far between. Like teachers, such specialists, who have seen it all, opt for early retirement. Yes, like what the teachers are doing now. You see, Malaysia likes things to boil over. But the poor housemen — some of whom are just hours into their service — can't ask for

“Senior doctors are not going to admit that they are abusing housemen in their charge. Some defensive ones even tell us such toxic treatment is good for building character.”

early retirement. Housemen's misery leads to two acts of desperation. In one, a few — and thankfully only a few — end it all. In another, a substantial number just disappear without notice. Statistics are hard to come by, but this newspaper's report on Feb 15, 2017 gave Malaysia a glimpse of the level of toxicity in our public hospitals then. Some 400 housemen walked out of the hospital gates, stethoscopes and all. What a loss of resources.

Four hundred times 20 years of learning and training gone just like that. It is easy to say that the 400 were one undisciplined lot. But what is the story behind the story? Did the authorities find out? If they did, they never told us. Again, no surprises. The 400 housemen weren't the only ones to succumb to the toxicity. According to Health Ministry data, 1.2 per cent of the 10,000 housemen around the country in 2017 either called it quits or were dismissed. Small wonder, toxicity in public hospitals has become part of the work culture. Because the institutions have either allowed it to continue or have done little to end it. Senior doctors are not going to admit that they are abusing housemen in their charge. Some defensive ones even tell us such toxic treatment is good for building character. The audacity of it all. Nonsense, we tell these doctors. It's time the Health Ministry sent such abusive doctors to get their heads examined. How does working a 16-hour day help build character? That is two days of work in a day. Don't these doctors know how the human body works? What men of science are these? They won't change. The only solution is for the Health Ministry to compel them to. Setting up a task force to uncover what happened to the houseman who fell to his death on April 17 is a late start. It must go further to get rid of the toxic environment in all public hospitals. The Health Ministry can begin with showing the door to abusive doctors.

NEWS / Story of the day



A trainee doctor on duty at a hospital in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

HOUSEMANSHIP WOES

SCREENING TEST FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS?

It will gauge their suitability for the medical profession and the toil involved, says MMA

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STUDENTS seeking to further their studies in medicine should be subjected to a screening test, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said.

MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the screening test would determine students' suitability and prepare them for the hardships of being medical practitioners.

"There must be a screening process to determine whether the prospective student is suitable to take the course," he told a press conference here yesterday, adding that the proposal was not new.

He said to further ensure fresh graduates were suitable for a career in medicine, they should take a common examination.

"They need to take a unified examination because not everyone has the same level."

He said this would ensure all medical graduates start "on the same level ground" when they begin their housemanship as re-

quired by the Medical Act 1971.

This was among MMA's recommendations to reduce pressure on the public healthcare system, eliminate bullying of junior health professionals and avoid recurrence of last month's tragedy that befell a trainee doctor.

"For many years, we have been talking about a unified examination which we want to have when graduates come out of school."

"This is to ensure that everybody (fresh medical graduates) will start at the same level when they start their housemanship."

He said MMA had repeatedly called for solutions to address not only issues faced by housemen, but also the welfare of doctors in public healthcare.

"This isn't just about housemen alone, but about the huge mental burden placed on the shoulders of all doctors."

On feedback from the ministry over the proposal, Dr Koh said: "Even if there is progress, there have been changes in the government so many times."

"The top leaders in the ministry have been changing as well. So we need to bring the matter up again."

He said there was no "real necessity" to revamp the healthcare training programme, describing the housemanship programme as "quite good".

He said students should instead look into their suitability before embarking on a medical career, while parents should be more

aware of the hardships before subjecting their children to a medical course and career.

"Young ones should be allowed to make their own choice."

"There will be immense stress exerted on a child who has no intention of going into a medical career."

"The long hours during the medical course and the huge financial expenses will always be on the minds of the students."

"The additional stress that will be heaped on them during the houseman training period may just be the straw that will break their back."

Dr Koh said there was a high attrition rate of at least 26 per cent among housemen.

He said this should not be the reason to simplify housemen's training, reduce hours, see fewer patients or assist in fewer procedures to lessen the perceived hardships medical officers face.

"What will happen when they become junior medical officers who are fully registered as competent doctors?"

"Will they be able to manage patients on their own?"

"There will be long hours of work when they face the never-ending queue of patients needing their care for which they were never prepared for."

>> Continued next page

Page 1 pic: A doctor on duty at the Covid-19 ward of a hospital in Kuala Lumpur.

NEW
STRAITS TIMES

Published by: The New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd.

31, Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE

CAP: LOOK INTO HOUSEMEN'S GROUSES

Call for probe into cases of bullying of trainee doctors and working conditions of all medical staff

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SET up a special committee to probe grievances from trainee doctors, said the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP).

Expressing concern over the report of a Penang Hospital houseman who fell to his death, CAP president Mohideen Abdul Kader said the committee should include doctors, nurses and civil society to look into the alleged ill-treatment of trainee doctors, their workload and working conditions.

He said the committee should publish a report with recommendations to improve trainee doctors' working conditions and ensure work-life balance.

"The Health Ministry should conduct a nationwide study. Bullying of housemen and junior doctors can't be happening only in Penang and it can't be happening to doctors alone."

"The study should include other healthcare professionals, such as nurses, because they are in the same system and working environment."

He said studies in countries like Finland, Norway, Australia, Singapore and China showed there was a rise in anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts among medical students and professionals.

He said more than 300,000 studies were available online about

suicide and mental illness among doctors.

Studies in the United States show that doctors have among the highest suicide rates of any profession, between 28 to 40 suicide cases per 100,000 people, which is more than twice that of the general population at 12.3 per 100,000.

Mohideen said bullying and long working hours of doctors were factors that could not be ignored.

He said doctors often worked longer than their official work hours as they might need to complete reports after work and pass duties to those on the next shift.

He said many fatal and non-fatal road crashes involved medical professionals because of long working hours with minimal rest between shifts.

Health Ministry data showed

that between 2014 and 2016, there were 554 commuting accidents involving medical professionals and these were only the reported cases.

"It is pertinent to point out that traffic accidents involving medical professionals happen in other countries as well and are often associated with sleep deprivation."

"Stress and depression are also linked to how doctors are treated and how institutions handle their complaints."

"A medical professional is in a uniquely vulnerable position as they are under constant stress and feel the weight of having people's lives in their hands."

"They may feel like a failure when a patient under their charge passes away despite trying their very best."

"It is not only about the lives that are lost, but also the agony of seeing the despair of the patients' family members after losing their loved ones."

He said in a survey among housemen in Penang, 88.5 per cent

rated their stress levels at three to five on a scale of one to five.

"An astonishing 15.4 per cent rated their stress level at five."

Mohideen said the uncertainty caused by the lack of permanent posts and opportunities for specialist training were among the reasons doctors experience stress and quit.

He said without a permanent post, it was difficult for doctors to plan their career paths and they would lose out on benefits that permanent doctors enjoy.

"The Higher Education Ministry should help the Health Ministry address this issue as civil service job vacancies for doctors have been frozen since 2015."

"According to the Higher Education Ministry, an average of 4,000 new doctors are needed every year for Malaysia to achieve the target of one doctor for every 400 people in the population by 2025," he said, noting that local institutes of higher learning have a current total intake capacity of 4,820 students.



Mohideen Abdul Kader

DELAYED BY COVID-19

'Gurney's grave to be restored'

KUALA LUMPUR: The British High Commission has assured that the dilapidated grave of war hero Sir Henry Gurney will be restored.

British High Commissioner to Malaysia Charles Hay told the *New Straits Times* this after a report was published last Saturday on the poor condition of the grave at the Cheras Christian Cemetery in Jalan Kuari.

"I am pleased that the work to restore Sir Henry Gurney's tomb will soon be under way with an anticipated completion date of the end of July," said Hay.

The NST learnt that high commission officials last Monday met with a company that was appointed to restore the grave.

An official involved with the matter, who declined to be named, said restoration work would begin within the next two weeks.

"We expect completion of renovation and restoration work to take six to eight weeks."

"The work will enhance the plot,



Hikers cleaning up Sir Henry Gurney's grave, which is overgrown with weeds. PIC BY ADRIAN DAVID

replant border hedges and the entrance, while retaining its history and providence.

"This has been in plan for some time, but Covid-19 restrictions caused some delay."

"Now that things are opening up again, work will be able to progress."

The NST report had highlighted the condition of the grave of the former British high commissioner to Malaya, who died not only a hero but perhaps even a warrior or martyr, seven decades ago.

Gurney was appointed Malaya's second high commissioner after Sir Edward Gent and had served three years from Sept 13, 1948.

His legacy lives on in Malaysia in the many places named after him, including the Henry Gurney Schools for juveniles in Telok Mas, Malacca, and other places in Batu

Gajah in Perak, Kota Kinabalu and Keningau in Sabah, and Puncak Borneo in Kuching, Sarawak. In Penang, there is Gurney Drive, and in Kuala Lumpur, there was Jalan Gurney, now Jalan Semarak.

The condition of Gurney's grave was discovered by a group of 40 people, comprising Hash House Harriers from the Hash Walk KL and Happy hiker groups.

His grave is adjacent to the well-kept Commonwealth War Graves, which is home to many officers and men who died in World War 2 or the communist insurgency.

A stone's throw from Gurney's grave is the grave of politician Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Koon, which is well-kept.

The hiker groups had organised a hike from the foothill of the 168m Bukit Pudu to Gurney's grave after learning of its existence.

Ministry urged to devise a way to manage doctors in training

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He urged the Health Ministry to devise a mechanism to manage the large number of doctors undergoing training and called on the ministry to look into all the factors contributing to the issues faced by housemen in their training, including the welfare of doctors in the public healthcare sector.

Dr Koh said 36 complaints on bullying among healthcare workers had been lodged through the HelpDoc helpline since it was launched in 2017.

He claimed that some complaints were retracted when the cases reached the "higher-ups" in the ministry, adding that those cases were deemed sensitive and needed to be handled in a confidential manner.

"The association (MMA) will do follow-ups to check on the development of these cases."

"There were cases where the complainants decided to retract their reports when it reached the higher-ups."

"When we reached out to them (complainants), they responded that they wanted to 'leave it be'."

"I do not know the actual reason, it could be personal."

"But I believe it is not because they were threatened."

He said complaints on bullying were among 120 cases reported to HelpDoc, including complaints on work, career growth, postings, claims and transfers.

He acknowledged that there was a fear of speaking out against other healthcare practitioners and fear that they might be reprimanded for lodging a complaint, but he said measures were being taken to address the issue.

"This is something we need to look at as not only house officers experience this, but medical officers and even consultants too."

"We are holding regular dialogues with the Health Ministry to rectify this."

Dr Koh said help was available in hospitals through special psychological units with trained psychiatrists and counsellors to help health workers manage stress.

"Stress management for doctors is available in hospitals. They can meet counsellors and psychiatrists if they face any issues concerning work."

"These units have regular engagement sessions with doctors, and the doctors themselves can approach these counsellors if they feel stressed."

It is a busy scene at Terminal Bersepadu Selatan on Sunday as people return to the capital after the Hari Raya Aidilfitri holidays.
BERNAMA PIC



POST-RAYA

COVID-19 INFECTIONS AND ADMISSIONS ON THE RISE

2,246 cases reported on Monday, the highest daily figure since April 30

KUALA LUMPUR

NEW Covid-19 cases and hospital admissions are on the upward trajectory post-Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

On Monday, 2,246 new infections were reported to the Health Ministry, the highest daily figure since April 30, before the long festive holiday kicked off.

The daily toll has since been climbing steadily. On May 3, the

country logged three-digit cases at 922 which jumped to 1,054 the following day. A total of 1,251 cases were recorded on May 6, 1,372 on May 7 and 2,153 on May 8.

A total of 4,461,135 people have been infected with the coronavirus since the pandemic started two years ago.

Hospital admissions have been on the rise since May 6 with 455 Covid-19 patients admitted compared with 373 on May 5.

Between 450 and 500 Covid-19 patients were admitted in past few days. A total of 447 patients were admitted on May 7, 468 on May 8 and 481 yesterday.

The number of active Covid-19 cases is, however, steadily declining with 22,368 people infected with the coronavirus.

About 95 per cent of them are

undergoing home quarantine, 4.8 per cent or 1,065 patients are receiving treatment at hospitals and four at Covid-19 quarantine and treatment centres.

Some 69 patients have been warded at the Intensive Care Units (ICU) with 39 on ventilator support.

As for healthcare capacity, 58.2 per cent of hospital beds are in use, with 55.1 per cent of ICU beds occupied and 34.4 per cent of ventilators being used. This included bed usage for Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients.

Only one Covid-19-related death was recorded yesterday. The death toll now stands at 35,584.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin tweeted that as long as the Covid-9 severity remained low, the country could continue its transition towards endemicity.

"As forecasted, there is a slight uptick in cases after the first week of Syawal. We need to get used to waves that will peak and recede. As long as the severity remains low, we can continue to transition towards endemicity," he said.

In **George Town**, the Penang government has urged parents to take their children for vaccination immediately under the Covid-19 Immunisation Programme for Children (PICKids).

Its chief minister, Chow Kon Yeow, said the state Health Department had, at the state secu-

rity special committee meeting on Covid-19 management yesterday, revealed that only 49.5 per cent of children had received the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine and 37.7 per cent of children had the second dose up to May 8.

"The figures are worrying. The state Health Department said children who contract Covid-19 are at risk of Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), which is highly dangerous and can prove fatal.

"As such, pity our children. As parents, we have to make the right decision to have the children vaccinated."

Chow said parents could take their children for vaccination before May 15 at vaccination centres, which still allowed walk-ins.

The ministry has set May 15 as the last day for PICKids, which involves children aged 5 to 11. After the time frame, parents will have to pay for the vaccination.

Chow said the state government would continue with efforts to increase the rate of vaccination.

"We are on standby to face any possibilities involving Covid-19," PICKids, which began in the Klang Valley on Feb 3, kicked off in Penang on Feb 7.

It initially involved children with comorbidities and those in the high-risk group before it was opened to all.

Penang has about 160,000 children aged between 5 and 11.

FLOOD MITIGATION

Lam Thye: Govt must have detailed plans for Klang Valley

KUALA LUMPUR: The government should look at detailed measures for flash flood mitigation in the Klang Valley, following Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) announcement of its own action plan.

Alliance for Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said while DBKL's interim measures to address flash floods were welcome, the drainage system in other places should be given attention as they were interconnected.

"The measures by DBKL are long overdue. I have been highlighting flash floods problem in Kuala Lumpur for more than 12 years," he told the *New Straits Times*.

"The government must ensure sufficient funding to improve the drainage system in the Klang Valley and maintenance.

"The RM10 million budget for the KL flash floods mitigation plan is barely enough, given the severity of the problem."

He said many areas affected by flash floods sat on shared boundaries between Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, hence measures with a lasting solution for the flash flood issue in Greater KL were needed.

He said it was important that all flood mitigation measures announced were monitored and implemented.

Lee said construction work led to debris falling into the drains and blocking the water flow during downpours, which contributed to make floods in some areas.

"I live in Cheras near Kampung Pandan and there were frequent flash floods there. I did an investigation and found out that the drains there were covered with construction debris.

"The media have been highlighting similar problems faced by residents, year in, year out. However, not much attention was given (by the authorities) on debris covering the drains."

He said there was much talk about drainage systems but not much being done on the ground.

He said the government must pay attention to environmental issues as it strived for development, including in Kuala Lumpur as the national capital.

"The government must be sensitive to the surroundings. With such intensive developments, the environment and drainage system have been overlooked." By **Nuradzimmah Daim**

	SUBUH (am)	SYURUK (am)	ZUHUR (pm)	ASAR (pm)	MAGRIB (pm)	ISTAK (pm)
Melaka	5:50	7:01	1:10	4:31	7:16	8:28
Penang	5:53	7:03	1:17	4:38	7:27	8:40
K. Lumpur	5:51	7:01	1:12	4:33	7:20	8:32
Johor Baru	5:45	6:56	1:04	4:25	7:08	8:21
Kuantan	5:46	6:57	1:07	4:28	7:13	8:26
Ipoh	5:52	7:00	1:15	4:36	7:23	8:36

4 KEDAH WATER TREATMENT PLANTS SHUT DOWN

80,000 HOUSEHOLDS HIT BY WATER CUT

Supply disruption caused by irrigation canal bund collapse to be resolved today, say state authorities

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THE number of households affected by water supply disruption after an irrigation canal bund collapsed near Sungai Bukit Pinang in Pokok Sena near here on Monday has increased to 80,000.

This came about after Syarikat Air Darul Aman (Sada) said they had to shut down all four water treatment plants (LRAs) in the area after powering down two earlier.

However, state authorities had given their assurance that all four LRAs affected by the incident would be up and running by today. Sada said the affected plants were LRA Bukit Pinang, LRA Pokok Sena, LRA Jenun Lama and LRA Jenun Baru.

"This resulted in an unscheduled water supply disruption involving 80,000 accounts in Kota



The collapsed bund along the Terusan Tengah irrigation canal near Sungai Bukit Pinang in Pokok Sena, Kedah, yesterday.
BERNAMA PIC

Star, Pokok Sena, Pendang and Yan beginning from 4.15pm on Monday," the company said.

Sada said it had immediately activated its headquarters operations room. It urged consumers to contact 04-740 8976 or the Sada Information Centre hotline at 1300-88-0017 for enquiries.

"Sada understands the predicament faced by consumers due to the water supply disruption. We

wish to apologise for the inconvenience caused."

Members of the public can get updates on the water supply disruptions via Sada's official Facebook page and its website at www.sada.com.my.

On Monday, more than 75,000 accounts under Sada were affected by water supply disruption after an irrigation canal bund belonging to the Muda Agricultural

Development Authority (Mada) collapsed.

On Monday night, Mada chairman Ahmad Tarmizi Sulaiman said temporary repairs on the collapsed bund near Sungai Bukit Pinang had begun.

The agency, he said, was working with Sada to build a temporary barrier to regulate the water level at the Terusan Tengah irrigation canal, adding that heavy

rainfall at the Sungai Padang Terap catchment area on Sunday had caused Mada's Lengkuas siphon structure to overflow.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor said all four LRAs would resume full operation today.

He said that up to yesterday, only the Pokok Sena LRA remained shut while the other LRAs were supplying water to the Alor Star, Pendang, Gurun and Yan districts.

"Some 14,900 accounts in Pokok Sena are affected by the Pokok Sena LRA shutdown.

"Sada has provided tankers and static tanks to assist the affected consumers," he said at the affected site yesterday.

Sanusi said works to build a temporary water barricade at the collapsed bund were expected to be completed soon, while the reconstruction of the bund is scheduled to be completed by today.

Sanusi said once the repair works were completed, the affected LRAs will be back at full operating capacity.

"Mada will release the water contained in Pelubang reservoir to refill this irrigation canal.

"Once its water level is restored at 4.9 metres, the Pokok Sena LRA will be back in operation," he said, adding that the repair works would cost up to RM1.8 million.

FLIGHT DELAYS

Ministry tells airlines to quickly fix issues

PUTRAJAYA: The Transport Ministry (MoT) has instructed airlines to quickly resolve the technical issues that caused flight delays.

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said his ministry had also informed airlines to keep their passengers updated with the latest information involving their respective flights.

"The ministry and agencies under it will continue to monitor each airline service to ensure that maintenance procedures and technical issues are adhered to with no compromise.

"Authorities have also reprimanded the affected airlines to ensure that they comply with technical, economic and safety regulations, and we will not hesitate to take action against operators who fail to do so.

"It is important for airlines to improve their communication

channels with passengers to ensure that they receive information on the status of their flights," he said yesterday.

Earlier, passengers of low-cost airline AirAsia expressed their dissatisfaction on social media when the airplane they were supposed to board arrived later than the scheduled time.

In fact, some passengers claimed that they had been rescheduling not only once, but repeatedly for the same flight.

Wee said the government sympathised with the passengers' plight and was working to resolve the issue with the airline.

"Most of the complaints made were related to higher-than-usual passenger traffic during the festive season, so that airlines had to make full use of their aircraft to meet demand.

"Aircraft facing technical problems have also been 'rested' from

service for a more thorough maintenance," he said.

He added that to date, all complaints relating to rescheduling and flight delays had been resolved.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that AirAsia would provide an explanation on consumer issues, including those related to flight delays and rescheduling, to the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry within 24 hours.

Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi said after compiling consumers' grievances and complaints on AirAsia flight delays, a preliminary study was conducted by the ministry.

He said the study looked into the problem of flight delays and rescheduling of flights, as well as consumers' eligibility for compensation.

"For the convenience of consumers, I've requested AirAsia to



AirAsia has undertaken to provide an explanation to the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry on consumer issues, including flight delays and rescheduling. FILE PIC

provide a flow chart on the process of filing a formal complaint for compensation, subject to the guidelines set by Mavcom (Malaysian Aviation Commission) as the regulatory agency on the issue," Nanta said in his latest tweet yesterday.

He said although the aviation industry was under the purview of the Transport Ministry, he, as the minister dealing with consumer issues, would intervene if

it was related to consumer rights.

"There is no *sembang kari* (empty talks), conducting investigation upon investigation or just doing nothing in this issue. The interest of consumers is my responsibility as the minister," he said.

Consumer grievances and complaints regarding AirAsia flight delays had been rising since the end of last month, and were still not fully resolved.

RM50,000 CASH PRIZE

NOMINATE AN OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR

Inaugural Malaysia Teacher Prize aims to empower and celebrate their achievements

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THE Malaysia Teacher Prize, which aims to celebrate educators with a grand prize of RM50,000, has opened its online application process until June 30.

Pemimpin GSL (Global School Leaders) chief executive officer Cheryl Ann Fernando said the Malaysia Teacher Prize was the national edition of the Varkey Foundation's Global Teacher Prize, to empower and celebrate the outstanding achievements of educators in the country.

Fernando said the prize was open to teachers fulfilling the four main criteria, namely having five years of teaching experience, teaching at least 10 hours a week, educating students between the ages of 5 and 18 using the national syllabus and planning to stay in



(From left) Pemimpin GSL chief executive officer Cheryl Ann Fernando, YTL Foundation programme director Datuk Kathleen Chew and Pemimpin GSL programme director Samuel Isaiah at the launch of the Malaysia Teacher Prize award programme in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY AZHAR RAMLI

the teaching profession for the next five years.

"This is the first award programme launched by Pemimpin GSL in partnership with YTL Foundation with the support of the Education Ministry.

"We are expecting around 1,000 applicants as this is the first time the prize has been launched.

"Apart from the grand prize, finalists will also be offered training on professional development. We will guide the teachers on how

they can best scale their intervention in the classroom to others in Malaysia," she said after the launch of the award programme at Majestic Hotel here yesterday.

Fernando said online roadshows and collaborations with the district education office and the state education department, as well as the Education Ministry, were being held to reach out to more schools.

"We want to encourage every teacher in the country to apply

for the award and their work in the classrooms to be highlighted," she said.

YTL Foundation programme director Datuk Kathleen Chew, who launched the award programme, said the Malaysia Teacher Prize represented another milestone in the foundation's ongoing commitment towards education to empower individuals and communities to be catalysts of change.

Chew said the application pro-

cess was not limited to only teachers from private or public schools, but also encouraged students to nominate their teachers for the award.

"There are many teachers who are working in non-government schools. We hope that they will also participate because many teachers dedicate their lives to teach," she said.

Applications and nominations for the Malaysia Teacher Prize can be done by logging in at www.malaysiateacherprize.org from May 10 to June 30.

Each candidate is allowed to submit only one application and required to complete five essays of 300 to 500 words each and upload supporting materials in the form of documents, graphics or videos.

Individuals are allowed to submit as many nominations as long as they include basic information on their nominees. Emails inviting the educators to apply for the award will be sent accordingly.

The grand prize winner will be receiving RM50,000 and four finalists will receive RM5,000 each.

The top 10 finalists will receive professional development training to assist them to better understand their impact and potentially scale their work beyond schools.

'BEST HARI RAYA GIFT'

160 Keda settlers get land title wish after 20-year wait

POKOK SENJA: "This is the best Hari Raya gift ever."

That was the response by Zakaria Bakar, 53, one of the 160 Kedah Regional Development Authority (Keda) settlement residents who received their land titles yesterday.

Zakaria, a labourer, had been waiting for 20 years to receive the land title since first moving into the settlement.

"I was happy when I was selected for the Keda settlement programme and today (yesterday), I am extremely happy for this land title.

"This is the best Hari Raya gift ever for my family and I. With this land title, I can now pass down the property to my children and grandchildren," he said.

Zakaria was among residents of three Keda settlements — Desa Keda Bendang Perang, Desa Keda

Kampung Bukit and Desa Keda Derang — who received their land titles.

His joy was shared by Norhayati Shafie, 54, who also received her land title.

"This is a priceless gift. I am thankful to the government. It means the world to my family and I.

"I am now at peace that my children will have a home to live in when I am gone," she said.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid, who presented the titles to the settlers, said they were awarded to settlers who met the criteria and conditions set by the agency.

"The residents must be disciplined and be of good character, must not have violated the rules set by Keda and must not be involved in illegal activities.

"The land title and the houses

are an invaluable asset and must be preserved as they will be passed down to their children and grandchildren," he said.

Present were Keda chairman Datuk Dr Ku Abd Rahman Ku Ismail and Keda general manager Kamarudin Abd Akib.

Mahdzir said the initiative to grant titles to Keda settlers began in 2015.

"Out of 3,862 housing units in 44 Keda Poorest People's Settlement Programmes, there are 2,778 Keda land owners.

"We have handed out land titles to 838 settlers. The process for the remaining 1,940 units is being done in stages."

Mahdzir said the land title ownership initiative was meant to complement the ministry's programmes to support Keda settlers, such as entrepreneurship and education programmes.



Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid (second from right) presenting a land title to a Keda settlement resident at SMK Pokok Sena in Pokok Sena, Kedah, yesterday. With him is Keda chairman Datuk Dr Ku Abd Rahman Bin Ku Ismail (right). PIC TAKEN FROM DATUK SERI MAHDZIR KHALID'S FACEBOOK PAGE

'HISTORICALLY-DESERVED' PLACE

UKRAINE LOOKING TO JOIN E.U.

Accession to union remains republic's strategic goal, says ambassador

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UKRAINE wants to regain its "historically-deserved" place in Europe by becoming a member of the European Union (EU).

Ukrainian ambassador to Malaysia Olexander Nechytailo said accession to the EU remains the republic's strategic goal, as enshrined in its national constitution.

"When Russian President Vladimir Putin attacked Ukraine on Feb 24, I believe he underestimated two very important factors. The first is the resilience and the will of the Ukrainian people, and the second is the unity and solidarity of the international community.

"It is devastating that the slogan 'never again' (a tagline associated with the Holocaust) did not materialise in the 21st century.

"However, I believe the hardship that my country is going through today is to ensure that no dictator or authoritarian regime would be able to impose their views and choices on other nations, be it in Europe or in other parts of the world.

"As we continue our fight for freedom, we also believe we will get our historically-deserved place back in Europe. It is just a matter of time when we are going to get there," he said during the Europe Day celebration at Saloma Bridge here on Monday.

Europe Day, celebrated on May 9 annually, marks the day French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman called on France and Germany to pool their coal and steel production as a starting point towards peace and reconciliation in war-ravaged Europe.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict took centre stage at this year's Europe Day celebration, as EU ambassador to Malaysia Michalis Rokas, together with ambassadors and representatives from 14 EU member states, pledged their support and solidarity for Ukraine.

"The process (for Ukraine's accession to the EU) has started. It might sound bureaucratic, but legislations need to be aligned before a country can be accepted as a new member state.

"Nevertheless, there is no doubt that we are determined to follow through the will and wishes of the Ukrainian people," Rokas said when asked about the progress on Ukraine's bid to join the EU.

He said negotiations were ongoing with another five candidate countries, namely Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey and Albania. The EU membership, he said, was also open to Moldova and Georgia.

Hungarian ambassador to Malaysia Dr Petra Ponevacs-Pana said the Russian aggression on Ukraine resembled the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in November 1956.

"Hungary supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Ukraine is our largest neighbouring country and we have so much in common in our history and culture," she said.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on April 20 said the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has gone past two months now, has claimed the lives of 5,121 civilians in Ukraine.

Besides expressing solidarity for Ukraine, Rokas said this year's Europe Day also presented an opportunity to cherish the strong bilateral relations between Malaysia and the EU.

"This event signifies the con-



Ukraine Ambassador to Malaysia Olexander Nechytailo joining the Europe Day celebrations at Saloma Bridge in Kuala Lumpur on Monday. PIC BY DHESEGAAN BALAKRISHNAN

tinuous partnership between the European Union and Malaysia, based on shared values and principles such as the rules-based international order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, and free and fair trade.

"The strong bilateral relations have made Malaysia the EU's second largest trade partner in Southeast Asia, while the EU is

Malaysia's fifth largest trading partner," he said.

The EU, he added, has also designated 2022 as the "European Year of Youth", and aimed to encourage participation of youth in democratic life, empower women and girls' participation in civic engagement, and develop sustainable solutions to fight climate change.

INDONESIA HALTS EXPORTS

Govt optimistic Malaysia can fill gap in global palm oil supply

PUTRAJAYA: The government has urged upstream oil palm growers and downstream palm oil producers in Malaysia to join hands and reap the benefits of the void created following Indonesia's decision to halt its palm oil exports.

"While Malaysia sympathises with Indonesian palm oil players who will be impacted by significant shift in the demand-supply mechanics in the country, this is the best time for our palm oil players to enhance their innovation capabilities, while exploring possible strategies to meet a spike in demand by palm oil importing countries," said Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin.

As the world's largest producer of palm oil, Indonesia imposed the ban to lower the commodity's prices and address its domestic supply shortages.

India is the biggest consumer of Indonesian palm oil, importing around 13 to 13.5 million metric tonnes of edible oils, of which palm oil makes up around eight to 8.5 million metric tonnes.

Zuraida said about 45 per cent of this quantity comes from Indonesia, while the remainder is from Malaysia, the world's second biggest palm oil producer.

This has led to further tightening of a market already on the edge due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and global warming issues.

The prices of palm oil, soybean, European rapeseed and even its Canadian GMO (genetically modified organism) counterpart,

canola oil, have since reached historic highs.

"Malaysia will be an instant beneficiary by virtue of being the second-largest exporter of palm oil after Indonesia. However, scepticism persists on whether Malaysia is able to cope with various production challenges and constraints," she said yesterday.

Daunting as it is to meet rising global demand amid a labour shortage, she said the ministry remained optimistic that Malaysia has what it takes to fill the gap in global palm oil supply based on its market trend analytics and projection.

"As palm oil prices will stay elevated supported by low inven-

tory levels at both origins and destinations amid heightened price volatility, it is our hope that Malaysian industry players seize the opportunity from Indonesia's absence to maximise their revenue stream."

As market analysts expect the export ban to be lifted by the end of the second quarter (around July), Zuraida said there was a likelihood that Indonesia would flood the global market with its inventory accumulated during the ban.

Given that the industry enters into its seasonal peak output period during this time of the year — coupled with the prospect of South Korea releasing its stockpile — this could trigger a sharp price correction.

"The prospect of both Russia and Ukraine releasing their rapeseed/sunflower oil stockpiles, if any, once their conflict has sub-

sided or settled must also be looked into.

"Based on these possible risks, it is only logical that both Malaysian oil palm planters and downstream players go all out to take advantage of the current situation."

Zuraida said in September last year, the authorities approved the recruitment of 32,000 migrant workers for oil palm plantations.

"Malaysia is now anticipating a new batch of foreign workers to arrive in May and June, hence overcoming the manpower crunch to harvest palm fruits.

"Rest assured that the process to hire foreign workers has already begun under a special quota," she said.

On the longer term, she said the ministry projects palm oil production and exports to rise by 30 per cent by year end.



Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin

14TH PROSECUTION WITNESS

NAJIB 'INTIMIDATED KPMG' TO SIGN OFF ON 2013 1MDB AUDIT

Incident happened during meeting at ex-PM's house on Dec 15 in 2013, says audit firm MD

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THE managing director of audit firm KPMG yesterday said he felt intimidated when Datuk Seri Najib Razak wanted auditors to sign off on 1Malaysia Development Bhd's (1MDB) 2013 accounts.

This, according to Datuk Johan Idris, happened during a meeting at the then prime minister's house in Jalan Langgak Duta here on the night of Dec 15, 2013.

The 14th prosecution witness said he felt the intimidation was aimed at getting auditors to quickly sign off on 1MDB's 2013

financial statement, which had been long delayed.

It was previously reported that KPMG auditors had refused to sign off on the financial report as they had failed to get proper information on the wealth fund's US\$2.3 billion investment in Brazen Sky Ltd, a company incorporated in the Virgin Islands by fugitive financier Low Taek Jho @ Jho Low.

Following its refusal to sign off on the accounts, KPMG was subsequently replaced by Deloitte.

Johan spoke out about the intimidation when he was re-examined by lead prosecutor Datuk Seri Gopal Sri Ram during the ongoing trial, where Najib is accused of misappropriating RM2.3 billion of 1MDB's funds.

To another question, Johan said he did not know if 1MDB funds had been siphoned off by Najib.

"I don't have personal knowl-

edge (of that)."

Sri Ram then prompted Johan to elaborate on an earlier question posed to the latter by Najib's lawyer, Wan Aizuddin Wan Mohamed, on KPMG's role in auditing 1MDB's accounts.

Sri Ram: It was suggested to you that for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012, KPMG acted in concert with the 1MDB management and allowed them to siphon out monies belonging to the company. You totally disagreed with it. My question is, apart from your audit fee for the professional services rendered, did KPMG receive any share of the money which was siphoned out of 1MDB?

Johan: None.

Sri Ram: Not a penny?

Johan: Not a penny.

Earlier, during cross-examination by Wan Aizuddin, Johan dis-



Datuk Johan Idris

agreed with the lawyer's suggestion that the misappropriation of 1MDB funds could have been uncovered in 2010 itself if the firm had done its audit properly.

Johan stood his ground and said the firm had done its job properly before going on to disagree that KPMG had acted in cahoots with 1MDB management by turning a blind eye to the ambiguous transactions.

The hearing is being held before High Court judge Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah.

CHANGE OF DATE

Umno EGM on May 15 to enable PM to attend

KUALA LUMPUR: The Umno extraordinary general meeting (EGM) will be held on May 15 to enable Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, who is also the party's vice-president, to attend the meeting.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan said the change of date for the EGM from May 14 was agreed by the party supreme council as the prime minister was currently overseas.

"We have distributed the invitations and 2,500 out of the 2,666 delegates have replied to attend Umno's EGM on Sunday."

Ismail Sabri is in Washington, D.C., the United States, to attend the two-day Asean-US Special Summit, which starts on Thursday.

The EGM will be held at the World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur, followed by a double-celebration for Umno's anniversary and Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

Ahmad said the EGM was also to ratify the proposed constitutional amendment so that the party's election would be held within six months after the next general election.

"The motion that was approved at the Umno General Assembly 2021 in March must be ratified in the special assembly in accordance with clause 30 of the party's constitution."

"The motion is to call for the amendment of the party constitution in relation to the election clause to be done within a suitable time by stipulating that the party election must be held within six months after each GE is held. This is to ensure that the strength of the party can be mobilised to face the GE without any threat and risk of division."

Ahmad said party members should not be worried about the EGM, which was held in accordance with Clause 10 of the party's constitution. He said the Registry of Societies had confirmed the validity of Umno's decision to postpone the party election.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin will be presenting the motion for the proposed amendment on the party's election after the GE.

On April 14, the Umno supreme council decided that an EGM would be held on May 14 to amend the party's constitution for the election period. **Bernama**

SABAH WILDLIFE DEPT CAUTION

Public urged not to feed, disturb otter spotted at park

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Wildlife Department has advised the public from getting close to an otter, which was spotted at the Tun Fuad Stephens Park in Bukit Padang here.

Its director, Augustine Tuuga, said this in response to a viral video showing the lone carnivorous mammal being docile to a group of joggers at the park.

The department, in a statement, said the animal that was recorded in the video was a smooth coated otter, which is a protected wildlife under Schedule 2, Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997.

"Population of otters in Sabah is unknown but the threats for the species are the decreasing of habitat and food source, as well as poaching."

"They are normally found in riverine areas or lakes."

"They are important as indicator of a healthy riverine habitat,"

said Augustine.

He added that the public must not offer food, pat or disturb the otter to prevent any disease transmission and also to maintain the animal's wellbeing.

Due to its territorial behaviour, he said, otters had sharp canine teeth and may attack humans.

Otters normally eat aquatic animals such as fish, crab and frog which are found in the lake in the park there.

In the viral video, the otter was recorded getting close to a jogger, who was giving it some water.

The jogger is heard saying: "We're lucky to have met you, you bring good luck to us ... we're going to strike a lottery. But beware of his sharp teeth."

A woman joins in the conversation and tells the joggers that she has seen the otter on several occasions in the park and that it always follows joggers and likes to be patted. **By Paul Mu**



A screenshot from a viral video shows a jogger feeding an otter with drinking water at the Tun Fuad Stephens Park in Bukit Padang, Kota Kinabalu.

TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC FUTURE FOR MYANMAR

KL's proposal for informal talks with NUG a step in right direction

FOREIGN Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah's announcement on May 1 that Asean should consider informal engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG) in Myanmar is a breakthrough, at least for Southeast Asia's standards.

Such new position is a positive and important development for the region.

On one hand, we have a more progressive camp led by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in trying to mould a tougher position against Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his associates in Naypyidaw.

On the other, we have the more authoritarian members of Asean who are against any bolder approach to solve the crisis.

That's why Malaysia's proposal to start working with the NUG is an important development.

In this context, Asean is trying to push forward with the one area where consensus can be met in relation to Myanmar — humanitarian affairs.

The bloc is working on two parallel fronts: a formal diplomatic engagement track, the Asean Humanitarian Assistance Delivery Arrangement Framework, and



SIMONE GALIMBERTI

then, a more behind-the-scenes personal relationship-based negotiation between Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Sen, also the current chair of Asean, and the Myanmar generals.

It has been reported that Hun Sen has been pushing the junta hard and not only in humanitarian affairs. As reported by the *Diplomat*, Hun Sen is demanding that the Asean Special Envoy to Myanmar be given access to ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The fact that Malaysia openly came up with a proposal to start informal negotiations with the NUG could create more pressure on the generals.

Their condemnation of Saifuddin's statement as "irresponsible and reckless" cannot but confirm that Malaysia took the right moral decision here.

If the international community wants to lessen the suffering and pain inflicted on the populations by the civil war right now raging in Myanmar, it is essential to talk with those who are opposing the junta.

The existing chaos and violence in the country meet all definitions of civil conflict, even though it continues to be hard to admit this plain truth.

And, that's why the new position that Malaysia is trying to forge within Asean is incredibly important. Could we expect more like a formal recognition of the NUG as a legitimate stakeholder in the future of the country?

I wish this were possible. I do sympathise with the position of the Asean Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) that Asean should "meet officially and publicly with representatives of the duly elected NUG".

Officially recognising NUG as part of the solution to any peace agreement would not automatically disqualify the regime from taking part in negotiations.

It is not the same thing as delegitimising the generals and, instead, proclaim the NUG as the only and exclusive representative of the people of Myanmar.

In my idealistic conception of foreign policies, I would have already officially recognised the NUG as the only legitimate government, but no nation has gone so far.

The French senate, last October, passed a resolution to these effects but was not brought forward by Paris.

Similarly, the European Parliament did the same thing just few days after the French senate's vote, but still no one in the European Union has officially disregarded the junta in favour of the NUG. They certainly do heavily criticise the regime, but still did not dare to go that far.

Like it or not, this is the current state of the play between Naypyidaw and the rest of the world.

For now, what is really important at least is to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches out to the population.

For this to happen, the generals have to commit in principle to lessen the use of lethal arms and constructively work for a mech-

anism that would allow unhindered humanitarian aid.

Malaysia should continue to push for Saifuddin's proposal.

Malaysia should continue to push for Saifuddin's proposal. Yet, as expected, the recent meeting of the Asean Foreign Ministers did not endorse it.

Yet, as expected, the recent meeting of the Asean Foreign Ministers did not endorse it.

Regardless, Malaysia needs to march on and press ahead with its new stance and ensure that like-minded countries like Singapore and Indonesia will also actively work in the same direction.

It is inevitable that sooner or later the NUG will be officially recognised as one of the two key actors, whose role is going to be paramount to chart out a democratic future for Myanmar.

Till then, not only Wisma Putra, but also Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob should vigorously lead this path of principled and moral foreign policy.

The author writes on civic engagement, youth development, the SDGs and regional integration in the context of Asia Pacific

HOLISTIC PLAN

Embracing Malaysia's future as an aging society

MYCENSUS 2020 recorded the Malaysian population at 32.4 million, along with declines in birth, total fertility and death rates.

A breakdown by age category further shows that children aged zero to 14 make up a quarter of the population, while those aged 15 to 64 constitute almost 70 per cent of all Malaysians.

These statistics point to a trend of significantly more elderly individuals in the near future. In fact, Malaysia is heading towards an aging population in 20 years, and a super aging one in 30 years.

In 2040, one in every five Malaysian is projected to be above 60 years old. The government has its hands full planning for the uncharted waters ahead, as community living in Malaysia will see a balance of young and elderly groups.

Predictably, retirement villages, elderly day care, and nursing homes will burgeon as the level of affluence in Malaysia increases. Major property development players have observed this



DR DEVIKA NADARAJAH

trend and are taking on this sector with interest.

Sadly, their focus is on the T20 bracket, despite the fact that aging affects all walks of life. The government should, therefore, encourage property developers not only to venture into this sector, but also to cater to the needs of the M40 and B40 groups as well.

It is certainly timely for developers to play a more consultative role in assisting the government's formation of a holistic plan for our aging nation. Healthcare, medical tourism, infrastructure, elderly care and recreation are other potential areas to be de-

veloped in preparation for the super aging population.

To support this population, the education sector, as well as the Human Resources Ministry, should focus on education and job creation for future generations.

With fewer young people expected to enrol, universities also need to begin designing survival strategies that focus on market-relevant courses in line with national needs. Likewise, the manufacturing and services sectors need to brace themselves for survival in the next decades.

If they insist on being labour-centric, these job creators may well lose their employees within the next 20 years due to aging.

Ultimately, these sectors need to move towards automation, robotics and digitalisation. Another challenge is the tug-of-war between fresh graduates and senior workers. The present outlook is rather grim for fresh graduates, as most are struggling to secure good jobs.

Exacerbating this situation is

the rising number of unskilled immigrant workers, who view Malaysia as a top employment destination. The government intends to keep these numbers to a minimum to curb worsening social problems.

Indeed, the government is doing a commendable job in creating employment opportunities and cultivating requisite job skills among the young local workforce. A cultural shift is also necessary for graduates to be less selective and take on unskilled jobs that are automated via vehicles or robots.

Similarly, M40 and B40 elderly citizens who are still fit for work should be employed for them to earn a living after retirement.

As a well-practised approach in exemplary Japan, this might be the way to reduce the number of unskilled immigrant workers in Malaysia.

Revisiting the population profile of Malaysia, there is expected to be a decline in births. However, the Education and Health Ministries have always taken the li-

on's share of budget allocations.

With the country moving towards an aging society, we may see a shift in these priorities and even a revolution in budget allocations, such as greater provisions for gerontology-related healthcare.

Indeed, as observed in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, tackling national-scale challenges is best done via cross-ministerial participation.

Lastly, Malaysia as a nation, needs to review its income sources. The increase in elderly citizens will affect the government's capacity to earn from personal income tax.

Therefore, alternative revenue streams should be strengthened, such as renewable resources, imports and exports, and corporate taxes. Notwithstanding efforts already in place, the way forward towards a thriving aging population is a holistic plan and an integrated approach.

The writer is an associate professor at Putra Business School

MBI to probe into mishap at amusement park

IPOH: The Ipoh City Council (MBI) is investigating an incident involving a child who fell into Sungai Kinta while riding an electric toy car at the Kinta Riverwalk amusement park here on Sunday. Ipoh mayor Datuk Rumaizi Baharin said yesterday the investigation was initiated upon receiving information on the victim, who was rescued by the parents with the help of the public. "Following the incident, MBI has issued an order to close the operation of the children's electric toy car ride beginning today (Monday)," he said, adding that MBI had previously appointed a company to carry out children's play activities at Kinta Riverwalk from Jan 1 this year, and had set safety guidelines to operate the facility. On Monday, a 29-second video of the incident went viral on social media. **Bernama**

Viral video of assault lands traffic cop in the soup

GEORGE TOWN: A police inquiry paper has been opened on an incident involving a traffic policeman who allegedly hit a man at a roadblock in Bukit Mertajam near here on Sunday. In confirming the incident, which occurred at 1.15am during Op Selamat, Penang police chief Datuk Mohd Shuhaili Mohd Zain said police were investigating the case. "About 3.30pm on Sunday, police had come across a 31-second dashcam video that was uploaded by the owner of the Penang My Hometown Facebook account showing a traffic policeman at a roadblock roughing up a male traffic offender. Following this, a police report has been lodged and we will identify and gather information from the owner of the Facebook account to complete the investigation." **Bernama**

Police recapture 2 Bukit Chabang Puspun escapees

KANGAR: Two inmates of the Bukit Chabang Narcotics Addiction Rehabilitation Centre (Puspun) who escaped on Saturday were rearrested on Monday. Padang Besar police chief Assistant Commissioner Mohd Shokri Abdullah said the male detainees were apprehended in front of a factory in Chupang about 1pm. "When we captured them, the two escapees aged 51 and 44 were still in their dark track-suit pants but had put on different shirts," he said in a statement. He said both inmates were being held in the Padang Besar police station lockup. On Sunday, it was reported that Padang Besar police headquarters had launched Op Tutup to track down the two men. **Bernama**



Belgium deputy head of mission Pierrick Massaux and his family at the Saloma Bridge in Kuala Lumpur on Monday. The bridge is lit up in the colours of the European Union and Ukrainian flags to commemorate Europe Day. PIC BY DHESEGAAN BALAKRISHNAN

Malaysia a second home for Belgian diplomat and family

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PIERRICK Massaux and his family have been in Malaysia for only less than a year, but they have comfortably settled in their second home.

Having spent most of his childhood abroad, adapting to a foreign setting came naturally to the diplomat.

Surprisingly, his three sons — aged 10, 9 and 4 — also seemed to have found a similar comfort in the country.

Proudly waving their European Union (EU) and Belgium national flags, the boys appeared to be in high spirits on Monday, as they watched the Saloma Bridge light up in the colours of the EU and Ukrainian flags to commemorate Europe Day.

Massaux, who is the Belgium deputy head of mission, landed in Malaysia last summer with his family to start his second foreign diplomatic stint.

"I lived in various countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, France and Burundi, because my father worked in the construction industry and his job required him to travel around the world.

"I started my diplomatic career quite late and Malaysia is only my second posting abroad, after Hungary. Before that, I taught French and Francophone literature at the University of Barcelona.

"Then, I returned to Belgium to work with the Justice Ministry on international issues. Later, I joined the diplomatic ser-

vice that took me back to exploring foreign lands," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Massaux's wife, who teaches French language and literature, is currently taking a training course at the National Museum.

Through her, he said, he had been learning a lot about the fascinating history of Malaysia.

Although Massaux and his family could not travel around the country during the Movement Control Order, he said the smiles of Malaysians, especially when they see his children, had a "magic" that instantly warmed their hearts.

"After the movement restrictions were lifted, we had the opportunity to visit several places.

"My children particularly enjoyed the night markets in Melaka, jungle trekking, and snorkelling at Pulau Perhentian.

"The kids will surely not let us leave the country without visiting Legoland and we definitely want to travel to Sabah and Sarawak.

"My son likes to remind us that the Taman Negara rainforest is one of the oldest in the world. We are eager to do some backpacking there and take the canopy walk."

Massaux said his family also loved Penang, which hosts the Belgium embassy's new honorary consulate.

"Malaysia is a country built on the marvellous coexistence of multiple cultures.

"And I am not just saying that for the country's gastronomy — its delightful flavours deserve a page of its own," he said.

'Man found by roadside possibly victim of robbery'

KUALA LUMPUR: Police are investigating the case of a man found unconscious by the roadside in Taman Tenaga, Cheras, on Monday after the victim's wife lodged a police report. Cheras police chief Assistant Commissioner Muhammad Idzam Jaafar said they found a video clip of the incident on social media about 5pm on Monday and believed the victim had been assaulted, adding that the man was receiving treatment at the Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz in Cheras here. "The case is being investigated under Section 394 of the Penal Code for voluntarily causing hurt in committing robbery," he said, adding that two men seen riding a motorcycle in the video were believed to be the main suspects in the incident. **Bernama**

Motorist arrested for blocking VIP convoy

KUALA LUMPUR: A man was arrested for obstructing civil servants, who were escorting dignitaries, by driving in a reckless manner along the Sultan Iskandar Highway towards Jalan Sultan Abdul Halim here on Friday. Dang Wangi police chief Assistant Commissioner Noor Dellhan Yahaya said they had received a police report on the matter. He said following that, police arrested the 36-year-old man for alleged involvement in the case and remanded him for four days. "The individual will be charged in the Kuala Lumpur magistrate's court on Tuesday (yesterday) under Section 186 of the Penal Code for obstructing civil servants and Section 279 of the Penal Code for driving or riding in a reckless manner on public roads," he said in a statement on Monday. **Bernama**

Teen held over fraudulent rental of bazaar sites

KUALA LUMPUR: A teenage boy was arrested on suspicion of having been involved in fraudulent rental of Ramadan and Festival Aidilfitri bazaar sites at Bukit Jalil Stadium here on Friday. Kuala Lumpur Commercial Crime Investigation Department (CCID) chief Assistant Commissioner Mohd Mahidisham Ishak said the suspect, 19, was detained by the CCID of the Cheras police headquarters after his family handed the teenager over to the Gemas police station in Negri Sembilan. He said the teenager was believed to have deceived five victims by advertising bazaar sites for rental on social media and fleecing victims of RM11,300. "The victims realised they had been cheated after the bazaar organiser confirmed there was no such event." **Bernama**



1 Year Four, Five and Six pupils of SK Taman Klang Utama in Klang enjoying their recess meal in the school canteen yesterday, which reopened for the first time in two years since the Covid-19 pandemic began. PIX BY FAIZ ANUAR

2 Joy and excitement was evident on the pupils' faces as they are able to socialise over a meal. Before this, they can only eat individually in classrooms.

3 SK Taman Klang Utama pupils lining up to buy drinks in their school canteen during recess yesterday.



4 The canteen operator is happy to sell her bihun and nasi lemak to pupils again.

5 A pupil inquiring about the food and another prepares to pay, as others line up to buy their meals in the school canteen yesterday.



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WHEN playing video games, the best strategy to win is to arm oneself with the right tools and skills. So, why should real life be any different?

Market data shows that the global games market is rising steadily and demand for talent in this field is increasing, which makes it the best time to enter this lucrative industry worth US\$175 billion.

From game art to design, engineering, development and production, there is no shortage of opportunities here!

However, just like in any good video game, abundant opportunities also mean abundant competition. If you have your sights set on a successful career in the game development industry, you need to have the education that puts you on the path to get there.

But how do you choose from so many options?

You go for the best, of course!

Here's your chance to learn from DigiPen Institute of Technology USA — the university behind the world's first video game development degree — to level-up your way to a lucrative career!

The One Academy has collaborated with DigiPen USA to offer exceptional computer science and game design programmes,

such as the Diploma in Game Design, Diploma in Computer Science, Bachelor of Arts in Game Design, Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Game Design, and the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science in Real-Time Interactive Simulation.

These programmes will be taught by no other than DigiPen International's professional team.

For those who are wondering if it is worth venturing into the game design and development field, cast your doubts away as it is the perfect blend of technical, computer-based learning with artistic, design-focused knowledge.

Given the fact that technology advances every day, you can find career opportunities seemingly anywhere around the globe!

The One Academy has been ranked World's No.1 Game Art Academy by the Rookies and together with DigiPen USA, it is widely known for making to the Top 5 of The Princeton Review's Top Game Design Schools for the last 13 years.

So, do not wait any longer. It is time to not just play games, but make games and grab your share of the market worth billions!

For more information, visit
www.digipen.toa.edu.my or
call +603-7875 5510 or email
info.digipen@toa.edu.my.

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A letter must have a writer's name, signature, home address, phone and MyKad numbers. It should ideally not be more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit a letter for clarity and length.

LETTERS

PRICELESS EXPERIENCE

SPEND GOLDEN YEARS WISELY

AS Malaysia gradually enters the endemic phase of Covid-19, life is also returning to pre-pandemic normalcy for many of us.

With the reopening of borders and lifting of various restrictions, it is now easier for us to resume our hobbies, leisure activities and travel plans.

We also have more opportunities to go outside and socialise once again.

Socialising is an important part of life as it allows us to voice our thoughts, improve our wellbeing by expressing our emotions, and form meaningful connections with the people around us.

If we intentionally keep to ourselves all the time and refuse to interact with others, we will eventually be overwhelmed by the feelings that we bottle up.

There are many benefits that come with socialising, especially for retirees or the elderly. Even a casual conversation in the local park or coffee shop can act as a form of stress relief or provide a change of pace to one's usual routine.

Moreover, retirees should make an effort to speak to others and use this opportunity to share their experiences, teach the younger generation new things or simply enrich other people's lives.



Retirees should share their experiences with others. FILE PIC

Contrary to popular belief, retirees are still very valuable despite their age. In fact, our age reflects the amount of experience we have accumulated over the years.

As the saying goes, "another year older, another year wiser". Growing old is also a privilege not given to many, so we should cherish every birthday that we get to celebrate.

Every retiree possesses unique skills and knowledge that can only be obtained after decades of hard work and experience in the workforce.

For instance, anyone can read an instruction manual and learn how to use a machine.

However, being able to operate the machine safely and understanding it like the back of your hand is only achievable after years of

hands-on experience.

There is a reason why our retirement period is also known as the golden years. Money cannot buy time, so our retirement is as precious as gold.

And, since we no longer have to go through the daily nine-to-five grind at the office, retirees can use these moments on other meaningful causes instead. Channel time and energy towards doing charitable works and giving back to society.

Each one of us can play a part in making the world a better place, and no contribution is too small.

Those of us who were more privileged to have networked and made business contacts throughout our working life can leverage these connections and encourage them to donate to worthy causes.

Retirees who truly wish to relax during their golden years can also use their time wisely to bless others and add value to them.

Ultimately, retirees can inspire and enlighten people to lead happier and more fulfilling lives.

TAN CHIN KIAT
Subang Jaya, Selangor

KOMUTER SERVICES

KTM should improve train frequency

ON the first day of Hari Raya (May 2), I had to go to KL Sentral and decided to take the KTM Komuter from Seremban.

I searched on the KTM service website and there was no time schedule on the frequency of its rail service to KL Sentral from Seremban station.

When I called the KTM Komuter station to ask for its schedule, there was no response.

I went to the station at 12.20pm, and on the monitor screen I saw that the next train to KL Sentral was at 1.20pm.

This left me with a one-hour wait. KTM should update its website and have the latest time schedule for the Komuter service available so that people can plan.

The waiting time at the platforms could be reduced if the time schedules are displayed on the website.

When the train arrived at 1.20pm, the platform was filled with loads of people who had come in droves.

The train arrived on time and

there were ample seats for everyone. I arrived at KL Sentral at 2.50pm. The service was commendable.

On my return trip back to Seremban from KL Sentral on May 4, I headed to Platform 6 and found to my dismay that the tv screens which displayed the time schedule of the train service, were not working. It was 5.30pm.

So, passengers were waiting aimlessly without knowing the time of arrival of the train to Seremban. On and off public announcements were made on train arrivals and departures to other destinations.

The KL Sentral platforms are strictly waiting areas with no rest rooms around. The nearest rest rooms are on the upper floor, about a 10 to 15 minute walk from the platforms.

I was in a dilemma on whether to go to the rest room or wait for the train.

I decided to wait for the train because if I missed this train, the next train would take an hour or

more to arrive.

The train arrived at 6.20pm and I reached Seremban at 7.50pm.

Hopefully, KTM will look seriously into the frequency of the Komuter service between Seremban and KL Sentral.

A few years ago, the frequency of the Komuter service was about one train every 30 minutes.

Today, the Komuter service runs at a frequency of more than an hour apart.

I know that the south-bound line now ends at Pulau Sebang and Tampin. A few years ago, the south-bound line ended at Senawang and Sungai Gadut.

Please update the website for passengers' convenience.

Also, TV screens at the stations showing the time of arrival of Komuter trains should be in working condition.

SAMUEL YESUIAH
Seremban, Negri Sembilan

MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE

Bullying cases must be nipped in the bud

WE hear about violence in learning institutions, such as the 13 secondary schoolboys bashing up a classmate in Langkawi recently.

We need to nip this problem in the bud. This violence threatens the wellbeing of students, teachers and society.

Gang violence, bullying and sexual harassment in schools have become a problem. Some even abuse others online.

Violence includes bullying, robbing, extortion, raping or killing.

Most of the time, boys are the main culprits. However, girls commit these acts as well.

They commit these acts as revenge or to gain popularity.

Bullying happens from primary schools to universities.

It begins with the physical or psychological abuse of victims who are unable to protect or defend themselves. There can also be physical abuse,

spreading rumours online and manipulating friends.

Victims are those who have low self-esteem, insecure, sensitive and quiet.

Parents should talk daily with their children and be involved in their school activities and know their friends.

They should also be active in the Parent Teachers Association, which will help them to know teachers and the situation in school.

Schools should form a Violence Preventive Committee that comprises teachers, parents, prefects and police officers to curb this problem.

Forums and talks should be organised to create awareness among students.

We should make our schools a safe place to nurture students who embrace peace.

PETER FRANCIS
Senior lecturer,
Universiti Teknologi Mara, Perak

WORLD
MARKETSFBM KLCI (May 10)
+5.40 (1,554.58) ↑STI (May 10)
-40.88 (3,234.19) ↓DJIA (May 9)
-653.67 (32,245.70) ↓FTSE 100 (May 9)
-171.36 (7,216.58) ↓Exchange rate (May 10)
US\$1=RM4.381Brent Oil
US\$104.59*

*AT PRESS TIME

BUSINESS

RECOVERY MODE

ANALYSTS SEE 4-5pc GDP GROWTH IN Q1

They also expect Bank Negara to hike OPR only in second half of the year

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MALAYSIA's economy is expected to have expanded by between 4.0 and 5.0 per cent in the first quarter, said analysts.

Bank Islam Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said this was on the back of improving domestic demand, especially private consumption, following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

He said an improvement in gross domestic product (GDP)

numbers would also allow Bank Negara Malaysia to raise the Overnight Policy Rate (OPR) in the second half of the year.

"However, the normalisation of the monetary policy will be gradual and not necessarily be in sync with the moves by the United States Federal Reserve (Fed)," he added.

Bank Negara will announce Malaysia's first quarter GDP performance on Friday.

The central bank said the overall recovery trajectory remained on track despite recent moderation in economic activity due to a resurgence in Covid-19 cases.

RHB Investment Bank Bhd

group chief economist and market research head Dr Sailesh K. Jha said Bank Negara was unlikely to raise the OPR at the Monetary Policy Committee meeting today.

It would likely wait until after the release of the first quarter GDP data on Friday and last month's core Consumer Price Index data on May 25, he said.

"We maintain our view that the central bank will hike the OPR by 25 basis points (bps) to 2.0 per cent in the second half of the year. The Bloomberg consensus forecast is for an OPR hike to 2.25 per cent at the end of the year," he said.

CGS-CIMB Research analysts

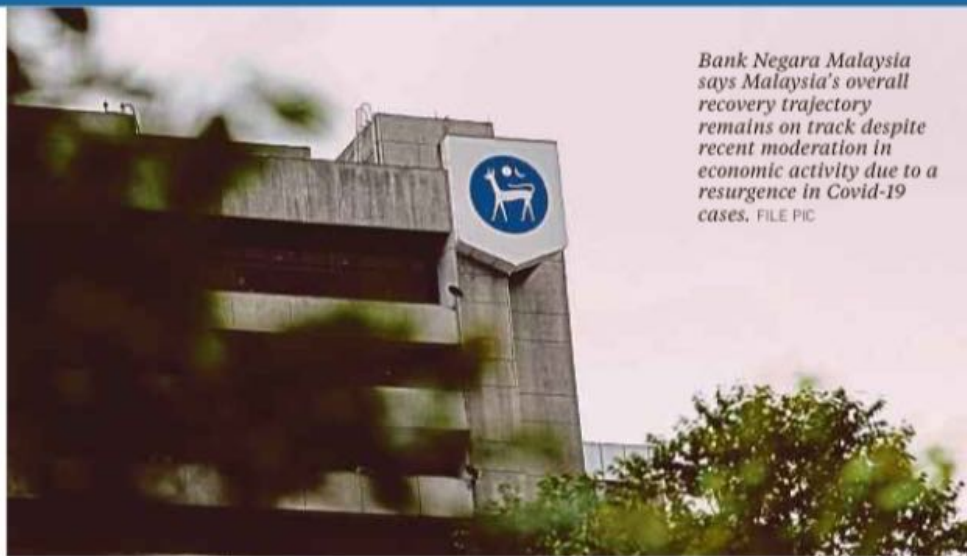
Nazmi Idrus and Lim Yee Ping said Malaysia might have greater control over its monetary policy movements over its regional peers.

They said the country was a major beneficiary of high commodity prices, especially with palm oil and natural gas prices on an uptrend.

"Hence, the inflow into its current account can offset the outflow on its financial account."

They said Malaysia also had other measures to minimise the ringgit volatility, including encouraging government-linked companies to repatriate money from abroad, as they had done in 2013 after the "taper tantrum".

Bank Negara Malaysia says Malaysia's overall recovery trajectory remains on track despite recent moderation in economic activity due to a resurgence in Covid-19 cases. FILE PIC



SIGNIFICANT HEADWINDS

Asian stocks mostly lower following rout on Wall Street

HONG KONG: Asian equities mostly sank yesterday and oil prices tumbled following a rout on Wall Street as anxieties were fanned over rising United States interest rates, surging inflation and the impact of China's prolonged Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Stock markets have been on a tempestuous ride this year, with Wall Street suffering another hit on Monday as the tech-rich Nasdaq slumped more than four per cent, while the S&P 500 ended below 4,000 points for the first time since March last year.

Steep declines in China's exports last month — due to Bei-

jing's staunch adherence to a zero-Covid policy that has placed millions under lockdown — and volatility in crude oil partly due to Russia's war in Ukraine have also hastened selling.

"This rather precipitous drop in equity markets has been building for several months," said Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities.

"The fundamentals of war, inflation, rate hikes and supply-chain disruption are all individually significant headwinds. When combined, equity markets have no way through."

US stock markets took a dive

late last week after the Federal Reserve raised interest rates by a half-percentage point and flagged more aggressive hikes ahead to tackle inflation.

Stoking global inflationary pressures are lockdowns in dozens of locations across China — from the manufacturing hubs of Shenzhen and Shanghai to the breadbasket province of Jilin — wreaking havoc on supply chains over recent months.

By yesterday's afternoon, the equities plunge in Asia had eased, and European stocks in Frankfurt, Paris and London rebounded as dip buyers sent mar-

kets rallying after the wreckage from Monday's rout.

"For now, investors need to be prepared for continued volatility," said Solita Marcelli, Americas chief investment officer at UBS Global Wealth Management.

Tokyo closed down 0.6 per cent yesterday, as Japanese traders fretted over US monetary tightening. Slumps seen in Seoul, Wellington and Jakarta eased.

"Risk markets remain on shaky ground," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management.

Bitcoin also slumped to as low as US\$29,764. The digital currency has lost more than half its value

since a November surge saw it hit a record of nearly US\$69,000. Such a drastic drop in its value has not been seen since July last year.

Analysts say traditional investors tend to view Bitcoin as a riskier asset and have been offloading it along with other digital tokens in response to growing fears of market volatility.

Crude — once considered a relative safe haven — also took a beating on Monday when it plunged more than five per cent.

The drop-off eased yesterday, with Brent trading at around US\$105.72 and WTI (West Texas Intermediate) at US\$102.97. **AFP**

FINANCIAL RESULTS

HARTALEGA POSTS FULL-YEAR NET PROFIT OF RM3.23B

Glove maker declares dividend of 3.5 sen per share, payable on June 9

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HARTALEGA Holdings Bhd's net profit rose 12.1 per cent to RM3.23 billion for the financial year ended March 31 from the RM2.89 billion a year ago.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia yesterday, the glove maker said this was mainly driven by the 17.7 per cent jump in revenue to RM7.89 billion from RM6.70 billion previously.

However, it added that the boost from the higher average selling price (ASP) for its products was partly offset by the higher raw material as well as other operating costs.

For the fourth quarter, Hartalega fell to a net loss of RM197.9 million from a RM1.12 billion net profit in the same period a year ago.

The group said this was primarily due to the prosperity tax that was announced in the 2022 Budget.

For the period, its revenue plunged 58 per cent to RM968.69 million from RM2.31 billion previously, which it attributed to the



Hartalega Holdings Bhd chief executive officer Kuan Mun Leong (inset) says it continues to face external pressures, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Covid-19 lockdown in major cities in China.

normalising ASP, reduced sales volume and higher operating costs.

Hartalega's earnings per share for the full year increased to 94.64 sen while net assets per share stood at RM1.50 as at March 31.

The company has declared a third interim single tier dividend of 3.5 sen per share, payable on June 9.

This will bring total dividends for the financial year 2022 to S3.5 sen per share.

Chief executive officer Kuan Mun Leong said despite the discouraging fourth quarter results, the group's prospects were expected to remain good.

He added that the current ASP for the glove sector seemed to have bottomed out, with the opening of international borders and easing of travel restrictions expected to ease labour shortage concerns.

"We continue to face external pressures, including the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the lockdown in major cities in China resulting from the new wave of Covid-19 infections.

"These are expected to further impact the already strained global supply chain, which has resulted in higher commodity and raw material prices.

"Additionally, the recent implementation of the new mini-

mum wage in Malaysia is likely to result in higher operating costs for the manufacturing sector.

"Amid this challenging backdrop, we are focused on cost optimisation, continuous efficiency improvement and automation initiatives across our operations to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the group," he said.

Kuan said Hartalega continued to progress in capacity expansion via its Next Generation Integrated Glove Manufacturing Complex (NGC).

"To this end, our NGC 1.5 expansion is on track and we target to gradually commission the first production line by the fourth quarter."

APRIL DATA

Malaysia CPO inventory up 17.4pc to 891,779 tonnes

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's crude palm oil (CPO) stocks grew 17.4 per cent to 891,779 tonnes last month from 759,732 tonnes in March, said the Malaysian Palm Oil Board yesterday.

It said processed palm oil inventory rose 5.2 per cent month-on-month to 750,215 tonnes from 713,112 tonnes previously.

Overall, palm oil stocks improved 11.5 per cent to 1.64 million tonnes from 1.47 million tonnes in March, it added.

As for production, MPOB said CPO output increased 3.6 per cent month-on-month to 1.46 million tonnes from 1.41 million tonnes.

Palm kernel output rose 2.23 per cent to 367,159 tonnes from 359,165 tonnes in the preceding month while crude palm kernel oil production jumped 4.59 per cent to 168,068 tonnes from 160,693 tonnes in March.

Meanwhile, palm oil exports fell 17.7 per cent to 1.05 million tonnes last month versus 1.28 million tonnes in March, said MPOB.

However, palm kernel oil exports grew 7.2 per cent to 74,203 tonnes last month from 69,221 tonnes in March.

Oleochemical exports slipped 0.46 per cent month-on-month to 242,863 tonnes last month from 243,978 tonnes while biodiesel exports surged 47.68 per cent to 23,411 tonnes from 15,853 tonnes in March, it said. **Bernama**

STATISTICS DEPARTMENT DATA

Manufacturing sales record highest value of RM144.6b in March

KUALA LUMPUR: Manufacturing sales rose 13.9 per cent to a record RM144.6 billion in March from RM126.9 billion in the same period last year, said the Statistics Department.

The sales value also increased 9.8 per cent from the previous month, it said in its manufacturing statistics report released yesterday.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said the growth was driven by the elec-

trical and electronics products sub-sector (25.9 per cent), especially in the manufacture of computer, electronics and optical products.

"The food, beverage and tobacco sub-sector recorded a 14.4 per cent growth, supported by the food products industries, while the petroleum, chemical, rubber and plastic products sub-sector added 6.3 per cent, mainly in the coke and refined petroleum products industries."

Uzir said sales value for export-oriented industries, which accounted for 72.2 per cent of the total, recorded an increase of 16.8 per cent, while domestic-oriented industries jumped 7.1 per cent in March compared to the same period a year ago.

"The higher sales value for export-oriented industries was in line with growth in the external trade exports and the favourable price factors," he said.

On month-on-month basis, ex-

port-oriented and domestic-oriented industries grew 11.2 and 6.4 per cent, respectively, Uzir added.

Meanwhile, he said in the first quarter of the year, the sales value of the manufacturing sector rose 12.8 per cent year-on-year to RM415.3 billion.

The increase was driven by the electrical and electronics products (17.6 per cent), food, beverages and tobacco products (16.3 per cent), and petroleum, chem-

ical, rubber and plastics products (9.7 per cent) sub-sectors.

Uzir said the total employees engaged in the manufacturing sector improved 2.4 per cent to 2,287,325 persons in March from 2,233,545 persons in the same period a year ago.

The report also stated that salaries and wages paid increased by RM328.6 million, or 4.4 per cent, to RM7,842.9 million in March from the same period last year. **Bernama**

2021 PERFORMANCE

UOB MALAYSIA PROFIT JUMPS TO RM1.14B

Lender retains strong capital base with common equity Tier 1 ratio at 17.7pc

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UNITED Overseas Bank (Malaysia) Bhd's (UOB Malaysia) net profit rose 12.2 per cent to RM1.14 billion last year on higher operating income and lower total allowance for expected credit losses.

Total operating income grew 4.3 per cent to RM3.35 billion on the back of stronger net interest income and higher net income from Islamic banking.

The bank said total allowances for expected credit losses were 17.7 per cent, or RM103.2 million, lower than the previous year.

The decrease was mainly due to lower expected credit losses on loans, advances, financing and other financial assets for non-impaired assets.

The bank's gross loans, advances and financing base rose 2.9 per cent to RM90 billion, and

non-bank deposits increased 3.7 per cent to RM97.1 billion last year.

Amid a challenging environment, UOB Malaysia's wholesale banking loans and financing grew steadily, riding on the bank's Islamic banking capabilities and regional networks.

The bank maintained a strong capital base with its common equity Tier 1 ratio at 17.7 per cent and total capital ratio at 20.5 per cent.

Its liquidity and funding positions also remained robust, with its liquidity coverage ratio and net stable funding ratio well above the minimum regulatory requirements.

Foreign direct investment transactions facilitated by the bank increased by close to 20 per cent compared with the year before. These flows included new investments from Greater China, ASEAN, South Korea, and the United States.

A rebound in consumer spend-



United Overseas Bank (Malaysia) Bhd chief executive officer Ng Wei Wei (inset) says it delivered a commendable performance despite the volatile operating environment.

ing and savings, coupled with efforts to make banking simpler and more innovative, boosted the bank's retail business.

Chief executive officer Ng Wei Wei said despite the volatile operating environment, UOB Malaysia delivered a commendable performance.

She said through prudent risk management and a disciplined business approach, the bank kept its balance sheet robust while capturing opportunities and growing market share.

"Going forward, we remain focused on enhancing our technology infrastructure to drive innovation and performance.

"We will also continue to sup-

port our customers to capitalise on ASEAN's structural growth trends and transition to sustainability through our suites of financing solutions."

Ng said Malaysia's recovery was gaining momentum.

"We are confident of Malaysia's development, which is underscored by our continued investment to deepen our country's presence and develop our people.

"Our commitment is reaffirmed by our recent acquisition of Citigroup's consumer banking business in Malaysia (subject to regulatory approval) and investment in our new headquarters in the heart of Kuala Lumpur."

DEMAND SURGE

US furniture wholesaler to double Malaysia imports

WASHINGTON: COE Distributing Inc, the largest furniture-only wholesale distributor in the United States, plans to double its office furniture imports from Malaysia to RM252 million over the next two to three years.

Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) deputy chief executive officer (export acceleration) Sharimahton Mat Saleh said this was due to a surge in demand for high-quality made-in-Malaysia furniture.

"Apart from that, the increased tariffs imposed on China by former US president Donald Trump's administration had made China's furniture more expensive," she said after a meeting with COE president and chief operating officer Michael Flaherty, here, on Monday.

Sharimahton said currently, up to 70 per cent of COE's office furniture was imported from Malaysia.

The meeting was also attended by Senior International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali, who is on a trade mission to the US until May 18.

Prior to the meeting with Flaherty, Azmin had engaged with Texas Instruments Inc manufacturing operations senior vice president Mohammad Yunus, who expressed an interest in expanding the company's facilities in Malaysia.

It currently has production sites in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka.

In a separate statement, the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) said Texas Instruments planned to expand its facilities in Malaysia in the next 20 years, which was expected to create high-skilled jobs.

MIDA said Texas Instruments had a 100 per cent Malaysian workforce, with more than 5,000 employees in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka.

"The company's contribution to the Malaysian economy is significant, which can be reflected in its two per cent contribution to the total semiconductor exports last year," it said. **Bernama**

THIRD MIDDLE EAST DESTINATION

Malaysia Airlines flying direct to Doha daily from May 25

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Airlines will start direct flights to Doha from May 25, the carrier's third destination in the Middle East after Jeddah and Madinah in Saudi Arabia.

The new service will land at Hamad International Airport, enabling optimal connections to the United States, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, through the codeshare partnership with Qatar Airways.

Group chief executive officer Izhah Ismail said Malaysia Airlines' new route to Doha was an excellent opportunity to expand its network and offerings while significantly connecting ASEAN markets with the Middle East and beyond.



Malaysia Airlines will utilise the A330-300 aircraft for the daily Kuala Lumpur-Doha route. FILE PIC

He said this new route marked another milestone in the airline network's expansion plan and its quest to become Asia's leading

travel and aviation services group.

"The service will further boost the growth of traffic flow via

Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), opening up Malaysia more broadly to travellers from other international destinations.

"As a leisure and tourism player, we aim to play a significant role in bringing in international travellers to continue driving Malaysia's tourism recovery via this new route," he said.

The national airline's flight MH160 will depart KLIA for Hamad airport at 9.20pm daily.

Flight MH161 will make the return journey from Doha at 01.30am.

Malaysia Airlines will operate the route with the A330-300 aircraft.

It has 290 seats, including 27 in the business class.

RM1.97 TARGET PRICE

KOSSAN RUBBER UPGRADED TO 'HOLD'

Glove maker to see minimal impact from prosperity tax, says HLIB Research

AZANIS SHAHILA AMAN
KUALA LUMPUR
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THE outlook for Kossan Rubber Industries Bhd's is improving but it is not out of the woods given the persistent inflationary cost pressures, said Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB Research).

"The ability to raise prices will undoubtedly help ease some

margin pressure in the future.

"However, we think that it will be rather challenging for the manufacturers to fully pass on the entire cost increase to buyers, considering the massive glove supply availability in the market," said the research firm in a note yesterday.

HLIB Research said Kossan Rubber anticipated the average selling price for gloves to bottom out in the second quarter and rebound in the second half of the year, supported by cost inflation.

Its utilisation rate could recover to near 80 per cent in the second half of the year from 70 per cent currently, following the inventory drawdown by glove buyers, it said.

"Post-financial model updates, we keep our financial year 2022

earnings forecast largely unchanged but we raise our financial years 2023-2024 forecasts by 12 to 14 per cent as we factor in the positives into our projections."

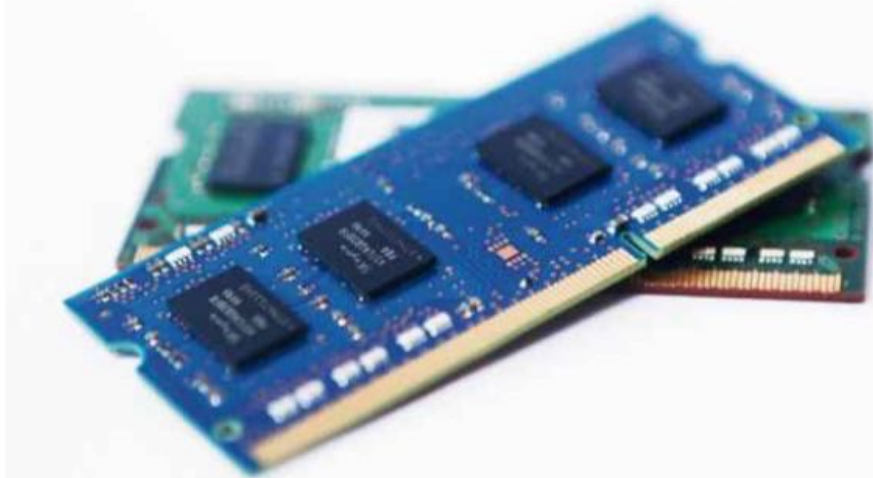
HLIB Research said minimal impact was expected from the prosperity tax as Kossan Rubber's earnings were spread across four subsidiaries.

The earnings for each entity were not expected to exceed the RM100 million threshold significantly, it said.

"Following our earnings adjustment and as we roll over our valuation base year to financial year 2023, we have upgraded our call for Kossan Rubber to 'hold' from 'sell' and with a higher target price of RM1.97 from RM1.53 previously," said HLIB Research.



Hong Leong Investment Bank Research says while the outlook for glove makers such as Kossan Rubber Industries Bhd has improved, inflationary cost pressure remains. FILE PIC



Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, automotive electronics, and augmented and virtual reality depend heavily on semiconductors to provide computing power, says MIDF Research. FILE PIC

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH POTENTIAL

MIDF Research positive on semiconductor sector

KUALA LUMPUR: MIDF Research has maintained its positive call on the semiconductor industry, noting that the sector is set for explosive growth due to the widespread adoption and integration of technologies.

The research firm said in a note yesterday emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, automotive electronics, and augmented and virtual reality depended heavily on semiconductors to provide computing power.

"The worldwide sales of semi-

conductors remained strong in the first quarter of this year despite the ongoing chip crunch, with sales at US\$151.7 billion, or a 23 per cent year-on-year growth," it said.

Global sales for March stood at US\$50.6 billion, with the United States continuing to surpass other regional markets by recording a 40.1 per cent year-on-year growth.

MIDF Research said since 2000, total semiconductor research and development (R&D) spending, as a percentage of

worldwide sales, outperformed the four-decade historical average of 14.5 per cent in all but five years (2000, 2010, 2017, 2018 and 2020).

"In these five years, lower R&D-to-sales ratios had more to do with the strength of total revenue growth rather than a weakness in R&D spending by semiconductor suppliers," it said.

MIDF Research has maintained its "buy" call on Inari Amerton (RM4.55 target price) and Unisem (M) Bhd (RM4.33 target price). **Bernama**

RM1.15 TARGET PRICE

CGS-CIMB maintains 'add' call on Taliworks

KUALA LUMPUR: Taliworks Corp Bhd's acquisition of four solar projects will establish its position in the renewable energy (RE) space, said CGS-CIMB Research.

Taliworks, as of the end of last month, completed the acquisition of the solar projects for

RM144 million, which will be funded mainly by internal cash.

The projects have a combined power generating capacity of 19 megawatts (MW).

The research firm said this acquisition was earnings-accretive, supported by a base-case combined post-merger and acquisition and earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation of around RM22 million at a 100 per cent stake.

The solar venture remains viable as revenue scalability is supported by substantially lower costs for solar panels, lower capital expenditure, and output optimisation closer to the declared annual availability of 19MW.

"Based on an assumed weighted average cost of capital of seven per cent, we arrive at an estimat-

ed aggregate discounted cash flow value of RM189 million for the remaining 13 years of the RE power-purchase agreement."

CGS-CIMB said it expected water tenders to regain momentum in the coming months on the contract outlook front.

Key catalysts include contract wins from Sungai Rasau and other water tenders and completion of the solar acquisition deal.

CGS-CIMB RESEARCH

This could provide more job flow upside following the RM896 million total win from the Sungai Rasau water supply scheme in December last year.

It has raised its financial years 2022 to 2024 earnings forecasts for Taliworks by 6.2 to 6.5 per cent.

"We retain our 'add' call on the stock with a RM1.15 target price, backed by attractive dividend yields of 6.9 per cent in its financial years 2022 to 2024."

"Key catalysts include contract wins from Sungai Rasau and other water tenders and completion of the solar acquisition deal."

"We believe that the new green recurring earnings stream will enhance Taliworks's environmental, social and governance visibility," it added.

CHUA
BEE KIM

WEALTH MANAGEMENT

ACHIEVING FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Buying too many insurance policies, buying a house that is too expensive once they start working, investing in the wrong schemes and even putting money in the bank without investing it — all these can be deemed as 'mistakes'.

YAP MING HUI

Whitman Independent Advisors Sdn Bhd founder and managing director

MANY people yearn for financial freedom as that would allow them to spend more time with their loved ones or to help others in need.

But amid the global economic as well as political uncertainties, can the average Malaysian ever hope to retire and live comfortably in his twilight years?

Yap Ming Hui, the founder and managing director of Whitman Independent Advisors Sdn Bhd — a holistic wealth management company — believes that the goal can be achieved if one invests discerningly and avoids mistakes along the way.

The 52-year-old financial adviser said Malaysians who had a stable career and did proper planning could achieve financial freedom at between the ages of 55 and 60.

"In finance, doing the right thing is to go against human instincts. However, due to a lack of knowledge, support and advice, many follow their instincts and get derailed from their path."

"Buying too many insurance policies, buying a house that is too expensive once they start working, investing in the wrong schemes and even putting money in the bank without investing it — all these can be deemed as 'mistakes'."

"For instance, retirees should not use their Employees Provident Fund (EPF) savings to settle their housing loan. Most people do this once they retire or get



Whitman Independent Advisors Sdn Bhd founder and managing director Yap Ming Hui is the author of six financial books and he has also shared his knowledge through his columns in mainstream newspapers.

access to their EPF money. It depends on each individual's circumstances but for someone who does not have a huge sum of money, settling a mortgage can affect their cash flow.

"Since the bank interest on a mortgage loan is still low, there is

no need to rush into settling it as banks will not give them another loan if an emergency arises.

"I also would not encourage retirees to start a business in their twilight years as that requires a huge capital outlay. In this present day, one should start a business when they are in their 30s or early 40s. Not in their 50s."

"A licensed financial planner will be able to assess your current financial status and provide the best advice. If you were to listen solely to your friends or a unit trust agent, their advice may not be in your best interest."

Yap is the eldest among three children. His family had struggled to pay the rent and their school fees and that, he believed, taught him persistence and eventually succeed in life.

If not for the Lee Yan Lian Charitable Foundation, Yap said he would not have been able to graduate from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia with first class honours in business management.

"Maybe because of the help I received from this foundation, I always strive to give back to the community as a way to pay it forward."

Yap is the author of six financial books to date and he has also shared his knowledge through his columns in mainstream newspapers.

He encourages his readers to share his work if they do find something of value in his books.

His most popular book is "Roadmap To Financial Free-

dom", which is a national best-seller.

In the early years of his career, Yap worked as a corporate trainer at a leading local conglomerate for four years. However, he found no satisfaction in the work he was doing.

"I wanted to make a difference in people's lives. So I bought the Rockwills Franchise. I was among the first 100 franchisees. Two years later, I qualified as a chartered financial consultant and that was how my journey as a financial adviser started."

Holistic wealth management was unheard of in Malaysia 20 years ago. There were neither peers nor seniors for Yap to benchmark his business.

"I read many finance books, visited successful practitioners in Australia, Singapore and the United States, and brought all the knowledge and best practices back to Malaysia. But Malaysia was different and I had to localise the business in terms of pricing and delivery."

Today, Whitman has more than 50 financial advisers serving 3,000 clients. Its mission is to help its clients grow their wealth and achieve financial freedom.

The writer was a journalist with the New Straits Times before joining a Fortune Global 500 real estate company. This article is a collaboration between the New Straits Times and Tradeview, the author of 'Once Upon A Time In Bursa'.

INCREASED BRAND PRESENCE

Continental Tyre, Castrol to jointly introduce more value-added offers

KUALA LUMPUR: Continental Tyre PJ Malaysia Sdn Bhd and BP Castrol Lubricants Malaysia Sdn Bhd have inked a memorandum of understanding to offer motorists a combined trade loyalty programme where they can enjoy various deals, incentives, redemptions and rewards.

Under the collaboration, both parties will also leverage each other's extensive dealer network, offerings and expertise to offer consumers high quality products and services.

Continental Tyre Malaysia managing director Andrea Somorova said there was a steady demand for both brands and its products in the market, especially among the premium vehicle owners.

She said the company saw a great opportunity for both companies to come together to consolidate their offerings.

"We believe that with both brands' long-standing service and excellence in the market, we will continue to be the preferred

brands in automotive maintenance," she added.

Castrol Malaysia and Singapore market sales director Gan Wee Kiong said the partnership was a testament to both brands' commitment to further build their brand presence in Malaysia.

"Through our combined expertise that supports new opportunities, we will continue to lead and innovate in securing global market leader when it comes to service and maintenance," he added.



Castrol Malaysia and Singapore market sales director Gan Wee Kiong (left) and Continental Tyre Malaysia managing director Andrea Somorova exchanging documents after the memorandum of understanding signing ceremony recently.

FLAIR

BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES

A balancing act

Retinol products require proper formulation to counter possible side effects on the skin, and one brand may have cracked the code, writes **Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan**

RETINOL is a beauty ingredient that needs no introduction. Proven to improve cell turnover and hailed as the holy grail in skincare, it can help with wrinkles, hyperpigmentation, acne and acne scars.

But its use does not come without a price. Primarily, it may make skin more sensitive, which is why the caveat in using retinol is to lather on sunblock (at least SPF 30) during the day.

Those who are new to this vitamin A derivative should start with a low-dose retinol product (which contains 0.3 per cent to 0.5 per cent). Use it twice weekly and increase the frequency as you go along.

Given its efficacy and side effects, retinol formulation is extremely important so skincare makers are trying different ways to balance this strong ingredient with hydrating substances like hyaluronic acid and ceramides.

Skincare label Drunk Elephant balances its retinol with oil, specifically virgin marula oil, in its new release called A-Gloei, designed for retinol beginners.

Founder Tiffany Masterson says she wanted to make something for people who aren't familiar with retinol.

"Retinol is highly effective at increasing cell turnover and is incredibly good at targeting the signs of ageing as well as reducing inflammation and acne. It's an amazing, powerhouse ingredient that teaches skin cells how to act younger."

"The flip side is that it can be an intimidating ingredient for people who have never used it before. It's easy to overdo it, so retinol gets a bad reputation for being sensitising. If you go in with too much in the beginning it can cause peeling and redness."



A-Gloei can be mixed with other serums.

RIGHT PIC: The oil aims to improve skin while retaining hydration.

A FINE MIX

So Masterson combines a lower dosage of retinol, at 0.5 per cent (versus 1 per cent in its A-Passioni) and adds soothing, antioxidant-rich marula oil.

"We made A-Gloei to be a gateway retinol. I essentially wanted to sneak retinol in at a lower level to make it ideal for anyone who is just getting used to retinol and wants to start building their tolerance."

Masterson says marula oil, which is widely used in the brand's skincare line, contains a high concentration of oleic acid.

"Research has demonstrated that oleic acid is a highly effective penetration enhancer, allowing other ingredients, like retinol, an easier time to penetrate by making the lipid surface on skin more permeable and the active ingredient more soluble."

"This is also why our marula oil absorbs quickly — the high content of oleic acid won't sit on the surface as other fatty acids do. With A-Gloei, you are getting all of the benefits of two powerhouse ingredients that complement each other."

FOR THE EARTH

Masterson says Drunk Elephant's marula oil is extracted by grinding and raw cold-pressing the kernels of the South African marula fruit.

"The tricky thing is that while marula oil



is naturally high in antioxidants and fatty acids, much of those benefits can be lost during harvest. So we use an extraction and filtration process that result in the purest and most concentrated form of the oil, with those delicate antioxidant and fatty acid compounds preserved."

True to the brand's philosophy of formulating its products with non-toxic ingredients, its marula oil is purchased from a supplier that is a member of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity: Nagoya Protocol.

The Nagoya Protocol has three primary goals — to protect the biological diversity of genetic resources, provide sustainable use of those biological resources and ensure fair, equitable profit and payment of the use of those resources.

"This allows the farming communities to supply our marula oil and, at the same time, establish protections for the crop, as well as to negotiate and establish their own price for their crop," she says.

CLEAR AND SOOTHE

A-Gloei also contains plant-derived ceramides that are identical to the wax-like moisturising ceramides that occur naturally in skin.

Ceramides help fill in the spaces between skin cells, giving them elasticity, and play a critical role in strengthening the skin barrier by helping to maintain the



Tiffany Masterson says a gentle dose of retinol helps clarify skin.



A-Gloei is a combination of retinol and soothing marula oil.

moisture balance of skin, while protecting against water loss.

While you'll see benefits from the marula oil and ceramides right away, it takes time to see results of retinol.

"It takes around three to four months, so be patient. There shouldn't be any rush and the results are worth it," Masterson says.

"If you are new to retinol, the best way is to ease in. Start by using A-Gloei once or twice a week, gradually increasing frequency to every other night, then every night as tolerated," she says.

Apply two or three drops in the morning or at night to clean, dry face, or mix with any Drunk Elephant moisturiser or serum.

"Always avoid the eye area — at least not without mixing A-Gloei into your eye cream. I would recommend that you not apply it undiluted to the eye area. If you are using A-Gloei during the day, be sure to follow with sunscreen."

"Also, keep in mind that all retinol products are not recommended for use by pregnant or nursing mothers, so consult your doctor before using it."

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Sleep symphony

A local brand based in Batu Pahat hopes to give customers a complete sleep ecosystem for better wellbeing, writes **Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan**

NESTLED in Batu Pahat, Johor, Gaias Home (www.gaiashome.com) is a home-grown home fabrics brand, with experience in curtain manufacturing, that started four years ago.

With an aim to provide premium quality products at affordable prices, its founder Lee Jia Wei says everyone deserves better, including better sleep and better fabrics for their homes.

"We believe in our capability and confidence to craft something unique and local since we already have a tailoring team who worked with our founder in the curtain industry."

"They have experience and knowledge in fabric and crafting, which we need for this brand."

Gaias Home specialises in handcrafted bed linen that blends meticulously chosen raw materials using advanced weave technology, operated by experienced in-house tailors.

It uses organic cotton and tencel to deliver breathability, durability and softness, especially in our hot and humid weather.

Lee says the cotton-tencel blend boasts a crisp finish that is light and soft to the touch, making the material ideal for users with sensitive skin.

"Tencel is made of very fine fibres that are hydrophilic, which absorbs excess moisture from the skin, preventing irritation," he says.

FOR BETTER SLEEP

Lee says when he created Gaias Home, he wanted people to feel instantly relaxed,



Gaias Home produces plain bed linen because Lee says rooms would already have patterns in them.



The movement restriction due to Covid-19 has propelled the interest in home items.

comforted and untroubled as they tuck themselves into bed.

"We aim to give people the five-star treatment that many feel they can get only when they stay at hotels on holidays. Quality sleep and pampering should be available to anyone, at any time and we hope that this sense of daily luxury can be replicated through our products," Lee says.

The brand has its own workshop and tailoring team, and its products are made in Malaysia. Gaias Home also provides customisation, so you can get a good fit for any mattress size and thickness.

Besides that, the brand provides home essentials such as pillow, duvet insert, mattress topper, blanket, curtain and travel accessories like towel and sleep mask.

"We also provide a 100-day trial for our customers, to make sure that they are satisfied with their purchase."

Lee says having a business based in Batu Pahat works well for him.



Lee says consumers are willing to pay top dollar for high-quality sleep products.

GROWTH SPURT

In March 2020, when the country was under its first Movement Control Order, the company did significantly well. Its yearly revenue grew from RM60,000 in 2018 to RM700,000 in 2020.

"People were spending more time at home which prompted them to spend more on in-home products. Consumers are also willing to buy online and spend more for better quality products. And we are exactly at these three intersections — providing bedding products, delivering premium quality at a lower price, on an e-commerce portal," he says.

Lee looks up to Japanese brand Muji and the simplicity it brings to customers. "We want to offer simple and various colours of plain bedsheets, not patterned."

"Some bedrooms already have designs or patterns, so plain bed linen would be a great choice to complete the bedroom without having too many patterns in one space. We will also have more colours for our customers to choose from," Lee says.

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Some of the colours available are Greige and Shore.



SPACE FOR HOMETOWN BRANDS

The Fashion Journal at Setia City Mall in Shah Alam is an all-new, go-to store for stylish pieces. The new fashion retail concept is home to a collection of unique homegrown brands such as Bayu Somerset, Binwani's, Locka, Nita, Oh Apogee, Syedewa and Umma, to cater to your fashion and beauty needs.



SUPPORT LOCAL

E-commerce store Modern Essentials (ME) provides another platform for local talent to market their products. Among the works featured in ME's Support Lokal initiative include Sabahan freelance graphic designer Adora Chloe George, who designs T-shirts and enamel pins. One of Adora's works was featured on Marvel's Instagram account, which showcases the work of talented fans from around the globe.



WALK EASY

The Mexico 66 Sabot by Onitsuka Tiger offers an option for hot sunny days with extra breathability through its mesh material. The covered shoe presents an easy slip-on function without being out of place in a more formal outfit. The shoe features OrthoLite sockliner to provide high-level comfort and is suitable for day-time errands or a casual dinner.

REPORTS BY: Roy Goh and Shankar Ganesh



ATTACKS PLANNED

ABU SAYYAF BOMB-MAKER DIES IN CLASH

Authorities seize high-grade explosives, bomb paraphernalia at the scene

MANILA

ASUSPECTED Abu Sayyaf terrorist, who has a stash of improvised explosive devices, died in a clash with the authorities on Friday. Adzhar Alih Anding, 34, was believed to be an expert bomb-maker, the Philstar.com portal reported.

He died in a clash with the authorities in Isabela, Basilan, in the early hours on Friday after he was abandoned by his fellow fighters, who retreated to the mountains in Barangay Baluno.

Zamboanga peninsula police director Brigadier-General Franco Simborio said the Army Special Forces Intelligence Team recovered high-grade explosives and

bomb paraphernalia at the scene.

He said a rifle, a pistol, a motorcycle, bullet shells and 5,000 pesos were seized from the suspect, adding that based on reports and initial investigations by Isabela city police, Anding was listed as an Abu Sayyaf member.

Authorities had been on full alert tracking the Abu Sayyaf after receiving information that the group was planning to stage bomb attacks.

Police had yet to determine the bombing targets and the dates of the alleged bomb plots.

DROPPED IN 1970S

Search for 9 one-tonne bombs in Phnom Penh

PHNOM PENH: Mine experts are continuing the search for nine one-tonne bombs that were dropped in Cambodia between 1970 and 1975.

The search started after two bombs were found in Chaktomuk River near the royal palace here recently.

According to the *Phnom Penh Post*, there are 11 such bombs and experts from the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) would continue to search for the remaining nine bombs. The authorities studied the two bombs before trying to defuse them.

CMAC director-general Heng Ratana said the 11 AN-M66 or AN-M34 bombs were believed to have been dropped in Cambodia during the war in the 1970s.

"Not all of the bombs exploded. During the war, we know that 11 bombs were dropped, but not just in the area. Do not get confused."

He did not reveal where the bombs were dropped, but noted that the AN-M66 bomb found in Chaktomuk River was the second of the 11 bombs.

The massive bomb was found by city municipal workers while they were carrying out work on the riverbed near a hotel. It was found buried about 3m deep in the muddy earth.

The workers suspected they discovered a bomb and reported it to the authorities, who then inspected and cordoned off the site.

It was later revealed that the United States-made bomb contained 500kg of explosives and weighed nearly one tonne.

Ratana said Cambodia was fortunate that the bomb did not explode as it would have caused many injuries and serious damage to nearby properties, including the royal palace.

"According to the risk level, (the bomb) would have caused an impact within a radius of 1,920m from where it fell."

Up to Monday, experts had yet to defuse the second bomb.

Ratana said the authorities had the expertise to deal with the bomb, but would conduct a thorough study first to ensure that all safety measures were met before attempts to defuse it.

"We need to study the technical details first because defusing such a large bomb is not only difficult, but also dangerous. Some bombs can be (swiftly) defused, and others have keys to remove without defusing them."

He said if the bomb could not be defused, the authorities would use other ways to destroy it in a controlled explosion.

According to the risk level, (the bomb) would have caused an impact within a radius of 1,920m from where it fell.

HENG RATANA
Cambodian Mine
Action Centre
director-general



SAOLA SALUTE

A man cycling past the mascot for the upcoming 31st Southeast Asian Games in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Monday. The mascot is a saola, a rare mammal native to central Vietnam. The SEA Games will take place from May 12 to 23. EPA PIC

BIZARRE TREATMENTS

Thai police find 11 corpses in raid on temple run by cult

CHAIYAPHUM: Thai police found 11 corpses in coffins in a raid on a makeshift temple belonging to a cult that preached superstition and provided bizarre treatments for diseases.

The unorthodox treatments include consuming the cult leader's excrement, phlegm and urine. His followers believed his waste could cure diseases.

Acting on information, police raided the temple in Khon San district, Chaiyaphum province, on Sunday.

The Bangkok Post reported that

the raid was jointly carried out by local administrative officials and police, including provincial governor Kraisor Kongchalad and provincial police chief Police-Colonel Wattanachai Jantathum.

The report said the raid was mounted after information was received from celebrity shaman Jeeraphan Phetkhao, who helped the authorities nab many monks who were allegedly involved in sexual and other misconduct.

Police detained the cult leader, an old man with long white hair and beard who called himself

"The Father".

According to a report by *The Nation*, Jeeraphan, better known as Mor Pla, led police and other authorities to the temple.

He has a television programme where he campaigns against "fake shamans" and Buddhist monks who violate monk laws.

Jeeraphan said a woman sought his help after her mother went to the temple, which was regarded by followers as a "hermitage".

The woman's mother was allegedly not allowed to go home.

During the raid, the authorities

found that the cult leader stayed with followers in a large makeshift wooden hut.

Police did not release his name, but local media identified him as Tawee Nanra, 75.

The cult's followers said the 11 corpses in coffins found at the temple were brought there for rituals to send them to heaven.

They were only able to show death certificates for five of them.

Wattanachai said the place was operated by a cult and they were spreading superstitious beliefs.

The cult leader is being held at

the Khon San police station. He has not been charged and police are continuing investigations.

Wattanachai said a decision on further action would only be taken after post-mortem examinations of the 11 bodies were completed.

Kraisor said activities at the temple were unacceptable and disgusting.

He said the temple was located on public land and the authorities would investigate the case for trespassing and look into other possible legal offences.

WORLD



(Clockwise from left) People protesting the results of the Philippine national election in front of the Commission on Elections' office in Manila yesterday; Supporters of presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr holding newspapers with coverage of his landslide presidential victory, outside the campaign headquarters in Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, yesterday; Vice-President Leni Robredo giving a statement at her home in Magarao town, Camarines Norte, south of Manila, yesterday. AGENCIES PIX

LANDSLIDE VICTORY

PHILIPPINE DICTATOR'S SON WINS POLLS

With more than 56pc of votes secured, Marcos Jr's supporters hope that he will tackle rampant poverty

MANILA

THE son of late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos cemented a landslide presidential election victory yesterday, after Filipinos bet a familiar but tainted dynasty could ease rampant poverty, while dismissing warnings the clan's return would deepen corruption and weaken democracy. With an initial count almost complete, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr had secured over 56 per cent of the vote and more than double the tally of his nearest rival, liberal Leni Robredo. His now unassailable lead of 16 million-plus votes spells another astonishing reversal in the for-

tunes of the Marcos family, who have gone from the presidential palace to pariahs and back again in the space of a few decades.

The Marcos victory is a hammer blow to millions of Filipinos who hoped to reverse course after six bloody years of increasingly authoritarian rule by outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte.

Far from repudiating Duterte's excesses, Filipino voters elected his daughter Sara as vice-president by a landslide in a parallel vote.

In 1986, Marcos Sr and kleptocratic first lady Imelda Marcos were chased into exile by the "People Power" revolution.

Marcos Jr steadfastly refused to denounce his family's brutal and

corrupt excesses in a campaign marked by a relentless online whitewashing of history.

With memories of the regime fading with time and muddled by countless misleading Facebook posts, Filipino voters turned to Marcos Jr to rekindle past glories that were mostly imagined.

"He will lift our country from the poverty we're experiencing now," said supporter and retired police officer Anthony Sola, who described himself as elated.

The 50-year-old dismissed allegations that the Marcoses stole as much as US\$10 billion during their last period in power: "I don't believe they stole money, because if they did, they should have been imprisoned already."

Some 43 per cent of Filipinos consider themselves poor, and 39 per cent more feel they are on the borderline, according to a March poll by the Social Weather Survey.

Delivering a late-night address

from his campaign headquarters here on Monday, a tired but beaming Marcos Jr thanked volunteers for months of "sacrifices and work".

But he stopped short of claiming victory, warning that "the count is not yet done". A fully certified tally is not expected before May 28.

Rights activists, Catholic leaders and political commentators all had warned about returning the Marcos clan to power.

"This election could have been our biggest chance for radical change," said Mae Paner, 58, political satirist who was part of the People Power Revolution.

"There will be more deaths, debt and hunger. The Marcoses will steal," she said.

Failed presidential hopeful Leni Robredo, a lawyer and the current vice-president, admitted "clear disappointment" about the result but vowed to continue the fight against poor govern-

nance.

The 57-year-old had promised to clean up the dirty style of politics that has long plagued the feudal and corrupt democracy, where a handful of surnames hold sway.

In the final weeks before the election, her campaign morphed into a catchall pro-democracy movement that drew almost one million people to a single protest in Manila. Fearing a backlash from 15 million disgruntled voters, with many alleging voting irregularities in Monday's poll, police urged restraint.

"I am appealing to you to remain calm. Let us respect the result of the vote," said acting Philippine police chief Lieutenant-General Vicente Danao.

The country's Commission on Elections indicated that despite long queues and problems with some voting machines, the initial tabulation of votes had gone well.

AFP

1 KILLED, 5 HURT

UKRAINE'S ODESA 'DESTROYED'

Port pounded by missiles, buildings damaged in attacks by Russian forces

KYIV

BUILDINGS in Odesa lay in ruins yesterday, a day after Kremlin forces pounded the southern Ukrainian port with missiles and Russian President Vladimir Putin led defiant celebrations marking the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War 2.

While Putin was silent about plans for any escalation, he exhorted Russians to battle and repeated his assertions that they were again fighting Nazis. His forces continued to destroy the infrastructure of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol where the last Ukrainian troops are holding out.

"You are fighting for the Motherland, for its future, so that no one forgets the lessons of World War 2. So that there is no place in the world for executioners, castigators and Nazis," Putin said.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on Monday, promised Ukrainians would triumph.

"On the Day of Victory over Nazism, we are fighting for a new victory. The road to it is difficult, but we have no doubt that we will win," said Zelenskyy.

In Odesa, the major Black Sea port for exporting agricultural products, one person was killed and five people were injured when seven missiles hit a shopping centre and a depot, Ukraine's armed forces said on Facebook.

Video footage from the scene showed rescue workers combing through piles of rubble and dousing still smoking wreckage.

Ukraine and its allies have intensified efforts on how to unblock ports or provide alternate routes for exporting its significant crops of grain, wheat and corn.

European Council President Charles Michel visited Odesa on Monday, and his meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal was interrupted by the missile attack.

Their talks continued in a bomb shelter, according to Shmyhal's official Twitter account.

Air raid sirens could be heard across several regions of Ukraine early yesterday, including Luhansk, Kharkiv and Dnipro.

Serhiy Gaidai, the governor of Luhansk, said the region was attacked 22 times in the 24 hours to



Emergency personnel working near a building damaged after a military strike, in Odesa, Ukraine, on Monday. REUTERS PIC

yesterday.

"On Monday, the Russians fired en masse on all possible routes out of the region."

Houses were destroyed in Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk and in the village of Shpylovo, where people remained trapped, there was an attack on an inspecting crew that wounded one person, Gaidai added.

In the town of Bogodukhov, northwest of Kharkiv, four people were killed and several homes were destroyed in Russian attacks on Monday, local media quoted Kharkiv officials as saying.

Ukraine's Defence Ministry said Russian forces backed by tanks and artillery were conducting "storming operations" at Mariupol's Azovstal plant, where hundreds of Ukrainian defenders had held out through months of siege.

Mariupol lies between the Crimean Peninsula, seized by Moscow in 2014, and parts of eastern Ukraine under the control of Russia-backed separatists. Capturing the city would allow Moscow to link the two areas.

More than 5.5 million Ukrainians have fled their country since Russia's invasion on Feb 24, according to the United Nations, which has called it Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War 2.

Moscow's gains from the inva-



A woman with the Ukrainian colours on her hair and a woman with red paint on her face confronting each other at the Cemetery-Mausoleum of Soviet Soldiers in Warsaw, Poland, on Monday. EPA PIC

sion, however, have been slow at best and it has little to show for it beyond a strip of territory in the south and marginal gains in the east.

United States President Joe Biden said he was worried Putin "doesn't have a way out right now, and I'm trying to figure out what we do about that".

Sources said US Democratic lawmakers had agreed on a US\$40 billion aid proposal for Ukraine, including a massive new weapons package.

The White House had earlier described Putin's remarks during

his Victory Day speech as "revisionist history that took the form of disinformation".

The Soviet victory in World War 2 has acquired almost religious status in Russia under Putin, who has invoked the memory of the "Great Patriotic War" throughout what he called a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Western countries consider that a false analogy to justify unprovoked aggression.

"There can be no victory day, only dishonour and surely defeat in Ukraine," said British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace. Reuters

IN BRIEF

S'pore bans Kashmir film praised by Modi

SINGAPORE: Singapore has banned a controversial Indian film about the exodus of Hindus from Muslim-majority Kashmir, citing concerns over its "potential to cause enmity between different communities". The *Kashmir Files* has been praised by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his right-wing Hindu nationalist followers, but critics said it could fan anti-Muslim sentiment. "The film will be refused classification for its provocative and one-sided portrayal of Muslims," the Singapore government said on Monday.

Athlete collapses after sanitiser swig

TOKYO: Japanese authorities have pledged to investigate a mix-up that saw high school athletes given hand sanitiser to drink during a race, with one student falling ill after taking a swig. Competition organisers for a girls' 5,000m walking race held last weekend in central Japan's Yamaguchi prefecture mistakenly poured the sanitiser into cups and placed them at a drinks station for athletes. One athlete collapsed, vomited and dropped out of the race after drinking the sanitiser, while two others spat it out and continued.

A\$20m drugs found near body of diver

SYDNEY: Australian police yesterday launched a probe after 50kg of suspected cocaine, estimated to be worth A\$20 million, was found near the body of a diver washed up on a riverbank in New South Wales state. A man wearing diving equipment was found lying unconscious near the Hunter River at Newcastle, on Monday, New South Wales police said. He died at the scene. Several packages, which contained what is believed to be cocaine, were found nearby. "We are trying to identify whether the two incidents are linked," police said. Agencies

'THREAT TO REGIONAL, GLOBAL SECURITY'

GIVE UP NUKES, N. KOREA TOLD

New South Korean president pledges economic aid if Pyongyang removes nuke weapons

SEOUL

SOUTH Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol called on the North to give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for massive economic aid at his swearing-in yesterday, describing Pyongyang's missiles as a threat to regional and global security.

Suk-yeol, 61, took office at a time of high tensions on the peninsula, with Pyongyang conducting a record 15 weapons tests since January, including two launches last week.

The former prosecutor, who won a close election by a razor-thin margin in March, said that he would consider sending transformative levels of economic aid to the North, but only if Pyongyang first gives up its nuclear weapons.

"If North Korea genuinely embarks on a process to complete denuclearisation, we are prepared to work with the international community to present a plan that will strengthen North Korea's economy and improve the quality of life for its people."

Suk-yeol's predecessor, Moon



South Korean guard of honour performing during an inaugural ceremony of the South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol (inset) in Seoul yesterday. AGENCY PIX

Jae-in, pursued a policy of engagement with Pyongyang, brokering summits between Kim Jong-un and then-United States president Donald Trump. But talks collapsed in 2019 and diplomacy has stalled since.

"While North Korea's nuclear weapon programmes are a threat not only to our security and that of Northeast Asia, the door to dialogue will remain open so that we can peacefully resolve this threat," Suk-yeol added.

But the offer of "audacious" aid was a dud, analysts said: North Korea, which invests a vast chunk of its gross domestic product into

its United Nations-sanctioned weapons programmes, has long made it clear it will not trade nukes for aid.

"Since 2009, North Korea has stated it will not give up its nukes for economic incentives," Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University said. "Suk-yeol's comment will only trigger Pyongyang, who will see it as an attack."

Jong-un did not want massive economic growth because achieving this would require opening up North Korea's information ecosystem, said Chad O'Carroll of Seoul-based specialist site NK News.

"Ideological pollution would

rapidly steep in, a key risk for Pyongyang's ruler. Suk-yeol's denuclearisation plans won't go anywhere because the 'carrot' is actually poisonous," he tweeted.

During his inauguration speech, Suk-yeol said that South Korea was facing "multiple crises", citing the pandemic, global supply chain issues and economic woes, and new armed conflicts and wars.

"Such complex crises are casting a long and dark shadow over us," he said, adding that he was confident the country would emerge from its current difficulties.

"Koreans never succumbed. We became stronger and wiser." **AFP**

CHINA'S STRATEGY

'Zero-Covid plan buys time to boost job rate'

SHANGHAI: China's tough zero-Covid measures remain essential to defeat the pandemic and buy time to improve vaccination rates and develop new treatments, senior health advisers wrote in recently published reports.

The city here has been locked down for nearly six weeks as it battles China's biggest coronavirus outbreak.

In correspondence published by the peer-reviewed medical journal the *Lancet* last Friday, a team of city medical experts said Shanghai's vital role in the national economy made lockdown unavoidable.

"Shanghai has huge exchanges with other cities and regions in the country, so the spill-out of virus to other places could have unimaginably severe consequences," said the team, which includes Zhang Wenhong, an adviser to authorities in Shanghai on treatment for Covid-19. **Reuters**

'BUT NOT TORTURED'

Activist claims forced labour in China prison

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese activist jailed in China said yesterday he was subjected to forced labour and endured stale food while serving a five-year sentence, but that he was not tortured.

Li Ming-che, a community college lecturer and activist at a human rights non-governmental organisation in Taiwan, disappeared while visiting China in 2017.

Later that year, a Chinese court found him guilty of subversion. He was released from jail and returned to Taiwan last month.

Li said he was forced to make clothing during his time in jail, working 11 to 12 hours a day with few days off, and he was not allowed to speak to most other prisoners.

"It was totally a sweat shop." While the food was also stale, Li said he was neither tortured nor "whipped", but that he had considered himself to have been "kidnapped" by the Chinese government. **Reuters**

UNMANNED MODULE

Chinese spacecraft docks with orbiting space station

BEIJING: An unmanned Chinese cargo spacecraft successfully docked with an orbiting space station module yesterday in the sixth of 11 missions needed to finish building China's first space station by the end of the year.

A Long March-7 rocket carrying the Tianzhou-4 spacecraft blasted off at 1.56am Beijing time from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in southern Hainan province.

Tianzhou-4 docked with Tianhe, the core module of the space station, at 8.54am Beijing time, the China Manned Space Agency

said yesterday.

The cargo spacecraft transported propellants, application experiment samples, some payloads and supplies for three astronauts, the agency said.

Three astronauts will travel to Tianhe in June on the Shenzhou-14 spacecraft and live and work onboard the module for six months.

China aims to complete the construction of its first space station this year, being a key rival of the world's only station — the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's International Space Station. **Reuters**



People watching a Long March-7 Y5 rocket carrying the Tianzhou-4 cargo spacecraft lifting off from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in southern China's Hainan province yesterday. **AFP PIX**

5 DEAD, 200 INJURED

CURFEW IN SRI LANKA AFTER DEADLY UNREST

PM's resignation did little to calm public anger over unprecedented economic crisis

COLOMBO

SRI LANKA deployed thousands of troops and police yesterday to enforce a curfew after five people were killed in the worst violence in weeks of protests over an unprecedented economic crisis.

Nearly 200 were also wounded on Monday as prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned, but that did little to calm public anger.

He had to be rescued in a pre-dawn operation by the military yesterday after thousands of anti-government protesters stormed his official residence here overnight, with police firing tear gas and warning shots to keep back the crowd.

"After a pre-dawn operation,

the former PM and his family were evacuated to safety by the army," a top security official said. "At least 10 petrol bombs were thrown into the compound."

The Rajapaksa clan's hold on power has been shaken by months of blackouts and shortages in Sri Lanka, the worst economic crisis since it became independent in 1948.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa remains in office, however, with widespread powers and command over the security forces.

After weeks of overwhelmingly peaceful anti-government demonstrations, violence broke out on Monday when Mahinda's supporters — bussed into the capital from the countryside — attacked protesters with sticks and clubs.

"We were hit, the media were hit, women and children were hit," one witness said, asking not to be named.

Police fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse crowds and declared an immediate curfew in Colombo, a measure later widened to include the entire nation.

Authorities said the curfew would be lifted today, with government and private offices, as well as shops and schools, ordered to remain shut yesterday.

Despite the curfew, anti-government protesters defied police to retaliate against government supporters for the attacks late in Monday night.

Outside Colombo, ruling party lawmaker Amarakeerthi Athukorala shot two people — killing a 27-year-old man — after being surrounded by a mob of anti-government protesters, police said.

"He then took his own life with his revolver," a police official said. Athukorala's bodyguard was also found dead at the scene.

Another ruling party politician, who was not named, opened fire on protesters, killing two and wounding five in the deep south of the island, police added.

Angry crowds set alight the homes of more than a dozen pro-Rajapaksa politicians, along with some vehicles, while buses and trucks used by the government loyalists in and around here were also targeted.

Doctors at the main Colombo



Government supporters and police clashing outside the president's office in Colombo on Monday.



A bus burning close to outgoing prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's official residence in Colombo on Monday. AFP PIX

National Hospital intervened to rescue wounded government supporters, with soldiers breaking open locked gates to ferry in the wounded.

"They may be murderers, but for us, they are patients who must be treated first," a doctor shouted at a mob blocking the entrance to the emergency unit. **AFP**



LIFESTYLE OF THE AGED

An elderly couple riding a personal mobility vehicle with a dog in Beijing yesterday. In China, demand for mobility vehicles has been surging, with the country's elderly seeking more independence as many of the younger generation walk away from their traditional role as their parents' carers. **AFP PIC**

'HOMICIDE'

El Salvador jails woman for 30 years after obstetric emergency

SAN SALVADOR: A court in El Salvador jailed a woman for 30 years on Monday for killing her unborn baby daughter even though she had been suffering what she said was an obstetric emergency. Citizen Group for the Decriminalisation of Abortion decriminalising abortion said.

The mother of a 7-year-old girl had a health emergency during her pregnancy in 2019 and sought assistance in a public hospital, but was detained.

A judge convicted the 28-year-old housewife, identified only as "Esme", for security reasons, after she was held in pre-trial detention for two years. It was the first case of its kind in the past seven years.

"(The ruling) is a hard blow for the road to overcome the criminalisation of obstetric emergencies that, as the Inter-American

Court of Human Rights has pointed out, must be treated as public health problems," group president Morena Herrera said.

Esme's lawyers said they would appeal against the decision and noted this was the first conviction of its kind under President Nayib Bukele's administration.

Over the last 20 years, El Salvador, which has banned abortion under all circumstances, including cases of rape and when the woman's health is in danger, has criminally prosecuted some 181 women who suffered obstetric emergencies.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in November that El Salvador had violated the rights of a woman identified as Manuela who was sent to prison for breaching the abortion laws and died while serving her 30-year sentence. **Reuters**



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RAMADAN TREAT FOR 100 CHILDREN



Allan Wong, Senior General Manager of TGCR & Project (far left); Ravindran Varnagopal, General Manager of TGCR Resort Management (second from left) and Abdul Razak, F&B Senior Manager of TGCR (third from left) presenting duit raya to all 100 children

TROPICANA Golf & Country Resort (TGCR), a subsidiary of Tropicana Corporation Berhad (Tropicana), spread festive cheer to 100 children from three orphanages in Klang Valley during the month of Ramadan, along with the donation of more than 21 dry goods and essentials.

The children, from Pertubuhan Kebajikan Al Mahabbah, Pusat Jagaan Haneen Firdaus, and Pusat Jagaan Kasih Murni, were

treated to the resort's celebrated Santapan 29 Malam iftar buffet, serving up more than 200 dishes at over 20 stalls with hospitality from the heart.

Speaking at the charity event, Tropicana's Senior General Manager (TGCR & Project), Allan Wong shared more on the initiative, organised in line with the humanitarian mission of Tropicana Foundation, the developer's charity arm.



Allan Wong, Senior General Manager of TGCR & Project (fifth from left); Ravindran Varnagopal, General Manager of TGCR Resort Management (third from left); David Wang, Deputy General Manager of TGCR (far left) and Abdul Razak, F&B Senior Manager of TGCR (far right) with representatives from the three orphanage homes

"As Malaysia moves forward to a new normal, the month of Ramadhan gives us time to reflect and give thanks. With Tropicana Foundation's focus on outreach and engagement with vulnerable groups in society towards Redefining the Art of Caring, we invited the homes to Tropicana Golf & Country Resort, where Tropicana's journey began so many years ago. Here, the children can break their fast while experiencing the communal warmth of kampung-style dining at our clubhouse. Aside from sharing the flavours and hospitality of Santapan 29 Malam, we also support the

homes' daily needs in the coming month by donating more than 21 necessities such as rice, cooking oil, Milo, cookies, detergents, Dettol, Colgate, and more," he said.

Tropicana Foundation, the charity arm of Tropicana Group will continue to organise various charity initiatives to engage with society and the underprivileged community. Since its inception in 2011, Tropicana Foundation has donated more than RM23 million via cash donations, food bank, wellness products, daily necessities, and collaborative sponsorships to various charitable causes.

REMPAH RATUS BUFFET 2022



"REMPAH RATUS" is the theme for 2022 Buka Puasa, or popularly known as Iftar at The Royale Chulan The Curve. This year, we unveil the dining options for iftar focusing on popular Malay traditional cuisines.

Centrally located within the bustling city of Mutiara Damansara and boasting a contemporary culinary setting with outstanding levels of service, Royale Chulan The Curve offers a memorable iftar dining experience ideal for family gatherings or business associates' get-togethers.

Upon breaking fast with an array of Malay kuih and Arab fine dates, guests will be able to enjoy a sumptuous buffet comprising a selection of Malay authentic kampung and contemporary dishes, including the highly recommended international spread that completes the delectable iftar experience.

The more than 1,000 dishes of the very best cuisines and specialties of the people of Malaysia such as ayam penyek ibu, daging salai masak lemak cili padi with belimbing, kambing kuzi, steamed fish Hong Kong style and sambal udang Sumatra are surely too tempting not to be missed. The new menu is crafted by Chef Zulfikri Bidin.

Price - RM88 Nett (Adult) RM58 Nett (Children ages 4-12)

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TENNIS

ALCARAZ 'BEST PLAYER' OF THE SEASON

Djokovic heaps praises on Spaniard before Roland Garros

ROME

NOVAK Djokovic on Monday hailed Carlos Alcaraz as the "best player" of the season so far and said the Spanish teenager is one of the "main favourites" for Roland Garros.

Djokovic, who opens his Rome campaign against Russia's Aslan Karatsev, lost to Alcaraz in the semi-finals in Madrid last weekend and paid tribute at a press conference.

After taking out Rafael Nadal and Djokovic, Alcaraz picked up his fourth title of the year on Sun-

day with victory over world No. 3 Alexander Zverev in the final.

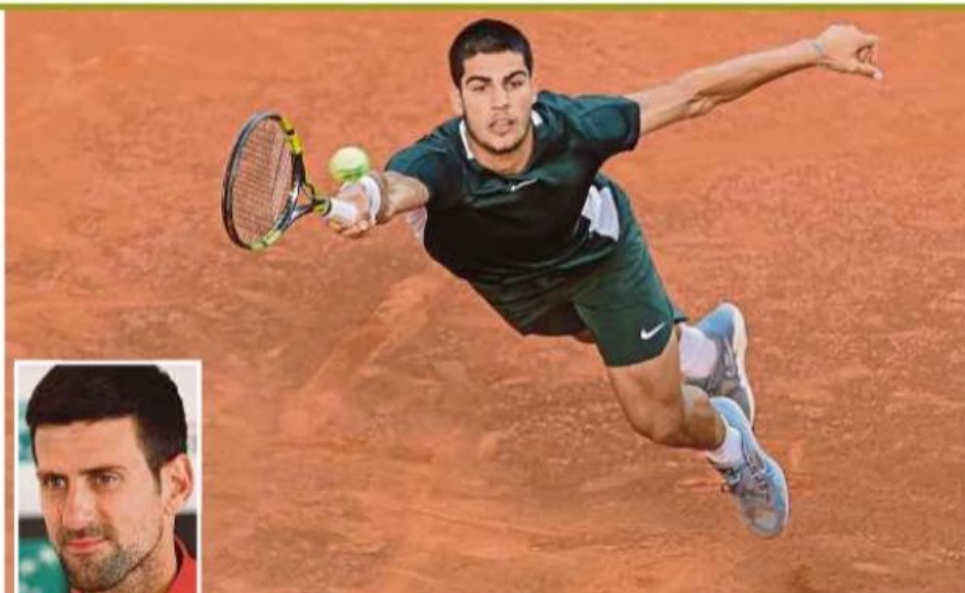
He became the youngest player since the start of the ATP Tour in 1990 to beat three top-five players at the same event.

"So far, he's the best player in the world, no question, this year with the results that he's been doing," Djokovic said at the Italian Open.

"The way he was dealing with the pressure in our match a few days ago, how calm he was all the way until the end, was impressive. He deserved to win the trophy."

Alcaraz hit a career-high ranking of No 6 on Monday and leads the tour with 28 wins against three losses this year.

The 19-year-old has seven top-10 victories this season, more than any other player. He is skipping the Rome tournament so he can be in peak condition for the



Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball to Germany's Alexander Zverev during their Madrid Open final at the Caja Magica on Sunday. (Inset) Novak Djokovic. AFP PIC

French Open later this month.

"Everything about his game is really impressive. He's a really complete player, can play equally well offensively and defensively. He's the talk of the sport," added Djokovic of Alcaraz.

"Roland Garros, he's definitely one of the main favourites, no doubt."

While he is searching for his peak form, Djokovic believes his own "level of tennis is really high now."

Meanwhile, third seed Rafael Nadal said he still has work to do to improve his game, having just returned from a six-week injury

lay-off in Madrid last week.

The 35-year-old has dealt with physical problems over his career, including a chronic foot injury that flared up last season, and ruled him out of Wimbledon and the US Open.

Nadal returned at the start of 2022, having played just two matches in the previous six months, and stormed to a 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open. He accumulated a 20-0 win-loss record before falling to Taylor Fritz in the Indian Wells semi-finals.

Nadal said it's tougher his game this time because the injury

struck mid-season rather than at the end of a campaign.

"My body is like an old machine."

"To put this machine on again it already takes some time," explained Nadal, who faces John Isner or Francisco Cerundolo in his opening match in Rome.

"It's not the same when you have 19 than when you are almost 36, with all the issues that I went through in my tennis career, no?"

"I am confident that I can play well honestly. I need some time, but maybe this week can be a positive week, maybe not. Who knows?" **AFP**

GOLF

Mickelson, Woods set to join PGA fray

LOS ANGELES: Former world No. 1 Tiger Woods and defending champion Phil Mickelson were named in the field for next week's PGA Championship on Monday.

Woods, who made a dramatic return from injuries sustained in a 2021 car crash at last month's Masters, has not played since his final round at Augusta.

The 15-time major winner — including the PGA Championship in 1999, 2000, 2006 and 2007 — has yet to confirm he will tee it up at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for the second major of the 2022 campaign, on May 19 to 22.

News of Woods' possible participation at Southern Hills in-



Tiger Woods (left) and Phil Mickelson during a practice round prior to the 2018 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia. AFP PIC

tensified after he played a practice round at the course recently.

Reports said he planned to play the tournament barring setbacks.

Woods hopes to play in the 150th British Open in July at St. Andrews and a two-day tune-up event in Ireland before that, but is firm about other tournaments, including the PGA Championship and the US Open in June

in Boston.

Mickelson, meanwhile, has not played since triggering uproar in February following publication of his remarks made last year concerning the new Saudi Arabia-backed LIV Golf Series.

US reports said on Monday that Mickelson had held talks with PGA of America officials about his schedule but had not decide whether he would defend his title. **AFP**

FORMULA ONE

Mercedes caught in 'no man's land'

MIAMI: For the team that has dominated Formula One, the landscape is looking bumpier this season.

Mercedes, team boss Toto Wolff said after the Miami Grand Prix, are caught in "no man's land".

Lewis Hamilton's narrow failure to take the driver's title last year was the only blip on Mercedes eight years ownership of the team and individual titles.

Yet this year Hamilton, 37, and his teammate, George Russell, 24, are struggling to keep pace with the Red Bulls and Ferraris.

On Sunday, the seven-time world champion could finish only sixth, one place behind Russell in the inaugural Miami Grand Prix, the fifth race of the season.

Even with some improvement in performance, especially in practice, Mercedes are well off the pace and a shadow of the

team that has dominated the sport.

"We're the same speed as we were in the first race. We just haven't improved in these five races," said Hamilton, who lies sixth in the standings with 36 points, 68 behind leader Charles Leclerc.

Hamilton's mood has hardly been helped by being outperformed in the new car by Russell, who is fourth with 59 points.

They have managed a single podium each. Hamilton took a fortuitous third in the opening race in Bahrain when both Red Bulls dropped out. Russell was third in Melbourne.

Hamilton's demeanour since losing the 2021 title to Max Verstappen in the final lap of last race, after which he hinted at retirement, has also raised eyebrows. **AFP**

FOOTBALL

SWEET VICTORY AT HAND

Manchester City captain believes Premier League title within reach

LONDON

MANCHESTER City captain Fernandinho has said winning the Premier League title this season would be especially sweet.

The 37-year-old Brazilian midfielder is set to leave the Etihad Stadium at the end of the season after nine years at the club.

Reigning champions City have been involved in a protracted battle for the title with Liverpool, but established a three-point lead at the top of the table last weekend by thrashing Newcastle 5-0, while their rivals could draw only 1-1 at home to Tottenham Hotspur.

It was the result City needed after an agonising 6-5 aggregate semi-final loss to Real Madrid still left them waiting for a first European Champions League title after they conceded two goals in the closing seconds of normal time.

"Every title is sweet," said Fernandinho, bidding for his fifth Premier League winner's medal.

"It's going to be one more... with a little more sugar."



Manchester City's Fernandinho (second from right) and Phil Foden (right) celebrates after the Premier League match against Newcastle United on Sunday. REUTERS PIC

"It was a great response, but at the same time, we are focusing on ourselves and know the title is in our hands."

He added: "It doesn't matter what they do over there, we have to keep going through all the hard games. This is what we are trying to do, focus on ourselves, but I thought it was a great response after the defeat in Madrid, especially for our fans and ourselves, because when you lose a match like this, the confidence can go a little bit down."

"But not just the result, the performance overall was really good and we are happy about that."

One downside for City in their win over Newcastle was when Ruben Dias went off injured at half-time.

He has now joined fellow defenders John Stones and Kyle Walker among City's casualty list, with none of the trio expected to play again this season.

Fernandinho, deployed as a makeshift centre-back after Dias's departure, said: "We have injury issues but — at the end of the season — that is normal."

AFP

Klopp: Citizens signing Haaland would 'set new levels'

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund top striker Erling Haaland is close to sealing a transfer deal with Manchester City and a move to the lucrative Premier League, several German media reported on Monday.

Haaland is among the hottest transfer prospects this summer with the 21-year-old Norwegian having scored 61 goals in 66 league games for the Ruhr valley club since joining them in 2020.

Several top clubs, including Real Madrid, Paris St. Germain and City, among others, have been linked with the player at times.

Sky Germany, which holds the rights to the Bundesliga, reported

on Monday the player had informed the club of his wish to leave and that Manchester City had contacted the club over the player's release clause.

Several other media outlets, including the *Bild* newspaper and *Kicker* magazine, citing unnamed sources, said a deal could be finalised in the coming days.

The club did not comment on the matter on Monday.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said he was ready to battle City for more trophies in the future, but admitted Haaland moving to their title rivals was transfer that would take things to the next level.



Erling Haaland warming up before the Bundesliga match at Sportpark Ronhof Thomas Sommer, Fuerth, in Germany on Saturday. REUTERS PIC

"I signed a new contract (until 2026) knowing that City will not stop developing," said Klopp.

"It's not about City to define if we can be happy or not. It's about us and what we can make of it."

"If Haaland goes there, that will not weaken them. I know in the moment that other people talk about money, but this transfer

will set new levels."

Dortmund are interested in Salzburg forward Karim Adeyemi as a possible Haaland replacement.

Dortmund sports director Sebastian Kehl had said on Sunday that the club wanted to have clarity on the matter of Haaland this week. **Reuters**

FIXTURES

PREMIER LEAGUE		
TODAY		
LEEDS	v	CHELSEA
(Tomorrow, 2.30am)		
LEICESTER	v	NORWICH
(Tomorrow, 2.45am)		
WATFORD	v	EVERTON
(Tomorrow, 2.45am)		
WOLVES	v	MAN CITY
(Tomorrow, 3.15am)		
TOMORROW		
TOTTENHAM	v	ARSENAL
(Friday, 2.45am)		

HOCKEY

Skills take a backseat

IN a break from tradition, fitness will take priority over skills in the selection for hockey's Asia Cup.

National chief coach Arul Selvaraj is looking for players who can last the pace of seven matches in 10 days, as he targets a podium finish in Jakarta on May 23 to June 1.

The Asia Cup is a World Cup qualifier that offers four tickets to India in January next year. Malaysia are one of the favourites to make the trip based on the grouping.

Malaysia have South Korea, Bangladesh and Oman in Group B while India, Pakistan, Japan and Indonesia battle for the two spots in Group A.

"This time, the selection will be different because fitness will be the top criterion, and some skilful players may see themselves sitting out."

"We have no choice but to select the fittest because the tournament will see seven matches in 10 days, and fitness will be the winning factor."

"I will select my team by May 13. I have an idea and will stick to it, barring any injury leading to selection."

Arul had placed GPS trackers on the players during the recent Australia tour, and he knows their work rate in the 3-0, 7-0, 5-0 and 3-0 losses in the four-match Test series against the World No. 1.

"GPS trackers' data and fitness trainer Tom Drowley's assessment will be instrumental in our selection for the Asia Cup."

Malaysia are looking beyond the Asia Cup as Arul has started planning for the World Cup.

"We will play in the Azlan Shah Cup and go on a tour of Spain at the end of the year to prepare for the World Cup which is in January next year." **By Jugjet Singh**

31ST SEA GAMES HANOI 2022 MAY 12-23

FOOTBALL

MALAYSIA EYE REVENGE

Maloney's boys going for Laos' scalp

K. RAJAN
k.rajan@nst.com.my

THOUGH Laos humiliated Malaysia in the Under-23 AFF Cup three months ago, Brad Maloney's boys are poised to take revenge today in the Sea Games.

After stunning 16-time Sea Games champions Thailand 2-1 in their Group B opener last week, Malaysia are brimming with confidence this time at the Thien Truong Stadium, Nam Dinh.

At the AFF meet, a depleted Malaysian team suffered 2-0 and 2-1 defeats to lowly Laos, leading to fans lambasting the Young Tigers on social media.

However, the stage is set for the Young Tigers to redeem themselves today.

Nur Azfar Fikri Azhar, the hero of Malaysia's win over Thailand with an injury time goal, admitted that the two earlier losses to Laos "hurt" the team.

Midfielder Azfar, who is known as Kaka, vowed to play hard and make Laos pay if he is fielded.

Against Thailand with 10 minutes to go, he had come in as a reserve and replaced Luqman Hakim Shamsudin.

Laos started their Sea Games campaign with a creditable 2-2 draw with Singapore last week but suffered a 4-1 loss to Cambodia on Monday.

Malaysia will have to keep an eye on Laos captain Bounphachan Bounkong and midfielder Thanouthong Kietnalon-

glop as both are linchpins of their team.

Maloney said his players are in high spirits but warned that Laos are capable of raising their game.

The Australian coach urged his team to keep their feet on the ground following their rousing show against heavyweights Thailand.

"Laos have always given us a tough fight. They have good players and are a team who don't get the credit that they should get."

"We respect Laos, they have quality and can cause trouble."

"We will stick to our philosophy and stay positive."

"The Thai game was very physical and our players picked up knocks and bruises. Our medical staff are working hard on keeping the players fresh."

"The players have been playing

FIXTURES

SEA GAMES	
GROUP B	
TODAY	
CAMBODIA	SINGAPORE
(Thien Truong Stadium, Nam Dinh, 3pm)	
MALAYSIA	LAOS
(Thien Truong Stadium, Nam Dinh, 6pm)	
* Malaysian time	

in the M-League, so there's no problem with fitness but we have to be careful playing through a tight round of fixtures."

Maloney said he believes striker Hadi Fayyadh Abdul Razak, who plays for Japanese club, Azul Claro Numazu, will soon score after coming in as a reserve against Thailand.

"Hadi is a great asset with his size up front. He also brings with him the experience of playing in Japan," said Maloney.



Malaysia players training yesterday for their Sea Games match against Laos.

GOLF

Alyaa aces dream debut in major championship

A MAJOR championship start could not have come sooner for rookie professional Alyaa Abdulghany.

On Monday, the 23-year-old qualified for the prestigious US Women's Open from June 2-5 after securing a top-two finish through a sectional qualifier at Pauma Valley Country Club in

California.

Alyaa passed the gruelling 36-hole contest with flying colours by posting a pair of 69s to tie in first spot with American amateur Catherine Park on four-under 138.

It will be a debut to remember for Alyaa at the Pine Needles Lodge & Country Club next month, as she will get to compete not only with the world's best players but also stand a chance to grab a share of the US\$10m (RM43.83m) prize purse on offer.

Alyaa, who only turned professional last year, is currently pursuing her LPGA Tour dream through the second-tier Epson Tour in the US.

Qualifying for the US Women's Open is certainly no easy feat.

Except for those exempted by virtue of being major event winners or ranked in the world's top

75, the rest have to earn their tickets through the sectional qualifying.

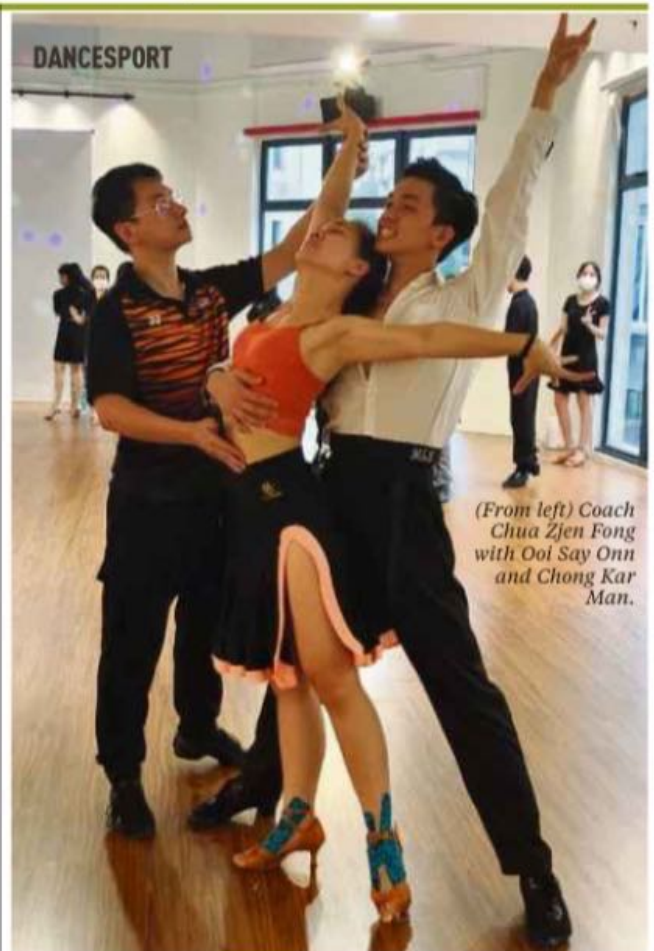
A record of 1,874 entries was received across 24 sectional qualifiers in the US and three additional international sites.

Elsewhere, in Phuket, Shahrifuddin Ariffin came agonisingly close to winning his second Asian Development Tour (ADT) title as he settled for the runner-up position at the Laguna Phuket Cup.

Shahrifuddin was pipped by Thailand's Sarin Sirithon in the third extra hole played on the par-five 18th of the Laguna Golf Phuket, after the latter carded a birdie against his par.

Sarin forced a playoff after he fired a final round of 65 to match Shahrifuddin's 54-hole total of 14-under 196 at the end of the regulation play. **Tan Ming Wai**

DANCESPORT



(From left) Coach Chua Zhen Fong with Ooi Say Onn and Chong Kar Man.

Malaysia's Latin pairs want to dance to podium

AFTER countless hours of practice, Malaysia's dancesport couples hope their hardwork and sacrifices will pay off at the Sea Games when they take to the floor in Long Bien on May 15-16.

Team manager Chua Zhen Fong said Latin pairs Ooi Say Onn-Chong Kar Man and Ooi Say Keat-Che Xin Nee have shown significant improvement following a three-week training stint in Bologna, Italy, in March.

They had trained under Latin world champions Gabrielle Goffredo and Anna Matus.

Zhen Fong and his wife, Evon Chong, who are both former national champions in the Latin discipline, are also serving as coaches for the Sea Games squad.

"They were there (Bologna) for three weeks which was not really long enough," said Zhen Fong yesterday.

"There was an option for them to continue training somewhere else in Italy after the three weeks but as it was a self-funded trip, there was just not enough to continue."

"They resumed training under me and my wife after returning to

Malaysia. I was quite surprised with their dramatic improvement (despite the short duration of their stint) and their motivation level is also really high."

"We usually start training at 6am and later in the day until 9pm. They (couples) also have to teach their own classes to earn a living."

"Of course we want to win the gold in Vietnam but for us to finish on the podium with any medal will be a great achievement, and it will help us get more publicity and support for the sport."

Zhen Fong said the dancers from Thailand, the Philippines and hosts Vietnam are expected to make a strong presence at the Sea Games.

The dancesport squad are competing under 'B' category where they are self-funded but will be reimbursed if they win a medal.

Malaysia won one gold in dancesport at the 2019 Manila Sea Games through Sam Lee Jek.

Breaking, which is set to make its Olympic debut at Paris 2024, is however, not included by the Hanoi Sea Games organisers. **Fadhli Ishak**



DIVING

FOR WENDY OLD IS GOLD

Veteran of seven Sea Games now has seven titles in her collection



Wendy Ng in action in the 3m springboard event at the Sea Games yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

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DIVER Wendy Ng has proved once again that she is the undisputed springboard queen in the region.

Yesterday, the 28-year-old secured a springboard double for the second Games running when she clinched the 3m individual title — a day after winning the synchro event with Ong Ker Ying.

It was not her best performance, but the three-time Olympian was still heads and shoulders above her rivals.

She posted a 270.60 total to win the gold by nearly 30 points from her teammate Ker Ying (242.40) at the My Dinh Aquatics Centre.

Singapore's Fong Kay Yian claimed bronze with

230.15 points.

For Wendy, her achievement in Hanoi was certainly a redemption of sorts following a dismal campaign at the Tokyo Olympics last year.

Then, she could not hold back her tears after failing to make the final for the second time.

"I think my performance wasn't that good considering that I am a senior diver," said Wendy yesterday.

"I feel like I could have done better."

"However, I still managed to win the gold, really grateful with this journey as I am still able to dive at my age."

"I am already 29, and I think I'm the oldest in this springboard event."

"And winning the individual gold is always special. Everyone knows how I performed in Tokyo last year, so I'm really happy to-

day."

Wendy has now collected a total of seven gold medals from seven appearances in the Sea Games.

It could have been nine titles, but her individual and synchro victories at the 2017 Kuala Lumpur edition were stripped after a failed doping test.

Meanwhile, Hanis Nazirul and Jellson Jabilin made it a double joy by dominating the men's 10m platform synchro to make it six gold medals in as many events in Hanoi.

The Malaysian pair came out tops after posting 345.93 points for their second straight gold in the event.

It took them nearly five years to taste the success again as their event was not contested in Manila two years ago.

Singapore's Jonathan Chan-Max Lee finished second with a

322.50 total, while Vietnam Nguyen Quang Dat-Dang Hoang Tu took the bronze on 251.46.

Two-time Olympic medalist Pandeleta Rinong will finally make an appearance in Hanoi when she competes in the wom-

en's 10m platform synchro with Nur Dhabitah Sabri. They are expected to win the title easily.

Syafiq Puteh, meanwhile, is the overwhelming favourite in the men's 3m springboard individual.

Springboard to success

CHEF de Mission Datuk Nur Azmi Ahmad (pic) has lauded the Sea Games diving squad for living up to expectations at the My Dinh Aquatics Centre in Hanoi.

The national divers have been a class above their rivals in Hanoi by sweeping all gold medals on offer.

On Monday, Malaysia picked up another two titles through Ooi Tze Liang (men's 1m springboard) and Wendy Ng-Ong Ker Ying (women's 3m synchronised).

Nur Dhabitah Sabri (women's 1m springboard) and Chew Yiwei-Tze Liang (men's 3m synchronised) were the gold medalists on Sunday.

Azmi said other Malaysian athletes in Hanoi should emulate the mental strength and determination displayed by the divers.

"Of course, the divers are a great example (for other athletes) as they are well on their way to achieving their vision and mission here," said Azmi.

"The target is eight gold (from diving), and they are already close to achieving it."

"Hopefully, we will celebrate them winning the remaining gold medals."

"I believe they are mentally strong and are also well prepared."

"They also have the advantage of having the now-retired Datuk Leong Mun Yee as their team manager."

"She is very experienced and has plenty of in-depth knowledge of the sport, which I believe has rubbed off on the divers."

Adapting to the new venue in Hanoi had been a concern for the divers, especially those competing in the springboard disciplines, as there was very little time to train there ahead of the competition.

The diving team are in a transition following the retirements of former world champion Cheong Jun Hoong and Mun Yee.

A good outing in the Sea Games will definitely spur the divers when they compete in bigger competitions.

Mun Yee, who retired after last year's Tokyo Olympics, holds the record for most Sea Games titles in diving, with 17 gold.

Malaysia had won four gold in total at the 2019 Manila edition when the platform disciplines were not part of the Games. **Fadhli Ishak**

SILAT

Jufferi takes on heavier rivals

THREE-TIME world silat champion Al Jufferi Jamari (pic) is keeping his expectations low in his fifth Sea Games in Hanoi.

That is because Jufferi has switched to the men's F category (70-75kg) after 12 years of dominating the E category (65-70kg) in the previous editions.

The 30-year-old former National Sportsman of the Year, who weighs 70.2kg, said he is still adapting to the heavier category in Hanoi.

He said there are also some rules change, and after not competing in the last two years due to Covid-19, he needs to get used to things.

"I had an injury and my bodyweight increased seven months ago, so I decided to switch to the higher weight class," said Al Jufferi who had won four consecutive gold medals in the E category, starting from 2011 in Indonesia.

"It's not easy to adjust immediately and for this Sea Games, my target is to reach the final, considering I could be the lightest competitor in the new class."

"It gets harder for me to fight my opponents as they could be weighing 74kg. It requires a lot of strength to grapple and you need to apply the right technique." **K. Rajan**



BADMINTON

REVERSE PARK-ING BY JAPAN

Coach Joo Bong says the Samurai are not in 'best shape' for Malaysia showdown

IS Japan head coach Park Joo Bong (pic) playing mind games with Malaysia ahead of today's explosive Thomas Cup Group D clash in Bangkok?

Joo Bong, a South Korean Olympic champion, has claimed that "The Samurai" are not in their best shape to mount a strong challenge in this



year's edition.

He pointed out that two-time world champion Kento Momota's poor run and second singles Kenta Tsuneyama's recent wrist injury might ruin their hopes of clinching their second Thomas Cup title after the 2014 triumph. Japan had defeated the Lee Chong Wei-led Malaysia 3-2 in the

2014 final in New Delhi.

"For me, this is not the best team that we have. We also did not have enough time to prepare (for the tournament).

"Momota is not in good form, while Tsuneyama had just recovered from an injury," he said at the Impact Arena in Bangkok yesterday.

Joo Bong is probably trying to remove pressure from his players ahead of the Malaysia clash.

On paper, Japan are still the favourites to beat their rivals and top the group.

Malaysia and Japan have recorded two wins each, and today's tie will decide the group champions.

In last year's edition in Aarhus, Denmark, the Momota-led Japan defeated Malaysia 4-1 to top their group.

Meanwhile, the South Korean also admitted that Japan's Uber

Cup squad were not well-prepared for the tournament due to form and injuries.

"World No 6 Nozomi Okuhara had just recovered from injury while one of our main doubles shuttlers, Sayaka Hirota, had just returned from surgery.

"Overall, my feeling is that this squad are not the best, but we will try our best," he added.

Japan have qualified for the Uber Cup quarter-finals following 5-0 victories over Germany and France in Group A ties. **Bernama**

GIVEN the magnitude of the tie, world No 6 Lee Zii Jia and Tokyo Olympics bronze medallists Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik will have to play a crucial role when Malaysia take on 2014 Thomas Cup champions Japan in their final Group D match today.

BA of Malaysia (BAM) coaching director Wong Choong Hann said it was important for these senior players to take the lead and give Malaysia a head start if they were to upset the form book at the Impact Arena in Bangkok.

On paper, the Japanese will start as favourites, with world No 2 Kento Momota and reigning men's doubles world champions Takuro Hoki-Yugo Kobayashi expected to take to the court in the

Seniors hold the key in crunch match

first singles and doubles match.

However, an upset in both these matches would not only boost the confidence of the entire team but also set the tone for the remaining three matches as Malaysia look to end their group stage campaign as winners for the first time since the 2016 edition in Kunshan, China.

"I know this is a team event, and everybody must play their role, but realistically, these players do hold the key in the tie against Japan and how it shapes up.

"Players like Zii Jia and Aaron-Wooi Yik always give their best when they play, so it could go either way.

"As a team, we have strategies to face Japan, as it is our target to try and top the group.

"There could only be two things. Either we take an assailable lead, or it could go down to the wire," said Choong Hann.

After having started in the 5-0 drubbing of England in the opening tie on Monday, Zii Jia, Aaron and Wooi Yik were rested when Malaysia played the United

States yesterday.

Similarly, Japan also rested their top guns in the 5-0 thrashing of the US on Monday but started with Momota and a scratch combination of Hoki-Yuta Watanabe in the match against England.

Only the top two teams from each group will reach the knockout stage before a fresh draw is conducted for the quarter-finals.

The winners from each group will be seeded first to fourth.

At the previous edition in Aarhus, Denmark, Malaysia fin-

PROBABLE MATCH-UPS

Singles 1 — Lee Zii Jia v Kento Momota

Doubles 1 — Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik v Takuro Hoki-Yugo Kobayashi

Singles 2 — Liew Daren v Kenta Tsuneyama

Doubles 2 — Ong Yew Sin-Teo Ee Yi v Akira Koga-Taichi Saito

Singles 3 — Ng Tze Yong v Kenta Nishimoto.

ished second in the group after losing 4-1 to Japan.

Apart from Zii Jia and Aaron-Wooi Yik, the other players expected to play today are 2018 World Championships bronze medallist Liew Daren, Ong Yew Sin-Teo Ee Yi and world No 46 Ng Tze Yong. **Fabian Peter**

Good show by the girls despite defeats

DESPITE failing to reach the quarter-finals, there are still plenty of positives from Malaysia's Uber Cup campaign in Bangkok.

For one, Malaysia's young shuttlers Myisha Khairul and Tan Zhing Yi gave good accounts of themselves, especially in the group ties against Denmark and Thailand.

On Sunday, the team lost 3-2 to Denmark before their hopes of reaching the knockout stage for the first time since 2010 were dashed by the host nation in a 4-1 defeat.

Myisha, 19, played in both ties, losing 21-12, 21-9 to Line Kjaersfeldt in the third singles match against Denmark and 22-20, 21-10 against world No 10 Pornpawee Chochuwong in the second singles match against Thailand.

Another debutante, 18-year-old Zhing Yi, also gave world No 12 Busanan Ongbamrungphan a decent fight before succumbing 21-

19, 21-6 in the third singles match.

BA of Malaysia (BAM) coaching director Wong Choong Hann acknowledged that Malaysia still have a long way to go as far as women's badminton is concerned but noted that the future looks bright with the emergence of these up-and-coming players.

"Coming into the tournament, we knew it would be a tall order to reach the quarter-finals, but I can say that we are pleased with how some of these youngsters have performed.

"Bear in mind, people like Zhing Yi have only been training with the senior squad for a couple of weeks before coming here.

"To play the way they did with some of the best in the world is commendable.

"Surely, they lost out on experience and physical ability, but they now know where they stand and what to work on when they

head back.

"On our part, we will continue to work on their programmes to push them further," said Choong Hann.

The former world No 1 also noted that BAM will continue to stand by underperforming women's singles shuttler S. Kisona, who continues to struggle following a horrid season last year.

The 23-year-old former Sea Games champion was criticised for her poor performance in the opening tie against Denmark and was subsequently dropped against Thailand and Egypt.

"Honestly, Kisona has been working really hard to regain her rhythm after a very bad year. Yes, she is still finding her footing, but I believe it is important for us to stand by her.

"It is still early in the year, and we want to give her that chance to find her form," he added.

As for two-time former world



Pearly Tan (left) and M. Thinaah celebrate after beating Thailand's Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai in their Uber Cup match on Monday. **BERNAMA PIC**

junior champion Goh Jin Wei, who came out of retirement to pursue a professional career, Choong Hann said: "Jin Wei is a gifted player, we have never questioned that.

"However, she feels that she needs to find her own way as a professional, and that is fine by us.

"As the national institution, we will support her in whatever way

we can, and that sentiment remains the same."

Women's doubles Pearly Tan-M. Thinaah were the best performing Malaysians, winning both their matches against Denmark's No 1 Maiken Fruergaard-Sara Thygesen and Thailand's world No 8 Jongkolphan Kititharakul-Rawinda Prajongjai. **Fabian Peter**



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JOO BONG STIRS UP MIND GAMES

JAPAN coach Park Joo Bong claims the Samurai are not good enough to win the Thomas Cup ahead of today's explosive battle against Malaysia.

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TIGERS EYE REVENGE AGAINST LAOS IN HANOI » **PAGE 45**



Wendy in full flow

WENDY Ng keeps the gold medals flowing from the pool for Malaysia as she dominates the 3m springboard at the Sea Games.

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