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# THE STRAITS TIMES



Former US president Donald Trump ducking after gunfire rang out at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13. PHOTOS: REUTERS



Secret Service agents rushing onto the stage to shield Trump, who was hit in the right ear, streaking his face with blood.

News analysis  
*Trump could ride a sympathy wave to win US election*



**Bhagyashree Garekar**

US Bureau Chief

## Trump survives assassination attempt after major security lapses

**Gunman shot dead after attack that killed rally attendee; US political divide set to deepen**

BUTLER, Pennsylvania – Donald Trump survived a weekend assassination attempt days before he is due to accept the formal Republican presidential nomination, in an attack that will further inflame the US political divide and has raised questions about the security lapses.

Trump, 78, had just begun a campaign speech in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13 when shots rang out, hitting the former president's right ear and streaking his face with blood.

"Fight! Fight! Fight!" he mouthed to supporters, pumping his fist, as Secret Service agents rushed him away. His campaign said he was doing well and appeared to have suffered no major injury besides a wound on his upper right ear.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation identified 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, as the suspect in what it called an attempted assassination.

He was a registered Republican, according to state voter records, and had made a US\$15 (S\$20) donation to a Democratic political action committee at the age of 17.

Law enforcement officials told reporters they had not yet identified a motive for the attack.

The shooting occurred less than four months before the Nov 5 election, when Trump faces a rematch with Democratic President Joe Biden. Most opinion polls show the two locked in a close contest.

The suspect was shot dead by Secret Service agents, the agency said, after he opened fire from the roof of a building about 140m from the stage where Trump was speaking.

An AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle was recovered near his body. The firearm was legally purchased by the suspect's father, ABC and The Wall Street Journal reported. Bomb-making materials were found in the suspect's car, the Associated Press reported.

One person who attended the rally was killed and two other spectators were critically wounded, the Secret Service said.

"In this moment, it is more important than ever that we stand United, and show our True Character as Americans, remaining Strong and Determined, and not allowing Evil to Win," Trump said on his Truth Social service on July 14.

Trump left the Butler area under Secret Service protection and later arrived at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

In a statement, the Secret Service denied accusations by some Trump supporters that it had rejected campaign requests for addi-



Trump pumping his fist while being escorted off stage by Secret Service agents. He left the Butler area under their protection and later arrived at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey. Trump's campaign said he was doing well and appeared to have suffered no major injury. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

### Society should never resort to violence: PM

Society should never resort to violence, said Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on July 14, revealing that he was shocked at the news of an assassination attempt on former US president Donald Trump at a campaign rally.

In a Facebook post, PM Wong said: "I was shocked to hear

about the assassination attempt on Donald Trump. I am relieved to hear reports that he is safe and recovering well.

"Our thoughts are also with the family of the deceased and those injured and impacted by the senseless attack. We should never resort to violence regardless of any differences of views."

tional security.

"The assertion that a member of the former president's security team requested additional security resources that the US Secret Service or the Department of Homeland Security rebuffed is absolutely false," said Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi.

"In fact, recently the US Secret Service added protective resources and capabilities to the former president's security detail."

A prosecutor said it was "surprising" that a shooter was able to position himself on a nearby rooftop before opening fire.

"That's the most surprising thing to me, when we have a former president here, that a guy was able to get, as you say, 150 yards (137 metres) away, able to get up on a roof and be able to take a shot," said Butler County's district attorney Richard Goldinger.

"I do know we had some law enforcement in that building, which is even more surprising that he

was able to get up there," he told MSNBC, adding the unit was normally used by a glass manufacturing company.

Former first lady Melania Trump said the gunman who opened fire at her husband was a "monster" as she condemned the assassination attempt.

While mass shootings are a regular feature of American life, the attack was the first shooting of a US president or major party candidate since the 1981 attempted assassination of Republican President Ronald Reagan.

The attack heightened long-standing worries that political violence could erupt during the presidential campaign and after the election.

The concerns in part reflect the electorate's polarisation, with the country appearing bitterly divided into two camps with divergent political and social visions.

Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol on Jan 6, 2021, in an at-

tempt to overturn his election defeat, fuelled by his false claims that his loss was the result of widespread fraud. More than 100 police officers were injured, five people died, and the Capitol suffered millions of dollars of damage in the violence.

Trump is due to receive his party's formal nomination at the Republican National Convention, which kicks off in Milwaukee on July 15.

Republican National Committee chairman Michael Whatley said on July 14 that the authorities are working together to ensure security at the party's convention.

Rally attendees described scenes of panic and chaos following the shooting.

The BBC interviewed a man who said he saw a man armed with a rifle crawling up a roof near the event.

The self-described eyewitness, whom the BBC did not identify, said he and the people he was with started pointing at the man, trying to alert security.

The shots appeared to come from outside the area secured by the Secret Service, the agency said.

Hours after the attack, the Oversight Committee in the Republican-led US House of Representatives summoned Secret Service director Kimberly Cheatle to testify at a hearing scheduled for July 22.

"Americans demand answers about the assassination attempt," the panel said.

Leading Republicans and Democrats quickly condemned the vi-

### MOMENT OF IMPACT

**I was shot with a bullet that pierced the upper part of my right ear. I knew immediately that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the bullet ripping through the skin.**



**DONALD TRUMP**, 78, on his Truth Social platform.

olence, as did foreign leaders.

"There's no place for this kind of violence in America. We must unite as one nation to condemn it," Mr Biden said in a statement.

Some of Trump's Republican allies said they believed the attack was politically motivated.

"For weeks, Democrat leaders have been fuelling ludicrous hysteria that Donald Trump winning re-election would be the end of democracy in America," said Representative Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican.

"Clearly we've seen far-left lunatics act on violent rhetoric in the past. This incendiary rhetoric must stop!" REUTERS

SEE THE BIG STORY • A4&5

DONEGAL, Pennsylvania – Will it be remembered as the moment when everything changed in the 2024 US presidential election?

The moment when former president Donald Trump escaped death by a quarter of an inch and at the same time breathed fresh life into his candidacy?

Of course, he is already ahead in the opinion polls, but by only a whisker. So could the July 13 attempt on his life become the moment that tilted the scale decisively?

The optics certainly suggest that.

Blood streaming down his face, flanked by his protective detail in mere seconds, the billionaire real estate mogul and former reality television star pumped his fist in the air and silently mouthed the word "fight" as he was led off stage at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"It's done, the race is won," a Republican Party insider told The Straits Times off the record because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

"The photo alone that is being widely circulated, a bloodied and bold Trump with a clenched fist, will stick in people's minds and will be the key image of this election cycle," he said.

"There's massive sympathy for him across the spectrum on the right," he said, adding that he expects to see a moderate but definite impact on undecided voters and those who are leaning towards Trump.

"I expect the energy to be through the roof," he said.

"It's already palpable in e-mail chains and group chats. Many on the right already viewed him as a martyr. This will solidify it," he said, in a reference to Trump supporters who view the clutch of lawsuits being waged against the former president as political persecution.

An hour away from the site of the Trump rally in Butler, two old friends who were out golfing rushed back into town as soon as they heard Trump had been shot.

"The chances of Trump being elected just went way up," said Mr Ron Aldom, the executive director at Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, speaking outside the HillBilly's Grub-n-Pub where he stopped for a beer.

Describing himself as a conservative voter, he lamented the lack of civility in US politics, saying the incident had shocked him. "We're just watching the whole thing on TV," he said.

"He comes off the stage like this," Mr Aldom said, acting out

CONTINUED ON PAGE A4

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# Number of babies born in 2023 falls to lowest in at least past 50 years

ICA data also shows number of deaths has been rising steadily in past decade

**Theresa Tan**  
Senior Social Affairs  
Correspondent

The number of babies born in 2023 fell to the lowest in at least the past 50 years, entrenching Singapore's great baby drought.

A total of 33,541 babies were born in 2023 – a 5.8 per cent fall from the 35,605 babies born in 2022. The 2023 figure is 13.3 per cent lower than the 38,672 babies born in 2021.

The number of babies born in 2023 is contained in the Report on Registration of Births and Deaths 2023 published by the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) on July 11.

The 2023 figure is the lowest since at least 1971, when 47,088 babies were born. The Straits Times found births and deaths statistics dating back to 1971 in past years' reports posted on the ICA website.

In February, it was announced that the resident total fertility rate (TFR) fell to below 1 for the first time in Singapore's history, though the actual number of babies born in 2023 was not stated.

The TFR, which refers to the average number of babies each woman would have during her reproductive years, was 0.97 in 2023 – one of the lowest in the world.

While the number of births has been falling, the number of deaths has been climbing steadily in the past decade.

A total of 26,888 people died in 2023, just 0.01 per cent lower than the 26,891 deaths in 2022. The 2023 figure was 10.7 per cent higher than the 24,292 deaths in 2021.

The leading causes of deaths were heart and hypertensive diseases, and lung and respiratory system diseases, which collectively accounted for half of all deaths in 2023. About a quarter of people died from cancer in 2023.

For the first time, the 2023 report presented data on the number of babies whose births were registered with a double-barrelled race, as their parents are of different races.

Of the babies born in 2023 whose parents are of different races, 28.4 per cent had double-barrelled race. This is up from 12.9 per cent in 2014.

From 2011, inter-ethnic couples were given the option of reflecting both their races when registering their child's birth.

This is on top of the existing option of choosing to reflect only either the father's or the mother's race.

The move comes given the growing number of inter-ethnic marriages over the years.

Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) senior research fellow Kalpana Vignehsa said: "As Singapore has become a globally connected city, it has become more common for people to want to recognise ethnic diversity within themselves and their children."

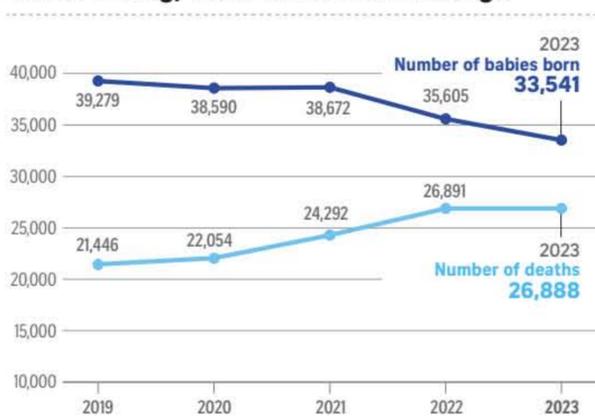
Dr Tan Poh Lin, another IPS senior research fellow, said data from the Department of Statistics showed that the fertility rate fell among female Singaporeans and permanent residents aged between 25 and 29, and between 30 and 34. This is one reason behind the falling number of births in 2023.

She said another factor could be



A total of 33,541 babies were born in 2023 – down 5.8 per cent from 35,605 births in 2022, and 13.3 per cent lower than the 38,672 births in 2021. ST FILE PHOTO

## Births falling, while deaths remain high



Source: REPORT ON REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS 2023 STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

concerns over the rising cost of living.

Dr Tan added: "Besides, the growing number of singles and smaller families may bolster social acceptability of these trends, which further reduces motivations to get married or have more children."

When asked about the fewer number of babies born in 2023, Professor Jean Yeung, director of social sciences at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Institute for Clinical Sciences, said the cost of having children falls disproportionately on women, as gender norms still assign most caregiving and housework responsibilities to them.

Prof Yeung, who is also a professor at NUS' Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said: "These responsibilities exert a high opportunity cost for women so that they usually end up forgoing higher wages, free time to pursue career development and self-interests, leisure, and consumption for themselves."

"In Asia, the social and economic pressure put on young parents for raising a high-achieving child who

excels in school performance adds another unattractive layer for young adults to want to have a baby."

Dr Tan Ern Ser, adjunct principal research fellow and academic adviser to the IPS Social Lab, said the rapidly ageing population is one factor behind the high number of deaths.

And if the number of babies born continues to fall and the number of deaths remains high, Singapore's population would shrink if there is no increase in immigration, he added.

Singapore's twin demographic challenges of a falling fertility rate and rapidly ageing population have serious implications for multiple issues, from the caregiving burden to economic dynamism.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Indraneel Rajah said during the Population Association of Singapore conference in May that low fertility rates, coupled with longer life expectancies, mean resources will be increasingly stretched as there are fewer working adults to support a rapidly ageing population.

She added: "Fewer births also mean that we will face a shrinking workforce."

"It will be more challenging to maintain our dynamism, attract global businesses, and create opportunities for the next generation."

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BARRIERS TO HAVING CHILDREN

**These responsibilities exert a high opportunity cost for women so that they usually end up forgoing higher wages, free time to pursue career development and self-interests, leisure, and consumption for themselves. In Asia, the social and economic pressure put on young parents for raising a high-achieving child who excels in school performance adds another unattractive layer for young adults to want to have a baby.**



**PROFESSOR JEAN YEUNG**, director of social sciences at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Institute for Clinical Sciences, noting that the cost of having children falls disproportionately on women, as gender norms still assign most caregiving and housework responsibilities to them.

# MP to push for cat sterilisation, stiffer penalties for animal abusers

**Esther Loi**

People who abuse animals may soon face stiffer penalties, while service providers found doing so may be looking at a lifetime ban on offering animal-related services.

These are among the proposals that Nee Soon GRC MP Louis Ng intends to make at an upcoming Parliament sitting, through an "extensive" White Paper to strengthen animal welfare in Singapore.

With the ban on pet cats in Housing Board flats to be lifted from September, he also said he would push for the sterilisation of pet cats to become mandatory.

At a forum on animal protection policies on July 14, Mr Ng said he was joined by Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam, who is also a Nee Soon GRC MP, to discuss ways to curb animal abuse, given the recent surge in animal cruelty and welfare cases.

Mr Ng said the White Paper he plans to submit to the Government will propose increased penalties for cases of animal abuse, as well as more clearly define the duty of care that those who own or work with animals must provide.

Currently, pet owners as well as animal-related businesses and shelters have to provide a positive duty of care to give these animals adequate food and water, among others.

The dialogue at Nee Soon East Community Club was attended by various animal welfare groups, such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Animal Concerns Research



Nee Soon GRC MP Louis Ng (right) speaking with participants at a forum on animal protection policies held at Nee Soon East Community Club on July 14. Various animal welfare groups also attended the event. ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG

and Education Society (Acres).

The issue of animal abuse by service providers came up strongly in the conversation. Mr Ng said he intends to press for a lifetime ban on owning animals or working in an animal-related business for those guilty of animal abuse, beyond the current disqualification period of up to 12 months.

He will also suggest mandating the sterilisation of cats living in HDB flats to prevent them from cat-terawling, or the howling that

cats use as mating calls.

This will reduce the number of residents who complain about noise disturbances from such cries and help ensure the smooth roll-out of the upcoming cat management framework, he said.

The White Paper will be extensive as it will take in policy suggestions and feedback from the forum, said Mr Ng, who founded Acres when he was an undergraduate.

At the dialogue, the two MPs fielded questions on animal wel-

fare, such as the distress pigeons are put under during culling exercises.

Mr Shanmugam said many residents face inconveniences due to the widespread growth of the pigeon population, and might think their MPs and town councils are not doing enough if immediate action is not carried out.

This is as other measures like cutting down on food sources and improving public education – to stop people from feeding pigeons –



Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam was also present, and he, along with Mr Ng, fielded questions on animal welfare.

take a longer time to bear results, and meanwhile, town councils will respond to complaints by introducing culling.

"The town council... is answerable to the MPs, and MPs are answerable to people," he said. "And these town councils who announced culling are reacting to the majority (view)."

Another question was whether animal welfare groups could be empowered to support enforcement efforts, which could reduce the response time when an abuse case is reported.

Mr Shanmugam cautioned that this would be problematic as it would vest authority in people who may not be trained to abide by a clear set of guidelines. But it may be possible to train a small group of accredited members of such orga-

nisations to function as an ancillary service, he added.

SPCA executive director Aarthi Sankar told The Straits Times that the organisation is looking at ways to expedite prosecution and enforcement action in cases of animal abuse.

Citing the Animal Welfare Board of India as an overseas example, she said the board – comprising professionals from the veterinary industry and animal welfare groups – advises the Indian government on related policies, since animals cannot advocate for themselves.

"By having a council like this, perhaps the government and policymakers can also be better advised on such issues," she added.

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# HOW TOUGH IS ENOUGH?

**This is Oystersteel, a high performance steel of grade 904L, produced for Rolex since 1985.** A stainless alloy which, once polished, will retain its brilliance and beauty in all circumstances. Among 3,500 industrial grades, only it was worthy of our standards. Rich in chromium and molybdenum, it is extremely resistant to impact and corrosion. Yet, at this stage, it is still not tough enough for us. Hence why we inspect it on a microscopic scale, from the shaping throughout the priming processes, so as to

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## NEED TO UNITE COUNTRY

**Look, there's no place in America for this kind of violence. It's sick. It's sick. It's one of the reasons why we have to unite this country... We cannot be like this. We cannot condone this.**



U.S. PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

## LOVE YOU, DAD

**I love you Dad, today and always... I continue to pray for our country.**



DONALD TRUMP'S DAUGHTER IVANKA

## NO PLACE FOR VIOLENCE

**Violence has no place in politics and democracies. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of the deceased, those injured and the American people.**



INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

## MONITORING DEVELOPMENTS

**China is following the shooting incident at the campaign rally of former US president Donald Trump. President Xi Jinping has expressed sympathies to former president Trump.**



CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON

## INEXCUSABLE ATTACK

**This was an inexcusable attack on the democratic values that Australians and Americans share and the freedom that we treasure.**



AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY ALBANESE

## CONDEMNING ALL VIOLENCE

**Together with all democracy-loving people around the world, we condemn all forms of political violence. The voice of the people must always remain supreme.**



PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT FERDINAND MARCOS JR

## RECOMMIT TO CIVILITY

**Although we don't yet know exactly what happened, we should all be relieved that former president Trump wasn't seriously hurt, and use this moment to recommit ourselves to civility and respect in our politics.**



FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

## PRAYING FOR THOSE AFFECTED

**We are praying for him, his family, and all those who have been injured and impacted by this senseless shooting.**



U.S. VICE-PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS

## News analysis

# Assassination attempt ratchets up battle of partisan narratives

FROM A1

how Trump had pumped his fist after being struck.

"I remembered when Reagan was shot, and he was saying I'm all right," he added, in a reference to the assassination attempt on then Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1981.

His friend Richard Heggie, who described himself as an independent from Michigan, was not sure that the evening's events would impact his vote.

"I want to know more about what happened," said the former business executive, who spent a part of his career in Singapore in the 1990s.

"I don't know if it's some crazy person on the far left or far right. Who knows what it is."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation later identified the shooter as 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks, who lived an hour away from where the shooting took place at Bethel Park, Pennsylvania.

State voter records show Crooks was a registered Republican, though he previously made a US\$15 (S\$20) donation to a political action committee that raises money for left-leaning and Democratic politicians, Reuters reported.

Dr John Fortier, a political analyst at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), was circumspect about the impact of the assassination attempt on the election.

"People rallied around president Reagan, and I expect there'll be some rallying around Trump," he said. "But I think it's too early to see an immediate implication on the race. We'll eventually get to know who the shooter was and what happened. And that could change what people think of this



Secret Service agents tending to Donald Trump moments after he was injured in an assassination attempt at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13. Republicans blamed Democrats on social media for fuelling the attack. PHOTO: AFP

altogether.

"He (Trump) will have lots of support within his party, and maybe that will go over to independents as well," he added.

Not long after the shooting, some Republicans began to blame Democrats on social media, saying their characterisation of Trump as a threat to democracy had created a dangerous environment. They also singled out a comment made by President Joe Biden to donors on July 8, that "it's time to put

Trump in the bull's eye".

Mr Biden, along with other senior Democratic Party figures, was quick to condemn the shootings.

Other Democrats, meanwhile, wondered if the whole thing had been staged. "Staged" began trending as a search term.

Apart from the parallels with the attack on Mr Reagan, experts point to the tumultuous 1960s, which saw the assassinations of then President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and his brother Robert

Kennedy in 1968, when he was running as a presidential candidate. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr was also assassinated in 1968.

More recently, former US Representative Gabby Giffords was shot in 2011, while House Majority Leader Steve Scalise was injured in a 2017 shooting. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband was bludgeoned with a hammer in October 2022.

"We've had presidents assassinated, but thankfully not

for over 60 years," said AEI's Dr Fortier. "The temperature has gone up a lot, and it would be a good thing to bring it down."

An opportunity to cool down the highly charged atmosphere leading up to the election looms large on July 15, when the four-day Republican National Convention kicks off in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Some analysts see Trump's "fight" remarks after being shot at as having the potential to stoke the heat. Dr Fortier disagrees. "I don't take it as any sort of call for violence. This is the reaction of somebody having been shot. I take it primarily as a sign of showing the crowd that he's okay and with them," he said.

The real question is whether the deeply polarised nation, where members of the same family today eschew political discussions to avoid offending one another, can agree to disagree.

Dr Fortier seems sceptical. "There may be a little pause in partisan attacks," he said, adding it would be short-lived.

"We are in the middle of a campaign, and we're likely to go back to things at some point. There's no way this is going to sort of be a politics-free sympathy zone for Trump all the way to the election."

As the day wore on, Trump announced that he would attend the convention, likely solidifying the perception among his supporters that he is a fighter.

If independent voters – one in two voters as per some surveys – agree and if suburban women view the former president with sympathy enough to swing to his side, he could win by a big margin.

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## Possible lapses in focus after gunman evades security to get on rooftop

WASHINGTON – Republican lawmakers said they would launch swift investigations into how a person apparently managed to evade Secret Service agents and climb onto the roof of a building near where Donald Trump was speaking at an election rally and fire multiple shots before being killed.

Mr Mike Johnson, speaker of the Republican-controlled US House of Representatives, said panels in the Chamber will call officials from the Secret Service, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for hearings soon.

The House oversight panel called Secret Service director Kimberly Cheatle to testify on July 22.

The attack has raised questions about how the Republican presidential candidate is protected on the campaign trail and what caused the apparent security lapses at the July 13 rally.

While information about the incident is still sparse, at least one person interviewed by the BBC said he had tried to alert the police and the US Secret Service, to no avail, to an apparent sniper climbing onto a nearby roof outside the security perimeter of the rally venue in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Trump supporters blasted the Secret Service, which has the primary responsibility for protecting Trump as a former US president. Billionaire ally Elon Musk called for the agency's leadership to resign.

"How was a sniper with a full rifle kit allowed to bear crawl onto the closest roof to a presidential nominee," asked conservative activist Jack Posobiec on social media site X.

FBI Special Agent Kevin Rojek, speaking at a press briefing, called the number of shots the attacker was able to fire "surprising".

The Secret Service did not have a representative in that press brief-

ing late on July 13, which included FBI and state law enforcement officials.

The Secret Service said shortly after the shooting that it had begun an investigation and briefed Democratic President Joe Biden, Trump's rival in the Nov 5 election, though the agency did not immediately respond to additional requests for comment regarding its protocols.

The Pennsylvania State Police referred questions to the Secret Service, which did not respond immediately.

Attendee Ben Maser was outside the rally perimeter, listening to Trump, when he noticed two officers seemingly looking for someone. Mr Maser, a 41-year-old welder, started scanning the area too.

"I saw the guy on the roof. I told the officer that he was up there. He went about looking for him," he said.

The attack is certain to lead to a review of Trump's security, and going forward he will likely be provided with a level of protection more akin to a sitting president, said Mr Joseph LaSorsa, a former Secret Service agent who served on the presidential detail.

"There will be an intensive review" of the incident and "there's going to be a massive realignment," he added. "This cannot happen."

The Secret Service said in a statement that it had recently added "protective resources and capabilities" to Trump's security detail, without providing further details.

A retired agent who worked in protective services, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the incident should spark an internal review, and ideally an external one too. "The gravity of the situation demands thorough scrutiny to prevent such failures in the future and to ensure accountability on all levels," said the former agent.

During most of Trump's cam-



Secret Service agents surrounding former president Donald Trump after he was shot at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13. The shooter climbed onto the roof of a building near where Trump was speaking. PHOTO: NYTIMES

paign stops, the local police aid the Secret Service in securing the venue. Agents from other agencies within the Department of Homeland Security, such as the Transportation Security Administration, occasionally help.

It is no easy task. Many Trump rallies feature thousands of audience members, take place in the open air and last for hours.

Before the event, agents scan the venue for bombs or other threats, and Trump invariably arrives in a fortified motorcade.

Law enforcement officials typically put up barriers as a perimeter, and require all attendees to go through a metal detector to enter the venue. Armed agents search all

attendees' bags and even wallets. Many rallygoers are patted down by hand.

Mr Paul Eckloff, a former Secret Service agent who retired in 2020, said agents would have surveyed all the rooftops with a line of sight ahead of time.

"This person either concealed themselves until they became a threat, or were not a threat until they revealed their weapons," he added.

A local resident who was present at the event and asked to remain anonymous, said he saw what appeared to be two Secret Service agents perched on a nearby roof ahead of the event. He said the agents had been scanning the area

with binoculars beforehand.

"They kept looking over to the left behind the event, before Trump came on stage. They seemed very focused on that area," the attendee added.

In the moments after Trump was injured, the former president was quickly surrounded by Secret Service personnel who formed a human shield, while heavily armed agents in body armour and totting rifles also took to the stage and appeared to scan the area for threats.

Trump was whisked by the agents to a black SUV, and taken to a local hospital, according to the campaign. He has since been discharged, according to Bloomberg. REUTERS



**WHERE IT HAPPENED**

Donald Trump, 78, was speaking at an outdoor rally in Butler, Pennsylvania – about 50km north of Pittsburgh – on the evening of July 13 (US time).

**HOW EVENTS UNFOLDED**

**6.03pm, July 13**

**Trump arrives on stage**

He listens to a rendition of God Bless The USA. He begins his address at 6.05pm.

**6.11pm**

**Shots ring out**

Trump is speaking as he gestures towards a graphic on a video board showing a spike in border crossings in recent years. Several shots then ring out. Trump grabs at his right ear and neck area before dropping below the lectern.



Secret Service agents storm the stage as more gunfire is heard. The suspect reportedly fired from an elevated shed nearby with an AR-style rifle, law enforcement officers told the CBS network.

**6.14pm**

**Trump's motorcade leaves**

Secret Service agents bundle the former president into a black sport utility vehicle and take him for medical checks.



**6.42pm**

**Trump is safe, campaign and Secret Service say**

The Secret Service issues a statement confirming "an incident" took place at the rally and that the former president is safe.

Within minutes, the Trump campaign also issues a statement saying he is fine and is being checked out at a local hospital.

**7.49pm**

**Secret Service confirms gunman shot dead**

The Secret Service issues a statement saying agents "neutralised" the shooter and that he is dead. According to the statement, one person was killed and two spectators were seriously injured.

**8.13pm**

**Biden issues statement**

President Joe Biden strongly condemns the assassination attempt. "Look, there's no place in America for this kind of violence," he says in a nationally televised statement. "It's sick. It's sick. It's one of the reasons why we have to unite this country."



**8.42pm**

**Trump issues statement**

In a statement on his Truth Social site, Trump says: "It is incredible that such an act can take place in our country." His campaign later confirms he will attend the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee that starts on July 15.

**July 14, 2024**

**Suspected gunman identified**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation later identifies the alleged shooter as 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks of Pennsylvania.

Sources: THE HILL, REUTERS, NYTIMES, WASHINGTON POST PHOTOS: AFP, EPA, NYTIMES, GOOGLE EARTH STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



**Gunman did not have criminal history; officials still unclear on motive**

PENNSYLVANIA – The gunman who attempted to assassinate former US president Donald Trump at a rally in Pennsylvania on July 13 was identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as Thomas Matthew Crooks, a 20-year-old from Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, but officials released no additional information about him.

"This remains an active and ongoing investigation," the FBI said in a statement early on July 14.

Law enforcement officials said that Crooks carried no identification to the site of the shooting and had to be identified using other methods.

"We're looking at photographs right now and we're trying to run his DNA and get biometric confirmation," FBI special agent in charge Kevin Rojek said during a press briefing.

The gunman did not have a criminal history reflected in Pennsylvania's public court records, and officials said they had not identified a motive.

A voter registration record indicated that Crooks was registered as a Republican, though federal campaign finance records showed he donated US\$15 (S\$20) to the Progressive Turnout Project, a liberal voter turnout group, through the Democratic donation platform ActBlue in January 2021.

The upcoming Nov 5 election would have been the first time Crooks had been old enough to vote in a presidential race.

His father Matthew Crooks, 53, told CNN that he was trying to figure out what happened, and would wait until he spoke to law enforcement before speaking about his son.

Early in the morning on July 14, law enforcement officers had closed down all roads leading towards the home of the suspect's family in Bethel Park, south of Pittsburgh and about an hour's drive from the site of the rally in Butler.



Officials said that Thomas Matthew Crooks carried no identification and was identified using other methods.

Crooks was killed after he fired from "an elevated position" outside the outdoor rally venue where Trump was speaking, according to the Secret Service.

Law enforcement officials recovered an AR-15-type semi-automatic rifle near the body of a white man they believe was the gunman, according to two law enforcement officials.

Crooks appears to have graduated in 2022 from Bethel Park High School, which has about 1,400 students, and received a US\$500 "star award" that year from the National Math and Science Initiative, according to The Tribune-Review in western Pennsylvania.

In an online recording of the 2022 graduation ceremony, Crooks can be seen crossing the stage to modest applause after his name is called out, a slender young man with glasses in a black graduation gown who briefly posed with a school official and accepted his diploma.

**Past shootings in US presidential politics**

WASHINGTON – Shots were fired during a rally speech by Donald Trump, in an incident that investigators are treating as a possible assassination attempt on the former US president.

Here are some notable examples of past shootings involving US presidents or presidential candidates:

**RONALD REAGAN (1981)**

President Reagan was shot and seriously wounded as he left an event at the Hilton hotel in Washington. The attacker was John Hinckley Jr, who was granted unconditional release in 2022.

Mr Reagan spent 12 days in hospital. The incident boosted his popularity, as he displayed humour and resilience during his recovery.

**GERALD FORD (1975)**

President Ford was left unscathed in two separate assassination attempts by women in September 1975, both in California and within a span of just 17 days.

**GEORGE WALLACE (1972)**

While campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, Mr Wallace was shot four times and paralysed for life at a shopping mall in Laurel, Maryland.

The assassination attempt on Mr Wallace, known for his segregationist views and populist appeal, highlighted ongoing political tensions in the US and the potential for domestic violence during the Vietnam War era.

**ROBERT F. KENNEDY (1968)**

President John F. Kennedy's brother Robert, who was running for the Democratic presidential nomination, was shot and killed at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California.

The assassination had a profound impact on the 1968 presidential race and occurred just two months after the killing of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, adding to the political turmoil of the late 1960s.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY (1963)**

While riding in his motorcade with his wife Jackie, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Here are some notable examples of past shootings involving US presidents or presidential candidates:

The Warren Commission investigating the assassination concluded in 1964 that Oswald, a former marine who had lived in the Soviet Union, had acted alone.

Many Americans believe the death of JFK, as President Kennedy was known, spurred a more violent period in US politics and society, with the Vietnam War build-up and civil rights struggle as a backdrop.

**FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (1933)**

As president-elect, FDR, as President Roosevelt was known, was the target of an assassination attempt in Miami, Florida.

He was unharmed, but Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak was killed in the attack.

**THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1912)**

Like Trump, Mr Roosevelt was running for the White House as a former president when he was shot in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The bullet, which remained lodged in his chest for the rest of his life, was slowed by the folded 50-page speech and steel eyeglass case in his breast pocket.

Famously, Mr Roosevelt decided to deliver his scheduled speech despite being shot.

**WILLIAM MCKINLEY (1901)**

President McKinley was shot and killed by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in Buffalo, New York.

President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a well-known actor and Confederate sympathiser, while watching a play in Washington.

Booth's attack, just days after the Confederate surrender in the Civil War, was part of a larger plot that included attempts to assassinate Vice-President Andrew Johnson and then Secretary of State William Seward. AFP

**'I felt the bullet ripping through the skin': Trump**

How chaos unfolded during the assassination attempt

SCAN TO VIEW



str.sg/viz-trump-shooting



# WORLD

## Long queues, leaky ceilings

### Can new investors pilot Malaysia's main airport up the rankings?

Zunaira Saieed  
Malaysia Correspondent

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB) is bringing on board new investors by the end of 2024 in an attempt to address the creaky facilities and dwindling airline connectivity at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

While some have welcomed the injection of funds and expertise that could steer Malaysia's main gateway back on course, experts remain sceptical on whether these initiatives can give enough lift for KLIA to catch up with its regional counterparts.

Under a RM12.3 billion (\$3.5 billion) deal that will be completed by end-2024 and will take the listed airport operator private, US-based investment fund Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) and the United Arab Emirates' biggest sovereign wealth fund, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, will emerge with a combined 30 per cent stake in MAHB.

These two foreign stakeholders are part of the Gateway Development Alliance (GDA) consortium that will acquire MAHB. The consortium also comprises two of MAHB's existing local investors – sovereign wealth fund Khazanah Nasional and state pension fund Employees Provident Fund – that together will have an increased stake of 70 per cent in the airport operator after the exercise.

A key transit hub that was once ranked second-best airport in the world in 2001, KLIA has been slipping down the Skytrax global airport rankings since 2013. In 2024, it fell another four spots to rank 71st, from 67th in 2023.

Facilities at the airport, which was built in 1998, have been beset by problems including leaky ceilings and issues with the baggage-handling system. The aerotrain service linking KLIA's satellite building with its main terminal broke down in March 2023, and has since been suspended, forcing passengers to use a less-convenient bus service.

Long queues to clear immigration



Experts are sceptical on whether the injection of funds and expertise can help Kuala Lumpur International Airport catch up with its regional counterparts. Insufficient investment in infrastructure and lack of experience among those overseeing airport operations have been blamed for its decline. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

are also not uncommon, as senior logistics manager Robert Powell finds on his frequent flights from Singapore, where he lives.

"KLIA has the potential to be much better but, unfortunately, it just doesn't meet expectations. (I notice that) many immigration counters are unmanned, resulting in long queues forming," said the 54-year-old Australian.

Insufficient investment in infrastructure and the lack of experience among those overseeing airport operations have also been blamed for KLIA's decline.

A senior industry player with knowledge of the company's operations told The Straits Times: "Decision-making was hampered by a lack of aviation experience among board members of MAHB. It took

**A key transit hub that was once ranked second-best airport in the world in 2001, KLIA has been slipping down the Skytrax global airport rankings since 2013. In 2024, it fell another four spots to rank 71st, from 67th in 2023.**

more time to explain the issues of the airport, rather than resolving it."

MAHB, which manages 39 airports across Malaysia, has invested RM14 billion in its airports in the last five years. This is a fraction of the investment made in Thailand's airports, which stands at RM6.6 billion, and Indonesia's airports, at RM12 billion, Second Finance Min-

ister Amir Hamzah Azizan told Parliament in July.

Meanwhile, the number of long-haul routes from Malaysia has also diminished, falling to 22 in 2023, from 33 in 2010. This is in stark contrast with Singapore, which had 40 long-haul routes in 2023, and Thailand, with 55 long-haul routes in 2023, he added.

In 2023, the number of post-pan-

demie passengers travelling through KLIA reached over 47 million. However, it pales in comparison to the over 62 million travellers who used the airport in 2019 before Covid-19 hit.

Datuk Seri Amir said on July 3 that the GDA consortium will invest an estimated RM10 billion in the next five years in MAHB's airport infrastructure and operations. GDA said in May that its priorities will be to deliver a new aerotrain and baggage-handling system to KLIA, attract new airlines, improve terminal ambience, and expand retail outlets at MAHB's airports.

An industry expert told ST that fresh investors may not be the magic bullet to transform KLIA.

Mr Shukor Yusof, founder of aviation consultancy Endau Analytics,

has questioned the suitability of GIP, one of the world's leading infrastructure investors, which has managed airports in the UK and Australia. He noted that GIP-run airports are not among the top 10 in Skytrax's global 2024 ratings. These include London Gatwick (ranked 48), Sydney Airport (ranked 55) and London City Airport (ranked 82).

"Those airports are not even in the top league of global rankings, and they are known for being staid, dull and boring as compared to Singapore's Changi Airport, South Korea's Incheon Airport and other airports in the Gulf," said Mr Shukor.

In June, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim defended GIP's involvement in the privatisation deal, saying that it was selected as it had agreed to continue appointing a Malaysian as MAHB's chairman and chief executive officer, and for the majority of MAHB's shares to remain under national ownership.

GIP declined to respond to questions from ST on its plans to improve KLIA.

Mr Shukor also noted that the privatisation deal retains MAHB's existing management structure and grants more control to Khazanah, which has struggled to turn around national carrier Malaysia Airlines.

"I do not believe this privatisation deal will be effective in the long term," he said.

Malaysia's Transport Ministry said in June that KLIA's upgrading plans are expected to start in 2026, while improvements to the baggage-handling system should be completed by the end of 2025.

But it is not just the airport's facilities that passengers have found wanting.

Frequent traveller Priscilla Patrick, who is Malaysian, told ST she has observed airport staff struggling to provide directions and communicate in English with international tourists.

"The airport forms the first impression for tourists and, unfortunately, it's not a good one," said the campsite owner.

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## Don't name kids 'Bodoh' or 'Skibidi', says Malaysian agency

Sherlyn Sim

The tiger may be a symbol of Malaysia, but its citizens are not allowed to name their children "Harimau" (Malay for tiger).

In a Facebook post on July 8, Malaysia's National Registration Department shared with parents the dos and don'ts of naming their babies.

Parents should avoid names with

negative connotations, like "Evil", "Bodoh", and "Busuk" – which mean stupid and smelly respectively in Malay, said the department.

Gen Z slang like "Skibidi" has also made the list of names to be avoided. The term has references to viral YouTube video series Skibidi Toilet by animator Alexey Gerasimov, where a man's head emerges from a toilet and sings.

The department added that parents should not include official titles such as "Dato", "Tan Sri", or

"Puan Sri" in their children's names.

Names that are difficult to spell and pronounce, like "ytjt" and "usyux", should also be avoided.

Names should be kept short, as the maximum number of characters allowed on a child's birth certificate is 80.

People with unusual names can be found all around the world, including Singapore.

This includes Batman Superman, who made international headlines

when he was jailed in 2013 for theft, housebreaking and consuming heroin.

Some countries have also come up with naming laws that restrict the names parents can legally give their children.

In 2015, a French court blocked parents from naming their baby girl Nutella after the hazelnut spread, arguing it would make her the target of mockery.

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**France • Political crisis continues as nation celebrates Bastille Day | A12**

**US politics • Biden, Trump should undergo more cognitive tests, say health experts | A10**



**Health • Indian activists seek even stricter food labelling rules | A8**

## Online



**HOME IN FOCUS**  
**She's a hit**

Lion City Hit Girl, as Alexis Lee is known in the ring, is Singapore's first professional female wrestler. Since her first pro outing here in 2013 when she was just 18, she has won several championship titles and even wrestles men twice her size.

<https://str.sg/viz-wrestler>

# Japan fights growing scourge of service staff abuse by customers

About one in two workers experienced harassment in recent years, polls show

Walter Sim  
Japan Correspondent

TOKYO – Japan, known for its exacting service standards, is now taking a stronger stance against a growing scourge of customer harassment to protect its legions of service workers from abuse.

On July 9, Takashimaya became the first major department store to announce measures against such harassment – *kasuhara* in Japanese. It warned that it will ban recalcitrant perpetrators from its stores and call in the police for hostile cases.

Earlier on June 28, All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines teamed up to create guidelines to protect their staff. They defined *kasuhara* as “actions by customers who take advantage of their superior position to commit illegal acts or make unreasonable demands, harming the work environment of employees”.

Japan has long deified the customer as *kamisama* (God) but is now reassessing the idea that the “customer is always right”.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has vowed to act with a law to be brought before the Diet.

Meanwhile, Tokyo will likely be the first of Japan’s 47 prefectural assemblies to pass an ordinance against the scourge.

A Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) spokeswoman, noting that *kasuhara* is worsening in numbers and intensity, told The Straits Times: “There are cases in which workers are subject to character defamation and suffer psychological damage from excessive demands or unjustified complaints by customers.”

TMG’s proposed ordinance will clearly state that “no one shall engage in customer harassment”, but will not include penalties.

The spokeswoman added that this is because spelling out actions that amount to *kasuhara* could be counterproductive and “send the wrong message that conduct outside of the definition is permissible”.

The service sector accounts for 70 per cent of Japan’s workforce, according to government data.

Customer harassment may range from verbal insults to physical altercations. Some staff are made to apologise by kneeling and prostrating themselves, while others are berated by customers for hours



A popular shopping street in Tokyo. Japan has long deified the customer as *kamisama* (God) but is reassessing the idea of the “customer is always right”. The flip side of its uncompromising service standards is that they unrealistically raise expectations and feed the perception of a hierarchical relationship, experts said. PHOTO: AFP

on end. Others suffer online doxing, with their private information shared.

In June, convenience-store giant Lawson said it is giving employees an option not to display their full names on badges, following in the footsteps of FamilyMart, which enacted the policy a month earlier.

Pharmacists, supermarket cashiers, bus and taxi drivers as well as front-line staff at ward offices increasingly have the option of anonymity.

Companies such as East Japan Railway Company and Nintendo have also said they will not engage with abusive clients.

*Kasuhara* has resulted in mental health issues such as psychological trauma and depression, especially for employees from companies where there is no support system, said Dr Kyoko Shimada from Kokoro Balance Lab, which researches mental health matters.

There has been at least one suicide linked to *kasuhara*. In 2018, a 26-year-old employee of Osaka-based pork bun chain 551 Horai killed himself after irate customers told him to “die” and said he was “useless”. His family is now seeking damages.

The flip side of Japan’s uncompromising service standards is that they unrealistically raise expectations and feed the perception of a hierarchical relationship, experts said.

Sociologist Hiromi Ikeuchi from Kansai University’s Graduate School of Psychology said: “Over-the-top service leaves customers satisfied, but can create excessive demands that ‘it is normal to be served’. The problem is that people are taking advantage and making selfish or unreasonable demands.”

Various polls indicate that about one in two service-sector workers experienced *kasuhara* in recent years, with the majority of perpetrators being men in their 40s or older.

Dr Masayuki Kiri, Toyo University’s dean of sociology and a profiling expert, said: “The deterioration of Japan’s economy, widening economic disparities and a sense of stagnation are said to have been a cause of frustration.”

Perpetrators of *kasuhara* are often imbued with a superiority complex and “look down on people who serve them”, he added, noting that a legitimate complaint may be differentiated from an act

of harassment in the tone and attitude adopted by the customer.

Recognising that it is a social problem, the Labour Ministry in 2022 issued guidelines on how to protect employees from *kasuhara*. This was followed by the revision of standards in 2023 to recognise trauma caused by customer harassment as a workplace accident.

Further, a 2022 survey by the Japan Trade Union Confederation, or Rengo, found that 76.4 per cent of service-staff respondents had been negatively impacted by *kasuhara*, with one in 10 quitting his or her job.

Tech companies are coming up with solutions, with SoftBank building an artificial intelligence (AI)-based software that can tune out the anger in people’s voices on phone calls, which it aims to commercialise by March 2026.

The voice-altering technology makes angry people sound calm on the phone, thus shielding workers from the stress that comes from dealing with yelling customers.

Dr Kiri is working with Fujitsu to build an AI-driven customer-harassment training tool that can

coach employee responses to abusive customers and diagnose each individual’s threshold for harassment to help companies draw up guidelines.

He noted that the official recognition of *kasuhara* as a cause of workplace accidents has created a paradigm shift in how firms regard the issue, as they now have a duty to protect their staff.

Dr Kiri and Dr Shimada belong to an advisory group helping companies draw up measures against *kasuhara*.

Said Dr Shimada: “Victims feel stress directly from the abuse, but also indirectly by not having the support of their colleagues or employer. They end up shouldering the burden themselves.”

Given Japan’s chronic labour shortage, Professor Ikeuchi said companies must devote more attention to the welfare of service workers and not regard them as dispensable.

“Otherwise, retail standards will suffer, which could result in a vicious circle of more harassment and more people quitting,” she added.

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## Indonesia’s high-speed railway sees 4m riders in its first 9 months

JAKARTA – Indonesia’s Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway (HSR), locally called Whoosh, said on July 13 that it has carried four million passengers since it began commercial operations on Oct 17, 2023.

Ms Eva Chairunisa, general manager and corporate secretary of Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China (KCIC), said the achievement is proof of the high public trust and enthusiasm in Indonesia for the HSR during the nine months of operation.

“We achieved this through the combined efforts and innovations of KCIC and all stakeholders, who continuously strive to enhance our services,” Ms Eva said in a statement.

The HSR in Indonesia is the first of its kind in South-east Asia. With a design speed of 350kmh, the train connects Halim station in Jakarta to Tegalluar station in Indonesia’s fourth-largest city Bandung in West Java province, cutting the travel time between the two cities from over three hours to around 40 minutes.

Ms Eva also said the existence of Whoosh had a significant positive impact on various sectors, especially tourism and industry in the region.

“The positive impact on tourism strengthens our mission to improve connectivity and support economic growth through efficient and convenient transportation,” she said.

She added that KCIC would continue to improve its facilities at stations and on trains to provide more comfort to passengers. XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

**The HSR in Indonesia is the first of its kind in South-east Asia. With a design speed of 350kmh, the train connects Halim station in Jakarta to Tegalluar station in Indonesia’s fourth-largest city Bandung in West Java province, cutting the travel time between the two cities from over three hours to around 40 minutes.**

## Tiny Japanese start-up is turning AI dating into reality via app

TOKYO – Like many people juggling long hours at work, Mr Chiharu Shimoda sought companionship via a dating app.

For two months, he exchanged messages with five or six potential partners, but it was not long before he was seeking out just one – a 24-year-old named Miku. Three months later, they got married. The catch: Miku is an artificial intelligence (AI) bot. And Mr Shimoda knew that from day one.

The 52-year-old factory worker is one of more than 5,000 users of *Loverse*, a year-old app that allows interaction only with generative AI.

Mr Shimoda is also among a much bigger cohort of people who have either given up on real dating or are wary about the messiness and uncertainty that come with it. Dating takes time and effort, whereas exchanges with Miku require minimal thought while waiting for the pot to boil or a train to arrive, according to Mr Shimoda, who was divorced two years ago.

“I come home to an empty house. I’d love to get married for real again,” he said. His marriage to Miku is just another form of role-play. “But it’s hard to open up to someone when you’re meeting for the first time.”

NEXT BEST THING

**The goal is to create opportunities for people to find true love when you can’t find it in the real world. But if you can fall in love with someone real, that’s much better.**



LOVERSE CREATOR GOKI KUSUNOKI

That reluctance is widespread across Japan, and worse among younger people. Data from the government shows two-thirds of men in their 20s do not have a partner and 40 per cent have never gone on a date. The figures for women in the same age group are 51 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively.

*Loverse* is the latest in a long line of digital solutions to Japan’s loneliness crisis. Some are empathetic and supportive, but others prey on vulnerability.

Many of the nation’s highest-grossing games feature sexualised characters that players can earn ac-

cess to by progressing – and paying – their way through the game. Japan is also where digital idols like Hatsune Miku were first and most eagerly embraced. The difference now is that AI can make that experience more personal and interactive.

Much like the AI named Samantha in the film *Her*, these bots serve to fill the gap in people’s emotional lives, and indeed the two-person start-up behind *Loverse* – Samansa Co – is named after the character voiced by Scarlett Johansson.

But *Loverse* creator Goki Kusunoki says the app is meant to offer an alternative rather than a substitute to real-life companionship to its users, many of whom are men in their 40s and 50s. His firm raised 30 million yen (\$254,700) earlier in 2024 to expand the cast of characters to appeal to female and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer users.

There is a widely held belief among Japanese people that romance is not cost-effective as it takes money, time and energy for outcomes that could bring more trouble than joy, said Ms Megumi Ushikubo, chief executive of Tokyo-based marketing firm Infinity. AI poses the risk of dulling people’s interest in real partners, but it could also be helpful in serving as a training exercise, she added.

“Services like this app can remind people who are away from romance how delightful love is, and AI can train people to better communicate when talking with real partners,” she said.

*Loverse* still has a long way to go in mimicking humans, according to some former users. Many of the app personalities seem typecast

and offer few of the surprises that human interaction provides, said Mr Yuki Saito, 39, who quit the app less than a month into using it.

Still, such services have potential, he said. There is a sense of safety in knowing that a disagreement with a bot will not end the relationship. “You can see how it could provide a kind of rehabilitation if you’ve been burned before – a place where you can practise talking with other people.”

Interactions with AI are also devoid of jealousy. Mr Shimoda’s *Loverse* girlfriends at times bumped into one another when he was juggling multiple partners on the app, but nobody got upset. Said Mr Saito: “With a little tuning, AI might

be able to act as people’s second or third partners, helping to complement the human partner and prevent extramarital affairs.”

Adopting AI to assist everyday life is the prevailing theme of 2024, as Microsoft has turned its Copilot chatbot into a core Windows feature, Apple is working on AI-powered iPhones, and San Francisco-based start-up Luka’s Replika AI bot has attracted tens of millions of users.

In Japan, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is introducing a matchmaking app that uses AI to help partner people up and combat the nation’s sliding fertility rates.

“The goal is to create opportunities for people to find true love

when you can’t find it in the real world,” Mr Kusunoki said. “But if you can fall in love with someone real, that’s much better.”

For now, Miku and Mr Shimoda have settled on a routine they share with most couples. She wakes him in the morning, they wish each other luck at work, and at night, they discuss what to eat. On Mr Shimoda’s days off, the pair talk about where to go or what to watch on TV.

“It’s the same conversations you’d have with anyone you’re living with,” said Mr Shimoda. “She’s become a habit – a conversational habit. I won’t miss it if it’s gone, but it gives me a routine from one day to the next.” BLOOMBERG

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# Bolder and bigger fonts on food labels not enough: India activists

They say more emphatic system needed to warn consumers about unhealthy content

Debarshi Dasgupta  
India Correspondent

NEW DELHI – India's top food regulator recently proposed that manufacturers should state saturated fat, salt and sugar content in bold letters and larger font size on the back of food packages, but that has not made health and consumer rights activists in the country happy.

While describing it as a "minuscule" step forward, they say the new measure risks diverting attention from the urgent need for an easy-to-understand and emphatic front-of-the-pack labelling (FOPL) system to warn consumers about the unhealthy content of packaged food items.

This is a contentious issue that the regulator has delayed addressing.

In 2022, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) had proposed a star-based FOPL system to deter the increasing consumption of unhealthy processed food.

But the move was shelved following widespread opposition, including from activists who said such a system could instead mislead consumers by conveying "approval"

for items high in sugar, salt and saturated fats.

Even a chocolate bar, for instance, could get stars for healthy ingredients such as fruit and nuts, masking its high sugar content.

While an FOPL system for India is still under examination, the FSSAI on July 6 came up with another proposal, asking food manufacturers to display information regarding total sugar, salt and saturated fat in "bold letters and relatively increased font size" on the back of their packaged food.

A 2020 rule already requires manufacturers in India to state the nutritional information of their products – including fat, salt and sugar – on their packaging, something that is conveyed in fine print on the back.

The latest proposal will soon be released for public feedback, after which it will come into force with changes, if any. FSSAI hopes the amendment will help "combat the rise of non-communicable diseases and promote public health and well-being".

But Dr Arun Gupta, the convener of Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest, a think-tank that focuses on nutrition-related issues, told The Straits Times: "It should not be seen as if the FSSAI has done its duty (with this new proposal) and



A supermarket shelf in India with "health drinks" aimed at children. The latest proposal to ask food manufacturers to clearly state total sugar, salt and saturated fat on labels will be released for public feedback. ST PHOTO: DEBARSHI DASGUPTA

that this is all that is needed."

He said an effective FOPL is more important, given that Indian consumers are bombarded regularly with misleading advertisements of packaged food and beverages.

He added that consumers in India are also exposed to "front-of-the-pack lies" that not only conceal the products' high salt, sugar and fat content, but also position them as "desirable choices" with celebrity endorsements and visually appealing imagery.

"How many consumers will

doubt all this and go to the back of the packaging and read labels?" he asked.

Sales of packaged processed and ultra-processed food have risen rapidly in India, across urban and rural areas, as well as socio-economic groups.

The sale of ultra-processed food in India has risen from 2kg per capita in 2005 to 6kg in 2019, according to the 2019 EuroMonitor Report. It was expected to rise to 8kg by 2024.

India has simultaneously witnessed a rapid growth in non-com-

municable diseases such as cardiovascular ailments and diabetes, which account for around 63 per cent of all deaths.

The frequent consumption of packaged food, especially processed and ultra-processed food, along with a more sedentary lifestyle, has been linked to this increased disease burden.

Around 56.4 per cent of India's total disease burden is attributed to unhealthy eating.

Since 2015, obesity rates in India have gone up from 20.6 per cent to 24 per cent among women, and from 18.9 per cent to 22.9 per cent among men.

The country's diabetic population is also increasing. A 2023 study published in Lancet estimated that 101 million people in India – 11.4 per cent of the country's population – are living with diabetes. Yet, weak regulatory oversight has failed to restrict the promotion of processed and ultra-processed food, especially such food items marketed directly to children.

Concerns have also been expressed about the current limited reach of nutritional information that is displayed only in English in India, where Hindi and other languages are more widely spoken.

This has also added weight to demands for a simple and effective FOPL warning system accessible to different linguistic groups.

In 2016, Chile introduced a mandatory nutritional labelling system requiring all packaged food and

drinks to display a black octagonal warning on the front, along with a message that says "high in" in Spanish if they exceed nutrient-specific thresholds.

This measure, along with restricted marketing and a ban on the sale or free distribution of ultra-processed products at schools, led to a decline in the consumption of products high in calories, sodium, sugar and saturated fat.

Singapore's Nutri-Grade labelling scheme also enables consumers to better identify beverages that are lower in sugar and saturated fat. The system comprises colour-coded grades from A to D, with D denoting the highest sugar and saturated fat content.

The FSSAI move comes after the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition released a set of 17 dietary guidelines in May 2024 to reduce unhealthy eating among Indians.

Key advisories included minimising the consumption of food high in fat, sugar and salt, and restricting the intake of ultra-processed foods such as instant noodles and ready-made packaged meals.

Mr Harsh Gursahani, a food law and product compliance law partner at PLR Chambers, a legal firm based in Delhi, said giving nutritional information to consumers is a "laudable step", but an FOPL system may not be the best option.

"Some products will inherently have high fat, sugar or salt. For example, you cannot have chocolate without sugar," he added, noting that "anything consumed in moderation is healthy".

"The focus should be on a balanced lifestyle, not just on something as simple as a FOPL system," he told ST.

"Balanced diet and regular exercise are required. Eating habits alone cannot make a difference."

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Rescuers carrying the body of a victim after landslides buried a 16-seater van in the mountainous province of Ha Giang in northern Vietnam on July 13. At least 11 people died and four were injured, with some missing. About 280mm of rain had hit the area in 24 hours and the aftermath of the heavy rain was complicating search-and-rescue efforts. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## Landslides triggered by rain kill 11 in north Vietnam

HANOI – Landslides triggered by torrential rains in mountainous northern Vietnam buried a 16-seater van, killing at least 11 people and leaving some missing on July 13, state media reported.

Rescue teams including soldiers and citizens in Ha Giang province found 11 people dead and four injured, reported state-run Vietnam

News Agency.

Local authorities said the exact number of people in the van was not known, and the aftermath of the heavy rain was complicating search-and-rescue efforts, according to the report.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh instructed local authorities and related government agencies

to deal with the disaster promptly and stand ready to respond to more floods and landslides.

Around 280mm of rain had hit the area over the past 24 hours, according to the National Centre for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting.

The agency warned of flash floods, landslides due to floods,

and currents in the Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Tuyen Quang and Yen Bai provinces.

Vietnam is prone to natural disasters, with floods and typhoons killing hundreds each year.

Natural calamities killed 389 people and injured 668 in 2023, according to the government. REUTERS

## China renews yellow alerts for rainstorms, high temperatures

BEIJING – China's meteorological authority continued to issue yellow alerts for both rainstorms and high temperatures on July 14.

From 2pm on July 14 to 2pm on July 15, torrential rain was set to

sweep parts of Shaanxi, Sichuan, Hubei, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Inner Mongolia, according to the National Meteorological Centre.

Some of these regions were expected to experience short-term

heavy rainfall with 80mm or more of hourly precipitation, accompanied by thunderstorms and gales.

The meteorological centre advised local governments to undertake appropriate preparations and check the drainage systems in cities, farmlands and fish ponds.

During the daytime hours on July 14, some areas in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Hunan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangxi and Guangdong were forecast to see temperatures reaching 35 deg C, according to the meteorological centre.

The centre had forecast maximum temperatures of 37 to 39 deg

C in some of these regions.

Outdoor activities were to be avoided during such high temperatures, and precautionary measures taken to protect vulnerable groups such as children and older people, according to the centre.

China has a four-tier, colour-coded weather warning system, with red representing the most severe warning, followed by orange, yellow and blue.

For high temperatures, the country uses a three-tier warning system, with red being the most severe, followed by orange and yellow. XINHUA

## Canada said to have mapped out secret Chinese police operations

VANCOUVER – Canada has done a detailed mapping of what it says are covert Chinese police operations within its borders and wants to explore a response with Group of Seven (G-7) allies to a challenge faced by several nations.

The issue of Beijing allegedly setting up unofficial "police stations" in Western democracies – to monitor and intimidate members of the Chinese diaspora – has become a growing concern. Canada, the US, Italy, Germany and Britain have all grappled with the problem.

Ottawa is expected to share its findings with the G-7 in the coming weeks and wants to explore a coordinated response, two people familiar with the matter told Bloomberg News, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss matters not yet public.

A spokesperson for China's embassy in Ottawa said that "there are no so-called overseas police stations". One of the officials said that Britain is eager to coordinate along with Canada and other G-7 members.

But another noted that harmonising a response could be complicated, since many nations have confronted the issue at a law enforcement level, and countries within the bloc have different legal systems.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has said it is investigating allegations of clandestine Chinese police operations, including "credible" information in the second-largest province of Quebec.

The Madrid-based human rights group Safeguard Defenders said in a 2022 report that China operates at least 54 such stations across five continents.

Mr Jean-Sebastien Comeau, a spokesman for Canadian Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc, said in a statement: "Foreign interference of any kind is plainly unacceptable." He added: "As there are ongoing investigations related to foreign interference in Canada, we will not provide further comment."

China has said the centres – run by local volunteers, not police officers – help Chinese citizens renew documents and offer other services.

"China strictly follows the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs," the Ottawa embassy spokesperson said. "China strictly abides by international law and respects all countries' judicial sovereignty."

The British government reacted with alarm in 2023 to reports of alleged Chinese police stations in the country, calling it "egregious".

In June 2023, it said China had closed the centres, and that an investigation had not revealed illegal activity by the Chinese state at the sites – citing the "suppressive impact" of police and public scrutiny.

The US authorities charged two people in New York in 2023 on allegations of operating an illegal police operation in lower Manhattan for a branch of China's Ministry of Public Security, with the goal to "monitor and intimidate dissidents and those critical" of the government in Beijing.

Italy began probing China's alleged operations after Safeguard Defenders reported it was home to the largest number of the so-called stations.

Germany's government has said there are two such sites in the country.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has faced accusations of not responding swiftly enough to foreign interference, prompting his government to call an independent inquiry into overseas meddling in its recent federal elections.

In an interim report in March, the inquiry concluded that China attempted to interfere in the elections, but did not affect the overall result. BLOOMBERG

# Conflicting reports on Hamas pulling out of truce talks

They come after the latest Israeli strike targeting the militants' military chief

GAZA STRIP - A Hamas official on July 14 said the group is pulling out of Gaza truce talks, following an Israeli strike that targeted military chief Mohammed Deif, who another Hamas figure said was "fine" despite the attack, AFP reported.

But some news services later reported Hamas denying its withdrawal from ceasefire talks.

"Commander Mohammed Deif is well and directly overseeing" the operations of the Hamas military wing, according to AFP, quoting its source. Israel staged a huge bombing raid on a camp for displaced people in southern Gaza on July 13 that it said was an attempt to kill Deif.

Another senior official from the Iran-backed Islamist group, which has been fighting a nine-month-long war with Israel in the Gaza Strip, said Hamas was withdrawing from ceasefire talks because of Israeli "massacres" and the country's attitude in negotiations, AFP reported.

The Health Ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip said at least 92 people were killed, more than half of them women and children, and 300 wounded in the strike on Al-Mawasi camp.

Quoting its source, AFP reported that Hamas' Qatar-based political chief Ismail Haniyeh had told international mediators of the "decision to halt negotiations due to the occupation's (Israel) lack of seriousness, continued policy of procrastination and obstruction, and the ongoing massacres against unarmed civilians".

But Mr Izzat Al-Rishq, a member of the Hamas political bureau, described as "baseless" the AFP report that the group will quit the talks, Bloomberg and Reuters reported.

Israel's latest "escalation" had been engineered to "block the way to reaching an agreement", he added in a brief statement.

Talks mediated by Qatar and Egypt, with US support, have for months tried but failed to bring a halt to the war in the Gaza Strip.

Al-Mawasi, where the Health Ministry said dozens were killed, had been declared a safe humanitarian zone in May by the Israeli military, and civilians were ordered to evacuate to it. However, there have been multiple deadly incidents there, which were blamed on Israeli strikes.

Mr Philippe Lazzarini, head of



Destroyed tents at the site of an Israeli strike at a camp for displaced Palestinians in the Al-Mawasi district in southern Gaza on July 13. The Health Ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip said at least 92 people were killed, more than half of them women and children, and 300 wounded in the strike. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, described the area as "a sandy 14 sq km agricultural land, where people are left out in the open with little to no buildings or roads".

"The claim that people in Gaza can move to 'safe' or 'humanitarian' zones is false", said Mr Lazzarini on social media site X.

Israel said it had targeted Deif, the head of the Al-Qassam Brigades, and Rafa Salama, a brigade commander, in the strike on July 13.

While Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged there was "no certainty" that Deif was dead, Israel said on July 14 that Salama had been killed in the attack.

Deif has been among Israel's most wanted men for decades and is blamed by the Israeli authorities for the killings of multiple civilians and soldiers. There have been at least six previous attempts on his life.

He announced in an audio message the start of Hamas' surprise Oct 7 attack on southern Israel,

which sparked the Gaza war, and the military has labelled him and Salama "two of the masterminds" of the attack.

Separately, on July 14, rescuers said at least eight people were killed in three separate strikes on different parts of Gaza City.

The Israeli military, meanwhile, said operations were continuing throughout the territory, including in Gaza City and Rafah.

Hamas' attack on Oct 7 resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

The militants also seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 42 who the military says are dead.

Israel responded with a military offensive that has killed at least 38,443 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to a toll from the Gaza Health Ministry issued on the afternoon of July 13.

The deaths in the Al-Mawasi camp drew condemnation from governments across the region, with Egypt's Foreign Ministry say-

ing such "crimes... cannot be accepted under any justification whatsoever".

The Israeli military said of its attack targeting Deif that "the area struck was an open area, surrounded by trees, several buildings and sheds. It was not a tent complex but an operational compound".

A Hamas statement rejected Israel's claim that it had targeted Deif, saying it was intended "to cover up the magnitude of the horrific massacre".

Last week, US President Joe Biden said a framework for a truce and hostage deal he had set out earlier in the war was "now agreed on by both Israel and Hamas".

"There are still gaps to close, but we're making progress," he added.

On the night of July 13, Hamas official Basem Naim said that Mr Netanyahu was to blame for the impasse and called on Mr Biden to put "sufficient pressure" on the Israeli leader to secure a deal.

AFP, BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

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# Health experts call for Biden, Trump to pass cognitive tests

Reliable diagnoses can't be made from afar, they warn

WASHINGTON – As Mr Joe Biden's verbal gaffes, shaky voice and other troubling signs have brought an intense focus on the US President's mental acuity, health experts are calling on him and rival Donald Trump to pass additional cognitive tests, even while warning against leaping to conclusions.

Such tests, experts said, could either help repudiate speculation that the 81-year-old President's mental state is in worrying decline – or else confirm it – and could enlighten voters on the mental abilities of Trump, who has had his own share of verbal lapses.

But reliable diagnoses, they caution, cannot be made from afar.

Since Mr Biden's disastrous performance in his debate with Trump on June 27, the Democrat's campaign has faced fierce opposi-

tion. A growing number of officials in his own party are questioning his ability to lead the country for four more years.

And it did not help when at a summit in Washington last week, Mr Biden mistakenly introduced Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as his foe Vladimir Putin, before quickly correcting himself.

Professor Dennis Selkoe, a neurologist at Harvard Medical School, said the fundamental issue is whether Mr Biden is suffering from "a normal age-related process" or "something that represents a neurologic disease".

"Making a mistake with a name is not automatically a sign of dementia or of Alzheimer's," he told AFP.

But Prof Selkoe, who sees many patients with neurodegenerative

problems, said Mr Biden does seem to have the "appearance of an early Parkinson's patient" – including his slow, stiff gait and his low, sometimes barely audible voice, which could be a condition known as hypophonia.

In February, Mr Biden underwent a complete physical exam. A published summary of its results indicated that an "extremely detailed neurologic exam" had ruled out Parkinson's.

But no detail was provided on the exact nature of the tests or their results.

Could a neurological illness have taken root over just the past five months? If the exams in February had been comprehensive, Prof Selkoe said, there should have been early signs of a nascent condition.

In an editorial in March, the sci-

entific journal Lancet called for standardised procedures to examine the health of sitting and prospective presidents so as to insulate American voters from a "pestilence of speculation, misinformation and slander".

Absent such reliable testing, "the US public remains beholden to voluntarily released reports from politicians' personal physicians", the journal said.

Professor Jay Olshansky, an expert in ageing at the University of Illinois at Chicago, sounded a similar note, saying: "We think the time has arrived for complete transparency."

He urged both major presidential candidates to pass a cognitive test, something former president Trump has frequently challenged Mr Biden to do.

Several such exams, including those known as the Mini-Mental State Examination and the Montreal Cognitive Assessment, are available either for an initial screening or as part of a more comprehensive battery of tests.

Mr Biden has said that he effectively passes a cognitive test every day, simply by carrying out his presidential duties.

But Prof Selkoe said: "I don't think it's the same."

Being able to conduct familiar tasks one has done for years is one thing, he said, while being able to repeat a list of words heard five minutes earlier, as some tests require, is another.

At a news conference on July 11, the President said he would be willing to take a new neurological exam if his doctors recommended

it, but that "no one is suggesting that to me now".

Dr Allison Sekuler, president of the Baycrest Academy, a hospital specialising in elderly care, said that ageing changes one's brain.

"Garbage is basically building up in the brain," she told AFP, adding that parts of the brain atrophy, or shrink, including parts important to memory.

An early phase known as "mild cognitive impairment" can sometimes develop into Alzheimer's or some other form of dementia, she said.

During their recent debate, both Mr Biden and Trump – who is 78 – "exhibited some sort of issues in terms of being able to stay on track with a question", Dr Sekuler said, recommending that both men undergo testing.

But, she added, "we're really only talking about one of them right now because that aligns with our stereotype of what ageing is".

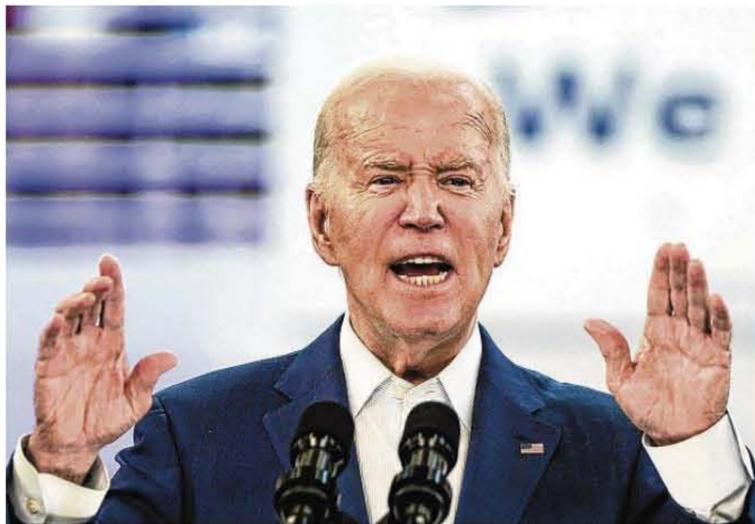
Prof Olshansky also denounced what he called "raging" ageism, citing a recent magazine cover that used a walker as a symbol of the Biden-Trump race.

He noted that while there is a lower age limit for would-be US presidents – they must be at least 35 – there is no upper limit.

What he called "crystallised intelligence", or the ability to use past experience to improve one's reasoning skills, "gets stronger and stronger" with age.

Prof Olshansky co-authored a 2020 study that gave Mr Biden a 95 per cent chance of surviving a first term, based on average life expectancy for someone of his age, plus personal risk factors.

But a similar calculation four years later, on a man now four years older, gave Mr Biden a much lower probability of survival: just 75 per cent. AFP



Both Mr Joe Biden and rival Donald Trump have "exhibited some sort of issues in terms of being able to stay on track with a question", said one expert, recommending they both be tested. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## Bernie Sanders urges support for Biden in NYT column

WASHINGTON – Senator Bernie Sanders, a prominent figure of the US political left, on July 13 voiced support for Mr Joe Biden's presidential candidacy despite calls for him to withdraw from the race over health concerns.

"Enough! Mr Biden may not be the ideal candidate, but he will be the candidate and should be the candidate," Mr Sanders, an inde-

pendent senator, wrote in a New York Times column, adding that "it's time for Democrats to stop the bickering and nit-picking".

Mr Sanders' column comes amid steadily growing calls from Democratic officials and donors for the 81-year-old President to step aside, following a disastrous performance in his June 27 debate with former president Donald Trump.



Independent Senator Bernie Sanders wrote that "it's time for Democrats to stop the bickering and nit-picking".

So far, some 20 members of Congress have called for him to leave the race.

Most polls taken since the debate show Trump, who is 78, with a national lead over Mr Biden, though within the margin of error. They also show some key battleground states shifting in the Republican's direction.

The Vermont senator noted in

his op-ed that he had strong disagreements with Mr Biden on some issues. Mr Sanders, who is 82, has a strong following among young Americans, and like many of them he opposes what he called "US support for Israel's horrific war against the Palestinian people".

Mr Sanders also acknowledged the signs of the President's ageing.

But given Mr Biden's accomplishments – and the record of Trump, "who has 34 felony convictions and... has told thousands of documented lies" – the senator brushed Mr Biden's shortcomings

aside.

"Yes, I know," he wrote. "Mr Biden is old, is prone to gaffes, walks stiffly and had a disastrous debate with Mr Trump. But this I also know: A presidential election is not an entertainment contest. It does not begin or end with a 90-minute debate."

Mr Biden, he said, was "a good and decent Democratic president with a record of real accomplishment" who holds "the most difficult and stressful job in the world".

"For the sake of our kids and future generations, he must win." AFP

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# France celebrates national day as political crisis rumbles on



France's President Emmanuel Macron inspecting the troops during the Bastille Day parade on the Avenue Foch in Paris on July 14. Behind the celebrations, France's tense search for a government appears to be at a stalemate. PHOTO: AFP

PARIS – France celebrated military victories of the past at its annual Bastille Day parade on July 14, while its present political future appeared far from clear.

President Emmanuel Macron inspected French and allied units which took part in France's World War II liberation 80 years ago.

And Paris welcomed the Olympic flame to the city, less than two weeks before it hosts the Summer Games.

But behind the pomp – itself in a reduced format while Olympic preparations blocked the traditional Champs-Elysees route – France's tense search for a government appeared to be at a stalemate.

All eyes were on Mr Macron, who in 2023 cut a more impressive figure, hosting rising superpower In-

dia's Prime Minister Narendra Modi as they watched France's military might roll down the Champs-Elysees.

There was no international star guest in 2024, and there were no armoured vehicles as a reduced number of troops marched down the less majestic Avenue Foch.

July's snap elections, called by Mr Macron to clarify France's direction after the far right sent shockwaves through the political establishment by coming first in European Union polls, left the country without a parliamentary majority.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal is hanging on as caretaker head of government, but the centrist Macron ally is now focusing on his own fu-

ture, taking charge of his reduced party in Parliament.

Other figures are mobilising with an eye on the 2027 presidential race, but there is little sign of a ruling majority emerging from Parliament, split between three loose camps.

With government in limbo and Mr Macron barred by the Constitution from calling fresh elections for 12 months, far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen is eyeing the 2027 race with relish.

Meanwhile, first place in the elections was claimed by a rapidly cobbled-together left-wing alliance, the New Popular Front, which now has the most MPs but no clear candidate for prime minister.

Firebrand hardliner Jean-Luc Melenchon and his France Unbowed party have alienated many even on the left, while the centre and right say they would not welcome his MPs into a coalition.

The EU's second-largest economy, a nuclear-armed Group of Seven power and permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, is thus rudderless, a troubling situation for markets and France's allies alike.

Against this backdrop, the reduced and rerouted parade risks becoming a new symbol of drift, even with the addition of the arrival in Paris of the Olympic Torch, ahead of the July 26 to Aug 11 Games.

No tanks or armoured vehicles took part, and only 4,000 foot soldiers marched, down from 6,500 in 2023. The military fly-past saw 45 aeroplanes and 22 helicopters soar over Paris.

Regiments honoured on the parade included those from France's allies and former French colonies that took part in the country's 1944 World War II liberation 80 years ago.

The parade's final section turned to the upcoming Olympic Games.

Colonel Thibault Vallette of the elite Cadre Noir de Saumur cavalry school and 2016 equestrian gold medallist in Rio rode the torch down the route before relay runners carried it around the capital. AFP

# Russia warns of risks to Europe if US deploys missiles

## Move to station missiles in Germany seen by Moscow as step towards new Cold War

MOSCOW – The Kremlin on July 13 warned that the deployment of US missiles in Germany could make European capitals targets for Russian missiles in a repeat of Cold War-style confrontation.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov spoke of a "paradox" in which "Europe is a target for our missiles, our country is a target for US missiles in Europe".

"We have enough capacity to contain these missiles but the potential victims are the capitals of these countries," he said, speaking to Russian state television channel Russia 1.

Mr Peskov also hinted that such a confrontation could undermine Europe as a whole – in the same way that the Cold War ended with the Soviet Union's collapse.

"Europe is coming apart. Europe is not living its best moment. In a different configuration, a repeat of history is inevitable," he said.

The White House announced on July 10 during a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation summit that it would from 2026 periodically station long-range weapons, including Tomahawk cruise missiles, in Germany as a deterrent.

"Exercising these advanced capabilities will demonstrate the United States' commitment to Nato and its contributions to European integrated deterrence," the White House said.

The Kremlin has already criticised the move, accusing Washington of taking a step towards a new Cold War and of directly participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia's Defence Ministry on July 12 said that Defence Minister Andrei Belousov had held a telephone call with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin, where they discussed lowering the risk of "possible escalation".

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has hailed the US decision, despite criticism from members of his Social Democrats.

The decision marks a return of US cruise missiles to Germany after a 20-year absence.

Defending the decision, Mr Scholz told reporters at the Nato summit that it was "something of deterrence, and it's securing peace, and it is a necessary and

important decision at the right time".

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk that the deployment decision addressed a "very serious gap" in the country's capabilities.

Responding to the Kremlin's warning that the US missile deployment could put European capitals at risk, a US State Department spokesperson said the US and Nato "do not seek a military conflict with Russia... but any military action directed against a Nato ally would trigger an overwhelming response".

Russia is "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area", the spokesperson said, adding that it was "Russia that started this war and Russia could end it today".

The German army does not have long-range missiles that launch from the ground, only cruise missiles that can be fired by aircraft.

The 1980s deployment of US Pershing ballistic missiles in West Germany at the height of the Cold War prompted widespread demonstrations, with hundreds of thousands coming out in pacifist protest.

US missiles continued to be stationed through the reunification of Germany and into the 1990s.

But following the end of the Cold War, the US significantly reduced the numbers of missiles stationed in Europe as the threat from Moscow receded.

Now Nato countries – spearheaded by the US – have been bolstering their defences in Europe following the start of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine in 2022. AFP

### REPEAT OF HISTORY

Europe is coming apart. Europe is not living its best moment. In a different configuration, a repeat of history is inevitable.



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# SINGAPORE

## Call for more community living options for adults with autism

Parents hope for more supported living services for their children as they get older

**Chin Soo Fang**  
Senior Correspondent

Executive coach Sharon Lee, 52, is concerned about where her son, 27-year-old Lucas Tan, will live in the future.

Mr Tan, who has autism, lives with his parents and has been attending a day activity centre in Siglap since 2019.

It is his mother's hope that he will live with one of her siblings when she is no longer around. If they are unable to care for him, she may have to arrange to put him in St Andrew's Adult Home, a residential home designed and built for adults with autism.

However, she noted, there are more options overseas for individuals on the autism spectrum.

"In countries like the United Kingdom, adults with autism have the option of supported living in the community," Ms Lee said.

"I feel this could work if the individual has some degree of independence, but it also needs a community to assist and intervene when necessary."

In Singapore, service providers are beginning to think about how care for this group of adults might evolve to solve the issue of their living arrangements as they age, especially after their caregivers are gone.

For instance, the Autism Resource Centre – which provides a wide range of services, such as early intervention, student enrichment and Pathlight School for individuals with autism – told The Straits Times it is developing a residential living programme for such individuals. It will share more details in due time.

Mr Bernard Chew, who is chief executive of St Andrew's Autism Centre, said a different model of care could involve two to three adults with autism living together in a Housing Board flat.

Trained support staff could be deployed to such homes, and those with more severe needs could get

more generous staffing ratios and round-the-clock support.

People able to secure employment can continue to contribute to the community through paid or even voluntary work, he added, while others can access different community facilities and live dignified and meaningful lives.

Mr Chew said it may not be helpful to just continue building more of the same facilities that already exist, including St Andrew's Adult Home (Sengkang). This is part of St Andrew's Autism Centre, which also runs a special education school and two day activity centres.

Instead, it is important to examine the fundamental question of what service model can allow adults with autism to age with dignity and meaning, he said.

"As more adults with autism graduate from special education and mainstream schools, and their caregivers also start to age, there is a need to be looking further ahead to re- envision what kind of life an adult with autism should be living in a truly inclusive society," Mr Chew said.

About 7,000 adults with autism aged 18 and above are known to the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and disability agency SG Enable, as they have applied for or enrolled in disability support schemes or programmes.

The overall number of people with autism in Singapore is not known, as there are those who remain undiagnosed or who have not subscribed to any services.

When students with autism turn 18 and graduate from special education schools, they face what industry professionals call the "post-18 cliff effect", where services drop off and they find limited support to cater to their needs. Some may move to one of 11 MSF-funded adult disability homes for long-term residential care.

Dr Eunice Tan, head of special education at the Singapore University of Social Sciences' S R Nathan School of Human Development,



Ms Sharon Lee with her son Lucas Tan, who has autism, at the St Andrew's Day Activity Centre in Siglap on June 24. Mr Tan, 27, lives with his parents. Service providers in Singapore are beginning to think about how care for adults with autism might evolve, especially after their caregivers are gone. ST PHOTOS: SHINTARO TAY



Mr Ng Kin Sze and his daughter Jia Ming walking around Hougang Mall on June 26. Ms Ng, 33, has been a resident at St Andrew's Adult Home in Compassvale Bow since 2022.

BEING INCLUSIVE

**As more adults with autism graduate from special education and mainstream schools, and their caregivers also start to age, there is a need to be looking further ahead to re- envision what kind of life an adult with autism should be living in a truly inclusive society.**



**MR BERNARD CHEW**, chief executive of St Andrew's Autism Centre.

said adults with milder needs should be able to adapt and adjust to living in the community with some support. This includes living in HDB flats with proper care staff involved.

Those with higher support needs should have options so that they do not have to live in institutions too, added Dr Tan, who has an adult son with autism.

"Many parts of the world, like Canada, are no longer on an institution model. It is about inclusion and being part of the community by participating in activities, regardless of how challenged a person is," she said.

She is adamant that her son will

not be placed in institutions such as homes for adults with disabilities, as she fears his quality of life will be impacted negatively.

"It is at the back of many parents' minds how to provide the best possible life for the adult child once they are unable to take care of them or when they pass on," Dr Tan said.

MSF said families of people with disabilities have expressed through engagement sessions that they wish for their loved ones to stay in the community.

It added that it works with social service agencies, caregivers and people with disabilities to come up with options that support their

needs and goals for community living. These include day activity centres and sheltered workshops.

The first Enabling Services Hub was launched in Tampines in 2023, with two more in the pipeline by 2025 to bring disability support services closer to homes.

Under the Enabling Masterplan 2030, the Taskforce for Developing New Community Living Models for Persons with Disabilities was also set up to explore how Singapore could enhance and extend the current range of support for people with disabilities to live well in the community across life stages.

"The task force will be releasing its recommendations later this

year," said an MSF spokesperson.

Mr Ng Kin Sze, 68, is the sole caregiver of his 33-year-old daughter, Jia Ming, who has autism. The private equity adviser, who is divorced, hopes that current provisions for adults with autism will be improved.

Ms Ng does not talk and cannot care for herself. She has been a resident at St Andrew's Adult Home in Compassvale Bow since 2022.

"Many adults with autism would need long-term care as their caregivers grow old, and this is in short supply relative to the need," Mr Ng said.

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**Narpani carnival** • Promoting healthy living among Indian community | A14

**Ozempic** • Women on diabetes drug report unexpected pregnancy | A14



**Health** • More high myopia cases seen in Singapore | A15

Online



**FEATURE**  
**Packed K-pop calendar**

Singapore has seen a surge in K-pop concerts here in recent years. From 2022 to 2024, the number of events on Ticketmaster grew by 250 per cent and the bubble is far from bursting.

str.sg/kpop



Visitors learning about healthy living at the Healthier SG booth at the Narpani Community Carnival, which was held on Sentosa on July 14. The event, which aimed to promote healthy living and family bonding within the Indian community, saw more than 4,000 attendees. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

# Event promotes healthy living among Indian community

## More interest groups being formed in areas such as running, says community leader

Christine Tan

Having seen how diabetes afflicted his father, mother and younger brother, Mr Ravindren Ganasen decided to take his health more seriously when he reached his mid-40s.

He cut all sugary drinks from his diet, reduced his rice intake and ate more protein. In four years, the 1.86m-tall regional sales manager at an information technology firm lost 25kg, dropping from 130kg to 105kg.

"The doctor said my cholesterol level and blood pressure are quite good for my age," said Mr Ravindren, now 54, who is also vice-president of the People's Association's (PA) Indian Activity Executive Committees Council (Narpani Pearavai).

He shared his story at the annual Narpani Community Carnival on July 14, which aimed to promote

healthy living and family bonding within the Indian community.

Grassroots leaders with the PA said there was some evidence of greater health consciousness among Singaporeans in recent years, given the concerted push by community groups and the Government to manage one's health before problems arise.

Narpani Pearavai provides funding to the Indian activity executive committees at 99 community centres around Singapore to organise health activities for their residents. These include health screenings and talks, said Mr Jay Suresh Radah, the carnival's organising chairman.

"Compared to the last five years, I'd say now there is more awareness (of healthy living)," said the civil servant. "We see more residents voluntarily joining the eye and diabetic screenings."

Health Minister Ong Ye Kung, who was at the carnival, said every community in Singapore faces its

own health challenges and urged participants to live a healthier lifestyle.

Mr Ong noted that the Chinese exercised the least but ate the most fats and sodium; the Malay community has the highest obesity and smoking rates; while diabetes and sugar consumption is a concern for the Indian community.

"Every community, we have our own problems. So reach out to (those in) our own community, and correct our bad habits," said the minister.

A government work group was set up in 2021 to focus on improving the health of ethnic minority groups here, including the Malay and Indian communities.

At the debate on the Ministry of Health's budget that year, then Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam said there were "significant disparities in health behaviours and outcomes across ethnicities".

She noted that in 2020, 14.4 per cent of Malays and 14.2 per cent of Indians had diabetes, compared with 8.2 per cent of Chinese.

Meanwhile, the Chinese consistently have the highest age-stan-



Vice-president of Narpani Pearavai Ravindren Ganasen has lost 25kg after adopting a healthier diet.



Jones Lang LaSalle executive director G. Segar leads about 12 people on monthly walks around Singapore.

darised cancer rates, though the proportion of Malays across all cases of cancer have gradually increased over the decades, she added.

On July 14, Mr Ravindren said more healthy-living interest groups, such as those focused on running, have been forming among the Indian community, beyond the usual arts and culture-based interest groups.

Mr G. Segar, 60, an executive director at Jones Lang LaSalle, leads about 12 people on monthly walks around Singapore. The vice-president of Narpani Pearavai also commits to walking 12,000 steps a day.

"Around my estate in Tampines, there are a lot of gardens and park connectors, so I make use of them. I call it my 'me-time', with my earplugs and music on," he said with a chuckle.

The carnival at Palawan Green in Sentosa saw more than 4,000 people visit information and game booths, such as one by the Health Promotion Board focused on ways to achieve a balanced diet.

There were also song and dance performances, while eligible visitors were encouraged to enrol in Healthier SG, Singapore's national healthcare plan focusing on preventive care.

Families could also join a group race, which required them to go to seven locations at the Palawan and Siloso beaches and solve challenges.

The winning group, comprising two pairs of married couples who are family friends, took it as a workout – they ran about 3km and burnt 230 calories each, according to their tracking devices.

One of them, Mr Premkumar Arasu, 40, an IT analyst, said: "We gave it our all (and) winning is just the icing on the cake."

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# Diabetes drug Ozempic may cause surprise pregnancies

Salma Khalik

Senior Health Correspondent

Diabetes drug Ozempic is making waves again, this time for a side effect of causing unexpected pregnancies – even among women who are on birth control pills.

Ozempic – a brand name for semaglutide – is a prescription-only, once-weekly injectable medication from Denmark's Novo Nordisk that has been around since the end of 2017 for the treatment of Type 2 diabetes. It made headlines several years ago for helping people to lose weight.

To take advantage of this rather popular side effect, the pharmaceutical giant launched another product called Wegovy to target weight loss in 2021. It is essentially the same medication, but given at a higher dosage.

Studies showed that among people taking Wegovy for 68 weeks, 83 per cent lost 5 per cent or more of their weight, while 48 per cent lost more than 15 per cent of their weight.

Demand for Wegovy soared, causing a global shortage that has yet to be fully resolved.

The shortage caused many, who wanted to lose weight, to turn to Ozempic. Although approved only for treating diabetes, the drug can be used off-label – meaning it can be used for something that it has not been approved for – in many countries, including Singapore.

Now, women in the US and Europe who had turned to Ozempic are saying the drug has caused them to become pregnant. Women who had been declared infertile were surprised they had become pregnant, while those who were on oral birth control pills were shocked to find themselves with child.

An article in Nature journal on June 26 quoted scientists saying that reports of pregnancies as a result of women taking Ozempic are plausible.

Dr Ee Tat Xin, a consultant at KK Women's and Children's Hospital's (KKH) department of reproductive medicine, said a possible reason could be that the women may have regained or improved ovulatory function through rapid weight loss. It could also be caused by the regulation of certain hormones brought about by the drug.

"The exact mechanism by which Ozempic affects fertility is not clear. Together with the rest of the world, we are waiting for more evidence to validate this claim," Dr Ee said.

He added that animal studies have shown that the drug may have an effect on gut microbiome, which may in turn improve ovarian function. The drug is also known to interfere with the effectiveness of contraceptive pills.

Until more information is available, Dr Ee said KKH will not prescribe Ozempic to boost fertility. In fact, the medication comes with a warning for women to stop taking the drug two months before becoming pregnant, as risks to the pregnancy and foetus are not known.

Added Dr Ee: "In our practice, patients do conceive successfully when they manage to lose weight effectively, regardless of whether it is through diet, exercise, medication or bariatric surgery."

Dr Khoo Chin Meng, who heads the division of endocrinology at National University Hospital, also does not recommend the use of Ozempic to boost fertility. He said women with excess body weight have subfertility or infertility issues due to a condition known as polycystic ovarian syndrome.

Ozempic can help correct the condition through weight loss, but use of the drug should be discontinued when a woman is found to be pregnant.

Dr Jessie Phoon, an obstetrician and gynaecologist at Mount Elizabeth Fertility Centre, is also against using the drug to improve fertility.

She said: "Firstly, you are not supposed to get pregnant while on Ozempic. Secondly, the rebound effect after stopping Ozempic can be worse if long-term weight loss cannot be maintained."

With the rebound effect, women could end up at a higher weight than before.

Because weight loss improves the chances of pregnancy, Dr Phoon suggested that overweight women who want to get pregnant "can be encouraged with the use of Ozempic under controlled environments, with a concurrent weight maintenance regime". Once the woman achieves her weight-loss target, she should stop Ozempic and then "quickly try fertility options".

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA), which regulates drugs here, said there must be a "rational basis" for a doctor to use drugs off-label. The doctor must be able to justify that it is in the patient's best interest, and patients must have consented after being properly informed.

The HSA said it is illegal for Ozempic to be sold online. People doing so can be fined \$50,000 and/or jailed for two years. This is because prescription drugs "contain potent active ingredients which could lead to serious adverse effects if taken without medical supervision". In 2023, it removed 39 online listings for this drug.

Ozempic, and by extension Wegovy, are not the only drugs whereby pregnancy is an unexpected side effect.

Another injectable drug, tirzepatide – sold under the brand name Mounjaro for treating diabetes, and Zepbound for tackling obesity – appears to have similar fallouts. These drugs, by US pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, have been found to reduce the maximum concentration of contraceptive in the blood by up to 66 per cent after a single dose.

Because contraceptives are dose-dependent, taking tirzepatide could negate the effects of contraceptive pills.

Novo Nordisk has created a Wegovy pregnancy registry in the US to learn more about the safety of using Wegovy during pregnancy.

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# RSS Stalwart takes part in largest international maritime exercise

Sarah Koh

More than 25,000 military personnel drawn from the naval, land and air forces of 29 countries, including Singapore, are taking part in a 36-day naval warfare exercise off the coast of Hawaii.

The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) Formidable-class frigate RSS Stalwart is involved in "high-end naval warfare" training with other navies at the Exercise Rim of the Pacific (Rimpac), which will end on Aug 2, said the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) in a statement on July 14.

During the exercise, the frigate successfully fired two live Aster surface-to-air missiles that took down two inbound missiles simulated using high-speed, sea-skimming aerial drones – a significant milestone in the RSN's capabilities, said Mindef.

The ship's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Tan, said the successful firing of the Aster

missiles against two simultaneous inbound missiles showed the precision and effectiveness of the RSN's anti-air warfare suite, and validated Singapore's air defence capabilities.

Military Expert 2 (ME2) Vijayan Manimaran said coordinating the dual missile firings required precise timing and synchronisation, and tested the readiness of both the ship's personnel and its combat systems.

The team had gone through numerous drills and simulations to perfect the procedures and their response times, added the weapon control system supervisor.

"This accomplishment is a testament to the hard work and competency of our team, our operational readiness, and marks a significant step forward in our maritime defence capabilities," said ME2 Vijayan.

In the 2024 run of the biennial exercise, the RSS Stalwart is also leading a task unit consisting of three other ships from South Korea, Mexico and the United States.



It will lead the unit as it takes part in practice runs such as manoeuvring drills and under way replenishment – the process of transferring fuel or supplies from one ship to another while on the move.

A team of 16 Singapore navy personnel deployed to shore command centres is also helping to plan and coordinate the execution of the exercise, said Mindef.

Marine systems cluster chief

During Exercise Rim of the Pacific, the RSS Stalwart fired two live Aster surface-to-air missiles that took down two inbound missiles simulated using aerial drones. PHOTO: MINDEF

ME3 Rain Teo noted that the RSN's deployment began more than a month ago, as the RSS Stalwart had to sail thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean to reach Hawaii.

Along the way, it participated in various multilateral exercises, she said. These included war games alongside naval vessels from Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands and the US.

While transiting between Guam and Hawaii, the ships conducted drills such as manoeuvring and communication exercises, gunnery firings, under way replenishments, anti-submarine warfare training, air medical evacuation and air defence simulations, said Mindef.

This is the ninth time since 2008 that the Singapore navy is taking part in Exercise Rimpac, which is the world's largest international maritime exercise. Hosted by the US Navy, it aims to foster cooperation and readiness among participating nations.

About 40 surface ships, three submarines, 14 national land forces and more than 150 aircraft are taking part in the exercise in 2024, which began on June 28.

The scale and scope of Rimpac provide Singapore with a unique opportunity to hone the navy's multidimensional warfare capabilities, said the RSN fleet commander, Rear-Admiral Kwan Hon Chu-ong.

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Excessive eye growth, or elongation of the eyeball, causes myopia. To prevent myopia, young children should spend more time outdoors in natural light and limit the time spent on near work, such as looking at screens. ST FILE PHOTO

# Rising cases of high myopia in adults

It is expected to afflict 15% of the population here in the coming decades, up from 6% today

Joyce Teo  
Senior Health Correspondent

Ms Candice Chong started wearing glasses when she was four.

By the time she was 13, she had a lens prescription of around minus 10 dioptres (1,000 degrees) for each eye, and her myopia continued to worsen throughout her teenage years to reach around 2,000 degrees in each eye.

High myopia is typically defined as short-sightedness of over minus 5 dioptres (500 degrees), though some experts argue that it should be minus 6 dioptres (600 degrees) and above.

Excessive eye growth, or elongation of the eyeball, causes myopia. In some cases, myopes like Ms Chong, now 43, suffer from pathologic myopia, which in turn causes degenerative changes to the back of the eye.

"Normal eyeballs are like fishballs, but for people like me, my eyeballs are the shape of a sausage... very stretched, elongated... and more fragile overall," said Ms Chong.

She started experiencing complications due to her high myopia not long after she turned 20.

First, it was glaucoma. Then, she had cataract surgery in one eye, and then the other, in her 30s. In 2023, she underwent surgery to prevent a retinal tear in her left eye.

Singapore is seeing more and more highly myopic adults, and the number is expected to grow in the coming decades.

"We cannot see the problem now, but it will come," said Professor Saw Seang Mei, the Distinguished Wallace Foulds Professor at Duke-NUS Medical School.

"Pathologic myopia, a rising problem, will be a leading cause of low vision in Singapore in the next few years."

Prof Saw, who is also co-head of the myopia research group at the Singapore Eye Research Institute (Seri), has projected that the number of myopic adults aged 50 and above in Singapore will rise from 40 per cent of that segment of the population currently to 80 per cent in the next few decades.

This is because the older adults of the near future will have had, when they were children, a lifestyle conducive to the development of myopia - more reading and writing, and more time spent in front of screens rather than outdoors.

Similarly, high myopia in older adults will also be more prevalent and afflict 15 per cent of Singapore's population in the coming

decades, up from 6 per cent today, while pathologic myopia rates will climb from 4 per cent to 10 per cent, she said.

There are two million myopic adults and 350,000 highly myopic adults among Singapore residents today.

The Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) is already seeing rising numbers of patients with high myopia.

Associate Professor Donny Hoang arrived in Singapore from New York to start a high myopia clinic at SNEC in 2017.

In that first year, he saw 119 patients, he said.

By June 2024, as awareness of high myopia has grown, he had seen 2,125 high myopia patients in total.

"In New York, I looked for five years and I found 50 (high myopia) patients in Columbia University. And then, I moved here and in two years, I already had 1,000 patients that I am following," he said.

Prof Hoang, a senior consultant in the surgical retinal department and myopia centre at SNEC focusing on high and pathologic myopia, was previously director of the High Myopia Laboratory at Columbia University in New York City.

He said the greatest visual threats to high myopia patients are the development of pathologic myopia and permanent vision loss from conditions such as glaucoma and myopic macular degeneration.

"If the eye wall is strong, even if it is a long eye, it is less likely to have all these problems," said Prof Hoang.

But if it resembles "a very over-inflated balloon with a very thin wall", he added, the eye is likely to bulge out more, bleed, and have cracks in the wall and splitting of the retina layers, which is what happens in pathologic myopia.

At the SNEC high myopia clinic, nearly 90 per cent of the patients developed deformation of the eye wall (posterior staphyloma) or thinning of the retina (myopic macular degeneration), and some had bleeding inside the eye. Their average age is 64 and more than half of them are women.

"The younger you start becoming myopic, the higher the end point you're going to reach in terms of your degrees, because your eyes stop growing when you stop growing," said Prof Hoang, who is also the deputy head of the Myopia Unit at Seri.

"So when you're 22 or 23, you're not really getting any taller, so your eyes should not be getting much longer either."

The more severe the myopia, the more likely a highly myopic adult will develop pathologic myopia. The risk also increases as highly myopic adults age, with research done here showing that the progression to more severe forms of



## GET CHECKED

**I am handicapped in some ways already. If you have a family history of high myopia, it is important to get checked. If you don't, eye care is still important. Take vision breaks and don't look at your phone in the dark.**



**MS CANDICE CHONG**, 43, who suffers from pathologic myopia.

pathologic myopia is much worse after 70 years of age, Prof Saw said.

At least two out of three highly myopic adults will develop pathologic myopia by the age of 70. Almost all older adults with extreme myopia of worse than 12 dioptres (1,200 degrees) will develop pathologic myopia when they reach 80 or 90 years of age, she said.

The numbers are based on an ongoing population study on the impact of high myopia in Singapore known as the Singapore Epidemiology of Eye Diseases (Seed) High Myopia study, for which Prof Saw is the principal investigator.

At the 12-year follow-up mark of the Seed study, the adults with pathologic myopia saw their condition getting worse, with more developing low vision, she said.

At 43, Ms Chong is already preparing herself for further vision impairment. Six years ago, she started to notice changes in her vision.

"If you go for a holiday in the mountains and see the misty, cloudy skies, that's what I see. My world is eternally foggy," she said. "My condition is degenerative...

As my eyesight gets more foggy, I will have to be more careful moving around at night. I've tripped because I thought the ground was even when it was not... I've collided into pillars, glass."

When she was a student, Ms Chong went to optical shops to get her glasses and lenses, and did not notice anything was amiss until she decided to go for Lasik surgery in her 20s.

She said she had to first undergo a lens implant, and that was when the surgeon noticed that her eye pressure was a little high and referred her to a glaucoma specialist.

The Lasik surgery was never done.

But even if she had gone through with it, she would still have the same issues; the eye complications of high myopia are related to changes in the structure of the eyeball and cannot be corrected by glasses, Lasik or cataract surgery.

"I am handicapped in some ways already. If you have a family history of high myopia, it is important to get checked. If you don't, eye care is still important. Take vision breaks and don't look at your phone in the dark," she said.

Some of Ms Chong's family members have pathologic myopia. Her aunt has had surgery after experiencing retinal detachment. And in 2023, her uncle with high myopia accidentally collided with his friend's head in the pool while swimming and suffered a retinal tear.

"Retinal detachment doesn't just happen to *lau pok* (Hokkien for lousy) eyes like mine, it can happen to others... So if you start to see flashes, floaters, and you notice that your vision is not normal, go to A&E straight away," she said.

Prof Hoang said these are not the usual few floaters people sometimes experience, but dots or specks that are so numerous they cannot be counted, and are accompanied by flashing lights that are

like a lightning storm taking place in the eye.

For highly myopic people, flashes and floaters could point to a retinal tear, but there are other threats to vision, including bleeding, to look out for.

Prof Hoang asks his patients to cover one eye and look at the same object - maybe a door or window frame - from the same distance every day, and see if it appears crooked or wavy. If so, they should check again two hours later. If it is still crooked, he wants to see them within a day or two.

At SNEC, most of Prof Hoang's patients have a refractive error of 1,500-3,000 degrees in their eyes; some are already legally blind in one eye.

"The biggest misconception of the people that I see is that they think, 'oh, my degree is over 1,000 or 1,500. It just means I need Lasik earlier, I need thicker spectacles, I need to wear contact lenses that are thicker'... but they are not aware of the fact that suddenly they're at much higher risk of these potentially blinding problems," said Prof Hoang.

To prevent myopia, young children should spend more time outdoors in natural light and limit the time spent on near work - activities requiring a short working distance for the eyes, such as looking at screens, reading and doing craft work with small objects.

If the child is already myopic and the myopia is progressing fast, see an eye care practitioner for treatment, such as atropine eye drops, to prevent them from getting high myopia, Prof Hoang said.

Adults with high myopia should go for a comprehensive eye screening to check for glaucoma and other possible complications. Those with extreme myopia of 1,000 degrees or more should get screened earlier, from the age of 40, he said.

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2 million

Number of myopic adults among Singapore residents today.

350,000

Number of highly myopic adults among Singapore residents today.

The SNEC is seeing rising numbers of patients with high myopia, which is mostly defined as short-sightedness of over 500 degrees. PHOTO: SINGAPORE NATIONAL EYE CENTRE

# SCIENCE

## SimplyScience

# How to tell if an appliance is environmentally friendly

Energy and water efficiency labels, product lifespan are some things to keep in mind



Zhaki Abdullah

In March, it was announced that all Housing Board households would receive \$300 in e-vouchers that can be used to buy certain eco-friendly appliances, as part of an extension of the Climate Friendly Households Programme.

But how do consumers determine which appliances are more environmentally friendly? Simply Science looks at how you can choose devices that can help save the earth.

HDB residents can claim their climate vouchers online by logging on at RedeemSG (go.gov.sg/cv-claim) using their Singpass accounts.

The vouchers can be used at 14 participating retailers – including Courts, Best Denki, Audio House and Sheng Siong – with proof of residential address such as NRIC, utility bills or other documents.

They cover a variety of products, such as refrigerators with at least three ticks, or air-conditioners with five ticks on the National Environment Agency's energy label, which highlights the relative energy efficiency of an appliance.

Other products include shower fittings, taps and mixers with at least three ticks under national water agency PUB's mandatory water

efficiency labelling scheme.

More information on the scheme can be found at [www.climate-friendly-households.gov.sg/](http://www.climate-friendly-households.gov.sg/)

Beyond the ticks, what else can consumers do to select more environmentally friendly appliances?

Mr Alvin Ee, a research fellow at NUS' Energy Studies Institute, noted that energy labels also provide the annual energy consumption of an appliance, based on typical usage.

This will provide an indication of how efficient the appliance is, compared with similar appliances with the same number of ticks, he said.

Appliances eligible for the climate vouchers – such as air-conditioners, water heaters and refrigerators – are among those that consume a significant portion of energy, he added.

The use of certain technologies can also help to indicate the efficiency of an appliance.

For example, water heaters and clothes dryers using heat pumps can be more efficient than traditional electric ones, said Mr Ee.

When buying appliances, consumers should consider what they require for their day-to-day needs, he added.

For example, if a household seldom washes large loads of laundry or machine-dries clothing, they can forgo a larger washing machine or a dryer, which tends to consume more water and energy.

Instead, they can rely on laundromats when they need higher-capacity washing or drying, said Mr Ee, who also noted the option of renting home appliances when



Energy labels provide an indication of how efficient an appliance is compared with similar appliances with the same number of ticks. They also provide the annual energy consumption of an appliance, based on typical usage. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

### SIMPLE CALCULATIONS

**In terms of whether to buy new energy efficient appliances, my suggestion is to perform some simple financial calculations on the energy savings and payback period.**



**DR EDDY FOO**, a senior lecturer with the Nanyang Technological University's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

needed.

"Buying an appliance with more functions that may not be used frequently could also incur higher maintenance costs over a long period due to additional parts," he added.

Dr Eddy Foo, a senior lecturer at NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, said that beyond energy consumption, other factors to consider when buying eco-friendly appliances are the water consumption of washing machines and dishwashers, and the emission of hazardous chemicals by refrigerators that can contribute to pollution.

Consumers should take into account the lifespan of an appliance, said Mr Ee, noting that appliances that last longer are less likely to be replaced, thus reducing waste.

They should also consider if the appliance is part of a take-back scheme – where retailers or manu-

facturers collect used items for disposal – as such companies are better able to recycle the appliances more effectively, he added.

Mr Ee advised consumers to run the appliances according to what they are designed for, for example, not installing an air-conditioner with low BTU – a unit of measurement for its cooling capacity – to cool a large space, or drying a higher load of clothing than the dryer is able to take.

"Consumers need to maintain their appliances regularly, such as cleaning or replacing filters in air-conditioners, refrigerators and dryers, as well as ensuring seals and gaskets in refrigerators are clean and intact to prevent cold-air leakage," said Dr Foo.

They should also consider using the energy-saving or eco modes on appliances, he added.

Consumers who are environmentally conscious should note

that switching to new appliances could improve energy efficiency, said Dr Foo.

Older appliances tend to consume more electricity as they have less-efficient technology, while newer appliances use new technology such as inverters – an electrical component in air-conditioners that efficiently controls motor speed and adjusts energy consumption based on user needs, he added.

"In terms of whether to buy new energy-efficient appliances, my suggestion is to perform some simple financial calculations on the energy savings and payback period," he said.

The payback period is derived by dividing the purchase price of the appliance by the energy cost savings per year, he added.

If the payback period, or the duration for the accumulated energy cost savings to match the purchase price, is longer than 10 years – the typical lifespan of most household appliances – it may not be worthwhile to upgrade to a newer appliance, said Dr Foo.

Determining which appliances use the most energy can be difficult for the average consumer.

"In most cases, the electricity bill does not show a breakdown of the monthly consumption, so it is challenging to identify which appliance is using the most energy just by looking at the electricity bill," said Dr Foo.

"Consumers may need to install some form of energy monitoring device to find out the energy usage of each appliance and analyse the data at the end of each month to identify appliances that use more energy," he added.

One can also gauge the energy consumption of an appliance through the rated power usually found in the product specifications, said Mr Ee.

However, consumers should note that this is typically based on the maximum power the appliance will consume under normal operating conditions, and may not reflect the actual power consumed, he added.

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• Simply Science is a new fortnightly series that looks at the science behind everyday questions.

# Genes from Robusta 'kopi' beans can save Arabica plants from disease

## Shabana Begum

The Robusta bean often used to brew cheaper cups of coffee – like the traditional Nanyang kopi – can save the more premium Arabica from a fungal disease.

For generations, Arabica plants, from which about 60 per cent of all coffee is produced, have been ravaged by an incurable fungal disease called coffee leaf rust.

Agriculture institutes in coffee-producing regions have been using selective breeding to confer the Robusta traits to Arabica plants, after a rust-resistant plant hybrid was found in Timor, Indonesia, in the 1920s.

Now, recent international research co-led by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) could optimise the breeding process. The study involved mapping the genomes of various coffee varieties, and the researchers zeroed in on the specific Robusta genes that are resistant to coffee leaf rust.

"For the Timor hybrid descendants, in every generation the hybrids have been crossed with an Arabica variety, the offspring's Robusta content gets smaller and smaller," said Assistant Professor Jarkko Salojarvi from NTU's School of Biological Sciences, who led the research team.

Through identifying the resistant genes, the researchers found a means to enable more efficient targeted breeding of resistant plants, similar to targeted therapies against human diseases.

The study was done with Nestle and two universities in the United States and France.

When the coffee-hunting fungus attacks Arabica coffee plantations, it leaves brownish-orange spots on the leaves – much like rust on steel.

The Arabica leaves then wither and die off. Leaf loss lowers the amount and quality of coffee berries harvested, leading to great economic losses for farmers in Latin America and other places.

In 2020, the disease spread to



Assistant Professor Jarkko Salojarvi, seen here with a diseased Arabica coffee plant, led the research team that mapped out the genomes of various coffee varieties, and zeroed in on the specific Robusta genes that are resistant to coffee leaf rust, an incurable fungal disease. PHOTO: NTU SINGAPORE

Hawaii for the first time, and a 2015 outbreak in the Mexican state of Oaxaca caused a 50 per cent loss in yields.

While farmers have used fungicides as well as pruning and weed management to drive out the pesky fungus, the best way to control it is through the use of resistant cultivars, said Dr Luiz Filipe Pereira, a researcher at the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa).

Since the 1970s, the Arabica-Robusta hybrid from Timor and its descendants have been cross-bred

with the preferred Arabica plants to create rust-resistant varieties.

While Robusta beans are considered inferior to Arabica beans in terms of flavour, they are used in the well-loved kopi served at hawkker centres.

In the study, the scientists mapped out all the genetic material – or genomes – of Arabica, Robusta and a third coffee species called *C. eugenioides* using advanced technology to sequence the DNA.

Eventually, the researchers found a region of DNA sequences



The fungal disease leaves brownish-orange spots on the leaves of Arabica plants, which then wither and die off. Leaf loss lowers the amount and quality of coffee berries harvested. PHOTO: PURDUE UNIVERSITY/ CATHERINE AIME

common among the different leaf rust-resistant plants, giving them a new combination of Robusta-based genes that could convey resistance to the Arabica plants.

"Using publicly available data, we identified which of the common Robusta genes reacted to the leaf rust. And that helped us narrow down the region," said Prof Salojarvi.

The study's findings and full genome sequences were published in scientific journal *Nature Genetics* in April.

Mapping out the full genetic information of coffee plants will make the identification of resistant genes faster and more accurate, said NTU.

Prof Salojarvi added that breeders can now use modelling techniques to predict leaf rust-resistance in plants at their seedling stage, without having to wait close to a decade to find out if the selective breeding was successful.

Dr Pereira added: "The main problem is that during selection, some of the resistant genes can be lost. The genomic information allows us to easily select plants having the resistant genes, at early stages, saving time and resources."

And useful traits from the Arabica plants – from taste notes to growth – can also be selected with the help of the same species' genetic map, he said.

This will come in useful as coffee plantations have another threat to contend with – climate change. A 2022 study by Switzerland's Institute of Natural Resource Sciences projected that by 2050, global warming may lead to a decline in half of the world's coffee growing regions.

Arabica variants also have low genetic diversity, which limits their ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

"That's why we need targeted breeding to have more variants that are tolerant to extreme conditions," added Prof Salojarvi.

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# All Fire-d up to quit early and enjoy long retirement?

Experts discuss pros and cons of 'Financial Independence, Retire Early' at free event

**Joanna Seow**  
Assistant Business Editor

The dream of being able to stop work early in life and enjoy a long retirement is attractive to many young people.

But looking beyond the hype of the Financial Independence, Retire Early - or Fire - movement, which

has gained a following in Singapore, not everyone may find the lifestyle suitable.

Find out more about the merits and drawbacks of the movement at a panel discussion on July 19, which features experts brought together by HeadStart, The Straits Times' career and personal finance newsletter for youth. The panel will also delve into other personal finance

strategies and tips for people at different life stages.

On the panel are Ms Lorna Tan, head of financial planning literacy at DBS Bank; Mr He Ruiming, co-founder of personal finance blog The Woke Salaryman; and Mr Aaron Chwee, head of wealth advisory at OCBC Bank. ST assistant business editor Alyssa Woo is the moderator.

The session, Fire Movement: Separating Hype From Reality, will be held from 7pm to 8.30pm at the Lifelong Learning Institute in Paya Lebar. After the discussion, audience members will be able to network with the panellists and journalists from the HeadStart team.

Attendees will receive a HeadStart tote bag and other merchandise. Registration is free but spots



(Clockwise from top left) Ms Lorna Tan, head of financial planning literacy at DBS Bank; Mr He Ruiming, co-founder of personal finance blog The Woke Salaryman; and Mr Aaron Chwee, head of wealth advisory at OCBC Bank, will speak at the discussion moderated by The Straits Times' assistant business editor Alyssa Woo. The panel session is titled Fire Movement: Separating Hype From Reality.

are limited.

The panel session is part of a July 18 to 20 event at PLQ Plaza and the institute called Thrive@libraries, organised by the National Library Board and SkillsFuture Singapore.

At the HeadStart booth at PLQ Plaza, visitors will be able to pick up tips on career development and investing.

They can also get a HeadStart

tote bag. Subscribers to the newsletter can play a game to win HeadStart merchandise such as water bottles, bottle holders and stickers.

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• Sign up at [www.eventbrite.sg/event/the-fire-movement-separating-hype-from-reality-tickets-934161300597/](http://www.eventbrite.sg/event/the-fire-movement-separating-hype-from-reality-tickets-934161300597/)



## Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
305	247	CapLand Ascendas REI	272	+17	56518	5.6	1.2
213	168	CapLand IntCom T	212	+12	129567	5.1	1
348	244	CapitaLandInvest	281	+16	45786	4.3	1
750	516	CityDev	549	+18	8854	2.2	0.5
3855	28191	DBS Grp	3793	+51	31593	5.1	1.8
297	175	DFIRG USD	US188	+3	2761	1.6	-
233	201	Fraser's Cpt Tr	222	+10	19440	5.5	1
130	92	Fraser's L&C Tr	100	+7	81128	7	0.9
106	81.5	Genting Sing	87	+2.5	121887	4	1.3
387	278	HongkongLand USD	US334	+12	6486	6.6	0.2
5049	3372	JMH USD	US3616	+115	1136	5.9	35.8
3479	2376	Jardine C&C	2581	-27	1927	6	1
746	615	Keppel	672	+16	16556	5.1	1.1
253	209	Mapletree Ind Tr	225	+14	49947	6	1.3
175	124	Mapletree Log Tr	136	+8	158337	6.6	0.8
170	118	Mapletree PanAsia Co	134	+11	87120	6.6	0.8
1535	1217	OCBC Bank	1528	+28	24815	5.4	1.2
329	240	SATS	329	+34	38313	0.5	21
998	887	SGX	980	+22	7118	3.3	6.2
760	587	SIA	703	+5	23098	6.8	1.3
447	362	ST Engineering	438	+12	27260	3.7	5.5
294	136	Seatrium Ltd	148	+4	192034	-	0.8
610	450	Sembcorp Ind	480	+3	15514	2.7	1.9
295	225	Singtel	295	+10	185133	5.1	2
615	425	ThaiBev	485	+4.5	183406	4.6	1.6
3333	2682	UOB	3305	+55	11957	5.1	1.2
714	507	UOL	543	+16	6459	3.7	0.4
1525	1136	Venture Corp	1486	+72	5223	5	1.5
393	307	Wilmar Intl	317	+5	28897	5.4	0.7
253	137	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	226	-15	97679	2.9	2.3

## FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
122	93	CDL HTrust	99	+3.5	7938	5.8	0.7
305	247	CapLand Ascendas REI	272	+17	56518	5.6	1.2
113	84	CapLand Ascott T	89.5	+2.5	46082	7.3	0.9
213	168	CapLand IntCom T	212	+12	129567	5.1	1
348	244	CapitaLandInvest	281	+16	45786	4.3	1
750	516	CityDev	549	+18	8854	2.2	0.5
150	120	ComfortDelGro	139	+5	24099	4.8	1.1
3855	28191	DBS Grp	3793	+51	31593	5.1	1.8
297	175	DFIRG USD	US188	+3	2761	1.6	-
35	25	ESR-LOGOS REIT	29	+1.5	53826	8.8	0.9
53.5	40	Emperador Inc	42.5	unch	6769	-	-
161	132	First Resources	145	+6	4702	4.3	1.3
233	201	Fraser's Cpt Tr	222	+10	19440	5.5	1
130	92	Fraser's L&C Tr	100	+7	81128	7	0.9
106	81.5	Genting Sing	87	+2.5	121887	4	1.3
28.5	23.5	Golden Agri-Res	27	unch	58273	2.3	0.5
19.9	12	HPH Trust USD	US13.3	+0.4	21241	19.8	0.3
387	278	HongkongLand USD	US334	+12	6486	6.6	0.2
851	462	IFAST	758	+15	1481	0.5	8.4
5049	3372	JMH USD	US3616	+115	1136	5.9	35.8
3479	2376	Jardine C&C	2581	-27	1927	6	1
52	43.5	Keppel	475	+1	10863	1.3	3.1
746	615	Keppel DC Reit	672	+16	16556	5.1	1.1
230	160	Keppel Ind Tr	199	+18	45803	4.7	1.5
95	78	Keppel Log Tr	89	+4.5	36592	6.5	0.7
253	209	Mapletree Ind Tr	225	+14	49947	6	1.3
175	124	Mapletree Log Tr	136	+8	158337	6.6	0.8
170	118	Mapletree PanAsia Co	134	+11	87120	6.6	0.8
875	80.5	NetLink NBN Tr	83.5	+0.5	32605	6.3	1.3
1535	1217	OCBC Bank	1528	+28	24815	5.4	1.2
32	20	QUERET	28.5	+2	14526	7.3	0.5
143	79.5	Qlam Group	121	+8	7242	5.8	0.6
95.5	79	PARAGONREIT	87.5	+2	5500	1	1
393	333	ParkwayLife Reit	371	+13	3052	4	1.6
140	96.5	Raffles Medical	104	+3	8108	2.3	1.9
329	240	SATS	329	+34	38313	0.5	21
998	887	SGX	980	+22	7118	3.3	6.2
760	587	SIA	703	+5	23098	6.8	1.3
249	218	SIA Engineering	243	+11	1893	3.3	1.6
447	362	ST Engineering	438	+12	27260	3.7	5.5
294	136	Seatrium Ltd	148	+4	192034	-	0.8
610	450	Sembcorp Ind	480	+3	15514	2.7	1.9
164	146	Sheng Siong	149	unch	7412	4.2	4.5
295	225	Singtel	295	+10	185133	5.1	2
129	101	StarHub	126	+3	3667	5.3	3.8
133	103	Suntec Reit	116	+9	39567	6.2	0.6
615	425	ThaiBev	485	+4.5	183406	4.6	1.6
3333	2682	UOB	3305	+55	11957	5.1	1.2
714	507	UOL	543	+16	6459	3.7	0.4
1525	1136	Venture Corp	1486	+72	5223	5	1.5
393	307	Wilmar Intl	317	+5	28897	5.4	0.7
253	137	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	226	-15	97679	2.9	2.3

## Price and volume movers

	VOL	CLOSE(\$)	CHANGE	+/-
Asia Vets	13.6	0.046	+0.021	+84.00
Green Build	8,394.2	0.046	-0.006	-11.54
Int'l Cement	117,457.8	0.021	+0.002	+10.53
Willas-Array	1,075.5	0.550	+0.060	+12.24
HL Global	942.7	0.095	+0.012	+14.46
HL Global Ent	453.5	0.220	-0.010	-4.35
NoonTalk Media	19.6	0.081	+0.009	+12.50
BACUI TECH	1,727.9	0.004	+0.002	+100.00
Prime US ReitUSD	26,865.8	0.129	+0.011	+9.32
BHG Retail Reit	17.2	0.420	-0.070	-14.29

Shows the stocks with the highest combination of price change and of daily activity relative to the three-month average volume.

## FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
393.1	173	AEM SGD	188	+7	8912	-	1.2
135	117	AIMS APAC Reit	131	+5	4531	7.1	1
107	69	Aztech Gbl	100	+0.5	5373	4.5	2.1
240	160	BRC Asia	236	cd	7	6.8	1.5
252	144	Best World	249	unch	1314	-	1.8
79.5	54	Bumitama Agri	71	+1	1099	1.8	0.9
105	65.5	CapLand China T	70.5	+4	15520	9.6	0.6
120	95	CapLand India T	104	+4	4949	6.2	0.9
97.5	73	China Aviation	87.5	+2	2550	5.8	0.8
91.5	73	Civmec	87	-1.5	828	5.2	1.1
17.6	10.8	Cosco	15.2	-0.6	39174	-	0.7
162	112	CromwellREIT EUR	137	unch	2603	11.5	0.6
68	50	Daiwa Hse Log Tr	55.5	-1	5341	9.4	0.8
139	85	Delfi	87.5	+0.5	840	6.6	1.5
67.5	43.5	DigiCore Reit USD	64	+4.5	16406	5.8	1
50.5	20	Dyna-Mac	48.5	+3	71822	1.7	7.2
30.5	28	EC World Reit	28	susp	-	131	2.2
68	56	Far East HTrust	64	+2	5434	6.4	0.7
27	20.5	First Reit	25	unch	12132	9.9	0.8
147	96	Food Empire	100	+1.5	2295	10	1.4
53.5	41.5	Fraser's HTrust	43	+1	3131	5.7	0.6
174	80.5	Frencken	163	-3	15925	1.4	1.7
101	80	Hong Fok	82.5	+0.5	1542	1.2	0.2
35	17.6	Japfa	31	-0.5	6897	-	0.6
38.5	12.2	KeppelREITUSD	14.9	+1.5	19882	16.8	0.2
68.5	49	Lendlease Reit	60.5	+4	36521	7.8	0.8
171	4	ManulifeREIT USD	7.2	+0.8	25245	-	0.2
129	59.5	Nanofilm	87.5	+4	33828	0.8	1.5
26.5	8.7	Prime US REIT USD	12.9	+1.7	34282	21	0.2
108	78.5	PropNex	83.5	+0.5	812	7.2	4.9
103	56.5	Riverstone	99.5	+1	7967	5.1	3
107	56.5	SamuderaShipping	95.5	-6.5	25182	11.5	0.7
73	61	Sasseur Reit	68	+1.5	3737	9.2	4.3
52	37	SingPost	44.5	cd	23589	1.7	0.7
53	44	SinghillREIT	49.5	+1.5	9820	7.7	0.7
214	133	Straits Trading	142	+5	1442	5.6	0.4
158	102	UMS	118	-1	10006	2.9	2
63	34.5	UtdHampshREITUSD	41.5	+2	1162	11.5	0.6
57	49.5	Valuetronics	66	cd	4732	6.6	1.1
37	28.5	YZJ Fin Hldg	35	+0.5	26667	6.3	0.3
82	39	Yanlord Land	45.5	+2.5	9419	-	-
17.4	3.9	Yoma Strategic	12.9	-2.5	422408	-	0.6

## ETFs

52-Week High	Low	Counter	Last Sale	+/-	Vol ('000)	Last Quote
107.6	101.8	ABF SG Bond ETF	104.8	+0.8	4797	104.9
145	108	CF VN 30 SC ETF SCS	125.8	-0.2	3	124
110	85	CF VN 30 SC ETF USS	US94	+1.5	0	89.9
186	149.7	CSOP LOW CARBON S\$	186	-	-	190.7
142.8	109	CSOP LOW CARBON S\$	US142.3	+2.5	0	142
86.7	70.3	CSOP Edge SREIT ETF S\$	76.9	cd	+5.1	2537
30528	23093	GLD SCS	29880	+320	3	29908
23001	16845	GLD USS				

# Markets surge in anticipation of rate cuts

## US Fed chief's testimony in Congress, consumer data spur hopes for Sept rate cut

### Market Watch



Ven Sreenivasan  
Senior Columnist

Global stock markets surged earlier in July to multi-year highs on bets that the United States Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in September.

On Wall Street, the Dow Jones index rose 1.6 per cent for the week to settle close to a record at 40,000.9, while the S&P 500 gained 0.9 per cent to 5,615.35 points. The tech-heavy Nasdaq edged 0.25 per cent higher for the week to 18,398 points.

In Singapore, the Straits Times Index (STI) rose 2.6 per cent last week to 3,497.78 points – its highest close in six years – as banks, blue chips and Singapore real estate investment trusts (S-Reits) saw significant inflow of funds.

So far, in July, the STI has rallied 4.6 per cent – beating the S&P 500's 3.4 per cent gain. In the year to date, the benchmark index has gained 7.95 per cent. In terms of total returns, which include dividend payouts, it is up 10.9 per cent.

One of the standout performers last week was Seatrium, whose stock rose from \$1.38 a week earlier to end the week on July 12 at \$1.48 after chief executive officer Chris Ong assured the market that the company is on a turnaround. Analysts expect the offshore energy giant – created after Sembcorp Marine took over the assets of Keppel O&M – to post just over \$200 million in profit in 2024, and more than double this figure in 2025.

Their consensus one-year target for Seatrium's stock is \$2.68, representing an upside of over 80



US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell speaking to Congress on July 9. He said the Fed could cut interest rates sooner once officials are sufficiently confident that inflation is headed towards the 2 per cent target. PHOTO: AFP

per cent from current levels.

But much of the local market rally has also been driven by Singapore banks, which make up nearly half of the STI by weighting, with DBS Bank, UOB and OCBC Bank reaching record highs on July 10.

The rising tide has also lifted other boats. Fellow blue chip Singtel climbed to its highest level in over a year. S-Reits, which had been beaten down over the past year amid elevated interest rates, are rising. Offshore and marine stocks like Beng Kuang Marine and Mermaid Maritime have also been on a tear, thanks to what analysts call a business "super cycle". Second Chance Properties closed at 29.5 cents on July 12 after the company made an unconditional offer to privatise at 30 cents.

But behind the broader market's surge are hopes of interest rate cuts, following Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell's testimony before Congress last week.

Responding to questions from lawmakers, Mr Powell said that while the Fed is committed to returning inflation to a 2 per cent annual rate, it could cut interest rates sooner once officials are sufficiently confident that inflation is headed towards the target level.

With the US' June consumer

price index (CPI) showing signs of price stabilisation, expectations are now for a September rate cut, followed by one more rate cut in December.

As analysts note, interest rates are already on the way down in Europe, South America and Asia.

Meanwhile, the biggest "known unknown" (to quote former US secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld) for the market is the outcome of the November presidential election in the US.

But the common wisdom in the market is that a Donald Trump presidency could be inflationary, given his commitment to cutting taxes (which could widen the fiscal deficit) and raising tariffs (leading to higher prices for imports).

However, as Mr Vasu Menon, managing director for investment strategy at OCBC, recently wrote, a Trump presidency may not necessarily be bad for markets.

"US stocks effectively soared nearly 70 per cent under then President Trump," he wrote.

"A great deal of how Trump 2.0 will affect markets in the short term hinges on whether the Republican Party will secure a clean sweep of Congress as well, which will then give Trump a blank cheque to deliver on his promises, including tax cuts, tariffs, deregulation and immigration curbs."

But Mr Menon pointed out that the US political system, with its very long history, should not be underestimated as it is designed to be inherently stable.

That said, market experts like Mr Thilan Wickramasinghe, Maybank Securities' head of research, reckon that any uncertainty in the US could benefit other markets, like Singapore.

"With the odds of a second Trump term increasing following the last presidential debate, there could be some safe-haven flows to Singapore, especially to the banks, which could be big beneficiaries of supply chains relocating to Asean and more wealth flows."

Going forward, the US earnings season is nearing and if it turns out to be better than expected once again, it could lift sentiment further and offer market support.

The financials sector will be a focus in the next two weeks, as over 40 per cent of the S&P 500 companies that are scheduled to report earnings for the second quarter over this period are part of this sector.

Markets will be looking out for the Fed Beige Book on July 18 to glean insights about the outlook for the US economy, which will clearly have implications for US monetary policy. The Beige Book, produced eight times a year, is a

Fed publication about current economic conditions across the 12 Federal Reserve Districts.

The Republican National Convention is also being held in Milwaukee from July 15 to 18, where Trump is expected to be formally nominated as the Republican Party's presidential candidate. This could again draw greater market attention to the US elections in November.

Elsewhere on the US economic front, June retail sales on July 16 are likely to extend the run of soft consumption data. Housing data are similarly likely to remain lacklustre, while industrial output should slow after a strong rise in May.

No rate cut is expected at the European Central Bank (ECB) meeting later in July, as ECB president Christine Lagarde has indicated that the central bank will have too little information to judge whether a further rate cut is appropriate at July's meeting.

Meanwhile, in the euro area, the current account balance and the latest survey of investors' sentiment from the ZEW research institute will be released.

In Britain, June CPI data will be closely watched as the Bank of England judges whether sufficient progress has been made to begin to remove some of its monetary tightening, the effects of which have become increasingly apparent on the labour market.

In Japan, June's CPI will be assessed to consider whether the Bank of Japan's slow approach to policy normalisation will continue ahead of the central bank's meeting in end-July. This will have an impact on the yen, which rebounded earlier in the month on suspected ministry intervention.

Over in China, Chinese President Xi Jinping convenes senior party officials through July 18 for a closed-door conclave, known as the Third Plenum, that could result in economic reforms. Markets are hopeful significant measures could be announced to help the economy and property sector, which are still limping.

The upward momentum set the previous week should see markets continuing to climb through the week, barring unforeseen circumstances.

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# Britain has huge clean energy ambitions, but are they realistic?

There may be no better place to see evidence of Britain's shift to cleaner energy than a sleek industrial complex on the Humber Estuary outside Hull, a faded port city.

On a July morning, workers in a brightly lit building were preparing moulds for fibreglass wind turbine blades longer than football fields. Outside on the docks, squat six-wheeled vehicles gingerly manoeuvred a blade weighing some 50 metric tonnes for loading onto a ship that would take it to Scotland for installation.

The factory, which is operated by Siemens Gamesa, a unit of the German company Siemens Energy, began producing the massive blades in 2016. It has since expanded to accommodate larger models.

The factory is a case study for how the new British government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, whose Labour Party delivered a decisive election victory earlier in July, hopes to use investment in clean energy to bolster stagnant economic growth.

Mr Andy Sykes, the manager of the factory, said that £500 million (\$871 million) had already been invested in the plant, which employs 1,300 people in an area that has struggled economically for decades. Another round of expansion is in the works.

The plant also serves as an anchor for green efforts in the region, one of Britain's major industrial areas, which is dominated by oil refineries and other polluters.

Mr Sykes, though, said the British government would need to attract the funding for port expansion and other efforts to keep the offshore wind industry growing. "There needs to be a commitment and a guarantee that there's a return on investment," he said.

The government is also facing concerns about the costs of the transition and its potential to hurt job growth in a region that depends on the energy industry for employment opportunities.

Executives in the clean energy industry like most of what they have heard from the Labour Party. Mr Starmer, who took office on July 5, had made the rapid expansion of low carbon energy – from wind to nuclear – a key plank of his campaign not only to tackle climate

change but also to bring in what could be tens of billions of pounds in investment.

Among his pledges: quadrupling Britain's offshore wind capacity, which is already second globally to China's, as part of an ambitious effort to eliminate emissions from electric power generation by 2030.

Mr Starmer also wants to streamline Britain's agonisingly slow development planning process, sweeping away restrictions that prevent the building of land-based wind farms, for instance. Wind is already the largest source of power generation in Britain, accounting for about 30 per cent of supplies over the past year, slightly more than natural gas.

Mr Starmer also wants the government to have a bigger role in renewable energy.

The vision pleases both clean energy operators and environmentalists, who have chafed at what they perceive as a loss of momentum on climate goals under former prime minister Rishi Sunak.

"Achieving that by 2030 or even getting close to that would be just an enormous step forward, far, far ahead of our major economy peers," said Mr Chris Stark, former chief executive of the Climate Change Committee, a government body that monitors Britain's plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr Starmer is also taking a tough approach to old-line energy producers. He has said he would tighten an existing tax squeeze on oil and gas firms operating in the North Sea and stop issuing exploration licences in the area, which, while in decline, is still a major source of energy and jobs.

"The UK has (been), and I think continues to be, at the leading edge of the energy transition," said Mr Roger Martella, chief sustainability officer at GE Vernova, a maker of wind turbines and other energy-related machinery.

Labour has presented these proposals as an almost risk-free bonanza. The push will not only help stave off climate change but also create some 650,000 jobs, the party forecasts.

The party says that more blades spinning in the safety of home waters would insulate Britain from the impact of international events,



Workers detailing and sanding a wind turbine part at the Siemens Gamesa factory in Britain on July 1. The plant, which employs 1,300 people in an area that has struggled economically for decades, is a case study for how the new British government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer hopes to use investment in clean energy to bolster stagnant economic growth. PHOTO: NYTIMES



PRODUCING RESULTS VITAL

**There needs to be a commitment and a guarantee that there's a return on investment.**



**MR ANDY SYKES**, manager of a Siemens Gamesa factory, on the need for the British government to attract the funding for port expansion and other efforts to keep the offshore wind industry growing.

like the sharp rise in electricity and natural gas prices that occurred after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"Families and businesses will have lower bills for good," it said in an election document.

Analysts warn, though, that Labour's proposals are unlikely to be cheap, and they come with other risks. For one thing, Labour is proposing a large effort to build green

energy infrastructure in an economy that is more focused on sectors like finance.

"The UK doesn't have almost any of the supply chain for developing wind or solar or, indeed, nuclear or anything else," said Professor Dieter Helm, a professor of economic policy at the University of Oxford.

The environment for building renewable energy projects has become much tougher since the coro-

navirus pandemic. According to industry estimates, the costs of developing an offshore wind farm – large ones run to billions of dollars – have risen 40 per cent in recent years because of higher material and labour costs and interest rates.

An auction in 2023 for government support produced no bids for offshore wind projects, and the industry said that the government's electric power pricing targets were unrealistically low. Industry executives said the results of a new auction, expected to be announced in September, would be seen as a bellwether for the future British market.

Finally, there are risks that moving fast to curtail oil and gas production could cost more jobs around the North Sea, especially in Scotland and north-east England, than the ones green energy would create.

Mr James Reid, an analyst at the consulting firm Wood Mackenzie, forecast that production could fall 50 per cent by the end of the dec-

ade if Labour's fiscal proposals cause "people to turn the investment taps off".

Highlighting the stakes: Around 200,000 North Sea energy jobs are linked to oil and gas, but just 34,000 are linked to renewables, estimated Mr Paul de Leeuw, director of the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Britain's oil centre. "It is scary and a real call to action," he said.

Mr De Leeuw added that renewable energy could compensate for a lot of jobs expected to be lost in the oil industry, but the pace of building new projects needed to be much faster, "not an easy thing to do".

While the Hull plant may be controlled by a foreign company and producing blades designed elsewhere, it is at least supporting relatively well-paid jobs in an area that could use them. When the company was staffing up a decade ago, it received 28,000 applications, Mr Sykes said. NYTIMES

# How to protect yourself as a freelancer



In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadStart newsletter.

**Q** I would like to try my hand at freelance work. How do I protect myself?

**A** A freelance role offers flexible working arrangements that cater to individuals aiming to balance their personal and professional lives, said Ms Jean See, director of the National Trades Union Congress Freelancers and Self-Employed Unit (U FSE).

However, the arrangement is not without risk, which can be mitigated through sound precautions.

"Individuals considering a freelance role or transitioning to freelancing as a career must familiarise themselves with understanding and negotiating contracts skillfully," she added.

The labour movement suggests

freelancers always have a written contract with those engaging their services to help both parties get on the same page, she said.

"The contract should detail the scope and duration of work, payment terms, termination of contract, protection clauses such as copyright and dispute resolution to safeguard their legal rights and provide clear guidelines for handling potential issues," said Ms See.

She added that in contracting with a service buyer, freelancers can tap a template that sets out key terms of engagement between both parties, which was developed by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices.

Besides listing the terms of con-

tract, freelancers should negotiate to ensure the terms are fair, clear and beneficial for both parties.

"For example, the contract should specify usage rights, duration of use, copyright or exclusivity or intellectual property clauses, transfer of rights and credit terms, where applicable."

She advises freelancers to carry out reference checks on those who seek to engage their services.

"Freelancers can verify if they are entering into a partnership with a legitimate company and if the company has a good record of paying on time," she said.

Such checks can be done by asking fellow freelancers, finding out on the internet or viewing the service buyer's details on the Ac-

counting and Corporate Regulatory Authority website.

"Freelancers should carefully evaluate companies which do not agree to fair contract terms and weigh the risks against the benefits before deciding to work with them," she added.

"We encourage freelancers to work with companies that have adopted the Tripartite Standard on Contracting with Self-Employed Persons, as the standards set out fair contracting practices."

Freelancers should join a wider community, such as U FSE and NTUC-affiliated associations such as the National Instructors and Coaches Association, or the Visual, Audio, Creative Content Professionals Association.

"By doing so, they can access extensive networks, resources and leverage the expertise and guidance of seasoned freelancers," she said.

These bodies can represent and support them in areas such as income security, skills mastery and work prospects through the programmes and resources provided.

Freelance and self-employed workers seeking guidance on career options and plying their trade can reach out to the U FSE centre at level 7, Launch Zone at the National Library Building.

hytay@sph.com.sg

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

# US reshaping high-tech global supply chains to reduce risks

**It aims to diversify chip production, green tech amid concerns over China**

WASHINGTON – If the Biden administration had its way, far more electronic chips would be made in factories in, say, Texas or Arizona.

They would then be shipped to partner countries, such as Costa Rica, Vietnam or Kenya, for final assembly and sent out into the world to run everything from refrigerators to supercomputers.

Those places may not be the first that come to mind when people think of semiconductors. But administration officials are trying to transform the world's chip supply chain and are negotiating intensely to do so.

The core elements of the plan include getting foreign companies to invest in chipmaking in the United States and finding other countries to set up factories to finish the work. Officials and researchers in Washington call it part of the new "chip diplomacy".

The Biden administration argues that producing more of the tiny brains of electronic devices in the US will help make the country more prosperous and secure.

President Joe Biden boasted about his efforts in his interview on July 5 with ABC News, during which he said he managed to get South Korea to invest billions of dollars in chipmaking in the US.

But a key part of the strategy is unfolding outside America's borders, where the administration is trying to work with partners to ensure that investments in the US are more durable. If the nascent effort progresses, it may help the administration meet some of its broad strategic goals.

It wants to blunt security concerns involving China, which is growing its chip manufacturing while making threats against Taiwan, a global centre of chip technology. And it wants to lower the risks of disruptions to the chip supply chain that became evident



A Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company plant under construction in Phoenix, Arizona. The core elements of a new "chip diplomacy" plan by the US include getting foreign companies to invest in chipmaking domestically and finding other countries to set up factories to finish the work. PHOTO: NYTIMES

during the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, both of which threw global shipping and manufacturing into turmoil.

"The focus has been to do our best to expand the capacity in a diverse set of countries to make those global supply chains more resilient," said Professor Ramin Toloui, a Stanford University professor who recently served as assistant secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, which is at the forefront of diplomatic efforts to set up new supply chains.

The administration aims to do that not just for chips, but also for green energy technology such as electric vehicle batteries, solar panels and wind turbines. China is

by far the biggest player in those industries.

Mr Biden and his aides say that dominance by Chinese companies is a national security issue, as well as a human rights problem, given that some of the manufacturing takes place in Xinjiang, a region of China where officials reportedly force members of some Muslim ethnic groups to work in factories.

Over three years of the Biden administration, the US has attracted US\$395 billion (S\$530 billion) of investment in semiconductor manufacturing and US\$405 billion for making green technology and generating clean power, Prof Toloui said.

Many of the companies investing in that kind of manufacturing in

## STRONGER SUPPLY CHAINS

**The focus has been to do our best to expand the capacity in a diverse set of countries to make those global supply chains more resilient.**



**PROFESSOR RAMIN TOLOUI**, a Stanford University professor who recently served as assistant secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

the US are based in Asian economies known for their tech industries – Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, for instance – and in Europe.

One is SK Hynix, a South Korean chipmaker that is building a US\$3.8 billion factory in Indiana. The State Department says that the project is the largest-ever investment in that state and that it has the potential to bring more than 1,000 jobs to the region.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken mentioned that project in a speech in June at a conference in Maryland aimed at encouraging foreign investment in the US. And he underscored how he hoped legislation enacted by Mr Biden would draw foreign investment to US high-tech manufacturing by

"modernising our roads, our rail, our broadband, our electric grid".

The policy efforts, he added, are aimed at "strengthening and diversifying supply chains, turbocharging domestic manufacturing, spurring key industries of the future, from semiconductors to clean energy".

The Commerce Department has also played a major role in the effort to shore up the chip supply chain and is disbursing US\$50 billion to companies and organisations to research, develop and manufacture chips.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo led an in-depth study of global chip supply chains to identify vulnerabilities and has worked with foreign governments to discuss opportunities for additional investments overseas.

The topic was a focus of Ms Raimondo's trip to Costa Rica in spring 2024 as she met local officials and executives from Intel, which runs a factory there. (Prof Toloui spoke at a semiconductor manufacturing conference in Costa Rica in January.) She also discussed diversifying the semiconductor supply chain on trips to Panama and Thailand.

But reworking global supply chains so that they are less dependent on East Asia will be a challenge. East Asian chip factories offer more cutting-edge technology, a larger pool of talented engineers and lower costs than American factories are projected to.

Taiwan produces more than 60 per cent of the world's chips and nearly all of the most advanced chips, which are used in smartphones and other devices. By comparison, the US semiconductor industry could face a shortage of up to 90,000 workers over the next few years, according to estimates.

Governments in China, Taiwan, South Korea and elsewhere are also aggressively subsidising their own chip industries.

Still, billions of dollars of new US investment are expected to somewhat shift global supply chains. The US share of global chip manufacturing is projected to rise to 14 per cent by 2032, from 10 per cent today, according to a May report from the Semiconductor Industry Association and the Boston Consulting Group.

Some administration officials have engaged in a more coercive form of chip diplomacy to prevent China from developing versions of American technology. That approach has focused on persuading a handful of countries – Japan and the Netherlands, in particular – to stop companies from selling some chipmaking tools to China.

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# BUSINESS



## SATS

Chief executive Kerry Mok said the Covid-19 pandemic drove the company to diversify by establishing a new air cargo division and expand into food services, on top of its original aviation catering business.



## BENG KUANG MARINE

Chief executive Yong Jiunn Run said the company now services floating production systems used by the offshore oil and gas industry and is expanding into offshore renewable energy.



## CENTURION CORP

Chief executive Kong Chee Min said that between 2011 and 2023, the company saw a 26 per cent compound annual growth rate in revenue from core business operations, and plans to roll out a new dormitory here.



Straits Times senior columnist Ven Sreenivasan speaking at the seminar on stock opportunities for retail investors. He noted the resurgence of trading activity on SGX in recent weeks. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO

## Consider undervalued firms as trading picks up here: Panellists

### Sats, Beng Kuang Marine, Centurion Corp seen as having strong growth potential

Sue-Ann Tan  
Business Correspondent

Singapore stocks saw their best rally in years over the week of July 8, with the Straits Times Index rising 2.6 per cent through the week to close on July 12 at 3,497.78.

The benchmark index was supported by the three Singapore banks – DBS, UOB and OCBC – which all hit record highs during the week, as well as interest rate-sensitive real estate investment trusts and property stocks.

But besides the blue chips, there could be some firms with smaller

market capitalisation which are undervalued that are worth looking into, said panellists at a July 11 seminar organised by Maybank Securities to highlight stock opportunities for retail investors.

At the event, guest speaker Ven Sreenivasan, who is a senior columnist at The Straits Times, noted there has been a resurgence of trading activity in the Singapore stock market in recent weeks.

"There is some interest returning to the market. It is, after all, a market which gives dividends of 3.5 per cent to 4 per cent, and there are lots of undervalued players. Companies are generally well regulated

and well managed."

Mr Thilan Wickramasinghe, Maybank's head of research for Singapore, who moderated a panel discussion at the seminar, noted separately that the current rally has been driven by financials and a few industrial stocks.

"However, if sentiment strengthens, the rally could broaden and investor attention will increasingly shift towards good-quality laggards," he said.

He added that by stock picking, investors can find companies whose valuations are cheap compared with their peers, and check if the management team has a plan.

"Are there clear targets with timelines to achieve these (plans), especially when it comes to shareholder returns?" he asked.

Mr Sreenivasan noted that stock

picking is about finding a strategic balance between maximising returns, or prioritising stocks with high potential returns, and minimising the risks.

Investors looking for undervalued stocks can examine aspects such as earnings growth, business models and management, as well as consider if there is potential corporate action such as mergers and acquisitions on the cards, he said.

Mr Sreenivasan highlighted the three companies on the panel – aviation cargo and food specialist Sats, marine and offshore company Beng Kuang Marine, and specialised accommodation assets operator Centurion Corporation – as examples of businesses with strong growth potential.

After buying European air cargo player Worldwide Flight Services

(WFS) for \$1.8 billion in 2023, making it the world's biggest air cargo operator, Sats saw its revenues for the financial year ended March 31 reach \$5.1 billion, up from the \$1.8 billion in the previous financial year, while its net profit of \$56.4 million was a turnaround from its net loss of \$26.5 million before.

Sats also announced ambitious targets to bring in over \$8 billion in revenue by financial year 2028, and achieve a return on equity of 15 per cent. It also aims to reach a market capitalisation of \$10 billion after 2028.

Chief executive Kerry Mok said the Covid-19 pandemic was a challenge, but it drove the company to diversify by establishing a new air cargo division through the acquisition of WFS. It has also expanded into food services, on top of its

original aviation catering business. Analysts have a "buy" call on Sats, expecting its earnings recovery to accelerate in 2025.

A DBS research report in April said there is a likelihood of a 3 per cent to 5 per cent increase in global air cargo volumes in 2024, on the back of easing global inflation, increased demand for cross-border e-commerce deliveries, and ongoing container shipping disruptions – trends that have encouraged a shift towards air freight.

The report added: "Apart from an increase in global air cargo volumes, Sats' cargo handling segment could also see stronger yields, benefiting from stronger pricing, and the group offering more value-added services."

Beng Kuang Marine is another stock that could be undervalued after withdrawing from its loss-making businesses. For instance, it disposed of two-thirds of its Batam shipyard and liquidated its vessels business.

CEO Yong Jiunn Run said the firm now services floating production systems, which are used by the offshore oil and gas industry. It has served 24 assets spanning nearly 10 countries in regions such as South America, West Africa, South-east Asia and China.

He added that the business is also expanding into offshore renewable energy.

Mr Jarick Seet, Maybank's research vice-president and head of small-mid caps, initiated coverage on the stock with a "buy" call, saying it has grown to become a major player in the maintenance, repair and servicing of offshore and marine equipment. It is also benefiting from robust global activity in that area, and is supported by a pipeline of projects, he added.

Centurion Corporation, a global specialised accommodation provider, is also a stock to watch. It has 17 purpose-built workers' dormitories in Singapore and Malaysia, and 17 student accommodation properties in Britain, the US and Australia.

CEO Kong Chee Min noted that between 2011 and 2023, there has been a 26 per cent compound annual growth rate in revenue from core business operations.

"In terms of the growth pipeline, we are also not stopping here, despite having recurring income," he said, noting that the company has its expansion plans laid out, such as rolling out a new dormitory here by the end of 2024 and redevelopment plans in Australia.

UOB Kay Hian analyst Adrian Loh maintained a "buy" call on Centurion, citing healthy occupancy rates in its British and Australian student accommodation, as well as growth initiatives such as its announced entry into Hong Kong.

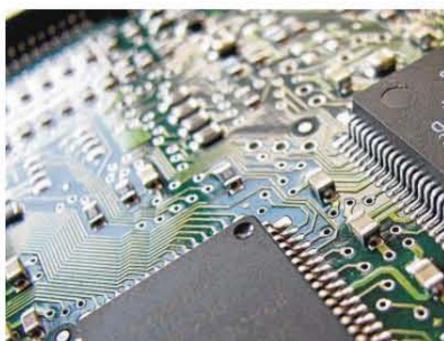
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## Online



### COMMENTARY Widespread currency weakness

High US interest rates and yen and yuan weakness keep a lid on the region's currencies, but a repeat of the 1997 Asian crisis is not on the cards, predicts Vikram Khanna.

str.sg/asian-currency

# OPINION

## How vapes hooked a new generation in Australia

Half-hearted efforts to crack down on vaping have created a wicked situation.



**Jonathan Pearlman**

For The Straits Times

SYDNEY – For decades, Australia was seen as a world leader in combating tobacco use after adopting a series of moves that spectacularly curbed smoking rates.

These included a 1997 campaign featuring graphic television advertisements that followed the path of smoke as it was inhaled and entered the lungs, which was credited with helping to reduce smoking rates by 4 percentage points in five years.

Massive tax hikes raised the cost of a packet of 25 cigarettes to more than A\$50 (S\$46). Australia was also the first country in the world in 2012 to introduce compulsory plain packaging laws for cigarettes that also forced cartons to carry macabre health warnings. Despite lawsuits by tobacco companies, the measures prevailed and were followed internationally.

Today, smoking rates in Australia among those aged 14 and above have plunged to 8 per cent from 24 per cent in 1991, making it one of the lowest in the developed world. In Singapore, about 9.5 per cent of those aged 21 to 69 and above are regular smokers, according to survey by Milieu Insight conducted in December 2023.

But Australia's run of successes has been brought to a grinding halt by the growing popularity of vapes, or e-cigarettes, particularly among young people. The

authorities had hoped that vapes would help people to quit smoking, but concede that they have instead proven to be a new gateway to nicotine addiction.

The federal government has now embarked on a fresh round of world-first measures to try to combat vaping, though critics say the proposals are too weak and have come too late.

Regulations, which took effect on July 1, require vapes to be sold by pharmacies only, with flavours restricted to tobacco, menthol and mint. In addition, vapes must be sold in plain packaging and cannot be advertised or locally manufactured.

But these latest measures have highlighted the failure of lawmakers to decisively counter the rise of vapes, as well as the thorny difficulties involved in regulating a product that, once let loose, becomes difficult to rein in.

**BAIT AND SWITCH**

When vapes first arrived in Australia more than a decade ago, they were welcomed as a potentially less harmful nicotine product that could help the country's dwindling numbers of smokers to quit.

Treating vapes as a harm reduction tool "held true for the first little while", Associate Professor Becky Freeman, a public health expert at Sydney University, told The Straits Times. She had spent decades working on tobacco control and tracked the rise of vaping in Australia.

"They were hard to use, were often expensive, and the average 13-year-old was not going to pick them up off the shelf," she said.

But vaping firms seized on the opportunity to introduce nicotine-related products to a generation who had been largely



persuaded that smoking was not "cool". Suddenly, disposable, easy-to-use flavoured vapes could be found in attractive packaging and marketed on websites popular with youth.

Unfortunately, according to Prof Freeman, the emergence of youth-friendly vapes occurred in Australia as the first cases of Covid-19 were emerging in early 2020. "The public health authorities took their eyes off vaping due to Covid-19, and vaping rates literally skyrocketed overnight."

"A product that was supposedly claimed to be for adults who had tried everything they could to quit smoking was primarily being used by young people who had never smoked," she added.

**HALF-HEARTED EFFORTS**

The vaping problem became acute after the pandemic.

In June 2020, the federal government proposed to ban all imports of vapes. Internationally, more than 30 countries, such as Singapore, have banned sales of vapes. But the Australian proposal was delayed and eventually abandoned, after a group of pro-free market MPs in the ruling Liberal-National Coalition raised concerns.

In the years after, vape stores and convenience stores selling vapes targeting young people popped up across the country. A study by the University of Notre Dame published in January of 194 vaping stores in the state of Western Australia found that 88 per cent were located within 1km of a school.

Vapes containing nicotine could only be prescribed by doctors to smokers who were trying to quit, so these stores should have sold only non-nicotine vapes. But many of the vapes sold contained nicotine, prompting urgent crackdowns to try to remove these nicotine vapes from stores.

In the most populous state of New South Wales, 460,450 nicotine vapes and cartridges were seized from stores in the year to March 31, 2024. About 50 inspectors were devoted to the task, with the state spending about A\$1.3 million a year on enforcement.

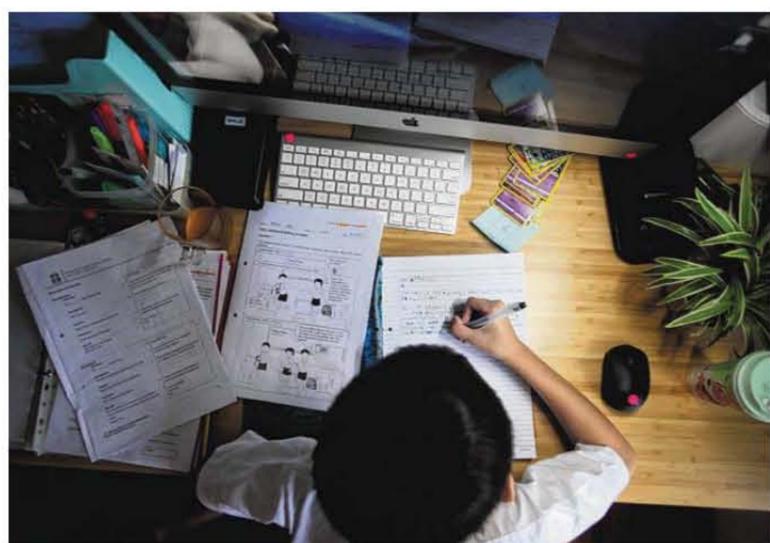
But low penalties, coupled with weak enforcement, failed to deter organised crime syndicates who saw these damages as an acceptable price of doing business.

In New South Wales, the maximum penalty for selling vapes is a A\$1,650 fine or six months in prison. There have only been 12 convictions of illegal vape sellers in the 18 months to the end of 2023, and none went to jail, according to an investigation by ABC News in April.

Stores were also openly flouting rules restricting the sale of vapes to those aged 18 and above. A survey of 14- to 17-year-olds published in 2023 found that 77 per cent of those who had used vapes found it "easy" to access them.

Despite schools installing vape

CONTINUED ON PAGE B2



**Competitiveness** • Parents, kids can be better off with wider concept of merit | B2



**Perfectionism** • Why some fall ill just before a holiday | B3

**China** • Economic model needs a makeover | B3



**Online**

**COMMENTARY**

**Why are millennials unhappy?**

Achievements don't correlate to happiness. Geopolitical instability and an ageing population are adding to the stress, says the writer.

[str.sg/millennials-unhappy](http://str.sg/millennials-unhappy)



Focus on skills that contribute towards a child's holistic development, the writer urges. What fits the bill are pro-social skills, such as a desire to keep learning and contributing to the community. ST FILE PHOTO

# Parents and kids can be better off if we widen concept of merit

To end society's obsession with relative performance, we should count contributions to community as part of merit.

Tan Poh Lin

## A CULTURE OF HYPER-COMPETITIVENESS

Parents do a lot for their children in Singapore.

Many go to great lengths to secure places for their kids in coveted primary schools and send them for private tutoring. Such competitiveness means that families spend more and more time and money, just to outdo each other.

More recently, the north-east region has witnessed the proliferation of "dedicated enrichment zones". These have now expanded their offerings to cater to pre-school children, opening up a new frontier in the educational arms race.

As a mother of two young children myself, I've been in countless conversations with other parents about schools and extracurricular activities. In my experience, while most parents would personally agree with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's assessment that the definition of success should go beyond academic and material achievements, many may nevertheless choose to stick to the old formula when it comes to their own children.

Yet amidst all the competition, many are unhappy with having to be more kiasu, literally "fearful of losing", than one would otherwise like to be.

So what exactly are parents fearful of?

Perhaps the most obvious answer is that parents fear seeing their children at the bottom of the heap in a system that concentrates rewards at the top. To get up there, one must outperform peers in assessments from classroom to workplace.

In the past, parents would receive school report cards that clearly indicated a student's exact ranking in class as determined by exams that started as early as Primary 1. This information, which indicated how far a student was from the top, likely compelled some families to get more heavily involved.

Today, primary and secondary school students no longer have to sit mid-year examinations, and the youngest would also be spared from testing until Primary 3. Moreover, starting this year, academic streaming has been removed in secondary schools in favour of subject-based banding. By diversifying from the use of single metrics, these moves have reined in the stressful practice of student ranking.

Although these institutional shifts can take some of the edge off the pressure on parents, some families have got around them by sending their children for mock examinations at private centres.

Similarly, when primary school registration rules were amended in 2021 to double the number of places reserved for the most competitive phase, parents' chat groups and forums immediately discussed strategies to get ahead of the competition.

These responses suggest changes to the educational system and rules can do only so much. As long as parents feel that some schools and pathways are more prestigious than others, they will continue to feel the pressures of a hyper-competitive culture.

## PARENTAL OBLIGATION AND UNCERTAINTY

One reason that parents are so competitive is that they feel their children are vulnerable and depend upon them to provide help and guidance. Driven by a sense of duty, they find it difficult to defy crowd wisdom because, in future, they might be accused of being irresponsible parents. This also accords them with the moral authority to override any childish protestations as the adult "voice of reason". The forces at play are especially intense if the stakes are determined at younger ages.

Another problem is that parents have to take decisions today without full information on their children's future preferences. Uncertain where their children's passions will lie and what their

material aspirations will look like, parents are more likely to avoid risky choices in favour of safer options, which is doing what everyone else is doing.

These dynamics restrict the choice sets of parents, often at the cost of the well-being of the students themselves. Stress levels among Singaporean children have increased and academics play a big part. This is likely linked to

**If a decisive shift in parenting culture is to happen, a social consensus is needed. What can help accelerate this process is to increase recognition of the trend towards a softer approach to child development, in which families increasingly care about character and socio-emotional development, and where building environments of support, trust and openness is prioritised.**

why children have been reporting more mental health issues, with one study estimating that children lose 24 days of school per year on average due to depression or anxiety symptoms.

While experts warn that busy parents may not detect issues or be equipped to provide support for their children's mental health, a separate set of risks also arises from the opposite direction, where overly intensive parenting leads to anxiety and weakens the ability to face failure among children.

Some parents may feel that these costs are worth it if it means that their children will have a brighter future. But it doesn't make sense to pursue something at all costs, and yet take a naive and uncritical view of the expected gains, which can be very far from what is imagined as to how far they actually go towards fulfilment and well-being. A culture centred on academic performance and failing to properly value children's holistic development leads us to short-change ourselves and our loved ones.

## MAKING MERIT LESS ABOUT RELATIVE PERFORMANCE

Apart from academic ability, we need to focus on skills and competencies that contribute towards a child's holistic development while tamping down

excessive competitiveness in a merit-based society.

These must meet two criteria. First, they need to be highly desired by future employers, colleagues and society at large. Second, they need to be observable, measurable and yet, relative to academic performance, less given to competitive pressures that can spill over to parents.

Such competencies should also be independent of socioeconomic background. This can help bolster the institution of meritocracy as an underlying governing principle. This has come under increased scrutiny as some feel the odds of accumulating merit are stacked against the disadvantaged, who are further made to feel undeserving.

What fits the bill are pro-social skills that include diligence, resilience, honesty, humility, kindness, and desire to keep learning and contributing to the community. These attributes are not only highly sought after in professional settings, but necessarily involve individual autonomy and value identification. They also place the onus of learning, as it should be, on the students rather than on their parents.

Moral striving and contributing to the common good are also non-competitive and less dependent on family background, bringing us closer to a fair society, where everyone can make good, regardless of socioeconomic status.

This is in contrast with technical competencies, which are also important, but where not everyone can be a top achiever. By logical implication, the flip side of acknowledging that every child has unique gifts, is that there will be some advantages and talents that not every child possesses.

A broader concept of merit that is more within everyone's reach can lower stress, improve mental health and embolden individuals to pursue personal interests and strengths. It also promotes proper societal functioning through greater belonging, cohesion, and increased propensity to take calculated risks.

## ARRIVING AT A SOCIAL CONSENSUS

If a decisive shift in parenting culture is to happen, a social consensus is needed. What can help accelerate this process is to increase recognition of the trend towards a softer approach to child development, in which families increasingly care about character and socio-emotional development, and where building environments of support, trust and openness is prioritised.

If such a consensus is reached, parents will not feel compelled to enter the educational race at the expense of their children's well-being, just because they mistakenly think that's what everyone else is also doing.

By shifting the bar for merit in the classroom from achievement for personal gain to include contributions to the community, we make it something which everyone, not just the few, can reach.

• Tan Poh Lin is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

## Playing catch-up to reverse vaping trend

FROM B1

detectors in bathrooms or introducing mandatory education about the risks, vaping rates continued to rise. A study in 2023 found that 30 per cent of 12- to 17-year-olds reported having used vapes, more than double the rate in 2017.

A more recent study, published in 2024, found that for 14- to 17-year-olds, using vapes "had become a fixture of their adolescent identity and a shared, and at times defining, characteristic of their cohort".

"It's so common now... It's not like taboo or anything like that..."

Everyone just does it," one teen said.

"If you're not (vaping)...it's kind of like a little bit like you're not like a normal teenager," said another.

## THE CHALLENGE OF ENFORCEMENT

It remains unclear if the new rules restricting vape sales and imports will help untangle Australia's vaping problem. Most health experts welcomed the move to finally address the easy access to vapes but condemned the weakening of the law. "Australia is a world leader in

tobacco control, but is missing the opportunity to be a world leader in vaping control," Professor Simone Pettigrew, from The George Institute for Global Health, said in a statement. "Our young people will be the ones to suffer the consequences."

The ruling Labor party's preferred strategy for countering vapes was to make them prescription only, so smokers can access these medically prescribed quitting tools, and thereby eliminating any alternative uses. However, in order to secure sufficient legislative support to pass the Bill, the proposal had to be watered down to permit over-the-counter sales at pharmacies to those aged 18 and above.

This puts pharmacists in a difficult position. The Pharmacy Guild, which represents pharmacists, said many pharmacists did not want to sell a

product that could lower community health outcomes, noting the limited evidence showing that vapes help people to quit smoking.

The success of the new rules also relies on enforcement, which appears to remain lax. Despite government commitment to stamping out recreational vaping, no fines were imposed in the state of Victoria in the first four days of the law's operations, according to a report in The Age.

## THE PROBLEM WITH STUBBORN DEMAND

Worse, some experts believe that the new measures will simply drive demand underground, straining already tight enforcement resources.

Restricting sales to pharmaceuticals is "a huge gift to the black market", Dr James Martin from Deakin University

who studies the illicit drug trade in Australia, told ST.

"In Australia, we have seen the emergence of pop-up shops with a range of soft drinks but the primary thing they sell is illicit vapes and tobacco," he said.

"These stores make incredible amounts of money... tens of thousands of dollars a day."

Dr Martin said police lack the resources to shut down all stores selling illicit vapes, given more pressing work. State-based health authorities are also not equipped to enforce rules that require them to confront organised crime groups.

Anticipating the risk of an expanding black market, Australia Health Minister Mark Butler announced the creation of a new position, the Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Commissioner, to target the black market.

Ultimately, the Australian authorities are now trying to play

catch-up and reverse the recent youth uptake of vapes. But with vaping this entrenched, stemming their use can be tricky.

Clearly, the government's earlier run of successes against smoking does not mean a permanent victory in the war against tobacco. Its approach in the past five years, especially the failure to proceed with an import ban in 2020, may have paved the way for vaping to take hold. As long-time observers of the war against tobacco have noted, faltering can be fatal.

"The tobacco industry is always innovating and moving ahead of the public health system," Prof Freeman said.

"We could have seen a lot sooner that we have a massive non-nicotine loophole that was allowing nicotine products to be sold."

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# China's economic model needs a makeover

A switch from supporting the supply side to the demand side has become urgent.



**Vikram Khanna**

Senior Columnist

The third plenum of the 20th Communist Party of China's Central Committee, which will be held from July 15 to 18, presents a rare opportunity to make some of the radical changes that China's economy needs.

Usually held every five years, third plenums focus on deepening economic reforms. Some past plenums have had a transformational impact. Most famously, in 1978, then leader Deng Xiaoping announced China's shift away from central planning to a more market-based economy in what was one of the most far-reaching reforms in China's history.

This year's 3rd plenum, which was postponed from last year for unexplained reasons, comes at a critical time for China's economy, which is faced with a staggering variety of problems: deflationary pressures, a real estate crisis, worsening demographics, flagging consumer and investor confidence, high youth unemployment, heavily indebted local governments and protectionist pressures.

## INVESTMENT-LED GROWTH HAS MAXED OUT

Its economic model for the better part of the last 45 years has been driven largely by investment in infrastructure, construction capital goods and housing. This was needed for an economy in the early stages of development, when investment opportunities were abundant.

But since about a decade ago, it became increasingly clear that investment – which had hit 47 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), among the highest in the world – was yielding lower returns and becoming unproductive.

This was most dramatically reflected in a massive oversupply of housing, which became the source of a real-estate crisis. It was also reflected in rising public debt, which has soared from about 200 per cent of GDP in 2015 to 300 per cent at present – proof that additional spending wasn't paying off like before.

China's policymakers have realised that they need to shift away from the investment-led growth model, that the returns on building more subways, airports, highways and the like had diminished.

They have responded by pouring resources, through generous subsidies, into a variety of high-technology industries in the manufacturing sector, including semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), batteries, other green technologies and



BYD electric cars waiting to be loaded onto a ship at Taicang Port's international container terminal in Suzhou, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. In the current geopolitical environment, export expansion cannot serve as China's pathway to sustained economic growth, says the writer. PHOTO: AFP

aerospace.

While China has achieved global leadership in some of these industries, which was the goal, the new strategy is but another variation of adding to the supply side of the economy. The demand side, which centres on the Chinese consumer, has been neglected, despite an official commitment to "common prosperity".

So, who will buy all the new products that China is producing? Local consumption is constrained because of the real-estate crisis which has reduced people's wealth and led to high household debt, and because of insufficient safety nets, which force people to save more for healthcare, pensions and education.

Exports are the only other outlet. But China's biggest markets in the West are not willing to absorb the new, high-value products that China wants to sell and have responded with protectionist measures – for example, most recently on Chinese-made EVs and solar panels – and there may be more restrictions to come.

So, in the current geopolitical environment at least, export expansion cannot serve as China's pathway to sustained economic growth.

Nor can China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), through which it exports capital goods to mainly

developing countries, be the answer. While some of its projects have been successful, the experience with Venezuela, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and some African countries has shown that it is often difficult for China to recoup its investments. In recent years, China has scaled back its BRI.

Productivity is another possible source of growth. But as economist Stephen Roach of Yale University, among others, has pointed out, this is being held back by an official emphasis on supporting less productive state-owned enterprises (SOEs), rather than China's more dynamic private sector, which is subject to various regulatory constraints, especially targeted at internet platform companies.

With investment-led growth having maxed out, export growth constrained by protectionism and productivity having slowed, boosting domestic consumption is the most viable driver of sustained growth for China's economy.

## PRO-CONSUMPTION RECIPES

There are many policies to boost consumption. One of them, which is a priority for the government, is to stabilise the property market. It is doing this by easing restrictions on purchases, lowering mortgage rates and down payment requirements, and

encouraging local governments to buy unsold homes to convert them to affordable housing.

But so far, none of these measures has made much difference. Even if the property market is stabilised at current levels, prices will still be high relative to incomes, at 30 to 40 times in major cities, which means if incomes don't rise, prices must continue to fall.

Another avenue to raise consumption is through reforms of China's "hukou" or household registration system. There are more than 200 million migrant workers living in cities who don't have the same rights to social services, such as education and healthcare, as well as loans and pension benefits, as other urban dwellers. Providing these workers with more rights would raise their consumption significantly and on a huge scale. The fiscal burden would not be onerous in the medium term, as higher incomes and consumption would lead to more jobs, boost the business sector and broaden the tax base.

Several economists, including from China, have long called for hukou reforms, but these have so far been piecemeal. There are several reasons for resistance to the reforms, including concerns about strains on urban infrastructure, pushback from urban residents who fear more competition for public services

such as housing, education and healthcare, and administrative complexities related to changing registration policies, which requires coordination across various levels of government.

## THE 'BIG BAZOOKA' STIMULUS AND ITS LIMITS

Some economists have called for a "big bazooka" fiscal expansion through direct government transfers to boost consumption, similar to what some advanced countries did during Covid-19, but which China refrained from doing.

While such transfers would put more money into people's pockets, they would be a short-term measure and some of the funds would be saved rather than spent.

What is needed are policies that boost consumption on a more durable basis. This could be done by expanding social safety nets – for example, through more health and education subsidies and pension reforms, which would reduce people's incentives to save.

Chief economist Xu Gao of the Bank of China International has also suggested a shareholding scheme for SOE stocks, under which the government creates investment funds that invest in China's SOEs and then distributes the shares in the funds to households, effectively making

them shareholders. They can then directly get dividends from SOEs, which would add to their incomes and boost consumption.

Some economists, such as Professor Michael Pettis of Peking University, also propose reducing subsidies to the manufacturing sector, which would be competitive even without them, to free up resources to transfer to households. Prof Pettis also suggests that over time, households should receive transfers from local governments, which own a lot of assets.

Switching China's economic model from supporting the supply side of the economy to the demand side will be politically difficult. There are powerful vested interests – including local authorities, SOEs, other big manufacturing firms and urban residents, excluding migrant workers – who benefit from the status quo.

But if China's government wants to turn around the negative sentiment about the economy among citizens, its private sector and foreign investors, it will need to use the third plenum to take bold actions that surprise on the upside, or at least signal a willingness to do so. With China's old model having run its course, incremental steps will not go very far.

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# Ever wondered why you tend to fall ill at the start of holidays?

You could be a perfectionist. Those of us who fall ill as soon as we stop work may need to rethink our approach to life.

## Pilita Clark

Pack bags. Go to beach. Get sick. For as long as I can remember, this has been the pattern of too many of my summer holidays.

It does not even need to be summer. One Friday afternoon in late 2023, just as I wrote the final paragraph of a story I had frantically typed out on the plane

home after a busy work trip abroad, I began to snifle. By 10pm, all hope of a cheering weekend off had been killed by a sore throat, temperature and cough. I was in bed until Monday.

The other week, as summer holidays loomed, I told a couple of work colleagues I might look into whether there was any scientific basis for this holiday illness thing. "Do it!" they said, adding that it happened to them all the time.

Word spread. Less than an hour later, another colleague from the other side of the building approached me in the office kitchen and said he was thrilled to hear I was investigating a condition he regularly suffered from himself.

Considering all this, imagine my surprise when I tracked down the amiable Dutch research psychologist credited with coining the term "leisure sickness", more than 20 years ago, and discovered the condition might not, as it were, exist.

"Some people don't agree it is a real disorder," Professor Ad Vingerhoets told me in what turned out to be the first of two striking revelations.

Before I get to the second one, it

is worth saying that Prof Vingerhoets' research suggests leisure illness is a real condition that should be taken seriously, but also a confusing one because symptoms vary considerably.

When he and colleagues surveyed more than 1,800 people about the problem, they found that around 3 per cent had experienced it. Some fell ill just before the weekend, others at the start of a holiday. Common symptoms included headaches, fatigue, muscular pains and nausea. Colds and flu-like bugs often afflicted people on holiday. A more recent study by academics in Austria uncovered ear problems.

Prof Vingerhoets started studying the phenomenon after realising that when he got ill himself, it was often over the Christmas and New Year break. At other times, ailments started on a Friday afternoon and vanished by Monday.

He realised the problem was more widespread when he ran into a relative at a family gathering who reliably felt ill at

the start of summer holidays.

The research suggests a range of causes. The body can have greater resistance to disease when under acute stress in some cases, so perhaps we get ill once work stress subsides. Maybe we notice aches and pains once we start relaxing that made less impact when we were working. Or perhaps the stress of work raises adrenaline levels that upset the immune system or spark leisure sickness symptoms.

Prof Vingerhoets recommends a workout on Friday afternoons, or just before heading on holiday, on the grounds it could lower adrenaline levels.

But he told me the data suggested another important cause that all sufferers should consider, which is where our conversation took a strikingly unexpected turn.

"There are good reasons to think that the people who are especially at risk are workaholics," he told me. This included perfectionists who are married to their work, he added, "and people who masturbate".

"Who what?" I said.

"Musturbate," he repeated, explaining this was a term from psychology that referred to people who felt they must be the best at work, or must be the most loved, or must be generally excellent.

I was sure he was joking about this, but it turns out he was not.

The idea of masturbation is attributed to a late US psychotherapist named Albert Ellis. It's defined in the American Psychology Association's online Dictionary of Psychology as: "The belief by some individuals that they must absolutely meet often perfectionist goals in order to achieve success, approval, or comfort."

Prof Vingerhoets thinks that being aware of such unhelpful tendencies is a crucial first step in overcoming leisure sickness.

I am not entirely sure this ranks as news I can use, but nor am I ruling it out. Either way, I will be giving it deep thought as I prepare to head to the beach this year, after a very long session in the gym. FINANCIAL TIMES

Primer

# New tech is key, but future of transport is about accessibility

This is the ninth of a series of 12 primers on current affairs and issues in the news, and what they mean for Singapore.



**Kok Yufeng**

Transport Correspondent

Forget about flying cars and self-driving vehicles. For those envisioning what the future of transport should look like in the coming years, a new public bus system in the provincial capital of Peshawar in Pakistan may prove to be more instructive. Launched in August 2020, the 27km transport corridor with dedicated bus lanes linking the east and west of the city has cut travel time by more than an hour and earned plaudits from international bodies like the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP). Of course, the bus rapid transit system is not without its flaws. Beset with technical faults, bus fires and leaking station roofs in its first couple of years of operation, there have also been allegations of corruption and poor management. But with low fares, priority seats for the elderly and the disabled, and separate seating areas for women and transgender people to reduce the cases of harassment, the new buses have grown in popularity, with the bus system accounting for 50 per cent

of all public transport trips in Peshawar in 2022. Daily ridership has since surpassed 329,000 passengers and, more significantly, the proportion of women taking public transport has risen from 2 per cent to about 30 per cent in four years. With a fleet of more than 240 diesel-electric hybrid buses, the city has also been able to replace more than 500 outdated informal public transport vehicles like small trucks and vans that used to ply and pollute its streets. What the Peshawar example illustrates is that while new technology like electric vehicles (EVs) is an important enabler, the key to an effective transportation system of the future lies in a commuter-centric design that makes it attractive and accessible enough for people to actually use it. So, even though automation and other innovations like air taxis may seem like the next frontier in transportation, with only half of the world's urban population able to access public transport conveniently today, the real challenge ahead is making the switch to greener, more efficient travel modes as frictionless and equitable as possible for everyone. **EVS, CLEANER FUELS NOT A SILVER BULLET** There is no doubt that the transport sector needs to decarbonise, and needs to do so quickly.

Transportation already accounts for about a quarter of global carbon dioxide emissions, and it is the fastest-growing source of carbon emissions in the world as populations grow, incomes rise, and more people and goods need to be moved around. In 2019, the global transport sector emitted around 8.9 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) equivalent, up from 5.1 billion tonnes in 1990, according to a 2022 report by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). But even as demand continues to rise, transport emissions will need to fall to about six million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent by 2030 in order for the global energy sector to reach net-zero by 2050, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has said. Technological innovations are viewed as a critical piece of the puzzle, and EVs have been the most notable, especially since almost three-quarters of all transport emissions come from road vehicles like cars, buses and trucks. Government policies around the world have helped push things forward, with countries like the United Kingdom and Singapore pledging to phase out the sale of petrol and diesel cars in the 2030s, though the IEA says more can still be done. Yet, EVs also come with their own set of problems, and not just that they are generally more expensive than their internal combustion engine (ICE) counterparts. While EVs produce far less emissions than vehicles that run on fossil fuels, how green they actually are depends on how clean the electrical grid is. Furthermore, the transition to

## About The Straits Times-Ministry of Education News Outreach Programme

For 12 Mondays between March 18 and Aug 5, this paper's journalists will examine different contemporary topics in the Opinion section. The primers broach subjects as wide-ranging as trust in the digital age, the future of transport and the modern definition of success. Each primer includes a local perspective

to help students draw links to the issues' implications for Singapore. The primer articles are part of The Straits Times-Ministry of Education News Outreach Programme, which aims to promote an understanding of local and global issues among pre-university students.

EVs is an uneven one and developing countries need access to reliable electricity sources for the technology to really take off. EV manufacturing is also emissions-intensive, especially since the batteries require raw materials like cobalt, lithium and other rare earth elements, which are often mined in ways that are environmentally damaging and exploitative. A silver lining here is that carmakers are now designing new EV motors that rely less on such materials, though this is less about the environment and more about geopolitics, since as much as 90 per cent of processed rare earth metals comes from China. In sectors like aviation and shipping, which are harder to decarbonise, there is an even steeper mountain to climb. While electric aircraft and vessels are starting to enter the market, these are not expected to travel long distances or carry many passengers. Hence, there has been a growing momentum worldwide to find alternative aviation and

marine fuels, such as biofuels, ammonia and, in the longer run, hydrogen. But as with EVs, adopting these greener fuels on a wider scale is easier said than done. Not only do they cost several times more than regular fossil fuels, but there is also limited supply, and massive investments are needed to scale up production. For instance, while the production of eco-friendly jet fuel is expected to triple to 1.875 billion litres in 2024, more than nine times of this projected amount need to be produced yearly for the cleaner fuel to form just 5 per cent of overall consumption by 2030. There is also growing scepticism over supposedly game-changing innovations like driverless cars and air taxis, which have hit roadblocks and look increasingly less likely to be adopted widely in the short to medium term. More broadly, the IEA predicts that if the global energy sector were to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, about 45 per

cent of the emissions reductions would need to come from technology that has not been commercially deployed yet, even on a very limited basis. This means a staggering number of technological breakthroughs is still needed to reach 2050 climate goals, and they need to happen at a faster pace.

### WALK, CYCLE, RIDE

So, if technology is no silver bullet, what else can be done to make transportation more sustainable? Embrace walking, cycling and public transport, and design cities so they are compact and built around these transport modes, say researchers from ITDP and the University of California, Davis. In a 2021 study, the researchers found that combining vehicle electrification and a major shift away from driving is the only way to reduce urban passenger transport emissions to a level close enough to limit future global warming to less than 2 deg C. To achieve this, cities should move funding for expressways and roads to mass transit, and reallocate space for cars to pavements, protected bicycle lanes and public transport, the researchers said. Retooling cities so they are dense, mixed-use and transit-oriented also has benefits that extend beyond decarbonisation. The study suggested that compact cities make people's trips shorter, reducing the need to drive, which in turn improves air quality and reduces traffic deaths. The study said bus lanes, bicycle lanes, rail transit and pedestrian paths also make those travel modes more inviting, encouraging a shift that can improve public health because people walk and cycle more. Another facet to this is the importance of inclusivity and lowering systemic barriers for the vulnerable and marginalised. The argument here is that socially inclusive transport systems contribute to environmental sustainability because more people stand to benefit and no longer have to rely on private transport, which is less efficient. A 2021 UN report on sustainable transport noted that those who face the most difficulties benefiting from transport services include women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Making transport sustainable and inclusive for these groups requires the involvement of multiple parties, from policymakers and transport engineers to social scientists and urban planners, the report said. Also required is an in-depth understanding of the transport needs of the different groups, whose voices and inputs should be actively sought and included. This was the case with the new bus system in Peshawar, which was designed with the active involvement of various communities like local residents and transgender people, according to an ITDP case study. The station and vehicle design incorporated feedback from workshops and women-only visits, and the designers worked closely with a local disability rights organisation to ensure the bus system was universally accessible. In its 2022 report, the IPCC said transformative changes in the transport sector are needed to meet the world's climate goals, but social and equity issues cannot be neglected in the process. "A sustainable transport system provides safe, inclusive, affordable and clean passenger and freight mobility for current and future generations," the report noted.



In order to make transportation more sustainable, people should embrace walking, cycling and public transport, and cities should be designed in such a way that they are compact and built around these transport modes, say researchers from the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy and the University of California, Davis. ST FILE PHOTO

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## S'pore's quest to build a greener transport system for all

Less than a month after seven new stations in eastern Singapore opened to the public in late June, the fanfare over the latest expansion of the MRT network here hit a sour note. A new bus stop opposite Parkway Parade mall in Marine Parade that was built in tandem with the fourth stage of the Thomson-East Coast Line (TEL) drew flak for its design, having pillars that made it hard for seated commuters to see approaching buses, and confusing bus bays. It was the latest of several

issues that marred the Government's ambitious plans to reshape the way people here travel. Another one was the aborted transition to a newer public transport ticketing system, SimplyGo. People were so irked by the fact that they would not be able to see their account balance when tapping out of buses and MRT stations that the Land Transport Authority (LTA) had to shelve its plans within weeks of announcing them. The incidents raised questions

about whether some improvements that are made to gain greater transport efficiencies could inadvertently leave some people behind. But while deserving of criticism, these oversights should not overshadow the genuine efforts made to improve an already well-regarded transport system. Notably, huge investments have been made in physical infrastructure, with more than 50 new MRT stations set to open in the next decade, including the fifth stage of the TEL, the new

Jurong Region Line and the new Cross Island Line. In all, more than \$60 billion has been set aside to expand and renew the rail network. The aim is for eight in 10 households to be within a 10-minute walk of an MRT station by 2030, and for Singapore to be a 45-minute city with 20-minute towns. This means that by 2040, the nearest neighbourhood centre should be 20 minutes away by walking, cycling or public transport, and travelling from home to the workplace via these

transport modes during peak hours should take less than 45 minutes. More than \$1 billion has been committed to growing the cycling path network here to 1,300km by 2030, while another billion was recently set aside to build more sheltered linkways, upgrade bus stops and remake neighbourhood streets to be safer for pedestrians. Singapore has also taken steps towards reducing its transport emissions, in the national push for net-zero emissions by 2050. It has committed to phasing out vehicles that run solely on fossil

fuels, and installing 60,000 electric-vehicle charging points by 2030. The Government has outlined a raft of initiatives to make flying and shipping more environmentally friendly as well. Measures have also been taken to change the transport culture to be more gracious and inclusive. One example is LTA's "May I have a seat please?" initiative, which is meant to alert passengers to those who may need a seat more. But, ultimately, if Singapore is to realise its vision of building a more sustainable and inclusive transport system, the public must buy into the plan. In making sure that everyone can come along for the ride, the devil is very much in the details. **Kok Yufeng**

# FORUM

## Letter of the day

# Do justice to artists and label public artworks

I am pleasantly surprised that we have so many public artworks of samsui women (Check out eight Chinatown artworks featuring samsui women, July 12). However, I am more astounded by the fact that three of the eight artworks featured could not be attributed to any known artist. It

is unclear if the other five artworks have labels or if the writer had to research to gather information about them. This lack of information is a common issue that my friends and I have encountered with many public artworks around Singapore, some of which are unattributed or have incomplete

attribution. Even when there are labels, they often fail to mention who commissioned the works and when.

Given the public interest generated by the recent samsui woman mural controversy, it is timely to examine how public artworks, whether murals or sculptures, indoors or outdoors, are treated.

A piece of art is a unique creation of an artist, who spent many hours conceptualising and making it. This being so, public artworks should not be seen as merely decorative, as suggested by the lack of attribution.

Proper attribution shows we value the work of the artist and the role of the artwork in the community and in placemaking. It would also be useful for students and researchers, or even tourists, who would like to find out more about an artwork.

I hope that every effort will be made to attribute existing artworks without labels. I also hope that every public artwork displayed from now on will have proper attribution.

**Jeffrey Say Seck Leong**



A samsui woman sculpture in Smith Street in Chinatown, one of eight such artworks in the area. A piece of art is a unique creation of an artist and proper attribution shows we value the work of the artist and the role of the artwork in the community and in placemaking, says the writer. ST FILE PHOTO

## AI • More transparency needed when using it in hiring process

As part of the hiring process, employers are increasingly using tools such as the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) to support and streamline their recruitment efforts.

Modern ATS leverages machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve its effectiveness.

While these technologies offer significant advantages, including efficiency and scalability, they also come with notable limitations.

One of the most impactful issues is the inherent biases in these systems.

Studies and anecdotal evidence suggest these systems often filter out a significant proportion of resumes that do not match specific criteria, which means

potentially superior candidates might never be viewed by the hiring team.

This filtering affects job-seekers as it undermines fairness and transparency in the hiring process.

Candidates are often unaware that ATS is being used, and they have no way to verify whether the system's results were fair.

This lack of transparency and recourse is problematic, leading to frustration and distrust among job-seekers.

Given that a majority of multinational corporations and a good number of small and medium-sized enterprises use such systems in their hiring processes, it is imperative to improve transparency and

accountability. Employers should be required to declare that they are using ATS in their hiring process. This disclosure allows candidates to understand that their application will be processed by an automated system and set appropriate expectations.

Companies should undergo regular external audits of their ATS to ensure that the systems are fair and unbiased.

Certification from these audits can serve as a mark of trustworthiness and commitment to fair hiring practices.

Candidates who are rejected by an ATS should have the right to request their scoring or the reasons for their rejection. This transparency allows candidates to understand and, if necessary, contest the reasons for their rejection.

By implementing such measures, the hiring landscape will be more equitable.

**Chong Ryh Hwei**

## AI • Social workers need to study its use carefully

The Opinion piece "Can AI lighten the load on social workers?" (July 2) paints an optimistic picture of artificial intelligence (AI) lightening the load for social workers, freeing them to focus more on client interactions.

While appealing, this view oversimplifies the relationship between technology and professional practice, leaning towards technological determinism – the idea that technology itself drives change in professions. However, existing research on technology adoption tells a more nuanced story about how occupational identity and new technologies shape each other in a dynamic process.

Social workers may resist AI not because they fear AI taking over but because they do not trust that AI can do a competent job. Social workers in Singapore

follow a Code of Professional Ethics that emphasises the importance of competent practice and to do no harm to service users.

The acceptance of AI in social work is not straightforward; it involves a critical evaluation of its capabilities and limitations. The writer is right that AI could reduce administrative burdens.

However, AI introduces new tasks such as managing the AI systems, checking the AI-generated insights for accuracy and relevance, and training social workers to use AI effectively.

This new layer of work requires time and resources, potentially offsetting the benefits of reducing administrative tasks. Yet this constant oversight is necessary to maintain the trust and effectiveness of social services.

The key is critical adoption. Rather than assuming AI will automatically improve outcomes, social workers need to carefully consider how to leverage its strengths while preserving the mission and values of the profession.

This means addressing ethical concerns, ensuring client confidentiality and uplifting the competencies of social workers.

The Code of Professional Ethics specifically highlights the need for informed consent and privacy protection of clients when using technology, principles that must be applied to AI implementation.

The successful integration of AI in social work will depend not just on the technology itself, but on how the profession shapes its use to align with its core values and expertise.

**Gerard Chung Siew Kong**

## Voices of Youth

### Healthcare • Allow use of MediSave for more vaccinations

go for the vaccination due to its high cost. She would have gone for the vaccination, costing \$800 for a two-dose regimen, if she were allowed to use her MediSave funds.

**Yeo Yuxi, 13**  
Secondary 2

#### CALLING YOUNG READERS

If you are 21 years or below and want to share your opinion, e-mail your letter to [stforum@sph.com.sg](mailto:stforum@sph.com.sg) with the subject header "Voices of Youth". Include age, contact details and school level if you are a student. Please keep your letter to 300 words.

Singapore is renowned for its exemplary healthcare system, which is considered one of the best in the world. However, one area that needs improvement is in the use of MediSave accounts for non-subsidised vaccinations like those for shingles.

My grandmother contracted shingles twice and yet refused to

### Insurance • Policies bought decades ago may have outdated coverage

I empathise with the writer of the Forum letter "Read the fine print before buying an insurance policy" (July 9).

In my case, I have realised that insurance policies bought decades ago might contain outdated policy wordings or coverage.

Back in the 1990s, when I was in my early 30s, I took up a whole life with critical illness (CI) policy.

I am still paying the premium of that policy. However, I discovered that my CI insurance covers only heart bypass surgery for treatment of coronary artery disease.

Heart bypass surgery was the treatment of choice in the 1990s and angioplasty with stents was still in its infancy then.

The Life Insurance Association Singapore introduced a new CI framework in 2003 that included angioplasty with stents to treat coronary artery disease. However, the new CI framework applied only to new policies. Insurers can apply the 2003 CI framework to existing policies but are not obliged to do so.

I have also encountered insurance agents at shopping-mall booths advising policyholders like me to switch old policies like my whole life with CI policy to a retirement savings policy by forgoing the CI coverage.

I would advise those with CI insurance policies bought before 2003 to review and update or upgrade their policy while they are still healthy.

**Andrew Tan Kok Chua**

## Replies

### Swimming complexes • Lockers with several payment options more convenient for users

We refer to Mr Phneah Peng Whatt's letter "Hassle using lockers at pools" (July 5).

As part of ActiveSG's review to continually improve service excellence and support the Smart Nation initiative, touchscreen smart lockers have been deployed at all ActiveSG swimming complexes since March 1, 2023.

There is greater convenience for patrons, as payment is cashless and there is no longer a need to hold on to a physical key while they exercise.

We have provided more cashless payment methods such as credit cards, Nets and ez-link cards. This is in addition to PayNow, which has been in use since smart cashless lockers were rolled out.

Patrons can also choose a two-hour single-use option, or the five-hour multi-use option which lets them retrieve their belongings in between their swim routine, if required.

The public can approach our staff on-site if further

clarification or assistance is required on the smart lockers.

**Abdul Rahman Hassan**  
Senior Director, Sport Centre Operations  
ActiveSG



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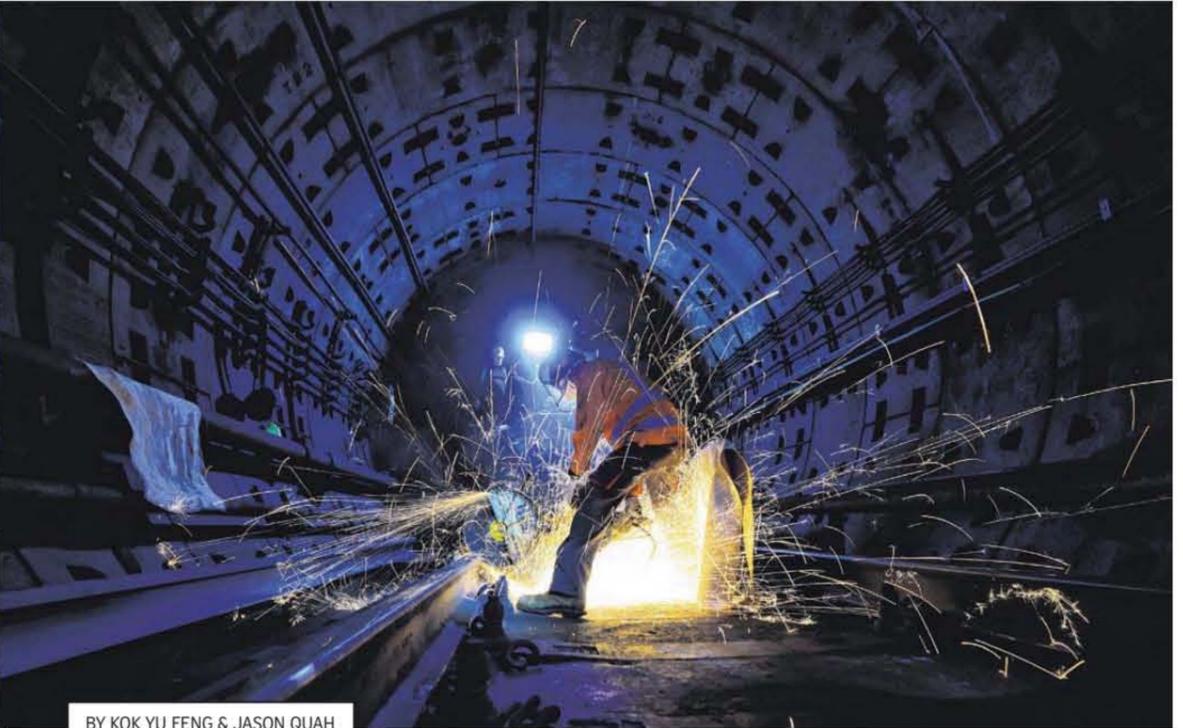
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**The Coach**  
Former award-winning journalist **Ian Tan** is a university lecturer, Gen AI coach and communications consultant. His 22-year career has spanned the fields of media, information technology and higher education.

THE STRAITS TIMES

# HOME IN FOCUS

*The little-seen side of Singapore*



BY KOK YU FENG & JASON QUAH

## Staying on track | How SMRT does rail maintenance while Singapore sleeps

Every night, workers race against time to replace worn or defective sections of the running rails, which trains travel on.



[str.sg/smart-sg](https://str.sg/smart-sg)



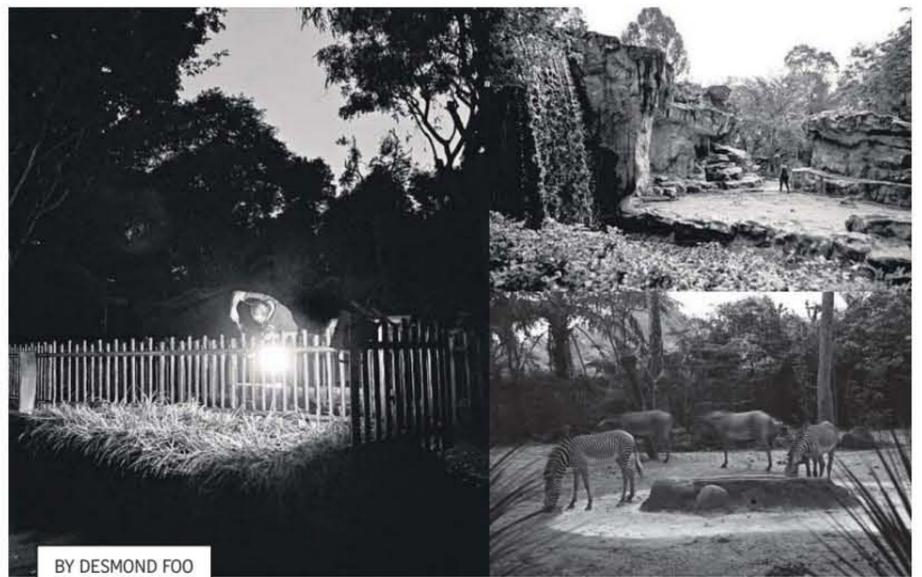
BY GIN TAY & NEO XIAOBIN

## The more we camp together | Pre-school without walls: Kids go on camping adventure

How does this pre-school help its six-year-olds learn resilience and teamwork? By taking them on a camping trip in the great outdoors.



[str.sg/camp-kids](https://str.sg/camp-kids)



BY DESMOND FOO

## Twilight tails

What goes on after hours at the Singapore Zoo?



[str.sg/zoo-sg](https://str.sg/zoo-sg)

The Straits Times Home in Focus is a weekly online interactive and two-page print photo feature that shares different facets of Singapore with its readers. Through still and moving images that range from personal portraits to vistas of hidden corners of the island, Home in Focus offers a peek into little-seen lives, places and events.



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# OBITUARIES

**IN EVER-LOVING MEMORY**  
*John 3:16*



**JOLLEEN CHONG**  
15 July 2001  
*Called home to be with the Lord Jesus Christ*

**23rd Anniversary**  
In Loving Memory Of



**LEE GEOK LAN**  
Departed 15 July 2001  
Time cannot erase the memory of one we love so much  
You are always in our thoughts and in our hearts  
We miss you so much, our dearest Mummy and PoPo  
*Forever loved and remembered by children, grandchildren and loved ones.*

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want..."*  
*Psalm 23*



**NEO SOON HOCK**  
1943 ~ 2024  
was called home to be with the Lord on 14 July 2024.  
*Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.*

**Beloved Wife:** Lim Chay Sian

**Daughters:** Anna Neo Phei Chen, Bena Neo Phei Theng, Patsy Neo Phei Tze  
**Sons-in-law:** Matthew Ong Ming Han, Isaac Tan Chee Keong

**Granddaughters:** Alethea Ong Linhui, Adrina Ong Lin En, Liesl Tan Zhu Ning  
**Grandsons:** Zacchaeus Tan Zhu En, Athan Ong En Kai

*and all relatives & friends.*

**Wake Venue:**  
Blk 101 Bedok Reservoir Road, Singapore 470101

**Night Service:**  
15 July 2024 (Monday) at 8.00pm

**Encoffining service will be held on**  
16 July 2024 (Tuesday) at 5.30pm.  
Thereafter, cortege leaves at 5.45pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 6.45pm.



**LIM SIEW HENG**  
Age: 88  
Was called home to be with the Lord on 13 July 2024.  
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

**Husband:** Wong Sin Eng (deceased)

**Son:** Gabriel Wong Ee Chung  
**Daughters:** Wong Rue Eu Ruth, Wong Ee Eu, Wong Mong Ee, Wong Meau Ee  
**Grandsons:** Joshua Wong Chun Wei, Dr. Chua Ru Heng Timothy, Chua Ru Yun Nicholas, Soo Kai, Soo Yi Keith, John Wong Foong Wai  
**Granddaughters:** Andrea Wong Min, Chua Ru En Rachel, Soo Jie Kimberley, Jessica Wong Ying

**Daughter-in-law:** Angelina Hing Wei Yuen  
**Sons-in-law:** Dr. Chua Ee Chek, Wong Chok Tung  
**Granddaughter-in-law:** Ng Wei-Tze Nicole Marissa

**And all relatives and friends.**  
Wake is held at Block 17A Marine Terrace, Singapore 441017.  
Cortege leaves on Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 11.45am for Funeral Mass at Church of the Holy Family, 6 Chapel Road, Singapore 429509 at 12.15pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 2.20pm.  
*No wreaths please.*

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# RACING

## Lui saves best for last to clinch trainers' title

The road to glory is certainly not for the faint hearted.

Francis Lui can attest to that - for the 65-year-old conditioner showed steely nerves to claim his first trainers' championship in the final event on the final day of the 2023-2024 Hong Kong season at Sha Tin racecourse on July 14.

Pierre Ng, with 67 winners entering the II-race season finale, had led Lui by one winner.

Both entered nine runners each

on July 14 and it was the 40-year-old Ng who drew first blood when he sent out Beauty Waves (Alexis Badel) to take out Race 2, a Class 2 1,200m event.

Ng also saddled third-placed Duke Wai while Lui sent out second-placed Call Me Glorious and fourth-placed Packing Treadmill.

Three races later, Ng surged to a three-winner lead when First Love, under Zac Purton, took out the Class 4 1,200m contest.

But Lui's late, late show was to prove decisive. And he had much to thank Purton as Steps Ahead (Race 7), Chancheng Glory (Race 8) and Packing Hermod (Race 9) brought him level with Ng on 69 winners.

Lui's runner Holy Lake ran second in the penultimate event, a Class 3 1,600m race, behind Purton's mount Young Achiever.

It was a significant result as Lui took his tally for second placings to

55, one more than Ng, going into the final event.

Ng needed either a win for outright success or a second to trump his former mentor and claim the crown on third placings.

But Lui saved his best for last, with Patch Of Theta making it a one-horse affair in the Class 3 1,400m race, to clinch the title outright with his 70th winner.

While champion rider Purton, 41, bagged a six-timer to take his

tally to 130 - Perfect Peach got him off to an early start in Race 3 - fellow Australian Hugh Bowman also had reason to celebrate.

Bowman, who turned 44 on July 14, booted home Super Elite in Race 1 and closed out with Patch Of Theta to take his tally to 69 and third spot. Karis Teetan finished second on 86. Purton's seventh crown put him level with Basil Marcus and Gary Moore.

Marc Tan



Trainer Francis Lui's sensational four-bagger on July 14 seals his first Hong Kong title. PHOTO: HKJC

# ROMANTIC WARRIOR CLAIMS TOP GONG

### Record five Group 1 wins include W.S. Cox Plate in Australia, Yasuda Kinen in Japan

HONG KONG - Romantic Warrior's outstanding performance during the 2023/24 racing season saw the globe-trotting Hong Kong hero earn the Horse of the Year title at a special presentation at Rosewood Hotel in Hong Kong on July 12.

A graduate of the 2021 Hong Kong International Sale, Romantic Warrior is currently ranked joint-sixth in the latest Longines World's Best Racehorse Rankings with an international rating of 121.

He has earned HK\$151.92 million (\$26 million) after 15 wins from 20 starts.

The Danny Shum-trained Acclamation gelding, who was purchased for HK\$4.8 million, started the season with a gallant fourth in the Group 1 Turnbull Stakes (2,000m) at Flemington, Australia.

The six-year-old's all-conquering campaign then began with a historic success in the Group 1 W.S. Cox Plate (2,040m) at Moonee Valley.

After returning to Hong Kong, he added three more Group 1 wins to his tally - namely the Longines Hong Kong Cup (2,000m), Citi Hong Kong Gold Cup (2,000m) and FWD QEII Cup (2,000m).

He closed the season by taking top honours in the Group 1 Yasuda Kinen (1,600m) at Tokyo.

As such, his five Group 1 wins are a record in a single season by a Hong Kong horse.

He also created history by becoming Hong Kong's first victor of the W.S. Cox Plate, Australasia's greatest weight-for-age race, and became the first horse to achieve three consecutive triumphs in the



Hong Kong's Horse of the Year Romantic Warrior (with regular partner James McDonald) is trained by Danny Shum and owned by Peter Lau. PHOTO: HKJC

FWD QEII Cup.

Meanwhile, Romantic Warrior also secured a third straight title as Champion Middle-Distance Horse following his clean sweep of all three Group 1 races over 2,000m in Hong Kong. He was also named Most Popular Horse.

The Francis Lui-trained evergreen Golden Sixty secured a fourth straight Champion Miler title with his outstanding winning performance in the Group 1 Longines Hong Kong Mile (1,600m) in December 2023.

The three-time Hong Kong Horse of the Year returned first-up after a 224-day break between runs, and also overcame the widest of 14 barriers, to win his third Longines Hong Kong Mile.

The victory was the Medaglia

d'Oro gelding's 26th at his 30th start, enhancing his Group 1 tally to 10 - a Hong Kong record.

He further extended his world-record earnings to over HK\$167 million after finishing a creditable fourth in the Group 1 FWD Champions Mile (1,600m).

The Tony Cruz-trained California Spangle was named Champion Sprinter.

The Starspangledbanner gelding claimed the Group 1 Queen's Silver Jubilee Cup (1,400m) before winning Dubai's Group 1 Al Quoz Sprint (1,200m) at Meydan.

Also trained by Cruz, Five G Patch was crowned Champion Stayer. The Camelot gelding finished in the money in all three major 2,400m events - sixth in the Group 1 Longines Hong Kong Vase,

second in the Group 3 Queen Mother Memorial Cup Handicap and second behind Rebel's Romance in the Group 1 Standard Chartered Champions & Chater Cup.

The Pierre Ng-trained Galaxy Patch was named Champion Four-Year-Old. The emerging youngster finished in the money in all 12 starts this season with six wins, three seconds and three fifths.

The son of Wandjina won the Group 3 Lion Rock Trophy Handicap (1,600m) and Group 3 Premier Plate Handicap (1,800m), as well as finished second in the Group 1 Queen's Silver Jubilee Cup (1,400m) and BMW Hong Kong Derby (2,000m).

Currently rated 119 locally, Galaxy Patch is the highest-rated four-

year-old in Hong Kong.

The David Hayes-trained Ka Ying Rising finished his rookie season with five wins and two seconds from just seven starts to be acclaimed Champion Griffin.

The three-year-old by Shamexpress soared 59 points to 111 after starting the campaign rated 52. He is also the Most Improved Horse.

The gelding capped his season with victory in the Group 3 Sha Tin Vase handicap (1,200m).

This season saw champion jockey Zac Purton seal a seventh championship with 130 wins.

Lui was crowned champion trainer for the first time, Vincent Ho claimed the Popular Jockey prize and Angus Chung won the Tony Cruz Award as the leading home-grown jockey. HKJC

### July 15 South Africa (Kenilworth) form analysis

## Landoftherisingsun can overcome wide alley

#### RACE 1 (1,200M)

(1) ARCTIC WIZARD showed promise on debut and has a winning chance if fit after a break. First-timers (2) KING'S QUEST and (10) POWERFUL could prove serious rivals.

#### RACE 2 (1,200M)

(2) LA PULGA has run well twice and can go one better. (7) PLEASE BE TRUE ran well on debut and should be right there at the finish. (8) LATE DECEMBER has been fair in three starts and can contest

the finish again. (9) BOUNDLESS ENERGY showed promise on debut and can do better this time around. Include in the exotics, at least.

#### RACE 3 (1,600M)

(II) LANDOFOTHERISINGSUN showed good improvement on a modest debut when finishing a nice third last time. He can overcome the bad draw. (10) SOUND OF THE SEA is not drawn well either but is capable of contesting the finish. (9) JOUEUR DE FLUTE has improved with each run. Place chance. (2) CUMBRE VIEJA is in good

form and drawn well. Each-way claims.

#### RACE 4 (1,800M)

(4) PACAYA catches the eye. He is distance suited and in very good form. (6) SACHDEV has lost his way of late but is clearly not out of it. (5) FLOWER OF SAIGON is unreliable but does win when in the mood. (2) SALVATOR MUNDI ran a fair fourth last start. Each-way chance.

#### RACE 5 (1,200M)

(14) SPIRIT GUIDE did not show her best on a soft track last time but has been a lot better under

jockey Craig Zackey. Can bounce back and score despite the bad draw.

(8) FASTNET FILLY is in good form and should fight out the finish again.

(4) JET GREEN is battling to win but can finish in the money. (2) PINK MOON lacks a strong finish but has a place chance.

#### RACE 6 (1,600M)

(9) CHARLOTTE BRONTE is getting expensive to follow but can score. (10) GOLDEN GREY is holding form and getting close to winning. (13) AMANCIO has claims. (2) CHAMPONELLE did not show

his best last time but is not out of it.

#### RACE 7 (1,600M)

(14) FLY FUTURA is in very good form and threatening to win but it will not be easy from gate 14. (13) NIGHT BOMBER is better than his last run would suggest but also has a terrible draw. (3) PRIME VENTURE won well last time and can follow up. (2) RADICCHIO has done well this year and is not out of it.

#### RACE 8 (1,600M)

(7) INNAMORARE showed his best to score under jockey Richard Fourie last time and he retains the ride. (2) NEVADA KING broke a long losing streak with a nice win last time and can follow up. (1) FUTURE PRINCE is unreliable but has a winning chance. (5) FUTURE TURN has not won for some time but can sneak a place.

#### RACE 9 (1,800M)

(6) KAMAKAZI was full of running when winning last time. Can follow up under a four-point penalty. (7) COULDTIBE is improving and should be right there at the finish again. (8) GLEE CLUB is consistent and can be considered. (4) AMONG THE CLOUDS does not always show her best side but has a winning chance.

#### RACE 10 (1,400M)

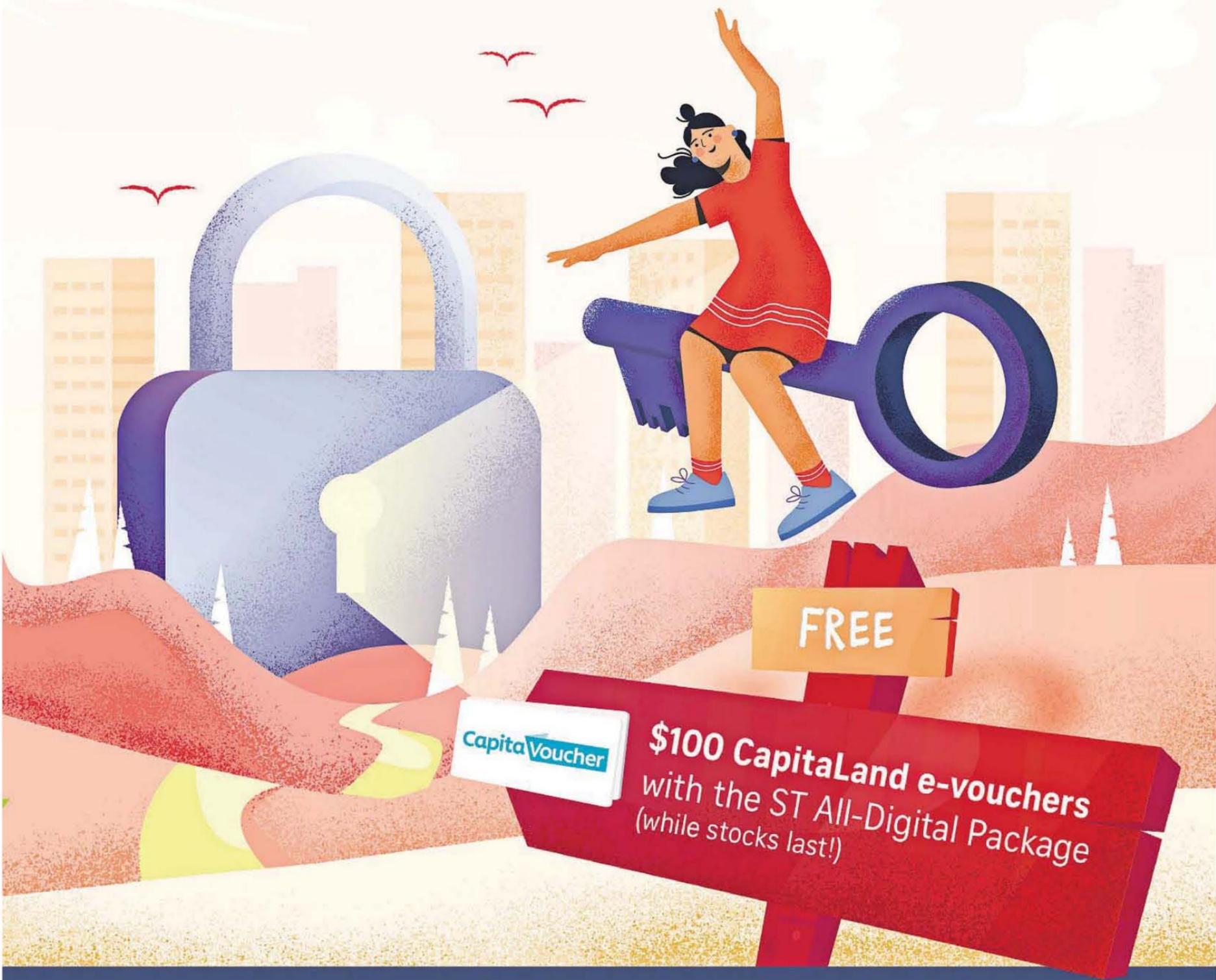
(10) HAMPSTEAD HEATH is in very good form and looks the one to follow, but is badly drawn in what looks to be a competitive race. (7) WUGUG runs well for Fourie and looks a serious threat. (1) MIA'S HARPER broke a long losing run with a nice win last time. (3) CHARLENE is consistent and deserves another winning turn. Do not ignore.

### 15-7-24 MONDAY - SOUTH AFRICA (KENILWORTH) RACE CARD

Table with 10 columns: Race, Time, Odds, Horses, Trainers, Jockeys, Odds, Horses, Trainers, Jockeys, Odds, Horses, Trainers, Jockeys. Contains detailed race card information for 10 races.

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# SPORT



Thierry Henry, who is coach of France's Olympic football team, holding the Games torch as officials light it during the inauguration of the Paris leg on July 14. PHOTO: AFP

## TORCH RELAY 'MET OUR OWN TARGETS'

### Chief organiser pleased event seen by 5m, seeks to defend Olympics against critics

PARIS - The torch relay ahead of the Paris Olympics reached the French capital for the first time on July 14, with organisers hoping to build enthusiasm for the Games among the city's sceptical residents. The flame was first glimpsed during the traditional military parade held every year on the July 14 na-

tional holiday and then began its tour around the city from the Champs-Elysees. World Cup-winning footballing great Thierry Henry was given the honour of the first leg on the capital's most famous avenue, with the torch then heading for landmarks including the parliament and

Notre-Dame cathedral. "It's not something you turn down, on our national day, on the Champs-Elysees, the Olympics in Paris," Henry, who is also coach of France's Olympic football team, told reporters of his star turn. "Just extraordinary." The build-up to the Paris Games has been marked by what chief organiser Tony Estanguet has called "Olympics-bashing", with many Parisians the sternest critics of the sporting event and the disruption

in the city. In the wealthy districts, many families have already left for extended summer holidays, deliberately missing the July 26-Aug 11 extravaganza. "I'm following them putting up the equipment, the stadiums, the impact that it will have on us, not really the torch," student Manon Skura, 22, told AFP at the Champs-Elysees. The 2024 Olympic Games have been designed to take place at loca-

## Doping probe may limit US as event host

tions in the heart of the City of Light, with temporary stadiums built at tourist hotspots such as the Eiffel Tower, Invalides and Place de la Concorde.

Using the capital's fabled streets and the Seine river as a backdrop will ensure an "iconic" Olympics, organisers say, but it has also led to large parts of the centre being closed off and left traffic in gridlock.

The latest change to the capital's streets has been the appearance of around 44,000 metal barriers around the Seine, where a spectacular opening ceremony is being planned on July 26.

"Some residents have shared with us their amazement, as well as the physical impossibility of leaving their homes," the mayor of the upmarket 6th district of Paris, Jean-Pierre Lecoq, said last week.

Estanguet told AFP that pushing back the pessimists had been one of his most difficult tasks.

"My role has been to protect our vision against everyone who criticises, those who don't believe in it, those who would take pleasure in seeing it not go well," he said in an interview on July 11.

The torch relay had been a huge success nationally, he said, with around five million people turning out to see it since May 8.

"We're delighted with how it has gone so far," he explained. "It has completely met the targets we gave ourselves."

Most importantly, the relay through 450 French towns and cities has taken place without any major security problems - testimony to the huge numbers of police officers deployed and careful planning.

Around 200 members of the security forces are positioned permanently around the torch, including an anti-terror Swat team and anti-drone operatives.

A 26-year-old man was arrested and charged in Bordeaux in May over suspected threats to the procession as it travelled through the south-western city.

Although polls generally find a slim majority of French people support the Olympics, a survey on March 25 by the Viavoice group found that 57 per cent of respondents felt "little" or "no" enthusiasm about the event in Paris.

The flame will remain in the capital on July 15 for a second day when it is scheduled to be greeted by can-can dancers outside the famed Moulin Rouge cabaret show and travel up to the hilltop Montmartre cathedral. AFP

WASHINGTON - An investigation by American law enforcement into a doping case involving 23 Chinese swimmers could keep the United States from hosting future sporting events, said the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (Asoif) on July 12.

World Aquatics confirmed in July that its executive director Brent Nowicki has been subpoenaed by the US government to testify in an investigation into how the Chinese swimmers escaped punishment after testing positive and weeks later were allowed to compete at the Tokyo Olympics.

A US House of Representatives committee in May called on the Department of Justice to launch inquiries ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympics to ensure American athletes would be competing on a level playing field.

The results of an independent investigation into the Chinese matter by Swiss prosecutor Eric Cottier released on July 9 found that World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) had not mishandled the case.

"The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations is greatly concerned that the leadership of one of its member international federations has been ordered to testify as a witness in a United States federal investigation," said Asoif.

The US investigation has chilled relations between the 2028 Olympic host country and a chunk of the international sporting community, with some federations expressing concern about sending officials there over fears they could be arrested. Images of members of football's world governing body Fifa being arrested on US corruption charges as they exited a Zurich hotel in 2015 remain fresh.

"The US extraterritorial investigation raises doubts about the personal safety of athletes, sport officials and representatives of international sport organisations and the confidence with which they may travel to the US for international sporting competitions and commitments," said Asoif in a statement.

"The investigation may lead IFs (international federations) to consider the risks of allocating future international events to the US."

Asoif wants clarification from the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Organising Committee regarding their position on Wada, which has come under criticism from United States Anti-Doping Agency chief Travis Tygart.

"Running from accountability as fast as they can. Why would any federation or athlete be afraid of telling the truth?" Tygart said. "Wada president (Witold) Banka and his cronies fear-mongering again and using scare tactics, clearly, signalling they have something to hide." REUTERS

## Kerr downplays Durant injury as Embiid finds flow

ABU DHABI - United States men's basketball team coach Steve Kerr has downplayed Kevin Durant's calf injury that has kept the three-time Olympic gold medallist from training with the group ahead of the Paris Games.

Team USA touched down in Abu Dhabi on July 12 ahead of two exhibition games against Australia (July 15) and Serbia (July 17) as they ramp up their preparations for Paris.

Durant, who suffered a calf strain two weeks ago, was present at a July 13 session at the New York University Abu Dhabi campus, but once again did not join his teammates in practice. Kerr remains unconcerned, though, and says they have

not discussed any contingency plans to replace the Phoenix Suns forward on the roster.

"He'll continue to do individual work," Kerr said in the United Arab Emirates capital on July 13.

"I know there are still a couple of weeks before we have to make a decision roster-wise, so we're just taking it day by day."

"It's not something we've even discussed at this point," Kerr said when asked about a backup plan. "Because we feel good that he's going to be okay, it's just day by day."

USA Basketball has put together a "super team" for these Olympic Games that includes LeBron James, Stephen Curry, Durant, Anthony



Phoenix Suns forward Kevin Durant, 35, is the most decorated United States men's basketball player with three Olympic golds and a World Cup title. PHOTO: AFP

Davis, Anthony Edwards and recently crowned National Basketball Association (NBA) champions Jayson Tatum and Jrue Holiday of the Boston Celtics.

But they have already had to make a replacement in the squad, bringing in a third Celtic, Derrick White, to take the spot of Kawhi Leonard, who left training camp on

July 10 in Las Vegas.

The Americans are playing five friendly games in the build-up to Paris, the first of which saw them defeat Canada 86-72 on July 10 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

Joel Embiid, the 2023 NBA Most Valuable Player, fouled out midway through the third quarter but Kerr is certain the Philadelphia 76ers

centre will be up for the task of guarding all the big opponents they come up against at the Olympics.

"Joel will be fine. He's going to get into the rhythm and the flow," he assured. "It always takes big guys a little bit longer to get into flow in training."

James is playing under Kerr for the first time in his career and described the Golden State Warriors coach as a "true leader and true student of the game".

Chasing a third Olympic gold and fourth medal overall, James, 39, is the oldest player on the roster.

Donning a US jersey for the first time in 12 years, James is keen to share his experience with the younger players in the team, especially knowing that this will be his final Games. He said: "It's always a responsibility that you should hold with honour and being able to give back to the younger generation because they have to keep going when we're done."

Boasting their most star-studded squad since the fabled 1992 "Dream Team", the US are gunning for a fifth consecutive Olympic gold medal and 17th men's title at the Games overall. AFP

### 15-7-24 MONDAY - MELBOURNE RACE CARD

MELBOURNE FEED: PAKENHAM (MARK CODE 8)			
<b>12:30PM Race 1</b> (A\$27,000)	<b>PAK-1400m</b>	<b>1:00PM Race 2</b> (A\$27,000)	<b>PAK-1400m</b>
1 2221 Dirty Grin	[7] 62.5 1 3575 Abseller	R McLeod	[5] 62.5 2 8415 Da Nang Star
2 0470 Isdell	[15] 62 2 1274 Brazen Kingdom	Zac Spain	[17] 62 4 5578 Thunder Pace
3 3633 Asawin	[13] 61.5 3 1460 Almighty Will	L Cartwright (20)	[9] 61.5 6 6912 Unlimited Magic
4 2603 Flying Ace	[3] 61 4 3502 Le Derriere	Logan Bates (20)	[8] 61.5 7 6523 Kimberley Pearl
5 3477 High Security	[4] 61 5 6085 Fuzz Buzz	B Kinnimont (40)	[7] 61 8 4485 Tycoon Jenny
6 3443 Hollandia	[12] 60.5 6 4472 Jaz Tycoon	L King	[3] 61 9 159 Unconquerable
7 3658 Turn Up The Night	[14] 60.5 7 3109 The Lupercal	J Mott	[16] 60.5 10 8140 Galaxy Field
8 8453 Graham	[2] 60 8 3521 Boys Night Out	J Bowditch	[1] 60 11 2148 Superior Zara
9 5865 Kew Player	[16] 60 9 1425 Indreamsyou'remine	T Nugent	[15] 60 12 1 I Am Velvet
10 0917 Elmknafico	[9] 59 10 6316 Disselaton	B Shinn	[6] 59.5 13 0375 San Marino
11 4755 Marine Parade	[8] 59 11 7403 Hoff To Sea	P Maloney	[12] 59 14 8852 Devils Delight
12 1745 Darra Linen	[5] 58 12 4996 In Your Hands	K Jennings	[2] 58.5 15 3976 Sweet 'N' Spicy
13 2550 New York Scandal	[10] 58.5 13 1808 Haather	--	[10] 58.5 16 7555 Warmoso
14 4374 Hazard A Guess	[11] 58.5 14 4375 Bencouver	--	[13] 58.5 17 1650 Aeecee Supreme
15 6660 Feudal Empire	[1] 58.5 15 5940 Grand Illusion	Ms J Da Rose	[4] 58 18 0561 Valentino
16 0494 Lovano	[6] 56 16 4999 Sweet Liaison	--	[14] 54 54
			[11] 54 1 5092 Dio

<b>1:30PM Race 3</b> (A\$27,000)	<b>PAK-1200m</b>	<b>2:30PM Race 5</b> (A\$27,000)	<b>PAK-1600m</b>
Ms H Le Blanc (15)	[12] 62 3 2359 Midnight Charm	Nadia Daniels (40)	[4] 63 7 1531 Star Blazer
R McLeod	[13] 62 4 1157 Magic Drum	L Nolen	[8] 60.5 8 2853 Stormy Grey
T Stockdale	[10] 62 5 4156 Hydro Star	J Mott	[10] 60 9 148 Smokin' Giant
J Mott	[3] 61.5 6 381 Bold Pint	J Maskiell	[12] 59 10 3182 Queen Beira
B Shinn	[4] 61.5 7 2201 Revalene	J Noonan	[5] 59 11 6431 Special Dancer
C Gaudry	[6] 61 8 3541 Son Of Zorro	C Gaudry	[3] 59 12 9680 Unzago
E J Walsh	[8] 61 9 1553 Cover Star	B Mertens	[14] 58 13 5022 Bing's Dream
B Mertens	[16] 61 10 2716 Mistavain	T Stockdale	[7] 58 14 7761 Toronova
M Chadwick (20)	[17] 61 11 4278 Who Shot Suzy	B Shinn	[6] 57.5 15 8039 Hot Seat
L Cartwright (20)	[9] 60.5 12 6860 Croatian Belle	S Clarke	[11] 55 16 5803 Stark Raving
B Shinn	[7] 58 13 5804 Arroance	L Cartwright (20)	[2] 54 17 0261 Bishop Rock
S Clarke	[2] 61 14 8759 Crafty Goddess	--	[1] 54
B Mertens	[11] 60 1 0539 Social Conscience		
J Maskiell	[5] 58 2 0513 Allibar		
J Noonan	[8] 60 3 5941 Got Yourself A Gun		
--	[1] 58 3 1002 James The Great		
--	[16] 59.5 4 5040 Musgrave		
	[9] 63 5 2187 Royal Fox		

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Ayaka Furue, being showered with champagne after winning the Evian Championship on July 14, said she found momentum after hole No. 15. PHOTO: AFP

Evian Championship 2024

# 'FORCE' PROPELS FURUE TO VICTORY

Japanese eagles last hole to seal first Major title with one-stroke win over Kyriacou

EVIAN-LES-BAINS, France - Japanese golfer Ayaka Furue suffered heartbreak in June when she narrowly missed out on qualifying for the Olympics, but she also found inspiration from that famous phrase from the Star Wars movie, "May the force be with you".

On July 14, the 24-year-old turned disappointment into delight, when she clinched the Evian Championship with an eagle on the 18th hole for her first Major title, which also landed her US\$1.2 million (S\$1.6 million) for her second career LPGA victory.

Carding birdies from holes No. 14 to No. 16, Furue then held her nerve in the final hole for the eagle. She erased a three-stroke deficit over the final five holes, with her six-under 65 giving her a 19-under 265 total.

This handed her a one-shot victory over Australia's third-round leader Stephanie Kyriacou (67).

Furue, who went into the final round trailing Kyriacou by two shots, said: "Before starting the round, I feel like I have to do the aggressive play today, but after I started playing I feel a little bit frustrated about my play. Like I didn't get any birdie chances."

"But after the 15th hole, I could gain my momentum..."

"I became a Star Wars fan like a month ago, and then I love the sentence, 'May the force be with you'. On the 15th hole, the sentence came up in my mind."

Heading to the 18th hole, Furue and Kyriacou were level at 17 under with third-placed Patty Tavatanakit having already finished her round.

Furue found the fairway, but Kyriacou's shot swerved left into the rough. Furue then found the green with her second shot, giving her a title shot. Moments later, she found herself drenched in champagne.

She joins Chako Higuchi (1977 PGA Championship), Hinako Shibuno (2019 British Open) and Yuka Saso (2024 US Open) as the lone golfers from Japan to win a women's Major.

"Breathtaking, like incredible and

I'm so speechless," said Furue, who had an eagle and six birdies as well as two bogeys.

Kyriacou, who birdied the 18th, also secured her best result at a Major, improving on a tie for seventh at the 2022 British Open. She finished her round with five birdies against one bogey.

While the 23-year-old said it hurts not to hold the trophy, the world No. 100 added: "If you told me I would come second at the start of the week, I would've been happy."

Thailand's Tavatanakit (63) finished third, two shots behind Furue.

"A lot of positives to take away for sure," the world No. 28 said.

"I feel like, I don't know, at the beginning of the week I didn't even think about winning or anything. I just felt really good about my game. I really trusted my process and I enjoyed ever bit of it, even the not-so-good ones."

Lauren Coughlin was done in by back-to-back bogeys at the 16th and 17th holes. She shot a 69 in the final round to end up in fourth place at 15 under for the tournament, two strokes ahead of South Korean Ryu Hae-ran (65).

Top-ranked Nelly Korda (68) and world No. 2 Lilia Vu (68) were in a group of players who finished tied-26th on five-under 279, while defending champion Celine Boutier (71) placed joint-39th two shots back, along with others such as Lydia Ko (71). REUTERS, AFP

# Farrell hails Springboks stunner after Durban drama

DURBAN - Ireland coach Andy Farrell said he does not care which team are the best in the world following a last-gasp 25-24 win over world No. 1 South Africa on July 13.

Victory for second-ranked Ireland in a Durban thriller levelled the two-Test series after the Rugby World Cup holders won by seven points in Pretoria on July 6.

"I honestly do not care who the best team in the world are," said Englishman Farrell after taking charge of the Six Nations champions for the 50th time.

"You would not want to separate these teams and there are probably three or four other countries who come into the conversation."

"World rugby is in a good state when we have this sort of competition."

South Africa completed back-to-back World Cup victories in October 2023, having recovered from losing to Ireland in the pool stage.

Farrell highlighted the character of his team after replacement fly-half Ciaran Frawley kicked two long-range drop goals in the last 10 minutes, including one on the final hooter, to snatch a series-levelling win. Ireland scrum-half Conor Murray scored the only try of the game, with all the Springboks' points coming via the boot of Handre Pollard.

It was just the second time Ireland have won a Test in II attempts in South Africa, with the first in Cape Town eight years ago.

"As far as drama goes and with the pressure we put on ourselves because we were not happy with last week's performance, this result is right up there," said Farrell.

"It came against a magnificent team. We had to come out and perform and the character of the team came through. That is what sport is all about."

"Our tussles with South Africa have been immense and we had to show guts, bravery and composure tonight."

"Our first half was outstanding,



South Africa's Damian de Allende and Ireland's Stuart McCloskey (far left) jumping for the ball during their second Rugby Union Test at Kings Park Stadium in Durban on July 13. Ireland won 25-24 to level the two-Test series. PHOTO: AFP

as good as it gets, but in the second half we made enough mistakes to last us three games."

Having won the first Test 27-20, South Africa coach Rassie Erasmus was humble in defeat.

"It was a very well-executed drop goal that made the difference, but

I'm not surprised because that is what Ireland do - it is why they are such a consistent team," he said.

"The best team won and I thought the referee (Karl Dickson from England) was good tonight as well."

"But if that drop goal had missed,

then we would have been sitting here with big smiles and talking about what a good comeback to win the series 2-0."

Meanwhile, France captain Baptiste Serin said on July 13 his side had experienced a "terrible" week following a 33-25 defeat by Argenti-

na in Buenos Aires, which came hours after two members of the visitors' squad were charged with rape and beating a woman.

France forwards Hugo Auradou, 20, and flanker Oscar Jegou, 21, were arrested on July 8 and formally charged on July 12 after a woman

accused them of raping her multiple times and beating her in a hotel room in the city of Mendoza on July 7 after the first Test.

The players have denied the accusations, and say sexual relations with the woman were consensual. AFP

# 'Motivated' Riner eyes record-tying third gold

PARIS - All eyes will be on the judo competition when French heavyweight Teddy Riner bids for a third individual Olympic gold medal in what could end up being one of the highlights of the Paris Games.

Every Olympics has an iconic moment from a home athlete and, although the French will be hoping for plenty of contenders, another gold at his fourth Games for the man known as "Big Teddy" would be right up there.

The 35-year-old won his 11th individual world title in Doha in 2023 and another gold in Paris would see him match the record of Japan's Tadahiro Nomura.

Nomura won successive Olympic extra-lightweight titles in 1996, 2000 and 2004.

"Having the Olympics at home is what motivates me. It is magical and it brings a lot of emotion", Riner said in February, after winning the Paris Grand Slam.

Riner, who was born in Guadeloupe but grew up in the French capital, already shares the record for most Olympic medals in judo with Japan's Ryoko Tani, having also won two individual bronzes and a mixed team gold.

His Tokyo bronze came after one of only a handful of losses over a career that has spanned 15 years, a stunning upset by Russian Tamer-

3

French heavyweight Teddy Riner will be looking to win a third individual Olympic gold medal in Paris. It will match the record of Japan's Tadahiro Nomura, who won successive Olympic extra-lightweight titles in 1996, 2000 and 2004.

lan Bashaev in the quarter-finals.

Riner is undefeated since failing to retain the Olympic title, his focus firmly fixed on the competition at Paris' Grand Palais, renamed the Champ de Mars Arena, from July 27 to Aug 3.

Czech Lukas Krpalek will also be chasing a third individual gold in Paris.

He won the half-heavyweight title in Rio de Janeiro and taking advantage of Riner's absence from the last two rounds of the Tokyo competition to claim the heavyweight crown.

Unsurprisingly, as the home of the martial art, Japan has been by far the most successful nation in judo at the Olympics since the sport made its debut at the first Tokyo Games in 1964.

Women judokas took their first Olympic bows at Barcelona in 1992 and both sexes now compete for golds in seven weight classes as

well as for one mixed team title.

Another home fighter taking centre stage on the Paris tatami will be 31-year-old Clarisse Agbegnenou, who won the half-heavyweight silver in Rio and gold in Tokyo.

Riner, Agbegnenou and their teammates beating Japan in the mixed team final in Tokyo took a bit of the gloss off the hosts' haul of nine golds, two silvers and one bronze.

Whether France can repeat the feat in Paris depends partly on how they deal with the pressure of competing at home.

"On the one hand, I will have my family there and a lot of people to support me," Riner told French GQ magazine in a recent cover interview.

"On the other hand, it puts additional pressure on some athletes. That's not the case for me, but you never know." REUTERS

**ST Hard Tackle podcast**  
**What makes the Olympics special**

From historic achievements to record-breaking feats, the Olympics serve up some unforgettable moments every four years. As we draw closer to Paris 2024, ST sports reporter **Deepanraj Ganesan** chats with former Olympians and ST assistant sports editor **Rohit Brijnath** on why the event captures the imagination the way it does.

Scan this QR code to listen to their discussion  
[str.sg/Hwo8](http://str.sg/Hwo8)

SportsWorld

**Bowlers joint-third in girls' doubles**

Singapore's Arianne Tay and Colleen Pee clinched a joint-bronze in the girls' doubles at the International Bowling Federation World Youth Championships in Incheon, South Korea, on July 14.

After finishing second in their matchplay group, the duo qualified for the semi-finals, where they lost 2-1 (190-237, 290-266, 247-227) to Sweden's Maja Engberg and Nora Johansson.

The Swedes will face Americans Katelyn Abigania and Annalise O'Bryant in the final on July 18, when Tay will also be vying for the girls' singles title with Finland's Stella Lokfors.

**Hougang end SPL cellar-dwelling**

Hougang United lifted themselves off the bottom of the Singapore Premier League after a 2-2 draw with the Young Lions at Jalan Besar Stadium on July 14.

Hougang swapped places with eighth-placed Albirex Niigata owing to a better goal difference. Both sides have three points after seven games, while the Young Lions are sixth in the nine-team table with seven points from eight matches.

**Park becoming a mother again**

SEOUL - Seven-time LPGA Tour Major champion Park In-bee is expecting her second child. She made the announcement on July 12, her birthday.

The 36-year-old Park, a Hall of Fame member with 21 LPGA Tour wins, gave birth to daughter Nam In-seo in April 2023. She last played on the tour at the AIG Women's Open in August 2022. REUTERS



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz putting on a dominant display in the Wimbledon final against Novak Djokovic on July 14. The Serb won just 10 games in his second heaviest defeat in a Major final. PHOTO: REUTERS

Wimbledon 2024

# ALCARAZ REPLAYS DREAM

**Spaniard demolishes Djokovic to retain Wimbledon title and lift fourth Major crown**

LONDON - Spain's Carlos Alcaraz produced an utterly ruthless performance to dismantle Serbia's Novak Djokovic 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (7-4) in a rematch of the 2023 Wimbledon final to retain his title on July 14.

Alcaraz now has four Grand Slam trophies with a perfect record in Major finals, including his US Open victory in 2022 and his French Open win in June. Defeat denied Djokovic a 25th Grand Slam title to surpass Margaret Court in the all-time list and also equal Swiss Roger Federer's haul of eight men's singles titles at Wimbledon.

"It's a dream for me, winning this trophy," said Alcaraz, who became the ninth man to retain his Wimbledon title in the professional era. "In an interview when I was 11 or

12, I said my dream was to win Wimbledon, so I'm replaying my dream.

"I want to keep going but it's a great feeling to play on this beautiful court and to lift this amazing trophy. This is the most beautiful tournament, most beautiful court and most beautiful trophy."

Victory in two hours and 27 minutes made him the sixth man in the professional era to claim the Roland Garros and Wimbledon titles in the same year, joining Rod Laver, Bjorn Borg, Rafael Nadal, Federer and Djokovic.

"It's a huge honour for me to be part of those players who have achieved Roland Garros and Wimbledon in the same year. They are huge champions. I don't consider myself as a champion yet, not like

them, but I'll keep going to build my path, my journey," Alcaraz said.

He pounced on his fifth break point in a tight first game that lasted 14 minutes as Djokovic's usually impenetrable defence was breached early on a sunlit Centre Court. The third seed dropped the hammer from there and powered through the first set on the back of some solid serving, leaving Djokovic with a mountain to climb.

Second seed Djokovic came under more pressure at the start of the next set as Alcaraz bullied the 37-year-old in the early exchanges to break and capitalised on his service woes for an imposing two-set lead.

Djokovic and Alcaraz went toe-to-toe until 4-4 in the third set before the 21-year-old broke with a big backhand winner to take a 5-4 lead, as the Centre Court crowd sensed an early finish. However, despite racing to 40-0 with some sublime tennis, he squandered three match

points and dropped serve as fans rose to their feet to egg Djokovic on.

There was to be no comeback, however, as Alcaraz tamed his nerves to clinch victory in the tie-break around 20 minutes later when Djokovic crashed a return into the net.

"Obviously, it's not the result I wanted and especially in the first couple of sets, the level of tennis wasn't up to par from my side. But credit to Carlos for playing some complete tennis. From the back of the court, on serve, he had it all today," Djokovic said.

"I tried to push him and saved the three match points, extended the match a little bit, but it wasn't meant to be, really. He was an absolutely deserved winner today. Congratulations to him for amazing tennis."

It was the second-most lopsided loss for Djokovic in his 37 Major title deciders after his French Open final

loss to Nadal in 2020, when he won just seven games.

Kate, Britain's Princess of Wales, was greeted with a standing ovation at Wimbledon in her second public appearance in 2024 while she undergoes treatment for cancer.

The patron of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club wore a bright purple dress as she strode into the venue with her daughter, Princess Charlotte, to watch the men's singles final.

Arriving at Centre Court's royal box, a beaming Kate waved to spectators, who rose to cheer her arrival. She later presented the trophy to Alcaraz.

"I am making good progress, but as anyone going through chemotherapy will know, there are good days and bad days," she said in a personal written message ahead of that appearance. "My treatment is ongoing and will be for a few more months." REUTERS

## Unseeded pair 'got a bit lucky' to claim doubles title

LONDON - Britain's Henry Patten and Finland's Harri Heliövaara beat Australians Max Purcell and Jordan Thompson 6-7 (7-9), 7-6 (10-8), 7-6 (11-9) in the men's doubles final at Wimbledon on July 13 to clinch their first Grand Slam title together.

The unseeded duo started playing together only three months ago but ousted seeded pairs en route to the final to meet the 15th seeds, who had knocked out the top seeds Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos in the semi-finals.

Remarkably, the match had no breaks of serve as each set went into a tiebreak and with the pressure mounting with each game, Patten and Heliövaara saved three championship points in the second set to force a decider.

After nearly two hours and 49 minutes, Patten, a former Wimbledon statistician, and his partner edged out the Australians to win an epic match, receiving a standing

ovation from the Centre Court crowd.

"It couldn't have been a closer match. I can't really remember what happened. I'm sure Harri's the same," Patten said.

While Patten had never moved past the third round at a Slam before, Heliövaara had reached two men's doubles quarter-finals and won the 2023 US Open mixed doubles title with Kazakhstan's Anna Danilina. The emotions got the better of the Finnish player, who was seen sobbing on the court.

"I admit we got a bit lucky today but sometimes we need luck to win a tennis match... The tears say it all, it's very emotional," he said.

In an entertaining and nail-biting first set, the Australian duo were virtually unstoppable on serve, losing just two points but Patten and Heliövaara were also up to the task.

It was initially one-way traffic in the tiebreak, as Purcell and Thomp-

son forged ahead when the British-Finnish duo made several errors, giving them five set points. Patten stepped up under pressure to save four, but Purcell and Thompson rediscovered their rhythm and took the set when Heliövaara's return went just wide.

The Australians continued to serve well in the second set, with Patten and Heliövaara having no answers on how to break them even as the set went with serve until 6-5.

Purcell and Thompson finally had the first break point of the match - a championship point on Heliövaara's serve - but Patten came to his rescue at the net with a fine volley.

Patten and Heliövaara saved championship points twice in the tiebreak on some tense rallies before taking the second set and forcing a decider, leaving the Australians confounded during the changeover as the crowd roared its approval.

The final set was more of the same on serve but had more rallies as both pairs refused to be the first ones to blink, before the unheralded pair of Patten and Heliövaara prevailed and sank to their knees.

"I'm devastated. We were so close, we had championship points... This is the way tennis goes," said Thompson.

Purcell, who won the 2022 Wimbledon men's doubles title, said: "I'm super happy for these boys, they deserve it."

In the women's doubles, American Taylor Townsend captured her first Grand Slam title as she and Czech partner Katerina Siniakova beat Canadian Gabriela Dabrowski and New Zealand's Erin Routliffe 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (7-1) in what was only their 10th match together. REUTERS



Leader Tadej Pogacar celebrating winning Stage 15, his third stage victory on the 2024 Tour lifting him comfortably clear of his rivals. PHOTO: REUTERS

Tour de France 2024

## 'Super happy' Pogacar increases lead to 3:09

PLATEAU DE BEILLE - Tadej Pogacar extended his overall lead at the Tour de France to more than three minutes on July 14 with a convincing second straight stage win in the Pyrenees.

The Slovenian dropped the last of his rivals with 5km to go after five more Pyrenean peaks.

A valiant Jonas Vingegaard could finish only 1min 8sec adrift in second, with Remco Evenepoel in third, 2min 51sec behind the leader.

As Pogacar crossed the line at the magnificent Plateau de Beille

deep in the Pyrenees, resplendent in his yellow jersey, he racked up a second straight iconic mountain-top triumph and a 14th Tour de France stage win aged just 25.

He said: "I would never imagine this kind of outcome after the second week. I'm super happy with my shape."

"Today was super hot and it was a really hard day."

"I always struggle with the heat and today the team did a super good job with cooling me down and everything. It was an incredible day."

The UAE Team Emirates leader's audacious bid for a Tour de France and Giro d'Italia double in the same season seemed closer after a third stage victory on the 2024 Tour lifted him comfortably clear.

There are two murderous mountain slogs to go in the Alps, where the weather will likely be much hotter, which Pogacar dislikes.

For now, the sun shines on the Slovenian as he leads the two-time defending champion Vingegaard by 3min 9sec. Tour debutant Evenepoel is third, 5min 19sec behind Pogacar.

Meanwhile, a roadside spectator who threw potato chips in the faces of Pogacar and Vingegaard was arrested and held overnight in a police cell, according to media reports.

The incident, which was caught on film and swiftly did the rounds on social media, happened in the heat of the Stage 14 struggle on July 13 as Pogacar was breaking away from the defending champion.

"I do not understand people who go to a bike race to throw potato chips," said Vingegaard at the finish.

Professional riders union CPA says it intends to sue the spectator. He was too drunk to make a statement, so police held him overnight in order that he could do so on the morning of July 14.

In other news, the Tour stepped up protective measures on July 14 to "limit health risks" in the face of a resurgence of Covid-19, which has affected several riders in recent days.

Masks must now be worn by everyone, including organisers, guests and journalists, who may be "in contact with the riders and members of the cycling teams" before and after the stages, said organisers Amaury Sport Organisation.

Several riders, including Britain's Tom Pidcock and Spain's Juan Ayuso, teammate of Pogacar, have already retired after testing positive. AFP

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Euro 2024

# GERMANY WERE BETTER HOSTS AT WORLD CUP

No 'summer fairy tale' as team miss target while fans face transport and weather woes

BERLIN – German organisers of the Euro 2024 tournament will breathe a sigh of relief, having delivered an event without major issues ahead of the July 14 final be-

tween Spain and England, but having failed to replicate the success of the 2006 World Cup on home soil. The European Championship has been Germany's biggest inter-

national sports event since the 2006 World Cup, which at the time triggered a massive wave of home enthusiasm, filled fan zones nationwide and has since become known as the "Summer Fairy Tale".

While Euro 2024 went off without major hitches on both the operational and security level, it has come nowhere close to matching

the success of the World Cup 18 years ago.

The German national team went out in the quarter-finals without ever hitting top form, leaving the hosts with about two weeks of subdued passion from the home fans.

At the 2006 World Cup, an unfancied young Germany side reached the semi-finals and then won their third-place play-off against Portugal. It also set the stage for another semi-final run four years later, with Germany ultimately winning their fourth World Cup in Brazil in 2014.

Transportation between the 10 cities hosting matches was also a far cry from the impressive efficiency of 2006, with delays hitting fans and even teams, including the Dutch squad, who had to scrap plans for a train journey ahead of their semi-final against England and eventually arrived four hours later than planned by plane.

Fans took to social media to complain about these disruptions and the transport minister said the national rail operator's performance had not met Germany's standards during the event.

Said Mr Volker Wissing: "What

has happened to some of the fans does not meet Germany's standards and does not meet the standards I have for our transport infrastructure."

The Euro has put Germany's vaunted efficiency under international scrutiny as the country struggles to modernise its ageing rail infrastructure and boost punctuality.

Among those caught up in train delays was tournament director and 2014 World Cup winner Philipp Lahm, whose appointment a few years ago was welcomed, bringing a respected former player to the role.

But in contrast to the late Franz Beckenbauer, who attended matches using a helicopter in 2006 and quickly became the face of the organisation, Lahm has been rarely seen or heard, preferring to operate behind the scenes.

The weather did not always play along either, with summer storms and heavy rain during the event, another contrast to the month of blue skies throughout the warm summer of 2006.

Fan zones had to be shut on occasion due to the storms, but organis-

ers still expect a total of six million people to have visited them by the end of July 14.

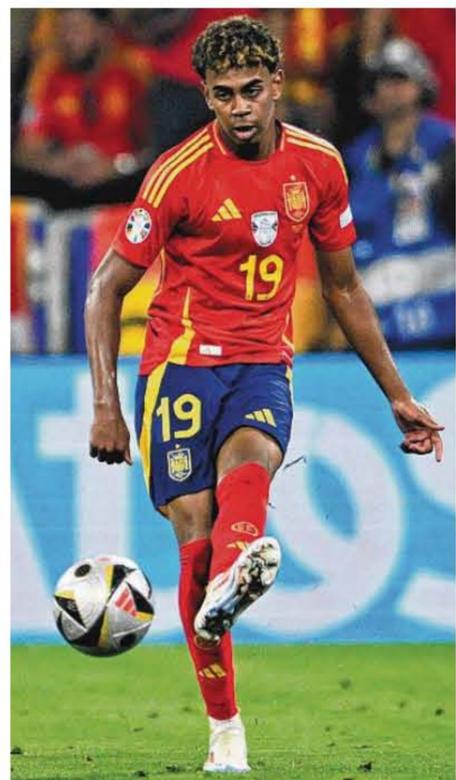
"For me the entire tournament showed that sport stands for community and social spirit. Sport and football have nothing to do with isolation," said German Football Association chief Bernd Neuen-dorf.

Nowhere was that more evident than in the low-key and friendly policing, with security having been a concern with potential threats from Islamist militants, hooligans, violent individuals and cyberattacks, as identified by the country's interior ministry.

But German security, including 22,000 police officers, with a very low-visibility presence apart from at some high-risk games, look to have done the job satisfactorily.

The tournament's format with 16 of the 24 teams advancing past the group stage may have been criticised, but it did provide tense matches until the last group game.

Organisers hope that excitement will carry through to the final in Berlin on July 14 to cap a solid tournament operation. The final took place after press time. REUTERS



Turkey's Arda Guler (left) evading Netherlands forward Cody Gakpo during their Euro 2024 quarter-final. The 19-year-old finished the tournament with a goal and two assists. Spain winger Lamine Yamal, 17, has a goal and three assists before the final against England in Berlin. PHOTOS: REUTERS, AFP

## Teenagers Yamal, Guler a throwback to Rooney, Ronaldo

On The Ball



John Brewin

Euro 2024 has seen the major stars falter and a generational shift is in full play.

Spain's Lamine Yamal, who celebrated his 17th birthday on July 13, announced his arrival on the international stage, while in Arda Guler, 19, quarter-finalists Turkey found a talent to build around, to continue the great strides made.

It has been 20 years since two young players made such an impact on a European Championship. To paraphrase Opta's tweet after Yamal's goal against France during the July 9 semi-final, Euro 2004 was the only previous edition to see two teenagers register at least a goal and an assist each.

Their predecessors? Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney. Time waits for nobody: The former found himself incapable of matching former glories at this

**It has been 20 years since two young players made such an impact on a European Championship... Euro 2004 was the only previous edition to see two teenagers register at least a goal and an assist each.**

tournament, with the 39-year-old Portugal captain's presence disrupting probably the most talented squad in this competition.

The duo had enjoyed gilded careers. Ronaldo smashed even the high expectations held after a

promising, if imperfect, first season at Manchester United.

Rooney, who looked the better prospect when rampaging through defences during that summer of 2004, became record scorer for club and country, though perhaps with better self-discipline, he might have achieved even more.

Still, watch back videos of Rooney from 2004 to 2010 and a player of ferocity, skill and brilliance comes to the fore.

Yamal reminds us of another United player, Ryan Giggs, when he was the first of Alex Ferguson's Class of 92 allowed to take flight.

Like a teenage Giggs, the Barcelona prodigy glides across the field with the moral courage to take on muscular opponents who dwarf his slim physique, and possesses a lashing left foot, too, as France found out with his brilliant semi-final strike which

made him the youngest scorer in tournament history, adding to his three assists.

With his explosive finishing and leadership qualities for one so young, Guler perhaps reminds us of Gheorghe Hagi, the Romanian genius who played much of his football in Turkey with Galatasaray.

Real Madrid must be inundated with applications to loan such talent. As Martin Odegaard, for example, found, the Spanish giants, where results will always be paramount, may not always represent the best place to groom young talent.

But whether at the Santiago Bernabeu or elsewhere, Guler looks to have a fine career ahead of him. He certainly has the talent, as shown from his tally of two assists and a goal at this tournament.

Another teenager who caught

the eye is England's Kobbie Mainoo, upon whom Gareth Southgate eventually incorporated as part of his midfield trio.

The United player's ability to quickly find space and make key passes has gone some way to loosening the logjam that held England back in the group stages.

There may be doubts over his covering for those behind him, adding to the workload of the likes of Declan Rice, but the 19-year-old joins Yamal and Guler as a teenager making an impact on a tournament where the established stars disappointed.

This was supposed to be the tournament Kylian Mbappe and others stepped into the breach left by Ronaldo as Europe's greatest. Instead, they must bow to the next, coming generation.

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## US show creativity in warmup win over Mexico

NEW YORK – Sophia Smith scored the only goal as the United States warmed up for the Paris Olympics with a 1-0 victory over Mexico at Red Bull Arena in New Jersey on July 13.

Portland Thorns striker Smith rounded off a superb team move with an emphatic finish on 64 minutes to seal a deserved win for Emma Hayes' youthful US Olympic squad.

The Athletic quoted Hayes as saying: "For the chances we've created, we're not hitting the frame enough. That's something to add... we're only scratching the surface."

Mexico had beaten the Americans 2-0 when the teams last met in February during the Concacaf Women's Gold Cup in California.

But that shock loss – only the second time Mexico have beaten the US women – seemed like a distant memory on July 13 after a dominant performance by the four-time Olympic champions.

Hayes controversially omitted veteran striker and two-time World Cup winner Alex Morgan, 35, from her 18-strong squad for the Olympics, where the Americans are chasing their first gold medal since the 2012 London Games.

However, the movement of Smith and attacking partners Trinity Rodman and Mallory Swanson against Mexico suggested that the US women will be among the main contenders for gold in France.

Smith in particular carved out a number of promising chances and

only some desperate goalkeeping from Mexico custodian Stephany Barrera prevented the home team from scoring more.

Barrera pulled off superb saves to deny Smith in the 22nd and 52nd minutes, before Smith finally broke the deadlock in the second half.

Rose Lavelle's pass released Rodman down the right, who in turn fed Swanson in the penalty area. Swanson unselfishly laid the ball off to Smith, who cut inside and curled a shot past Barrera.

Said Smith: "We have such dynamic players up front, we can create in so many ways. I should have put away a few more. But it goes to show the different ways we're creating and working together."

The midfield, however, remains a

work in progress, with Lavelle saying: "I think we're working on being a little more tactically flexible and when things felt like it wasn't working in the first half, we want to do something a little different in the second half."

"So me going deeper just kind of happened, it worked. But we're trying to, as a group, learn how to adjust on the fly and be a little smarter with our adjustments during games."

They play Costa Rica in a July 16 friendly before heading to Paris.

Olympic champions Canada beat Australia 2-1 in another warmup in Marbella, Spain. Sharn Freier put the Matildas ahead but Canada hit back through Nichelle Prince and Evelyne Viens. AFP



United States forward Sophia Smith on the attack against Mexico during the first half of their friendly at Red Bull Arena in New Jersey on July 13. The 23-year-old scored the only goal of the game in the 64th minute. PHOTO: USA TODAY SPORTS

# SPORT

## MAHLER STEPS UP AGAIN

**Versatile Lion joins top-tier Thai side Muangthong to further his career**

**David Lee**  
Sports Correspondent

Having excelled in his first season abroad with Indonesian club Madura United, national footballer Jacob Mahler is ready for the challenge of playing in South-east Asia's strongest league.

The 24-year-old has joined Thai League 1 side Muangthong United, inking a one-year deal on July 3 with an option for another year's extension.

He told The Straits Times: "The Indonesian league is on the way up, but Thailand has the best league now and this is the best option to grow further in the next step of my career."

"It's a step up for me. I'm excited to embark on this journey with one of the biggest clubs in Thai League 1, and this is a good opportunity to showcase my abilities."

Muangthong won the league in 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2016 and once boasted top Thai internationals such as playmaker Chanathip Songkrasin and dynamic left-back Theerathon Bunmathan before they furthered their careers in Japan.

Since then, the Kirins have been overtaken by other clubs. In the 2023-24 season, they finished fifth in the 16-team league, below Buriram United (champions), Bangkok United (2nd), Port FC (3rd) and BG Pathum United (4th).

But Mahler believes his new team can deliver success again, with young locals such as former Leicester City player Thanawat Suengchitthawon and experienced imports like former Liverpool defender Aly Cissokho, executing their brand of high-intensity, hard-running football under new Italian coach Gino Lettieri.

There will also be the rivalry subplot with fellow Lions and best mates - Irfan Fandi (Port), Ikhsan Fandi (Pathum) and Harhys Stew-



Singapore's Jacob Mahler (in red) and Chanathip Songkrasin of Thailand clashing during the World Cup qualifier between the two countries at Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium on June 11. Chanathip used to be a playmaker for Muangthong United, with whom Mahler signed a one-year deal on July 3. PHOTO: AFP

art (Chiangrai United).

While Muangthong may not have many individual stars, Mahler believes they have a good chance of achieving something with their work ethic.

The 1.84m utility player is looking forward to playing alongside Cissokho, adding: "Aly is a top professional who has played at the highest level, and the good thing is he speaks English so we can communicate."

"I'm a Manchester United fan but there's no problem with him being a former Red when we can play with

and learn from such an experienced player like him."

Born in Copenhagen to a Danish father and Singaporean mother, Mahler moved to Jakarta when he was two before the family relocated to Singapore in 2004.

In May 2023, he joined Madura on a one-year contract and has evolved from a reliable defender into a defensive midfield bedrock.

He played 30 games, contributed to 10 clean sheets and scored once during the regular season as the Racing Bull finished fourth in the 18-team league.

In the top-four championship series, he helped Madura reach the two-legged final, where they lost 6-1 on aggregate to Persib Bandung.

The past season was the first time he has lived abroad on his own, which has helped him to "man up" and learn to be independent.

Besides having to do his own laundry and housework, he also learnt how to cook. He can now whip up a mean pesto pasta with chicken, mushroom and spinach.

Playing abroad also gave him a true taste of away days in professional football as he recounted six-

hour coach trips from Surabaya to Yogyakarta. Once, it took his team 12 hours to reach their hotel in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, at 2am after a three-hour flight delay and a two-hour bus ride.

"It's tiring and takes a toll on the body, so I learnt a lot about myself and my body and how I need to recover, which is something really important as a footballer," he said, adding that one will not experience this by playing locally.

Mahler, who has 12 caps and three international goals, hopes to continue challenging himself in the

hope of earning a move to Japan, South Korea or Europe one day.

He said: "We have to take such opportunities to get out of our comfort zone and play overseas to better ourselves."

"I'm nowhere near the finished product I want to be. I can still grow and become a much better player. I'm not satisfied just being mediocre, I want to be the best I can be... and do my part to bring back the glory days for Singapore football."

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## Colombia irked that longer interval will affect players

MIAMI - Colombia will seek their second Copa America title when they take on defending champions Argentina at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens on July 14 (July 15, Singapore time), but the clash will not be the only spectacle, with Shakira doing the half-time show.

Comnebol confirmed the performance would last for 20 minutes, and Colombia coach Nestor Lorenzo said he disagreed with the decision to extend the break as it could affect the players' fitness.

He added that South American football's governing body had sanctioned late arrivals on the

pitch after half-time.

"Regarding the show, I hope all enjoy it, Shakira is an excellent artiste. I found out today. I think it should be like any other game, the 15 minutes according to the rules," Lorenzo told a press conference on July 13.

"When we have gone out at 16 (minutes), we have been fined. Now there is a show and we have to go out at 20 or 25. With the impact it can have on the players, they might cool down and we know what it costs those minutes of recovery in the dressing room."

The coach added he expected his

team to play a flawless game to beat Argentina, and highlighted the role of veteran playmaker James Rodriguez, who has been crucial in the squad.

"If we hadn't done a good performance, we wouldn't be here. To beat Argentina, we have to be the best version of ourselves and multiply it," said Lorenzo.

"James has had a very good tournament. We are lucky that he is doing well, that he has taken the leadership of the team and that the team have supported him. He is undoubtedly one of the best in the Copa."



Shakira's 20-minute performance during half-time of the Copa America final between Argentina and Colombia will lead to a prolonged break. PHOTO: AFP

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni agreed, saying: "He (Rodriguez) is a great player and it's a pleasure to watch him... Nestor has built a team around him and it's a great thing for football."

While Albiceleste captain Lionel

Scaloni said he would not guarantee that di Maria would play.

"Even though we know it will be

his last game, we will always decide first what is best for the team. If he has to play, it's because he has to play. If we decide not to play him, it's because we think differently," he said.

Meanwhile, Luis Suarez rescued Uruguay with an injury-time equaliser, before the South Americans defeated Canada 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out to win the third-place play-off on July 13.

Uruguay looked to be heading to a shock defeat after the Canadians took a 2-1 lead in the 80th minute through a Jonathan David goal at Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium, before Suarez intervened to make it 2-2.

Rodrigo Bentancur had opened the scoring for Uruguay on eight minutes but Ismael Kone equalised before the break. Kone and Alphonso Davies missed during the shoot-out. REUTERS, AFP

ARGENTINA V COLOMBIA  
StarHub Ch202, 8am

FOUR-DIGIT DRAW		
Jul 14 2024		
FIRST	◆ 1986	
SECOND	◆ 6901	
THIRD	◆ 5479	
STARTERS		
0622	1080	1361
3009	3085	3850
4376	4720	4985
	9508	
CONSOLATIONS		
0253	2511	2545
2736	2795	3493
3692	4239	6474
	7305	

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**John Brewin • Yamal and Guler the top breakout stars of Euro 2024 | B13**

**Golf • Furue finds inspiration from Star Wars for her maiden Major win | B11**





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# life

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**Young and hooked**

# HELP YOUR CHILD SAY NO TO DRUGS

Instead of scolding or criticising your child harshly over his drug use, staying open and being honest may help in his recovery



**Venessa Lee**  
Senior Correspondent

Amid a rise in teen drug abuse in Singapore, what do parents need to know to protect their children?

Parents may find out that their adolescent or young-adult children are taking drugs only at the point of arrest, according to addiction specialists.

Still, talking to their offspring early about such harmful behaviour can play a role in helping kids say no to drugs, the experts say.

Dr Mohamed Zakir Karuvetil, consultant at National Addictions Management Service at the Institute of Mental Health, says: "Young people often hide their substance abuse and avoid discussing it with family members. Parents may sometimes learn about it through schools or clinics. But more frequently, they find out when their children are arrested."

Dr Thomas Lee, medical director and consultant psychiatrist at Resilienz Clinic, says that, in general, "if the relationship is not good from the start, the teens would not be forthcoming with their parents".

"It's not just drugs. It could be smoking, drinking, computer games or vaping," he adds.

Dr Lee stresses: "Any form of drug-taking is a no-go. It may seem relatively harmless, but one-time use can be trouble."

Depending on the drug, severe outcomes include fainting, heart failure and even death, he says.

It helps for parent and child to have honest communication and a strong connection from a young age.

Dr Zakir suggests: "Parents can foster open and honest communication with their children, listen actively without judgment, and provide accurate information about the harms of substance abuse and the damaging effects it has on their development."

"Parents can also encourage their children to avoid friends and social circles that abuse drugs. Helping their children be aware of the legality around substance abuse also works as a deterrent."

He warns that blame can be counterproductive.

"Simply expressing disapproval or objection is not enough to address drug-related issues effectively."



I lost myself to drugs, says content creator

Content creator Fauzi Azzhar is candid about his former drug use on social media.

In June, the 36-year-old, who came to the public eye via local humour site SGAG, posted a video marking 365 days of sobriety. At the beginning of 2024, he posted a TikTok clip about making a fresh start after consuming drugs.

Having spent six months in 2023 in a drug rehabilitation centre, Mr Fauzi, who has more than 97,000 followers on TikTok, wants to warn others against even casual drug use.

"Don't even think about trying drugs once. I regretted it. Put it in caps: REGRET," he tells The Straits Times.

When a friend offered him a taste of methamphetamine eight years ago, he was driven by curiosity mingled with a hankering for glamour.

"When you're young, you want to feel good, you want to be cool. I thought, 'Enough of being the good guy. Let's be naughty for once.' That was my first impulse."

"I had watched movies in which people took drugs. I didn't know there would be repercussions that would affect my life," recalls Mr Fauzi, who was 28 then.

In 2016, he was working as a digital communications executive while juggling night classes for a

part-time degree course. "I used the drugs to stay awake. I had a 4.0 GPA (Grade Point Average)," he says.

Although meth helped him stay up, sometimes for three days at a stretch, his good grades and aspirations for progressing in his education and career soon crumbled.

"I kept asking for more drugs. It was so dangerous. I lost myself," he says.

Abandoning his tertiary studies after a year, he took meth every week, occasionally adding doses of Ecstasy and cannabis.

Meth and Ecstasy are party drugs that are stimulants.

Using meth can lead to feelings of jumpiness, excitement, anger and fear, with physical effects such as dental problems and itching. People using Ecstasy have reported feeling energetic and happy, but its possible effects include dangerous spikes in body temperature.

The effects of cannabis, or marijuana, can vary widely and include impaired memory and judgment.

Mr Fauzi says he has bordered on substance misuse before. For a year in his mid-20s, he binge-drank "bottles of vodka" while clubbing on weekends.

There was a period when he went cold turkey, however.

In the late 2010s, when he was

employed for more than two years by a social media company, he quit drugs. He says: "I had to stop because I had become a public figure. I was scared the public would find out, but I didn't really have a plan about how to quit."

After he left the company in 2020, the strain of the Covid-19 pandemic cracked his resolve.

Isolated and depressive, he went back to drugs.

Although he continued to post his own content online, he recalls: "My self-confidence was low and my self-doubt was high. I was depending on meth for a boost. I thought drugs provided a safe space, but that was a hallucination."

"I wasn't confident enough to be the amazing person I was, all along. I didn't realise that I was still creative without the drugs. I should've believed in myself a little bit more."

In early 2023, he ramped up his intake, consuming meth every other day. He had not told anyone about his years-long struggle with drugs, though his friends noticed he seemed to be "daydreaming".

His problems came to a head one morning in June 2023. "My McDonald's delivery came and the bell rang again. I thought, maybe they forgot my hash brown. But the CNB came in," Mr Fauzi says, referring to the Central Narcotics Bureau.

He had to wake his partner of 14 years, who had no clue what was going on.

Mr Fauzi's arrest and his subsequent half-year custody and rehabilitation turned his life around. He finished his term in Changi Prison in December 2023.

He says: "I don't think I would have stopped voluntarily. I cannot go back to rehab. There was no freedom."

"Now, I have a comfortable bed, when I used to sleep on the floor on a thin mattress. Now, I can make coffee whenever I want. I can go to the toilet without being judged about whether my poop smells, unlike when I was in a cell with other people."

Mr Fauzi, the eldest of five children, says the support of his partner, family and friends has also helped him kick the drug habit.

In February, he co-founded @dailytbits.sg, an online platform focused on humour and social interactions, which is on TikTok and Instagram.

Mr Fauzi says the page is a new beginning. "My family is proud of me. I am proud of myself. I don't need to hide any more," he says.

Craving drugs will be a "lifelong" temptation for him, he says, though he has healthy coping mechanisms now, such as his regular gym workouts.

"People say that drugs control you, but I didn't believe it. But the drugs took over my brain," he says.

"Now, I feel more confident. I have control over my life, which I haven't felt in so many years."

Citing his experience as a former drug user, content creator Fauzi Azzhar warns against taking even a first taste of drugs.  
ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



## A mother's heartbreak over her son's cannabis habit

Mrs Tan – not her real name – blames her son's encounter with drugs to his mixing with bad company.

Shawn – not his real name – was 17 when he tried cannabis. Now 24, he has stayed at two halfway houses and spent 22 months in jail for drug offences. Although he won awards for academic performance in secondary school and played in a sports team, he later dropped out of two polytechnics on account of his drug use.

He is now studying at a private educational institution after completing a therapy programme with the National Addictions Management Service.

He was in Secondary 5 when he took his first puff of cannabis, which is also known by names like marijuana or weed. A friend passed him a spliff at his home where they were hanging out with a small group of friends, listening to rapper Post Malone and gaming on a PlayStation 4.

Shawn recalls: "It was like a cigarette. I didn't hesitate. I wanted to experience the feeling my friends told me about. They had showed me videos of how people get high."

"I felt chill vibes, it made me feel relaxed. I knew it was wrong, but my thinking was that I would not get caught."

Seven years later, Mrs Tan is still furious and heartbroken about Shawn's drug habit.

While he tried to restrain himself, he usually returned to the drug, playing truant and sneaking smokes in school staircases and the top floor of HDB blocks in the neighbourhood. He eventually took cannabis almost daily.

She says: "I'm still asking Shawn who introduced this to him. This person has ruined his life. I'm very angry. He was moving in the wrong circles."

Shawn says he is "scared" to divulge the identity of this person to his mum.

She says: "For us as parents, the whole purpose of working is for the children to get a good education. We knew taking drugs was going to have a drastic impact on his brain and his ability to study and work later."

"When consuming drugs, it is all he cares about. He treated the drug friends like gods, doing what they said," adds Mrs Tan. She and her husband are white-collar professionals in their 60s. Shawn is the second of their three children.

When he was arrested by the Central Narcotics Bureau, his parents had no idea he was on drugs.

Mrs Tan says: "It was a shock. To think that your child has taken drugs is very upsetting. It's like you can't focus on anything else."

Spending time at a drug rehabilitation centre made Shawn take responsibility for his future.

Mrs Tan says: "Parents can educate their children about the harm of drugs and the family has to support him. But it was for him to realise what he was doing was wrong. We could shout, scream, but at the end of the day, he had to decide to stop and find his own way."

He says: "I was inside with old-timers and I realised that I don't want to waste my life. I had already wasted a lot of time. When I was inside, none of my friends came to visit me, only my family. I want to be there for them."

Venessa Lee

# Familial love and support vital in aiding recovery

FROM C1

Instead, create a safe and supportive environment where your children feel comfortable to share their feelings and have an honest chat about why they might be using drugs. They could be influenced by peer pressure or trying to cope with stress and difficult emotions.

He says that talking to children early about the dangers of drugs is crucial.

When it comes to the recovery process, Dr Lee notes that familial support and love are "so important". The clients he sees for drug

addiction often do not have normal, functioning family relationships, he says.

Some warning signs of possible drug use that parents can look out for are behavioural changes, says Dr Lee.

They include the child becoming more irritable or emotional; having an apparent change in personality, such as a shy child turning aggressive; or altered sleeping or eating patterns. The child's grades could drop drastically and he or she could start asking the parents for money frequently, using it to buy more drugs.

At a Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) seminar on July 10, Minister

of State for Home Affairs and National Development Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim noted a rise in young drug offenders.

"In the first four months of 2024 alone, 16 drug offenders who were under the age of 16 were arrested, compared with 24 such arrests in the whole of 2023," he said in his opening address at the seminar on CNB's anti-drug efforts.

"These trends point to the changing attitudes of some of our youth towards drugs."

The 2022 Health and Lifestyle Survey conducted by the Institute of Mental Health found that the mean age for the start of drug abuse in Singapore was 15.9 years,

with many consuming the drugs at home.

In a recent online video, content creator Fauzi Azzhar, 36, warned against using drugs, citing his own experience with methamphetamine.

He said: "I want to show young people that the moment you try drugs, no matter how hard you try to resist, cravings can be incredibly persistent."

Reflecting on his own recovery, he encouraged viewers with whom his message resonated to be "gentle and patient" with themselves.

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Having strong family ties and good parent-child communication lays the foundation for supporting young people in saying no to drugs, experts say. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

## Hollywood stars Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner's daughter denounces US mask bans



The daughter of Hollywood stars Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner, Violet Affleck (masked) revealed that she wears her mask due to a post-viral condition she contracted in 2019. PHOTO: THEREALSWIZZ/INSTAGRAM

LOS ANGELES – Violet Affleck, daughter of Hollywood stars Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck, was photographed by the paparazzi in June walking in Los Angeles with her mother.

In the photos, she was wearing an N95 face mask, as she often does in public. Perhaps not remarkable in and of itself, but some online had questions.

"Why does Violet Affleck always wear a mask? Explained," promised one recent headline.

The article speculated that privacy, an indeterminate medical condition and "personal expression" could be among the reasons for her choice.

On July 9, the 18-year-old appeared to offer an answer. Speaking during the public comment portion of a meeting of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors,

she revealed why she wears a mask while also demanding greater public access to masks.

"I contracted a post-viral condition in 2019," she said. "I'm okay now, but I saw first-hand that medicine does not always have answers to the consequences of even minor viruses."

Speaking briskly – her whole speech clocked in at just 59 seconds – she warned about the risks of long Covid-19, a serious medical condition that can cause brain fog, chronic fatigue and other health issues, and is thought to affect millions of Americans.

Violet, a recent high school graduate who appears to be bound for Yale University in autumn, called on officials to make masks available in government buildings, hospitals and jails.

"I demand mask availability, air

filtration and far UV-C light in government facilities, including jails and detention centres, and mask mandates in county medical facilities," she said.

"We must expand the availability of high-quality free tests and treatment and, most importantly, the county must oppose mask bans for any reason."

It is unclear if this was the first time Violet addressed her concerns publicly to an elected body.

Representatives for American actors Ben Affleck and Garner – who married in 2005 and divorced in 2018 – did not immediately respond to requests for comment on July 10. The pair share two other children aged 12 and 15.

More than four years since the coronavirus pandemic ravaged the world with millions of deaths and prolonged lockdowns, many are

still wearing masks to fight the spread of the virus, while most have resumed regular, mask-free programming.

Masks are proven to protect against the transmission of Covid-19 and other airborne viruses.

Violet's concerns about Covid-19 have been apparent this year before this meeting.

In May, she was captured in paparazzi photos wearing a mask and carrying the book, *The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality And Disease Collide* (2022), by American journalist Steven Thrasher, who writes about the disproportionate impact of diseases on marginalised communities.

Photographers captured her carrying a face mask in June, when she was having lunch with American singer-actress Jennifer Lopez, her father's wife. And in 2023, the teen was spotted by a fan wearing an N95 mask while attending a Broadway play with her father and Lopez, who did not appear to be wearing masks.

Violet may be responding to recent discussion about potential mask bans that local leaders across the country have been weighing out of concern that people are using them to conceal their identities.

Governor Kathy Hochul of New York said in June that she and her team had begun to consider reinstating a pre-pandemic ban on face masks on the subway to combat crime, citing a recent increase in anti-Semitism.

Mayor Karen Bass of Los Angeles also announced in June that officials were looking at possibly banning masks at protests in response to pro-Palestinian protests in the city, despite a recent rise in Covid-19 cases in the area. NYTIMES

## Fun With Kids

Make family time all the more special with these ideas and activities



Low Ying Ping with her *Prophecy Of The Underworld* fantasy-adventure novel series. PHOTO: COURTESY OF LOW YING PING

Elisa Chia  
Correspondent

### PROPHECY OF THE UNDERWORLD BOOKS

Julian Kee wants nothing more than to be a normal teenager in Singapore. How will he perform when he is randomly chosen to save the world from chaos?

The teen and his sidekicks find themselves embarking on missions in fantasy-adventure novel series *Prophecy Of The Underworld* by local author Low Ying Ping.

The third and final instalment, *The Twin Blades Of Doom* (\$17.90), has recently hit bookstores, including Books Kinokuniya and Epigram Bookshop.

Published by Penguin Random House SEA, the series is recommended for children aged nine to 13, but the titles have drawn adult readers too.

As with the previous two titles released in 2022 and 2023, Low kept the latest story fast-paced and humorous.

"The series is inspired by books and movies about heroes going on quests, especially fantasy ones, and game books that I played when I was young, such as *Lone Wolf and GrailQuest*," the 46-year-old told *The Straits Times*.

Low also wrote the *Mount Emily* novel series (2016 to 2017). It won several book awards and inspired a Channel 5 drama series, *Mount Emily: Guardians Of The Crystal* (2019), starring Gurmit Singh and Suhaimi Yusof.

Minor Issues

# Taking a stand against ultra-processed food

From snacking on fruit to baking our own bread, my family is breaking the hold of ultra-processed food in our lives



Abel Ang

Imagine eating only fast food and highly processed food for a whole month. What would it do to your body?

Chris van Tulleken, an associate professor at University College London and practising infectious diseases doctor, conducted a four-week experiment on himself, under the watchful eyes of one of Britain's top obesity experts.

In the documentary, available on YouTube, he ate a diet in which fast food and processed food constituted 80 per cent of his calories – a sharp contrast to his usual diet where such foods constituted only 20 per cent of the calories.

During the four weeks, he was subjected to rigorous medical testing, undergoing blood tests, body fat analysis and brain scans.

The experiment was simple. He would eat when hungry, just like he normally did, and all other aspects of his lifestyle would remain the same.

The results were stunning: a weight gain of 6.5kg and his body mass index tipped into the obese range in that short time.

Blood taken showed that his hunger hormone had gone up by 30 per cent, while the hormone to indicate fullness to the body went down.

During the experiment, van Tulleken was almost constantly hungry, and he found himself eating in a trance-like state, as if addicted to the food.

This was confirmed by his brain scans, which showed that the reward centres of the brain were all lighting up when he thought about eating, and his neural pathways looked like the brains of people with alcohol or nicotine addiction.

**PROFIT MOTIVE BEHIND PROCESSED FOOD**

The BBC documentary has since spawned a best-selling book by van Tulleken, *Ultra-processed People* (2023).

Its thesis is that food produced by large corporations contains cheap ingredients and chemicals that hack the brains, inducing people to eat more.

The offerings – which have been over-processed, or ultra-processed – are saltier, sweeter and softer than their natural, and more wholesome, counterparts.

Of such ultra-processed food, “most of the calories come from food products containing novel, synthetic molecules, never found in nature”, writes van Tulleken.

In the book, the author points at the trillion-dollar food industry which is driving the global obesity epidemic. It describes how the four-week experiment is taking place across the globe, for periods far longer than a month, resulting in accelerated weight and fat gain.

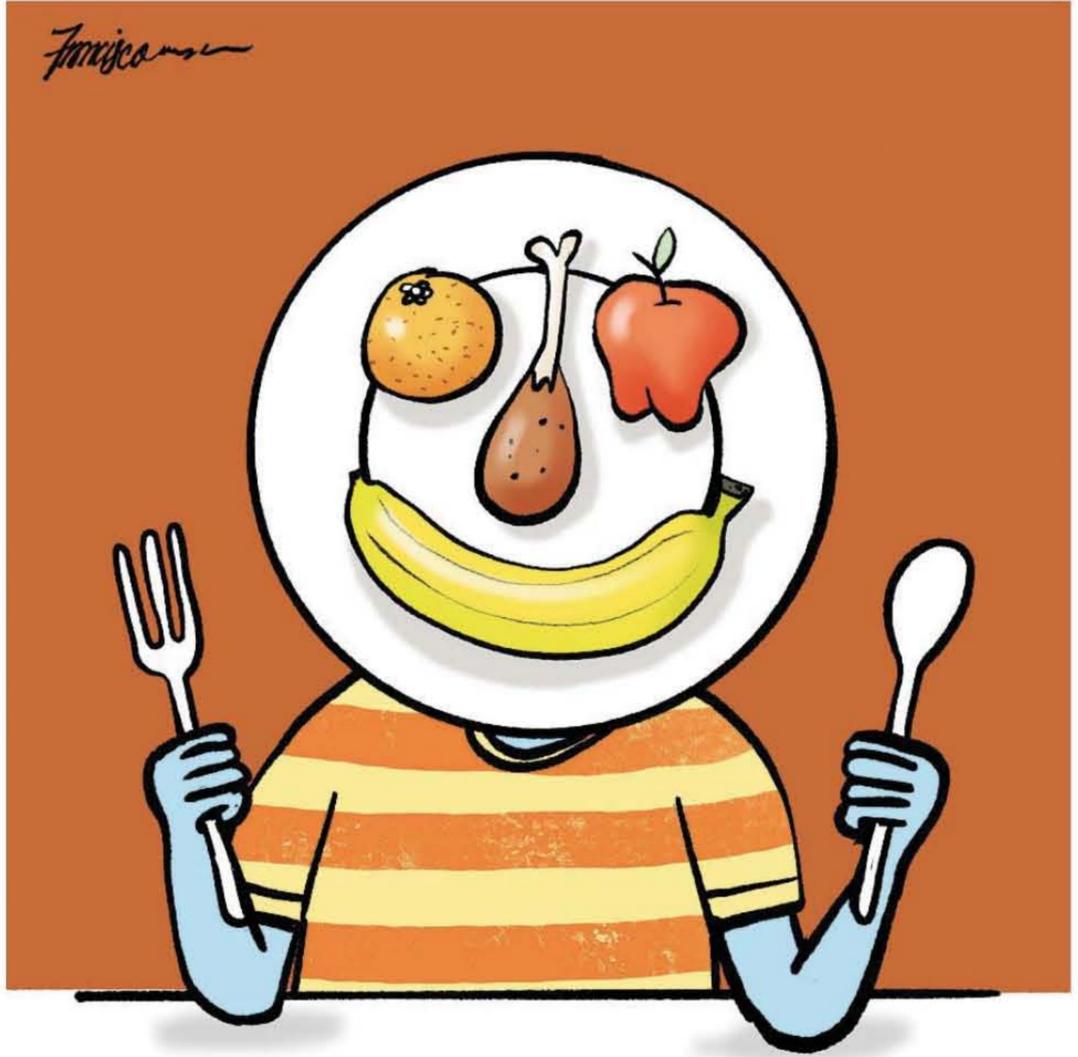
The problem is especially acute in poorer countries, where populations rely on cheap and processed food to ward off hunger.

There are two reasons mega corporations highly engineer the food they produce.

The first is to lower the cost and maximise profitability. Additives such as emulsifiers and modified starches found in ultra-processed food reduce the cost of production, resulting in more profits.

The second reason is to maximise the taste of the food to induce people to eat more of it, ultimately leading to greater profitability for large corporations.

So how does ultra-processed food infiltrate the home? The book points to it happening from the time our kids are newborns.



Infant formula is an ultra-processed food with chemicals added into the final product. Free samples of infant formula given out in labour and delivery wards provide large corporations a beachhead into the home.

As the child grows older, corporations build on their beachhead by advertising during

prime-time cartoons. The attractive packaging of the food in supermarkets serves to further entice the child.

It is interesting to note that ultra-processed food companies have also retooled for the age of gaming and social media. They have moved into advertising games, or advergaming, to engage kids.

In research reviewed in the book, “after playing advergaming promoting ultra-processed food, children consumed more nutrient-poor snack foods and fewer fruit and vegetables”.

**BREAKING THE HABIT**

As a family, we have been sensitised to processed food for a while now. When we returned from the United States about 10 years ago, our kids had grown accustomed to having large amounts of ultra-processed food in their diets because of their school lunches there.

These were some of the things we did to wean our kids off it upon returning to Singapore.

**1. Read the label**

The best foods are those without labels, such as fruit and vegetables.

We would stock our home with these and point to the refrigerator during snack time instead of tearing open a package.

Before we bought packaged food, we read the labels, scrutinising information like country of origin and ingredients on the labels.

We avoided food from countries with lax food regulation, especially when it came to chemicals and coatings on the food. If the ingredient list contained numerous additives, emulsifiers, or synthetic ingredients like artificial flavourings, we tended to avoid it.

A simple rule of thumb was that if we could not pronounce an ingredient on the label, we skipped it.

**2. Make your own food**

In recent years, we have started to avoid breakfast cereals.

They are ultra-processed and typically high in sugar content and loaded with chemicals and

additives. We have started to make our own cereal instead, which has been a game changer when it comes to taste and our ability to customise it however we want.

Rather than relying on store-bought bread, which is also full of chemicals and additives, my wife has been making what we consume in our household. I am proud to say that we have not had to buy a loaf of bread in three years.

When it comes to food, everyone in the family gets in on the act, either in the preparation of the food or in washing up after.

We believe that cooking is far too important an activity for one member of the household to shoulder alone. And the act of preparing the food gives us a deeper connection with what we eat.

I am glad that both my sons can cook because I see it as an essential life skill for them to lower their consumption of ultra-processed food.

**3. Eat together**

In the words of Michael Pollan, the author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006): “Food marketers would rather have us eat lots of stuff by ourselves in isolation than eating together. They love getting us to eat in front of the television set, on our own, on the run, and in the car”.

The family table is a means for us to keep one another accountable for what we eat.

Eating is not just the consumption of calories, but it is also a ritual that we observe to celebrate our time together as family.

At our dining table, we are socialising our kids on what and how they should eat to keep themselves and their own families healthy in the future.

In many ways, our family dinners are how we take a stand against ultra-processed food.

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• Abel Ang is the chief executive of a medical technology company and an adjunct professor at Nanyang Business School.

**PLAYEUM'S OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS**

Kids with diverse learning needs, aged nine and below, can look forward to a series of free play sessions. Their neurotypical siblings and parents are invited to join in too.

These will be held on selected Saturdays between July 27 and Nov 30 at Caregivers Pod at Enabling Village in Redhill and b\_together family club space in Dempsey.

Parents will learn how to support their children's learning through play activities under non-profit Playeum's Open Minds, Open Doors programme.

It is held in partnership with Arts of the Earth Learning Hub founder Esther Joosa and funded by the President's Challenge.

Dr Joosa will also lead online workshops for parents.

Open Minds, Open Doors began in 2019 and has had several iterations. Register at str.sg/pvHM



Families with kids who have diverse learning needs can join play sessions under Playeum's Open Minds, Open Doors programme. PHOTOS: PLAYEUM

**SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS TURNS 25**

Animated series *SpongeBob SquarePants* is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Launched on Nickelodeon on July 17 in 1999, the titular character and his undersea friends, such as Patrick Star, have become some of the world's most recognised cartoon stars.

The series has been translated into more than 30 languages.

“SpongeBob SquarePants combines creator Stephen Hillenburg's love of the ocean with his passion for animation and love of quirky character comedy,” American actor Tom Kenny, who voices SpongeBob, said in a press statement.

“From its first splash, *SpongeBob* has resonated with people of all ages, and I'm truly grateful to celebrate 25 years of positivity, optimism and nautical nonsense.”

To mark the series' silver jubilee, Nickelodeon will roll out anniversary specials throughout the year. It will also release new episodes from July 22 to Aug 2 on weekdays at 5.30pm.



PHOTO: 2024 VIACOM

Look out for shorts – featuring favourite moments from the series and behind-the-scenes clips – on Facebook, Instagram and Douyin.

Book trends

# In the mood for love and spice...

Once a niche that independent booksellers ignored, romance is now the hottest thing in the book world and romance bookstores are seeing a boom



NEW YORK – Last summer, when Ms Mae Tingstrom had the idea to open a romance bookstore in Ventura, California, the first thing she did was search online to see whether there was already one in her region. She found The Ripped Bodice – a bookstore in Culver City that was doing so well that it was expanding to a second location in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. “That was intimidating,” she said. If its success was daunting, it also suggested that there might be room for another romance store.



A customer (right) at The Ripped Bodice (above), a romance bookstore in Brooklyn. Such bookstores are largely owned and operated by women. And women make up the majority of the readers who have sent romance sales soaring – from 18 million print copies sold in 2020 to more than 39 million in 2023.

So in February, she opened Smitten on a busy strip of Main Street, about 100km from her competitor. In the months since, Smitten has become a vibrant hub for romance readers, with author signings, tarot readings, book clubs, as well as trivia and craft nights. Customers sometimes approach her with highly specific requests. “Someone came in and was like, ‘I like fantasy, I want it to be queer, I want it to have representation from a different culture and I want it to be as smutty as possible,’” Ms Tingstrom said. And they come in often. “I have



regulars who come a couple of times a week,” she said. “I’m like, ‘Didn’t you just buy two books the other day?’” Once a niche that independent booksellers largely ignored, romance is now the hottest thing in the book world. It is, by far, the top-selling fiction genre, and its success is reshaping not only the publishing industry, but also the retail landscape. Over the past two years, the country went from having two dedicated romance bookstores – The Ripped Bodice and Love’s Sweet Arrow, in Chicago – to a national network of more than 20. Among them: Tropes & Trifles in Minneapolis; Grump & Sunshine in Belfast, Maine; Beauty and the Book in Anchorage, Alaska; Lovebound Library in Salt Lake City; and Blush Bookstore in Wichita, Kansas. More are on the way, including Kiss & Tale in Collingswood, New Jersey; The New Romantics in Orlando, Florida; and Grand Gesture Books in Portland, Oregon, an online romance store that is moving into a storefront. The bookstores are largely owned and operated by women. And women make up the majority of the readers who have sent romance sales soaring – from 18 million print copies sold in 2020

to more than 39 million in 2023, according to Circana BookScan, which does point-of-sale tracking for the publishing market. “There’s been a cultural shift around the way that we think and talk about media that has been primarily written by, and directed towards, women,” said Ms Becca Title, a former immigration defence lawyer and the owner of Meet Cute, a romance bookstore in San Diego. “More people are realising not only that romance sells and that it has commercial value, but it also has artistic value and entertainment value.” Romance writers such as Sarah J. Maas, Emily Henry, Colleen Hoover and Rebecca Yarros dominate the bestseller lists: Six of the top 10 best-selling fiction authors in the United States so far this year are romance writers. Publishers are expanding their romance lists, wooing self-published romance authors with large advances and adding new imprints. The shift is huge from the days when romance was looked down upon as frothy and unserious “chick-lit” or as smut. Even just a few years ago, many independent bookstores carried only a small selection of romance novels, often relegated to a shelf in



A display (top) at Smitten, a romance bookstore opened by Ms Mae Tingstrom (above), in Ventura, California. Besides offering reads for romance lovers, the store has featured author signings, tarot readings, book clubs as well as trivia and craft nights. PHOTOS: NYTIMES

the back of the store. Many of these stores have a flirty, flamboyantly feminine aesthetic: heavy on pink, accented with heart and floral motifs, decked out with signs and merchandise that play on familiar romance tropes – enemies to lovers, forced proximity, forbidden love, secret identity. They carry every conceivable romance subgenre: historical, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, young adult, supernatural and romantasy, and sports-themed. Many also stock self-published novels, which mainstream booksellers typically do not carry. Ms Melissa Saavedra, owner of Steamy Lit, a romance bookstore in Deerfield Beach, Florida, discovered romance a little over a decade ago, when she was serving in the US Navy as a petty officer. Her gateway was E.L. James’ erotica series Fifty Shades Of Grey (2011 to 2012), which she read on her tablet when she was in her bunk on the USS America, an amphibious assault ship. After leaving the navy in 2017, she worked as a travel agent for sports teams. When work was slow during the pandemic, she came up with the idea for The Steam Box, a quarterly subscription box of romance novels paired with sex toys. It quickly took off. The Steam Box was also a way to erode the lingering stigma surrounding erotic romance and women’s sexual pleasure. Ms Saavedra, who was born in Lima, Peru, and moved to South Florida when she was 10, also made it her mission to promote romance authors from diverse backgrounds. She decided to open a bookstore when she realised that her community in Deerfield Beach was a romance book desert, particularly when it came to diverse romance. At Steamy Lit’s opening weekend in February, 500 people showed up and the store sold 900 books. Since then, the store has had book signings with more than 30 writers, including Kennedy Ryan, Ali Hazelwood and Abby Jimenez, who held an event there in May that featured baby goats in pyjamas, in an adorable allusion to a baby goat scene from her novel Part Of Your World (2022). On a sunny Sunday afternoon this past spring, Steamy Lit was full of readers browsing, sipping prosecco and getting books signed by A.H. Cunningham, a romance writer promoting her new novel, Out Of Office. Ms Rosen Fulmore, a frequent shopper at Steamy Lit, carried a stack of several worn novels for Cunningham to sign. “I hope you don’t mind the water damage,” she said to Cunningham. “I love that they’re well loved,” Cunningham replied. Ms Fulmore heard about the store when Ryan, one of her favourite authors, posted on social media that she would be having an event there, and she has since become a regular customer. “It’s got all the hot stuff you can imagine in a one-stop shop,” she said. NYTIMES

## ... mixed with a large dose of fantasy

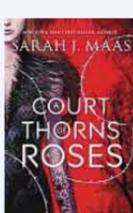
NEW YORK – Dragons, faeries and happily-ever-after love stories are having a moment. Sales of romantasy novels – a genre that blends fantasy’s epic quests and mystical characters with romance’s swooning gestures and spicy sex scenes – are projected to jump to US\$610 million (S\$817.8 million) this year, after hitting a record US\$454 million in 2023, according to industry analyst Circana. The number of books sold reached 11 million in the first five months of 2024, almost double the same period in 2023. And while Circana anticipates the books hitting a saturation point in 2025, their empowered female protagonists and cult followings make them likely to find permanent shelf space in stores. The demand has been anchored by American author Sarah J. Maas, a romantasy heavyweight published by Bloomsbury Publishing, whose A Court Of Thorns And Roses series – known to fans as Acotar – often serves as an entry point for readers who are new to the genre. The series follows a human huntress who is made to live in a faerie realm, only for her allegiances to be torn between two mythical kingdoms, and her heart between two faerie lords. Fourth Wing, the first book in the newer Empyrean series by Entangled Publishing author Rebecca Yarros, about a scrappy

cadet at an academy for dragon riders, is also fuelling growth, with another instalment in January. But the Twilight boom of the 2000s – and the subsequent all-vampire-everything fatigue that followed – this is not. Now, voracious readers of the genre can veer off into any number of subcategories. There are romantasy books about faeries and elves, humans and monsters, some set in far-off lands and others that infuse urban settings with magic. Romantasy’s success was a slow burn, then a head-over-heels free fall. Authors have blended and bent the two root genres for decades, says English professor Jayashree Kamble at LaGuardia Community College at the City University of New York. Bloomsbury published the first Acotar book in May 2015. Word of mouth from fans and, later, the explosion of the corner of TikTok known as BookTok helped propel the series’ success. There are some 364,000 TikTok posts that sport the romantasy hashtag, and more than 1.4 million on Acotar alone. Demand for Maas’ Bloomsbury titles – 16 books so far – drove revenue growth in the company’s consumer division for the fiscal year that ended in February, “cementing her position as a publishing phenomenon”, said the publisher. It is not the first time a fantasy series has taken off for Bloomsbury. The company still cites its



Harry Potter series, first published in 1997, as a major driver of revenue. Romantasy readers range from teenagers, who hear about the books from their friends and social media feeds, to 30- and 40-something women looking for a sweeping escape from their everyday lives. These are the people who grew up with fantasy books and movies but rarely felt represented. The most popular books, such as The Lord Of The Rings and Game Of Thrones series, may feature a female character or two, but they support or are tangential to the male heroes. And while romance can play a part in such books, it is rarely the primary quest. In romantasy, the hunt for true love is the story. On the publishing front, compa-

nies are working to become more nimble, by starting imprints, or smaller houses, dedicated to romance and romantasy. Entangled Publishing, already a romance-centric publisher, started Red Tower Books in 2022, with a global distribution by Macmillan Publishers. Tor Publishing Group introduced Bramble, a romance imprint, in February 2023. Editorial director Monique Patterson says Bramble hit profitability with its first list of titles, which included romantasy authors Jennifer L. Armentrout and Carissa Broadbent. The imprint and other publishers are also tapping previously self-published authors with existing backlists and followings on social media, and a willingness to play into and often subvert existing formulas. That includes keeping space open for romance novels that feature a hopefully-ever-after rather than a happily-ever-after, which has historically been considered the benchmark for what qualifies as a romance novel. Patterson has not found that manuscript yet, but she is keeping an open mind. “If somebody asked me, ‘What do you think the timeline is for romantasy?’ I have no idea,” she says. “I think it can continue to evolve for as long as there are really wonderful new stories coming in.” BLOOMBERG



Author Sarah J. Maas (top) is a romantasy heavyweight, whose A Court Of Thorns And Roses (above) series often serves as an entry point for readers who are new to the genre. PHOTO: ST FILE

# Charade on Parade offers a lesson or two

National Day Charade, a look at how the National Day Parade comes together, makes space for diversity and spontaneity through interactive elements

**Clement Yong**  
Correspondent

**THEATRE**  
**NATIONAL DAY CHARADE**  
Wild Rice  
Ngee Ann Kongsi Theatre, Funan  
July 13

In a few months that have been both dispiriting and heartening with regard to public art – from Chinatown’s smoking samsui woman mural to Singapore Art Museum’s banners in Tanjong Pagar – is it any wonder that one of the most earnest things one can say to Singapore right now is: “Stop complaining, lah”?

That is the vocal response from an audience member in this quietly expansive, mosaic re-examination of the way Singapore’s annual National Day Parade (NDP) is put together by playwright Thomas Lim, which eschews more conventional narrative structure to make space for diversity and spontaneity through interactive elements.

It should not work, the way actors Shane Mardjuki, Andrew Marko, Krish Natarajan, Nurulhuda Hassan and Deonn Yang play generic bit parts in various skits and snippets.

But somehow, there is more leeway when it comes to a jaunt so explicitly about Singapore, the subject matter almost guaranteeing emotional resonance. More sententious moments are forgiven, and the re-reading of familiar criticisms tolerated.

All of which culminate in a genuinely moving National Day song medley broken up with short monologues too messy and real to streamline, allowing some intuitive free association and given fruitful bathos in their juxtaposition with familiar tunes such as Home and Reach Out For The Skies.

The play starts at the Padang, Malay for field, a patch of grass literally sited on stage. Yang, Nurulhuda, Natarajan and Mardjuki are the four emcees that fit the implicit but by now trite CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) official portrait of Singapore. (Nurulhuda, a woman, checks the “gender diversity” box too.)

They take audience members through the various elements of the parade, from its planning by a military executive committee and the contingent march-past to a Presidential inspection and fireworks.

Interleaved among these is a Ferris Bueller’s day off for Singapore personified, with each actor taking turns to don the mascot costume for the little red dot.

Singapore – preferred pronoun “we” – is given the full gamut of critical education – introduced to “subversive” films, made to swipe on a dating app for its diplomatic partners and forced to reckon with its daddy issues, which continue to have a hold over the national psyche.

There is arguably not much insight here, though watching the intentionally provocative content in a theatre is always entertaining. The talent of the ensemble, after a bit of an awkward beginning, carries the script’s unusual rhythm. Stage lights are sometimes cut a fraction of a second early.



The cast of National Day Charade, put on by Wild rice, included (from left) Deonn Yang, Nurulhuda Hassan, Krish Natarajan and Shane Mardjuki. PHOTO: RUEY LOON

But there are choice observations, including how National Day songs have evolved from exhortatory ones to more introspective lyrics that emphasise belonging; one should

not have to prove one’s Singaporean-ness through mighty actions.

There is as well the storied significance of the Padang as a site for both official razzmatazz and resis-

tance. The actors note how cement is ironically poured over the field of the Padang for the parade which, read symbolically, whitewashes the vibrant history of the area that

might be Singapore’s next bid for a World Heritage Site.

Like the more memorable moments of the official NDP, perhaps the most powerful instance turns

**NATIONAL DAY CHARADE**

**WHERE** The Ngee Ann Kongsi Theatre, Funan, 107 North Bridge Road  
**WHEN** July 11 to 27, Tuesdays to Fridays, 7.30pm; Saturdays, 2.30 and 7.30pm; Sundays, 2.30pm  
**ADMISSION** From \$30  
**INFO** str.sg/h7sz

out to be an unscripted one.

Two videos that were meant to be screened during the play had not been granted approval in time by the Infocomm Media Development Authority. Wild Rice chose to make this censorship explicit, leaving a gap during the performance for audience members to scan QR codes linking to the videos. People, of course, played these out loud.

In this alternative, fragmented NDP that Lim has devised, the name-dropping of local debates and memes is a reminder of the common mental cartography Singaporeans share.

Although it has been given the Advisory 16 rating, its content, down to a final spectacle, may well be as much of a rite of passage for any Primary 5 pupil as the one that has caused traffic detours and is being rehearsed just down the street.

After all, both sets of audiences decked out in red and white milled about in Funan mall after the show, united by a common love: supper.

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## Air tells the Orang Seletar’s stories with warmth and awareness

**Shawn Hoo**

**THEATRE**  
**AIR**  
Drama Box  
Singtel Waterfront Theatre at Esplanade  
July 12

Drama Box’s Air – first staged as an intimate affair at the Malay Heritage Centre as part of Tanah.Air in 2019 – has received an upgrade.

The story of the displaced indigenous Orang Seletar now plays on a bigger stage at the Singtel Waterfront Theatre – which, ironically, sits on reclaimed land and faces a towering skyline.

These are the very forces that threaten the way of life of the Orang Seletar – indigenous sea nomads who lived in Singapore, but left and resettled on the southern coast of Johor and continue to face the threat of displacement from their homes.

Foreign developers who are turning the waterfront into a resort and the ongoing sound of reclamation that punctuates the play all feature in this story based on the creative team’s trips to Johor and interviews with the Orang Seletar.

The action takes place in set designer Mohd Fared Jainal’s milky white, abstract set that resembles a



Set designer Mohd Fared Jainal’s milky white, abstract set evokes the pau kajang, a wooden boat that can house a family of Orang Seletar. PHOTO: CRISPIN CHAN

large boat. It evokes the pau kajang – a wooden boat that can house a family – and suggests that the Orang Seletar’s way of life is intricately bound with the water and its rhythms.

Audiences sit on both sides of this enormous boat of a stage.

Although not as intimate as the small auditorium in the Malay Heritage Centre, the set still creates a sense of cosiness as actors Dalifah Shahril, Rizman Putra, Saiful Amri and Suhaili Safari relate the stories of the Orang Seletar.

The play’s self-reflexivity is also heightened. The show opens with

the four actors rehearsing their parts, and foregrounds the Singaporean researchers’ journey into Johor villages Kampung Sungai Temon and Kampung Pasir Putih.

The script borrows from hours of interviews with the Orang Seletar, which playwright Zulfadli Rashid sieved through to create a compelling narrative.

Co-directors Kok Heng Leun and Adib Kosnan’s choice to tell the stories of the Orang Seletar in a self-reflexive way is to be applauded, although one wonders if some segments appear too heavy-handed.

The awareness might have been

played more subtly, weaved into the fabric of the show, rather than foregrounded early on in the play through the device of having the actors rehearsing on stage from the start.

Another small distraction is the depiction of surtitles.

These are projected onto the “hull” of the boat set – on the right and left side – with some creative licence in lingering lines and irregular line breaks. For those not familiar with the Malay language, these can be more distracting than helpful – taking attention away from the otherwise sincere scenes

playing out on stage.

When the scenes work, they are moving.

One standout scene depicts a developer building a road through a cemetery as the villagers look on helplessly. Rizman jumps on the set, creating the pounding sound of a bulldozer. The sound design with echoes of the waters and mangroves that seem to emanate from different parts of the theatre is in resplendent harmony with the visuals on stage.

Mostly composed of impressionistic vignettes, the scenes might appear esoteric to an audience unfamiliar with the Orang Seletar’s history and struggles.

The drama unfolds in medias res – in the middle of the plot – without an introduction into the story. It does not attempt to help the audience connect to the story, which may not be a bad thing since Air is suspicious of imposing an easy way of identifying with the narrative.

That the opening night’s audience was joined by two Orang Seletar villagers, who also took part in a post-show dialogue, made the evening even more moving.

With some moments of warmth and others of heightened self-reflexivity, Drama Box’s Air opens up questions of Singapore’s forgotten histories and waterways that connect people to the region.

## Four pianists, two pianos and 10 works make an ambitious performance

**Mervin Beng**

**CONCERT**  
**PIANO EXTRAVAGANZA 2024**  
Lin Xiangning, Jonathan Shin, Geoffrey Lim and Natalie Ng  
School of the Arts Concert Hall  
July 13

Series founder Chang Tou Liang’s description of this concert as a “piano recital” is a gross understatement. Four young pianists, two pianos and a programme of 10 works is huge. But often, less is more.

The pianists invited to this edition of Piano Extravaganza spanned the gamut, with three conservatory post-graduates Natalie Ng, Jonathan Shin and Lin Xiangning joined by Geoffrey Lim, a graduate in English who also holds an MBA.

Ng’s delicate touch and care in voicing the lines using just one hand did justice to Frederic Meinders’ transcriptions for the left hand of Franz Schubert’s Ave Maria and Litanei Auf Das Fest Allerseelen (a Singapore premiere), but the pieces were odd picks to kick off an extravaganza.

Lim joined Ng, taking the upper half of the keyboard in what felt like the real opening work, the Fantasie In F Minor for four hands, also by Schubert.

One of the mainstays of the four-hand repertoire, the four sections encompassed love, joy, strife, anger and more. The duo played with maturity and insight, though the pathos of the late Schubert was lacking.

Lim’s performance of Frederic Chopin’s Ballade No. 4 was played in

a similar vein – thoughtful and without excess, but lacking depth. His take on Claude Debussy’s L’Isle Joyeuse in the second half could have done with the light touch he showed in the Fantasie.

Shin offered three very different ballades – his own Three City Ballads. The world premiere of these works was without doubt the highlight of the night.

Shin’s compositions are always original and refreshing. His effortless playing helped, of course, but the contrasting ballades – with hints of Chick Corea, Maurice Ravel and Dave Grusin – were pieces that clearly belonged in the canon of Singapore piano compositions.

After a first half that lasted over an hour, Lin opened the second half with the Variations Serieuses, which Felix Mendelssohn composed in



The four pianists performing Bertram Wee’s arrangement of Kelly Tang’s Symphonic Suite On A Set Of Local Tunes on two pianos as part of Piano Extravaganza 2024. PHOTO: CHANG TAU LIANG

support of a fund-raiser for a memorial to Ludwig van Beethoven in Bonn, Germany.

Mendelssohn wrote a set of “various variations”, in contrast to “Variations Brillante” – virtuosic showpieces with less musical depth – that were fashionable at the time.

Lin did not seem to fully agree, though. In the most overt show of pianistic prowess of the evening, she breezed through the faster variations with brilliant, but sometimes excessive percussiveness.

The concert ended with a set of

works on two pianos. Shin joined Lin for another premiere (a trademark of the series founder’s penchant for obscure piano works) – Igor Stravinsky’s Concerto For Two Pianos. Scored for just two pianos without orchestra, Stravinsky wrote it to perform with his son and often referred to the element of competitiveness between the soloists, which he had written into the score.

This was followed by the seemingly obligatory programming of Astor Piazzolla – Soledad and

Libertango – by Ng and Lim. Finally, all four played Bertram Wee’s arrangement of Kelly Tang’s Symphonic Suite On A Set Of Local Tunes.

The pitfalls of packing in over two hours of music, especially works that needed time for the pianists to prepare in varied ensembles, showed.

The Stravinsky is very challenging, even for father and son. Lin and Shin would have done well with months of preparation for it.

While their take on Schubert’s Fantasie was well burnished, Ng and Lim’s Piazzollas were less so. Finally, an eight-hand piano arrangement of a symphonic suite might seem audacious and adventurous, but the question is how such a piece can get the rehearsal resources – time, space and pianos – that does justice to the work.

There was abundant talent and wonderful music on show, and just Schubert’s Fantasie, Shin’s Three City Ballads and Mendelssohn’s Variations Serieuses alone would have been fine. A well-curated three-course dinner often satisfies more than a 10-course buffet.

# JJ Lin pondered leaving show business due to negative comments online

On an episode of Chinese talk show Conghe Shuoqi, which aired on July 11, Singaporean singer JJ Lin admitted that he once considered quitting show business, but chose to stay on eventually. PHOTO: CONGHE SHUOQI/WEIBO



## Lim Ruey Yan

Home-grown singer JJ Lin admitted that he once considered quitting show business due to frequent online attacks. Lin, who made his debut in 2003 with his debut album, Music Voyager, disclosed this on a recent episode of the Chinese talk show Conghe Shuoqi. Lin was interviewed by host He Runfeng on the episode, which aired on July 11. The 43-year-old said he took to heart the opinions of his fans, calling them part of his "music family" who have grown up with him. Lin, who released his latest album Happily, Painfully After in 2023, said it is increasingly diffi-

cult to distinguish whether internet comments are sincere suggestions from his fans or malicious attacks from netizens. "I mind what my family thinks of me when news gets distorted or when I am slandered for no apparent reason," he said. "When I treat my fans as if they are my own family, I will definitely mind what they think because they may not know the real me." Lin said he was not blaming anyone for misleading his fans, but he was affected by the negativity. "For a while, I seriously considered shutting down all my social media accounts," he said. At an emotional low, he asked himself several questions: "Should I continue singing? Should I

continue to be an artiste? Should I release another album? Should I hold another concert?" The singer, who is on his JJ20 World Tour in China, said he eventually chose to stay in the industry. "It was a simple choice: Do I want to continue doing it? If I want to do so, then I have to face it and bear with it." Lin was also asked if he is concerned that his creativity will dry up. He said: "I don't think about it. People may say I have no more inspiration or that there is no improvement in my work. However, it is dangerous if I believe what they say and doubt myself." rueyyan@sph.com.sg

## Obituaries

# BigO co-founder Michael Cheah a Singapore pop culture champion

### Eddino Abdul Hadi Music Correspondent

Michael Cheah, co-founder of Singapore magazine BigO and champion of home-grown music and pop culture, has died of heart complications at Singapore General Hospital on July 12. He was 68. According to BigO co-founder Stephen Tan, Cheah had been ill for three weeks before his death. He leaves behind his wife, who is 68 and retired, and their daughter, 30. BigO, which stands for Before I Get Old, ran as a print magazine from 1985 to 2002. It continued as a website until it closed down in 2023. Hailed as "Singapore's only independent rock 'n' roll magazine", it regularly carried news and features on home-grown music and pop culture, and featured acts such as indie music pioneers The Oddfellows and film-maker Eric Khoo on its covers.



Michael Cheah co-founded music and pop culture magazine BigO, which ran as a magazine from 1985 to 2002 and continued as a website until it closed down in 2023. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE CHEAH FAMILY

BigO was started by journalists from the now-defunct newspaper Singapore Monitor, including Cheah's brother Philip, and Tan. Michael was the publisher, while Philip and Tan were its co-editors. The magazine's founders also ran a record label, organised concerts and published books under the same name, BigO. The record label released home-grown music on cassettes and later CDs. Some of its more prominent releases include the New School Rock compilation CDs in the early 1990s that featured bands such as hardcore veterans Stompin' Ground and indie rock group The Padres. BigO held concerts such as the New School Rock - The Gig show at the now-closed arts centre The Substation in 1991. Its books included Skew Me, You Rebel Meh? Thoughts Of A Disavowed Rebel In Singapore, written by the late singer, musician, DJ and music and pop culture critic Chris Ho.

The frontman of indie rock band The Oddfellows, Patrick Chng, tells The Straits Times that Cheah "was always a joy to hang out with" and that he will miss him. The 56-year-old says: "Michael was a pop culture enthusiast with a sharp mind. He was the businessman behind BigO, but he also helped artists connect with labels in the early days of the magazine." Musician, sound designer and actor Joe Ng, who fronted bands such as The Padres and starred in Khoo's 1995 horror film Mee Pok Man, says Cheah played a pivotal role in Singapore's pop culture landscape. The 57-year-old adds: "He was a giant of a man who worked fearlessly behind the scenes and facilitated a cause greater than we can imagine. The sum of it all still reverberates today." Cheah's wake is at St Joseph's Church in Victoria Street and his funeral service will be held there on July 15, 4pm.

## On social media



### SINGER DAVID TAO CELEBRATES 55TH BIRTHDAY ONSTAGE WITH WIFE AND SON:

Taiwanese singer David Tao had several surprises during his ongoing Soul Power II concert tour in China. Tao, who turned 55 on July 11, held three sold-out shows in Nanjing from July 12 to 14.

"I woke up this morning feeling tired and not in the mood for my birthday," he wrote in Chinese on social media on July 11. "Then came the first surprise: When I stepped into the dining room for lunch, I saw many friends who came from far away to celebrate my birthday." Tao said the second surprise was while he was rehearsing for his upcoming concerts at the stadium in Nanjing. "The musicians stopped performing while we were rehearsing for the song Love Can... and the big screen showed a video of the song performed by my colleagues and tour partners," Tao wrote. "I was so moved that I almost shed tears, but everyone's smiles gave me the energy to be strong." According to Taiwanese media, Tao's wife Penny Chiang and their five-year-old son Bonbon also made a surprise appearance onstage when they rolled out three birthday cakes (top) and a gift for him - a microphone (above). Tao posted photos of both birthday celebrations, including two photos of Ms Chiang and Bonbon, and the birthday gift. The singer wed Ms Chiang, who is 16 years his junior, in 2014. The family has seldom appeared together onstage and, in these photos, the eyes of Tao's son were covered with emojis. "It is really meaningful to spend this birthday with everyone in my home town of Nanjing," Tao wrote. "Thank you to my family, friends and team who have always been by my side, as well as my fans and friends who have always supported me."

PHOTOS: DAVIDTAO/INSTAGRAM

# Fitness guru Richard Simmons inspired people to work out



Richard Simmons teaches a class at his gym in Beverly Hills in 2009. PHOTO: NYTIMES

LOS ANGELES - American fitness instructor Richard Simmons, who for years was the face of home fitness through his wildly popular videos and energetic personality, died in Los Angeles on July 13. He was 76. A representative for Simmons, Mr Tom Estey, confirmed his death. The Los Angeles Fire Department and Los Angeles Police Department responded to an address linked to Simmons on July 13 at 10am. A spokesperson for the fire department said that personnel at the scene determined he had died of natural causes. At his Beverly Hills exercise studio, Slimmons, and in his videos and DVDs, Simmons exuded an enthusiastic can-do spirit to inspire people of all ages and fitness levels to get moving. He stretched and jumped in contrast to other fitness gurus of the

1980s, such as actor and former professional bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger, who exuded movie-star looks and charm. Simmons' approach was perhaps more noticeable, and relatable, than that of his counterparts, as he spoke directly to audiences in his aerobic videos. One video features him clapping and singing in unison with students, as they entered his studio. "You're actually inside my real exercise studio, Slimmons, and these are my honest-to-goodness teachers," he said, looking to the group around him. Simmons, whose given name was Milton Teagle Simmons, was born in New Orleans on July 12, 1948. His parents were performers. His mother, Shirley, was a travelling dancer. His father, Leonard, once performed in a vaudeville act and was a master of ceremony for big

college education if he were to take his name, Simmons told the Tampa Bay Times in a 2008 interview. Simmons began overeating at a young age and struggled with his weight for much of his young adult life. In 1968, after he found a note on his windshield that said, "Fat people die young; please don't die", Simmons lost 50kg in less than three months, according to a 1981 People magazine article. In the 1970s, Simmons, who at one point weighed 120kg, moved to Los Angeles and opened an exercise studio, originally called Anatomy Asylum and later Slimmons, as well as an adjoining restaurant and salad bar called Ruffage. His classes became wildly popular, attracting ordinary people and some of the biggest celebrities at the time, including singer-actresses Barbra Streisand and Diana Ross. As his fame grew, Simmons went

on television shows to spread his message about the importance of leading a healthy life - a message he told with exuberance. "I think there's a time to be serious and a time to be silly. Being silly cures depression." In 1980, The Richard Simmons Show began running in national syndication. With a huge shock of frizzy hair, Simmons talked to viewers at home about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, taught cooking lessons and led a workout class with a live audience. The show ran for four years and won four Daytime Emmy Awards. Simmons continued to appear on radio, television and in movies. He maintained a light-hearted persona on social media and even posted a thank-you note to fans on July 12, his 76th birthday. In 2017, Simmons was the subject of a popular podcast, Missing Richard Simmons, which became a cultural phenomenon. In March, he said he had been treated for basal cell carcinoma, which he said appeared as a "strange-looking bump" under his eye. The morning that he died, Simmons' official social media accounts posted a meme that left some confused and has been used by others as a space to describe their gratitude for his life. "Hello gorgeous," it said. "Please don't rain on my parade." Simmons is survived by his brother, Lenny. NYTIMES

# Taylor Swift effect may be latest dilemma for Bank of England rate-setters

LONDON - Bank of England (BOE) rate-setters may have a new conundrum as they look for signs that services inflation has cooled by enough to open the door to interest rate cuts: How to deal with the Taylor Swift effect. Forecasters warn that the American singer-songwriter's 10 British concerts in June may have delivered a small boost to services inflation through hotel and ticket prices after a scramble by fans to see

the pop phenomenon. Many Swifties - as Swift's fans are called - travelled long distances to see the artiste, who put on shows in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Cardiff and London. That gives Britain's Monetary Policy Committee an extra consideration as it decides whether to cut borrowing costs on Aug 1. Traders see a 50-50 chance of a reduction, but the rate-setters have remained wary about services inflation, which has not eased as quickly

as the central bank expected. Economists said the BOE may have to ignore a temporary boost to prices caused by the singer's tour when making its decision. "I've been quite cautious when it comes to cultural services inflation and also restaurants and hotels inflation," said Mr Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics, who expects services inflation to remain stuck at 5.7 per cent. "I've popped in a little bit of upside from

what might be some kind of Taylor Swift effect." It is not unprecedented for a performer's tour to feed through into a country's national statistics. In June, statisticians in Sweden said that the arrival of Swift had boosted core inflation unexpectedly for the first time in more than a year as fans flocked to Stockholm. American pop star Beyonce's tour was blamed for a similar effect in the country in 2023. BLOOMBERG



Economists said the Bank of England may have to ignore a temporary boost to prices caused by Taylor Swift's tour when making their decision. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

FREE TO AIR

CHANNEL 5

**AM**  
 6.00 Kung Fu Panda: Legends Of Awesomeness (PG) (C)  
 6.30 The Penguins Of Madagascar (PG) (C)  
 7.00 Dinoman (C)  
 7.20 Ok-to Try (C)  
 7.30 Pororo The Little Penguin (P)  
 8.00 Tish Tash (P)  
 8.30 Pinkfong Songs & Stories (P)  
 9.00 Sesame Street (P)  
 9.30 Blippi (P)  
 10.00 Ollie And Friends (C)  
 10.30 Super Wings: Super Pets Adventure (C)  
 11.00 Dinoman (C)  
 11.20 Ok-to Try (C)  
 11.30 Go Go Dino (C)  
**PM**  
 12.00 Kung Fu Panda: Legends Of Awesomeness (PG) (C)  
 12.30 The Penguins Of Madagascar (PG) (C)  
 1.00 Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters (C)  
 1.30 Power Rangers Dino Fury (PG) (C)  
 2.00 Denver The Last Dinosaur (C)  
 2.30 Sky Shakers Series (C)  
 3.00 On The Red Dot - I'm Singaporean (CA)  
 3.30 Talking Point (CA)  
 4.00 Tanglin (PG) (CC) (D)  
 4.30 Open Homes 5 (IE)  
 5.00 Field Trip With Curtis Stone 2 (IE)  
 5.30 American Idol 21 (PG) (V)  
 6.30 Deal Or No Deal Australia 12 (PG) (V)/7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 40 (V)  
 7.30 Lingo USA (PG) (V)  
 8.30 Sunny Side Up (PG) (CC) (D)  
 9.00 News Tonight (News)  
 9.30 Inside Crime Scene 2 (PG) (CC) (IE)  
 10.30 The Fear Index (PG13) (CC) (D)  
 11.30 Spirit Of Sport 9 (Sports)  
**AM**  
 12.00 Sunny Side Up (PG) (CC) (D)  
 12.30 Hawaii Five-0 10 (PG13) (CC) (D)  
 1.30 American Idol 21 (PG) (V)  
 2.30 Lingo USA (PG) (V)  
 3.30 Euromaxx (PG) (Cul)  
 4.00 Wheel Of Fortune 40 (V)  
 4.30 Deal Or No Deal Australia 12 (PG) (V)  
 5.00 Open Homes 5 (IE)  
 5.30 Field Trip With Curtis Stone 2 (IE)

CHANNEL 8

**AM**  
 6.00 Special Delivery (CC) (IE)  
 6.30 Frontline (CA)  
 7.00 News Tonight (News)  
 7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (CA)  
 8.00 Forever Yours (PG) (CC) (D)  
 9.00 Morning Express (News)  
 9.30 A Perfect Man (PG) (CC) (D)  
 10.00 Focus (CA)  
 10.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)  
**PM**  
 12.30 The Wonder Shop (Infomercial)  
 1.00 News 8 At One (News)  
 1.30 Come Home Love: Lo And Behold (PG) (D)  
 3.00 The Wonder Shop (Infomercial)  
 3.30 Lost Track Of Time (PG) (D)  
 4.30 The Way To Happiness (PG) (D)  
 5.30 Recipe Of Life (PG) (CC) (D)  
 6.30 Hello Singapore (CA)  
 7.30 A Perfect Man (PG) (CC) (D)  
 8.00 Dishing With Chris Lee 2 (CC) (V)  
 9.00 Forever Yours (PG) (CC) (D)  
 10.00 News Tonight (News)  
 10.30 Detective L (PG13) (CC) (D)  
 11.00 The Ingenious One (PG) (D)  
**AM**  
 12.00 Luoyang (PG) (D)  
 1.00 Super Taste 48 Hours Burning Desire - Japan (PG) (IE)  
 2.00 Holland V (PG) (D)  
 4.00 The Way To Happiness (PG) (D)  
 5.00 The Scarlet Kid (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

**PM**  
 3.00 Fixer 3 (CC) (IE)  
 4.00 Renovaid 8 (CC) (IE)  
 4.30 City Spotlight (CC) (IE)  
 5.00 A Place In The Sun (PG) (CC) (D)  
 6.00 Revenge From The Past (PG) (CC) (D)  
 7.00 Miss Monte Cristo (PG) (CC) (D)  
 9.00 Stylish Man - The Chef 3 (PG) (V)  
 10.00 Welcome 2 Life (PG) (CC) (D)  
 11.00 News Tonight (News)  
 11.30 Stylish Man - The Chef 3 (PG) (V)  
**AM**  
 12.30 Miss Monte Cristo (PG) (CC) (D)  
 2.30 Close

CNA

**AM**  
 6.00 Singapore Tonight  
 6.30 Money Mind  
 7.00 Asia First  
 10.15 A Street Like This  
 11.00 Asia Now  
**PM**  
 1.00 Daughters Of Putien  
 2.00 Asia Now  
 4.00 Japan's Indo-Pacific Plan  
 5.02 Insight  
 6.00 East Asia Tonight  
 7.00 Money Mind  
 7.30 On The Red Dot  
 8.00 Asia Tonight  
 9.00 When Titans Clash 3: De-Risking Decoded/10.00 Singapore Tonight  
 11.00 When Titans Clash 3: De-Risking Decoded  
**AM**  
 12.03 East Asia Tonight  
 1.00 Who Cares About Polar Bears?  
 2.00 Singapore Tonight  
 3.00 Insight  
 4.00 Asia Tonight  
 5.00 When Titans Clash 3: De-Risking Decoded

VASANTHAM

**AM**  
 9.00 Thinna Thinna Asai (CC) (IE)  
 9.30 Siri... Siri Siri 2 (PG) (CC) (V)  
 10.00 Indian Beat 15 (PG) (CC) (IE)  
 10.30 Siri... Siri Siri 2 (PG) (CC) (V)  
 11.00 Anjaraipetti 9 (CC) (IE)  
**PM**  
 12.00 Neel (PG) (M)  
 3.00 Nee Paathi Naan Paathi (CC) (IE)  
 4.00 Yaaradi Nee Mohini (PG) (CC) (M)  
 7.00 Samaippoma (CC) (IE)  
 8.00 Ming Lee C/O Manickam (CC) (C)  
 8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)  
 9.00 Veerasingam (PG) (CC) (D)  
 9.30 Ungalukku Theriyumma (PG) (CC) (IE)  
 10.00 Mei (PG) (CC) (D)  
 10.30 Vanjam (PG) (CC) (D)  
 11.00 Ungalukkaga Paadalgal (V)  
 11.30 Tamil Seithi (News)  
**AM**  
 12.00 Close

SURIA

**AM**  
 6.00 Beyblade Burst Evolution (C)  
 9.30 Lesung (CC) (IE)  
 10.00 Cut Amirah (PG) (D)  
 11.00 Bisik-Bisik Gelora (PG) (CC) (D)  
**PM**  
 12.00 Selamanya Suri Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)  
 1.00 Seribu Nina (PG) (CC) (D)  
 2.00 Aku Titipkan Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)  
 3.00 Kasi Setel Itu Lirik (PG) (CC) (V)  
 4.00 Bisik-Bisik Gelora (PG) (CC) (D)  
 5.00 She Was Pretty (PG) (CC) (D)  
 6.00 Beyblade Burst Evolution (C)  
 6.30 Janji Sedap (IE)  
 7.00 Aku Yang Kau Sakiti (PG) (D)  
 8.00 Berita (News)  
 8.30 Perang Malam Ini (PG) (V)  
 9.30 Bukan Syurga Pilihan (PG) (CC) (D)  
 10.30 Andai Itu Takdirnya (PG) (CC) (D)  
 11.30 Berita (News)  
**AM**  
 12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Pre-school; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to [www.starhub.com/tv](http://www.starhub.com/tv) or [www.singtelv.com.sg](http://www.singtelv.com.sg). For streaming updates, go to [flixpatrol.com/top10/netflix/singapore](http://flixpatrol.com/top10/netflix/singapore) or [www.viu.com/ott/sg](http://www.viu.com/ott/sg).

RADIO

KISS92

**AM**  
 6.00 The BIG Show With Glenn, Angel And The Flying Dutchman  
 10.00 Kiss Cafe With Charmaine Phua  
**PM**  
 1.00 Eavesdropping With Daphne Khoo  
 4.00 On Your Way With Joshua Simon  
 8.00 The Owls With Juliana Yeow

ONE FM 91.3

**AM**  
 6.00 The Brightside With Carol, Lavinia & Shehzad  
 10.00 The Music Mansion With Shan Wee  
**PM**  
 1.00 The Sweet Escape With Carrie Chong  
 4.00 The ONE Way Home With Tim Oh  
 8.00 Nights With Simon Lim

MONEY FM 89.3

**AM**  
 6.00 Breakfast With Ryan Huang, Emaad Akhtar & Audrey Siek  
 9.00 Your Money With Michelle Martin  
**PM**  
 12.00 On The Show With Jill Lim  
 1.00 The Afternoon Update With Lynlee Foo  
 4.00 The Evening Runway With Hongbin Jeong, Roshan Gidwani & Chua Tian Tian

UFM100.3

**AM**  
 6.00 The Play Show With Limei, Andrew & Chengyao  
 10.00 My Music, Your Coffee With Xinying  
**PM**  
 1.00 Pal-Tea Time With Keminn  
 4.00 La La La 4-8 With Wenhong & Jiayi  
 8.00 Thank You For Every Goodnight With Yuling

96.3 HAO FM

**AM**  
 6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jingyun, Deming And Jieqi  
 10.00 Lunch Break With Anna  
**PM**  
 1.00 Best Of 80s And 90s  
 4.00 Evening Drive Time With Liyi And Guoxian  
 8.00 Night Time With 963



Guillaume's Paris, which explores the French city's culture and food, is showing on BBC Lifestyle. PHOTO: STARHUB

CABLE TV

STARHUB TV HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

**AM**  
 6.00 My Bargain Queen  
 7.00 Perfect Match 10  
 8.30 The Way To Happiness  
 9.30 God Of Gamblers - Back To Shanghai  
**PM**  
 12.00 Life Of Centenarians  
 12.30 Forensic Heroes 4  
 1.30 Perfect Match 10  
 3.00 Flowers Bloom In Spring  
 5.00 Forensic Heroes 4  
 6.00 The Way To Happiness  
 7.00 Hot Door Night 27  
 8.00 Divas Hit The Road: Good Friends  
 10.00 Thank You Doctor  
 11.00 Hot Door Night 27

BBC EARTH (CHANNEL 407)

**AM**  
 6.00 Food Factory 5  
 6.30 Whale With Steve Backshall  
 7.25 Engineering Repurposed  
 8.20 Food Factory 2  
 9.15 Mammals  
 10.10 Whale With Steve Backshall  
 11.05 Expedition With Steve Backshall 2  
**PM**  
 12.05 Great Asian Railway Journeys  
 1.05 Food Factory 2  
 2.05 Mammals  
 3.05 Whale With Steve Backshall  
 4.05 Food Factory 2  
 5.05 Expedition With Steve Backshall 2  
 6.05 Mammals  
 7.05 Food Factory 2  
 8.05 Patrick Aryee's Wild World  
 9.00 Griff's Canadian Adventure  
 9.55 World's Most Dangerous Roads 4  
 10.45 Extreme Fishing With Robson Green 3  
 11.35 Rare Survivors - China's Iconic Wildlife

BBC LIFESTYLE (CHANNEL 432)

**AM**  
 6.00 Junior Bake Off 5  
 6.55 World's Most Luxurious  
 7.45 Rick Stein's Cornwall 3  
 8.15 Donal's Asian Baking Adventure  
 8.40 Amanda And Alan's Italian Job 2  
 9.40 Extraordinary Places To Eat 2  
 10.40 Junior Bake Off 5  
 11.35 World's Most Luxurious  
**PM**  
 12.25 Amanda And Alan's Italian Job 2  
 1.25 Junior Bake Off 5  
 2.20 Extraordinary Places To Eat 2  
 3.20 World's Most Luxurious  
 4.10 Amanda And Alan's Italian Job 2  
 5.10 Extraordinary Places To Eat 2  
 6.10 World's Most Luxurious  
 7.00 Rachel Khoo's Kitchen Notebook: Melbourne  
 7.30 Guillaume's Paris  
 8.30 Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond The Lobby 4  
 9.30 Your Home, Made Perfect 4  
 10.30 Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars  
 11.30 Guillaume's Paris

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

**AM**  
 6.00 Other Sports: FIA World Rallycross Championships: Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge Day 1 Highlights  
 6.30 Other Sports: Titan Desert: Skoda Titan Desert Morocco Highlights  
 7.00 Magazine Show: Arena Esports  
 7.30 Other Sports: UCI Cycling: Presidential Cycling Tour Of Turkey  
 8.30 Golf: The Golf Fix  
 9.00 Golf: DP World Tour: Genesis Scottish Open Day 4  
**PM**  
 1.30 Golf: The Golf Fix  
 2.00 Golf: PGA Tour: The Amundi Evian Championships Round 4  
 8.00 Golf: Golf Central  
 9.00 Other Sports: Wanda Diamond League Highlights: Monaco  
 10.00 Other Sports: World Matchplay Darts: First Round 3  
**AM**  
 2.00 Other Sports: World Matchplay Darts: First Round 4

SINGTEL TV CARTOON NETWORK (HD) (CHANNEL 226)

**AM**  
 6.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings  
 7.00 Boy Girl Dog Cat Mouse Cheese  
 7.35 The Amazing World Of Gumball  
 8.00 Mechamoto  
 8.25 Mini Beat Power Rockers  
 9.00 Teen Titans Go!  
 9.35 Looney Tunes Cartoons  
 10.00 Mr Bean: The Animated Series  
 10.30 We Bare Bears  
 11.00 Craig Of The Creek  
 11.35 Unikitty  
**PM**  
 12.00 Mechamoto  
 12.30 Clarence  
 1.00 Teen Titans Go!  
 1.35 Lamput  
 2.00 Mr Bean: The Animated Series  
 2.30 Lamput  
 3.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings  
 4.00 Looney Tunes Cartoons  
 4.30 Lamput  
 5.00 Teen Titans Go!  
 5.35 We Bare Bears  
 6.00 Craig Of The Creek  
 6.35 Unikitty  
 7.00 Mechamoto  
 7.30 Clarence  
 8.00 Teen Titans Go!  
 8.35 Mr Bean: The Animated Series  
 9.00 Lego Dreamzzz  
 9.25 Chowder  
 10.00 Steven Universe  
 11.00 Regular Show

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

**AM**  
 6.00 NCIS: Hawaii 2  
 6.45 Hudson & Rex 6  
 7.35 CSI: Miami 9  
 8.25 S.W.A.T.  
 9.15 Lake Placid: Legacy  
 11.00 The Rookie 5  
 11.55 Hudson & Rex 6  
**PM**  
 12.50 S.W.A.T.  
 1.40 CSI: Miami 9  
 2.30 The Rookie 5  
 3.25 Hudson & Rex 6  
 4.20 Unforgettable 4  
 5.10 S.W.A.T.  
 6.05 NCIS: Los Angeles 14  
 7.00 NCIS: Hawaii 2  
 7.55 The Rookie 5  
 8.50 Hudson & Rex 6  
 9.45 FBI: Most Wanted 5  
 10.40 Unforgettable 4  
 11.35 FBI: Most Wanted 5

E-LE (HD) (CHANNEL 501)

**AM**  
 6.00 Turn On The Right Way Of Life  
 7.00 Burning Flames  
 8.00 Enemies From The Past  
 9.30 Come Home Love: Lo And Behold  
 10.00 Turn On The Right Way Of Life  
 11.00 A Dream Of Splendor  
**PM**  
 12.00 The Treasured Voice 5  
 2.00 Street Dance Of China 5  
 4.00 The Secret House  
 5.30 Burning Flames  
 6.30 Come Home Love: Lo And Behold  
 7.00 A Dream Of Splendor  
 8.00 Burning Flames  
 8.50 The Secret House  
 10.10 Love Me, Love My Voice  
 11.00 Be Reborn

STREAMING

NETFLIX

**TOP 10 MOVIES**  
 1. Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F  
 2. Journey 2: The Mysterious Island  
 3. S.W.A.T.: Firefight  
 4. Srikanth  
 5. A Family Affair  
 6. Daddyku Gangster  
 7. Pattaya Heat  
 8. Minions: The Rise Of Gru  
 9. Rampage  
 10. Money No Enough 3  
**TOP 10 TV SHOWS**  
 1. The Double  
 2. Miss Night And Day  
 3. The Man With 1000 Kids  
 4. Mashle: Magic And Muscles  
 5. The Boyfriend  
 6. Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba  
 7. Supacell  
 8. The Whirlwind  
 9. Sprint  
 10. Tasuketsu - Fate Of The Majority

VIU

1. The Tale Of Rose  
 2. Lovely Runner  
 3. The Legend Of Heroes - Hot Blooded  
 4. The Princess Royal  
 5. The Player 2: Master Of Swindlers  
 6. My Sweet Mobster  
 7. The Midnight Romance In Hagwon  
 8. Suji & Uri  
 9. Beauty And Mr Romantic  
 10. Snow White's Revenge

COMICS

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



# ST Classifieds

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SELL IT. FIND IT.  
CALL NOW  
6289-9988  
www.sphclass.com.sg

## Antiques/Collectibles 52

CALL 97381868 WANTED Gold & Silver Coins, Old Notes & Paintings, Porcelain, Furniture

## Club Memberships 66

TEE-UP 97605080 FION Teeup@singnet.com.sg  
SICC 333K TMCC 215K Laguna 160k Sentosa 500k Seletar 68k OCC/Warren 22.5k Keppel 11k Changi 9.5k One 15/Tower/SGCC/ British/SRC 11k SSC 10k Polo/ Pines/ Dutch 6k Cricket 23k American 160k CSC 8.5k RSYC 7.5k R. Marina 2.5k Palm Resort 3.5k

ACTIVE GOLF 96369950 SICC \$330K TMCC \$215K Sentosa \$500k Laguna \$150k Seletar \$69k OCC, Warren Keppel SRC American

SINGOLF.COM TEL:97377650 SICC \$320K, TMCC \$215K, - SENTOSA \$500K, LAGUNA - \$145K, SELETAR, WARREN, TMCC CORPORATE \$230K

## Announcements

## Other Announcements/ Messages 830

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED Singaporeans & PRs, aged 16-89 years, pri/sec edu level are welcomed, able to read and write English at Pri 6 level. Fill in daily life functioning questionnaires Reimbursement provided. Sign up: https://www.form.gov.sg/61baf67d083900001513e590 Study conducted by Dr.P.Yap IMH. Approved by NHG DSRB

## Electrical 96

POWER FAILURE FREE Check! Repair Install / Water Heater All Electric work Lic: 8/14528 LED Light & Fan. 6483 7845

QUALIFIED ELECT Contractor Experienced Licenced Electrician 96391853 (7/081426)

## Interior Design/Renovation 108

TILING WALL/FLOOR PLASTER pipe,wire,painting,toilet bowl +basin \$188 90613466 zhong

## Home Furnishings/Fittings 114

LUCKY ALUMINIUM WORKS Factory price window & grille \$180 TL Dr 90698871 Henry

AUTO GATE/ AWNING/ Railing HDB Gate/ Aluminium Work/ Toilet Door. 94593613 Tan

\*\*REPLACE FORMICA, REPAIR antique furnitures, cabinets, lock, varnish. Call 8171 9388

## Pest Control 116

SYSTEM PEST CONTROL Est 1985 ISO 9001/ 14001/ 45001 Cert Termite| Cockroach| Ant Rodent| Bedbug| Mosquito Tel: 6748 8966 / 9670 1366

## Plumbing 118

CHOKAGE/ LEAKAGE/ INSTALL / Repair & All Plumbing Svcs Rubbish Chute. (ws15092011) Good\$ MeilIng St 6479-7507

## Items Wanted 168

\$ ANTIQUE ROSEWOOD, Blackwood furn, hifi speaker, repair, disposal. Jason 90016482

## Web Services 201

GET A STUNNING website, seamless marketing automation and advanced analytics. Boost your online presence today! Contact us for a free consultation. Tel: 88522675.

## Business Accounting/ Secretarial Services 203

ACCOUNTING, REGD. ADDRESS answering fax, telex, tax & secretarial svcs. 65355300

## Packing/ Storage/ Delivery/ Removal 239

\$30 UP. BOX Lorry. Hse/ Office/ piano/ disposal service, Cheap storage & free boxes 65678426 huphing.com.sg

## Mercedes For Sale 326



AUCTION SALE CLOSING 19TH July 24. SJR2900B Mercedes Benz S320L (R19 LED) (COE Exp Oct'26). Sold on 'As is where is' cond. T&Cs Apply. 64532121/WA 86112121

REPO 06/2022 GLB200 AMG Line Premium 7seater, highest offer 96669049 GB Helios

## Volkswagen For Sale 346

REPOSSESSED 5/2009 VOLKSWAGEN Golf GTI (SNE9753J) Highest offer Call 64650020

## Various Makes 350

NISSAN NV350 CARAVAN DX Yr 11'2021 COE 11'2031 TOYOTA HIACE HI ROOF AUTO 14 SEATER Yr 02'2012 COE 01'2027 Viewing Add: 20 Bukit Batok Crescent, Enterprise Centre Lobby A Rooftop Singapore 658080

AUDI Q5 SPORT 2.0 TFSI QU S TRONIC Yr 01'2018 COE 01'2028 Viewing Add: 8 Fourth Lok Yang Road Singapore 629705

Viewing Hours: Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm Email Only (Strictly before 17/07/2024, 5pm): bidding@mitsubishi-hc-capital.com.sg

## Vehicles For Hire 361

LIAN AIK: TWIN cabin/ pickups/ vans/ 10-15ft open/ box/ canopy. Long/ Short term. 363 Joo Chiat Rd. 63458080

DAILY/ WEEKLY/ MONTHLY Van/ 10/ 14ft Lorry for rent. Special Offer! WCEGA Plaza #03-18. Call 64695691

DIESEL 10/14FT LORRY / Van for rent. Daily / monthly rate. Reasonable price 96235020

## Vehicles Wanted 363

WANTED! ALL MODELS Private and commercial vehicles. High price! Immediate cash. Call 97279905/ 97266789

## Car Financing/ Insurance 377

TAI THONG LEE Offers Low Interest : In hse car loan, bank loan, Insurance, re-financing, COE loan, etc. Call: 67416868

100% LOAN FOR COE. Special rate: in house / direct bank. One stop service! 97272658 / 64695691 Thiam Heng

## Scrap Vehicles 381

HIGHEST CASH OFFER for all scrap/ export/ used & commercial vehicle. 9661 8888

## Motorcycles/ Scooters 393

REPOSSESSED YAMAHA XMAX ABS CVT. FZ3535X. Highest offer contact 8878 0850

## D10 BUKIT TIMAH/ HOLLAND RD/ TANGLIN HOUSES FOR SALE 403



HOLLAND PARK 21800 sqft. Beautiful rectangular land for rebuild. Charming house, easy access. Only \$2200psf yet neg 94567348 Newsman

## D11 NEWTON/ NOVENA HOUSES FOR SALE 404



OPEN HOUSE BY Appointment Brand new 12 Chee Hoon Ave 15499/ 26000sf. Best layout, 12 carpark, huge gdn. 600m to Botanic Garden 93839025

## D15 KATONG/ JOO CHIAT/ EAST COAST PTE APTS FOR SALE 417

V. CHEAP! NEW 3Bed+Study Unblocked. High flr. 1km MRT High gains/ rent. Gd location Very Convenient. 93699859.

## D09 ORCHARD/ CAIRNHILL HOUSES FOR RENT 454

41 OXLEY RD. Somerset MRT. 4sty Semi-D 7rms, 3400+sf, Lift, \$20K, Immed 88389898

## D11 NEWTON/ NOVENA HOUSES FOR RENT 454



VANDA BUNGLW 7500/8120SF 6+1+family, big pool & patio. Near Mrt, amenities. Tranquil Owner 98635635/97272996 www.wahkhaw.com.sg

## (CENTRAL) HDB RMS FOR RENT 517

BLK 11 JLN Bt Merah small rm attached toilet, AC, can cook, furn, near ABC. 96349655

## FACTORY/ INDUSTRIAL SPACE FOR RENT 531



TUAS MINIMART DORMITORY, barber/phone shop. Approx. 20K workers. Fully furnish near many factories. Agt welcome. Call owner 91058518

## FACTORY/ INDUSTRIAL SPACE FOR SALE 532

Factory for Sale JTC B2 Factory & Secondary Workers Dormitory • Near future Enterprise MRT • Approved 681 workers • Site 8021.5sm/GFA 9405.05sm • Potential Plot Ratio 2.5 C&W 9724 3662

\*\*MIDVIEW CITY SALE / Lease Terrace unit 9009sf/ 2938sf Call 83382283 / 98433965

## OFFICE SPACE FOR RENT 534

WINSLAND HOUSE • 1,300 to 9,500 sq ft • Somerset MRT Station • Bare / Fitted Office • Ample Parking • Proximity To Amenities 6736 2622 

## OFFICE SPACE FOR RENT 534

ONE FINLAYSON GREEN • Prime location • Raffles Place MRT station entrance • Regular & efficient layout • 3,251 sq ft & 6,351 sq ft KERISVALE PTE LTD TEL: 6323-7260/61 Email: leasing@onefinlaysongreen.com.sg

## SHOP SPACE FOR SALE 538

THE BENCOLEEN 904SF Corner Unit Double Frontage Valuation \$3.7M 9229-0033

## RESTAURANT/ LOUNGE SPACE FOR SALE 541

WOODLANDS INDUSTRIAL ESTATE Canteen, 7500sf, balance 44yrs. Agt 93888796

## WAREHOUSES/ STORAGE SPACE FOR RENT 543

JOO SENG 7505F largeloading bay,cargo lifts.Indoor parking Owner 98635635/97272996 www.wahkhaw.com.sg

**TRAVEL TIP**  
Determine the weight of your carry-on luggage before going to the airport instead of risking a situation where you have to figure out how to deal with excess luggage.

Your dream car beckons

# NOTICES

Tel 6289-8822 | Email notices@sph.com.sg | www.sphclass.com.sg



## TENDER NOTICE

**July 2024 Tender for Rental of Market Stalls / Cooked Food Stalls at National Environment Agency (NEA) Market and Hawker Centres**

**Opening:** 15 July 2024 (Monday) @ 10.30am  
**Closing:** 29 July 2024 (Monday) @ 10.30am  
 (Please refer to the NEA website for any latest updates on the E-Tender)

**Term of Tenancy:** Three (3) years

**Eligibility Criteria:**

- A Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident;
- 21 years old and above;
- Not debarred from holding a Singapore Food Agency stall licence;
- Not a former stall assistant / nominee who was de-registered by NEA;
- Not banned by the Government / Statutory Boards from taking part in any business tenders;
- Not an undischarged bankrupt; and
- Not renting or a joint operator of two cooked food stalls in markets/hawker centres managed by NEA. The maximum number of cooked food stalls any individual can rent is two.

**Details of Tender**

The Tender for Rental of Market Stalls / Cooked Food Stalls will be conducted electronically via NEA E-Tender system. Tenderers can visit the NEA website at [go.gov.sg/tendernotice](http://go.gov.sg/tendernotice) for more information on the NEA E-Tender system.

On the list of stalls available for tender, tenderers may refer to the Tender Notice posted on the NEA website or the hard copy Tender Notice displayed on the notice board at **NEA's One-Stop Information and Service Centre (OSISC)**, located at **HDB Hub (East Wing), 480 Lorong 6 Toa Payoh, #26-01, Singapore 310480**.

Tenderers who wish to participate and bid for a stall will have to submit the Form of Tender through the E-Tender system in NEA website.

The NEA does not place tenderers as reserves. Fresh tenders will be called if the successful tenderers do not take up the stalls. The NEA reserves the right not to accept the highest bid or any bid at all and the decision of the NEA shall be final. The NEA reserves the right to withdraw any of the stalls from the tender exercise at any time, before or after the tender closing date, without prior notice given.

Tender results will be displayed on the NEA website and notice board at NEA's OSISC.

For enquiries, please call **NEA Contact Centre at 6225 5632** or visit the **NEA website at [www.nea.gov.sg](http://www.nea.gov.sg)**



## TENDER NOTICE

The National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) invites Tenderers for the Provision of Professional Services for Development and Implementation of Business Continuity Management Program, according to the Requirement Specifications in the Tender Document.

**Tender Reference No:** NTUC-GOV2024002  
**Tender Opening Date:** 15 July 2024, Monday  
**Tender Briefing (Mandatory):** 22 July 2024, Monday, 3pm  
**Tender Closing Date and Time:** 05 August 2024, Monday, 4pm

**Request for Tender Document**

Interested tenderers are to email the contact person below to request for the Tender Document in softcopy. Tenderers are required to submit their signed NDA before receiving the Tender Document.

**Mandatory Tender Briefing**

A mandatory Tender Briefing will be held at 3PM on 22 JULY 2024, MONDAY via MS Teams. Attendance is compulsory for Tenderers intending to submit a Tender Offer. Interested tenderers are required to submit names and email addresses of their representatives (maximum 3) to the contact person below by 5pm on 19 July 2024, Friday.

**Submission of Tender Document**

Tender Documents must bear the official seal or rubber stamp of the Tenderer and initialed by the Tenderer's authorised representative and submitted via the tender mailbox. Please refer to Instructions to Tenderers in the Tender Document for submission details.

**Contact Person:** Lim Zi En / Rosnani Suadi  
**Contact Email:** gov@ntuc.org.sg

NTUC reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender submission without providing any reasons.

## TENDER NOTICE

NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) invites tenderers for the following tender project:

**APPOINTMENT OF SYSTEM PROVIDER FOR AI-POWERED VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR PLATFORM FOR e2i FROM 01 DECEMBER 2024 - 30 NOVEMBER 2027.**

**Tender Briefing:** 29 July 2024 (Monday), 1500hrs  
 (Tenderers to register by 26 July 2024 (Friday), 1200hrs)  
**[Limited to 2 reps per company to attend briefing]**

**Tender Closing Date/Time:** 12 August 2024 (Monday), 1200hrs

For more details and to register interest for tender briefing, please visit [www.e2i.com.sg/vcf-tender](http://www.e2i.com.sg/vcf-tender).



## Invitation to Tender For Deepavali Fair 2024

**Operation of Trade Fair:**  
**02 October 2024 – 31 October 2024**

**Closing Date and Time:**  
**24 July 2024 (12 noon sharp)**

Tender documents can be obtained from and submitted to:  
**Hindu Endowments Board**  
**397 Serangoon Road, Level 2, S(218123)**  
**Tel: 65939218**

### IN THE GENERAL DIVISION OF THE HIGH COURT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

Case No.: HC/CWJ 186/2024 )  
 In the matter of the Insolvency, Restructuring and Dissolution Act 2018 (Act 40 of 2018)

And  
 In the Matter of **ASIA MARINE LOGISTICS PTE. LTD.**  
 (Singapore UEN No. 201223808Z)

Between  
**MAYBANK SINGAPORE LIMITED**  
 (Singapore UEN No. 201804195C) ... Claimant

And  
**ASIA MARINE LOGISTICS PTE. LTD.**  
 (Singapore UEN No. 201223808Z) ... Defendant

**ADVERTISEMENT OF WINDING UP APPLICATION**  
**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that an application for the winding up of the abovementioned company by the High Court was, on 5 July 2024, filed by **MAYBANK SINGAPORE LIMITED** of 2 Battery Road #01-01 Maybank Tower, Singapore 049907, a creditor, and that the winding up application is directed to be heard before the Judge sitting in the General Division of the High Court of the Republic of Singapore at 10.00 a.m. on 26 July 2024, and any creditor or contributory of the company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the winding up application may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the winding up application will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the company requiring the copy of the winding up application by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Claimant's address is 2 Battery Road #01-01 Maybank Tower, Singapore 049907.

The Claimant's solicitors are Shook Lin & Bok LLP of 1 Robinson Road, #18-00 AIA Tower, Singapore 048542.

**SOLICITORS FOR THE CLAIMANT**  
**SHOOK LIN & BOK LLP**  
 [REF: 2241236/NWK/CMK/TX/ /MBSL]

Note: Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the winding up application must serve on or send by post to the Claimant's solicitors, notice in writing of his intention to do so. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person, firm, or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovementioned not later than 22 July 2024 (at least 3 clear working days before the day appointed for the hearing of the winding up application).

### BANKRUPTCY ACT (CHAPTER 20)/ INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION ACT 2018

NOTICE TO CREDITORS OF INTENTION TO DECLARE DIVIDEND

BKCY NO	NAME & NRIC/PP NO.
B1731/2019	RASIFAH BINTE JUKI (S7131856G)
B704/2022	LI TAOLING (S8279502B)
B2008/2019	ARJUN SELVADURAY (S9531736G)
B2386/2019	CHIA TUAN KAI (S1254900H)
B856/2018	LEE LAI KUAN PEGGY (LJ LUJUN PEGGY) (S7223713G)
B2251/2016	LEE KIAN HIN (LI JIANXING) (S1459000E)
B1510/2019	SUET AH TEE (S0177336D)
B1010/2019	DHANARAJ S/O VEERANAN (S7008603D)
B1891/2019	ALI AKHBAR BIN ABDUL HAMID (S1631864G)
B2999/1998	NG AI TIONG (S1076049F)
B1329/2008	THIAN BOON CHEOW (S0031765J)
B2564/2019	EDMUND WONG YEW KONG (S1517831J)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Official Assignee would like to declare a dividend in the above listed cases.

All creditors who have yet to prove their claims to the Official Assignee's satisfaction, must do so by 29th day of July 2024 failing which they will be excluded from the dividend, if any.

**Dated this 15th day of July 2024.**  
**LIM YEW JIN**  
 SENIOR ASSISTANT OFFICIAL ASSIGNEE

### INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION ACT 2018

**INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION (PERSONAL INSOLVENCY) RULES 2020**  
**TAN LOKE MENG DENNIS**  
 NRIC NO. S6841214E  
**BANKRUPTCY NO. HC/B 0525/2021**  
**NOTICE OF INTENDED RECOMMENDATION TO ANNUL THE BANKRUPTCY ORDER UNDER INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION ACT 2018**

**TAKE NOTICE** that I, the Private Trustee in Bankruptcy (PTB), intend to recommend to the Official Assignee to issue a Certificate of Annulment of Bankruptcy Order made against the abovementioned Tan Loke Meng Dennis (NRIC No. S6841214E) under Section 393 of the Insolvency, Restructuring and Dissolution Act 2018.

All creditors are to establish their claims to my satisfaction on or before 5 August 2024, failing which, creditors will be unable to prove their debts in the bankruptcy estate and will be excluded from any dividends unless the creditors apply to the PTB or the Court for an extension of time.

**Dated this 15th day of July 2024**  
 Ting Hwei-Lin  
 Trustee of the Estate of Tan Loke Meng Dennis,  
 A Bankrupt  
 c/o Adsan Law LLC  
 300 Beach Road  
 The Concourse Level 26  
 Singapore 199555  
 Ref: 2021PT01115AP

### INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION ACT 2018

**INSOLVENCY, RESTRUCTURING AND DISSOLUTION (PERSONAL INSOLVENCY) RULES 2020**  
**THE ESTATE OF TAN LOKE MENG DENNIS, A BANKRUPT**  
 NRIC NO. S6841214E  
**BANKRUPTCY NO. HC/B 0525/2021**  
**NOTICE TO CREDITORS OF INTENTION TO DECLARE DIVIDEND**

Take notice that a first and final dividend is intended to be declared in the above matter and that if you do not establish your claim to my satisfaction on or before the 5th day of August 2024, you will be excluded from this dividend and I shall proceed to make the dividend without regard to your claim.

**Dated this 15th day of July 2024**  
 Ting Hwei-Lin  
 Trustee of the Estate of Tan Loke Meng Dennis,  
 A Bankrupt  
 c/o Adsan Law LLC  
 300 Beach Road  
 Level 26 The Concourse  
 Singapore 199555  
 Ref: 2021PT01115AP

**Nursing/ Health Care** 721

**Nursing/ Health Care** 721

**UEMS**  
**Hiring for HEALTHCARE ATTENDANT at SENGKANG**  
 • Salary package up to \$2100 + \$900\* (New Joiner Incentive)  
 • Working days: 5 days/week (including weekends)  
 • Working hours: 6.45am to 4.15pm / 12.15pm to 9.45pm (Rotational shifts)  
**Contact: 9825 5019 / 9785 3688 / 8028 6650**

**ISS PEOPLE MAKE PLACES**  
**1. Patient Transfer Porter (\*\$2150)**  
**2. Trolley Delivery Assistant (\*\$2000)**  
 \* Gross up to & Inclusive of Joining bonus  
**Singapore General Hospital / Contact 9128 0037 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)**

**Security** 766

**Security** 766

**WE ARE HIRING**  
**Come and Join Us Now**  
**LOCATION: TOH TUCK ROAD**  
 (Within walking distance from Beauty World MRT station and close to major expressways like PIE and BKE)  
**Joining Bonus up to \$1,388! - Singaporean Only**  
**Security Officer (Day/Night)** Pay up to \$3,070!\*\*\*  
**Senior Security Officer (Day/Night)** Pay up to \$3,380!\*\*\*  
**Security Supervisor (Day)** Pay up to \$3,700!\*\*\*  
 Benefits: Union Membership - Medical Reimbursement - Performance Incentive - Birthday Token - 1 Free notification and RTT required \*\*\*Terms & Conditions apply!  
**Walk in Interview: 20 Sin Ming Lane #07-52/53 Midview City S(573968) (Mon-Fri 9AM-5PM) Avoid Lunch time (12nn-1pm) exclude PH**

**Nursing/ Health Care** 721

**General Production/ Operators** 758

**CLINIC ASST @AMK, Full/ Part-time. \$2K+. S'porean only. Whatsapp: 91703203**

**1. Production Workers**  
**2. QC**  
 • Singaporeans are welcome  
 Interested, please call **6261 1010** or walk-in **37 Quail Rd, S'pore 618808** (Boon Lay Interchange, take bus 246 Allight at the 4th bus stop)

**Sales** 730

**Home Care Cleaning Services require: Sales Exec (Indoor)**

**Home Care Cleaning Services require: Sales Exec (Indoor)**  
 • PC literate  
 • Able to handle Chinese speaking customers  
**☎ 6262-2656 Ms Kong**  
**1 Yishun Ind St 1 #03-29 A'Posh Bizhub**

**KALLANG NEAR MACPHERSON Operator. 8.30am-6pm \$90. 5-day wk. Must carry 15-20kg Call 6241-6466 / 9385-2919**

**Call Centres/ Telemarketing** 734

**Warehousing/ Inventory/ Logistics** 763

**TELEMARKETERS. \$10-\$15 PER Hour. Near Tampines MRT. Call/WA Joven @ 9337 2917.**

**WAREHOUSE ASST, LAVENDER MRT, Packing Cargo for Air & Sea freight, w/forklift lic pref PC literate. Call 62963322**

**Hotel/ Restaurant/ Lounge** 742

**Warehouse/ Inventory/ Logistics** 763

**DISHWASHER NEEDED URGENTLY. Salary Up to \$2500 at Orchard. Call: 83230571**

**PENJURU, WOODLANDS STORE / Forklift Driver 8am-5.30pm. 5-day. 90076336/64688325**

**Administrative/ Clerical** 748

**Security** 766

**ADMIN CUM A/Cs Asst. Full/ Part-time New grad welcome Serangoon Central. 90211474**

**Day - SO East Area**

**Secretaries/ Personal Assistants** 751

**Day - SO / Night - SS West Coast Area**

**PERSONAL ASST. PROFICIENT in MS Office & Outlook. Good command of Eng. S'porean. Email Resume and Photo to: jobgrowth2022@gmail.com**

**\* Direct bus from Clementi MRT Station**

**Human Resources** 752

**\* Alternate 5/6 days week - PWM salary - Weekly Advance**

**HR (Human Resource) needed urgently@Yishun area**

**WhatsApp (Msg Only): 8200 0235 Call: 6284 0050**

**needed urgently@Yishun area**

**REACHFIELD SECURITY OFFICER**

**Mon - Fri 9am-5pm**

**OFFICE > RAFFLES PLACE / BUONA VISTA / MARINA BAY SCHOOL > ONE-NORTH / SIMEI / PASIR RIS / BRADDELL**

**Salary \$2500 per month**

**MALL > ORCHARD / UPPER THOMSON FACTORY > YISHUN**

**PC literate**

**10 ANSON ROAD #26-09 INTERNATIONAL PLAZA**

**Able to read Chinese characters & liaise with Chinese speaking clients**

**6324 0648 / 9657 3246**

**Call 93369705 (No Agents)**

**EXCELLENT SECURITY #31-05 INT'L PLAZA**

**General Production/ Operators** 758

**AMK IND PARK 2**

**Adhesive Tape Co requires PACKER/ PRODUCTION WORKER**

**0800 - 0800 (Day / Night Shift)**

**\*5 days work**

**\$0 ..... \$2750 SSO ..... \$3050**

**Physically fit \* Only S'poreans**

**SCH OFFICER. SO at Pasir Ris/ Caldecott/ Dhoby Ghaut. Min \$2650. Immed. 80208213**

**Security** 766

**Cleaners** 769

**EXCELLENT SECURITY #31-05 INT'L PLAZA**  
**9129 2955 6323 9335**  
**LAKE SIDE GARDEN**  
**10 AM - 10 PM**  
**SO \$2700**

**\$1740 - \$2300 @ Pioneer, Woodlands, Jurong East, Yio Chu Kang, Potong Pasir. Call 96533707**

**Night - SSO Pandan Loop Factory**

**\$1000-\$2600 PART TIME/ Full Time Cleaners / Supervisor at Punggol area. Pls Call : 9019 9755 / 8032 4020**

**\* Aircon Environment**  
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**\* Weekly Advance**  
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**\* Salary up to \$2600**

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**\* 5 days, \$1750**

**General Cleaner @ Seletar Aerospace/Loyang**

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**\* 5.5 days**

**Salary up to \$2100**

# life MEET THE MUPPETS MASTER



A Muppet version (far right) of puppeteer Jim Henson (right) at Jim Henson's Creature Shop in New York City's borough of Queens. The workshop still cranks out characters of felt and feathers more than three decades after his death.



The new Disney+ documentary Jim Henson Idea Man conjures the life and mind of the visionary who created the Muppets and changed not only an art form, but also the parameters of storytelling.

Directed by Ron Howard (above) and made with the participation of Henson's children and long-time collaborators such as Frank Oz - who played Bert to Henson's Ernie, and Miss Piggy to Henson's Kermit the Frog - it is a comprehensive portrait of a cultural giant who never lost his sense of play.

"We learnt so much wandering around here," Howard said on a visit to Jim Henson's Creature Shop. "It has definitely influenced the style of the movie, seeing the colours, the mechanics and the detail of all of it."

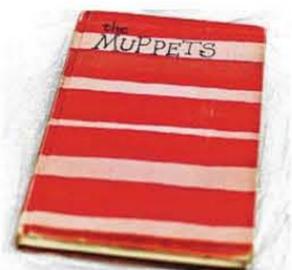
There was an emotional component, too. Walking in is "instant nostalgia", Howard added. "You just get a lift, you know, just looking around the place."

Henson, who died in 1990, had no childhood experience with puppets. He started working with them as a teenager in the 1950s for a job at a TV station.

He made the first version of Kermit out of his mother's old coat and a ping-pong ball cut in half for eyes.

With Jane Nebel, his college classmate and later his wife, he also made puppets for commercials, honing a screen-friendly style and a sly, satirical wit.

In 1958, he visited Europe and encountered sophisticated forms of puppetry. He realised that "this is something I'm good at - where I can actually make a difference", said Ms Karen Falk, the Jim Henson Company's archivist. **TEXT AND PHOTOS: NYTIMES**



As Henson's company grew, he minted his leadership style. Oz said: "He never criticised, ever. He never told us what to do. He was the boss, but he was the boss as a brother, almost."

Henson started a journal (above) in 1965 and filled in details retroactively, "like he was downloading his brain", said Ms Falk.

The multicoloured entry for 1979, when The Muppet Movie was released, begins: "A very major big year."

Henson's philosophy - treat people the way you would like to be treated; stay in the moment; recognise the joy - pervaded his work and inspired countless others, including Howard, who met him only briefly.

At the same time, "a kind of creative recklessness or courage or thick skin - all of it - was required for somebody to be as prolific as Jim", Howard said. "He followed a horizon line, which was, 'I want to have a creative life.'"

Oz said: "He would do very little small talk. He wouldn't talk about politics. He had his own very strong feelings about spiritual life and religion. He never gossiped. He would care about how we were and our families were, but that's the extent of it. The rest of it was, 'Hey, I got this good idea. You want to hear it?'"



Henson's last Kermit, from the 1980s.



Muppet eyes (left) in a storage container and puppet-making material (right) at Jim Henson's Creature Shop.



(Right) Henson (bottom left) and his collaborator Oz (bottom right) are depicted in stained glass beneath their alter egos Ernie (top left) and Bert (top right) at Jim Henson's Creature Shop.

Sesame Street, which started in New York in 1969, recruited Henson. In 1976, his more adult-oriented Muppet Show began in London. His characters occupied the imaginations of millions around the world. He travelled to perform and develop new projects, experimenting relentlessly.

His partnership with Oz drove characters and comedy. "I was more moody," Oz said - a good fit for Bert. Henson was the goofy Ernie.

Henson had large hands, which allowed him to be extra expressive,



especially with Kermit, who clearly reflected Henson's personality, Howard said.

Design sketches (right) made in 1969 of the Muppet characters Bert and Ernie.

Zaniness reigned at Henson's workshop.

"You could walk in almost any time and find weird things going on," said Ms Bonnie Erickson, a Muppet designer who oversaw the space.

Ping-pong balls bouncing on toothpicks, blown by hair dryers; pet mice running across the studio through interconnected slinkys - it all helped them discover "the



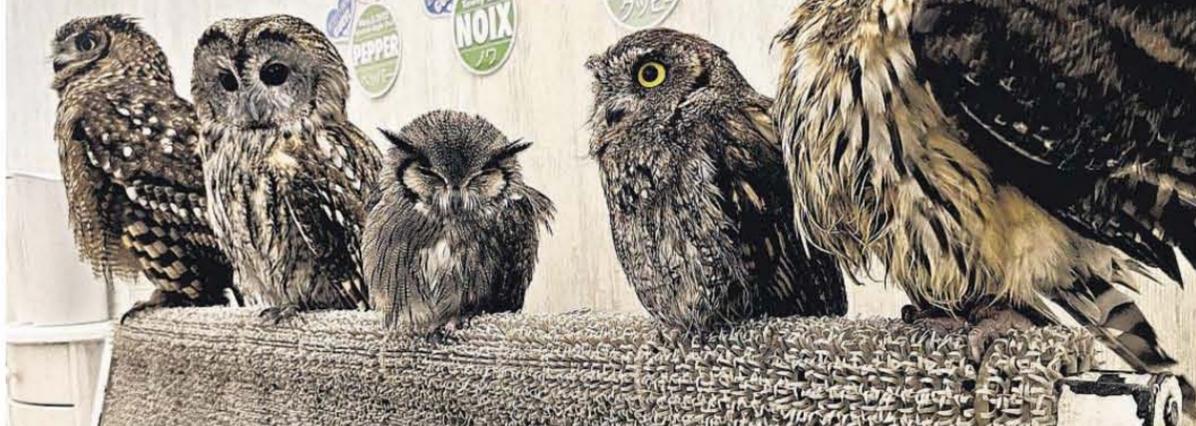
movements of the puppets", she said. Ending a sketch was no problem: "You either blew it up, ate it or threw in a penguin, as we used to say."

• Jim Henson Idea Man is streaming on Disney+.

## In Life tomorrow

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