

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

RM500m set aside for flood repairs, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday announced an allocation of RM500 million to repair public infrastructure damage caused by floods.

Anwar said he had instructed federal and state departments to conduct damage assessments and carry out repairs immediately.

"This includes schools, clinics, basic facilities and roads. I have approved RM500 million for this." He said this when tabling the Supply (Budget) Bill 2026 for its second reading at the Dewan Negara.

The Supply Bill was passed at the Dewan Rakyat after being tabled by him on Oct 10.

Anwar, who is finance minister, said the National Disaster Man-

agement Agency (Nadma) had coordinated with local authorities and state governments in dealing with the disaster.

"About 150 flood relief centres accommodated more than 12,000 people."

The flood situation up to 8am yesterday showed a decrease in the number of evacuees in seven states: Selangor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Perak, Kedah, Pahang and Perlis.

Earlier, he said the government had allocated RM470 billion through the 2026 Budget with a focus on driving economic growth, strengthening governance and ensuring that aid reached the people directly.

He said Sabah and Sarawak continued to be given priority for development through the imple-



The National Disaster Management Agency coordinated with local authorities and state governments in dealing with the floods. AFP PIC

mentation of water projects, dilapidated schools, the Sabah Pan-Borneo Highway project and digital facilities under the Madani Undersea Cable project.

In terms of security and disaster preparedness, Nadma received RM460 million, while RM2.2 billion was allocated to implement 43 flood-mitigation projects nationwide.

Anwar said the Education Ministry received the largest allocation of RM66.2 billion, followed

by the Health Ministry at RM46.5 billion, including the permanent appointment of 4,500 contract doctors next year.

The budget is the fourth budget under the Madani Government and the first to be implemented within the framework of the 13th Malaysia Plan. **Bernama**

Page 1 pic: Volunteers helping clean the homes of flood-affected residents in Kampung Jimah Lama, Port Dickson, recently.

HIV: When understanding fails to translate to action

By KOUSALYA SEELAM
kousalya.seelam@sinardaily.my

Experts warn behavioural risks and low prevention knowledge among 20-39 age group drive alarming 9.4:1 male infection ratio

MALAYSIA is witnessing a worrying rise in HIV infections among young adults despite unprecedented access to information, with experts warning dating apps, stigma and silent transmission are fueling the country's new wave of cases.

Malaysia's 2024 HIV & AIDS report recorded 3,185 new infections primarily through sexual transmission, with the fastest growth seen in adults aged 20-39.

This upward trend is consistent with national surveillance over recent years. New HIV cases rose from 2,760 in 2022 to 3,220 in 2023, while the estimated number of people living with HIV increased from 81,942 to 85,283 during the same period.

Gender trends revealed the most striking shift, where the epidemic remained overwhelmingly male, with the male-to-female ratio growing from 7.5:1 in 2022 to 8.8:1 in 2023 and in 2024 9.4:1.

Rising infections among men particularly those in higher-risk sexual networks aligned with projections that men who have sex with men (MSM) will become the primary population driving new infections by 2030.

Public health experts say this trend reflects a widening and dangerous gap between HIV awareness and real-world behaviour.

Former Health Ministry Disease Control Director and Harm Reduction Action Network president, Dr Anita Suleiman said the rise in HIV cases among men in higher-risk sexual

networks was expected, noting MSM has grown significantly.

"In 2018, we estimated about 220,000 MSM in the country and the actual number is likely higher today," she said, adding that risks remain high because about one-third of MSM living with HIV remain undiagnosed or untreated and inconsistent use of condoms or pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) continues to drive transmission.

Dr Anita also warned the recent raids on men-only saunas and spas may worsen the situation by fuelling stigma and pushing communities further underground.

Beyond enforcement issues, Dr Anita said dating apps have quietly reshaped how young people form sexual relationships, making it easier to meet partners and increasing the likelihood of more frequent and riskier encounters.

Without regular testing, honest safety discussions or consistent protection, it elevated the chances of HIV and sexual diseases transmission, she said, emphasising that the apps themselves were not the problem but the behaviours they enable.

Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) Executive Director, Jasmin Jalli echoed similar concerns, noting that dating apps and social media increased the speed, anonymity and opportunities for casual or multiple partners - a known HIV risk factor.

"Technology can be used for harm or for

good, which is why MAC is intensifying our digital outreach, offering discretion, anonymity and round-the-clock access," he said.

He pointed to MAC's ProtectNow digital outreach and TestNow online HIV testing service as examples of how digital platforms can reach people who have never visited clinics or drop-in centres.

Commenting on whether Malaysians still lack awareness of HIV risks, the experts stressed that the issue goes beyond "not knowing" and instead driven by misinformation, silence and false confidence.

Dr Anita said particularly troubling data from a 2023 survey saw only 11 per cent of Malaysians aged 15 to 34 had adequate HIV prevention knowledge, highlighting the urgent need for targeted education.

Jasmin noted that while awareness campaigns have reached wider audiences, real understanding remains uneven, with many still viewing HIV as an "other people" problem - a false sense of security, especially for the young.

He said emotional and social pressures often override what young people already know, creating a gap between awareness and actual behaviour.

The experts said HIV routine screenings for sexually active individuals must be normalised, as common as regular health check-ups, while also strengthening comprehensive, non-judgemental sex education delivered jointly by schools, parents and religious leaders.

Overview of the HIV & AIDS Epidemic in Malaysia

3,185	New HIV infections in 2024
138,220	Total reported HIV cases (1986-2024)
871	HIV/AIDS-related deaths in 2024
63,979	Total HIV/AIDS-related deaths (1986-2024)

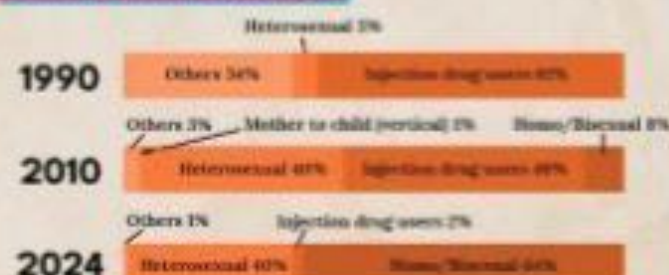
53,996	Total people living with HIV (1986-2024)
9.4	HIV notification rate in 2024 (per 100,000 people)
307	New HIV infections in women & girls in 2024
11,276	Total reported HIV in women & girls (1986-2024)

9	New HIV infections in children (<13 years old) in 2024
1,245	Total reported HIV in children (<13 years old) (1986-2024)
69,194	Total reported HIV in people who inject drugs (1986-2024)
57,447	Total reported cases of sexually transmitted HIV (1986-2024)

New HIV cases



Changes in HIV landscape



'Condom shame' still a major barrier to HIV prevention, say experts

Despite decades of awareness campaigns, many still avoid condoms due to cultural discomfort, moral judgment and misinformation



JASMIN JALLIL



DR ANITA SULEIMAN

SHAH ALAM - Misconceptions, embarrassment and persistent social stigma continue to keep Malaysians from using condoms consistently, fueling preventable sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and contributing to new HIV cases, experts warn.

Despite decades of awareness campaigns, many still avoid condoms due to cultural discomfort, moral judgment and misinformation.

Harm Reduction Action Network (HIRANO) founder and president, Dr Anita Suleiman said social attitudes and false beliefs remain major barriers.

"Myths play a big role. Some think condoms reduce pleasure, others feel embarrassed to buy them or believe they're only for 'certain types of people'. These ideas are harmful," she said.

She also pointed to the rise of recreational drugs being used during sex, mostly among younger adults and certain communities. The behaviour, she said, lowered inhibitions and led to unprotected sex.

Dr Anita stressed that condoms remained "one of the simplest and most effective tools" for protection, but only if people felt empowered to use them.

While widely available, she said many Malaysians still use them incorrectly.

"Mistakes are common such as wrong size, late use, expired condoms or failure to check for damage. These errors lead to breakage or

slippage. Better education would significantly reduce these risks," she said.

Meanwhile, Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) executive director, Jasmin Jallil said embarrassment was only part of the issue as misconceptions about trust and responsibility in relationships often played a bigger role.

"Many people tell themselves they trust their partner, so they don't need a condom. But trust does not protect you from HIV or STIs," he said, adding that stereotypes continued to mislead people into thinking condoms were only necessary for certain groups.

"The idea that condoms are only for sex workers or certain communities is still very common. This stereotype is harmful because it gives people a false sense of immunity," he said.

Jasmin also highlighted incorrect condom use as a neglected factor in infections.

"People put it on late, use oil-based lubricants that weaken latex or don't check for small tears. We cannot assume condom availability equals condom literacy," he said.

He also noted that young Malaysians and those in conservative communities still struggle to access condoms without judgment.

"For many youths, the issue isn't the price. It's the look they think they'll get from the cashier. That hesitation may feel small, but its consequences can last a lifetime," he said, adding that MAC continues to improve discreet and affordable access across the country.

Condom Check: Mistakes Many People Still Make

- Putting it on too late
- Using oil-based products that can damage the condom
- Not checking for damage or tears
- Using the wrong size
- Using an expired condom

HIV prevention a collective responsibility - Jakim

SHAH ALAM - The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) has expressed concern over rising HIV infections, particularly among men who have sex with men, saying HIV prevention must be treated as a collective responsibility involving health, education, social wellbeing and community support.

In line with national policy, Jakim said it remains committed to value-based education and efforts to raise awareness about unsafe sexual behaviour.

"Our focus is on strengthening Islamic understanding that emphasises protecting personal dignity and preventing harm."

On the recent gay parade, Jakim said it respects the jurisdiction of enforcement authorities but stressed the need for balance.

"Enforcement should not create fear that discourages individuals from seeking testing or treatment," it said, adding that a prudent and empathetic approach can help reduce stigma and allow at-risk groups to access support safely.

Jakim also noted that stigma surrounding condoms and HIV prevention continues to undermine public health efforts, especially within Muslim communities where "condom shame" remains common.

This stigma stems from cultural and religious sensitivities, with condoms often associated with premarital sex rather than their intended role in preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

PrEP is not a 'licence to abandon condoms' - experts caution amid surge in use

SHAH ALAM - Addressing public concerns that pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) may lead to riskier behaviour, Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) executive director, Jasmin Jallil stressed that it is not a licence to abandon condoms or engage in unsafe sex.

"PrEP is one layer of protection. It does not replace condoms and it does not protect against any sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy. From a cultural and Islamic perspective, PrEP is a medical intervention intended to protect life, not encourage risky behaviour," he told Sinar Daily.

This caution comes as new Health Ministry figures reveal a significant surge in uptake, with over 9,000 Malaysians now using the HIV prevention medication, a growth credited to the coordinated national strategy.

Jasmin said the expansion was intentional and reflects a clear national commitment to reducing new HIV infections.

PrEP, he said, was now available at a growing number of go-

vernment clinics under the Differentiated HIV Services for Key Populations model, which relies on community engagement to bring PrEP directly to people who need it.

"This model ensures that anyone at risk can be linked to PrEP quickly. It's a system built on trust, support and continuity of care," he added.

However, Harm Reduction Action Network founder, Dr Anita Suleiman highlighted that despite its usage in high urban centres, Malaysia has yet reached the coverage levels needed to substantially reduce HIV transmission nationwide.

"Usage is increasing especially in urban areas as more clinics now offer PrEP but affordability remains an issue."

"Government clinics subsidise it but capacity is still limited. Private-sector prices can be too high for students and low-income groups. Making PrEP cheaper and easier to access at scale would protect more people," she said.

Lebih 65 peratus kes kanser libat golongan ini di Malaysia lewat dikesan

Oleh MOHD IZZATUL IZUAN TAHIR

KUALA SELANGOR - Kanser pangkal rahim dan payudara terus menjadi 'pembunuh senyap' wanita apabila kebanyakan pesakit hanya dikesan pada peringkat lewat, menyebabkan rawatan lebih sukar dan peluang pemulihan semakin tipis.

Pengarah Urusan Kumpulan World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur, Datuk Seri Dr Irmohizam Ibrahim berkata, situasi itu amat membimbangkan kerana kedua-dua penyakit berkenaan sebenarnya mampu dicegah atau dirawat dengan lebih berkesan jika dikesan awal.

"Kesihatan bukan sekadar angka di atas kertas, tetapi menjadi nadi kebahagiaan rumah tangga, kekuatan ekonomi keluarga dan asas kestabilan masyarakat.

"Jika wanita sihat, keluarga kita kukuh dan masa depan anak-anak lebih terjamin," katanya ketika ditemui selepas Program Women's Voices, Women's Choices: Cervical and Breast Cancer Awareness di Kampung Api-Api di sini pada Isnin.

Irmohizam memberitahu, masih ramai wanita teragak-agak untuk menjalani

Wanita terus jadi mangsa 'pembunuh senyap'



Irmohizam (duduk depan tiga dari kanan) dan Dr Magendra (duduk depan dua dari kiri) bersama peserta dan kakitangan Hospital Metro sempena Program Women's Voices, Women's Choices: Cervical and Breast Cancer Awareness di Kampung Api-Api.

saringan kanser disebabkan kurang maklumat, rasa malu, kekangan masa atau kepercayaan bahawa tanpa sejarah keluarga, mereka tidak berisiko.

Beliau turut merujuk laporan Malaysia National Cancer Registry (MNCR) 2017 hingga 2021 yang menunjukkan 65.1 peratus kes kanser di negara ini dikesan pada peringkat lewat, selain peningkatan 15,200 kes baharu dicatatkan pada 2022, menjadikan kanser penyebab kematian

ketiga tertinggi di negara ini.

"Bagi wanita, kanser payudara kekal sebagai yang paling lazim iaitu 38.9 peratus daripada keseluruhan kes kanser wanita.

"Lebih membimbangkan, sekitar 50.5 peratus dikesan hanya pada tahap tiga dan empat," jelasnya.

Irmohizam menjelaskan, walaupun insiden kanser pangkal rahim menunjukkan penurunan kepada 6.0 bagi setiap 100,000 wanita, namun penyakit itu masih wujud

dan ramai hanya dikesan apabila sudah berada pada tahap lanjut.

Mengulas cabaran lain, beliau berkata, gaya hidup moden, tekanan hidup dan peningkatan penyakit tidak berjangkit turut menyebabkan wanita sering menyetepikan kesihatan sendiri demi keluarga.

Sementara itu, Pakar Sakit Puan Hospital Wanita Metro, Dr Magendra Ramalingam berkata, program berkenaan bukan sekadar taklimat kesihatan semata-mata, sebaliknya permulaan gerakan kesedaran membawa mesej jelas mengenai pemeriksaan awal mampu menyelamatkan nyawa.

"Kita tekankan kepentingan ujian pap smear, ujian HPV, pemeriksaan payudara dan pemeriksaan klinikal berkala.

"Program ini bukan sahaja untuk mendidik, tetapi memberi inspirasi kepada individu dan keluarga untuk memberi keutamaan kepada kesihatan, terutamanya dengan saringan pap smear pada harga RM50 sahaja," tambahnya.

Ubat bersih, selamat dan patuh syariah

ANTARA kejayaan terbesar Pharmaniaga yang membanggakan setakat ini adalah menjadi peneraju industri farmaseutikal halal negara.

"Kami telah berjaya menghasilkan sebanyak 151 produk ubat generik halal yang mendapat pensijilan Halal Malaysia dan kini dibekalkan secara meluas terutamanya kepada hospital kerajaan."

"Ini memberi keyakinan bahawa ubat-ubatan yang digunakan oleh pesakit adalah bersih, selamat dan mematuhi syariah."

"Kami juga telah melangkah ke hadapan dengan usaha mendapatkan pensijilan halal untuk insulin dan vaksin yang akan kami keluaran melalui kerjasama strategik dengan rakan teknologi antarabangsa," katanya.

Walaupun bidang ini diakui mencabar dan memerlukan kajian lebih mendalam untuk mendapatkan pensijilan halal bagi produk insulin dan vaksin, namun ia penting kerana terdapat permintaan yang tinggi di kalangan umat Islam di seluruh dunia.

"Pharmaniaga telah memubuhkan Jawatankuasa Halal Dalaman (JHDC), melaksanakan Halal Risk Management Plan, audit halal dalaman serta melatih kakitang halal yang kompeten selaras dengan kandungan Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (MPPHM 2020), Sistem Pengiraan Halal Malaysia (MHMS 2020), dan MS 2424:2019 Halal Pharmaceutical - General Requirements."

"Semua ini bagi memastikan bahawa sistem jaminan halal kami bukan sahaja mematuhi syarat minimum malah menjadi model rujukan untuk industri farmaseutikal halal di peringkat Malaysia dan global," katanya.

Menurut Zukifli, farmaseutikal halal bukan sekadar bebas daripada bahan terlarang seperti derivatif daripada bahan yang tidak halal, tetapi ia juga merangkumi aspek kebersihan, keselamatan, keberkesanan serta integriti rantai bekalan ubat.



Rangkaian 14 gudang dan pusat apilot Pharmaniaga menjamin kelancaran bekalan ubat dan peralatan pembuatan ke lebih 2,000 fasiliti kesihatan kerajaan di seluruh negara.

"Setiap bahan mentah yang digunakan mestilah disahkan halal, proses pengilangan wajib dikawal melalui titik kawalan halal dan kebolehtahanan produk dijalankan bagi memastikan produk tersebut memenuhi keperluan halal."

"Dengan itu, pengguna dalam kalangan umat Islam terutamanya boleh menggunakan ubat tanpa sebarang keraguan dan sagi syariah mahupun keselamatan keutuhan," katanya.

Pencapaian luar biasa

Dalam pada itu, syarikat dengan lebih 2,000 pekerja seluruh negara itu juga merupakan penerima Global Halal Excellence Award (GHEA) 2020 Excellence in Pharmaceutical yang mengiktiraf organisasi dengan prestasi cemerlang serta menyumbang kepada pertumbuhan Ekonomi Halal Dunia.

Ia turut menerima Halal Pharmaceutical Excellence Award dari Halal Development Corporation (HDC) bagi sumbangan serta pencapaian luar biasa dalam pembangunan industri halal selain menjadi contoh teladan yang boleh memberi inspirasi.

Menyentuh tentang jajak bisnes, Pharmaniaga yang



Pharmaniaga berada pada kedudukan unik untuk pembangunan hab farmaseutikal halal serantau."

- Zukifli

memegang komisi logistik dan pengedaran ubat-ubatan bagi KKM, turut mempunyai kehadiran kukuh di negara jiran, Indonesia.

Pharmaniaga melalui anak-anak syarikatnya PT Millenium Pharmacon International Tbk (PT MPI) menguruskan logistik dan pengedaran ubat-ubatan sementara PT Erita Pharma terlibat dalam pembuatan ubat.

Zukifli berkata, PT MPI yang terasari di Bursa Indonesia mempunyai kira-kira 1,200 kakitangan dan 36 cawangan di seluruh Indonesia, manakala PT Erita Pharma dengan hampir 300 tenaga kerja beroperasi di Bandung.

"Operasi kedua-dua syarikat ini bukan sahaja mengukuhkan kedudukan kami di pasaran Indonesia yang besar tetapi juga membuka peluang lebih luas di ASEAN," katanya.

Selain Indonesia, produk Pharmaniaga turut dieksport ke beberapa negara ASEAN dan Timur Tengah khususnya dalam kategori ubat generik.

"Dengan status sebagai antara syarikat yang telah menerima pensijilan halal bagi produk farmaseutikal Pharmaniaga berada pada kedudukan unik untuk pembangunan hab farmaseutikal halal serantau."

"Tabung kejayaan logistik, pembuatan dan inovasi halal inilah yang meletakkan Pharmaniaga di landasan kukuh untuk menjadi pemain utama dalam industri farmaseutikal serantau dan antarabangsa," ujarnya.

Dalam pada itu, sebagai satu-satunya syarikat dengan kepakaran logistik dan pembuatan, Pharmaniaga tidak melupakan aspek keselamatan sekiranya melihat ia sebagai pemacu nilai perniagaan.

Fokus syarikat adalah insentif yang mengurangkan jajak dan risiko, memperkukuh kesegharian komuniti dan meningkatkan taraf sosel sambil menjaga kecekapan kos, mengurangkan risiko dan membina kepercayaan jangka panjang.

"Antara lain, Pharmaniaga sedang melaksanakan projek teraga selar di enam fasiliti utama, termasuk kilang dan gudang, yang dijangka menyumbang kepada pengurangan emisi karbon secara ketara."

"Di samping itu, kilang pembuatan di Bangi, Puchong, Sungai Petani dan Seri Iskandar, telah menjalani retrofit sistem HVAC, chiller dan pencahayaan LED untuk meningkatkan kecekapan tenaga," katanya.



Pasut pengaliran vaksin dan insulin tempatan Pharmaniaga yang dibekalkan tahun lalu kini berada dalam fasa pemindahan teknologi dan proses pengeluaran pihak berkuasa.

More flu cases, but it's not bird flu

Ministry confirms no cases of H5N5 avian influenza in Malaysia

By ZAKIAH KOYA
zakiah@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Hospitals in the country have seen a noticeable rise in patients seeking treatment for bird flu-like symptoms over October and November, say medical practitioners.

However, there have been no cases of H5N5 avian influenza in Malaysia, a Health Ministry official has confirmed.

Influenza A, which is a form of bird flu, and Influenza B, which afflicts only humans, are both common in Malaysia.

Public health medicine specialist Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the threat of H5N5 avian flu, caused by a strain of Influenza A, was always present in this region.

"There is always an increase in

flu cases in November and December," he added.

Dr Zainal Ariffin said simple prevention measures should always be practised.

"Wear a mask if you are in a crowded place or feel unwell. Wash your hands regularly. Stay home if you have flu symptoms.

"In Malaysia, flu is often seen as a normal part of life. But when cases spike in schools, it needs to be taken seriously," he said.

General practitioner and clinic owner Dr Zafrina Burukan said, in October, many patients were arriving with fever, flu-like symptoms and body aches, prompting doctors to perform swab tests after discussing recent travel history and other risk factors.

Patients tended to come in with temperatures as high as 39°C.

Many were first seen in other clinics and were started on antibiotics, but their symptoms did not improve, she said, pointing to the incubation period of viral infections.

Dr Zafrina emphasised the importance of correct treatment as bacterial infections typically respond within three days, whereas viral infections – such as influenza – do not improve with antibiotics.

According to her, not all patients opt for swab tests, yet a common trend has emerged: many test positive for Influenza A, while there have been fewer cases of Influenza B.

She also said some over-the-counter test kits may be unreliable due to improper use, stressing that medical-grade nasal swabs

for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and other microbes remain the standard.

Preventive measures, she said, remain crucial.

"In malls and other public places, basic hand hygiene helps break the cycle of transmission. Also, wear masks in public places," said Dr Zafrina.

Government health clinics too have reported an increase in patients with fever, cough and flu-like symptoms over the past two months, raising concerns about a possible spike in influenza or bird flu-like infections.

According to one government doctor in Kuala Lumpur, the number of patients with such symptoms has risen noticeably, although not all are tested.

"We don't swab everyone

because test kits are expensive and supplies are limited," he said.

He confirmed that government clinics experienced a significant rise in cases in October.

"It was at least double the usual number. In my clinic, that means about 80 patients a day," he said.

The numbers appeared to have decreased in November.

He also confirmed that government health clinics (Klinik Kesihatan) in Selangor do not carry influenza swab kits.

In early November, a man in Washington state was confirmed to be infected with the H5N5 avian influenza virus.

The patient, an older adult with underlying conditions, died on Nov 21. It was the first reported human infection with an H5N5 influenza virus.



YOUR OPINION

When climate advocacy ignores scientific solutions

COP30 has now concluded without a clear or unified outcome. The negotiations were deeply divisive, but they still amplified calls for stronger climate ambition, greater efforts to halt deforestation and urgent action to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Climate activists played a central role, championing climate science and urging governments to act with urgency. Yet, many of the same organisations that defended climate science so passionately continued to deny biotechnology at the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (COP-MOP) to the Protocol under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

At COP-MOP, these groups refused to acknowledge the scientific evidence that agricultural biotechnology, particularly genetic modification and gene editing, delivers real environmental gains. This refusal stood in sharp contrast to the climate narrative at COP30, where science was celebrated and evidence was non-negotiable.

The benefits of agricultural biotechnology are not speculative. They are measurable, peer reviewed and grounded in decades of global data. Studies by agricultural economists Graham Brookes and Peter Barfoot show that pesticide use has fallen by 172 million kilograms due to GM crops. The environmental impact linked to pesticide applications has dropped by 14%.

A 2022 report by International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications (ISAAA) shows GM crops are a land-saving technology. Higher yields have spared 183 million hectares from agricultural expansion, preventing deforestation and protecting biodiversity.

Biotechnology has also contributed to meaningful reductions in carbon emissions. Herbicide-tolerant crops have enabled conservation tillage and no-till systems that reduce fuel consumption and keep more carbon stored in soil. This shift has avoided 39 billion kilograms of carbon emissions, the same as removing nearly 26 million cars

from the road for one year.

Industrial biotechnology further expands this impact. GM and gene edited microbes can produce biofuels, biodegradable plastics and bio-based chemicals that reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

These technologies are central to the circular bioeconomy that COP30 leaders highlighted as essential for achieving climate goals. Yet, at COP-MOP, many activists opposed the very tools that could deliver the fossil-free future they champion.

This inconsistency weakens both climate and biodiversity outcomes. These two agendas are not competing; they are interdependent. Climate change accelerates biodiversity loss and degraded ecosystems worsen climate risks. Solutions must therefore be aligned.

The food security dimension adds further urgency. Climate change is already reducing yields across many regions. Gene editing offers a precise and affordable way to develop crops that tolerate drought, heat and salinity.

These innovations help farmers maintain productivity with fewer inputs, protect vulnerable communities and reduce environmental pressure.

Blocking such tools harms the very people climate justice claims to protect. For the Global South, this contradiction has real consequences. Overly restrictive biotechnology regulations slow innovation and limit access to tools that support sustainable development. Wealthier nations advance with new technologies while poorer regions are left with ageing and less efficient systems.

It is time activists adopt the same honesty at COP-MOP as they do at COP. If we are serious about planetary health, then both COP and COP-MOP must champion science with the same integrity.

**TS. DR MAHALETCUMY
ARUJANAN**
Executive director
Malaysian Biotechnology
Information Centre
Petaling Jaya

Matrix Concepts to build nursing care facility

By **SARBAN SINGH**

sarbans@thestar.com.my

SEREMBAN: Matrix Concepts Holdings Bhd will build a 130-bed integrated skilled nursing care facility at Suria Heights in Bandar Sri Sendayan near here with construction expected to start by the middle of next year.

Located next to the 150-bed private hospital it also plans to build, the property developer will jointly operate the nursing care facility with Alpro Group and Mercy Senior Care Centre Sdn Bhd.

The facility, expected to cost some RM5mil, will provide specialised nursing care to individuals requiring post-surgery rehabilitation and clinical support, long-term care for bedridden patients, accident recovery and for those seeking continuous medical supervision.

Matrix Concepts' group executive director Kelvin Lee said the initiative reflected its aspiration to build places where families can thrive and seniors can age gracefully with access to professional care and a nurturing environment.

"Through this collaboration, we bring together the expertise of Alpro Group, a trusted name in integrated healthcare services in Malaysia, and Mercy Senior Care Centre, a company with nearly three decades of experience operating nursing facilities and licensed care centres for seniors and clinical patients.

"This partnership is to further provide additional essential amenities in Bandar Sri Sendayan which currently has a population of 120,000, as we remain committed to shaping townships that uplift every stage of life," he said at the signing ceremony witnessed by state women, family and community wellbeing committee chairman Datuk Noorzunita Begum Mohd Ibrahim.

Lee said the construction of the facility would be completed within 18 months and it would commence operations once it receives the approval from the Health Ministry.



Healthcare uplift: Lee (seated middle) with Ng (left) and Low after the signing ceremony. The event was witnessed by Noorzunita (standing second from right). Also present were (from left) Alpro Group chief executive officer Ph Low Swee Siong, Matrix Concepts group executive deputy chairman Datuk Seri Lee Tian Hock and Mercy Senior Care Centre director Francis Tan.

"The facility will complement the new private hospital which we hope to start building in June and expect to complete in three years.

"Patients already seeking treatment at the nursing centre will be able to go to the hospital for any urgent treatment while those already on the road to recovery for example, can then move to the facility," he said.

Alpro Clinic medical director Dr Ng Ming Lee said the centre was not just another nursing or old folks home but one that would provide post-discharge care, rehabilitation and recovery for both short and long term stay patients.

"We are building a Health Ministry-certified nursing care centre where through our multidisciplinary healthcare network of doctors, pharmacists, physiotherapists, dietitians, nutritionists, and allied health specialists, patients will receive comprehensive and continuous care.

"It is unlike the traditional or conventional old folks home where people just stay in to live their last mile of life," he said.

Ng said Alpro was fortunate to have joined forces with two highly respected strategic partners in Matrix Concepts and Mercy Senior Care Centre.

"This collaboration proves that when expertise is combined with a shared vision and mission, we can build something that truly impacts society," he said.

Mercy Senior Care Centre managing director Low Chee Moi said through the collaboration, the partners are enhancing the future of senior care and medically complex patients by combining clinical expertise, operational excellence and a shared commitment to compassionate service.

"This collaboration marks an important step forward in expanding accessible, high-quality care for our community's ageing population, what more with more people seeking high standards of medical care.

"At the facility, patients will be able to undergo treatment in a modern and conducive environment under the care of experienced healthcare service providers," she added.

By Dr THERESA T. NGUYEN

MOST young people who experience suicidal thoughts keep those thoughts to themselves. They might not bring it up on their own unless they are asked directly.

Any time your adolescent visits their paediatrician, for any reason, they may be asked a simple question "Have you been having thoughts of killing yourself or ending your life?"

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that paediatricians ask these questions for children and teens age 12 years and older.

It's because paediatricians know that young people may have mental health concerns that they are not sharing with others. If your child shares that they are having suicidal thoughts, their paediatrician will ask more questions to help decide what to do next.

One strategy that your child's paediatrician may recommend is to create a safety plan.

A suicide prevention safety plan is a written, personalised guide that your adolescent can use when they have thoughts of suicide.

A well-thought-out safety plan includes detailed descriptions of coping techniques to use during crisis moments. It also affirms your family's commitment to making your living environment as safe as possible. Creating a safety plan in advance can help young people prepare to get through intense suicidal feelings.

There are different versions of safety plans. All plans share the same goal of keeping a person safe when they experience suicidal thoughts.

Your paediatrician or mental health professional can provide a template for a plan and work with you and your child to fill it out.

Plans come in printed and digital or app formats. Choose the one that works best for your adolescent. (The AAP does not recommend one plan over another.) If the safety plan is in a printed format, save a copy of it on your mobile phones. If you use a mobile app on your phone, be sure to keep printed copies so your adolescent can access it when they need it. A few examples include the Stanley Brown Safety Plan, My Safety Plan from the Child Mind Institute and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Safety Plan.

Share a copy with trusted adults who are listed in your child's plan and on their school health team so they can support your child.

Talk with your child about their safety plan. Remind them that it is a personal tool that they can turn to whenever they feel overwhelmed, hopeless or desperate.

Ask them to describe when they would use it. Check in regularly to see if the safety plan needs to be updated.

Begin with listening

Creating a written safety plan begins with listening and learning. For many young people, suicidal thoughts do not happen "out of the blue." There are usually signs or triggers. Coping with these triggers becomes easier if you see these

signs early and act. Your child will work with their paediatrician to personalise the safety plan to fit their needs.

Their safety plan will include the following information:

> **Inner signals that let your child know it's time to follow the plan.** These could include feelings of overwhelming sadness (despondence), a sense that life will never get better (hopelessness) or actual thoughts of killing themselves.

> **Outer signals that parents and others might notice.** For example, you might observe that your child is always irritable. This may include intense reactions that do not match the situation, or the need to be very careful not to upset or offend them. Or, they might withdraw, pulling away from friends and family. When you see these signs, it's time for

your child to use the tools in their plan.

> **Coping strategies your child will use.** Encourage coping strategies such as deep breathing, listening or dancing to music, creating art, guided imagery, going for a walk, or cuddling with a pet. These should be actions that they can use to distract themselves until the distressing thoughts pass.

> **People who offer a healthy distraction and/or help during a crisis.** Sometimes, coping strategies are not enough in the moment. It's important for your child to have people they can reach out to for help. This could be a trusted friend, family member, teacher, coach or counsellor – someone who cares about them and can listen to them offload. In moments of crisis, children (and adults) need to feel seen, heard and understood.

> **Make sure your child has a backup plan, in case their immediate circle of friends or family aren't available.** Adolescents need trusted adults who can help and guide

decision-making during a time of crisis. They can add a few trusted adults to the list, along with their contact information.

Keep home safe

The steps above focus on ways to protect your adolescent during a mental health crisis. You can also take precautions to help ensure their home environment is safe.

This is important, since most people who try to injure themselves do so impulsively. Remove items that could be used for self-harm in the moment.

Mental health providers and paediatricians may ask your child about their safety plan at each appointment. The goal is to make sure that the plan still fits their needs and will keep them safe.

If adjustments are needed, they can be worked out in partnership with your child's paediatrician or mental health provider with your input.

You can have routine conversations about mental health. Just like you talk about physical fitness, you can talk about mental fitness with your child.

These regular check-ins throughout their childhood, adolescence and into adulthood help show that it's normal and healthy to talk about feelings. They also give you a chance to notice if something seems off.

You can't fix everything for your child, but you can be there for them. Just listening without judgement, offering a reassuring hug or sitting quietly beside them can help them feel seen, heard and understood. – American Academy of Pediatrics/Tribune News Service

Dr Theresa T. Nguyen is the chair of paediatrics at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center and an assistant professor of paediatrics at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. She practices integrative medicine, a whole-person approach to healing, incorporating all aspects of lifestyle (mind-body-spirit, nutrition, sleep) in partnership with her patients and families. She is passionate about integrative physical and mental well-being. She is the Maryland American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Ambassador for Youth Suicide Prevention and Trauma Informed Care and a member of the AAP Section on Integrative Medicine. She has published two TEDx talks, and "Why Young Adults Don't Need Your Advice" was a TEDx Editor's Pick.

For dark,
overwhelming
days

Through
communication
and cooperation,
putting together
a safety plan
can help save
your child's life.

Those suffering from mental health issues or contemplating suicide can reach out to the Mental Health Psychosocial Support Service (03-2935 9935 or 014-322 3392); Talian Kasih (15999 or 019-261 5999 on WhatsApp); Jakim's Family, Social and Community care centre (011-1959 8214 on WhatsApp); and Befrienders Kuala Lumpur (03-7633 0000).

How many steps do you need?

A new research finds that taking 4,000 steps benefits those in the older age group.

By RICK SOBEY

ARE you constantly looking at your watch or phone to check your step count as you strive to hit 10,000 steps a day?

Well, a new Mass General Brigham study shows that only 4,000 steps one or two days a week can lead to health benefits for a senior population.

Older women who took 4,000 steps on just one or two days per week had a 27% lower risk of cardiovascular disease and a 26% lower risk of death compared to those who got less steps, according to the researchers. And with more steps came even greater benefits.

"In countries like the United States, advances in technology have made it such that we don't really move very much, and older individuals are among those least active," said senior author I-Min Lee, an epidemiologist in the Mass General Brigham Department of Medicine and the Division of Preventive Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

"Because of today's low step counts, it's increasingly important to determine the minimum amount of physical activity required to improve health outcomes, so that we can offer realistic and feasible goals for the public," Lee added.

In this federally funded study, Mass General Brigham research-



For seniors, taking 4,000 steps a couple of times a week will reduce mortality and cardiovascular disease risk, according to a new study. — Pexels

ers conducted a prospective cohort study of 13,574 older women – who were about 72 years old on average – without cardiovascular disease or cancer from BWH's Women's Health Study.

The women wore ActiGraph GT3X+ accelerometers to track their steps over seven days between 2011 and 2015. For the

next 10 years, the researchers monitored mortality and cardiovascular disease incidence.

The bigger picture

Participants were sorted by how many days per week they achieved steps of 4,000, 5,000, 6,000, or 7,000.

Those who got 4,000 steps one

or two days per week had 26% lower mortality risk and 27% lower cardiovascular disease risk compared to those who never hit 4,000 on any day.

What's more, reaching 4,000 steps three or more days in a week decreased mortality risk further to 40%.

As for women who reached the higher step thresholds, cardiovas-

cular disease risk leveled out.

The health benefits seem to be associated with the total volume of steps taken, rather than how many days per week a particular threshold was achieved.

This suggests that there isn't a "better" way to get steps – women with similar total volume of steps, either achieved by consistent steps throughout the week or sporadic steps in just a few days, had similar health benefits.

Future research will need to explore whether these effects hold in populations beyond older, American, mostly white women. Also, the researchers want to analyse even lower step count thresholds to determine whether less than 4,000 steps can produce similar health benefits.

"I hope our findings encourage the addition of step count metrics to physical activity guidelines, including the upcoming 2028 US Physical Activity Guidelines," said lead and corresponding author Rikuta Hamaya, of Mass General Brigham's Department of Medicine and the Division of Preventive Medicine at BWH.

"If we can promote taking at least 4,000 steps once per week in older women, we could reduce mortality and cardiovascular disease risk across the country." – Tribune News Service

Govt beefs up safety in schools

Ministry vows zero tolerance on bullying, stresses strict adherence to guidelines

KUALA LUMPUR: The Education Ministry has reiterated its commitment to strengthening school safety measures and will not compromise on any form of bullying.

Deputy Minister Wong Kah Woh said efforts to combat bullying require the cooperation of all parties, as well as full compliance with existing guidelines under the Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas (SPI).

"The ministry will not compromise on any form of bullying in educational institutions. Combating bullying is a long-term effort that requires the commitment of all parties to ensure a safe and conducive school environment," he said during a question-and-answer session at the Dewan Negara yesterday, Bernama reported.

Wong said this in response to a question from Senator Datuk

Salehuddin Saidin on the ministry's measures to enhance school safety and prevent bullying, treating the tragedy involving Zara Qairina Mahathir as a lesson.

He said the SPIs in place include managing bullying, student safety, reporting disciplinary issues and implementing the Safe School Programme, among others.

"This is in line with the ministry's immediate comprehensive action plan, which includes a safety survey of schools conducted by the Special Committee on Educational Institution Safety Reform, established to address safety and well-being issues for everyone at schools," he said.

Wong said safety audits were also conducted nationwide, followed by the installation of closed-circuit television cameras (CCTVs)

and the strengthening of mental health and psychosocial support programmes.

On efforts to strengthen school capacity, he said 10,096 new teachers were deployed in November, including more than 500 counselling teachers.

"The ministry allocated RM3mil for CCTV installation in 200 school hostels, which was completed by Nov 19, 2025," he said.

Wong said the installation of CCTVs would expand to another 333 schools with an additional allocation of RM5mil.

He added that starting in 2026, the ministry would also appoint 600 hostel assistant wardens from MySTEP personnel to strengthen surveillance, particularly at night.

He stressed that reforms to the school security system would con-

tinue to be implemented to ensure more effective and comprehensive bullying prevention.

Meanwhile, the ministry said the co-teaching initiative under the 2027 School Curriculum would not create a divide between urban and rural schools. The programme would be implemented gradually, based on the readiness of each school, said Wong.

He said this approach allowed school principals the flexibility to decide on the best methods for implementation, considering their schools' needs, capacity and challenges.

He was responding to Senator Susan Chernal Anding's question about the readiness of rural and remote schools compared with urban ones.

Wong acknowledged that some

schools face challenges, such as a lack of teachers or facilities.

To address this, the ministry is providing flexibility to ensure the programme is not burdensome or uneven across schools.

Wong also stressed that the co-teaching initiative would not cause performance differences between schools.

Even schools that are still using traditional teaching methods, like a single teacher for new subjects, would not be left behind, he added.

Co-teaching is a pedagogical approach where two teachers work together to plan, implement and assess learning, specifically for new subjects that are transdisciplinary and require hands-on activities and project-based learning.

Natural disasters ignore borders

Strong Malaysian-Thai bilateral action can tackle storms of our time

MALAYSIA'S relations with Thailand are shaped by centuries of diplomacy, trade, security, tourism and cultural exchanges. Historically, the Malaysian-Thai border witnessed frequent conflicts. Centuries of Siamese expansionism into Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu triggered the northern sultanates' resistance to Siamese rule. For centuries, the sultanates were Siam's vassal states, compelled to pay the triennial *bunga mas* (gold flowers) tributes to the Siamese king. The skirmishes ended with treaties and diplomatic agreements, mainly through the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 between the United Kingdom and Siam.

This agreement allowed Britain to take control of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis from Siamese suzerainty, establishing the current boundaries. In return, Thailand claimed sovereignty over Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. However, Pattani has experienced resistance and insurgency against central authority. During World War 2, occupying Japanese forces permitted Thailand to reassert control of the four states, but they were returned to British rule after Japan surrendered in 1945. Then the 1968-1989 communist insurgency compelled Thailand and Malaysia to join forces to neutralise the Communist Party of Malaya, which commandeered the dense border jungles as its base.

Recently, some negative sentiments arose over Malaysia's role as facilitator of the Thai-Cambodian peace talks, with some commentators in Bangkok accusing Malaysia of "interfering". However, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul rebuffed these accusations. Recently, Tropical Storm Senyar barrelled through Malaysia's northern states and Thailand's southern provinces, leaving death and destruction in its wake. Disaster risk expert Dr Khamarrul Azahari Razak has urged the government to strengthen bilateral disaster response mechanisms with Thailand. Rising transboundary climate risks make cross-border communication, data-sharing and coordinated disaster response critical. The logic? What happens in Thailand is relevant to Malaysia and vice-versa, Khamarrul says. No matter what protests flare up, natural disasters are stark reminders that these catastrophes ignore borders. To protect both nations, it is vital that a framework is drawn up for emergency management of storms, landslides, droughts, public-health emergencies and human crises. Such a framework should include early-warning alerts for water release, coordinated evacuation, joint disaster-relief logistics, shared infrastructure resilience assessments and pre-agreed protocols. The Sungai Golok estuary improvement project is a good start at structural cooperation that delivers flood mitigation. Still, broader cross-border emergency-preparedness strategies will improve our ties with our northern neighbour, despite the occasional flare-ups.

What happens in Thailand is relevant to Malaysia and vice-versa ...

KUKU bukan sahaja berfungsi untuk melindungi hujung jari, malah ia juga boleh menjadi petunjuk penting kepada kesihatan tubuh seseorang.

Dalam dunia perubatan, kuku dianggap sebagai petunjuk kesihatan dalaman. Perubahan pada warna, bentuk, dan tekstur kuku kadangkala menunjukkan masalah kesihatan yang serius. Oleh itu, memahami tanda-tanda yang muncul pada kuku amat penting untuk mengenal pasti kemungkinan penyakit sejak awal.

Salah satu tanda yang paling mudah diperhatikan adalah perubahan warna kuku. Kuku yang sihat biasanya berwarna merah jambu pucat dengan sedikit kilauan. Jika kuku mula kelihatan pucat atau putih, ia mungkin menandakan masalah anemia atau kekurangan zat besi. Sebaliknya, kuku yang kelihatan kebiruan atau ungu mungkin menunjukkan masalah peredaran darah atau kekurangan oksigen dalam tubuh, yang berkaitan dengan penyakit paru-paru atau jantung. Warna kekuningan pada kuku juga boleh menjadi tanda jangkitan kulat atau penyakit hati, manakala garis-garis hitam di bawah kuku, jika tidak berkaitan dengan kecederaan, mungkin memerlukan pemeriksaan lanjut kerana ia kadangkala dikaitkan dengan kanser kulit.

Selain warna, bentuk dan tekstur kuku juga memberikan petunjuk yang

Kenali Tanda-tanda Penyakit yang Boleh Dikesan melalui KUKU ANDA



berguna. Kuku yang rapuh, mudah patah atau bercabang mungkin menunjukkan kekurangan vitamin dan mineral, terutamanya biotin dan protein. Kuku yang menebal dan berbentuk seperti suda boleh menjadi tanda masalah darah atau gangguan tiroid. Begitu juga, kuku yang berbentuk cambung atau membengkak sering dikaitkan dengan masalah paru-paru kronik, jantung, atau penyakit hati.

Perubahan lain yang perlu diberi perhatian ialah kemunculan garis atau tompok pada kuku. Garis-garis putih pada kuku, yang dikenali sebagai leukonychia, biasanya disebabkan oleh kecederaan ringan pada kuku, tetapi kadangkala ia juga boleh menunjukkan kekurangan

zinc. Garis-garis gelap atau coidat yang baru muncul tanpa sebab jelas memerlukan pemeriksaan doktor kerana ia boleh menjadi tanda awal melanoma, sejenis kanser kulit yang serius. Selain itu, keadaan kulit di sekeliling kuku juga penting. Kulit yang kering, merah, dan radang di tepi kuku boleh menunjukkan masalah autoimun atau jangkitan.

Secara ringkasnya, pemerhatian terhadap kuku bukan sahaja penting dan sgt kosmetik, tetapi ia juga boleh menjadi alat awal untuk mengesan penyakit. Walaupun perubahan pada kuku tidak semestinya bermakna seseorang itu sakit, ia memberikan isyarat awal yang berharga untuk mendapatkan pemeriksaan lanjut. Oleh itu,

menjaga kesihatan kuku melalui pemakanan yang seimbang, hidrasi yang mencukupi, dan penjagaan kuku yang bersih adalah sangat penting. Jika terdapat perubahan yang tidak biasa pada kuku, segeralah berjumpa pakar perubatan untuk diagnosis dan rawatan yang tepat.

Oleh itu, kuku bukan sekadar aksesori cantik pada tangan, tetapi ia juga boleh menjadi cermin kesihatan dalaman kita. Dengan memperhatikan warna, bentuk, tekstur, dan keadaan sekeliling kuku, seseorang dapat mengenal pasti tanda-tanda awal penyakit dan mengambil langkah pencegahan yang sewajarnya. Kesedaran ini amat penting dalam usaha mengekalkan kesihatan tubuh secara menyeluruh.