MALAYSIAeBiz
BERNAMA
WEEKLY BUSINESS ROUNDUP FEB 2 - FEB 6, 2015

February 6, 2015

This Week's Highlight : M'sia Confident Trade With Indonesia Will Remain Positive - Najib

GREAT TIES...Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak with Indonesian President Joko Widodo at Putra Mosque to perform Friday prayers. --fotoBERNAMA

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia is confident that bilateral trade with Indonesia remains positive despite the volatile economic landscape, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said. He said although the trade target of US$30 billion between Malaysia and Indonesia set earlier might not be achieved, the country's second priority is certain, that is to continue to promote trade and investment growth. "At present, our statistics show Malaysia's investments in Indonesia stood at US$3.97 billion between 2008 and September 2014 while that of Indonesia's in Malaysia were US$1.89 billion," he told a press conference after meeting Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the Perdana Putra Complex here Friday.

This Week's Top Stories

MONDAY

Jokowi Draws On Business Experience To Improve M'sia-Indonesia Ties

By Noor Farhana Ahmad Norain and Anas Abu Hassan

KUALA LUMPUR -- President Joko Widodo's business acumen and experience would put him in good stead in strengthening trade ties between Indonesia and Malaysia, Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Herman Prayitno said. He said the challenges, difficulties and bureaucracy that the president had encountered as a businessman before would enable him to provide a platform for trade and investment. "He makes investors feel more at ease now as everything comes under one roof at the Indonesia's Investment Coordinating Board. Investors can just make a visit, see what they want and get everything done there. Everything is centralised," he said in an interview with Bernama, recently.

WEDNESDAY

Islamic Finance To Attract World's Financial Services Industry

KUALA LUMPUR -- Islamic finance is expected to continue attracting a greater share of the world's financial services industry as it has reached maturity and depth. Managing Director of RHB Islamic, Ibrahim Hassan, said the Malaysian industry players needed to equip and strengthen their competency in developing Islamic finance to be at the forefront of the financial industry. He said Malaysia's rise in the Islamic finance industry was by design and the concerted effort by the relevant authorities might not be easy to be replicated by other countries. "In contrast to other jurisdictions, we are fortunate, as regulators like Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), together with the support of government agencies and market players, have developed a well-regulated islamic finance industry," he told reporters here Wednesday.

THURSDAY

M'sia's 2014 Trade Surplus Registers Double-Digit Growth

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia's 2014 trade surplus registered double-digit growth of 16.6 per cent, a remarkable achievement when compared with the negative scenario in 2012 and 2013, says Minister of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed Thursday. "The growth impetus in exports resulted in a trade surplus of RM83.11 billion, representing Malaysia's achievement of 17 consecutive years of trade surplus," he told reporters at the unveiling of 'Malaysia's Trade Performance 2014', here Thursday. He said exports in 2014 rose by 6.4 per cent or RM46.14 billion to RM766.13 billion, surpassing the forecast export growth of six per cent in the 2014/2015 Economic Report. Mustapa noted that the country's imports increased by 5.3 per cent or RM34.32 billion to RM683.02 billion.

FRIDAY

Proton & PT Adiperkasa To Develop Indonesian National Car

SHAH ALAM -- Proton Holdings Bhd and PT Adiperkasa Citra Lestari Friday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the development and manufacture of Indonesia's national car. The MoU signing was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Proton Holdings Chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

SMEbrief

Umno Conducts Entrepreneurship Course Under 'Membara' Programme

LANGKAWI, Feb 2 -- The Umno Information Division is conducting an entrepreneurial development course, particularly for the Malays, twice this year under the People's Assistance Programme (Membara). Party information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan said the course would focus on financial management and entrepreneurship. "Those interested could attend the course twice this year, apart from other Membara activities throughout the year," he said at a gathering with Umno members here Monday. Ahmad, who is also deputy finance minister, said with more entrepreneurs joining the fray, it would promote a healthy competition in the market and create a better economic landscape for the benefit of the people.

Vendor Boutique Concept Introduced To Help New Entrepreneurs

By Nur Fazlizai Ali and
Wan Nabila Aisha Wan Bakhri

KUALA TERENGGANU -- WanDa Butik and Kafe has introduced a vendor boutique concept to help entrepreneurs market their products online and to walk-in-customers and online. The concept was fast catching on as it provided rental space at affordable rates which allowed new entrants to come in with limited resources. Founder Wan Noor Rulhuda Wan Yahya said the new concept would appeal to new entrepreneurs as it was difficult for them to start up without affordable rental and adequate investment. She told Bernama that her boutique, in operations the past two months, was receiving overwhelming response. To date, 18 entrepreneurs have rented space from her at a rate of between RM100 and RM300.

SME Corp Extends GST eVoucher Deadline To Feb 28

KUALA LUMPUR -- SME Corp Wednesday announced that the validity period of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) eVoucher has been extended to Feb 28. "Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are urged to redeem their eVouchers from appointed GST compliance accounting software vendors immediately," the corporation said in a statement here Wednesday. SME Corp said the GST eVoucher was introduced as a quick, fast and efficient method to disseminate the grant to SMEs for the purchase or upgrade to GST compliant software, to prepare them for implementation of the GST on April 1.

PropUP Property*update*

Moody's: Lacklustre Demand For Residential M'sian Properties In 2015

SINGAPORE -- Moody's Investors Service expects demand for residential properties in Malaysia to slow further in 2015, crimped by property cooling measures imposed in 2013 and weak buyer sentiment. Moody's Assistant vice president and analyst, Jacintha Poh said: "We expect the anticipation of higher mortgage rates in 2015 and implementation of the 6 per cent Goods and Service Tax in April to dampen sales as buyers take a wait-and-see approach. But the magnitude of the sales impact will depend on Malaysian property developers' target segment of project launches and pricing." Moody's analysis is contained in its latest edition of Inside Asean, a quarterly publication looking at major credit trends prevalent in the Southeast Asian region.

CIDB Encourages Industry Players To Participate In QLASSIC

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) is urging industry players to participate in the Quality Assessment System in Construction (QLASSIC), to assess the quality of workmanship in construction. CIDB Technology Development Sector, Senior General Manager Elias Ismail said this is to encourage contractors to "do things right, the first time and every time" in terms of quality. "This would be added value in marketing their products to end users. "QLASSIC assessments are carried out through site inspection for completed projects according to the Construction Industry Standard. Marks in percentage will be awarded if the workmanship complies with the standards," he told reporters here Wednesday.

UDA Welcomes Bumiputera Investment In BBCC Project

KUALA LUMPUR -- UDA Holdings Bhd is inviting bumiputera investment in its RM8 billion gross development value mixed development project, the Bukit Bintang City Centre (BBCC), under the construction and retail section. UDA Chairman Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani said under government rules, any new retail development must have at least a 50 per cent participation from among bumiputera businesses. "We are looking for bumiputera investors with a good track record, in terms of handling retail businesses, as well as building and maintaining any past development projects. We are aware that most bumiputeras do not carry an international or well known brand. So, we've decided to build the Malaysian Grand Bazaar, specifically to give them an opportunity to market their products," he told reporters here Wednesday.

BURSA MALAYSIA

Scoreboard

Gainers - 512

Losers - 291

Not Traded - 585

Unchanged - 341

Value - 2148578509

Volume - 19245443

BURSA: FBM KLCI Ends Higher On Oil Price Rebound

By Mohd Khairi Idham Amran

KUALA LUMPUR -- The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) closed higher Friday, in tandem with regional stock markets, buoyed by a rebound in oil prices, a dealer said.

At 5 pm, the key index finished at 1,813.25, up 10.04 points, after fluctuating between 1,806.3 and 1,814.3 throughout the day. Affin Hwang Investment Bank Head of Retail Research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan said global benchmark Brent crude rose another 5.8 per cent to US$57.91 a barrel, a fourth successive advance and the highest settlement since late December last year. "The rebound was supported by capital expenditure cuts by major oil producers and a drop in the number of global rigs in operation as shown by industry data," he told Bernama.

Gainers outpaced losers 512 to 291, while 341 counters were unchanged, 585 untraded and 22 others suspended. Total turnover rose to RM1.92 billion units valued at RM2.14 billion from 1.65 billion units valued at RM2.09 billion on Thursday. Main Market volume widened to 1.13 billion shares valued at RM1.96 billion from 1.08 billion shares worth RM1.93 billion on Thursday.

FOREX: Ringgit Ends Higher Against US Dollar

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ringgit ended higher against the US dollar Friday on the rebound in oil prices, dealers said. At 5pm, the local note was quoted at 3.5460/5490 against the greenback from Thursday's 3.5725/5755.

Exchange Rate
(Ringgit : Foreign Currency)

	Buying	Selling
USD	3.5460	3.5490
EUR	4.0588	4.0636
GBP	5.4307	5.4364
100 YEN	3.0215	3.0243
SGD	2.6335	2.6379

Source: Bank Negara Malaysia

The price of benchmark US oil futures gained US$2.03, or 4.2 per cent, to US$50.48 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. "This helped boost the ringgit's momentum among other Asian currencies despite a cautious trading ahead of the release of key US jobs data," a dealer said. The local note was traded higher against other currencies. Against the Singapore dollar, it rose to 2.6335/6379 from 2.6488/6528 and improved to 3.0215/0243 from 3.0461/0489 against the yen Thursday.

The local note ended higher against the pound to 5.4307/4364 from 5.4384/4444 and against the euro, it strengthened to 4.0588/0636 from 4.0626/0668 previously.

Money Market: Short-Term Rates Close Stable On BNM's Intervention

KUALA LUMPUR -- Short-term interbank rates ended stable Friday on Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) intervention to reduce excess liquidity from the financial system. The liquidity surplus in the conventional system fell to RM21.69 billion from RM34.42 billion earlier, while in the Islamic system, the surplus dwindled to RM7.96 billion from RM14.66 billion. In the morning, BNM called for five tenders -- a conventional money market, two repos, an Al-Wadiah and a Commodity Murabahah Programme tender. The central bank also conducted a late conventional money market tender for RM21.70 billion and a RM7.5 billion Al-Wadiah money market tender, both for three-day money. The overnight Islamic reference rate stood at 3.21 per cent, while the one-, two- and three-week rates stood at 3.28 per cent, 3.32 per cent and 3.36 per cent, respectively.

KLIBOR Futures Finish Untraded

KUALA LUMPUR -- The three-month Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate (KLIBOR) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives were untraded at close Friday. Spot month February 2015 remained pegged at 96.15, while March 2015 and April 2015 were each pegged at 96.18, while June 2015 stood at 96.17. Open interest was at 1,320 contracts. At the 11 am fixing, the underlying three-month KLIBOR stood at 3.85 per cent.

KLCI Futures Contracts Close Firmer

KUALA LUMPUR -- The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI futures (FKLI) contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives closed firmer Friday, in sync with the uptrend on the cash market. At the close, spot month February 2015 and March 2015 gained 5.5 points each to 1,804.5 and 1,803.5 respectively, June 2015 advanced 9.5 points to 1,804.5 and September 2015 garnered five points to 1,800 points.

Total turnover declined to 5,625 lots from yesterday's 6,251 lots while open interest was slightly lower at 37,557 contracts from 37,819 contracts previously. The underlying FBM KLCI finished 10.04 points higher at 1,813.25.

Al Rajhi Expects RM15 Mln Contribution From Bancatakaful This Year

KUALA LUMPUR -- Al Rajhi Banking and Investment Corp (M) Bhd, an extended entity of the world's largest Islamic banking group, Al Rajhi Bank, expects RM15 million contribution from its bancatakaful products, this year. Al Rajhi Bank Acting Chief Operating Officer, Selamat Sirat said the bank's first bancatakaful products, i-Great Raudhah and i-Great Bakti, was a collaborative effort with Great Eastern Takaful Bhd. "The RM15 million contribution is estimated to be equivalent to 6,000 policy insurance holders. We are also confident that Takaful products would contribute about 20 per cent to our fee-based income this year," he told reporters at the launch of both bancatakaful products here Wednesday.

Affin Islamic Contributes RM350,000 Zakat To Wakaf Desa Fahmi

KUALA LUMPUR -- Affin Islamic Bank Bhd has contributed RM350,000 from its zakat funds to Wakaf Desa Fahmi, a centre that offers shelter and accommodation to hardcore poor, homeless, neglected Muslims and religious students. In a statement here Wednesday, the bank said the zakat contribution would be used to assist the centre in helping those in need through basic accommodation, Islamic education, social welfare activities and to develop mental and spiritual strength of the less fortunate. Affin Islamic Chief Executive Officer Kamarul Ariffin Mohd Jamil said the effort and initiative was to ease the burden of the needy in Malaysia. "Recently, we contributed RM1.8 million to Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia and zakat centres in Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Perlis and Kelantan. We have also contributed to the flood victims in the East Coast states," he said.

M'sian Banks Profitability First Line Of Defence Against Risks - Moody's

KUALA LUMPUR -- The outlook for Malaysian banks this year is certainly going to be stable with their strong profitability providing a good first line of defence against risks, said Moody's Investors Service. Its vice president -- senior credit officer, financial institutions group, Eugene Tarzimanov, said Malaysian banks were also generally well-capitalised, with low non-performing loans (NPLs) and all these acted as solid capital buffers against risk. "Malaysian banks have solid capital buffers and low NPLs, and the credit growth is moderating only due to macro headwinds," he told a media briefing here Wednesday.

EXIM Bank Receives Alpha Magazine Award

KUALA LUMPUR -- Export-Import Bank of Malaysia Bhd (EXIM Bank) has been named one of the recipients of 'Most Innovative Islamic Finance Deal of the Year 2014 in South-East Asia' award. In a statement here Wednesday, EXIM Bank said it was honoured for the award by Alpha South-East Asia Magazine in respect of its US$300 million sukuk issuance. EXIM Bank President/ Chief Officer, Datuk Adissadikin Ali, said the bank was honoured and delighted to receive the award. "The issuance is in line with our initiatives to grow Islamic finance business and would position EXIM Bank to capture opportunities in the Islamic financial markets," he said. Adissadikin said the award also represented EXIM Bank's commitment to support the government's ongoing initiatives and efforts to position Malaysia as an international Islamic finance marketplace.

Infrastructure Projects To Be Catalyst For Sukuk Issuance In 2015

KUALA LUMPUR -- Funding for infrastructure projects will be the driver for Sukuk issuances this year, says CIMB Islamic Bank Chief Executive Officer, Badlisyah Abdul Ghani. He said the Sukuk issuance in 2015 could emulate the peak of 2012, if all planned infrastructure projects such as My Rapid Transit, the Pan-Borneo highway and Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high speed train venture come on stream. "We nearly touched the 2012 level last year in falling short by just about RM2 billion. This year, we'll be at the same point as last year and can test the 2012 level, if all planned infrastructure projects come stream," he told reporters here Thursday. Last year, Malaysia's Sukuk issuance rose 27 per cent from 2013 to RM62 billion.

RHB Targets 10 Pct Increase In Debit, Credit Cards Usage

KUALA LUMPUR -- RHB Banking Group expects credit and debit card spending to grow by 10 per cent this year compared with six per cent increase in 2014. Group Retail Banking acting head, Group Cards and Unsecured Business, Vice President, Cheong Pek Soon, said the target was based on the encouraging response from its recent reward campaign on the usage of RHB cards. "Although 2015 is going to be challenging and competitive for us, we are optimistic we can achieve the target as we continue to offer our customers rewarding experiences when they shop with RHB cards," he told reporters here Thursday. The campaign was held from Sept 17, 2014 until Dec 9, 2014 where RHB also awarded cash prizes worth RM12,000 to 12 weekly winners.

Husni Leads M'sian Delegation To G20 Finance Ministers Meeting

KUALA LUMPUR -- Second Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah will lead the Malaysian delegation to the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting from Feb 9-10 in Istanbul, Turkey. In a statement here Friday, the Finance Ministry said Malaysia had been invited to the meeting in its capacity as Chair of Asean in 2015. It said Ahmad Husni would share with the G20, the progress Asean had achieved, particularly in relation to the Asean Economic Community 2015 and other regional initiatives. He will also highlight the region's concerns towards ensuring stable and sustainable growth, for the prosperity of all.

Asia's Looming Pension Crisis Could Get Worse - HSBC Survey

KUALA LUMPUR -- Asia's looming pension crisis could get worse as millions of workers who created the region's economic miracle will struggle in their old age, a HSBC research revealed. In a statement here Friday, HSBC said its Future of Retirement survey showed that almost 70 per cent of Asians worried about running out of money in retirement. "A third of them said they are forced to cut back on savings for their pensions in the wake of the global financial crisis. In Malaysia, 88 per cent are concerned about not having enough money to live day-to-day in retirement," it said.

CIMB Group Outlines T18 Plans, Key Organisational Changes

KUALA LUMPUR -- CIMB Group (CIMB) Friday outlined its new T18 plans and key organisational changes as part of the group's mid-term strategy targets at end of financial year 2018. In a statement here Friday, CIMB Group said the T18 was the product of a strategic review exercise that began in January 2014. "Anchored on T18 initiatives, we expect to achieve our financial targets at the end of financial year 2018 which includes return on equity of more than 15 per cent, common equity tier 1 of more than 11 per cent, cost-to-income ratio of less than 50 per cent and consumer banking to contribute about 60 per cent of its income," it said.

Timber Exports Up At RM29.9 Mln In Jan-Sept 2014

KUCHING -- Sarawak's furniture exports from Jan-Sept 2014 rose five per cent to RM29.9 million compared with RM19.6 million recorded in the same period in 2013. State Industrial Development Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan however, said the export earnings were still an insignificant contributor to the overall state timber industry sector. He added there was infact vast market potential in the United States, Canada, Japan and India, for Sarawak-made furniture. "Worldwide furniture shipment to the United States in 2013 was about US$20 billion and US$8 billion to India. I hope local furniture makers will collaborate with big timber companies in order to improve their performance," he said before launching the www.sarawaktimberexpo2015.com website the Second Sarawak Timber and SMEs Expo 2015 here Tuesday.

Harumanis Production To Be Increased To Meet Demands

PADANG BESAR -- The Perlis government will look to increase the production of Harumanis Mangoes in the state, following great demand from local and overseas markets. State Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Committee chairman Ahmad Bakri Datuk Ali said the 127-ha of land being cultivated by 157 farmers would soon be increased to 2000 ha with each hectare able to accommodate 123 trees. He said the production capacity per metric tonne had also increased from 4.8 metric tonnes last year to 5.5 metric tonnes this year. Ahmad Bakri said the local price of the fruit this year would likely be similar to last year at around RM18 per kilogramme, but it could go as high as RM32 per kilogramme in places where demand was high.

TA Investment Declares Distribution For 3 Funds

KUALA LUMPUR -- TA Investment Management Bhd (TAIM) has declared a gross income distribution of 0.2 sen per unit for TA Asian Dividend Income Fund (TADIF), three sen per unit for TA Dana Optimix (TADO) and 2.5 sen per unit for TA Global Asset Allocator Fund (TAGAAF) to registered unit holders of the funds as at Jan 30, 2015. In a statement here Wednesday, the company said liquidity appeared to be the key determinant of global market directions in the short-term, at least for the first quarter of 2015. "The world is now facing the consequences of too much liquidity looking for a home. Despite the Dow Jones Industrial index reaching above the 18,000 level, it is not excessively expensive at prospective price earning ratios of 16 times and could technically overshoot more," said the statement.

Press Metal Sees 10-15 Pct Higher Aluminium Productions By Year-End

KUALA LUMPUR -- Press Metal Bhd is looking at a 10-12 increase in aluminium production b year-end as phase two of its smelting facility in Samalaju Industrial Park, Sarawak, is running at full capacity. Group Chief Executive Officer Datuk Paul Koon Poh Keong said the higher production was due to the expansion of its Samalaju smelter plant which was currently producing about 320,000 tonnes of aluminium. "Higher production was boosted by Samalaju's plant which is now operating at full capacity and we are also in the middle of expanding into phase three, which is expected to be operational by the last quarter of 2015," Koon told reporters here Wednesday.

Muhibbah Gets RM116 Mln Job In Rapid Pengerang

KUALA LUMPUR -- Muhibbah Engineering (M) Bhd Wednesday announced it has been awarded a RM16 million contract by Tecnicas Reunidas, S.A. Group for the design and building of temporary construction facilities and accommodation camp for package three in Petronas' Refinery and Petrochemicals Integrated Development (Rapid) project in Pengerang, Johor. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Wednesday, Muhibbah said the construction was scheduled to commence in the first quarter and was expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2016. Tecnicas Reunidas is one of the leading international engineering and construction company for oil and gas production, refining and petrochemicals and power generation projects.

FIM 2015 Expects To Attract In RM370 Mln In Investments

PUTRAJAYA -- The three-day Franchise International Malaysia 2015 (FIM 2015), starting June 12, 2015, is expected to attract RM370 million in investments compared with RM360 million last year. Minister of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism, Datuk Seri Hasan Malek, said the event would be held in cooperation with Malaysian Franchise Association at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur. "The 22nd FIM 2015 is the biggest franchise event in Asia-Pacific and acts as a one-stop centre for domestic and foreign franchise industries to promote and expand trade network. This year, 110 exhibition stores are expected to be set up, of which 20 per cent of them will be foreign participants," he told reporters here Wednesday.

Silk Unit Gets RM24 Mln ExxonMobil Deal

KUALA LUMPUR -- SILK Holdings Bhd unit, Jasa Merin (M) Sdn Bhd (JMSB), has received ExxonMobil Exploration and Production Malaysia Inc (EMEPMI) contract for the provision of a straight supply vessel with accommodation. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia Wednesday, SILK said the contract was estimated to have a value of approximately RM24.46 Million for the primary term. "The contract, commencing immediately, is for a primary term of two years and may be extended for a further one year, at the discretion of EMEPMI," it said. It said the contract was expected to contribute positively to the earnings of the group for the financial year ending July 31, 2015 and beyond.

Asia-Pacific Posts 5.9 Pct Air Cargo Demand Growth For Dec 2014

KUALA LUMPUR -- Asia-Pacific recorded a 5.9 per cent demand growth of air cargo for December 2014 compared with the corresponding month in 2013, and a 5.4 per cent rise for the full year 2014 from the year before, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said. Its Director-General and Chief Executive Officer, Tony Tyler said the volumes benefitted from increasing import demand, apart from continuing manufacturing strength. "The Japanese and Chinese markets were particularly important contributors," he said in a statement here Wednesday.

Co-Ops Can Contribute RM50 Bln To GDP By 2020 - Angkasa

By Nurqalby Mohd Reda

SHAH ALAM -- Angkatan Koperasi

Kebangsaan Malaysia Bhd (Angkasa) is confident the country's cooperatives could contribute RM50 billion to gross domestic product by 2020 from around RM35 billion currently. Chairman Datuk Abdul Fattah Abdullah said to reach the target, Angkasa has formulated a restructuring plan based on the needs of seven sector leads outlined in the National Cooperative Policy. "From 2015 onwards, the cooperatives will be more active in financial services, wholesale and retail, tourism, healthcare, agriculture and agro-based industry, plantations, telecommunications as well as property development," he told Bernama after the tabling of Angkasa's Key Performance Index (KPI) report here Thursday.

MHB's Pre-Tax Profit Slips To RM39.263 Mln In Q4

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia Marine and Heavy Engineering Holdings Bhd's (MHB) pre-tax profit declined to RM39.263 million in the fourth quarter ended Dec 31,2014 from the RM47.046 million recorded in the same period last year. Revenue also fell to RM508.343 million from RM726.306 million, the company said in a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Thursday. For the full year, the company's pre-tax profit slipped to RM119.113 million from RM197.571 million, and revenue fell to RM2.7 billion from RM2.884 billion. In a statement here Thursday, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Dominique de Soras said the company had a number of distinctive achievements in 2014, in terms of delivery of the Cendor, Tapis and Kebabangan projects.

Public Bank Records Higher FY14 Pre-Tax Profit Of RM5.81 Bln

KUALA LUMPUR -- Public Bank Bhd posted a higher pre-tax profit of RM5.81 billion for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2014 compared with RM5.31 billion the year before. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Thursday, the bank said revenue for the period also increased to RM16.86 billion from RM15.26 billion. Public Bank founder and chairman Tan Sri Dr. Teh Hong Piow said the bank achieved another year of commendable results in 2014 with a record net profit attributable to shareholders of RM4.52 billion, representing 11.2 per cent growth compared with 2013. In a separate statement, he said the group's commendable 2014 financial results were mainly contributed by steady growth in net interest income and non-interest income as well as stable credit costs.

Honda Malaysia Targets Sales Of 85,000 Units

KUALA LUMPUR -- Honda Malaysia aims to increase its market share to 12.2 per cent this year with a sales target of 85,000 units. Its President and Chief Operating Officer, Roslan Abdullah, said the target could be achieved with the introduction of new models and from the current line-up. "Last year, we sold 77,485 units, making it the leading brand in the non-national passenger car segment with a 11.9 per cent market share. We have the capacity to produce 100,000 vehicles yearly and we are looking at selling 85,000 units this year. We are targeting 70 per cent of total sales in 2015 from the City and Jazz models, 10 per cent from the recently-launched CR-V, another 10 per cent from HR-V and from other models to make up the total sales percentage," Roslan told reporters here Thursday.

Marks & Spencer Positive On Asian Market For Growth

GEORGE TOWN -- British retailer Marks & Spencer (M&S) is positive on the Asian market for growth despite economic challenges, says its regional director in Asia, Bruce Findlay. He said generally Asia is still an exciting growth place amid M&S' long market presence and great partnerships in the region, adding that M&S grew 15 per cent last year in Asia. "Markets like Singapore are still growing and Malaysia has a huge potential for us as it is still a young and developing country. We want to be part of the growth," he told reporters after the official opening of a M&S store in Gurney Plaza here Thursday. Also present were British Deputy High Commissioner to Malaysia Paul Rennie and M&S Malaysia General Manager Stephanie Chang.

Nasim Aims To Sell 6,000 Peugeot Cars In 2015

TAIPING -- Nasim Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of the Naza Group of Companies, is targeting to sell 6,000 Peugeot cars in 2015 in line with the Malaysian Automotive Association's (MAA) forecast of a two per cent increase in new vehicle sales for the year. Its Chief Operating Officer, Datuk Samson Anand George said Nasim was confident of meeting the target with the unveiling of the latest version of its new core models, namely Peugeot 508, Peugeot 308 and Peugeot 408. He said the all-new Peugeot 308 was crowned European car of the year 2014 and was sold over 215,000 units globally. "It will be the driving resurgence for the Peugeot brand in Malaysia and we have absolute confidence that it will be very well received," he said at the launch of the RM1 million Peugeot Taiping outlet here Thursday.

Maserati Sales Increase

KUALA LUMPUR -- Maserati sold approximately 36,500 cars last year, an increase of 136 per cent compared with 2013 and almost six times the sales figure for 2012. Its Maserati Global Overseas Markets Managing Director, Umberto Cini, said the South-East Asia and Pacific region (SEAP) alone, Maserati recorded a 252 per cent increase in sales last year driven by the launch of the new Ghibli and the brand's flagship model, the Quattroporte. In a statement here Thursday, Naza Italia Sdn Bhd, the distributor for Maserati cars in Malaysia, said the Ghibli alone accounted for over 60 per cent of retail sales in the region.

AmInvest Declares Distribution For FBM KLCI etf And ABF Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR -- AmInvest has announced a final income distribution of 2.35 sen per unit for FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI etf (FBM KLCI etf) and 4.00 sen per unit for ABF Malaysia Bond Index Fund (ABF Malaysia) for the financial year ending Dec 31, 2014. FBM KLCI etf and ABF Malaysia are the country's first equity and bond exchange-traded funds, AmInvest said in a statement here Thursday. For the financial year, FBM KLCI etf and ABF Malaysia have paid out two income distribution totaling 2.85 sen and 6.00 sen respectively to investors. Over the past five years, FBM KLCI etf has registered total returns of 52.7 per cent, which translated to annualised returns of 8.8 per cent. Meanwhile, ABF Malaysia has locked in positive returns of 19.1 per cent, over the period of five years or 3.6 per cent per annum.

Boeing Delivers Scoot's First 787 Dreamliner

KUALA LUMPUR -- Boeing and Scoot Pte Ltd has announced the delivery of the Singapore-based airline's first 787 Dreamliner. The plane will play a key role in the low-cost carrier's strategic plan to expand its long-haul fleet. "We are excited to be taking delivery of our very first 787 Dreamliner," Scoot Chief Executive officer Campbell Wilson said in a statement issued from Everett, Washington Monday. "The Dreamliner represents a step-change for Scoot, allowing us to take our onboard customer experience to a new level and to greatly expand our network. The 787's significant advances in efficiency will enable Scoot to continue offering safe and reliable service, with increased comfort and even greater value airfares," Wilson said.

GST: No Action Against Companies If They Register By Feb 28

KUALA LUMPUR -- No legal action will be taken against companies if they were to register for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) by Feb 28, 2015, Royal Malaysian Customs Department director-general Datuk Seri Khazali Ahmad said. He said however, action would be taken against those who failed to do so and a crackdown would be launched against errant traders from March 1. "In accordance with the provisions in the GST Act 2014, companies that failed to register for the tax regime by Feb 28 will be forcibly registered and legal action will be taken against them. Hence, we urge traders to take this opportunity to register for the GST to avoid legal action from being taken against them," he said in a statement here Monday.

GST Will Not Greatly Impact Habib's Products

KUANTAN -- Habib Jewels is optimistic the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on April 1 will not greatly impact its business as it would continue to offer its products at affordable prices, says Managing Director Datuk Meer Sadik Habib. He said the company would be able to keep prices low as it had ample stocks. "Many people say the GST will raise prices of goods but the US dollar's appreciation and the ringgit depreciation has also contributed to the increase. However, with the ample stock of gold, diamonds and precious stones we will be able to maintain prices although the greenback has appreciated by 20 per cent," he told reporters after the simultaneous opening of Habib Jewels, Pandora and Ice Watch at the East Coast Mall here Tuesday.

South Korean Company To Invest US$4 Bln In Sarawak O & G

KUCHING -- Korean Electricity Power Company (KEPCo) is keen to invest between US$3 billion and US$4 billion in Sarawak's oil and gas industry. Malaysia's Special Envoy to East Asia Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing said the South Korean company earmarked Bintulu as its main target for investment. "KEPCo is interested to invest in the oil and gas industry in Bintulu but they want to carry out feasibility studies first," Tiong told reporters here Wednesday after accompanying Republic of Korea Ambassador Cho Byungjae who called on Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem.

Analyst Calls For Consensus On Prices Of Goods

By Ainul Farahana Chik Lid

KUALA LUMPUR -- An economic analyst has proposed that the government hold discussions with consumers' associations, wholesalers and suppliers as well as traders to arrive at a consensus on the appropriate prices of goods. Prof Datuk Mohd Yusof Kasim said the discussions should encompass the costs of production, raw materials, manpower and transportation to ensure that the prices of goods were relevant and did not burden consumers. "Consumers can, as a group, take action against those who continue to maintain exorbitant prices even after the discussions," he told Bernama. Mohd Yusof, who is the rector of the Insaniah University College (Kuin), said suppliers and wholesalers who reduced the prices of their goods following the reduction in the cost of fuel would be able to increase sales.

Jakim Appoints TPM Biotech As Halal Panel Lab

PUTRAJAYA -- TPM Biotech Sdn Bhd has been appointed as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia's (Jakim) first halal panel laboratory in an effort to help speed up the Halal Malaysia validation and certification process. A Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom said the measure under the National Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) was taken to cope with the vibrant growth of the halal industry in this country which called for a faster certification process. "The industry now has the option to either engage the services of the Department of Chemistry at no charge, but takes about 30 days to process, or engage the panel laboratory which charges according to analysis parameters and results can be obtained within 15 days," he told reporters here Wednesday.

UTM Signs Agreement With MyPEC To Explore Entrepreneurial Opportunities

KUALA LUMPUR -- Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Wednesday signed a licensing agreement with Malaysia Practice Enterprise Centre Sdn Bhd (MyPEC) in a bid to explore wider entrepreneurial opportunities. UTM Technology Entrepreneurship Centre (UTMTEC) Director, Prof Madya Dr Kamariah Ismail said with the agreement, more than 1,000 UTM students would get the opportunity to attend entrepreneurship training courses and gain access to information communication technology (ICT). "Through this agreement, UTM students have the chance to undergo an entrepreneurship programme based on theory and business practice with the guidance of experts from MyPEC," she told Bernama here.

Hasan Malek To Meet With Wholesalers Over Prices

PUTRAJAYA -- Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Hasan Malek is to meet with wholesalers next week to seek an explanation on the prices of goods which consumers want reduced following the drop in fuel prices. He said it was necessary to listen to their explanation because some of them had argued that the prices of goods were influenced not only by the prices of fuel but also other factors such as the rate of minimum wages and electricity tariff. "However, we have an assurance from wholesalers that they will not raise the prices of goods. The prices of our goods are stable. The purchasing power is high. Supermarkets are crowded because of the high purchasing power," he told reporters here Wednesday.

11Street To Invest RM35 Mln In M'sian Venture
KUALA LUMPUR -- Korea's 11street, an online shopping mall, will invest over RM35 million this year to drive sellers' participation in Malaysia, following its debut in the country in April this year. In a statement here Thursday, 11street said via the Malaysian version, it aims to get 11,000 sellers on-board in 2015. "The Malaysian version will be hosted by Celcom Planet Sdn Bhd, a joint venture between Celcom Axiata Bhd and SK Planet, a Korean e-commerce open marketplace provider, which is also a wholly-owned subsidiary of mobile operator, SK Telecom," it added. 11street's Chief Executive Officer in Malaysia, Hoseok Kim said being in the country, reflected the company's commitment to delivering for local consumers a trustable and convenient e-commerce platform, whereby they can shop for a variety of products across a broad range of categories.

IATA Welcomes ICAO's Tracking Standard Recommendation
KUALA LUMPUR -- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has welcomed the recommendation of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) Second High Level Safety Conference to move towards the adoption of a performance-based standard for the global tracking of commercial aircraft. "This will continue the industry's successful record of working with governments to improve safety through global harmonisation. "We are all moving in the same direction. The conference conclusions should be a reassurance to all travellers that safety is always aviation's top priority," IATA Director General and Chief Executive Officer, Tony Tyler said in a statement here Thursday.

M'sia Airports To Continue To Expand Airport Facilities
KUCHING -- Malaysia Airports Holding Bhd (MAHB) says it will continue to upgrade facilities at the airports it manages and operates in order to meet customers' needs. Managing Director Datuk Badlisham Ghazali said upgrading works include those at the Kota Baharu International Airport (KBIA), Kota Kinabalu International Airport (KKIA) and Kuching International Airport (KIA). "We do not wait until it hits maximum capacity. We will upgrade, that is our job," he told reporters here Thursday. Badlisham said KKIA and KIA are capable of catering to increased flight frequencies, especially KKIA, which has undergone expansion.

MAS Offers More Travel Deals and Low Fares
SUBANG -- In conjunction with the Chinese New Year, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) is offering great travel bargains for its customers to plan for the upcoming holidays. The limited offer from Feb 4 to Feb 15, is specially for Economy Class travels to both domestic and international destinations and applicable for departures from Feb 7 to Nov 30, 2015. MAS in a statement here said that the low fares include those to MAS' favourite destinations - London, Paris, Dubai as well as on the North Asia destinations of Incheon, Narita, Osaka and Taipei. Attractive fares are also offered to the Orient and ASEAN destinations like Phuket, Yangon, Phnom Penh with more than 20 interline destinations including New York, Chicago and Miami.

M'sia Ranks 4th Highest In Terms Of Percentage Of Digital Natives
KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia is ranked fourth highest in terms of percentage of digital natives globally, as more than 70 per cent of youth had at least five years Internet exposure, according to 'Measuring the Information Society 2013' report by International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In a statement here Thursday, MDeC Youth Division Director, Sumitra Nair, said the current digital competency of Malaysian youth would continue to greatly impact the workplace of the 21st century. "This advantage, when harnessed appropriately, will serve to steer the nation towards becoming a fully-developed digital economy, with the youth continuing to play a leading role in this," she said.

Demand For Air Travel Rises In 2014
KUALA LUMPUR -- The global passenger traffic results for 2014 shows demand (revenue passenger kilometers or RPKs) growth of 5.9 per cent from the year before, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said. "The 2014 performance was above the 10-year average growth rate of 5.6 per cent and the 5.2 per cent annual growth in 2013 compared with 2012," IATA said in a statement here Friday on the global passenger traffic results for 2014. Capacity rose 5.6 per cent last year, with the result that load factor climbed 0.2 percentage point to 79.7 per cent, it said, adding that all regions saw demand grew in 2014. "More than half of the growth in passenger travel occurred on airlines in emerging markets, including Asia-Pacific and the Middle East," it said.

Operations As Usual For RadioShack In Malaysia
KUALA LUMPUR -- RadioShack's operations in Malaysia are not affected by the position that RadioShack Corp USA is currently in, said Berjaya RadioShack Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned unit of Berjaya Retail Bhd. In a statement here Friday, Berjaya RadioShack said it was a separate entity from RadioShack Corp. "RadioShack Malaysia does not rely on RadioShack Corp and has its own arrangements in place with distributors worldwide for merchandise," it said. In US, RadioShack Corp faced financial losses which had caused it to default in its debt settlement and has since been delisted on the New York Stock Exchange.

16. Proton & PT Adiperkasa To Develop Indonesian National Car
SHAH ALAM -- Proton Holdings Bhd and PT Adiperkasa Citra Lestari Friday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the development and manufacture of Indonesia's national car. The MoU signing was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Proton Holdings Chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Firefly Launches FlyPremier For Frequent Travellers

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia's premium short-haul airline Firefly has launched its latest service Monday called FlyPremier, which is designed to cater to the needs of frequent travellers. Its Chief Executive Officer Ignatius Ong said FlyPremier allows guests one free flight change, offers an additional 10kg baggage allowance, access to the Firefly Biz Zone at the Subang Skypark Terminal, priority baggage, free seat selection and the opportunity to earn Enrich Miles. "With FlyPremier, a single-click will allow our guests to pre-select all the convenience that are required by a frequent traveller, effectively making the booking process faster and easier," he said in a statement here Monday.

Shah Alam, PJ Nominated As Finalists In Earth Hour City Challenge

KUALA LUMPUR -- Two cities in Malaysia have been selected to be among the forty-four finalists from countries around the world for this year's Earth Hour City Challenge (EHCC). Both Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam have made it in the list, competing with cities from 15 countries such as Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, South Africa, Singapore, Spain, Sweden and Thailand. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia in a statement here Monday said EHCC worked to mobilise action and support from cities in the global transition towards a sustainable future powered by renewable energy.

Strategic Marine Launches Offshore 40 Generation 3 Crew Boat

KUALA LUMPUR -- Strategic Marine, the world's leading shipbuilding and engineering specialist company, Tuesday launched the Jati Seven, its first ever Offshore 40 generation three-crew boat being constructed for Dinastia Jati, a prominent oil and gas services group. In a statement here Tuesday, Strategic Marine with its operations in Singapore, Western Australia and Vietnam, said Jati Seven was the first in a series of three third generation vessels being built for Dinasti Jati. The Jati Seven also marks a new benchmark for the most efficient crew boat in the market for its class. The generation three vessel has increased cargo carrying capacity, fuel efficiency and improved sea keeping.

Final Chance To Grab "One Direction" Concert Passes-Hotlink

KUALA LUMPUR -- Hotlink customers who are fans of British boy band One Direction could still win an all-expense-paid-trip to watch the band's live concert at the Singapore National Stadium on March 11. In a statement here Wednesday, Maxis Bhd said February would be the last month through the One Direction Bus-Away contest, to grab the last eight passes of 'On The Road Tour'. Maxis Head of Prepaid, Consumer Business Navin Manian said the winners would be driven to the concert on a specially designed bus. "The contest is another example of the rewards and benefits our customers can expect when they access the #LiveLifeLoud world through the Hotlink RED App. We wish our customers the best of luck and hope the experience would be more memorable for all winners," he said adding the contest which offered a pair of passes each to 16 winners, had been going on since Nov 18, 2014.

Esthetics Gets Exclusive Rights To Distribute Evo Products

KUALA LUMPUR -- Esthetics International Group Bhd (EIG) has been granted exclusive rights to distribute the Australian professional hair care products, Evo in Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. This is following the signing of distribution agreement between EIG's wholly-owned subsidiary, EIG Haircare Sdn Bhd (EIGH) with Privity Pty Ltd and EA Holland Pty Ltd. In filing to Bursa Malaysia here Wednesday, EIG said the term of the agreement is for a period of 10 years from April 1, 2015 until March 31, 2025 with the option to renew for a further period of 10 years.

National Audit Dept To Host Asosai Assembly On Feb 10

KUALA LUMPUR -- National Audit Department of Malaysia will host the triennial 13th Asian Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (Asosai) on Feb 10. Asosai, a regional group of 46 members, represented by the country's Auditor-General was established to enhance professionalism of government auditors through exchange of knowledge, experience and skills relating to government auditing. In a statement here Wednesday, the national audit department said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak was expected to deliver a keynote address and open the four-day Asosai assembly.

Endeavor To Host 28 Entrepreneur Candidates At 57th ISP

KUALA LUMPUR -- Endeavor Global, a non-profit organisation focusing on the scale-up phase of entrepreneurship, will host 28 entrepreneur candidates from 20 companies at the 57th International Selection Panel (ISP) in Singapore. The three-day event which began Wednesday, is the conclusion of a rigorous multi-step selection process that is at the core of the Endeavor model. In a statement here Wednesday, Endeavor co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Linda Rottenberg said panelists from 10 countries will be reviewing the entrepreneurs. They will then be selected into the Endeavor network and given access to customised services.

UTHM Lab Receives Int'l Accreditation

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Centre for Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMCcenter) under the Research Centre for Applied Electromagnetics, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) has received recognition as a world-class laboratory. The EMCcenter was awarded the MS ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation certificate under the Laboratory Accreditation Scheme Malaysia, Department of Standards Malaysia, which is effective for three years from Dec 15, 2014. "Our EMCcenter is the only lab in a Malaysian university that has successfully achieved the standard in the field of Electromagnetic Compatibility," EMCcenter, head, Prof Dr Mohd Zarar Mohd Jenu said in a statement here Wednesday.

Jokowi Visit Good Start To Bilateral Ties

By Soraya Jamal, Noor Farhana Ahmad Norain and Anas Abu Hassan

PRAYERS...Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak (second, right) and Indonesian President, Joko Widodo (centre) performing their prayers at Masjid Putra in Putrajaya, Friday. --fotoBERNAMA
-Pic: Muhammad Zulhilmi Daud

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- The visit by Indonesian President Joko Widodo, is a good start and a good indication in bilateral relations, despite the ups and downs in bilateral ties between Malaysia and Indonesia over the past 60 years, analysts said. President Joko Widodo, or fondly known as Jokowi, is in town for a three-day visit. Malaysia is the first destination for Jokowi after he took over the republic's leadership on Oct 20, last year.

Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Herman Prayitno said Widodo's business acumen and experience would put him in good stead in strengthening trade ties between Indonesia and Malaysia. He said the challenges, difficulties and bureaucracy that the president had encountered as a businessman before would enable him to provide a platform for trade and investment.

"He makes investors feel more at ease now as everything comes under one roof at the Indonesia's Investment Coordinating Board. Investors can just make a visit, see what they want and get everything done there. Everything is centralised," he told Bernama in an exclusive interview recently.

Close Political, Cultural, Economic Ties

Herman said: "Jokowi will continue Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's policies where the friendship and ties with Malaysia will be maintained. This first bilateral visit (to Malaysia) also reflects the close political, economic, cultural and emotional ties between the two nations.

"This is tradition...a courtesy visit. The new president will discuss what will be carried out in the next five years. His political, economic and cultural policies...which are suitable to Malaysia," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia is confident that bilateral trade with Indonesia remains positive despite the volatile economic landscape. He said although the trade target of US$30 billion between Malaysia and Indonesia set earlier might not be achieved, the country's second priority is certain, that is to continue to promote trade and investment growth.

"At present, our statistics show Malaysia's investments in Indonesia stood at US$3.97 billion between 2008 and September 2014 while that of Indonesia's in Malaysia were US$1.89 billion," he told reporters after meeting Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the Perdana Putra Complex in Putrajaya Friday.

Malaysians Invited To Invest In Infrastructure

Najib said he told Widodo Malaysia welcomes investors from Indonesia and likewise Widodo said Malaysian companies are also welcomed to invest in Indonesia and they would be given priority. Widodo said Indonesia is inviting Malaysian companies to invest in the development of infrastructure such as ports, railways, airports and energy plants.

The Indonesian leader said he discussed with Najib on the lifting of fuel subsidies by Indonesia and and the setting up of a national office to provide better services to foreign investors in Indonesia.

Malaysia is one of the biggest trading partners of Indonesia with bilateral trade of between RM24 billion to RM25 billion and also one of the biggest investor in the republic. Up to November 2014, bilateral trade reached US$19 billion, and Malaysia's investments in Indonesia touched close to US$1 billion currently. Malaysians mostly invest in oil palm, banking, mining, telecommunications and health sectors in Indonesia.

-- BERNAMA

LIST OF MARKET REPORTS :

1. Bursa Malaysia
2. Forex
3. Money Market
4. FBM KLCI Futures
5. Crude Palm Oil (CPO) Futures
6. Rubber Futures
7. KLIBOR Futures
8. Kuala Lumpur Tin Market (KLTM)
9. Gold Futures

BURSA: KL Shares To Trade Higher On Improved Sentiment

By Mohd Khairi Idham Amran

KUALA LUMPUR -- Bursa Malaysia is expected to trade higher next week driven by a slow boost in risk-taking sentiment, a dealer said. Affin Hwang Investment Bank Head of Retail Research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan said sentiment is expected to improve on the back of calmer conditions with oil prices rebounding, the ringgit strengthening, tension over Greece easing and foreign central banks implementing policy accommodation.

"We see global easing with the central bank of Australia and People's Bank of China becoming the latest to join policy easing," he told Bernama. He said the Reserve Bank of Australia cut its main interest rate by 25 basis points to a record low of 2.25 per cent, the first easing in 18 months, in response to slowing inflation and growth concerns.

Meanwhile, the People's Bank of China surprised the markets by announcing a 50-basis point cut in the required reserve ratio, worth 600 billion yuan (US$96 billion) in liquidity, for major banks earlier than expected.

Locally, he said, the benchmark FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) has been able to recoup from the previous week's plunge and recover from its worst levels following a better external front and stronger than expected global data such as US jobless claims and an upwardly revised Eurozone growth outlook. "Overall, the FBM KLCI showed a positive technical setup with major support now pegged at the 1,800 and 1,780 levels while the major area of resistance is spotted at the 1,830 and 1,850 levels," he added.

He said some stocks are undertaking interesting corporate exercises which could stimulate market activity. They include Sime Property's proposed taking full control of Malaysia Land Development Co, Malaysia Airports continuing to expand airport facilities, and Felda Global Ventures getting approval to establish a company in Indonesia.

Other interesting stocks are AirAsia X, MK Land, Astro, Public Bank, Inari Amerton, Globetronic and TDM. The market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day (replacement) and Thaipusam holidays respectively. Weekly turnover decreased to 5.98 billion units valued at RM6.93 billion from 9.74 billion units valued at RM11.07 billion previously. Main market volume declined to 3.75 billion shares worth RM6.39 billion from 6.32 billion shares worth RM10.31 billion.

Forex: Ringgit To Stabilise On Rebound In Oil Prices

By Nurul Hanis Izmir

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ringgit is expected to stabilise next week on improved oil prices, says Affin Hwang Investment Bank vice-president and retail research head Datuk Dr Nazri Khan Adam Khan. He said if oil prices continue to strengthen, not only the ringgit but other currencies will get a boost, with oil being one of the country's main revenue sources. "There is a broad relief with the ringgit rising two per cent to the 3.55 level and the US dollar weaker against most of its major peers, notably against the euro and yen," he told Bernama.

Nazri said if the trend continues, the ringgit would likely be traded at the 3.3-3.4 level. For the holiday-shortened week, the ringgit saw its rate increase due to the rebound in oil prices of up to 2.3 per cent to the 3.5 level against the greenback, its strongest since Jan 12, 2015. It was reported that the price of benchmark US oil futures gained US$2.03, or 4.2 per cent, to US$50.48 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

For the week just ended, the ringgit firmed to 3.5460/5490 against the US dollar from last Friday's 3.6290/6320, and was traded higher against other major currencies. It appreciated against the Singapore dollar to 2.6335/6379 from 2.6872/6916 and improved vis-à-vis the yen to 3.0215/0243 from 3.0825/0853.The local unit strengthened against the euro to 4.0588/0636 from last Friday's 4.1156/1198, and rose against the pound to 5.4307/4364 from 5.4689/4745 last week. The market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for local public holidays.

Money Market: Short-Term Rates Likely To Remain Steady

KUALA LUMPUR -- Short-term rates are expected to remain steady next week on Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) intervention in the money market to absorb excess funds. The central bank is anticipated to intervene on a daily basis to mop up excess funds from the system. For the week just ended, BNM intervened on a daily basis, conducting conventional, Al-Wadiah, repo, Islamic range maturity auction and Commodity Murabahah Programme tenders.

The overnight rate for the week stood at 3.21 per cent while the one-week, two-week and three-week rates were pegged at 3.28 per cent, 3.32 per cent and 3.36 per cent, respectively. The underlying three-month Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate was fixed at 3.85 per cent. On Friday, the total liquidity surplus in the conventional system was reduced to RM21.69 billion from an earlier estimate of RM34.42 billion while in the Islamic system, the liquidity surplus was reduced to RM7.96 billion from an earlier forecast of RM14.66 billion. Following this, the central bank issued a late conventional tender for RM21.70 billion and a late Al-Wadiah tender for RM7.5 billion, both for three-day money.

KLCI Futures Likely To Trend Upwards

By Mohd Khairi Idham Amran

KUALA LUMPUR -- The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) futures contracts (FKLI) on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are likely to trend upwards next week in tandem with the cash market, a dealer said. Affin Hwang Investment Bank Head of Retail Research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan said momentum studies on FBM KLCI show that the benchmark index is trending higher from mid-range, which should support more upside if resistance levels are penetrated.

He said the market's close above the 20-day and 50-day moving averages suggests the short-term and medium-term trend remains positive. "Going forward, we expect more vibes to support the bull camp, with 1,830 (200-day moving average) being the immediate target," he told Bernama. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, February 2015 increased 17.5 points to 1,804.5, March 2015 rose 25.5 points to 1,803.5, and June 2015 advanced 31 points to 1,804.5. Newly introduced September 2015 ended the week at 1,800.

Turnover for the week dwindled to 21,141 lots from 90,460 lots last week while open interest narrowed to 37,557 contracts from 44,721 contracts previously. For the week just ended, the benchmark FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) was 10.04 points lower at 1,813.25.

CPO Futures To Trade Between RM2,250 & RM2,350 A Tonne

KUALA LUMPUR -- Crude palm oil (CPO) futures prices on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are expected to trade in the range of RM2,250 to RM2,350 per tonne next week on a positive note. Interband Group of Companies Senior Palm Oil Trader Jim Teh said the market is waiting for January output and stock data due for release by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) on Tuesday. “For the week just ended, the local market was traded mostly higher due to the announcement on Wednesday by the Indonesian government’s decision to increase biodiesel subsidies as well as on the back of a strong rebound in the crude oil market,” he told Bernama.

The Indonesian government on Wednesday agreed to increase biodiesel subsidies from 1,500 rupiah to 4,000 rupiah per litre. HLIB Research in a note on Friday said higher biodiesel subsidy improves the economic viability of bodiesel, hence boosting the consumption of palm oil.

It added that higher biodiesel subsidy would lower the break-even production cost for biodiesel by US$250 a tonne. The market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day and Thaipusam holidays respectively. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, February 2015 gained RM176 to RM2,330, March 2015 and May 2015 rose RM201 to RM2,351 and RM2,333 respectively, and April 2015 increased RM200 to RM2,346 per tonne. Weekly turnover rose to 228,862 lots from 272,867 lots last week while open interest rose to 253,380 contracts from 233,922 contracts previously. On the physical market, February South was traded RM180 higher at RM2,360 per tonne.

Rubber Market To Trade Cautiously

By Nurunnasihah Ahmad Rashid

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Malaysian rubber market is expected to trade cautiously next week with the market influenced by the crude oil price and currency movements, a dealer said. He said rubber prices would also track the performance of other commodities. “For the week just ended, the rubber market performed better than expected, mainly affected by the performance of regional futures markets as well as the movements of the ringgit,” he told Bernama.

The market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day and Thaipusam holidays respectively. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the Malaysian Rubber Board’s official physical price for tyre-grade SMR 20 fell one sen to 495.5 sen a kg and latex-in-bulk rose 10 sen to 371.5 sen a kg.

The unofficial closing price for tyre-grade SMR 20 gained 4.5 sen to 495.5 sen a kg while latex-in-bulk surged 12.5 sen to 372.5 sen a kg.

KLIBOR Futures Likely To Stay Lacklustre

KUALA LUMPUR -- The three-month Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate (KLIBOR) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are likely to remain lacklustre next week. For the holiday-shortened week, no contract was traded throughout the week and open interest remained unchanged at 1,320 contracts. Spot month February 2015 remained pegged at 96.15, while March 2015, April 2015 and June 2015 were pegged at 96.18, 96.18 and 96.17, respectively.

The underlying three-month KLIBOR remained at last week's 3.85 per cent. The market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day (replacement) and Thaipusam holidays respectively.

Tin Price To Trade Higher At US$19,000 Per Tonne

By S. Joan Santani

KUALA LUMPUR -- The tin price is expected to trade higher at US$19,000 per tonne on the Kuala Lumpur Tin Market (KLTM) next week, supported by active buyers from Europe and Japan, a dealer said. Speaking to Bernama, he said steadier oil prices coupled with crucial US employment data next week would also help to maintain the price at the US$19,000 per tonne level.

As usual, the local tin market is also expected to take cues from movements on the London Metal Exchange (LME). The local tin market was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day and Thaipusam holidays respectively. During the week just ended, the KLTM was traded mostly mixed on mild buying support.

On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the tin price was traded lower at US$18,950 per tonne compared with US$19,200 jumped to 740 tonnes from 290 tonnes last week, with activities dominated by European, Japanese and local traders. The price differential between the KLTM and LME narrowed to a premium of US$340 per tonne from US$375 per tonne last week.

Gold Futures Likely To Be Uncertain

By S. Joan Santani

KUALA LUMPUR -- Gold futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are likely to be uncertain next week as investors cautiously await the release of US jobs data which is expected to set the direction for the precious metal, a dealer said. Phillip Futures Sdn Bhd dealer Thomas Yew Jia-Jong said strong US jobs data could lift expectations of an increase in interest rates soon and this could dent gold prices. "Weaker data could, however, lift the gold price," he told Bernama.

Gold trading on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives was closed on Monday and Tuesday for the Federal Territory Day (replacement) and Thaipusam holidays respectively. During the week just ended, gold was traded lower due to lack of appetite and news of a decline in COMEX gold prices on the Greek government's decision to drop calls for a write-off of its foreign debt.

"This has affected gold prices as interest wanes in gold as a risk haven," he said. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, February 2015, March 2015 and April 2015 decreased 85 ticks to RM144.10 a gramme, RM144.50 a gramme and RM144.95 a gramme respectively, while June 2015 slumped 89 ticks to RM145.40 a gramme.

Volume for the week dropped to 522 lots worth RM7.55 million from 735 lots worth RM10.96 million last week. Open interest on Friday was higher at 2,952 contracts against last week's 2,938 contracts.