BERNAMA
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This Week's Highlight : ASEAN Needs To Position Itself As The 'Third Force' - Najib

FOCUS...Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak being interviewed on a wide ranging of issues on ASEAN by senior Bernama editors at his office in Putrajaya Wednesday in conjunction with the 26th ASEAN Summit to be hosted by Malaysia on April 26-27.

PUTRAJAYA -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Thursday that ASEAN needs to position itself as the "third force" that is the focus of the global business community, which now seems to be drawn to markets such as China and India. "I want to portray ASEAN as the 'third force', meaning, the focus will not be just on the big markets as China and India," he told Bernama in an interview at his office here in conjunction with the 26th ASEAN Summit to be hosted by Malaysia on April 26-27.

This Week's Top Stories

MONDAY

Malaysia's Economy Set To Grow Between 4.5-5.5 Pct

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia's economy is set to grow between 4.5 per cent and 5.5 per cent this year, Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Monday. "The growth rate will make Malaysia one of the 20 fastest-growing economies in the world. "Over the years with political stability and strong fundamentals, Malaysia's economy has been on a steady and sustainable growth path," he said on his official Facebook page.

TUESDAY

Sukuk Success Reflects Investor Confidence - Treasury

PUTRAJAYA -- An aggregate interest of over US$9 billion (US$1=RM3.63) drawn from the issuance of Malaysia's US$1.5 billion sukuk recently signalled foreign investors' confidence in the country's long-term economy fundamentals, a treasury official said. Overwhelmed with the keen interest shown, Treasury secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah said it was a testimony that foreign investors were impressed with the government's transformation plan.

WEDNESDAY

Najib: Fiscal Position Strong, Sustainable

KUALA LUMPUR -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the country's fiscal position is strong and sustainable following the increase in tax revenue and gradual reduction of budget deficit. He said the government tax revenue would continue to strengthen, with an estimated RM183.37 billion expected to be collected this year, an increase from RM171.77 billion in 2014, he posted this on his twitter late Wednesday.

THURSDAY

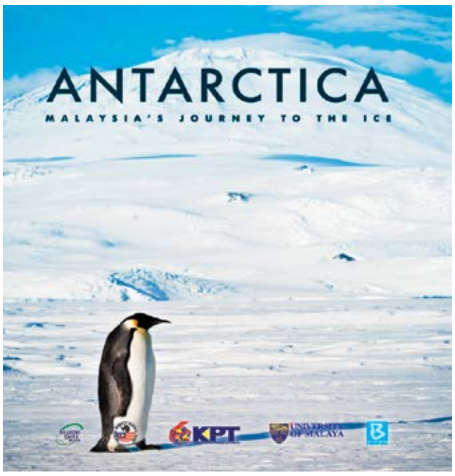
EPF Withdrawal Retains At 55 - Najib

KUALA LUMPUR -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced Thursday that the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) members will retain their right to withdraw their savings at the age of 55. "This strikes a fair balance between the people's expectations to their hard-earned money at the age of 55 while protecting them if they retire at the age of 60," he said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia 2015 here.

FRIDAY

Senior Officials Meeting Ushers 26th ASEAN Summit

KUALA LUMPUR -- Senior officials from ASEAN member countries started gathering at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC) Friday to work out the details and progress on various issues relating to the 26th Asean Summit. The meetings, scheduled to take place Friday, are the Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the 10th meeting of the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration Working Group on Post-2015.



SMEbrief

KPDNKK Wants 100 Retail Firms To Join Price-Reduction Campaign

SHAH ALAM -- The Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumerism Ministry (KPDNKK) is targeting 100 retail companies to join a campaign to reduce prices of goods, which was launched on March 1. Its minister, Datuk Seri Hasan Malek said the ministry was conducting further discussions with more major supermarket operators and related companies to take part in the campaign. He was confident the target could be met as 40 companies had agreed to take part in the campaign as of Wednesday. "This is among our effort to help the people. KPDNKK will continue to find ways to tackle the cost of living," he told reporters here Thursday.

AmBank, CGCO To Provide RM300 Mln Initial Working Capital

KUALA LUMPUR -- AmBank (M) Bhd and Credit Guarantee Corp Bhd (CGC) will provide an initial working capital of RM300 million under the Portfolio Guarantee (PG) scheme to qualified small and medium enterprises (SMEs). AmBank Group managing director (wholesale banking), Pushpa Rajadurai, said the bank has already disbursed about RM75 million to 34 SMEs as of yesterday and would further finance up to RM1 billion. The two entities signed a PG agreement Friday to provide financing to five main sectors engaged by SMEs -- wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, education, healthcare and construction and resources.

Sime Launches Bumiputera Vendor Devt Proogramme

KUALA LUMPUR -- Sime Darby Bhd has launched its Bumiputera Vendor Development Programme (BVDP) to increase its pool of approved Bumiputera vendors to 30 per cent. In a statement Wednesday, Sime Darby said BVDP was designed to help specific bumiputera companies develop their capabilities in partnerships with the diversified multinational company. It said during the development phase, selected vendors would supply goods and services that were strategic to the needs of Sime Darby for a period of three to five years.

PropUP Propertyupdate

EPF Pulls Off Best Valuation Possible For London Property

KUALA LUMPUR -- The sale of One Sheldon Square in London to British Land, the UK's largest real estate company, for 210 million pounds (£1 = RM5.39) is the highest price ever fetched for a property in the city's history, the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) said. EPF chief executive officer Datuk Shahril Ridza Ridzuan said the EPF made a hefty profit from the sale as the property was purchased at £150 million in 2010. "We feel that we had pulled off the best valuation possible in the history of London and we had seized the opportunity to make a big profit that will be used for future investments," he told reporters after the launch of four initiatives to improve EPF schemes here Monday.

AMPROP, Partners Acquire RM63.3 Mln Residential Property In Japan

KUALA LUMPUR -- Amcorp Properties Bhd (AMPROP) and its co-investors, Grosvenor Asia Pacific Ltd and Nan Fung of Hong Kong, have acquired residential property worth 2.06 billion yen (RM63.3 million) in the Roppongi district of Minato-ku, Tokyo. AMPROP, Grosvenor Asia Pacific, part of the UK Grosvenor Group, and Nan Fung, one of the largest property developers in Hong Kong, made their maiden investment in a residential block, known as Forest Nanpeidai, in Shibuya-ku, Tokyo in January this year. In a statement here Wednesday, AMPROP said they agreed to acquire 62 apartments, covering 1,963 sq metres in a mixed use building known as Court Annex Roppongi.

Govt To Boost Ownership Rate To Over 50 Pct

KUALA LUMPUR -- The federal government is committed to building more affordable homes for the rakyat and to increase the current 50 per cent ownership rate. Deputy Minister of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government, Datuk Halimah Mohamed Sadique, said almost 85 per cent of Singaporeans were home-owners. "To improve the ownership rate, the government has pledged to supply one million affordable houses by 2018 and it has started to mobilise the public and private sectors to achieve the agenda, she said at the National Affordable Housing Summit 2015 here Thursday.

Demand For Properties Forecast To Outstrip Supply

KUALA LUMPUR -- Property developer Mah Sing Group Bhd, which sets sales target of at least RM3.43 billion this year, expects demand for properties will continue to outstrip supply, says its founder and chief executive officer Tan Sri Leong Hoy Kum. "Property remains the preferred wealth preservation and investment option in Malaysia, supported by healthy economic growth, household income growth, young demography and stable employment conditions," he told a press conference in conjunction with Invest Malaysia 2015 here Thursday.

MARKET

BURSA MALAYSIA

Scoreboard

Gainers - 393

Losers - 445

Not Traded - 636

Unchanged - 341

Value - 2004205407

Volume - 21029954

BURSA: FBM KLCI Ends On Firm Note, Up Almost 1 Pct

KUALA LUMPUR -- The key index on Bursa Malaysia ended the week on a firm note Friday, boosted by persistent buying momentum in selected blue-chips, led by banking and oil and gas stocks. At 5 pm, the benchmark FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) rose 16.5 points, or almost one per cent, to 1,862.58 after fluctuating between 1,849.71 and 1,862.58 throughout the day. A dealer said the benchmark index was traded in positive territory throughout the day, supported by foreign fund buying, ringgit appreciation and improved global sentiment. On a sectoral basis, losers led gainers by 445 to 393, with 341 counters unchanged, 636 counters untraded and 18 others suspended. Total volume decreased to 2.1 billion shares worth RM2.0 billion from 1.98 billion shares worth RM1.68 billion on Thursday. Main Market volume increased to 1.21 billion units worth RM1.78 billion from Thursday's 1.20 billion units worth RM1.45 billion.

FOREX: Ringgit Ends Higher Against US Dollar

By Azlee Nor Mahmud

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ringgit ended higher against the US dollar Friday, reacting positively to Eurozone finance ministers' meeting to determine Greece's fate, a dealer said. At 5pm, the ringgit was quoted at 3.5790/5830 against the greenback compared with 3.6250/6280 Thursday. The dealer said the local unit rose on the back of news that German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, wanted to keep Greece in the Eurozone. "There is a lot of speculation that a Greece deal will be reached later today, and I view this as a strong possibility given the recent headlines," he told Bernama.

The ringgit was quoted mostly higher against other major currencies. It strengthened against the Singapore dollar to 2.6767/6811 from Thursday's 2.6916/6958 and rose against the British pound to 5.4193/4268 from 5.4371/4435 previously. The local unit also edged up against the yen to 2.9947/9986 from 3.0213/0246 Thursday. It, however, eased against the euro to 3.8954/9008 from 3.8882/8925 previously.

Exchange Rate
(Ringgit : Foreign Currency)

	Buying	Selling
USD	3.5790	3.5830
EUR	3.8954	3.9008
GBP	5.4193	5.4268
100 YEN	2.9947	2.9986
SGD	2.6767	2.6811

Source: Bank Negara Malaysia

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

KUALA LUMPUR -- Short-term interbank rates ended on a stable note Friday on Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) intervention to absorb excess liquidity from the financial system. The liquidity surplus in the conventional system decreased to RM24.49 billion from RM27.8 billion earlier, while in the Islamic system, it trimmed to RM3.95 billion from RM8.55 billion. In the morning, BNM called for five tenders -- two conventional money market, two repo and an Al-Wadiah tender. The central bank also conducted a late conventional money market tender for RM24.5 billion and a RM3.9 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 3.27 per cent, 3.32 per cent and 3.35 per cent, respectively.

KLIBOR Futures Contracts Close Untraded

KUALA LUMPUR -- The three-month Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate (KLIBOR) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives closed untraded Friday. May 2015, June 2015, July 2015 and September 2015 stood at 96.32, 96.35, 96.39 and 96.42 respectively. Open interests totalled 922 contracts. At the 11 am fixing, the underlying three-month KLIBOR was pegged at 3.72 per cent.

KLCI Futures Contracts End Broadly Higher

KUALA LUMPUR -- The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) futures contracts closed broadly higher Friday, in tandem with the stronger underlying cash market. At the close, April 2015 soared 15 points to 1,864.5, May 2015 and June 2015 chalked up 14.5 points each to 1,861 and 1,858.5 respectively, while September 2015 perked 13.5 points to 1,849.5. Turnover rose to 7,408 lots from Thursday's 5,496 lots, while open interest widened to 38,594 contracts from 36,831 contracts Thursday. The benchmark FBM KLCI finished 16.5 points stronger at 1,862.58 Friday.

Takaful Ikhlas Launches 'E-Rakan' Takaful Portal

SIBU -- Takaful Ikhlas Bhd, a wholly-owned unit of MNRB Holdings Bhd (MNRB) Monday launched a general takaful portal for the staff of Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB) group of companies. Takaful Ikhlas's President/Chief Executive Officer, Ab Latiff Abu Bakar, said the portal, named 'e-rakan', was nested under official corporate portal owned by the company and could be access through www.eikhlas.com.my/erakan. In a statement here Monday, he said the portal was developed with the intention of encouraging the staff of PNB group of companies to choose Takaful Ikhlas as the takaful provider company for their general takaful coverage and facilitate their transactions. "We are offering numerous protections and benefits. For instance, staff from PNB group of companies who subscribed to our motor Takaful will obtain a 10 per cent rebate from e-IKHLAS portal," he said.

EPF Launches 4 Initiatives To Improve Current Pension Scheme

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has launched four initiatives to improve the current scheme, including aligning the full withdrawal age with the minimum retirement age as determined by the government. The other three proposals are aligning minimum contributions with minimum age legislation, extending dividend payments from the age of 75 to 100 years, and introducing shariah-compliant retirement savings in addition to the existing scheme. Chief Executive Officer Datuk Shahril Ridza Ridzuan said despite the changes in the full withdrawal age, the existing pre-retirement withdrawals remain unchanged. "The proposals are designed to address issues related to the inadequacy of retirement savings among EPF members for the long term," he tld reporters here Monday.

US Rate Hike Must Happen Soon To Reduce Market Volatility

By Farhana Poniman

KUALA LUMPUR -- Interest rates hike by the United States Federal Reserve (Fed) must happen this year as the uncertainty on the timing of the hike is causing volatility in regional markets. Responding to a comment by Bank Negara Malaysia governor, Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, that the Fed should act soon on the rates hike, ForexTime Ltd Chief Market Analyst Jameel Ahmad said Zeti's comments were probably based on concerns that the Fed would not raise interest rates at all this year. "I also agree that it needs to happen this year otherwise there is a risk of severe US dollar profit-taking in the financial markets. In my view, the Fed will not be too aggressive when it does come to raising interest rates, and the pace of interest rate increases are likely to be slow and gradual," he told Bernama. Zeti made the comments in an interview with Bloomberg in Washington last Saturday.

OCBC Upbeat On Eurozone Index Beta Fund's Long-Term Performance

KUALA LUMPUR -- OCBC Bank (Malaysia) Bhd, the exclusive distributor of the newly-launched series of funds managed by RHB Asset Management Sdn Bhd, is upbeat on the RHB-OSK Eurozone Index Beta Fund's long-term performance. The Beta funds, Malaysia's first series of single Exchange Traded Fund (ETF)-based products, are designed to track the performance of their underlying index as closely as possible. OCBC Vice-President Research and Content, Wealth Management, Michael Lai said he was optimistic over the Eurozone Index Beta Fund, due to the European Central Bank's effort in stimulating growth by launching an aggressive sovereign-bond purchase program. "We are optimistic that the quantitative easing (QE) in Europe will work and furthermore, business and consumer confidence is moving up, compared with six months back. The QE will allow banks to lend more, thus helping the economy to grow. So, we are confident that the Eurozone will recover," he told reporters here Tuesday.

Maybank Islamic Expects Customers To Switch To Investment Account

KUALA LUMPUR -- Maybank Islamic Bhd expects the bulk of its Mudarabah deposit account holders to reclassify their accounts to Mudarabah Investment Account (IA), in compliance with Bank Negara Malaysia's requirement. Chief Executive Officer Muzaffar Hisham said the 350,000 customers of the bank's existing Mudarabah deposit products had been given until May 31, 2015 to consent to either have their accounts reclassified as IA or other Shariah-compliant deposit products. He anticipated some 70-80 per cent of customers to make the switch as the IA was a compliance requirement arising from the central bank's Islamic Financial Services Act 2013. The IA will take effect on June 16, 2015 and will see the bank investing in a diversified portfolio of assets with capital preservation being a central objective for the management of the IA.

AIBC To Build World-Class Banking School In KL

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Asian Institute of Chartered Bankers (AICB) will build a world class Asian Banking school here as part of its commitment to develop professional bankers in Malaysia and ASEAN as a whole. Chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim said the main objective of the school is to produce professional bankers of a high standard for the financial industry. "The plan is at preliminary stage. But, we have agreed to appoint a very experienced head for the school to be located near Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM)," he added. The investment for the school will come from AIBC's staff training fund which has been accumulated over the years, said Azman. "We are now working on the type of building that can incorporate pertinent facilities and try to make it world class, catering to the ASEAN region as well as locals," he told reporters here Wednesday.

Ringgit Slide More Influenced By Non-Economic Factors - MIER

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ringgit's decline is more influenced by non-economic factors and an over-reliance on oil and gas revenue, as well as political issues, said the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER). Executive Director Emeritus Professor Dr Zakariah Abdul Rashid said fundamentally, Malaysia is still in a strong economic position and this would be reflected in the ringgit over the long term. "We expect the ringgit to find an equilibrium price of 3.50 to the US dollar in the third quarter of this year," he told reporters after a briefing on Malaysia's first quarter 2015 economic update here Wednesday. He said the ringgit is presently being termed as undervalued in view of extreme troubleshooting but was expected to revert back as exchange market pressures subside and the two-way flows return to the foreign exchange markets. Zakariah said portfolio flows had been very volatile since the global economic and financial crisis in 2008, with funds moving in and out of Malaysian equity and capital markets.

QNET Eyes Sales Growth With New Compensation Plan

KUALA LUMPUR -- Direct-selling company QNET is eyeing positive sales growth this fiscal year through its new compensation plan called Q10. The super hybrid plan combines two well-known industry traditions -- a binary and a unilevel compensation plan -- that give business owners higher income potential and incentives. “With the power of 10, QNET will pay up 50 per cent of sales in commissions and with 10 ways to earn, true residual income and lasting wealth are within reach of every QNET Independent Representative (IR),” said Managing Director JR Mayer in a statement here Monday. Mayer said the plan multiplies IRs’ earnings potential with the power of 10 ways to earn.

Public Bank Posts RM1.49 Bln Profit Q1

KUALA LUMPUR -- Public Bank Bhd’s pre-tax profit for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 grew by 12.2 per cent to RM1.49 billion from RM1.34 billion a year ago. Its revenue improved to RM4.60 billion from RM3.95 billion previously, the bank said in a filing to Bursa Malaysia Monday. Chairman Tan Sri Teh Hong Piow said the group has a head start in achieving its 2015 targets, particularly in its lending and deposit-taking businesses despite operating in a more subdued operating environment. “The group registered a strong loan growth at an annualised rate of 13.1 per cent and in tandem with that, the group’s customer deposits also increased favourably at an annualised growth rate of 12.8 per cent,” he said in a statement here Monday. The bank also planned to launch attractive campaigns to reward both new and existing retail customers in placing more funds with the group, as well as be partially supplemented by wholesale deposits, he said.

BioShoppe To Rake In Over RM20 Mln Income In 1st Year Of Operations

KOTA KINABALU -- Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation (BiotechCorp) targets to generate income of RM20 million to RM30 million in the first year of operations of its BioShoppe network. The franchise business concept shop created with the cooperation of Perbadanan Nasional Bhd (PNS) is expected to be launched this year. Its Chief Executive Officer Datuk Dr Mohd Nazlee Kamal said BiotechCorp also planned to open 10 BioShoppe outlets to market close to 500 health, cosmetics and nutritional products produced by Bionexus status companies. “The target is possible...and we will see how much the entrepreneurs can really gain every month to cover their cost. We are quite confident that when we launch this shop, traders will enjoy lucrative income,” he said to reporters after the launch of BioBorneo Conference and Exhibition 2015 here, Monday.

Nestle’s Q1 Pre-Tax Profit Jumps To RM244.25 Mln

KUALA LUMPUR -- Nestle (Malaysia) Bhd’s pre-tax profit for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 rose to RM244.25 million from RM238.81 million a year ago. Revenue also improved to RM1.28 billion from RM1.27 billion previously. Although consumers sentiments remained subdued, the group had performed solidly in its domestic business, Nestle said in its filing to Bursa Malaysia here Monday. The good domestic performance was primarily driven by the successful “Lebih Nilai, Lagi Hebat” promotional campaign launched at the end of February, 2015. Managing Director Alois Hofbauer said the campaign was a proactive step to assure Nestle consumers that they continued getting greater value for money for their favourite products amid uncertainty over price movements prior to the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax. Moving forward, Hofbauer said the food and beverage manufacturer would focus on strategic plans to grow its top and bottom line while expanding manufacturing capacity.

CIMB Thai Bank’s Q1 Profit Falls 70.4 Pct

KUALA LUMPUR -- CIMB Thai Bank plc’s net profit for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 fell by 70.4 per cent year-on-year (yoy) to 130.6 million baht (100 baht = RM12.14), mainly attributed to an increase in provisions. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Tuesday Holdings Bhd said the 117.6 per cent higher provisions reflected weaker environment from the slower economic conditions. CIMB Thai Bank’s Pesident/Cief Eecutive Oficer, Subhak Siwaraksa, said the group’s consolidated operating income, however, was 9.8 per cent higher yoy to 2.96 billion baht. “Operating expenses grew by 6.2 per cent while the cost-to-income ratio fell to 60.1 per cent from 62.2 per cent as a result of better cost management and increased income. Net interest margin over earning assets stood at 2.95 per cent in the first quarter this year, 0.32 per cent lower yoy,” he said.

HLI Q3 Pre-Tax-Profit Rises To RM68.36 Mln

KUALA LUMPUR -- Hong Leong Industries Bhd’s pre-tax profit for the third quarter ended March 31, 2015 increased to RM68.36 million from RM62.36 million in the same period a year ago. Revenue rose to RM551.05 million from RM506.28 million previously, the company said in a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Tuesday. Moving forward, the company said it expected performance to be satisfactory for the financial year ending June 30, 2015.

KFC Expects New Products To Boost Sales By 30 Pct

KUALA LUMPUR -- Fast food chain restaurant KFC Malaysia expects the newly launched products to its menu, Butter Garlic Crunch Chicken and Butter Garlic Burger, to boost its sales. KFC Chief of Digital Marketing and Information Technology Ahmad Taufek Omar said the company expects an increment of 30 per cent to the fast food restaurant’s current sales. “As for the new Butter Garlic Crunch products, we have spent about

RM4 million to advertise on TV and radio, online digital media, as well as outdoor and point-of-sales materials. Based on positive feedback from customers to our previous products, we believe the new additions will be able to contribute to the company's sales," he told a media briefing here Wednesday. The Butter Garlic Crunch Chicken is available nationwide in a value treat combo that includes rice and one regular soft drink for as low as RM6.95, while the Butter Garlic Burger is available a la carte at RM8.40, beginning Wednesday.

CIMB Niaga Operating Income Increases To 3.40 Trillion

KUALA LUMPUR -- PT Bank CIMB Niaga Tbk's (CIMB Niaga) unaudited consolidated operating income for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 rose 0.7 per cent to 3.40 trillion rupiah (100 rupiah = RM0.029) compared to the same period last year. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia Wednesday, CIMB Holdings Bhd said its Indonesian unit's net profit for the three months was 83 billion rupiah, which translated into earnings per share of 3.29 rupiah. CIMB Niaga vice-president director, D. James Rompas, said despite the challenging operating environment, CIMB Niaga 1Q15 operating income recorded a higher net interest income of 10.8 per cent year-on-year. "However, asset quality remains a challenge given the economic conditions, volatile rupiah and softer commodity prices," he said.

Bursa Malaysia Q1 Pre-Tax Profit Increases To RM62.93 Mln

KUALA LUMPUR -- Bursa Malaysia Bhd's pre-tax profit for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 (1Q15) rose to RM62.93 million in the same period last year. Revenue increased to RM127.09 million from RM123.17 million previously, Bursa Malaysia said in a statement here Wednesday. The bourse operator said the listing and issuer services dropped by 17 per cent to RM10.8 million compared to the same period in the first quarter of 2014 (1Q14). "The decrease was mainly due to lower initial and additional listing fees, resulting from absence of initial public offerings and fewer corporate exercises in 1Q15 respectively," it said. It said the securities trade activities in 1Q15 were dominated by domestic institutions with continued participation from foreign institutions and retail investors.

Mercedes-Benz Confident Of Sales Growth This Year

KUALA LUMPUR -- Premium German automaker Mercedes-Benz Malaysia Sdn Bhd is optimistic of its sales performance for 2015, driven by a series of new model launches this year and good showing in the first quarter. Without giving specific target, its President and Chief Executive Officer Roland Folger hopes to maintain, if not accelerate, its car sales momentum this year. "I see a good opportunity this year for us to chart growth in our sales," he told a media briefing on the company's first quarter performance here, Wednesday. For the first quarter ended March 31, 2015, Folger said Mercedes-Benz's passenger car segment recorded total sales of 1,886 units, an increase of 13 per cent compared to the same quarter in 2014. In March alone, the company achieved sales of 967 units of passenger cars, up 57 per cent from the same month last year. Folger said the uptrend in sales was attributed to the success of newly introduced E300 BlueTEC Hybrid model in January, which contributed 638 units to sales during the January-March period this year.

Boeing Reports Higher Q1 Revenue

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Boeing Company reported first-quarter revenue increased eight per cent to US$22.1 billion on higher commercial volume. Its core earnings per share (non-GAAP) increased 12 per cent to US$1.97. First-quarter 2014 core operating earnings (non-GAAP) increased two per cent to US$2.13 billion while core operating margin (non-GAAP) declined to 9.6 per cent amid continued strong operating performance. The company also reaffirmed its 2015 financial and delivery guidance. "With disciplined execution and a sharp focus on productivity, we are meeting increasing customer commitments while profitably growing our business," Boeing Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jim McNerney said in a statement here Thursday.

Eco World Aims For RM4 Bln Sales In 2016

KUALA LUMPUR -- Property developer, Eco World Development Group Bhd, aims to achieve RM4 billion in sales for its financial year ending Oct 31, 2016. Chief Executive Officer Datuk Chang Khim Wah said for the current financial year, the company was eyeing RM3 billion, adding, the sales target for both years was on the back of strong sales momentum and high pre-sales registration. The group has achieved cumulative sales of RM3.8 billion over the last 16 months, including RM621 million in the first four months of financial year 2015, he told reporters at Invest Malaysia 2015, here, Thursday. "Prospects for the property market remain strong," said Chang, who is also the company president.

Pavilion Q1 Pre-Tax Profit Increases To RM60.49 Mln

KUALA LUMPUR -- Pavilion Real Estate Investment Trust's pre-tax profit for the first quarter ended March 31, 2015 (1Q15) rose to RM60.49 million from RM56.63 million in the same period last year. Revenue increased to RM105.13 million from RM101.21 million previously, the company said in a filing to Bursa Malaysia here Thursday. "We will continue to attract shoppers as well as manage our operational cost effectively and seek investment prospects to ensure the best achievable return for unitholders," it said.

MAS Revises Excess Baggage Fee

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia Airlines (MAS) said its revised excess baggage fee structure will come into effect on April 22. Previously applied regional rates per blocks of 5kg will be replaced with a zonal fee structure, with rates per block of 3kg for travel on all MAS-operated flights system-wide, both domestic and international. Excess baggage rates will be calculated based on zones, depending on the distance flown in a single itinerary. “The fee will be calculated for every 3kg in excess of the Free Baggage Allowance, instead of the previous 5kg blocks,” it said in a statement here Monday. According to MAS’ website, its fixed rate for each block of 5kg varies from RM55 within Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak to a maximum of RM195 to Europe. This revision will also apply to passengers connecting on domestic routes between Sabah and Sarawak on MASwings-operated flights, it said, adding passengers with tickets issued before April 22, 2015 will be charged based on whichever rate is lower if they are travelling on April 22-Aug 30, 2015.

Economy Class Travellers Lift Int’l Passenger Traffic

KUALA LUMPUR -- Passenger travel on international markets rose 4.6 per cent in February compared with a year ago, driven by economy class travellers, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said. Economy class travellers, which was up 4.8 per cent year-on-year (YoY), drove the rise in volume for the month under review bolstered by lower air fares. “The acceleration in the YoY comparison is also partly due to the Lunar New Year as the celebration tends to give a boost to holiday-related leisure travel,” it said in a statement here Monday. The growth trend in premium international passenger travel, on the other hand, flattened over the past several months and had not increased since August 2014. The IATA said this development reflected a lagged response to the gradual slowdown in improvements in business confidence throughout the second half of last year, with deteriorating economic conditions in some emerging markets.

MDeC Aims To Make Malaysia Big Data Analytics Hub In Asean

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Multimedia Development Corp (MDeC) aims to make Malaysia a Big Data Analytics hub in ASEAN by 2020. Its Chief Executive Officer, Datuk Yasmin Mahmood, said to achieve this, MDeC would increase the number of data scientists to 1,500 from 80 now. “Seven local private and public universities are committed to offer data and computer science courses in data and business specialisations from July 2015. Data scientists are experts in analysing data to come up with business insights. Hence, it is important to have the right skills to develop the local digital economy and make Malaysia a digital nation. We want the institutes to develop the required talents and we are in talks with four more universities that are showing interest in this intiative,” she told reporters at the Big Data Week (BDW) 2015 @ Kuala Lumpur here Tuesday. The seven universities are Asia Pacific University, Malaysia Multimedia University, International Islamic University Malaysia, Sunway University, Monash University, Universiti Teknologi Mara and Universiti Teknologi Petronas.

Govt To Allocate RM15 Bln For Green Tech In 11MP

KUALA LUMPUR -- The government is allocating more than RM15 billion in the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP) as part of a game-changing move to introduce green technology initiatives into the economy. Director-General of the Economic Planning Unit Datuk Seri Dr Rahamat Bivi Yusoff said about RM3 billion to RM4 billion annually has been set under the 11MP to create environmentally-sustainable development. The 11MP, outlining the economic growth plans between 2016 and 2020, will be announced in May. Rahamat Bivi said there would be a wider implementation of green growth related initiatives to ensure continuity between the current Malaysia Plan and the upcoming 11MP. “Green will part of the whole planning process. The main focus is on sustainable consumption and production, which promotes doing more and better with less, meaning that high productivity and quality with less resources and very minimal pollution,” she told reporters here Tuesday.

Walt Disney Accepts Applications For Accelerator Programme

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Walt Disney Co is accepting applications for its second Disney Accelerator programme powered by Techstars, within the region including Malaysia. Disney Accelerator programme will select a class of 10 start-up companies for a three-month mentorship and investment programme beginning July 6, 2015 and concluding with a Demo Day on Oct 6, 2015. In a statement here Tuesday, Techstars said the programme would be opened to technology-based start-ups with a vision for making an impact on the media world and entertainment. “The participants will be offered US$120,000 investment capital along with mentor support from top Disney executives, entrepreneurs, investors and notable business leaders from the entertainment and technology communities,” it said.

MAHB Set Up Committee To Monitor Recently-Acquired Airport

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) has set up an integration steering committee to ensure an appropriate integration of its recent acquisition, Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen Airport (ISG) and LGM Havalimani (LGM), into the group. In a filing to Bursa Malaysia Tuesday, MAHB said the establishment of the committee would assist it to monitor ISG and LGM, including but not limited to procurement, finance, human resource and operational issues. “The committee shall be formed as a sub-committee to MAHB board of directors with an objective to facilitate the integration and rationalisation activities of ISG and LGM. It shall report directly to MAHB board," it said. LGM is responsible to manage and operate the Sabiha Gökçen International Airport in Turkey.

Bring Industry To Classroom To Enhance E&E Sector - Talentcorp

GEORGE TOWN -- The Industry-Academia Collaboration (IAC) initiative for the Electrical and Electronics (E&E) sector launched Wednesday aims to bring industry into the classroom to produce industry-ready graduates, says Talent Corporation Malaysia Bhd (Talentcorp). The IAC, a partnership between Talentcorp, the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian Investment Development Authority, aims to catalyse greater industry-academia collaboration. "The employers and universities will work together on both short-term and long-term interventions to cater to employers' different hiring strategies and specific talent needs as well as universities' challenges and gaps. "By mapping demand and identifying key industry players, we would be well positioned to facilitate initiatives that promote readiness of graduates," TalentCorp Chief Executive Officer Johan Mahmood Merican told reporters here Wednesday.

June Launch For ValueCap's RM1 Bln ESG Fund

KUALA LUMPUR -- ValueCap Sdn Bhd's Environmental, Social and Governance Index Fund (ESG Fund) of RM1 billion will be launched by June this year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said. He said the Securities Commission had approved the ESG Fund, which is in line with the country's agenda of sustainability and inclusivity. "I urge other institutional funds to follow suit and allocate at least five per cent of their assets under management for sustainable and responsible investment," he said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia 2015 institutional investor conference here Thursday. At the end of last year, Bursa Malaysia launched an Environmental, Social and Governance Index (ESG Index), which measures, amongst others, efforts at environmental conservation, the impact of social responsibility initiatives on the community, and responsible and ethical decision-making.

ASEAN To Play Significant Role In Global Economy, Says Najib

KUALA LUMPUR -- ASEAN, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) set to reach US$4 trillion dollar by 2020, will play an increasingly significant role in the global economy, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. He said cooperation and integration of ASEAN would see the economy at US$2.5 trillion annually, with a further US$7 trillion spending on infrastructure, as predicted at the ASEAN Cap 10 CEO Summit last February. "These are astonishing figures and they underline just how much more can be achieved in our region," the prime minister said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia 2015 institutional investor conference here Thursday. Najib said 2015 is an historic year for ASEAN, as all member countries declare the establishment of the Economic Community, the next stop in ASEAN's progress together as a region.

Inclusiveness And Sustainability Core To 11MP – Najib

KUALA LUMPUR -- Inclusiveness and sustainability will be the core values of the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP) to be tabled in Parliament next month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said. He said the values are also key pillars of Malaysia's growth vision and embedded in the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). "The government has long recognised that increasing our national prosperity means nothing, if not shared. The fruit of our success must be available to all," he said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia 2015 institutional investor conference here Thursday. He said since the launch of the ETP in 2010, an additional 1.8 million jobs had been created. He added that the government had also embarked on the new National Higher Education Blueprint to ensure the nation's talented younger generation can compete and succeed at the global level. Najib said to make the most of the opportunities arising from the country's diverse range of Shariah-compliant investment products and services offerings, the Securities Commission (SC) is developing a comprehensive blueprint for Malaysia's Islamic Fund and Wealth Management industry.

M'sia Successfully Demonstrates Ability To Emerge From External Shocks, Challenges

KUALA LUMPUR -- Malaysia has successfully demonstrated its ability to emerge from external shocks and challenges more than once, said Bank Negara Malaysia Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz. Zeti said the country was in a stronger position to manage external challenges due to its economic restructuring and financial reforms undertaken in the recent two decades. "Malaysia has, over several decades, demonstrated time and time again the ability to emerge from commodity price shocks, financial crises and the spillovers from disruptions generated from other parts of the world. For each respective major shock confronting our economy, Malaysia has registered V-shaped recoveries, essentially reflecting the economy's flexibility to adjust and the early and comprehensive policy response," she said in her speech at the two-day Invest Malaysia 2015 conference here Thursday.

Malaysian Franchise Firms Open Outlets In 55 Nations

PUTRAJAYA -- Sixty local franchise firms have expanded overseas, opening 2,380 outlets in 55 countries, through the 'Franchise Malaysia Goes Global' programme, said Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Hasan Malek. The outlets, which are also in major cities such as Tokyo, London, New York and Sydney, show Malaysian franchise companies' international competitiveness, he said when opening Franchise Day 2015 at his ministry here Thursday. Hasan said the franchise industry contributed RM25.6 billion or 2.6 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product last year, and this year the ministry expects the contribution to rise to RM27.7 billion. A total of 771 franchise firms are registered with the ministry, he said.

26th ASEAN Summit To Focus On ASEAN Single Window

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ASEAN Single Window (ASW) initiative will be one of the main areas to be discussed at the 26th Asean Summit to be held in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi on April 26 and 27. International Trade and Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Hamim Samuri said ASW, which integrates national single windows of Asean countries to facilitate trade and business, has been put on the summit's agenda. "ASW is important and could eliminate all the barriers especially the non-tariff barriers. Currently we are also enjoying zero import duty and a few other customs duties," he told reporters after opening the Asean Youth Forum Malaysia 2015 here Monday.

Mitsubishi Offers Five-Year Free Maintenance

KUALA LUMPUR -- Mitsubishi Motors Malaysia is offering a five-year free maintenance and warranty for the first 1,000 units of the new Mitsubishi ASX model. In a statement here Monday, Mitsubishi said the offer covered labour charge, engine oil, oil filter, air cleaner, transmission oil, fuel filter, brake fluid and coolant. "Mitsubishi is the first car company to offer a five-year free maintenance package for the compact SUV segment. The 2WD variant is priced at RM117,334.31 while the 4WD variant at RM131,828.59. Both are available in Black Mica, Titanium Grey, Cool Silver and Solid White colours," it said.

TBOI 2015 Aims To Produce More Innovative Leaders

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Business of Innovation conference (TBOI) 2015 aims to produce more innovative leaders able to raise their businesses, careers and personal lives to the next level in today's world. The London Speaker Bureau regional director of South-East Asia and Hong Kong, Harrienath Pillay, said the TBOI 2015 aimed to provide innovative development solutions to drive growth and profits for organisations. "TBOI 2015 is a priceless opportunity for business owners, company executives, entrepreneurs and organisation leaders to pick up marketing, branding and innovative development solutions to drive growth and profits. "In this era of innovation, creative thinking is everything and having a competitive edge will set apart industry leaders from the rest of the pack," he told a media briefing here Tuesday. Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank) Group Chief Strategy Officer, Michael Foong, said he hoped TBOI 2015 would help company leaders realise the importance of building an innovative culture.

Petronas Presents Outstanding Vendor Awards To 23 Firms

KUALA LUMPUR -- Petronas Carigali Sdn Bhd (PCSB), the upstream arm of Petronas, presented the Outstanding Vendor Awards (OVA) to 23 local and international oil and gas service companies for their exceptional performance and delivery for 2014. With the OVA, Petronas accords recognition for excellence in 15 different categories with emphasis on exemplary performance, reliability, responsiveness as well as commitment to implement high standards in health, safety and development (HSE). PCSB president Datuk Mohd Anuar Taib said the company's deliverables are significantly growing in terms of number and complexity. "Therefore, aligning expectations as well as building mutually beneficial business relationship between Petronas and its contractors is paramount in order to face the recent changes in oil and gas business environment," he said in a statement here Tuesday.

Perodua To Host Myvi 10th Anniversary Celebration In May

KUALA LUMPUR -- Second national car maker Perodua is organising the Myvi 10th Anniversary Celebration at Setia Alam City Mall, Shah Alam on May 23 and 24 to herald the success of the iconic model. Its President and Chief Executive Officer, Datuk Aminar Rashid Salleh said in conjunction with the celebration, Perodua is calling on all Myvi owners and/or drivers to assemble for the "Myvi Nation, the Biggest Myvi Gathering" at the same venue on May 24. To participate in the event, a Myvi owner and/or driver must register at Perodua's website www.perodua.com.my from Tuesday until May 10 with a minimum fee of RM50. Intended participants must bring their Myvi to the event to receive a certificate and a gift pack worth RM400 and they would also be in the running to win a special 10th anniversary commemorative edition Myvi car.

UMW Introduces GRANTT Lubricant Brand To Sarawak

By Sharifah Pirdaus Syed Ali

SIBU -- UMW GRANTT International Sdn Bhd (UMWG) has introduced its in-house lubricant brand, GRANTT, to Sarawak in an effort to expand market share. UMWG is a wholly-owned subsidiary of UMW Group. UMW Group President and Chief Executive Officer Datuk Syed Hisham Syed Wazir said although the brand is relatively new in being launched only in January this year, he is confident of it gaining a strong foothold in Sarawak. This he added, is due in part to UMW being a reputable name in the lubricants business. Currently, GRANTT has seven distributors nationwide and is gearing towards building sub-distributors and dealerships to reach the mass market. The GRANTT range of products are targeted at not just passenger cars, but also motorcycles and commercial vehicles.

ASEAN Community To Top Agenda Of 26th ASEAN Summit

By R. Ravichandran

ASEAN OFFICIALS...Malaysian Permanent Representative (PR) to ASEAN Datuk Hasnudin Hamzah (six left) with other representatives of ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) Leaders and Senior Economics Officials' Meeting (SOEM Leaders having a group photo after a meeting during 26th ASEAN Summit at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), here, Friday.

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- The two-day 26th ASEAN Summit, which kicks off here this Sunday (April 26), will focus among others on the progress made towards establishing the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015 and charting the next course to propel the regional grouping to greater heights. The annual summit, gathering the leaders from all ten members of the grouping, comes at an important time as ASEAN members are working hard to realise the establishment of the long dreamt ASEAN Community, which aims at deeper and wider regional integration.

The ASEAN Summit, first held in 1976 in Indonesia, will provide the ASEAN leaders an opportunity to take stock of and review efforts and challenges still need to be tackled, towards establishing a politically cohesive and an economically integrated and socially responsible ASEAN Community. Other ASEAN Summit related meetings including committee level meetings and the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) will precede the Summit, to be attended by ASEAN Heads of State/Governments. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) will be held on April 26. Besides these, in conjunction with the 26th ASEAN Summit, the 11th Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) Summit and the 9th Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) Summit will be held in Langkawi on April 28.

PEOPLE-CENTRED

Formed on Aug 8, 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, ASEAN's membership has expanded to include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Themed 'Our People, Our Community, Our Vision', Malaysia's vision throughout the chairmanship, which it assumed on Jan 1 from Myanmar, is the creation of a people-centred ASEAN involving all sectors of society in the grouping's activities. HOST ASEAN Since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, Malaysia is hosting the ASEAN Summit for the third time, after 1977 and 1997. Malaysia will also host the 27th ASEAN Summit in November. ASEAN leaders are also expected to have bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the 26th Summit. At this summit, ASEAN leaders are also expected to deliberate on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision.

Malaysia as the ASEAN 2015 chairman has been tasked to lead the process of formulating the post-2015 ASEAN vision, which is seen to be crucial for the ASEAN Community to continue progressing and prosper based on the spirit of oneness as one community.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Ensuring the priority measures and initiatives for the ASEAN community are in place and the integration process continues progressively beyond 2015 is Malaysia's key focus during its chairmanship. The ASEAN Community will among others result in a deeper and wider regional integration that would enable ASEAN to be more competitive globally and ensure its leadership role in the evolving regional architecture. In line with Malaysia's vision throughout the chairmanship, Malaysia has also proposed that ASEAN leaders adopt a Declaration on a People-Centred ASEAN as well as a Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM), which are to be decided by the leaders. If adopted, the GMM could be considered a success for Malaysia which has been actively promoting moderation in dealing with extremism. At the 20th ASEAN Summit in Cambodia in April 2012, ASEAN leaders endorsed a concept paper on the GMM, which was among the main outcome documents. The proposed Declaration on a People-Centred ASEAN is also in line with Malaysia's vision as Malaysia wants to create more opportunites for greater engagement of the peoples, and the ASEAN Community itself's ultimate aim is about the people, to bring about positive changes to the livelihood and well being of its more than 600 million citizens.

MALAYSIA'S PRIORITIES

Malaysia also in its Chairman's Statement will outline Malaysia's eight priorities for ASEAN during the chairmanship, with formally establishing the ASEAN Community as topping the priorities. ASEAN leaders are also expected to exchange views on current regional and international issues. The 26th ASEAN Summit will be the first event where the leaders gather officially to discuss ASEAN's agenda and priorities for 2015. One issue which could be expected to surface during their discussions is the esclating tensions in the South China Sea. ASEAN is currently intensifying efforts towards achieving the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and in this context, efforts have been going on for many years towards the early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC).

-- 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: Positive Sentiment To Further Lift Bursa Next Week

By Zairina Zainudin

KUALA LUMPUR -- Positive sentiment in the Malaysian stock market is likely to further drive the key index higher next week, reaching towards the 1,900-point level. Affin Hwang Investment Bank vice-president/head of retail research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan Adam Khan said the local market should see more accumulation, in line with persistent foreign buying. "Given the strengthening ringgit and the improved crude oil prices, the local market should trade with good momentum and towards the record high of 1,896.23," he told Bernama. The analyst also said the recently announced tame inflation data coupled with the upcoming Malakoff mega initial public offering slated for May 15 would boost local sentiment. For the week just ended, the local bourse moved in a volatile pattern influenced by Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz's remarks on Malaysia's fiscal direction, and new developments over a potential interest rate change in the US and China. Weekly turnover grew to 12.99 billion units worth RM10.42 billion from 12.11 billion units worth RM11.27 billion last week. Main market volume rose to 7.44 billion shares valued at RM9.02 billion from the 7.38 billion shares valued at RM10.07 billion the previous week.

FOREX: Ringgit To Be In Positive Territory Against Greenback

By Azlee Nor Mahmud

KUALA LUMPUR -- The ringgit is forecast to be in positive territory against the US dollar next week, prompted by positive market sentiment amid the Eurozone predicament. Affin Hwang Investment Bank Vice-President/Head of Retail Research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan Adam Khan said the possibility of a sovereign default by Greece and potentially the country's exit from the Eurozone has intensified. "Investors are keeping a wary eye on developments in Greece as concerns intensify that Athens failed to reach an agreement with European finance ministers on Friday to unlock much-needed funding," he told Bernama. On the domestic front, he said the local unit gained momentum with a 3.1 per cent week-on-week increase to 3.5800. "The recently announced tame inflation data and the upcoming Malakoff mega IPO would support the local sentiment," Nazri said, adding that Malaysia's Consumer Price Index remained surprisingly low at 0.9 per cent in March, below the long-run average. He said this suggests very little sign of imported inflation despite the rapid depreciation of the ringgit, the upwards adjustment in fuel prices (25 sen/litre) and the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax over the past quarters.

For the week just ended, the ringgit traded more strongly against the US dollar at 3.5790/5830 from last Friday's 3.6240/6270. The ringgit appreciated further near the end of the week on stronger demand due to investor confidence in the country's long-term outlook, in line with most major currencies. It appreciated versus the yen to 2.9947/9986 from 3.0487/0515, strengthened against the British pound to 5.4193/4268 from 5.4418/4485, rose against the euro to 3.8954/9008 from 3.9212/9259, and went up against the Singapore dollar to 2.6767/6811 from 2.6944/6985 last Friday.

Money-Market: Short-Term Rates Likely To Stay Stable

KUALA LUMPUR -- Short-term rates are expected to remain stable next week on Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) intervention in the money market to absorb surplus liquidity. A dealer said the central bank is expected to continue to call for money market tenders on a daily basis. For the week just ended, BNM intervened daily by conducting conventional, Al-Wadiah, repo, range maturity auctions, reverse repo and commodity murabahah programme tenders to reduce excess liquidity in the system. The overnight rate for the week stood at 3.21 per cent, while the one-, two- and three-week rates stood at 3.27 per cent, 3.32 per cent and 3.35 per cent respectively. The benchmark three-month KLIBOR stood at 3.72 per cent. On Friday, the total liquidity surplus in the conventional system was reduced to RM24.49 billion from an earlier estimate of RM27.8 billion. In the Islamic system, the liquidity surplus was reduced to RM3.95 billion from an earlier forecast of RM8.55 billion. Following this, the central bank issued a late conventional money market tender for RM24.5 billion and a RM3.9 billion Al-Wadiah money market tender, both for three-day money.

KLCI Futures Likely To Extend Gains Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- Gains in the FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are expected to be extended next week, taking the cue from the firmer cash market. Affin Hwang Investment Bank vice-president/head of retail research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan Adam Khan told Bernama the local bourse should take a higher track next week, driven by strong global market sentiment and China's mega stimulus plan. He said the market would also be supported by positive momentum from the ringgit, which appreciated 3.1 per cent to 3.5800 week-on-week, higher Brent oil price, the Invest Malaysia Conference and the upcoming Malakoff mega initial public offer. Externally, he said, the only stock market concern is over the possibility of a sovereign default by Greece and the country's potential exit from the Eurozone. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, contract month April 2015 was 18.5 points higher at 1,864.5, May 2015 gained 17.5 points to 1,861, June 2015 advanced 18 points to 1,858.5, while September 2015 bagged 14.5 points to 1,849.5. Turnover for the week rose to 32,473 lots from 25,715 lots last week, while open interest grew to 38,594 contracts from 36,157 contracts previously. For the week just ended, the benchmark FBM KLCI advanced 16.72 points to 1,862.58.

CPO Futures To Trade Cautiously Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- Crude palm oil (CPO) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are likely to see cautious trading next week due to higher production expectations for April, said Interband Group of Companies senior palm oil trader Jim Teh. He said the local market is also expected to track trends in crude oil prices as well as the ringgit's movements. "The market will also likely see sluggish demand, in line with other commodity markets. "Physical CPO will likely move between RM2,000 and RM2,100 a tonne next week," he told Bernama. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, May 2015 decreased RM18 to RM2,166 a tonne, June 2015 slid RM1 to RM2,162 a tonne, July 2015 rose RM6 to RM2,154 and August 2015 was RM13 higher at RM2,148 a tonne. Weekly turnover fell to 229,922 lots from 243,653 lots last week, while open interest rose to 223,010 contracts from 208,988 contracts previously. On the physical market, May South declined RM5 to RM2,185 a tonne from last week's RM2,190 per tonne.

Rubber To Trade Mixed Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Malaysian rubber market is likely to trade mixed next week tracking the trend in crude oil prices as well as the ringgit's movements, a dealer said. He said the trading is also expected to be driven by worries over weakening demand from top buyer China, after its central bank cut the reserve requirement ratio for all banks to stimulate growth. For the week just ended, rubber prices traded mixed, influenced by movements of rubber prices in regional futures markets. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, the Malaysian Rubber Board's noon price for tyre-grade SMR 20 remained unchanged at 500.50 sen a kg, while latex-in-bulk declined 3.5 sen to 403.50 sen a kg. The 5 pm unofficial closing price for SMR 20 added 0.5 sen to 498 sen a kg, while latex-in-bulk decreased two sen to 403 sen a kg.

KLIBOR Futures To Remain Flat Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- The three-month Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate (KLIBOR) futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are expected to remain flat next week. For the week just ended, there were no contract months traded. Turnover was nil, while open interest amounted to 922 contracts. On a week-to-week basis, May 2015, April 2015, June 2015 and September 2015 remained pegged at 96.32, 96.35, 96.39 and 96.42 respectively. The underlying three-month KLIBOR decreased 0.01 per cent to 3.72 per cent.

Tin Market Likely To Be Lower Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- The Kuala Lumpur Tin Market (KLTM) is likely to continue its downtrend next week with sellers reluctant to offload their stock. The dealer added that the tin price is expected to hover around US$15,500 a tonne next week, which would push sellers away from the market. "Sellers are not keen to sell as the KLTM hit a five-and-a-half year low and at the same time the expected price will sustain at the current level," he said. He noted that European and Japanese buyers might dominate trade next week, taking the cue from the London Metal Exchange (LME), which usually influences the global trend for tin. For the week just ended, the KLTM price moved between US$14,575 and US$15,650 a tonne, while turnover was down to 154 lots from 205 lots last week. The price differential between the KLTM and LME widened to a premium of US$440 a tonne from US$70 a tonne last Friday.

Gold Futures Likely To Stay Bearish Next Week

KUALA LUMPUR -- Gold futures contracts on Bursa Malaysia Derivatives are likely to remain bearish next week amid speculation on the timing of a US interest rate hike, a dealer said. Phillip Futures Sdn Bhd dealer Thomas Yew Jia-Jong said the negative sentiment for gold is also due to Purchasing Managers Index data to be released by the Chicago-based Institute of Supply Management next Friday. The local market was traded mostly lower for the week just ended. On a Friday-to-Friday basis, April 2015 declined 64 ticks to RM136.90 a gramme, while May 2015, June 2015 and July 2015 eased 55 ticks each to RM137.35, RM137.85 and RM138.45 a gramme respectively. Volume for the week fell to 869 lots worth RM12.06 million from 2,091 lots worth RM29.85 million last week. Open interest was higher at 3,315 contracts from 3,157 contracts last Friday.