



TELLING IT AS IT IS

the Sun e paper

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Golden Merdeka gift



ZULFADLI ZAKI/THE SUN

It took 215 students two months to piece together 8,000 coconut shells to form this huge Jalur Gemilang for the Merdeka Day celebrations. The special flag will be paraded at Dataran Merdeka today.

HUGE SUCCESS
of Malaysian contingent at SEA Games sets tone for joyous day of patriotism and unity

BY HAIKAL JALIL AND AIEZAT FADZELL
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: It is a march of victory and pride for high-spirited Malaysians to celebrate National Day. National fervour is at an all-time high a day after Malaysia concluded its most successful SEA Games yesterday. What sets this year's celebration apart from the past is the exuberance and strong sense of patriotism sparked by the successful Malaysian

contingent at the regional Games, which drew to a conclusion just a day before Merdeka Day. Malaysia topped the medal tally, besting 10 nations by bagging 145 gold medals and leaving Thailand a distant second by more than 70 medals. What made the Games even more memorable was that the glorious triumph was achieved on home ground, with 844 national athletes hauling more than the targeted 111 gold medals. The sporting event was without doubt a show of unity for Malaysians

of various backgrounds and beliefs as they rallied together in support of national heroes such as Khairul Hafiz Jantan, N. Thanabalan and Goh Jin Wei. Malaysian football legend Datuk Santokh Singh has always regarded sports as the best catalyst in boosting unity among Malaysians of diverse backgrounds. "Sports has always been the medium to unite people, and the SEA Games has been successful in doing that," he said. "Many people from different races and backgrounds have given

their support to the nation first before thinking about anything else," Santokh told *theSun*. "Malaysia has reached its 111 gold medal target, and we have obtained 145 gold medals. It is our best performance in the SEA Games, and the tremendous achievement has helped a lot in hyping up the Merdeka Day celebrations." Santokh suggested that Malaysia continue to bid for other international sporting events to reinforce the nationalism spirit.

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SPARKLING ENDING ...
A spectacular display of fireworks at the SEA Games closing ceremony last night at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak along with athletes and officials from 11 countries who participated in the Games were in attendance at the ceremony. The next SEA Games will be held in the Philippines in 2019.

ICE RACE ... Speed skater (short track) Anja Chong leading the pack in heat one of the women's 1000m at MyNISS, Damansara yesterday. She went on to win gold in the final.

Sporting event created 'moments of unity'

▶ FROM FRONT PAGE

"Events such as these should be continued because when we have something to cheer, this is the time when your nationalism spirit is heightened."

"This is also the time we can see people from different races sitting side by side in cheering for their nation," he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Joseph Kurup agreed that the SEA Games had created "moments of unity" for National Day.

He called for the momentum to be maintained.

Kurup, who is in charge of

national unity, added that fractions or disunity would not occur among Malaysians if they held true to the principles embedded in the Rukun Negara.

Highlighting sports as an important mechanism of unity, he said such games could eliminate the domination of one particular ethnic group, as well as contributing to the "one nation, one vision" spirit.

"Such instances was seen during the semifinal football match between Malaysia and Indonesia.

"I saw youths of various races drinking together in a mamak restaurant to give their support to the national team," he said.

"What's even more pleasant was scenes of our younger generation hugging each other at the victory of our team."

Kurup said such sporting events should be maintained, especially at the district and state level as it could inculcate interaction among the various races.

Gerakan vice-president Datuk Dr Asharuddin Ahmad said the triumphant sporting event serving as a run-up to the National Day had indeed created a "feel good factor" in fostering national unity.

Asharuddin, who is also the party's national unity bureau chairman, added that the SEA Games had brought Malaysians



Santokh. Kurup. Asharuddin.

closer before the Merdeka event. "This is the time for us to continue with the euphoria by saying no to racism, especially

with the visibly heightened patriotism spirit among Malaysians after the games," he said.

BBXPIX



The near-capacity crowd at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil last night enjoyed song and dance performances and a fireworks display.

Jubilant display of unity

> Merdeka spirit, Games victory rev up crowd

KUALA LUMPUR: Winning the 29th SEA Games was a special gift to Malaysians celebrating the eve of Merdeka Day last night.

The double celebration was held in full patriotic spirits and unity throughout the country, irrespective of race, religion, background and political differences.

The mood at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium, where the Games were held since Aug 19, turned into a celebration of patriotism in ushering in the country's National Day.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and thousands of Malaysians celebrated the country's achievements ahead of

the stroke of midnight.

A video on the Father of Independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was shown before a high-spirited speech was delivered by Najib.

At the stroke of midnight, cries of "Merdeka" echoed throughout the stadium, before the audience sang the national anthem.

A concert and fireworks presentation was also held at the Petronas Twin Towers (KLCC) with thousands, including tourists, filling the KLCC Esplanade Park.

Selangor and Perlis opted to celebrate Merdeka Day last night although it is normally celebrated on the morning of Aug 31.

The celebration with the theme "Negaraku Sehati Sejiwa" (My Country, One Heart, One Soul) in both states were no less exciting, with thousands of people gathered in the spirit of patriotism.

In SELANGOR, members of the public began gathering at the Shah Alam Dataran Kemerdekaan from 8pm to witness a colourful parade of about 10 contingents comprising government agencies, non-governmental organisations and state subsidiary companies.

A traditional dance performance which combined the cultures of the various races in Malaysia by about 100 school children was also presented.

Also present at the event were Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali, state exco members and senior state government officials.

In PERLIS, the public began filling the Tuanku Syed Putra Stadium in Kangar as early as 5pm to view an exhibition of the history of the nation before and after independence by government departments and agencies as well

as non-governmental organisations.

A parade comprising 75 contingents with 5,500 participants representing government departments and agencies, non-governmental organisations and political parties began at 10.30pm.

The Raja Muda of Perlis Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Jamalullail was present at the celebration, which was also attended by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azlan Man and state dignitaries.

In PERAK, the celebration at Ipoh City Square was attended by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Shah and Raja Permaisuri of Perak Tuanku Zara Salim, and was filled with various events that included cultural presentations, a Tae Kwan Do demonstration and musical performances.

The event was kicked off earlier with the Ipoh Merdeka Ride

organised by the Ipoh City Council.

In KELANTAN, the celebration was held at the Kuala Krai Malaysian Civil Defence Agency office with local song performances, followed by a lucky draw and "Dikir Gegar Merdeka Negaraku" concert.

This was followed by a video showcasing the development of Kuala Krai before the opening speech by Dabong state assemblyman Datuk Ramzi Ab Rahman, who is also Kuala Krai Umno division chief.

In KUALA TERENGGANU, thousands gathered at the Shahbandar Square in Kuala Terengganu to enjoy cultural performances and patriotic songs.

The ceremony, which began at 10pm, was attended by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Razif Abdul Rahman and state assembly speaker Datuk Zubir Embong.

BBPIX

Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs and chairman of the SEA Games 2019 Organising Committee Alan Peter S. Cayetano holding the SEA Games Federation flag after receiving it from federation president Tunku Tan Sri Imran Tuanku Jaafar (second from right) during the 29th SEA Games closing ceremony.



Sept 4 a public holiday

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak last night declared Sept 4 as a public holiday in appreciation of the outstanding achievements of the Malaysian contingent in the 29th SEA Games.

"It is not easy to declare a holiday because Malaysia has too many public holidays but since we have achieved an outstanding result in the SEA Games through the unwavering support of the various races and the excellent performance of our athletes, on behalf of the government, I declare Sept 4 as a public holiday," he said in his Merdeka Day speech at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil after the SEA Games closing ceremony.

Najib said the government decided to award a public holiday in recognition of the sacrifices made by the athletes to achieve the most memorable result in the history of the SEA Games. - Bernama

SEA Games stage for patriotism

> Malaysians demonstrated love for the country during the biennial event: Zahid

KUALA LUMPUR: All Malaysians clearly expressed their patriotism and love for the country during the 29th SEA Games that concluded yesterday, said Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

The deputy prime minister said the expression was all the more prominent when Malaysian athletes achieved success and won medals at the biennial games.

"Gold medal victories saw the national flag raised. The national anthem reverberated. All Malaysians enthusiastically gave their total support to our national teams.

"For all the athletes, I feel this is a translation of the love for the country," he said in a video clip containing his National Day 2017 speech that was uploaded onto Twitter yesterday.

Ahmad Zahid said he felt proud the undivided support from Malaysians for the national athletes did not have any prejudice against any community.

He said this clearly demonstrated the true value of

Malaysian unity.

"We have to maintain this spirit for the sake of the country," he said and wished everyone a Happy National Day.

The video clip, which runs for four minutes 51 seconds, starts off showing an interview of the Father of Independence Tunku Abdul Rahman who relates his struggle to secure independence for Malaya.

The first prime minister said that after seeing the failing British efforts against the communist terrorists, he felt the only way to overcome the communists was to gain independence.

"This is the only country in the world that fought the communist terrorists and won," said Tunku. "Being so fortunate, it is left to the people to safeguard and preserve our country for our descendants to live in a sovereign and an independent nation."

The video clip also portrayed Malaysia in modern times and showed the faces of several Malaysians who had brought fame to the country in various fields. - Bernama



BERNAMAPIX

CLEAN SWEEP ... Malaysian divers show off their prizes after collecting all 13 gold medals in aquatic diving events of the 29th SEA Games at the National Aquatic Centre in Bukit Jalil yesterday.

FINAL MEDAL TALLY



	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
MALAYSIA	145	92	86	323
THAILAND	72	84	86	242
VIETNAM	58	51	60	169
SINGAPORE	57	58	73	188
INDONESIA	38	63	88	189
PHILIPPINES	24	33	63	120
MYANMAR	7	10	18	35
CAMBODIA	3	2	11	16
LAOS	2	3	22	27
BRUNEI	0	5	8	13
TIMOR-LESTE	0	0	3	3

World champs deliver Cambodia's gold

PETALING JAYA: Two world champions, Ke Leng and Ouk Sreymom, ensured Cambodia didn't return empty-handed as they won their country's gold medal in petanque last Thursday.

They defeated Thailand's Phantipha Wongchuvej and Pataratida Meepak 13-10 at the women's doubles final.

Earlier, the two Cambodians beat their Vietnamese, Myanmar and Indonesian

counterparts 13-8, 13-1, 13-5 respectively.

Ouk Sreymom was crowned the world champion of petanque in 2017 at a competition held in Belgium while Ke Leng earned her first and second world champion titles in 2013 in France and in 2015 in Thailand.

Cambodia's other golds were delivered by Sorn Seavmey in women's taekwondo and Khun Dima in kickboxing.

Timor-Leste chops down 3 bronzes

PETALING JAYA: Taekwondo exponent Sonia Martins Soares, 19, delivered one of Timor-Leste's three medals at the 29th SEA Games when she won the bronze in the finweight (below 46kg) kyorugi event on Monday.

Soares shared the bronze with Indonesia's Dhean Titania while Thailand's Julanan Khantikulanon and Vietnam's Truong Thi Kim Tuy took gold

and silver respectively.

She was one of the four taekwondo exponents from Timor-Leste which sent a contingent of 50 athletes. They had the smallest contingent among the 11 participating Southeast Asian countries.

Timor-Leste got its other bronzes from karate through Ana Da Costa Da Silva Pinto Belo in the women's kyorugi below 49kg category and futsal.

Gold in the most unusual place

PETALING JAYA: The Philippines found gold in the most unusual place at the 29th SEA Games by winning the first-ever ice hockey event. They scored a 5-4 win over Thailand in the finals to become the inaugural champions last Thursday.

The Philippines also triumphed in another sport that is considered

unconventional in their country.

The Filipinos also struck gold in the men's fours event of the lawn bowls. The team of Emmanuel Portacio, Curte Robert Guarin, Leoncio Carreon Jr, and Ronald Lising upset hosts Malaysia 16-14 in the championship round. Thailand took the bronze in the men's fours.

Vietnam's Little Mermaid scores big with 7 golds

PETALING JAYA: Vietnam's Little Mermaid, Nguyen Thi Anh Vien, overshadowed Singapore's Olympic champion Joseph Schooling by sweeping seven golds in swimming. Schooling won six after scaling down his number of events from 10 in 2015.

Nguyen dominated her events at the National Aquatic Centre in Bukit Jalil, winning seven gold medals and three silvers, and breaking two Games records and a further three Vietnamese national records.

The 20-year-old captain in the Vietnamese army won the women's 200m individual medley by nearly 5sec, and added the 50m backstroke gold to her collection last Friday.



Nguyen overshadows Schooling by sweeping seven gold

145 golds for Merdeka joy

> Best ever SEA Games campaign by the Malaysian contingent

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian athletes fought with grit to the very end to wrap up their best ever SEA Games to emerge overall champions and presented a euphoric gift of 145 gold medals to the nation, which celebrates its 60th anniversary today.

In the final push yesterday, Malaysia whacked five of the last seven golds at stake – two from diving as expected and three from the ice skating – to bring the curtains down on 12 days of competition.

This is the second time Malaysia has topped the Games after their first in 2001 when they won 111 golds on home soil. Setting a similar target this time and to its utter delight, the national athletes

responded with high fighting spirit and comradeship to surpass the mark.

Taking top spot on the medals board with 145 golds, 92 silvers and 86 bronzes, the host nation towers over Thailand, which is going home with 72 golds including the prized men's football title for the third time in a row, a sharp drop from their 95-gold domination of the Singapore Games two years ago.

Vietnam finished third by a whisker with 58 golds, just one ahead of Singapore, which is followed by Indonesia with 38, the Philippines 24, Myanmar seven, Cambodia three and Laos two. Rounding up the 11 participating nations are Brunei, which has five silvers and eight bronzes and

Timor-Leste with three bronzes.

National divers signed off with the men's and women's titles in synchronised 10m platform to sweep all 13 gold offered in the sport at the National Aquatic Centre.

Leong Mun Yee and Traisy Vivien Tukiet faced no threat at all in retaining the women's gold while in the men's event, promising 16-year-old Jellson Jabillin and Hanis Nazirul Jaya Surya did not squander the opportunity in nailing the men's title for their first time.

The men's gold was won two years ago by the more experienced Ooi Tze Liang and Chew Yiwei, who are still in the team but are taking a back seat to give the youngsters a chance to prove themselves.

In the hotly contested final day of speed skating, Malaysia's 500m gold medallist Anya Chong kept

her cool to win a second Games medal from the 1,000m short track event with Ashley Chin taking the bronze.

The two girls came back to pick up a fourth gold medal for Malaysia in the 3,000m relay with Nor Marissa Ahmad Lokman and See Wan Ni in tow before the men's team took the 3,000m relay gold.

The first gold was won by figure skater Julian Yee.

In weightlifting, Malaysia's best show was a silver from Mohamad Fazrul Azrie in the men's 85kg with a 323kg total including 182kg in the clean and jerk that smashed his own national record of 181kg set in May this year.

The gold was won by Thailand's Pornchai Lobsi with 337kg and the bronze went to Vietnamese Hoang Tan Tai on 322kg.

The next Games will be hosted by the Philippines. — Bernama

Class act by our divers

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia divers of Leong Mun Yee and Traisy Vivien Tukiet claimed the women's 10m synchronised platform gold medal on the final day of the SEA Games yesterday to give the host nation a clean sweep of 13 golds in diving.

It was Malaysia's third straight win with a clean sweep in gold medals in diving, after its eight-gold feat in both Myanmar (2013) and Singapore (2015).

World champion Cheong Jun Hoong braved a back injury to claim gold in 1m springboard category and nudged teammate Jasmine Lai into second place on Aug 26. The 27-year-old competed on painkillers.

Pandelela Rinong amassed three golds yesterday with almost flawless attempts in the women's individual 10m platform, mixed team event and the 3m springboard women's team event.



Khairul outpaced Eric Shaun Cray of the Philippines and Jirapong Meenaprafom of Thailand in the 100m dash.

Speedy Jantan toast of the nation

PETALING JAYA: Khairul Hafiz Jantan became the toast of the country when he won the 100m gold to end Malaysia's 14-year wait for gold in the blue-riband event at the SEA Games.

His 10.38sec sprint to glory on Aug 22 was the cherry on top for track and field athletes from Malaysia who grabbed 25 medals overall, of which eight were gold, eight silver and nine bronze medals from the 45 events contested.

Khairul, dubbed Speedy Jantan, is the first Malaysian to win the race since Nazmizan Muhammad's 10.47sec effort at the 2003 Games in Hanoi.

He is also the fourth

Malaysian sprinter to win the 100m crown, after Nazmizan, Gunaratnam Rajalingam (Bangkok 1967) and M. Jegathesan (Kuala Lumpur 1965). However, Khairul limped out of the 200m race with hamstring injury.

He also had to pull out of the 4x100m, putting paid to his triple-goal hope.

Pocket Rocket takes host to magical 111

PETALING JAYA: "Pocket Rocket Man" Azizulhasni Awang provided Malaysia its targeted 111th gold, making it a key moment in the host's SEA Games campaign.

Azizulhasni rode to gold in the men's individual sprint on Monday.

Malaysians watched with bated breath as the countdown to the target got hyped up right after Malaysian rhythmic

gymnast Amy Kwan Dict Weng delivered the 100th gold medal in style by winning the ribbon apparatus final earlier.

The tally rose via gymnastics, diving, silat, squash, and hockey respectively, before the cycling team delivered the 109th, 110th and 111th golds.

Azizulhasni screams in delight after winning the men's sprint individual gold.

Sultan Mizan sparks off dream start

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's dream start to the 29th SEA Games came with a golden royal touch as the Sultan of Terengganu galloped to the first triumph of the day in the 80km equestrian race.

Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin led the country to a majestic start on Aug 20 with a double-gold feat in the individual endurance event and the team endurance event. The team gold was won with Mohd Faris Syafiq and

Mohammad Fuad Hashim.

Sultan Mizan, who is the first sultan to participate in the SEA Games, credited team effort for Malaysia's success. He is ranked fourth in the world in this discipline.



National gymnasts show off the gold medals in team rhythmic gymnastics at the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre yesterday.

Clean sweep reaffirms M'sia as rhythmic gymnastics powerhouse

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia cemented its position as the rhythmic gymnastics powerhouse in the region by making a clean sweep of eight gold medals at stake in the sport at the SEA Games.

They stole the show by clinching four gold medals in the hoop, ball, clubs and ribbon finals through Koi Sie Yan (hoop and clubs), Izzah Amzan (ball) and Amy Kwan Dict Weng (ribbon)

on Aug 27.

The national gymnasts added four more the next day, with the icing on the cake coming from the group exercise mixed apparatus final yesterday through Amira Sofiya Amirul Fares, Chan Mei Thung, Koh Jei Yi, Tee Wei Qi, Tee Wei Wen and Thew Yue Jia who collectively scored 15,350 points, ahead of Vietnam (13,650 points) and Singapore (11,450 points).

BERNAMAPIX

'Govt will keep promises'

Survey: Many proud to be Malaysian

> Better to focus on people's welfare than waste time responding to baseless allegations, says Najib

KUALA LUMPUR: Nothing is more special as a Merdeka Day gift to the people than a government capable of delivering its promises, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

He said his administration does not wish to waste time staving off baseless allegations but would rather remain committed to efforts to spur economic growth.

"The story of Malaysia's independence continues to be infused with all kinds of successes and achievements that are respected by friends and foes alike," he said in his National Day message.

Malaysia, he said, was now widely referred to as a progressive nation developing fast based on a clear stand on issues such as rejection of extremist ideologies, especially in combating the Islamic State threat.

"King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud (of Saudi Arabia) chose Malaysia to locate the King Salman Centre for International Peace," he said.

Najib also recalled some of the country's latest achievements, including an impressive gross domestic product growth of 5.8% for the second quarter of this year, one of the highest in the world, Bernama reported.

He said *Forbes* magazine placed Malaysia at the forefront of all Asian countries for foreign investments while international rating agency Fitch Ratings also maintained Malaysia's credit rating at "A-".

Referring to the position of Bank Negara Malaysia's international reserves, Najib said it had now increased to RM431 billion.

"How is it possible that some quarters are accusing Malaysia of being a failed state when, in the 90s, when the reserves were much lower, there was no talk of the country having failed?"

Najib said his administration believed in service to the people which, he added, must go beyond politics and be in the people's interests.

Over the past eight years, his administration had never lagged but

remained committed to implementing various policies and initiatives to prosper the nation and people, he added.

He said the government, in keeping with the philosophy of "iMalaysia: People First, Performance Now", would continue to give priority to infrastructure projects such as the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), a world-class facility that benefits about 500,000 commuters daily.

The MRT project could help reduce the cost of living by providing a convenient and cheaper system of transportation while reducing traffic congestion, easing stress among the people, helping the environment by reducing carbon emissions and intensifying economic activities along its route. Likewise, the proposed East Coast Rail Link, the Pan-Borneo Highway and the High Speed Rail will bring similar benefits, he said.

Najib also said initiatives and aid for the underprivileged would continue to be provided and intensified. These include the iMalaysia People's Aid, iMalaysia Housing Programme for Civil Servants, iMalaysia People's Housing Projects, iMalaysia Clinics, iMalaysia Student Discount Card, and aid for farmers, smallholders, fishermen and Felda settlers.

KUALA LUMPUR: A survey conducted among the people in the run-up to Merdeka Day found an overwhelming majority are proud to be Malaysian.

In the study, conducted by commercial and social intelligence organisation Kajidata, 98.3% of 1,041 registered voters surveyed nationwide stated "I'm proud to be a Malaysian", a 3% increase compared with last year's findings.

Kajidata advisor Prof Datuk Seri Syed Arabi Idid said the survey, conducted from July 10 to 18, also found a strong sense of patriotism among Malaysians, with 80.2% celebrating National Day on Aug 31 every year.

Syed Arabi, a former rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, said the survey also found Malaysians acknowledged that unity is important in nation-building. The survey also found 85.9% of the respondents agreed the Rukun Negara could serve as a guide in promoting unity.

Almost 80% of respondents said they would not migrate regardless of the current situation in the country.

In the study, conducted via telephone poll, only 12.2% indicated intent to migrate. - Bernama

PKR reaching critical mass

PRESS DIGEST

BY KONG SEE HOH
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

THE simmering internal conflicts in PKR have come to a boil, as evidenced by Rembau division chief Yusuf Tapa's call on Aug 28 for an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) to decide whether the party should continue working with PAS.

Party vice-president Rafizi Ramli had a day earlier suggested that a special congress be held for the same purpose.

These developments, combined with the resignation of Selayang MP William Leong from PKR's political bureau after disagreeing with the party's decision to negotiate electoral seats with PAS, and signs of grassroots discontent with PAS, are enough to put the party in stormy waters, *Nanyang Siang Pau* said in a commentary yesterday.

While party chief Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail urged PAS to choose between Pakatan Harapan and Umno, admitting that the party is split over the matter, deputy president Datuk Seri Azmin Ali said calls for an EGM or special congress were individual requests as the party had never broached the subject.

But Azmin's remark does not seem to hold water.

Firstly, the first person from the party to propose a special congress to discuss party overtures towards PAS was none other than Rafizi, who is holding a very senior party post.

Secondly, as long as a third, or 73 of the party's 218 divisions requisition an EGM, PKR has to hold it under the party constitution. According to Yusuf, 56 divisions have already given their endorsement for the meeting.

To be fair, said the commentary, PKR stands to gain should it succeed in forging an electoral pact with PAS in the coming polls but any person worth his salt can see that as *mentri besar* of Selangor, Azmin's immediate concern is the stability of the state government. Antagonising PAS at this juncture might well cost Pakatan Harapan the state.

As for Wan Azizah, it is laughable that she should ask PAS to state its stand as the Islamist party has long made it clear that it had severed ties with PKR.

Time will tell if PAS is really indispensable to Pakatan Harapan, but PAS had not done well in general elections except in 1999, 2008 and 2013 when it got a helping hand from DAP and PKR.



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COURTESY CALL

... Najib greeting one of the nine new envoys who paid him a visit yesterday in Perdana Putra, Putrajaya. The nine are Datuk Mat Dris Yaacob (Russia), Zakri Jaafar (Bosnia Herzegovina), Datuk Lim Juay Jin (Brazil), Zanariah Zainal Abidin (Czech Republic), Sarah Nava Rani Al Bakri Devadason (Germany), Datuk Jilid Kuminding (Jordan), Mohd Aznor Mahat (Lebanon), Datuk Sudha Devi K. R. Vasudevan (Australia) and Loh Seck Tiong (Kenya).



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HAPPY RETIREMENT ... Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi shaking hands with Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar at the Home Ministry yesterday. Khalid will be retiring on Sept 5, after 40 years in the force.

Website to check dubious accounts

BY CHARLES RAMENDRAN
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: The federal Commercial Crimes Investigations Department (CCID) will soon launch a web portal where the public can verify bank account numbers to ascertain if it is genuine or blacklisted as fraudulent.

The website, that will be fully accessible to the public in the near future, was created by the CCID to counter the rising number of cheating cases involving online trading and other scams.

Federal CCID deputy director and head of cyber and multimedia investigation SAC Ahmad Noordin Ismail said yesterday the portal is in its trial stages and being fine-tuned before it is officially launched by CCID director Comm Datuk Seri Acryl Sani Abdullah Sani, who mooted

the idea for the website.

He said just hours after a trial run was launched a few days ago, the portal had received 47,000 hits and 25,000 searches.

"The portal is being built to deter fraud and help the public when they are carrying out transactions that involve bank accounts.

"The search allows them to verify if any given bank account number had been reported to be involved in fraud," Ahmad Noordin said.

The website is accessible at <http://ccid.rmp.gov.my/semamule/>.

On average, police receive about 500 reports each month involving e-commerce fraud that often required buyers to make payments via bank transfers before purchases are delivered.

Last year, over 6,200 reports were lodged by online shoppers who were fleeced of about RM30 million.

Joint effort to weed out errant firms

> Customs and IRB to audit, detain offenders over outstanding corporate tax, GST

PUTRAJAYA: The Customs Department and Inland Revenue Board (IRB) will collaborate to audit and detain errant companies that have outstanding corporate tax and Good and Services Tax (GST).

Stating this, Finance Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah said both enforcement authorities will combine initiatives under the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Audit Programme.

Both Customs and IRB signed the SOP audit programme yesterday, which will focus on Klang Valley before going nationwide.

"The initiative, under the National Blue Ocean Strategy, will enable sharing of information and joint enforcement, besides saving money.

"Both agencies will share information on those who don't declare either the corporate tax or GST, commit fraud in declaring taxes or those who don't pay.

"With the combined initiative by both parties, it is hoped that any wrongdoing will be traced quickly," Irwan said.

He said the joint audit programme would provide advice and recommendations to the individuals and companies to comply with taxation regulations.

He also stressed that all officers involved in the audit programme will be given a card to only carry out auditing, and are prohibited from collecting any payment.

"Two types of working committee have been formed under the programme - the Joint Audit Committee and Joint Audit Implementation Committee.

"These committees will work together in the selection of cases, audit scope, audit procedures and implementation," Irwan said.

Also present were Customs Director-General Datuk Seri T. Subromaniam and IRB chief executive officer Datuk Sabin Samitah.



Loo (left) and Ng being brought to the sessions court yesterday.

Couple deny falsifying GST claims

BY P. CHANDRA SAGARAN
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

IPOH: An unemployed couple claimed trial to a total of 11 charges of falsifying GST claims amounting to more than RM745,838 at the sessions court here yesterday.

Loo Peng Wah, 50, faces seven cheating charges amounting to RM478,715 while four charges involving a total of RM267,123 were against his wife Ng Lee Foon, 45.

Loo was said to have made false statements as a registered person under the Act in the GST-03 tax returns, with the intention of obtaining credit for tax input against tax output at the state Customs headquarters in Jalan Tun Abdul Razak here on separate occasions between October 2015 and April 2016.

Ng committed the same offence at the same place between January and May last year. If found guilty, they could be fined between 10 and 20 times

the amount of tax involved, or jailed up to five years or both, for each offence.

Judge S. Indera Nehru set bail of RM20,000 for each of the seven charges for Loo and RM10,000 for each of the four charges for Ng. She ordered them to surrender their passports to the court and report to the nearest Customs office once a month.

Case management was fixed for Oct 4.

**WISHING ALL
MALAYSIANS
A HAPPY
MERDEKA DAY**

From all of us at

theSun
TELLING IT AS IT IS

BBX PIX

'Forex losses shocked me'

> Former BNM chief said he would fix the mess, witness tells RCI

BY S. TAMARAI CHELVI
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PUTRAJAYA: A former Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) deputy governor said he was horrified by the huge amount of losses incurred by the central bank due to foreign exchange (forex) trading, a Royal Commission of Inquiry heard yesterday.

Tan Sri Datuk Dr Lin See Yan, 85, (pic) said the then governor of Bank Negara Tan Sri Jaffar Hussein was worried and shocked, when he was informed of the losses and had later told him that he would "fix the mess".

"I first came to know about the big losses suffered by Bank Negara in forex trading from the special assistant to the governor, Lee Siew Kuan, in the early 1990s," Lin said, adding that subsequently, he was informed by a friend at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the bank had large "open forward" foreign exchange transactions, in multiple currencies, especially in New York and London and the bank had suffered huge losses.

"I went to see Jaffar and told him what I had heard and he confirmed the losses. I did ask him how big the losses were and he told me that he was not sure. Jaffar told me that Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yacop was the chief dealer," said Lin.



"I told Jaffar, since he did not know the amount of losses and how much more there would be, it was better we investigated to find the details of the

losses, how they came about and how much more the bank was exposed to," said Lin.

He said Jaffar agreed that Lee would carry out the preliminary investigation with the help of one "Datuk Murad".

He said they found out that the bank had large "open positions" in multiple currencies far forward in time. "This simply meant that BNM could be subjected to further losses when the time comes for settlement with counter parties.

"As a central bank, this risk is not acceptable and Jaffar agreed. When circumstances permit, the bank should close all the "open forward" positions."

Only then, he said, the bank would know for certain the amount of losses incurred.

"I told the governor that Nor Mohamed should not be allowed to deal any more and Murad be allowed to take over and close all the 'open forward positions'."

He said the bank should cease with immediate effect all the future commitments and Jaffar agreed.

Jaffar's parting words to Lin were: "I got the bank into this mess and I will fix it," adding Jaffar was an honourable man and that he was too "trusting".

"He let his guard down and wasn't fully aware of what had happened."



The boat in flames off Kelantan yesterday.

Foreign boat set ablaze for illegal fishing

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia yesterday for the first time set fire to a foreign boat for illegally fishing in its waters as a stern warning to trespassing trawlers.

Porous maritime borders are a constant problem for

Malaysia and its Southeast Asian neighbours, which struggle to keep foreign fishing vessels from operating illegally in their waters.

In early 2016, more than 100 Chinese fishing vessels were detected off Sarawak. In April

Indonesia sank 81 mostly foreign boats caught for illegal fishing.

The boat was set fire at sea off the coast of Kelantan, according to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.

Cops unsure why ex-AG's driver was shot

KUALA LUMPUR: Police are unsure of the motive behind the shooting of former attorney-general (AG) Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail's driver on Tuesday.

Ampang Jaya police chief ACP Hamzah Alias told *theSun* that police have not arrested any suspects yet but gave an assurance that a thorough investigation is underway.

"We cannot speculate on the motive of the shooting because we have not caught the suspects involved. It is not right to say that it is linked to the former AG."

He said that the police are currently questioning eyewitnesses.

In the incident, the 40-year-old victim was at the front door of his house when two men, in

their 30s, without crash helmets rode up to him on a motorcycle. One of them fired a shot after the other called out his name.

They then sped off on their motorcycle.

Hamzah said the driver was shot in the leg and has been warded at the Ampang Hospital and is condition his reported to be stable.

71 Rohingyas held for protesting

BY TIMOTHY ACHARIAM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 71 Rohingyas were detained by police for gathering at the Tabung Haji (TH) building in Jalan Tun Razak here yesterday.

Sources revealed they were arrested for among others, creating provocation when police ordered them to disperse.

About 1,200 protesters had earlier gathered around the Ampang Park, Lembaga Tabung Haji and the Myanmar Embassy areas. The embassy was protected heavily by police. The protesters were demonstrating against the treatment of the Rohingya people by the Myanmar government.

With the violence going on in the Rakhine state against the Rohingyas, a group of non-governmental organisations and protesters gathered at the embassy as early as 8am to hand over a memorandum.

Members of the group are believed to have come from all over Malaysia by bus, with the travel arrangements made by the Rohingyas themselves, to hand over the memorandum.

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Islam Organisations and other organisations handed the memorandum to Myanmar embassy representatives.

"However, after handing over the memorandum, they still gathered around and some acted aggressively, forcing the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) to detain them," said Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Amar Singh.



ASRYRAF RASID / THE SUN



Top: FRU personnel removing a protester from the front of Masjid Tabung Haji yesterday. Bottom: Some of the detained protesters being taken away.

BRIEFS

RISE IN NUMBER OF STUDENT DRUG USERS

SEREMBAN: The number of drug users among students is rising, with 1,256 detected in the first six months of this year by the National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK). AADK Prevention Division director Abdul Rahman Hamid said the figure was obtained through urine tests conducted in schools. "The situation is still under control but it is nevertheless a serious issue because the number is rising compared with last year. "These students are new users," he told reporters after the signing of a Note of Understanding between Negri Sembilan AADK and Seremban Cosmopoint College here yesterday. - Bernama

INDONESIAN CHARGED WITH KILLING BOSS

TANGKAK: An Indonesian who worked in a chicken farm was yesterday charged with murder at the magistrate's court here. Samsul Hadi, 35, was charged with killing his employer, Sam Peng Kok, 46, at the workers' quarters in Jalan Seng Heng, Sagil, between 10am and 1pm on Aug 16. He was charged under Section 302 of Penal Code which carries the death penalty upon conviction. Magistrate Arun Noval Dass fixed Oct 2 for mention after Inspector Siti Alina Mohd Adil, who appeared as prosecution officer, said the post-mortem and related chemistry reports were not ready yet. No plea was recorded and the accused was unrepresented.

Welcoming place for hot meals and care



Cheah says Kechara prepares about 200 packs of food daily.

> Kechara Soup Kitchen provides food, medical assistance to the homeless, urban poor

BY VATHANI PANIRCHELVUM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: As a disheveled man enters the premises of Kechara Soup Kitchen, Justin Cheah quickly grabs a pack of the packed lunch and hands it to the man. Cheah, 41, who works with Kechara full-time, said the man is mentally unsound and comes regularly for his meals at the kitchen.

The biggest challenge, Cheah said, is dealing with the mentally unsound.

"The hospitals have limited space to keep them for treatment. Often, families cannot handle a mentally unstable person and they will give up, so where else can they go but the streets."

Cheah said the non-religious community action group relies on volunteers for about 90% of its daily operations, which are often more than just feeding the homeless and the urban poor.

Kechara prepares about 200 packs of food daily for the homeless who start lining up at

about 11am for their meals.

"The homeless and the urban poor come in for lunch and to do their laundry. We also provide medical assistance," he added.

Although Kechara does not have a full-time doctor, the staff take blood pressure readings, and if needed, take the person for medical attention at a nearby clinic or Hospital Kuala Lumpur.

Cheah said when necessary, Kechara will pay for the treatment.

"Sometimes (we have) no choice. People with all kinds of ailments come to the kitchen seeking help."

Cheah said there was a homeless woman who had pus oozing from her body which had a horrible stench.

"She had stage four breast cancer and her breast had ruptured.

"She also seemed to have lost her memory," he said.

"Working with the National Registration Department, we managed to trace her brother who is now taking care of her."



Eng Lai serving up a bowl of a delicious icy treat.

New place for ice kacang stall

GEORGE TOWN: One of Penang's most famous ice kacang (shaved ice dessert) stalls at the New World Park food court in Swatow Lane will be moving to new premises.

Lee Wah Chai, 32, the fourth-generation operator, said they will be moving to a shoplot within the New World Park itself.

"We will open tomorrow," he told *theSun*.

His great-grandfather, Lee Kar Tee, first served the local delicacy in 1923 in Swatow Lane outside the "Sin Sei Kai" (The New World) open-air entertainment centre.

Kar Tee handed the business to his two sons, Soo Hun and Soo Eng.

Eng Lai, the son of Soo Hun and father of Wah Chai, continued operating the business on a push cart by the roadside at Swatow Lane before moving to the refurbished New World Park food court nearby 12 years ago.

"We'll be moving from the food court with a heavy heart," said Eng Lai, who has been selling the icy delicacy since he was 15 years old.

Wah Chai said the new outlet would be a fusion of an old-style coffee shop with a contemporary cafe feel.

"The plan is to provide dining options from breakfast to supper, and focus on serving healthy food." – by Ong Jo Yi



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WHY?

- Charity as a platform for unity.
- Focus on neglected families missed out by society.
- Create an avenue for Malaysians to help others in a simple but meaningful project.

This project is a collaboration between Zubedy (M) Sdn Bhd, Kechara Soup Kitchen Society and theSun.





A Hwasong-12 ballistic rocket lifts off from its launching pad at an undisclosed location near Pyongyang on Monday in this picture released by KCNA on Tuesday.

'More missiles to come'

> North Korea says rocket launch first step in Pacific operation

SEOUL: The United Nations condemned North Korea's "outrageous" firing of a ballistic missile over Japan on Tuesday, demanding Pyongyang halt its weapons programme but holding back on any threat of new sanctions on the isolated regime.

North Korea said the launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile was to counter US and South Korean military drills and was a first step in military action in the Pacific to "contain" the American territory of Guam.

The North's leader Kim Jong-Un ordered the launch to be conducted for the first time from its capital, Pyongyang, and said more exercises with the Pacific as the targets are needed, KCNA news agency said yesterday.

"The current ballistic rocket launching drill like a real war is the first step of the military operation of the KPA in the Pacific and a meaningful prelude to containing Guam," KCNA quoted Kim as saying.

The Korean People's Army or KPA is the North's military.

Earlier this month, North Korea threatened to fire four missiles into the sea near Guam, home to a major US military presence, after

President Donald Trump said the North would face "fire and fury" if it threatened the United States.

In a statement, the 15-member Security Council said it was of "vital importance" that North Korea take immediate, concrete actions to reduce tensions and called on all states to implement UN sanctions on Pyongyang.

However, the US-drafted statement, which was agreed by consensus, does not threaten new sanctions on North Korea.

Diplomats say veto-wielding council members China and Russia typically only view a test of a long-range missile or a nuclear weapon as a trigger for further possible sanctions. - Reuters



Residents in the Japanese city of Wajima cover their heads during an evacuation drill for North Korean missiles yesterday.



AFPPIX

Smoke rises from what is believed to be a burning village in an area near Maungdaw yesterday.

Villages burn in Myanmar

YANGON: Smoke billowed from at least three burning villages in the remote section of Rakhine state where Myanmar's military is carrying out sweeps for militants, an AFP reporter saw yesterday.

The violence, which erupted six days ago after Rohingya militants staged surprise raids on police posts, has shown little sign of abating, leaving at least 110 confirmed dead and sending thousands fleeing.

The displaced include ethnic Rakhine people and the persecuted Rohingya minority, thousands of whom have massed at the "zero line" border with Bangladesh which they are barred from crossing.

The bodies of two Rohingya women and two children washed up on Bangladeshi soil yesterday,

an official there said, as villagers took to rickety boats or tried to swim across a frontier river.

Villagers in Rakhine continued to flee their homes yesterday.

A Rohingya villager near the town of Maungdaw, speaking on condition of anonymity, said residents fled his hamlet as security forces approached and torched their homes.

It was not immediately possible to verify his account but Rohingya who have made it into Bangladesh have brought similar testimony with them.

Large fires were visible early yesterday from the May Yu river that cuts through the area worst hit by unrest, according to an AFP reporter travelling by boat on a Myanmar government-led trip to the town of Maungdaw. - AFP

Thaksin breaks silence on Twitter

BANGKOK: Thailand's former premier Thaksin Shinawatra yesterday made his first public comment since his sister fled the country last week, breaking a long silence with a Twitter post that appeared to denounce the Thai justice system as tyrannical.

Thaksin's sister, Yingluck, 50, whose government was ousted by a coup in 2014, disappeared from Thailand last week, shortly before a Supreme Court verdict in a negligence case against her.

Former premier Yingluck would have faced up to 10 years in prison if found guilty.

In his comment on Twitter, Thaksin quoted the 18th century French philosopher Charles de Montesquieu.

"Montesquieu once said 'There is no crueler tyranny than that which is perpetuated under the shield of law and in the name of justice,'" Thaksin tweeted.

The post, which appeared in both English and Thai, was his first on that page since 2015.

The message was re-tweeted more than 1,000 times within 40 minutes.

Former telecommunications tycoon Thaksin was ousted in a 2006 coup and lives in self-exile to avoid a 2008 graft conviction he says was politically motivated.

Yingluck disappeared ahead of the court verdict last Friday in her trial for negligence over a costly rice subsidy scheme that helped to bring her to power in a 2011 general election.

She was forced to step down days before a May 2014 coup against her government, after a court found her guilty of abuse of power in connection with a civil service posting.

Supporters of Yingluck and Thaksin have accused the courts of bias in frequent rulings against

the Shinawatras and their allies.

Last week, junta chief Prayuth Chan-ocha said the government had no influence over the courts.

Thaksin re-shaped Thai politics after building a business empire, winning staunch support with populist policies that raised living standards, especially for the rural poor, and propelled him or his loyalists to victory in every election since 2001.

But Thaksin also posed a challenge to the royalist-military establishment, which denounced him as corrupt, setting up a struggle that has defined Thai politics for most of the past 15 years.

His seemingly defiant tweet will be viewed with interest on both sides of the divide.

Winthai Suvaree, a spokesman for the junta, declined to comment on Thaksin's post. - Reuters

Ban child sex dolls: British charity

LONDON: Recent criminal convictions prove a strong link between people who use lifelike child sex dolls and child abuse, a British charity said on Tuesday, calling for ownership of the "grotesque" dolls to be outlawed.

Britain should close a legal loophole which allows people to own child sex dolls even though it is illegal to import, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children said, amid a surge in seizures on its borders.

"Early evidence shows that those using these grotesque dolls are already harming children through other online activities," its spokesman, Tony Stower, said.

"Six of the seven men who have been charged in the past year with importing child sex dolls also had indecent images of children," he said.

A British man was convicted in July of importing a child sex doll in a landmark case in the fight against a new form of sex crime against children.

Police found over 34,000 indecent images of children aged three to 16 on computers and hard drives in his home.

Opinion is divided over the use of sex dolls, which have the appearance, weight and anatomy of real children.

A Welsh charity said this

month that the dolls should be made available on prescription to help prevent people who are sexually attracted to young children acting on their desires.

Paedophilia is a psychiatric disorder. Most treatment focuses on therapy, mentoring and supervision to help paedophiles control their behaviour.

Critics say sex dolls can be dangerous proxies to act out fantasies like rape or child abuse.

Britain's National Crime Agency has stepped up probes into sex dolls since border officials noticed an increase in imports of child sex dolls in 2016 from Hong Kong and China. - Reuters

REUTERSPIX

Rescue personnel, hanging from a military helicopter, save a stranded resident from floods caused by Harvey in east Houston on Tuesday.



Harvey's second landfall

> Louisiana braces for heavy winds and rain

WASHINGTON: After pouring record rains on Texas, Tropical Storm Harvey made a second landfall yesterday to strike Louisiana, a state that still bears deep scars from 2005's Hurricane Katrina.

The second hit comes five days after the monster storm slammed onshore as a Category Four hurricane, pummeling the US Gulf coast with torrential rains that turned neighbourhoods into lakes in America's fourth largest city, Houston.

Harvey made its second landfall just west of the town of Cameron, the National Hurricane Centre said, with "flooding rains" drenching parts of southeastern Texas and neighbouring southwestern Louisiana.

Louisiana residents braced for Harvey's ferocious maximum sustained winds nearing 72kph, with forecasters predicting

another 13cm to 25cm of rain could pour on the region.

In Texas, emergency crews were still struggling to reach hundreds of stranded people in a massive round-the-clock rescue operation - but the National Weather Service tweeted that weather conditions there were to at last improve.

The storm had transformed Houston roads into rivers, driving more than 8,000 people into emergency shelters.

Houstonians woke up yesterday from a night-time curfew declared by mayor Sylvester Turner aimed at aiding search efforts and thwarting potential looting in the flood-ravaged city.

At least one bridge had crumbled, one levee had breached and dams were at risk in the Lone Star State.

The full scale of the catastrophe's impact - including the number of deaths and the extent of destruction - remained difficult for authorities to gauge, as rescue efforts

were ongoing and much of the city remained flood-stricken.

Media reports indicated the death toll could have risen to 30, and authorities feared confirming more once the worst had passed and search teams could again travel roads.

Everywhere, the figures from the storm are staggering. The National Weather Service said over six million Texans have been impacted by heavy rain since Friday.

Andrea Aviles, 16, fled her home along with her family on Tuesday.

She and some 30 extended family members were now crammed into a hotel in the small town of Winnie.

"I've never seen it like this," she said of the flooding. "All our yard is full of water."

Hugging the road's central median in their Suburban vehicle - water reaching halfway up the tyres - they passed ditches full of abandoned cars.

"It was sad," she said. "It's overwhelming." - AFP

Australian number plate sells for A\$2.45 million

SYDNEY: A black-and-white number plate with the single digit "4" has sold at a Sydney auction for a record-breaking A\$2.45 million (RM8.3 million), reportedly to a Chinese-Australian sex toy entrepreneur.

The sale shattered pre-sale estimates of up to A\$1.5 million, with the auction hammer coming down at A\$2.45 million - more than twice the average cost of a Sydney home.

"Just nine of these New South Wales number plates were ever issued, making them ultra-collectible and irreplaceable," Shannons auction manager Christophe Boribon said.

"Their unique status and desirability is never going to change.

"The opportunity to acquire such a plate is exceptionally rare, as most single-digit plates remain in family hands, are usually passed down through generations and rarely, if ever, come onto the open market."

The auction house refused to reveal who the buyer was, but the Sydney Morning Herald said it was Chinese-Australian billionaire Peter Tseng, who made his fortune in sex toys.

It said he arrived at the Sydney auction on Monday evening in his red Ferrari bearing a No. 2 licence plate.

He also reportedly owns a Hong Kong-registered No. 1 plate and a personalised number plate "ONE" registered to his 1969 Mercedes in Sydney.

Boribon said the previous Australian auction record was for the NSW plate "2", which sold for A\$689,000 in 2003. - AFP

Melania makes waves with 'storm stilettos'

WASHINGTON: First Lady Melania Trump is making waves ... for her flood fashion.

The former model is always elegantly turned out and perfectly coiffed, and on Tuesday was no exception as she left the White House with her president husband for storm-ravaged Texas.

Melania was photographed walking across the White House lawn in sky-high stiletto pumps, part of an outfit that included tailored capri pants, an army green bomber jacket with ruched sleeves and aviator sunglasses.

"Melania over here looking like Flood Watch Barbie," writer Maria Del Russo tweeted.

Television writer-producer Brad Wollack quipped: "Help is on the way, Texas! Don't worry, Melania has her special storm stilettos."

Added comedian Jessica Kirson: "Brilliant idea @FLOTUS. You can pick up debris with your heels."

Donald Trump's outfit was more in line with what politicians normally wear to visit weary survivors of deadly natural disasters: a black hooded rain jacket, khaki trousers and brown boots.

A wide swathe of Texas is reeling from monster storm Harvey, which has devastated coastal communities and left large parts of Houston underwater.

Tens of thousands of people are packed into overcrowded shelters as authorities continue to pluck victims from rooftops.

The first lady changed into something a bit more disaster-appropriate on the flight to the hard-hit coastal city of Corpus Christi - the Trumps' first stop in Texas.

She stepped off Air Force One wearing black trousers and a white button up shirt, trading the stilettos for white tennis shoes.



Trump and Melania depart the White House to visit Texas on Tuesday.

She also wore a black baseball cap that read "FLOTUS", or the abbreviation for First Lady of the US, setting off another round of Melania-bashing on Twitter.

At day's end, the first lady issued a statement hailing the "strength and resilience" of Texans.

"I want to be able to offer my help and support in the most productive way possible, not through just words, but also action," she said.

"My thoughts and prayers continue to be with the people of Texas and Louisiana." - AFP

BRIEFS

1,000 'TREASON' COMPLAINTS

BERLIN: More than 1,000 criminal complaints for high treason have been filed against German Chancellor Angela Merkel since the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, reports said yesterday. Most of the complaints come from supporters of the right-wing Alternative for Germany party, *Mannheimer Morgen* daily said. Merkel's decision to let in one million asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 sent support for her Christian Democratic Union party into a nosedive but her support has recovered as new arrivals have dwindled. - AFP

LOW FERTILITY RATE

SEOUL: South Korea's fertility rate plunged to a seven-year low in 2016, official statistics showed yesterday, with more women delaying marriage. The average number of babies a South Korean woman is expected to have in her lifetime dropped to 1.17 last year, down 5.4% from 2015 and the lowest in the OECD group of advanced countries, Statistics Korea said. The average age of first-time mothers was 31.4 last year, up from 31.2 in 2015. - AFP

HEAVY RAINS KILL 14

NEW DELHI: Two toddlers were among 14 people killed as heavy monsoon rain deluged India's financial capital Mumbai, causing transport chaos and forcing schools and many offices to close yesterday. The coastal city of more than 20 million people is the latest to be hit by floods that have ravaged South Asia this monsoon season, affecting millions of people across India, Nepal and Bangladesh and killing over 1,200. - AFP

FORMER SPY CHIEF JAILED

SEOUL: A former South Korean spy chief was jailed for four years yesterday for leading an online smear campaign against the man who is now president, Moon Jae-In, during the 2012 election. Won Sei-Hoon, who led the National Intelligence Service from 2009 to 2013, orchestrated an illicit smear campaign to sway voters in favour of the then-ruling conservative party, the Seoul High Court said. - AFP

CROC ALERT IN PHUKET

BANGKOK: Popular beaches in the Thai southern city of Phuket were on alert yesterday following sightings at the weekend of a 3m-long crocodile on the loose, authorities said. "A lot of locals reported the sighting but we haven't found it yet," said Paiboon Bunlipatanon, head of the Phuket Office of Fisheries. "We have warned local businesses to be careful and we will keep looking," he said. - dpa

FIVE CHINESE DEPORTED

SYDNEY: Australia has deported five Chinese men whose boat landed on a remote Australian island and charged two men on the boat with people smuggling, foreign minister Julie Bishop said yesterday. Five men were sent back to mainland China after their boat landed on the island of Saibai, 150km north of Cape York, the northernmost tip of Australia, Bishop confirmed after a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. - dpa

TRUMP JR TO TESTIFY

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump Jr, the US president's eldest son, will take questions from a congressional committee investigating possible collusion between the Republican's 2016 campaign team and Russia, officials said Tuesday. The Senate judiciary committee announced that the 39-year-old Trump Jr agreed to testify before investigators behind closed doors. No date was immediately given. - AFP

MACRON'S TRUST ISSUE

PARIS: A majority of voters do not trust President Emmanuel Macron to lead France in the right direction, with his popularity falling further in the month to mid-August, a Harris Interactive poll showed on Tuesday. The poll showed 46% trusted in Macron's political leadership, down five points on the previous month and 13 points off his mid-June high. - Reuters



RUKUN NEGARA: THE PRINCIPLES

- 1 BELIEF IN GOD
- 2 LOYALTY TO KING AND COUNTRY
- 3 THE SUPREMACY OF THE CONSTITUTION
- 4 THE RULE OF LAW
- 5 COURTESY AND MORALITY

THE OBJECTIVES

- TO achieve greater unity among Malaysians
- TO maintain a democratic way of life
- TO create a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared
- TO ensure a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions
- TO build a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology

Ideas of freedom



EGALITARIA

BY TRICIA YEOH

OVER the last four years, I am proud to have been part of a young, dynamic team of people working hard to produce research-based ideas and policy proposals at a local, independent think-tank. My study leave to pursue a PhD in political science coincides with the celebration of the country's 60th anniversary of its independence, so for this column I shall share reflections of specific instances in which I felt IDEAS offered me the right platform and opportunities to contribute to the nation's future.

One of the projects that I am most proud of was a nine-month programme that brought selected young Malaysians from all over the country together under the banner of a national unity youth fellowship. Every other weekend, we would bring them from state to state: fishing villages in Kuala Terengganu, Iban land rights activists in Sarawak, Chitty village in Malacca, Thai community in Perlis, and one of the most memorable to me - the post-flood devastation in a small Kelantanese village.

These visits were to expose our youth to the realities on the ground, and discuss challenges and issues being faced locally. We met local politicians and community leaders who gave us the inside story of the political economy and governance of each of the states. Mostly, they shared their hopes and fears about their future, which were unsurprisingly similar in nature: better economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their families.

During these intensive workshops, speakers would educate the young fellows on the economic and political shape of the nation. Discussions would take place about

our constitutional history, economic policy, interethnic and interreligious challenges - a safe space that I helped facilitate to achieve rational discourse (something rare and precious these days). Today, some of these fellows have gone on to join politics, start their own movements and one was even awarded the Queen's Young Leaders Award by Queen Elizabeth. I watch on with pride.

Second, our undying belief in the principles of liberty and justice (a quote from Tunku Abdul Rahman's declaration of independence that we often use). We organised numerous conferences over the years, but the flagship one that always reminded me of why this work was so gravely important was our Liberalism Conference. Held annually, it was the one conference that would attempt to dispel the unfounded views that put liberalism in negative light.

Unprecedented, this was the only platform that brought together speakers from disparate perspectives on one panel: from right-wing conservative groups like ISMA (Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia) and Perkasa (Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa) to the more liberal IRF (Islamic Renaissance Front) and Sisters in Islam (SIS). Sure, the speakers would consistently disagree since they had different worldviews altogether, but this was the rare opportunity for the issues to be discussed openly. Only through engagement can there be any resolution on how we can live together in a common space.

The Liberalism Conference would also bring together varied perspectives on the economy: should there be more or less government intervention in managing our economy? Again, there are vastly different opinions. We explored the negative impact that poorly managed government-linked

companies have on the country's fiscal health; how opaque and non-transparent public procurement practices mean that even bumiputra companies do not benefit as long as they are not well-connected; how excessive government regulation makes it tough for companies, both small and large, to operate in the country.

How about the political future of the country? Bringing together political leaders from both sides of the divide was this conference's forte. What is the right model that works to secure the future of Malaysia? The Barisan Nasional consociational model that was meant to allow different ethnic groups a political party to air their grouses, or the Pakatan Harapan model where each party is at least in theory multiracial? More importantly, what public policies should be implemented to ensure the long-term wealth to allow all communities to prosper and flourish, living the lives they desire?

These are all questions that have been explored deeply throughout my years here, and it is this enabling of such intellectual debate that I believe has added value.

The Malaysia of today has the burden of dealing with multiple faultlines, and it is these we must carefully navigate. At a time when these faultlines - race, religion, geographical distance, urban-rural divide, language - seem to be rearing their ugly heads more often than we like, it is ever more important for there to be avenues for us to understand "the other".

Finally, the working together with other members of civil society was a valuable experience. Through a coalition of governance, integrity, accountability and transparency (GIAT), we launched several

campaigns to promote good governance in the public sector. One of the most prominent ones was to establish an even more independent Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the separation of powers between the attorney-general and the public prosecutor, both roles of which are fused into one person today.

Separately, a "Good Governance Agenda" that political parties can sign up to included the need for open data practices, transparent budgets, the review of the Official Secrets Act, Whistleblower Protection Act and the tabling of legislation to allow for transparent political financing, and freedom of information. It is these governance frameworks that can help existing systems to mitigate the effects of any possible human failure.

It is always a challenge to measure the public policy impact that a think-tank makes, especially one that is independent of government. However, four years on, there were certainly key occasions during which some role was played in contributing to Malaysia, now and beyond: educating young Malaysians; expanding the space for discussions on liberty, justice, governance and economic development; painting a vision of the future we want.

While we celebrate 60 years of independence, it is all too easy to romanticise the past and imagine what it was like in those early years, brimming with hope. We have accomplished a lot, let us not deny this.

But let us keep moving to greater heights. And to do this, we will need more such platforms that I believe IDEAS has been able to provide Malaysians, by bringing together people from all walks of life to face the realities of present-day crises, and ultimately seek practical public policy solutions that will best provide us the freedom we seek. Selamat Hari Merdeka ke-60.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

The Malaysia of today has the burden of dealing with multiple faultlines, and it is these we must carefully navigate.

Technological change and social disruption

COMMENT

by Azeem Fazwan Ahmad Farouk

HUMANITY is witnessing another great disruption. The creative destruction is linked to the fourth industrial revolution. We are told that the fourth revolution is fundamentally different from the previous three because it is essentially a combination of cyber-physical systems, the internet of things, and the internet of systems.

It has also been pointed out that the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0 will change the way we live, and that change we must.

Technological progress such as steam and water power, and later on computerisation is referred to by economic historians as a general purpose technology - a state whereby advances in the technique of doing things can be used to do things more effectively.

The first three industrial revolutions had shaped how our modern job evolved, shaped by the rise of manufacturing. The second industrial revolution, for example, handed to us a template for modern life that continues to support our consumption economy. While the first three revolutions had ushered in an era of unprecedented growth and wealth, it came at a tremendous social cost.

The shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial one was wrenching, breaking up communities and making hard-learned trades redundant. In Western Europe and its offshoots, the industrial revolution increased social mobility but it also widened the social divide.

In Europe, whose lower social orders had never had it as good as the American colonists, the industrial revolution was so socially wrenching that it inspired the first coherent political



Globalisation and technological revolution have created a chasm between 1% of the super class and 99% of the rest.

ideology of class warfare, Marxism, which culminated in violent revolutionary movements that would eventually instal communist regimes in Russia, Eastern Europe, and China.

The communists had shattered the Western bourgeoisie's confidence, and many proxy wars were fought between the West and the Soviet Union to advance their ideologies. Nevertheless, the fall of the Soviet Union had placed capitalism firmly as the engine of technological and economic advancement. That too came at a high social cost.

Today, the two powerful and unstoppable forces shaping our economies are globalisation and technological revolution. Together, they constitute a transformative capacity that dwarfs

the power and scale of the first three industrial revolutions. The fourth industrial revolution, however, has yet to create a surge in economic growth for the West that is comparable to that of the first. What the fourth revolution has done is to enable an industrial revolution in much of the rest of the world.

Countries such as China, India and some parts of the developing world are going through their own economic and technological transformation. Economic growth in China has increased twelve-fold. The global economic and technological change is unprecedented in its scale and impact. What is less discussed is the negative externalities of the growth-centred economy that does not pay close attention to an increased social divide.

The twin forces of economic shift, globalisation and technological revolution, have severely impacted social, economic, and political relations. It has created a great economic chasm between the 1% of the super class and 99% of the rest. While the economy and corporate earnings are growing, wages for the middle and lower classes have stagnated.

The technological revolution, globalisation, and the Washington Consensus have contributed to the re-emergence of social and economic inequality. Among students of income inequality, there is a fierce debate about which of the three is the most important driver of the

rise of the super class. Whatever the starting point of the debate, the economic and political implications of the rise of the 1% are very clear.

Globalisation and the technological revolutions have allowed the 1% to prosper but as they have been getting richer and more powerful, the tax laws in many rich and developing countries have taxed and regulated them less.

We are essentially returning to the robber barons era not only because of the twin revolution but also due to the fact that the rules of the game are written in favour of the 1%. We tend to forget that the fourth industrialisation will not be able to transform society until society has learned how to live with its many disruptions.

To deal with the great disruptions that were often associated with the first and second industrial revolutions, Western countries set up a generous social welfare system. A winner takes all approach in dealing with the fourth revolution will create a lot of losers but to make good use of technological advancement would require policies that can ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth, and the development of robust primary schooling systems, and universities that are in sync with the latest technological change.

Remaking societies is not easy, and if not done right, the fourth industrial revolution can also be an impetus for revolutionary movements of the 21st century.

Associate Professor Dr Azeem Fazwan Ahmad Farouk is director of the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

KLCI	1,773.16 ▲ 8.35	Hang Seng	28,094.61 ▲ 98.28	Nikkei	19,506.54 ▲ 87.35	KOSPI	2,372.29 ▲ 5.56
STI	3,265.26 ▲ 18.28	SCI	3,363.63 ▼ 2.57	TSEC	10,569.40 ▲ 29.41	S&P/ASX200	5,669.72 ▲ 40.88

10 MOST ACTIVES

AUGUST 30, 2017

STOCK	VOL	CLSG (sen)	+/- (sen)
HUAAN	217,341,300	15.5	+11.5
COMPUGT	66,699,500	2.5	-0.5
MLAB	46,069,900	18.5	-1.5
CSL	44,291,900	4.0	+0.5
KGROU-WB	36,088,500	1.0	-0.5
OLYMPIA	31,191,600	15.0	+2.5
XINGHE	28,209,400	5.5	+1.0
HUBLINE	27,700,300	6.0	UNCH
AIRASIA	26,741,000	332.0	-1.0
PALETTE	23,711,900	15.0	-0.5

KL MARKET SUMMARY

AUGUST 30, 2017

INDICES	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,610.07 +81.30
FBMKLCI	1,773.16 +12.02
INDUSTRIAL	3,201.14 +17.49
CONSUMER	623.08 +0.42
IND-PROD	157.16 +0.55
CONSTRUCTN	330.52 -0.22
TRAD/SERV	230.77 +1.39
FINANCE	16,772.31 +187.88
PROPERTIES	1,241.01 -4.07
PLANTATION	7,848.46 +12.56
MINING	607.93 -4.05
FBMSHA	12,749.09 +46.68
FBMACE	6,612.74 +97.43
TECHNOLOGY	37.83 +0.23
TURNOVER	VALUE
1.825 bil	RM2.210 bil

FBM KLCI ends at day high in volatile trading

BURSA Malaysia bounced back to end higher yesterday with the blue-chip index closing at its intra-day high, after late buying support emerged in a day of volatile trading, Bernama reports.

The FBM KLCI ended 12.02 points, or 0.68%, better at 1,773.16 after moving between 1,757.89 and 1,773.16 during the day.

Market breadth was positive as advancers led decliners by 480 to 375, with 350 counters unchanged, 634 untraded and 46 suspended.

Affin Hwang Investment Bank vice-president/head of retail research Datuk Dr Nazri Khan Adam Khan said the market was calm as geopolitical concerns eased.

Index-linked gainers were led by CIMB, up 38 sen to RM7.08. Among the others, MISC added 19 sen to RM7.44 and Axiata advanced eight sen to RM4.93. Maybank was flat at RM9.46. Tenaga Nasional fell two sen to RM14.28.

The market will be closed today and tomorrow for the Merdeka Day and Hari Raya Aidiladha public holidays.

IPIC says 1MDB has paid rest of money due by today

PETALING JAYA: State-owned strategic investment fund iMalaysia Development Bhd (iMDB) has made the remaining payment due by the end of this month to International Petroleum Investment Co PJSC (IPIC) under a settlement agreement between IPIC and Minister of Finance (Incorporated) Malaysia (MoF Inc) and iMDB.

"IPIC has now received the funds required to be paid by Aug 31, 2017 to complete the performance by MoF Inc and iMDB of the payment obligations that were initially due to be performed by July 31, 2017 under the Settlement and the Consent Award and to pay default interest on the delayed payment," IPIC told the London Stock Exchange yesterday.

iMDB said in a separate statement that all funds were paid from proceeds of the ongoing rationalisation programme.

The statement follows an earlier announcement made on Aug 11, 2017, in which IPIC confirmed that it had received payment from iMDB in order for the extension agreed with MoF Inc and iMDB to be effective.

IPIC had agreed to grant MoF Inc and iMDB an extension until the end of August to meet their payment obligations, subject to their making a minimum payment of US\$310 million (RM1.32 billion) by Aug 12. iMDB had missed its original payment deadline of July 31, 2017 as well as a five-day extension.

iMDB had remitted the equivalent of US\$350 million to IPIC by Aug 11, 2017 while the balance of the original July 31, 2017 payment obligation to IPIC was to be settled by Aug 31, 2017.

Maybank optimistic on loan growth, NIM

> Q2 net profit up 43%, driven by higher net interest income, margin

BY **LEE WENG KHUEN**

sunbiz@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank), which reported a 43% increase in second-quarter net profit, expects continued expansion in loans and net interest margin (NIM) for FY17.

The group registered 6.4% loan growth for the first six months, with NIM improving to 2.41% in June 2017 from 2.28% in June 2016 and 2.27% in December 2016.

CFO Datuk Amirul Feisal Wan Zahir was non-committal on whether the full-year 6%-7% loan growth target is achievable given that second-quarter loan growth saw a 1.2% contraction quarter-on-quarter, saying only that it will be in line with industry growth. He was speaking at a briefing on the group's first-half results.

Its other headline key performance indicators for FY17 include 6%-7% deposits growth and 10% to 11% return on equity.

Nonetheless, Amirul Feisal highlighted that loan growth for its operations in Indonesia and Singapore is challenging due to the competitive pricing in the current environment that demands high-quality credit.

For the Malaysian operations, NIM is expected to contract in the second half due to still competition for deposits.

While the gross impaired loans (GIL) ratio has been rising since September last year, Amirul Feisal said, the group is not overly concerned as it was due to a flat loan base. "We do hope loan growth will improve, therefore it (GIL) will normalise."

Maybank's net impaired loans ratio rose slightly to 1.73% as at June 2017

from 1.72% a year earlier, while gross impaired ratio went up from 2.34% to 2.53%.

The group's net profit jumped to RM1.66 billion for the second quarter ended June 30, 2017 against RM1.16 billion in the previous corresponding period, driven by higher net interest income and NIM, as well as lower net impairment losses.

Revenue, however, was flat at RM10.92 billion

compared with RM10.94 billion in the same period last year.

The group has proposed an interim dividend of 23 sen a share, amounting to RM2.4 billion for the quarter under review, representing a dividend payout of 72.2%.

For the first half of the year, Maybank's net profit expanded 29.9% from RM2.59 billion to RM3.36 billion on the back of a 0.4% rise in revenue from RM22.12 billion to RM22.2 billion.

Its net impairment losses for the first half declined substantially to RM1.38 billion from RM2.06 billion a year ago,

given the group's proactive stance taken since early last year to restructure and reschedule the credit facilities, particularly from the market segments that were affected by the challenging economic environment.

The group's loan-to-deposit ratio as at June 2017 improved to 93.8% from 93.9% as at December 2016.

Maybank said it remains one of the strongest capitalised banks in the region with a total capital ratio of 18.98% and common equity tier-1 ratio of 13.56%, after the proposed dividend and assuming an 85% dividend reinvestment rate.

On another note, Maybank president and CEO Datuk Abdul Farid Alias (pix) said the group is undecided on the proposal mooted by Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB), Maybank's largest shareholder, to convert 20% of the banking group's shares into Islamic shares or i-shares, emphasising that it is still too early to tell.

He, however, did state that the proposal should not lead to the creation of different classes of shares as well as a subsidiary.

Farid also said there is no plan to spin off Maybank Islamic.

To recap, PNB chairman Tan Sri Wahid Abdul Omar called on Maybank to consider categorising 20% of its shares as Islamic shares, which could create new syariah-compliant equity instruments worth RM20 billion.

Maybank shares were unchanged at RM9.46 yesterday on 15.38 million done, giving it a market capitalisation of RM100.01 billion.

FGV cuts FFB production target for 2017

BY **EVA YEONG**

sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Feluda Global Ventures Holdings Bhd (FGV), whose net profit for the second quarter ended June 30, 2017 fell 65%, has revised downwards its fresh fruit bunches (FFB) production target for the year to 4.3 million tonnes from the initial 4.5 million tonnes.

"This is partly because of the current shortage of labour and also the younger age trees which did not perform up to mark. So these two have actually been a setback for FFB production," plantation sector COO S. Palaniappan told reporters at a briefing yesterday.

He said the 4.3 million tonnes is still higher than last year's FFB production of 3.9 million tonnes. The group achieved FFB production of 1.04 million tonnes for the second quarter ended June 30, 2017 (2Q'17) and 1.85 million tonnes for the first half ended June 30, 2017 (1H'17).

Officer-in-charge Datuk Khairil Anuar Aziz said FGV has some 35,000 foreign workers at its plantations now and is in the process of recruiting more workers from Bangladesh, Indonesia and India.

He said it is also recruiting local workers but interest is low with only 200 to 300 local workers at its plantations.

For 2H'17, FGV expects the crude palm oil (CPO) price to range between RM2,700 and RM2,900 per tonne. In 2Q'17, the group recorded higher average CPO price of RM2,796 per tonne compared with RM2,570 a year ago.

In 2Q'17, FGV's net profit fell 65% to RM26 million from RM74 million a year



ZULKIFLI ERSAL/
THESUN

From left: acting group CFO Aznur Kama Azmir, Khairil and Palaniappan at FGV's media briefing yesterday.

ago while revenue rose 2% to RM4.22 billion from RM4.14 billion a year ago, despite better performances in its plantation and logistics sectors, due to losses incurred in the sugar sector as a result of higher raw sugar cost.

Khairil said the raw sugar price is expected to range between US\$0.14 and US\$0.15 per lb in 2H'17, while gross margin is expected to improve as the ringgit strengthens and average down the raw sugar cost.

On the divestment of its non-core businesses, Khairil said the sale of its stake in AXA Affin is pending Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) approval and is expected to be completed by year-end. FGV has a 16% stake in AXA Affin.

"We prefer to sell off the 16% to the prospective buyer but there are some regulations that we have to follow and BNM is looking into the approvals. We would like to sell off the whole 16%

instead of a certain percentage because it is totally not our core business.

"In terms of value, safe to say it is slightly above RM100 million; that is very important in terms of contributing to our bottom line this year, in line with our aspiration to divest the non-core businesses," he said, but declined to reveal the prospective buyer.

Khairil said he was not authorised to speak on the domestic inquiry involving CEO Datuk Zakaria Arshad and three others. Members of the board of FGV were not present.

For 1H'17, FGV achieved a net profit of RM28 million compared with a net loss of RM7 million a year ago. Revenue for the period rose 8% to RM8.55 billion from RM7.90 billion a year ago.

FGV's share price fell 3.12% to RM1.55 yesterday with 6.92 million shares traded, giving it a market capitalisation of RM5.76 billion.

StanChart: GDP growth to moderate in H2

PETALING JAYA: Standard Chartered (StanChart) Research which had revised its full-year gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for Malaysia to 5.4% from 4.6% following a strong first-half economic performance, expects growth to moderate in the second half of the year.

The research house said the strong first-half GDP growth of 5.7% was driven by resilience in private consumption, increase in private investment and pick-up in exports.

It, however, expects private consumption to ease going forward.

“Domestic spending in the first half was likely boosted by one-off measures, including the minimum wage increase and voluntary employee pension contribution cuts. Higher BRiM (cash assistance to low-income households) may have also helped, but this was likely reduced by lower subsidies. Consumption may have been boosted by higher rural income due to the commodity price recovery.

“We think some base effects of the one-off measures may weigh on consumption growth in the second half. Furthermore,

the slightly negative real wage growth may affect consumption (empirically, we found that real wage growth affects private consumption with a lag of about three quarters),” StanChart said.

StanChart was alarmed by the strong pace of growth which it said could increase the risk of a pick-up in core inflation. According to StanChart, if growth continues to surprise on the upside, expectations for an interest rate increase by the central bank may also build up.

“In the latest monetary policy statement in July, Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) noted that underlying inflation (measured by core inflation) will be sustained by more robust domestic demand but is expected to remain contained.

“We think BNM is comfortable with the current accommodative monetary policy settings and maintain our view of no change in the policy rate for 2017, while keeping a watchful eye on core inflation even as headline inflation has eased since its peak in first quarter,” the research house said.

The export sector is set to be affected by unfavourable base effects such as the fading boost from high commodity prices and moderating external demand.

The softening growth in China, which is the primary source of demand for exports, may also impact export growth.

StanChart also displayed a cautious sentiment on the sustenance of the momentum of private investment which was driven by ongoing infrastructure projects and a pick-up in external demand as well as foreign direct investment.

However, loans disbursed have eased in the second quarter compared with the first, while construction projects have fallen steadily over the last few quarters.

Private investment were supported by ongoing infrastructure projects and a pick-up in external demand together with foreign direct investments, in the first half.

StanChart remains somewhat cautious on the sustainability of this strong momentum however, as loans disbursed eased in the second quarter from the first, as construction projects have fallen steadily over the last few quarters.

edotco: RM4b to buy 13,000 towers in Pakistan

BERNAMAPIX



Axiata CEO Tan Sri Jamaludin Ibrahim speaking at the media briefing yesterday.

> Axiata's Q2 net profit doubles on forex gains and lower taxation

PETALING JAYA: Axiata Group Bhd, which saw net profit for the second quarter ended June 30, 2017 more than double on foreign exchange gains and lower taxation, announced at a media briefing yesterday the acquisition by its infrastructure subsidiary of 13,000 towers in Pakistan from Pakistan Mobile Communications Ltd (PMCL) for US\$970 million (RM4 billion), the telco's biggest expansion plan thus far.

The acquisition will grow edotco Group Sdn Bhd's portfolio of towers in six countries to almost 40,000, making it the eighth largest independent tower company and second largest multi-country tower operator globally, based on Tower Exchange's *Journal of the Telecom Tower Industry* figures as at May 2017.

The purchase of PMCL's tower subsidiary, Deodar Private Ltd, will be funded through a combination of external local debt of US\$600 million and an equity split of US\$174 million by edotco and equity injection of US\$166 million by Dawood Hercules Corp Ltd (DH Corp).

DH Corp's capital will accord it with a 45% stake in edotco Pakistan Private Ltd,

leaving edotco with a 55% stake in edotco Pakistan. DH Corp is a conglomerate listed on the Pakistan Stock Exchange with a market capitalisation of US\$600 million.

According to estimates by Axiata, the purchase could lead to an increase of US\$600 million in borrowings for the group, which stood at RM22.3 billion as at Dec 31, 2016.

In a filing with the stock exchange, Axiata said it made a net profit of RM407.2 million for the second quarter 2017, compared with RM188.9 million for the same quarter in the year 2016.

Operating profit before finance for the quarter under review was slightly lower at RM855.1 million, compared with RM857.8 million for the second quarter ended June 30, 2016. This was on a 14% increase in revenue to RM6.1 billion, compared with RM5.3 billion for the quarter in 2016.

Net profit for the six month ended June 30, 2017 was up almost 16% to RM646.2 million, compared with RM557.2 million for the same period in 2016. This was achieved on a 15.7% jump in revenue to RM11.9 billion, from RM10.3 billion the year before.

The group's share price closed eight sen higher at RM4.93 yesterday, with 5.05 million shares changing hands. This gives Axiata a market capitalisation of RM44.3 billion.

Mixed views on AirAsia's corporate revamp, earnings

PETALING JAYA: Analysts are mixed on AirAsia Bhd's (AAB) corporate exercise and earnings performance for the first half of the year ended June 30.

HLIB Research maintained a BUY call on AirAsia's shares at a higher price target of RM4.10 (from RM3.82) on the back of expectations for seasonally stronger earnings in the second half of the year.

The research house also expects a stronger load factor in the second half due to strong demand and sustainable yields. Its fuel requirement is also expected to be hedged at US\$60 per barrel.

On top of that, AirAsia is expected to gain from the corporate exercise and the disposal of its Asian Aviation Centre of Excellence Sdn Bhd for RM429.30 million.

PublicInvest Research maintained a NEUTRAL call on AirAsia at a price target

of RM3.19.

“Upon completion, there will be no significant changes to the effective shareholdings in IAA by AirAsia, which is up to 48.4% (currently holding 49% of IAA). In addition, there will be a total one-off gain of about RM230.4 million in FY17, owing to reversal of IAA's impairment in AAB of RM207.5 million, as well as forex gain of RM22.9 million, this however subject to approvals be given for the transaction. We view the listing as positive as it should provide financial flexibility to IAA to pursue growth,” PublicInvest said.

“We understand that IAA is participating in the Indonesia Tax Amnesty Programme, which IAA will no longer be liable for any tax liability prior to FY16, whilst the existing deferred tax asset in IAA's book prior to FY16 will also no

longer be deductible against future profits,” it added.

HLIB also said it expects no significant impact on the group's earnings and shareholdings from the corporate exercise which is expected to be completed in the first quarter of FY2018, as it is pending the approval of regulators and shareholders.

Meanwhile as analysts agreed that the group's core net profit came within expectations, they differed on the quantum of the core earnings.

PublicInvest Research said the core net profit for the first half stood at RM775.70 million whereas HLIB Research said the earnings for the first six months were at RM667.60 million.

AAB shares fell one sen to RM3.32 with 26.7 million traded yesterday. It has a market capitalisation to RM11.1 billion.

High operating costs dent Boustead's Q2 earnings

PETALING JAYA: Boustead Holdings Bhd's net profit plunged 73.7% to RM59.3 million for the second quarter ended June 30, 2017 against RM225.8 million in the previous corresponding period, due to higher operating costs.

Revenue, however, rose 15.3% from RM2.07 billion to RM2.39 billion.

The group has proposed an interim dividend of three sen per share for the quarter under review.

Boustead's six-month net profit plummeted 68.9% from RM204.3 million to RM63.5 million on the back of a 21.3% rise in revenue from RM3.93 billion to RM4.76 billion.

The group said in a filing with the stock exchange that for the half-year, the plantation division registered a lower pre-tax profit of RM85.9 million compared with RM151.2 million in the same period a year ago due to the absence of plantation land disposal gain.

The average selling price of crude palm oil for the first six months was RM2,969 per tonne, up by RM545 or 22% from RM2,424 in last year's corresponding period.

The heavy industries division registered a pre-tax profit of RM45.9 million, marking an improvement from the deficit of RM99.6 million in the previous year's corresponding period, thanks to improved contribution from Boustead Naval Shipyard.

The finance and investment division closed the half-year period with a higher pre-tax profit of RM40.5 million versus RM24.6 million in the same period last year.

The pharmaceutical division recorded a lower pre-tax profit of RM28.7 million versus RM37.9 million, while the property division recorded a deficit of RM15 million against a pre-tax profit of RM212.2 million in last year's corresponding period.

Looking ahead, Boustead expects its six core business areas to benefit from the positive long-term prospects for the Malaysian economy, which is supported by strong economic fundamentals, a sound financial system, an accommodative monetary policy as well as the implementation of various government initiatives.

Boustead Holdings shares closed unchanged at RM2.70 yesterday, with 188,600 traded, giving it a market capitalisation of RM5.47 billion.

BRIEFS

TNB COMPLETES TAKEOVER OF 51% STAKE IN POWER FIRM

PETALING JAYA: Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) has completed the takeover of a 51% stake in Southern Power Generation Sdn Bhd (SPG) from SIPP Energy Sdn Bhd for RM51. SPG was incorporated on Aug 12, 2016 as the special purpose vehicle for the development of 2x720MW combined cycle gas turbine power plant in Pasir Gudang, Johor. The acquisition will make TNB the controlling shareholder, while SIPP will own the remaining 49%. The project is expected to achieve its scheduled commercial operation date on July 1, 2020. TNB's share price was down two sen to close at RM14.28 on 9.8 million shares done. It has a market capitalisation of RM80.8 billion.

PINTARAS JAYA UNIT WINS RM26M APARTMENT DEAL

PETALING JAYA: Pintaras Jaya Bhd's subsidiary Pintaras Geotechnics Sdn Bhd has bagged a works contract worth RM26.3 million for an apartment complex in Petaling, Kuala Lumpur, from Maison Rouge Sdn Bhd. The works are to start on Sept 12, 2017 and be completed within nine months. Pintaras Jaya's share price fell seven sen to RM3.99 yesterday, with 129,400 shares traded. It has a market capitalisation of RM658.2 million.

Sunway gets approval for two new hospitals

> Still awaiting nod for one in Penang, and plans to build another in Ipoh

BY V. RAGANANTHINI
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Sunway Bhd, which aims to expand its healthcare division by building five more hospitals, has received approval from the government for the construction of two hospitals.

Speaking to reporters after the group's EGM yesterday, Sunway founder and chairman Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah said the group has received approval from the authorities for the construction of medical centres in Sunway Iskandar, Johor, and Sunway Damansara, Selangor, for which construction plans are in the works.

Cheah said Sunway is still "chasing for approval" for the construction of a medical centre in Seberang Jaya, Penang, where one of its hotel and Sunway Carnival mall is located.

"We would want to build a tertiary (referral) hospital. Once the government approves the plan, we will start building," he added.

Meanwhile, construction of its medical centre in Sunway Velocity, Cheras, is on track and it is expected to be completed next year.

In addition to that, Sunway is planning to build another hospital in Ipoh, which will be in an area that also houses a hybrid mall and serviced apartments.

"There are a lot of people coming to knock on our door, asking (if) you (Sunway)



ASYRAF RASID/
THESUN

Cheah (centre) with Idris Jala (left) and president Datuk Chew Chee Kin at Sunway's EGM yesterday.

want a partner," Cheah said on the proposals for partnerships for its medical venture.

"We have not entertained any proposals to be our partners because we believe we can do it ourselves," he said on the proposals received.

Besides its medical venture, the group is also looking for opportunities to expand its core businesses, by scouting for new talent and opportunities for mergers and acquisitions. It is also looking to expand the technology sector.

Sunway's construction arm, meanwhile, is aiming to lock in non-inhouse projects worth RM1.5-RM2.5 billion from the tenders

it has put out.

As of end June, the construction division's tender book value stood at more than RM14 billion.

On another note, Cheah said the appointment of Datuk Seri Idris Jala as co-chairman of Sunway Group brings wealth of knowledge, practical hands-on experience, a highly valued reputation and international network, to help steer Sunway to new heights. Idris was appointed to his new role on Aug 11.

Sunway's share price fell 0.23% to close at RM4.34 yesterday with 4.18 million shares changing hands, bringing the group's market capitalisation to RM8.92 billion.

Multi-Usage suspends director indefinitely

PETALING JAYA: Multi-Usage Holdings Bhd yesterday said it has decided to indefinitely suspend director Tan Chew Hua after he refused to cooperate in an internal investigation conducted by the company's solicitor.

The purpose of the internal investigation was to seek clarification from Tan on matters highlighted in the Special Audit Report dated Feb 25, 2016 and auditors' qualified opinion in the audited financial statement for the financial year ended June 30, 2016.

The company however told Bursa Malaysia its solicitor was unable to conclude the internal investigation on Tan as he refused to cooperate and attend any interview.

The board of directors was advised by the solicitor that it is at liberty to continue the suspension until the suspension is set aside by a court order, or is prohibited by a court order.

Multi-Usage is engaged in a total of 16 material litigation as at Aug 22, 2017.

The group said in its filing with Bursa Malaysia, it will continue to focus on and develop its major business segment which is property development in Machang Bubok, Bukit Mertajam and actively pursuing opportunities to increase its landbank.

For the manufacturing segment, the group will continue to pursue enhancement in productivity of high margin products as well as implementing cost efficiencies.

Affin net profit up 8% in Q2

PETALING JAYA: Affin Holdings Bhd's second quarter ended June 30, 2017 net profit was up 8% on higher net income, in particular, a RM52 million jump in other operating income.

The group made a net profit of RM148.4 million for the quarter under review, compared with RM137.4 million for the same quarter in the year 2016.

This was despite impairment losses on loans and advances going up to RM35.9 million, from RM2.2 million for the same quarter in 2016.

This was on a 23% increase in revenue to RM588.3 million for the quarter under review, compared with RM476.7 million for the quarter ended June 30, 2016.

Affin said as at June 30, 2017, Total Capital Ratio, Common Equity Tier-1 Capital Ratio and Tier 1 Capital Ratio of all banking entities within AFFIN remained at healthy levels, well above minimum regulatory requirements. Total Capital Ratio for AFFIN Bank Bhd and AFFIN Hwang Investment Bank Bhd stood at

18.1% and 36.6% respectively.

The group said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia, the bank's strategic objectives will be focusing on strengthening its fee-based income from digital banking, unit trust and credit card to mitigate the impact of margin compression on net interest income.

The bank is targeting a loan growth of 8-10% for 2017 and its Islamic division is expected to grow by 15%, supported by the implementation of "Priority Islamic" approach and AFFINITY Transformation Program initiatives.

Priority is also placed on increasing deposits to further strengthen the bank's liquidity and funding profile.

The group made a 6% jump in net profit to RM268.6 million for the six month period ended June 30, 2017, compared with RM253 million for the same period in 2016.

Revenue for the period was also higher at RM1.1 billion for the six month period ended June 30, 2017, compared with RM903.6 million for the same period in 2016.

Scomi posts wider net loss in first quarter

PETALING JAYA: Scomi Group Bhd reported a widened net loss of RM16.18 million for the first quarter ended June 30, 2017 against RM12.21 million in the previous corresponding period, due to losses across its three major segments namely oilfield services, transport solutions and marine services.

Revenue was down by 10% from RM237.56 million to RM213.81 million.

It told Bursa Malaysia the group remains cautious on its performance for the current financial year.

Scomi Group said oilfield activities are likely to be sluggish until the end of the year, but it continues to explore opportunities that require minimal investment and to leverage on the existing resources and competitive advantage.

"For Ophir production, the well drilling campaign is expected to be completed by August/September 2017. First oil is expected by fourth quarter of calendar year 2017."

For the marine services division, Scomi said the stable coal price has continued to drive activity at the coal

Scomi

unit and is expected to contribute positively to the bottom line

of the segment.

"However, we expect the offshore vessels unit to continue impacting the profitability of marine services as we explore all possibilities to charter out the vessels in a challenging market."

For the transport solutions division, Scomi Group continues to intensify efforts to expand businesses in its current markets of Brazil and India and to pursue new businesses in various strategic markets such as China, Turkey and Asean for the rail segment.

"For Mumbai monorail project in India, work continues on phase two with expected commencement of operations of phase two before end-2017."

Meanwhile, Scomi Group's 65.65%-owned Scomi Energy Services Bhd swung to the red registering a net loss of RM17.15 million for the first quarter ended June 30, 2017 against a net profit of RM18 million in the previous corresponding period.

Revenue declined 17.6% from RM204.59 million to RM168.49 million.

For Scomi Engineering Bhd, a 72.33% subsidiary of Scomi Group, it registered a net loss of RM14 million for the first quarter ended June 30, 2017 versus a net profit of RM344,000 in the same quarter last year.

Revenue came in at RM45.32 million, 37.5% higher than the RM32.97 million it made in the previous corresponding period.

Bonia's earnings almost double in fourth quarter

PETALING JAYA: Bonia Corp Bhd's net profit for the fourth quarter ended June 30, 2017 almost doubled after the group adjusted its pricing strategy, and introduced higher margin products and reducing discounts.

The group made a net profit of RM7.7 million for the quarter, compared with RM3.8 million.

This was on marginally lower revenue of RM153.4 million for the quarter under review, compared with RM159.8 million for the quarter ended June 30, 2016.

The group expects its prospects for the financial year ending June 30, 2018 to be challenging with rising cost of living, weakening ringgit and the influx of online marketing which has directly or indirectly

affected the retail infrastructure.

"With the continued increase in imported merchandise costs due to the weakened ringgit, the group will continue to monitor its operating costs and cautiously adjust its selling price to cope with rising cost of operation," the board told Bursa Malaysia.

It said it will also continue its business consolidation by closing down non-performing outlets, improve gross margins by improving the sourcing of products and continue to reorganise its retail operations and brand positioning to increase efficiency and productivity.

Moving forward, the group said it will focus and channel the resources on house

brands namely, Bonia, Braun Buffel, Carlo Rino and Sembonia, consolidate and improve the performance of its licensed brands, continue to develop and strengthen its overseas markets, particularly Indonesia, Vietnam and some Middle East countries.

Net profit for the 12 month period was 30% at RM31.7 million, compared with RM24.4 million for the same period in 2016.

This was on slightly lower revenue of RM613.2 million, compared with RM665.4 million for the financial year ended June 30, 2016.

Bonia's share price was down half a sen to 56.5 sen yesterday, with some 582,200 shares changing hands. It has a market capitalisation of RM455.2 million.

Taiwan battles money laundering

> Measures include training staff, beefing up financial systems after being taken off Asia-Pacific group watchlist

TAIPEI: After Taiwan's state-run Mega Financial Holding Co was fined US\$180 million (RM767.6 million) by US authorities for lax enforcement of anti-money-laundering rules at its New York branch, the bank started a rigorous training programme for its staff.

Now, like Mega Financial, companies across Taiwan are working to get staff and systems up to speed after the island passed laws to meet international standards on combatting money laundering and was taken off a watchlist by the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG).

"Unfortunately, Taiwan has earned a name for itself as a paradise for money

laundering," Deputy Justice Minister Tsai Pi-chung told Reuters.

Money laundering and cybercrime connections to Taiwan, which is also in the process of pushing through a cyber security bill, have grabbed global headlines.

US authorities fined Mega Financial US\$180 million last year for lax enforcement of anti-money-laundering rules at its New York branch.

Some money from the US\$170 million cyber heist of India's Union Bank of India was transferred through Taiwan's Bank SinoPac. An international crime ring used malware to steal US\$2.6 million from the

ATMs of Taiwan's First Bank.

Taiwan was one of the six most targeted countries of the Wannacry ransomware attack earlier this year, according to security company Avast.

Since 2011, 800 people from China and Taiwan have been deported from Cambodia on suspicion of telecoms fraud.

Following its US fine, Mega Financial said cleaning up its act is a top priority.

US authorities had said the Mega branch had been "indifferent" to the risks associated with transactions involving Panama, a high-risk area for money laundering.

"What happened at our New York branch was just terrible," said Robert Tsai, a senior executive-vice president, referring to the fine and ensuing scandal.

"Half of our 6,000 clerks have been

certified with anti-money laundering training. How each of our branches implements the rules and ensures proper training is the top priority for our business."

To gain international confidence in its anti-money laundering measures, Taiwan will have to demonstrate it is putting the laws into practice. The APG will review Taiwan in 2018.

"The visit will focus on how effectively Taiwan will have actually implemented the anti-money laundering rules," said Liang Hung-lieh, partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers Taiwan.

"The APG's on-site review will be new to most of the assessed, including banks, non-bank financial institutions and in particular non-financial institutions such as lawyers, public certified accountants and other professional service providers."

Moody's: G20 GDP growth to exceed 3%

HONG KONG: Moody's Investors Service kept its forecast for G20 economic growth at just over 3% for this year and next, but warned of geopolitical risks, US protectionism and spillovers from global monetary tightening and China's deleveraging measures.

The ratings agency said surprisingly strong data in the first half of the year prompted it to raise 2017 growth forecasts for China to 6.8% from 6.6%, for South Korea to 2.8% from 2.5%, and for Japan to 1.5% from 1.1%.

It also expected the euro zone to accelerate in the rest of the year as suggested by robust sentiment indicators and revised upwards its forecasts for Germany, France and Italy.

The agency cut its forecast for the United States, however, to 2.2% in 2017 and 2.3% in 2018 from a previous 2.4% and 2.5%, respectively, citing its weaker-

than-expected first half performance and expectations of more modest fiscal stimulus than previously assumed.

"The balance of risks is more favourable than it was at the beginning of the year," Moody's said. "However, we note event risks related to conflicts in the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, and the Middle East."

"The test firing of missiles by North Korea, intensification of aggressive rhetoric on both sides, and a hardline stance from the Trump administration have raised the risk of a conflict in the Korean Peninsula."

The agency also said there appeared to be "renewed momentum" to address bilateral trade issues that the Donald Trump administration deemed as unfair trade practices, which could hurt growth if wide-ranging measures were introduced.

For markets, it warned of risks of

increased volatility due to historically elevated asset prices and broad investor expectations that interest rates would remain low even as the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank said they were preparing to start rolling back unconventional stimulus.

While raising its China forecasts, the agency warned the economy has become increasingly reliant on new debt to foster growth. The agency downgraded China's ratings by one notch to A1 in May, saying the financial strength of the economy would erode in coming years.

The agency revised its India forecast slightly lower to 7.1% as the government's demonetisation move last year led to several months of acute shortages for manufacturing and construction firms in particular, although it said it expected the impact to ease in coming months. - Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AUGUST 30, 2017

Foreign currency	Bank sell TT/OD	Bank buy TT	Bank buy OD
1 US DOLLAR	4.3320	4.2060	4.1960
1 AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	3.4420	3.3490	3.3330
1 BRUNEI DOLLAR	3.1930	3.1070	3.0990
1 CANADIAN DOLLAR	3.4540	3.3680	3.3560
1 EURO	5.1750	5.0470	5.0270
1 NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	3.1520	3.0420	3.0260
1 SINGAPORE DOLLAR	3.1925	3.1070	3.0990
1 STERLING POUND	5.5730	5.4600	5.4400
1 SWISS FRANC	4.5160	4.4210	4.4060
100 UAE DIRHAM	119.2100	113.2600	113.0600
100 BANGLADESH TAKA	5.4000	5.1160	4.9160
100 CHINESE RENMINBI	65.7000	63.2000	0.0000
100 HONGKONG DOLLAR	55.9500	53.1600	52.9600
100 INDIAN RUPEE	6.8730	6.4700	6.2700
100 INDONESIAN RUPIAH	0.0336	0.0304	0.0254
100 JAPANESE YEN	3.9420	3.8290	3.8190
100 PAKISTAN RUPEE	4.1900	3.9300	3.7300
100 PHILIPPINE PESO	8.6000	8.1200	7.9200
100 QATAR RIYAL	118.7400	112.9500	112.7500
100 SAUDI RIYAL	116.7900	110.8700	110.6700
100 SOUTH AFRICA RAND	34.1800	31.5200	31.3200
100 THAI BAHT	13.9000	11.8200	11.4200

Source: Malayan Banking Berhad/Bernama

S'pore not renewing Universal Energy's bunker supply licence

SINGAPORE: Singapore's port authority will not renew the bunker fuel supplier and craft operator licences of Universal Energy Pte Ltd, one of the biggest ship fuelling operators in the city-state, a company director said yesterday.

It wasn't immediately clear why the Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) was withdrawing the licences, said Universal Energy director Hua Tan. He said the firm received notification of the move on Monday, without specifying when the licence withdrawals take effect.

"This has caught us by surprise (and comes) despite our appeal and explanations," the director told Reuters.

The MPA did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Singapore, the biggest global hub for ship refuelling, this year became the world's first harbour to mandate the use of mass-flow-meters to minimise inaccuracies and errors in measuring the delivered amount of marine fuels (bunkers).

The Universal Energy withdrawals follows the MPA's decision effective Aug 14 to revoke the bunker craft operator licence of Panoil Petroleum. Checks on Panoil Petroleum's bunker barges revealed that unauthorised alterations were made on board five tankers operated by the company.

Universal Energy last year was ranked by the MPA as the third-biggest marine fuel supplier in Singapore by volume, operating 11 bunker barges, two of which it owns and nine it has on charter.

As of Aug 15, there were 58 licensed bunker fuel suppliers here, MPA data showed.



REUTERSPIX

File photo shows a public phone booth displaying the logo for Telstra Corp Ltd in Queensland, Australia.

Telstra axes A\$5.5b fundraising plan

SYDNEY: Telstra Corp, Australia's largest telecoms operator, dropped a plan to raise as much as A\$5.5 billion (RM18.8 billion) through an income securitisation deal after a government-backed business partner rejected the move, sending its shares tumbling.

Telstra said two weeks ago it was considering doing a deal with investors by which it will get upfront a chunk of the A\$1 billion per year that it receives from state-owned National Broadband Network (NBN), which rents ducts and other infrastructure from Telstra.

But yesterday Telstra said in a statement it was scrapping the plan as the government network refused consent.

"Without that, we can't proceed," Telstra spokesman Jon Court told Reuters, adding though, that it will continue to receive the income from

the state network.

The scrapping of the fundraising plan comes at a delicate time for Telstra, which built Australia's copper-wire phone network and is now seeking upfront cash to spend on growth businesses as its traditional revenue streams decline.

It was not immediately clear why the government network would need to approve Telstra's securitisation plan, details of which are not known.

The state network, though, is usurping Telstra's status as Australia's monopoly telecoms wholesaler, and will replace Telstra's copper lines with fibre-optic by about 2020.

Telstra warned earlier this month the network would hit its earnings by about A\$3 billion a year from its scheduled completion in 2021. It said it would cut its dividend by 30% in fiscal 2018, partly because of the negative impact of the state network.

Costlier jet fuel clips China Southern profit

SHANGHAI: Asia's biggest carrier China Southern Airlines said higher jet fuel costs clipped its profit in the first half, while China Eastern earnings rose but only with the help of a one-off asset sale.

Net profit at state-owned China Southern dropped 11.1% year-on-year to 2.77 billion yuan (RM1.8 billion) in January-June, the carrier said late Tuesday in a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange, where it is listed.

Its bottom line was hit by a more than 30% rise in operating expenses due to higher jet fuel costs, which offset revenue gains, the Guangzhou-based airline said.

Chinese carriers have benefited from a boom in domestic and international air trips as China's middle class spends more on travel and leisure.

China Southern said its total operating revenue increased 11.7% in the first half, to 57.82 billion yuan.

China Southern's shares jumped 4.74% in Hong Kong yesterday and were 5.81% higher in Shanghai, where the company also is listed.

China Eastern said in an exchange statement that its net profit for the first half jumped 34.4% to 4.34 billion yuan, but that was due to 1.9 billion yuan earned through the sale of a logistics subsidiary.

The Shanghai-based carrier's jet fuel expenses surged 45%.

"The international crude oil prices have increased significantly from a lower comparison base in the same period last year," China Eastern said, adding that intensifying industry competition resulted in a drop in revenue from its international routes.

However, strong demand boosted operating revenue nearly 10%.

China Eastern said in July it will buy a 10% stake in Air France-KLM for about €375 million (RM1.91 billion) as it moves to expand its network in Europe. - AFP

THE GRUNGE veterans of Foo Fighters are channelling their inner Rick Astley with a bold new record the American rockers describe as their "weirdest" yet.

While their DNA is rooted in the Seattle grunge scene of the early 90s, the band told AFP that turning to British pop diva Adele's award-winning producer Greg Kurstin for their ninth studio album, **Concrete and Gold**, brought a fresh dimension to their sound.

In an interview before headlining the Summer Sonic festival in Tokyo - where they invited Astley on stage for an improbable mash-up of the 80s pin-up's *Never Gonna Give You Up* and Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* - Foo Fighters guitarist Chris Shiflett said: "People think it's a really weird choice for us to work with a pop producer but it made perfect sense.

"There's so much more to Greg and his love of music and knowledge base than just the pop stuff."

Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl, the former Nirvana drummer, chose him to replicate the alchemy he has with Adele, this time with a gnarly rock band.

"We weren't getting Greg for Adele's sound," said keyboardist Rami Jaffee, previously a fan of Kurstin's indie synthpop duo The Bird and the Bee.

"The Greg we had in the studio was definitely the more adventurous soundscape guy - he brought more of that stuff."



A new sonic sound

> American rock band Foo Fighters comes out with its weirdest album yet in its ninth studio outing, *Concrete and Gold*

"I thought: 'Oh boy, we're getting weird quick!' This record we really took extra leaps and bounds, sonically."

Due out next month, the new Foo Fighters album combines thunderous guitar riffs with lush, harmonic textures.

Tracks such as *La Dee Da* and the Donald Trump-inspired

single *Run* rock out, but the Foo Fighters shift gears on the dreamy *Dirty Water*, while the title track is a slow-burner that features Boyz II Men's Shawn Stockman.

Beatles legend Paul McCartney also plays drums on one track among several other guest turns, including Alison Mosshart of The Kills.

"Paul McCartney is a fan of music," said Shiflett, nibbling on vegetable sticks in between photo shoots.

"He only did two passes at the song, which he had never even heard before. Then he just wanted to noodle around so we just jammed on a bunch of other stuff."

The Foo Fighters shot to fame in the late 90s with hits such as *This is a Call*, *Monkey Wrench* and *Learn to Fly* and has sold more than 30 million records worldwide.

"I didn't join the band until 1999 but I remember a cassette tape bootleg of the first album way before it came out circulating," said Shiflett.

"All my friends that were in the know had it and it was just something that would be on the stereo at parties."

But after a turbulent 2015 when

Grohl broke his leg after plunging off the stage and they were forced to cancel a tour, rumours persisted that the group was set to split.

"It would be so dumb for any band to break

up," insisted guitarist Pat Smear, who also used to tour with Nirvana. "You just look stupid when you get back together."

Shiflett believes the secret of the band's longevity lies in the members not taking themselves too seriously.

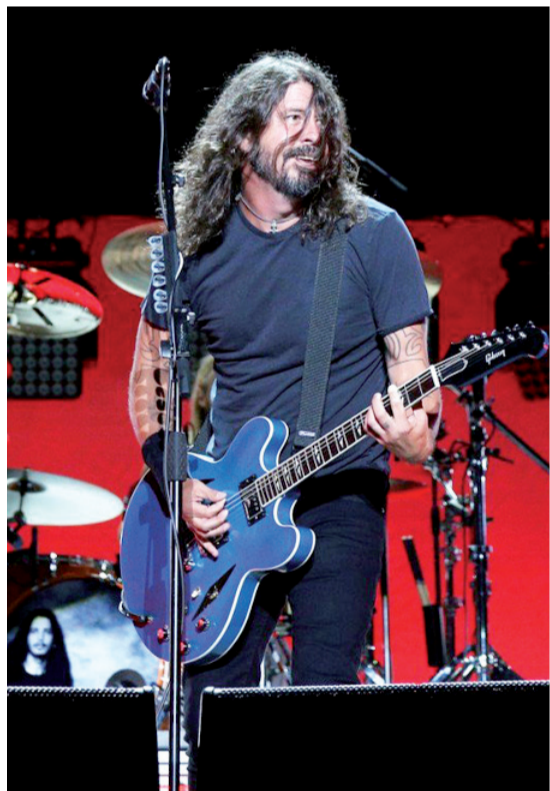
He points to a spat with Coldplay, who took offence at a mischievous bumper sticker joke in a 2011 Foo Fighters video.

"I remember at the time, Chris Martin got super offended and actually got into it with Dave at a kids birthday party or something," he said.

"It certainly wasn't meant to offend anybody. I don't think this band could ever take itself too seriously."

Jaffee agrees. "Not taking yourselves too seriously - all other bands take note," he said.

"It's a very important thing to keep in check and I'm sorry, Chris Martin, but all our wives love you!" - AFP



(top) Members of Foo Fighters ... refuse to take themselves too seriously.

(left) Foo Fighters' Grohl ... brought in Adele's producer Kurstin to give a fresh dimension to the band's sound for its ninth album.

Call to stop buying huskies as pets

ACTOR Peter Dinklage (right) recently urged fans of *Game of Thrones* to stop buying huskies because of their similarity to the fearsome 'direwolves' in the TV series.

The US actor, who plays Tyrion Lannister in the series, in a statement issued by animal rights group Peta, said: "Shelters are... reporting that many of the huskies are being abandoned - as often happens when dogs are bought on impulse, without understanding their needs."

Peta said that since the hugely-successful HBO



series started in 2011, animal rescue centres in Britain had seen a 700% increase in abandoned huskies from around 10 a year to 81 last year.

Two rescue groups in

Northern California in the US had also seen their numbers of huskies double over the last two years, it added.

Peta said the huskies were being dumped when the "novelty wears off" and their new owners realised the work and commitment required to care for them.

The campaign group said films such as *101 Dalmatians*, *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, *Legally Blonde* and *Men in Black* had caused similar spikes in sales and subsequent abandonment of the featured dog breeds. - AFP-Relaxnews

Swift's new album out in November



TAYLOR SWIFT (left) will release her sixth album, *Reputation*, in November, the American pop star announced recently on social media.

The first single was released last Thursday, according to Swift's posts.

The Grammy-winning singer's last album, *1989*, sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.

The announcement comes after the 27-year-old recently deleted her social-media accounts.

She reemerged on several platforms earlier last week, posting a video of a snake moving towards the

camera without any explanation.

Recently, a jury in Colorado found former radio host David Mueller guilty of groping Swift at a 2013 meet-and-greet photo session.

Swift had sued for only US\$1 (RM4.70) because she wanted the suit to be an "example to other women who may resist publicly reliving similar outrageous and humiliating acts".

In June, Swift announced that her music would be back on Spotify three years after she removed her songs from the streaming service. - dpa

SCREEN SHORTS

SCAM WARNINGS

ROBERT DOWNEY Jr, 52, took to Instagram to warn fans that scam artists are impersonating him online to seek donations.

He wrote: "I will never ever communicate via private chat platforms, and I would never ask individual fans for money for any reason."



LOVING MORE GIRLS

RYAN REYNOLDS, 40, says he would love to add more females to his family even though he already has daughters James, two, and 11-month-old Ines with wife Blake Lively.

Saying fatherhood is the best thing to ever happen, he gushed: "There's more love, there's more diapers."



NEW DOCUMENTARY

LADY GAGA, 31, has announced her new documentary, *Lady Gaga: Five Foot Two*, is due to air on HBO in September.

The one-off special will give fans unprecedented access to the star and will focus on the past year of her life, including the release of her comeback album, *Joanne*, last October.



SLAMMING CRITICS

AMY SCHUMER, 36, has slammed critics who commented on her salary demands from Netflix.

She initially negotiated a US\$11 million (RM47 million) deal for *The Leather Special*, but after discovering that Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle were each offered US\$20 million (RM85.45 million) per special, she went back and demanded more, according to *Variety*.



NOT IMPOSSIBLE

CARMEN ELECTRA, 45, hasn't ruled out remarrying former spouse Dave Navarro as she feels they have a connection and understand each other so well.

She said: "Getting back together? Who knows. You never know what can happen in the future." - Bang Media



TWO DECADES ago, on Aug 31, 1997, Britain's Princess Diana died in a high-speed car crash in Paris.

Divorced for the past year from heir to the throne Prince Charles, Diana, 36, and her new millionaire lover, Egyptian Dodi Al-Fayed, were stalked by a posse of press photographers over the summer as they took a holiday in the Mediterranean.

They had arrived in the afternoon of Aug 30 in Paris, and dined in the evening at the Hotel Ritz, in the luxurious Place Vendôme. They tried to leave discreetly shortly after midnight in a Mercedes.

Chased by paparazzi on motorcycles, the powerful sedan careened at high speed into a pillar in an underpass near the Alma Bridge opposite the Eiffel Tower on the north bank of the River Seine.

Both Diana and Dodi were killed in the accident.

Amid a flurry of book launches on Diana this month, several authors have again claimed to expose how the popular royal was the victim not of a tragic road accident but a sinister murder plot, perhaps even with the collusion of senior members of the royal family.

The reissued titles include former journalist Noel Botham's 2006 book *The Murder of Princess Diana - The Truth Behind the Assassination of the People's Princess*.

Botham's book is based on "reporting from the innermost sanctums of British intelligence and royalty".

It "firmly lays to rest the theory that Diana's death was mere accident, and finally gives the people of Britain the explanation they deserve", according to publishers John Blake.

The rumours and speculation began soon after Diana's death in 1997, fuelled by apparent delays in treating her after the high-speed crash in a tunnel in Paris, and by official secrecy surrounding the case.

Dodi was the flamboyant son of Mohamed al-Fayed, a super-rich Egyptian-born businessman who moved in elite British circles and owned the famous London store Harrods.

Mohamed led the conspiracy claims, alleging that the royal family wanted to prevent Diana from marrying his son, partly because of his Muslim background.

The couple had been about to announce their engagement, he said, also claiming that Diana was pregnant at the time of her death.

The sole survivor of the four people in the car, bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones, suffered

A loss that's still resonating

> Princess Diana's shocking death 20 years ago continues to trigger a deluge of speculations and conspiracies to this day

serious head injuries and said he could not remember details of events before the crash.

Formal inquests in Britain and France continued for more than a decade, but eventually, they dismissed the most sensational allegations.

"If ever there was a case that has generated rumour and suspicion, and indeed it has done so on an international scale, surely this is it," Lord Justice Scott, who oversaw the British inquest, commented near the end of proceedings in 2008.

A jury issued a verdict of 'unlawful killing' in 2008, following the inquest,

highlighting gross negligence by driver Henri Paul, and by paparazzi who were pursuing the car at high speed.

It said the lack of operational seatbelts and alcohol consumed by Paul were contributory factors.

Hasnat Khan, a heart surgeon whose two-year relationship with Diana had ended earlier in 1997, told a separate Operation Paget inquiry by London's Metropolitan



Police that he found "no evidence that anyone was opposed to his relationship with the Princess of Wales (Diana) other than her own mother".

The report concluded that Diana had "explored the possibility of an inter-faith marriage" to Hasnat, but it said its evidence suggested she had not intended to marry Dodi and did not believe she was pregnant.

Hasnat said Diana had told him

in December 1995 that she had changed her car because "the brakes had been tampered with" on her previous vehicle, while other witnesses said she had concerns for her safety.

The inquests did not satisfy the doubters. Mohamed bankrolled the 2011 documentary film, *Unlawful Killing*, directed by British actor and comedian Keith Allen, which included claims that the royal family had wanted Diana

"consigned to a mental institution".

Writing in *The Guardian* on the film's ban in Britain after the makers rejected dozens of proposed cuts, Allen alleged that many "significant witnesses" were not called or declined to speak at the inquest into Diana's death.

He accused the British establishment, including the media, of "quietly suppressing uncomfortable evidence".

Michael Cole, a former journalist who was Mohamed's public relations adviser for many years before and after 1997, has written a new book, *Diana and Dodi: The Truth*.

Cole describes his feeling in 1997 that many events following the crash "seemed strange".

"He sensed a cover-up, with the authorities on both sides of the Channel anxious to write off the deaths of the world's most celebrated woman and her lover as accidental," publishers Biteback said.

Yet Biteback and Cole withdrew the book just two weeks before its scheduled publication, citing "an abrupt change of mind" by Mohamed, and leaving another void for conspiracy theorists to fill. - dpa



(left) Diana's royal ceremonial funeral on Sept 6, 1997, watched by over two billion people worldwide.

(above) The tragic couple, Diana and Dodi, who both died in the crash.

Turning your smartphone into a car key

WHEN the Frankfurt International auto show opens its doors to the public on Sept 14, leading automotive equipment and tech provider Bosch will be demonstrating a new digital feature.

Called Perfectly Keyless, this feature can turn any driver's smartphone into a hands-free car key for opening and closing doors.

Bosch Automotive Electronics division president Harald Kröger said: "Perfectly Keyless, our digital vehicle access system, means that drivers will be able to do without traditional car keys."

The system is simple and secure, requiring a sensor

fitted to the car that can wirelessly connect to an individual phone for identification.

"Once this identification has happened, the vehicle is unlocked without any need for a physical key," said Kröger. "Similarly, no key is needed to start the engine or to lock the car again at the end of a journey."

In recent years, carmakers have been embracing the possibilities of the smartphone, whether as a tool for programming a vehicle's navigation system, or for remotely checking its location, its fuel reserves or, in the case of electric cars, the amount of charge remaining

in the battery packs.

In the case of Mercedes, BMW and Audi, your handset can even be used to remotely park or summon the car.

However, as Bosch is an industry-wide global supplier, its system can be adopted by any car company in the world, and all a driver will need to take advantage of it is to install the supporting app.

And, if a car has several drivers, when the smartphone connection is made, the car can also automatically adjust settings, such as seat and mirror positions and radio stations, in line with that driver's preferences.

The system is also future-facing. With the growing

popularity of peer-to-peer car rental services, Perfectly Keyless can enable other people to access a person's car (with their permission) without having to use car keys.

What's more, the app allows drivers to set a time limit and geographical boundaries for another user's key - something that could be just as effective for parents worried about their teenage children's driving habits.

And as innovative as Perfectly Keyless sounds, so far, the best alternative digital key system is Jaguar Land Rover's Activity Key.

It's a slim waterproof wristband that doesn't require



a battery and which will automatically lock and unlock a car.

The idea behind the device is that many drivers, especially those of proper SUVs want to head out on adventures and leave their valuables securely

locked in the car - including the car keys and their smartphone.

As long as they're wearing the band, the traditional key fob and any access apps on their phones are automatically disabled. - AFP-Relaxnews



HORO SCOPE

Aug 22 – Sept 21
NEXT Tuesday, the powerful Mars moves into Virgo. In the two years since it was last in your sign, a lot has changed, in the world around you, your circumstances and in your own life.

Sept 22 – Oct 22
IT'S not that you distrust certain individuals but, rather, you're unsure whether they know what they're talking about. Yet because this is based on your intuition more than hard facts, challenging them wouldn't be easy.

Oct 23 – Nov 21
THE last thing you're inclined to do right now is alter elements of your way of living, working or loving, to suit the demands of somebody you're not really close to.

Nov 22 – Dec 20
OTHERS say that if you planned ahead more, you would run into fewer obstacles. From your perspective, you'd rather move swiftly and learn from whatever arises, be it opportunities or obstacles.

Dec 21 – Jan 18
ONLY recently, you sidestepped potentially-troublesome issues, for fear that talking them over in depth would only create more confusion.

Jan 19 – Feb 17
ONE of your requirements for friendship is an easy exchange of ideas. This means you needn't agree with others but, instead, truly enjoy exploring differences, if any.

Feb 18 – March 19
WHEN it comes to tricky situations, you're usually the soul of tact, yet, at the same time, ensure that everybody is aware what's important and what isn't.

March 20 – April 18
THERE'S no arguing that sticking with what you believe in shows character. At the moment, however, it could also get you into difficulties.

April 19 – May 19
USUALLY your ability to make, and stick to, a decision is a virtue. It keeps life simple. At the moment, however, it could lead to complications.

May 20 – June 20
THERE'S a difference between changes you've planned and so are expecting and those that have been coming your way recently.

June 21 – July 21
OBVIOUSLY, you'd rather be able to tell certain increasingly-anxious individuals what you have in mind and, even more, turn those thoughts into lasting arrangements.

July 22 – Aug 21
WHEN Mercury went retrograde on Aug 13, it was in your neighbouring sign of Virgo, which accents life's practicalities.



(left and below) Jin is using acupuncture as well as other traditional Chinese medicine treatments to help animals, especially dogs, recover from their afflictions at his Shanghai TCM animal health clinic.

Prickly treatment for pets

> TCM practitioner Jin Rishan is using his acupuncture skills to help his canine patients

LOOKING like a furry brown pincushion, eight-month-old French bulldog Dan Jiao whimpers nervously as he waits for the end of a Chinese acupuncture session aimed at curing partial paralysis caused by a puppyhood injury.

Dan Jiao (which means 'egg dumpling'), would obviously rather be chewing on a bone somewhere than sitting strapped against his will into a harness that resembles a medieval torture device, and being pricked by several long needles hooked up to a mild electric current. But the ministrations of Jin Rishan, a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioner at his Shanghai animal clinic, at least provides hopeful owners an alternative to putting down the beloved family dog or cat, the typical fate of pets immobilised by severe spinal and nervous-system injuries.

"We're getting more and more customers," said Jin, 53, whose Shanghai TCM Neurology and Acupuncture Animal Health Centre is operating at full capacity of around 20 patients per day, and growing. Many dogs suffer from tough-to-treat back injuries or spinal deterioration, which can render them unable to walk. A range of breeds including



Bulldogs, German Shepherds, Collies, Basset Hounds, and Shih Tzus are particularly prone to these afflictions.

"Seventy per cent of the animals here suffer from spinal disc herniation, leading to paralysis of the hind legs or all four legs," Jin said, adding that acupuncture is more effective than modern medicine.

"Western medical practices can't do much," he said. It appears to be working for Dan Jiao, who was completely paralysed when his owner, Michael Xu, first brought him in for treatment after a fall that broke his back.

Xu said: "After three days of acupuncture, he was slowly able to crawl on his front paws. By the seventh day, he was able to limp on all four legs." That day, patients ranging



from a gangly black Labrador to a tiny teacup poodle, were carried in by their owners or carted in baby prams.

They were eventually strapped into harnesses before the thin acupuncture needles were inserted into their problem spots.

Others sniffed nervously as smoking moxibustion cups – a form of heat therapy that involves burning aromatic plants – were applied to their hides.

But the place had not completely gone to the dogs. The day's sole feline patient looked particularly put out, being completely strapped down to prevent it squirming around.

Wang Ping, the owner of Mei Mei (which means Little Sister), has fresh hope of getting the five-month-old teacup poodle back on her tiny feet, after a

paralysing neck injury suffered three months ago.

"I went to traditional clinics with Mei Mei, but the vets said she was too small for surgery," Wang said.

Doctors initially recommended euthanasia before referring Wang to Jin's clinic.

"So I came over and she's much better, at least she can lift her head and crawl a bit now."

Jin's practice is based on the feeling that a pet is like a human member of the family, entitled to the same loving care.

"In the past, Chinese people had a very weak notion of what a pet was," he said.

"But now more and more families treat pets as a companion or family member. So they care so much about their pets, it is not like in the past." – AFP

How animals can benefit from acupuncture

WHEN should you submit your pet for acupuncture treatment?

This is a question that should be answered by a veterinarian trained in traditional Chinese veterinary medicine (TCVM).

The goal of acupuncture is to promote the body to heal itself. From a TCVM perspective, veterinary acupuncture encourages healing by correcting energy imbalances in the body.

The appropriate application of TCVM treatments – acupressure, acupuncture, Chinese herbs, and food energy therapy – can be integrated into western (or conventional) treatments.

Your pet's medications or supplements will not adversely interact with veterinary acupuncture treatment; therefore, it can safely be used to treat a variety of illnesses.

Acupuncture involves the insertion of needles into body tissue where nerve bundles



and blood vessels come together.

These collections of nervous and vascular tissues are termed acupuncture points, which course over all aspects of the body's surface on meridians (energy channels).

The meridians permit a cycle of energy to occur throughout the entire body over the

course of the day's 24 hours.

Acupuncture and TCVM can benefit all life stages and a variety of conditions. Since most pets' health problems are diagnosed once illness has become very advanced, it's vital to strive to prevent disease from occurring.

Veterinary acupuncture can stimulate the release of the body's own pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory substances.

It causes muscles to relax at the site of the needle insertion and more distant locations in the body, creating both a local and generalised pain-relieving effect.

Veterinary acupuncture also improves tissue blood flow, oxygenation, and removal of metabolic wastes and toxins.

Unlike prescription and over-the-counter pain medications, veterinary acupuncture lacks potential adverse side effects for your pet's internal organs. – Agencies

Federer escapes



> Swiss survives five-set US Open thriller as rain brings chaos

ROGER FEDERER survived a five-set battle to defeat American teenager Frances Tiafoe and reach the US Open second round yesterday, keeping his bid for a record sixth New York title alive.

The 36-year-old Swiss, chasing his third major of the year and 20th of his career, prevailed 4-6, 6-2, 6-1, 1-6, 6-4 to avoid losing in the first round of a Slam for the first time since the 2003 French Open.

The fast and furious duel under the roof of Arthur Ashe Stadium was one of only nine matches to be completed as torrential rain swept 55 matches off yesterday's schedule.

At times, Federer also looked as if he was about to disappear with the deluge, struggling with a back injury as well as the all-out assault of Tiafoe, the big-hearted 19-year-old son of immigrants from Sierra Leone.

But the veteran survived to register his 79th win in New York and set-up a second round match-up with either Russia's Mikhail Youzhny or Blaz Kavcic of Slovenia.

"It was more than a test. We enjoyed it out there, we kept fighting, trying and it was exciting," said Federer, who finished with 17 aces, 41 winners and 56 unforced errors.

"I had a slow start. I was worried about the back injury. In the fifth set, it was a coin toss and it went my way tonight so I am very happy."

"I am feeling extremely well. This will give me great confidence," added Federer, who missed the 2016 tournament with injury and was playing under the US\$150million (RM640m) Ashe roof for the first time.

The back problem, which Federer suffered in losing the Montreal final to Alexander Zverev and ruled him out of the Cincinnati tournament, restricted his movement in the

Frances Tiafoe (left) congratulates Roger Federer after their match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City yesterday. – AFPPIX



opening set.

World No. 70 Tiafoe claimed it on the back of an uncharacteristic 18 unforced errors by the Australian Open and Wimbledon champion.

Federer swept through the next two sets before Tiafoe levelled by storming through a 24-minute fourth set.

In the decider, Federer broke for 3-1 but wasted a match point as he served at 5-3 and was broken by the American.

But Tiafoe's nerve failed him in the 10th game and the match was over when he dumped an off-balance forehand into the net.

The win took Federer's first-round record in New York to 17-0 while world No. 1 Rafael

Nadal, a two-time champion in New York, went to 13-0 after the French Open winner claimed a 7-6 (8/6), 6-2, 6-2 win over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic.

The 31-year-old Spaniard was critical of the noise inside the Ashe stadium, which was amplified to distracting levels by the roof, which was closed for virtually the whole day.

"I understand it's a show, but under the roof we need to be a little bit more strict about the noise. All the noise stays inside, and this is difficult," said Nadal.

With play on the outside courts trimmed to a mere 90 minutes, it means 87 singles matches will be staged today. – AFP

Japanese teen Osaka sinks Kerber

JAPANESE teenager Naomi Osaka sent defending champion Angelique Kerber crashing out of the US Open yesterday as torrential rain swept New York, causing more than 50 first round matches to be shelved.

As players ran for cover off the outside courts where just 90 minutes of action was possible, Osaka's big-hitting game and love of the big occasion thrived under the roof of the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

The world No. 46, born in Japan to a Haitian father and Japanese mother, won 6-3, 6-1 as sixth seed Kerber became the first US Open women's defending champion to lose in the first round since Svetlana Kuznetsova in 2005.

Osaka, who surrendered a 5-1 final set lead on the same court in losing to Madison Keys in the third round 12 months ago, fired 22 winners as Kerber went tumbling out of the world's top 10 as well as the tournament.

"At 4-1, I was hoping I don't do what I did last year," said the 19-year-old Osaka, who admitted suffering a brief flashback to her tearful loss to Keys.

"So that helped me focus and



Naomi Osaka celebrates defeating Angelique Kerber in their first round Women's Singles match yesterday. – AFPPIX

concentrate, which I needed as Angelique gets everything back."

Osaka will face either Sweden's Rebecca Peterson or Denisa Allertova of the Czech Republic for a place in the last 32.

"I just want to play good. I did that today and so I want to carry that

into the next match," added the Japanese teenager, who secured her first career win over a top-10 player.

Kerber is the third top seed to go out in the first round after No. 2 Simona Halep and seventh-seeded Johanna Konta lost on Monday.

"She just went for it," said 29-year-old Kerber. "She took her chances. For sure, it was not the best day and not the best match for me."

With no sign of the torrential rain abating, US Open chiefs decided to cancel 44 singles matches and postpone the completion of 11 others until today.

World No. 1 Karolina Pliskova, bidding to back up her lofty status with a maiden first Grand Slam title, was able to make a winning start, courtesy of playing under the roof on Ashe.

Czech 25-year-old Pliskova, the runner-up in 2016, eased past Poland's Magda Linette 6-2, 6-1 on the back of eight aces and 29 winners.

"I felt a little bit nervous walking on this court, especially after last year and the memories I have here," said Pliskova. – AFP

NADAL WANTS NEW YORKERS TO BE QUIET

RAFEL NADAL has conquered the French Open 10 times and battled career-threatening knee and wrist injuries, but his greatest challenge awaits him – telling rowdy New Yorkers to be quiet. The world No. 1 and two-time US Open champion took his first-round record at the season's concluding Grand Slam to 13-0 yesterday with a 7-6 (8/6), 6-2, 6-2 win over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic. But with torrential rain lashing the Flushing Meadows site, the roof on the showpiece Arthur Ashe stadium was shut tight, creating a giant echo-chamber for the boisterous crowd of 24,000 beneath. "Being honest, it (the noise) is a little bit too much," said the 31-year-old Spaniard, whose Grand Slam collection of 15 titles includes the 2010 and 2013 US Open crowns. "The energy and support of the crowd is massive. I enjoy it and I have unforgettable memories from this tournament and this court, because the energy is different from in other places. But at the same time, under the roof, it's too much noise. I was not able to hear the ball when hitting."

HOPE SPRINGS FOR HOLDER AS WINDIES SHOCK ENGLAND

WEST INDIES captain Jason Holder said he had never lost belief in his side after they vindicated his faith with a stunning five-wicket win over England in the second Test at Headingley. The West Indies chased down a seemingly tough target of 322 with more than four overs to spare on Tuesday's final day. Shai Hope (pix) led the way with 118 not out as the West Indies won a Test in England for the first time in 17 years. None of Hope's previous 11 Tests had yielded a hundred. But this match saw the 23-year-old Barbados batsman score two, with Tuesday's knock following his first-innings 147. Opener Kraigg Brathwaite fell just five runs short of also scoring twin hundreds at Headingley, combining with Hope for two partnerships worth 390 runs in total, including a key stand of 144 on Tuesday. The West Indies will now head to Lord's for next week's third Test all square at 1-1 in the three-match series following a win made all the more remarkable by their humiliating innings and 209-run defeat in the first Test at Edgbaston. "A lot of teams would have crumbled coming back into the second Test match and probably would not have given England the fight that we gave them," the towering all-rounder added. "I said at the beginning of this Test match that I back these guys to rebound and there was no better way to do it."



SHAKIB HELPS BANGLADESH HUMBLE AUSTRALIA

BANGLADESH spun their way to a first test victory over Australia yesterday, with Shakib Al Hasan's second five-wicket haul of the match securing a memorable 20-run win inside four days at the Shere Bangla National Stadium. Overnight batsman David Warner struck a belligerent 112 and added 130 runs with skipper Steve Smith but their efforts were in vain as the hosts took a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Chasing 265 to win, Australia lost five wickets in an eventful morning session, and whatever hopes they had were snuffed out when Shakib bowled Glenn Maxwell with the first delivery after the lunch break. Pat Cummins scored an unbeaten 33 down the order to inject some drama but it was not enough in the end as Australia were all out for 244. Shakib (5-85) celebrated his 50th test appearance by scoring 84 in the first innings and finishing with a 10-wicket match haul, a performance worthy of his status as the world's top-ranked test all-rounder. Resuming on 109-2, Warner batted with calculated aggression, while Smith was content to play second fiddle as they continued the good work they had started on Tuesday evening with some generous assistance from Lady Luck.

BRIEFS

INJURED MURRAY PONDERES HIP SURGERY

US OPEN absentee Andy Murray is debating a career-shaping decision on whether to undergo surgery on the dodgy hip which has kept him off court since an early Wimbledon loss two months ago. The former No. 1, displaced this month atop the ATP rankings by Rafael Nadal, is said to be weighing his medical options after training in pain onsite at the Open before finally pulling the plug on his participation last weekend. "I have never had to take any time off because of my hip before," the Scot said. "Obviously I spoke to a number of specialists about the injury to get the best

advice possible. When you speak to a lot, there are different views and opinions on what the best thing to do is moving forward. That's a decision I'll need to take now." Murray's former coach Leon Smith, the British Davis Cup captain, believes that his long-time pupil can make a full recovery from any surgery if he chooses an operation over weeks of rest to try and cure the hip.

DATE ENDS CAREER AT AGE 46

THE END of tennis life has finally arrived for Japan's evergreen Kimiko Date, with the 46-year-old announcing her retirement from the sport after more than two decades on WTA courts. The one-time No. 4 player said she finally had heeded the call of her "inner

voice" to determine that her time was up as a professional. Date will make her final appearance in next month's Japan Open, a fortnight before she turns 47. Date returned to tennis last May after a transplant operations to fix knee cartilage. "I was determined to continue my challenge until the day I could no longer ignore my inner voice," she said. "I had survived painful knee surgery, overcome harsh rehabilitation and hard training to get in shape to play in a tournament, which I feel is a great accomplishment. However, when I compare my level of play to before my injuries, I realise there's a gap and it's not easy to fill." The three-time grand slam semifinalist first retired 21 years ago, but bounced back to start a second career a dozen years later.

TOUCH LINES

TOTTENHAM are close to signing 19-year-old Argentina Under-20 defender Juan Foyth from Estudiantes for £8m and are still trying to push through the £23m signing of Paris St-Germain right-back Serge Aurier, 24.

INTER MILAN have made a new offer to Arsenal for 25-year-old Germany centreback Shkodran Mustafi.

TOTTENHAM are considering whether to delay their move for Everton midfielder Ross Barkley because of the 23-year-old's injury problems.

CHELSEA have made a £25m offer for Barkley but it was rejected by the Toffees who are holding out for £40m.

WEST Brom's 29-year-old centre-back Jonny Evans would turn down a move to Arsenal because he wants to join Manchester City.

THE Baggies are set to sign 27-year-old Polish midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak from Paris St-Germain.

WEST Brom will also secure the £7m signing of Arsenal full-back Kieran Gibbs, 27, in the next 24 hours.

CRYSTAL PALACE will back manager Frank de Boer with three big signings.

STOKE City want to sign Manchester City midfielder Fabian Delph, 27, and are prepared to offer £12m for the player who cost City £8m from Aston Villa two years ago.

NEWCASTLE United manager Rafael Benitez is willing to sell 26-year-old striker Dwight Gayle for £18m.

MEANWHILE, Newcastle midfielder Jack Colback, 27, could join Championship side Hull City on loan.

NEWCASTLE are hoping to make another two signings before the transfer window closes, but will not do so unless they can first sell players.

SERIE A side Napoli want to sign 23-year-old Barcelona midfielder Denis Suarez.

STOKE midfielder Giannelli Imbula, 24, is set to join Toulouse on loan.

SAM Allardyce says he is not interested in a return to management with Crystal Palace - or any other Premier League club - at the moment.

SPANISH winger Adama Traore, 21, wants to leave Middlesbrough for Lille, but Boro will not lower their valuation.

LIVERPOOL fans turned detective - apparently breaking a flight tracking website and monitoring webcams at Liverpool Airport - amid speculation that Southampton defender Virgil van Dijk was on board a private plane heading for the city.

FORMER England boss Roy Hodgson, 70, would consider a role at Crystal Palace if the club decide to sack Frank de Boer after a poor start to the season.

> 10 transfers that could still go through, featuring Sanchez, Coutinho and Vardy

THE last few days of the transfer window are always a dramatic affair, with fans, clubs, managers and above all, the players themselves left on edge with late moves and rumours.

It is the big-name transfers that really set tongues wagging, however, and with fewer than 24 hours of the transfer window remaining, there are still a host of major deals that might or might not go through.

COUTINHO TO BARCELONA

The fleet-footed playmaker has been linked with Nou Camp for virtually the entire summer, or so it seems. Reports in Spain suggest Liverpool's hardline stance against selling Philippe Coutinho has softened in recent days, but the Reds would still rather refuse to sell the Brazilian than leave complex transfer negotiations to the last minute.

A struggling Barcelona are prepared to offer well in excess of £100m to secure the Brazilian's services, emboldened by their £200m windfall from Neymar's PSG move, but the sticking point remains Fenway Sports Group's willingness - or lack thereof - to sacrifice Liverpool's star man.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** 50/50

SANCHEZ TO CITY

Two major factors point towards the Chilean's departure from North London in the next few days. First, as has been widely reported, his wage demands are astronomical. Manchester City are perhaps the only (non-Chinese) club in the world willing to lavish Alexis Sanchez with in excess of £400,000-a-week.

Secondly - and this is perhaps bound up with his wage demands - Sanchez's

commitment to Arsenal has seemingly faltered as time has elapsed. In July he claimed to be ill in a less-than-convincing Instagram post after Arsenal had expressly stated he was returning to training, and on Sunday he was spotted seemingly laughing on the bench while the Gunners were being thrashed 4-0 by Liverpool.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** More likely than not

LLORENTE TO CHELSEA

The vastly experienced forward has long had an admirer in Antonio Conte, with the Blues boss having signed Fernando Llorente once before while he was Juventus manager.

However, Swans boss and former Madrid assistant Paul Clement said on Sunday that "I'm confident of keeping Fernando and I see no reason why I shouldn't be".

With Swansea's other big name, Gylfi Sigurdson, having departed for £45m, one would think the Swans will choose to keep Llorente even in the face of big-money offers.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** Relatively unlikely

DRINKWATER TO CHELSEA

Leicester are currently insisting on £40m for Danny Drinkwater, having rejected a £25m bid from Chelsea earlier this month.

Chelsea believe, however, that Leicester are just waiting to sign a pre-emptive replacement for Drinkwater before cashing in. Even in this age of inflated transfer fees, £40m seems exorbitant for a player who is struggling to make the England squad.

It is hard to imagine the Foxes standing in the way of a

Deal me in!

move should Chelsea mount an offer north of £30m. Boss Craig Shakespeare has even admitted that Drinkwater may yet leave before the window shuts.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** More likely than not

OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN TO CHELSEA/ LIVERPOOL

Although the 24-year-old was offered an improved contract in early July, his rejection of it clearly signalled his desire to leave. Boss Arsene Wenger has expressed a desire to keep the England winger, but there is a sense that Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain is replaceable, unlike a certain Chilean forward.

Antonio Conte is thought to be extremely keen on signing Oxlade-Chamberlain, with the ex-Southampton man's ability to play in nearly every midfield position appealing to the Italian. It remains to be seen exactly how much Chelsea are willing to pay for a player with a dubious injury record, however.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** 50/50

MUSTAFI TO INTER

The former Sampdoria player is thought to yearn for a return to Italy's warmer climes, with Inter Milan heavily linked to the German international. Though the Nerazzurri were rumoured to be interested in signing Shkodran Mustafi on loan with an option to buy him later, Arsenal would prefer a permanent transfer after paying Valencia £35m for his services only one year ago.

But unless Inter suddenly decide to cough up a bucketful of cash, it looks as if Mustafi won't be leaving the Emirates any time soon.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** Unlikely

SANCHEZ TO LIVERPOOL

The Portuguese won the Golden Boy award for Europe's top young player in 2016, but his much-heralded move to Bayern has not panned out. He started a paltry four league matches last term, and former Bayern star Lothar Matthaus named him among the three worst players of the season.

Renato Sanches has himself expressed a desire to leave Bayern. Consequently, a clutch of upper-level Premier League sides have attempted to sign him this summer.

Liverpool's overtures have been particularly strong, and Sanches is very much a

Jurgen Klopp player: young, hungry and swashbuckling in possession, but Liverpool's attentions may be elsewhere.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** Unlikely

VAN DIJK TO LIVERPOOL

The imposing Dutchman has hogged headlines for months, with a posse of clubs reputedly chasing his signature. His is a classic case of loggerheads between player and club, with Southampton as keen to keep Virgil van Dijk as van Dijk is to leave.

Van Dijk has repeatedly made it clear he wants out from St Mary's this summer, handing in a transfer request and even refusing to make himself available for pre-season matches.

Mauricio Pellegrino's side, however, seem utterly unwilling to let Van Dijk's petulance win out. Their stance - that he is going nowhere - has never wavered.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** Unlikely

EVANS TO CITY

Pep Guardiola is reportedly unhappy with several of his centrebacks, and is seeking a player with Champions League experience for (relatively) little outlay.

However Jonny Evans's recently-granted status as West Brom captain means that Tony Pulis is reluctant to sell. Evans himself has just declared loyalty to the Midlands outfit - on Sunday, he stated in West Brom's matchday programme that "until anybody tells me different, I'm committed to the Albion and I'm only thinking about getting in this team".

As well as rebuffing Manchester City's bid of £18m, Pulis's side have also rebuffed a bid of more than £20m from Leicester City. Guardiola is thought to be preparing a bigger bid, however.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** 50/50

VARDY TO EVERTON/ CHELSEA

Though everyone in football respects Jamie Vardy's rise from obscurity, the reality is that he has now turned thirty. It would not surprise anyone were Leicester to cash in on the former factory worker, especially with Chelsea and Everton prepared to pay £40m for his services.

Vardy may well feel that this summer is his last chance of a big move, and with Leicester failing to repeat their wonder-season from 2015/16, a move would seem the logical step for the England international. That said, Vardy has turned down big moves before, and retains a deep affection for Leicester City.

► **Likelihood of the transfer:** 50/50

- The Independent



Why Lemar makes sense

> There may be fires to fight elsewhere in the squad but Liverpool are right to look for more attacking reinforcements

BY MARK CRITCHLEY

WITH LIVERPOOL 3-0 up in the 77th minute, Roberto Firmino collects the ball out on the right flank, skips a Nacho Monreal tackle and passes inside to Emre Can.

THE midfielder, in his new marauding role, carries the play forward, shrugging off Rob Holding and releasing Mohamed Salah.

SALAH looks up, curls a fine cross to the far post where Daniel Sturridge heads in from close range.

Sadio Mane was sitting on the bench at the time. Adam Lallana was sidelined through injury. Philippe Coutinho was not at Anfield, but the club are adamant he will be once again after the close of the transfer window today.

When you consider all this and then the ongoing defensive issues at Anfield, the addition of another attacking player to Jurgen Klopp's squad seems unnecessary. Yet interest in Monaco's Thomas Lemar makes sense.

Klopp's style of play

famously demands much from his players, but makes special demands of those in the frontline. The move for that fourth goal against Arsenal on Sunday came at the end of a high-octane performance full of quick counters, but it was just as incisive as those made in the opening stages.

Like the moves that preceded the second and third goals, it featured direct running at pace and at length. Liverpool's forwards are expected to do that repeatedly.

Then there is also the defensive side of their responsibilities. Salah, Mane and especially Firmino are often just as off the ball as they are on it. All three are expected to lead the press from the front, denying their opponents the opportunity to build attacks from the back. Surprisingly, despite their superiority on Sunday, Liverpool actually saw marginally less of the ball than Arsenal. This meant only more work for their forwards.

Players in this Liverpool attack need stamina in reserve until the final whistle and at the

moment, after a summer without an international football tournament and a full pre-season, they have it. Will they be so explosive come November?

It is a question that has to be considered by Klopp, as well as several other top-flight managers. This year's Premier League calendar features a scarcely-believable run of 10 fixtures in less than five weeks between 25 November and 1 January – a period which could define the campaigns of many clubs. Liverpool start it by entertaining champions Chelsea, face a Merseyside derby in the middle and travel to the Emirates two days before Christmas.

If they are to negotiate that period successfully, they will need their attack – the strongest part of their side – to be on top form and in peak condition. Mane's African Cup of Nations exploits and an ankle injury to Coutinho left them light up front during the winter last season. The addition of Salah this term has helped, but Liverpool remain

only one or two injuries away from the promising but raw teenager Ben Woodburn being called into the match day squad. Dominic Solanke, another talented but inexperienced youngster, was named among the substitutes on Sunday.

Indeed, below Sunday's starting front three and Coutinho, the options are either untested or unreliable. Divock Origi's encouraging development stunted last season while Sturridge is a fantastic player who is rarely fit enough.

The inclusion of either diminishes Liverpool's attack and, given Klopp's defensive problems every now and again, there will be times this season when he needs his frontline firing in order to take wins from tight, high-scoring games.

Yes, there are fires to fight in other areas of the squad, namely at centreback, but if Liverpool can afford to strengthen there and up front by adding a highly-rated, 21-year-old rising star, they should. – The Independent

Devils bid RM535m for Bale

MANCHESTER UNITED have launched a £97million bid for Real Madrid star Gareth Bale, reports claim.

Manchester United have so far been thwarted in their efforts to lure Bale away from Spain.

But Diario Gol claim the undeterred Red Devils have launched a huge £97million offer to sign the Wales international.

Bale's future at the Bernabeu remains shrouded in uncertainty with less than 48 hours of the transfer window remaining.

He was booed in their 2-2 draw with Valencia on Sunday and Zinedine Zidane had to release a statement publicly backing the player as a result of their actions.

Supporters are known to favour youngster Marco Asensio, who has already scored four goals from five games this campaign.

Manchester United's interest in Bale dates back to his time in the Southampton academy.

Back then, Sir Alex Ferguson attempted to snap him up but Bale ended up signing for Martin Jol's Tottenham instead.

United again tried to sign him just before Real Madrid won the race for his signature.

David Moyes thought he would convince the then Tottenham star to move to Old Trafford.

But, despite the Scot bidding a huge £120m, the 28-year-old chose a transfer to Spain instead.

Speaking back in December, Moyes confirmed he had made the Wales international his No. 1 target.

"When I first went in my real target was Gareth Bale," he said. "I felt all along that (Gareth) Bale was a Manchester United player."

Whether or not Jose Mourinho fares better, however, remains to be seen. – Express Newspapers



Keane: Giggs would be worth £2bn

MANCHESTER UNITED great Ryan Giggs would be worth £2bn in today's "mind-boggling" transfer market, according to former teammate and captain Roy Keane.

The Republic of Ireland assistant manager has described his shock at the fees being paid for "average players" this summer.

Paris St Germain have forked out a staggering £200million for Neymar and are preparing to invest heavily once again in Monaco's Kylian Mbappe, however, it is the prices which have been paid for players lower down the food chain which have surprised Keane.

"It's mind-boggling, the figures that are out there – especially for the average players," Keane said. "If ever there was a time to be a professional player it's now. Average players are going for £35m. My goodness."

"I don't really analyse it too much, but that's the market place at the moment. There aren't many top players out there. The really big players are going for big money and it's filtering down now."

"When average players are going for £30-40m, it does make you scratch your head. But if the clubs are prepared to pay that, then it's not the players' fault."

Keane, of course, played in Sir Alex Ferguson's all-conquering Manchester United side alongside the likes of Peter Schmeichel, Jaap Stam, David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Ruud van Nistelrooy, as well as Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo, who cost Real Madrid £80m when he left Old Trafford eight summers ago.

Asked what Van Nistelrooy would cost now, he replied with a smile: "Ruud would certainly be worth in the market now probably a billion."

"David Beckham?" "A billion."

"Ryan Giggs?" "Two billion."
Asked further how much he himself might cost nowadays, he answered: "£3.75m, I think." – The Independent



SIDE NETTING

CITY WANT CASH FOR SANCHEZ

MANCHESTER CITY remain hopeful they will complete a cash-only deal with Arsenal for Alexis Sanchez, and are not interested in a part-exchange involving either Raheem Sterling or Sergio Aguero. City however are not interested in that and have already said "no" to the idea of letting Sterling or Aguero leave, and believe they can put together the kind of cash offer that will ultimately persuade Arsenal to sell. The situation also remains skewed by the fact Sanchez is now said by sources close to him to be "desperate" to leave the Emirates in this window, marking a conspicuous shift from a recent acceptance that he might have to see out the last year of his contract there. Arsenal still don't want to sell Sanchez, but might be more open if a player comes the other way. The City hierarchy do not want to lose a club icon like Aguero, though, while Sterling is seen as an asset for the future.

WHY KEITA JOINED LIVERPOOL

NABY KEITA has revealed he is excited about the Liverpool "project" and that he will be a supporter from afar before he joins the Reds in 2018. The 22-year-old midfielder has completed his move to Anfield for what is understood to be a club-record fee with the deal set to go through officially in July of next year. "I am delighted that an agreement has been reached which will allow me to join Liverpool Football Club next summer, when I will become part of a project that excites me greatly," he told the club's official website. "My commitment to RBL remains absolute for the remainder of my time at the club. I have given my all every time I have worn the shirt – that will be the case until the final whistle, in my final appearance. Having my future resolved means I can now focus on helping RBL achieve great things this season. Until I join my new club, next summer, I will remain an interested supporter from a distance." Keita flew into Manchester on Sunday night and had his medical at a private medical centre ahead of Guinea's World Cup qualifiers.

MESSI ISSUES THREAT AT BARCA

LIONEL MESSI'S camp reportedly told Barcelona via a phone call that their client could still leave the Nou Camp if certain transfer deals are not completed. Messi agreed to sign a new Barcelona contract a couple of months ago but it has recently emerged the Argentina international is yet to sign an extension. And Spanish outlet Diario Gol claims that, despite the verbal agreement, there is a chance the 30-year-old will call time on his Nou Camp career. Barcelona have endured a rocky summer, losing Neymar to Paris Saint-Germain and overspending on Ousmane Dembele, who arrived from Borussia Dortmund. And Messi is known to be frustrated at how things have panned out. The Argentina international's entourage are said to have reached out to Barcelona highlighting the need to sign Angel Di Maria. Speaking earlier this week, manager Ernesto Valverde said all was well with his star performer. "Messi seems fine to me," Valverde said. "He is training with us and seems to be the same as ever. I do not think there is any problem at all." Manchester City, meanwhile, have been tipped to sign him as a free agent should Messi's frustration force him out of Barcelona.

VAN DIJK WANTS REDS, BUT...

VIRGIL VAN DIJK is still hopeful of a move to Liverpool in this transfer window, *The Independent* understands, although his future could yet be complicated by a late bid from Arsenal and title rivals Chelsea. The 26-year-old centre-half has effectively been exiled from the Southampton squad since telling new manager Mauricio Pellegrino that he wanted to leave in July, and Anfield remains his first choice for a move. While it would take a huge amount of money – likely over £70m – to even persuade the south-coast club to sell in the first place, the St Mary's hierarchy remain adamant they will not sell to the Anfield club. That has ensured Chelsea have kept their long-standing interest in Van Dijk, while Arsenal are now ready to enter the fray, and both clubs are considering late bids – though the problem would then be that Southampton accepting any offer would then allow Liverpool back in to match it. Sources close to the player have told *The Independent* he is still optimistic that he will be an Anfield player by the end of the window, and that it is still by far his first preference. Manchester City have previously been linked with the player but are instead focusing on a move for veteran centreback Jonny Evans. Arsenal are also considering a move for Evans as Arsene Wenger looks for defensive reinforcements before today's transfer deadline. Van Dijk's deal has no bearing on the future of Mamadou Sakho, who continues to be frozen out by Jurgen Klopp. Crystal Palace are optimistic of securing a deal for the France international, but the Reds are holding out for the best part of £30m.

'China's Maradona' carries nation's World Cup hopes

BRAZILIAN star Oscar labelled him "the best Chinese player" and for most of his career he has carried the burden of being called "China's Maradona".

Wu Lei will need to show why today if China are to keep their wafer-thin World Cup 2018 hopes alive in a must-win encounter with Uzbekistan in Wuhan.

Wu upstaged his 60-million-euro teammate Oscar in Shanghai SIPG's 4-0 mauling of Guangzhou Evergrande in their AFC Champions League quarterfinal first leg last week, scoring twice in three minutes and winning a penalty.

The 25-year-old's first was a classy solo effort that demonstrated why he does not look out of place alongside Oscar and Hulk at Shanghai SIPG – and why he is central to China's footballing future.

China's 2006 World Cup-winning Italian coach Marcello Lippi alluded to Wu's vital importance this week when he said that he was woefully short of out-and-out goal-scorers.

"We don't have strikers. On paper I don't even have one striker, I have to make players from other positions play striker," said the 69-year-old Lippi.

Step up winger-cum-forward Wu, who last year was nominated for Asian Player of the Year.

Wu became the youngest ever Chinese professional when at the age of 14. He has a ratio of roughly a goal every two games for his Shanghai club.

This season he has been even better, scoring 19 times and grabbing eight assists in 31 appearances.

He is as prolific for his country – seven goals in 43 appearances – but is likely to be

thrust farther forward by Lippi for today's home clash with Uzbekistan because of the dearth of choices up front.

China must win on Thursday and

again next week in Qatar, and hope results elsewhere go their way, to grab a highly improbable third-place in Group A and with it a playoff spot. They are currently bottom with one win from eight matches.

Wu is largely unknown in Europe, but he won lofty comparisons with Argentina legend Maradona from former China coach Xu Genbao when the player was just 13.

Wu credits the Brazilian trio of Oscar, Hulk and Elkeson, as well as Shanghai's former Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur manager Andre Villas-Boas, with his spectacular club season. – AFP

Spain host Italy in classic

> European giants Spain and Italy are chasing an automatic spot at the World Cup next year and face off in a vital showdown in Madrid this weekend; Germany close in on WC qualification

SPAIN host Italy in a classic encounter in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers while reigning champions Germany could secure their place at the Russian finals next year.

The top two in Group G clash in Madrid on Saturday with Spain looking to maintain their goal difference advantage over Italy.

Next Tuesday Spain then follow up in Liechtenstein while Italy host Israel.

Joachim Low's World Cup holders travel to Prague to meet the Czech Republic tomorrow and welcome Norway on Monday within touching distance of qualification from Group C.

And

England will hope to bounce back from dropped points last time in Group F as they head to Malta and play at home to Slovakia in another Friday-Monday combination.

Italy coach Gian Piero Ventura pulled no punches ahead of the trip to Spain.

With only the nine group winners qualifying automatically, they must chase the win.

"It's obvious that we have to go to Madrid to take them on and play for one result which is victory," Ventura said.

"I'm excited about the Spain match, I'd have liked for a draw to be a more useful result but the fact that only one result is good enough is an extra motivation."

He has made only minimal changes to the squad from the last outing against Liechtenstein, which Italy won 5-0.

"I've started from where we left off with the call-ups, because with only one week gone in the season, there wasn't enough time to make other judgements," the coach said.

"I've called up the same players that I had in Udine in June for the match with Liechtenstein, the only

difference is (reserve goalkeeper Mattia)

Perin in place of (Simone) Scuffet. But there could be some changes in a few months."

The big talking point

for the hosts is the return of record-scorer David Villa after a three year absence – few expected the 35-year-old New York City forward to represent his country again. Villa replaces Diego Costa, dropped from the squad because of his ongoing dispute with Chelsea.

"There is nothing more I enjoying doing than sweating the Spain shirt," Villa said. "I am just here to help my team-mates."

"I thought there would be some controversy over my selection but the reaction has all been positive. I have been pleasantly surprised."



Argentina, Uruguay collide in South America qualifiers

LUIS SUAREZ could yet line up against Barcelona teammate Lionel Messi today as South America's battle for 2018 World Cup places resumes with Argentina's trip to Uruguay the pick of the fixtures.

With leaders Brazil already locking up their place at next year's tournament, attention turns to the tussle for the three remaining automatic berths on offer in the marathon 10-team qualifying tournament. Colombia are second in the standings on 24 points while Uruguay and Chile occupy the other two automatic spots on 23 points.

It means that fifth-placed Argentina have little margin for error as they head to Montevideo's Estadio Centenario for the latest instalment of their historic rivalry with the Uruguayans.

Argentina have spluttered their way through the qualifiers so far, notching only six wins in 14 games, but have shown signs of life under new coach Jorge Sampaoli.

Sampaoli, who masterminded Chile's victory at the 2015 Copa America, took control of the 'Albiceleste' in May, and began his reign with a morale-boosting 1-0 win over Brazil in a friendly in June.

A 6-0 romp over lowly Singapore provided a further clue that Sampaoli, who favours an aggressive, attacking style, may already have begun to have an influence.

Sampaoli served notice of his determination to invigorate Argentina's ranks by axing striker Gonzalo Higuain in favour of Inter Milan's Mauro Icardi.

Icardi is expected to start at the apex of a front three with Messi and

Juventus prodigy Paulo Dybala (pix) lurking just behind.

Argentina's path to Russia has been complicated by the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruling yesterday that confirmed a sanction against Bolivia for fielding an ineligible player in their September 2016 0-0 draw with Chile.

FIFA later converted that result to a 3-0 win for Chile, a ruling that means Sampaoli's former team now have a one-point advantage over the fifth-placed Argentines.

"Now we have to play catch-up to get to the World Cup," Sampaoli said yesterday.

Uruguay meanwhile are sweating on the fitness of Barcelona star Suarez.

The 30-year-old talisman was initially ruled out of the fixture through injury but has travelled back to his homeland to train with the team.

If Suarez fails to win his fitness battle, Uruguay will once again turn to in-form Paris Saint-Germain striker Edinson Cavani, who is the

Coach Julien Lopetegui has had to tinker since making his original selection – Las Palmas winger Vitolo is injured so Real Madrid's Lucas Vazquez replaced him.

Germany have won six games out of six so far to top their group by five points from Northern Ireland. Two more victories will ensure early progress to Russia if the Irish slip up in San Marino or, more plausibly, at home to the Czechs on Monday.

Captain Manuel Neuer is not part of the squad as he makes a gradual recovery from a broken foot.

"I would have liked to be there, but what is clear is that it's better that I play a few games with Bayern before going back for international duty," he told the German association homepage.

Low, though, has plenty of talent still at his disposal after a virtual B-team won the Confederations Cup and the under-21s lifted the European title in Poland.

England manager Gareth Southgate could give debuts to Leicester defender Harry Maguire and Watford midfielder Nathaniel Chalobah for what is likely to be a formality in Malta.

Daniel Sturridge is also in contention to start after scoring as a substitute for Liverpool in last weekend's win over Arsenal.

It will also be England's first match since record goalscorer Wayne Rooney retired from international football.

In Group A, France host the Netherlands in a crucial clash as they chase leaders Sweden, and in Group B Switzerland hope to maintain their perfect record at home to Andorra and away to Latvia.

There is a table-topping Group D clash on Tuesday when Ireland play Serbia while in Group E Poland can all but clinch qualification away to Denmark and at home to Kazakhstan.

Group H leaders Belgium take on Gibraltar then pursuing Greece and in tight Group I, Turkey go to Ukraine on Saturday and host Croatia Tuesday in what could be decisive clashes. – dpa

SPORTS

-AHEAD OF THE GAME

theSun

Barca agree RM818m Coutinho fee – report

LIVERPOOL have reportedly agreed to sell Philippe Coutinho to Barcelona for £148.5million (RM818m).

But an announcement has been delayed until Liverpool have brought in a replacement for the Brazil star.

That is according to *Yahoo Sport* and if true, would mark the end of lengthy chase by the Spanish side to sign Coutinho.

And the deal would make him the second most expensive transfer of all time following Neymar's move to Paris Saint Germain.

Earlier this week, Barca sporting director Robert Fernandez revealed

they were in negotiations to sign a someone but wouldn't confirm the identity of the player.

"We are negotiating with a player with the possibility that he can arrive. We hope it ends well. We hope to be able to present a new player," he said.

It now appears as though Liverpool's attempts to sign Thomas Lemar and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain are part of their bid to replace Coutinho

"One could arrive or two could arrive. We are negotiating. My intention is that another player arrives and if possible two."

The report says Coutinho was

told by Liverpool owners Fenway Sports Group that he would be a Barcelona player by the end of the week.

This was after Coutinho submitted a transfer request earlier this month via email, which was instantly dismissed.

Liverpool have been briefing that Coutinho would not be allowed to leave and any business done was not linked to his exit.

But it now appears as though Liverpool's attempts to sign Thomas Lemar and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain are part of their efforts to replace Coutinho.

Liverpool had a £64.5m

(RM355m) bid for Lemar rejected by Monaco and are yet to match Chelsea's £40m (RM220m) offer for Oxlade-Chamberlain.

Yahoo Sport say Liverpool have asked Barcelona to delay the completion of Coutinho's move until they've signed a player.

The 25-year-old is currently on international duty with Brazil and has been deemed fit enough to play in their upcoming World Cup qualifiers.

He had been sidelined for Liverpool due to a back injury and recent reports suggested the back problem was due to emotional stress. – *Express Newspapers*

Under fire

> Wenger faces testing end to transfer window <

ROCKED by Arsenal's humiliating 4-0 defeat at Liverpool, Arsene Wenger faces a series of damaging transfer window defections that threaten to derail his side's already chaotic season.

With the transfer deadline looming at 6am (Malaysian time) Friday morning, Gunners boss Wenger finds himself mired in a mess of his own making as Alexis Sanchez and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain headline a host of Arsenal stars trying to flee the troubled club.

Chile forward Sanchez is desperate to seal a move to Manchester City after rejecting Arsenal's offer of £300,000 (RM1.6m) per-week to extend a contract which is due to expire at the end of the season.

Sanchez, who angered fans when he was pictured smirking on the Arsenal bench during the Liverpool rout, is reported to have asked to be excused from training with Chile this week while negotiations over his future heat up.

City are said to have offered their England winger Raheem Sterling plus cash in a bid to convince Wenger to part ways with his prize asset.

Wenger reportedly countered by asking City to include Sergio Aguero as a makeweight in the deal but, while Pep Guardiola has shown signs of losing faith in the Argentine striker, it would be a surprise if he was allowed to join Arsenal.

City would prefer a straight cash deal for Sanchez, but are believed to be willing to compromise by including Sterling and would fly to Chile to sort out personal terms and a medical before the deadline.

Sterling, who was sent off after scoring City's winner at Bournemouth on Saturday, could be surplus to requirements at Eastlands given the array of attacking talent in Guardiola's squad.

Sanchez's future isn't the only problem piling up in Wenger's in-tray.

England winger Oxlade-Chamberlain has snubbed Wenger's attempts to persuade him to sign an £80,000 (RM992,000)-per-week contract extension and, with his deal running out in June, he is reported to be on the verge of joining Chelsea in a £35million

(RM193m) deal.

West Bromwich Albion are looking at signing Arsenal leftback Kieran Gibbs, while Shkodran Mustafi, Jack Wilshere and Mathieu Debuchy could also be sold.

After a miserable first season with Arsenal, Lucas Perez has been told he can leave and the Spanish striker hopes to return home, with Levante among the interested clubs.

Wenger will try to off-set those potential losses with some last-ditch shopping of his own and West Brom defender Jonny Evans and Paris Saint-Germain winger Julian Draxler are among his mooted targets.

For Arsenal to be in such a panicked state is a huge blow to Wenger only three months after an FA Cup final triumph against Chelsea that the 67-year-old Frenchman hoped would herald a new era of sustained success.

The craven manner of Arsenal's capitulation at Anfield, coming just a week after a disappointing defeat at Stoke, laid bare all the flaws that

Wenger has been unable to fix in recent years. Without a

Premier League title in 13 years and absent from the Champions League this season following last term's fifth-place finish, Arsenal are no longer a marquee destination for the sport's top stars.

Now Wenger, who signed a new two-year contract in the close season, looks set to spend the remaining hours of the transfer window in damage limitation mode.

And former Arsenal star Ian Wright has seen enough, claiming it's time for his old boss to step down.

"Where do we start? The amount of things that are going wrong, it does come back to Arsene Wenger's door. We're three games in and we're literally at crisis point," Wright told the BBC.

"Do I think he should go? I would like him to go simply because I do not believe now that Arsene Wenger can motivate those players with everything that's going on above him.

"We are three games in and it's already an absolute nightmare." – AFP

QUOTE OF THE DAY



"Ruud [van Nistelrooy] would certainly be worth in the market now probably a billion. David Beckham? A billion. Ryan Giggs? Two billion."

– Roy Keane on what he called "mind-boggling" transfer fees. When asked further how much he himself might cost nowadays, he answered: **"£3.75m, I think."**

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> **Why Lemar makes sense** ▶ pg22

