



7//11/2008 (Friday)

## **PKNS officers under probe**

By : Neville Spykerman

**SHAH ALAM:** The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) is looking into allegations that senior officers of the Selangor Development Corporation (PKNS) received allowances from developers involved in joint-venture projects.

Sources said the ACA has already interviewed several senior officers and was expected to call others to probe further into the alleged irregularities at the corporation. The allowances are alleged to have been paid after sale and purchase agreements between PKNS and private developers were signed.

The undisclosed sums which were given to the senior officers are believed to be in the form of a reward, for signing the agreements. The source refused to reveal who had exposed the allegations. However, it is learnt that providing the allowances was believed to be a common practice in PKNS.

Meanwhile, PKNS acting general manager Low Siew Moi was yesterday called to the Selangor ACA headquarters and had her statement recorded. Selangor ACA director Moh Samsudin Yusof, when contacted by the New Straits Times, refused to elaborate on the allegations, but said he would meet the press today.

PKNS has been plagued with controversy recently after Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim appointed Low as its acting general manager for one year until a replacement could be found. However, the state has come under fire from within the Pakatan Rakyat ranks, Umno and Malay non-governmental organisation for selecting a non-Malay. Following the protest, the state also revealed that almost 70 per cent of PKNS projects were awarded to non-Malay developers, contrary to the purpose of the corporation.

10/11/2008 (Monday)

## Drivers are better off with 'contracts for service'



Shamsuddin Bardan

**WE want them to become entrepreneurs and independent enough to manage their own business. That, argue employers, is why many drivers are given contracts for service, (CFS) instead of contracts of service (COS).**

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan says it is common practice among employers to treat drivers as independent contractors and not employees.

"If they are employees, we have problems because we can't monitor or manage them properly. "For example, if they are driving from Penang to Johor Baru, they might decide to stop the moment their eight-hour shift is up. We cannot manage our businesses like that. As far as companies are concerned, contracts for service are the way forward."

Shamsuddin adds that the ideal situation is one where the driver owns the vehicle himself, and manages it like a business. "However, there are variations to this and, sometimes, the prime mover is owned by the company. This is when the situation is not so clear and moves into a gray area."

Shamsuddin says employers should ensure the CFS is appropriate to both parties as the intention ultimately is to come up with a win-win situation for both parties. Told that the main grouse among drivers is that they do not get accident benefits, among others, he says they should get their own insurance if they want to protect themselves, but adds that companies should properly brief their drivers on the details of their contracts.

He also denies that giving CFS instead of COS is a way for companies to save money on benefits. "It is not a question of cost-cutting but managing the business in a mutually beneficial manner. An employee can only make so much, whereas an independent contractor can make so much more."

He says a case that had been brought to court some years back on this issue had proved that drivers under CFS make more money than those who are employees. But, how is this possible when many companies do not allow drivers to work for other companies?

"It's true that companies do want exclusivity sometimes because they feel that drivers should not be working for their rivals. However, if they are hardworking, take better care of their vehicles and don't incur so many summonses, they can make more money,"

**10/11/2008 (Monday)**

### **Contracts that do not provide any protection or benefits**



VK Raj

**THE contracts handed out to drivers are "interesting", to put it mildly. Loaded with caveats, disclaimers, jargon and extremely fine print, in some cases, one could be forgiven for wondering if they are deliberately meant to befuddle.**

**In one of the contracts, the very first thing stated is that the driver is not protected by the Employment Act 1955. For good measure, it also states that the cost of preparing the contract is the driver's burden to bear.**

**Best of all, however, is the stipulation that the driver has to pay a deposit of RM1,000 to the company upon signing the contract. Labour lawyer V.K. Raj couldn't help but shake his head in amazement as he pored over the document.**

**"I find it very odd that the company is actually taking a deposit from the drivers. Can you imagine how much they would be taking if they had 20 or 100 workers? "Usually, it's the**

other way round. The contractor -- which is what the company says the driver is -- is the one that usually takes a deposit for work to be rendered."

The reason for the deposit being levied? Apparently, because the company has suffered tremendous losses due to drivers breaking traffic rules and using the company's vehicles for their own purposes. Oddly, the most important thing for the employee -- the size of his paycheque -- is not stated.

Instead, all that is said is that wages will be paid on a piecemeal basis, the quantum of which will be decided by the company and can be revised based on the company's needs. In another instance, an eight-page contract goes to great lengths to tell the driver that he would not be covered under social security insurance (Socso) or workman's compensation. It gives him an 8.8 per cent commission on the haulage tariff, but quickly adds that this is in no way to be construed as forming an employer/employee relationship.

It also expressly states that the company shall not make any of the statutory payments usually required of employers. And, while noting that a contract driver is not subject to working hours like a normal employee, it nevertheless demands that the driver fulfil his work schedule according to an "allowed timeframe". He also has to check in with the depot every day to receive his delivery schedule.

The driver is also warned that if he does not show up for three days continuously, or any shorter period if the company deems it so, his contract will immediately be terminated. This includes weekends and public holidays, which means those long Hari Raya Aidilfitri or Deepavali weekends are a privilege these men do not enjoy.

10/11/2008 (Monday)

### **'More money will be pumped in if need be'**

By : Adie Suri Zulkefli and Patrick Sennyah

**GEORGE TOWN:** Second Finance Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop yesterday said the government would only inject more funds to complement the RM7 billion stimulus package, which was announced recently, if there was a need for it. Nor Mohamed said Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak would consider increasing the size of the stimulus package based on the government's capability and reserves. Najib had on Tuesday tabled the stimulus package which aims to increase domestic consumption to help the country weather the global economic crisis.

The deputy prime minister also said the government would increase the value of the package in the future based on needs. Nor Mohamed was commenting on a statement by DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng in Seremban earlier yesterday that the RM7 billion stimulus package was

not large enough to stimulate the economy. Lim, who is also Penang chief minister, had proposed that the amount be raised to RM48 billion. "This is a good sign as Lim has taken a different stand, compared with his colleagues in Pakatan Rakyat who alleged that the money was non-existent. "The most interesting part is he said the amount is not enough. This means he has acknowledged that the RM7 billion is there," Nor Mohamed said, after opening the Muslim Jewellers and Moneychangers Association building here yesterday.

Lim, who was opening the Negri Sembilan DAP convention, said he had arrived at the RM48 billion figure after "detailed deliberations with economists". "This is not an impossible figure since companies like Petronas are still making huge profits which could be channelled to help the people." At a separate function in Pongsu Seribu, Tasek Gelugor, Nor Mohamed said the government had decided to stick with the procedure for workers to reduce their contribution to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF).

EPF had said that employees who did not wish to reduce their statutory contribution from 11 per cent to eight per cent a month would have to state that in writing by filling up a form. The move had drawn criticism from the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, Malaysian Airline System Employees Union and Malaysian Employers Federation. Nor Mohamed said the procedure had proven to be effective when it was implemented during the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis. "The government came to the conclusion that the majority of contributors may feel that the initiative is good since they would be getting more cash in hand during these challenging times." He added that the procedure was the more convenient of the two as most employees would opt for the reduction in the EPF contribution rate. "We made the decision based on many factors and one of it is that it would be wiser to make those who do not want the cut to fill the form rather than get the bulk of contributors to undergo the procedure."

**14/11/2008 (Friday)**

## **A matter of minds over pretty halls**



Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launches a Permata early education curriculum book in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him are Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor (centre) and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris vice-chancellor Datuk Professor Dr Aminah Ayob.

**KUALA LUMPUR: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak wants local universities to move towards an era of "intellectual renaissance" and not just be satisfied with having beautiful convocation halls.**

Speaking at the opening of a seminar on "Creating a Blue Ocean in Education and Training Sectors" yesterday, Najib called on public and private universities to focus more on developing their intellectual infrastructure and not just physical infrastructure.

"We are blessed with beautiful universities. Even the London School of Economics has to rent halls outside to conduct its convocations. "But you got to have not just a university but a quality university, where it is really a centre of learning of the liberated, open and inquisitive minds.

"Malaysians are good at rote learning; they learn well and they are studious. They spend long hours learning but they are not inquisitive enough. "Their minds have not been challenged because our system has not challenged them," he said, adding that this was probably due to Eastern values where being passive was seen as being respectful to someone senior. But he said Malaysians needed to change and encourage inquisitiveness in children.

On the "Blue Ocean strategy", a concept that advocates creative strategy as opposed to the traditional competitive strategy, he said it could be adopted by public and private universities to help academicians in their quest for competitiveness in education and training.

"Blue Ocean strategy " is a concept by Korean Professor W. Chan Kim, which promotes out-of-the-box thinking to create new uncontested market spaces, that is, creating a new pie instead of fighting for a bigger slice. Taking a cue from the book, Najib told the seminar participants, comprised mainly of academicians and chancellors from local universities, to look at where they were at today and where they wanted to be in the coming years.

"We should ask what are our strengths and weaknesses. Can we leverage on our strength? "Can we add value to it and create a real Blue Ocean so that we can grow?" He added that universities in Malaysia had plenty to leverage on. "Malaysia is a strategic gateway between the West and the East, the Christian world and the Islamic world, between China, India and the Malay world."

On Islam, he said he was a believer of Islam Hadhari and would continue its implementation when he took over as prime minister in March. Islam Hadhari or civilisational Islam is a concept of government based on the principles of Islam as derived from the Quran and promoted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The one-day seminar was jointly organised by the Productivity Corporation and Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities held at the Putra World Trade Centre.

**14/11/2008 (Friday)**

## **DEWAN RAKYAT: 'No gender bias in picking VCs'**

By : V. Vasudevan, Eileen Ng, R.S. Kamini and Irdiani Salleh

### **IS there gender bias in the appointment of vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors at public universities in the country?**

Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Idris Haron insisted there was none despite vehement opposition to his contention by two DAP MPs. It all started when he told the house that the sudden termination of Datuk Rafiah Salim's tenure as Universiti Malaya VC was not a case of gender bias.

He had been replying to a supplementary question by Dr Puad Zarkashi (BN-Batu Pahat) who had asked why the ministry did not advertise vacancies for VCs and DVCs in the media to allow more transparent selection of candidates.

Idris' answer got Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam) and Fong Po Kuan (DAP-Batu Gajah) going, with Chong accusing the ministry of not giving Rafiah more time to improve the university's standing.

(Rafiah, appointed in May 2006, was the first woman VC in the country. The government had high expectations of her. However, the university's performance kept sliding, from 192th ranking in the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) in 2006 to 245th ranking last year.)

Chong said the ministry should appoint more women VCs as there were 17 public universities in the country. "There should be at least a 30 per cent representation among VCs by women."

Idris objected to this, saying the ministry gave priority to performance and warned Chong not to turn the matter into a political issue. He added that there were women already holding high posts in universities.

This included Datuk Prof Dr Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin (VC Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), Datuk Prof Dr Aminah Ayob (VC Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris), Datin Prof Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir (Deputy VC Universiti Teknologi Malaysia), Prof Dr Fatimah Abang (Deputy VC Universiti Malaysia Sarawak), Prof Dr Rosnah Ismail (Deputy VC Universiti Malaysia Sabah) and Prof Dr Asma Ismail (Deputy VC Universiti Sains Malaysia).

When Chong and Fong continued to accuse him of being biased towards women, Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar told Idris to ignore them and move on to the next question.

Wan Junaidi said he knew the background of the members of the select committee formed a long time ago to decide on the appointments of VCs and DVCs.

Earlier, replying to a question from Taib Azamuddin Mohd Taib, he said the committee comprised experienced and prominent figures in higher education like Tan Sri Dr Mohd Salleh Mohd Yassin, a director of the United Nations University, Tan Sri Dr Tajuddin Ali (former Tenaga Nasional president) and academicians Tan Sri Dr Augustine Ong and Professor Emeritus Datuk K.J. Ratnam.

"The committee's decisions are highly respected and the ministry never or rarely disputes them. "We accept the candidates chosen by them without fear or favour."

Idris said candidates for the VC and DVC posts were screened through several interviews and chosen on their performance, vision, mission, leadership and management abilities, academic qualifications, communication skills and outstanding personality. He added that three months prior to the end of a VC's term, the ministry would form a search committee. The search committee was responsible for evaluating the performance of the particular VC and if the performance was up to expectation, the committee could recommend an extension of contract.

"If the committee is not satisfied with the VC's performance, they have the task of finding a new candidate," he added.

**17/11/2008 (Monday)**

## **Cuepacs' boycott threat slammed**

**KUANTAN: Cuepacs' threat to boycott the efficiency level assessment (PTK) examination is improper as it can affect the promotional process of civil servants, said Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam. He said it should, instead, continue talks with the Public Service Department and Public Services Commission while waiting for the government to make a decision.**

"Cuepacs has provided its views on the matter ... it will have to wait for the government to decide," Subramaniam, who is also MIC secretary-general, said at a MIC rebranding seminar here yesterday. A local daily reported yesterday that the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service wanted to boycott the PTK if it was not abolished next year because it puts a lot of pressure on civil servants. Its president, Omar Osman, was reported to have given the PSD until Dec 31 to decide whether to continue with the system or scrap it.

He wanted the promotion process to be done by evaluating the work performance of civil servants and through interviews by heads of department. Bernama reports that the Peninsular Malaysia Road Transport Officers Union has pledged its full support for Cuepacs' call to boycott the PTK next year. It quoted union president Hamzah Masri as saying: "The PTK process results in a lot of wastage and even officers who pass have difficulty gaining promotion."



**17/11/2008 (Monday)**

## **Residents cry foul over quarry activities**

By : Sulaiman Jaafar



The 2km road that was built through a deer park, affecting the animal's habitat.

### **GUA MUSANG: A silica quarry operator has allegedly built a 2km road through a deer park.**

The pollution caused by lorries plying the road has now forced the Kelantan Wildlife Department to abandon its plan to develop a popular limestone cave called Gua Sidang as an eco-tourism site. The 40ha deer park is managed by the department.

Residents here said the cave, which got its name from being a popular place where communists' sidang (meeting) was held during the insurgency, is no longer a peaceful site with lorries passing by it daily.

The residents in Taman Rusa have been complaining about the pollution for the past three years. They claimed that the quarry caused noise and dust pollution from morning till night. They also said that since a hill was levelled, flash floods have hit the nearby Tanah Putih settlement.

Residents fear the worst as the quarry operator is expanding operations by acquiring 40ha of land early this year. The displaced villagers, however, could not claim any compensation as the land is state-owned. The quarry operator allegedly put up notices around the area stating that the land was leased from the Yayasan Kraftangan Kelantan, under the patronage of the Raja Perempuan Kelantan.

When villagers held a demonstration two months ago to protest the acquisition, they were told that the Kelantan royalty was not involved. Taman Rusa Residents Action Committee chairman Hisham Mustafa said: "Gua Musang member of parliament Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah has given a statement denying the palace's involvement.

"Yet the quarry is still operating. They have acquired land and orchards but the villagers who have worked for years on it did not get a single sen. They should get something for the loss of the trees and income." Hisham said the committee had sent memorandums to the departments involved and also to the state government but there had been no reply.

**17/11/2008 (Monday)**

### **Fattening fish on bits of chicken and veggie oils**

By : Jaswinder Kaur



Dr Rossita Shapawi with the fish feed she took more than three years to produce, and which is cheaper than imported feed.

**KOTA KINABALU: With the aquaculture industry dependent on fish-based feed, a researcher has come up with a formula that uses poultry by-products and vegetable oils.**

Dr Rossita Shapawi said the industry currently relied on trash fish, which is defined as fish with little or no commercial value. "Trash fish is not sustainable for the long term and so we have to use artificial feed, but we don't produce quality feed. The imported feed is also expensive," said Rossita, who is with Universiti Malaysia Sabah's Borneo Marine Research Institute.

"I was keen to develop a feed that was not only profitable for aquaculture farmers but one which would also contribute to the environment. "A quality locally-produced feed not only cuts costs but also lessens the pressure on wild fish stocks used for fish meal and fish oil production."

Her hard work has paid off. Her study on "cost-effective feeds using a novel blend of ingredients for the culture of humpback grouper" resulted in two prototype dietary feeds,

earned her a doctorate from UMS in August and netted a silver award at BioMalaysia 2008 in Kuala Lumpur last month.

Testing of the U-MS/SM2 feed found a 100 per cent survival rate of the humpback grouper with a final feeding cost of RM5.70 for every kilogramme of fish bred. In comparison, the use of trash fish feed showed a mere 50 per cent survival rate of the same grouper species and a final feeding cost of RM15 for every kilogramme of fish.

Testing of the U-MS/SM1 feed showed a 95 per cent survival rate of the humpback grouper at a final feeding cost of RM7.94 for every kilogramme of fish, which was cheaper than a commercial diet in the market which led to the same survival rate but at a feeding cost of RM10.23.

"While we still use some fishery-based ingredients, the innovation here is to replace some amount of fish meal with poultry by-products and fish oil with palm oil and other types of vegetable oil.

"After we fed the humpback groupers, we analysed them for protein content, fat and body weight and the results were good. "This is the trend now to look for sustainable ingredients," the aquaculture nutritionist said.

Rossita said the humpback grouper, also known as the mouse grouper, fetched more than RM300 per kg at seafood restaurants and that the species was chosen for the study because the institute had been able to breed it after years of research. She said cost-effective feeds were critical in the success of any commercial culture of groupers as feed was one of the most expensive components in aquaculture.

**18/11/2008 (Tuesday)**

## **It's discrimination, says Rafiah**

By : Joseph Sipalan



Datuk Rafiah Salim may file a civil suit against the deputy higher education minister

**KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Rafiah Salim is tired of the controversy surrounding the appointment of her successor as vice-chancellor of Universiti Malaya (UM).**

Speaking at her new office set aside for former V-Cs on campus, she grappled with what she felt was a sad way to end her career. Rafiah said she was resigned to the fact that her tenure as UM's V-C was over and insisted that she had moved on. "It is their (Higher Education Ministry's) right (to choose the next V-C). "I am disappointed because I wanted to finish the work that I had set out to do, but I have accepted it. "I don't care who they replace me with. I am not interested in holding on to the post or to be reinstated. I am sure (Professor Dr) Ghauth (Jasmon) has his own plans."

Jasmon took over as V-C on Nov 8 on a three-year contract. Her mood shifted to anger and incredulity when asked about her view on Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Idris Haron's statement that performance was the yardstick to select a V-C.

"How dare he cast aspersions on my credibility and track record. I've had a stellar performance over my 34-year career, including what I have done during my 21/2 years (at UM). "If they are going to take the THES (Times Higher Education Supplement) as a reference, then they should sack the V-Cs of other universities which have been sliding in the the ranking."

She maintained her demand that Idris retract his statement, made in Parliament on Nov 12, failing which she would file a civil suit against him. "I want them to clear my name, that is all," said the former United Nations assistant secretary-general for human resources.

She said female V-Cs were victims of gender discrimination, going by the shorter tenures offered to them compared with their male colleagues. She was given a two-year tenure with a half-year extension to her contract.

Similarly, her female colleagues -- Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia vice-chancellor Datuk Professor Dr Sharifah Hapsah and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris vice-chancellor Datuk Professor Dr Aminah Ayob -- were given two-year contracts. "Other V-Cs who were male were given three-year contracts. Now tell me if that is not gender discrimination."

Her anger, however, subsided when asked about what she intended to do next, and she took a more reflective tone as she revealed her plans. "I'm going on holiday to see my four grandsons in Bahrain on Nov 20 for 10 days. "Now that I am no longer V-C, I also have more time to focus on my two books."

She said one book would be on her experiences as the country's first female vice-chancellor and the other would be a third edition evidence book for legal reference. Asked if she would take up offers in other organisations, she said she had been approached by three private organisations but did not intend to work full-time again. "It is sad that in the autumn of my life something like this happened but, at the same time, this is the first break from work that I have had in 34 years. "One good thing is I have now joined my husband in retirement. Now we can pack up and go on holiday any time we want. "Every cloud has a silver lining," she said with a smile.

18/11/2008 (Tuesday)

## Group wants Perak to take back forest land

**IPOH: The state government has been asked to take back more than 1,000ha of degazetted forest alienated to the director-general of the Land and Mines Department by the previous administration two years ago.**

The Perak Environment Association claimed the department had failed to comply with the law when it did not submit an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before felling trees in the area. The degazetted parcel, measuring 1,063ha, was alienated to the Land and Mines Department in 2006 to implement the government's Boer goat project in Perak. After the trees were felled, the cleared area was recently handed over to the Perak Veterinary Department.

Perak Environment Association president Abdul Rahman Said Alli yesterday said the Land and Mines Department had disregarded legal requirements before felling trees. "No EIA was submitted although the forest parcel given to the department was more than 500ha. Under the law, an EIA must be submitted to the Department of Environment and the department must give its approval before trees could be felled."

Rahman said the state government should take back the land and regazette it as part of the Pondok Tanjung Forest Reserve. "This will serve as a reminder to government departments that they are not above the law."

He said information gleaned from various sources by the association showed that the trees were felled without any logging permit. Rahman also pointed out that two years ago nearly 200ha of the Parit Forest Reserve was degazetted for a Boer goat project but nothing had taken place after the timber had been harvested.

He said the state government should not allow government departments, whether at state or federal level, to take charge of implementing business projects in the state. "It is not the role of the government to be in business. "It should enforce the laws it had enacted and not violate them."

**19/11/2008 (Wednesday)**

## **Govt revamps water services to prevent crisis**

By : Joseph Sipalan



Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak examining some of the equipment used to supply water. With him are Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor and Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya Water Association president Tan Sri Rozali Ismail (left).

**SUBANG JAYA: The Federal Government has restructured the country's water services industry to ensure water crises do not occur in future, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.**

He said the government would also press on with the development of water supply and sewerage facilities under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) to improve rural and urban water supply.

Speaking at the 1st Asia Pacific Regional Water Conference at a hotel here yesterday, Najib said laws had been introduced to develop a new business model. "Two new acts have been enforced, the Water Services Industry Act and the National Water Services Commission Act.

"The Federal Government foresees that with the restructuring of the industry, reputable water companies will spearhead the industry, thus providing world-class water services to the population."

Najib, who is also finance minister, said the government would also implement the Public-Private Partnership concept to enhance economic activities and create more employment opportunities. "We do not want to see unemployment on the rise during this challenging phase," he said, referring to the current global economic crisis.

Najib suggested that sustainable sanitation be adopted to ensure the world's water resources were better managed. The existing framework of water and wastewater management, which emphasises conventional sanitation, was only suitable for "water- and money-rich" developed countries, he said.

Najib said sustainable sanitation would be technically manageable, socio-politically appropriate, systematically reliable and cheap to run with minimal waste of energy and resources. "I strongly believe that sustainable sanitation is more appropriate and relevant in order to materialise the Millennium Development Goals for Water and Sanitation by 2015.

"Sustainable sanitation is flexible in approaching any community -- poor or rich, urban or rural, water-rich or water-poor country -- and requires lower investment cost compared with the conventional sanitation approach.

"It is important to note that the framework of sustainable sanitation is much easier to be adopted in developing countries where water supply and sanitation infrastructure are still in the developing stage.

"In some developing countries, no public facilities are available. Therefore, it is an ideal condition to start a new infrastructure with a new framework."

Najib noted, however, that sustainable sanitation was still in the development stage, and highlighted three areas of sustainable sanitation that needed serious study. Aside from separation of water pollutants at the source, attention must also be given to decentralisation of facilities to increase efficiency and reuse of by-products, especially treated wastewater and sludge, he said. Also present at the conference were Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya Water Association president Tan Sri Rozali Ismail and Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Mohamad Jawhar Hassan.

**20/11/2008 (Thursday)**

**AP issue makes a comeback**

**APPROVED permits, which created a lot of problems for former international trade and industry minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz three years ago, returned to haunt her yesterday when an opposition member alleged that her relatives had received them during her tenure.**



Azmin Ali (PKR-Gombak) alleged that her ministry had issued approved permits, used for importing cars, to her relatives, including a niece, long after the government had decided to ban the issuing of franchise APs.

After the decision to ban franchise APs was made in 2005, Azmin said the then Miti secretary-general Tan Sri Sidek Hassan had approved the issue of permits to Autostadt Sdn Bhd for the import of Volkswagen cars.

"He did it without the knowledge of the committee formed specifically for the purpose of issuing APs.

"What is more disturbing is that Autostadt to this day has no showroom or sales and service centres which are a requisite for the issue of such franchise APs."

Azmin said this when he sought clarification from Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Jacob Dungau Sagan, who was winding up the debate on allocations for the ministry at the committee stage.

Azmin said Autostadt's shareholder was Zulkifli Ishak and his wife, Annie Tajul Arus, who is said to be Rafidah's niece. Rafidah, who is the Kuala Kangsar MP, was not in the house yesterday.

Azmin alleged that another company, Amira Venture Sdn Bhd, which was also connected to Rafidah through a relative, had been issued open APs which allow any type of car to be brought in over a period of two years.

He did not give the names of the company directors or how they were related to Rafidah. He said Amira received 150 APs in 2007 and was given 225 this year. "How were they issued APs?" he asked Jacob.

In reply, Jacob said his ministry was carrying out an audit on all the APs that were issued and would be able to give a clearer picture later on. Replying to a point made by Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur), he said the issuing of APs by the government was in decline. He said 70,381 APs were issued in 2005, 60,460 in 2006, 50,304 in 2007 and 44,168 this year.

"This shows a declining trend and not as claimed by Ipoh Timur (Lim)." Lim had alleged that APs were being issued as part of the Umno election power play and many Umno members, particularly delegates, had been given permits.

Speaking in the Parliament lobby later, Azmin said the ministry had to explain how the APs were being issued to market players. He noted that 77 companies had been issued 45,686 permits from 2004 to 2007.

"The problem is not the issue of permits but the way they were being distributed. On the average, all 77 companies should each receive 600 APs, but that is not the case. "Some, like Naza Konsortium Sdn Bhd were given 8,431 permits from 2004 to 2006. Surely, this is an unusually large number of APs for one company." He said, at RM50,000 for each AP, Naza would stand to make more than RM420 million without even bringing in a single vehicle.



**20/11/2008 (Thursday)**

## **Zin: Govt cannot stop toll collection**

**THE government cannot stop the collection of toll on congested highways, Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed said yesterday.**

There was no clause in the concessionaire agreements that would allow the government to do this, he said in reply to a question by Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong).

"We cannot take any action which goes against the terms of the concession agreement. "Once the government hands over the infrastructure, these concessionaires must bear the financial responsibilities and obligations as agreed upon."

Gobind, who had complained about the traffic congestion on the Puchong-Damansara Highway (LDP), said it was unfair for motorists to have to pay toll. He also expressed unhappiness that all motorists driving to Puchong must pay toll.

"All roads leading to Puchong end in tolls. I don't understand why there isn't any clause in the concessionaire contracts which allows the government to intervene and do something. "Most parts of the LDP are congested during peak hours and it is unfair to motorists to endure congestion after paying toll."

Acknowledging the unsatisfactory "level of service" of the LDP highway, Zin said the Malaysian Highway Authority had sent directives to the concessionaire to implement remedial measures immediately. These included increasing the number of toll booths and encouraging toll payment via electronic toll collection. He said more measures would be put in soon.