



15/10/2008 (Wednesday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: Recruitment four times a year

POLICE will increase their recruitment exercises from two to four times a year to fill 60,000 vacancies by 2012.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said so far, 2,364 constables and 879 inspectors had been recruited this year. The target for the year is 5,000 constables and inspectors. More training centres would also be established, including one each in Langkawi and Ulu Kinta, Perak which are scheduled to open next year.

15/10/2008 (Wednesday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: Plan to help Bumi firms secure govt deals

By : V. Vasudevan, Joseph Sipalan and R.S. Kamini

A CENTRAL contract system may be put in place to help deserving Bumiputera companies secure government work.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the government is studying the problems faced by small Bumiputera companies, particularly those supplying furniture to schools. "If there is a need, we may centralise the contract awarding system so that these businesses do not close shop," said Najib, who is also the finance minister.

He was replying to Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid (BN-Padang Besar), who asked if government-linked companies were looking after the interests of small Bumiputera businesses. "I've met several Bumiputera representatives in the furniture industry and they have been complaining that it was difficult to secure contracts from the Education Ministry to supply their products to schools. "I've asked my ministry to look into the matter and we might establish a centralised system to help these people."

On the roles played by GLCs, Najib said several had taken the initiative to help Bumiputera entrepreneurs and small businesses through the Bumiputera Vendor Development Programme. "This programme was introduced to enable small businesses to compete and encourage more Bumiputera entrepreneurs to be active in business."

He said Tenaga Nasional Bhd, for example, had allocated about RM1.8 million from its RM5.5 billion profit to the Bumiputera Vendor Development Programme last year. "TNB is also the umbrella body for 250 vendors trained under the programme."

Najib said if the GLCs helped to develop a skilled and competitive workforce, the country could produce corporate leaders and far-thinking entrepreneurs such as those supporting companies like Petronas and Proton. "Non-Bumiputera companies that get government tenders should help develop and provide opportunities for Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera entrepreneurs."

16/10/2008 (Thursday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: Accounts committee queries three mega deals

THE Public Accounts Committee is seeking clarifications on three major deals, including Maybank's acquisition of a stake in an Indonesian bank.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the committee wanted to know the rationale behind the high expenditure by the government to acquire 12 Eurocopter helicopters, estimated to cost RM2.3 billion.

He also wanted to know why the government had allowed Maybank to purchase the Bank International Indonesia (BII) stake at five times the book value, and the awarding of a high-speed broadband contract to TM Bhd.

"We do not want to preempt anything. We need an explanation on how decisions were made for the three deals and why they cost so much," Azmi said during a conference in Parliament after a PAC committee meeting yesterday.

He said the committee would set a date to meet the respective agencies and Maybank to gather the information needed. Asked if he would meet Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Azmi said this was up to the committee to decide.

He said the committee wanted the Home Ministry to consider implementing a biometric system at several entry and exit points to check illegal immigrants.

He also said Sabah had implemented a similar strategy to keep a record of visitors entering the state via land and waterway.

PAC also called for a study to be done on the special court established to deal with illegal immigrants.

"We have a special court, but we do not understand why the cases are taking such a long time to be heard," he said, adding that there were close to 800 cases involving employers pending trial.

20/10/2008 (Monday)

RM660m construction fees settled

PORT Klang Authority (PKA) has settled the RM660 million owing to Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd this year, for the construction of Port Klang Free Zone's (PKFZ) infrastructure and facilities.

The RM660 million is part payment for the RM4.6 billion PKFZ project, of which Kuala Dimensi, a subsidiary of Wijaya Baru Global Bhd, is the turnkey contractor. In June this year, PKA general manager and chief executive officer Lim Thean Shiang said that the RM660 million payment was pending the release of audit findings by the Ministry of Finance and conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Meanwhile, Lim said the current economic situation provides PKFZ an opportunity to attract firms that are looking for low-cost free trade zones in Southeast Asia. He said the economic crisis has made companies operating in places like Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone that command high rental charges, to consider relocating to other low-cost free zones.

PKFZ has been seeing an incremental rise in revenue through its tenancy agreements since last year, he said. It recorded some RM7.6 million in rental revenue to date, almost double that of the RM3.7 million it collected last year. "We foresee a growth to RM14 million in 2009," Lim said.

21/10/2008 (Tuesday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: IPPs paying RM500m

THE independent power producers (IPPs) are paying RM500 million over a period of 12 months for the one-off payment that replaced the windfall profit levy that the government scrapped last month.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Kong Cho Ha said the details could not immediately be ascertained as the payments were collected by the Customs Department and channeled into the Consolidated Fund. He said the fund was to be used for management and development expenditures.

21/10/2008 (Tuesday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: 564 projects approved

A TOTAL of 564 projects have been approved under the ScienceFund, TechnoFund and InnoFund involving RM358.03 million as of October.

The funds are to promote new development in biotechnology research and development. Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili said RM270 million had set aside for research and development initiatives under the Institute of Agro-Biotechnology, Institut Genom Malaysia and the Institute of Pharmaceuticals and Nutraceuticals. -- Bernama

21/10/2008 (Tuesday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: Put government critics on the air, RTM urged

By : V. Vasudevan, Joseph Sipalan and Irdiani Mohd Salleh

Why is it (RTM)
so scared of
airing clippings
of us speaking in
the Dewan
criticising the
government?

*Datuk Ghapur Salleh
BN-Kalabakan*



A BACKBENCHER has called on RTM to show courage and telecast clippings of backbenchers criticising the government, and not just leave it to the private television stations.

Datuk Ghapur Salleh (BN-Kalabakan) said the state-controlled media was prone to showing entertainment, particularly those in relation to the occult, but not backbenchers saying their piece against the government. "Such clippings are screened on TV3, TV9 but not on TV1. Why is it so scared of airing clippings of us speaking in the Dewan criticising the government?"

Ghapur said the Barisan Nasional would stand to benefit if TV1 screened clippings of backbenchers criticising the government. "It will be an advantage to the Barisan Nasional and they will know we are speaking without fear or favour. Even if it is bitter medicine for the government, it should be screened."

Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam) interjected and told Ghapur his complaint could be addressed to everyone's satisfaction if there was a channel dedicated to just screening Dewan Rakyat proceedings. "Yes, I agree with you. But there must be some censorship. We don't want the fighting between backbenchers to be screened. That does not reflect what we do here."

Tony Pua (DAP-PJ Utara) interjected and wished Ghapur well and hoped his speech criticising TV1 would be aired on television. Touching on another subject, Ghapur took a swipe at an MIC Youth representative who had gone on Astro Awani and criticised the government.

"When they (MIC) were strong and powerful, they were quiet. They did not say anything. But now when they are beaten and weak, they are saying all sorts of things about the BN. Where is their substance?"

He said Umno did not bully any of its partners and MIC was an example of how it had benefited from the BN system. "Take for example my constituency. The Merotai seat has 80 per cent Muslim majority but BN had given the seat to the Liberal Democratic Party. So how can Umno be bullying?"

Ghapur touched on the popular Hindi film star Shahrukh Khan being conferred a Datukship by Malacca. "What is the meaning of this. What did he do to contribute to our society. What is his contribution?"

On the budget, Ghapur said members should not be complaining about the figures and should just debate it. "I am sure if there are adjustments, the government will announce them when they reply to the points we have raised during the debate."

21/10/2008 (Tuesday)

Sultan bemoans project delays

By : Sulaiman Jaafar



Sultan of Kelantan Tuanku Ismail Petra inspecting a guard of honour at the opening of the Kelantan state legislative assembly yesterday.

KOTA BARU: The Sultan of Kelantan yesterday voiced dismay over long delays in the implementation of projects under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

He said some of the work was going slowly while other projects had not even started, adding that the state government should stop giving special treatment to government agencies and corporations.

The sultan also urged the state government to take legal action against private companies and recover the money they owed. In his opening speech at the state assembly, the sultan said that of 1,434 projects, 258 had been completed. Another 243 were on the way.

"I call on the agencies involved to ensure projects proceed on schedule. "This includes the construction of the main campuses of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan in Bachok and Jeli, and the second Sultan Yahya Petra bridge."

Also present was the Raja Perempuan of Kelantan. Citing the auditor-general's report which described the state government's financial standing as "unstable", he said the deficit in the accumulated account had doubled to RM326.34 million from RM155.86 million in 2003, while

the deficit in the development fund had also doubled to RM45.04 million at the end of 2007 from RM23 million at the end of 2003.

"I urge the state government to be prudent and spend moderately to ensure a stable flow of government funds. "It should not make decisions which will reduce income to the state coffers. "Government agencies and corporations should not be given special treatment. "Legal action must be taken against private companies which fail to make payments."

The sultan said the state could no longer depend on current natural resources and must work harder to find new sources of income in every sector to finance its increasing development and operating expenditure.

He called on the Kota Baru Municipal Council to re-evaluate its planning in the aspects of cleanliness, lifestyle and security. The sultan said the East Coast Economic Region would generate economic development in the state but the communication network must be upgraded to enable all projects to proceed on time.

"I hope the Federal Government will speed up the third phase of the east coast highway from Terengganu, the new Kota Baru-Kuala Krai road and the widening of the Gua Musang and Kuala Lipis road."

Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat did not attend the ceremony. His deputy, Datuk Ahmad Yaacob, said Nik Aziz had been admitted to the Universiti Sains Malaysia Hospital after complaining of fatigue on Sunday.

"Although he had been told to rest for a few days, the menteri besar is expected to present the coming budget," he said.

24/10/2008 (Friday)

Defence secretary-general to be asked about copter deal



PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid

NILAI: Defence Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abu Bakar Abdullah will be among those called in to assist the Public Accounts Committee to look into the Eurocopter deal.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the committee would scrutinise details leading to the purchase of the helicopters at a two-day meeting beginning Oct 29.

"It is part of the normal procedure for us to call the ministry secretary-general to assist us. "We are going to scrutinise the case from two aspects, mainly the financial and technical side of it as well as the decision-making process which led to the eventual purchase.

"We feel two days would be sufficient as it will give the PAC enough time to study the matter objectively and scrutinise all the relevant details," he said after launching the Malaysia Audit Day yesterday.

The government recently announced the purchase of Cougar Eurocopter EC725 helicopters to replace the ageing Nuri helicopters at a cost of RM2.3 billion. The deal brought about controversy when one of the bidders of the helicopter contract, Mentari Services Sdn Bhd, questioned the offer to Eurocopter.

Azmi said: "We have been informed that the procurement was based following a tender process, but we will go through the entire process and urge all parties to be patient," he said.

Azmi said he hoped all 12 members of the PAC would be present during the two days. On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister and former defence minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said that the cabinet had given the PAC the green light to investigate the procurement of the helicopters for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) to replace the Nuris. In a statement issued last week, Abu Bakar said the purchase was done according to procedures and that the issuance of the letter of intent to Eurocopter was not influenced by any parties.

On another matter, Azmi said the PAC has proposed that internal audit units in all government agencies and departments function more independently and report directly to the auditor-general.

By doing this, it would not only enhance the public delivery system, but also greatly avoid any abuse by the relevant heads of department who are now responsible for approving all internal departmental audit reports.

"At present, all internal audit reports are submitted to the relevant heads of department. This procedure is open to abuse as the members of the internal audit unit are at the end of the day going to approve the report and be answerable to their own head of department."

24/10/2008 (Friday)

Former govt accused of fund mismanagement

By : Mazlinda Mahmood

STATE executive councillor Ronnie Liu (DAP-Pandamaran) alleged yesterday that power abuses in local authorities had wasted taxpayers' money.

For example, he said a Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) member had ordered council officers to carry out projects worth RM2 million before the last general election. He said until today, there were still contractors of the projects who had not received their payments.

Liu, who is state Local Government, Research and Development Committee chairman, was replying to Mohd Isa Abu Kasim (BN-Batang Kali) during the question-and-answer session.

Answering a question by Saari Sungib (Pas-Hulu Klang), Liu said the state government had not lodged a report with the Anti-Corruption Agency. "We encourage the current local councillors or anybody who has proof (of power abuse) to do so. "We do not want to blame anyone, but we want to tell the people what happened during BN's tenure," he said.

Liu said power abuses by Barisan Nasional local councillors were also suspected to have taken place in the Klang Municipal Council (MPK) because the council's reserves of more than RM100 million in 2000 were exhausted in less than five years.

"Local councillors, who were also state assemblymen, had abused their powers and forced council officers to carry out many wasteful projects before the election to buy votes. "Once MPK was the richest council and had reserves or savings of more than RM100 million, but now it has to use overdraft to pay staff salary." He said power abuses among local councillors and state assemblymen were among the factors that had made five local councils in the state to be in deficit this year.

The local councils are Kajang Municipal Council (MPKJ), Hulu Selangor District Council (MDHS), Kuala Langat District Council (MDKL), MPK and MPS. Liu said when Selangor was under BN, its politicians were on the local council's tender board, which was why there were many cases of power abuse.

24/10/2008 (Friday)

Khazanah opens first overseas office

KHAZANAH Nasional Berhad officially opened its first overseas office here yesterday and immediately set its sights on opening more, namely in the Middle East and India.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who officiated at the launch, said the Beijing office represented a new "Silk Road" between China and the Middle East, through Southeast Asia.

He said within the short time that Khazanah had been operating in China since May 13, it had proven itself by turning a 9.9 per cent stake in Parkson into a US\$647 million (RM2.3 billion) success story. The company did this by issuing an exchangeable sukuk which allowed Middle East investors to participate in the retail consumption growth in China.

Abdullah said the representative office would have two roles -- to help government-linked and private companies to invest in China, and to woo Chinese investments to Malaysia. He said the Chinese have shown keen interest in investing in Iskandar. "This will be the new Silk Road... for China, Malaysia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia," he said.

Abdullah said Khazanah's physical presence in China was another clear proof of the strong economic ties between Malaysia and China. He said this and the strong friendship between the two countries would be significant especially in the current climate of global financial instability. He said China, Malaysia and the other Asian countries should strive to mobilise their large savings pool to effectively and efficiently fund growth potential within the region.

Abdullah said China could be counted on to stand by its neighbours. "The Chinese have a long memory. They still remember Tun Abdul Razak Hussein who started diplomatic ties with China when no one else in Southeast Asia wanted to ... they remember that it was I who invited them to participate in the Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting in 1991, despite the Tiananmen incident.

"(For that) It has remained a strong Asean friend ... it helped Asean in 1997 during the financial crisis when it kept its word not to devalue the yuan despite its own problems," Abdullah said.

Malaysia, he said, never viewed China as a threat but as an opportunity in which both China and the Asean countries have benefited from.

30/10/2008 (Thursday)

Panel probes Eurocopter finances today

By : Ridzwan Abdullah



**Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid answering questions from the press at
Parliament House yesterday.**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee will touch on the financial aspects of the RM1.67 billion Eurocopter helicopter deal today after finding nothing wrong in the technical aspects of the deal in deliberations yesterday.

Its chairman, Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid, said the meeting yesterday concluded that the technical aspects of the deal in July last year were above board. "As far as technicalities are concerned, the deal was professionally done," he said, but declined to elaborate.

Azmi said yesterday's meeting was purely to discuss technical aspects of the deal and did not touch on the financial aspects. He declined to comment on DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang's statement earlier yesterday that he should withdraw from the PAC inquiry on the deal as he was a member of the Cabinet that endorsed it. "I'll answer everything tomorrow (Thursday) after our second meeting," he said.

Lim had told a press conference that Azmi should recuse himself from the inquiry as he was a part of the decision-making process on the deal. He said PAC must continue with the inquiry despite the deal being called off as there were "gross discrepancies" in the manner in which it was negotiated.

He alleged that there were contradictions in public statements made on the cost involved, pointing out a RM600 million difference between the RM1.7 billion figure cited by Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and RM1.1 billion stated by Defence Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abu Bakar Abdullah. "The question is how could it have ballooned, even before a letter of intent was issued, by RM600 million. This is a very big difference."

He said there were also other areas which had not been clearly addressed, including the difference quoted on costs involving the offset package offered by Eurocopter. "I do not know if the prime minister was wrongly advised, but he should probe and make comparisons on the pricing and specifications."

Lim also urged the PAC to broaden its probe into the large number of crashes involving Nuri helicopters. He said the matter was important as the Eurocopter Cougar EC725 was supposed to have replaced the Nuri. He added that 70 officers and staff had died in at least 15 crashes since the Nuris were first used in the 1960s.

"The PAC should probe the entire defence procurement process, and also investigate whether there were any middlemen involved who benefited either through commissions or maintenance contracts."

30/10/2008 (Thursday)

EUROCOPTER PURCHASE: No physical evaluation done on helicopters, Dewan told

By : Eileen Ng at the Dewan Rakyat

KUALA LUMPUR

The purchase of 12 Eurocopter helicopters to replace the aging Nuri fleet was done without any physical evaluation, the Dewan Rakyat heard today.

In admitting that the ministry did not conduct any flight tests or made factory visits prior to the purchase, deputy defence minister Datuk Wira Abu Seman Yusop said the decision to purchase the aircraft were based on the latest information it had on hand.

"The Royal Malaysian Air Force had experts who are knowledgeable and equipped with up-to-date data on the latest helicopter technology in the market," he said when replying to points raised at the Budget 2009.

He said it was also to maintain the integrity of a six-man valuation committee, to ensure it had no direct connection with bidders for purchase, which was conducted via international open tender. (The purchase had since been put off to reduce government expenses and the money would be used to implement projects that would bring direct benefits to the people).

Various MPs had expressed shock over the ministry's decision to proceed with the controversial purchase without any physical inspection.

Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said it does not make sense that such sophisticated aircraft were bought based solely on documentation specifications. Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur) said purchasing aircraft without any physical testing showed a severe disregard to human lives.

Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) said the government could not depend on aircraft capabilities based on specifications listed on paper, while M. Manogaran (DAP-Teluk Intan) noted that even a person buying a Kancil car would conduct a physical inspection before putting down his money.

Abu Seman said the process of purchasing the helicopters was not as simple as buying cars. He said after an order was placed, the manufacturer would fabricate the aircraft based on the buyer's specifications and needs. Physical pre- and post-acceptance tests, which include safety evaluation, will be conducted before and after the helicopters were built. "Currently at such preliminary stage, no physical evaluations were needed as we are just choosing the helicopters based on our needs and specifications."

31/10/2008 (Friday)

Eurocopter purchase: Abdullah gives exact figure for deal

By : Ridzwan Abdullah



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and DPM Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday provided the exact figure for the Eurocopter deal after he was given a clarification by the Defence Ministry.

The prime minister said the correct figure was RM1.607 billion, and not RM1.7 billion quoted when he announced to the media earlier this week the government's decision to defer the purchase. "I have been told that the actual amount is RM1.607 billion. I apologise for the mistake," he said after chairing a cabinet committee meeting on palm oil industry competitiveness.

Abdullah questioned why the opposition was making so much fuss about the issue as the deal was not binding in the first place. "It is really very technical and academic to argue about the price, especially when a decision has been made (to postpone the purchase)."

He said if conditions permitted in the future, negotiations on the purchase would resume. "When we feel there is money to spare, then we will negotiate the price."

Abdullah, however, declined to say whether the price would differ should fresh negotiations take place. "Whatever it is, we will still have to negotiate."

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who was present, said the opposition was making a meal of the proposed purchase, especially with its contention that the government had not conducted physical and specification inspections on the helicopter. He said the Eurocopter was a proven helicopter in several developed nations, including France.

"The helicopter has also seen combat in Afghanistan, and our pilots have flown it in exhibitions. They know the performance of the Eurocopter." According to Najib, before a sale is confirmed, a free delivery inspection is held and that is when the helicopter would be thoroughly examined. "So, what we have done is nothing unusual. It's not experimental and it's not that it has not been tested."

At the press conference, Abdullah also said the government would embark on an oil palm replanting scheme for trees aged over 25 years. The government will allocate RM200 million for this scheme to replant trees in some 200,000 hectares. "An incentive of RM1,000 per hectare will also be given to those who want to take part in the scheme."

He said plantation owners and smallholders had been reluctant to replant before due to the high prices for palm oil. "Now that prices have dipped, the government feels that this is the right time to embark on the scheme."

The committee also decided to implement a five per cent bio-diesel blending exercise using methyl ester and diesel.

Abdullah said the programme would be implemented in stages beginning February. The blended fuel will be used in government vehicles, followed by the industrial and transport sectors. "We estimate using about 500,000 tonnes a year for this. Since our yearly palm oil production is about 17.8 million tonnes, this should not be a problem."

31/10/2008 (Friday)

DEWAN RAKYAT: Senior civil servant 'too busy' to attend Eurocopter probe

By : Eileen Ng, Ridzwan Abdullah, Irdiani Mohd Salleh and Joseph Sipalan

THE absence of a senior civil servant led to the postponement of the Public Accounts Committee meeting yesterday looking into the financial aspects of the controversial RM1.607 billion Eurocopter helicopter deal.

The meeting was deferred to Monday after Finance Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Wan Abdul Aziz Wan Abdullah failed to turn up and sent a representative instead.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said Wan Abdul Aziz had been expected to attend the inquiry yesterday. "We are not happy with this (Wan Abdul Aziz's absence). We wanted him to attend as the custodian of the (ministry's) purchasing procedures. "It was his responsibility (to explain)," Azmi said at parliament lobby after the hour-long meeting.

Azmi said Wan Abdul Aziz had verbally informed the PAC that he was "busy with other duties" and had not given specific reasons in writing. "Wan Abdul Aziz may have his reasons for not attending, the PAC felt the reason he gave was not at all convincing."

Azmi said the PAC was taking the Eurocopter issue very seriously as it was now considered a high profile issue and had become a matter of public interest. "We need him to attend. If he wants to bring his officers along, that is all right with us."

Azmi said nothing substantial came out of yesterday's meeting due to Wan Abdul Aziz's absence. He said the PAC would not be calling ministers before the inquiry for the moment.

Azmi, however, steered clear of statement made by opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who had wanted to know why there had been no physical inspection and specification tests on the helicopter. "I have no comments as I do not know what he said. "Moreover, we have to let this committee function independently and not pre-empt anything."

Azmi said the PAC had to be open-minded on the issue, adding that the committee would not take sides. Minutes earlier, at a separate press conference in the lobby, Anwar had called for an independent commission to investigate the Eurocopter deal. He hoped the PAC, which also comprises opposition MPs, would conduct the probe in a transparent manner.

Anwar said purchasing defence hardware without sending out an assessment team or conducting a physical examination was something unheard of when he was finance minister. This means this purchase was based purely on documentation... a whopping RM1.6 billion was spent just based on how good the purchasing documentation was."