

28/12/2008 (Sunday)

Govt looking into smallholders' plight

Bernama

MALACCA: The government is looking into the problems faced by rubber smallholders following the drop in the price of the commodity, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

However, he said the government had not made a decision yet on how best to help them. "The drop in the price of rubber is a major concern for the government and the plight of rubber smallholders needs serious attention," he said after visiting the D-Paradise Tropical Fruit World and Aboriginal Native Village in Alor Gajah.

There has been a drastic drop in prices of the nation's top two commodities, palm oil and rubber, following the global economic crisis. The price of Standard Malaysia 20 has dropped by 62 per cent from RM10.51 a kilogramme on July 3 to RM3.98 a kilogramme in the middle of this month, while the ex-farm price of coagulated rubber is at its lowest level at RM1.39 a kilogramme. Rubber smallholders have voiced their grievances to the government in the hope that they could remain afloat.

Abdullah and his wife, Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, spent about two hours touring the 67.2ha farm. Present were Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam and his wife, Datin Seri Asmah Abdul Rahman. Abdullah and his wife later took a boat ride on Sungai Malacca from the Spice Gardens in Alor Gajah.

28/12/2008 (Sunday)

38pc of treated water is lost



Expect drought in 2028, 2029, 2034, 2042 and 2044, says Zalilah Selamat .



Prof Chan Ngai Weng says people must not expect water costs to be subsidised.



Datuk Teo Yen Hua says to be water sustainable, there has to be tariff revision.

Klang Valley and other parts of the country may face a water crisis as early as next year, but no one seems to be listening.

Some Malaysians continue to let the water run as they brush their teeth, hose water down their lawns and cars, and flush nine litres down the bowl after each visit to the toilet. Consumers at home are not the only ones thirsty. As the economy expands, industries are also using more water.

With supply capacity projected to barely meet next year's water demand in Klang Valley and Putrajaya, the possibility of a shortage is very real, warned Tan Sri Rozali Ismail, president of the water association of Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

Supply capacity feeding these areas is estimated to stand at 4,375 million of litres a day next year, with demand playing catch-up at 4,336 million. If Klang Valley and Putrajaya folk are not careful and use more than the amount projected, a shortage might occur.

Come 2010, water demand would match supply in volume, but after that demand triumphs, Rozali said, speaking at the recent First Asia-Pacific Regional Water Conference 2008 in Subang. This could go on for another four years, until when the Langat 2 —which is part of the Pahang-Selangor inter-state water project — is expected to move up supply capacity by more than 1,000 million litres a day.

Until then, Klang Valley folk should best had better brace themselves for a crisis not unlike that of 1998 when backs were scorched and many throats were parched. Already, estimates by the National Hydraulic Research Institute show that less rainfall can be expected in Selangor and Johor though there would be an increase in Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang.

The country would also be facing hotter days in the near future, with a predicted increase in maximum monthly temperature of up to two degree Celsius over Peninsular Malaysia. The institute's director of the centre for research on river basin study, Zalilah Selamat, said drought could be expected in 2028, 2029, 2034, 2042 and 2044.

Experts are warning that Malaysians and the industries must seriously think and practise conservation to stave off a water crisis. The average Malaysian consumes 300 litres of water a day, double the recommendation by United Nations. In urban areas, daily usage per capita can breach 500 litres.

If one Malaysian everyone in the country cuts down on toilet flush by just one flush a day, about 460 cubic metres of water can be saved a year — an amount sufficient for use by 10 African families a year, said activist Professor Chan Ngai Weng.

By halving their consumption down to 150 litres a day, which is still more than what Singaporeans use, Malaysians can save more than 20 Teluk Bahang dams in Penang a year, he added. In order to get the public to even want to save, they should be involved in policy-making. “For far too long, whenever we’re short of water, we just built more dams and treatment plants. “But this does not involve stakeholders because you don’t tell them to save water. “It’s like giving a child more and more money when he demands for it.”

Chan said the authorities should rid of the “Not enough? OK, we’ll pipe to you” thinking and consumers must not expect the government to continue to subsidise heavily their water cost. The country’s river basins have reached their limits of maximum supply, but water demands continue to rise as population and industries grow. Saving also means that plans to build dams could be postponed for future generations, said Chan, who heads Water Watch Penang. Despite having such high annual rainfall of more than 3,000mm, water woes have continued to beset the country, increasingly so in the last 20 years.

Malaysians’ lackadaisical attitude towards water conservation is perhaps born out of the country’s wealth in water, said conference co-chair and think tank group head Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan. “We had a foretaste of the problems to come when we had the water crisis in several states over the last few years,” said Jawhar, chief executive officer of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis) Malaysia.

When tariffs do not reflect the cost of supplying water, Malaysians can’t care less about saving water, said Fairul Ismal Jamal Hisne, conservation officer with the Malaysian Nature Society.

Tariffs, with a starting price per cubic metre starting from 30 senRM0.30 and 90 senRM0.90 for domestic use and 90 senRM0.90 and RM2.90 for industrial use, are too low. Water is often provided free or cheaply for political and short-term economic reasons. “Lower tariffs are seen as an incentive for industries to develop. “However, they are a disadvantage to water saving and recycling technology. “Increased usage also leads to greater volume of waste water, which becomes a pollution problem.”

Datuk Teo Yen Hua, chief executive officer of the Malaysian National Water Services Commission, questioned the country’s ability to be sustainable without tariff revision. “Some states collect enough revenue only to pay for water treatment. “Maintenance in distribution, like replacement of pipes, is out of the question.”

Prof Chan, whose family pays RM5 for two months' water, said the tariffs should be raised by 10 times. But there is just so much consumers can do, as they use only 10 per cent of the country's water.

A huge bulk goes to irrigation, where farmers, although using untreated water, should practise prudence, said Chan. Mismanagement of resources should also be tackled. Malaysia's rate of non-revenue water stands at 38 per cent. For every 100 litres of water piped to consumers, only 62 litres reach them!

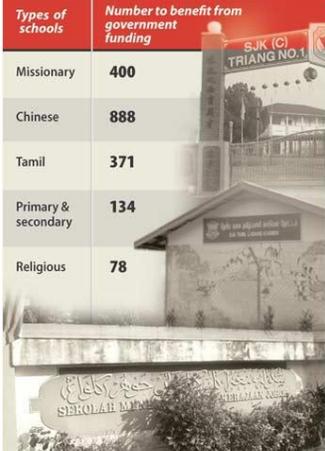
Professor Torkil Jønch Clausen, from consulting and research organisation DHI Water Policy, said there is no water crisis — only bad governance. "The amount of water available to us globally is adequate for all our needs if we manage it properly," he insisted.

29/12/2008 (Monday)

Schools to get RM200m aid from next week

By : Hamidah Atan

Types of schools	Number to benefit from government funding
Missionary	400
Chinese	888
Tamil	371
Primary & secondary	134
Religious	78



PUTRAJAYA: Some 1,870 government-aided schools will benefit from the additional RM200 million allocated under the RM7 billion stimulus package for next year.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, at a special meeting recently, directed that the allocation be distributed fairly among the schools, particularly those deemed to be unsafe, old or which had not received any allocation from the government.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein yesterday said Najib, who is also finance minister, wanted the allocation to give optimum benefit to targeted schools, which also included Chinese and Tamil schools. Hishammuddin said the allocation would be distributed

from next week when the new school term begins. "This financial aid will be channelled consistently and in stages to all the schools throughout next year. "To prove the government's commitment in the development and progress of such schools, the deputy prime minister has agreed to be present at functions where he would give away the money to the schools."

About RM50 million has been set aside for each category of school -- religious, missionary, Chinese and Tamil. Other primary and secondary schools aided by the government will also receive the same amount.

About 400 missionary schools, 888 Chinese schools, 371 Tamil schools, 134 primary and secondary schools, and 78 religious schools would benefit from the allocation. The government had allocated RM100 million for government-aided schools under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

With the additional RM200 million and another RM50 million set aside under the Mid-Term Review, Hishammuddin said the total allocation now stood at RM350 million. "This is the highest allocation ever set aside for government-aided schools throughout the implementation of the Malaysia Plans," Hishammuddin said.

Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, only RM50 million was set aside for government-aided schools. Hishammuddin said the additional allocation was in line with the government's strategy to assist schools of various mediums as outlined under the Education Development Master Plan 2006-2010.

30/12/2008 (Tuesday)

Palm fibre to prevent landslides



Dr Fauziah Ahmad showing samples of her palm fibre product.

GEORGE TOWN: A Universiti Sains Malaysia researcher has turned palm oil waste into Malaysia's first fibre-based soil protective layer to prevent landslides.

USM associate professor Dr Fauziah Ahmad, who spent more than two years to perfect the invention, said the product would be used for erosion control and slope protection. Fauziah said the fibre product would help to strengthen earth surfaces and enhance groundwater flow. "Shrubbery and plants are able to grow through the bio-degradable layer unlike with concrete materials, making it an environment-friendly agent," Fauziah said at USM recently. Instead of paying up to RM200 per sq metre for conventional synthetic materials, Fauziah said the fibre-based layer only cost a fraction of that, at RM5 per metre. The fibre product has a lifespan of 20 years.

Fauziah said the multi-layered product could be custom-made for specific needs. She said the material could be used in the construction of retention walls at all landslide-prone areas. She said it could also be used to improve the surface of untarred roads in rural areas. "Once we obtain the patent for the product, we will find a commercial partner to promote its use on slopes on major highways, especially along the North-South Expressway," said Fauziah, who sits on the advisory panel of the government's slope management committee. She added that negotiations were ongoing with Malaysian Technology Development Corporation to commercialise her product by next year. Fauziah has been a lecturer in geotechnical engineering since 1997.

31/12/2008 (Wednesday)

Kedah thinks again on replacing Perdana fleet

ALOR STAR: The Pas-led state government is re-looking its decision to replace its fleet of Proton Perdana with foreign vehicles. This about-turn came about after a meeting between Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak and Proton Edar Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Mohamad Shukor Ibrahim, here yesterday. Azizan said the state government would reconsider its plan to replace the fleet if the company could provide quality and reliable repair and maintenance services. "I was satisfied with the explanation given by Proton Edar. I have now advised them to hold another round of briefings for the state officials. "I will then wait for the feedback from the state officials before reaching a decision, whether to stay with the Proton Perdana fleet or to replace it with foreign cars. "We are willing to continue using the Proton Perdana fleet if the company could assure us of better service and affordable repair and maintenance fees."

At present, the state government has 26 Proton Perdana cars, of which 16 are Perdana V6 Executive while the rest are non-executive models. The cars have been in use since 2003. Shukor said Proton Edar would come out with a new repair and maintenance scheme for the fleet used by the state government officials. It was reported earlier this month that the state government was prepared to change the fleet as the maintenance cost for the Proton Perdana was high.