



6/12/2008 (Saturday)

Newsflash: DPM says no more hillside developments

Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat.: The government will not allow any development in hilly areas at risk of landslides to avert a recurrence of such mishaps, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today. He said that developers should not lobby the government for approval for projects in these areas. "I believe there is no reason to carry out development on hill slopes at risk of landslides. It is better to take preventive measures to avert possible disasters. "We have to learn from what has happened today," he said during a visit to look at the landslide at Bukit Antarabangsa, Hulu Klang, near here. He was accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor. Najib said however that there is no stopping developers from sending in their applications for hillslope projects once the stir over the landslide has eased. "Human beings have a short memory. In three or six months, people would have forgotten (what happened) and the developers will lobby for their applications to be approved. They do not learn from what has happened," he said.

Police have confirmed that three people were killed in the landslide which buried 14 bungalows in Taman Bukit Mewah and Taman Bukit Utama in the Bukit Antarabangsa area. A section of the hillslope collapsed and buried the bungalows at about 4 am when most of the residents were fast asleep.

Najib warned developers not to pressure the government for approvals or to regard the government's action as harsh. However, he said the government should not be blamed if any area where development was not allowed in the first place was later found to be risk-free. "We have to take a decision if an area is regarded to be at high risk. If the people cannot accept (the government's decision), those living in these areas will have to accept the fact that they may be exposed to danger," he said.

On the landslide in Bukit Antarabangsa, Najib said experts would be appointed to examine the high-risk area which has seen two major landslides so far. The Highlands Tower collapse had occurred in 1993 just 1.5km from the site of today's landslide. Najib expressed satisfaction with the swift action of the security forces. He said the rescue operation had to be conducted with caution as the area was still unstable. He also said that the government had taken the precautionary measure of evacuating more than 2,000 occupants of from one block of condominiums located close to the disaster area. A massive landslide occurred in Bukit Antarabangsa at 4am today. As of 11am, three people are confirmed dead and seven missing. So far, 2,000 have been evacuated from a condominium as well.

6/12/2008 (Saturday)

Landslide site may still be unstable

By : Fadhal A Ghani



The landslide happened in the open-air car park between CIMB Commerce Square and CIMB Amanah building in Jalan Semantan yesterday. — NST picture by Mohd Radzi Bujang

KUALA LUMPUR: Another landslide occurred in Damansara Heights yesterday, at the same place where a 20-metre high retaining wall collapsed on Thursday evening. At 2.15pm, huge clumps of earth slid onto the open-air car park between CIMB Commerce Square and CIMB Amanah building in Jalan Semantan. A fire engine from the Sri Hartamas Fire and Rescue Department with six firemen arrived at the scene at 3pm to monitor the situation.

Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk M. Saravanan said preventive measures had been taken. "The water drainage in the affected area has been redirected. The managements of the two buildings have been told to evacuate."

People were seen entering and leaving both buildings yesterday, some ferrying documents and office materials. It has been learnt that CIMB has moved its operations from the Damansara buildings to its disaster and recovery centre in Bangi, Selangor. Six cars damaged in Thursday's landslide have been removed from the car park while five badly damaged ones remained. Federal Territory and Selangor Minerals and Geoscience Department director Zakaria Mohamad said they were investigating the physics of the soil to "identify the type and how deep the soil is".

The report should be ready in two weeks and would be handed to City Hall, he added. A mobile police beat base from Brickfields police station is parked in front of the car park with five policemen monitoring the area. After the wall came down about 5pm on Thursday, Jalan Semantan was blocked by curious motorists who stopped to have a look.

The landslide is also being investigated by the Public Works Department, City Hall and the Malaysian Public Works Institute.

7/12/2008 (Sunday)

BUKIT ANTARABANGSA TRAGEDY: Freeze all hillside projects, says PM

By : BERNAMA

KUALA LUMPUR: All state governments have been urged to consider stopping housing projects on hillsides.

"It's for safety," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said after visiting the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide site.

Landowners and developers might be angry at not being allowed to proceed with their plans but their loss would be nothing compared with the loss should a landslide occur, he said.

Abdullah said yesterday's landslide and two earlier incidents in the Klang Valley should be taken as a sign. "If we disregard land stability, especially on hillsides, we are inviting disasters and tragedies." He instructed the Public Works Institute (Ikram) to inspect and monitor the affected area in Bukit Antarabangsa to save the nearby housing estates. He also ordered a stop to all development projects in Bukit Antarabangsa, pending a full report from Ikram.

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said all applications for hillside development would be frozen with immediate effect while risk-management studies would be carried out on existing projects.

Najib warned contractors not to pressure the state governments to approve hillside construction. "Existing projects which were approved will be re-examined and risk-management studies carried out. "The state government has received several applications for development to be carried out on hillside areas but none will be approved."

Bukit Antarabangsa is a high-risk area for landslides and geologists will carry out tests to check the soil in the area. For those living in the area, Najib said they would have to accept the risk of landslides. "Almost 2,000 residents have been evacuated from the condominiums in the area as the soil is unstable and the area not deemed completely safe yet." They left the area via an emergency lane created by the military's engineering corps as all roads leading in and out of the area were cut off by debris. Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan assured residents police would safeguard their homes during their absence. -- Bernama

**MAJOR LANDSLIDES IN
THE HULU KLANG AREA
1993 – 2008**

11/12/1993

Highland Towers

14/05/1999

Bukit Antarabangsa

15/05/1999

Athanaeum Towers

05/10/2000

Bukit Antarabangsa

29/10/2001

Taman Zooview

08/11/2001

Taman Zooview

20/11/2002

Taman Hillview

02/11/2003

Oakleaf Park Condominium in
Bukit Antarabangsa

07/11/2003

Jalan Bukit Mulia, Bukit
Antarabangsa

31/01/2005

Jalan Tebrau, Dataran Ukay

01/02/2005

Jalan Tebrau, Dataran Ukay

31/05/2006

Taman Zooview-Kg Pasir

06/12/2008

Taman Bukit Utama and
Taman Bukit Mewah in
Bukit Antarabangsa

8/12/2008 (Monday)

3,000 affected by road collapse



The collapsed road linking the three villages in Beaufort has to be reconstructed as soon as possible as now the people have no direct access to Beaufort town.

BEAUFORT: About 3,000 people were affected when the road connecting their villages to the main road collapsed three days ago due to a downpour. The tarred road started collapsing in phases on Friday morning after continuous rain the night before. The collapse is believed to have been caused by inefficient water drainage in the area. Villagers from Kampung Batu 58, Kampung Batu 60 and Kampung Jimpanga had no direct access to the town of Beaufort where most have to travel to for work. However, some still continued to walk across the road despite warnings from authorities that the road was unsafe.

There is also a gravel detour that villagers can use to get to the main road. Assistant district officer Mohd Said Othman said that the district office was asking for immediate funding to help reconstruct the road. He asked villagers to report flash floods and landslides, no matter how minor, to ensure that the authorities can take preemptive action.

8/12/2008 (Monday)

Erosion threatens beach resort



The beach at Sunset Resort in

Rompin faces a serious threat of erosion.

ROMPIN: A favourite spot for holiday makers and a paradise for nature lovers, Summerset Resort in Rompin, Pahang, is losing its allure.

The eight-year-old resort in Pahang, overlooking the South China Sea, is facing a serious threat from the erosion of the beach. And unit owners fear that eventually their vacation homes will no longer be safe. Members of the Summerset Joint Management Body (JMB) on Saturday said they hoped the state government would step in to stop further damage to the beach and the nearby mangrove swamp.

Kong Kar Loong said when the units were handed to them in early 2000, the shoreline was about 60 metres away. "Now it is barely 20 metres from the south wing units, and I can't imagine what will happen if nothing is done. "The beach began to erode in 2003, and about four metres disappear every year."

Dr Mohd Daud Yahaya hoped the state government would do something before tourists stop visiting and tourism revenue was affected.

The JMB representatives took the New Straits Times on a tour of the area. Several casuarina trees less than 15 metres from the building were uprooted. And where the hotel's multi-purpose hall once stood, there remained only the concrete footings. "I have heard there are plans to make Summerset a world-class eco-friendly resort. I hope the state government will find a solution to prevent the erosion from causing more damage," said Dr Daud.

8/12/2008 (Monday)

BUKIT ANTARABANGSA TRAGEDY: Review projects in high-risk areas, Najib

By : Reports by Ridzwan Abdullah, Adrian David, Alang Bendahara, Jeniffer Gomez, Marc Lourdes, Joseph Sipalan, S. Suganthi and B. Suresh Ram.



The Ivory Continental project site situated on a hillside in Batu Feringghi.

PEKAN: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has called on state governments to review projects in high-risk areas.

He suggested that projects in areas such as hillsides, which were yet to take off, should not be implemented at all. "We call upon the state governments to do their part in not approving such projects or issuing development orders for such high-risk areas. "If not, the tragedy at Bukit Antarabangsa could be repeated," he said, asking that lessons be learnt quickly from Saturday's catastrophe.

Najib was responding to a question on whether the Federal Government would re-examine development projects in high-risk areas following the landslide which buried 14 bungalows in Taman Bukit Mewah and Taman Bukit Utama and claimed four lives. On projects in potentially risky areas which were already under way, Najib said they should be reviewed through agencies like the Malaysian Public Works Institute (Ikram) to determine the stability of the ground.

"If it is ascertained to be a high-risk area, then I hope the state governments would not continue with the development projects. The question is whether we want to listen (to the advice of Ikram)."

Najib also said there was no need to advise developers as similar tragedies had occurred before, of which they are well aware. The thing is not to be persuaded by some of the developers that the projects should be implemented." He said that since land was the prerogative of the state governments, the Federal Government could only provide guidelines to the construction of buildings in high-risk areas.

9/12/2008 (Tuesday)

MPAJ refutes claims that it failed to respond to complaints 

Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR, TUES:

The Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) today refuted claims that it had failed to respond positively to complaints by residents in Bukit Antarabangsa on numerous issues ranging from soil erosion to tree pruning in the area.

Its public relations officer, Norhayati Ahmad, said immediate actions had been executed either by the MPAJ or the developers to address the problems. "For instance, after receiving complaints about suspected erosion at the main road to Bukit Antarabangsa in September, we immediately sent our experts to the ground and put up the gabion wall to prevent further erosion," she told Bernama here today.

Following Saturday's massive landslide in the area which claimed four lives, residents in Bukit Antarabangsa had alleged that the authorities, including the MPAJ, had failed to take necessary

actions to prevent the disaster. Among others, they claimed that the local council had failed to respond to their complaints of soil activities in the area a few days prior to the tragedy.

On another note, Norhayati said the MPAJ was now preparing to begin the cleaning up and restoring amenities once the search and rescue operation was called off. "We expect to begin work some time next week," she said, adding that at present the local council was among others assisting the authorities in evacuating residents in the affected areas.

Meanwhile, an Oakleaf Park Condominium resident caused a scene at the MPAJ operations centre in Taman Bukit Mewah today when he railed at the MPAJ staff and other workers for not helping him and his family to evacuate.

Tumiran Mohd Kasdi, 56, who had been living at the condominium for 15 years claimed that he, his wife and two children had to walk for 30 minutes in the rain up the slippery road to collect their belongings at about 3pm yesterday and the drivers in two MPAJ four-wheel-drive vehicles did not offer them help.

He said his daughter was still in confinement and had to carry her baby and other belongings on the wet and slippery road. The businessman also claimed that there were no vehicles provided to help them evacuate despite announcements to the contrary.

10/12/2008 (Wednesday)

DEWAN DISPATCHES: Let the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide tragedy blame game begin...

By : Azmi Anshar

The lethal landslide that flattened a major part of the swanky neighbourhood in Bukit Antarabangsa killed four residents, injured many, forced the evacuation of 5,000 and virtually turned the residential area into Ground Zero. The disaster soon triggered three explosive issues - who in tarnation was to be blamed for this tragic mess, the incompetent follow-up services to help victims and the looting of victims' homes.

For Ground Zero residents at Taman Bukit Mewah and Taman Bukit Utama, they can truly understand now the abject misery felt by victims of Highland Towers -- tomorrow would have been 15 years since the 12-storey apartment, called Block 1, collapsed and killed 48 residents. And yet, after all these years, the victims have not been able to seek closure on the fate that befell them. The current victims also shudder with what they see are the ominous signs -- from the lame blame game to the difficulties they are drowning in -- that they too will face similarly long, toilsome years ahead battling the authorities and developers to get back a glimmer of what could be considered a "normal" life.

These three issues played strongly in the minds of MPs debating the tragedy today, the motion being deliberated after it was allowed by Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia on the behest of Azmin Ali (PKR-Gombak), who immediately went for the jugular when he, supporting his party's stance, charged that previous BN-led Selangor Government leaders be held responsible for the tragedy.

Azmin's accusatory tone seemed to land on ex-Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Khir Toyo, the predecessor to Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim who is having an opportunistic time playing the blame game. Dr Khir acknowledged in his blog that hillside projects at the area were approved by a BN administration but it so happens that it was NOT during his administration. However, Khir or any previous MBs may not be able to absolve themselves just yet since many complaints of indiscriminate development that messed up Mother Nature and the hillslopes came during their tenure.

So whose direct responsibility was it? The forensic trail would have to go back far, first to Tan Sri Abu Hassan Omar (1997-2000) and then regressing to Tan Sri Muhammad Taib, the MB reigning from 1986 to 1997. Or does it have to go back further to the late Tan Sri Ahmad Razali Mohamed Ali (1982-86)? Or the late Datuk Hormat Rafie (1976-1982)? Perhaps even the late Datuk Harun Idris who governed from 1964 to 1976? So, who is Azmin actually blaming?

If current conditions prevailed, all attention will zero in on Senator Muhammad as the one holding the ball, being the only other ex-MB still in active play. If Umno politics and the high-pressured March party elections are under consideration, Muhammad, who is vying for a vice-president's post, and Khir, the underdog in the Umno Youth smash-up, would have to armour themselves against exponential flak shooting from this calamitous incident.

The cliché applied to describe the landslide was "massive" and by all descriptive accounts, it was. But to the victims, it was horrific and traumatic; the loss being beyond mere economic privation. While the houses were big bungalows and the owners deemed wealthy and affluent, their lives and their souls were heavily committed to these homes, housing loan payments and the love and care tendered all these years notwithstanding.

After the landslide, they may have to consider their homes as irretrievable and forever gone, if they were to measure up against what a realtor bluntly aspersed: Bukit Antarabangsa properties have little value after the landslide and even if it dropped to RM10,000, people won't buy because they value their lives more. That's just too rich.

Nevertheless, the remaining blocks of Highland Towers is a constant, ghostly reminder. In reality, the home owners have lost perhaps everything that they have worked for all their lives and even getting compensation from a lawsuit they are planning may be moot. A 2006 Federal Court ruling declared that local councils were not liable for damage caused by landslides and collapses, the so-called all-encompassing immunity against negligence suits.

The Highland Towers folk had to find this out the hard, arduous way and now, the Ground Zero residents of Taman Bukit Mewah and Taman Bukit Utama will soon follow in their erstwhile

fellow victims. If there is to be any consolation, it came from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who stated that the Government would consider paying compensation to victims. There were no further details to be derived from the PM's statement but even if compensation takes place, it may be years before the funds emerge.

No matter. Even as MPs debate the tragedy, the Bukit Antarabangsa community have piled up their list of grievances -- first they lodged a police report against the looting and pillaging, and demanded better security. Then they slammed the realtor, Zerin Properties Group chief executive officer Previndran Singhe, for his thoughtless analysis of the real estate situation in Bukit Antarabangsa.

"People invested their life savings into this area," Task Force Action committee vice-president Raymond Jagathesan sounded off angrily. "It is unfair to tell them that their homes and investments are worth next to nothing now. This is not the right time for these comments. Why don't they assist us instead?"

Jagathesan will be frothing with fury if he had the chance to react to what Ong Ka Chuan had stated: there was no clear evidence to show that the landslide was a result of human negligence. The Housing and Local Government Minister blamed natural causes as the probable factor. "If it was human negligence, the landslide would have occurred a year or two after the houses were built but the houses here were built since 15 years ago," Bernama reported him as saying. How soon will it be when some other person of influence makes a senseless conjecture and places the blame on divine intervention?

The residents' grievance was also aimed at Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek, who commented that property buyers should share the blame. The reaction to this particular conjecture was naturally a highly agitated one. Jagathesan's fumes again: "Just because you catch a thief doesn't mean you have to charge the mother for raising the man. So, how can you pin the blame for this on the residents?"

Even before the House debate commenced, the Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club immediately pitched their sympathies with the victims, calling on the Government to check on the looting and unsatisfactory services during the search-and-rescue operations. Club chairman Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing demanded that the victims' woes be looked into seriously and not be "swept under the carpet".

The residents may have their accusations documented under a big pile of documentary evidence but even they too will concede that weeks will turn to months and to years before blame can be officially assigned and some form of compensation procured. For now, let the blame game on this pitiful cataclysm begin.

11/12/2008 (Thursday)

Hillslope danger prompts evacuation

By : Mazlinda Mahmood

SUNGAI BULOH: Residents of 12 double-storey terrace houses at the Sungai Buloh Country Resort, Saujana Utama, were given notice to vacate their homes following soil movement behind their homes since Monday.

They were served the notice at 8pm yesterday after a briefing by the Kuala Selangor district council (MDKS) technical team. One homeowner, Norlaila Hamima Jamaluddin, said she first noticed the earth movement on Monday after it rained non-stop the whole day. "Afterwards, pebbles and rocks came down from the slope and landed outside my neighbour's kitchen."

A spokesman for the council's technical team said the residents were advised to temporarily vacate their homes to enable the developer to reinforce the slope. "At first, we only wanted to clear the area and remove debris to prevent it from sliding, but since it is difficult to estimate the movement of underground water, it is safer for the residents to vacate their homes."

MDKS president Haris Kasim said the notice to the 12 homeowners at Phase Four Jalan Melor 1/5 was issued on the advice of the Kuala Selangor Public Works Department Slope Unit. He said the council and project developer Glomac had started monitoring the retaining wall at the area after receiving reports of soil movement during Hari Raya Aidil-adha.

"The soil movement made the 10m retaining wall unsafe as the back of the terrace houses was just 5m away from the slope. "We have issued the notice as slope-strengthening will start tomorrow to ensure the residents' safety," he said yesterday.

For the time being, the developer has placed plastic sheets on the slope to reduce soil movement.

11/12/2008 (Thursday)

99 hill projects in Selangor

A TOTAL of 99 hillside projects were approved in Selangor before the March 8 general election with none given the green light after that, the Dewan Rakyat was told yesterday.

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said that 33 of the projects had been approved by the Barisan Nasional state government between 2000 and 2005. He said the remaining 63 were approved between February 2005 and February this year. Of the 99 projects, 64 are

ongoing, 21 have yet to start while three were abandoned. He said there was no information on 11 projects in the Sepang district.

"Since the Pakatan Rakyat government took over the state after the general election, no development projects have been approved for hillsides," he said at the Parliament lobby yesterday.

He also released a detailed 23-page list of development projects approved, complete with the names of the developer, location, acreage and status of the development. Khalid said there were 27 ongoing projects in the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council area, of which 10 were located around Bukit Antarabangsa and 11 at Taman Melawati.

He said as a result of the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide, the state government would review all projects approved by the previous state administration.

"There will be risks during construction which we will need to monitor. "If we find that they do not follow proper regulations, they will be slapped with a stop-work order. "They can only continue if they comply with the proper regulations."

He also proposed that slope development insurance, similar to that in France, United States and Switzerland be created to protect homeowners and local authorities in the event of a disaster.

11/12/2008 (Thursday)

Hold them accountable, says survivor



Dr Benjamin George says those who give permission for projects must be held responsible. Behind him is what remains of Highland Towers

KUALA LUMPUR: With the two remaining abandoned blocks of Highland Towers standing as warnings against hillside development, residents of the condominium hope that people will

learn the lessons of the past. On the 15th anniversary of Malaysia's worst landslide disaster and with another similar incident in Bukit Antarabangsa just past, they hope the government will back up its words with action.

Survivor Dr Benjamin George, speaking on behalf of former residents of the condominium, said while it was encouraging to hear the prime minister and deputy prime minister calling for a freeze on all hillside developments, people wanted to see actual action this time. He said similar comments were made after the Highland Towers tragedy.

Dr George said it only took two months from the issuing of the stop-work order for projects to "resume with a ven-geance". He outlined a list of suggestions for the authorities to follow, the most important of which is a ban on development on slopes above 25o.

He urged developers not to pressure the government and local authorities to give them building permits. "Some developers, when their proposals are rejected, come back six or seven times and get their projects forced through. They always talk about Hong Kong allowing slope development. "Hong Kong has reduced their slope failure by 50 per cent in 10 years and they are going to reduce it by another 50 per cent in the next five years.

"What is our track record? In the 15 years since Highland Towers, there have been 12 major collapses and hundreds of minor ones," he said at the ruins of the building in which 48 people lost their lives.

He said the latest techniques boasted about by developers were not going to save anybody. He called for holding the parties responsible for green-lighting disastrous projects, be they local councils or bodies like the Public Works Institute (Ikram), despite the immunity afforded to them by law.

"In future, those who give permission must be held responsible." He also suggested that developers maintain slopes even after projects were completed and that all development be called off during the rainy season.

11/12/2008 (Thursday)

Residents upset at minister, agent over "hurtful" statements

KUALA LUMPUR: Bukit Antarabangsa residents had a list of complaints against a minister, a real estate agent and the authorities yesterday.

Its community council also lodged a police report yesterday to demand more security in the evacuated areas as the residents were afraid of looting and ransacking.

Wangsa Height Condominium chairman of management corporation Syed Fadzil Alishahab said: "We had informed authorities of the likelihood of a landslide before this happened, even as far back as the Highland Towers incident."

Task Force Action committee vice-president Raymond Jagathesan took to task Zerine Properties Group chief executive officer Previndran Singhe for his comments on property prices there.

Previndran was quoted by the New Straits Times yesterday as saying that he did not think that properties in Bukit Antarabangsa had any value at all, even if the price dropped to RM10,000, as prospective buyers valued their lives more.

Raymond said: "People have invested their life savings in this area. It is not fair to tell them that their homes and investments are worth next to nothing now."

The committee also said Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek's comments on property buyers sharing the blame for the incident was uncalled for.

12/12/2008 (Friday)

It's raining inside Putrajaya Corporation



The lobby of the Putrajaya Corporation was flooded when the roof leaked during a downpour yesterday. — NST picture by Izhari Ariffin

PUTRAJAYA: The Putrajaya Corporation (PJC) chief was left red-faced when the swanky headquarters here was flooded during a high-powered business function.

A few spots of the roof at the PJC lobby became a shower head after a thunderstorm yesterday evening. Several workers were seen trying to keep the water away from the high tea buffet at one end of the lobby. This happened at a talk on global financial uncertainties by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and 2003 Nobel laureate in economics Prof Dr Robert Engle.

Apart from the nearly 600 business executives, the Regent of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah was also present. A scuffle nearly broke out when a public relations officer of the corporation tried to stop photographers from taking pictures.

PJC president Tan Sri Samsudin Osman said the corporation had started repair work on the roof several months ago but he was not sure if the work had been completed. "I don't know if the engineers have made it worse, or they simply took out parts of the roof in the repair process," he said, visibly upset. "I really don't know why this is happening. This is the first time it has occurred in this building."

It is not the first time a government office building in the administrative capital here has been damaged by water. In April last year, the Immigration Department's information technology division was flooded after water leaked from a broken pipe. Part of the ceiling collapsed. In the same month, the ceiling of the Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development Ministry's multi-purpose hall caved in, also due to a burst pipe.

13/12/2008 (Saturday)

Perak exco to get Camry

By : Brenda Lim

IPOH: The Perak state government will be replacing its fleet of Proton Perdana V6 with 16 Toyota Camry 2.4 at a cost of RM2.6 million or RM167,000 each.

"We will buy the cars as soon as possible. We can no longer bear the cost of repairs and breakdown of the old cars," Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin said yesterday.

While the new cars cost over RM2 million, maintenance cost for the Perdana was over RM1 million, he told reporters, citing previous media reports, after chairing the last state exco meeting for this year.

The cars will be for state executive council members. Nizar urged developers with projects on slopes with 25- and 35-degree angles to cooperate with local authorities in furnishing them with information such as their Environment Impact Assessment reports.

The stop-work order on these projects would only be lifted when they were deemed safe, he said. "We will only take a week or two to check. This is for their own safety."

On Village Security and Development Committee (JKKKP) heads being advised to sue the state government over the use of community halls built using federal funds, Nizar said these halls were on state land and thus belonged to the state government. "We've no objections (to any legal action), but the committee is not even a legal entity."

The use of community halls was not confined to those in Pakatan Rakyat, he said, urging those wishing to use the halls to apply through the usual channels.

Nizar said residents of several new villages and planned villages would be granted ownership of their land in perpetuity before Dec 25. It was also agreed that the state government would give financial aid to victims of natural disasters in Perak, while Perak-born people would also be given a small sum of money if they were seriously injured outside the state. In the event they are killed, their relatives would receive the money.

14/12/2008 (Sunday)

Perak government's car buy comes under fire

By : Jaspal Singh



Pangkor Assemblyman Datuk Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir

IPOH: Hoodwinking or straight-forward lying?

Either way, the move by the Pakatan Rakyat-led state government to purchase 16 Toyota Camry cars has been thoroughly condemned as giving false representation to the people. Pangkor assemblyman Datuk Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir said it was only not too long ago, that the state government boasted of its prudent financial philosophy when it declared that it would continue to use the Proton Perdana cars inherited from the former Barisan Nasional administration despite its faults.

Zambry was referring to Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin's statement during the car-buying controversy in Terengganu a few months ago. He said when the Terengganu state government came under fire for replacing its Perdana fleet with Mercedes Benz cars, Nizar had announced that the new Perak state government would continue to use Perdana cars despite many mechanical problems.

Nizar was reported widely in the media as saying that the state government had no plans to replace its Perdana cars because it wanted to use its financial resources to help alleviate the plight of the people. He said despite the condition of the Perdana cars, the state exco would

continue to use it and not waste public funds. However, on Friday, Nizar was reported as saying that the state government would be purchasing 16 new 2.4-litre Toyota Camry cars worth RM2.6 million.

The menteri besar said the purchase was made because of the high maintenance cost of the Perdana fleet, which was over RM1 million. "Congratulations to Nizar and all the state excos for finally accepting the fact that they cannot avoid the temptation of driving luxury cars like the Camry. "This is especially so when they decided on the 2.4-litre Camry instead of the 2-litre ones. "However, I want the menteri besar to answer this: So what has happened to the mighty righteous principle that he had proudly pronounced a few months ago about not spending the people's money for personal indulgence?

"Was he lying or hoodwinking the public when he declared that the new state government would not replace the Perdana cars, but repair and maintain them?"

Zambry said what the state government should have done was to buy new Proton Perdana cars instead of the Camry. "If they blamed the previous administration for bad maintenance and the poor quality of Perdanas they inherited it from BN, then it is only reasonable that they buy new Perdanas and show us (BN representatives) how well they can maintain their cars," he said.

15/12/2008 (Monday)

Terengganu has been paid RM6.2b royalties

THE state government has received some RM6.2 billion in oil royalties, including the RM408.6 million it collected on Saturday, Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Said told the assembly yesterday.

He said the state government would also make a claim on the RM1.5 billion used by the Federal Government for projects it implemented, such as the construction of Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad houses in other states.

"However, we are not sure of the actual sum in royalties owed to us between 2000 and 2008, as the Finance Ministry has not figured out how much of it, which was included in the 'Dana Khas', is left," he said, responding to a question by Mohd Abdul Wahid Endut (Pas-Wakaf Mempelam). He added that the state government was still waiting for the Federal Government's expenditure list. Ahmad was also unsure how much of the RM6.2 billion in oil royalties was spent on projects by the Federal Government in Terengganu.

To a supplementary question by Datuk Harun Taib (Pas-Manir) as to why the royalties were kept by the Federal Government, Ahmad replied:

"This is why there was a legal suit. "Although the Federal Government has agreed to return the money to the state, we have yet to retract the suit. "Negotiations are still going on over a few matters," he said.

In 2000, the Finance Ministry announced that oil royalties would be channelled directly to the people through development projects (funded by the wang ehsan) and no longer be given to the state government when Pas took over administration after the 1999 general election.

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Seafood firms ready for EU re-audit

PUTRAJAYA: Seafood industry companies are ready to be re-audited by European Union officials after their exports to the EU were suspended since June.

Health Minister Datuk Liow Tiong Lai said five farms and six processors would be checked again by EU's Food and Veterinary Officers (FVO) in the first two weeks of March. However, he said he would work on getting the FVO to come in as early as next month. He was speaking after chairing a dialogue with seafood export industry players at his ministry yesterday.

The industry bigwigs, representing organisations of the 45 seafood producers, had criticised the inefficiency of officers from the Health and Agriculture and Agro-based Industries ministries' over the control of fish exports to the EU.

Liow said both ministries were short-staffed. He added that both ministries would get more officers by next year. "If we can pass the requirements this time, we will put a guarantee on our quality and (the two ministries) will take it upon themselves to continue the monitoring after the EU inspection." He also said that Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Ministry was working to provide soft loans of about RM100 million to help industry players hit by the suspension.

Exports of seafood to the EU are worth RM600 million a year, and it is estimated that industry players have lost up to half of that amount after their products were banned. One of the seafood producers who will be inspected by the EU officials next year had claimed that the suspension was damaging to the company, which exports one-third of its products to the EU.

Golden Fresh senior manager (commercial) Rosy Ng said she hoped the officials would come as soon as possible. "In fact, if they want to come during Chinese New Year, we will open up the factory for them."

She added that the company had undergone renovations to keep up with EU's hygiene standards. When the EU came close to imposing a total ban on Malaysian seafood in June, in which case a reverse would have been a more tedious and complicated affair, the Malay-sian government had appealed for a suspension instead.