

1 November 2009 (Sunday)

'Drivers need a raise'

GEORGE TOWN: Cuepacs wants the government to raise the maximum wages of public sector drivers from RM1,800 to RM4,000 per month. Its president, Omar Osman, said the existing pay rate of the 25,000 public sector drivers in the country was too low. Omar said yesterday the majority of the public sector drivers were employed by public hospitals. "They have wider job scope and added job responsibilities over the years but their current salary levels can no longer support their living.

"I hope the government will consider increasing the salaries of the drivers to ease their financial burden." Omar said the drivers were required to send their vehicles for routine inspections and work long or at odd hours. He said the drivers also had to bear the costs of traffic summonses. Omar said he would bring up the matter at a meeting with the Public Service Department this month. In a related development, Omar said Cuepacs would call for the housing loan interest of civil servants to be lowered from four per cent to three per cent.

2 November 2009 (Monday)

UIA upbeat on RM1b hospital in Kuantan

By Alina Simon

KUANTAN: After producing eight batches of doctors and other health-related graduates, the International Islamic University (UIA) is hoping to finally have its own teaching hospital. Its rector, Professor Datuk Seri Dr Syed Arabi Idid, said UIA had proposed to the government for funds under the 10th Malaysia Plan for the hospital to be set up at its medical campus in Bandar Indera Mahkota here. He said having a hospital here would not only help provide medical services to the residents in the area but also contribute to the growth of Kuantan. This is similar to Kubang Kerian in Kelantan which is home to Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia and Cheras in Selangor where Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia is located.

"We are ready to have our own teaching hospital as we have produced enough graduates and post-graduates in various disciplines in medicine. "We are also the only university to have our own nursing faculty. "Our proposal was submitted in 2000 and we hope it will be included in the 10th Malaysia Plan. "The teaching hospital will have 600 beds and is expected to cost about RM1 billion," he said after launching the two-day Asian Breast Disease Association teaching course at Vistana Hotel yesterday. Meanwhile, he said UIA had acquired 40 hectares in Penor here, courtesy of the Pahang government, to site its new Institute of Oceanography and Maritime Studies.

3 November 2009 (Tuesday)

New agency to protect personal data

KUALA LUMPUR: A personal data protection commission will be set up under the Information, Communication and Culture Ministry soon. "The commission will protect the confidentiality of personal documents," said its minister, Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim. The Personal Data Protection Act, which the cabinet has approved, will be tabled in Parliament soon. Speaking after the ministry's monthly assembly yesterday, Rais said the formation of the commission was timely in view of the many reported cases of companies having access to personal documents like bank statements. He also said the ministry's Christmas open house, complete with roast turkey and carols, would be held either in Sabah or Sarawak. "There will also be programmes for the less fortunate."

7 November 2009 (Saturday)

'Rice subsidy shows govt cares for needy folk'

By V. Shankar Ganesh

SABAK BERNAM: Starting next month, about 200,000 needy families in the country will enjoy rice subsidies that will ease their financial problems. The Rice Subsidy for the People programme (Subur) will provide each family with subsidy coupons for up to 30kg of rice monthly. In launching the Subur programme here last night, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said it was the best example of the government's efforts to ensure that it met the needs of the people. He said the programme would touch the pulse of the people who needed it, in line with the 1Malaysia concept. Speaking to a crowd of about 10,000 people here, Najib said the Finance Ministry would increase the allocation for the programme if it did not meet the demand. "But it's more than enough unless those receiving it start eating three plates of rice," he said jokingly.

"This is a rice bowl issue and I don't want the people to be lacking. I don't want to see empty kitchens, no school uniforms, incomplete houses or leaking roofs. Also present at the function at Dataran Tonggak 10 here were Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Noh Omar and Deputy Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Noriah Kasnon. Najib said no other party, apart from Barisan Nasional, could carry out complete and proper programmes for the people. "This is the people's champion government and it will continue to fight for the people, unlike others who give little to the people but make a big deal out of it."

Najib said this was only part of the many programmes the government was carrying out. A total of 52,317 hardcore poor families will get free Super Tempatan (ST) 15 rice, which will no longer be subsidised starting Dec 1, every month. At the same time, 147,749 poor families and 57 welfare institutions will get RM10 discount vouchers a month to buy 10kg of the unsubsidised rice, which will retail at RM24. Subur is being introduced to also check on abuse by certain quarters. Checks showed that only 6,000 of the 40,000 tonnes of subsidised rice released monthly since April 1 this year went to the poor, with the rest being taken up by restaurants, the food industry and foreigners. Currently, the government pays RM60 million monthly to selected rice millers and suppliers to produce this rice for the poor at RM18 per 10kg. The Subur programme will cost the government RM8.3 million a month and will ensure that the rice reaches the needy.

Any miller or supplier can produce and supply ST15 rice from next month. The distribution of the two types of vouchers will be done every six months and the vouchers will have the name and MyKad number of the recipients. The poor will get a maximum of three vouchers per family a month depending on the number of dependants. They can use the vouchers at retail outlets. The discount vouchers may be used to buy more expensive varieties of rice but the recipients will have to pay the difference. Anyone who needs the assistance but is not on the list may register with the various agencies under the Agriculture and Agrobased Industry.

7 November 2009 (Saturday)

Ministers to ensure project completion

By Farrah Naz Karim

PUTRAJAYA: Ministers must take the responsibility for ensuring the timely completion of projects identified by the 2010 Budget as behind schedule, the deputy prime minister said. Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the ministers' respective secretaries-general had been tasked with personally monitoring at least three projects a month. "This means that we will be closely monitoring four projects every month and take proactive action on them if we need to. "The point is, the projects must be completed according to the timeline set," he said after the special cabinet session on the 2010 Budget chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday, which was attended by all ministers and their secretaries-general and directors-general.

Muhyiddin said Najib's approach on the monitoring of projects that involved ministers and top officials was unprecedented and focused on materialising the country's ambitions. "Focus is not merely given on execution of projects but great emphasis is given on the final outcome. "We are all to shoulder specific tasks and, to me, accountability like this is the best approach. "In a set timeframe, the people will be able to see for themselves the positive results of what was tabled in the 2010 Budget," he said.

Muhyiddin, who is also education minister, said Najib wanted the over 160 projects listed in the Budget to be carried out fully. Meanwhile, Second Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah said the meeting outlined the best practices for making the 2010 Budget plans a success. "This is the first time we all sat together to chart ways for effective and efficient implementation of the projects. "Lists were also drawn up to show the budgets involved, when the projects would take off and their completion dates. "These are among the matters discussed to ensure their smooth implementation," he said.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission deputy chief commissioner Datuk Seri Abu Kassim Mohamed said Najib wanted the MACC to carry out its prosecutions soundly. The meeting discussed the setting up of 14 special Sessions Courts to handle corruption cases and four special courts to take on appeal cases. "For the MACC, the faster cases are brought to court, the greater the chances of securing a conviction," Abu Kassim said.

7 November 2009 (Saturday)

Ensuring Budget strategies are carried out

PUTRAJAYA: In an unprecedented move, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has assigned tasks, responsibilities and deadlines for ministries and agencies to execute the strategies and measures announced in the 2010 Budget. They were told what was expected from them in a special cabinet session at the Finance Ministry yesterday, which lasted about four hours. "This is to ensure that measures implemented benefit the rakyat. "Follow-ups will be conducted to ensure that the desired objectives and timelines are met," the ministry said in a press statement. It said the Prime Minister's Department's Implementation and Coordination Unit with branches in every state, and in divisions and districts in larger states, would act as the troubleshooter of the physical projects on the ground.

The Technical Committee for the Economic Stimulus Packages in the Finance Ministry, which meets weekly, would oversee the overall monitoring and address issues for the successful implementation of the 2010 Budget. "The prime minister briefed all ministers, secretaries-general, department and agency heads as well as other stakeholders on what needs to be done. "They have been reminded that the welfare of the rakyat is of utmost priority and that every effort must be made to ensure objectives of the 2010 Budget are fully realised." The 2010 Budget, which Najib tabled in the Dewan Rakyat on Oct 23, is designed to propel the nation into a high-income economy.

8 November 2009 (Sunday)

RM3 billion to yet be claimed by inheritors

KOTA BAHARU: Failure by the depositors to name their inheritors has resulted in a total of RM3 billion in cash not being given out to the inheritors concerned to date. Deputy Finance Minister Senator Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin said the money should have been claimed from the Accountant-General's Department as they were left by the original depositors who had died without naming their inheritors. "There is still a vast sum of unclaimed money throughout the country amounting to about RM3 billion kept in the Accountant-General's Department because some of the depositors have died and the inheritors or their children had no knowledge of it. "Some of the money were left through the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and the depositors' banking accounts without the knowledge of their next of kins including their children," he told reporters after attending a Briefing by Departments and Agencies Under the Finance Ministry operating in the state, here today. Also present was the Chairman of Amanah Raya Berhad, Datuk Dusuki Ahmad.

8 November 2009 (Sunday)

RM350m theme park for Nusajaya

JOHOR BARU: Popular kiddie characters Barney, Thomas and Friends, Bob the Builder and Hello Kitty will be among the attractions at the RM350 million, four-storey indoor theme park slated to be opened to the public at the end of 2012.

The park, to be housed at Puteri Harbour in Nusajaya, will boast a floor area of 60,000 sq ft and another 100,000 sq ft of retail space. It will also see our very own cartoonist Lat's first-in-Malay- sia themed family restaurant. Themed Attractions and Resorts (TAR) Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional, today signed an agreement with HIT Entertainment Ltd, Sanrio Entertainment Ltd and Kampung Boy Sdn Bhd.

TAR also signed an agreement with Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts for the development of a 300-room Traders Hotel, as well as UEM Land, for the construction of the indoor theme park. Also present at the ceremony was Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman. According to TAR chief executive officer Tunku Datuk Ahmad Burhanuddin, the indoor theme park would be an additional attraction in Nusajaya and Iskandar Malaysia. He said construction of the indoor theme park was expected to commence in the middle of next year. "The indoor theme park reinforces Iskandar Malaysia as a destination for families with children under 12 years. It further complements the other attraction, following the signing with Legoland Malaysia last year."

8 November 2009 (Sunday)

Ipoh airport to get a RM60m upgrade

IPOH: The extension and upgrading of the Sultan Azlan Shah Airport here is expected to attract more investments and tourists to the state. Finance Minister II Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah said work on the airport was expected to start next year. The cabinet approved an allocation of RM60 million for the project on Friday. "With the extension of the runway and upgrading of other facilities, it is hoped that larger aircraft would land at the airport," he told reporters after performing the ground-breaking for a market at Kampung Baru Tanah Hitam, Chemor, here yesterday.

The existing 1.8km runway would be extended to 2km and another 2km taxiway would be constructed. Other facilities at the airport would also be upgraded. Firefly now operates the Ipoh-Singapore route from the airport. The RM60 million is part of the RM120 million announced by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat for the entire project, including upgrading the airport complex and other facilities. "As for now, we want to focus on budget carriers to utilise the airport," Ahmad said. "We are hoping flights from Asean countries would start operations here once the project is completed."

9 November 2009 (Monday)

Ministries must be pro-active in maximising use of ICT

PUTRAJAYA: The ministries must take pro-active action to maximise the use of information communication technology (ICT) in the delivery of public services because it can improve the quality of life of the people and the image of the government, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today. However, the e-Government initiative should move one step further and go beyond automation of government transactions, the prime minister said.

It had to build the types of services that the public needed and expected, including making full use of available multimedia tools, mobile access devices and social network on the Internet. "Only when the citizens utilise the services and derive benefit from it, can we consider that a successful delivery of public service," he said before chairing the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) Malaysia Implementation Council meeting here.

This is the first time that Najib is chairing the meeting since taking over as prime minister in April this year. Najib said it was important to bring the national ICT initiative to the backyards of as many Malaysians as possible to help close the digital divide and stimulate economic activity in the more rural areas of the country, citing the example of MSC Malaysia Pahang. ICT should be seen as not just an industry to be developed but also as an enabler for major economic sectors to increase productivity and efficiency. There should also be more initiatives to benefit the citizen and to improve the quality of life, he said.

"The e-Government initiative, which features MSC Malaysia e-Government application, was ranked 11th in the world in 2008 according to the US-based Brookings Institute, a commendable 14-place jump from its 25th position in 2007." Najib said the e-Government project made it possible for the public to conduct business with the government over the Internet any time of the day or week and was one of the ways that had made great strides in improving the public service delivery. He said a pilot project to allow Public Works Department draughtsman to work from home was one such example.

"I would like to now give you an update on what MSC Malaysia has achieved in the year 2008. Despite the deteriorating global economic condition towards the fourth quarter of that year, I'm encouraged to learn that MSC Malaysia revenue grew steadily from RM17 billion to RM21.8 billion which was a year-on-year growth of more than 23 per cent. "Up to 2008, there were over 90,000 high skill jobs in MSC Malaysia and this accounts for more than a quarter of the ICT workforce in Malaysia. "In addition, MSC Malaysia value added contribution to Malaysia's GDP was over 1.2 per cent in 2007. I would certainly like to see this figure more than triple by the year 2020," he said.

Najib said MSC was the foundation from which could build a world class technology sector that could be one of the engines of growth in the New Economic Model which is to be unveiled by the end of this year. He said the New Economic Model would be powered by innovation, creativity and high value activity which were a natural fit with MSC Malaysia's aspirations to built the vibrant Malaysian ICT industry. "When discussing matters during the council meeting, I would encourage everyone to bear in mind that we aim to be a develop nation by the year 2020 and that we are looking to more than double our per capita gross national income from USD7,000 to at least USD17,000 by then in order to qualify as a high income nation according to World Bank classification. "This would also mean that Malaysia has to grow its GDP by over 9 per cent annually until the year 2020," he said.

Najib said MSC had already put certain emphasis to various ICT taxes which it had put in place the framework for a regional creative multimedia hub with some 200 companies generating RM677 million in annual revenue in the areas of post production, animation, game development, e-learning, mobile and interactive content. "We need to take advantage of this strong start to win a bigger share of the global content market-estimated to be worth RM2.2 trillion in 2009. "We need a plan to increase adoption of local ICT solution and services in the domestic market and give them a stable home base from which they can branch out to international markets," he said.

Najib said Malaysia also benefit from the strong presence of the world's top multinationals such as HSBC, BMW, HP and BHL, which were a testament to the quality of Malaysia workforce and the attractiveness of MSC Malaysia incentive. "In the context, we have infact become a victim of our own success and companies are now facing difficulties finding quality knowledge workers due to the imbalance of supply and demand. "We, therefore need to ensure our education system and social environment has the capacity to produce, attract and retain talent for the industries of today as well as tomorrow. "But, while the development for the ICT industry is encouraging, we will need to reassess our implementation strategies in like of the more complex and challenging global environment as well as where Malaysia needs to be in the next 10 years," he said.

9 November 2009 (Monday)

Revise formula of pension calculation, urge pensioners

BUTTERWORTH: A group of more than 60 pensioners from Penang has urged the government to implement the revised formula for calculating pensions based on years of service. They claim they had been waiting for the last 14 years for the government to implement the formula. Based on a letter from the Public Services Department (PSD) to Cuepacs (Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service), the formula was to have been implemented on Jan 1, 1996, they said. S. Arumugan, 66, from Bukit Mertajam, who had served the government for 31 years, said he hoped the prime minister would help to resolve the problem. "A group of us sent a memorandum to the then prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2005 and 2008 respectively.

"We received replies which stated that the letters had been referred to the PSD director-general. "But we have not received any response from him. "We are not asking for anything extra but for something which had been approved by the government." The pensioners gathered at the Taman Inderawasih Rukun Tetangga office in Prai here yesterday to highlight their plight. Arumugan said a similar memorandum would be handed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak soon and a copy of it would be forwarded to Cuepacs and the Malaysian Government Retirees Association. Currently, civil servants with more than 25 years of service receive full pension, which is 50 per cent of their last drawn salary. They are expected to receive a higher pension if it is calculated based on years of service.

10 November 2009 (Tuesday)

State wants 10pc of federal taxes

MORE than 4,000 civil servants in the state will receive a special bonus of RM500 next month. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the state had allocated the funds for the special bonus payments, as announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in his recent Budget speech last month. Ali made the announcement when he was tabling the state's 2010 budget yesterday. He also said the state had requested the Federal Government to release at least 10 per cent of the federal taxes collected last year from Malacca to help fund the development of the state. Last year, the state contributed more than RM2 billion in tax revenue.

Ali said he had asked the Federal Government to consider the state's huge contribution to the country. Ali said of the RM2 billion collected in the form of federal taxes, RM1 billion was collected by the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, with the major portion of it from Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd and Petronas Penapisan (Melaka) Sdn Bhd plants in the state. "However, the state's income has been stagnant over the years as we rely on taxes from quit rent, rentals and other types of premiums. "We are one of the biggest tax contributors in the country. In 2006, we paid more than RM1.6 billion to the Federal Government and the figure went up to RM1.9 billion in 2007. "Last year, the figure surpassed the RM2 billion mark." Ali said if the Federal Government approved the application, the state could expect a revenue increase of RM200 million.

10 November 2009 (Tuesday)

Prudent management leads to sixth surplus

THE state government yesterday tabled a surplus budget for next year, with income exceeding expenditure by RM200,000. It is the sixth consecutive surplus budget tabled by the state since 2005. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the secret behind the state government's success was prudent financial management. "Over the past six years, we have been following a prudent management system based on careful, hands-on, effective and value-for-money implementation of projects, and we have been very careful with our expenditure. "We have also followed principles of good governance," he told reporters after tabling the 2010 state budget at the state assembly yesterday.

Ali took pride in pointing out that Malacca did not receive any criticism on its accounting of public funds in the **Auditor-General's Report**. Earlier, in tabling the budget, Ali said: "The budget is based on four core areas improving the livelihood of the people by offering the best service and infrastructure development; placing the interests of the people first and giving priority to performance; strengthening Malacca's position as a foremost tourist destination; and revolutionising the state civil service. "For example, the transportation and road systems would undergo a major improvement. "And, we will build more low-cost houses for the hardcore poor.

"Education aid for students will be increased and more courses held for people to increase their income." He said the government would also give priority to agriculture development, including maintaining the state's position as the nation's largest chicken egg producer. It would also work to increase investments to the state and improve tourist attractions, he added. Among the new tourism projects are a Submarine Museum, Cheng Ho Museum, Chocolate Museum, Malacca Wonderland Theme Park and Dolphin Theme Park. Ali said the government expected state earnings to reach RM375.2 million. Of this, RM127.4 million would be spent on physical development, RM12.1 million on social development, RM10.5 million on housing, RM8.4 million on community development and RM4.6 million on agriculture.

10 November 2009 (Tuesday)

1,200 padi farmers in Perlis face RM1m loss

By Sharanpal Singh Randhawa and Adib Povera

KANGAR: More than 1,200 farmers in Perlis face losses amounting to RM1 million when padi crops on 800ha were destroyed due to four days of continuous heavy rain. This involved 500ha of padi fields under the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada). State Agriculture, Agro-based Industries and Cooperative Development Committee chairman Sabry Ahmad said yesterday most of the affected areas were in Kangar, Arau and Padang Besar. Sabry said the state government would check on the situation and conduct an individual evaluation on the losses. "We (the state government) will then submit the results of our evaluation of the damage and losses faced by the farmers to the Federal Government for financial aid."

Earlier, Sabry visited padi fields in the Sungai Bakong and Padang Siding areas, believed to be the worst affected areas. Meanwhile, 20 people from Kampung Bakau were evacuated from their homes when the water level rose more than a metre. The six families were shifted to SK Seri Perlis, where 14 other families were already housed. A state Welfare Department spokesman said another temporary shelter for flood victims was the Taman Seri Intan Community Hall where 141 people were staying. "There are two more temporary shelters which still remain open at Tok Kandang and the Mara Junior Science College (MRSM)," he said.

In Alor Star, Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Johari Baharom said checks would be conducted by Mada and the Farmers Organisation Board to ascertain the extent of agricultural land affected by floods in Kedah and Perlis. "Most of the padi farmers have just started their padi planting process and the seedlings are about 50 days old. " Those whose agricultural land were affected by the floods, need to inform the farmers organisation in their area in order to obtain aid prepared for them," he said, adding that the survey was expected to be completed by next week. Earlier, Johari, who is also the Kubang Pasu Member of Parliament, handed over aid to some 200 flood victims at Kampung Kota Giam in Malau, near here. In Kedah, some 1,500 people have been evacuated to 17 centres. Kota Star is the latest district to be affected by floods. Seven evacuation centres have been set up there, housing 379 people.

Among the affected areas were Kampung Seri Pasir, Lapangan Terbang, Kampung Lorong Sungai, Kampung Lengkuas, Simpang 4 Sungai Baru, Kampung Alor Gunung, Anak Bukit and Titi Gajah. In the Pokok Sena district, the flood condition worsened after hundreds of houses in seven villages were inundated. A state Welfare Department spokesman said the affected villages were Kampung Bukit Derang, Kampung Bukit Hijau, Kampung Baru Padang Temusu, Kampung Empa, Kampung Seberang Paya, Kampung Menerong and Kampung Derang. The flood situation in the Padang Terap District improved, with three of five evacuation centres closed yesterday.

10 November 2009 (Tuesday)

Govt rolls out advanced national communications infrastructure

PUTRAJAYA: The government has rolled out an advanced national communications infrastructure by wiring up 1.2 million households and business premises with fibre-optics and enabling all internet subscribers to receive a fast speed of between 10 Mbps (Megabits per second) to 1 Gbps (Gigabits per second). The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in his opening remarks at the MSC International Advisory Panel (IAP) meeting here today said, the high speed broadband network will create a platform to develop future ICT applications, while providing the people, businesses and government agencies with a competitive boost via cutting edge communications.

Thus he said, he is pioneering a new style of intimate, people centric approach through the use of ICT. "My 1Malaysia website allows Malaysians to interact directly with me via the internet. It is not a passive site but fully interactive. Those accessing it can not only hear my thoughts but also submit their suggestions directly to me online," he said. Elaborating on this, Najib said that a recent open solicitation for suggestions on the government budget, drew more than 400 responses from the public. This warm response he said, was followed by 500 more from the public following the budget announcement, and these would be taken into consideration next year.

The Prime Minister also said, Malaysia has done very well in the past by growing an industrial base while expanding the agricultural sector. At the same time he said, the country had also nurtured a strong oil and gas industry. "Our prior focus on attracting foreign investment as a low cost producer, has somehow created a dilemma, as our industrial advancement has not kept pace with global leaders and we remain rather under developed in this respect. "We need a new paradigm to not only help catch up but take us on a quantum leap into the ranks of developed nations," he added.

Najib also said that MSC Malaysia had entered the third phase of its development and would expand the country's ICT Vision for industry and society. "The next phase of MSC Malaysia will build upon our success and accelerate the use of ICT to boost the nation's economic growth and societal well-being," he explained.

10 November 2009 (Tuesday)

Call for guidelines on spending funds

By Farrah Naz Karim and Noor Adzman Baharuddin

PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) should provide clear guidelines to elected representatives on how government funds are to be spent, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday. As the same time, they should also understand the requirements of the members of parliament and state assemblymen. "The people expect them to address problems such as school fees, health matters, gatherings and many other woes they face. "Sometimes this forces them to look at whether or not government allocations can be used. This is something that the MACC should explain to elected representatives," he said after chairing the 21st Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) Malaysia Implementation Council meeting here.

He was commenting on the MACC's move to set up a special team to check misappropriation of funds by elected representatives. In Istanbul, Turkey, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said MACC's special team would enhance the present system in the disbursement of funds to elected representatives. He said it would also help to monitor the disbursement of funds by the elected representatives. "The commission's decision is within its jurisdiction. For the government and Barisan Nasional, we have been following the present system and we require all elected representatives to adhere to it. "If the commission wants to give advice and improve the present system, then it is for the better," he said after attending the inaugural Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) summit here.

11 November 2009 (Wednesday)

Mega-speed Internet to benefit 1.2m

PUTRAJAYA: More than 1.2 million households and business premises in the country will be wired up with optical fibre to enable them access to mega-speed Internet connection. Telekom Malaysia has been tasked with laying the optical fibre and is expected to complete half the job by next year. Telekom Malaysia has been tasked with laying the optical fibre and is expected to complete half the job by next year. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the high-speed broadband network of between 10Mbps and 1Gbps would give the public, businesses and government agencies a competitive boost via cutting edge communications.(At these speeds, it will be possible to offer, among others, highdefinition TV online, live video chat and e-health services. Downloading a full-length feature film to your PC, for example, can take less than two minutes compared with at least two hours under the current speeds of 2 to 4Mbps). It will also give the country the platform to develop the information and communication technology of tomorrow, Najib said at the opening of the 12th Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) International Advisory Panel meeting here yesterday.

Najib, who is also IAP chairman, said the move would also help Malaysia catch up with global leaders in industrial developments. He said Malaysia needed a new paradigm to not only help the country catch up from where it was left behind but also take on a quantum leap to the ranks of developed nations. "Malaysia has done well in the past by growing an industrial base while expanding our agricultural sector. At the same time, we have also nurtured a strong oil and gas industry. "But our prior focus on attracting foreign investment as a lowcost producer has now created a dilemma. "Our industrial advancement has not kept pace with global leaders and we remain somewhat under- developed in this respect."

A new economic model would be introduced by the year-end with emphasis on innovation, creativity and high-value activities. So far, Malaysia had already put in place a comprehensive reform of its capital market and introduced sweeping measures to liberalise its service sector. It is also in the midst of putting in place a system to drive high performance at all levels of society. Najib said the push for MSC Malaysia as a platform for developingworld- class ICT applications and a seeding ground for Silicon Valley-type entrepreneurs was vital, saying no economy could claim to be developed without having a significant technological component. "Countries which are technologically advanced have and will continue to triumph while those that fail to make innovation a centrepiece of the economy will fall behind.

"It is no accident that technologically- advanced countries, like the US, Japan, Switzerland, Sweden, Canada and Australia, also dominate the list of the world's wealthiest nations." He said MSC Malaysia was on its way to become a bustling creative multimedia hotspot with more than 200 digital content companies generating US\$200 million (RM676 million) in revenue. Najib cited the MyKasih programme, which incorporates the use of MyKad for needy families to use as a document to buy groceries, as another milestone for the MSC Malaysia initiative. He said MSC Malaysia was entering its third phase of its development and would expand its ICT vision for industries and society. "The next phase of MSC Malaysia will build upon our success and accelerate the use of ICT to boost the nation's economic growth and societal well-being."

11 November 2009 (Wednesday)

Study audit reports to prevent abuse : A-G

GUA MUSANG: Civil servants' failure to study audit reports by the respective departments has led to dishonesty, abuse and incurred the government additional project cost. Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said contents of the audit reports would help civil servants to avoid repeating the same mistakes. "The audit reports can improve performance in line with the government's thrifty policy. Poor planning by departments and agencies will lead to wastage," he said after being briefed by the South Kelantan Development Authority (Kesedar) here today.

The auditor-general said abuse in spending government expenditure would affect the people who were in need basic facilities. "Rural people are counting on the government to implement more projects for the poor like housing and roads. Dishonest civil servants who plan projects not according to needs will only burden the government with additional cost." Ambrin said the visit was not a fault finding mission but to ensure transparency in project implementation. He reminded civil servants to monitor contractors so that the projects could be completed according to schedule. "Many may consider a delay of two to three months as normal but for transparency, this must be avoided as it incurs additional cost," he added. -Bernama.

11 November 2009 (Wednesday)

Selangor Assembly - State to tell all on failed projects

Reports by V. Shankar Ganesh and Mazlinda Mahmood

CLASSIFIED information on three failed projects will be released to the public, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim told the Selangor legislative assembly yesterday. The projects, designed to benefit the state, ended up benefiting certain companies instead, he said. Khalid said the state government had initiated efforts to declassify information marked as "official secrets" by the previous state administration. He said this was being done in accordance with Section 2C of the Official Secrets Act. "I have already initiated efforts towards this, although the Freedom of Information Enactment (FOI) will only be tabled at the next Selangor state legislative assembly meeting in March."

Khalid said one report would be released today and the other two later this week. "These reports will expose the real story behind the projects initiated by the previous Barisan Nasional administration which benefited certain companies. "They include reforestation projects for commercial purposes and several abandoned projects in Selangor." Khalid said two of the projects were the 800ha Bandar Alam Perdana housing estate in Ijok and the failed people's housing project in Bukit Botak. He said the move was not the start of a witch hunt, comparing it instead to the revelations made in the Port Klang Free Zone scandal.

"If people say this is a witch hunt, so be it. What we want to do is make people responsible for their actions. They will also be careful from now on and not hide behind the OSA." He said the state would also ensure the FOI enactment does not overlap the OSA as the federal law supercedes the state enactment. "While we can accept OSA for security reasons, the rest should be made available to the public."

11 November 2009 (Wednesday)

MB calls for setting up of grants commission

SELANGOR has proposed the setting up of an Independent Grants Commission to ensure continuous development in all states. Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim said the commission could ensure that financial distribution to states was based on development needs and not political affiliation. He said this concept was already being practised in countries such as Canada and Australia. He said this when tabling the Budget 2010 at the state legislative assembly here yesterday. "The long-term policy should take into account justice and equality in financial distribution." He added that the current system practised by the Federal Government was one that could be termed as "winner takes all".

Khalid said a better way would be to use an equalisation formula that took into account issues such as the population, poverty rate, developed areas and costs. "By giving more autonomy to the states, it will raise the public's involvement in the democratic institutions." Touching on a different issue, he said Selangor had mooted several projects that would see it becoming a competitor to Cyberjaya and also take over from Kedah as the rice bowl of Malaysia. Khalid, who tabled a balanced budget of RM1.3 billion, said the state was in discussions with entrepreneurs to introduce the plug-and-play company concept in the RM2 billion I-City project in Shah Alam. He said the high-tech facilities would link the state capital with operators in Silicon Valley, the United States. "We hope this will boost innovation and technology development and benefit the people in Selangor." Khalid met with entrepreneurs in the Silicon Valley last month. They are to follow up with a visit to the state in the coming weeks.

11 November 2009 (Wednesday)

No 'reel mess' with loan scheme, says Finas head

KUALA LUMPUR: There's no "reel mess" with the government's RM50 million feature film loan scheme. National Film Development Corporation (Finas) director-general Mohd Mahyidin Mustakim said only two of the 45 films that were funded by the four-year-old scheme were not completed. "Eighteen films were completed and screened. Two films are completed and on the way while 20 are still in progress." Speaking at his office yesterday, Mahyidin revealed that two films -- Kanto and Sereem -- were being "rehabilitated", one film (Cinta Terakhir) had been completed but not screened and two films (Aduh Saliha and Jibam) were not completed. Three other films have been documented by Finas. "It's far from being a failure. Only two films which took our loans did not make it, and we collected RM10.2 million from the films which did."

Mahyidin said while the loans, capped at RM1.5 million, were to be repaid in three years, extensions could be provided if the filmmakers had valid reasons. "Films that cannot be completed are taken over by us and given to established producers. We also take action against filmmakers who fail to repay their loans without valid reasons," he said, adding that action was being taken against two film companies. Loans are approved by a committee whose members come from Finas, the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry and SME Bank, which manages the loan. Mahyidin said lack of experience in film production was the main reason the films were not completed.

12 November 2009 (Thursday)

Local councils get RM44m reprieve

By Roy Gohroygoh@nst.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: Government loans amounting to RM44 million owed by local authorities in Sabah before 2000 have been converted to grants. The move aimed at balancing the accounts of the local authorities was announced by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman after chairing the weekly state cabinet meeting yesterday. "Most of the projects were to develop social amenities which generally do not generate income for the local authorities, so, I think it would not be right to keep the debts in the accounts. "The meeting today agreed that we write off the loans by converting them to grants," he said, adding that Kota Kinabalu City Hall was the biggest debtor, with RM22 million in outstanding loans.

Musa also disclosed that the cabinet had agreed for the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (Risda) to help smallholders in the state. "Risda will complement efforts carried out by the Sabah Rubber Industry Board," Musa said. "They will introduce things like replanting, training of smallholders with new techniques, entrepreneurship plans, commercial support and marketing." Last year, over 90 per cent or 68,000 of 75,000 families were categorised as smallholders.

12 November 2009 (Thursday)

'Study reports to avoid same mistakes'

GUA MUSANG: The failure of civil servants to study audit reports has led to dishonesty and abuse. It has also incurred additional project costs. Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said contents of the audit reports would help civil servants avoid repeating the same mistakes. "The audit reports can improve performance. Poor planning by departments and agencies will lead to wastage," he said after a briefing by the South Kelantan Development Authority here yesterday.

He said abuse of government funds would affect people who were in need of basic facilities. "Rural people are counting on the government to implement projects for the poor. Dishonest civil servants who plan projects not according to needs will only burden the government with additional costs." Ambrin said the visit was not a fault-finding mission but to ensure transparency in project implementation. He reminded civil servants to monitor contractors so that the projects could be completed according to schedule.

12 November 2009 (Thursday)

Kelantan padi farmers suffer RM18m loss

By Sharifah Mahsinah Abdullahnews@nst.com.my

KOTA BARU: About 1,200 farmers in Kelantan suffered losses of some RM18 million after their padi fields were destroyed by floods, said Kemubu Agricultural Development Authority (Kada) general manager Ibrahim Mat. He said the padi fields were in Pasir Mas, Pasir Putih, Bachok, Kota Baru and Tumpat. "The affected farmers are waiting for the right time to harvest their padi but, unfortunately, rain hit their areas last week, causing floods." Floodwaters damaged all padi fields in the five districts and Tumpat was the worst affected," he said after visiting farmers at Kampung Telok Jering in Tumpat yesterday.

Ibrahim said the affected farmers should not worry about their losses as Kada would help them. "There will be compensation. "We will pay the affected farmers RM1,800 for each hectare of padi field destroyed. "We will also seek financial assistance from the Federal Government." The flood situation in the state improved yesterday with the water level at Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang below the danger level and the number of evacuees dropping. A spokesman for the state flood operations room said 1,094 evacuees were still at three relief centres in Tumpat as at 4pm yesterday. "They are expected to return home this evening or tomorrow." He said Sungai Golok was measured at 8.05m at 4pm, below the danger mark of 9m.

13 November 2009 (Friday)

Aggressive but prudent budget

KOTA KINABALU: Aggressive but prudent, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman hinted of the 2010 budget which will be tabled at the state assembly today. Musa, who is also finance minister, said the budget would be people-friendly in line with the "people first, performance now" concept by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Themed "continued harmony and prosperity", the chief minister said the budget would focus on continuing development efforts under the Ninth Malaysia Plan. "Sabah will be heralding the 10th Malaysia Plan and I believe our aggressive yet prudent approach will make our state a more conducive place for local and foreign investors. "I wish to stress here that we want to ensure that the delivery system by the public sector is more effective and efficient to support development growth. At the same time, our prudent practice in dealing with the state's coffers will always be in place," said Musa in a pre-budget press conference at Wisma Kewangan yesterday.

Musa also took time to meet a delegation from KKIP Sdn Bhd, the government-owned company responsible for developing the Kota Kinabalu Industrial Park near here. Led by chairman Datuk Basalie Abd Hamid, the company paid RM1.5 million in dividends to the government for the first time since it was established 15 years ago. "We now have 196 companies operating within the park, generating investments amounting to RM1.68 billion," Basalie said in his briefing to Musa. Also present were Assistant Finance Ministers Datuk Tawfiq Titingan and Donald Mojuntin. "We believe the company will progress further with more interest coming from potential investors," he said, adding that the park had created nearly 6,000 jobs.

14 November 2009 (Saturday)

Millions spent, but river still a dump

By Satiman Jamin

JOHOR BARU: After millions of ringgit spent in the past one year to rehabilitate Sungai Skudai and its tributaries, the river is still a filthy dump literally. Sungai Skudai, along with Sungai Segget and Sungai Tebrau, were part of a RM900 million river rehabilitation programme announced last year. But the river's water is still teh tarik-coloured and rafts of rubbish are still floating in Sungai Skudai. Residents who depend on the river for their living, have questioned whether the project had actually taken off. Orang Asli of the Seletar tribe at Kampung Bakar Batu Danga feel the river had actually worsened in the past year, especially with development projects being carried out at the river.

Fisherman Udi Ki, 35, was cynical when asked about the condition of Sungai Danga, a major tributary of Sungai Skudai. He said the only "improvement" was that now Orang Asli children collect plastic bottles and other scrap, instead of fish, from the river to be sold. "We can't even cast our fishing nets now because all sorts of rubbish gets tangled in it." He also pointed to a gaping gash on a nearby riverbank, where a bridge was being built as part of the Johor Baru-Nusajaya coastal highway project an example of development projects being carried out at the river.

"Red earth is allowed to crumble into the river and when it rains the water looks like a frothing river of teh tarik," he said. Another villager Suni Jenol, 35, said they had seen rubbish traps installed at several locations along the river but the trapped rubbish was never collected. He said the rubbish would break free once the traps were full. Suni added that the villagers' outboard boat engines were frequently damaged when the propeller hit submerged debris in the river. "The rubbish-filled water had not only wiped out the marine life in the river but has also 'strangled' our outboard engines," he said.

The flow of rubbish at the river has not gone unnoticed by Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman. In a statement available at the state government website (<http://www.johordt.gov.my>), he said that 41,000 tonnes of rubbish ran through Sungai Skudai annually. The statement also mentioned that RM90 million was allocated to tackle Sungai Skudai's solid waste problem. It was learnt that a contract to clean up the river was given out by the Iskandar Regional Development Authority earlier this year but the contractor had run into some problems.

14 November 2009 (Saturday)

State targets RM480m revenue

THE state government yesterday tabled a deficit budget for next year, citing lower tax collection and higher expenditure as among the reasons. Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the deficit was reduced to RM92.48 million from the RM98.61 million in the 2009 budget. He said an amount of RM814.4 million had been allocated for next year's budget with RM571 million for management expenditure and RM242.5 million for development cost. For next year, he said the state government projected to generate some RM480 million in revenue. Tabling the 2010 state budget, Adnan said agricultural activities and the agro-based industry was still the main contributor to Pahang's economy, although there has been an increase in activities in the manufacturing and services sector. He said as such the state's per capita income for next year was projected to rise to RM8,245 from RM6,648 in 2005.

Adnan said for next year the state government would venture into new areas to increase revenue, such as water royalty and mining. The state government, he said, would also work towards preserving the forests by gazetting them as water catchment areas. To date some 972,800ha of forests have been gazetted as water catchment areas where logging is prohibited. The commercial value of the forest could have brought in a revenue of some RM28 billion for the state government. Adnan said as compensation for the loss of revenue, the state government hoped its request to the Federal Government for the RM280 million annual grant would be considered.

14 November 2009 (Saturday)

Poor postal service

THE postal service in rural Sarawak is poor and needs to be upgraded, a government backbencher told the house yesterday. Telang Usan state assemblyman Lihan Jok described the service as one of "the most lacking" among other government services to the people. "In my constituency the postal service only stretches up to the Long Lama bazaar. "It is common to see hundreds of letters, postcards and other items piling up at the Long Lama post office. "Some are returned to senders, and others, after some time are thrown away or burnt," he said during the state 2010 Budget debate.

He said in Baram, a large number of the postal items were official letters or notifications from the National Registration Department in Kuala Lumpur, Kuching or Miri. He said they were usually meant to inform MyKad and birth certificate applicants to collect their documents at Long Lama or Miri, or that their applications were being processed, approved or rejected due to incomplete information. Because of the poor service, thousands of letters do not arrive at the desired destinations. "This is a serious problem and the government must look into this."

14 November 2009 (Saturday)

Najib sets 5pc as growth target for next year

SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has set a higher bar for the economy next year, a five per cent rise from the official three per cent aim, as he seeks to nudge the private sector to do more. "I'm not happy with three per cent, I want two more per cent next year. We will push hard. We'll make the government more efficient." He was speaking at a gathering of chief executive officers during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting here yesterday, at a session discussing whether the global crisis was over. Asked later at a briefing for Malaysian media if his new growth target was realistic, Najib said the government would try its best to achieve it.

Malaysia's trade-dependent economy is due to contract by three per cent this year as Western consumers buy less from Asia. Americans have been hit hard by a property market bust that has resulted in massive job layoffs, among others. However, the global economy is expected to rebound next year, helped by government spending and interest rate cuts in almost every major economy around the world. In addition, it is still uncertain if the recovery will continue past 2010. Most governments want the private sector to take over the baton and drive the economy for growth to continue.

Najib made known his unhappiness with Malaysian companies. "I think the private sector is not doing enough in Malaysia. I've got some ideas," he said, adding that this would be revealed at the end of the year. Najib also said it was "imperative" that the Doha Round of trade talks be concluded next year, pointing out that the world needed "real leadership" from the United States. The stalled talks, under the World Trade Organisation, would prise open markets and boost trade and investments worldwide but have been hampered by differences among big countries like the US, India and China.

Najib's call was supported by Victor Fung, chairman of Hong Kong outsourcing giant Li & Fung, saying completing Doha would be the biggest symbol that the world wanted to push for a real economic recovery.

14 November 2009 (Saturday)

Deficit budget of RM3.3b for next year

SABAH proposed a deficit budget of RM3.3 billion for next year, which is RM525 million or 18.91 per cent more compared with that for this year. It's tailored to ensure vigorous implementation of development programmes. Tabling the budget yesterday, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman said it was also aimed at preparing the state government's machinery to implement transformation and strategic packages under the 10th Malaysia Plan. As in previous years, the budget gave focus to the aggressive development of the agriculture, tourism and industrial sectors, as well as the eradication of poverty.

Musa said state earnings for next year was estimated at RM3.1 billion, with the bulk of it expected to be derived from tax collection totalling RM962 million and royalty payment totalling RM724 million. Musa, who is also state finance minister, said the bigger budget proposed for next year was testimony of the Barisan Nasional government's commitment to make Sabah one of the most developed states. "It (budget) clearly shows that BN is sensitive, sincere and seriously committed in carrying out development and to bring about progress to Sabah. " Under the budget, RM583 million has been proposed for emoluments, RM949 million for recurring expenditure and RM1.7 billion for special expenditure.

Musa said the estimated expenditure for development for next year was RM1.1 billion, an increase of RM69 million or 6.67 per cent compared with this year's spending of RM1.04 billion. Of the amount, RM541.5 million would be utilised for the continuation of projects and RM568.2 million for new projects. The balance of RM79.4 million is for the general administration sector. Musa also said the state government expects to receive federal allocation totalling RM1.15 billion next year, of which RM968 is for infrastructure and communication, RM117 million for agriculture and RM73 million for industrial development. The chief minister also brought cheers to the more than 25,000 civil servants by announcing that a special payment of RM500 will be paid before the end of the year.

15 November 2009 (Sunday)

Contractor ordered to repair stadium

KUALA TERENGGANU: The government has decided that the contractor of the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium in Gong Badak is responsible for repairing the roof which collapsed in June. Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek said the contractor would have to bear the cost of the repairs because the stadium was still under warranty. "The investigation papers for the roof collapse were tabled at the post-cabinet meeting on Nov 6 and the cabinet ordered the contractor to repair the stadium," he said after closing a youth convention here yesterday.

He declined to furnish details of the repairs, including the cost, saying that the matter was under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Department. "Our hope is that the repair work can start soon so that the stadium can be used again." On June 2, about 60 per cent of the roof of the stadium collapsed over the grandstand. The stadium was built at a cost of RM300 million and was opened in May last year in time for the 12th Malaysia Games. No one was reported to have been injured. – Bernama.