



1 May 2009 (Friday)

Ministers may suggest own KPIs



Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon says the framework will be decided by the prime minister

PUTRAJAYA: All 28 ministers have been given a free hand to suggest their own criteria for their Key Performance Indicator assessment.

They have been instructed to discuss with their deputies and secretaries-general to identify the steps for the preliminary KPI. This will serve as a first stage of the KPI assessment which will be made public by November. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday that feedback from various sources would be considered.

"We will be talking to various organisations. We will also be monitoring the media closely to find out what the people think of ministers," said Koh, who is in charge of the assessment. He gave an assurance that the KPI was not meant as a punishment to shame non-performing ministers. "It is meant to show what is going on and for the people to tell the leaders whether they are happy or not.

"Those being assessed should take it in their stride and improve themselves," he said, adding that he will also be up for assessment. He said there would be no conflict of interest in getting the government's investment arm, Khazanah Nasional, to help draw up the framework for the KPI. "They are just assisting, and giving us input from their experience. "But the framework will be decided by the prime minister and his deputy," he said.

1 May 2009 (Friday)

Panel wants to know Smart subsidy amount

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee wants the Malaysian Highway Authority to disclose how much subsidy the government is providing to the operator of the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (Smart).

PAC deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said they wanted to know the subsidy to determine if the management had been justified in charging the current toll rates. "We want a fair rate for motorists but before PAC can decide on this we have to know the amount of subsidy the management received," he said after PAC visited several flood-mitigation projects in the city yesterday.

Dr Tan said the committee would be calling the MHA to come before it as soon as possible. On the tunnel, he said it had achieved its objective to mitigate floods in the city. He noted that flood-prone Masjid Jamek and the area surrounding it had been spared flooding since the Smart system began operation. "On seven occasions at least the area would have been hit by flooding if not for the tunnel." He said two retention ponds -- in Jinjang and Batu -- costing RM528 million would be completed soon after a two-year delay owing to financial difficulties faced by the main contractor. "It will be completed and there will be no cost overrun. We are satisfied."

The two retention ponds have flood diversion channels that begin from Sungai Gombak to Sungai Batu and from Sungai Keroh to Sungai Jinjang. When operational it would help to reduce flash floods in areas around the Putra World Trade Centre, Kepong and the Segambut. On the Port Klang Free Zone, Dr Tan said the PAC would invite the authorities to meet it again. "We spoke to them two years ago and they are on our schedule. We will definitely meet them again but I can't say when." He said the PAC would be interested in the PKFZ audit report to be released soon.

2 May 2009(Saturday)

Kedah to replace some Perdanas

ALOR STAR: The Pas-led state government will replace some of its Proton Perdana V6 Executive official cars with the same model soon.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak said four or five of the cars used by exco members would be replaced soon because they broke down frequently. He said the state government was forced to get new cars because of the many costly repairs needed to the cars that had been in use for more than six years. "The wear and tear of the cars used by exco members is different from the wear and tear experienced by ordinary motorists. Exco members have to travel extensively and frequently," he said after attending a dinner with civil servants here on Thursday night.

Azizan said the state treasury had been entrusted to come up with a budget for the purchases. "The state treasury is currently negotiating the price with Proton." He could not estimate the total cost of the new purchases but said that the price of each Perdana V6 Executive car was estimated to cost about RM100,000. To date, the state government has 26 Proton Perdana cars, of which 16 are Perdana V6 Executives. It was earlier reported that the state government

was prepared to replace its fleet of cars with foreign models as maintenance costs for the Proton Perdana were high. The state government changed its mind after Proton Edar Sdn Bhd officials visited Azizan in December.

4 May 2009 (Monday)

Kubang Pasu to have big pineapple plantation

By : Adib Povera

JITRA: The Kubang Pasu district is set to become Kedah's largest pineapple exporting area soon.

Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Johari Baharum said a study had shown that the district could host a commercial-scale pineapple plantation. Johari, who is also the Kubang Pasu member of parliament, said the ministry was planning to plant pineapple on a 1,200ha site in the district soon. "The soil quality and rain-fall is suitable to plant pineapples. "There is a 200ha pineapple plantation in Bukit Kayu Hitam near here, which produces good quality crop," he said here on Saturday.

Johari said he would meet the district's Area Farmers Association to discuss the matter. He added that he would also seek help from the Malaysian Pineapple Industry Board to advise villagers and farmers interested in planting the crop. "The plantation will help generate income for rural folk," he said.

"There is great demand in the market for raw and processed pineapples. "I hope the people of Kubang Pasu will use this opportunity to improve their livelihood."

4 May 2009 (Monday)

Satisfaction of rakyat is 'benchmark of success'

By : Hamidah Atan

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Najib Razak believes the key performance index (KPI) will be attained when both civil servants and the executive satisfy the rakyat via superlative services.

Addressing the monthly gathering of Prime Minister's Department staff for the first time yesterday, Najib said good governance resulted from good ties between the administration and civil servants. "Members of the administration are not out to give instructions only. It is also their responsibility to care for the welfare and interests of the civil servants.

"I suggested the KPI as a benchmark to gauge their performance, not merely as a yardstick for quality or quantitative traits. "We all must realise that the KPI must be achieved within a stipulated time frame. But, at the end of the day, we must all be able to make the rakyat contented and happy. "If we can satisfy them, then that is the actual KPI," he told the gathering, which was also attended by his deputy, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan, ministers in the Prime Minister's Department and their deputies.

Najib said a satisfied rakyat would continue to support the government. He said as prime minister he had stressed the importance of creative and innovative approaches to make Malaysia succeed in the new millennium. He said the approaches should be taught from a young age through the education system, which was being reviewed by the Education Minister, Muhyiddin. All problems, he said, could be resolved if creativity was combined with innovation. "This is what I have been hoping for, not just incremental success but a quantum leap for all solutions."

The prime minister also paid tribute to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi whom he said had handed over the premiership to him smoothly, as planned. Najib said the monthly gathering would remain to foster esprit de corps between civil servants and the administration.

8 May 2009 (Friday)

Fishermen blame port management for poor catch

By : Phuah Ken Lin



Md Zainol Ajamin says mediocre facilities and shoddy maintenance had contributed to a decline in the fishermen's daily catch

GEORGE TOWN: The livelihood of some 300 fishermen based at the Batu Maung fishing port here is under threat due to appalling port management.

Penang Fishermen Association chairman Md Zainol Ajamin said mediocre port facilities and shoddy maintenance services had contributed to a sharp decline in the fishermen's daily catch. He said the failure of the port authority, Malaysian International Tuna Port Sdn Bhd (MITP), to acknowledge their grievances was the crux of the problem. He attributed the poor daily catch to the lackadaisical attitude of MITP towards the development and maintenance of the port.

"MITP has been dragging its feet to deliver its promises to upgrade the port to international standards since 2006. "Nothing has been done to address the plight of the fishermen," he told a press conference here yesterday. The Batu Maung fishing port is 40 per cent owned by Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM) with the remaining 60 per cent owned by Bindforce Sdn Bhd. To add to their woes, Zainol said MITP had not bothered to fix the power outage problem which had been plaguing the port since April 9.

"We are forced to resort to rationing of power which is supplied to us by generators, but the electricity is available only for a limited time each day. "Without constant electricity, the fishermen are scrambling to refill diesel via electrical pumps and this forced them to reduce their fishing trips," Zainol said, adding that there were times when there was no power supply the entire day. He added that despite the expiry of the concession period, MITP remained the interim custodian of the port. To alleviate the hardship of fishermen, he urged LKIM to take over the management of the port immediately. Zainol said works to build a RM240 million mammoth world class international wharf, which should have been completed last year, had yet to begin.

8 May 2009 (Friday)

Freeze on contract sharing policy



Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor says the guidelines are vague

KUALA LUMPUR: The Works Ministry has suspended a policy requiring Class A contractors to distribute 10 per cent of all projects to small-time contractors.

Works Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor said his ministry was preparing a paper on the best way to distribute projects. He said the ministry would take a month to draw up a paper to be submitted to the cabinet. Class F contractors now get a 10 per cent share of contracts worth more than RM10 million awarded to the main contractors who are in Class A. A total of 4,373 Class F contractors have benefited from the 10 per cent distribution policy, with contracts worth RM860 million.

Shaziman gave an assurance that the affected Class F contractors would not remain jobless as they would be given priority in road repair and maintenance work under the RM200 million stimulus package announced by the government. "We need a clearer guideline on the types of projects that could go to Class F contractors, and its costs, to avoid confusion and problems

between Class A and Class F contractors."Shaziman was speaking after his ministry's monthly assembly. He said the current guidelines were vague and did not specify the types of jobs that could be undertaken by Class F contractors and their value.

This, he said, caused problems between the big and small contractors, including the issues of profit margin and distribution of contracts. He said the decision to freeze the 10 per cent distribution policy was made after a dialogue with Class F contractors on Tuesday. "We heard their grouses and many were not happy with the distribution method. Half of them even wanted us to abolish the policy."

9 May 2009 (Saturday)

Fuel subsidies for interior boatmen



Deputy Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Tan Lian Hoe with Sarawak Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs deputy director Mohd Khalis Kasim checking the prices of fish.

KUCHING: The burden of the people in the interior of Sarawak should be alleviated soon.

The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry has been giving out fuel subsidies to boat operators transporting goods into rural areas. Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Tan Lian Hoe said boat operators in Saratok, Batang Lupar, Batang Ai and Kapit divisions were selected to receive the aid. It was implemented early this year and expected to run for another month. "In some rural areas in Sarawak the price of goods compared with those in urban areas is three times higher," Tan said after visiting Stutong Community Market yesterday. "Because of the low profit margin for delivery of controlled goods to rural areas, transporters were reluctant to carry them.

"Through the scheme, the ministry would be using the same transporter to determine the additional cost, which it would absorb to ensure the prices are standardised in rural areas." To ensure continuous supply of fuel, the ministry has adopted several measures. Among them are to provide rebates to boat owners, to channel subsidised petrol through floating barges, and to build mini petrol stations and fuel storage facilities.

10 May 2009 (Sunday)

Quiet welcome home for entrepreneurs abroad



Mida director-general Datuk Jalilah Baba says the agency will guide entrepreneurs keen on relocating their ventures here.

STATISTICS on them are hard to come by as government departments and agencies do not see them as "important". As such, tracking them down can be a difficult task.

But there are a number of successful Malaysian entrepreneurs abroad who have brought their businesses home. The Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (Mida) acknowledges that more Malaysians overseas, especially from the United States and Europe, want to return to the country. And the agency is now taking note. "We did not see the statistics as a necessity. This is because whether they have businesses abroad or not, it is not a deciding factor to support the issuance of licences or incentives," says Mida director-general Datuk Jalilah Baba.

Rather, she says, the viability of the projects and the value-added services that the businesses provide are the yardstick. Mida is the government's principal agency for the promotion of the manufacturing and services sectors. It also assists companies which intend to invest in the sectors and facilitates their project implementation. "Personalities involved in the business and their backgrounds are also among our concerns," Jalilah says.

However, she agrees that the agency should have been keeping track of entrepreneurs who have returned home, more so since the country needs their knowledge and expertise. She says the agency, under the purview of International Trade and Industry Ministry, has been trying to woo more entrepreneurs home. "The new minister (Datuk Mustapa Mohamed) has said he will look at ways to provide incentives for them and Mida will guide those who are interested to come home. "It is also high time for us to acknowledge them for they will contribute greatly to the country." . Jalilah says it is a good chance for the entrepreneurs as the country has not been badly hit by the global slowdown and remains a conducive place for new businesses. For enquiries, entrepreneurs can email investmalaysia@mida.gov.my or visit www.mida.gov.my.

10 May 2009 (Sunday)

Growth signs with orders up, factories report silver lining

By : Sharif Haron



Datuk Mustafa Mansur says Malaysians may have over-reacted to the economic crisis in the West

KUALA LUMPUR: More manufacturers have reported rising demand for their products, a sign that things are looking up for the manufacturing sector.

The most "positive signs" are in the electrical and electronics and chemicals sectors, which have experienced rising orders from overseas in recent months, according to the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers. FMM president Datuk Mustafa Mansur said the improving export market had resulted in higher job vacancies. Exports account for 85 per cent of manufactured products. He, however, expressed cautious optimism when asked whether the slowdown, which impacted a large percentage of the federation's 2,300 members last year, had bottomed out. "We've got to be very cautious. This trend (of rising demand and exports) needs to go on for three to four months."

Mustafa said a recent survey among FMM members confirmed the general uptrend in the demand for their manufactured products. "It's very encouraging to report that export figures have gone up. Demand has increased compared with August and September last year." In the survey, which began about two months ago, a higher percentage of respondents said they expected some improvement in export sales in the next six to nine months. These respondents forecast that production would pick up with more domestic sales and new orders. A slight improvement is also expected in new capital investment, capital expenditure and liquidity or cash flow in the next six to nine months.

Mustafa said during his recent meetings with manufacturers in Penang, Sarawak and Negri Sembilan, most reported that things were improving. One of them was German bulb manufacturer Osram in Penang, which received encouraging orders last month. Official figures released by the International Trade and Industry Ministry on Friday showed that exports in March registered a double-digit growth of 10.3 per cent at RM43.65 billion compared with the previous month, with shipments to China, the United States and Asean countries registering particularly sharp rises.

Mustafa said the country had not been that badly affected by external factors, adding that Malaysians might have over-reacted to the economic downturn in the West. "Unlike the financial crisis of the late 1990s, we have a strong financial system in place today. "In fact, the

banks are flush with cash." Thus, even foreign banks incorporated in Malaysia have not been affected despite the economic battering in their countries of origin, he said.

"Citibank is making losses in the US but here, Citibank is making profits." In addition, Mustafa noted that Malaysia's intra-Asean trade had been growing and so, too, exports to China and the Middle East. In tandem with the uptrend in exports, according to the Labour Department, there are 27,000 job vacancies in the manufacturing sector. Asked if employers had been too hasty in retrenching workers, Mustafa said the FMM had warned that retrenchment should only be a last resort. "But now, we believe this is the best time to retrain our workers and, at the same time, slowly reduce the number of foreign workers."

10 May 2009 (Sunday)

42,000 projects awarded under 2 stimulus plans

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 42,000 projects valued at RM5.6 billion have been awarded and implemented under the government's two stimulus packages.

Of these, 39,316 projects valued at RM3.4 billion are under the first package, while 2,745 valued at RM2.2 billion are under the second stimulus package. The Project Management Unit, headed by chief executive officer Datuk Mohamad Othman Zainal Azim, is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the projects. It said all projects under the first RM7 billion stimulus package, announced on Nov 4, would be implemented by the end of this month. The second RM60 billion mini-Budget was tabled in Parliament on March 10.

Othman, in a statement yesterday, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak monitored every aspect of the stimulus packages on a weekly basis. This hands-on approach is to ensure that the two stimulus packages achieve their targets. A technical committee had also been set up to resolve policy and administrative issues. The committee is chaired by Treasury secretary-general and meets every week. The committee reports to the Steering Committee chaired by the prime minister.

The PMU received more than 130 questions on the two stimulus packages via its website, which was launched a month ago. Many of the questions were on how to do business -- at home and abroad -- getting loans for start-up businesses, on housing, transportation including rural roads and scholarships. Othman said queries and proposals relating to different ministries and agencies had been forwarded to them for further action.

12 May 2009 (Tuesday)

Sabah getting allocation

KOTA KINABALU: A quarter of the RM1 billion special allocation for Sabah announced last year has been disbursed to the state government, while another RM200 million is in the hands of the Sabah Development Office (SDO) under the Prime Minister's Department.

In total, the RM450 million that has reached Sabah will be used to implement infrastructure projects, including four major roads in the state. State development officer Matusin Sunsang said the Federal Government would channel the remaining RM500 million next year, and the SDO could request the balance of RM50 million for this year "as and when" it needed to.

"We have identified projects that will be funded by the RM1 billion special allocation. Apart from the major road projects, some of the money will be used to build rural roads and to provide water supply in rural areas."

13 May 2009 (Wednesday)

Building owners fined

KOTA BARU: Forty-one commercial building owners were fined by the state Fire and Rescue Department for failing to follow safety rules.

Department director Azmi Osman said most of the owners were operating in the town area and the rest in districts such as Bachok and Pasir Putih. He said the buildings were among 119 checked by the department so far this year. "Most of the buildings did not have emergency exits," he said at the department's monthly gathering in Pengkalan Chepa yesterday.

13 May 2009 (Wednesday)

Channel project will affect park



Datuk Michael Manyin says the project is the result of several studies carried out by the Department of Irrigation and Drainage

THE Kuching Wetland National Park will be affected by a bypass channel that is currently under construction to shelter the city and Bau from floods, Urban Development Minister Datuk Michael Manyin told the house yesterday.

Replying to a question from backbencher Abdul Rahman Junaidi (BN-Pantai Damai), he said a part of the park would be affected by the RM2 billion flood-mitigation project as the surplus of the 20 million sq metres of excavated material would be dumped there. He said an environmental impact assessment (EIA) study had been ordered on the effect such a dumping would have on the park. He added an EIA consultant had been appointed and asked to study the proposal to establish an environmental monitoring programme.

Manyin said the project was the result of several studies the government had asked the Department of Irrigation and Drainage to undertake to identify feasible flood-mitigation measures for the city. "In 2000, the department commissioned a study, the Sungai Sarawak flood-mitigation option study. "The study recommended the flood by-pass channel as the best option to solve the flood problem of the city by diverting the flood waters from Sungai Sarawak's upper catchments to Sungai Salak. The channel runs from Kampung Paroh to Sungai Salak near Santubong. Work on the first 2km of the channel, costing RM148 million, had commenced and is expected to be completed next year.