



1 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Sweeping changes to boost growth (HL)

By: Adeline Paul Raj

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has eased investment rules, including one on Bumiputera equity ownership, in a major move to attract foreign investments amid a slowing economy. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he was scrapping a rule that requires companies seeking a public listing to reserve 30 per cent of its stock for Bumiputeras. Besides that, he raised the foreign ownership limit on unit trust companies and brokerages, and vastly reduced the powers of the Foreign Investment Committee (FIC), a body that had closely monitored the 30 per cent ownership rule in Malaysia.

The FIC has "outlived its usefulness", Najib said, adding that its approval would no longer be required for property transactions, except for those where Bumiputeras are the sellers. He said all these changes were necessary to transform Malaysia into a high-income nation within the decade. "We have become a successful middle-income economy, but we cannot and will not be caught in the middle-income country trap. We need to make the shift ... or we risk losing growth momentum in our economies and vibrancy in our markets," he said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia conference here yesterday. Making the transition to a high-income economy has become his key priority and he will continue to "modify or eliminate policies that inhibit growth", he added.

"I am convinced that failure or hesitation to act now will have long-term ramifications for the nation." The measures to boost foreign investment come as Malaysia faces its first economic contraction in a decade. The government expects the economy to fall by as much as five per cent this year as exports slow amid the global recession. On Malaysian companies seeking a listing on Bursa Malaysia, he noted that they would previously had to sell a 30 per cent stake to Bumiputeras and also ensure a quarter of the shares were held by public investors. From now on, however, with the 30 per cent rule scrapped, companies only need to offer half of the public spread to Bumiputera investors.

This effectively means that Bumiputeras will hold at least 12.5 per cent in initial public offerings. "I think this is a good, bold move. It should bolster market sentiment and in the mid- to long term, small investment banks will benefit from doing more fund-raising exercises," said Chris Eng, head of research at OSK Investment Bank, of the new move.

Najib stressed that he remained committed towards enhancing economic participation by Bumiputeras. "While the government remains fully committed to the goals of equitable growth, our approach will be to implement these goals in a market-friendly manner." He said the new policies were designed to be a win-win situation for all and that no one should feel marginalised. "It is a tricky balancing act, (but) it's do-able." He also said that as at June 19, projects worth RM9 billion had been awarded under the government's RM67 billion stimulus packages, of which RM3 billion had been paid.

1 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Private equity fund to boost Bumi stake

By: Jeeva Arulapalam

KUALA LUMPUR: The government will set up a private equity fund, Ekuiti Nasional Bhd (Ekuinas), that will invest in unlisted companies in a move to boost Bumiputera participation in the economy. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the new investment institution will have an initial capital of RM500 million but this will rise to RM10 billion. "Ekuinas will focus its investments on sectors with high growth potential, in line with supporting the New Economic Model," Najib said in his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia conference here yesterday.

Ekuinas would be one of the ways for Malaysia to increase the Bumiputera share of corporate equity to 30 per cent from about 19.4 per cent now, Najib said. Although Ekuinas will invest in both Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera companies alike, there will be a specific Bumiputera agenda to develop Bumiputeras through such investments, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop. While specifics will be announced later, Nor Mohamed said the fund would be run by professionals but funded and owned by the government. "It will come under the supervision of the EPU but reports to the prime minister," he said at a media briefing.

Ekuinas, to be established soon, will buy into companies in high growth sectors such as education, medical tourism, oil and gas and ICT. "There is one space that has not been filled and that is the unlisted SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and companies. In the big scheme of things, the unlisted companies are bigger in size, in terms of number and value," Nor Mohamed said. He added that Ekuinas was different from Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB) as the latter pools together retail investments to purchase equities in listed companies. Najib said Ekuinas will also jointly invest with private sector funds. Corporate figures said Ekuinas was timely as it provides capital aid for entrepreneurs. "One of the biggest challenges previously was in terms of capital for the Bumiputera entrepreneurs and this makes the fund available to them," said Maybank group president and chief executive officer Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar.

Axiata Group Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Seri Jamaludin Ibrahim welcomed Ekuinas as it would develop quality Bumiputeras. Bursa Malaysia director Datuk Saiful Bahri Zainuddin said Bumiputera companies and investors now had another avenue to participate in capital markets. "They will no longer be passive investors as they will now be able to participate or learn the trade or industry. This can be done through the management or running of the company."

1 July 2009 (Wednesday)

"We can still achieve Vision 2020", says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR: Despite the dip in the world economy, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the country could be on par with developed nations by 2020. But to meet the vision, he said several measures need to be put in place. Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was selling goods overseas at low prices to compete with other developing countries. "We should not compete with our neighbours to sell goods at lower prices. We should not go for small profit margins or become a low-cost country."

Developed countries like Denmark sold cheese worldwide but "that does not mean they are poor". He said these countries, including other European nations and Japan, were high-cost countries. They make world-class products and sell them locally at high prices. "It has helped boost local business. Their per capita income is high because the people are trained and receive high wages."

Dr Mahathir, who spoke during a talk on "Vision 2020 - Is it a mission possible? 1Malaysia - Is it the driving force?" - said Malaysia needed to boost its per capita income to become a developed nation. At the talk, Dr Mahathir was named "Father of Vision 2020" by the organisers, Asia Pacific Brands Foundation. He also said that to realise Vision 2020, Malaysians must improve their English proficiency and curb corruption among politicians.

1 July 2009 (Wednesday)

ASN 2 to pay out 5.2 sen dividend

KUALA LUMPUR: Amanah Saham Nasional Bhd (ASNB), a wholly owned subsidiary of Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB), has declared an income distribution of 5.20 sen per unit for its Amanah Saham Nasional 2 (ASN 2) scheme for the financial year ended June 30. This year's distribution is similar to the quantum announced in the previous two financial years ended June 30, 2008 and 2007, PNB chairman Tun Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid said yesterday.

The income distribution will involve a total payment of RM11.67 million and would benefit 10,962 unit holders, who collectively own 224.34 million units of ASN 2. Ahmad Sarji said during the year under review, ASN 2 performance was influenced by the country's economy and local stock market, which were affected by the global financial and economic crisis. The benchmark Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (KLCI) dropped 9.33 per cent from 1,186.57 points on June 20 last year to 1,075.84 points on Monday. He said during the period, sentiment was weak with the local bourse trading within a narrow band. "Although the KLCI had rebounded lately, a clearer indication would depend on the global turnaround expected in the second half this year."

During the year, ASN 2 recorded a gross income of RM10.8 million. Dividend income contributed RM6.7 million to the income, followed by sale of shares, contributing RM2.3 million and short-term investment instruments, RM1.8 million. PNB president and chief executive officer Tan Sri Hamad Kama Piah Che Othman said although the ASN 2 income this year was less than the previous year's, ASN 2 was able to maintain 5.2 sen income distribution despite tough economic and market conditions, as the fund had reserves. "Our capacity now is 9.73 sen but we announced 5.20 sen (income distribution), so we have brought forward 4.53 sen. If the market continues to be weak, we have 4.5 sen in our income."

1 July 2009 (Wednesday)

PKA freezes RM660m fees

By: V. Shankar Ganesh

PORT KLANG: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) has decided to freeze RM660 million in payments to Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, the main contractor for the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) development. PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the payments would be withheld until after the task force appointed by it had completed its investigation into the controversial project. The RM660 million was due in four payments to Kuala Dimensi's special purpose vehicles for the project. A total of RM360 million was to have been paid to KDSB by yesterday while a further RM300 million is due this month.

The four special purpose vehicles are Special Port Vehicle Bhd, Transshipment Megahub Bhd, Valid Ventures Bhd and Free Zone Capital Bhd. Lee announced this at a press conference at PKA's headquarters here yesterday. The PKA board had resolved, on the basis of preliminary and provisional views obtained, to withhold these payments pending the completion of a full review by the task force. He added that PKA was aware of potential legal suits by Kuala Dimensi over its decision. "If this happens, PKA will defend these actions and will await the outcome of litigation, which will determine PKA's true liability." He said the board was acting in its best interest.

The decision is also part of efforts by the Transport Ministry to restructure the PKFZ's financial position and seek a legal review of some of the agreements it had signed in the past. The task force's full recommendations are expected next month.

2 July 2009 (Thursday)

Khazanah to speed up GLC divestments

By: Adeline Paul Raj

SOVEREIGN fund Khazanah Nasional Bhd plans to speed up selling stakes in government-linked companies (GLCs) over the next two to three years, its chief says. The company will be more active in pursuing deals in the second half of this year, managing director Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar said. "Acquisitions are one possibility, and if we think values have gone up and this is the right time to divest, we are open for business," he told reporters after delivering a speech at the Invest Malaysia conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The company will, however, continue to retain stakes in certain sectors, such as power, which are considered strategic and of public interest, he added. Khazanah has stakes in more than 50 companies, including Tenaga Nasional Bhd and Telekom Malaysia Bhd. In the last five years, it has made divestments totalling RM12.6 billion, locking in gains of RM3.6 billion over 20 deals. The sale has been done through the issuance of exchangeable bonds and sukuk. These instruments may also be used for future divestment exercises, Azman said.

Asked if there was a target on how much Khazanah would ideally want to hold in GLCs, he said there were internal thresholds and limits, but declined to reveal the numbers. Khazanah's style was "to either sell out completely or maintain control", adding that there was no "one-size-fits-all" formula. "A more efficient way of holding is to use minimum capital and yet achieve that degree of control or substantial shareholdings," he remarked.

Azman urged GLCs to do more in terms of divesting non-core assets. Best practices such as bidding, whether in open or invited bids, would be expected when there are companies to be sold, he said.

Khazanah made a "modest" audited realised pre-tax profit of RM128 million last year despite a severe fall in asset prices globally, he said.

The value of its assets stood at RM44 billion as at June 30, up 34 per cent from the end of last year. Azman also said that Johor's Iskandar Development Region has attracted RM42.7 billion of investment commitments, of which RM11.4 billion is already being carried out. Meanwhile, when asked on speculation that he will not stay on as Khazanah chief, Azman said that was up to the government to decide. His contract expires in June 2010.

2 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Najib: It's time for Felda to go global

By: Zaidi Isham Ismail; Azura Abbas

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) must now become a serious global player after its success in Malaysia. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said over the past 50 years, Felda had developed land and built thriving settler communities that now enjoyed a good standard of living, thanks to income from rubber and oil palm. "In the process, Felda Holdings Bhd was incorporated as a commercial entity to ensure that settlers' produce reached the market in the fastest time at minimum cost to ensure that their income was above poverty level. "I believe that Felda Holdings has yet to realise the full potential of its size," Najib said at the launch of Felda Global in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Government-owned Felda is the world's largest plantation owner and manager, handling over 850,000ha of estates, of which over 500,000ha are owned by more than 110,000 settlers. It has 38 subsidiaries, which own 75 refineries, turning over RM15 billion in revenue a year, with a global presence in seven countries. Felda also accounts for one-fifth of the world's crude palm oil production. The board and management of Felda must now pursue a commercial strategy to become a globally integrated and diversified multi-crop agro business multinational corporation. Felda Global has been set up to realise this vision for the group.

Najib said the mission of Felda Global was to develop Felda's strengths in four businesses, namely global multi-crop, global oils and fats, global oleo chemicals and global logistics. "It is my hope that with this new structure, the entire Felda group will have the clarity of the direction and lines of responsibility to implement the government's vision for Felda for the next 50 years."

2 July 2009 (Wednesday)

RM6bil to be spent on expansion

KUALA LUMPUR: Felda Global Ventures Holdings plans to invest over RM6 billion in the next five years to expand its overseas presence in its core plantations and related businesses. The new company is the new commercial entity of the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda). Felda Global will now be the Felda group's integrated commercial arm, taking over the role of Federal Holdings Bhd. Felda Holdings will become Felda Global's wholly-owned subsidiary. Felda, in a statement yesterday, said Felda Global would be headed by president and chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Bakke Salleh.

Felda Global was launched yesterday in Kuala Lumpur by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Felda said with the new business structure and governance in place, Felda Global can create value from existing investments as well as undertake new projects. To date, Felda Global's investments include buying US-based olechemicals group Twin River Technologies, which owns oilseeds crushing facilities in Canada. Felda Global also has a joint venture with the IFFCO group, one of the world's largest food and consumer product companies, with operations in five countries.

Felda Holdings recorded a pre-tax profit of RM819 million in 2008, while Felda recorded a profit before tax of RM1.3 billion. International growth is expected to significantly increase the group's pre-tax profit over the next five years. Felda Global was formed to be an integrated global multi-crop agro-business group on Sept 6, 1995. Felda Holdings is 49 per cent owned by Felda and the remaining 51 per cent by Koperasi Permodalan Felda which, in turn, is owned by Felda's 110,000 settlers and 22,000 workers.

Felda's 49 per cent stake will now be transferred into Felda Global. With this transfer a number of synergies are being pursued which will benefit shareholders of both Felda and Koperasi Permodalan Felda. The management resources and shared functions will be spread across a much larger scale of operations. This will reduce operating costs.

2 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Bold measures for the times

By: Hamidah Atan

PUTRAJAYA: There is an urgent need for Malaysia to implement bold measures in view of the challenges posed by the global economic situation and intense international competition. The Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department supported the comprehensive rationalisation of the investment guidelines administered by the Foreign Investment Committee (FIC), as announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on Tuesday. It said they articulated the need for transformational changes, critical for Malaysia to achieve developed nation status.

The EPU was involved in formulating the new economic model. In a statement, it said the prime minister had stressed it was necessary for Malaysia to strengthen its business and regulatory environment to attract greater investments. This was essential for the nation to continue prospering and for all Malaysians to take part in this prosperity. In this regard, the government has decided to substantially deregulate FIC investment guidelines, it added.

All changes to the FIC guidelines will be implemented with immediate effect. The EPU also said a copy of the revised FIC guidelines on the acquisition of properties could be found on its website - <http://www.epu.jpm.my/>. The measures constituted a major easing of investment regulations and should significantly strengthen Malaysia's position as an investment destination. "The government remains committed to the objective of growth with equity. "However, in the light of the current challenges and landscape, a new approach is required which promotes effective and sustainable economic participation in a market-friendly manner.

"This new approach will focus on promoting genuine partnerships, meaningful participation of Bumiputeras and meritocracy among Bumiputeras." As part of this new approach, the government will set up Ekuiti Nasional Berhad (Ekuinas) as a private equity fund to ensure meaningful and effective participation by Bumiputeras. It will also stimulate investments in sectors with high growth potential.

Ekuinas would be provided an initial endowment of RM500 million, with a target to increase this to RM10 billion. Ekuinas will jointly invest in the private sector and investment decisions will be commercially driven. This is to ensure meritocracy in the selection of companies to benefit from capital injection and to be nurtured for growth.

EPU said the comprehensive deregulation of FIC investment guidelines had been formulated to strengthen Malaysia's attractiveness as a place to do business and invest, for Malaysians and foreigners alike. A facilitative business and regulatory environment, combined with a more effective and market-friendly distribution policy, will benefit all stakeholders. The government intends to place Malaysia on a high growth trajectory, while maintaining the philosophy of growth with equity.

VOICES

"What the Prime Minister presented is reasonable as it represents the current situation and global economic landscape. With the support of all parties, there is no reason why our dreams cannot become reality."

- Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein Umno vice-president

"This is the right step at the right time, considering our current policy is over 16 years old and has not achieved its objectives. If we know a policy does not bring benefits to the people, we should not continue with it."

- Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal Umno vice-president

"I hope the formation of Ekuiti Nasional Bhd (Ekuinas) will achieve its intended objectives and goals, especially in pushing growth of small and medium industries. The time has come for Bumiputeras to take the opportunity to promote their products and services."

- Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang Pas president

3 July 2009 (Friday)

Missing PKFZ audit reports stir passions

By: V. Vasudevan; Joseph Sipalan; Shuhada Elis

THE troubled Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) triggered a shouting session in the house moments after the morning session started yesterday. M. Kulasegaran (DAP-Ipoh Barat) asked why the house had not distributed the PKFZ audit report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to members. "It was promised to us by the transport minister and today is the last day," he said.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Ronald Kiandee said the audit reports were sent to the Parliament secretary who had asked for it on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee. "The PAC is still meeting before submitting its report to the house. At the moment, the reports and pamphlets associated with PKFZ are for use by the PAC for its investigations and it (the report) will be given to the house only after it has completed its investigation," Ronald said.

Kulasegaran demanded to know which was more powerful - the house or the PAC - as Tian Chua (PKR-Batu), Saifuddin Nasution (PKR-Machang), Teresa Kok (DAP-Seputeh), William Leong (PKR-Selayang) and Sim Fong Him (DAP-Kota Melaka) started heckling Ronald.

Ronald maintained his position and ordered the opposition to accept the decision. PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid on Wednesday said a full report on the PKFZ scandal would be ready in three months and would be tabled in Parliament in October.

4 July 2009 (Saturday)

Bio-Desaru draws RM236m investments

By: Anis Ibrahim

THE Bio-Desaru bio-agricultural project in Tanjung Balau, Kota Tinggi is set to move forward with RM236 million in investments from seven companies. Confirmed investments are expected to draw earnings of more than RM85 million annually from the fifth year of operation. Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the companies would be running an integrated herb and vegetable garden, a pepper plantation and Arowana fish and goat farms. The companies will be using the latest techniques in biotechnology, such as microbe and tissue culture, embryo transfer and applying the biomass concept, to name a few. "Their activities and operations will be carried out in a 711ha area," he said at the state assembly yesterday.

Replying to questions by Datuk SamsolBari Jamali (BN-Semarang) and Hamimah Mansor (BN-Penawar), Ghani said preliminary work had begun on the Bio-Desaru Organic Food Valley - the first big-scale organic food farm in the country - such as an environmental study, demarcation and earth-cleaning works and basic infrastructure. "Access roads to the southern part of the area have been completed and in the meantime, water and electricity supply will be connected to allow investors to begin their operations."

Negotiations are also being held with 10 other companies which have expressed interest in investing in the project. It is estimated that the 10 potential investors will bring in RM800 million. "They will be involved in producing beef and dairy products, aquaculture fry and salt-water fish products," he said.

The 10 companies are likely to earn RM1.5 billion annually after four years. "The Bio-Desaru project is one of the state government's efforts in applying the latest green technology, such as biomass recycling and the control of organic pests. "This project will also improve our food security and reduce our dependence on food imports."

5 July 2009 (Sunday)

Ling: Call me, I'll be there

By: Veena Babulal

PETALING JAYA: Former transport minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik says he has nothing to hide and is ready to appear before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to explain his role in the controversial RM4.9 billion Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project. Dr Ling, who was named together with several other individuals in the report prepared by Pricewaterhouse Cooper (PwC) on the project, said he would respond positively once he was summoned by PAC. "I am publicly declaring my intention to do so, but I have not received notice to appear before the committee.

"Once I receive the letter I would be happy to do so. "I don't have anything to hide. The facts are all there in black and white. "A team of internationally-recognised experts have reviewed documents of over thousands of pages to come out with the report. I will answer questions based on facts."

Ling said this after opening a talk at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman here yesterday. He urged the public not to speculate and to allow the experts to complete their investigations. "Don't jump to conclusions as even PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the committee was not calling people to pronounce them guilty and tarnish their image."

Ling said he had not been called by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission which was also looking into the issue. On Thursday, Azmi announced that a number of stakeholders in

the project would be summoned to appear before the committee, which would meet in Parliament house weekly starting this month, to prepare a report before the next meeting of Parliament in October. Among the prominent people mentioned in the report were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat and his predecessor Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy who succeeded Ling in 2003.

Others were Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung, who was the former Port Klang Authority (PKA) chairman; Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, chief executive officer of Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB), the project's turnkey contractor; Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail; and former PKA chairman and Pulau Lumut Development Cooperative chairman Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil, whose company sold a plot of land in Pulau Indah to KDSB.

PKA bought the land, totalling 404.7ha, from KDSB in 2003 at a cost of RM25 per sq ft for the PKFZ project. KDSB was later appointed the turnkey developer. The PwC report released in May highlighted the involvement of several politicians, saying there might have been a conflict of interest.

6 July 2009 (Monday)

Do we need new probe?

By: Gursharan Singh

IT was reported that the Terengganu government would appoint a British consultant to determine the actual cause of the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium roof collapse in Gong Badak on June 6, and that it was currently discussing the fee to be paid. The state had earlier rescinded a decision to set up its own probe team to avoid any clash with the team set up by the Federal Government. The menteri besar's statement suggests there are no local experts and if there are any, they may not be reliable or independent. This does not send a good message to the international construction industry fraternity as it may negate government efforts to export technical consultancy services.

It has been reported that there is another federal team due to submit its report to the cabinet. Furthermore, the Public Works Department, Public Works Institute of Malaysia (Ikram) and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission are also involved in the investigations. All these are being funded by taxpayers. Thus, how many investigations does the country need and what would happen if the investigators come up with different findings? Remember the case of Middle Ring Road 2 defects that were also investigated by several local and foreign experts? The repairs cost RM70 million but the public still does not know the party responsible and what action has been taken if any against the culprit. Finally, what was the total cost of the investigations?

The Terengganu MB has stated that his administration had decided on its own probe team because the state government also had to take responsibility for the incident. It is hoped that this "responsibility" will include imposing deterrent penalties on those identified as responsible. The findings of the investigation reports, the party responsible and the total cost should be publicised. This is in line with promises to practise transparency and accountability, which are important if fraud is to be eradicated.

GURSHARAN SINGH

Kuala Lumpur

7 July 2009 (Tuesday)

PKA board to release payment to trustees of bondholders

PUTRAJAYA: The Port Klang Authority board has agreed to release payment due to trustees for bondholders after considering their appeal and the stand of the Finance Ministry. PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the board made this decision at its meeting to consider the appeal yesterday. "The appeal letter dated July 3, 2009, described the background of the issuances of private-debt securities, comprising bonds and commercial papers (CP) as well as medium-term notes (MTN), by the four special-purpose vehicles. "It also spelt out the consequences of non-payment and the possibility of the trustees acting upon the directions of the bondholders and CP/MTN holders enforcing the security charged."

Lee said PKA had also received instructions from the ministry that the board be mindful of the implications that might affect the confidence of local and foreign investors in the private-debt securities market. He said the payment was to be made without prejudice, with reservation of the rights basis and without an admission of liability.

"PKA will, however, not waver from its earlier commitment to seek legal remedies and take action to determine its true liabilities and rights. "The board had on June 30 deferred RM660 million payment to Kuala Dimensi, the turnkey contractor for the Port Klang Free Zone project, pending the completion of investigation by its special task force.

PKA needs to pay Kuala Dimensi RM660 million in four instalments from last month to this month. The first sum of RM130 million should be paid on or before June 30 under the sale-and-purchase agreement signed on Nov 12, 2002. Another RM230 million was to be paid on or before June 30 under the development agreement dated March 27, 2004. PKA has to pay RM150 million this month under the supplemental agreement for additional development works dated Nov 30, 2005, and another RM150 million also in July under supplemental agreement for new additional development works dated April 26, 2006.

7 July 2009 (Tuesday)

Fifth jetty to collapse

MUAR: Shoppers at a night market in Panchor here were shocked when a jetty along the banks of Sungai Muar collapsed into the river. Residents believe soil erosion may have caused the collapse, the fifth such incident along Sungai Muar in the past two years. The Panchor fishermen's jetty was built early last year at a cost of RM1.3 million, which included repair works on a 450 metre stretch of embankment.

The previous jetty had collapsed on May 21 last year. Another jetty in Kampung Kolam, near Serom had collapsed in July last year; while the jetty in Kampung Pengkalan Kota near Bukit Serampang had collapsed twice in February 2009 and May 2008. The worst incident of a riverside landslide occurred on April 20 last year when nine cars were damaged and shoppers at a night market fled after a 100m stretch of embankment collapsed into the river. A witness to the latest incident Rahimi Mansur, 46, said that he was at a nearby coffee shop when he heard a loud noise. He said the jetty had slowly collapsed and slipped into the river. Rahimi said that soil erosion and cracks had surfaced at the area for several months. He said the area had been sealed off to prevent fishermen from using the jetty.

8 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Ong: PKA's decision proper

By Hamidah Atan and Mazlinda Mahmoodnews@nst.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat has defended the move by the Port Klang Authority (PKA) to release payments due to Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) and the bondholders. He said there had been allegations that PKA had wrongly reversed its decision to release the money. "I am told that the PKA board has agreed to the repayment for two reasons -- following the appeal from the trustees for the bondholders indicating the consequences of non-payment and possibility of the trustees taking action and clear instructions from the Finance Ministry to release the repayment," he wrote in his blog.

Ong, who is also MCA president, said the payments would be made without prejudice to PKA's rights. "It must be made abundantly clear that the payments to KDSB and the bondholders are distinctly separated from the issue of PKA's rights and commitment to seek legal remedies. "In the meantime, I expect the Task Force on Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) to expedite investigation and submit its recommendations to PKA and the ministry as soon as possible. "At the end of the day, we are aware that the public expects every single sen overpaid to be recovered and wrongdoers must be brought to book."

On Monday, PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng had said the PKA board had agreed to release the payment after considering their appeal and the stand of the Finance Ministry. The board had, on June 30, deferred RM600 million payment to Kuala Dimensi, the turnkey contractor for the PKFZ project, pending the completion of investigation by its special task force.

PKA needs to pay Kuala Dimensi RM660 million in four instalments from last month to this month. The first sum of RM130 million should be paid on or before June 30, under the sale-and-purchase agreement signed on Nov 12, 2002. Another RM230 million was to be paid on or before June 30, under the development agreement dated March 27, 2004. PKA has to pay RM150 million this month under the supplemental agreement for additional development works dated Nov 30, 2005, and another RM150 million, also in July, under supplemental agreement for new additional development works dated April 26, 2006.

In Shah Alam, Civil Movement Against Corruption Malaysia (Gerak) lodged a report with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), alleging abuse of power in Lee's appointment. Its president, Mohd Nazree Mohd Yunus, said the report was Gerak's own initiative based on the movement's observation and research on the PKFZ scandal. "We discovered some irregularities in this matter (the appointment of PKA chairman) in terms of several procedures," he said after handing the related documents to officers at the Selangor MACC office. Nazree, however refused to reveal the alleged irregularities. Asked whether the report lodged was against Ong, he said the question should be posed to the minister in charge.

8 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Mustapa: Don't pin blame on Kesedar

MANIK URAI: The Southern Kelantan Development Authority (Kesedar) has played a major role in developing areas under its supervision, especially in opening land settlements for the landless. International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said development in the state was previously concentrated in northern Kelantan, in places such as Kota Baru, Pasir Putih, Pasir Mas and Tumpat. "The setting up of Kesedar about 30 years ago was Umno and Barisan Nasional's contribution. It has successfully opened up vast tracts of land for the people. "Let us not forget that it was we who did it and Kesedar played a major role," he said at Kesedar's Kuala Krai office here yesterday.

Mustapa, who is Kelantan Umno chief and Manik Urai election director, was commenting on allegations that Kesedar should partly be blamed for the lack of development in Manik Urai. "There might be weaknesses here and there as we are all human and not perfect. The important thing is for Kesedar, and other agencies, to rectify the problems."

Mustapa said he had thanked villagers who brought up the issue in his meetings with them, adding that he had promised that action would be taken swiftly. He called on voters in the constituency to vote for the BN so that the party could bring development to the area. Mustapa said Manik Urai lacked many infrastructure facilities and the federal government was doing its best to fulfil the expectations of the people.

8 July 2009 (Wednesday)

'Shoddy work is rare'

SHODDY workmanship is found in only a few government buildings, Deputy Works Minister Datuk Yong Khoo Seng said yesterday. There had been reports of leaks in ceiling and roofs collapsing but none of buildings collapsing, he added. "The main reasons buildings are prone to leaks and of roofs collapsing are the extreme changes in weather and natural disasters," he said in reply to Senator Khoo Soo Seang. Yong said sometimes the problems in buildings were caused by consultants hired by the contractors. The contractors are liable to pay for repairs if there are problems with the structure and design of a building during the defect liability period.

"The Public Works Department has set up a technical and finance committee that will review the criteria used in choosing consultants for government projects." Yong said the ministry had come up with guidelines to protect government buildings from being infested by fungi. Earlier, replying to Senator Mumtaz Md Nawli on the collapse of the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium roof in Terengganu, he said a committee had been formed to probe the mishap. The committee comprises representatives from the PWD, Board of Engineers Malaysia, Institute of Engineers Malaysia, Malaysian Structural Steel Association, Board of Architects Malaysia, Institute of Structural Engineers Malaysia, National Audit Department, Attorney-General's Chambers and the Construction Industry Development Board.

9 July 2009 (Thursday)

Sipadan may become 'new world wonder'

KOTA KINABALU: Pulau Sipadan, one of the best diving spots in the world, is set to qualify for the final round of the New Seven Wonders of Nature search. State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun said that based on the unofficial result of the search, which ended on Tuesday, Pulau Sipadan was said to be in fourth place in the islands category. "I hope we get through and qualify for the next round," he said after launching orientation week for new students of the Kota Kinabalu Polytechnic near here yesterday.

Masidi said the ministry, through the Sabah Tourism Board, had embarked on an all-out

"Vote for Sipadan" campaign to promote the island as one of the world's New Seven Wonders of Nature since December. It went through the first stage of qualification on Dec 31 last year. The second stage of the search, via an Internet online voting system, was conducted from Jan 1 to July 7 this year. Pulau Sipadan must be in the top 11 to go to the next round. Pulau Sipadan is one of the 261 national and multinational nomi-nees from 222 countries which participated in the search. – Bernama.

10 July 2009 (Friday)

Leaky RM18m aquatic centre shut down

By Ridzwan Fernandez

KUALA TERENGGANU: The RM18 million Aquatic Centre in Batu Burok here was ordered by the Works Ministry to close indefinitely yesterday. Works Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor said too many flaws had been detected in the year-old centre, making it unsafe for public use. The state of the art centre, which has separate facilities for swimming and diving events, was completed in May last year, just in time for the Malaysia Games. Since then, the centre has been open to the the public for swimming. "We inspected the lower ground level and found too many leaks. "We also found rusty structures and faulty electrical connections that were exposed to water. All these have made the centre unsafe for use,"

Shaziman told reporters after leading a ministry inspection team to the centre. In an immediate response, Public Works Department director-general Datuk Seri Dr Judin Abdul Karim, who was also present, said action would be taken against the Terengganu PWD officers who were the supervisors of the project if they were found to be negligent. The state PWD was in charge of the contract, which meant they implemented and managed the project. The closure of the aquatic centre is the latest blow for the state government after another of its sporting facilities, the roof of the RM228 million Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium in Gong Badak, collapsed on June 2.

Shaziman expressed regret and concern over both incidents and questioned how two important and costly sporting projects ended up this way. "We have asked the contractors (Pakatan Nadiwangsa Sdn Bhd) to conduct immediate remedial works as the project is still in its defect period." Shaziman said, more importantly, the PWD found other weaknesses. They included its design, the implementation of the project and the supervision of the project when it was being built. "Maybe they hurried the project to meet the (Sukma) games deadline but this is not an excuse why the project did not meet the required standards. This is supposed to be a safe facility for the people."

Shaziman said PWD must, from now on, look seriously at how it conducts its projects. He said the department must stop looking only at deadlines and instead ensure specifications

and quality standards were met. "We do not want projects that are unsafe and have short lifespans. This aquatic centre is a good example. It is just one year old and already there are so many problems. This is definitely not healthy." Shaziman expected a preliminary finding on problems affecting the aquatic centre to be submitted to him by the federal PWD in 10 days.

11 July 2009 (Saturday)

PM Najib's 6 key areas for KPI

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today announced six national key result areas for more effective attainment of the targets of the key performance indicators (KPI). He said these are crime prevention, fighting of corruption, widening access to quality and affordable education, raising the living standard of the low-income people, upgrading infrastructure in the rural and interior regions, and improving public transportation in a moderate period of time.

Najib said these six areas will be given priority focus by himself, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Cabinet ministers and Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan. "I do not want to go into the details (yet) because I will be meeting the government officers at the end of this month. I want to discuss the details with them first. Let's wait for the announcement of the details," he said at the '100 Days of Najib with the People' function here. The event, held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), was to mark Najib's first 100 days as the prime minister following his appointment on April 3.

On crime prevention, Najib said that if there was a commitment to check crime, then it must be executed seriously. "Otherwise, the people will blame the government. And when the (election) time comes, we will know the people's response. I want us to be responsible to the people of Malaysia," he said.

The KPI was established to enable the people to gauge the performance of the government administration as well as to ensure that clear guidelines were in place for formulators and implementors of policies to discharge their duties and responsibilities. Najib said he will be decisive in arriving at decisions, otherwise the people would be left wondering in indecisiveness. He said the government approach is based upon thinking of and listening to the aspirations and grievances of the people because according to him, the era of "the government knows best" is over.

The process of listening to the people's voice would continue to be used in almost all important government decisions, an example being that involving the Internal Security Act (ISA) where the views of civil society, the Bar Council and others will be considered, he said. - BERNAMA

11 July 2009 (Saturday)

Sipadan a step nearer to wonders list

By Jaswinder Kaur

KOTA KINABALU: Pulau Sipadan has won a spot in the New7Wonders of Nature online campaign's top 77 list after intense voting which saw 261 nominees competing. A panel of experts led by former director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Prof Dr Federico Mayor, will reduce the list to 28 finalists. The finalists will be revealed on July 21 in Switzerland and voting will resume to determine a new list of natural wonders in 2011.

Pulau Sipadan, which stepped onto the world stage when French explorer, scientist and filmmaker Jacques Cousteau showcased it in the documentary Ghost of the Sea Turtles, will be vying for the finals alongside other islands, mountains, lakes and landscapes. Six other islands which made it to the top 77 list are Christmas Island, Cocos Island (Costa Rica), Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), Jeju Island (South Korea), Ometepe Island (Nicaragua) and the Maldives.

Other famous landmarks that are hoping to get into the finals are Ayers Rock in Australia, Table Mountain in South Africa, Milford Sound in New Zealand, the Grand Canyon in the United States, the Amazon in South America and the Great Barrier Reef which is shared by Australia and Papua New Guinea. The panel of experts will choose the finalists on the basis of criteria which include the unique beauty of the nominated site, and its ecological significance and historical legacy.

The campaign is organised by the New7Wonders Foundation, which conducted the New7Wonders of the World campaign a couple of years ago. Sabah Tourism Board had embarked on a nationwide campaign to encourage Malaysians and foreign visitors to vote for Pulau Sipadan, after it was reported in mid-February that the island was one of the nominees.

Pulau Sipadan, an oceanic island formed by corals growing on top of an extinct undersea volcano rising 600 metres from the sea bed, is famous for its barracudas, trevally, turtles, coral gardens and a myriad of other marine life. It was catapulted into the limelight for the wrong reasons nine years ago when gunmen kidnapped 21 tourists and Malaysians and spirited them to southern Philippines. They were released in stages within a year. Despite security issues, the island remained popular among divers.

In 2002, the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that Pulau Sipadan and nearby Pulau Ligitan belonged to Malaysia, in a 16-1 majority verdict over Indonesia. A joint state and federal committee set up the following year directed dive operators to vacate the island on Dec 31, 2004 for security reasons, and to further protect its marine diversity.

12 July 2009 (Sunday)

Mah: No illegal logging at Bukit Larut

TAIPING: There is no illegal logging at Bukit Larut as claimed by the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca), said state Environment Committee chairman Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon. It was impossible to o illegally log at Bukit Larut as the hill only had a steep, narrow and winding road, he said after visiting the hill on Friday. Bukit Larut is the country's oldest hill station. The erosion on the hill near the Tourism Ministry's RM4 million Tea Garden project was due to natural causes and was unavoidable, he said. Mah said the developer would repair the slope after completing work on a septic tank. The state government, which will finish building a 67-bed hostel there next month, had spent RM900,000 to strengthen the slope near the project, he said.

Fomca had claimed that it found evidence of illegal logging, construction of a bungalow and a hostel on the hill slope, landslips, silting of rivers and dumping of rubbish, in a study of Bukit Larut in February and March. Mah visited the site with senior state government officials to check on those claims. Asked about a proposed cable car project for the hill station, Mah said the state government was reconsidering the viability of the project and its impact on the environment. "The facilities on the hill can only accommodate 60 visitors at any one time and even with the hostel, only a small number can be accommodated." Former executive councillor Nga Kor Ming had announced that the Pakatan Rakyat state government had agreed in principle to build a RM60 million cable car project at Bukit Larut.

15 July 2009 (Wednesday)

PKFZ inquiry: Ling, Ong to testify before PAC

KUALA LUMPUR: Former transport minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat will testify before the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in a two-day inquiry into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project, starting today. Dr Ling will appear before the PAC at 11am today, while Ong will testify tomorrow at 2pm. The inquiry will be held at Parliament House. "We have also sent a letter asking (former transport minister). Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy to appear but he has yet to give us a reply," PAC deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said when contacted yesterday. Dr Ling was transport minister from 1986 to 2003, and Chan took over the portfolio from July 1, 2003 to March 18 last year. Chan was succeeded by Ong. Both Dr Ling and Ong said that they would give their full cooperation to the bi-partisan parliamentary committee.

Dr Tan said PAC was calling several other individuals, including Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who is also Barisan Nasional Backbenchers' Club chairman and Pulau Lumut Development Cooperative (the company

that sold the land to KDSB) president Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil to testify before the committee. However, he stressed that being summoned by the committee did not imply any guilt or wrongdoing.

PKFZ, a transshipment hub built on a 405-hectare site in Port Klang which also houses warehouses, office blocks and a four-star hotel, became a subject of controversy after it was revealed that the development cost had ballooned from RM2.5 billion to RM4.6 billion. PKA bought the PKFZ land in Pulau Indah from KDSB in 2002 at a cost of RM25 per sq ft. KDSB was later appointed the turnkey developer for the project. The issue is of huge public interest as the PKA obtained a finance ministry soft loan of RM4.632 billion to fund the project.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) audit report, commissioned by PKA and released in late May, had mentioned the involvement of several politicians and stated that there might be some conflict of interest. Last month, PAC called up several individuals, including Port Klang Authority (PKA) chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng, to testify before the committee.

PAC had also met Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Datuk Seri Ahmad Said Hamdan and MACC investigations commissioner Datuk Mohd Shukri Abdul. On June 14, Ong had said that 300 copies of the PwC audit report on the PKFZ would be sent to Parliament the following day for distribution to all members of parliament. However, he said it was up to Parliament to decide when the copies should be distributed to the MPs.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Ronald Kiandee had said that the documents were handed to the parliament secretary and that the documents -- for use by the PAC for its investigations - would be given to the House only after PAC had completed its investigation.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said a full report on the PKFZ scandal would be ready in three months and tabled in Parliament at its sitting in October. Meanwhile, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung, who served as PKA chairman from 2007-2008, said he had not received any notice for him to appear to testify before the committee. He also denied any conflict of interest, saying that he accepted the job as chairman of PKA and described it as "national duty". – Bernama.

15 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Water projects worth RM8b by end-2010

KUALA KLANG: A total of 219 national water supply projects worth RM8 billion are expected to be completed by the end of the Ninth Malaysia Plan. Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said 40 per cent of the projects were nearly completed. However, he said, some were in the stages of implementation and due for

completion only by the end of next year. He said all outstanding projects by the end of next year would be included in the 10th Malaysia Plan, which begins in 2011.

"The government estimates that water consumption in the country would increase to 18,000 million litres a day by 2020. So, the water supply projects need to be ongoing to meet the future demand," said Chin after visiting the Triang Water Supply Scheme project site here yesterday. He said the most critical water project was the plan to channel untreated water supply from Pahang to Hulu Langat in Selangor, costing RM1.3 billion. 'If the project is not implemented by 2014, a water crisis may happen in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya."

Chin said once the project was completed, it could supply water from Karak, Pahang to Hulu Langat, Selangor and meet the water consumption needs in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya until 2025. The Triang Water Supply Scheme, worth RM398 million, would channel water with a capacity of 534 million litres a day through a tunnel in Jelevu to Sungai Terip in Seremban.

16 July 2009 (Thursday)

Dr Ling relates role in Port Klang Free Zone project

KUALA LUMPUR: Former transport minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik said he signed the government's first letter of support for the Port Klang Free Zone project after he was advised to do so by the ministry's secretary-general and legal adviser. He signed the letter on May 23, 2003 - his last day as transport minister. However, Dr Ling told Parliament's Public Accounts Committee yesterday that the letter of support was not a letter of guarantee and it did not have any financial implications for the government. He was interviewed by members of the PAC for nearly two hours at its office in Parliament.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said Dr Ling signed the first of four letters of support, and the cabinet in July 2007 decided on a RM4.6 billion bailout of PKFZ. The other three letters were signed by Dr Ling's successor Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy on April 23, 2004, Dec 8, 2005 and May 23, 2006. Azmi said Dr Ling was cooperative and related his role in the project. "We posed a few questions regarding the decisions he made. He answered all except for some where he could not remember as it happened some years ago," Azmi said.

He said the PAC questioned Dr Ling on the early years of the project, including land acquisition for the project. "He gave his version of the land acquisition. However, we did not ask him about the implementation work as he had left office by then," he said.

"The interview with him is part of our effort to summon all related parties, including all former ministers, as well as current Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat. Ong will

also appear before the committee today." He said the interview with Chan had been scheduled for next week.

Azmi said members of the committee would try to determine how the premium for the land was reached and also the reason why the PKFZ was built at one go and not in phases. The PKFZ has been built at a huge cost. But only 14 per cent of it can be rented out, thus affecting the viability of the project. He said the PAC wanted to have its report on the project ready to be tabled at the October sitting of the Dewan Rakyat.

21 July 2009 (Tuesday)

Dam project in Penang to go on

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Mengkuang Dam expansion project costing RM1.2 billion will be reinstated under the Ninth Malaysia Plan. Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said the project would begin before the end of the year, once the tender and documentation processes were finalised. "The capacity of the dam upon completion will be increased from the current 23 million cubic metres to 78 million cubic metres, to meet the increasing water demand in the state," he said after visiting the dam yesterday.

The project, which will begin in October, is expected to be completed by 2013 and the water capacity will meet the state's demands until 2020. "The Federal Government decided to reinstate the project after seeing the demand and cooperation from the Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd.

"The first phase of the project will cover the basic work to widen the dam and increase its height. "The second phase will involve the construction of the 13km-long dual-flow steel pipe between the dam and the Sungai Dua water treatment plant." He said the Sungai Dua plant would pump raw water from Sungai Muda to be stored at Mengkuang Dam during the rainy season between April and December.

Chin added that parallel pipes would be used to pump raw water from the dam to the plant during the drought season between January and March when there would be low water supply in Sungai Muda. He added that a 9km-long road would be built around the dam for the public to jog and enjoy recreational activities. The Federal Government shelved the expansion project last year, along with the RM1.5 billion Penang Outer Ring Road and the RM2 billion Penang monorail project.

22 July 2009 (Wednesday)

Federal monitoring of projects over RM50m

By R. Sittamparam

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Works Department last week ordered shut a third sporting facility in Terengganu. This has also prompted the Works Ministry to issue an order that all state government projects costing more than RM50 million be overseen by the federal PWD, with immediate effect. This is to prevent building flaws, such as those affecting the three sports facilities in Terengganu. PWD director-general Da-tuk Seri Dr Judin Abdul Karim said the latest closure was that of an indoor stadium in Gong Badak, not far from the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium. "Some things at the indoor stadium were not in order. So we had to close it last week." Earlier this month, the ministry closed a RM18-million aquatic centre in Batu Burok due to building flaws. In June, it closed the RM228-million Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium after part of its roof collapsed.

Judin said although problems had cropped up at the building stages of the aquatic centre, which delayed the project by about five months, the federal PWD was not notified. "The state PWDs should come to us if they encounter problems with their projects." The state-of-the-art centre was completed last May, in time for the Malaysia Games. The centre has since been opened to the public. "Our investigations showed problems with the rusting iron structures on the roof, fencing, stairways, electrical fittings and lights, as well as leaks in the wall and deck of the diving pool, were due to the use of unsuitable building materials. "It appears the problems were caused by weaknesses in the design, poor quality of construction, use of unsuitable building materials and absence of proper maintenance," said Judin.

PWD has set up two committees to monitor the repair works by contractor Pakatan Nadiwangsa Sdn Bhd and to investigate if there is any negligence on the part of state PWD officers, contractors or others involved, he added. "The committee has three months to complete its probe."

23 July 2009 (Thursday)

MACC: Do not award projects to relatives

KUANTAN: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday reminded civil servants that they could be charged with corruption if they awarded projects to their relatives whether related by blood or through marriage. "Many are still unaware that the term 'relatives' has been expanded under the MACC Act 2009. "It now includes in-laws and close relatives -- nephews, nieces, uncles, aunts and cousins," MACC deputy chief commissioner

(prevention) Datuk Zakaria Jaffar said at a ceremony to lay down the foundation for the state MACC headquarters in Bandar Indera Mahkota here.

Zakaria said the commission would not accept any excuse from those caught awarding projects to their relatives. "If we can prove that the recipient is his or her relative, we will prosecute the public servant involved." He also explained that the term "public bodies" under the Act also includes any organisations, sport associations, co-operatives and unions registered under the law.

Zakaria urged the heads of public agency to co-operate with the MACC in its war against corruption. "Without your support, MACC can never effectively fight corruption." On the RM20 million Pahang MACC headquarters, Zakaria said it would consist of a five-storey office complex, a multipurpose hall and a shooting range. He said on the project which began in December last year is scheduled for completion in May next year.

24 July 2009 (Friday)

MCA ministers and deputy ministers back Ong

KUALA LUMPUR: MCA ministers and deputy ministers yesterday came out in force in support of their president, Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat, who is also the transport minister, in his handling of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue. The three ministers and seven deputy ministers, in a joint statement, said yesterday: "This is an appropriate time for us to show our support for the leadership of Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat as our president. "We share his stand that the interest of the people must be addressed, as the government and the public await for an acceptable solution to the PKFZ saga."

The ministers were Datuk Seri Kong Cho Ha (housing and local government), Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai (health) and Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen (tourism). The deputy ministers were Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong (education), Datuk Dr Hou Kok Chung (higher education), Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun (women, family and community development), Wee Jeck Seng (youth and sports), Datuk Chor Chee Heung (finance), Datuk Lee Chee Leong (foreign affairs) and Senator Heng Seai Kie (information communications and culture).

They also supported Ong's handling of party issues and concerns. They said those who created obstacles, made threats, suppressed the truth and misled the public should be condemned in the strongest terms possible. "The MCA is now on a difficult journey to redeem itself and to win back the support of the Chinese community, in particular, and all Malaysians, in general. "We need a leader who has the credibility and moral standing to make the MCA a modern, reconfigured and cohesive party that is able to support and strengthen Barisan Nasional. "Ong is our clear choice to perform such a task." Ong, they said, had not only answered the call for change but had been leading reforms within the party in its effort to serve members and Malaysians. -- Bernama

24 July 2009 (Friday)

Sipadan even more popular

By Joniston Bangkuainews@nst.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: Pulau Sipadan may not have made it to the list of 28 finalists vying to be the world's New 7 Wonders of Nature, but its participation in the online campaign has made the island even more popular. State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun said the fact that Sipadan was voted into the top four in the islands category was in itself a global recognition of its unique features.

"Sipadan may have failed to advance to the final round of the competition, but in the process, Sabah, in particular, and Malaysia, in general, have become more well known to the rest of the world. In a way, I consider it a win for Sabah and Malaysia," he told the New Straits Times. He said Sipadan "lost" to worthy contenders, each unique in its own way, and it was noteworthy that the finalists were chosen by experts and not based on the results of the global voting. "We accept the judges' decision. Sipadan is a unique creation of God, but God also created natural wonders in other parts of the world."

A panel of experts led by former United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation director-general Prof Dr Federico Mayor had sat for close to two weeks to decide which sites would go into the last round. Sipadan, an oceanic island famous for its coral gardens, barracudas, trevally, turtles and myriad other marine life, was thrust into the global limelight recently when it won a spot in the campaign's top 77 list from a field of 261 nominees.

Islands which did not make the cut were Christmas Island, Cocos Island in Costa Rica and Nicaragua's Ometepe Island. Voting stopped on July 7 to allow experts to decide which sites would be shortlisted. The New 7 Wonders of Nature will be revealed in 2011. There's hope yet that Sipadan may advance into the final should any of the 28 finalists be disqualified. It remains on the reserve list along with 40 other sites at www.new7wonders.com.