

17 August 2009 (Monday)

Socso hauls up 43 employers

ALOR STAR: The Social Security Organisation has issued RM248,000 in compounds fines to 43 employers in the state between January and June this year. State Socso director Ismail Abi Hashim said the compound fines were levied after the companies failed to make their contributions on time. Besides issuing the compound notices, a total of RM851,000 in arrears of Socso contributions were recovered from the errant companies. "We will not tolerate companies which fail to carry out their responsibility by defaulting in their contributions," Ismail said at a reward handing over ceremony.

Present was Bakar Bata state assemblyman and State Umno liaison committee deputy chairman Datuk Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah Ismail said the organisation had conducted checks on 2,519 employers within the same period and would complete its inspection on 29,548 companies in the state soon. He added there are 653,385 employees registered with Socso in Kedah. Earlier, during the ceremony, Ahmad handed over a total of RM300,000 of compensation to 28 recipients.

17 August 2009 (Monday)

MCA denies there was a RM10 million 'donation' from Tiong

Eileen Ng

KUALA LUMPUR: MCA said no one, including Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, had donated or given RM10 million to the party since the end of last year. However, Wanita MCA chief Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun admitted that she had received a RM30,000 donation from Tiong on behalf of a senior citizens' association. Treasurer-general Tan Sri Tee Hock Seng said the party did not need large donations since it was financially stable. "Ever since I was appointed as treasurer in November last year, we did not receive any money from outsiders," he said at a press conference after a special briefing for MCA members at the party headquarters yesterday.

Article 137 of the party's constitution states that MCA's income can be derived from subscriptions, donations, or other sources approved by its central committee. However, it is silent on the amount and the mode of donation. Last Wednesday, Tiong alleged that he had given RM10 million in three instalments for MCA's divisional activities last year. MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat had denied the allegation and gave seven days, from Thursday, for Tiong to apologise and retract his statement.

Tiong, who is also the BN Backbenchers Club chairman and Bintulu MP, then told Ong to sue, adding that he was not going to withdraw his statement. Tee said there was no proof that Tiong had given RM10 million to MCA, as the yearly audit conducted by the party did not state it received such an amount. Chew said she received RM30,000 from Tiong as part of a donation to the Selangor and Federal Territory Senior Citizens Association to build a RM3 million hall in Kelana Jaya, Selangor.

She said she was approached by the association in 2004 to help them raise funds for the project. She raised RM1.68 million. "In 2006, Tiong agreed to donate RM30,000. Initially, he gave RM20,000. A year later, I reminded him that he had yet to give the remaining RM10,000, which he did then. "If he is willing to donate, why not?" she queried, while showing the receipts. Tiong, when contacted, refused to confirm the amount of money given to Chew. He only said that over the years, he had given out money to various non-governmental organisations, associations and individuals. "I don't even demand receipts out of goodwill. I just want to help people and whenever I can help, I will do it."

17 August 2009 (Monday)

Lee's appointment as chairman challenged

By Azura Abas

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, the contractor for the controversial Port Klang Free Zone, is challenging the legitimacy of Datuk Lee Hwa Beng's appointment as chairman of the Port Klang Authority. And it has given the Transport Ministry until 4.30pm today to produce Lee's appointment letter from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or for the the king's office to confirm that he is occupying the post legitimately. It wants the letter to be published in the media or posted on the ministry's official website.

KDSB deputy chief executive officer Datuk Faisal Abdullah, who issued the challenge yesterday, said ever since PKA began its public spat over the PKFZ, the company had consulted its lawyers whether to deal with Lee or not. "Our lawyers have advised that the minister of transport has no statutory power or prerogative to extend the term of office of the chairmanship of PKA under the Port Authorities Act 1963. Lee is an usurper of a statutory office," he said at a press conference.

Faisal said KDSB had gathered from the blog of the Minister of Transport Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat that he personally decided to extend Lee's tenure as chairman when it expired on March 31 this year. "According to our lawyers, the statutory power or prerogative to appoint a person to act as chairman of PKA is vested with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as provided for under Section 2(4) of the act, not the minister of transport.

"The minister of transport is only empowered to appoint the general manager and not less than five but not more than nine members of the Port Authority. "Is the minister statutorily empowered to do so? If not, is it not an abuse of a ministerial position? If so, is not Lee assisting the minister in the abuse of powers?"

Faisal said Lee had committed PKA to a number of actions after March 31 that had damaged the image of KDSB and the government. Faisal said if the ministry failed to produce Lee's appointment letter, he would let his legal team decide on the next course of action. He again raised the company's request for a copy of the special task force report on the PKFZ and said that KDSB's lawyers had officially sent a letter of demand for it.

Faisal said the brouhaha over the PKFZ was a contractual dispute which was quite common in any business and could be settled in court. But what was happening now had pushed KDSB to the wall, he said. "We are constitutionally right to defend ourselves."

18 August 2009 (Tuesday)

10,000 doctor vacancies, only half filled

KUALA LUMPUR: Government hospitals and clinics are facing a severe manpower shortage with over 10,000 vacancies for doctors. By June only half of the jobs for government doctors were filled, forcing the Health Ministry to hire foreign doctors. More than 1,100 dentists, 1,044 pharmacists and 5,634 staff nurses are also needed in the public service. Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the government was looking at ways to attract medical personnel by improving the incentives. And ties with the private sector should also be improved to fill the gap, he said.

"Government hospitals are under tremendous pressure. We have prepared a master plan to work with the private sector." Liow said the plan was to tie up public and private hospitals and clinics and exchange data through online networking. Now, a lot of time was wasted because patient data was not available from one clinic to another, so if someone visited more than one clinic each one had to start from scratch, he said.

"If everything is online and connected, then the exchange of information and consultation would be faster and more efficient," he said after the opening ceremony of the Asia Healthcare 2009 conference yesterday.

18 August 2009 (Tuesday)

Action against parties which conspired to defraud PKA

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) will take action, including legal proceedings, against parties allegedly conspiring to defraud the authority in relation to the Port Klang Free Trade Zone (PKFZ) issue. "The PKA Board will make relevant announcements as and when action is taken," its chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said in a statement posted today on PKFZ's website. He said board members deliberated at length the recommendations made by the special task force in relation to possible fraud, negligence, wrongdoings and irregularities, as well the non enforceability of certain agreements. "The board also discussed the issues raised by the task force in relation to breaches of fiduciary duty by certain individuals as well as conspiring to defraud PKA," Lee said.

Members of the task force explained to PKA members the rationale behind their findings, which included notices of payments which were believed to be false, erroneous or defective. "It also included instances of wrongdoings carried out by certain parties which were detriment to PKA," Lee added.

He also briefed members on his status as chairman of PKA, his duties and responsibilities and that due process was always followed. "We regret attempts to thwart the board's efforts to take legal action and other appropriate proceedings against parties concerned, in the best interest of PKA and the government," he added.

19 August 2009 (Wednesday)

Police query PKA chairman and staff

PORT KLANG: Police have recorded statements from Port Klang Authority chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng and several of its officers over his report alleging excessive claims by two parties in connection with the Port Klang Free Zone last week. Lee lodged the report at the Klang police station on Aug 11 against Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB), the turnkey contractor of the PKFZ, and BTA Architects over alleged billing discrepancies ranging between RM500 million and RM1 billion. He said several officers from the Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Division have been visiting the PKA office since Friday to take statements in connection with the report.

Lee was interviewed for six hours on Friday and Monday. He, however refused to reveal what was asked during the interview. "I am very happy that they came quickly after the report was lodged. From Monday afternoon and today (yesterday) they have interviewed several officers. "I have instructed all PKA staff to give their full cooperation to the officers." Lee said when a PKA board meeting to discuss the special task force report on the controversial PKFZ adjourned for lunch yesterday. He said the board would decide on the report when it had finished reviewing it. "The board will make a definite decision after its members have finished reviewing the report," he said.

Lee said the board had also not decided whether or when to lodge a report to the MACC. Asked why KDSB was not called by the task force during the investigation, he said the task force members had sent letters to KDSB but did not receive a reply. He said PKA could not give KDSB a copy of the report as it was confidential and could not be released to anybody except the board members.

The billing discrepancies were uncovered by a special task force comprising lawyers, accountants, quantity surveyors and building cost consultants set up by the Transport Ministry two months ago following the audit report on the PKFZ by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The 4.5ha PKFZ initially cost m RM1.8 billion. The audit report released on May 28 showed that the cost of the project may spiral to RM12.45 billion.

19 August 2009 (Wednesday)

MCA rallies behind Ong

By Syed Umar Ariff

JOHOR BARU: MCA secretary-general Datuk Wong Foon Meng said the party has the right to defend itself against the allegation that Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing gave RM10 million to the party. "MCA had no intention to interfere with the issue. But later we decided to defend ourselves after the accusations," he said yesterday after the party's central committee council meeting here. Tiong, who is also Bintulu member of parliament, had told MCA on Monday "to mind its own business" following his allegation that he had given RM10 million in three instalments for the party's divisional activities last year. He had said he gave the money to a person and not to the party.

Wong said MCA decided to back its president after the party was linked to the allegation. Ong and Tiong are in a highly-publicised dispute arising from the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) scandal. KDSB is the turnkey contractor for PKFZ. The PKFZ special task force found that KDSB may have made between RM500 million and RM1 billion in excessive claims. Wong said the central committee also stood behind Ong in his efforts to investigate the PKFZ scandal. "We are also with the president in his decision to lodge a police report against Tiong's accusations."

Yesterday, Ong announced two new members of the central committee council -- MCA Youth secretary-general Datuk Chai Kim Sen and Wanita MCA secretary-general Heng Seai Kie. Ong said MCA was geared up to help Barisan Nasional's campaign in the Permatang Pasir by-election. On another matter, Ong said MCA welcomed Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's suggestion to phase out filling in race in government forms. "We are fully supportive of the suggestion. (Such a matter) is very dear to our hearts for a very long time. This is consonant with the 1Malaysia concept."

21 August 2009 (Friday)

'PKFZ bond issue a factor in cost increase'

IPOH: Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said simultaneous development of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) and bond issuance to finance the project were among the reasons why its cost had ballooned from RM2.5 billion to RM4.6 billion. He said the National Audit Department had made several observations with regard to the PKFZ development several years ago but it was not given due attention by the Port Klang Port Authority (PKA). "We observed that to set up the PKFZ, it needed a huge investment or expenditure. "The issue here is whether PKA had the capacity to implement it.



Matter should have been discussed with federal agencies, says Auditor- General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang.

"So this matter should have been discussed with federal agencies like the Finance Ministry and Economic Planning Unit," he told reporters at the handover ceremony of the NAD Perak branch building in Meru Raya here yesterday. He said PKA, as a statutory body, should not evade complying with all regulations and procedures set out by the government in developing PKFZ. "We need to know our responsibility, our powers have limits and when we make a commitment, we must be aware of the risks if it involves a big amount of public money," he said when asked what was the lesson that could be learnt from the PKFZ controversy.

PKFZ is a transshipment hub built on a 405-hectare site in Pulau Indah, Port Klang, housing among others, warehouses, building blocks and a four-star hotel. PKA had bought the land from Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd at RM25 per sq ft and later appointed the company to develop it. The issue received public attention since PKA had obtained a soft loan of RM4.632 billion from the Finance Ministry for the project. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat had told the Dewan Rakyat in June that the whole cost of PKFZ project could reach RM12.453 billion by 2051 if no intervention and efforts were made to promote it.

21 August 2009 (Friday)

Azmi: We back any action taken

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee supports any action taken by the Port Klang Authority in addressing the current Port Klang Free Zone controversy, including going to court, said its chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid. He said this yesterday after interviewing current PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng at parliament house.

Lee was invited by the PAC to brief it on the current status of the PKFZ and what was being done by the PKA to address some of its problems. "We are not investigating him but want to know what the PKA has done to address the problem," Azmi said.

He said during the two-hour interview with Lee, they had raised several matters in relation to the project. One area which the PAC found strange was in relation to the issue of bonds to raise funds for the PKFZ project.

Azmi said the bond was issued by Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, which is a private company that has entered a contract with the government to develop the project. He said the bond should ideally be issued by government agencies unlike the KDSB bond which was recommended by the government through the four letters of support issued by former transport ministers, which some parties argued that these letters were government guarantees.