

25 March 2009 (Wednesday)

e-Payment system for home loans

PUTRAJAYA: Civil servants can now service their home loans with even more ease and convenience, thanks to an e-Payment system launched by the government.

With the new online service by the Loans Division of the Treasury Department, borrowers can pay off their loans through CIMB Clicks and Maybank2u, the web portals of the two banks, and debit automatically from their savings or current account. The division will also be able to pay off the developers or contractors online without issuing cheques to them.

"We are also going to work with the director of the Land and Mines Office for an e-Cagaran (e-Surety) service to speed up payment and the issuance of mortgage. "With this, developers won't even have to wait for the division to receive the grant first, and borrowers can avoid late penalties by the developers," said Treasury secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Wan Abdul Aziz Wan Abdullah.

26 March 2009 (Thursday)

Millions in timber stolen, says Kedah MB



Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak Kedah menteri besar

ALOR STAR: Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak accused crooked businessmen with strong political links of stealing millions of ringgit in timber from several parts of the state.

He said the latest such case to be uncovered was in Bukit Kachi in the Kubang Pasu district. "We have also uncovered similar activities in the Padang Terap district," he said after chairing the weekly state executive council meeting here yesterday. Without giving details, Azizan said some of them had also sold state land in several districts. Others have been stealing and selling sand belonging to the state, he said.

The latest incident, he said, was the seizure of a lorry-load of black sand, valued at RM340,000, near Kuala Kedah on Tuesday night by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency. The black sand, used on walls and floorings of luxury homes and offices to give them a glossy look, was being towed on a barge from Langkawi.

"The lorry did not have a permit to transport the material and we are now looking for its owner, the buyer and seller of the sand. "These are some blatant examples of how some businessmen, many of them with political connections, have been stealing from the state."

Azizan, who was also upset with study loan defaulters, said they owed the state Scholarship Board RM17 million. He said many of them were now holding high posts in both the public and private sector.

"We are now carrying out an inventory of all government properties, permits issued by the various departments and study loans to check on errant activities. "We will haul them to court to get back the people's money. We will, however, be lenient if they own up to their mistakes."

31 March 2009 (Tuesday)

Restructuring water service

By : Hamidah Atan

Federal government will not discriminate against opposition-ruled Selangor, says Minister.

PUTRAJAYA: The Federal Government will not discriminate against the opposition-ruled Selangor government in restructuring its water service. Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor said the restructuring model had been well received by the Negri Sembilan and Malacca state governments.

"It must be emphasised that the Selangor restructuring model is the same one used to restructure the Johor water service, which was implemented successfully. "It must also be emphasised that the Federal Government will not adopt an approach that is discriminatory in nature against Selangor, even though it is under the administration of the opposition."

The ministry had produced booklets to explain to the public the restructuring of the Selangor water service. Shaziman said the Federal Government would assist Selangor in the restructuring process but with conditions. Water company Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Syabas), owned by the state government through a 30 per cent equity ownership, is licensed under the 2006 Water Service Industry Act (Act 655).

Three concession water treatment companies -- Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd (PNSB), Konsortium Abass Sdn Bhd (Abass) and Syarikat Pengeluaran Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Splash) -- are allowed to continue their operations until their concessionary period expire. "For Syabas, the proposed service licence allows them to implement water service operations and maintenance of assets.

This licence needs to be renewed every three year, depending on the level of compliance," Shaziman said.

A condition was that there should not be any hike in water tariff this year. He said the ministry's primary concern was to ensure a continuous supply of water and keeping the tariffs low. Any more delays in water restructuring in Selangor would result in cash flow problems and financial defaults among the concessionaires, which would eventually put the state's water supply at risk, he said.

The ministry had allowed the Selangor government deadline extensions to buy over the water companies on its own four times between Sept 19 last year and Feb 14. The state eventually offered to pay RM5.7 billion for all the water assets but the companies rejected it, mainly because the offer was too low.

1 April 2009 (Wednesday)

Move to speed up citizenship approval

IPOH: The Home Ministry will clear the backlog of about 17,000 applications for citizenship and issue approval letters by June this year, says Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

"We received about 30,000 applications and it was gradually reduced after a task force was set up on Nov 1 last year to handle it," Syed Hamid said after presenting letters of approval to 168 applicants of Perak, Perlis, Penang, Kedah and Selangor here yesterday.

The Registration Department receives about 5,000 applications every month. "Granting citizenship is selective and we have to go through the applications step by step, including vetting by the police." Syed Hamid said six presentations of approval letters had been held so far, four last year and two this year. "We will try to present the letters once a month."

1 April 2009 (Wednesday)

Subsidised healthcare to continue

SEREMBAN: The government will continue to provide subsidised health services for all despite escalating costs, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The prime minister said public sector healthcare financing had been spiralling over the past decade since it breached the billion ringgit mark in 1983. "Government healthcare allocations have continued to increase, reaching RM11 billion last year. However, we will continue to provide subsidised health services and have allocated RM13.7 billion this year to enhance

healthcare facilities." He said the allocation would be used to purchase new equipment, increase the supply of medicine and improve human resources. Additionally, he said investments would also be made to intensify research and enforcement activities, as well as build more hospitals, clinics and quarters.

Abdullah said this at the ground-breaking for the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Medical City in Bandar Enstek near here. Built at a cost of RM4.7 billion, the IIUM Medical City is set to become the region's prime education centre in medicine and the leading regional referral centre in Malaysia. It will also provide a platform for research and development for local and international clinical specialists. Developed by Medicalcity Corporation (M) Sdn Bhd, the project is a joint venture between TH Properties Sdn Bhd and ISR Capital Berhad. Abdullah said that while the government placed great emphasis on bringing quality healthcare to all Malaysians, it felt that more could be done to develop the industry.

"We have taken big strides in healthcare over the past decade and we need to focus on ways we can leverage on this progress. "We are already positioned on the regional healthcare map given the high quality world-class facilities and the highly trained and qualified healthcare workforce we have.

"With the right investments and effective policy thrusts, we can aspire to take our place as a leading centre of medical excellence," he said, adding that private medical service providers also had an important role in complementing and supplementing the national healthcare system. He said declining levels of health caused the country to incur various direct and indirect costs and the missed opportunities and untapped potential were a hindrance to economic growth.

"Lost productive working hours are a serious cost to industries, from agriculture to manufacturing to services. "Ill children and students perform less well, drop out of school and risk being excluded from economic opportunities later in life. "Above all, permanent ill health, like poverty and other similar extreme conditions, effectively erodes fundamental human rights and breaks down human dignity."

He said among the key factors behind sustained economic growth in the most successful developing countries was the rising standard of healthcare. Improvements in healthcare, he said, often resulted in increases in GDP per capita and higher rates of growth. "The effects of better health will directly enable us to help those least able to help themselves as it will have the greatest impact for the poorest and most vulnerable."

Meanwhile, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan thanked the prime minister for his contributions and the development he had brought to Negri Sembilan. "Since Abdullah became prime minister, we have benefited in various aspects,

3 April 2009 (Friday)

No more delays, contractors warned



Datuk Seri Musa Aman warned contractors to complete govt projects

SANDAKAN: Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman yesterday told contractors to complete government projects within the stipulated time or risk being blacklisted.

He said contractors who delayed projects or compromised on quality of work could be prevented from participating in the tender process in future projects. "We will take action against contractors who do not complete projects on time and according to the right specifications," he told reporters after inspecting the progress of the Taman Cahaya Blind Centre here.

He said the government went all out to help Bumiputera contractors by giving them the opportunity to participate in government projects. "When given the opportunity, complete the projects on time. Don't delay and compromise on quality. I am disappointed with those who are not serious and committed in doing their job right."

Musa said there were many projects under the 9th Malaysia Plan stimulus package for the country, including Sabah. "These projects must be implemented accordingly so that the people will benefit. The delivery system must be continuously improved. "We are going to be selective and careful and choose contractors who have good track records. They must be efficient and dedicated." Musa inspected the progress of various projects throughout Sandakan, including the construction of mosques in several villages and a community hall in Kg Padas.

3 April 2009 (Friday)

RM11.7m on illegals

THE government spent RM11.7 million last year to house and feed illegals at detention centres nationwide, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said. It also spent RM9.8 million on deporting illegals to their country of origin.

He added that the government spent RM30 a day to house and feed one illegal. Replying to a question by Senator Datuk Saripah Aminah Syed Mohamed, he said this did not include medical treatment. He said several steps had been taken to ensure that detained illegals did not stay too long in the country by establishing specific courts to try them.

Chor said close cooperation with foreign countries also allowed travel documents for illegals to be issued quickly besides allowing them to leave voluntarily after paying the fines. "These measures have been taken to prevent overcrowding, increasing costs and possible outbreak of fights and riots," he said, adding that Immigration Department figures showed between 2007 and last year, 14,338 operations were conducted nationwide to flush out and detain illegals.

3 April 2009 (Friday)

Abdullah's message to civil servants

PUTRAJAYA: On his last day in office, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had only one message for civil servants -- remain committed to your work and take firm action to spur the public sector forward.

The outgoing prime minister said his only hope was to see civil servants providing the best service to the people and the country. Abdullah yesterday hosted a farewell lunch for about 130 staff members of the Prime Minister's Office and Defence Ministry at the prime minister's official residence, Seri Perdana.

Present were his wife Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah and Islamic adviser to the prime minister, Datuk Abdullah Md Zin. "It is my fervent hope that while young people continue to work diligently and explore new things, those who are retiring will contribute their vast experience and expertise."

He expressed his gratitude to the staff and officers and wished them luck. "Many thanks for your services," said a cheerful Abdullah who had just returned from Istana Negara where he submitted his resignation. If there are mistakes or wrongdoing on my part, my wife and the late (Datin Seri) Endon (Mahmood), forgive us. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the support given to us."

Later in Kuala Lumpur, Abdullah chaired his last Armed Forces Council meeting before bidding farewell to officers and staff of the Defence Ministry. He inspected a guard-of-honour comprising three officers and 103 other ranks from the navy, the air force and the army which was mounted by the First Battalion, Royal Malay Regiment, led by Maj Norhisyam Kamar.

Abdullah was given a rousing send-off in a ceremonial jeep pulled by soldiers. Present were ministry secretary-general Datuk Abu Bakar Abdullah, Armed Forces chief Gen Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Zainal and the tri-services chiefs. Abdullah took over as defence minister on Sept 17 last year.

8 April 2009 (Wednesday)

IJN not a burden to the government

By B. Suresh Ram

THE aborted privatisation of the National Heart Institute (IJN) had not burdened the government, senators were told.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Kong Cho Ha said the IJN had from the beginning operated as a public sector company. In reply to a question from Senator Datuk Ridzuan Abd Hamid, he said IJN operations were enhanced from year to year to ensure that its services were of the highest standards. Kong said IJN was expanding its capacity of 274 beds to 438, and increasing the number of treatment and consultation rooms as well as operating theatres and parking spaces because the numbers seeking treatment at IJN were increasing. "These facilities are expected to be completed by early next year," Kong said.

He also said the medical expenses of 124,632 of the 175,667 who sought treatment at IJN last year were borne by the government. In 2007, IJN had 161,000 patients, of whom 112,000 comprised government servants, pensioners and those subsidised by the government. To Ridzuan's claim that members of parliament and state assemblies had to pay for treatment at IJN, Kong said they could get free treatment if they submitted a referral letter from a government hospital and a parliament identification card. State assemblymen had to submit a guarantee letter from their state governments, while a minister or deputy minister had to submit a guarantee letter, he added.

8 April 2009 (Wednesday)

Trimmer Cabinet: 6 ministries to become 3

By : Hamidah Atan and Farrah Naz Karim

PUTRAJAYA: At least three ministries will "disappear", while parliamentary secretaries will make a comeback when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak names his cabinet.

Najib is said to have received consent from the palace to announce his line-up. He is expected to do so as soon as he finishes meeting leaders of Barisan Nasional component party leaders today or tomorrow. It is understood that the merger of six ministries into three is to avoid overlapping of duties and jurisdictions, to make Najib's administration smaller but more effective.

The Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry is expected to be merged with the Tourism Ministry; Higher Education Ministry with the Education Ministry; and, Plantation, Industries and Commodities Ministry with the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry.

The fewer ministers will, however, be getting extra help, as parliamentary secretaries are set to be appointed. Former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi did away with the posts when he had a larger cabinet. At least one minister who lost in his bid for a post in Umno recently is likely to be retained. Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim is likely to continue to lead Wisma Putra although he lost in his bid for a vice-president's post. Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Mansor is also likely to remain in his post.

The Finance Ministry, now headed by Najib, is likely to be strengthened with Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, an economist, moving from the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry. Both Najib and Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah are expected to remain in the ministry. Several people are being lined up to be appointed senators, to become full ministers.

Najib is, however, keeping the list of names close to his chest. "There is no way you will know it until he makes the official announcement. Until then, people can make all sorts of guesses and speculation," said an aide to the prime minister.

"But the line-up, on the whole, will reflect the prime minister's 1Malaysia concept, that is unity and progress in diversity."

The aide said, however, that despite the short time since his appointment as prime minister, Najib had sought the views and opinions of people from all levels of society, including leaders, academicians, businessmen and community leaders on who should be in his line-up. This was to ensure that the people would be well represented and taken care of. It is also said that ideas and input from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission were also being sought.

Over the past few days, several Barisan Nasional component party leaders met Najib over the cabinet appointments. Among them was MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat. Sabah and Sarawak BN leaders also made their representations.