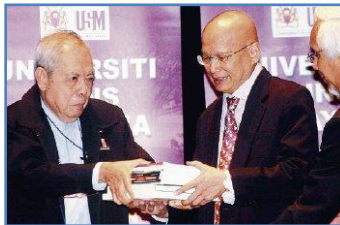


8 January 2009 (Thursday)

'Let academicians focus on research'



Prof Datuk Dr Khalid Kadir (centre) receiving books as a token of appreciation handed over by from USM board of directors chairman Tan Sri Datuk Ani Arope. Khalid presented the inaugural lecture in the Merdeka Award Lecture Series. — NST picture by Fariz Iswadi Ismail.

GEORGE TOWN: Academicians should not be bogged down with administrative work. They should be allowed to concentrate on research.

The joint recipient of the 2008 Merdeka Award for health, science and technology, Prof Datuk Dr Khalid Kadir, said other people should be hired to do the administrative tasks. "Universities should try to separate the two as administrative work will interfere with their development as academicians," he said at a question and answer session after his lecture at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) yesterday. His lecture, "Hormones, Stress and Metabolism: A 30-year Journey" was the first in the Merdeka Award lecture series hosted by USM and jointly organised by Universiti Teknologi Petronas and Merdeka Award. Khalid was responding to a question from USM vice-chancellor Tan Sri Prof Dzulkifli Abdul Razak on how universities should be managed.

Khalid also said that young people should not be made heads of department. He urged that these posts be given to the veterans. "These young people should be identified and then allowed to develop in their research fields," he said, adding that universities must be research-based. He said that promotion of academicians must be based on research undertaken, and universities should not merely promote department heads. Also present at the inaugural lecture were USM board of directors chairman Tan Sri Ani Arope, Universiti Teknologi Petronas rector Datuk Dr Zainal Abidin Kassim and Merdeka Award executive director Datuk Khalid Mohd.

8 January 2009 (Thursday)

Federal aid needed to stop developers who flout rules



Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob says the root cause of this problem is greed as developers always want to make more profits.

KUANTAN: Pahang wants the Federal Government to help it take action against developers who violate rules on hillside development.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the state government and the local authorities needed more funds to overcome the problems, particularly in Cameron Highlands and Bukit Tinggi. The New Straits Times yesterday highlighted the lack of enforcement and low penalty, which encouraged developers to flout rules. In one case in Kampung Raja, Cameron Highlands, the landowner was only slapped with a fine of less than RM500 for breaking almost every rule on highlands development. Although his permit was also revoked, the landowner can make a fresh application for the same permit and continue the land-clearing activities. "The root cause of this problem is greed as the developers will always want to make more profits," Adnan said.

The menteri besar expressed concern over development in Bukit Tinggi where landowners build their houses on dangerous slopes. "We have to look into this problem," he said, adding that the state government could only advise landowners to be careful about building on dangerous slopes. Adnan also denied a Malay tabloid's report that the state government would continue developing projects on hillsides. He alleged the newspaper editor had been bought over by a politician who wanted to pit him against Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who had announced that permits for hillside projects would not be approved, after the landslide in Bukit Antarabangsa.

9 January 2009 (Friday)

Syndicate selling fake licences

SEREMBAN: The Road Transport Department here has uncovered a syndicate based in the Klang Valley which has been selling fake driving licences, claiming they were original and issued with the knowledge of the state RTD director.

The syndicate allegedly charged RM1,000 for each licence and the purchaser does not have to take any test required by the RTD. To further convince buyers, the syndicate claimed that the licences were issued with the knowledge of the state RTD director, and that the purchaser's name would also be listed in the RTD database.

The syndicate members claimed to be "close friends" of the director. However, their operations came to light when a woman became suspicious of her son's driving licence, which was obtained without having to go through any driving or written tests. The woman then contacted the state RTD to seek a clarification.

State RTD director Mohd Kamal Saad said he received a call from the woman last week, telling him what transpired and how her son got the fake licence. "The woman told me the syndicate members said they were authorised agents and knew many senior RTD officers in the state. "She said the syndicate members told her that her son would be called to go through his driving test in Negri Sembilan soon," he told the New Straits Times yesterday.

He said the woman became suspicious when her son was later given a driving licence without taking any driving or written tests. "We then ran a check and the son's name was not in our database as alleged by the syndicate members. "The licence that the syndicate issued was a fake." Kamal said his officers were trained to differentiate between a genuine licence and a fake one. He cautioned the public and warned them against buying and using fake licences.

8 January 2009 (Thursday)

Illegal hunting pushes box turtles to the brink



The Malayan box turtle has a slow reproductive cycle in its lifespan of 30 to 35 years.

KUALA LUMPUR: The box turtle is disappearing across the country because of increased illegal hunting for its meat and use in traditional medicine, wildlife activists said yesterday.

Traffic, a wildlife trade monitoring network, said in a report the Malayan box turtle "is in peril due to over-exploitation", despite a government ban on its export since 2005. Since the ban, export of turtles for the pet trade in Japan, Europe and the United States ceased but Traffic found widespread evidence of illegal export, mainly to Hong Kong, China and, to a lesser extent, Singapore. Exotic meats from wildlife are much sought after by the Chinese, who also use parts of the animals for traditional medicine including aphrodisiacs.

There is no commercial breeding of the animal in Malaysia or elsewhere because it is expensive and time-consuming. "To meet demand, animals are taken from the wild at an unsustainable rate, which has to be addressed or they will disappear from the countryside," said Sabine Schoppe, the author of the report. The report said a survey of stock at two traders in Selangor found 385 box turtles in a 38-day period.

Multiplying by the number of known illegal suppliers of turtles gave a conservative estimate of 22,000 animals illegally exported per year from Malaysia, Schoppe said. "Simple maths leads you to the obvious conclusion: stop the over-exploitation of Malayan box turtles before we lose them."

She said the majority of the illegally exported Malayan box turtles -- distinguished by three yellow stripes on the head and a dark olive carapace -- were adults. This is especially dangerous because the species has a slow reproductive cycle and produces a limited number of eggs in its lifespan of 30 to 35 years. A typical adult is about 20cm long.

The Asian box turtle, which includes a range of box turtles, was listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2000. Traffic, a joint programme of IUCN and World Wide Fund for Nature, called for better regional cooperation in controlling illegal wildlife trade, particularly at border crossings.

Deputy director of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Mislihah Mohamed Basir, said it was difficult to stamp out the illegal trade. Smugglers, if convicted, often get away with a fine. "We try our best to curb this, but it's not an easy job," she said. -- AP

9 January 2009 (Friday)

Rape of Camerons continues

By : Jaspal Singh



A large section of forest and hills, estimated to be the size of 10 football fields, has been cleared in Cameron Highlands.

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: Two days after blatant violation of a land-clearing permit in Kampung Raja here was highlighted, another case has surfaced.

This time, the land-clearing activities covered five hectares. The site in Kampung Raja involved only a quarter of a hectare. Pictorial evidence showed a number of tractors bringing down the

trees and hills in the forested area under the control of the Pahang state government, bordering Perak. Regional Environmental Awareness of Cameron Highlands (REACH) president R. Ramakrishnan said the land-clearing activity started early last month but was temporarily stopped, only to regain momentum in the last week of December. For REACH, this pointed to the questionable standards of enforcement in safeguarding the environmental quality of the highlands.

Ramakrishnan said the respective government agencies tasked with enforcing environmental laws, rules, regulations and the 2002 Cabinet Guidelines on Highlands and Islands Development clearly failed to discharge their duties. He took to task the Cameron Highlands district and land office and Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob for poor enforcement of the laws.

Stressing that the highlands' environment had been deteriorating every year, he blamed both parties for doing "very little" to ensure the quality of the greenery, air and water. "Enough is enough. I urge Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan to personally intervene and carry out investigations into the Cameron Highlands district and land office."

Ramakrishnan said the continuing degradation had given rise to speculation among concerned citizens here that elements of corruption existed in the district and land office. "How else can all these (violations of laws and guidelines) happen? That is why REACH is pleading with Sidek to do something."

Ramakrishnan also took a swipe at Adnan for paying lip service to the protection of the highlands. Meanwhile, a Cameron Highlands Department of Environment officer said they were investigating the matter.

10 January 2009 (Saturday)

Lim shocked by RM1m toilets

GEORGE TOWN: Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng yesterday expressed shock that the cost of recent renovations to toilets at the Bayan Lepas International Airport came to RM1 million.

Lim, who held a meeting with airport officials in Komtar yesterday, said he was briefed that the renovation costs for the toilets amounted to RM250,000 each. "I was told there are four toilets. They must indeed be very expensive toilets."

The airport's senior manager, Abdul Wahab Yusof, had earlier informed Lim that the high cost was due to vandalism. "That is why the cost came to about RM250,000 each," he said.

Lim had, during the meeting, urged airport authorities to maintain cleanliness in the airport's toilets. "I have received complaints that the toilets are very dirty. I am sure tourists arriving at the airport, and others who use the toilets, will be disgusted if they are dirty."

10 January 2009 (Saturday)

Klang Sentral to stay at new premises

SHAH ALAM: The Klang Sentral Terminal relocation issue was settled once and for all yesterday.

It will remain at its new premises in Meru. This decision was reached after a "summit" called by the Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim with all stakeholders, with the exception of Kapar member of parliament S. Manikavasagam, who is away in India.

Khalid assured everyone present that other issues surrounding the terminal, including the decision to make public its concession agreement, would be settled by the end of next month. The menteri besar, who chaired the State Economic Council meeting yesterday, said they were now working out a few operational issues, including the number of pick-up points and issues affecting traders.

Khalid said the Klang Municipal Council had agreed to meet with the traders and discuss the possibility of reducing the rent of council-owned premises to make up for the traders' lack of business. On the concession agreement, he said the public could now view the document at the council office during office hours. "The terminal began operations on Dec 27. We felt there are many unresolved issues and that is why we called for the meeting today."

He said the state government had agreed with Klang MP Charles Santiago's suggestion that a public meeting be held to listen to more views from the people with regard to the operations of the terminal. On suggestion that the meeting should have been called much earlier, Khalid said: "I'm just solving an old problem, not a current one."

"As a new CEO, I have come to solve this problem." Asked on Manikavasagam's statement that the meeting was deliberately held yesterday so that he would not be able to attend it, Khalid denied the allegation. Santiago was also asked why the meeting was held during Manikavasagam's absence. "This is an emergency situation," he said.

"If we are going to wait for everyone to be present, the meeting may never take place." Santiago added that even though Manikavasagam was not present, he would have been satisfied with the turnout of the meeting, as all the stakeholders were brought together and the concessionaire agreement was made available to the public.

He, however, said that he would still lodge a complaint against Sungai Pinang state assemblyman Teng Chang Khim with the DAP disciplinary committee, even though the relocation controversy had been resolved. Santiago had taken offence to a statement by Teng earlier who had accused him of behaving like the opposition due to their disagreement over the terminal issue.

10 January 2009 (Saturday)

Perak and Selangor get their fleet of Camrys



Nine out of the 16 Toyota Camrys at the State Secretariat in Ipoh yesterday.

IPOH: The Perak and Selangor governments yesterday received their fleet of Toyota Camrys for their state officials.

Perak took delivery of nine of the 16 cars ordered, while Selangor received the whole fleet of 14 cars. Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin said the nine cars would be allocated to those who had the most problems with their Proton Perdana V6. The remaining seven cars would be delivered to the state government at a later date, he said here yesterday.

"The Camrys were purchased at about RM157,000 a unit, while the old Perdana would be traded in for about RM30,000 to RM40,000 each." This would mean that the 16 cars would cost some RM2.5 million, excluding savings made from trading in the old fleet of cars.

Nizar pointed out that the cars would have cost some RM80,000 each or about half the total amount, but the state was not exempted from paying taxes. It was previously reported that maintenance costs for the Perdana V6 amounted to more than RM1 million since they were bought in 2004.

Those entitled to use the new cars are Nizar, 10 state executive councillors, three state ex-officios (state secretary, state financial officer and state legal officer), state speaker and state mufti. Meanwhile a spokesman for the Selangor menteri besar's office said only several of the state executive councillors took their cars yesterday.

10 January 2009 (Saturday)

New income tax provisions

KUALA LUMPUR: The Inland Revenue Board (IRB) has come up with new provisions allowing employers to reduce employees' monthly tax deductions.

The new adjustments, which can be made at any time of the year, will take into account other tax deductions and rebates. Among the adjustments allowed include medical expenses for parents, medical expenses for serious diseases and education up to tertiary level, each limited to RM5,000 annually.

The IRB has also set a RM5,000 annual limit to adjustments for basic supporting equipment for the disabled, on top of RM6,000 for disabled employees, and also a life insurance adjustment of RM6,000. Employers can also apply for reduced tax deductions for fees or levies paid by holders of employment, visit passes (temporary employment) or work passes.

For information or assistance, contact the IRB at 1-300-88-3010.

11 January 2009 (Sunday)

500,000 want low-cost houses

By : Brenda Lim



Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan says the list of applicants will be checked

IPOH: Something is wrong when at least 500,000 people are waiting to buy low-cost houses.

'How can half a million people register for so many years and still not get one?" Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan said yesterday. The open registration system (ORS) for low-cost houses at the ministry's website (www.kpkt.gov.my), said Ong, started more than five years ago.

The number of applicants was growing and many were inquiring about low-cost homes, especially in the cities, he said after presenting ang pows to about 1,200 senior citizens here yesterday. He said the Federal Government had previously handed low-cost houses over to state governments to be handed out but would now participate in the distribution of the homes. "If we build houses in Taiping, we will print out the names of applicants who live there. By doing so, we will reduce the number of applicants." The list of applicants in the ORS would have to be checked and those found to be deserving would get priority to buy the low-cost homes, he said.

"We have discovered that some people have rented the houses to Indonesians, which we cannot allow." It was better that applicants buy the houses rather than rent them at RM124 a month, unless they were among the hard-core poor, single mothers or disabled, he said.

The Federal Government would build 4,000 low-cost houses this year and would also consider entering into joint-ventures with private companies to build more of such homes, he said.

11 January 2009 (Sunday)

FISHERMEN'S WOES: We are landing fewer fish

By : ELIZABETH JOHN, AHMAD FAIRUZ OTHMAN and MELISSA DARLYNE CHOW



A fisherman with a spotted sting ray at Pengkalan Penghulu jetty in Kampung Serkat.



Johari Hamid claims the javelin fish he lands now are smaller.



Ilias Shafie (left) and Hassan Mohamad pondering over the small catch they got after more than five hours at sea.



Hassan showing his meagre catch.

Fishermen are warning that how you would like your fish cooked might soon be the least of your concerns, but whether you can have any at all, write ELIZABETH JOHN, AHMAD FAIRUZ OTHMAN and MELISSA DARLYNE CHOW

KUALA LUMPUR: Hundreds of coastal fishermen struggling to fill their nets have this stark warning to the government: address pollution, mangrove loss and destructive fishing methods or coastal fisheries that supplies over half the fish sold in markets today will end.

Two major groups of fishermen sent a memorandum to the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry in November, along with a list of fish that they say are becoming scarce. It includes several varieties of shark, rays, groupers and popular threadfins like senangin and kurau. Their woes mirror worrying trends that researchers and fisheries experts have been highlighting in recent years.

An Asia-wide study by the World Fish Centre and Fisheries Research Institutes of Malaysia among others, found that over a 20-year period since 1971, the total biomass of fish at shallow depths along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia has plunged by about 90 per cent. When scientists calculate biomass, they are estimating the abundance of fish at a place and time in terms of weight. Large declines were also recorded in the east coast and Sarawak.

According to the study published in the journal Fisheries Research in 2006, the most affected species in Malaysia are those that dwell close to the seabed like red snapper, grouper and shrimp. Another study by fisheries consultants Sea Resources Management, based on the Fisheries Department's data between 2000 and 2006, also showed noticeable declines in fish catches in the east coast.

The yellowtail scad or ikan pelata was an example of a potential crash in a fish population. In Kelantan, for instance, the pelata catch in 2000 stood at 1,621 tonnes. In 2005 and 2006, it nosedived to just one tonne, said the study. The pelata bulat, pelata bali and pelata sela are also on the list sent to the ministry and memorandum were jointly prepared by Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWA), the Malaysian Inshore Fishermen Action Network (Jaring) and Sahabat Alam Malaysia.

The groups call for an end to policies that push inshore fishermen towards deep-sea fishing and aquaculture. Instead, the groups ask the government to focus on halting the destruction of mangrove ecosystems, which fishermen depend on for their livelihood, for development and aquaculture projects. The memo cites Penaga, Pulau Pinang and Bagan Datoh in Perak as instances where fishermen's incomes dropped after vast tracts of mangroves were cleared for aquaculture and pollution from pond waste found its way into the sea.

Their concerns about the environment were backed by the 2006 study which highlighted siltation from land development as one of several serious issues in the coastal zone. The study also noted excessive heavy metal pollution in the areas studied in Malaysia. Fishermen also want the government to look into their welfare, including the difficulty older fishermen faced in

getting loans or making payments. Other issues they raised included destructive and illegal fishing methods, red tape and political interference in the issuance of fishing licences.

PRAWN CATCH AND MANGROVES LINK

IN a paper presented at the National Fisheries Symposium in 2006, Universiti Malaya's Professor Dr Chong Ving Ching drew a link between mangrove loss and falling prawn catches. Between 1980 and 2004, he noted that Malaysia lost about 23 per cent of its mangrove forest reserves. Then he compared it with landings of Penaeid prawns and Acetes shrimp over the last 30 years. The analysis showed that the catches of both increased steadily during the early years and reached their potential yield by the late 1980s.

But after the 1990s, Penaeid prawn yields plunged to 65 per cent of its potential yield by 2003. Similarly, Acetes catches fell by 50 per cent. There was little change in fishing effort at that time, he said. The figure above illustrates this. The vertical bars at the bottom indicate trawl units while the numbers show the total number of licensed boats. Chong has also been monitoring nursery areas in the Matang mangrove forest, one of the major nursery areas for fish and prawns. In less than a decade researchers had found that the biomass of fish in that area had decreased, Chong said.

'TRASH', BUT IT'S ALSO NICE

A FALLING catch doesn't necessarily spell the end of seafood dinners, just a different kind of menu that's not as appealing or star-studded.

The reason: more and more of the one million tonnes of seafood fishermen net every year is made up of trash fish rather than high value food fish. High grade fish -- grade one and two -- comprise less than five per cent of total landings today, says Maritime Institute of Malaysia researcher Siti Nazatul Izura Ishak. The causes are manifold and complex, she explains, ranging from environmental to enforcement. But of greatest concern, says her colleague Tan Kim Hooi, is mangrove loss. Between the 1970s and 2005, the country lost about 20 per cent of its coastal mangroves. Senangin, promfret, kurau and prawns depend on these coastal ecosystems.

While government policy discourages conversion of mangroves, the wetlands are still making way for aquaculture, housing and oil palm plantations, says Tan. Coastal fishermen depend on the catch from Zone A and B that stretch up to 12 nautical miles from shore. This is the area mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds thrive and where fish and prawns breed or seek refuge. "If it's overexploited and degraded then there's little chance for marine life to replenish."

In a paper the duo presented at a marine fisheries and aquaculture management conference in August, they laid part of the blame on destructive fishing methods like modern trawlers, mechanised push nets and traditional bagnets or pompang. Over the years foreign fishermen have grown bold and encroached into Malaysian waters, even into marine parks. Local trawlers

also encroached into traditional fishing zones and marine parks during the monsoon season. Excessive coastal and island development have also worsened pollution.

Tan says components to better manage fisheries do exist but there are problems. He cites the following example: "We have a zoning system but there are just too many fishermen in some zones, 70 per cent of coastal fishermen are in the 0- to 12-nautical mile zone." Tan and Siti say solutions will have to tackle all, not just a few problems. "We need practicable solutions that cover ecosystem protection, enforcement, pollution and illegal gear control. We must implement special species recovery plans and protect broodstocks," said Tan.

"Agencies, states and fishermen need to speak the same language and shoulder equal responsibility to make it work."

COMPARISON OF TOTAL MANGROVE FOREST AREAS IN MALAYSIA IN 1973 AND 2004				
	Mangrove Areas (ha)		Mangrove Loss	
	1973	2004	ha	%
Johor	39,700	23,000	-16,700	-42.07
Kedah	10,250	8,200	-2,050	-20
Kelantan	300	150	-150	-50
Malacca	300	100	-200	-66.66
Negri	3,500	800	-2,700	-77.14
Pahang	3,500	3,000	-500	-14.29
Perak	56,500	43,000	-13,500	-23.89
Perlis	250	30	-220	-88
Penang	3,900	1,400	-2,500	-64.10
Selangor	32,000	17,000	-15,000	-46.88
Terengganu	3,500	2,500	-1,000	-28.57
Sarawak	175,000	130,000	-45,000	-25.71
Sabah	366,000	346,000	-20,000	-5.46
Total	694,700	575,180	-119,520	-17.20

Source: Analysis of data state forestry annual reports, state forest inventory reports, data provided by state forestry departments and various publications.

MANY HAVE GIVEN UP ON THE SEA

ASK any fisherman in Kampung Serkat, Pontian and he will tell you how hard it is to get by these days. The frustration on fishermen's faces say all there is to say about the empty nets and their struggle to get by on less in Johor's south western coast.

Fisherman Johari Hamid, of Kampung Serkat Laut caught barely 2kg of prawns and ikan tebal pipi (common javelin fish) after six hours at sea. "The waters used to teem with the fish, now we are lucky to return with 500g of fish." It's giving them sleepless nights, says Jamaluddin Mohamad, a fishermen and president of Malaysian Inshore Fishermen Action Network (Jaring), a national inshore fishermen's action group. Previously kurau, tenggiri and parang were plentiful along the coast of Pontian, he said, but not anymore. Inshore fishermen are catching only a fifth of what they used to catch a decade ago.

They blame the declining catch on development and trawlers that encroach into their fishing zone, netting all the fish and leaving them little. They are also unhappy about the conversion of coastal mangrove forests and the impact of effluents from the port and the petrochemical plant in nearby Tanjung Bin on marine life.

Pontian fishermen also share their crowded waterway with giant cargo ships. Ships plying the Straits of Malacca navigate through Pontian waters before reaching the Port of Tanjung Pelepas -- Johor's busiest cargo port. "The sea around here is getting busier. "I get scared when I bump into the ships when I go out to sea," said Adam Mohamad, another fisherman in this sleepy hamlet. This has forced some to venture further out for a better haul and others into uncharted territory -- inland.

Some of Jamaluddin and Adam's compatriots have taken second jobs or have just given up fishing. Mohd Tahir Hamid, 36, traded the RM300 his net could bring for a job in an independent power plant in Tanjung Bin, near Gelang Patah that pays RM2,000 a month.

Abdul Rahim Saman, 43, juggles fishing with carpentry and farming to supplement a RM600 monthly income. For most who don't have this option, morale has plummeted along with the catch. The situation drove Jaring's 1,000 members to help put together the memorandum to government in November. The nine-point memorandum highlights how existing policies and practices have adversely affected inshore fishermen. They also feel that the problem is compounded by a general lack of respect for their community.

Jamaluddin claimed Fisheries Department officials seldom meet inshore fishermen and were often in the dark over their plight. "I would like to suggest the district Fisheries Department send officials to the Penghulu fishermen's jetty here. "They should check the situation from one dock to the other. They should look into our licensing problems. "Unfortunately it is the fishermen who have to approach the officials."

Jamaluddin recalled his surprise during the submission of the memorandum recently that there was a RM25,000 fund for fishermen to buy new boats. The fund under the Fisheries Development Authority does not carry any interest, but Jamaluddin said most inshore fishermen had no idea it existed.

'SOME DAYS, FISHERMEN DON'T HAVE FISH TO EAT'

THE weathered fisherman is holding on, but only just. Spending more and more time in his 23-foot sampan with less to show, Illias Shafie is getting worried. The catch was substantial decades ago, said the 56-year-old fisherman, but it has dwindled to almost nothing now. "It has reached a point where sometimes, even fishermen do not have fish to eat." A stark contrast with the past when 100kg catches were common, he said.

Fishermen now have to cope with spiralling maintenance and transport costs while feeding their families with a catch of just 30kg. "Previously we were able to catch more types of fish like pedukang, selama, sembilang, siakap and senangin. Now we are only able to catch sembilang, siakap and senangin." Ilias, chairman of the Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWA), said they helped to draw up the memorandum to the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry because inshore fishermen faced many problems that no one was helping to solve. He said trawlers using Appolo seines were encroaching into the fishing zone that

traditional fishermen like him depended on. This fishing equipment is supposed to be used further out at sea, not close to the coast. "This hampers the inshore fishermen as trawls and Appolo seines are meant to make big catches. Coupled with the pollution and unpredictable weather, inshore fishermen have been hit hard. 'Mangrove forests, corals and artificial reefs in the sea have also gone down," he said.

"Fishermen must be taught that they cannot destroy these reefs and mangroves. "Agencies, on their part, must be firm in enforcement." Illias said the ministry and other agencies had promised to help. "The government has good plans and policies, but what we do not like is that when implemented, the plan does not work. "The help does not reach fishermen."

Illias said from the monitoring PIFWA had been carrying out, there were fishermen who had no licence and those who did not receive fuel subsidies. "Politicking needs to stop, so that these fishermen can get the help that they need so that they can feed their families."

WE ARE ON TOP OF THINGS, SAYS MINISTRY

WE are aware of the problem and are taking action, says the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry. In a written response to the New Sunday Times, minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said there were signs of depleting fish stocks in coastal waters, particularly in the Straits of Malacca.

"This trend has been observed by scientific investigations and monitoring programmes carried out by the Fisheries Department and through evaluation of commercial fishing. "The recommendation is to sustain the annual catch from coastal fisheries to 900,000 tonnes." An estimated 70,000 fishermen depend on coastal waters for their livelihood. Their annual catch of about a million tonnes contributes more than 80 per cent of the total fish production of Malaysia.

The ministry said it had started a scheme to invite small trawlers to voluntarily surrender their licences and opt for deep sea fishing or more environment-friendly methods. This scheme has so far attracted 80 small trawlers in Kedah. More artificial reefs were also being constructed to protect and rehabilitate coastal fisheries.

11 January 2009 (Sunday)

RM900m for Class F contractors

KUALA TERENGGANU: The government will continue to nurture Class F contractors in the face of global economic slowdown.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the government had allocated RM900 million this year as part of an economic stimulus package to offer projects to contractors in this category. "We will ensure that the country does not slip into a recession like others, including those in Europe. "We want to have growth even if it may not be high," Najib said when opening the bidding for small infrastructure projects in the Kuala Terengganu district at Wisma Darul Iman here. Last year, the government allocated RM600 million to the sector.

Najib, who is also Finance Minister, said the government was looking at weathering the economic crisis when many people in the developed countries, including in the United States, were losing jobs. In fact, he said, the government was able to provide financial allocations for development, and in bigger sums compared with last year. "Malaysia has the largest number of Class F contractors. They are special and being nurtured by the government. "Last year, the government spent RM4.7 billion through 90,000 projects awarded to 85,000 Class F contractors."

The government allocated RM15.8 million for small infrastructure projects for 583 contractors in the category here. Each project was valued at between RM30,000 and RM200,000, Najib said. "We will award bigger projects in phases to contractors who get small projects this time. In this way, we will ensure that the people benefit while the contractors earn an income, and the economy continues to grow." Najib said the allocation of projects by computer bidding was transparent, adding that the software was developed by a Terengganu-born. -- Bernama

12 January 2009 (Monday)

RM9m care centre for elderly, disabled to open soon

By : T.N. Alagesh

KUANTAN: The district Welfare Department day-care complex is expected to be fully operational by March, providing several services for the elderly and disabled.

National Welfare Planning and Development Division director Norani Mohd Hashim said the complex was part of the department's efforts to have an organised community rehabilitation programme centre. "The complex at Kampung Tiram here is the third in the country after similar ones in Alor Gajah, Malacca and Sungai Petani, Kedah," Norani said after the key handing-over ceremony for the complex between the contractor and the state Public Works Department and the Welfare Department.

She said besides activities for senior citizens and the disabled, the complex would also focus on educating young children, especially the poor. She assured those who sent their elderly parents and children to the centre not to worry as the staff were trained to deal with people of all ages.

The RM9.5 million complex will be opened from 8am to 5pm daily except on weekends. The five-building facility will have a centre for the elderly, a centre for the disabled, a multipurpose hall, a surau and an administration office.