

1. No tax on govt goods

CONFIRMED: GST to be fixed at six per cent, says deputy minister

KUALA LUMPUR: CONSUMPTION tax will not be levied on goods and services offered by the government, local authorities and statutory bodies under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act, when it takes effect from April 1 next year.

This would apply to any supply of goods and services made by the federal and state governments as well as local authorities and statutory bodies in regards to regulatory and enforcement duties.

Services under this category include transport, education, housing, health and financial goods and services.

The first reading of the bill was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday by Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Maslan.

He said although the percentage of the GST was not fixed in the bill, the government had determined it would be six per cent as announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in the 2014 Budget last year.

"By replacing the 10 and five per cent government and sales and services tax (SST) to GST at six per cent, we can reduce tax redundancy and provide a more structured taxation system.

"The GST will only be levied on goods and services provided by businesses with a capital threshold of RM500,000 and above, in addition to imported goods. Next year, we will be introducing some measures to reduce the impact of the GST towards a targeted subsidy system."

The 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M 4.0) would see an increase of of RM300 as well as tax reductions of between one and three per cent on all taxable groups.

"Malaysia has the lowest tax rate among Asean countries, compared with seven per cent in Singapore and Thailand, and 10 per cent in Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia."

GST payment failure would see offenders fined between 10 and 20 times the amount of tax evaded, provisions in the bill specify.

The provisions also noted that those found guilty would be subjected to a maximum jail sentence of five years or face both a fine and imprisonment.

A tax evasion repeat would see the fine doubled. Offenders would have to pay between 20 and 40 times the amount of tax evaded, and could be jailed up to seven years, or both.

If the amount of tax evaded cannot be ascertained, offenders would be liable to a fine between RM50,000 and RM500,000, or seven years' jail, or both.

Other exceptions to the GST would see retail trade activities approved under the Free Zones Act 1990 and located within free commercial zones also enjoying tax-free supply of goods and services.

Second Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah is scheduled to table the 2014 GST Bill for the second reading next Monday.

NEW STRAITS TIMES Tuesday, April 1, 2014

2. Rise of TB cases cause for alarm

CONTAGIOUS: Almost 1,600 Malaysians succumbed to tuberculosis last year, says Dr Subramaniam

KUALA LUMPUR: TUBERCULOSIS (TB) was the main cause of death under the contagious disease category last year, with an increase of 183 cases from 1,414 cases recorded in 2012.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said last year, the country recorded a total of 1,597 TB-related deaths nationwide, an increase of 13 per cent in comparison with number of cases in the previous year.

"The number of TB cases also increased last year with a total of 24,071 cases reported, an increase of six per cent from 2012.

"Based on the ministry's records, 14 per cent of TB cases were spread by foreigners, with the remainder being spread by locals," he said, adding that an active TB patient could infect 10 others if they did not receive treatment or failed to observe early preventive measures to fight the virus.

To date, Sabah recorded the highest number of TB cases with 4,526 cases, followed by Selangor (4,148), Sarawak (2,673), Johor (2,248), the Federal Territories (1,967), Perak (1,573), Kelantan (1,402), Penang (1,272) and Kedah (1,169).

Dr Subramaniam said early detection was vital to enable patients to seek treatment to beat the chain of infection.

"We have to identify, confirm and treat them so they do not become a threat to others.

"The challenge is to reach them or get them to come forward for treatment," he said after launching the national-level World TB Day 2014, themed "Improving Performance: Towards Detection, Treatment and Curing of TB Patients" here yesterday.

He said there was a theoretical risk for the country, as it could see the number of cases shooting up to ten times more than present, or 240,000 cases.

"Opening our borders has the risk of allowing communicable disease to spread, too."

Dr Subramaniam said three per cent of foreigners failed the first health screening in their home countries and were subsequently not allowed to enter Malaysia.

"Some were cleared in the first screening, but failed the second screening in Malaysia and were also sent back."

Dr Subramaniam said it was important for the authorities to look into ways for foreigners to voluntarily come forward so that they do not spread the disease to locals.

He said those who exhibited symptoms of TB, which included continuous cough; loss of appetite; sudden and drastic weight loss; fever for over two weeks; bloody phlegm and headaches when coughing or taking deep breaths, to immediately seek medical attention.

"There must also be enough awareness and education on the threat of TB in locals to make them undergo health screenings," he said.

Dr Subramaniam said those who had close contact with a patient, prison or correctional institution inmates and those suffering from diabetes, kidney failure and HIV were also at risk of contracting the air-borne disease.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that nine million people are currently suffering from TB, which accounts for one million deaths worldwide annually.

In 2012, there were an estimated 8.6 million new cases of TB, which claimed about 1.3 million people.

3. Kedah govt shuts down sand mines

SAFEGUARD: Operators who failed to abide by regulations have been told to cease operations in a move by the authorities to protect the environment and its people

KULIM: THE state government has ordered eight sand mining operators to cease operations as it clamps down on companies that fail to abide by regulations.

State Housing and Local Government, Water Supply and Resources Committee chairman Badrul Hisham Hashim said the state government was also reviewing the RM10,000 bond imposed on sand miners. It is thinking of raising that amount to RM100,000.

Badrul said the state government will continue to monitor the 400 licenced sand mining operators all over the state to ensure that they do not pollute the environment and threaten the livelihood of those who live nearby these sites.

All sand mining sites were approved by the previous administration. The current government stopped issuing permits since last year.

"We are concerned about sand mining operations which disregard the environment and affect the livelihood of people near these sites," said Badrul.

"To date, we have shut down eight sand mining sites in Kuala Muda, Kulim and Baling," he added.

Badrul said the state government would not hesitate to shut down errant sand miners.

"We are organising a special course to educate sand mining operators on regulations," he said after visiting several sand mining sites along Sungai Muda and Sedim recently.

Commenting on the activities there, Badrul said that it had triggered soil erosion at the riverbanks.

"The river has been polluted due to the erosion and it also caused problems for Syarikat Air Darulaman (Sada) as it affected its raw water supply.

"The mining activity is a cause of worry for residents who fear that landslides may occur."

On March 29, Streets reported that state Education, Transport and Public Works Committee chairman Datuk Tajul Urus Mat Zain had announced that the Kedah government had ordered sand mining operations in Kampung Batu Belacan, Bukit Selambau in Sungai Petani to cease.

The order was issued when the government found the activities there were posing a threat to the riverbank and farms in Kampung Setol.

4. Mission: Zero Dengue launched

KILLER MOSQUITOES: The Health ministry will focus on monitoring the Petaling district, which has been identified as a hotspot in Selangor

KUALA LUMPUR: SELANGOR tops the list of states with the highest number of dengue cases, with 13,915 cases.

This was disclosed by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam who said 23 deaths were reported compared with only one fatality last year.

"The Petaling district has been identified as a dengue hotspot in Selangor, with 60 per cent of the total cases.

"This week, the ministry's staff will focus on monitoring this area. They will carry out inspections, fogging exercises and awareness campaigns to curb the rise in dengue cases,"

"Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya also see an alarming rise of dengue fever with 2,253 cases and four deaths, compared with 446 cases and three deaths last year."

He said other states also saw a spike in cases -- Perak with 1,732 cases and five deaths, Johor with 1,526 cases (12 deaths), Negri Sembilan 1,356 cases (one death), Kelantan 1,312 cases (four deaths), Malacca 826 cases (three deaths), Penang 553 cases (three deaths), Sarawak 310 cases (one death), Terengganu 238 cases (one death), Kedah 185 cases (one death), Pahang 316 cases, Perlis 54 cases, Sabah 336 cases and Labuan five cases.

He also stressed that the country continues to see a drastic rise in dengue fever as 24,917 cases were reported between Jan 1 until March 29, compared with just 6,100 cases for the same period last year.

Statistics by Health Ministry revealed that the dengue cases has increased by 308 per cent, with 58 deaths reported compared with last year's 14 fatalities.

Subramaniam urged the public to take necessary precautions in ensuring their neighbouring areas are free of mosquito breeding grounds.

"It is worrying that we are living in an area that is open to dengue infections yet many are not mindful.

"Despite the many warnings by the ministry, the public are lax about their surroundings," he said after launching the Mission: Zero Dengue campaign at Taman Sejahtera Flat in Kepong, here, yesterday.

The campaign, organised by SC Johnson in collaboration with Tesco and Communication for Behavioural Impact (Combi), was aimed at combating the increase of dengue cases in the country.

It was an initiative to raise awareness on dengue prevention to individuals by encouraging them to take personal action, starting from their own home.

It is a long-term campaign consisting of a series of activities aimed at penetrating the wider community in the country.

SC Johnson also contributed RM200,000 to the ministry for dengue prevention initiatives.

The ministry will be channeling all funds to Combi which is actively working with various parties to minimise dengue cases.

A total of 2,000 dengue kits containing an aerosol, a liquid vapouriser, a mosquito repellent, Tesco card voucher and an educational leaflet, were also presented to Combi for their volunteers to distribute to the public during their home visits.

S.C. Johnson and Sons (M) Bhd general manager Christina Ronski said: "As a leading household insecticide brand in Malaysia, our mission is to assist the Health Ministry in driving awareness and education to families.

"We hope to empower them to take personal action in dengue prevention as it only takes one mosquito to spread the disease."

Combi volunteers Tesco and S.C. Johnson employees also conducted "search and destroy" activities by going house-to-house to spread awareness in 500 homes.

S.C. Johnson will continue its Road Rangers programme, an on-ground awareness effort that will engage the public via games, while disseminating information on Aedes mosquitoes and tips to prevent dengue.

Present were Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya state health director Dr Balachandran Satiamurti, Tesco Malaysia director (government and corporate affairs) Azlam Shah Alias and Segambut Umno division chief Datuk Kamarudin Ambok.



Saturday, April 5, 2014

5. Malaysia set on zero rice imports, says minister

EFFORT: Country to use quality seeds and good practices to boost production

HANOI: MALAYSIA is determined to achieve its target to end rice imports and be self-sufficient to meet local demand by 2020, Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said.

He said this was despite the fact that the country had recorded an increase of 117,000 metric tonnes in rice imports last year from the total of 983,000 metric tonnes in 2012.

"The ministry is viewing this trend seriously and it is pertinent for us to step up our efforts in enhancing the local rice production to gradually reduce our dependency on rice imports," he said before the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Malaysia and Vietnam here.

The signing of the MoU, which sought collaboration between the two countries in agriculture, was held yesterday and witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung.

Najib, who arrived here on Thursday night from Perth, Australia, is on a three-day working visit at the invitation of his Vietnamese counterpart. This was his first official visit to the country since he took office in 2009.

Malaysia currently produced 70 per cent of its rice for local demand annually and the remaining was sourced from Vietnam and Pakistan. Ismail Sabri said Vietnam was Malaysia's biggest rice exporter with 764,878 metric tonnes, valued at RM1.3 billion in 2012, and 658,120 metric tonnes (RM812 million) last year.

"We have stopped importing from Thailand several years ago due to the high price imposed by them," he said, adding that Vietnamese rice was the best option not only due to its good price, but also quality.

Ismail Sabri said to achieve the 2020 target, the ministry had come up with plans to improve local rice production and its quality through the use of hybrid padi seeds and good agriculture practices.

"We are encouraging farmers to be professional and efficient in their endeavour by following our rice production checklist where, for example, they will be guided as to when to plant the padi seeds and to apply pesticides, and how much the amount should be.

"We are offering incentives for farmers to produce rice in a big scale while encouraging them to pool their resources and finances."

He said Mardi had been tasked to research and produce quality seeds, like the Aerob padi seeds, which only required sprinklers to irrigate and could be planted three times a year.

"We have started planting the Aerob padi seeds from last year."

Ismail Sabri said the implementation of uniformed RM1,200 per tonne as the price for the purchase of padi from farmers in the peninsula would also push them to produce quality padi.

By producing quality padi, he said, farmers could cut their post-harvest losses as their products would be purchased and not left to waste.

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

6. 'No fraud in buying of Rela uniforms'

RM17 MILLION: There were problems with boots and uniforms bought, says Zahid

PUTRAJAYA: HOME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said there are no elements of fraud in the procurement of boots and uniforms for Rela volunteers as highlighted in the 2013 Auditor-General's (AG) report.

Zahid said representatives from the ministry had explained the procurement, reportedly worth RM17 million, to the audit team before the report was distributed to Parliament on Monday.

"There is nothing to dispute as it is very technical.

"There were some problems with the specifications of the boots and uniforms bought.

"The amount of allocations used for the procurement exceeded the allowed amount to purchase the boots and uniforms.

"Thus, there is no element of embezzlement involved (in the procurement)," he said after attending the ministry's monthly gathering here yesterday.

Zahid was asked to comment on the issues highlighted in the AG's report.

It was reported that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) would call the Home Ministry to explain the procurement of boots for Rela staff.

The PAC would also summon four other ministries to explain the discrepancies highlighted in the report.

On calls for the Registrar of Societies (RoS) to reveal the outcome of the investigation into DAP's central executive committee (CEC) elections, Zahid said all information had been gathered and details of the probe completed.

"The RoS initiated the investigation following complaints lodged by DAP members over alleged discrepancies in the CEC last year.

"The RoS will meet the DAP leadership soon to ensure that the party adhered to its constitution.

"During the meeting, we want to ensure DAP leaders that the RoS will not interfere in the party's domestic affairs and that it is compulsory for the party to adhere to the provisions stipulated in its constitution," Zahid said.

It was reported that several current and former DAP members had claimed it had been more than a year since the investigation was carried out into the CEC election, which had been plagued by problems of legitimacy, despite a fresh election being held.

Former DAP member Rahmad Isahak had said RoS should have concluded the investigations by now.

7. Boost security in Sabah, urges Nazri

KUALA LUMPUR: Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz called for stricter security measures to be carried out in Sabah, following the kidnapping of a Chinese tourist and a Filipino worker from a resort in Semporna last week.

He said the "unsatisfactory" security standards along the coast of Sabah had not only affected tourist arrivals, but also threatened the safety of residents.

"This is not the first time this has happened. The (security) arrangements in place should have ensured that something like this does not happen.

"Security has to be at its best, not just for tourists, but also for Malaysians living there," he said after launching the International Digital Library Conference here yesterday.

However, Nazri said he would leave it to the authorities to rectify the security issues.

He was one of several Barisan Nasional leaders who had called for security to be beefed up in Sabah after a string of kidnappings in the state in the last six months.

The incidents occurred despite the setting up of the Eastern Sabah Security Command in March last year, following the Lahad Datu intrusion.

Nazri said the ministry would consider reviving Visit Malaysia 2014 activities in China only once there was a conclusion to the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 tragedy.

8. Panel to look into Besut dam delay

PUTRAJAYA: The Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry has established a special committee to investigate the delay in completing the Paya Peda Dam in Besut, Terengganu.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, said the investigative committee was set up two weeks ago to look into the delay even before the 2013 Auditor-General's report was released to the public.

He said the contractor has been directed to complete the dam by June.

Ismail said the decision to establish the special committee was made when ministry officials conducted a site visit a few weeks ago.

He said the contractors were given a notice to complete the dam in two months. Failure to do so would result in a penalty.

"The contractors will have to pay RM50,000 per day, until the project is ready to be released to the ministry. That is the penalty that they will face," Ismail said yesterday after launching the Guidelines for Agriculture on Steep Slopes.

On reasons given for the delay, he said the contractors had blamed a lack of manpower and machinery as well as bad weather.

It was learnt that the Paya Peda dam was to be completed and handed over in September last year, but the contractors had asked for an extension.

Ismail said the contractors had applied for a second extension but it was rejected.

Asked if he would explain the delay to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), he said an explanation had been given when recommendations were made by the national auditors prior to the release of the 2013 report.



Sunday, April 13, 2014

9. Govt urged to stop wastage

CRITICAL: Nation's non-revenue water higher than other countries

KUALA LUMPUR: THE government must take steps to curb water wastage, particularly non-revenue water (NRW), to tackle the crisis, said experts.

"Malaysia's NRW is high compared with other countries. Aside from our efforts to ensure continuous water supply, we need to take drastic measures to reduce NRW to save the treated water for consumption," said International Islamic University Malaysia's Water Quality and Modelling associate professor, Dr Zaki Zainudin Ibrahim, in a telephone interview with the New Sunday Times yesterday.

Non-revenue water is water that has been produced and is "lost" before it reaches the customer, such as through pipe leakages, burst pipes, theft and inaccurate metering.

Zaki said in 2012, the national average of NRW was at 36.4 per cent of the 5,474 trillion litres of pipe waters produced, while the figures for Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya stood at 33.1 per cent.

"The water condition is indeed critical in Malaysia, especially the Klang Valley.

"If we continue to neglect our water resources and continue to take it for granted, our situation will worsen," he said, adding that the government had to come up with a contingency plan to address the issue.

Zaki said one of the things needed to be done was to establish an Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources.

This is to maximise economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems and the environment.

For example, Zaki said Malaysia had many agencies governing water resources and management, which made the handling of an issue "haywire", with authorities finger-pointing at each one when problems arose.

"The ministries and agencies need to be clear of their roles and responsibilities."

Echoing his thoughts was Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia's (AWER) president Piarapakaran S., who said if the NRW was brought down to 20 or even 25 per cent by 2020, close to 10 per cent of the water could be saved and utilised to meet increasing water demand.

He also noted that Malaysia's domestic water usage, as of 2012, was 212 litres per person daily, while it was only 151 litres in Singapore.

In Selangor that year, it reached 235 litres per person. Other states which recorded high volumes were Penang (285 litres), Perak (238 litres), Malacca (237 litres), Negri Sembilan (227 litres) and Johor (221 litres).

Malaysia Water Forum's research and policy executive, Mathini Arveena Ravee, said there were multiple reasons behind the current crisis, namely, high consumption, an unpredicted long dry spell, high NRW and pollution of water resources.

"Right now, we are only focusing on supply management. A comprehensive water demand management plan should be drafted and implemented."

10. Ministry mulls 'womb to tomb' healthcare

LONG-TERM CARE: Health Ministry wants families to choose their own doctors

KUALA LUMPUR: THE government is promoting the assignment of doctors to patients as a long-term measure to better manage a person's healthcare throughout his or her lifetime.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said the plan would require patients to be registered to a doctor of their choice, either in a public or private sector facility, to prevent the occurrence of doctor-hopping and patients seeking suspected quick cures.

He said the move would enable healthcare providers to have their patients' complete medical records from "womb to tomb".

"A long-term relationship between doctors and patients is imperative to manage health issues better. This would help in building trust and foster mutual partnerships in maintaining health," he said in his address at the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute's Healthcare Forum here yesterday.

Subramaniam said the plan would require families to register themselves with a primary healthcare provider of their choice, as this would enable the doctor to know their entire health history.

In this regard, he said, many people no longer value the concept of "family doctors" to manage their health needs over a lifetime.

"People are more likely to go doctor-hopping in search of quick cures and seek specialist services even before their problem is assessed holistically. There is an over-focus on curative care."

Subramaniam said the trend is far less effective in tackling long-term chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma or lifestyle problems.

On a related matter, he said the ministry has stepped up efforts to empower communities to take more responsibility for their health.

"The current and next Malaysia Plan will continue to focus on prevention and promotion of healthcare. Individual and community empowerment will also be emphasised to reduce exposure to non-communicable disease risk factors."

On the issue of overcrowding at government health facilities, Subramaniam said: "The ministry is preparing a Healthcare Facility Master Plan to overcome hospital congestion and to better locate new hospitals in the areas where they are most needed."



Wednesday, April 23, 2014

11. Govt gets tough on express bus companies

DRASTIC MEASURES: Drivers will only be allowed to start journeys if they pass drug test

PUTRAJAYA: FACED with a perplexing number of bus crashes, the government has decided to introduce drastic measures to tackle the problem.

These include making it mandatory for express bus drivers to undergo drug tests at bus terminals nationwide starting today, as well as banning double-decker buses from hilly terrain.

Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Kaprawi said the National Anti-Drug Agency (Nada) and the Road Transport Department (RTD) would conduct the drug tests.

He said the drivers would be allowed to start their journey only if they passed the tests, adding that the screening would affect nearly 9,000 express bus drivers.

"This will be done at terminals nationwide before they (express bus drivers) can operate the vehicles. This is to ensure they are fit to carry out their duties.

"This was among the preventive measures underlined by the independent advisory panel of the Genting Highlands bus crash to reduce the number of express bus crashes," he said yesterday.

Speaking after a meeting with land transport and road safety stakeholders, Aziz said the ministry had also decided to suspend double-decker buses from plying six accident-prone hilly routes.

"The routes comprise Cameron Highlands, Genting Highlands, Bukit Tinggi and Fraser's Hill in Pahang, Gunung Jerai in Kedah and Bukit Larut in Perak."

Aziz said the suspension, which begins in two weeks, was made after a consensus among the RTD, Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD), Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (Miros), Road Safety Department and Public Works Department.

"The services will be suspended until we have resolved all outstanding issues on the safety of the said routes," he said, adding that bus operators involved would be given notice on the matter soon.

Aziz said the use of global position system (GPS) in all buses would be made compulsory by June.

The system, which had similar functions as vehicle black boxes, would record and update information on bus movements, including speed and routes, to allow the companies to monitor their driver's actions in real time.

The ministry would introduce a five-star rating system on a company's safety and service performance to help the public in choosing bus operators.

He said the system, which would be implemented by July, would be assessed by Miros, which would display the company's ratings at ticketing counters and their vehicles.

Aziz added that the RTD had been instructed to deploy undercover officers on random bus journeys to assess a driver's performance and issue summonses.

"The bus registration number and SPAD feedback and complaints hotline numbers will also be displayed in all seats to allow consumers to report reckless driving."

He said installation of seatbelts in all express bus seats would be enforced by Jan 1. Additional reporting by Tharanya Arumugam

NEW STRAITS TIMES Thursday, April 24 2014

12. We are looking at alternatives

AID: Govt to help by funding project

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federal government will assist the Selangor government to meet the state's water needs via alternative solutions.

Natural Resources and Energy Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel said the proposals could serve as a solution to the water predicament faced by the state.

He said the alternative water sourcing includes rainwater harvesting system and tapping groundwater sources.

"After discussing the matter with the relevant people in the ministry, we will sit down with Selangor Menteri Besar (Tan Sri) Abdul Khalid Ibrahim to discuss on the possibilities of implementing rain water harvesting and ground water sourcing.

"The ministry is willing to work with the state government in implementing these alternatives if the state government agrees to implementation in the state," he told reporters yesterday.

Palanivel also revealed that the cabinet at its weekly meeting yesterday discussed these two proposals.

He adds that the National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia (Nahrim), had carried out studies on the potential of developing groundwater using the riverbank filtration technique at Jenderam Hilir, Kuala Langat and Hulu Langat.

Palanivel also said Nahrim had already carried out study and investigations on groundwater sources at the Sungai Langat basin, and had completed a pump and source management model at Olak Lempit in Banting.

On the the high cost of implementing rainwater harvesting system, Palanivel said the federal government could help in funding the project if the system comes into implementation.

"Apart from the government, industries could also do their part to fund the system in industrial areas as well as residential areas.

"Rainwater can be harvested and recycled. Then, this water can be used by people in the areas nearby without having to depend fully on treated water supply," he added.

Earlier, Palanivel presented grants from Shell Malaysia worth RM294,000 to six organisations for their eight sustainable projects.

Meanwhile, Deputy National Resources and Environmental Minister Datuk Seri James Dawos Mamit said the Selangor state government needs to reassess its effort to use the 'Royal Rainmaking Technology' from Thailand for cloud seeding operation.

He said Selangor did not have a proper dam system which would cause the water source not to be stored properly in the dams.

"Dams are supposed to store water as water reserves. But if the water is cascading, it will flow to the next dam until it reaches its way to the water treatment plant and the water treatment in Selangor is in Sungai Selangor, not in those dams," he said after opening the largest 'Paya Bakau' species tree-planting here.

The Thai technology for the cloud seeding programme has been used in Malaysia.

Yesterday, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim were reported to have directed Lembaga Urus Air Selangor (LUAS) to seek help from Thailand for the cloud seeding technology as it could provide rains for three times a week in the Selangor dam areas.

Earlier in the Dewan Rakyat, Dawos said a comprehensive study will be conducted to test the level of usability of groundwater as an alternatives water resource in the country.

He said the study to be undertaken by the Mineral and Geoscience Department will be conducted under the 11th Malaysian Plan.

"To ensure the water is completely safe to use, the study will give emphasis to identify arsenic contents in the underground water," he said in reply to Senator Norliza Abdul Rahim.

"The underground water that can be easily found in areas where it frequently rains, has to be given attention as it may be contaminated and be hazardous to health," he

Dawos also said that the ministry did not prevent the states from using underground water as an alternative source, but stressed that such a process had to be carried out in the best possible way.

He said the cost to treat contaminated water in rivers which will be higher, may be translated to users.

"This is also something we do not want, which is why we ensure all water to be treated is clean,"

Dawos also revealed that only 59 per cent of rivers in Malaysia were clean while the rest had been contaminated.

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Wednesday, April 30 2014

13. Govt gives RM500m to Mara education fund

IN STAGES: Sum to go towards programmes to empower Bumis, says DPM

PUTRAJAYA: THE government has agreed to set aside RM500 million in stages for the setting up of the RM1 billion Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) Education Fund.

In announcing this yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the funds would be used for training programmes, education, creating entrepreneurship opportunities, and research and development to empower Bumiputeras.

"Under the national framework to become a developed country by 2020, the government will continue to ensure the interests of all communities are taken care of, including Bumiputeras.

"Any groups left behind in terms of income, education, mental and physical capabilities, and those living in rural areas, shall continue to be included in the development and modernisation of this nation," he said after the launch of the corporate identity rebranding of Pelaburan Mara Bhd (PMB) and the setting up of PMB Tijari Bhd here.

Muhyiddin said the education fund would be managed by PMB while an additional RM500 million would be borne by Mara.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had announced the fund in the form of a matching grant, worth RM1 billion, when he launched the Bumiputera Economic Agenda last year.

Muhyiddin also witnessed the signing of a shareholders agreement between PMB and Saudi-based Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) on the setting up of a joint venture PMB subsidiary known as PMB Tijari Berhad.

"The agreement signed between PMB and ICD will allow the latter to own nearly one-third of the equity for PMB Tijari.

"This shows that ICD is confident about continuing its investment in Malaysia. This is also in line with the corporation's policy of aiding the development of Islamic capital and finance in member nations of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)."

Muhyiddin expressed hope that the joint venture would enable PMB Tijari to expand its services to the other OIC member nations.

"With the excellent performance shown by PMB and its subsidiaries, coupled with the initiatives recently introduced, I hope this organisation can contribute further to the financial market and Islamic capital in the country."

PMB chief executive officer Nazim Rahman told Bernama that the fund would be managed as a waqaf (eternal) fund that would still be worth RM1 billion, even after the existing fund was completely spent over the next seven years.

"All returns will be used for educational activities organised by MARA," he said, adding the distribution of the fund would take three years to complete.

"In the first year, RM200 million will be distributed, followed by RM150 million each in the second and third year. Among the areas to be focused on are innovation, commercialisation of R&D products and training programmes for teachers."