

1. Oil smugglers active in Kelantan

CRACKDOWN: Petrol station operators and fishermen under MACC watch

KOTA BARU: THE Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is keeping a close watch on petrol station operators and fishermen in Kelantan suspected to be involved in diesel smuggling.

MACC intelligence division director Datuk Azam Baki said the suspects were operating along the Kelantan/Thai border in Tumpat and Rantau Panjang.

He said a majority were members of well-oiled syndicates based in the state and the neighbouring country.

"Diesel smuggling is rampant along the Kelantan border as it is only separated from Thailand by the narrow Sungai Golok and if no immediate action is taken like setting up a security fence, smuggling activities will continue."

Azam said it was unfair for the public to solely blame MACC enforcement officers on the matter as other law enforcement agencies were also involved in curbing the problem.

"All relevant agencies must play their part to find a way to solve the problem. The MACC will also do its part. We will continue to carry out our intelligence work round-the-clock to stop these activities and nab those involved," he said.

Asked whether it was necessary for the MACC to station its officers at the petrol stations and the fishermen's jetties, he said the MACC would not do so but would continue its mobile operations.

"Apart from checking the operators and fishermen, we will also continue to check on the law enforcement officers to ensure they are not on the take," he said.

Azam said MACC was still investigating the case of a law enforcement officer who was found to have RM1.5 million in his savings account, believed to be profits from fraudulent activities involving subsidised diesel. MACC had obtained a court order to freeze the officer's account pending investigations.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (Operation) Datuk Seri Mohd Shukri Abdull was reported to have said that there was also a case where another law enforcement officer was detected to have purchased a lorry to run a diesel-smuggling business.

Shukri, however, declined to disclose which agencies the two officers were attached with.

He said it was high time for the government to review the subsidised diesel policy to combat smuggling.

The government had lost 3.5 million litres of subsidised diesel to smugglers while syndicates made huge profits from the six billion litres of RON95 petrol they sold last year.

2. Local councils to help monitor prices of goods

KUALA LUMPUR: The Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumerism Ministry will launch an integrated operation to crack down on price hikes of essential goods before the Hari Raya Aidilfitri festive season next month.

The joint operation, which involves the ministry as well as relevant agencies and local councils, will seek to prevent traders from hoarding.

"We are discussing the matter with other agencies, such as local councils, to ensure this operation is a success.

"This is part of the ministry's efforts to prevent traders and business operators from manipulating the prices of goods," said its enforcement division director, Mohd Roslan Mahayudin.

He said the ministry, through local councils, would be deploying enforcement officers to carry out inspections to monitor the prices of essential goods and other necessities in their respective areas.

Roslan warned traders against raising the prices of goods or hoarding essential goods, as they would face stern action if caught.

When asked to comment on the shortage of cooking oil and flour in the northern states, which had been ongoing since last month, he said the ministry had yet to receive a report on the matter.

"So far, we have not received any reports about the shortage or the increasing price of cooking oil and flour in northern states.

"If there is a price hike, consumers can report the matter to us and we will take immediate action against the errant trader," he said, adding that the ministry had sent officers to investigate and observe the market price of goods and essential items in the areas reportedly affected.

It had been reported that the shortage, believed to be caused by unscrupulous individuals hoarding flour and cooking oil, had prompted some traders in several northern states to increase their prices.

The price of cooking oil in Kedah and Perlis had increased from RM2.30 and RM2.50 per kg to RM3.50 per kg. The price of flour, meanwhile, had increased by 50 sen to RM1.80 per kg.

Meanwhile, ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Alias Ahmad said the surge in demand for cooking oil and flour during the school holiday season had led to the shortage of those items in the northern states.

"Our preliminary investigation revealed that the demand for the goods (cooking oil and flour) had increased, as people tend to hold wedding ceremonies during the school holidays.

"However, there is no need to panic, as the situation is under control and the prices will return to normal shortly," he said, adding that people should avoid resorting to panic-buying or stocking up as it would worsen the situation.



Tuesday, June 3, 2014

3. Billboards on GST ineffective, says NGO

KUALA LUMPUR: Jaringan Melayu Malaysia (JMM) yesterday expressed disagreement with the idea of using cartoon strips on billboards as a means of explaining the Goods and Services tax (GST) concept.

The non-governmental organisation's president, Azwanddin Hamzah, said by doing so, it had failed to meet its purpose of educating the public.

He said road users were unable to read the information on the billboards as the advertisements were written in small fonts.

"The idea of using cartoons on billboards is also counter-productive as people do not have time to read everything displayed on the board," he said, adding that the advertisements should be removed immediately.

He urged Treasury secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah and Treasury Tax Analysis division secretary Datuk Siti Halimah Ismail to opt for early retirement for employing such methods.

He said the decision to use the method, which was costly, could prove detrimental in the long run and could potentially open room for criticism by the opposition.

On Sunday, a Malay-language daily had reported that Umno supreme council member Dr Mohd Puad Zarkashi had called upon Irwan to opt for early retirement as the latter had failed to use the best medium of communication to explain the GST to the public.

The implementation of GST, set to be effective from April 1 next year at six per cent, will replace the existing sales and service tax at a total of 16 per cent.

NEW STRAITS TIMES Thursday, June 12, 2014

4. 20,434 civil servants discipline since 2009

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 20,434 public servants faced disciplinary action from 2009 to last year.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday the individuals had abused their power at the implementation level of procurement, payment and losing assets in their care.

"For every offence, we have to conduct investigations and attain proof on the involvement of the officers in misconduct. If found guilty, the individual can face disciplinary action, lose his job or be charged in court.

He revealed that 4,743 civil servants were sacked, 125 were demoted with their promotions not being reviewed for the next 48 months, 963 had their salaries cut and the rest were given warnings.

Shahidan said misconduct was not solely the fault of department heads and the misuse of power often happened at the implementa- He was replying to Datuk Mohd Johari Baharom (BN-Kubang Pasu).

NEW STRAITS TIMES Friday, June 13, 2014

5. 15 clinic to start dialysis collaboration: Subramaniam

PUTRAJAYA: The government has identified 15 health clinics nationwide to begin dialysis treatment, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private companies, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam.

He said through close cooperation, the ministry would provide the venue and staff, whereas the equipment and machinery, as well as all renovation costs would be borne by the NGOs and the private sector, on the basis of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

"Today, the Cabinet decided on the matter on the recommendation of the prime minister to help those who cannot afford the cost of hemodialysis, at the request of the NGOs themselves, particularly those getting the services at private hospitals.

"We hope all 15 clinics will be operational before the end of this year, because the NGOs and the private sector are ready to sponsor the effort," he said at a media conference after chairing a post-Cabinet meeting here today.

According to Dr Subramaniam, developing hemodialysis centres at 15 clinics will cost between RM30 million and RM40 million and fully funded by the NGOs and private sector.

"Currently, there are 26,404 hemodialysis patients nationwide. After providing the hemodialysis treatment in 15 clinics, we will expand to other clinics," he said.

The 15 clinics include three each in Kelantan and Negeri Sembilan; two each in Pahang and Johor; and, one each in Perak, Selangor, Terengganu, Sarawak and Penang.

Meanwhile, Dr Subramaniam has urged the people to use water wisely in the face of the El Nino phenomenon which is expected to lead to a water crisis in the country.

He also said that obesity had become a serious concern in Malaysia, for which the country was renowned in the Asean region, adding that the matter was discussed at today's meeting.- BERNAMA

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Tuesday, June 17, 2014

6. 80 civil servants detained for alleged corruption in first five months

MALACCA: A total of 80 civil servants were detained by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for alleged corruption in the first five months of this year.

The MACC official website said the nationwide figure shows an increase compared to the 65 civil servants detained over the corresponding period last year.

Most of the civil servants detained were from the support group (67) followed by the management and professional group (13) while none from the top management group were detained.

Over the same period, the MACC also detained 127 members of the public and of the total, 36 people were employed in the private sector. --BERNAMA

7. PAC to call Finance Ministry over dam project

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) will call the Finance Ministry to explain the awarding of a dam project through direct negotiation to a company not qualified to undertake the project.

PAC chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said the committee would also be calling the relevant officer from the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry and the company, JAKS Resources Bhd, which was awarded the RM348 million Paya Peda Dam development project in Besut, Terengganu.

"After listening to the briefing from the ministry today on the project, the PAC is still not satisfied as the delay in completing the project has caused a lot of problems to the local residents, besides not being managed well and not monitored.

"The PAC will call all those involved soon. Although we have many other proceedings, we will give priority to this case," he said at a news conference after the briefing at Parliament building, here.

The dam project which is to supply water to the agriculture areas in Besut was highlighted in Series 1 of the Auditor-General's Report 2013, tabled in Parliament in April.

Nur Jazlan said PAC found the company to be not credible and did not possess a qualifying certificate from the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) to build the dam, besides contravening the conditions set by the ministry.

"This contractor's weaknesses include not having enough equipment and a technical officer, and sub-contracting the project to other contractors when it should be completing the project."

He said that any company vying for a government project should be professional and must not take up a project which it was not qualified to implement.

Nur Jazlan, who is also Pulau MP, said the Paya Peda dam project should have been completed and expected to operate next April but at the moment, it was only 83 per cent completed.

He said the company was fined for delayed completion at RM50,000 for each day of delay. - BERNAMA

8. MOF denies tax collection to be used to invest in stocks or bonds

KUALA LUMPUR: The Finance Ministry today denied reports that tax collected by the Inland Revenue Board (IRB) will be used to invest in stocks or bonds.

"We want to make the IRB self-financing by giving it an agency fee to cover operating costs.

"For example, after expenses such as bonus payouts, it can keep whatever savings in fixed deposit as an investment," said Treasury Secretary General Tan Sri Dr Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah after attending the "CFO Summit 2014" here today.

His comments came when asked by reporters about the controversy surrounding the tabling of a bill on proposed amendments to the IRB Malaysia 1995 [Act 533], after attending the "CFO Summit 2014" here today.

"The proposed bill aims to give the IRB flexibility in having its own employee and salary schemes, which will increase productivity and efficiency," Irwan said.

He cited Singapore and Canada as examples, saying their respective IRBs are self-financing, resulting in an increase in productivity and the amount collected as tax.

According to Irwan, the authority is looking at offering 1.5 per cent of all tax collected as an agency fee to the IRB, but that had yet to be finalised.

The figure was derived from the revenue collected by the IRB for the past 10 years and the board's operational expenditure during the same period, he said.

The Finance Ministry yesterday said the government had postponed the tabling of the bill to the next parliamentary session in October, from this week, to allow more revisions to be made. - BERNAMA

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Thursday, June 19, 2014

9. Education Ministry plans to set up 500 Amanah schools by 2025

KUCHING: About 500 Amanah Schools, a joint programme between the Education Ministry and the private sector, will be set up throughout the country by 2025.

Education Ministry Deputy Director (Teaching Professionalism Development), Datuk Misrah Ibrahim said the programme was aimed at creating a school transformation model as a long-term strategic vision.

"Currently 30 schools have been selected to participate in the programme which covers primary and secondary schools at all levels of performance, with the objective of obtaining a sustainable level of achievement," he said when officiating the 2014 Amanah School Programme Conference here today.

He said under the programme, the school management would be given more power to make decisions in the management of the school to encourage improvement of quality in teaching and learning among teachers and students.

"The schools will be given autonomy to draw up their own Standard Operating Procedures and make decisions on curriculum delivery, continuous professional development, finance and procurement as well as human resource development," he said.

Misrah said the success of the Amanah Schools not only depended on their academic performance and satisfaction of the parents, teachers and students, but also non-academic elements.

"The percentage of attendance in schools, level of discipline, identity, character and patriotism spirit are also taken into account," he said.



Friday, June 20 2014

10. 150 health clinics to accommodate trainee doctors

PUTRAJAYA: A total of 150 health clinics nationwide will accommodate trainee doctors (house officers) to undergo the compulsory two years housemanship.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said the ministry was also expanding the service to several hospitals that never offered training facility.

"Some 5,000 graduates have to wait between three to six months to start their mandatory training. This is a big issue and we expect the number to rise in the next few years," he told reporters after chairing the ministry's post-Cabinet meeting, here today.

The move will not affect quality as trainee doctors are only allowed to train at health clinics that have family specialists for six months before transferred to other hospitals.

Subramaniam said 30 health clinics have started the service since the last two months without any problems.

In an effort to prevent a glut of doctors, the Health Ministry is in talks with the Education Ministry to review the minimum qualification to study medicine.

He said presently, the minimum qualification is 5B in the SPM examination.

Some 14,000 students obtain A in all subjects annually.

"We have 37,000 doctors, including 6,000 specialist doctors and expect the figure to rise to 60,000 to 70,000 in five years."

The ministry has also stopped issuing licence for new medical colleges, new medical programmes and approval to increase the number of students.

Subramaniam said there are 33 medical colleges that offer 44 programmes nationwide that produce 2,900 trainee doctors in 2015 and 4,000 by 2019.

"Currently, there are 10,803 posts for house officers (HO) in the government sector and as of April 30 (2014), 90.3 percent or 9,760 posts have been filled.

"Based on this, only 5,000 new HOs can be employed yearly and on average about 400 posts monthly. Therefore, HOs are employed in phases subject to availability of vacant posts," he added.
- BERNAMA

11. Diabetes : Sale, content of sugary drinks being reviewed

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry is carrying out a study on the awareness of sugar level content in drinks and sugar intake by people as a way to promote health management for the public.

Health Department director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said review of the study would be revealed in a couple of months and the ministry would then look at the feasibility of imposing certain measures to control intake of sugar in drinks.

"We will study in detail on ways to implement measures to create awareness to the people but we need to see the feasibility, implications and sugar content causes.

"The measures could be in the form of advertisements, campaigns method or even like practice awareness, for example official ministry's functions will not include sweetened drinks. At the moment sugary drinks are not allowed in schools," Dr Noor Hisham said after opening the 5th National Diabetes Conference 2014 today.

Dr Noor Hisham added that reducing sugar consumption can help avert cases of obesity-related illness in the future and its cost implications for the government.

The cost implication of complications related diabetes has high impact on the country's economy as it becomes costly to treat them, Dr Noor Hisham said.

"Malaysia is faced with double disease burden with non-communal disease (NCD) and communal diseases (CD). The National Health and Morbidity Survey 2011-2014 estimated 15.2 per cent of adult aged 18 and above have diabetes, translating to 2.6 million people, which is high.

"Looking at next five years, we anticipate that more people, who don't control their diabetes well, would end up coming to either public or private hospital, which are already congested.

"So our challenge is that we need to control the diabetes related complications and manage it by creating a healthy lifestyle among people," Dr Noor Hisham said.

According to the International Federation of Diabetes, about 255 million of the population is affected by diabetes and over 20 years it is expected to increase by 50 per cent, Dr Noor Hisham added.

Dr Noor Hisham said the ministry has four strategies of work processes to help create preventive awareness, reach out to people and re-engineering the work processes to decongest public hospitals.

"There are about 300,000 new cataract cases a year and the 37 hospitals can only do 10 per cent of the surgery.

"We have a partnership with Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP) with a centre on Jalan Ipoh that can do at least 6000 cataract cases a year," , " Dr Noor Hisham said.

Dr Noor Hisham said that complications related to diabetes if not managed well can create a problem.

"Diabetes related complications include heart attack, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, kidney failure, loss of vision, nerve damage, diabetic foot leading to amputation and coma.

"It is estimated more than 60 per cent of diabetes die from blood vessels diseases, 40 per cent die from heart attack and the rest from heart failure and stroke.

"While such complications can be prevented, if not delayed, their prevalence is high but there is a lack in preventing good diabetes management," Dr Noor Hisham said, adding that a change of mindset was severely needed for people to adopt a healthier living and eating lifestyle.

The 5th National Diabetes Conference 2014 themed Multidisciplinary Approach: Enhancing Diabetes Education and Manage is held from June 20 to 21.

It was organised by the Diabetes Malaysia, supported by the Malaysia Endocrine and Metabolic Society and endorsed by the Health Ministry.

NEW STRAITS TIMES

Sunday, June 22 2014

12. 11 arrested by Penang MACC over corruption

GEORGE TOWN: Six civil servants are among 11 people arrested by the state Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in the first half of the year.

The 11 have been detained to assist in investigations.

Penang MACC director Datuk M. Samarajoo said the six government servants were arrested for allegedly receiving bribes and the others over alleged attempts to give bribe.

"We are investigating 58 of the 170 reports we have received.

"The rest are not being probed due to lack of evidence," he said after officiating a forum with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) here yesterday.

Samarajoo urged NGOs to work closely with MACC to prevent bribery.

Present were Penang Youth Council president Lim Swee Bok and representatives from other NGOs.