

1. Auditor General to verify 1MDB's accounts

KUALA LUMPUR: The Auditor General has been instructed to independently verify 1MDB's accounts, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak told Cabinet today.

The report will be passed for inspection to the Public Accounts Committee, which is fully bipartisan and reflects Parliament's composition.

"If any wrongdoing is proven, the law will be enforced without exception," Najib said, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office.

The statement said 1MDB and their auditors Deloitte briefed the Cabinet today on the company's current situation and responded to questions from the ministers.

"Having received clarifications from 1MDB and Deloitte, Cabinet expressed confidence that no wrong-doing has been committed within 1MDB, and their desire for the company to be allowed to implement the proposed outcomes of its strategic review," the statement added.

2. 7.2mil applications have been approved for BR1M 2015, says Ahmad Maslan

PUTRAJAYA: The Finance Ministry has disbursed one third of the RM5.6 billion total payout for the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) in the first phase of the payment.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Maslan said 7.2 million applications were approved for this year with the first phase expected to be completed this month while the second phase will commence on May 28 followed by the third phase in Sept 28.

He said 4.1 million people will receive RM950, 2.7 million people will receive RM350 and another 410,000 will receive RM750 in the BR1M 2015.

"There are three stages of the BR1M payout; the first was carried out on Jan 15 to 5 million recipients followed by Feb 25 to 880,000 recipients. Another 1.4 million recipients will receive their BR1M from March 10 to 13.

"Some concerns were raised by the 1.4 million recipients because there is a delay in the payment. But we would like to clear the air saying that some had made manual applications while some had made late submission, therefore these are the reasons why payment is delayed.

"973,067 application were rejected based on 36 reasons among which includes 310,235 applicants having a household income of more than RM4,000, 214,452 applicants who are single with income of more than RM2,000 and 135,939 students who had received their book vouchers," he said.

Ahmad added that the rejected applicants have until end of the month to file for an appeal at any of the Inland Revenue Board (IRB) branches by filling up a form and submitting the necessary supporting documents manually.

NEW STRAITS TIMES Thursday, March 5, 2015

3. Cabinet supports audit of 1MDB's accounts

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cabinet supports the directive by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak for the Auditor-General to independently verify the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) accounts.

Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal in a statement said the Cabinet, was briefed by 1MDB and its auditors Deloitte on a number of allegations made against the strategic investment fund.

"The clarification provided by 1MDB and the auditors indicated that there had been no wrongdoing within the company.

"The Prime Minister has also pledged that if any wrongdoing is proven, 1MDB would face legal repercussions," he said in a statement today.

Yesterday, Najib who is also Finance Minister in a statement said the Auditor-General's report would be passed for transparent inspection to the Public Account Committee, which is fully bi-partisan.

Following is the full statement by Mohd Shafie on the 1MDB:

"The cabinet was briefed by 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and its auditors Deloitte, on a number of allegations, made against the strategic investment fund.

The clarification provided by 1MDB and the auditors indicated that there had been no wrongdoing within the company.

The cabinet also supports the directive by the Prime Minister, who is also Finance Minister for the Auditor-General to independently verify 1MDB accounts.

In addition, the Auditor-General's report would be forwarded to the Public Accounts committee, which is fully bi-partisan, for further scrutiny.

The Prime Minister has also pledged that if any wrongdoing is proven, 1MDB would face legal repercussions."—BERNAMA

4. 1MDB audit should be comprehensive, says DPM

KUALA LUMPUR: The Auditor General's audit of 1MDB accounts should be thorough and comprehensive to clear the sovereign fund's name of any wrongdoing.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the audit should encompass 1MDB's operations from its inception more than five years ago.

"This is because some of the accusations of wrongdoing hurled at the strategic investment fund were in relation to transactions made since 2009, which were not included in the 2013 accounts audited by Deloitte," he said in a statement today.

This includes allegations about the joint venture between 1MDB and PetroSaudi International as highlighted by several news portals recently, Muhyiddin said.

He said a transparent, independent and comprehensive audit is important to clear 1MDB's name of any wrongdoing.

Muhyiddin lauded Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's directive for the Auditor General to check 1MDB's accounts, adding that the report should be ready as soon as possible given its national importance.

"This is crucial to restore 1MDB's reputation and investors confidence," he added.

Muhyiddin said the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) can also start its own investigations without having to wait for the Auditor General's report to be completed.

He said 1MDB, on its part, should take seriously the allegations made against it, especially in social media, and take legal action against wrongful accusations.

"The 1MDB board of directors must also take collective responsibility and be ready to face legal action if investigations uncover any negligence or malpractice," Muhyiddin said.

He also suggested that 1MDB explain several transactions that do not appear to have long-term benefits to the company and the government.

Muhyiddin said the government would incur losses if 1MDB's restructuring involves selling the TRX and Bandar Malaysia land — bought from the government at a discount — and the proceeds used to repay the company's debts.

"It would be unwise if efforts to address the 1MDB issue include bailing out the company using public funds," he said.

5. PM assures no cover up on 1MDB: Ismail Sabri

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak has given his assurance to the party's division chiefs that any person found to have committed wrongdoings in the running of 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) will not be protected, said party supreme council member Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

Ismail, who was speaking to reporters after attending a meeting between the prime minister and 160 Umno division chiefs here today, said everyone was satisfied with the Najib's explanation on the recent allegations against 1MDB.

"The president gave us an assurance that we will not protect any person who committed wrongdoings in the running of 1MDB," Sabri, who is also Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister, said at Umno's headquarters here this evening.

According to Ismail, Najib had explained to the Umno division chairmen that 1MDB's accounts had been vetted by international auditing firm Deloitte Malaysia via forensic auditing.

"It was explained (by Najib) that Deloitte Malaysia found no elements of fraud during their audit. After hearing the president's clarification on the matter, all the Umno division chiefs were satisfied with the explanation given," Ismail said.

A forensic audit is an examination and evaluation of a firm's or individual's financial information for use as evidence in court. It can be conducted in order to prosecute a party for fraud, embezzlement or other financial claims.

Ismail, who is also Bera member of parliament, said all the division chiefs later expressed their undivided support for Najib as the Umno president.

"Lately, our president has been insulted and accused of many things. It is the responsibility of the division chiefs to be with him in times of mounting pressure and accusations," he said.

6. Transport Ministry will review M370 Interim Statement

PUTRAJAYA: The Transport Ministry will undertake an immediate review of the 578 pages of factual information that accompanied the interim statement from the Malaysian ICAO Annex 13 Safety Investigation Team for MH370.

Its Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the review would be done as the Investigation Team conducts an analysis of several areas, comprising 'Airworthiness and Maintenance and Aircraft Systems', and 'Air Traffic Control operations; Cargo Consignment; Crew Profile; Diversion from Filed Flight Plan route.

The team's analysis also covered Organisational and Management Information of DCA and MAS, and Satellite Communications (SATCOM).

"The transparent report will pave the way for further review."

"We will definitely take heed of the facts contained in the document and the appropriate measures will be undertaken once the necessary reviews have been completed," Liow said in a statement this evening.

Earlier, the investigation team released an interim statement and factual information pertaining to MH370, releasing the report detailing the full scope of information gathered to date, as the search marked its one year anniversary today.

The report, compiled by the 19-member Malaysian ICAO Annex 13 Safety Investigation Team, includes air traffic control (ATC) radio and radar tape recordings and transcripts, aircraft maintenance records, cargo consignment data, and interviews with more than 120 persons.

The report is available on the Transport Ministry's website: <http://mh370.mot.gov.my/>

NEW STRAITS TIMES Monday, March 9, 2015

7. Civil servants mandatory urine test, six positive for drug

JOHOR BARU: Six out of 2,194 civil servants who have gone for the mandatory urine test in the first two months of the year were tested positive of drug abuse.

For the whole of last year, 18 of the 5,376 civil servants were tested positive.

State Health and Environment Committee chairman Datuk Ayub Rahmat said the urine test for civil servants was made compulsory although the problem of drug abuse among civil servants is small.

He said this is because an efficient and effective state administration is only possible if all the civil servants are both mentally and physically healthy.

"Drug abuse will lead to low productivity. When the civil servants need money to further their addiction, they may resort to stealing, or even corruption.

"This will affect his integrity as a civil servant and the overall state administration. The mandatory urine test is a proactive measure to nib the problem at the bud.

"This is also in line with our objective to have zero drug abuse among the 20,000 civil servants in Johor by the year 2018," he told reporters after attending the National Anti-Drug day celebration here today.

8. Health Ministry to address shortage of medical assistants

PUTRAJAYA: The Health Ministry will be taking the necessary steps to address the shortage of medical assistants in the country to ensure the public especially those in rural areas are not deprived of basic health services.

Its minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said the shortage was particularly in rural areas adding that those in Sabah and Sarawak were reliant on medical assistants.

"It is important to have enough medical assistants as in some health facilities, it is the medical assistants who perform the doctors' role," he said in his speech during the national medical assistant celebration here.

He revealed that there were a total of 11,469 medical assistants nationwide

9. Police will wait for Auditor General's report on 1MDB: IGP

KUALA LUMPUR: The police will only commence an investigation if the Auditor General's enquiry into 1MDB and its accounts uncover any discrepancies, Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said today.

For now, he added, the police will await the Auditor General's report on this matter.

The police chief also clarified media reports which quoted him as suggesting that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak would be questioned.

"What I meant was that the police will speak to all those whom it believes can shed light on the case. But the focus would be on the decision makers of the company."

"And let me reiterate, this is only if the auditor's report discovers discrepancies and indications of wrongdoing. Otherwise, there is nothing to investigate," he added.

At the same time, Khalid cautioned all parties against lodging reports without any basis, saying that the police would take action against those who deliberately waste its time and resources.

Elaborating on the task force, which is headed by the Attorney-General's Chambers, Khalid said it was formed in order to ensure that an investigation, should there be need for one, was conducted in a streamlined and effective manner.

"It is far more effective for all of the relevant agencies involved to pool their resources together to investigate the matter, as opposed to carrying out separate investigations," he stated.

In addition to the police's commercial crimes division and the Attorney-General's Chambers, the task force also incorporates the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

10. Separate pharmacies from clinics would burden patients: Tun M

SERDANG: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed today spoke out against a proposed plan to separate pharmacies from clinics, saying that it would pose a burden on patients and may endanger their lives.

Dr Mahathir, a former medical doctor, said unlike many clinics, most pharmacies and dispensaries did not operate around the clock which would make it difficult for patients who needed medication at night.

"When they are prescribed something at night, they would have to send someone out to the dispensary, which may be far away or closed."

"The patient himself may be too ill to move so they would have to send someone to get the medicines for them. It takes time... in the meantime, he (the patient) might die.

"Sick people don't follow the clock," he told a press conference here.

Dr Mahathir said it was more cost-effective to maintain the present system of allowing doctors to dispense medication.

"I know, I was a doctor before. Patients often came to me at odd hours - 3am, 4am - so I had to carry my own stock of medicines with me so that I could immediately treat them.

"It's harder for the patients if we are asked to obtain medicines from dispensaries."

He also dismissed claims by the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society that separating dispensaries from clinics would reduce the number of medication errors made by doctors as pharmacists would be able to double check the prescription.

"It's a possible benefit, but let's face it, pharmacists get sleepy and make mistakes too."

The proposal is part of a new Pharmacy Bill, which is currently under review by the Attorney-General's Chambers.

11. 1MDB's US\$1.103b now in Singapore: Najib in Parliament

KUALA LUMPUR: The balance of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad 's (1MDB) funds totalling US\$1.103 billion in the Cayman Islands has been redeemed for cash and is now parked at the BSI Bank Limited in Singapore.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the decision to park the money at BSI is to facilitate transactions as the ruling by Bank Negara is that it has to approve transactions of more than RM 50 million.

Najib, who is also Finance Minister, said this a written reply to a question from Tony Pua Kiam Wee (DAP-Petaling Jaya Utara) in Parliament today.

BSI Bank Limited Singapore is a wholly owned subsidiary of BSI AG, Lugano, Switzerland.

12. National debt at RM582.8 billion, says Najib

KUALA LUMPUR: The federal government's external debt at end-December 2014 stood at RM582.8 billion (or 54.5 per cent of GDP), of which RM566.1 billion (97.1 per cent) was domestic debt while the remaining RM16.8 billion (2.9 per cent) was in offshore loans, said Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"The federal government's debt position remains manageable and puts the country in the moderately-indebted category.

"The government is committed to ensuring the federal government's debt level does not exceed 55 per cent of GDP," the premier, who is also Finance Minister, said in his written reply to William Leong Jee Keen (PKR-Selayang) today.

Leong had wanted to know the reasons for the dramatic rise in the country's external debt to RM740 billion in the third quarter of 2014 from RM43 billion in 1990, and its effects on the government's finances and economy.

Najib said to ensure the federal government's debt remains low and manageable, fiscal consolidation measures would continue to be taken to lower the deficit in stages, reducing the need for the government to borrow and thus reducing the debt level.

"Strict adherence to fiscal discipline and good debt management should be given emphasis to ensure a strong fiscal position and macroeconomy as well as to withstand any crisis," he said.

Najib said Malaysia's external debt was RM740.7 billion in the third quarter of 2014, compared to RM41.5 billion in 1990 and RM196 billion at end-2013.

He attributed the drastic increase to the redefinition of external debt in use since 2014, in line with international reporting requirements, which now put the country's external debt as comprising

offshore borrowings by the federal government, public enterprises and the private sector as well as holdings of debt securities, deposits and trade credits denominated in ringgit by non-residents.

Najib said the higher external debt under the new definition reflects the high level of non-residents' holdings of ringgit-denominated debt securities, constituting nearly two-thirds of the rise in the country's external debt.

"This is due to the wider depth, openness and attractiveness of the Malaysian financial market.

"At the same time, the new definition allows the government to better assess the risk exposure to non-residents," he said.- BERNAMA

NEW STRAITS TIMES Wednesday, March 11, 2015

13. Government signs new concession agreements for hospital support services

PUTRAJAYA: The government inked today new concession agreements for hospital support services with five concessionaires.

The companies are Faber Medi-Serve Sdn Bhd, Radicare (M) Sdn Bhd, Medivest Sdn Bhd, Sedafiat Sdn Bhd and One Medicare Sdn.

The services scope under the hospital support services agreement involve facility engineering maintenance services; biomedical engineering maintenance services; linen and laundry services; cleansing services; healthcare waste management services and facility management services.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said the new concession contract would be for the period of 10 years effective April 1 involving 148 government hospitals.

"Under the new agreement, the government will pay RM1.3 billion yearly to these five companies for the hospital support services provided by them," he said after witnessing the signing of these contracts.

Dr Subramaniam also reminded these concessionaires to continue giving high standard of services as the government had invested so much for its hospitals.

He said the ministry would keep a close watch on their performance and would not hesitate to take action against them including imposing penalty and payment deduction of the services cost.

Meanwhile, Health secretary-general Datuk Farida Mohd Ali said the ministry also supported efforts to promote green projects and it was included in the new concession contracts under the sustainability programme.

"The concessionaires have to implement programmes that have three key elements namely energy management; indoor air quality and 3R (reduce, reuse and recycle)."

14. RM950m standby credit facility to 1MDB is "a loan on commercial terms," says Arul Kanda

KUALA LUMPUR: 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) says the RM950million standby credit facility provided by the government is a loan on commercial terms.

Its president and group executive director Arul Kanda said any funds drawn would be used for clearly defined purposes as agreed with the Ministry of Finance.

"We are confident that with this facility from the shareholder, the company is well-positioned to effect its previously announced plans, as we are not focused on implementation to achieve our stated aim of maximising value for all stakeholders," he said in a statement today.

Arul said having completed a strategic review of the business, 1MDB had announced on 17 February 2015 specific plans for each of its key assets.

"The Ministry of Finance is fully supportive of these plans and, in its capacity as the 100 per cent shareholder of 1MDB, has provided the company with a standby credit facility to help ensure that it is able to realise maximum value from these plans."

In Parliament today, Second Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah said the government had injected RM950 million into 1MDB as a standby credit facility to be used to manage its cash flow.

15. Petrosaudi dismisses online criticisms of 1MDB as inaccurate

KUALA LUMPUR: The Saudi-based oil exploration and services company PetroSaudi International (PSI) has today dismissed as inaccurate online criticisms of its former joint venture with the Malaysian strategic development company, 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB).

"Any suggestions of wrongdoing in the online allegations about the partnership are simply false. All the capital invested by 1MDB has been returned - with profits," an unnamed PetroSaudi spokesperson was quoted as saying in a statement released here today.

In fact, it said, the joint venture, which ended in 2012, was a 'win-win' for Malaysia and PetroSaudi, and the information relating to the joint venture is publicly available in the audited accounts of 1MDB at the Malaysia Companies Commission.

"Unfair or false attacks on investors and partners of Malaysia only serve to damage the country," said the statement.

It said PetroSaudi is committed to delivering successful projects in the petroleum sector globally, working with its partners to international standards of corporate governance and due diligence.

"We will not be deterred by inaccurate or malicious stories that have circulated online.

"Some of those reports appear to be based on selective and distorted extracts of copies of internal company emails and documents, the originals of which we believe to have been obtained unlawfully and in some cases altered.

"We are actively considering our legal options," it added.

PSI, a global oil exploration and services company operating in Latin America, Asia and Africa, is headquartered in Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia with offices in London, Geneva, Houston, Jakarta, Carupano and Caracas. - BERNAMA

NEW STRAITS TIMES Tuesday, March 17, 2015

16. PAC to check on 1BestariNet hold up

KUALA LUMPUR: The implementation of the 1BestariNet , a project to improve the information communication technology system and the SchoolNet services in schools was a failure , the Public Action Committee, the Public Accounts Committee chairman Datuk Nur JazlanMohamed said.

Nur Jazlan said that they want to call former Education Ministry secretary-general, former education department director-general and the project management officer in charge of the 1BestariNet to explain why the project failed from the user end experience as well as the providing broadband access to the schools.

He said the 15-year project by YTL Communications initiated in 2011 costing RM4.077 billion for 10,000 schools was not satisfactory in terms of delivery of services and required further explanation from the ministry.

"We had called the present secretary-general and director general to explain but it's not fair as the project was not approved during their period. The ministry needs to improve the user experience because students, teachers and parents are unable to access the system or modules properly.

"Phase one has been delivered by YTL and the second phase are under consideration to continue as per schedule. So far RM663 million has been paid as part of the first phase and there are three phases to the project based on the tender.

"Our contention is that since the first phase has failed, why the ministry is pushing forward with the second phase. However the ministry has said that the second phase will be carried out with improvements," he said at Parliament, today (yesterday).

Nur Jazlan added that ministry will be looking into bringing the former ministry secretary-general, former director-general and the project officer, who have retired to come in for a meeting with the PAC to discuss about the issue.

The issue of 1BestariNet was raised in the Auditor-General's Report 2013 Series 3 on Nov 10, 2014 highlighting the delay in installing internet services, the lack of a project committee, feedback

from the schools stating the broadband access was unsatisfactory and the ministry's failure to carry out proper research on the needs of the schools.

NEW STRAITS TIMES Tuesday, March 17, 2015

17. 1BestariNet implementation "a failure" says PAC

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has deemed the implementation of 1BestariNet project a failure.

PAC chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said the committee will call Education Ministry's former secretary-general, former education department's director-general and the project management officer in charge to explain why the project failed to be implemented.

The project is aimed at improving the information communication technology system and the SchoolNet services. It also include providing broadband access to schools.

Nur Jazlan said the 15-year project by YTL Communications, which began in 2011 at a cost of RM4.077 billion involving 10,000 schools, was unsatisfactory in terms of delivery of services and required further explanation from the ministry.

"We had called the present secretary-general and director general to explain but it was unfair to them as the project was not approved during their time," he said.

The ministry, he added, needs to improve the user experiences as students, teachers and parents are unable to access the system or modules properly.

"YTL has delivered phase one of the project. The second phase is under consideration to continue as per schedule.

"So far, RM663 million has been paid as part of the phase one. There are three phases of the project based on the tender," he said.

Since the first phase had failed, PAC questioned as to why the ministry is pushing forward with the second phase.

"However the ministry said the second phase will be carried out with improvements," he said after chairing the committee's meeting at Parliament building today.

18. 1MDB: PAC will start investigation after receiving audit report

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) wants to discuss with the Auditor-General's Department on the scope and timing of work over its investigations on 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB) to avoid an overlap.

PAC chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said that this will allow them to start their hearing earlier as the scope of the AG's department could take a longer time.

However Nur Jazlan said that they don't want to rush into things without any unsubstantiated evidence from the investigation despite the public demands into quick answers on the issue.

"We will try to discuss within one week on the scope we can look into while complimenting each other. The department's investigation will still be our basis, so this way we can look into what we can do on things like governance of 1MDB.

"PAC had called 1MDB in the past under the former chairman but the findings were not tabled in Parliament. At the time there was no evidence that certain 'things' were happening and in 2013 the committee was disbanded because of the 13th General Election, so these could be the reasons why the findings were never tabled earlier," he said.

Earlier the PAC had said that it will proceed with its investigations on 1MDB once they received the audit report from the Auditor-General's Department.

Nur Jazlan had said that the committee required an audit basis from the Auditor-General's Department before it can start the proceeding on 1MDB.

Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said that the department has begun an audit of 1MDB soon after being instructed to do so by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak earlier this month.

Ambrin added that 1MDB audit report will be submitted to PAC.

19. Remands expire, MACC release 11 individuals

IPOH: Eleven individuals, including six Royal Malaysian Navy middle-rank officers, detained to assist investigations into alleged corrupt practices involving making false claims for tenders and procurement projects, were released upon the expiry of their remand order.

They had been remanded for 10 days since their detention.

The release order was issued by Ipoh Lower Courts assistant registrar Shamshol Azwa Martadza.

All 11 individuals, including the five civilians, were brought to the court building in a Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) bus about 10am.

They were then taken back to the MACC office in Ipoh, where their personal belongings were returned to them.

MACC prosecuting officer Roseli Roszaini said the court had allowed them to be detained for 10 days before this to assist investigations under Section 17(a) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 for soliciting an/or receiving gratification and Section 17(b) of the same act for offering an/or giving gratification.

He said investigators had recorded statements from all those detained and that the investigation papers had been forwarded to the deputy public prosecutor (DPP).

He added that some of those detained may be prosecuted soon while the rest may be summoned as witnesses.

Meanwhile, sources told the New Straits Times that the MACC is expected to serve a notice for those detained to declare their assets under Section 36 of the MACC act.

The source said the investigations would be continued thereafter whereby the commission would be doing financial and asset tracing.

"Once that is done, there is a possibility that those freed today (yesterday), will be called back for further questioning," he added.

It was reported that 15 people, including six middle-rank Royal Malaysian Navy officers, and nine civilians were detained about two weeks ago to assist investigations into the case.

The officers were investigated under Section 17(a) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 for soliciting an/or receiving gratification while the civilians were investigated under Section 17(b) of the same act for offering an/or giving gratification.

The officers' activity came to light following their extraordinary lavish spending.

NEW STRAITS TIMES Monday, March 23, 2015

20. RM2.5 billion for Sarawak rural development this year

KUCHING: The Rural and Regional Development has set aside RM2.5 billion for the development of eight rural programmes in Sarawak this year.

Its minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal said five of the programmes involved basic infrastructure costing RM2.4 billion, while three were under the Desa Abad ke-21 initiative costing RM54 million.

"The five programmes are construction of 697 kilometres of roads costing RM891, 880,006; electricity supply for 13,319 houses (RM1,060,659,100); water supply for 7,500 houses (RM337,010,000); assistance for 9,500 homes (RM200 million); and maintenance of 313 kilometres of roads (RM6,232,200)," he said.

He said the three other programmes were focused on large scale fruit farming, comprising two projects costing RM8 million; 13 sustainable farming projects (RM26 million) and the rural business challenge involving 8,500 participants (RM20 million).

Mohd Shafie said this here, today after chairing the first coordination committee meeting for this year for state Rural Exco chairmen in the country.

"We also stressed on cooperation between the departments and state government to ensure smooth implementation of the programmes.

"Aside from that, we also discussed the need to be prepared in the event of a disaster to enable community leaders to assist agencies under the KKLW," he said.

Meanwhile, Mohd Shafie said the ministry received applications from both the Sarawak and Sabah governments for additional funds to build more houses under the hardcore poor people's housing programme including longhouses.

"Sarawak applied for RM51 million more while Sabah, RM50 million more. We will refer their applications to the Finance Ministry," he said. - BERNAMA

NEW STRAITS TIMES Tuesday, March 24, 2015

21. AZAM implementation is 'problematic' PAC

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has deemed the implementation of the 1AZAM programme as 'problematic'.

PAC chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said the selection of participants for the programme was not according to standard operating procedures.

"Participants were supposed to be selected based on the eKasih database but the ministry involved did not do this, some participants have also have failed to be identified," he said after chairing the committee's meeting at the parliament building today.

The 1AZAM initiative mooted by the Women Family and Community development ministry is aimed at helping poverty stricken individuals to secure jobs and improve their income.

Nur Jazlan said most of the participants business projects had failed and the equipment provided for by the ministry such as ovens, fridges, and sewing machines could not be retrieved.

The committee has decided to call the ministry's former secretary general Datuk Seri Dr Noorul Aini Mohd Noor and Yayasan Kebajikan Chief executive officer Datuk Syed Abdul Rahman Syed to explain on why the selection process had not been adhered to strictly.

"We had called the present secretary-general and director general to explain but it was unfair to them as the project was not approved during their time," he said.

22. 1MDB Govt serious to get the truth, says Paul Low

SERDANG: The Auditor-General's auditing process on the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) is about getting the truth and not a 'classic way of distracting comments', said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paul Low Seng Kuan today.

He said the National Audit Department had begun the audit after being instructed to do so by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to independently verify the 1MDB accounts.

"The government is serious in getting to the truth. The Auditor-General is requested to do the audit not just about the account but whatever that is necessary to get to the truth, particularly areas relating to what the public is worried about.

"There are some people who claimed that this is a classic way of distracting comments by the public but it is not true. The Auditor-General's findings will be presented to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) which is bipartisan, transparent and open," he told reporters after the launching of the Auditor-General's Dashboard Version, here today.

On March 4, Najib had instructed the Auditor-General to verify the 1MDB accounts and said that if any wrongdoing was proven, the law would be enforced without exception.

On March 9, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar said a special task force comprising representatives from the Attorney-General's Chambers and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has been formed to investigate into complaints on the status of the 1MDB.

Low said the audit by the Auditor-General and the task force were carried out simultaneously and independently.

"Please bear in mind that they are not receiving instructions from anyone and (there is) no interference too. I can assure you that it is proceeding independently to verify accusations because the public need to know (the truth).

"The Auditor-General's report will be made public," he said.

The 1MDB, established in 2009, became the focus of the media and the people following allegations of financial mismanagement. - BERNAMA