



Sunday November 4, 2007

Musa: Gold medallions and gun in safe not a problem

KOTA KINABALU: Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman sees no problem with a state-owned company storing 271 gold medallions worth more than RM350,000 and a gun in an officer's safe.

"I was told that the gold medallions are for long-serving staff of Sawit Kinabalu Sdn Bhd and the gun was for use at its plantation," Musa said after attending Sawit Kinabalu's Hari Raya open house here yesterday.

The Sabah chief minister was commenting on the Auditor-General's Report 2006 which highlighted that an officer of Sawit Kinabalu was found to have kept a gun and 271 gold medallions valued at RM354,724 in one of three safes when a surprise check was made.

"I see no problem with the matter raised in the A-G's report," Musa said after being briefed by Sawit Kinabalu's Group managing director Salim Mohamad.

He said he was informed that such medallions were given to staff who had served 25 years and above while the gun was kept there for safe keeping. Salim later explained to reporters that most of the medallions worth RM1,000, RM2,000 and RM3,000 were already given away to their staff.

"Only a few are left now," he said.

Salim said that the gun was used at their oil palm plantations for protection from wild boars that intruded into the estates. He said they had explained the matter to the government auditors.



Wednesday November 14, 2007

Our envoys poorly paid

MPs voiced their sympathy for Malaysian diplomats who have to live in poor condition in foreign countries.

Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN – Kinabatangan) said Malaysian diplomats were given old cars to drive in countries they were based in.

“Once when I was in another country, a diplomat picked me up and halfway through the journey, the car broke down. “This is very embarrassing and it will be difficult for us to show the world that we are a developed country,” he said.

Wong Nai Chee (BN – Kota Melaka) said the Government should maintain the buildings of Malaysian embassies.

“According to the Auditor-General Report, the Malaysian embassy building in London has a leaking roof and a broken lift,” he said, adding that out of the 90 properties owned by the Government, 14 were without proper documentation.

Dr Junaidy Abd Wahab (BN – Batu Pahat) said Malaysian diplomats earned the lowest pay compared to diplomats in other Asean countries. In the winding-up speech, Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Joseph Salang Gandum said there was insufficient allocation to maintain the buildings and increase the pay.

“We had applied for RM10mil but were only given RM4mil and there is no allocation for that provision in next year’s Budget,” he said.

He also said the ministry applied for RM20mil to maintain the buildings, but the allocation was not approved too.



Thursday November 15, 2007

Action being taken even as ACA probes continue

PENANG: Investigations into irregularities highlighted in the Auditor-General's 2006 Report are being reviewed, Anti-Corruption Agency deputy director-general Datuk Abu Kassim Mohamed said.

"Certain cases related to failure to comply with internal procedures would be left to department heads to act upon. But we will investigate all the cases involving criminal offences," he told newsmen after giving a talk at Universiti Sains Malaysia here yesterday.

He said investigations into the A-G's report was still ongoing, adding that many officers have been charged in court with mismanagement of funds.

"The ACA does not discriminate when hunting down those involved in corruption. We look at all aspects, including the impact of the perpetrators' wrongdoings. We will go after all suspects regardless of their status," he said.

Abu Kassim also said that a centre called Ethics Centre or Integrity Reference Centre, under the ACA's inspection and legal division, was set up recently to advise the private sector.

"The ACA has guidelines that differentiate between gifts and those with vested interests. The centre is set up to provide clearer advice to the private sector. "We have received more than 200 enquiries from the private sector on what constitutes bribery. They brought up concerns related to presentation of tokens and gifts," he added.



Thursday November 15, 2007

PM's directive will also cover govt agencies, says Shahrir

KUALA LUMPUR: The Auditor-General's Department will now conduct internal audits of government departments and agencies.

Previously, the audits were conducted by officials from the department or the agencies themselves, said Public Accounts Committee chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad.

The directive came from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi himself, he said.

"This is one change that we can see after the A-G's report was made public.

"Although many may find the report shocking, we must commend the A-G for revealing the information, and the Government for making changes," he said at a public talk on *90 Days After the Auditor-General's Report, What Next?* on Tuesday.

Shahrir said people who wanted to know how the Government spent taxpayers' money could write letters of inquiry to the relevant departments or ministers.

Other speakers at the talk organised by a non-governmental organisation called Empower were Transparency International Malaysia deputy president Associate Prof Mohamad Ali Hasan, human rights lawyer and activist Malik Imtiaz Ahmad Sarwar and human rights activist Zaitun Kassim.

Shahrir said he would go through every letter that comes his way.

"This process has to start, and if we don't make use of it, the situation will go back to square one."



Wednesday November 14, 2007

Ask questions, says Shahrir

By MANJIT KAUR

KUALA LUMPUR: One way to encourage accountability of where the public's money was being used is by asking questions and ensuring an answer is provided.

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said writing as many letters to government departments and the ministries concerned is one way to get answers to questions that are lingering on one's mind.

Shahrir said it did not matter if he was flooded with letters as his priority was to investigate the content of the letters.

"This process has to start. If we don't do this, the situation will be back to square one," he added.

He was speaking at a public talk entitled '90 days after Auditor-General's report, what next?' organised by a non-government organisation called Empower on Tuesday night.

Shahrir said, prior to the directive by the Prime Minister that the Auditor-General's department will conduct an internal audit of government departments and agencies, the audit was conducted by "people" from within the departments or agencies.

"This is one change that we can see after the AG's report was made public.

"Although many may find the report shocking, we must commend the AG for revealing this information, and the Government for making changes," he said.



Wednesday November 21, 2007

50% low-cost units unoccupied

At the Penang State Assembly

ONLY 50% of the currently available 14,273 low-cost housing units in the state have been taken up so far.

Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang in the Auditor-General's Report 2006 for Penang said that up till December last year, a total of 7,141 units of such housing units were still not occupied.

"Most of the applicants had either rejected these units or failed to inform the developers about their offer," he said.

The report was presented to the House during the sitting yesterday.

Ambrin said rental arrears on occupied units till last December had increased to RM6.59mil compared to RM6.08mil in 2005.

However, he said, the monthly maintenance fee arrears had dropped from RM2.86mil in 2005 to RM2.7mil last year.

"Many occupants failed to settle their rental arrears because of an increase in the cost of living while some of their descendants declined to be responsible over the payment.

"In some cases, the monthly bills were not issued, while there was also a lack of enforcement by the State Secretary's department," he said.

On a different matter, Ambrin said the Penang Development Corporation (PDC) had yet to submit strata title applications of 1,590 property owners in its commercial and housing schemes to the state Land and Mines Department.



Saturday November 24, 2007

Dept rapped over scheme failure

THE Penang state Veterinary Services Department was taken to task for failing to meet the desired results in its RM1.5mil Calf Fattening Scheme.

Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang said the scheme, which was implemented since 2004, under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (8MP), had failed to see an increase in number of commercial breeders.

“The production of beef in the state too dipped annually from 910 metric tonnes in 2004 to 770 metric tonnes in 2005.

“It further declined to 760 metric tonnes in 2006,” he said in the Auditor-General's Report 2006, which was presented at the State Assembly.

Ambrin said the scheme, which utilised a feedlot system, was aimed at increasing beef supply and cattle count using modern, intensive and an environment friendly approach.

On a different matter, Ambrin said the Penang Municipal Council's assessment management and collection in 2006 was unsatisfactory.

He said the council was late in processing building plan approvals and conversion of land use.

The usage of outdated computers and the high amount of assessment arrears were also cited as among the reasons for its weaknesses.