



Friday November 7, 2008

Ex-judges paid RM10.5mil ex-gratia

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Lord President Tun Salleh Abbas and five ex-Supreme Court judges were paid a total of RM10.5mil as ex-gratia payment. Of the amount, almost half went to Salleh, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abd Aziz revealed in Parliament yesterday.



»I wish to clarify that their services were not terminated« DATUK SERI MOHAMED NAZRI ABD AZIZ

The minister also offered a twist to the story. He said the judges were not sacked or suspended. Instead, they had been receiving monthly pensions of between RM4,815 and RM6,548.59 in the last 20 years following their early retirement.

"The ex-gratia payment is not the Government's admission of guilt. I wish to clarify that their services were not terminated. "They have been given pensions for the past 20 years. Does that mean that they were considered guilty?" he said when asked by Wee Choo Keong (PKR – Wangsa Maju) on why the judges were given pensions.

He said Salleh was paid RM5mil, former Supreme Court judges the late Tan Sri Wan Suleiman Pawan Teh and Datuk George Edward Seah Kim Seng RM2mil each while Tan Sri Wan Hamzah Mohd Salleh, Tan Sri Azmi Kamaruddin and the late Tan Sri Eusoffe Abdoolcader received RM500,000 each.

Nazri said this in his reply during the committee stage. He said the monthly pensions received by Salleh was RM5,102.16, Wan Suleiman RM4,815, Seah RM5,916.90, Eusoffe – last pension received prior to his death RM4,815, Wan Hamzah RM6,548.59 and Wan Azmi RM5,916.90.

"The ex-gratia payment is not about closure (of the 1988 judicial crisis). It is about moving on," he said. Nazri said the pensions were given because they were given early retirement and not dismissals. "They were not sacked, the Government told them to retire early. "So they chose to retire and received their pensions," he added.

Khalid Abd Samad (PAS – Shah Alam) said there should be proper closure of the issue. "The Government should admit that there was abuse of power against the judiciary," he added. On the reason for revealing the ex gratia sum, Nazri said the compensation made to judges were taken from public funds and taxpayers had the right to know the amount.

He said the former judges' families had requested the Prime Minister to keep the sum confidential. However, due to strong requests from MPs, the Government had no choice but to disclose it, he said. When contacted, Bar Council vice-chairman Ragunath Kesavan said the payment was the right move.

"We have always championed the interests of the judiciary and not any one personality. "As far as the Bar is concerned, 1988 was the lowest point in the judiciary. The ex-gratia payment showed acknowledgement that what happened then was wrong," he said when asked to comment on the fact that RM5mil was paid to Salleh after the Bar had championed the cause.

This was in the context of Salleh recently criticising the Bar for not giving him a waiver on his application to be a consultant to his own law firm. "He (Salleh) has every right to criticise. That is his right," Ragunath said.

Friday November 7, 2008

Upko: No need for gas pipeline

KOTA KINABALU: Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok may take his party out of Barisan Nasional if the controversial RM3bil Petronas gas pipeline project is not scrapped. Party insiders said they did not rule out the possibility of such a move or that Dompok himself may quit as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

However, Dompok was evasive when asked if he would resort to such a move. Approached by reporters after launching an integrated multi-agency mobile public complaints programme at Buhavan Square in Penampang here yesterday, he said: "We will cross the bridge when we come to it."

Upko has four seats in Parliament. Dompok said he wants to bring up the issue on the proposed 500km pipeline from Kimanis in Sabah to Bintulu in Sarawak at the Cabinet meeting today.

“We have to take things one at a time,” he said, On Parti Keadilan Rakyat’s call to Upko to quit the Barisan, Dompok said: “They are entitled to express whatever opinion they have. We are not beholden to any other party, Our client is the rakyat.”

Dompok said there was no need to build a pipeline to Bintulu where it would be processed and exported as Liquefied Natural Gas. “The gas could be used in Sabah itself for a lot of downstream activities, including generation of electricity so that we will be assured of ample energy supply,” he said.

He said the Gayang Independent Power Plant in Tuaran has about 20 years of guaranteed supply. He questioned what would happen after the gas ran out there.

“What we want is to ensure ample energy supply for Sabah,” he said adding that the Prime Minister had on May 31 said that the gas pipeline project had been scrapped and that a power plant would be built.

On Saturday, though, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the gas pipeline project would go ahead and gave an assurance that the state government would be paid oil royalty and that Petronas would build a natural gas powered plant in Kimanis.

Monday November 10, 2008

No evidence of illegal Indonesian timber

By SHARON LING

KUCHING: There is no evidence of illegal timber from Indonesia being shipped to Sarawak for re-export as legal timber as has been alleged in an Indonesian newspaper, Second Minister of Planning and Resource Management Datuk Awang Tengah Ali Hasan said.

He said the state government had not received any official complaint from Indonesian authorities on the alleged export of illegal timber from Indonesia to Sarawak.

“As such, we ought not to accept what had been alleged in the Indonesian newspaper (*Tribun Pontianak*) as the truth,” he told the Sarawak State Assembly on Monday when winding up the debate on matters related to his ministry.

He said although the state government did not permit the import of logs from Indonesia into Sarawak, it allowed small sizes of sawn timber to be imported subject to certain conditions.

The sawn timber, which can only enter Sarawak through authorised entry points, must have supporting documents issued by the relevant Indonesian authorities permitting its export.

In addition, it must be handled by Harwood Timber Sdn Bhd at designated timber depots to be tagged and issued with a removal pass from the Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) before it can be taken elsewhere.

“These procedures enable the government to identify timber products from Indonesia so as to exclude any illegal timber taken into Sarawak from our neighbouring country,” Awang Tengah said, adding that the state government would never allow Sarawak to be used as a conduit for the illegal timber trade.

Monday November 10, 2008

Converting teacher training institute to English academy

By R.S.N. MURALI

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Education Ministry has set aside RM29.5mil to convert the Kuala Terengganu Teaching Institute in Batu Rakit here to an English academy by the year 2010.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Razali Ismail said the academy would help trainee teachers from Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu become proficient in the English language.

Work on the institute is currently being carried out and once completed, it would be the second academy in the country to offer intense English courses besides the International Language Centre in Lembah Pantai in Kuala Lumpur, he said after opening an Education Expo here on Sunday.

Razali said the ministry would also introduce the “first step concept” to enhance students’ ability to hear, converse in, read and write English.

He said the concept emulates an Australian learning module that transforms the way English is absorbed by students, in a fast and efficient manner.

Some 1,000 schools in the country will start using the new concept during the new schooling session in 2009, he added.

Monday November 10, 2008

Govt may add to package announced by Najib

By LOOI SUE-CHERN

GEORGE TOWN: The Government may add to the RM7bil economy stimulus package announced by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. Second Finance Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said the matter could still be discussed with Najib.

"We will see how much more we can afford to give and pace our affordability over time," he said when asked to comment on a recent statement made by Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng that RM7bil was insufficient when at least RM48bil was needed.

Najib had announced last Tuesday that the money would be used to boost the country's economy in the face of the global financial crisis and to be spent on a wide range of projects, from light rail transport to repairing houses of the poor. Nor Mohamed said it was all right for Lim to think that more was needed to encourage the country's economy but what he found interesting in the latter's statement was his stand on the matter.

"I am happy that he acknowledges the RM7bil while some of his Pakatan Rakyat colleagues have acted as if the RM7bil does not exist at all," he told a press conference after opening the Muslim Jewellers and Money Changers Association building at Lorong Soo Hong here yesterday.

At the function, association president Abdul Waheed S. Abdul Wahab appealed to the Finance Ministry to consider letting money changers keep a daily closing stock of RM2mil as the current limit of RM250,000 was insufficient for their business. "The foreign exchange rates are escalating these days and money changers are facing a dilemma every day. "When Bank Negara officers inspect money changers' premises, they confiscate all the money if the closing stock exceeds RM250,000. The confiscated money is then held for months or over a year," Abdul Waheed said.

"We hope the ministry could consider our appeal and in the meantime grant us a temporary permit to keep a larger closing stock. We also hope Bank Negara will not confiscate all the money but just the exceeded amount," he added.

He said 12 money changers in Penang and Kuala Lumpur had a total of RM9.7mil confiscated from their premises since last year because they had exceeded the permitted closing stock. Nor Mohamed said he would discuss the association's appeal with Bank Negara.

Friday November 14, 2008

Former deputy DG in court again over more graft charges

By CHRISTINA TAN

KLANG: Former Immigration Department deputy director-general (control division) Yusof Abu Bakar claimed trial in a Sessions Court here to four counts of graft for allegedly accepting bribes amounting to RM35,600.

Yusof, 54, from Seremban, pleaded not guilty to all charges Friday. He is alleged to have committed the offence at the North-South expressway northbound Serdang rest stop in Sepang district between Apr 29 and July 7. He is said to have obtained bribes from a sales manager through a third person, Munir Mohd Hamid, as an inducement to approve the extension of the China visitation passes.

If convicted, Yusof can be jailed up to 20 years and fined RM10,000 or five times the amount of the bribe, whichever is higher, for each charge punishable under Section 16 of the Anti-Corruption Act. Yusof was arrested on Jul 12, 2008, and was first charged in the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court on Oct 14 under the same Act with nine counts of bribery involving RM82,500.

Deputy Public Prosecutor of the Anti-Corruption Agency Ng Siew Wee applied for both cases to be heard together as a joint trial at the Kuala Lumpur court because both cases involved similar offences and witnesses.

She also asked for a gag order to protect the identity of the manager. She added that the Kuala Lumpur court has granted the order based on the same grounds and the possibility of job termination by the manager's company.

However, Judge Aslam Zainuddin questioned Ng on the matter jurisdiction for Kuala Lumpur to hear a Selangor case. He also did not allow the gag order and questioned the prosecution how revealing the manager's identity could endanger the manager.

Aslam allowed Yusof bail without security and fixed Nov 27 for mention for the prosecution to further offer submissions on the issue of transferring the case to Kuala Lumpur.

Friday November 14, 2008

Sarawak sets up peat R&D lab to back palm oil lobby

KUCHING: The state government has set up the tropical peat research laboratory unit to counter anti-palm oil campaigns by western non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam said the NGOs claimed that

planting of oil palm on tropical peat land was unsustainable as it would lead to higher greenhouse gas emissions.

“To counter the allegations, we need to generate credible scientific data in those areas,” he added. Towards this end, Dr Chan, who is also state Minister for Modernisation of Agriculture, said the government set up the laboratory to gather relevant scientific and technical data related to the use of tropical peat land for palm oil cultivation.

“It will evaluate the influence of tropical peat structure and decomposition on peat subsidence dynamics and determine the nutrient dynamics of tropical peat land,” he said on Wednesday. The unit recently organised an international seminar to update the recommended practices for oil palm cultivation.

Dr Chan said Sarawak has some 1.65mil hectares of peat land, representing 13% of the state, which the government planned to open up for oil palm cultivation. On a plan to turn Sarawak into the country’s second rice bowl, Dr Chan said the Federal Government had allocated RM80mil this year to fund seven projects.

Of the amount, he said, RM47mil would be used by the Agriculture Department to carry out land levelling. It will also provide mechanisation services and supply fertiliser, lime and pesticides. The balance would be used by the Drainage and Irrigation Department to maintain drainage and irrigation facilities as well as develop farm infrastructure. He said the state hoped to become self-sufficient in rice in four years’ time.

Friday November 14, 2008

Nazri admits mistake, says King wanted pension paid to the three

 [Nazri confirms King’s request that pension be paid to sacked judges](#)

FORMER Lord President Tun Salleh Abas and two Supreme Court judges were indeed sacked and not asked to leave as claimed by de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz in the Dewan Rakyat last week. In admitting his mistake yesterday, Nazri said he has since discovered that the King had written to the Chief Secretary requesting that pensions be paid to Salleh and Justices Datuk George Edward Seah Kim Seng and the late Tan Sri Wan Suleiman Pawan Teh.

The three other Supreme Court Justices who were suspended in the 1988 judicial crisis were reinstated. Tan Sri Wan Hamzah Mohd Salleh, Tan Sri Azmi Kamaruddin and the late Tan Sri Eusoffe Abdoolcader then continued to serve until their retirement.

“Since they received a pension, I was under the impression that the judges were not sacked,” said the Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department. “I did not have the facts and the letters with me at that time when I answered last week,” he said at the

Parliament lobby yesterday. "I was caught because as far as I know, a sacked person would not receive a pension," he said.

Nazri said the judges had been receiving their pensions without the public realising it. The minister added that if the Government had publicised it previously, there would not be any misunderstanding after 20 years. He maintained that it was not right to "bargain" with the judges that the ex-gratia they received not be disclosed because it was taxpayer money.

"When they presided on the bench, they would have taken action in the name of public interest. "Does it mean that public interest does not prevail after they retire?" Nazri asked. Except for matters related to national security, Nazri said a request in Parliament for disclosure should be met.

Last week, Nazri announced that a RM10.5mil ex-gratia payment had been made to the six judges involved as follows: Salleh (RM5mil); Wan Suleiman and Seah (RM2mil each); and Wan Hamzah, Azmi and Eusoffe (RM500,000 each).

He revealed their monthly pensions to be RM5,102.16 for Salleh; RM4,815 for Wan Suleiman; RM5,916.90 for Seah; last pension received prior to his death RM4,815 (Eusoffe); RM6,548.59 for Wan Hamzah and RM5,916.90 for Azmi. Nazri added that even Opposition MPs had differing views on the ex-gratia payment and pension. While N. Gobalakrishnan (PKR - Padang Serai) had said the amount was too little, Wee Choo Keong (PKR - Wangsa Maju) said it was too large because they were getting pensions.

Friday November 14, 2008

MPs question the lack of women V-Cs in universities

WOMEN MPs, especially those from the Opposition, hit out at Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Idris Haron on the lack of gender fairness in appointments for vice-chancellor posts in universities.

In a supplementary question, Dr Mohd Puad Zarkashi (BN - Batu Pahat) had asked what the ministry was doing to get high quality V-Cs, and whether the posts were advertised so that a competitive list was available rather than a politically-influenced one.

"Universiti Malaya's V-C (Datuk Rafiah Salim) had voiced disappointment over her unfinished mission. Why was the post not filled by another woman? This was an issue that Bukit Mertajam (DAP - Chong Eng) was angry about because there was no gender equality," said Mohd Puad.

Idris said Mohd Puad's suggestion for the posts to be advertised was good and that the Government did not look down on the names recommended by the Search Committee,

and noted that a princess was even impressed that Rafiah was the first woman V-C. This created an uproar and Chong Eng interjected, saying that it was only one woman V-C.

Idris then replied that it was a high quality one (*berjenama*), not like the person from Bukit Mertajam. “*(Kita) mahu 15 wanita berjenama, OK?* (We want 15 women with high quality, OK?)” Chong Eng shot back, which caused some to cheer.

Idris said that in UM’s case, it needed someone with a high level of performance who could elevate the university’s status, and the committee found that former Multimedia University president Prof Datuk Dr Ghauth Jasmon not only had vast experience in public universities but had also built up Multimedia University.

Fong Po Kuan (DAP - Batu Gajah) then asked Idris to name all the candidates for the UM V-C’s post, and a shouting match ensued when several other MPs joined in. Chong Eng then said there were 17 universities in Malaysia and at least 30% of the V-C posts should be given to women. At the Parliament lobby, Idris said that among the six women holding key posts in public universities were vice-chancellors Prof Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Shahabudin and Prof Datuk Dr Aminah Ayob at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris respectively.

The Deputy V-Cs were Prof Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia), Prof Dr Fatimah Abang (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak), Prof Dr Rosnah Ismail (Universiti Malaysia Sabah), Prof Dr Asma Ismail (Universiti Sains Malaysia), Prof Wan Mahzom Ahmad Shah (Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia) and Prof Dr Saran Kaur Gill (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia).

Sunday November 16, 2008

MPs weigh in on judicial issues

By LEE YUK PENG

ISSUES relating to judges, whether the 1988 judicial crisis or creating a precedence for the future, such as the setting up of the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), will always hit a raw nerve with MPs. De facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Abd Aziz more often than not bore the brunt of such related issues in the past week. He first revealed the amount of ex-gratia paid to the sacked and suspended judges in the judicial crisis in 1988.

He then dropped a bombshell of sorts when announcing their monthly pension for the past 20 years, which created arguments and questions on whether the judges were sacked. He replied to the MPs that the judges had retired early. Last Thursday, Nazri set the record straight by explaining to reporters at the Parliament lobby that former Lord President Tun Salleh Abas and Supreme Court judges Datuk George Edward Seah Kim

Seng and the late Tan Sri Wan Suleiman Pawan Teh were sacked. He said he had also discovered that the King had written to the Chief Secretary requesting that pensions be paid to them on compassionate grounds. The issue did not end there.

Karpal Singh (DAP - Bukit Gelugor) said Nazri should have explained the matter in the House and under Standing Order 14(i), it was improper for him to make ministerial statements in the lobby. The senior lawyer suggested that Nazri be referred to the Committee of Rights and Privileges for misleading the House in his reply. Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar told Karpal Singh that he would need to look into the records of the tribunal before making a ruling on Nazri's statement. The Bukit Gelugor MP did not stop at the issue of the judiciary's history but also delved in its future.

After his emergency motion to discuss reports of Chief Justice Tan Sri Zaki Azmi's failure to report corrupt practices in the judiciary which he had knowledge of 21 years ago was thrown out by Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, several opposition MPs led by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (PKR - Permatang Pauh) announced their intention to form a parliamentary caucus on the integrity and independence of the judiciary. Karpal Singh was elected the caucus chairman in the inaugural meeting and the deputy chairman's seat was reserved for a backbencher. Nazri, the only one from Barisan Nasional to attend the meeting, saw nothing wrong with backbenchers taking part in the caucus, saying it was "a parliamentary caucus, not an opposition caucus."

"Integrity is also what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has been talking about. I see nothing wrong in joining the caucus, which also stressed on integrity," he said. But the Backbenchers Club (BBC) thought otherwise, stressing that none of them would join the caucus. Its chairman, Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing (BN - Bintulu), said the deputy chairman's seat allocated for Barisan was only one of nine seats given to them. More storms are expected in the House as Karpal Singh wants to call for the first meeting of the caucus soon to discuss the Zaki issue and the setting up of the JAC.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar also had his share criticism over the closure of a police beat base in Chow Kit. Although a written reply to Dr Lo Lo Mohamad Ghazali (PAS - Titiwangsa) attributing him had stated that it was closed due to security reasons, Syed Hamid had denied having knowledge of it. After his supposed reply was highlighted by the media, Syed Hamid clarified that the owner wanted his premises back, resulting in the relocation of the police beat base. This prompted Syed Hamid to pay Chow Kit a visit. He also admitted that he gave instructions to his officers preparing answers in Parliament to get his signature of approval before they are released.

Tan Kok Wai (DAP - Cheras) was puzzled with the differing figures of hardcore poor families announced by the Government as a written reply by Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Mohd Johari Baharum stated that the national poverty data - eKasih - estimated it to be 181,564 families. A day later, another deputy

minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk S.K. Devamany, told Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj (PSM - Sungai Siput) that the Statistics Department, which defines household income of the hardcore poor being RM1,000 (in rural areas) and RM1,500 (in cities), recorded that 496,500 families earned RM1,000 and below while 1,695,900 families earned between RM1,000 and RM2,000.

"The disparity in figures - 181,564 families and 496,500 families - is too big. "There should be only one method to define hardcore poor," said Tan, who was frustrated with Johari's answer.

Another topic hotly debated, but not in the House, was the smoking issue. Smokers are lighting up everywhere in the Parliament building although the health clinic there had put up no-smoking signs and several huge anti-smoking campaign banners.

Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, himself a former smoker, had hinted that he would not bar action against smokers, stating that: "This is also the place where they passed anti-smoking laws." However, the no-smoking signs in the MP's lounge had been missing for some time and an MP even challenged the press to take a photo of him smoking.

The Dewan sits again tomorrow.

Monday November 17, 2008

Zeti and Jomo picked for UN financial panel

PETALING JAYA: Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz and Malaysian economist Jomo Kwame Sundaram have been appointed members of the United Nations' high-level task force to examine possible reforms of the global financial system. The task force was formed as a result of the current global economic turmoil.



Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz

The Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System would also look into the possible reform of the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) and the World Bank, the United Nations said in a statement. The commission would also suggest measures to secure a more stable global economic order.

Former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2001, will chair the commission. Other members include Jean-Paul Fitoussi, professor of economics at the Institute d'Etudes Politiques de Paris in France; Avinash Persaud of Barbados, who is chairman of Intelligence Capital Ltd, and Yaga Venugopal Reddy, former governor of India's Reserve Bank.

Also on the panel are Japan's Eisuke Sakakibara, who is professor at Waseda University in Tokyo; Chukwuma Soludo, the Governor of Nigeria's Central Bank; and China's Yu Yongding, the director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics.

Jomo, a former Universiti Malaya lecturer, is the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' assistant secretary-general for economic development.

UN General Assembly president Miguel D'Escoto, who announced the formation of the panel last month, had noted that a coordinated effort at the global level was needed to resolve the current financial turmoil.

Monday November 17, 2008

Ministry to release PKFZ report once it gets it

KUALA LUMPUR: The report on the probe into the problems at Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) will be made public once it is handed over to the Transport Ministry, its minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said.

Ong said the report, which had to fulfil some conditions imposed by the Finance Ministry, was now ready and would be handed over to him. The audit was carried out by accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"I will be receiving the report soon together with the chronology of events," he said after opening the Fourth South-East Asian Puer Tea Trade Fair here yesterday.

Ong had announced in May that an audit exercise would be carried out following a public outcry on the RM4.6bil "soft loan" given by the Government to revive PKFZ. He said he had promised that the issue would be settled by the fourth quarter of this year and that he would reveal what had been compiled.

Monday November 17, 2008

Sabah oil palm planters leaving fruits to rot

KOTA KINABALU: Thousands of Sabah rural families involved in oil palm cultivation are in dire straits as mills are refusing to buy their oil palm fruits because of palm oil's plunging price. In the Kinabatangan district, as many as 7,000 families are facing financial hardship as they watch fruits rot on trees.

"These families have been suffering for the past two months. The federal or state government has to do something," said Kinabatangan MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin.

He said most oil palm smallholders were cultivating between 5ha and 15ha and were paid about RM500 to RM600 per tonne. This translated into profits of between RM500 and RM700 per hectare in good times.

"The last I heard, processing mills were willing to pay RM190 per tonne, that is if they are buying any fruit at all. For the smallholders, this is a money-losing proposition," Bung Mokhtar added.

Among those affected is farmer Asrah Adari of Bukit Garam in Kinabatangan, who said mills were limiting their daily purchase of oil palm fruits to just 50 tonnes. "There are 2,000 smallholders in this area. All of us are incurring heavy losses because we can't find buyers for our fruits. "At the same time, we have to pay for the maintenance of our smallholdings," said Asrah.

Monday November 17, 2008

Khaled: Stop debate on V-C issue

TASHKENT: Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin wants the debate on the appointment of Prof Datuk Dr Ghauth Jasmon as the new Universiti Malaya vice-chancellor to stop.

He said nobody should question or politicise the matter, saying the appointment was done according to procedures, adding that former V-C Datuk Rafiah Salim was not removed or replaced due to incompetence. "Please stop politicising this. Prof Ghauth's appointment was recommended by a select committee and I endorsed it as I have full faith in the seven-member team," he said here.

Prof Ghauth was appointed to a three-year term as V-C on Nov 8, replacing Rafiah who was appointed in May 2006. On Saturday, Wanita Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Napsiah Omar expressed unhappiness over inferences made in Parliament that Rafiah's contract was not renewed as she had failed to perform in the position.

Earlier, Rafiah had demanded an explanation and public apology from Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Idris Haron for his insinuation that she was not reappointed due to her track record. The minister said appointments of all V-Cs to the four research universities – UM, UPM, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia – would be made by the select committee.

Monday November 17, 2008

Plans for bioherbal industry

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia aims to be a regional hub for the RM8bil local bioherbal industry which is targeted to grow by 10% annually, said Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat.

He said the Government had identified the industry as an emerging industry following the information and communication technology sector.

“Apart from capitalising on the rich biodiversity of the country, emphasis should also be given to spur more research and development by the private sector and universities,” said Ong.

“Product development, making new discoveries and maintaining safety standards and efficacy of herbal products should be of perennial importance.

“Additionally, marketing and branding of bioherbal products should not be neglected. Having physical identity for the products will definitely enhance their marketability,” Ong said at a dinner in conjunction with the Second Global Bioherbs Economic Forum 2008 night.

Ong said the herbal industry was a lucrative one, with worldwide growth expected to be US\$200bil (RM726.6bil) this year.

He said that through forums, encouragement could be extended to “herbalpreneurs” to participate in the industry, adding that the Government had taken positive steps to boost the industry by providing various incentives.

Tuesday November 18, 2008

Highway concessionaires to make agreements public

By TEH ENG HOCK and NURBAITI HAMDAN

KUALA LUMPUR: All highway concessionaires, except for one, have agreed to make their concession agreements public. Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed said only

Maju Expressway, the concessionaire for the Kuala Lumpur-Putrajaya Highway, had “yet to agree” on making its agreement public.

He said on Oct 17, the Cabinet had agreed to declassify the agreements, but a non-disclosure clause in them meant that the Government had to obtain the consent of the concessionaires before making them public.

Asked if a deadline had been set for Maju Expressway to give its consent, he said the Government cannot force the company if it did not wish to publicise its concession agreement “as the Government cannot act unilaterally in this case”.

Mohd Zin said he hoped to have the agreements published for public viewing by Jan 1 next year. He was speaking after launching PLUS Expressways Berhad travel incentive programme, which offered discounted toll rates at off-peak hours. He hoped concessionaires would reduce their toll rates voluntarily like PLUS, whose programme is a corporate social responsibility and did not involve cash compensation or an extension to its concession agreement.

He said the revision of toll rates by PLUS was a result of a study conducted by the Highway Authority of Malaysia, which also found eight other concessionaires unable to reduce toll rates because they encountered low traffic volume, cash flow problems, restructured their loans, just started operations, or have their concession agreement expiring next year.

The highways are New Pantai Expressway, Kajang Dispersal Link Expressway (SILK), SPRINT Highway, Shah Alam-Kuang Expressway, SMART Tunnel, KL-Putrajaya Highway, North Klang Straits Bypass Expressway and New North Klang Straits Bypass Expressway.

Mohd Zin said the remaining 15 concessionaires were financially capable of reducing their toll rates, but the Government cannot force them to do so without having to pay compensation due to the terms in the concession agreements. “If a cash compensation is not given, the concessionaires will not be able to repay their loans and interests on the issued bonds. This will directly affect the bond market, and the stocks of these companies on Bursa Malaysia will be affected,” he said.

Tuesday November 18, 2008

Controversial oceanarium still needs EIA evaluation

By P. K. KATHARASON, MUGUNTAN VANAR and RUBEN SARIO

KOTA KINABALU: A controversial oceanarium resort at Pulau Mabul along Sabah’s east coast still has to get the approval of various authorities here although the state cabinet has endorsed the land office’s green light for project. State Tourism, Culture and

Environment Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun said the oceanarium proponents would need to get approval for the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) and development before it can get off the ground.



Subject of controversy: Part of the existing chalets on Pulau Mabul.

He said his ministry would evaluate the proposal when they received the development plan of the proposed oceanarium. "As such, the issue of the project's approval does not arise at this point in time," he told *The Star* yesterday.

He said the EIA was a crucial component in the entire evaluation process of the project. Masidi said the state cabinet had endorsed the state Land and Survey Department's decision to approve the resort's location on a 33ha site on the basis the project proponents carry out rehabilitation and conservation works of the coral reefs in the area concerned.

He said the state needed more high-end tourism products such as resorts "to value add what nature has endowed us." He added that despite this, protecting and conserving the environment would be the overriding consideration as Sabah had one of the best track records of conservation efforts in the country. "We in the state government would like to maintain, if not improve on that," he added.

Voicing worries over the oceanarium resort plan, environmentalists, villagers and dive operators said the proposed project would spell disaster to Mabul marine life and might also degrade the eco-sensitive coral reefs of Pulau Sipadan, a 20-minute boat ride away.

Application for a 99-year lease for the parcel facing south of Sipadan was first put in by a local company based in Kota Kinabalu in September last year. It was reported the oceanarium would be surrounded by five villages of more than 200 sea-view bungalows and semi-detached villas, with side pools and spa villas as well as staff and scientist quarters.

Sabah Environment Protection Association president Wong Tack questioned the necessity of the oceanarium being built. He added that tonnes of construction material would have to be brought in by barge and sand pumped in from the shores of the island. Wong said the authority that approved the resort project should remember what

happened at Sipadan in 2006 when a construction barge ran aground, destroying a coral reef patch the size of three tennis courts.

He said the existing four resorts for higher-bracket tourists and five to 10 homestay places for backpackers with a total of more than 250 rooms, provided enough accommodation for the 120 divers given permits to dive in Sipadan waters daily.

Tuesday November 18, 2008

Motion to debate gas pipeline project rejected

AN emergency motion to revoke a proposal by Petronas to continue with its RM3bil project to build 500km of gas pipeline from Kimanis to Bintulu in Sarawak was thrown out on grounds that it was not urgent.

Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar held that while the motion, tabled by Datuk Eric Majimbun (SAPP – Sepanggar), was specific and of public interest, it was not urgent.

In his application, Eric said Petronas stated in June that the project was expected to be ready by March 2011 although Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had announced that the project was shelved.

“There should be an immediate decision on the matter for the sake of the people as the project would benefit only certain group. Many Sabahans are still poor,” he said.

Eric said the project did not benefit people in Kimanis as it was only a transit point.

Datuk Chua Soon Bui (SAPP – Tawau), supported the motion, saying: “Sabah is still the second poorest state in Malaysia. The RM3bil can be used to build more low-cost houses for the hardcore poor and improve basic infrastructure in Sabah.”

Wan Junaidi has also clarified that he obtained his doctorate in Business Administration from the University of Southern California and not from the American Northeastate University that is not recognised by the United States as alleged by a Sarawakian.

Wednesday November 19, 2008

Sabah gets RM23.5mil to build houses for the poor

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah has been allocated RM23.5mil to build houses for the poor this year, the State Legislative Assembly was told Wednesday.

State Assistant Rural Development Minister Datuk Sairin Karno said the allocation included RM13mil provided by the federal government through the Implementation Coordination Unit of the Prime Minister's Department for implementation of the Housing Aid Programme for the poor.

He said the amount comprised 26 per cent of the RM50mil allocated under the programme nationwide. "Besides that, the state government has also allocated RM10.5mil to build houses for the hardcore poor, including single mothers and the disabled, this year," he said in response to a question from Pang Yuk Ming (BN-Merotai).

– Bernama

Wednesday November 19, 2008

All but one agree to make deals public

KUALA LUMPUR: All highway concessionaires except for one have agreed to make their concession agreements public.

Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed said yesterday that only Maju Expressway, the concessionaire for the Kuala Lumpur-Putrajaya Highway, had yet to agree on making their agreement public.

He said the Cabinet had on Oct 17 agreed to declassify the agreements but a non-disclosure clause in the contracts meant that the Government must get the consent of the concessionaires before making them public.

Asked if a deadline had been set for Maju Expressway to give its consent, Mohd Zin said the Government could not force the company if it did not wish to publicise its concession agreement "as the Government cannot act unilaterally in this case".

Mohd Zin said he hoped to have the agreements published for public viewing by Jan 1, next year.

Thursday November 20, 2008

Jakim not involved in Rebana Ubi arch project

SHAH ALAM: Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has denied that the Islamic Development Department (Jakim) is involved in the construction of the Rebana Ubi arch, which will reportedly be built on the Federal Highway.

He said the department was not involved in any construction involving arches, adding that he would not know if other religious authorities were involved.

“Jakim definitely has many other more important things to do than to construct arches along the Federal Highway,” he told reporters after launching the 29ha International Islamic Hub at I-city here yesterday.

“I deny that Jakim is involved in the construction of any arch.” He was responding to a news report on public outcry that they had been kept in the dark over the project that was reportedly being carried out by Jakim.

The newspaper claimed that there were plans to build the arch near the UEM and Malay College Old Boys Association buildings at the Jalan Syed Putra stretch of the Federal Highway.

City Hall and the Federal Territories Ministry have since denied any links with the project, which is said to have left thousands of consumers without water on Tuesday night due to work carried out by Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor for the project.

Earlier in Serdang, Ahmad Zahid said the authorities would charge heretical Islamic sect founder Ayah Pin or Arifin Muhamad, 65, in court in Kuala Terengganu once he returned to the country. He said the authorities had identified Ayah Pin’s location and were working on bringing him home.

In Kuala Terengganu, Mentri Besar Datuk Ahmad Said slammed the state’s religious department for its weak stance over the Ayah Pin case although it had the opportunity to apprehend him recently.

Thursday November 20, 2008

Terengganu folk owe government RM100mil

KUALA TERENGGANU: Property owners owe the local government a whopping RM100mil.

The defaulters have not made any attempt to pay their assessment and quit rent for umpteen years, despite repeated reminders and warnings. An upset Mentri Besar Datuk Ahmad Said described the defaulters as an ignorant group who don’t seem bothered to settle their dues. It was unfortunate that property owners in Terengganu were not like those in Selangor and the Klang Valley who would pay up promptly, he said here yesterday.

He said that in Kuala Terengganu, only 50% of property owners paid their assessment and quit rent on time. He said the defaulters had disregarded the notices and warnings even though the rates and taxes had remained unchanged since 1981.

Ahmad said that due to this lackadaisical attitude, the onus of sustaining local government expenditure in maintaining cleanliness and garbage collection was borne by the state.

He said that local government spending had also increased, adding that Kemaman required RM10mil annually for maintenance works. "This would be turned into a political issue if we decide to proceed with stern action like sealing the defaulters' properties but we cannot go on allowing these dodgers to continue doing so," he warned.

Thursday November 20, 2008

Ship caught transferring sludge

By FARIK ZOLKEPLI

JOHOR BARU: A tanker was detained off Pengerang, near here, as it was transferring 678,000 litres of oil sludge worth more than RM1mil from another vessel.

Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (APMM) personnel, who were patrolling the area, spotted the tanker about 2.7 nautical miles south of Tanjung Stape in Pengerang at 5.20pm on Tuesday.

The *MT BST Mariner*, which is registered in San Lorenzo, Andorra, was in the midst of transferring the sludge from the *MT Siam Supha*, a Singapore-based tanker, when it was raided. APMM Southern Region commander Laksamana Pertama Che Hassan Jusoh said the *BST Mariner* had stopped at the location while on its way to Singapore.

"We have taken statements from the tanker's 12 crewmen and we also seized some documents. We have handed the investigation to the state Department of Environment," he told a press conference here yesterday.

He added that transferring sludge without permission from the authorities was illegal under Section 34b(c) of the Environment Act.

LP Che Hassan said offenders could be fined RM500,000 or jailed five years, or both, should they be found guilty. He said that the *Siam Supha* was detained for a similar offence on Nov 12. "This is their second offence," he said, adding that statements were also taken from the vessel's 30 crewmen.

Thursday November 20, 2008

Parliament - Mohd Zin: Govt can't order toll collection to stop

THE Government cannot order highway concessionaires to stop collecting toll because of persisting traffic congestion, said Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamad.

Such a move was not in accordance with the Government's agreement with the concessionaires, he said in reply to Gobind Singh Deo (DAP – Puchong) who asked if the Government could order concessionaires to stop collecting toll if traffic congestion was not resolved.

“For us to order them (to stop collecting toll), if that was not achieved and don't operate the concession, no, that was not in the agreement. “According to the agreement, after we hand over the infrastructure to the private sector, they have their financial obligations and we cannot take action as we like,” he said.

The cost of the Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP) was RM1.6bil and the agreement signed allowed for an estimated toll collection of RM13bil between 2008 to 2030, he said. Mohd Zin said the concessionaire had set up six more toll booths each at the Puchong West and Puchong South plazas.

Thursday November 20, 2008

Parliament - Project tender to be opened soon

Reports by LEE YUK PENG, LOH FOON FONG and NG CHENG YEE

THE tender for the Pahang-Selangor Raw Water Irrigation Project will be opened next month, said Deputy Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Joseph Salang Gandum.

Replying to Ismail Mohamed (BN – Kuala Krau) who asked for updates on the sale of water from Pahang to Selangor and on the Kelau Dam, he said construction work on the Kelau Dam was scheduled to be completed in 2013.

Meanwhile, the Public Land Transport Commission (SPAD) is expected to be set up by March next year, said Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk S.K. Devamany.

The Government was currently looking for a suitable model to emulate and prepare its draft law while amending existing laws to pave the way for its implementation, he said when replying to Liew Chin Tong (DAP – Bukit Bendera) who asked the Prime Minister on the SPAD.