



Monday October 20, 2008

PAC urged to pore over Eurocopter deal

PEKAN: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is free to initiate an inquiry into the Defence Ministry's decision to procure helicopters from German-French firm Eurocopter.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Cabinet, at its meeting on Friday, had approved his motion that the matter be scrutinised by the committee.

He said the ministry's secretary-general, Datuk Abu Bakar Abdullah, had already issued a public statement on the processes which were said to be in accordance with tender procedures and devoid of external influence.

"However, the matter should be studied in detail by PAC and it can hold a hearing in order to make a conclusion over what has happened. "I had suggested this and it was accepted, I hope the PAC will start to work on it," he told reporters during a Hari Raya open house yesterday.

Earlier this month, Mentari Services Sdn Bhd chairman Capt (Rtd) Zahar Hashim alleged the tender accepted during Najib's tenure as Defence Minister to replace the ageing Nuri helicopters was "too costly."

He claimed the Government could have saved almost RM1.5bil if it had bought the Kazan-M172 helicopters from Kelowna Flightcraft Ltd, a firm he represents. He said the Kazan-M172 met all the specifications required by the armed forces and costs RM898mil while the Cougar EC-725 would cost the Government RM2.3bil.

Tuesday October 21, 2008

Many fraudulent cases in MyKad applications

By SIM LEOI LEOI

PUTRAJAYA: Many of the cases alleging delays in the application for citizenship, MyKad or passports are actually fraudulent. Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said in these cases, the applicants were foreign nationals who had sneaked into the country illegally and threw away their documents. "They then claimed to be Malaysians. The National Registration and Immigration Departments have to be careful when processing their applications.

“Sometimes, we receive reports that an application has been delayed, only to find out later that the person involved has never applied before. Malaysia is very popular with foreigners. “It’s odd for people who claim to be Malaysians living in the country for 20-odd years but have never registered themselves with our departments,” he told reporters Tuesday after the ministry’s monthly assembly here.

Asked on the number of such fraudulent cases traced by the departments when processing such applications, Syed Hamid declined to reveal the statistics. “I don’t want to disclose the cases because we don’t want to raise the alarm of the Malaysian public. However, we have recently received a report from Interpol that fraudulent cases involving our passports are very high so we have to be careful,” he said.

Recently, there had been cases where the applicants claimed to have their applications for MyKad turned down or citizenship denied because of discrepancies within the NRD, especially in Sabah.

Syed Hamid said he had also directed both departments to set up a unit to specially deal with the complaints of delays in processing applications from the public. “At present, the cases are handled on a case-to-case basis. It takes the departments a long time to verify these claims, particularly for those without documents, because we don’t want to be taken in. Our citizenship should not be automatic, but a privilege.

“For the genuine cases, the unit will try to resolve the applications. I hope nobody will try to politicise their cases,” he said, pointing out that since Independence in 1957, the ministry had approved citizenship for two million applicants.

Earlier in his speech, Syed Hamid said the ministry staff should be prudent in spending its allocation under the Budget to ensure that all its projects had the most impact on the public. “The global economic crisis now is worse than the Asian financial crisis in the 1997 so we all have to be prepared for the effects. We want to focus on building more district police offices and quarters, as well as upgrading police beat bases into stations,” he said.

Friday October 24, 2008

Ex-Deputy Vice-Chancellor under probe over illegal contract extension

By LOURDES CHARLES

KUALA LUMPUR: A former deputy vice-chancellor is being investigated for allegedly falsifying documents including forging his superior’s signature to obtain an extension of his service contract at the university.

It is learnt that the Anti-Corruption Agency has completed its investigations into the allegations against the former professor and forwarded the findings to the Senior Federal Counsel (SFC) within the ACA for further action.

Sources close to the investigations said ACA officers found several suspected irregularities in the acknowledgement of documents by the university's Human Resources Department, thus putting the professor back on the payroll.

They said that the professor, in his 50s, had been enjoying the "illegal" extension and other perks and benefits for more than a year before university authorities realised they had been duped.

A report was lodged with the ACA which started investigating the matter in April.

The sources said the ACA had questioned all parties concerned including the former vice-chancellor whose signature was allegedly forged to make it look as though he supported the extension as well as other staff members of the university.

It is learnt that the appointment of deputy vice-chancellor is the prerogative of the vice-chancellor.

Saturday October 25, 2008

Audit committee to ensure good governance in the state

BY ELAN PERUMAL AND STUART MICHAEL AT THE SELANGOR STATE ASSEMBLY

ALL the 12 local authorities in Selangor will come under close scrutiny once the Audit and Corporate Governance committees' are formed.

"No politicians or officers of the authorities would be allowed to sit on the committees which will provide checks and balances," Local Government Committee chairman Ronnie Liu said.

"This is in line with our earlier decision to give a free hand to the heads of the local authorities and their subordinates to decide on the contracts and tenders. "The committee will scrutinise the entire process and they will be empowered to have access to all required documents and investigate any complaints or irregularities," he told Batang Kali assemblyman Mohd Isa Abu Kasim.

Liu said several councils, including the Klang Municipal Council (MPK), had experienced budget deficits due to indiscriminate development in the past.

He said that under the previous government, the assemblymen had played a major role in the implementation of developments at the various local authorities. "They have

forced the council to implement projects that were not feasible. "These projects and expenses resulted in the councils going into the red," he said.

He cited the MPK as an example as it had once been the richest local authority in the state. He said the council used to have more than RM100mil in its accounts and the situation had changed drastically in recent years. "The council has now been forced to apply for a bank draft facility in order to pay the salaries of its staff," he said

Citing another example, Liu said the Selayang Municipal Council owed contractors more than RM2mil due to indiscriminate development. He said a former state assemblyman had influenced the council to obtain projects as part of the general election campaign.

"The council is unable to come up with the payment for these projects since they are not genuine ones but created just to safeguard the political interests of the assemblyman. "It is due to these sort of projects that the state had experienced RM30bil in losses over the past 30 years" he added.

Thursday October 30, 2008

PAC meeting on Eurocopter postponed

By LEE YUK PENG

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has postponed its meeting to probe the Government's decision to buy new Eurocopter helicopters to Monday.

PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the meeting on Thursday was rescheduled as Finance Ministry secretary-general Wan Abdul Aziz could not attend the meeting due to other duties. A division secretary was sent to attend the meeting instead and Azmi said he was not satisfied with this. "It is a serious matter and I want to hear from a high-ranking officer from the Finance Ministry for clarification," he said.

PAC would resume its meeting on Monday by calling an officer from the technical division of the Defence Ministry in the morning to provide clarification and the secretary-general of the Finance Ministry in the afternoon, said Azmi.

He also said there was no need for PAC to call any ministers or deputy ministers at this moment. Thursday was the second day for the parliamentary committee to scrutinise the purchase of 12 Cougar EC 725 helicopters for the Royal Malaysian Air Force.

Thursday October 30, 2008

Start building houses, Govt urges developers

By CHRISTINA KOH

IPOH: Housing developers should launch their projects now that the fuel prices and the cost of building materials have dropped, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan said.

Over the past six months, he said, many projects did not take off as developers chose to stall them because of the rising cost of building materials. He pointed out an average of 100,000 homes were built each year, but as of October, only half of that amount had been delivered so far.

“We always need the sale of houses to generate economic activity. Every house has 140 components, so if the developers stop building, then this also affects the factories producing the building materials.

“The professional bodies would have no business and this creates a backlash in the industry,” he told reporters at a Perak Fire and Rescue Department Hari Raya celebration here on Wednesday night. “Launch the project because the demand for houses is always there. Of course, some developers still prefer a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude,” he added.

Ong also said the ministry was working out a mechanism to stabilise the cost of building materials for the housing sector, particularly low and medium cost housing schemes. The Government, he said, had learnt its lesson from previous experiences when steel prices, for instance, had once soared and thrown builders into a difficult position.

“We have to talk with the developers, manufacturers and building material suppliers to work out the mechanism because we cannot make a decision when it affects their interest. “We don’t want a situation where the high prices (of building materials) affect the supply of low and middle cost houses, which are in great demand,” he added.

Among the possibilities for the mechanism was the Government stockpiling steel or rendering other form of assistance, he said.

Earlier in his speech, Ong commended the Perak Fire and Rescue Department for being one of the recipients of a ‘Pride of Workmanship’ award from the Greentown Rotary Club here. He noted that for this year alone, state firefighters had responded to 2,089 fires, rescued people from drowning and car accidents in 2,720 cases and removed 1,166 snakes, bee hives and other dangerous animals.

Thursday October 30, 2008

Probe into PKFZ scandal under way

PETALING JAYA: The probe into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) scandal is under way, with international accounting firm Price-waterhouseCoopers beginning auditing work early this month.

Port Klang Authority chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the probe would be completed by the end of the year, and a copy of the report will be submitted to Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat.

“It will be up to the Transport Minister to decide if the report will be made public,” he said. Lee said the accounting firm’s team, which consisted six members and led by a senior manager, had been given authority to interview all staff and board members.

He added that former staff would be interviewed by the team as well, should the need arise. 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.

Thursday October 30, 2008

PAC probes copter deal

THE Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is studying the technical details regarding the Government’s decision to buy new Eurocopter helicopters. Committee chairman Datuk Azmi Khalid said the technical details of the deal had been professionally carried out.

“We will also study the financial aspects of the deal later on,” he said at Parliament House yesterday.

The parliamentary committee is conducting a two-day study, which ends today, to scrutinise the purchase of 12 Cougar EC725 helicopters for the Royal Malaysian Air Force.



Important gathering: Azmi and Dr Tan chairing the PAC meeting at the Parliament House in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The meeting was held to discuss the Government’s decision to buy 12 Eurocopter EC725 helicopters in a RM1.7bil deal.

Asked on the call by DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang that the inquiry be chaired by PAC deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw, Azmi said it was only Lim's opinion. "Let us look into the matter professionally," he added.

Lim had urged Azmi to withdraw from chairing the meeting as he was a former Cabinet minister.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced the deferment of the RM1.7bil purchase of the helicopters due to the current economic climate. He said the helicopter purchase would be reactivated once the economy improved.

In a separate press conference, Lim said the committee should study the entire procurement process of defence-related equipment and investigate the financial discrepancies said to be found in the deal.

He said it should also make a comparison of the price and specifications of the Cougar chosen by Malaysia and the ones bought by Brazil in another deal to determine whether the Defence Minister had been properly advised. He urged Abdullah to explain to Parliament the details behind the decision to buy the aircraft.

Thursday October 30, 2008

Price of construction materials to be adjusted

THE PRICE of construction materials will be adjusted following the price increase in fuel and other items to ensure that projects under the Ninth Malaysia Plan are not abandoned.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Husni Mohamad Hanadzlah said the ministry had issued a circular in August on the criteria and methods of making price amendments to replace the one set in 1991.

"The new rule enables conditional price changes on design and built projects, mechanical and electrical works while increasing the number of construction materials in the list," he told Datuk Rosnah Abdul Rashid Shirlin (BN – Papar).

Rosnah had asked whether capital would be injected for the 6,000 contractors carrying out public projects under the Ninth Malaysia Plan since the tender prices were no longer relevant due to the increase in the prices of fuel and construction materials. The ministry had also established a committee at the highest level to monitor implementation of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, Ahmad Husni said.

On extra payment for contractors, he said the Government had instead made price changes based on the actual price published by the Statistics Department.

Dr Dzulkifli Ahmad (PAS – Kuala Selangor) asked if the Construction Industry Payment and Adjudication Act could be expedited in view of the Corridor projects and delay in payments to contractors.

Ahmad Husni said the ministry monitored the cash flow at all times and ensured that payments are made as soon as possible.

Friday October 31, 2008

Perak probe losses by state agency

IPOH: The Perak Government has begun investigations into a state agency subsidiary company with an accumulated loss of more than RM100mil.

Perak senior executive councillor Datuk Ngeh Koo Ham said the subsidiary of the State Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) had a paid-up capital of RM50,000 but accumulated losses stood at over RM100mil.

“How can a subsidiary company with a paid-up capital of RM50,000 have an accumulated loss of more than RM100mil?” he said at a press conference yesterday after attending the Perak Water Board meeting.

Ngeh also asked if there were people using the subsidiary to siphon money from the government? He pointed out that the government wanted to cut losses, reduce pilferage and increase productivity of state agencies, such as the SEDC and the State Agriculture Development Corporation (SADC).

When entering into an agreement to develop prime land, he said, SADC officers must ensure the returns achieved were similar to what the private sector made