



Friday November 28, 2008

## Pak Lah: Civil servants can go back to pension scheme

By SIM LEOI LEOI

 [Civil servants who opted for EPF can revert to pension](#)

PUTRAJAYA: Some 40,000 civil servants, who had opted for the Employees Provident Fund, can now revert to the pension scheme.



Well done: Abdullah talking to UiTM Vice-Chancellor Datuk Seri Ibrahim Abu Shah after the award presentation in Putrajaya Thursday. Looking on is Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said these civil servants can exercise their option to revert to the pension scheme in January. "Their decision will take effect from Feb 1, and they will be able to enjoy all the facilities currently entitled to pensioners, such as free medical treatment. Parents of civil servants, who have passed away and were single at that time, will also receive ex-gratia payments.

"These are some of the decisions that were made following a recent meeting by the Cabinet committee on appointments and salaries for civil servants," he said in his speech before presenting the Public Sector Quality Awards at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre here yesterday.

Other decisions taken by the committee included upgrading the salary schemes for investigating officers under the Anti-Corruption Agency and for senior, low-ranking officers and constables in the police force, and a 20% increase in pay for maritime officers. "All these decisions will be effective from Jan 1," he said, adding that the Government would work out the actual amount of financial allocation involved in the upgrading and salary increase later.

Cuepacs welcomed the move to allow civil servants on the EPF scheme to opt for the pension scheme, said its secretary-general Ahmad Shah Mohamad Zain. Last week, Cuepacs president Omar Osman complained that civil servants who opted for EPF scheme did not enjoy benefits such as free medical treatment in government hospitals and gratuity payments upon their retirement. Earlier, Abdullah said he was glad to note from his dialogues with various business and non-governmental groups that the number of complaints involving public delivery of services had gone down.

“In the World Competitiveness Yearbook report for this year, Malaysia has managed to improve its ranking from 23rd last year to 19th this year. For the category of countries with more than 20 million population, we have also moved one place from 8th to 7th this year.

“Efforts to enhance our online access for government services have begun to bear fruit. In an analysis by Brown University, Malaysia’s online government services have improved from 25th place last year to 11th place,” he said.

However, Abdullah said award-winning government departments should ensure that they continue to maintain and improve on their standards. “Selection of winners must be made according to high standards so that their win will not be disputed by anybody, which can then erode public confidence in our awards,” he said.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) won the Prime Minister’s Award for Quality at the event. The five winners for the Public Service Innovation Award were the Dental Specialist Clinic in Kuching, Perak Irrigation and Drainage Department, Department of Survey and Mapping, Seremban Municipal Council and Mampu.

**Sunday November 30, 2008**

### **Parliament - MB: Kedah govt won’t let Lada deal go sour**

ALOR STAR: Kedah Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak has lashed out at his predecessor for presuming the state would pull the plug on Langkawi Development Authority (Lada) when the charter expires in 2010.

He called on Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid not to make assumptions that would hamper the state’s progress. “I have never said we may not allow the renewal of Lada’s charter, as reported in certain media,” he said.

Azizan was refuting a report in an English daily which quoted Mahdzir as saying that Lada’s charter might not be renewed after its jurisdiction over Langkawi lapses in March 2010. Mahdzir, who is also Opposition Leader and state Barisan Nasional chairman, had said he was worried if the rumour that the PAS-led state government would not renew the charter was true. He warned that the state would have financial difficulty in sustaining development in Langkawi because Lada operates on federal funds.

Azizan called on Mahdzir not to imply the state was unwilling to co-operate with the Federal Government. "Of course we want to co-operate with the Federal Government to renew Lada's charter. But we want to discuss the terms and conditions first," he said.

Azizan said the state was not going to pull the plug on Lada that had contributed so much to the progress of the famous tourist destination.

**Monday December 1, 2008**

## **Wild orchid found in Cameron Highlands**

By CHRISTINA KOH

IPOH: The rare flowering of a mountain "leafless orchid" has sparked excitement among a group of friends who spotted it in the Cameron Highlands jungle of Gunung Jasar, Tanah Rata. Local environmentalist and orchid enthusiast Embi Abdullah, 60, said it had been five years since he had seen the *Aphyllorchis montana* orchid blooming in the area. Commonly known as the "leafless orchid", the plant only reveals itself when it flowers, producing a 1.2m tall stem of butter-yellow orchids with brown specks, he said.

"It is very difficult to find them because this mountain species usually flowers once every two or three years," said Embi.



Precious petals: A close-up of the *Aphyllorchis montana* orchid in the Gunung Jasar jungle, Tanah Rata.

"Even then it needs the right climatic conditions, like plenty of rainfall, before the orchid will flower." Embi said that since the first sighting of the plant in 2003, he and fellow nature lovers N. Madi and Khairulanwar Husain had been looking out for it in Gunung Jasar. He added that the leafless orchid happened to be near the same spot where they had sighted another rare flower, an unusually reddish *Amorphophallus bufo*, in May.

The group of friends are trying to get the authorities' help to protect the jungle site so that it would not be developed in the future. "The *Aphyllorchis montana* has beautiful flowers. Although it is called the leafless orchid, in truth it has leaves so tiny that people often mistake them for something else," he enthused. The orchid, he added, was found only in Asian highland areas and fed on decaying organic matter. Its roots only go down some 15cm deep.

**Monday December 1, 2008**

## **Most pre-schools, nurseries in Penang don't have permits**

**By NG SU-ANN**

GEORGE TOWN: Only six out of 200-odd kindergartens and nurseries in Penang have operating permits, said Penang Health, Welfare and Caring Society Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh.

"Most have no licence while some have expired ones. I've been appealing to them to be regulated. "I want to promote awareness followed by educating, issuing warnings before finally using enforcement as the last resort. "Instead of going into war, we should settle things at the table," he told newsmen after opening a Mass CPR Programme held by St John Ambulance of Malaysia on Sunday.

He said an illegal operator in Bukit Mertajam had been circulating rumours via SMS since Friday that DAP state executive councillors were forcing a new ruling on them which meant they had to pay quit rent and assessment based on commercial rates.

"The SMS also urged the public to support her cause by forwarding the messages to four state executive councillors -- myself, Chow Kon Yeow, Lydia Ong and Danny Law. The message even supplied our handphone numbers," he added.

Phee said he spoke to the operator for one hour and arranged for a meeting between her and Chow for Wednesday. He added the ruling had been in existence for years. "All the illegal operators have to do is apply to the Land Office to convert their land from residential to commercial use. "The municipal councils will then issue them the permits after the fire and health departments inspect them and give the green light. "These are all done to ensure that the necessary safety measures are in place," he said.

He also said that since they were operating a business, it was only fair that they pay commercial rates for utilities, quit rent and assessment.

**Wednesday December 3, 2008**

## **National disaster relief centre to be set up in Subang**

KUALA LUMPUR: A national disaster relief centre will be set up in Subang next year with an annual Government contribution of US\$1mil (RM3.6mil), says Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. "In the future, all disaster relief and food relief operations will be co-ordinated from Subang," he said, adding that such a centre was first mooted by the Defence Ministry.

Najib was presenting a keynote speech at the third Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday. The three-day conference is being held to review the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), adopted by 168 countries worldwide in 2005.

The HFA is a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction efforts, designed as a 10-year plan to make the world safer from natural hazards. "Disasters can be reduced substantially if people are well informed about the measures they can take to reduce vulnerabilities," said Najib.

An estimated 600 delegates from 39 countries in the Asia-Pacific region are attending the conference. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction director Salvano Briceno and National Security Council secretary Datuk Muhammad Hatta Ab. Aziz were also present.

Wednesday December 3, 2008

### **Developer: Council HQ project followed procedures**

BUTTERWORTH: The developer of the RM84.3mil Seberang Perai Municipal Council (MPSP) headquarters in Bandar Perda maintains that the project was carried out above board. Aseania Development Sdn Bhd chairman Datuk Musa Sheikh Fazir said he had nothing to hide and would provide all relevant documents to the state committee tasked to investigate the council's plunging reserves. "I will give my full co-operation to the committee if summoned for an explanation. "We have followed all procedures during the process of constructing the headquarters. I will tell all when I am called," he said yesterday.

Musa, who is Bukit Mertajam Umno division chief, said he hoped the committee would give him ample notice to prepare all the related documents. Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng had said on Monday that the state government had appointed state financial officer Datuk Supiah Md Yusof as acting council president and also to head a committee to find out why the council's reserves depleted from RM230.2mil on Jan 1, 2000, to only RM6.4mil now. Supiah had said she would be calling several people, including Musa for investigations.

Lim had claimed that the MPSP headquarters was built by Aseania without an open tender, adding that there was another proposal to build it on a 7.5ha plot in Ampang Jajar at a cheaper cost. Meanwhile, MPSP president Farizan Darus clarified that he was not told to take leave but was attending a three-week course at Intan in Bukit Kiara from Nov 24. He said he had received many SMSes from friends following a report in *The Star*

stating that he was asked to go on leave. "I am actually attending a course and will be back to work after that," said Farizan, who was only appointed MPSP president last year.

A letter from the Chief Minister's office yesterday also clarified that Farizan was on "his scheduled annual leave".

**Thursday December 4, 2008**

### **Retrenchment 'the last resort'**

*By MAZWIN NIK ANIS*

PUTRAJAYA: The Government will ensure that retrenchment is the last resort by employers should the need to downsize arise. Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam also said that the ministry would also ensure that employers let go of foreign workers first. "That is the rule. We will see to it that bosses adhere to the Employment Act where recently employed workers will have to be retrenched first," he said in an interview.

He said the Government would do everything in its power to assist retrenched workers. "We will also help the retrenched workers look for new employment and provide allowance should they opt to take up training or skills courses while awaiting a suitable job," he said. Dr Subramaniam said the Government had put in place various initiatives, including training, retraining and creating new job opportunities for the displaced.

The new initiatives are part of the National Action Plan for Employment beginning this year until 2010. It aims to tackle the unemployment rate, heavy dependence on foreign workers, fast-changing demands of the labour market and enhance the country's labour market competitiveness.

Dr Subramaniam said that under the action plan, the Government would help create more jobs for the retrenched and the unemployed. He said training would be provided so they would become valuable workers while more value would be given to jobs via advanced training, including to workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

**Friday December 5, 2008**

### **Sabah forest conservation creating 'native towkays'**

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah's massive forest conservation programmes are helping to create "native towkays" – those undertaking contract work under sustainable forest management. Sabah Forestry director Datuk Sam Mannan said conservation efforts had

created numerous high quality jobs, with villagers getting contracts which never existed before.

“These contracts for replanting indigenous plants and other requirements for sustainable forest management can be worth about RM1.4mil a year,” Mannan told reporters after signing a partnership agreement between his department and Sime Darby Sdn Bhd for the restoration and protection of orang utan habitats in Ulu Segama. Under the agreement, Sime Darby will give RM25mil, the largest amount from the private sector, to restore orang utan habitats in an area of about 5,400ha in northern Ulu Segama which is home to 400 to 500 of the primates. Stressing that conservation alone would not be sustainable without socio-economic development, Mannan noted that an article in the November issue of *National Geographic* implied that poverty was the greatest threat to the rainforest of Borneo, and not logging, oil palm or fires.



Conservation fund: Sime Darby Berhad chief sustainability officer Puvan J. Selvanathan (right) presenting a mock cheque for RM25mil to Mannan in Kota Kinabalu yesterday. Looking on is Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman.

He said Sabah’s approach to eliminating abject poverty had been successful. Its strategy was to safeguard the rainforests through diversification programmes targeting agriculture development, agro-based value addition, resource-based industrialisation and tourism. “What we are doing in Sabah will help the orang utans and more, he said at the function, also attended by ambassadors from the European Union. The 250,000ha logged over Ulu Segama-Malua sustainable forest management area in Lahad Datu was earmarked for conservation in March 2006 and logging was phased out by December last year.

The federal and the state governments have pumped in nearly RM200mil towards conservation efforts, while groups like the WWF, Arcus Foundation, NewForests, LEAP and the Alexander Abraham Foundation have also contributed.

Friday December 5, 2008

### 300 evacuate buildings in landslide

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 300 people were forced to evacuate two buildings when a landslide caused part of the retaining wall of a car park to collapse in Jalan Semantan here.

Heavy rain from 3pm yesterday had caused soil erosion at an adjacent hill, resulting in the landslide which rendered buildings on either side of the collapsed wall – CIMB Commerce Square and Amanah Raya – unsafe.



Rescuers go into action: Rescue personnel examining the cars buried and damaged by the landslide in Jalan Semantan, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

Six cars were buried in the landslide while five other vehicles were damaged. The incident, which occurred around 5.20pm, caused massive traffic congestion until 10pm along Jalan Semantan leading to the city. Authorities had to make sure the public stayed at a safe distance as chunks of earth kept falling off the wet slope, while water and mud were seen flowing down the slope continuously. Several people from the Amanah Raya building said they heard a loud crash and felt the whole building shake as the retaining wall collapsed into the staff car park between the buildings.

Norhaliza Abdul Jalil, who works in the Amanah Raya building, said she did not realise that her car was crushed until she walked out of the building. Meanwhile, CIMB group chief executive Datuk Seri Nazir Tun Razak said no one was injured in the incident and that the two buildings were evacuated as a precautionary measure.





The Fire and Rescue Department's Sniffer Dog Unit searches for any trapped survivors. "We want to ensure the safety of our employees which is why we evacuated both buildings," he said. Federal Territories Minister Datuk Zulhasnan Rafique, who arrived at the scene later, said the car park and Jalan Sri Semantan 1 located on top of the hill were closed pending investigation into the structural integrity of the wall.

"The investigation will be conducted by Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Public Works Department and the Public Works Institute," he said.

Fire and Rescue Department operations commander Azizan Ismail said 47 firemen from the Sri Hartamas and Jalan Hang Tuah fire stations, together with 30 police officers from Brickfields, were deployed to the scene and began the clearing process. Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk M. Saravanan said the clearing work was expected to take about four hours.

**Friday December 5, 2008**

### **Events behind PKFZ to be revealed**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Transport Ministry will make public the chronology of events over the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) scandal by the end of the year, said minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat. He said the quantitative aspect of the scandal, which involved some amount of money, would only be announced after accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers completed its interviews with personalities attached to the PKFZ entities.

"PricewaterhouseCoopers will still have to interview one more personality before the investigation can be concluded," he told a press conference after the launch of Road Traffic Accident Study Day 1 at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Hospital yesterday.

Ong said the probe had reached its final stage and that PricewaterhouseCoopers would also go through the past accounts of PKFZ.



Saying thanks: Ong receiving a souvenir from UKM deputy vicechancellor Prof Dr Saran Kaur during the launch of the Road Traffic Accident Study Day 1 at UKM Hospital yesterday.

On another matter, Ong said the ministry would also find ways to improve the ambulance response time. According to Road Safety Department director-general Datuk Suret Singh, the current average response time of ambulances was 30 to 40 minutes, compared to the international standard of seven to 10 minutes. Ong said the Ministry would be looking into making an improvement to the response time.