



Tuesday February 3, 2009

## Several companies offering employees 75% of monthly pay

By ANN TAN and ZULKIFLY MOHAMAD

GEORGE TOWN: Several companies here have extended their holiday shutdown and are offering employees 75% of their monthly salaries to scale down operational costs. Malaysian Trades Union Congress has received complaints from members about employers verbally informing them the Chinese New Year holiday shutdown had been extended from the maximum two weeks to one month.

The congress' Penang secretary K. Veeriah said the members' had been seeking advice on whether to accept or reject the offer. "The proposals were all made verbally. The workers felt caught in a bind. "Any pay cut is considered illegal unless there is consent from the employees," he told *The Star* yesterday.

Veeriah added employers usually observed a maximum two weeks shutdown for the Chinese New Year break, but they might opt for an extended break in view of the global economic slowdown. Last month, the Penang Labour Department reported several companies cutting their staff salaries by between 3% and 10%; while some offered a two-week holiday shutdown for the Christmas to the New Year period.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers northern branch chairman Datuk O.K. Lee described the proposal as a generous solution as it was better than to retrench people. "I believe this is a more reasonable way for the employees to share the suffering of the company," he said, adding that more than 90% of the federation's 2,300 members were affected by the global economic slowdown. Lee said a dialogue between the federation's chief executive officers and council members would be held on Feb 12 to discuss strategies to overcome the current situation.

Cuepacs president Omar Osman has appealed to federal and state governments not to terminate the services of contract staff, adding that the body's random survey showed more than 1,500 of them were laid off in the past three months. The latest case of termination involved 13 Penang Public Library Corporation staff members last month, some of whom, he said, had been working for 10 years. "They were not given any reminders or warnings for poor performance, yet out of the blue, their service were terminated without compensation," he said, adding that this was against a Government circular requiring laid-off civil servants to be compensated fairly.

**Tuesday February 3, 2009**

### **February deadline for welfare homes to register**

KUALA LUMPUR: Welfare homes and non-governmental organisations caring for the needy have until the end of the month to register with the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry. “This will enable such homes to enjoy subsidies provided by the Government.



Season’s greetings: Dr Ng sharing a light moment with Lee Soon Mun, 84, from Rumah Victory during the Chinese New Year celebration with senior citizens at The Pavilion in Kuala Lumpur.

“Those registered will receive a daily subsidy of RM8 for each occupant for food and necessities as long as the homes fulfil the minimum requirements set out by the ministry,” said minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen.

She said the ministry would check on the condition of each home to ensure there was adequate infrastructure and that the premises were kept clean and not congested. As for the number of underprivileged people receiving aid from the Social Welfare Department under ‘projek cari’ (search project), Dr Ng said the figure had increased from 16,739 to 40,000.

The project, launched last July, would continue to look for those deserving of help. “The ministry also called up family members of senior citizens identified under the project. “We advised the children to look after their aged parents as this is a duty the ministry is not able to undertake,” Dr Ng said at a Chinese New Year celebration with senior citizens hosted by the Pavilion Kuala Lumpur yesterday. She handed out *ang pows* and hampers to 108 senior citizens from Rumah Charis, Rumah Victory, Rumah Sejahtera Seri Setia and Caring Old Folks Home.

**Wednesday February 4, 2009**

### **Gambang gets RM4mil bio-organic fertiliser facility**

**By ROSLINA MOHAMAD**

KUANTAN: A company under a state agency will build the second “green waste” fertiliser factory following the success of its first three years ago. LKPP Corporation Sdn Bhd (LCSB) will begin building the RM4mil bio-organic fertiliser factory next week. It is expected to be

operational by September. Bio-organic fertiliser is produced from “green waste” such as the fruit bunch remnants, decanter cake, boiler ash and fruit fibre. The first factory operates at LCSB’s oil palm plantation in Lepar with a monthly production of 2,000 tonnes of fertiliser. The second facility, to be set up in Dominion Square Sdn Bhd (DSSB)’s oil palm plantation in Gambang, will have a similar output. LCSB is a company under the Pahang Agriculture Development Board (LKPP), while DSSB is a subsidiary of LCSB.

The two projects are joint ventures of Malaysian Agri Group of Companies (Myagri), LCSB and DSSB. LCSB managing director and DSSB executive chairman Datuk Md Adnan Sulaiman said the current production was meant for use at LKPP’s 23,000ha oil palm plantation. It is part of the agency’s long-term measures to reduce the usage of chemical fertiliser. “We have reduced the use of chemical fertilisers by half, and are now using some bio-organic fertiliser,” said Md Adnan. “Results have been good with better quality and increased yield,” he told reporters after a ground-breaking ceremony for the new factory here on Monday. Also present at the ceremony was Myagri managing director Norhayati Md Taib. She said bio-organic fertiliser was an alternative to organic fertilisers, adding that bio-organic fertiliser was free of *E.coli* and *salmonella* bacteria. “It helps to improve crop productivity and land rehabilitation.”

Norhayati also said Myagri plans to build 20 such factories within the next five years.

**Friday February 13, 2009**

## **Merit, income criteria for PSD scholarship**

**By ROYCE CHEAH**

SERDANG: Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan has agreed that the Public Service Department scholarship should be awarded based only on merit and household income, after discussions with MCA leaders and community heads. MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said consensus was reached at a recent meeting and that the idea would be brought to the Cabinet for further discussion. The other leaders involved in the move were from the Indian and Sabah and Sarawak ethnic communities. “The consensus reached also included the fact that students who qualify for the scholarships will be eligible not only for overseas study but also for local universities.”

The proposed criteria to select students based on good results and low household income ought to be strictly adhered to, Ong said at the Serdang MCA Chinese New Year open house last night which was attended by top MCA leaders such as secretary-general Datuk Wong Foon Meng, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai and Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen, and Youth chief Datuk Wee Ka Siong. Ong also said that MCA’s goal to see more Chinese civil servants would be realised soon. “We cannot expect this to happen overnight but I assure you that proper steps will be taken,” he said.

**Friday February 13, 2009**

## **Sabah and Sarawak to get RM21mil under government stimulus package**

**By JACK WONG and SHARON LING**

KUCHING: Mission schools in Sabah and Sarawak will receive RM21.4mil under the government's economic stimulus package to carry out upgrading work and other projects.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the allocation would be channelled directly to the schools' board of directors.



Financial scheme: Najib (right) chatting with Alfred Jabu in Kuching yesterday. Looking on are Ong and Dr Wee (left).

He said it was the first time the Government had given such a large allocation to mission schools. "I am confident that by giving the money to the board of directors, we will get value for money because they are responsible people and will use the money wisely," he said.

He urged the schools to spend all the funds this year to help stimulate the domestic economy. The funds are part of a RM50mil allocation for mission schools nationwide. Najib paid tribute to mission schools, saying that they contributed to Malaysia's development by producing well-educated students. He noted that many political leaders and corporate figures were products of mission schools, including himself, a former student of St John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur.

"It is most appropriate for mission schools to be given financial assistance as they are schools of excellence and well-known for their ethos and spirit," he said when presenting the funds to representatives of mission schools at SMK St Thomas here.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Sarawak Deputy Chief Ministers Tan Sri Alfred Jabu and Tan Sri Dr George Chan were also present.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong, representing Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, said there were 410 mission schools nationwide, including 128 in Sarawak and 75 in Sabah. He said the ministry was committed to assisting the board of directors of mission schools which needed help in carrying out projects such as improving facilities.

Najib also advised the Bidayuh community not to put their trust in politicians who were powerless and running for office. "I want the Bidayuh people to be with Barisan Nasional and to continue to have faith in Barisan," he told some 1,500 Bidayuhs at the Dayak Bidayuh National Association (DBNA) headquarters. Bidayuhs make up about 8% of the state's 2.4 million people. They live mostly in the Bau, Lundu and Serian districts in southern Sarawak. They have three Barisan MPs and six assemblymen.

Najib later announced a Federal Government contribution of RM4mil to the DBNA to fund the construction of its proposed multi-purpose centre

**Friday February 13, 2009**

### **Higher project ceiling price sought for Class F contractors**

KUANTAN: The Works Ministry will propose that the ceiling price for projects awarded to Class F contractors be raised, Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed said. "The present ceiling of RM200,000 is no longer feasible due to the rising cost building materials," he said after a briefing by the state Public Works Department (PWD) and local contractors here yesterday. "I think the limit of RM200,000 should be reviewed for the benefit of the contractors involved. We will submit a proposal to the Treasury for an increase in the ceiling price."

Mohd Zin urged Class F contractors to submit tenders for projects listed under the stimulus package. They should also start adopting the industrial building system (IBS) to remain in business or be left behind by the challenging global atmosphere, he said.

"If we choose to continue with conventional methods such as depending mostly on foreign labour to cut costs, then I am sorry to say that the end is near," he said.

"I suggest all Class F contractors start migrating to the new method, utilising at least 70% IBS technology to remain competitive and to boost productivity."

IBS technology, among other things, involves the pre-fabrication of construction components, minimising the need for a large labour force. Mohd Zin also revealed that out of the 40,000 Class F contractors registered, only 17,000 were still operational and active.

He reminded all PWD staff and district engineers against offering any projects via selected tender or direct negotiations. "All projects under the PWD are on an open tender basis," he said.

**Saturday February 14, 2009**

### **299 lots at markets up for rental**

A TOTAL of 299 empty lots at 13 Penang Municipal Council (MPPP) markets are up for rental.

Those interested to rent the lots can send in their applications to the council between 8am and 5pm daily from Feb 16 to Feb 20 at the MPPP Licensing Division counter on Jalan Padang Kota Lama. MPPP councillor Tay Leong Seng said they have to bring along a copy of their identity card. "Eligible applicants will be called for an interview via letter on the third week of March," he said in a press release yesterday.

The empty lots are located at the MPPP markets at Jalan Kuantan, Datuk Keramat, Lebuh Cecil, Jalan Perak, Jelutong, Batu Lancang, Lintang Macalum Dua, Jalan Patani, Jalan Tengku, Bayan Baru, Taman Tun Sardon, Desa Ria Sungai Ara and Desa Mayang.

**Monday February 16, 2009**

### **Furore over lifting of hillside ban**

**By NURBAITI HAMDAN and M. SHAMINEE**

KUALA LUMPUR: Resident associations have expressed their outrage at the Works Ministry's "green light" for hillside development to continue. The housing developers association, however, welcomed the announcement and labelled a total ban as "absurd".

On Saturday, Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed said land was needed for development as the country's population was increasing. Real Estate and Housing Developers Association president Datuk Ng Seing Liong said the move was a right direction for the country's development. He said an official statement would be issued today. Bukit Antarabangsa Residents Association chairman Dr Mohamed Rafick Khan Abdul Rahman said the problem with such developments in Malaysia was the inadequate laws on the issue.

"In Hong Kong, each year US\$70mil (RM252mil) is spent to manage hillside developments. They have an authority to oversee these projects. "In Malaysia, once a project is completed, it is handed over to the local authorities. But what kind of expertise do they have in maintaining these developments?" asked Dr Rafick, who created a stir by gate-crashing a press conference by Mohd Zin on Saturday and demanding the report for the Dec 6 Bukit Antarabangsa landslide tragedy.

Dr Rafick said he was disappointed when he was told by the minister that he had no *locus standi* to ask him questions regarding the report. "I didn't demand for a copy of the report right

there and then, I asked for the status of the report. When is it ever coming out?" he asked, adding that residents wanted accurate information on the tragedy.

Environmental expert Derek Fernandez, representing Federal Hill residents, disagreed with Mohd Zin's statement on land shortage. "The National Physical Plan provides and identifies sufficient land for development. The land in Kuala Lumpur comprises of a very large area. He (Mohd Zin) should be more concerned about public safety," he said.

Medan Damansara Residents Association committee member Randhir Singh said the announcement contradicted Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's call on local authorities to ban all hillside development. Meanwhile, Mohd Zin said he expected a follow-up report on the landslide to be submitted to him next week. "I will study the report first before making any public announcement

**Monday February 16, 2009**

### **Selangor won't lift hillside ban**

KLANG: The state government has brushed off the Works Minister's comment that hillside development will go on, saying it cannot lift its blanket ban just because a federal minister thinks it is the right thing to do. "He has to prove the viability of his opinion and we want to see some evidence that it is safe to lift the ban," said Selangor Local Government Committee chairman Ronnie Liu.

Liu added that a fact-finding mission and in-depth research must be carried out before a decision is made. He said past experience did not reflect Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed's optimism that certain hillside development could be carried out again. He said the state had received many requests from developers, and from its own land task force, to lift the blanket ban on hillside development. "We are looking into it as these developers, who own large parcels of Class 3 and Class 4 land, are telling us that it is safe to build if it is done properly," he said.

Liu, however, reiterated that the state needed further convincing before it would even consider lifting the blanket ban. In George Town, Penang Local Government, Traffic Management and Environment Committee chairman Chow Kon Yeow said it would be disastrous to stop ongoing hillside development projects in the states.

Chow said that if these projects were stopped the local councils would have to fork out RM100mil to RM200mil as compensation for developers. He said the state government could only ensure that projects complied with existing guidelines. "We have taken measures such as

issuing stop-work orders on some projects, sometimes even repeatedly, to ensure the developers complied with the guidelines,” he said.

“The state should not be accused of not addressing the residents’ problems as these projects were not approved by the present administration,” said the Penang DAP chairman said when commenting on recent protests held against hillside development. He said it would be easier if the Federal Government imposed a blanket ban on all hillside projects.

**Monday February 16, 2009**

### **KK Mayor: Project involves no reclamation**

KOTA KINABALU: The controversial RM500mil Kota Kinabalu City Waterfront project here took off with Mayor Datuk Iliyas Brahim giving an assurance that no reclamation will be involved. “Despite the limited space of the project site, there will be no reclamation. I repeat, no reclamation work, involved in this project,” he said.

Speaking at a brief ground-breaking ceremony yesterday, Iliyas said all relevant authorities have given the green light for the project. The project has created a storm of protest among the people here and owners of apartments adjacent to the seafront project,

The mixed development project on a 1.24ha strip of seafront land in the city centre will feature one of the longest city waterfront boardwalks in Asia. It will also include a four-level retail mall, residential designer suites and a five-star hotel.

The project is a joint venture project between DBKK Holdings Sdn Bhd and Sunsea Development Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Waterfront Urban Development Sdn Bhd. The state government had initially announced that it would take a re-look into the project following public criticism of the possible reclamation work.

Owners of neighbouring condominium units had also complained that the project would block their view of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park islands and the South China Sea. Iliyas said he hoped the project would put Kota Kinabalu among the ranks of world-class cities with seafronts like Sydney’s Darling Harbour, Cape Town, Hong Kong, London’s Canary Wharf and Singapore’s Clark Quay. Iliyas said the project was also part of the Sabah Development Corridor’s objective of turning Kota Kinabalu into an international-class tourism destination.



**Monday February 16, 2009**

## **Residents want more notice as PJ billboard removal causes traffic jams**

**By THO XIN YI**

THE billboard removal operation by the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) causes traffic congestion each time the council takes down the illegal billboards. Some Petaling Jaya residents find it an inconvenience, even though the works are being carried out at night after the evening rush hour.



On duty: Traffic police and council officers are on hand to ensure a smooth flow during the removal operation.

The recent operations at Jalan Semangat and Jalan SS2/24 had unavoidably caused traffic jams at the said areas. SS2B RT chairman Ngiam Chong Choy said the residents were caught off guard with the traffic situation on Wednesday night when the billboard operation was being carried out at Jalan SS2/24.

“It was not a big problem and we understand that the council has its duty to take down the illegal billboards. “But we just hope that the residents can be notified earlier to plan our schedule to avoid being caught in the congestion,” he said.

MBPJ public relations officer Zainun Zakaria, when contacted, said the time to carry out the operation was decided after due consideration. “The traffic situation will be the same if we do it earlier in the afternoon, and we want to minimise the danger posed to the pedestrians. “In fact, the traffic was still moving, albeit slow, on the nights we had our operations. We had enforcement officers and traffic police on duty to direct the traffic,” she said.

Zainun added that six illegal billboards at Jalan SS2/24 were taken down. “We dismantled four while two were removed by the billboard operators earlier,” she said.

The council will continue to take down the illegal billboards in the city until all 36 have been removed.

**Monday February 16, 2009**

### **Sabah to have three new entry points**

KOTA KINABALU: Kudat, Lahad Datu and Semporna will soon become entry points to Sabah, says Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman. The three places would be in addition to the existing points of Sandakan and Tawau.

“The additional points are to ensure foreign workers use the right channels and procedures to enter the country. The Immigration Department will implement the biometric monitoring system to identify those who enter the country,” he told reporters after chairing the State Safety Committee meeting here on Thursday. He added that safety features along the shores would be improved with the installation of four surveillance radars to prevent illegal entries that were detrimental to the safety of Sabahans.

“Throughout last year, 24,269 people were detained for entering the state illegally. Of the total, 19,151 were deported to their respective countries, namely the Philippines (13,615), Indonesia (5,278) and others (258),” he said.

He added that, until October last year, the state registered 312,837 foreign workers employed by 21,156 companies in sectors like construction, agriculture and farming. “From the law perspective, 64% of those detained and deported were produced in court and handed with penalties for their offences,” he said.

He urged employers to register their foreign employees and pay the levies before May to avoid any repercussions. — Bernama

**Tuesday February 17, 2009**

### **S'gor wants Minister to flex his muscles over water deal**

**By SIM LEOI LEOI**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Selangor Government wants Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Mansor to “flex his muscles” and give his backing to the state’s plan to acquire its water assets. Petaling Jaya MP Tony Pua, a member of the state’s water review panel, said under the new Water Industry Services Act, the minister had been granted with wide-ranging powers. “The minister’s decision on a matter of national interest cannot be challenged, appealed against, reviewed, quashed or questioned in any court. “Since he has full powers, he should exercise it by giving us full backing for our offer to buy over the assets belonging to the four water companies in the state. This is the right thing for him to do to protect the rights and welfare of all consumers,” he told reporters at the Parliament lobby here Tuesday.

Other members in the panel are Klang MP Charles Santiago, Selayang MP William Leong and Kuala Selangor MP Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad. The state government is racing to complete negotiations with the four water companies -- Konsortium Abass Sdn Bhd (Abass), Puncak Niaga (M) Sdn Bhd, Syarikat Pengeluar Air Sungai Selangor Sdn Bhd (Splash) and Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Syabas) -- to buy over their water assets before March 31.

If negotiations fall through, tariffs will then be increased for 1.5 million consumers in Selangor, Putrajaya and the Federal Territory. Pua said the state government had offered some RM5.1bil for assets belonging to the three of the four companies. "They are supposed to come back with their response for our offer by this Friday. "However, from reports leaked to the press by the companies, they don't seem very interested in our offer and have in fact indicated they are unlikely to take it up ... because they want us to include their expected future profits in our offer," he said.

However, with the backing of the minister, Pua said he was still confident that negotiations would be completed before March 31.

**Tuesday February 17, 2009**

### **Unitar developing smart news reader**

KUALA LUMPUR: Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (Unitar) said it has received an RM163,000 grant from the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry to conduct research into what it is calling an "interactive news engine."

The proposed interactive news reader which will respond to a viewer's request to extract and retrieve information from its news database, particularly those relevant to current news, Unitar said in a statement Tuesday. The research is scheduled to be completed by May 2010.

**Tuesday February 17, 2009**

### **Complaints panel Bill to cover all enforcement agencies**

**By NURBAITI HAMDAN**

KUALA LUMPUR: All 20 law enforcement agencies in the country will be included in the Special Complaints Commission Bill, set to be tabled next month. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Abd Aziz said that although there had been a spate of cases alleging abuse by police of suspects in detention recently, complaints from the public were not against the police only. "Other enforcement agencies have received complaints as well. We can't have a special commission on complaints against each and every enforcement agency, so

we hope to come up with only one commission that handles all 20,” said Nazri, adding that the Bill would be tabled by Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Nazri said this in a speech at the launch of the Redbook pamphlet project at the Bar Council office yesterday. The project was started in 2005 by a group of lawyers who called themselves *Tindakan Anti Penyalahgunaan Kuasa Polis* (Tangkap) after a videoclip of a female detainee squatting in the nude was circulated in November that year.



Light moment: (From left) Human Rights Committee chairman Edmund Bon, Nazri, Ambiga and Bar Council secretary Lim Chee Wee checking out the newly-launched Redbook pamphlet at the council’s office in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

A year later, a booklet titled *Polis dan Hak-hak Asas Anda* (Police and Your Basic Rights), or popularly known as the Redbook, was introduced to educate the public on their rights under the Federal Constitution and Criminal Procedure Code. The booklet has been converted into a pamphlet for practicality and to save costs. “The problems that triggered the creation of Redbook are still around,” said Nazri.

Council chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said limited knowledge of basic rights meant that the public did not know what the police could or could not do during an arrest. She said the pamphlet provided an easy read of a list of rights when dealing with the police. Pua said the state government had decided not to include future profits into its offer because the water concession agreements were granted to the companies by the Federal Government.

Selayang’s Leong said figuring future profits into the state government’s offer would make it just another “privatisation exercise,” which was not in line with the new Act.