

Thursday October 1, 2009

Tabung Haji declares 2.5% bonus payment

By ZULKIFLI ABD RAHMAN

KUALA LUMPUR: Lembaga Tabung Haji will make an interim bonus payment amounting to 2.25% for the first half of 2009. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who made the announcement, said that 4.7 million depositors would receive a total RM465mil in bonus payments. He said the interim bonus payments were expected to be credited into their accounts on Oct 5. "I hope this payment will bring cheer to all Tabung Haji depositors," he said at the launching of Lembaga Tabung Haji's new corporate group logo at the corporation's headquarters here yesterday. "Since its formation (in Sept 30, 1963) with an initial fund of RM152,000 from the Government, Tabung Haji now manages deposits reaching RM23bil," he added.

In Petaling Jaya, Wisma Putra said in a statement that Najib would discuss bilateral and regional issues with top French leaders during his first official visit as Prime Minister to France. He is scheduled to meet French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his counterpart Francois Fillon. They are expected to discuss the global financial crisis, environment issues and hold an inter-civilisation dialogue. Najib is also scheduled to attend a breakfast meeting with captains of industry and host the 1Malaysia Hari Raya open house during his visit.

The Prime Minister will be accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Foreign Minister Datuk Anifah Aman, Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, Deputy Education Minister Dr Mohd Puad Zarkashi and senior government officials during the four-day visit. Najib will also be one of the keynote speakers at the 35th United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (Unesco) general conference on Oct 6, the first time a Malaysian leader has been invited to do this at the conference.

Thursday October 1, 2009

Tender out for 'green' theme park in Teluk Bahang

By MANJIT KAUR

GEORGE TOWN: The tender is out for a first-of-its-kind world-class, environment-friendly theme park in Teluk Bahang. Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd, which owns the 12.14ha land located downstream from the Teluk Bahang Dam, advertised the tender for the multi-million-ringgit project in several newspapers recently. Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng was reported as saying that a Penang-based company involved in the design and construction of the landmark Universal Studios Theme Park in Singapore had submitted a proposal to the state government for an eco-friendly Ecofun Theme Park Resort here.

Lim said like any other project, an open tender would be called before the state could decide which company was most suitable to construct the theme park. Penang Water Supply Corporation corporate services manager K. Jeyabalan said the tender was called on Sept 28 and the closing date for submission was Oct 19. "Some parties have started to take the documents and normally, they would only hand in their proposals on the closing date," he said yesterday.

Sim Leisure's managing director Sim Choo Kheng, the individual who first proposed the theme park, also confirmed that several parties had shown interest in building the park. He said at a briefing by the corporation on Sept 25, he met several competitors, adding that he would be submitting his proposal soon. "Although I am passionate about the project, I do not have any hidden agenda. It is not a problem if my company does not get the tender. "I will be happy if any of the other parties get the offer. I am also happy for Penang as this project can bring another range of value-added products to promote the state," he said.

Thursday October 1, 2009

Economists expect cuts in Government operating expenditure

By FINTAN NG

PETALING JAYA: Economists see the impending cuts in the Government's operating expenditure as part of the framework that is being laid out for a new economic model that includes consolidating Malaysia's medium-term public spending. The move to cut expenditure is fiscally prudent as the global economic slump has brought reduced revenues from corporate taxes while lower commodity prices have also taken a toll, they said. Furthermore, the country's budget deficit, which has steadily risen since 2008, is expected to hit 7.6% this year from the pump-priming measures announced by the Government last November and this March.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the Government was looking at ways to cut back on operating expenditure ahead of the Budget 2010 announcement expected later this month. He said there might be a slight reduction in the operating expenditure, which has reached RM1bil a month, an amount that the Government was committed to spend until the end of next year. CIMB Investment Bank Bhd economic research head Lee Heng Guie told *StarBiz* that the Government would need to make those cutbacks to rebuild fiscal strength in order to weather a future slump.

“They need to adopt a credible plan as fiscal reform is a core element of the new economic model and this is not just for next year’s expenditure but for the medium term,” he said, adding that there was more breathing space for reforms to be carried out and cuts to be made as the economy started to recover. “The Government will need to look into areas where they can reduce operating expenditure, in other words they’ll need to trim down the excesses and be focused on the spending,” Lee said, noting that as revenues would be affected by the economic slump, there was a need to cut back on its commitments via lower expenses and capital expenditure.

Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd economist Wan Suhaimie Saidi said the Government’s move to cut back on operating expenditure could be in anticipation of suppliers increasing their prices as the economy recovered later in the year. “The target budget deficit for this year is 7.6%, anything above that may be damaging to the country’s credit rating too.” Separately, it was reported that the Government was also considering plans to cut the development expenditure to RM180bil for the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP), which would run from 2011 to 2015 from the RM200bil in the 9MP, which ends next year. Citigroup Inc Asia Pacific economics and market analysis vice-president Kit Wei Zheng said in a Sept 24 report that a targeted reduction in the fiscal deficit next year “looks challenging” and could result in a spike in inflation if subsidies were reduced.

He also noted that fiscal implementation continued to gain momentum in the second half of the year. As at August, 40% of the RM7bil stimulus package announced last November had been completed while a further 30% had been awarded contracts but the funds had not yet been spent, according to Kit. He added that of the RM15bil stimulus package announced earlier this year, 20% of planned spending had been completed while a further 30% was work in progress.

Friday October 2, 2009

No need for a dam in Ampang, Puncak told

THE Selangor government suggested that Puncak Niaga upgrade the Salak Tinggi water treatment plant (WTP) instead of building a new dam in Ampang. It was reported in *StarMetro* on Sept 30 ("Syabas plan for a dam in Ampang") that Syabas has submitted a proposal to the Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry for a dam to be built in Ampang. The Salak Tinggi WTP was shutdown for the third time due to raw water pollution this year. According to information provided by Syabas, the shutdown was due to objectional odour, foam and high ammonia content. State Tourism, Consumer Affairs and Environment Committee chairman Elizabeth Wong said so far the state government had not received any suggestions from Syabas regarding to the matter.



Not safe: The ammonia content at the Salak Tinggi water treatment plant measured 1.72 parts per million (ppm) at 2pm on Sept 28. The permissible level is below 1.5 ppm.

"Syabas should have discussed this with the state government before proposing the plan to the federal government. "The reason given by Syabas that the Salak Tinggi water treatment plant has to be closed due to raw water contamination caused by high levels of ammonia does not make sense. "Puncak Niaga, the company responsible for the water treatment plant, cannot assume that raw water that flows through the water treatment plant is below 1.5ppm as it is their responsibility to treat raw water with ammonia levels exceeding 1.5ppm," she said at a press conference at the state government secretariat.

She added that according to an investigation by the Department of Environment (DoE, the pollution was caused by contaminated water from Sungai Nilai in Negri Sembilan converging with Sungai Labu (Sungai Labu supplies water to the Salak Tinggi water treatment plant). "Just by shutting down the plant whenever the ammonia level is above 1.5ppm will not solve the problem. "If the WTP manned by Puncak Niaga shuts down, it will incur high costs for the company and the state government," she said.

The state government will have a meeting with Puncak Niaga and the DoE next week to solve this problem. The DoE has advised Puncak Niaga to upgrade the Salak Tinggi WTP since 2006.

Friday October 2, 2009

Bakun RM606mil hydro-power turbine works on track

By LEE KIAN SEONG

IMPSA has completed about 50% of the job

LUMUT: IMPSA (M) Sdn Bhd, which is supplying four of eight hydro-powered turbines for the 2,400-megawatt Bakun dam project, has completed more than 50% of the turbine works and is on schedule to complete the four turbines by 2012. IMPSA Malaysia managing director Juan Jose Aguero said the total costs for its turbines were RM606mil, of which RM145mil was the claim awarded due to the delay of the project and the increment in costs. Aguero said the company planned to invest about RM50mil over the next two years to expand its business in Malaysia. This would include the purchase of new machinery and the installation for its plant. "We have invested RM200mil in the last five years to expand our plant locally and our intention is to continue expanding our business here," he said.



IMPSA president Enrique Pescarmona (left) and Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui at the IMPSA plant in Lumut

Aguero said this during Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui's visit to IMPSA plant in Lumut yesterday. He said the company manufactured components and machinery for renewable-energy industry and port cranes. "The renewable-energy products manufacturing business contributes about 80% to our revenue," he said, adding that 30% to 40% of its total products were currently for export. Meanwhile, Chin said the Government was studying the possibility of developing nuclear energy for power generation. He said an overseas study trip would be made within the next few days in relation to this matter. "I'm going to South Korea to look at what is happening there with regard to nuclear technology," he said.

Nuclear development in Malaysia is currently in its infancy and the possibility of using nuclear as a source of renewable energy might happen in 15 to 20 years. "It may happen when our resources like gas, coal and fossil fuel have depleted." He said many countries had the expertise in this area and the Government was keeping the option open. On the possibility of using wind for power generation, Chin said the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry was now doing testing in a few places, including Sabah. "We have to make sure that we have enough wind for the installation of machines like wind-turbines to generate power. "We will make the decision after the test has been completed but it is hard to set a timeframe," he said.

On the power tariff hike, Chin said the next review would take place in December but it did not mean there would be an increase. He said the Government would look at the costs before making any decision. "The last review was sometime in June and the Government had made the decision not to increase the tariff due to the economic slowdown. We don't want to increase the burden of the people," he said.

Saturday October 3, 2009

Sarawak to replant land to cut logging in natural rainforests

KUCHING: Sarawak is planning to replant one million hectares of forest by 2020 to cut the need to log in natural tropical rainforests. State forest department director Datuk Len Talif Salleh said Sabah had 350,000ha of forest planted with quick growing species like acacia and rubber. The plantations, he said, were in areas which had been logged in the past. "By replanting forests, we will reduce the need to log in tropical rainforests. "The productivity of a plantation is 20 to 30 times more than the natural forest, so in the next 10 years, less of the tropical rainforest will be cut by the timber industry," he told reporters at a Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house hosted by the Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation here yesterday.

Len said the state was presently harvesting timber from only 100,000ha of its replanted forests. This could produce between 20mil and 25mil cubic metres of log for the timber industry, he said, adding that acacia was the most successful species as it could be harvested for the pulp and paper industry in seven years, and for sawn timber and plywood in 10 years. "For pulp and paper, we are looking at a yield of 180 cubic metres per hectare after seven years, while the yield for sawn timber and plywood is about 300 cubic metres per hectare after 10 years," he said.

Sunday October 4, 2009

No oil palm development near orang utan habitats

By MUGUNTAN VANAR

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah government is determined to ensure the continued existence of its iconic orang utans by enforcing land laws that do not allow clearing of forests along riparian reserves for planting crops such as oil palm. Riparian or river bank reserves are extremely important for linking isolated patches of forest which are home to such unique wildlife such as the orang utans, the Borneo Pygmy elephants, the sunbear (world's smallest bear species) and many others. The commitment was made in a resolution from the two-day Orang utan Conservation Colloquium and it calls for a minimum of 100 meters for wildlife corridors along riverbanks to be acquired by the Sabah Wildlife Department.

"We are here together to do one thing, to make sure future generations can see wildlife in their natural habitats and enjoy what we are able to enjoy now," said the Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun in accepting the final resolution. The resolution was formulated by orang utan and wildlife experts together with Sabah government officials and local and international Non Governmental Organisations including local communities. Masidi promised to enforce the resolution which he acknowledged as being a very important document with specific agenda and timeframe to get things done within three years. "Otherwise, trust me, we'll still end up in another colloquium in three years time and talk the same thing and never get anywhere," Masidi added.

Masidi also ordered director of the Sabah Wildlife Department Laurentius Ambu to prepare a position paper based on the resolution to be tabled to the state cabinet. "The document recognises the importance of corridors within a fragmented landscape for biodiversity conservation of orang-utan and other wildlife," Ambu said. "Some of the action points are already in existing legislation and we merely need to implement and enforce these policies." The Colloquium themed, "Developing Models for Orang Utan Conservation Within Fragmented Ecosystem" was organised by the Borneo Conservation Trust with the Sabah Wildlife Department and French NGO HUTAN with funding from the Malaysian Palm Oil Council.

Monday October 5, 2009

Business - Minister: No plan to sell highway toll operator Plus

KUALA LUMPUR: The government has no plan to sell highway toll operator PLUS Expressways Bhd, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said on Monday. "As far as we are concerned, there is no plan to sell the highway toll operator," said Nor Mohamed, who heads the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), in response to a question on whether the government had received any proposal to dispose PLUS. He earlier delivered a keynote address at the Khazanah Megatrends 2009 Forum here.

PLUS Expressways operates the North-South Expressway, the country's longest highway that runs the length of Peninsular Malaysia. The government's investment arm, Khazanah Nasional Bhd, directly owns 23.66 per cent in PLUS Expressways and a further indirect stake of 40.21 per cent via wholly-owned UEM Group. The present market value of the stake is estimated at RM10.5 billion. "As far as we are concerned, there is no plan on our part to sell the highway toll operator to anyone," Nor Mohamed said.

"I can confirm it. I talked to them (PLUS) and they have no plan to sell. If anyone has a plan to buy, good luck. But we have no plan to sell," he said. While addressing the Khazanah Megatrends 2009 Nor Mohamed said Malaysia needs to develop and strengthen industry clusters in areas that will be drivers for the country's future. He said the areas included Islamic finance, downstream palm oil and higher value added electronics industries.

"In recovering from the current global financial crisis and transforming our economy, it is imperative for us to act quickly and seize early mover advantages." "Emerging as a regional or even global centres or clusters in key areas will provide a resilient and sustainable platform for future growth," he said.

Monday October 5, 2009

Contractor of mosque summoned

By R.S.N. MURALI

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Terengganu Public Works Department (PWD) has summoned the contractor responsible of building the Batu Putih mosque in Kerteh to provide details on the type of material used and how the construction and installation of the roof was done. It is learnt that PWD officials asked the contractor to submit finer construction points including the architectural documents. This is the third in a spate of mishaps caused by construction flaws involving newly completed structures in Terengganu. In June, the roof of the Stadium Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin in Gong Badak collapsed. The following month, several defects were found at the Batu Burok aquatic complex, forcing the facility to be declared unsafe by Work Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor.

Another minor mishap was reported early this year where a part of the roof at a canteen in SMK Wakaf Tapai in Marang collapsed. In Saturday's mishap, part of the roof structure of the year-old mosque collapsed, injuring three Indonesian workers. The workers were conducting repairs inside the mosque after cracks had appeared on the roof. The mosque was constructed at a cost of RM2.1mil and was opened in early 2008 to cater for a 500-people congregation. Mentri Besar Datuk Ahmad Said, who is dismayed by the incident, had directed the PWD to immediately conduct an in-depth probe. The department's Kemaman engineer Ir Rosli Daud said his team had already started investigations. "We are compiling facts and part of the procedure is to summon the contractor."

Monday October 5, 2009

Govts globally introduced tax relief. Will Malaysia do the same?

By TAN HOOI BENG and OLIVIA LIM



THESE are challenging times. As the world anticipates with bated breath an economic recovery, there is evidence of an angry earth as major earthquakes shook American Samoa and Indonesia. Earlier, Typhoon Ketsana hit the Philippines and Vietnam. Spared from these natural disasters, Malaysia should thank her lucky stars. No doubt, much of those countries' precious financial resources are being put to use to counter the effects of the disasters. Countries worldwide, including Malaysia, have initiated broadly similar efforts to counter the effects of another tsunami – the global financial and economic crisis. More measures are expected to be announced taking into account the need to protect the government's revenue base. Against this background and by examining trends in recent budgets globally, we may scientifically crystal ball gaze into Malaysia's Budget 2010.

Governments, sensitive to the financial hardship experienced by taxpayers, yet with a need to balance national funding, have introduced certain relief measures. Tax payment deferment. One such trend seen is the deferment of income tax payments. Through this, the quantum of tax remains status quo; however, free cashflow available to taxpayers is improved. Australia has granted a 20% reduction in the quarterly pay-as-you-go withholding instalments for small businesses. A replica of this has also been seen on the individual side with Indonesia allowing individual taxpayers to reduce their monthly instalments by up to 25% for six months and individuals with loss of employment in Singapore are given relief to settle their 2009 taxes in 24 instalments with an option to defer the commencement of the instalments.

Malaysia may likewise enact similar laws rather than leaving this matter to administrative discretion. Corporate income tax rates have seen a decrease in the following countries – Singapore, Indonesia (for listed companies), the Philippines, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Russia and Sweden to mention a few. If Malaysia believes that allowing the corporate sector to retain more cash would help the private sector rejuvenate the economy, similar corporate tax reductions could follow suit here through Budget 2010. The much welcomed loss carryback relief announced during the second stimulus package, albeit a temporary measure, was something new here but not in countries like Singapore and the United States. It would be good if that relief becomes a permanent feature in Malaysia. Individual taxpayers in Denmark, Taiwan, Austria and Israel have reason to rejoice when each government respectively announced tax cuts in recent months. Denmark, among the countries with the highest personal tax rate in the world, will see a reduction in tax rate across the board beginning January 2010.

Taiwan has lowered the tax rate for the three lowest brackets and Israel will lower its highest tax rate progressively up to year 2016. Nevertheless, several countries have increased their personal tax rates to reduce the growing deficit and boost the weakened fiscal standing resulting from the economic crisis. The most notable would be Britain, where the top tax rate of 40% will be increased to 50% come April 2010. Mexico proposes to temporarily increase personal tax rate by 2% and Ireland has introduced an income levy on high earners. It is unlikely that Malaysia will adopt the British route as we were not as badly hurt.

The concept of a temporary tax raises horror memories. Some of us will recall that Malaysia introduced a certain tax years ago to fund the expenses connected with the confrontation with Indonesia. This tax was only removed in the later years after good relationship had been re-established with Indonesia. However, a caring government may well reduce personal tax especially for the lower paid.

Is Malaysia ready for “fat” tax?

Based on various studies, the medical costs of treating obesity-related diseases have soared tremendously. Hence, “fat” tax, which is a form of tax that is imposed on fattening foods or beverages needs to be considered. The United States is contemplating the introduction of a beverage tax to help counter the obesity which, relative to Malaysia, is prevalent in the United States. The United States would present a challenge to the growing number of slimming companies in Malaysia.

Widening the market

Malaysian firms should consider enlarging their market to include the United States to prove to Malaysians that their solutions really work rather than feature Hong Kong actresses. But they need to compute their charges and craft their ads, sales pitches and contracts carefully or else their profits will emerge far slimmer than now. We do not foresee that Malaysia will introduce a fat tax in Budget 2010 as many of us have had to tighten our belts and most of us here are not obese. Instead, we expect green initiatives such as incentives for companies and households which reduce consumption of electricity, and transport companies which reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The Russian and South African tax amnesty programmes for individuals seem to be a success.

Since this is a good way to increase revenue in difficult times, Malaysia should also ponder the idea of granting a one-time tax amnesty whose positive effects have been proven in many foreign jurisdictions in terms of tax collections. Given that Oct 23 is just around the corner, we await with bated breath some goodies.

Tan Hooi Beng and Olivia Lim are executive director and assistant manager respectively in the international tax group of Deloitte Malaysia.

Monday October 5, 2009

Bleeding scam: LBA is 'junk science'

By LIM WEY WEN



PETALING JAYA: There's a scam going around and what they are after is your blood. With just a drop, unscrupulous doctors, sinsehs and alternative medicine practitioners claim they are able to diagnose a host of illnesses, ranging from vitamin deficiencies to cancer. They are able to convince their unsuspecting patients by using an impressive but discredited test method called Live Blood Analysis (LBA). It is believed that thousands have fallen victim to this scam over the past 10 years. Alarmed by the growing number of centres offering such services, medical associations are now urging the authorities to take action against those offering LBA. Up to press time, Health Ministry's director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican had yet to respond to requests for comment on this practice.

The test is currently available in the Klang Valley, where some centres advertise the service, and in several other states, including Malacca, Terengganu and Sarawak. It is also known as Nutritional Blood Analysis or Live Cell Analysis. All methods require a drop of the patient's blood to be put under a high resolution darkfield microscope. Those using LBA claim they are able to assess a patient's health and detect infections, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, toxic substances, weak kidneys, bladders and spleens, and even cancer earlier than standard laboratory tests. LBA, however, has been deemed "unestablished" and "experimental" by US health authorities.

Robert W. Bradford, who invented the microscopy system used for the test in 1996, is facing charges in the US Federal Court for fraudulently marketing it as a diagnostic test for an infectious disease. Medical doctors also criticise the test as a fraudulent practice to mislead unsuspecting people into buying unnecessary and expensive supplements or alternative therapies for non-existent medical conditions. (See '[A bloody encounter](#)') Malaysian Society of Haematology president Dr Ng Soo Chin said: "The society's stand is very clear - LBA is junk science. It is a mixture of a little bit of science that is unsubstantiated and interpretations that are erroneous. "We think that this sort of practice should not be condoned, and action should be taken against those who prey on patients."

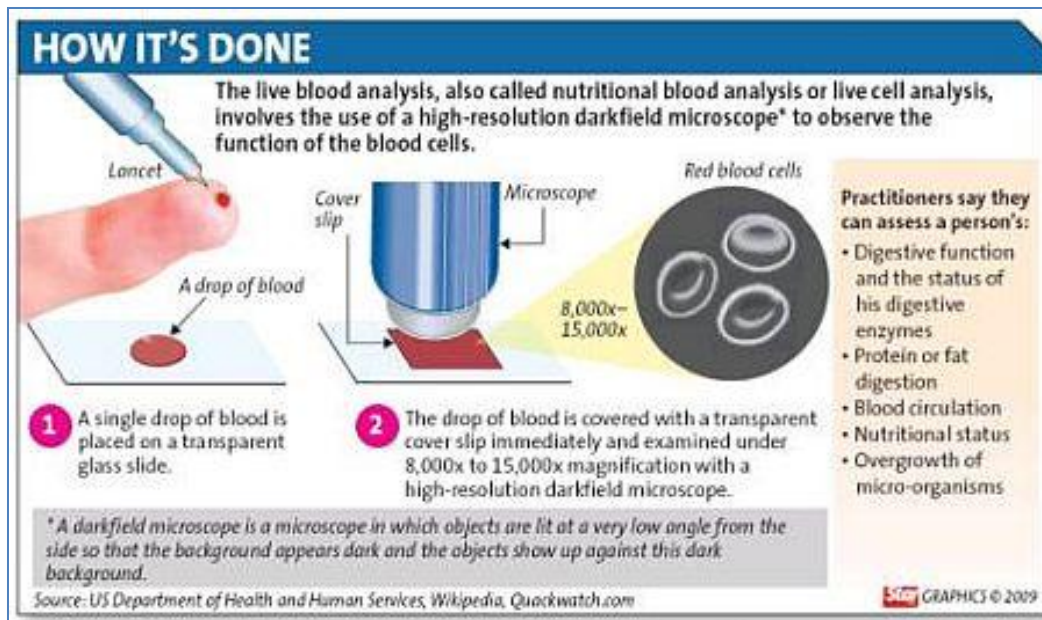
Although LBA has been available in Malaysia for at least a decade, it appears to have attracted little concern from the authorities because, as a doctor who asked for anonymity observed, the test itself is harmless. In fact, currently, most LBA practitioners offer the test free with the purchase of certain products. But there are others who charge up to RM1,200 with consultation sessions and reports thrown in.

StarProbe was alerted to LBA after a member of the public sent an e-mail to express his outrage after a relative was duped into taking the test. He said his relative had the LBA test done by a Chinese sinseh in Kuala Lumpur recently. "The sinseh told my relative he was in ill health and could die anytime. Subsequently, he was told to buy supplements amounting to RM500 monthly from the sinseh to cure these 'illnesses'." He added the supplements were to help the relative "detox the colon, clean the liver of bad blood, remove bad cholesterol clogging up blood cells, promote weight loss, and boost energy."

According to Dr Ng, this was the *modus operandi* of some LBA practitioners. Many would also claim the patient had a blood infection caused by a type of yeast, which they would then proceed to treat with costly supplements and alternative treatments. Dr Ng said the public should know that if yeast was truly present in a patient's blood, he would be very sick and require hospitalisation. However, a Klang Valley medical doctor, who only wishes to be known as Dr Lim, defended the test, saying that it was done by many medical doctors in countries such as Taiwan, but here it has been misused to sell nutritional supplements.

Dr Lim insisted that the problem lies in the fact that non-medically trained people were performing the tests. LBA practitioners claim a high resolution dark field microscope, which is a valid medical tool, uses special lighting to view specimens against a dark background, enabling a trained eye to see abnormalities that cannot be detected by a regular microscope. But Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr David K.L. Quek said looking at something under a microscope cannot scientifically determine diseases, however powerful the microscope.

According to reports, authorities in the United States, Australia and elsewhere have warned or prosecuted health practitioners, including chiropractors and naturopaths, for misleading their clients with LBA tests. On whether the MMA would take action against such practices in Malaysia, Dr Quek said that without a patient's official complaint, or proof that such tests or therapies had caused harm, there was little the MMA could do. He urges the public to be more aware, less gullible, and more discerning when dealing with claims about unproven therapies, which are not always what they seem. He also said those affected by the scam can forward their complaints to the MMA or Malaysian Medical Council.



Monday October 5, 2009

A bloody encounter



SURFING the Net, I found three such centres – two private clinics and one wellness centre, all in the Klang Valley. I decided to pick one private clinic and made an appointment for a “check-up”. The doctor asked detailed questions about my eating habits and sleeping patterns. I was given a physical examination, and she then lanced my finger. A drop of blood was placed on a slide. She proceeded to look at the slide under a microscope. That’s the LBA test. The whole process took 10 minutes. According to the doctor, my red blood cells were of unequal size, which is a sign of vitamin deficiency. There were crystal-like structures seen in between the cells, which according to her, is a sign of early liver problems. Apparently, my white blood cells were not moving – a sign of a weak immune system. Her diagnosis – I had some vitamin and antioxidant deficiency, early liver problems and a lack of “good organisms” in my colon.

I left the centre with a month’s supply of supplements to correct those abnormalities, which cost about RM200. I was told to go back to the clinic in a month’s time. I couldn’t help but wonder if it is possible to deduce so much about my health just by looking at a drop of blood under a microscope. With that in mind, I did a laboratory blood test to check whether I had those conditions mentioned. As vitamin and antioxidant levels are not routinely tested and colon health can often only be assessed by endoscopies and faecal examinations, I did a blood and liver function test – the results were normal.

Still unsure, I went to consultant haematologist Dr Ng Soo Chin with my results. He did not think that anyone could come to those conclusions just by looking at a drop of blood. For instance, without testing the levels of vitamins in a person's blood, one could not check for the presence of a deficiency. Specialised tests are also needed to study the number, appearance and the function of blood cells. "I wished the process of diagnosing those conditions were so simple," he said.

For him, using unestablished science on a commercial basis is misleading. "And not only that, you are endangering the health of some of the patients who come forward because they may have some serious illness that may not be picked up by these tests." But what about some people who actually got better after undergoing these tests and subsequent therapies? Dr Ng said it may be due to the placebo effect. The mere fact that a healthcare provider is doing something – even though the treatment does not have any therapeutic effect – is enough to make 30-40% of patients feel better, he added.

Tuesday October 6, 2009

Landfill collapse a hot topic at council meet

By PRIYA MENON

THE Sungai Kertas, Ulu Yam, landfill landslide was the most talked about issue at the Selayang Municipal Council full board meeting. All the councillors had suggestions of their own which they contributed to the discussion that lasted more than 45 minutes. Councillor Zulkifli Hamzah suggested that the MPS set up a task force for natural disasters in the long run. Zulkifli, who was sore with the media, refused to divulge any extra information on the issue. "Not many officers from the MPS were present at the site after the disaster occurred," he said.

His opinion was seconded by Lee Khai Loon who added that stricter by-laws should be introduced to ensure such problems do not reoccur. Lee added that there should be constant supervision on landfill areas to determine the contractors who frequent them. Another councillor Datuk Paduka Raja Wan Mahmood Pa Wan Teh said there should be 24-hour vigilance through CCTVs to monitor the lorries driving in and out of the illegal landfills.



Still smoking: Zainal said that by Saturday, there was less smoke at the landfill site.

MPS president Datuk Zainal Abidin Azim said the existing task force which was sent out for floods and other problems could be expanded to serve as a natural disaster task force. However, he said CCTV cameras were not feasible in the long run at landfills as they might get stolen. "Anyway, Sungai Kertas is the only place and after it is sanctioned for a project, there will be people on surveillance so it is not necessary," Zainal Abidin said.

He added that by last Saturday, the smoke emission from the landfill had reduced significantly and MPS officers and contractors were levelling the garbage. According to him, the fire was caused by natural gases and they are building drains to ensure new fires do not break out. "For now, we have four to five people there on shift, round-the-clock with contractors and workers working till 7pm to level the garbage," Zainal Abidin said.

He added that work should be completed within the next one month. The two affected cattle farmers have been relocated to a lot near the landfill temporarily until the state government decides on the new place to relocate all the farmers from the area. Zainal said the state would be seizing the land from the owners while the Department of Environment would be taking the landfill operator to court. "After the state government has seized the land, they will decide on the next possible method to treat the area," he added.

On another issue, councillors were concerned about residents illegally occupying a few semi-detached lots built in Bukit Botak for squatters. "The action lies with the state government and the land office. "They are in the process of collecting details from the residents so they can be placed accordingly," he said.

Wednesday October 7, 2009

Najib: 1Malaysia a concept for the world

By CHOI TUCK WO

PARIS: The 1Malaysia national philosophy can be extended to the concept of 1Region and ultimately 1World, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. He said this would be the next logical extension of the philosophy based on mutual trust and respect between all communities. Najib said he believed this was the right formula not only for national harmony but also for enhancing regional and global peace.

“No obstacle is too high or too deep or too wide for us to overcome if we join hands, think and act together as 1World,” he said, quoting an old Malay proverb that together, people could conquer all peaks and traverse all valleys.

Najib was speaking at the 35th Unesco general conference’s opening plenary session yesterday. He said the three major challenges currently confronting the international community were the need for durable peace, a new global financial architecture and tackling climate change. However, Najib noted that there could be peace only if various groups were willing to engage each other constructively through inter-cultural dialogue.

“Ignorance, fear, prejudice and apathy, if left unchecked, are fertile ground for breeding hatred, extremism, fatalism and fanaticism, which are the root causes of the world’s ills. “As such, Malaysia is willing to play its role in facilitating inter-cultural dialogue,” he said, citing Malaysia’s strategic position as a bridge in linking all of the world’s major cultures.

“Truly, for Malaysians, inter-cultural dialogue is an everyday fact of life,” he said of the founding fathers’ wisdom to use integration, rather than assimilation as a national policy to manage race relations. On the financial system, Najib said the world must shun the instinctive tendency to retreat into narrow nationalism and protectionism. “We must ensure that prosperity is shared more equitably and there are appropriate mechanisms to deal with excesses and manipulation of the system,” he said.

He also touched on the recent tragedies of the Padang earthquake in Indonesia, the tsunami in western Samoa, hurricanes in the Philippines and major floods in southern India as a reminder of the world’s fragility and interdependence. He said the forthcoming United Nations summit in Copenhagen on climate change must reflect a strong global commitment and action to reverse the planet’s serious deterioration. “Unesco has been in the forefront to preserve some historical sites as part of our global heritage. “Yet, the most valuable heritage that we can bequeath to future generations is Earth itself, a planet which can sustain the quality of life for mankind to the end of time,” he said.

Wednesday October 7, 2009

Tiong’s plane ‘frozen’

KUALA LUMPUR: A luxury jet aircraft worth millions of ringgit and several other assets belonging to embattled Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing have been frozen. Police invoked a section under the Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA) to also freeze a luxury car as well as a plot of land said to be owned by Tiong. The jet is one of two luxury aircraft — a Learjet 60 and a Gulfstream IV — registered with Wijaya Baru, the parent company of KDSB. Sources said the order to freeze the asset transactions was served on Tiong yesterday as part of police investigations into Tiong’s Kuala Dimensi — the turnkey contractor for the construction of the controversial Port Klang Free Zone.



Wednesday October 7, 2009

Caveat on Tiong's luxury jet

By LOURDES CHARLES

KUALA LUMPUR: Police have frozen transactions over a luxury jet aircraft worth millions of ringgit and several more properties and assets belonging to embattled Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing. It is learnt that police have invoked a section under the Anti-Money Laundering Act to (AMLA) also freeze a luxury car as well as a plot of land said to be owned by Tiong. The jet is one of two luxury aircraft — a Learjet 60 and a Gulfstream IV — registered with Wijaya Baru, the parent company of KDSB. Sources said the order to freeze the asset transactions was served on Tiong yesterday as part of police investigations into Tiong's Kuala Dimensi — the turnkey contractor for the construction of the controversial Port Klang Free Zone — for possible fraud, unsubstantiated claims and overcharging amounting to close to RM1.6bil.

Both the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission started investigating Tiong following reports by Port Klang Authority chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng following the findings of a special task force set up on June 10 to look into the legal and financial aspects of both the PKA and PKFZ. The task force comprised Skrine partner Lim Chee Wee and PricewaterhouseCoopers advisory services managing director Chin Kwai Fatt, and senior executive director Lim San Peen. Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan confirmed that the police had frozen several properties of Tiong for investigation purposes but declined to elaborate. Tiong, who is Bintulu MP and the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party treasurer-general, had more than RM140mil in the account of Kuala Dimensi frozen early last month, also under AMLA.

Wednesday October 7, 2009

MACC probe on Tiong's allegation against Tee Keat draws a blank

By LOURDES CHARLES

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has not found any evidence to indicate that MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat received RM10mil from Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd CEO Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing for party activities. It is learnt that investigations by the commission have so far drawn a blank, and nothing has been uncovered to back Tiong's allegations. Tiong himself is being investigated by the police and the MACC for fraud, including overcharging and unsubstantiated claims in the construction of the controversial RM4.6bil Port Klang Free Zone project.

Sources familiar with the investigations said the commission interviewed more than seven witnesses, including Tiong and Ong, who has vehemently denied the allegations. (Ong has since filed a RM500mil suit against Tiong for unfounded and defamatory remarks by Tiong following the Port Klang Free Zone disclosure. The High Court has set Nov 4 to hear the suit.) Sources said MACC officers, besides questioning all those allegedly involved, also checked their bank accounts. It is learnt the MACC was expected to submit its findings to its legal and prosecution department, and to the Attorney-General's chambers for advice.

Tiong, the Bintulu MP and treasurer-general of the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), made the allegations after a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory Services (PwC), which was commissioned by Port Klang Authority (PKA) to look at the PKFZ project, was released. The report by the Special Task Force formed by the Transport Ministry on June 10 alleged that Kuala Dimensi, the main developer appointed as the sole turnkey contractor for the project, was involved in possible fraud, including overcharging and unsubstantiated claims which could run up to RM1.6bil. PwC estimated that based on current projections of revenue and costs, including interest costs, the project could eventually cost RM12.45bil.

Ong, in his statement of claim, demanded that Tiong fully withdraw his defamatory remarks and publish an apology in major Malaysian newspapers of all languages. The purpose of such remarks, he said, were to tarnish his name. He said they were published with the element of *mala fide* by Tiong to obstruct fair and just investigations into the misuse of funds in the PKFZ issue and the role played by Tiong's company in the controversy.

Wednesday October 7, 2009

Shah Alam council introduces standard fee

By SALINA KHALID

BILLBOARD operators in Shah Alam now have to pay a standard fee. The city council has recently decided to impose a standard 20% fee based on the market price of such billboards. Previously, the companies only had to pay the licence fee for putting up the billboards. The fee ranges from RM2,800 to RM24,000 depending on the size of the billboards. It was done based on the market price of between RM14,000 and RM120,000. The move was in line with the state guidelines on billboards at all local councils in Selangor.

In addition to the fee from the gross sale income derived from the billboard, the operators also have to pay fees for the billboard permit and the temporary occupancy licence (TOL) for the leasing of land used for the structure. "Previously, they had to get the TOL from the land office and get the licence to put up the billboard from us. "Now they can get it all from us. They have to submit the application for the building or temporary structural permit but no fee will be charged on application," Shah Alam City Council public relations officer Shahrin Ahmad said.

Currently, there are 202 licensed billboards in Shah Alam. He added that the fee was charged annually. The city council will also step up enforcement efforts to ensure that all the billboard operators in the city heed the new ruling. Billboards that are illegal and deemed unsuitable will be taken down. One such example is the billboard located at the junction in front of Concorde Hotel and Plaza Masalam in Section 9. "We have received a lot of complaints about the billboard as it is obstructing the view. "We will take down the billboard and relocate it elsewhere," he said.

The billboard, which was put up by the Selangor Agriculture Development Corporation (PKPS), features the image of Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim and State Agriculture, Natural Resources and Entrepreneurial Development Committee chairman Yaakob Sapari.

Thursday October 8, 2009

Police freeze another Tiong plane in PKFZ probe

By LOURDES CHARLES and STEVEN DANIEL

KUALA LUMPUR: Police have “frozen” another million-ringgit aircraft belonging to businessman Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing under the Anti-Money Laundering Act. Police also said their investigation into the Port Klang Free Zone scandal was showing positive developments. Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, of which Tiong is CEO, is the turnkey contractor of the PKFZ project. The Learjet 60 registered with Wijaya Baru, the parent company of Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, is the second to be frozen by the police under the Act. On Tuesday, police ordered a Gulfstream IV jet aircraft belonging to Wijaya Baru to be frozen.

Also frozen were a luxury car and a plot of land said to be owned by Tiong. The move was part of the investigation into allegations of possible fraud including unsubstantiated claims and overcharging close to about RM1.6bil in connection with the development of the Port Klang Free Zone. Tiong, who is also Bintulu MP, was said to have been informed about the freeze this afternoon. Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan confirmed that police have ordered the second aircraft to be frozen. Assets frozen under the Act cannot be sold, leased or used as collateral.

In a related development, Deputy IGP Tan Sri Ismail Omar said investigations into the PKFZ scandal were progressing well. He said it was too early to comment on any detail of the investigation. “Once we complete the investigations, if there is any criminal offence, we will bring those responsible to book,” he said after making a spot-check at crime hotspots in Kajang district. Both the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) started investigations into Kuala Dimensi following reports lodged by Port Klang Authority chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng after the findings of a special task force set up on June 10 by the Transport Ministry to look into the legal and financial aspect of the PKFZ. The task force comprised Skrine partner Lim Chee Wee and PricewaterhouseCoopers advisory services managing director Chin Kwai Fatt and senior executive director Lim San Peen.

Thursday October 8, 2009

High-end jets that cost a fortune to upkeep

PETALING JAYA: The Learjet 60 and Gulfstream IV aircrafts belonging to businessman Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing are high-end private jets, aviation experts said. They said the cost could vary depending on whether it was bought “off the rack” from manufacturers or were custom-made to include additional comfort fittings or avionics. New planes, they said, would cost between US\$15mil (RM51mil) and US\$40mil (RM138mil) each. If the aircraft were bought second-hand, the price would be lower.

However, there is no fixed rate for them in the second-hand market. They said both planes required qualified and specialised crew. Each plane would require two pilots. The monthly salaries of pilots could be estimated to be RM20,000 each. "Such pilots are usually expatriates," one of them said. As for inflight crews, how many were employed would depend on the requirements of the owner. As for maintenance, both planes required special expertise. They said there were limited personnel in Malaysia to maintain the aircraft and they would most likely have to be serviced in Singapore.

> *The picture of the Learjet 60 on the front page of The Star yesterday was sourced from an aviation enthusiast's website jetphotos.net and was taken by GOH WEIYANG.*

Thursday October 8, 2009

Ti lauds report on MACC's investigation

KUALA LUMPUR: An MCA central committee member has welcomed a report that the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has not found any evidence indicating Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat has received RM10mil for party activities. "We are glad with the speedy investigation by the commission," said Datuk Ti Lian Ker in a statement. *The Star* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* yesterday stated the commission had not found any evidence to indicate that Ong, the MCA president, had received RM10mil from Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd CEO Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing for party activities.

It was learnt that investigations by the commission have so far drawn a blank, and nothing had been uncovered to back Tiong's allegation. Tiong himself is being investigated by the police and the commission for fraud, including overcharging and unsubstantiated claims in the construction of the controversial RM4.6bil Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project. Ti, the MCA's non-governmental organisation liaison bureau chief, said Ong's management of the PKFZ fiasco should be lauded and given full support.

Thursday October 8, 2009

Task force to restore PKFZ

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government has announced an 11-member special task force headed by Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan to restore the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project and identify measures for its development. The task force will, among others, determine the type of misconduct or criminal element on the part of individuals or entities involved in the project and recommend actions to be taken against them, Mohd Sidek said in a statement yesterday. He said the task force would submit reports to the Government within six months and would call in the parties concerned to seek their explanation from time to time.

The task force's members are Public Service director-general Tan Sri Ismail Adam, Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail, Finance Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Wan Abdul Aziz Wan Abdullah, Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang, Port Klang Authority (PKA) general manager Kee Lian Yong, chairman and chief executive officer of LIN Associates Sdn Bhd Tan Sri Dr Lin See Yan, Vinayak P. Pradhan of Messrs Skrine and Co, PriceWaterHouseCoopers Advisory Services managing director Chin Kwai Fatt, Malaysian Institute of Accountants president Abdul Rahim Abdul Hamid and Malaysian Institute of Corporate Governance president Tan Sri Megat Najmuddin Megat Khas.

Mohd Sidek said Transport Ministry secretary-general Datuk Zakaria Bahari was appointed secretary and he would be assisted by the ministry's deputy secretary-general (Planning) Datuk Long See Wool. He said the task force would recommend measures to improve governance as well as PKFZ's management. It would also assess PKA and PKFZ's financial situation, prepare a restructuring plan for the PKFZ, formulate business models for the PKA and PKFZ and recommend strategic plans to attract local and foreign investors.

PKFZ is embroiled in controversy when the cost for its development shot up to RM4.6bil from RM2bil. Following this, the PKA lodged two police reports on an alleged "overbilling" of up to RM1bil and claims of conspiracy to cheat PKA, involving the turnkey contractor Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd and project consultant BTA Architects. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the Public Accounts Committee are also investigating the PKFZ issue. — Bernama.

Friday October 9, 2009

Pahang MB need not pay RM63mil to logging company: Court

PUTRAJAYA: Pahang Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob need not pay the judgement debt of RM63mil to logging company Seruan Gemilang Makmur Sdn Bhd for breach of agreement, the Court of Appeal ruled. Justice Datin Paduka Zaleha Zahari, who sat with Datuk Sulaiman Daud and Datuk Jeffrey Tan Kok Wha, held that Adnan was wrongly named as the respondent in the judicial review proceeding at the High Court, initiated by Seruan Gemilang, to demand the judgment sum from the state government. "We allow the appeal with costs, on the principal ground that a wrong entity was named as the respondent in the judicial review proceeding," Zaleha said in her oral decision Friday.

However, the sum of RM63mil owed to Seruan Gemilang would still need to be paid as the decision would not affect the main judgement ordering the Pahang government to pay RM63mil made by the High Court in 2007, the court held. Karpal Singh, for Seruan Gemilang, told the media later that he would file for leave to appeal against the Appeal Court's decision next week, and would issue a fresh certificate to demand debt payment from the Pahang financial officer.

On April 20 this year, Adnan appealed against the Kuantan High Court's decision, ordering him to pay RM63mil to Seruan Gemilang after allowing the company's application for a writ of mandamus (compelling order). Seruan Gemilang filed the mandamus application last year, saying that it had demanded the judgement sum with interest, through a solicitor's letter, and had furnished an endorsement letter under Section 33 of the Government Proceedings Act 1956, but did not receive any payment.

On May 25, 2007, the Pahang Government was ordered by the Kuantan High Court to pay the company RM37,127,471.60, at eight percent interest per annum from Dec 31, 2000. Seruan Gemilang filed the suit against the state government and the state forestry director on Dec 2, 2002, seeking RM31 million in damages for breaching a logging concession contract relating to the extraction of timber logs from a 10,000acre plot of land belonging to Umno in Mukim Bebar, Pekan district.

In their statement of defence, the defendants said that Seruan Gemilang was only given a licence to log 7,000 acres because they found that the company was not interested in logging the remaining 3,000 acres. Counsel Datuk Shafee Abdullah and state legal adviser Datuk Mat Zara'ai Alias acted for Adnan. – Bernama.

Friday October 9, 2009

PKA files suit against former GM

PETALING JAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) has sued its former general manager Datin Paduka O.C. Phang for breach of duty during her tenure. PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the suit was for the breach of her "fiduciary, contractual and common law duties to PKA." "This suit is in addition to the earlier actions taken by PKA, including the criminal reports made against the relevant authorities," he said in a statement on Thursday. "PKA contends that she had failed to exercise due care, diligence and skill in the discharge of her duties as the General Manager of PKA," he added.

He said she failed to comply with the Treasury guidelines, failed to ensure that key agreements entered into by PKA contained adequate terms to safeguard its interest, and had appointed a quantity survey firm associated with the PKFZ turnkey developer Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, resulting in a conflict of interest. "Further, she caused PKA to enter into further key agreements which were not referred by her to the board members for deliberation and approval, despite having full knowledge that such agreements would cause PKA financial distress as PKA was not in the position to self-finance the project," he said. Lee added that Phang also failed to take subsequent action to address PKA's financial predicament in an appropriate and prompt manner.

Friday October 9, 2009

New govt approach said to curb graft

PETALING JAYA: The Government's serious approach in getting to the bottom of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) controversy sets a precedent for others not to make the same mistakes again in future projects, said investigative journalist R. Nadeswaran. Nadeswaran, author of *Some Untold Stories* which will go on sale next Thursday, said the Government's adamant manner would cause others to think twice before "putting their hands in the cookie jar."

Time for change: R. Nadeswaran hopes that the stern approach in pursuing the PKFZ issue would be a new culture for the Government. "We are seeing a change in which the Government is seriously going after perpetrators who have dug their hands in taxpayers' money. "Although getting the money back is highly unlikely, we have gained an expensive lesson. Such mistakes should never be repeated," he said in an interview at Menara Star here yesterday.



Journalist R. Nadeswaran. Nadeswaran

The journalist, popularly known for his "Citizen Nades" column in *The Sun*, said he hoped that the stern approach in pursuing the PKFZ issue would be a new culture for the Government. "If we use the same template of action for other failed projects, then we would be able to solve a lot of things and prevent culprits from trying to hoodwink the *rakyat* because they would be brought to book," said Nadeswaran, who is also the editor for special and investigative reporting.

He added that there were indications the PKFZ project was undergoing problems when it was highlighted in the auditor-general's report in 2003, but nothing was done about it. "If the authorities had acted on it, the PKFZ project would not have been in such a big mess right now," Nadeswaran said. In his book, Nadeswaran said readers would be able to see copies of Government documents and letters regarding the project, and understand what went wrong. "There is no witch-hunt in the book because I would like readers to decide for themselves," he said.

The book would be launched at the Royal Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur by retired Court of Appeal judge Datuk V.C. George next Thursday. Copies of the book, which are priced at RM30 each, are available online at Nadeswaran's website www.citizen-nades.com.

Friday October 9, 2009

CTRM signs RM3.5b deal, to become world player

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS

PUTRAJAYA: Government-linked company Composites Technology Research Malaysia Sdn Bhd (CTRM) has signed a major business deal worth RM3.5bil over 20 years which it said would boost its position as a world player in the airline component manufacturing industry. The deal between CTRM and US-based Goodrich Corporation will establish the latter as a composites-manufacturing centre of excellence, providing nacelle components across multiple commercial airline programmes. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who announced CTRM's success in securing the contract, said the Malaysian company had managed to "seal the deal" based on its past performance, work quality and Goodrich's confidence in its capabilities.



CTRM Chairman Datuk Wira Syed Ali Syed Abbas Alhabshee (second from left) explaining the product (Aero Structures – V2500 Engine Nacelle) that CTRM is supplying to Goodrich Corporation to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the Contract Announcement and Excellant Supplier Award Ceremony to CTRM from Goodrich at Perdana Putra in Putrajaya on Friday. Looking on is (from left) CTRM CEO Datuk Rosdi Mahmud and Goodrich Aerostructures, Director of Supply Chain Tim Martin. - Starpic by Rohaizat Md Darus.

"Under these agreements, CTRM will expand its capabilities to include delivery of larger, more complex components and composite assemblies for long-term programmes, and further strategic co-operation between CTRM and the Goodrich Aerostructures business unit. "The contracts signed are valued at RM450mil over the next five years. The period of the contracts is to last for the life of the aircraft and CTRM projects the contract value to be worth RM3.5bil," he told reporters on Friday.

Najib said the Goodrich contract increases CTRM's current book order of RM3bil to about RM6.5bil, adding that the book order was expected to increase to RM8.5bil by the end of the year through more new contracts from various customers. CTRM was incorporated in 1990, with Ministry of Finance Incorporated as its principle shareholder, to develop a high technology-based industry in the areas of aerospace and composites. Goodrich Corporation, a Fortune 500 company, is a global supplier of systems and services to the aerospace, defence and homeland security markets.

Friday October 9, 2009

Logging activities to be stopped

By SALINA KHALID

THE Selangor state government will no longer issue permits for logging on government land starting Jan 1 next year. The blanket ruling will cover all logging activities for the inland and the mangrove forests in the state. A source had informed *The Star* that the state government, in its exco meeting on July 22, had decided to stop all logging for the inland forest with immediate effect, while the ruling on the mangrove forest would be enforced on Jan 1. It means all inland forest logging activities has stopped about two months ago while logging concessionaires holding the licence to log mangrove forest along the state's coastal area could only do so until the end of the year. Their licences will not be renewed upon its expiration on Dec 31.



No permit: Confiscated boats without the permit to transport mangrove timber along the Selangor coastal area are left to rot at the Port Klang Forest Ranger Office premises. The rule, however, does not cover the clearing of privately-owned land.

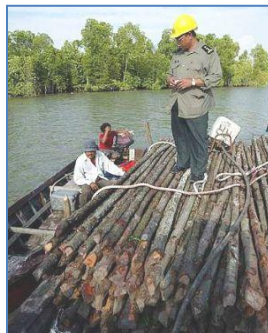
Selangor Forestry Department director Dr Yunus Zakaria said the department had not issued any new licence for logging concession this year. He said any logging being carried out were done using the licence issued since 2006. It allows them to log until the licence expires. He added that those concessionaires who were given the licence to log (from the previous government) were still allowed to continue until their concession expires or until their logging in the area was completed. Asked whether they could apply to renew the licence next year, Dr Yunus said they could submit their application to them and they would forward it to the state government for approval. "We have informed them about the expiry date of their licences," he said.

The National Forest Council had set a quota of 1970ha of forest that could be logged for timber in Selangor. The figure is the maximum area that could be harvested for timber every year. However, Dr Yunus said the actual logging allowed through the licence approval was less than that of the quota by the National Forest Council. When asked about the logging this year, he said it was much less and not even a quarter of the quoted figure allowed for harvesting. "There are seven logging concessions for mangrove forests in Selangor," said Dr Yunus. "But only five of them are carrying out logging activities and sharing an area of 800ha in Pulau Ketam," he said.

Article 74(2) of the Federal Constitution provides that land and natural resources are matters under the jurisdiction of the state governments. It states that the state is empowered to enact laws and policies on forestry independently and a State Forestry Director is appointed to manage the administration and regulation of forest harvesting; revenue collection which includes premiums, royalties, deposits, cess and other charges, the management and development of forest resources as well as planning and coordination of the development of forest-based industry.

The states, through their respective Forestry Department, constitute permanent reserved forests and classify them for timber production and protection such as water catchment areas, wildlife reserves and bird sanctuaries, virgin jungle reserves, state parks and amenity forests. All forest produce from these permanent reserved forests or state land remain the property of the state and all exploitation of forest produce must be licensed and administered by the state. The state forestry directors have the power to arrest, search, seize and investigate forest-related offences, and impose fines and prosecute offenders.

In accordance with the requirement of National Forestry Act 1984, the State Forestry Departments are expected to submit annual reports to both the state authority as well as the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia.



Seized: This filepic shows a Klang district forestry officer inspecting the timber cargo on board a boat in the Pulau Kelang canal leading to the open sea. The logs were confiscated on the spot.

Malaysia's forest policy has always emphasised the balance between protection and production. Regulations are in place with regard to forest management operations, which specify in detail harvesting guidelines, codes of best practices, forest inventory and construction of forest roads. All harvesting and related operations are carried out by licensed contractors. These licences stipulate intensity of extraction, harvesting sequence, tree size limitations, transport routes and standard of road. Harvesting timber, for both inland and mangrove forest, is allowed in the country, with the logging licence issued by the relevant state Forestry Departments.

The licence for harvesting the trees is granted to the concessionaires under the selective management systems to ensure the sustainability of the forest. It advocates the selection of a cutting regime based on diameter limits and species composition of the standing trees. It means the logging is permitted to zones that have met the maturity criteria of the trees. Meanwhile, the chopping of mangrove trees in Selangor is only allowed on those that have

reached a minimum of 30cm in diameter. With the average growth of about 0.6 to 0.8cm per annum, it will need about 10 years for mangrove trees to reach the minimum diameter before they can be harvested.

According to the Malaysian Nature Society, only 1.8% of Malaysia's land is covered in mangroves, with over 50% of these mangroves lost between 1950 and 1985. Forestry Department statistics show that Peninsular Malaysia had 85,000ha of mangrove forest in 2003, down from 86,497ha in 2002. The Selangor Forestry Department statistics show that in 2008, a total of 18,088ha of the coastal area in the state is covered with mangrove forest. Those who are felling the trees that are smaller would be fined if they are caught. Contractors who cut immature tree can be fined a maximum of RM50,000. At the same time, those who are carrying out illegal logging in the state have to pay a heavier fines. Under Section 15 of the National Forestry Act, 1984 (Amendment 1993) those illegal loggers can be fined up to a maximum of RM500,000 and mandatory imprisonment of one year minimum and a maximum of 20 years.

Saturday October 10, 2009

Completion of 2nd Penang Bbridge delayed by a year to 2013

By K. KASTURI DEWI

BATU KAWAN: The completion of the RM4.3bil Second Penang bridge has been delayed by a year to 2013. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said Saturday that the bridge was initially projected to be completed by mid-2012 but several factors such as in-depth study and re-designing of the bridge had caused the completion date to be shelved to before April 2013. "The bridge's scheduled progress should be now 20% but it was only 7%. I am however satisfied with the progress of the works being carried out and am confident that we can catch up despite the few hitches". He was speaking to reporters after visiting the United Engineers Malaysia (UEM) segmental box girder factory in Batu Kawan Saturday.

The factory was set up to manufacture some 8,100 such girders for the bridge project. Nor Mohamed said under the project, the packages awarded included RM2.2bil worth of works on the main span, sub-structures and the foundation that were expected to be completed in May 2012. The second package involves a RM1.55bil super structure works to be completed by early 2013 and the final package involving RM350mil of land portion works both on the island and mainland. He said the project would benefit the state's economic development and create 1,200 jobs. The 17km bridge will link Batu Kawan to Batu Maung on Penang island and will be the longest in the region when completed. Also present were Jambatan Kedua Sdn Bhd managing director Dr Ismail Mohd Taib and construction director Major (R) Ir. Mohd Ashari Alias.

Sunday October 11, 2009

TNB plans to build two dams in Terengganu and Pahang

KUALA TERENGGANU: Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) is planning to build two new hydroelectric dams, namely in Hulu Terengganu and Hulu Jelai in Pahang. Its vice-president (Human Resources), Muhammad Razif Abdul Rahman, said the proposed dam in Hulu Terengganu would be built in Sungai Tembat and Sungai Puah with a 250megawatt (MW) capacity, while the one in Hulu Jelai would be built with a capacity of 372 MW. While saying that it was too early to announce the estimated cost and width of the dams, Muhammad Razif, however, said that the projects would begin soon. "Both dams will be built simultaneously and are expected to be ready by 2014," he told reporters at the Terengganulevel TNB Aidilfitri celebration, here Sunday.

He said, once completed, the dam in Hulu Terengganu would be the third in the state, after that of the Sultan Ismail Power Station in Paka and the Sultan Mahmud Power Station in Tasik Kenyir. "The demand for power supply is not so high in Terengganu, probably just around 300 MW. We already have a power station in Paka, which has the capacity to generate 1,200 MW electricity, and another one in Tasik Kenyir with a capacity of 400 MW. "We are connecting the two power stations to the national grid to ensure continuous supply of electricity nationwide. " Muhammad Razif said the TNB had received the approval from the Terengganu Forestry Department to start the forest clearing work. He also reiterated that the construction of the dams was vital to achieve the government's aspiration to diversify the sources of energy in the country. – Bernama.

Monday October 12, 2009

Minister: Cabinet approves RM3.4mil to help rebuilding Sumatra

BY STEVEN DANIEL

PADANG: Malaysia will donate US\$1mil (RM3.4mil) to help in rebuilding efforts in the earthquake stricken capital of West Sumatra. Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the aid was expected to be used in the construction of schools, places of worship and public amenities. Cabinet had approved the amount and the aid would be channelled through the Foreign Ministry to the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. "We will pass the money to their government," Zahid said during his visit to several locations hit by the Sept 30 earthquake.

Zahid said he also expected collections via the various disaster funds set up by the media and non-governmental organisations to reach around RM10mil. "This aid to the people of Indonesia is proof of the caring nature of the Malaysian government and its people to the plight of its close neighbor." Meanwhile Padang mayor H. Fauzi Bahar was hopeful the Malaysian private sector could help sponsor the rebuilding of about 1,000 classrooms.

“In return, we will place a plaque with the sponsor’s name at the new classrooms as a mark of gratitude and appreciation,” he said. He also thanked the Malaysian government for sending the first foreign team to provide assistance in search and rescue efforts, as well as medical assistance.

Monday October 12, 2009

Commuters want exact locations of new stations

By BAVANI M

IT HAS been almost a month since Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd revealed its preferred alignments for the proposed extension to the Kelana Jaya and Ampang LRT lines. Since then, there have been numerous calls by residents and stakeholders requesting that the exact locations of the stations be identified. Having a clear idea of where these stations are located would help people provide feedback, comments and suggestions to the proposed lines as well as prevent any confusion in future that might hamper the project. Several locations have been proposed and it is believed that the most of the stations will be within a 500m radius of these locations with some exceptions.



Convenience: There will be a station near Carrefour & Subang Parade on the Kelana Jaya line extension.

The Kelana Jaya line starts from the Kelana Jaya station, passing through Subang Jaya and USJ, before ending at Putra Heights, covering 17km, with 13 new stations. There are two stations in Petaling Jaya, while Subang Jaya has seven stations located along Jalan Jengka and Persiaran Kewajipan and three stations in Putra Heights. The line will have five stations with multi-storey park-and-ride facilities. The Ampang line, which spans 17.7km, starts at the Sri Petaling station and passes through the Kinrara and Puchong industrial zones before ending at Putra Heights. It has 13 stations, with six multi-storey carpark and park-and-ride facilities, including Putra Heights. Two stations are located in Kuala Lumpur, while 10 stations are in Puchong. The 35km of lines, which are estimated to cost about RM7bil, will be elevated and are expected to be ready by 2012.



Future option: There is a lot of land waiting to be developed at Putra Heights, where both the extensions are expected to meet.

For those wanting to make comments and objections, note that the display hours are from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. It is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. Views should be in writing and submitted to the Department of Railways director-general's office before Dec 14. For details call 03-2278 1222 or visit www.dor.gov.my.

Monday October 12, 2009

More information needed

VALLEY VIEWS By BAVANI M

WHEN Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd recently announced the much-anticipated proposed LRT lines for both its Kelana Jaya and Ampang Lines, I was ecstatic! The news was welcome relief, especially after the recent increase in taxi and bus fares. I basically live and breathe public transport, and I am all for measures that could improve our beleaguered public transport system a few notches. A selfish point of view, perhaps, but let's get real. The public transport system is the spine of every major city in the world. Without a first-class public transport system, Kuala Lumpur can never stand up and be counted as one of the best cities in the world.

That we still have to grapple with the issues of traffic congestion and public transportation often baffles me. It is no secret that KL's gridlock costs the city millions of ringgit each day and, according to a statement from the Association for the Improvement of Mass-Transit (Transit) Klang Valley, congestion costs are leading to the loss of 2% of Malaysia's GDP (about RM10bil) every year. Is it because of the lack of capital, expertise, or the conviction to come up with the best solution without allowing anything, political interference included, get in the way?

Prasarana's recent public display of the proposed extensions and alignments of the two LRT lines for feedback from the people is truly laudable. According to Prasarana's group managing director Datuk Idrose Mohamed, Prasarana had evaluated 10 alignments and decided to choose the one that was the most cost-effective and reached the largest number of people. That sounds reassuring but there is no denying that there is discontentment

among the people since the maps were put on display. Some are unhappy that the lines would be close to their houses, while others are unhappy about the choice of some of the locations for the proposed stations.

While I do understand that we all have a tendency to speak and act out of self-interest and that Prasarana is in an unenviable position where they can never satisfy everyone, I believe that people have the right to know why certain decisions are taken and the rationale behind them. According to Transit adviser Moaz Ahmad, there may have been some constraints that affected the alignment and the locations chosen as the entire project involves relatively built-up and developed areas. However, his view that Prasarana has not revealed enough information is a valid one.

“Prasarana has decided that they will extend the LRT but they have shown no studies to prove that the LRT is the best choice over the other alternatives like trams or buses,” Moaz said. “We also do not even know if they have looked at any alternatives over the past five years. “Prasarana has chosen Putra Heights as the final destination but provided no data to show that it is the best place for the LRT to end, as opposed to Puchong, Cyberjaya or Shah Alam. “The line will bypass high-density areas like Bandar Sunway and Petaling Jaya. But they have not explained why they have chosen to do this,” he added.

I am a believer that people are, in general, reasonable beings and will be less sceptical when logical explanations are provided. I believe that people can certainly provide more feedback when they are better informed. Being more open will also cut down on the unwarranted scepticism and criticism people have against Prasarana. More importantly, it will go a long way in showing that the company has the conviction to strive for the best.

Monday October 12, 2009

Is the Govt delivery system faster than the private sector?

MONDAY STARTERS By SOO EWE JIN



TAN Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon revealed last week that 40% of the 11,000 complaints received monthly by the Public Complaints Bureau, ministries and government agencies was through e-mail and SMS. And he rightfully surmised that the response time must also be shorter. “People can now make complaints instantaneously. This means the time to react, respond and find solutions must also be shorter because clients’ expectations have increased,” he said.

It would be interesting to know how many people bothered to write in to express their appreciation because the delivery system in many government agencies has improved tremendously over the years. For example, there are currently four passports in my house that have recently expired but I am not the least anxious about renewing them because the procedure is so fast and simple these days. My friend in the printing business laments that clients are now taking forever to make payment, citing the economic situation as an excuse. In contrast, the Government, having put the payment system into place, is now an efficient paymaster.

I am sure if there is a minister designated to monitor complaints about private hospitals, banks, car companies, housing developers, telcos, etc, the numbers would tell an interesting story. When we talk about the delivery system and efficient service, we do not seem to hold the private sector as accountable. Many of us like to say that we are taxpayers so we deserve nothing but the best service from our Government. But we barely raise a whimper when the car salesman fails to deliver on time or when the credit card company imposes a penalty charge just because our payment reaches them one day late.

Well, some of us do, but seriously, how many of us believe that a complaint to a private company's helpline – by phone, email or SMS – will be attended to promptly, if at all? Actually, I am not the complaining type, preferring to dish out bouquets instead of brickbats. Even then, I find that because people generally don't care to respond, many of my compliments also go to waste. Let's face it. How many of you believe that an email sent to a generic address like info@website, enquiry@website or feedback@website will be attended to promptly? Or, for that matter, an SMS to a generic SMS service number?

Dr Koh said the people expect “firm, fair, friendly and fast service” from the Government. Are we not entitled to the same standards from private concerns as well? Here's an interesting story to share. Sometime in June, I ordered a DVD and 2 CDs from Amazon UK. The package did not arrive within 8 to 10 days as it usually does and I lodged an online report. I was told to wait for another week and if the package did not arrive, they would send me a replacement, at no extra cost. And so they did. Last Tuesday, the long-lost package arrived, after being lost for nearly four months.

I reported to Amazon and within the hour, they replied to say it would be too cumbersome and expensive for me to send back the package. I offered to pay but they told me to keep the goods as a token of their appreciation. That being the case, I told them I would sell off the DVD and CDs and donate the sum to charity. They responded immediately and said thanks. Koh is right to say that if people still care enough to complain, we must act fast enough to show that we are serious in attending to what they have to say. If I did not have confidence in the Amazon customer service department, I probably would not have bothered to even tell them that the missing package had arrived. A good system will always encourage people to do right and be right. A compromised system is what leads to people taking short cuts and offering bribes. Think about that. *Deputy executive editor Soo Ewe Jin is happy to give the proceeds to a bunch of dedicated teachers serving in a centre for children with learning disabilities, to have a special lunch.*

Monday October 12, 2009

Asas Serba needs Govt approval to take over tolled highways

By YEOW POOI LING

PETALING JAYA: Private entity Asas Serba Sdn Bhd's attempts to take over the country's tolled highways seem like a hard battle to win. Datuk Syed Md Amin Aljeffri, one of the four individuals behind Asas Serba, was quoted two weeks ago that the company might brief Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on its proposal after the plan was submitted to the Government in May. He did not reply to an email sent by *StarBiz*. Najib, however, reiterated last Wednesday that the Government did not have plans to sell any toll concessionaires in the country and had not seen the suggested acquisition plan.



Datuk Syed Md Amin Aljeffri

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop had put it more crudely: "If anyone has a plan to buy (the tolled roads), good luck but we have no plans to sell." Nor Mohamed heads the Economic Planning Unit, which is tasked to study highway concessions and review toll rates to ease the burden of road users.

Asas Serba's proposal involves consolidating all the 22 concessionaires in the country, bringing down toll rates for users by 20% and helping to save government subsidies by as much as RM114bil. But details are sketchy as to how it hopes to execute the plans. Asas Serba is already facing a tough task trying to get the green light from the Government, which indirectly owns PLUS Expressways Bhd via Khazanah Nasional Bhd. Even if it manages to, it will still have to get consent from others like Lingkar Trans Kota Holdings Bhd (Littrak), Gamuda Bhd, IJM Corp Bhd, SILK Holdings Bhd and MTD Capital Bhd, which are unlikely to give up their prized jewel so easily because tollways, especially matured ones, offer recurring income.

Gamuda, for example, enjoys steady cashflow from its 46% associate Littrak despite the doldrum in the construction sector at the start of the economic crisis. The next issue is funding and its capital structure. The takeover cost is estimated at RM50bil, excluding debt obligations, as the concessionaires have issued bonds totalling some RM26bil. Does it plan to issue more debts on top of the existing bonds? If yes, will that increase interest payments? Note that PLUS alone paid some RM654mil in finance costs for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2008.

If toll rates are reduced by 20%, Asas Serba will receive lesser income that it will need for operating and maintaining the highways, while absorbing losses from underperforming highways, such as the Kajang traffic dispersal ring road managed by SILK, which is still low in traffic volume. Extending the concession period is one option suggested, but if this can keep toll rates low in the first place, the Government can always negotiate with existing concessionaires instead of making Asas Serba the sole concession holder.

Monopoly has often been criticised by capitalists because non-competition tends to lead to lack of incentives to innovate and improve services. Asas Serba can take over all the concessions and re-list the consolidated entity on Bursa Malaysia but a head of research pointed out: "Why sell and then list when some of the existing concessionaires are already listed?"