

Saturday July 11, 2009

Najib to announce national KPIs

By YENG AI CHUN

 [Najib's first 100 days as PM](#)

PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will announce today national key performance indicators (KPIs), where the Government will identify areas to focus on. Najib said in his video Q&A session on his blog 1Malaysia.com.my that he would unveil five or six national key result areas in his speech to mark 100 days in office. "We will create and introduce KPIs or national key result areas, which are close to the hearts of Malaysians and which they want the Government to focus on," he said when answering a question from Khairuddin Musa of Pekan, who submitted a video recording of himself asking the question.

Najib had earlier invited Malaysians to pose questions to him through a video Q&A session on his blog. He said the details of the national key results areas would probably be announced at the end of this month after a meeting with government officers. "When we know what the national KPIs are, the people will be able to measure the Government's efforts and performance. They can also give their views and suggestions on how we can achieve these national KPIs.

This, he said, was a reflection of the Government's intention to have a more effective and meaningful achievement as demanded by the *rakyat*. A woman from Sarawak asked Najib how he rated his own work in the past 100 days. "It is difficult for me to comment on myself but basically we have put forward the agenda for the new administration," he replied. He outlined the measures the Government had taken, which included the liberalisation of 27 sub-sectors, and the financial and banking sectors. "I think it is a very positive step forward," he said, adding that he wanted to initiate changes that would send the right signals to the market.

However, he said that such changes did not mean ignoring domestic goals that were needed to be achieved for a just and balanced society. Najib said the concept of 1Malaysia was to embrace the country's multi-cultural society. Government policies, he said, should be seen as fair to all communities. He reiterated that the policies must be fair to the "have-nots" and the "haves". "In other words, we must be helpful to all those deserving of help but at the same time we must allow each and every Malaysian to have his rightful place under the sun."

Saturday July 11, 2009

Thumbs up for liberalisation

By P.GUNASEGARAM

Najib has shown he is serious about transforming the economy

TRANSFORMING an economy is never an easy task, especially in a country like Malaysia where policy-making is closely tied to establishing and maintaining a balance among the various races in the country economically. Anyone taking over such a task at this time is saddled with another major problem – the international financial crisis which has crimped growth all over the world and pushed many countries, including Malaysia, into recession.

The standard prescriptions for this new menace to the world are major stimulus packages involving government spending. Malaysia has had to do its share too. However, any spending has to be tempered by considerations as to how much such moves will affect the government coffers. Any leader who wants to transform the economy into a more dynamic and efficient entity will have to look into these two areas and give it some thought.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, in his first 100 days in office has shown he has, although much will depend on follow-up action and additional measures later. Ever since the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1971, all important policy-making has been tied to this. In the corporate arena, this was inexorably and rather narrowly tied to 30% bumiputra participation in corporate ownership.

This policy of more than three and a half decades not only impeded the development of local business and foreign businesses and entrepreneurial talent but it did not even help increase bumiputra participation in the corporate sector. That was because a large proportion of the favoured bumiputras who received such allocations actually sold them. Government figures show that of some RM54bil in equity sold to bumiputras between 1985 and 2004, much of it at concessional prices, only RM2bil remained in their hands.

In these difficult and trying times, and following gradual globalisation and interdependence of countries, and strong competitive pressures, it became obvious that there was a need to move away from this mould to give a new impetus to the economy. Najib showed that he was serious about moving things when he announced some liberalisation measures at the end of June, key of which was the dropping of the 30% bumiputra equity quota.

In what is probably the most important announcement he has made to date he also disbanded the dreaded Foreign Investment Committee or FIC whose approval was required for all manner of transactions. That move ended an era of sorts and now the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department only has to give approval in instances where there is the possibility of dilution of existing bumiputra interests in a sale. Otherwise, no approval is required.

While there is much more to be done to, this is a major starting point to stimulate economic and corporate activity and sends the clear message that some of the old ways of doing things will have to give way to other things. From a social standpoint, it moves away from benefiting a few through a micro approach via equity quotas to an approach where regulators will help ensure that a macro target of 30% bumiputra equity participation is met over time. This is more equitable and frees the ordinary entrepreneur, foreign or local, from constantly fretting over whether there is sufficient bumiputra equity participation. And importantly too, a tool for distribution of patronage would be removed, helping to loosen the nexus between business and politics.

Najib, however, started dealing with the economy as it came under severe pressure from external events before he became Prime Minister on April 3. But by that time, he was the designated successor and had already assumed the mantle of Finance Minister (from Sept 17 last year) in addition to his then current post of Deputy Prime Minister. Barely a month before assuming the premiership he announced a RM60bil second stimulus package in addition to the RM7bil first one. However, only RM18bil of this was direct – RM15bil in government spending and RM3bil in tax breaks. The rest of RM42bil was in the form of government guarantees, mainly to stimulate lending by financial institutions. The Government, for instance, was prepared to guarantee bonds to be issued by small and medium enterprises which are finding difficulty obtaining financing from banks because of uncertainties.

Najib has so far ruled out a third stimulus package, citing among other things, a need to keep government spending under control. Most of these economic policies and changes have been generally welcomed by the business community as progressive. However their efficacy will eventually depend on effective implementation and continuing with new measures to keep the momentum for change up. That will mean continuous, unremitting effort.

Saturday July 11, 2009

Government may reduce toll rates

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government is mulling over a proposal to cut toll rates to ease growing public complaints about rising charges. A source said the proposal also entailed discounts for heavy users of toll roads in cities and major towns. This could be modelled along the loyalty programme currently being offered by Litrak, the Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP) operator, which had a 20% rebate for road users paying RM200 or more a month.

The proposal suggested that discounts be offered to users who paid toll five or more times a day, regardless of the daily amount. However, the source said it was uncertain if concessionaires would be asked to absorb the cost for the discounts or whether they would be compensated. "The Government undertook a study following complaints of increasing

toll charges and the initial finding is that it would be too costly to mount a Government takeover of the companies,” the source said in an interview yesterday.

Malaysia has 22 highway concessionaires, three of which are listed. There have been public dissatisfaction over the scheduled increase in toll charges, stipulated in the concessionaries’ agreements. The Government has since declassified the toll agreements for public viewing and had said it would revisit the agreements. — Reuters.

Saturday July 11, 2009

Machinery used for illegal sand mining uncovered in Rawang

Story and photos by ELAN PERUMAL

A VILLAGE headman from Desa Kuala Garing, Rawang, was found storing machinery used in an illegal sand-mining activity in the area. The act came to light during a visit by Selayang Development Coordination chairman Datuk Tang See Hang to the site on Friday. Tang, who visited the area after reading a *StarMetro* report on the illegal operation on Tuesday, was surprised to find the machinery in a store belonging to Village Security and Development Committee chairman Kee Sai Hiong.



Serious business: Tang (right) speaking to Parameswaran during the visit to the site.

The former Selangor state executive councillor visited the site after farmer K . Parameswaran alerted him that the headman was in cohorts with the syndicate involved in stealing millions of ringgit worth of sand in the area over the past six months. Besides allowing his store to be used to park the excavators, trucks and other heavy machinery, Parameswaran alleged that the headman had also allowed the syndicate to carry out sand-cleaning operations at his compound.

Parameswaran expressed his dissatisfaction over the involvement of the headman and urged Tang to act on it. Kee, who accompanied Tang during the visit, admitted that he had rented the land to an unidentified person. He said the land was rented out for RM3,000 a month.



Hidden: The machinery parked within the compound of the store.

Asked on the status of the land, Kee said it was a temporary occupational licence (TOL) land which had been granted to him by the Selangor government. "I only rented out the land and was unaware of the illegal operation that was going on here," he said when asked for an explanation. Tang, who appeared unhappy with the action of the headman, instructed Kee to remove the machinery from the land immediately. "I don't want this machinery to be here any more and you should not allow syndicates to use your place for illegal activities," Tang said.

A check by *StarMetro* also revealed that the illegal operation had stopped since Tuesday. Tang urged the District Land office and the Selangor government to ensure that the mining operation did not continue.

Saturday July 11, 2009

Selangor reverses decision on tender committees

Stories by SALINA KHALID and OH ING YEEN at the Selangor State Assembly

COUNCILLORS will now be allowed to sit in the local council tender committees in Selangor. This means the state government will do away with its previously policy of only appointing local government officials to sit on the tender boards. State local government, studies and research committee chairman Ronnie Liu said the inclusion of councillors on the tender boards was to stem corruption at the local government level. "The state has decided to include councillors in the tender committee to provide a check and balance. It will also enable the committee to work more efficiently," he said.

Liu said this in reply to a question from Hannah Yeoh (PR-Subang Jaya). He added that the move would allow a good mix of politicians and civil servants in the tender committee, which would promote good governance and transparency. He said under the previous system, the check and balance process was done externally. "We will retain all the previous committee members," he said, adding that the move will help do away with poor decisions at the committee stage. "It is always hard to rectify a poor decision once it has been made," Liu said.

He said the proposal to revamp the tender committees should not be perceived as a failure of the existing system. Liu also said the status quo would still be maintained. "We want to continuously improve and are willing to make changes to any existing system if there is a need to do so," Liu said.

Saturday July 11, 2009

Delays hamper effective action

Stories by SALINA KHALID and OH ING YEEN at the Selangor State Assembly

STATE Environment Committee chairman Elizabeth Wong said the long legal process in prosecuting offenders had stumped the government's efforts in putting a stop to open burning. "To date, 23 cases have been filed in court, 23 compound notices have been issued and 10 cases are under investigation. "The government, however, feels that the legal process is taking far too long. For example, a case in Jalan Kebun here was taken to court in May last year but the hearing has yet to take place. "We hope that assemblymen who are also Selangor MPs can bring this issue up in Parliament," she said.

In reply to assemblyman Azmin Ali's (PR-Bukit Antarbangsa) question about the government's role in tackling the issue of open burning, Wong said: "Among the ways to prevent open burning, especially in peat land, is managing it with a water management system by building a check dam and water gate to control and reduce peat fires. "Another method is to improve enforcement on open burning under the Environment Quality Act 1974 by the Department of Environment as well as other laws by related government agencies such as the local councils, Land and District Office, Agriculture Department, Forestry Department and Fire Department.

"High-risk areas like construction sites, agricultural sites, waste disposal areas and peat land will be closely monitored. The Department of Environment will monitor and patrol by land whereas the Royal Malaysian Police Air Wing and the airlines will monitor by air to prevent the fire from spreading. "Offenders will be charged under Section 29A of the Environmental Quality Act 1974 that carries a maximum fine of RM500,000 or a five-year jail term, or both. "Education and environmental awareness programmes will be improved so that the relevant parties such as those in the industrial sector, developers, farmers and the public can give their cooperation," she said.

Saturday July 11, 2009

Legal stumbling block to local council elections

Stories by SALINA KHALID and OH ING YEEN at the Selangor State Assembly

SELANGOR'S proposal to introduce elections at the local government level has been hampered by legal limitations. State executive council member Ronnie Liu said the law did not allow the state to hold such elections. Liu, who is government, studies and research committee chairman, said the existing rules and regulations had prevented the move.

"Section 15C of Act 171 from the 1976 Local Government Act clearly stated that an election at the local government level cannot be held. "But we are looking for alternatives on whether this can still be carried out," he said.

Liu was answering a question by assemblyman Gan Pei Nei (PR- Rawang) during the state assembly sitting yesterday. He said a team of researchers was formed to carry out a detailed study on the possibility, especially on the legal aspects of the issue.

The team, which was formed last year, comprised NGO representatives, lawyers, academicians and election experts. "The state had allocated RM20,000 for the study and we are now finalising the findings of the report. "At this juncture, we are not in a position to make the decision whether we will or will not introduce elections for the local government," he said.

Liu added that if conclusive findings from the study deemed an election feasible, then it would be held at the state level. He said the final decision would be announced later. Liu also said a portal was set up to handle the complaints lodged by the public to all local councils.

He said the portal, which was handled by the state's corporate division, would help to organise all the complaints lodged by the public in a systematic manner. The system will enable the public to get their problems solved in a more efficient way. "All correspondence and action taken on the complaints will be recorded which will improve the delivery system," Liu said.

Wednesday July 15, 2009

Ling and Ong to testify before PAC on PFKZ issue

KUALA LUMPUR: Former transport minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat will testify before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) during a two-day inquiry into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project starting today. Dr Ling will appear before the PAC at 11am today, while Ong will testify at 2pm tomorrow, to the committee which will conduct the inquiry at the Parliament House. "We have also sent out a letter asking (former transport minister) Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy to appear but he has yet to give us a reply," PAC deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said when contacted yesterday.

Dr Ling was transport minister from 1986 to 2003, and Chan took over the portfolio from July 1, 2003 to March 18, last year. Chan was succeeded by Ong. Both Dr Ling and Ong said that they would give their full cooperation to the bipartisan parliamentary committee. Dr Tan said PAC would also call Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd (KDSB) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who is also Barisan Nasional Backbenchers' Club chairman and Pulau Lumut Development Cooperative (the company that sold the land to KDSB) president Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil to testify before the committee. However, he stressed that the summoning of the individuals by the committee did not imply any guilt or wrongdoing.

Last month, PAC called up several individuals, including Port Klang Authority (PKA) chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng, to testify before the committee and met Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief commissioner Datuk Seri Ahmad Said Hamdan and MACC investigations commissioner Datuk Mohd Shukri Abdul. Meanwhile, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chor Chee Hueng, who served as PKA chairman from 2007-2008, said he had not received any notice for him to testify before the committee. He also denied any conflict of interest, saying that he accepted the job as chairman of PKA and described it as "national duty". — Bernama

Thursday July 16, 2009

MACC widens Selangor probe

By WANI MUTHIAH, CHRISTINA TAN and LOURDES CHARLES

SHAH ALAM: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has widen its investigations in Selangor to cover the abuse of constituency development funds. The office of Selangor exco member Ean Yong Hian Wah in the State Secretariat building here was raided yesterday by the MACC in connection with the investigations. This could be the first time such a raid has been conducted in a State Secretariat.



Raid; A MACC officer talking to lawyer M. Manoharan (second from right) and Ean Yong (right) at the state secretariat building in Shah Alam Wednesday. Also present was Teoh.

A team comprising MACC officers from Selangor and Putrajaya entered Ean Yong's office and seized a personal laptop belonging to his political secretary Teoh Beng Hock and a desktop computer which was state government property. Teoh, 30, was asked to follow the officers back to the Selangor MACC office. Officers went to Ean Yong's 15th floor office at 3.45pm when he was downstairs at the assembly. When Ean Yong reached his office, the

officers were already inside. They, however, left when they saw a big group of journalists following Ean Yong. They returned about 15 minutes later when the journalists were downstairs. The officers left the State Secretariat building at about 6pm.

MACC officers also visited Ean Yong's service centre in Seri Kembangan as well as the centre belonging to Kampung Tunku assemblyman Lau Weng San earlier yesterday. Ean Yong, who is Seri Kembangan assemblyman, is also Selangor DAP chief while Lau is the state secretary. Lau, during a press conference at the assembly later, said the MACC had asked him questions about the community programmes he organised.

MACC, which confirmed that its officers also visited the offices of two other assemblymen, said the visits were part of investigations into allegations of abuse of constituency development funds. Seven Pakatan Rakyat-elected representatives from the Petaling District are allegedly being investigated over the matter.

Besides Ean Yong and Lau, the others are Teresa Kok (Kinrara assemblyman), Elizabeth Wong (Bukit Lanjan), Dr Cheah Wing Yin (Damansara Utama), Edward Lee (Bukit Gasing) and Hannah Yeoh (Subang Jaya). Kok had said told a press conference on Monday that even the recipients of the allocations were also quizzed by the MACC.

Thursday July 16, 2009

PAC: Ex-minister's letter had no financial implication on Govt

By IZATUN SHARI

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Transport Minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik signed the letter of support for the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project on the advice of the ministry's secretary-general and its legal adviser at that time. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid, who disclosed this at a press conference yesterday, said the letter, the first of four which Dr Ling signed, had no financial implication on the Government. Dr Ling, said to be one of two former Transport Ministers who would be interviewed by the PAC over the PKFZ issue, was questioned for two hours from 11.15am. "According to his statement, the letter was signed on the advice of the administration which is the secretary-general and also on advice of the legal adviser in the ministry," he said.



Full co-operation: Dr Ling (left) at the PAC inquiry at the Parliament building in Kuala Lumpur Wednesday.

The letter of support was issued on May 23, 2003. The press conference was held after the PAC meeting which followed the inquiry with Dr Ling at the Parliament building here yesterday. "Actually, the letter is not a guarantee." "Hence, there is no financial implication on the Government," Azmi said. He said Dr Ling was only involved in the initial part of the PKFZ project when it was at the proposal stage and not during the development stage. Asked whether Dr Ling's testimony would shed some light to the PKFZ issue, Azmi said: "He gave his part of the story."

He said that according to Dr Ling, many decisions were made based on needs, such as the reason for making the area into a free zone so that Port Klang could become a developed port in the region. "Today, Port Klang is ranked 14th in the world in terms of its size and efficiency ". He said Dr Ling was very co-operative and tried to answer all the questions. "There were parts where he could not remember because it happened 10 years ago. The proposal was made before 1999," he added.

Azmi said Dr Ling also gave his version on the land premium issue. "When the Federal Government acquires land for projects, it will be under the purview of the state government. The decision was made at the state government level," he said.

Azmi said that all former ministers and current minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat would be called before the PAC. Ong is scheduled to appear today while his predecessor Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy would be called next week. Azmi said officials representing the Finance Ministry and legal advisers who gave advice concerning the project then would also be summoned.

Thursday July 16, 2009

New design RM50 note issued

KUALA LUMPUR: Bank Negara issued the new design RM50 banknote yesterday that incorporates various modern and innovative security features aimed at deterring counterfeiting. "This new design of RM50 banknote is the first denomination of the fourth series of Malaysian currency notes, which will be replacing the existing series in stages," the central bank said in a statement here. It said the existing RM50 banknote design series would continue to remain legal tender and would co-circulate with the new notes and

would be gradually phased out. No time limit had been set on the duration of co-circulation, it added.



Freshly minted: The new note has improved security features to deter counterfeiting. The reverse side of the note is shown above.

The enhanced security features incorporated in the new design include the colour-shifting security thread which replaces the existing security thread and is embedded in the paper. The thread appears on the reverse side of the note as coloured intermittent lines. — Bernama.

Thursday July 16, 2009

Aug 16 deadline for Bukit Botak solution

By STUART MICHAEL

THE Bukit Botak Task Force has urged the original settlers of the Bukit Botak resettlement project who were left out from the list of those eligible for land to contact the Gombak Land Office for an interview. The task force had been set up after the issue was highlighted by *The Star* in an exclusive StarProbe story, "Land rip-off" on May 14.

These settlers should make a claim for their rights and the task force set up by the state government in May has extended the deadline to the end of the month to enable them to do so. On Monday, 23 settlers were interviewed while another 150 were interviewed on Tuesday but there are still settlers who are unaware of the interviews.



Promised land: An overall view of the land the settlers were supposed to have received.

Taman Templer service centre coordinator Mohamad Abd Rahman, who is part of the task force, said the 173 people represented about 60% of the settlers. “The interviews were supposed to be closed on July 14 but will be extended to the end of the month as we have to take into account people staying outstation. The interviews are conducted at the Gombak Land Office in Bandar Baru Selayang,” he said.

Abd Rahman also said the task force was set up on May 27 and comprised representatives from the Selayang Municipal Council, the Gombak Land Office, lawyers, Selayang MP William Leong and State Housing Building Management and Squatters Committee chairman Iskandar Abdul Samad and their representatives. Abd Rahman was speaking at a press conference held at the service centre together with secretary Mohd Mokhtar Rozaidi Mohd and chairman Mohd Shafie Osman.

Mokhtar said the task force had targeted Aug 16 as the date to solve all the issues surrounding the Bukit Botak controversy. “Our biggest concern is those who were left out of the original list. “We will then look at the 81 who were underaged at the time they received the land. “The Gombak Land Office has had some difficulty tracing the original settlers as more than 1,600 files were seized by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) two months ago. However, we are trying to work around this,” Mohktar said.

Mokhtar added that some new issues had also cropped up. He said that some of the original settlers claimed that they had paid the 10% downpayment upfront to the developer without having any house to stay. “Other settlers claimed that they had paid RM7,000 for land premiums or progressive payments to the bank. “Some of these settlers also claimed that they had received the 5A form for the second time while having to pay for land premiums again in order to get their grants. “The state government wants the original settlers to be given the land they were promised. “However, those who qualify for the land might have to be resettled elsewhere,” Mokhtar said. The pioneer Bukit Botak settlers who want to attend the interview can contact operation room chief Zulkifli Abdul Hamid at 013-380 2578.

Friday July 17, 2009

Ong did not reveal names in PKFZ issue to PAC

KUALA LUMPUR: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat did not reveal the names of those involved in the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said. Dr Tan said Ong seemed to have an idea about those who were involved but did not say who they were. He said Ong told PAC during the hearing yesterday that it was sufficient for them to look at the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report to find out who should be responsible for the issue. "He answered many questions and told us that many things happened before March 8," Dr Tan said, referring to the date last year before he became Transport Minister.

Dr Tan said Ong clarified that the RM1.2bil additional soft loan for the project, which was approved by the Finance Ministry, was requested by the Port Klang Authority (PKA) before he became minister. "The PKA made the request and he only passed it to the authority concerned". Speaking to reporters after finishing his hearing with the PAC, Ong said he answered many of the questions to the best of his ability. "But there was no need for me to answer other hypothetical questions and those that required my personal opinion," he said.

Ong said PAC also asked him about his exclusive interview with a Chinese daily. In the news report, Ong was quoted as saying that certain quarters had tried to stop him from revealing the PwC report. "I did answer to a certain extent," he said, adding that it was not right for him to be threatened that way. Ong said he told PAC that the current financial standing of PKFZ was RM3.5bil and not RM12.5bil as twisted by certain parties. "I also told them about the viability of PKFZ at the hearing," he added.

Friday July 17, 2009

Tee Keat urged not to resign

By SIRA HABIBU and SHAUN HO

PETALING JAYA: Several leaders have called on Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat not to quit over the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) controversy. Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow said Ong should not be apologetic for seeking the truth to restore public confidence in Barisan Nasional. "He is certainly not an embarrassment for the Barisan, for he has done a good job in promoting greater transparency and accountability," he said.

Teng said this in response to an article in *Sin Chew Daily* quoting Ong, who is also the MCA president, as saying that he was willing to quit if he had caused embarrassment to MCA and Barisan over the PKFZ issue. Ong also claimed that he had to bear pressure from within the party and threats from outside the party. MCA secretary-general Datuk Wong Foon Meng

called on members to remain united in support of Ong. "We know Ong is very sincere in giving the true report on the PKFZ issue, to clear all the suspicion in the eyes of the public," he said, urging Ong not to quit.

Wong, who is also the MCA Selangor chairman, said members should remain united to fight against the powers trying hard to hinder the investigations to uncover the truth. Kinabatangan MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin said PKFZ was an issue of national concern, and therefore Ong should not take it personally. PAS vice-president Datuk Mahfuz Omar urged Ong to lodge a police report against those threatening him. Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan said Ong should lodge a police report to facilitate investigation as the police viewed such threats seriously.

MCA deputy secretary-general Datuk Loke Yuen Yow in a statement yesterday said Ong's decision to disclose the issue to the public was to prevent the issue being snowballed and to ensure the project is accountable to the public. "What is saddening and disappointing is that Opposition parties chose to accuse and criticise Ong without seeing the rationale and truth in the whole issue. Besides exploiting this issue, the Opposition parties took the opportunity to attack the MCA president to gain political mileage. I could not think of a better excuse."

Saturday July 18, 2009

Review for all Perak govt offices

THE Perak Government has started reviewing the administration of all state departments, agencies and their subsidiaries to ensure their effectiveness. Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abd Kadir said the state had also begun mulling over methods to reorganise each institution where needed. "This will involve the process of reinvention, restructuring and possibly reappraisal of each department. "We will also look at their delivery system to see if they are satisfactory," he told reporters after chairing the state exco meeting here yesterday.

Dr Zambry said that this was to ensure that the institutions would be effective in their service to the people. "We also hope that by conducting this review, we will be able to increase the state's revenue and expand our economic sector". Dr Zambry also said that the Perak Economic Council, after holding its second discussion recently, would soon create an economic development plan for the state. "We hope to improve on certain sectors that can help better the state's economy ". Dr Zambry said the state would put emphasis on its manufacturing, tourism, food and service industries.

Saturday July 18, 2009

PKA posts appendices of PwC's review online

PETALING JAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) has posted online the appendices of PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) position review of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ), said chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng. The Appendices of the PwC Advisory Services' Position Review of the PKFZ can be viewed at www.pkfznews.com.my. The appendices, found at www.pkfznews.com.my/download-appendices-position-review have been put up since July 15, said Lee.

"The decision to put up the appendices on the website is in line with the Transport Minister's stance on transparency and accountability. "Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat has repeatedly said that he has nothing to hide. In fact, under his instructions, the PKA has put the report online and also allowed the public to view the appendices." He hoped the issue of MPs not receiving the full report would come to an end. "I wish to put on record that the PKA has sent 300 copies of the report, including the appendices to Parliament on June 15," said Lee.

Saturday July 18, 2009

Ong: I'll act on threats

SUNGAI PETANI: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat will take the necessary action on the threats received over the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) controversy. The MCA president said he would heed the advice of Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan on the matter.



"I hope the commission will speed up its investigation"- DATUK SERI ONG TEE KEAT

"The PKFZ case has been reported to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. I hope the commission will speed up its investigation," Ong told newsmen after opening the Kedah MCA's 32nd annual convention at the Beng Siew Hall here yesterday. He was reported to have said in a recent interview with *Sin Chew Daily* that he had to bear with pressure from within the party and threats from outside the party over the PKFZ issue. He also expressed his willingness to quit if he had caused embarrassment to the MCA and Barisan Nasional over the issue.

Yesterday, Musa was quoted as urging Ong to lodge a police report against those threatening him. Ong said the investigation into the PKFZ controversy would be a "hard

test” for the commission, and it needed to show its professionalism and effectiveness in curbing bribery cases. “I believe the people will judge how committed we are, especially the Barisan government, in fighting bribery through this PKFZ issue,” he said. In Langkawi, Ong said the Transport Ministry would study the feasibility of introducing flights from Langkawi to Bangkok and London. The proposal was among many mooted by the Kedah MCA grassroots to help promote tourism and the economy on the island, he said.

Saturday July 18, 2009

Penang MCA backs Tee Keat over PKFZ issue

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang MCA backs the handling of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue by party president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat, said its chairman Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai. Liow, also MCA vice-president, said Ong had always been very committed and transparent in ensuring that the PKFZ was a viable project. “He has come out strongly in ensuring that Barisan Nasional and the party will continue to gain the support of the people, although he is facing pressure from certain quarters,” Liow told reporters after chairing the Penang MCA liaison executive committee meeting at its headquarters here yesterday.

In Petaling Jaya, the Wanita MCA also stated its full support for Ong in his handling of the PKFZ issue. “It shows the determination of Barisan Nasional to ameliorate the shortcomings of the past and move forward with a new start,” said movement chief Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun.

Sunday July 19, 2009

DPM not aware of bids to sabotage PKFZ probe

IPOH: Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has said he was not aware of attempts by certain quarters to sabotage investigations into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue as revealed by Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat. “To date, I have not received any information on such matters,” the Deputy Prime Minister told reporters after opening the National Cooperative Day 2009 at Stadium Indera Mulia here yesterday.

Ong had been quoted in a Chinese news daily recently as saying that certain quarters had tried to stop him from revealing the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report. The report was aimed at finding out who should be responsible for the PKFZ issue. Asked to comment on former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s call to abolish the Internal Security Act (ISA), Muhyiddin said:

“The Act is being studied. Whether or not it will be amended, improved or repealed will be looked into by the special committee carrying out the study.” Earlier during his speech,

Muhyiddin told Domestic Trade, Cooperative and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob to raise in the Cabinet the request of the country's co-operatives to bring down the 27% income tax imposed on them. Ismail Sabri had said that being social-oriented organisations, co-operatives should enjoy a similar or lower tax percentage as the 25% imposed on the corporate sector.

Monday July 20, 2009

PWD: Learning to detect slope failures can save lives

By ZANI SALLEH

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Works Department (PWD) has embarked on a campaign to educate housebuyers and people living near hillslopes to detect landslides and monitor slopes for possible earth movement. Its slope engineering department consultant Erika Motoyama said slope safety awareness would enable people to identify warning signs prior to a disaster. The campaign, entitled "Safe Slopes Save Lives", includes an exhibition featuring graphics and posters on preventive measures for landslides. "The exhibition showcases monitoring and understanding the six signs of slope failure, how to maintain slopes and report signs of serious failure to the relevant authorities," she said.

Motoyama said the country has a high concentration of hills and slopes that are susceptible to landslides, especially during heavy rain. "Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of housing projects at foothills and at areas where hills have been cleared," she said, adding that it was vital for people to recognise and detect landslides early to prevent loss of lives and property.

Motoyama identified 11 signs of slope failure and impending landslide, including bulging ground and water at the base of slopes or retaining wall; water breaking through the ground surface in a new location near a slope; fences, retaining walls, utility poles or trees tilting or moving; cracks appearing on the slope, ground and in the foundation of structures; and water pipes breaking. Others signs are jammed doors or windows; widening cracks on streets or driveways; land movement; and stairs pulling away from the building.

Monday July 20, 2009

Perkeso issues 143 employers with compounds

SANDAKAN: A total of 143 employers in Sabah were issued with compounds between RM300 and RM2,000 by the Social Security Organisation (Perkeso) for various offences during the first half of this year. "Last year we issued compounds to 83 employers in the first six months and this year there has been an increase. This reflects efforts taken by

Perkeso to step up enforcement,” state Perkeso director Jeeva Narayanasamy said when launching the 2009 Perkeso seminar here.

Jeeva said the offences were for late registration of companies with Perkeso and late submission of accident reports. According to Jeeva, 37 employers were taken to court from January to June this year for various offences. Among them were for failing to register businesses and workers, failing to remit the contribution and penalty for late payment, and failing to report an accident. Offenders were liable to be fined up to RM10,000 or jailed two years or both under Section 94 of the Social Security Act 1969, he said.

Jeeva said there were 45,000 employers and 519,000 workers registered with the Sabah Perkeso as of May 2009. The body processed 1,360 claims throughout Sabah from January to May this year with 164 cases from Sandakan itself. “The total compensation paid out to insured persons and their beneficiaries in Sabah amounted to RM3,343,268.59, of which RM531,923.74 was paid in Sandakan,” added Jeeva.

Tuesday July 21, 2009

Mengkuang Dam expansion reinstated in Ninth Malaysia Plan

By DERRICK VINESH

BUKIT MERTAJAM: Penangites can heave a sigh of relief as the shelved RM1.2bil Mengkuang Dam expansion project has been reinstated in the Ninth Malaysia Plan. Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said the project was expected to begin as early as this October and be completed by 2013. “It will proceed once all necessary tender and documentation processes are sorted out in the next three months,” he said after visiting the dam here yesterday.

Chin said the project, which would be carried out in two phases, was vital to increase the state’s water capacity, which was approaching a critical stage. He added that the expansion would increase the dam’s capacity from 23 million cubic metres now to 78 million cubic metres, which would be able to meet the state’s water needs until 2020. “The Federal Government felt it was necessary to carry out this project with the co-operation of the state, especially the Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd,” he said.

Chin said the first phase would cover the principal work to widen and increase the dam’s height, while the second phase involved the construction of a 13km-long dual-flow steel pipe between the dam and the Sungai Dua water treatment plant. He said raw water from the Muda River would be pumped into the dam for storage via the pipe, at about 440 million litres a day, during the rainy season between April and December.

Chin added that raw water from the dam would be pumped through the pipe at a maximum capacity of 1.114bil litres a day, back to the Sungai Dua treatment plant during the drought

from January to March to make up for the low water supply from the Muda River. He said an additional 9km-long perimeter road would be built around the dam, similar to the one at the Air Itam Dam, for public recreation. Last August, Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng had said the state would face a water crisis by 2012 if the Mengkuang Dam expansion project did not start by this year.

The dam's expansion was among three mega projects in Penang worth a total of RM4.7bil shelved during the mid-term review of the Ninth Malaysia Plan in June last year because of the global economic slowdown. The other two projects were the RM1.5bil Penang Outer Ring Road and the RM2bil Penang monorail.

Wednesday July 22, 2009

Probe into biofeed project

By LOONG MENG YEE

KUALA LUMPUR: A company which successfully obtained a controversial contract from the Tourism Ministry is being investigated for another multi-million ringgit deal involving another ministry. Venturepharm Asia Sdn Bhd, which got a RM19mil contract to construct Malaysia's pavilion at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, is being probed by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) over a Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry grant to develop poultry feed known as biofeed. It is understood that part of the grant, totalling RM5.4mil, has been paid to the company but the ministry stopped further payment when the commission began investigations.

Deputy Minister Fadillah Yusof, when contacted, confirmed the ministry had frozen payment as well as other dealings with the company pending the investigations. In June, Wangsa Maju MP Wee Choo Keong asked in the Dewan Rakyat why the ministry approved the company's grant application under its Technofund project when Venturepharm did not have any track record in biotechnology. Replying to the question in writing, minister Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili had said a project monitoring team would record each milestone achieved by the company and part-payment of the grant was released accordingly. "The company has fulfilled all suggestions for improvements recommended by the monitoring team," he said.

On the Malaysian pavillion contract, Wee yesterday questioned the awarding of the contract to Venturepharm. Wee claimed in his blog that Venturepharm did not have any experience in the field. He also claimed that the company did not participate in the first tender which was held on March 13 when the ministry was under Datuk Seri Azalina Othman. "A second tender was called on May 13 when Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen took over. This time, Venturepharm participated and got the contract despite not being the cheapest," he said.

Wee said he would present documents to the commission to substantiate his claims. In Shanghai, Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen said the tender process for the pavilion contract was done in a transparent and accountable manner by the Finance Ministry and Tourism Malaysia. She said the design for the pavilion submitted by the companies involved in the initial tender were not consistent with the theme of the expo. "We wanted something modern yet reflected Malaysia's traditional and unique culture and brought out the quality of life of Malaysians," she said.

Dr Ng said she was not involved in the tender board's decision. She said that one of the considerations of the board was that the cost of the project must not exceed RM20mil.

Wednesday July 22, 2009

Ong: PKFZ case won't fizzle out

PETALING JAYA: The Transport Ministry will reveal its follow-up actions on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) before Aug 10, said Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat. He said that at present, it was too early to ask why no action had been taken against those implicated in the PKFZ project, adding that the Public Accounts Committee was still investigating. "There is also follow-up work like answering the 20 questions raised in the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) position review report. "The case will not be forgotten and fizzle out," said Ong in a face-to-face live interview with ntv7 on Monday night, during which he also fielded questions from viewers.

"The few committees set up on June 10 are also working on it." Ong revealed that when he became the Transport Minister, he could not find some of the documents relating to the PKFZ but did not explain why they had gone missing. To salvage the PKFZ, he said the ministry could restructure its loan by asking the Treasury to lower its 4% interest rate, attracting foreign investments and privatising the entire project. To comments from viewers that most privatisation did not succeed, Ong said this was not true as not all such projects had failed and there were some which had turned out well. However, he admitted that there had been a lack of good corporate governance over the PKFZ, adding that the Port Klang Authority had not managed it well.

He also did not rule out the possibility of letting the Selangor government take over the PKFZ if it was capable of doing so. "I do not rule out this possibility and will also not reject them in toto," he said, adding that closing down the PKFZ would not bring any benefit as this did not mean that it need not continue settling its huge debt. To another question, Ong said he did not regret declaring the PwC report public.

"I am doing it for the sake of taxpayers, not to please anybody. I am also prepared to risk my political career for that reason and also do not fear for my life," he said, adding that he was preparing to lodge police reports over threats he had received over the PKFZ report.

Asked why he seemed to be the only person responsible for the PKFZ and not others, Ong said it could be due to the fact that the Transport Ministry had ordered the probe into the PKFZ project and as such, the responsibility had been placed on his shoulders although this did not seem fair.

Wednesday July 22, 2009

Shoddy aquatic centre

By ZANI SALLEH

KUALA LUMPUR: Irregularities in construction work including the use of substandard material led to defects at the Batu Burok Aquatic Centre in Kuala Terengganu, said the Public Works Department. PWD director-general Datuk Seri Ir Dr Judin Abdul Karim said it was evident that the construction of the centre had not met the standards outlined by the department. He said the department had set up a committee to rehabilitate and repair the aquatic centre.

“The department has also set up a committee to determine if there was misconduct by individuals in the implementation of the project,” he said at a press conference yesterday. He said that the two committees would submit their findings to the department in three months. The aquatic centre remains closed until rehabilitation works are completed.

Dr Judin said that initial checks showed that rusting on the roof structure was serious and required immediate repair works. He said the rust was possibly due to usage of unsuitable construction materials, improper installation or shoddy job. He said the rust had not only effected the steel roof structure but also metal fittings such as railings, electrical conduits, lights, staircases and fences. “Besides the rust, walls and decks of the diving pool were damaged from seeping and serious leakages,” he added.

Dr Judin said that the problems arose from a weak design and substandard construction works. “The factors contributed to water stagnation in service passage which was worsened by the rainfall,” he said.

Initial findings also indicated there were no scheduled maintenance carried out, he said. The centre is a project undertaken by Kuala Terengganu Municipal Council and the project director comes under the state PWD, he said. The state PWD handed over the centre in conjunction of Sukma on June 1 2008. The defective grace period date ends on May 31 next year.