



Wednesday February 18, 2009

45,000 vacancies in the civil service

By SIM LEOI LEOI

KUALA LUMPUR: There are now some 45,000 job vacancies available in the civil service.

Deputy Minister in Prime Minister's Department Senator T. Murugiah said he would also be meeting with the board of the Public Services Commission, which is responsible for interviewing and recruiting civil servants, particularly non-Malays. "We have checked thoroughly and these are the places available that need to be filled, either due to promotion or retirement. There has also been some restructuring of government agencies, which may see more vacancies, as well as demand for more staff from the ministries.

"These vacancies do not take into account available posts in the teaching or police professions, which conduct their own recruitment, as well others in the local authorities and councils," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby on Wednesday. Murugiah was commenting on the statement by Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri S. Subramaniam that there were 20,000 vacancies available in the civil service. This is good news to many Malaysians due to the high retrenchment figures and the generally gloomy outlook for employment this year.

Subramaniam had announced there would be a "major breakthrough" in the request for increase in non-Malay recruitment in the civil service. On a statement by MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu that there should be quotas on places set aside for non-Malays in the civil service, Murugiah said he would be meeting with SPA on the matter on Monday.

"In 2007, 827,540 Malays applied for positions in the Government, of which 41,117 were successful. For the Chinese, there were 17,443 applications, of which 2,286 were successful, and for the Indians, 24,815 applications, of which 2,367 were successful. "I will the matter further with my minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and we will hand in any proposal to the Cabinet," he said.

Currently, there are some 1.2mil civil servants.

Wednesday February 18, 2009

New timber industry policy launched

By TEH ENG HOCK

KUALA LUMPUR: The timber industry is poised to be transformed into a manufacturer of high-value products and services under the National Timber Industry Policy (Natip), instead of being merely a commodity producer.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that under the new policy, emphasis would be placed on exporting processed timber products. "With the policy, the industry's annual export is expected to more than double to RM53bil by 2020," he said in his speech yesterday when launching the policy. "More emphasis should be given to higher value-added downstream activities that can be expected to generate 60% of export earnings."

Najib also presented cheques totalling RM30mil in loans to eight companies involved in the Forest Plantation Development Program-me. Malaysia is the largest exporter of tropical logs and sawn timber, the second largest supplier of plywood and the 10th largest exporter of furniture.

Wednesday February 18, 2009

Only 70% of RM7b stimulus package disbursed, says Abdullah

 [Public sector to speed up projects](#)

KUALA LUMPUR: Only 70% of the RM7bil stimulus package announced in November has been disbursed and the Prime Minister wants civil servants to do more to speed up the implementation of projects. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the projects were meant to spur the economy and help the people and industries ride out the economic crisis. "The civil servants must work hard to make the Government's plans a success. Such delay is undesirable and will not help in achieving the government's aim of stimulating the economy. "The 70% achievement (as of January) is just not enough," he said at the Defence Ministry's monthly gathering yesterday.

Abdullah said the civil service's capabilities and efficiency would be shown by having a sense of urgency in implementing projects meant to benefit the people. "Having a sense of urgency, efficiency and ability to carry out our work well will also increase our integrity," he said.

He said these traits would be demanded of the civil service as the next stimulus package, to be announced next month, would possibly involve bigger allocations. Abdullah, who is Defence Minister, said that continuing with development projects was crucial during an economic

downturn. “The projects will benefit those undertaking them, suppliers of building materials and workers. This is because if the industries are affected by the economic downturn, they may be forced to retrench workers,” he said.

“During this economic situation the civil service is the agent of economic recovery because the private sector may not be in the position to play its role as the agent of growth,” he said.

Abdullah also called on the ministries concerned to use the allocations given to them.

Wednesday February 18, 2009

‘Special agency must oversee hill projects’

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (Fomca) has urged the Government to set up a special agency to oversee and approve all hillside developments. Fomca president Datuk N. Marimuthu said all development on hillslopes and hillsides should in the meantime be temporarily suspended. He said the agency should be tasked with developing mandatory standards and enforce them to ensure that no landslide occurred. He was commenting on the announcement by Works Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed that there would not be a blanket ban on hillside development.

Marimuthu said the proposed agency should have at least one independent representative without any vested interest. He said that whatever the Government’s decision, no development should be allowed near water catchment areas. “There should in fact be a total permanent ban on development in such areas because it is too risky as it would jeopardise our already scarce water resources,” he said.

Since all development approval rests with local authorities, he suggested that they should employ enough professionals to carry out scheduled inspections of hillside development in their respective areas. As for areas which have already been developed, Marimuthu suggested that developers put in place an emergency response plan to warn residents of impending landslides. — Bernama

Wednesday February 18, 2009

Bank Negara probe delays RM600m project

MALACCA: The state government is awaiting Bank Negara's clarification over the status of a RM600mil coastal reclamation development project in Klebang following the central bank's probe into the development company. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam confirmed that Bank Negara had launched a probe into the company's activities with the state sending its officials to Kuala Lumpur to determine the outcome of the probe. "Based on the company's representatives, they said they had answered all queries posed by Bank Negara," he said.

"However, we want to wait for the official letter from Bank Negara," he told reporters after officiating the 3rd Asian Cities Against Drugs Conference here yesterday. Mohd Ali was asked to comment on the status of the 200ha project launched by the Kuala Lumpur based company here in December 2007. The project, which is to be completed in four years, was to include a marine theme park, a 10,000-seat international convention centre, sailing boat docks, a three-storey shopping complex, 510 small offices, 1,397 apartment units, a five-star hotel with 3,000 rooms, historical gallery and a replica of a Dutch ship.

During the launch of the project, which received wide media coverage, the company carried out a membership drive offering three different packages ranging from between RM1,200 and RM27,500. It is estimated than 1,000 packages worth some RM30mil were sold. "I was informed that the probe is almost completed and hope the project would resume once everything has been sorted out," Mohd Ali said.

Thursday February 19, 2009

Abdullah promises 'effective spending' in stimulus package

By SHARON LING

KUCHING: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wants "effective spending" for all the funds provided under the government's stimulus package. He said this was to ensure that the people benefited from the approved projects and allocations. "This is our promise to the people," he added when launching the Tanjung Manis Halal Hub in Mukah Division in central Sarawak yesterday. Sarawak has earmarked 16,000 hectares of land for the halal hub project, the country's biggest.



Grub hub: Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation general manager Datuk Len Talif Salleh (second from right) showing Abdullah, Taib (second from left) and Second Minister of Planning and Resource Management Datuk Awang Tengah Ali Hasan (right) a model of the Tanjung Manis Halal Hub.

Abdullah asked Sarawak to implement as quickly as possible its approved projects under the RM7bil stimulus package to spur the economy. Some 70% of the RM7bil allocation has been disbursed. He said the government would announce additional funds for the stimulus package during the current Parliament session. On the halal hub project, Abdullah advised the state government to prepare early to provide comprehensive skills training at all levels to the locals so that they could be absorbed into the various industries and factories once these are operational. He said skills training institutions should be set up in Tanjung Manis to provide convenience to the locals to be trained.

Earlier in his speech, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said the factories to be set up in the hub would produce halal food for the export markets. Taib said the halal hub was part of the development of the Sarawak Corridor for Renewal Energy (Score), which would require RM6bil for its infrastructure development. "With the infrastructure, many areas including in the interiors would be opened up for development, such as hydro projects," he said.

Taib added that the federal government had approved RM300mil to develop the proposed Samalaju Industrial Park within Score in Bintulu Division.

Thursday February 19, 2009

Sabah government to replace Perdana cars with Volvos

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah government is replacing part of its Proton Perdana official cars with Volvo cars because they will be cheaper to maintain. Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman said the Volvo cars, to be acquired by state government-linked Angkatan Hebat Sdn Bhd, would be used by the 12 ministers and 16 assistant ministers. "Senior civil servants, including the permanent secretaries in the various ministries, will continue to use the Proton Perdana cars," Musa said after the Cabinet meeting yesterday.

On another note, Musa said state officials would highlight to their Health Ministry counterparts of the existing congestion at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital here. "We hope the Health Minister can resolve this matter as soon as possible," he said.

Thursday February 19, 2009

Government to matchmake job seekers with firms

THE Human Resources Ministry will hold job-matching exercises at state labour offices twice a month. *Tamil Nesan* quoted minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam as saying that the job matching was for those who had lost their jobs and for new job seekers who needed information. He said the current global economic crisis had forced many people to be retrenched.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the Human Resources Department in Ipoh, he said there were about 17,000 jobs available nationwide with Perak having 575 vacancies. He urged job seekers not to be choosy and to be prepared to accept the jobs that were available. On local workers being retrenched while foreigners were allowed to work, he said that employers were reluctant to retrench their foreign workers because of the levy they had paid.

Good response from Malaysian doctors in overseas

> *Makkal Osai* reported that the Health Ministry had received encouraging response on the move to attract Malaysian doctors abroad, including specialists, to return home following the Government's move to ease the terms of service.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the Government had relaxed the requirement to make it mandatory to serve in government hospitals and allow the spouse to work in the same area. He said many Malaysian doctors in Singapore had expressed interest to return home this year.

Friday February 20, 2009

CEO told to declare his interest in water restructuring exercise

KUALA LUMPUR: Selangor has asked National Water Services Commission (SPAN) chief executive officer Datuk Teo Yen Hua to "declare his interest" in the state water restructuring exercise. Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said this was because Teo appeared to be pandering to the interests of the four water operators in Selangor with SPAN's decision to bypass the state and negotiate directly with them. "Instead of supporting our government's initiative to buy back these water concessions in the interest of the rakyat, Teo appears now to be pandering to the interests of private concessionaires," he told a press conference at Parliament House here yesterday. "We urge that he declares his interest on the matter. If any irregularity is found, we call for his resignation. He is being mischievous."

Describing it as regrettable, Khalid said SPAN's decision to negotiate directly was an obvious U-turn to the federal government's earlier decision of Jan 16, 2008, to let the states spearhead their respective water restructuring exercises. "I am shocked. This is even before our letters of offer to the concessionaires dated last Friday are set to expire (tomorrow)," he said.

Such a decision, added Khalid, would undermine the constitutions of both the federal and state governments as well as relations between the two. "It will also have deep implications on consumers in Selangor and the Federal Territory," he said.

Khalid was commenting on a statement by Teo on Wednesday that Pengurusan Aset Air Bhd (PAAB) had "moved in" to negotiate directly because Selangor had failed to meet the various deadlines given by the federal government, although they had been extended twice, and that the assets would eventually be turned over to PAAB anyway. The restructuring exercise has to be completed by March 31, failing which water tariffs will be increased by 37% for 1.5 million consumers in Selangor, Putrajaya and the Federal Territory.

On Tuesday, the Selangor water review panel asked Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Mansor to flex his muscle and back the state's plan to acquire its water assets after some water companies indicated that they were not interested in the offer of some RM6bil. Khalid said Selangor wrote to Shaziman yesterday as it felt that Teo had overstepped SPAN's boundary as a regulatory body and that the matter should be brought to the Cabinet for further debate. "In my corporate experience, which I believe is far longer than Teo's, it takes a long time for a restructuring and takeover exercise involving such a huge sum of money," he said.

Asked on the "missed" deadlines, Khalid said no formal notices or deadlines in writing were served on Selangor. "If they can give a lower price than our evaluation of the water assets, we are willing to give them our support."

Friday February 20, 2009

Ministry seeks RM400mil

KUALA LUMPUR: The Tourism Ministry is asking for RM400mil under the second economic stimulus package to promote niche products. Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said said the extra allocation would be used to increase promotion of products such as the Malaysia My Second Home programme, eco-tourism, medical tourism and MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions).

"We believe that by pushing aggressively in the niche market, we would be able to get the groups (tourists) to extend their stay and spend more," she said after launching the Zoom! Malaysia's jingle and quiz at Jalan Masjid India yesterday.

Zoom! Malaysia is an on-going domestic tourism campaign to encourage Malaysians to choose local tourist spots as their main travel destination. The jingle will be broadcast three times daily until the end of the year over 13 RTM radio stations nationwide.

Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is expected to announce the package in Parliament on March 10. Azalina said the ministry's strategy was to create more spending among tourism players, consumers, domestic and foreign tourists. "The whole idea of a stimulus package is to encourage spending. We want more spending. Spending on hotel, food, connectivity, transport and souvenirs. We want that kind of spending," she said.

On another matter, Azalina described the suspension of Perak Mentri Besar Datuk Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir and his six exco members from attending the State Assembly as a "backdoor tactic" of the opposition party.

Friday February 20, 2009

State govt to act after failed bid to seize PWD property

MALACCA: The state government is studying the legal options over the failed attempt to execute a writ of seizure and sale against the state Public Works Department over a RM4.5mil debt. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the state legal adviser was studying if legal action could be taken against Kuala Lumpur-based Tropical Profile Sdn Bhd. "We are looking into the possibility of suing them as the PWD was successful in its earlier application to the courts," he told reporters after officiating at the Local Councillors Conference 2009 yesterday.

Mohd Ali had previously said that the company had no right to seize moveables at the state PWD office in Jalan Tun Sri Lanang two weeks ago as the property belonged to the state. On Feb 5, there was confusion over Tropical Profile's attempt to execute the writ of seizure and sale it obtained on Jan 12.

The PWD managed to stop the process the following day when the High Court ruled that a declaratory order and certificate obtained by Tropical Profile was invalid due to procedural defects. On Feb 12, PWD lost in its bid for a stay in the judgment order with the company indicating that it would proceed with action to secure the RM4.5mil owed to it. PWD is appealing the case in the Court of Appeal.

Tropical Profile was involved in a RM54mil bridge project under the RM205mil Durian Tunggal-Paya Rumput-Sungai Udang Highway project. It was responsible for building seven bridges and was paid RM49.5mil. It sued the PWD and main contractor Central Effective Sdn Bhd for the balance in 2004. Meanwhile, a Tropical Profile representative confirmed that they were called in by the police on Feb 12 to give a statement following a report lodged against them by PWD for trespass.

Friday February 20, 2009

Roof of low-cost flats blown off by strong winds

By LIM CHIA YING

STRONG winds blew off the roof at Block A of the Angsana low-cost flats in Jalan Bukit Puchong 17/1, Bandar Bukit Puchong 2, on Tuesday evening. Many of the residents panicked and feared for their safety when the aluminium roof came crashing down, causing damage to some cars parked below the flats. Residents said the roof came off as the nails holding it in place had loosened. They believe this was due to the daily rock blasting being carried out nearby to facilitate construction of a highway.



Too close for comfort: The Angsana low-cost flats in Bandar Bukit Puchong 2 is located very near the rock blasting site.

They said the blasting started in January and that the walls of some flats had cracks. "When we first moved into our units in September last year, there were the usual, very fine hairline cracks but now these are very obvious," said resident Abdul Malik Mohamed, 35.

"The blasting is carried out about three times a day. It is loud and we can feel the tremors each time, especially since the distance between our flats and the site is a mere 100 metres. He said no notices were given to residents to inform them about the blasting and that no signboards were put up at the site.

Housewife Siti Rohaida Kamaruzaman said her two-year-old daughter was terrified of the blasting and would cry each time it took place. Staying in the top unit of Block A, she is fortunate that her rooftop was not blown off by the strong wind. The vacant unit opposite hers had its roof torn out, leaving a mess behind. "I worry for the safety of my family. I cannot imagine what would have happened if the roof, nails and all had collapsed on us. "I really want to move to a unit on the lower floor," she said.

Resident Shahrul Nizam Zainal Abidin said they had lodged reports with the relevant authorities including the Sepang Municipal Council (MPSp) and the police over this matter. "This is a serious matter and we hope the relevant authorities would look into the rock blasting work near the flats. The five blocks have a total of 304 units. "We want the blasting to stop until our problems are attended to. We have been here for only five months but our walls are cracking," said Abdul Malik.

When contacted, an officer from the MPSp public relations department said a site visit by the MPSp building department officers was carried out on Feb 13 and it was found that the building was still under a defects warranty period for repair works to be done. "The council will call for coordination soon between the police, which issues permits for explosions, and the Malaysian Highway Authority to monitor safety during the blasting.

"Following this meeting, we will decide who should carry out the repair work as it still has to be determined whether the cracks are a result of the blasting," said public relations officer Zelda Mohd Zamri.

Friday February 20, 2009

RM40mil facelift for Subang airport

By TAN KARR WEI

THE Terminal 3 at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport at Subang has been given a RM40mil facelift and renamed the Skypark Subang Terminal. Compared with its previous rundown state after the main airport shifted its operations to the KL International Airport in Sepang, the upgraded terminal now has a friendly environment with a more pleasing ambience. Subang Skypark executive director Datuk Ravindran Menon said air travellers could look forward to a pleasant and comfortable time at the terminal.



Modern: The refurbished Skypark Subang Terminal.

Instead of rows of plastic chairs typically found in airport terminals, there are leather sofas dotting the centre of the terminal, giving it a classy cosy look. "We also provide high speed WiFi services and Samsung LCD TV sets around the terminal so that passengers and patrons will be entertained," Ravindran said.

He said passengers would be spoilt for choice for both retail and F&B services, with a choice of international and local cuisine available. Two banks have already set up operations at the terminal and a spa is in the works. Ravindran said passengers could look forward to limousine, taxi and coach services at the terminal.



New look: Most parts of the terminal has been refurbished, like this walkway leading to the departure hall.

“This will provide them with options in travelling out from the airport. For now, we have the normal taxi counter,” he said.

With proper signboards and directories installed at strategic places, passengers and patrons will find it easier to get around the terminal. “Once the exterior renovation is completed, passengers can expect a more systematic traffic movement as the check-in counters will be the first they see when they are departing from the terminal,” Ravindran said.



Welcoming: There is a cosy lounge to greet the corporate and private jet travellers at the Fixed Base Operations facility.

The interior is almost completed while the exterior refurbishments are due to be completed by June. “By then, we will have proper drop-off lanes for passengers, valet services and more for the comfort of patrons,” Ravindran said.

He said the terminal was not a budget terminal as perceived by many people but an international terminal catering for community airlines such as FireFly and Berjaya Airways. “With the community airlines expanding their business and their routes, we are expecting some 1.5 million passenger traffic for the year,” Ravindran said.



For convenience: The Skypark Subang Terminal has new check-in counters for Firefly and Berjaya Air passengers.

With the wider range of retail and F&B outlets, the Subang Skypark is also positioning itself as a shopping and eating destination for people working and staying in the area. “Those working in

the area now have another option for lunch and even the residents have something new to look forward to during the weekend. This transformation of the terminal will also regain Subang's prominence and long established name on the global aviation map," Ravindran said.

The terminal also boasts of a Fixed Base Operation (FBO) facility called the Skypark FBO Malaysia. "The FBO is the regional hub for private jet charter giant VistaJet. The facility comprises a fully-equipped business centre, relaxation facilities, food and beverage services plus dedicated crew amenities. This places Skypark FBO on par with other FBO facilities worldwide," Ravindran said.

Besides the FBO, there is also a Regional Aviation Centre and Skypark has allocated 30 acres of land to house this comprehensive hangarage facility which will include a hub for maintenance, repair and overhaul and aircraft parking.



Work in progress: The facelift to the exterior of the terminal is still being carried out.

The car park opposite the terminal has been cleaned up and has more than 350 parking bays for of passengers and patrons. "We have a 24-hour secure parking system. Security cameras are placed around the parking vicinity for safety and more lights have been installed," Ravindran said.

There are also plans for a commercial building where the car park is located. "The commercial nexus is in the concept design stage and we are now finalising planning details. "We see the commercial nexus as something exciting that we have in store for the passengers and residents in the vicinity. "We are looking at a 15-month time period for the completion of the commercial nexus," Ravindran said.

Monday February 23, 2009

Sime Darby lacks funds, new terminal to be built within KLIA

By EDDIE CHUA eddiechua@thestar.com.my

PHUKET: The proposed RM1.6bil low-cost carrier terminal (LCCT) project in Labu, Negri Sembilan, has been cancelled. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the project would not be carried out as Sime Darby Berhad had no funds to initiate the infrastructure. "Instead, the new LCCT will be built within the KL International Airport," he said after attending a special Asean + 3 Finance Ministers meeting yesterday. He said Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad would build the new LCCT.

Malaysia Airports is also expected to work closely with AirAsia. It is understood that the budget airline's input in the building of the new terminal will be taken into consideration. "We are still negotiating the terms and conditions with AirAsia on the new LCCT," he said.

Najib's announcement put paid to the notion that the government was considering having the LCCT in Labu. "The decision is final. The LCCT in Labu has been scrapped," he said.

On the mini-budget to cushion the impact of global financial woes on the local economy, Najib said it "will be bigger in size than what is being speculated."

Najib, who is also the Finance Minister, will table the mini-budget in Parliament on March 10.

Monday February 23, 2009

Women first to be retrenched

By SIM LEOI LEOI

KUALA LUMPUR: Employers are still discriminating against women when it comes to retrenchment. Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Noriah Kasnon said the Government was concerned with the statistics as half of the workers retrenched recently in the current economic crisis were women, despite them making up only 35% of the country's total workforce.

"Female workers may be contributing towards their companies' productivity. "But when an economic slowdown occurs, they are still the first to be asked to go, with excuses that many of them tend to focus on their family or are pregnant regularly," she said.

We would hold talks with both the Human Resources and the Entrepreneur Development and Cooperative Ministries on how we can create more jobs for women, she told reporters after

launching a seminar on violence and sexual harassment against women at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, here, yesterday. On calls by the Bar Council and Women Parliamentary Caucus for stricter laws to protect privacy in the wake of the scandalous pictures involving former Selangor exco member and Bukit Lanjan assemblyman Elizabeth Wong, Noriah said the ministry would consider the proposal. Earlier, in her speech, Noriah said violence and sexual harassment affected women from all classes, including professionals. "Sexual harassment can happen everywhere, even at home. There is no point for victims to hide or shy away from filing complaints," she said.

"Last year, the police recorded 3,906 cases of sexual harassment, including molest. The Public Service Department took disciplinary action against 27 officers over such complaints between 2005 and last year."

Monday February 23, 2009

44 schools get RM27m for repairs

By RUBEN SARIO

KOTA KINABALU: Forty-four government-aided schools in which pupils study in dilapidated or unsafe buildings are given a helping hand. Deputy Education Minister Datuk Wee Ka Siong said the 44 were among 245 government-aided schools in the country to receive a total of RM27mil under the Federal Government's first phase of the special allocation.

"Our assurance is that schools, which are in need of help, will get it," he said after performing the ground-breaking ceremony of SJKC Yue Min primary school's new classroom block at Penampang, near here, yesterday. Of the RM27mil, nearly RM5mil had been allocated to 23 Chinese national type primary schools in Sabah while another RM7.1mil were for 35 mission schools, said Wee.

"We are pleased to see the schools moving quickly after receiving their funds," he said. "Some have started urgently needed refurbishment works." The funds were channelled directly to the respective school boards that had experience in managing their respective projects. Last month, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had announced that the boards of directors of Chinese schools and other vernacular schools would receive direct funding from financial allocation under the economic stimulus package.

Wee said the ministry was still vetting the funding applications from schools for the allocation's second phase. The ministry, he said, would not provide funds for non-essential projects such as installation of air conditioning for school halls. "We want to make sure that the students are provided for," he added.

Tuesday February 24, 2009

Sime Darby has funds

IN yesterday's front-page report titled "LCCT@Labu off", it should have been reported that Sime Darby did not want to fund the infrastructure costs of the terminal and would only sell the land for the project. It was incorrect to say that Sime Darby lacked funds to initiate the infrastructure. We apologise for the error.

Tuesday February 24, 2009

More government clinics to extend operating hours

PUTRAJAYA: All state health department directors have been asked to submit applications to extend the operating hours for government clinics to 9.30pm or even later. This followed the good response to the 16 clinics already providing such late-hours services since last year, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.



Ready to serve: Nurses from Putrajaya Hospital posing with the newly launched logo of the Health Ministry's Corporate Culture Campaign in Putrajaya yesterday.

If needed, the ministry was even prepared to increase the number of such clinics up to three times the current number. There are about 800 government clinics nationwide. On another matter, Liow said the ministry would be providing communication skills training to its medical staff to reduce the 1,896 complaints received from the public last year. He added the ministry took seriously the complaints, as well as another 34 registered with the Public Complaints Bureau under the Prime Minister's Department.

Liow said complaints included rude behaviour by medical staff; uncaring attitude and failing to inform patients and family members about the medical conditions. "There were also complaints over delays in releasing medical reports but the ministry has already tackled the problem by directing all hospitals to issue them within eight weeks," said Liow after launching the Health Ministry Corporate Culture Campaign here yesterday.

Although there were close to 2,000 complaints, Liow said the ministry also received 3,184 commendations. "We have to bear in mind that we have the same number of medical staff as privately-run facilities, but we attend to 80% of total patients nationwide. "They work during

the festive seasons when most other people are enjoying their leave; and often even during their meal times too. They should be given credit for this,” he said.

Wednesday February 25, 2009

Ministry extends on-line medical service for rural folk

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry hopes to extend its rural on-line medical service Teleprimary Care (TPC) to Sabah, Sarawak and Pahang.

The service, launched in 2005, now covers 87 areas in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Perlis and Sarawak. The system covers specialist services in family medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology, internal medicine, dermatology, epidermatology and paediatrics. Cases in rural areas would be transmitted to urban hospitals for diagnosis and advice by specialists so that the patients need not travel.

Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the extension of the service would benefit millions in rural areas without good transportation. “We want to save them time and money and to get more specialists to look into rural patients,” he said after launching the HiMSS Asia Pac 2009 Conference and Exhibition yesterday.

Liow said the allocation for the extension would depend on the second economic stimulus package next month. So far, RM35.5mil had been spent on the services. Meanwhile, he said the public should not be worried about higher healthcare costs with the implementation of more information technology because it would only improve healthcare quality and make delivery systems more efficient. “Actually, it should lower the costs (of healthcare) since we’re improving productivity,” he said.

Wednesday February 25, 2009

Employers’ payment to HR Fund could be cut by half

KUALA LUMPUR: The Human Resources Ministry is considering a 50% reduction in contributions by employers to the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF), in view of the global economic slowdown. “They now contribute about RM400mil a year to the fund, set up to train and retrain workers. With the reduction, some RM200mil will be saved by the employers,” said Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam. He said the six-month exemption of the HRDF levy for employers in the textile, and electronics and electrical industries announced in January, and effective this month, would be reviewed in July. “If the current economic condition prevails, we might extend the exemption period for these sectors,” he said.

Dr Subramaniam was speaking to reporters after officiating a Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) industrial relations conference here yesterday. He also said a mechanism needed to be worked out to pay a monthly allowance to retrenched workers who were being retrained so they could be re-employed. "I have requested the FMM to help draw up a formal mechanism for this scheme, as we do not want any abuse of the system. It will be a win-win situation, with the workers getting trained and the industry getting better-trained workers," Dr Subramaniam said.

He said the retraining programme would start in two weeks and those interested could apply through the ministry's website. On FMM president Datuk Mustafa Mansur's call for the Government to suspend Socso contributions for two years, Dr Subramaniam said this was not possible as it would have legal implications.

Wednesday February 25, 2009

ECER Development Council office to open in Kuantan

By ROSLINA MOHAMAD

KUANTAN: Development projects under the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) in Pahang are expected to be given a boost with the setting up of the ECER Development Council's (ECERDC) new state office here. Located at Sri Kuantan Square in Jalan Teluk Sisek, it will be officially opened by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob soon.

The event will coincide with the first meeting of the state's Implementation and Coordination Committee (ICC) that oversees the projects. The Pahang ICC consists of 11 members chaired by the Menteri Besar. Other members include the ECERDC chief executive officer, the state secretary, State Economic Planning Unit director and representatives of related state and federal government agencies and institutions. According to ECERDC chief executive officer Datuk Jebasingam Issace John, the office in Pahang would speed up the activities and boost the region's economic growth. "This is in line with objectives of the masterplan," he said.

"The office signifies ECERDC's commitment to facilitate smooth implementation of the projects and will strengthen ECERDC's presence," he said in a statement.

As a one-stop centre, it would coordinate the processes for potential investors and current establishments and provide information on ECER projects, he added.

"It will also process applications for incentives before they are approval by the Finance Ministry, and for investments in high-impact projects for consideration by the Cabinet Committee for Investments," he said.

He added that manufacturing licences and expatriate posts in projects would be approved in the ECER. Under the 9th Malaysia Plan, 45 projects were identified for implementation in Pahang under ECER. Of these, 32 were exclusive to the state and the remaining 13 were cross-border projects involving neighbouring states. Twenty four projects were started last year while 11 will commence by the middle of this year and seven will kick off before yearend. The remaining three will be carried out by early 2010.

Thursday February 26, 2009

Don't use box ruling to raise fish prices, says LKIM

KUALA LUMPUR: Fish prices should not be increased following the new ruling for importers to use insulated containers instead of plastic boxes to transport fish. Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM) development department deputy director-general Mohad Khazin Hamzah said the ruling should not be a reason for fish to be more expensive because the service charge imposed on each container was still the same.

"For every container that is less than 50kg, the service charge imposed is RM2.50. The same amount is charged for the insulated container, which has the same volume as the plastic box. "The container also ensures that the freshness and quality of the fish are not compromised as it enters the country," Mohad Khazin told a press conference here yesterday.

He pointed out that the old plastic box did not come with its own lid which required importers to buy wooden boards. "This would incur higher costs and might cause food contamination if the wood rots and comes into contact with the fish," he said.

Mohad Khazin added that the container also had its own anti-bacterial cassette and radio frequency identification device to trace the vessel which transported the fish. He said it was not compulsory for local distributors and fish wholesalers to use the containers but they were encouraged to do so. The ruling, which will come to effect on Sunday, requires fish importers to use insulated containers for at least 10% of the number of boxes carried in one load.

Thursday February 26, 2009

Bright pineapple prospects for Sabah and Sarawak

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah and Sarawak are set to become key pineapple suppliers, with the Malaysian Pineapple Industry Board (MPIB) targeting to cultivate 15,000ha of the fruit in each state. Board chairman Datuk Hasni Mohammad said both states had the necessary conditions and land to become the country's premier pineapple growers. He said the land could be

developed in clusters or via cooperatives to enable the people, particularly the hardcore poor, to participate in the industry.

Hasni, who said this during a meeting with Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman yesterday, added that MPIB would provide financial assistance, technical know-how and marketing expertise to help pineapple growers in both states succeed. In Sabah, MPIB would be working with the Sabah Land Development Board (SLDB) which was also embarking on cultivating 120ha of the renowned Babagon pineapples in Penampang, near here.

Hasni said MPIB would be able to start work as early as next year, and that a Sabah regional office had been opened to lay the groundwork. However, what was needed was the extension the Pineapple Industry Act by Parliament to both states, he added.

The Act had to be amended to include Sabah and Sarawak under its jurisdiction, and a draft agreeable to all parties has already been prepared, he added.

Hasni said MPIB would work closely with SLDB to introduce schemes to encourage smallholders to plant pineapples with a guaranteed buy-back, as well as help small and medium-scale livestock farmers to use pineapples as feedstock. According to Hasniat, at present, some five to seven container loads were being exported weekly to the Middle East. "We find that even the Koreans and Japanese are seeking Malaysian-grown pineapples, and it is difficult to expand our acreage in the peninsular," he added.

An area of 0.8ha is required to grow enough pineapples to fill a container for overseas export, with some excess for downstream processing, he said.

While the overseas markets opted for fresh fruits, Hasni said downstream processing had seen MPIB come up with 10 products, including juices, canned cubes, flavoured teas and coffee, jam and fritters.

Thursday February 26, 2009

Flexi work to benefit 13 million workers

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 13 million private and public sector workers will benefit from the flexi work system when it is implemented in two months, Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam said here.

Dr Subramaniam said his ministry had drawn up the regulations for the flexi wage system and handed them over to the Attorney-General for approval. "After approval, it will be implemented to enable the workers to work flexi hours," he told reporters after receiving a memorandum on workers' plight from Parti Socialist Malaysia here yesterday.

Dr Subramaniam said the regulations contain the terms and conditions on the payment of salaries for workers opting for flexi hours, as well as protection for both workers and employers. "The protection is important to ensure that the interests of both workers and employers are protected in case of any dispute," he said, adding that the terms for EPF and Socso contributions would also be spelled out.

Dr Subramaniam said the flexi wage concept not only entailed working after office hours but also the employment of housewives who only wanted to work for two hours. He said government servants who wanted to work after their office hours needed to get approval from the head of their departments, while private sector workers would be dependent on the agreements with their employers.

On the retrenchment fund handled by Socso, he said the International Labour Organisation was in the process of giving its suggestions to the ministry on the most suitable system for implementing the fund. "We are positive that the fund would be introduced very soon," he said.

Thursday February 26, 2009

Councillors debate on MPSJ awards ceremony

By LIM CHIA YING

AT THE Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) full board meeting the council's excellence service awards ceremony to be held this Friday became a topic of question. MPSJ president Datuk Adnan Md Ikshan had extended his invitation to all councillors present to come for the ceremony that would take place on Friday night at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel. However, councillor Tan Jo Hann raised the question of cost for the ceremony, given that the MPSJ had in total more than 1,200 staff members.

"I'm not questioning the issue on abuse of funds, but am only trying to find out the total cost involved since the council's staff is quite large in number. "Is it necessary to hold the ceremony at a five-star hotel? It's an exorbitant sum, so is it wise to spend this way in this economic crisis?" asked Tan.

Adnan said the hotel was chosen as it had a big ballroom that could fit in more than 1,200 people, since the ceremony held at another hotel in Subang Jaya last year could not accommodate all. "Of course there are those who are asking why don't we do it at our own council compound. "But then, the rental fees for the tents alone cost more than RM120,000, and this does not include food and other things. "In fact, we have also discussed with the hotel, which had also given us some discount so the cost per head is only RM95," he clarified.

Adnan said all other things like logistics and use of equipment were complimentary. "Perhaps other councillors can also give us feedback and if they too think that the ceremony at the hotel is not suitable, then we shall cancel it." Councillor Theresa Ratnam Thong said there was nothing wrong in spending RM100 on one staff member, who had worked hard throughout the year. Councillor Pooi Weng Keong said in the current not-so-good economic times, the council should try to spend as less.

Adnan said once people saw the breakdown of just RM100 per head, they would understand better compared with one big lump sum. "The reason we organise a ceremony so early in the year is to motivate our staff to do better for the rest of the year. "But while we can do away with the ceremony, the council has been practising monetary incentive for all these years whereby 100 selected staff members will be given RM1,000 each. "In fact, we do this based on a circular from the federal government handed down to all civil service departments, which is to reward 8% of the total staff members in the respective departments." Councillor Sapiyan

Mohd Din said achievements could not be measured in terms of money. "But taking in the point of the president, if people are motivated, the returns in public service can hopefully be more." In the end it was decided that the ceremony will go on as scheduled. Tan, however, proposed that in future, councillors be invited to discuss on matters such as this as soon as the idea was mooted. "Since we are the council, this money is not ours, which is why we have to be careful."

Thursday February 26, 2009

RM66.5m for upgrading water infrastructure

RAUB: The Government has allocated RM66.5mil to upgrade water plants and piping systems, and build new ones in the district, says Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen. Dr Ng said that funds for the projects to be carried out in stages from March were allocated under the 9th Malaysia Plan.



Site tour: Dr Ng (centre) visiting the new water plant's construction site in Raub recently.

She said, by the end of 2010, residents in Teras, Trantum, Sang Lee and Sungai Chetang would receive an uninterrupted supply of clean, treated water. "Of the allocation, RM15mil will be set aside for a new water plant in Teras to address the problem of disruptions and poor quality of supply. "Residents will reap the benefits when the project is completed. "As a temporary

measure, they will be supplied with water from Fraser's Hill through a new piping system costing RM200,000," she said after attending a briefing on the projects near here recently. Later, she visited the project site accompanied by Raub district officer Datuk Abdull Muain Abdul Hamid and the village headmen of the affected areas.

Dr Ng, who is also Raub MP, said the plant in Teras was given priority as certain areas in the locality were not covered by water projects carried out earlier. "I am confident the problem of poor quality water in the area after the landslide incident in Fraser's Hill will be resolved after 2010. "Other projects in the district will be carried out by the State Water Supply Department (JBA) in stages depending on the situation and needs," she said.

Among the projects listed under package two were the installation of a new piping system from Chenara pond to Air Rokam, replacement of old piping in Ulu Renggol, construction of new water tanks in Sungai Keloi, Cenara, Rokam and Lipis, and the building of a water plant in Sungai Keloi.

Dr Ng said, under package three, JBA would construct a new plant in Sungai Bilut, including a store and staff quarters. "I hope the residents will give full cooperation during the construction period and bear with the inconveniences," she said.