

Friday June 19, 2009

New PKA committee chief quits MCA

PETALING JAYA: Datuk Paul Low, who has been appointed head of the Port Klang Authority (PKA) ad hoc corporate governance committee, will resign from MCA in the interest of impartiality. Low, who is the Transparency International-Malaysia president, said he became a life member of MCA in 1991. He said he joined the party to enable him to take part in discussions in the first National Economic Consultative Council.

"The MCA offered me the opportunity and I accepted. This explains my membership and my involvement in its think-tank," he said in a statement yesterday. He said this in response to comments by several parties questioning his ability to carry out his duties in an impartial manner because of his MCA membership. He also said he was not involved in any other political activities of the MCA and has "long forgotten that my membership still exists." He also affirmed the independence of the PKA ad hoc committee, saying it was not answerable to individuals in business or politics.

Saturday June 20, 2009

Contractors who fail to finish school projects will be blacklisted

KEPALA BATAS: The Education Ministry is compiling the names of contractors who fail to complete school projects for blacklisting. Deputy Minister Datuk Dr Mohd Puad Zarkashi said action would be taken against contractors responsible for 148 delayed and abandoned school projects nationwide. "These 'sick' contractors are not qualified to receive anymore contracts. We will not compromise as they only inconvenience students and disrupt schooling," he said after visiting SK Permatang Bertam here Saturday.

Dr Mohd Puad said stern action, including blacklisting, would be taken against contractors irrespective of their race as the ministry was tired of their excuses. He was commenting on the abandoned canteen and additional building project at SK Paya Keladi which forced the school to have two sessions while a tent was used as a makeshift canteen. The Public Works Department was in the process of calling for a new tender to replace the problematic contractor and complete the project in six months as the temporary canteen could expose students to food poisoning.

Dr Mohd Puad said the ministry's development division had been asked to prepare a long term plan for schools to accommodate new buildings to meet future needs. It would have to take into account the increasing population and students particularly for schools in urban areas due to land shortage. The deputy minister had a closer look at the primary and was disappointed that lack of classrooms forced some students to study in a cabin. SK

Permatang Bertam was the first school for former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. – Bernama.

Saturday June 20, 2009

Civil servants to get e-assessment soon

PUTRAJAYA: The performance of civil servants can be rated immediately by the public once an electronic assessment system is set up at government agencies under the Prime Minister's Department. Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk T. Murugiah said the system would be created as soon as possible to allow the public to rate the performance of government staff who provide counter services.

"The system will provide monthly statistics and assessment of these government servants and the services they render to the public. "If they are found to be inefficient or if their work is not up to the mark, they will be warned and be given retraining," he said here yesterday. He said the system would then be expanded to cover other ministries and government agencies in an effort to upgrade government services and the delivery system. "This is in line with the 1Malaysia concept which promotes the 'People First, Performance Now' principle," he said.

Sunday June 21, 2009

Govt to emphasise on services, says Najib

By SIMON KHOO and EDWARD RAJENDRA

PEKAN: The Government will look into ways to create a new economic model, emphasising more on the services sector, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. Citing the Tanjung Agas Oil, Gas and Maritime Industrial Park, Najib said the project was a good example of a critical change in spearheading the country's growth and wealth. "Based on the development scale of the proposed park, it will be able to meet the demands and needs of oil and gas dredging activities in Malaysia and Asean region.



Sultan Ahmad Shah, Tengku Abdulah and Najib looking at a model of a tanker at the Tanjung Agas Oil, Gas and Maritime Industrial Park.

"At present, the services sector contributes about 54% of the Gross Domestic Product and our hope is to increase it further to 70% in the coming years. "The shift will mark Malaysia's coming of age as a knowledge-based economy in our quest to be an

industrialised country,” he said in his speech during the ground-breaking ceremony of the project by Sultan Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah here yesterday.

Also present were Tengku Mahkota Tengku Abdullah, Tengku Muda Tengku Abdul Rahman who is also the chairman of Tanjung Agas Supply Base & Marine Services Sdn Bhd, the project’s concessionaire, and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob. Najib, who is Pekan MP, said the Federal Government would give full backing to the project dubbed the “Maritime Bay of the East,” which would act as a one-stop centre with advanced service facilities and offshore base. He said under the first phase, some 5,000 job opportunities would be created. It is projected that the park will provide 30,000 jobs over a 10-year period.

The RM2bil park, spread across 1,833ha, comprises a shipyard, a fabrication yard, a dredger yard, a logistic base, a vessel lay-up anchorage as well as facilities for petroleum storage and blending. In Tanjong Karang last night, Najib warned enforcement officers in local authorities to not pressure hawkers and petty traders but instead help them in their businesses. “Enforcement officers have much contact with traders and it is these officers that should lend a hand or even advise those without licences to apply for one and not put pressure on them,”.

Earlier, Najib attended the gathering of the Federation of Malay Hawkers and Petty Trader where some 5,000 people attended at the Padang Astaka field in Tanjong Karang. Najib also handed over RM500,000 to the federation. Also present were Najib’s wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and the federation’s president Datuk Ramli Norani. Najib will open and deliver the keynote address at the 7th Heads of Mission Conference at Putrajaya International Convention Centre tomorrow. The conference with the theme “Malaysian Foreign Policy: Future Direction for 2009 to 2015” from June 21-27 begins with the 4th Honorary Consuls Meeting from June 18-22.

Monday June 22, 2009

300 audit reports on PKFZ sent to Parliament

KUALA LUMPUR: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat will attend the Dewan Rakyat sitting today to issue a ministerial statement on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue. “Why shouldn’t I attend the parliament sitting? This has been part of my schedule,”. Speaking to reporters after attending a family day event at the Pandan Lake Club here yesterday, he said 300 PKFZ audit reports had been sent to the Parliament and it was up to the House to circulate them. “It is up to Parliament. We have sent them as promised,” he said.

Asked if MCA would explore the possibility of having unity talks with DAP, Ong said: “If it’s for the benefit of the people and the country, then MCA is willing to hold dialogues and exchange views with any party whether DAP or PKR.” He added that MCA was also interested to know if DAP was willing to be disassociated with the fundamentalists in PAS.

Asked about the Government's proposal to limit the number of SPM subjects to 10 next year, Ong said views expressed by the public had to be taken into account. "There are pros and cons. I can see that there are some contrasting views expressed by concerned citizens and parents. "We need to look at both sides of the coin," said Ong.

Monday June 22, 2009

Parliament: 'Hysterical' outburst over PKFZ report

By **SIM LEOI LEOI and ZULKIFLI ABDUL RAHMAN**

KUALA LUMPUR: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat accused DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang of being "hysterical" for repeatedly questioning him about those involved in the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue. During the question and answer session in the Dewan Rakyat, Ong was interrupted by Lim. Both Deputy Speakers Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar and Datuk Ronald Kiandee had to remind Lim repeatedly to sit down before Ong could continue with his statement. At one point, Lim was heard shouting that Ong should be referred to the Committee of Privileges for misleading the House and that the statement was a "waste of time."

Even before Ong had begun his statement, several MPs including Datuk Ibrahim Ali (Independent-Pasir Mas) and Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) had questioned the decision of the House to allow the statement. On Lim's outburst in the Dewan, Ong said he should be allowed to continue with his statement under the House rules. In his statement, Ong denied speculations by the Opposition that the costs for the PKFZ project would balloon to RM12.453bil by the year 2051.

"This cost will only increase to that sum if there is no intervention or efforts to promote PKFZ. "This is merely a hypothetical scenario," he said, adding that there had been various initiatives to promote PKFZ Sdn Bhd lately. Later at a press conference in the Parliament lobby, he also denied a claim by the Opposition that he had asked the Government for another RM1.2bil soft loan for the project. Ong said the RM1.2bil was part of the soft loan extended to the Port Klang Authority by the Finance Ministry back in 2007 when he had yet to assume the post.

On the role played by Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing (BN-Bintulu), who has been named in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report, Ong said he was the chief executive officer for Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, who sold the land to Port Klang and was the turnkey contractor during its development. "According to records, he did not hold any position either in Port Klang Authority or Port Klang Free Zone during the land transaction.

"I did not make any statement on whether the Bintulu MP was involved in any conflict of interest," he said, adding however that he had no objections against the PriceWaterHouseCoopers report. On the special taskforce and committees set up to come up with recommendations on how to rectify PKFZ, Ong said these were "now working intensely."

Monday June 22, 2009

Johor PAC to discuss secondary forest issue

JOHOR BARU: The Johor Public Accounts Committee (PAC) will meet to discuss the use of 37,881ha of secondary forests for latex timber cloning (LTC) activity, once a report by the Forestry Department is completed. State PAC chairman Datuk Abd Hamid Abd Rahman said the committee expected the report to be completed soon. "We are serious about addressing the matter," he told *The Star* here yesterday.

Abd Hamid, who said he was the director of one of the three private companies allocated such land near the Sg Mas secondary forest in Kahang, added that the allocation was made by the state government. "The forests used for LTC activities are designed to assist the furniture industry. "Such activities are also conducted in Sabah, Sarawak and Kelantan," he said.

Abd Hamid, who is also Machap assemblyman, said the upcoming meeting would also address the environmental effects of LTC. It was reported on June 19 that villagers staying near the affected secondary forests state-wide had complained that the massive land-clearing activity was leading to severe flooding of housing areas.

Monday June 22, 2009

Freshwater fish on govt hostel menu

SHAH ALAM: Government hostels will be required to include at least a dish of freshwater fish a week in their menus, Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Noh Omar said. He said the requirement would be enforced under a new tender for the supply of fresh food items upon the expiry of the current one.

Speaking to reporters after launching a freshwater fish campaign organised by the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (Fama) here, he said the new requirement was approved by the Cabinet last Wednesday in efforts to encourage the consumption and market expansion of freshwater fish in the country. Noh said the move would also minimise the country's dependence on saltwater fish. Malaysia imports up to 350,000 tonnes of saltwater fish a year.

Monday June 22, 2009

Selangor to place exco member on PKA board

SHAH ALAM: The Selangor government will go ahead and appoint a state executive councillor to the Port Klang Authority's (PKA) board of directors although the move is not welcomed by PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng. Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim said the state exco member chosen would fill the seat that had already been

allocated for a state government representative. "We are just replacing the representative, therefore there should be no problem. "Previously, the state government's representative had come from the state Economic Planning Unit, but now we want a state exco member to sit on the board as this is more relevant," he said after closing a discourse on public education here yesterday.

On Lee's reaction, he said the state government's decision to place its exco member on the PKA board should not be questioned but PKA should instead reevaluate the position of the three representatives from Umno, MCA and MIC. "I feel these representatives are not necessary as they do not add value to the developments in PKA, so they should be removed," he said.

Lee was reported to have said on June 7 that there was no need to appoint a state exco member to the PKA board to monitor developments pertaining to the Port Klang Free Zone as a representative from the state Economic Planning Unit could do the job. — Bernama.

Monday June 22, 2009

Foreigners owe govt hospitals RM12.8mil

Other News & Views

FOREIGNERS owe government hospitals RM12.8mil, *Berita Minggu* reported. Of the figure, 27% is for post-natal care, 12% for accident treatment, 9% for orthopaedic surgery and the balance for outpatient care. Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican said this figure was double the RM6.7mil owed in 2000. "Indonesian nationals owe 47%, Indians and Filipinos owe 17%, while the rest is owed by Myanmar, Bangladeshis, Vietnamese and Thais." He said that if every foreign labourer who entered Malaysia was required to have health insurance, this problem could be solved.

> Perlis Mufti Dr Juanda Jaya has requested that a child born without a penis be raised as a boy, *Metro Ahad* reported. He said Muhammad Nabil Mustaqim was born a male, and even medical tests confirmed he had more male chromosomes.

He added that in the eyes of Islam, it was haram to alter one's genitals after being characterised as a man or woman. The child's father, Rodzake, said he needed advice and the views of an ulama and those knowledgeable in matters of *hukum*, before going ahead with any surgical procedures.

> Three Year Five students in Jerteh were caned by their teacher because they could not afford to buy workbooks for their English class, *Kosmo!* reported.

Normi Hafidah Muhammad, 11, said the teacher became angry because they did not do their homework as they had not bought their RM18 workbooks. She and her friends were then hit on their heads with a cane once and received four strokes on their legs.

Monday June 22, 2009

MACC officers to sit on Selangor tender boards

By ELAN PERUMAL

OFFICERS from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will be called in to sit on the tender boards of all the 12 local authorities in Selangor. This will be a new regulation to be introduced by the Selangor Government in a move to eradicate any possibility of wrongdoings in the process of awarding contracts by the local authorities. "We want to be transparent at every level of the decision-making process so that the public will have more confidence," local government committee chairman Ronnie Liu said recently.

Liu said the state executive council had on Wednesday last week, endorsed the proposal from his office. He said by having the MACC officers sitting on the tender boards, the public could be rest assured that only the rightful bidders were given the jobs. "However, this does not mean that the rightful contractors are not getting the jobs now. "The presence of the officers will further streamline the process," he said.

Liu said the presence of the officers was also aimed at disproving allegations that the current system lacked transparency. He said it would also put an end to allegations that the state was applying political quotas when allocating the contracts. "We will use the same system that is being used to select the suitable candidates for the jobs and there will be no change in this process. "The MACC officers will not have a say in the process but their presence will prove that we have nothing to hide," he said.

He added that the officers would ensure procedures were strictly met while selecting the contractors. Liu said all contractors who had been awarded jobs had been given three months to prove themselves. He said their performance would be monitored especially for the first three months to ensure they offered the best service to the people. "During this probation period, we have the right to terminate the contracts of those who failed to offer satisfactory service," he said.

Liu also said the state had also reduced the quantum of the contracts that were being offered. He said this paved the way for more contractors to be awarded jobs and ensured that that the areas were well maintained. "We also want to promote the owner-operator concept so that those awarded the contracts will carry out the maintenance themselves and not sub-contract the jobs to a third party. "It will be almost impossible for contractors to sub-contract now as the areas and the amounts offered for the jobs have been reduced," he said.

Tuesday June 23, 2009

PKA clarifies why letter to PM wasn't in audit report

PETALING JAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) has clarified the issue of a letter dated May 10, 2008 from the Transport Minister to the then Prime Minister. PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the letter, on the finalised principal sum under the main development agreement, was not included in the audit report because the report had already touched on the same matters in its section on the board's deliberations. "The letter from the Transport Minister dated May 10, 2008 to the then Prime Minister was to inform the latter of what the PKA board had already deliberated on, on Feb 5, 2008. "It must be made clear that the cost that was approved by the board of PKA for builder's works and preliminaries (excluding professional fee) was RM1.216bil."

Lee said he also wished to make it clear that he was not on the PKA board in February 2008 when it wrote to the then Transport Minister asking for the RM1.2bil. He said the review of the authority to enter into agreements pertaining to the project, including acceptance of any variation and cost escalation from 2002 to 2007, was covered under the scope of work by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. "These findings are presented as issues in section 4 of the report."

Tuesday June 23, 2009

Use rating system, says Sidek

KEMAMAN: All government departments and agencies have been encouraged to implement a rating system to enable their customers to evaluate the quality of their services. Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan said the public had the right to appraise the kind of public service they received. "We are more open now; we encourage the public to lodge complaints. "Although our public service is among the best in the world, it does not mean that we should be satisfied.

We must try to improve further. "For example, if we use the rating system at the Immigration Department, the public can immediately rate the quality of its service as excellent, good or poor by pressing a button and the outcome can be seen by all. "The staff will be happy to know that they have performed well or whether they need to do more to improve the service provided," he said after opening the Conference of the Public Service Institutions of Commonwealth Nations yesterday.

Mohd Sidek said the system would also make it easier for the department or agency's officials to identify the excellent or below-par frontline staff and carry out restructuring of duties if necessary. He said the rating system had already been practised in government agencies such as the Tabung Haji which had resulted in its counter staff being more people-friendly. "There are over 1.2 million public servants. They must be prepared, to meet the changing expectations of the service users," he said. — Bernama.

Tuesday June 23, 2009

Koh: KPI targets to be met in two years

📁 [Preliminary key performance indicators \(KPI\) submitted](#)

KUALA LUMPUR: Ministers are expected to achieve their key performance indicators (KPIs) for their ministries in less than two years. "I hope it will be sooner than two years for some, but for many others, we should start getting results as soon as possible," Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon told reporters after delivering his special address at the KPIs conference for the public sector, statutory bodies and government agencies here yesterday. All ministers have already submitted their preliminary KPIs. All ministers except for a few who were away on official duties, had attended two six-hour workshops chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Dr Koh said the issue of KPIs had been brought up in Cabinet meeting in the last nine weeks. He said ministers were concerned about how to determine KPIs that were meaningful and have real impact on the people. "I think we have to get public feedback on what issues are considered most important to the people. It may be crime, it may be transportation or the cost of living. "We are in the process of fine-tuning. We must make sure we are targeting the major concerns for every ministry."

Koh said a team of experts to provide a framework, guideline and methodology of the KPI would be appointed to help ministers. At this stage, he said, nobody would be punished for failing to meet the KPIs. "Promoting is better than punishment. Eventually, yes. If after repeated advice, guidance and help, someone still has a very negative attitude, then we have no choice,". He said the national KPIs, which the Prime Minister would focus on, would be made public within the next few months.

Tuesday June 23, 2009

Traders complain of unfair competition

By DESIREE TRESA GASPER

JOHOR BARU: Traders at the Larkin bus terminal had voiced out their concerns on losing their business due to unfair competition by other food vendors on the ground-level of the complex. Trader Pathmawati Othman, 35, said all food outlets were supposed to be housed on the same level when they initially signed the tenancy agreement.



Taking note: Mohd Naim listening to the grievances aired by the traders during the site visit.

"The management assured us that no other food stalls would be placed at the lower level of the terminal, "At first a few shops began to spring up on the lower levels. But now, there are so many stalls that sell the exact food as us," she said adding that her income is about RM50 a day, which was not enough to cover her overheads. Another trader Mohd Abu Sulaiman, 52, who has been operating in the food court for the past 15 years, said that business had gone down so much that he might have to close down. "We are lucky that our rental is only RM287 a month, but the situation has become so bad that most of the other stalls had closed down."

Mohd added that the traders only wanted a fair share of the business from commuters at the complex. "If they want to start a food stall, they should do it the proper way and open their business at the food court area." Another trader, Salimah Bibi, 52, who has been selling Indian food at the food court for over 13 years said that she was fed up of complaining to the authorities. "All the traders have jointly signed a petition, which was directed at the management about six years ago but nothing has been done. "The management should consider our situation and help to level the playing field by placing everyone in one single level," she said.

She added that it was difficult for her to sustain her business as times were bad and even Singaporeans who patronise her stall had stopped going there. Johor Baru City Council mayor Datuk Mohd Naim Nasir, who was on a site visit to the terminal said that he would look into the matter and come up with a solution as soon as possible. "These traders are in a tight situation and we will try our best to solve their problem," he said.

He also explained that the management was in the process of renovating the terminal for the betterment of traders as well as the public and the first phase of renovations had already started. Mohd Naim said the renovation cost is about RM10mil and construction would be conducted in phases.

Tuesday June 23, 2009

Dewan Rakyat - Ipoh Timur MP moving the goalpost on port's free zone issue, says Ong

BY LEE YUK PENG, ZULKIFLI AB RAHMAN, SIM LEOI LEOI, and ZALINAH NOORDIN

TRANSPORT Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat has labelled Ipoh Timur MP Lim Kit Siang as "hysterical" for repeatedly raising the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue. Ong, when replying to Lim's questions, said the latter had been repeating his queries on the PKFZ issue for almost three years in Parliament. "He has repeatedly asked the same questions again and again. "Yang Berhormat seemed to have not properly read the report (PricewaterhouseCooper's [PwC] Position Review) although he was the earliest MP to ask when the report would be revealed." "Now, when the report is released, you then decide to move the goalpost," he said.

When Lim accused Ong of finally returning to the House after “absconding overseas for the Paris Air Show,” Ong replied that even his own job as minister was being questioned and disputed by Lim. “This is the kind of hysterical reaction that will not help to uphold the truth and resolve the problem,” he added.

Earlier, Ong said the full cost of the project had not been finalised because the financial accounts for the completed development work was not done yet. “This means the real cost of the PKFZ project has yet to be finalised,” he said, adding that checks would have to be conducted by the Special Task Force, formed to look into issues raised by the PwC Position Review on PKFZ. “The task force will have to inspect the legal aspects, the possibility of legal action and the restructuring of the finances that will affect the final cost of the PKFZ project,” he added.

“The figure of RM12bil that had been bandied about by Yang Berhormat Ipoh Timur is only an estimate by PwC in its report. “The figure also includes an additional interest of RM5bil that must be paid to the Finance Ministry if KPA had delayed its loan repayment to the Government in accordance with the KPA’s projected cash flow by 2051,” he added.

To a question by Lim, Ong said the report could not be released sooner because of the need to declassify certain documents and the indemnity issues with the PwC. Lim told reporters at the lobby later that Ong had not replied to his queries on what action would be taken against several personalities who were involved in the project. “For example, the minister had not replied as to why the cost had ballooned from the original RM400mil to RM2.8bil,” Lim said.

Tuesday June 23, 2009

Tee Keat accuses DAP adviser of making up stories

PETALING JAYA: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat blasted DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang for making up stories about the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) issue, which the former claimed can be “easily debunked”. “We live in dangerous times. Stories that weave fantasy and conspiracy theories spun by irresponsible quarters are accepted at face value. These flimsy theories weaved by cowards hiding behind the veil of anonymity can easily be debunked,” he said.

Ong explained in his blog www.ongteekeat.net that his letter to the then Prime Minister and Finance Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on May 10, 2008, was to notify the latter on the finalised principal sum under the main development agreement. “Firstly, there is no need to approve the RM1.2 billion since the main development works had already been approved in 2004, a decision made before my tenure as Transport Minister.

“Secondly, the technical question of variation of agreement does not arise at all from my said letter since the principal development agreement does not mention a fixed development sum. It stands to reason that since there is no fixed goalpost, the question of variation does not arise,” he said.

Ong added that he was duty bound to report to the PM of the final sum under the main development agreement as the Port Klang Authority (PKA) was given approval for a soft-loan from the Finance Ministry in 2007. "In any case, with money available for drawdown from the said soft loan, it would not make sense for me to assert any form of pressure for additional funds to be approved," he said.

Calling them clumsy attempts to smear his name and efforts to the right thing, Ong said there were even allegations that reputable accounting firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory Services (PwCAS) were working "hand in glove with me" to hide allegedly damaging facts. "If Kit Siang has enough intellectual depth and does his homework, it will be obvious to him that findings related to the final account of the main development works, referred to as DA3 of the PKFZ report, was covered by PwCAS," he said.

In another salvo, Ong asked Lim: "Why would a person who had directed the commission of an independent report by a reputable international accounting firm, and championed for the findings to be made public make an inexplicable decision to hide facts?"

Wednesday June 24, 2009

Parliament - PKFZ probe under wraps for now

MALAYSIAN Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is not obliged to disclose the progress of investigations into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). PAC member William Leong (PKR-Selayang) said MACC Commissioner had informed the PAC that the PKFZ issue was still under probe and Section 29 of the MACC Act 2008, does not allow the commission to disclose any information about the investigation to the PAC. "Unfortunately, we were unable to get any information as to the situation of the investigation, when the investigation will end and whether any action would be taken against anyone," he said.

Leong said he was disappointed with MACC's reply, adding that several reports over the PKFZ were lodged with MACC, or ACA, since 2004. Chief commissioner Datuk Seri Ahmad Hamdan had spent an hour at the PAC meeting yesterday but did not reveal the investigation into the alleged irregularities in PKFZ. Even PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid declined to talk. Meanwhile, Dr Tan Seng Giaw said PAC might call on Attorney-General Tan Sri Gani Patail to provide information regarding the PKFZ. Dr Tan, who is PAC deputy chairman said a meeting would be held next Tuesday on whether to call on Gani or not. "The Attorney-General had advised the Cabinet on the land acquisition matters according to Section Four of the Land Acquisition Act. "However, that piece of advice was not taken into consideration," he said.

"We want to know what kind of advice he had given to the Government and why his advice was disregarded," Dr Tan told reporters at the Parliament lobby. "The MACC is still conducting its investigation, and we cannot say that we're satisfied until the investigations are completed". Asked whether the PAC would call other individuals to give their

statements in relation to the PKFZ issue, Dr Tan replied that PAC was not the Royal Commission of Inquiry.

Thursday June 25, 2009

Slow approval for government loans in agriculture and processing sectors

By GLADYS TAY and DESIREE TRESA GASPER

JOHOR BARU: Government loans for entrepreneurs in the agriculture and processing sectors are slow to be approved - with only about 10% of the applicants having received their funds. "A total of 239 entrepreneurs applied for the loan totalling RM4.95mil and as of June 9, 32 applications have been approved," Johor Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development, Education and Higher Learning Committee chairman Datuk Maulizan Bujang said. He added the sum approved was RM402,000, from the RM350mil allocated under the Second Economic Package to be dispersed via Agro Bank and Tekun.

"Among the areas with not a single approval given was Segamat with 30 applications amounting to RM500,000; Johor Baru with 19 applications amounting to RM370,000, Kota Tinggi with 15 applications amounting to RM312,000 and Rengit with 13 applications amounting to RM262,000," he said at the state assembly to a question from Abdullah Ali (BN-Bukit Naning).

As for the approved loans, Maulizan said based on the districts, Pontian had the highest number of loans approved at 13; followed by Labis (nine), Kluang (six), Muar (two) and Mersing (one) as well as Batu Pahat (one). To another of Abdullah's question on why it was difficult to obtain the loans, Maulizan explained that under the normal procedure, it usually took about five weeks. "However, I have learnt that 15,000 applications are being processed now and the delays may be caused by the huge number of applications," he said.

Asked whether there were any criteria for the loan application (Munusamy Mareemuthu, BN -Permas), Maulizan said that applicants must be from the agriculture and processing sectors. "The maximum amount of loan for the agriculture sector is RM50,000 while the highest amount of loan for those from the processing sector is RM20,000," he said.

Asked by Munusamy whether only certain races were entitled to the loan, Maulizan said that it was open to everyone.

Saturday June 27, 2009

Lee: 300 copies of PKFZ report submitted to Parliament

PETALING JAYA: The Port Klang Authority submitted 300 copies of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) report and its appendices to Parliament on June 15. PKA chairman Datuk Lee

Hwa Beng said they had received a signed acknowledgement from the Parliament office after the documents were delivered on that date. "News reports and blog statements by (DAP adviser) Lim Kit Siang accusing the Transport Minister and PKA of failing to submit 300 copies of the PKFZ report and its appendices to Parliament are completely baseless and untrue," Lee said in a statement yesterday.

PKA, he said, received a letter from Parliament secretary Datuk Roosme Hamzah on June 12 requesting for 300 copies of the PKFZ report for the benefit of the MPs. "On the same day, consent was obtained from the Transport Minister (Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat) to deliver the documents to Parliament. "PKA acted in a prompt and professional manner under the instructions of the Transport Minister to deliver the said reports and appendices to Parliament as requested," he added.

On Thursday, Lim said Ong would face a protest from MPs if he failed to table the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report in Parliament by Monday, stating that neither he nor other MPs had received the report to date. Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia was reported as saying that the PKFZ report would only be tabled together with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report.

Pandikar Amin had said that the PwC report on the PKFZ would have no relevance if it was tabled without the PAC report. The PAC was still carrying out its inquiry on the PKFZ controversy. Meanwhile, Sementa assemblyman Datuk Abdul Rahman Palil, whose name was mentioned in the audited report over the PKFZ issue, denied that he was involved. "Not once did members of the PwC call me to verify their findings and all of a sudden, the released report has my name in it. Being a public figure, my credibility and image has been tarnished," he said.

Saturday June 27, 2009

Kit Siang 'has misled House'

By LEE YUK PENG

KUALA LUMPUR: A motion has been filed to cite veteran DAP MP Lim Kit Siang to the committee of privileges for misleading the Dewan Rakyat on the Port Klang Free Zone. Teng Boon Soon (BN – Tebrau) filed the motion under Standing Order 36 (12) at Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia's office at 4.30pm yesterday. In the motion, it said that Lim, who is also Ipoh Timur MP, had made the misleading remarks in the Dewan Rakyat when Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat was delivering his ministerial statement on the PKFZ on June 22.

"Lim has referred to a Cabinet decision dated Oct 23, 2002 with a further explanation that this decision was later superseded by another Cabinet decision dated Nov 6, 2002. "Lim has misled the House with the impression that the Cabinet decision dated Oct 23, 2002 was final. "Lim is aware of the Cabinet decision on Nov 6, 2002 as he has debated the issue in

the House on Sept 4, 2007," he said, adding that Lim ought to be referred to the committee for this.

In a press statement, Teng said Lim chose to suppress important facts from the public for the sake of a political gimmick and that he was bent on gaining cheap political mileage. "Lim should not cower behind parliamentary privileges and be brave enough to admit that he has deliberately misled and confused the public by failing to disclose the full and proper account of Cabinet decisions on the PKFZ," he said. Lim had filed a similar motion with Pandikar Amin against Ong last Thursday.

Sunday June 28, 2009

Almost 40% of civil servants in debt: Cuepacs

KUALA LUMPUR: Heads of ministries and departments should be humane in dealing with civil servants who are in debt, Cuepacs secretary-general Ahmad Shah Mohd Zin said Sunday. He said this group of workers needed "special attention as they may be vulnerable to corruption and moonlighting." Almost 450,000 of the civil servants were in debt and their take home salary was less than 40 percent of their monthly pay, he said, adding that the bulk of their salaries was deducted at source as payment for various loans housing, cars, renovations, education and hospitalisation. Cuepacs' stand was that these officers needed to be "rehabilitated" before any disciplinary action was taken against them, he told Bernama.

"What is happening now is that the heads of department usually find the easy way out by taking disciplinary action, like stopping of increment, denying promotions and suspension from duty, thus aggravating the situation." Under the General Orders, disciplinary action can be taken against civil servants if their take home salary is less than 40 percent of the gross pay. Ahmad Shah said there were hundreds of civil servants who were moonlighting as taxi drivers, petty traders, direct sales agents and watchmen to make ends meet. Although the government was aware of the situation and had taken some positive steps like giving them official permission to work part-time, it was not enough, he said. "The high cost of living, especially in the urban areas, is eating into their income, thus causing them to be constantly in debt," he added.

Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) secretary-general Muhammad Shaani Abdullah agreed that the high cost of living was one of the contributory factors for the debts of civil servants. "It is a myth that civil servants are spendthrifts and don't know how to manage money. "The truth is that the civil servant's salary has not kept in tandem with the increase in the cost of living," he said."

For example, he said, about 30 years ago one could easily have a good breakfast for RM1.20, but today the same breakfast cost five times more. However, at the same time, the civil servant's salary had not increased by the same proportion. Muhammad said that if the government was unable to increase salaries, it could assist these civil servants in many

other ways to cope with the rising cost of living. Some of the areas where it could help were to improve the public transportation system to make it affordable and reliable, provide better medical facilities and more scholarships, open special cooperatives, offer soft loans for housing and other needs and give discounts for utilities. – Bernama.

Monday June 29, 2009

Chopped down in the name of reforestation

By GEETHA KRISHNAN

THE Sungai Jelok Forest Reserve in Selangor has been pillaged under the guise of reforestation and little is now left of the undulating expanse of greenery previously visible from parts of Kajang. The obvious question is why did the previous state government gazette an area as a permanent forest reserve, only to later allow it to be violated under the excuse of harvesting the timber? A sizeable 200ha of the 250ha forest reserve has been cleared and its precious resource of timber carted away to enrich the coffers of a few. Rubber timber clone saplings have been planted to yield another round of timber in seven years.



Green no more: What is left of the cleared area for the reforestation of the Sungai Jelok Forest Reserve.

An area gazetted as a permanent forest reserve cannot be logged while those designated as forest reserves can have their land use changed to allow for agricultural activities or even logging. In March, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairman and Kajang assemblyman Lee Kim Sin acted on a tip-off and visited the forest reserve located in the lush Hulu Langat district. "By the time a full report was recently presented to the committee, the damage to the forest reserve was sadly beyond repair and it is contributing to the floods in Kajang. "We are now asking the state government to terminate the agreements so the forest reserve can serve its purpose and be preserved for posterity," he said.



Hauled away: A log felled near the makeshift post used by Forestry Department guards to monitor the clearing

As we stood in a clearing on June 24, surrounded by logs and bare terraced slopes, the drone of a chainsaw was heard in the distance. "We are upstream and the river running

below us is murky, evidence of hill clearing. The logging company has retained a narrow line of trees for the so-called buffer but this is barely sufficient to support the eco-system," Lee said.

The report states that logging permits were issued to two private companies by the Selangor Forestry Department for a rubber estate project by the Perbadanan Kemajuan Pertanian Selangor (PKPS). According to the report, a 25-year lease was given to two private companies to log a total of 200ha at the forest reserve. The green light was given at the state executive council meeting on May 10, 2007, and the agreements signed on July 27 of that year.



Artificial forest: A rubber timber sapling planted in the cleared area.

The agreement was signed based on the National Forestry Act of 1984 (Act 313) under Section 4, stating that the Forestry Director has the power "to implement forest management plans and reforestation plans". Section 14 states that "all resources from a permanent forest reserve belong to the state". Lee said these loopholes had been exploited by the parties involved to further their own interests. "Furthermore, the report reveals that both companies will pay PKPS RM15 per ha annually for the lease from Year One to 10 and RM25 per ha annually from Year 11 to 25, totalling RM105,000. The land premium to be paid is RM600 per ha, totalling RM120,000 and the land use permit is RM50,000 annually," Lee said.

"Only 4% of the profit will be channelled back to the state government so exploitation is pretty evident. "Moreover, a forest reserve rich with many species of trees is making way for an artificial forest, replanted with single species clones. Where is the biodiversity to ensure the survival of birds and wildlife?" he asked.

For the record, the Sungai Jelok Forest Reserve is a hilly lowland dipterocarp forest and functions as a water catchment area for Sungai Jelok, a tributary of Sungai Langat. The question remains whether the forest reserve will be sacrificed further and left as an ugly legacy for future generations.

Tuesday June 30, 2009

Port Klang Authority withholds payments over PKFZ

By WANI MUTHIAH

PORT KLANG: The Port Klang Authority has decided to withhold payments due to Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd for the Port Klang Free Zone project. Its chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said the board had decided to do this pending completion of the full review of the project

by the task force already commissioned to take another look into PKFZ. "As has been previously announced, the PKA has commissioned the task force to make recommendations on action to be taken based on the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report. "The PKA board has resolved, on the basis of preliminary and provisional views obtained, to withhold these payments pending the completion of the full review by the task force.

"The authority recognises that in not making these payments litigation could result against it. If this happens, PKA will defend these actions and will await the outcome of the litigation, which will determine PKA's true liability," he told reporters at a press conference here Tuesday. The authority was supposed to have paid Special Port Vehicle Bhd, Transshipment Megahub Bhd, Valid Ventures Bhd and Free Zone Capital Bhd totalling some RM660mil payable in four parts this and next month.

The payment is for:

- RM130mil allegedly payable on or before Tuesday under the Sale and Purchase agreement dated Nov 12, 2002 between KDSB and PKA,
- RM230mil allegedly payable on or before Tuesday under the Development a greement dated March 27, 2004 between KDSB and PKA
- RM150mil allegedly payable next month under the supplemental agreement for additional development works dated Nov 30 between KDSB and PKA
- RM150mil allegedly payable next month under the supplemental agreement for new additional development works dated April 26, 2006 between KDSB and PKA.

The board, he stressed, was taking the action in the best interest of the authority and had not decided so due to pressure from any outside party. "The Board's decision is also part of efforts by the ministry to restructure PKFZ's financial position and seek appropriate legal remedies, including a legal review of some of the agreements it had signed in the past," he said. Lee said the full recommendations of the special task force were expected to be submitted to PKA and Transport Minister in August.