



Friday January 23, 2009

## **111 landfills to be closed**

By YENG AI CHUN

KUALA LUMPUR: One hundred and eleven of the 260 landfills nationwide will be shut down to reduce pollution and revamp solid waste management, said Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan. "The landfills will be closed in stages and 10 new landfills with a better solid waste management system will be built.

"The new landfills will have state-of-the-art technology facilities. There will be a drainage system to tackle the leachate and mechanism to address the gas emission problem as well as recycling facilities," he told a press conference after attending the ministry's monthly gathering with staff members in Bukit Kiara yesterday. Ong said the Government had allocated a RM1bil grant for the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007 (Act 672).

Under the Act, the Government would take over the management of landfills in the country. "The ministry has set March as the date to enforce the Act. It is in the final process of being reviewed by the Attorney-General. "Some may think the Federal Government is out to victimise local governments but this is not true. We are coming in to help local governments by providing better solid waste management," he said, adding that the takeover would not result in assessment fees for the people.

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## **Kampar has come far, but other small towns also need to grow**

FRIDAY REFLECTIONS By B.K. SIDHU

KAMPAR, once rich with tin reserves, was not heard of after the tin mining era collapsed. Founded in 1887, Kampar boomed during the heights of the mining industry. Today, this Perak town is bustling again with activity, thanks to the Universiti Tuanku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Perak campus, which has given it a new lease of life.

People from the neighbouring towns of Gopeng, Tronoh, Jeram, Tanjung Tualang, Bidor, Malim Nawar and even Ipoh are flocking into Kampar. Some have even settled down there. The bustling town offers jobs; the night life is exciting, the food is sumptuous and even Tesco is there. Some have found work at UTAR, others at food eateries, many have joined or opened small businesses, and some others seem proud to be working for Tesco. The hypermarket chain has not just created jobs; it has introduced to these folks a new way of shopping. The pop and mom shops are still there but on a typical Sunday afternoon, Tesco is packed with people from all walks of life. They come in big or small cars, buses and motorbikes to shop or just to browse.

Once you step into Tesco, the feeling is that you are in one of Tesco's hypermarkets in the Klang Valley. Not only are most of the prices of goods the same as in the Klang Valley, everything else looks familiar from concept to products. If there is RotiBoy in the Klang Valley, Kampar has its own PapaRoti; if Tesco has a children's playground in its Klang Valley outlets, try the one in Kampar; it is an amazing crowd puller.

Kampar also has its own star-rated hotel, the Grand Kampar Hotel, which has 155 rooms. The rates are comparable to some hotels in the Klang Valley. Property prices have also escalated over the years. A Chinese school teacher who works in a neighbouring town said: "In some areas in Kampar, the prices are similar to those in Kuala Lumpur."

This is development and the people of Kampar are a privileged lot. But just miles away is Kuala Dipang, Malim Nawar and Tanjung Tualang – that vibrancy is notably absent. Malim Nawar was also a tin mining town and a migratory bird sanctuary. What is sad is that this town is split in two since a double-tracking railway line was built several years ago. This was done in the name of development and today, one has to take a big detour to get from one side of town to the other as the through road is now closed. The tracks have been built on an elevated ground.

The joy of going down the one-street town of yesteryears is gone and some businesses had to close shop because nearer the tracks is a dead-end for vehicles even though a pedestrian bridge links the two sides. Now, there is a plan to build a cement plant in Malim Nawar. But there are objections on pollution concerns. It may be decision-making time for those who live there.

What this town needs more is a flyover over the rail tracks. That will save people time commuting between the two sides of town and bring life back to it. Coming back to Kampar; it is amazing what one university has done and continues to do for a small town like that. If this model of spreading development to smaller towns is adopted, their residents will not have to migrate to the cities to look for jobs as there will be enough economic activity to keep their hometowns growing. Perhaps it is time for the authorities to revisit these towns and help spread development more equitably so that vibrancy is felt not just in the cities and bigger towns; and to ensure that the ordinary *rakyat* running a small business in a small town has enough jobs to keep him busy all year round. It is during the economic downturn that such towns need more help than ever.

● *B.K. Sidhu is deputy news editor. She hopes to see the day when Malim Nawar, a town she used to visit, will be united again by a flyover.*

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## **RM500m projects for Sarawak**

KUCHING: The Works Ministry will complete three bridge and two road projects worth nearly RM500mil in Sarawak this year, said minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed. He said RM191mil

would be spent to upgrade the Kuching-Sibu trunk road from the Julau junction to the Sibu Airport while a new road costing RM201mil would be built to link the proposed new federal administrative centre near here. The bridges planned are across the Batang Loba Pulau and Batang Belawai rivers in central Sarawak (RM71.4mil) and Sungai Trusan in the north (RM31mil).

Mohd Zin said this in his speech which was read out by his deputy Datuk Yong Khoo Seng during the opening of a briefing session on variation of prices and industrialised building systems yesterday. Mohd Zin said the ministry had increased its allocation for road and bridge projects in Sarawak under the Ninth Malaysia Plan by RM124mil to RM2.1bil. As of last year RM1.44bil or 68.3% of the funds had been spent.

Mohd Zin said 38 of the 68 infrastructure projects under the 9MP had been completed. The roads which have been upgraded are Jalan Tun Jugah to BDC junction in Kuching costing RM98mil, Miri to Jalan Lutong (RM109mil), Jalan Oya-Mukah-Balingian (RM374mil), and Jalan Tanjung Genting-Paradom in Sarikei (RM21mil). Part of the additional RM124mil allocated to the state would be used to upgrade Jalan Mambong Sejingkat here as a bridge across Sungai Kuap in the area was now under construction, he said.

He added that more funds had also been made available for the construction of a road connecting Beluru to Long Teru and Long Lama in northern Sarawak.

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### **Fishermen 'see red' after drop in catch**

*KOSMO!* front-paged a report that the waters around Pulau Pangkor, which used to be blue, are now reddish due to unknown reasons. Kampung Sungai Pinang Besar village development and security committee chairman Roslan Ahmad said this had caused problems to fishermen who reported a drop in their daily catch. International Islamic University Oceanography and Maritime Studies Institute director Dr Kamaruzaman Yunus told the paper that the cause might be due to pollution, structural changes to the sea floor or an excess amount of algae.

### **Utusan Malaysia published a letter from Umno member**

> *Utusan Malaysia* published a letter from an Umno member advising the party to make brave changes to prevent the people from getting bored with it.

The writer, who signed himself as *Sayang Umno* (Love Umno), said the party should choose leaders who were truly accepted by the people.

"How many division leaders in Umno have held their posts for a long time? They should ask themselves what changes they have made for the good of the party.

Why didn't Umno bring in young leaders who are vocal and have inspiring ideas?

“Is it because their presence will threaten the position of the present Umno leaders?” he asked, adding that Umno leaders and their spouses tended to show off their wealth and that some were involved in scandals to the detriment of their marriages.

### **30% increase in fares for express and short-trip buses**

> The Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development Ministry has agreed to a 30% increase in fares for express and short-trip buses, *Berita Harian* reported.

A source told the newspaper that the request by bus operators was approved at a meeting between 200 public transport representatives and minister Datuk Noh Omar on Tuesday.

“The final agreement will only be made when a report is made to the Cabinet later, but at this stage the rates may be imposed as early as next month,” the source said.

**Wednesday January 28, 2009**

### **Global crisis won't affect Penang bridge project**

GEORGE TOWN: The current economic slowdown will not affect the construction of Penang's RM4.5bil second bridge, which will proceed according to schedule. China's ambassador to Malaysia Liu Jian said the project was expected to move into full gear after the Chinese New Year period. He said by China standards, the project was not a “difficult job” for contractor China Harbour Engineering Company. “The project will be completed on time without its quality being compromised,” he said at a dinner hosted by the Penang Chinese Town Hall last night.

Liu Jian said the project would help cushion the impact of the global economic slowdown and provide job opportunities for Malaysian workers. He added that it would also create business opportunities for those involved in the industry, like local building material suppliers and contractors. “This project will help revitalise Malaysia's economy. It shows the positive spirit of cooperation between China and Malaysia,” he added.

**Wednesday January 28, 2009**

### **UMP signs deals with six foreign varsities**

KUANTAN: Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) has signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with six foreign universities in a concrete step to foster closer educational cooperation. Two of the universities are from Egypt (MISR University for Science and Technology (MUST) and Alexandria University (AU)) and the rest from Ireland (Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC), Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT), Dundalk Institute of Technology (DIT) and Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)).

UMP board chairman Datuk Mohd Hilmey Mohd Taib said he hoped the agreements would not be limited to bilateral efforts between UMP and the individual institutions but also develop into multi-lateral efforts between the participating institutions. He also said internationalisation in higher education has become an increasingly important issue today. UMP Vice-Chancellor Dr Daing Nasir Ibrahim said the Irish institutions were known to have formed good links with industries, while MUST and AU had unconventional engineering approaches.

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## **Smaller banks may opt for lower cut in fixed deposit rates**

By EUGENE MAHALINGAM

PETALING JAYA: Industry competition, especially among smaller and less well-capitalised banks, remains relatively intense and this could see these banks opting to cut the fixed deposit (FD) rates by less than the 50-basis-point (bps) reduction initiated by Bank Negara, says OSK Investment Research. OSK Research said in a recent note that it had imputed a 50bps cut in FD rates in its earnings sensitivity impact after the central bank reduced the floor rate for the one-month and 12-month FD rates by 50bps to 2.5% and 3% respectively.

Last week, the central bank cut the overnight policy rate (OPR) by a record 75bps to 2.5% and the statutory reserve requirement (SRR) from 3.5% to 2% effective Feb 1. The ceiling and floor rates of the corridor for the OPR were reduced to 2.75% and 2.25% respectively.



Since the OPR reduction, only Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank) and CIMB Bank Bhd announced that they would cut their base lending rates (BLR) by 55bps from 6.5% to 5.95% effective Feb 3. However, OSK Research said it expected other banks to also adjust their BLRs in line with Maybank. "That said, the less cost-efficient banks in the current credit down cycle may want to protect margins by reducing the BLR by a smaller quantum," it added.

It also said new loans would be based on new market-risk pricing. "Given the current economic climate and banks' lower-risk appetite, we think that banks would be mindful of their loan-pricing strategies and may begin to price in a higher risk premium by reducing the rate-discount factor on their floating-rate loans," it said.

While such a move would boost the yields on new loan books, it would certainly be insufficient to offset the margin squeeze on current floating-rate loan bases, it said. As for the OPR, OSK Research expected Bank Negara to potentially reduce the OPR by a range of 25bps to 50bps to between 2% and 2.25% by the end of this year. It said the continued lowering of interest rates

and the ensuing restructuring of loans repayment might help reduce the incidence of rising loan delinquency, especially in the consumer retail loan segment. "However, we believe that a reduction in interest rates may not necessarily help small and medium-sized enterprises currently facing increasing earnings and cash-flow stress arising from a steeper-than-expected deterioration in the global economic and export conditions," it said.

**Thursday January 29, 2009**

## **RM2bil in savings bonds for the retired**

By IZWAN IDRIS

PETALING JAYA: Bank Negara will issue RM2bil worth of bonds this year aimed at Malaysian citizens aged 56 and above and to those who have retired on medical grounds. The latest Bon Simpanan Malaysia (BSM) issuance comes on the back of a massive rate cut by the central bank. Last week, Bank Negara lowered its benchmark interest rate by 75 basis points to 2.5% and lowered the floor for 12-month fixed deposit rates offered by banks to 3%. The BSM 2009 series has a three-year tenure and offers a return of 5% per annum with flexibility for early redemption before maturity. The first of the two series of three-year RM1bil BSM to be issued this year starts on March 18. The second tranche is scheduled for June 4.

"Eligible investors wishing to subscribe to BSM 01/2009 may apply during the sales period from Feb 18 to March 17," the central bank said in a statement yesterday. Analysts said the tax-free, higher-than-market rate savings bonds issued by Bank Negara provided an opportunity for pensioners to earn higher yields from a portion of their savings. The BSM is available at all commercial banks, including Islamic banks, Bank Kerjasama Rakyat Malaysia Bhd, Bank Simpanan Nasional and Bank Pertanian Malaysia Bhd. "The allocation is based on a first-come, first-served basis," Bank Negara said, adding that successful applicants would be notified by their banks. The BSM will be scripless and based on Syariah principles.

Profit payments will be made on a monthly basis through the bondholders' account with their agent banks. This works out to about 0.42% return on principal every month. The minimum investment is RM1,000 and the maximum is RM50,000 per investor. The limit applies to aggregate holdings per investor for the two series to be issued this year. The minimum redemption amount allowed is RM100, or in multiples of RM100. The lower maximum amount set for BSM was to allow a wider distribution of the product, Bank Negara said. In 2004 and 2005, the maximum amount an investor could subscribe was RM100,000.