



Thursday April 23, 2009

Contractors concerned over freeze on water pipe project

KUALA LUMPUR: Contractors in Selangor are unhappy over the freezing of the project to replace old water pipes, saying it would affect the livelihood of about 20,000 people. Selangor Water Contractors Association said the move will affect some 600 contractors and thousands of workers and create a domino effect in other sectors. On April 21, Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Syabas) said in a statement that it had been directed to postpone its programme of replacing old water and communication pipes in the Klang Valley. Executive chairman Tan Sri Rozali Ismail said the RM2.6bil project, which included restoration work, was supposed to have started on Jan 1.

He said the suspension of the project was due to a revamp of the water management sector in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya by the federal and state governments. Association committee member Ang Chin Hann said he was shocked by news of the postponement of the project. "Please do not politicise the situation because we are trying to make a living. "We hope that the Government will start the project for the sake of the people," he said, adding that the project would stimulate the economy and provide jobs to the lower income group. Another committee member, Amir Hamzah Abdul Majid, questioned the logic in interfering in an organisation that was doing so well. "We have already carried out part of the project in certain areas. Stopping it now will just create more problems." he said.

Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim clarified that only RM300mil of the RM2.6bil project would be affected by the freeze. This is because RM2.3bil had been spent on capital expenditure and on projects that were ongoing. Thus, he said, consumers should not be alarmed over the announcement that Syabas had frozen the jobs. Consumers with water problems can contact Puspel customer service centres at 1-800-88-5252.

Thursday April 23, 2009

Consult residents before approving projects, says Murugiah

By PRIYA MENON

GOVERNMENT agencies should do some ground work before approving plans for new projects, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk T. Murugiah said. He said it was always best to conduct research and meet the residents of a development area before

approving a project. "It is best to meet the people and listen to their side as well. Work a little bit more before approving anything," he said.

Murugiah said this at a hearing with the residents of Section 11, Kota Damansara who are opposing the construction of a Carrefour hypermarket in their neighbourhood. The hearing held on Tuesday at the Pusat Kegiatan Kemas Wilayah Persekutuan in Kampung Seri Batu, Jalan Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, was attended by 11 representatives of the residents, officials of ministries and government agencies. The hypermarket project is located near the SK Section 11 Kota Damansara, which has 1,600 students.



Giving details: Murugiah (right) charing a meeting with representatives from various ministries after a complaints session with the public, including residents from Section 11, Kota Damansara.

Murugiah said the local authorities might have overlooked certain criteria required to build the hypermarket in that location when it was approved in 2005. "There should be a radius of 3.5km between any shopping mall and the neighbouring houses or schools but in this case, they are only several metres apart," he said.

The residents said they were afraid that the hypermarket would result in social problems such as lepak by students, influx of undesirable elements and traffic problems. They are not in favour of making the access road a one-way street as the traffic would increase, endangering the lives of the children in the area. "With the new hypermarket, job opportunities will definitely increase but the jobs will be given to foreigners, not locals, and then the crime rates will escalate as well," resident Mohd Nor Mahzan, 53, said.

He pointed out that the Giant Hypermarket was located only 500m away from the Carrefour location. More than a thousand residents had signed petitions objecting to the Carrefour project, while 300 went to meet Murugiah at the complaints bureau in Sentul recently. Murugiah has assured the residents that by this Friday, the agencies involved would have to submit a detailed report to him while he would meet the various ministers whose ministries were involved in the approval of the project.

Thursday April 23, 2009

Mums-to-be can go on leave two weeks before due date

By SARBAN SINGH

SEREMBAN: Mothers-to-be in the civil service can now begin their 60-day maternity leave two weeks prior to their due date. It takes effect on May 1. They will only be required to submit a letter from their doctor stating their due date to obtain permission to go on leave earlier. At present, they are only allowed to start their maternity leave from the day they give birth.

Public Service Department director-general Tan Sri Ismail Adam said the new rule was among measures taken by the Government to improve the benefits for civil servants. "The mother will be allowed to start her leave earlier but she must report to work once the 60 days are up," he said in a circular. Half of the country's 1.1 million civil servants are women.

The Government had increased maternity leave from 42 to 60 days in April 1998. They are also allowed up to 90 days' unpaid leave after confinement to look after their babies. The benefits apply only up to the fifth child. However, Cuepacs has been pressuring the Government to increase the leave to 84 days. Its president, Omar Osman, had said that the extra days would be crucial for women, particularly those who undergo Caesarean births. "Sixty days are insufficient for a mother, particularly if she has to undergo surgery, to recover and look after her baby. We hope the Government will consider this," he said.

He said that alternatively, the Government should offer them half-month salary for six months after their two-month maternity leave was up. Last September, the Government announced a new provision allowing mothers to apply for up to five years' unpaid leave to look after their newborns. To date, only the Selangor government has increased the maternity leave for its female employees from 60 to 90 days. Paternity leave has also been doubled from seven days to 14 days.

Thursday April 23, 2009

RM12mil debts force changes to scheme

KUANTAN: Debts amounting to over RM12mil was why the state government made changes to the housing scheme for the poor, Housing, Infrastructure and Transportation Committee chairman Datuk Mohd Soffi Abdul Razak told the state assembly. He said the changes include requiring buyers under the Affordable Public Housing Project to make direct purchases and those who qualify to get bank loans.

"Efforts have been taken to overcome problems in the application by way of putting a second or third name in the sales and purchase agreement, extending the repayment period and allowing withdrawals from EPF (the Employees Provident Fund). "A total of 345 applications had been submitted and 296 approved. Among them are farmers, fishermen, drivers and labourers," he told Mohd Fadil Osman (BN — Kemayan). He noted that problems could arise over applicants who had been listed as bad paymasters or had other loans. Otherwise, a loan application should be approved within two weeks, he added.

To a supplementary question by Mohd Fadil, Mohd Soffi said the housing unit of the State Secretary's Office would meet representatives of financial institutions from time to time to brief them about the state government's housing policy for the poor.

State Local Government, Environment and Health Committee chairman Datuk Hoh Khai Mun said the Drainage and Irrigation Department was carrying out design and repair work on the RM258mil Sungai Pahang estuary. The project began on Nov 1 last year and is expected to be completed in October next year, he said when replying to a written question from Ibrahim Awang Ismail (BN - Peramu Jaya).

Friday April 24, 2009

1,580 flats still lying idle after several years

Story and photo by YIP YOKE TENG

SOCIAL worker Karen Khoo frowns whenever she drives past the five blocks of vacant flats at Lembah Subang in Petaling Jaya built under the Projek Perumahan Rakyat (PPR), the public housing programme. There are about 30 families under the care of her church who want to move into the flats where the rental would be affordable for them but there seems to be no end to their wait.



Temporary shelter: On and off, families of workers nearby will put up temporarily at the Lembah Subang PPR flats which have been vacant for years. "They have been hoping to move into the PPR flats for years and we do not know what is taking so long for the flats to be ready for occupation," Khoo said.

"I have been checking with many departments on when the flats would be ready but I could not find an answer," she said.

It was earlier highlighted in *StarMetro* that the 1,580 flats have been left vacant for years with rumours going around among nearby residents that the site built on a former landfill was unfit for occupation. The Housing and Local Government Ministry later clarified that the project had been delayed due to the need to engage Universiti Malaya (UM) consultants to verify if the site was safe in response to a stop-work order by the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) in 2006.

According to the ministry, the consultants' final report released in September 2006 found that the soil had been adequately treated. Construction had then resumed and the project was in its final phase with Syabas installing the water mains to the units. It is expected that with the issuance of the certificate of practical completion, the flats would be ready by the second quarter of this year.

Another concerned resident, Aloysius Francis Pinto, a former aide to Subang MP R. Sivarasa, urged the ministry to speed up the progress as many low-income families needed proper and affordable housing. However, Pinto insisted that the ministry had to convince the public that the flats were fit for habitation by disclosing findings of the UM study before the people were allowed to move in. "The project has been delayed for years and they should not sit on it any longer. I drive past the flats every morning and it always gives me a twinge in my heart that more than 1,580 units are left vacant while the poor are suffering for lack of housing," he said.

"The more they prolong the progress, the more it seems that they are cloaking something in secrecy. They have to be honest with the public. If the flats are safe, let the people move in and, if they are not, demolish them and use the site for better purposes," he said.

Attempts by *StarMetro* this week to reach the ministry for the latest update on the project proved futile.

Friday April 24, 2009

Cyberview owes Sepang council RM4mil in dues

GEETHA KRISHNAN at the Sepang Municipal Council full board meeting

SEPANG municipal councillors were aghast to hear on Thursday that Cyberjaya landowner, Cyberview Sdn Bhd, owed assessment dues amounting to RM4.18mil up till March 31 this year. They were also told that Cyberview had requested that RM1.94mil be reduced from the sum to cover the cost of a bridge it built to provide access to the council.

MPSp council president Azizan Mohamad Sidin said the dues were for three properties – the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, InventQ Jaya and SME Technopreneur – as Cyberview owned the buildings. "Cyberview wrote to the Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim requesting for exemption by stating they built certain public facilities which MPSp should have done," he said, adding that the request had been rejected.

The landowner wrote in again, this time asking for the assessment dues to be reduced by RM1.94mil as contra payment for the bridge and the remainder to be paid in instalments. Councillor Rohaya Mohd Shahir said the building sub-committee members did not agree to the proposal as they wanted to determine the cost of the bridge. At a press conference later, Azizan said the bridge was built because the previous state government only gave MPSp RM20mil for

the council building in Cyberjaya. "When we heard that Cyberview was building a bridge for access to the Cyberjaya Community Clubhouse, we suggested including an access for the council building," he said.

Councillors were also told there were 14 approved locations for billboards in the municipality and the council will call for a meeting with a few of the operators soon to update them on the new guidelines laid down by the state government. In an update to the proposal discussed in the March full board meeting to hand over certain aspects of the Cyberjaya Cybercities Management (CCM) to Cyberview, Azizan said the matter would be referred to the state executive council meeting. It was suggested that the council revert to its back-to-basics services in Cyberjaya and leave the task of promoting Cyberjaya and drawing investors to the cybercity to Cyberview.

Friday April 24, 2009

RM234m Govt funds for Terengganu telecom projects

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Federal Government has allocated RM234.3mil to implement various telecommunication infrastructure projects in Terengganu over the three years from last year. State Public Amenities and Infrastructure Committee chairman Yahaya Khatib Mohamad said the funds were for the construction of new towers, setting up 48 community broadband centres, upgrading 21 rural libraries into community broadband libraries and providing the disabled access to basic telecommunications.

"We expect all the projects to be completed by 2010," he told reporters after launching the Civil Works Preparation Guideline for telecommunication infrastructure in new development areas here recently. Also present was Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission eastern regional office manager Mohd Shafie Harun. Yahaya said the biggest project was the construction of 98 new towers costing RM137.4mil. He said, besides Federal Government initiatives, the state was doing its part in supporting the national broadband plan. This included the T@WAN project, a wireless broadband service in Terengganu, and a government proposal to provide fibre optic cables at all district offices statewide, said Yahya. — Bernama

Saturday April 25, 2009

Go-ahead for Sabah-Johor undersea electricity cable

By STEPHEN THEN

MIRI: At least 10,000 megawatts of electricity from the RM6bill-Bakun hydro-electric dam project in central Sarawak will be supplied to peninsula Malaysia so that every states there will

have adequate and uninterrupted supply of power for households and industries. The Cabinet has decided that the undersea-power transmission cable project between the southern tip of Sarawak and Johor must proceed so that energy from Bakun can be channeled via the bed of the South China Sea to Johor and then to the rest of peninsula Malaysia.

Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said the Cabinet during its recent meeting agreed that it would be better to undertake the undersea-power cable project rather than to continue building new power plants in the peninsula states. "Over the long term, it will be more economical and viable to transmit power from Bakun to peninsula Malaysia even though the undersea-cable project would be very costly.

"This project will ensure that folks in peninsula Malaysia get constant and adequate supply of electricity at a rate that would be much better compared to what they will have to pay if we (Government) were to allow more power plants to be build in the states in the peninsula. "The costs of having to build more power plants in peninsula states will be much more as compared to the costs of the undersea-cable project," he said when interviewed after presenting grants for minor projects at the Sarawak United People's Party here.

Chin said that the 10,000 MWs from Bakun should be enough to meet the needs of the whole of the peninsula, but stressed that the amount could be increased as and when the needs arise. The great benefit of hydro-power is that it can be increased when needed, he said, pointing out that Sarawak itself will have an abundant source of hydro-power that will be enough to meet not just the nation's needs, but also the needs of regional countries.

Asked who will handle the undersea-cable project, Chin said a joint-venture would be undertaken by Tenaga Nasional Bhd and Sarawak Electricity Board to carry out the job. The cost of the undersea-cable project has not been finalised as yet, he said, adding that the rates at which power would be sold to the peninsula is also being worked out. Bakun is expected to be operational by 2011. "Sarawak will sell to Kalimantan, Sabah and even the southern Philippines as well because there will be much electricity to be generated not only from Bakun, but also from the other hydro-dams that will be build under the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) project," he said.

Chin said Sarawak will have the capacity to generate electricity reserve of up to 28,000 Mws from the SCORE project.

Saturday April 25, 2009

Sabah JPJ building unsafe too

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Road Transport Department headquarters has become the third government building deemed unsafe for occupation in just six months. Shocked to see cracks

everywhere, Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Abdul Rahim Bakri ordered that the headquarters be moved to a temporary complex.

“Obviously this building is no longer safe. I’ll bring up the matter to the ministry for further action,” he said after a closed door meeting with department officers during his familiarisation visit to the state JPJ at Jalan Bundusan yesterday. Before this, the 10-storey tower block of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital here was declared unsafe in October last year, followed by the state archives building in March.



The JPJ building is barely a decade old and has been besieged with problems from day one.

Three other blocks adjacent to the main two-storey office have not been occupied since the project was completed in 2002. The blocks were deemed unsuitable for occupation. Rahim said the complex site was once swampland. One of the three buildings is tilting because of the sinking land. Some parts of the 5.8ha (14.5acre) land was even prone to flooding.

The complex was once inspected by the Institut Kerjaraya Malaysia which recommended relocation. Rahim was told the JPJ office buildings had never been issued with the occupation certificate. “One solution is to build a new JPJ building in Kepadang but this will take time. For now, it is more convenient to relocate to a temporary building,” said Abdul Rahim.

Sunday April 26, 2009

More than RM21,000 fished from my account, says cockle breeder

NIBONG TEBAL: A fish and cockle breeder claims RM21,202 in subsidies issued to him by the Malaysian Fisheries Development Board (LKIM) has gone missing from two of his accounts at a bank here. Chu Nyok Moi @ Chu Voon Fong, 62, of Sungai Udang, said he was shocked to discover the money was gradually withdrawn when he updated the bank passbooks on April 20.

“A total of RM16,446 was withdrawn on three occasions since February from one of my accounts. Another RM4,756 was taken out from my other joint account with my son in February,” he told a press conference organised by Nibong Tebal MCA division chief Tan Cheng Liang at her office here yesterday.

Chu added he did not own an automated teller machine (ATM) card and only used his passbook to conduct transactions with the bank. Chu said the bank officers failed to give him a proper explanation about the withdrawals. He lodged a report at the Sungai Acheh police station here on the same day he discovered the money missing.

Tan said she would write to Bank Negara urging it to advise agencies such as LKIM to issue notifications to subsidy recipients whenever money was deposited into their accounts. "This is necessary to prevent any misappropriation," she said, adding some 400 fishermen in Sungai Udang receive subsidies from the Government.

Monday April 27, 2009

Pahang Govt to use KPI for reps

KUANTAN: The Pahang Government plans to introduce key performance indicators (KPI) on state assemblymen to evaluate their services. Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the move was in line with efforts by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in introducing the KPI at the Cabinet level. The state government had held discussions with two professionals to determine the guidelines for the KPI, he said.

"We will organise a workshop with state assemblymen to get their views on the implementation of the KPI," he told reporters after attending the opening of the Pahang Malay Chamber of Commerce annual general meeting by the Sultan of Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah yesterday. — Bernama

Monday April 27, 2009

4,116ha for orang asli

By ROSLINA MOHAMAD

KUANTAN: A total of 4,116ha has been gazetted for development and housing programmes for orang asli in Pahang. The land is in Rompin (2,510ha), Raub (1,402ha) and Maran (204.12ha). Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said the programmes would be under the purview of the Federal Government. Under the programme, the orang asli would be grouped together, he told reporters after chairing the state exco meeting here recently.

Adnan was asked to comment on land issues raised by certain groups of orang asli said to have been instigated by Opposition parties. He said the Opposition would do anything to take advantage of issues that could jeopardise the state, but the state had its ways of handling the situation. However, he refused to comment on land issues raised by those who sought legal

action. On applications for land titles, Adnan said the state would issue grants for reasonably-sized houses and agricultural lots. He cited the ludicrous example of an application for 1,600ha by 40 families. "We will issue titles for house lots of 0.1ha and between 1.6ha to 2.4ha for farming. "This is to ensure fairness to the community on state land matters," he said.

Adnan said that people must understand the constraints faced by the state where land was concerned. He said there were 57,300 orang asli comprising 11,910 families from 263 villages in Pahang, adding that the state would soon hold a dialogue with the community to clear the air on issues involving land and titles

Monday April 27, 2009

Official: Malacca not responsible for RM600m theme park

By MARTIN CARVALHO

MALACCA: The state is not responsible for the stalled RM600mil Melaka Water Theme Park coastal reclamation development in Klebang following a Central Bank probe into the company behind the project. State Housing, Rural Town Development and Abandoned Projects Revival Committee chairman Datuk Abdul Ghafaar Atan said the state was never involved in the project, although the earth-breaking ceremony was done by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam.

"It is usual for companies or developers to invite state leaders to launch their projects. "However, this does not mean that the state is involved in or promoting the projects," he said in reply to a question raised by Lim Jak Wong (DAP - Bachang) at the state assembly here recently.

He clarified that the project was called Sunshine Villa and the company behind it was Syarikat Awan Plasma Sdn Bhd. Lim earlier said that Mohd Ali was present during the project's ground-breaking ceremony and his photographs were used by the company to shore up confidence in the project. He said that over 1,000 lots were sold to investors here and wanted to know how the state was going to assist them. To this, Abdul Ghafaar said the state would assist those affected provided they lodged official complaints.

Betty Chew (DAP - Kota Laksamana) said the state should be careful when approving such projects and carry out checks to determine the credibility of the company involved. "The submission of forms 24 and 46 for scrutiny is not sufficient as the details of the directors and thier share holdings appear good only on the surface. "The state should carry out investigations to determine the company's image," she said.

Abdul Ghafaar said the state had found nothing wrong with the company's directors at the time of the project's approval. He said the project would be revived after the company sorted out its problems. The project covering over 200ha was launched in late 2007 and scheduled for completion in 2011.

It included the development of 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. It is estimated that 1,000 packages worth RM30mil were sold to investors.

Tuesday April 28, 2009

Government goes easy on financial sector

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS

 **Foreign ownership to rise from 49 to 70 percent equity Zeti: Changes to local financial sector a gradual process**

PUTRAJAYA: The Government will issue up to nine new banking and insurance licences until 2011 and allow foreigners to own up to 70% equity in the country's Islamic banks, investment banks and insurance companies. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the liberalisation package, comprising six thrusts, was aimed at enhancing Malaysia's linkages with international economies. "It will also bring about greater confidence into the economy and promote better economic regional integration,"

Najib said when announcing the steps at his office yesterday. Najib, also the Finance Minister, said there would be flexibility in allowing for an increase in foreign equity ownership limits of investment banks, Islamic banks, insurance companies and takaful operators from 49% to 70%. "Such alliances will strengthen business potential and enhance growth prospects of financial institutions through the international expertise and global networks of foreign shareholders," he said.

However, the foreign equity limit for commercial banks would remain at the current 30%, said Najib. He said new licences for seven banks and two family takaful players would also be issued. Under this, a maximum of two new Islamic banking licences would be issued to foreign players to establish banks with paid-up capital of at least US\$1bil (RM3.62bil). Also, two new commercial banking licences for foreign players that would bring in specialised expertise would also be issued.

These four licences would be issued this year, together with the two new family takaful licences. In 2011, up to three new commercial banking licences would be issued to world-class banks. The Government, Najib added, would offer operational flexibility to foreign institutions

to increase the number of branches, while locally incorporated foreign commercial banks could establish four new full-fledged branches from 2010, and 10 micro-finance branches starting this year. Effective June 1, holding companies in Labuan, incorporated under the Offshore Companies Act 1990, would be given flexibility to establish an operational and management office in Kuala Lumpur.

Najib said that offshore banking institutions and insurance companies licensed by the Labuan Offshore Financial Services Authority (Lofsa), which met the predetermined criteria, could be allowed to have a physical presence onshore from 2010 and 2011 respectively. "Greater flexibility will also be accorded for employment of expatriates in specialist areas able to contribute to the development of the financial sector," he said.

Najib said that over the last three years, the finance and insurance sector had expanded by 8.8% per annum, outpacing the growth in real gross domestic product of about 6%.

Tuesday April 28, 2009

RM2.3bil spent on Kelantan projects

KOTA BARU: The Federal Development Department has spent RM2.3bil of the RM4.4bil allocated by the Federal Government for development projects in Kelantan under the Ninth Malaysia Plan. Department director Datuk Mohd Shukri Salleh said the money was disbursed through various government agencies over 347 completed development projects out of the 1,428 in the pipeline. "Among the fully completed projects are the construction and renovation of houses for the hardcore poor, maintenance of schools and mosques and construction of roads, bridges and facilities at public areas," he said.

Mohd Shukri said that among the parliamentary constituencies in the state, Kota Baru received the biggest chunk of RM725mil for 130 development projects. "This is followed by Gua Musang that received RM599.4mil for 57 projects," he said. — Bernama

Tuesday April 28, 2009

Government complexes in Putrajaya in need of urgent repairs

By GEETHA KRISHNAN

AFTER just a decade, the impressive cyber-age government buildings in Putrajaya are already showing signs of wear-and-tear, and repair and restoration work is certainly needed urgently. One of the victims of such a deteriorated condition is the Palace of Justice in Precinct 3. The complex is regal in bearing and favoured as a backdrop during celebrations like the Merdeka

Parade and New Year Countdown or for film and wedding shoots, but, unfortunately, some of its outer parts are crumbling away.

Tiles on the stairs to the main complex are chipped or broken. In one corner, a vertical slab was missing, revealing the unsightly layer of cement below. Looking up at the splendid structure, one can see ugly patches on the ceiling, caused by water seepage.



Cracking: Can the road in front of the Palace of Justice complex in Putrajaya cope with heavy usage?

Some students who were working on a photography project at the site told *StarMetro* that they were thankful that the five domes and the building with its impressive pillars were still imposing and impressive. During a 90-minute walk within the Core Island, home to many ministries, government departments and public agencies, *StarMetro* discovered several other anomalies that certainly require immediate remedy. One obvious example is the leaking fire hydrant at the back of the Land and Minerals Department next to the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry in Precinct 4.

Two other cases are the broken pavement near the Customs Department in Precinct 2 and the uneven road surface in front of the Perbadanan Putrajaya (PPj) Complex in Precinct 3. One concrete chunk was missing along a section of the Boulevard from Dataran Putra to the Core Island, posing a danger to road users, especially motorcyclists.

The National Registration Department (NRD) building in Precinct 2 has been cordoned off for maintenance work. It is unclear what work is being done there. According to a recent visitor to Putrajaya, Peter Ho, the Immigration Department building in Precinct 2 seemed under-utilised. "An entire floor is vacant. For a new building, I would expect more and thought the services would be more centralised," he said.



Temporarily closed: The front entrance to the National Registration Department was cordoned off for maintenance work.

The Immigration Department in Putrajaya deals with matters related to foreign workers and expatriates. When contacted, Putrajaya Corporation (PPj) city services director Datuk Ghani Ahmad said the maintenance of government office buildings was generally the responsibility of the Public Works Department (PWD). “The PPj maintains the public amenities like neighbourhood complexes, sports facilities, bus stops, park-and-ride sites and the Putrajaya Sentral,” he said.

Meanwhile, PPj president Tan Sri Samsudin Osman said Putrajaya should last for the next 100 years and the corporation was taking the necessary measures to preserve and maintain the nation’s administration capital for posterity. In 2007, after a string of misadventure involving the government buildings in Putrajaya, the then Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu was reported as saying that it would cost RM22mil just to carry out checks.

The most ruinous incident was the massive leak at the Immigration Department building where operations had to be suspended as the result of a burst pipe. The incident was blamed on poor workmanship and maintenance. Later, the roof of an auditorium in the Entrepreneurial and Cooperative Development Ministry building collapsed.

This led to the Auditor-General’s Department to conduct an audit on the safety and maintenance of the government buildings. The percentage of land use in Putrajaya is divided into government (5.3%), commercial (2.9%), residential (25.8%), civic and cultural (0.2%), public facilities (10.1%), utility and infrastructure (18.2%) and green area (37.5%). Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd (PJH) is the master developer of Putrajaya and the development of the government buildings was carried out privately on a build-lease-transfer basis.

Tuesday April 28, 2009

PJ residents accuse local govt of not doing its job properly

By JADE CHAN

THE first Petaling Jaya residents meeting with Selangor state executive council member Ronnie Liu was a heated affair with residents citing their numerous complaints and accusing the local government of not doing its job properly. The session with the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) was the first of a series of meetings to be held every Sunday with all the local councils in Selangor. Present at the meeting were PJ mayor Datuk Mohamad Roslan Sakiman, MBPJ councillors and various heads of department from the MBPJ.

Among the complaints raised were the congestion at the Tropicana Tunnel, roads not being resurfaced, clogged and broken drains, flash floods, methane gas emission in PJS2, and foreigners operating illegally at night markets. Some of the more serious issues involved those on access roads to Paramount View Condominium and several other housing areas, as well as those on boom gates with regard to gated and guarded communities.

Liu, who is the Selangor state local government research and studies committee chairman, said the dialogue session was aimed at understanding the residents' issues and concerns, and what they felt was not up to mark with the local councils. "Once we have completed the sessions with all 12 local councils in Selangor, we will compile the complaints into a report to understand the issues people have and improve on it," he said.

Liu urged the residents to be specific when lodging their complaints, and to note details like the road names and streetlight numbers. "This will help facilitate action on the complaints, as certain infrastructure fall under the MBPJ's jurisdiction but others don't. It's not about passing the buck, but the MBPJ can't repair roads that fall under the Public Works Department and vice-versa. "The complainant should also politely enquire the name of the MBPJ officer they are dealing with, because if the complaint is not attended to for various reasons, the necessary action can be taken," he said.

Liu also suggested that the residents set up meetings with their respective zone councillors if necessary, and that billboards with their local assemblyman's and MP's contact details and service centre addresses be put up to make them more accessible to the public. He acknowledged that the need for a gated community was very real, and that the boom gates were put up as a temporary measure. "As for the bylaws and legislation needed to address the problem, it has to be referred to the state and federal governments. "A lot of complaints were received today. Whether they were minor or major issues, they can be resolved. Those on potholes and drains can be tackled first at the MBPJ level, but others require more time as they involve developers or other agencies," Liu said.

Roslan said all the complaints had been noted, and he would raise and follow up on the issues during the heads of department meetings until the issues were resolved. "We will also sit down with the councillors and work out a standard operating procedure on things like complaints and enforcement, as well as to streamline the process between all the departments," he said.

On the access road to Paramount View Condominium, Roslan said the Malaysian Public Works Institute would be engaged as an independent consultant to decide on the road to be used or give a better suggestion. The next meeting is scheduled to be held on May 3 with the Shah Alam City Council (MBSA).

Wednesday April 29, 2009

Civil service revamp to modernise sector

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS

PUTRAJAYA: The civil service and government-linked companies can have staff exchanges under a move to restructure and modernise the public service. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, when announcing proposals to revamp the civil service, said the change would also open up the service by allowing people to join at different levels. Another change, Najib added, would be for the civil service to have career development and talent searching plans like companies such as Petronas, Pemodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB) and Bank Negara.



Meeting for the first time: Najib shaking hands with officers of the public sector at the event at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre yesterday. Also present is his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

"These changes are necessary as we need a civil service which not only understand the realities of things but one that is comprised of players who dare to make changes. "We do not need mere seat warmers, we need actual doers," he told a gathering of civil servants at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre here yesterday. This was his first address as Prime Minister to the civil service. On the exchange programme, Najib said the civil service would benefit from the "cross fertilisation" process between the private and public sector. He said the time had come for the public service to be opened to talents in the private sector.

Najib said that to capture the best talents, the civil service should consider the career development and talent search plans. He said the plans by Petronas, PNB and Bank Negara had proven effective in getting talented individuals to work for them. "The Government will send its

best people to study and gain knowledge at top-notch world institutions such as the Kennedy School of Government in Harvard University and the Wharton Business School in Pennsylvania University,” he said.

Najib said the changes would not be top down but involve all segments of the sector, starting from top leaders,” he said.

He said that apart from structural, paradigm shifts – from being rigid to flexible – were necessary. He said the public sector must shift from evaluating success based on output to outcome. Najib said that for example, it was not only important how many rehabilitation centres were built to tackle drug addiction but more importantly, the number of addicts who had been successfully cured.

“We also need to shift from cumbersome red tape to bureaucracy that facilitate the people. Productivity must be measured not on its own but together with creativity and innovation. “The conventional way of measuring productivity will only give us incremental improvement when what we want is a quantum leap.”

Touching on his 1Malaysia concept, Najib said there should not be any quarters in this country that should consider themselves second-class citizens nor feel sidelined or left behind in the process of progress. Najib said that under the concept, each member of the public who were eligible, in need of help and aid, would be rendered assistance. “No party should be overly zealous in demanding its rights and forget its responsibilities as citizens of Malaysia,” he said.

Wednesday April 29, 2009

Ministry gets another RM295m to upgrade roads

SEREMBAN: The Works Ministry has been allocated RM295mil to upgrade and maintain the country’s federal roads, under the two stimulus packages announced last November and in March this year. Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor said the amount was in addition to the RM545mil announced in Budget 2009 last year.

“We want the quality of our roads to be good. Of the amount, RM200mil will be used to finance the resurfacing of federal roads throughout the country,” he said in his speech read by ministry secretary-general Datuk Thomas George at a dinner briefing on the Federal Routes Expedition here on Monday. Shaziman said the extra funding came in handy as the amount announced during the tabling of Budget 2009 was insufficient. The ministry would carry out more programmes to ensure the 17,700km of roads under its supervision were always safe to use, he said.

He added that the ministry was also in the midst of launching the “Love the Federal Roads” campaign. “We want road users to assist ministry staff in ensuring the quality of our roads. We need all the information we can get to ensure this is realised and hope to achieve it through the campaign,” Shaziman said.

Wednesday April 29, 2009

Effective ePerolehan

The online procurement system has been a boon for businesses dealing with government agencies.

Over 90% of the total 2,487 procurement centres of the Federal Government agencies in the country are now ePerolehan-enabled, transacting fully on the system. The government’s official electronic procurement system is expected to offer the facility at all procurement centres nationwide over the next few months. The move gives an enormous business potential to the government agencies with an average procurement budget of RM20bil to RM23bil annually for product and services. Through the advantages of seamless electronic technology, all ePerolehan-enabled suppliers will inevitably benefit from an instant expansion of their market reach with less time, cost and effort. The decentralised approach to procurement centres allows them to control their own budgets and be directly responsible in managing their own expenditure which includes finding suppliers, tendering, ensuring compliance with procedures, policies and orders.

Fifteen companies representing suppliers to the government agencies gave a thumbs-up to the service as it has provided ease in conducting business and encouraged business communities and entrepreneurs to participate in government procurements. In the past, to participate a government procurement supplier had to register with the Ministry of Finance but different procedures and information given by various government agencies made it a more lengthy and tedious process. This resulted in numerous errors and repeated visits for the suppliers to the Finance Ministry. The introduction of the online supplier registration system in ePerolehan as a single point of entry dramatically standardised and simplified all the registration procedures. Suppliers’ productivity levels improved significantly as all applications, renewals, payments and submission of supporting documents are conducted online. The convenient and user-friendly online facility has influenced a larger pool of business communities to register as ePerolehan-enabled suppliers.

BRIS Manufacturer Sdn Bhd administration officer Hairul Azman said it is now much easier to register as a supplier with the Ministry of Finance through ePerolehan as the online tools and guidelines facilitated the application process. He said the process is not complicated and takes a maximum of seven days for approval provided that one follows the checklist. Hairul said ePerolehan ensures that all budget commitment codes have been recorded at the requisition

stage. He said this did away with the need for the invoice to be passed around the authority for approval before being registered. "Also electronic invoices can be processed and matched automatically, again speeding up the process. All of this should lead to reduced time for payment." The majority of the suppliers interviewed have experienced faster payment cycles with ePerolehan. The electronic fund transfer (EFT) features for payment processing are greatly appreciated by the community for accurate and secure transactions. Armvex Sdn Bhd sales and marketing manager Ariffin Sharif said that previously payment cycles took a few months after product delivery. "We in fact incurred further cost as visiting the government offices was the norm to get our payment processed," he said.

"Through ePerolehan, we have now expanded our business through investments in ICT technology." Alam Medik Sdn Bhd sales coordinator Hazmira Ishak said ePerolehan made the company become more ICT savvy. "As it is a third party system, there is less worry for us on incurring cost towards maintenance and system upgrades," she added.

She said ePerolehan provides an impetus, especially for SMIs, to participate in e-commerce. Hazmira said through greater participation in ePerolehan, the Government is also catalysing the critical mass of widespread computer adoption that makes further provisions of online government services appealing. Pharmaserv Alliances Sdn Bhd sales executive Fazly Hisham agrees with this. "It is obvious that through the virtual market, we are now having better opportunities to exploit wider procurement offices," said Fazly.

Sasawang Sdn Bhd director Mahmud Tajudin added that ePerolehan enables the company to eliminate high overheads in order to establish permanent resources and manpower in each region in order to tap existing and new markets within government agencies. Without having their own websites, small enterprises as well as SMIs can experience an enormous scale of market expansion through ePerolehan. This is sufficient enough for them to be on a level playing field with the rest of the big corporations, with geographical boundaries diminished. Mahmud said while becoming ePerolehan-enabled does not guarantee business, it nevertheless gives suppliers Internet penetration. "I am fully confident that the automated and tracking delivery features in ePerolehan have actually improved the accuracy and decision making processes in government agencies," said Bekalan Jurusains Sdn Bhd administration officer Yap Chwee Min.

She said ePerolehan also paves the way in promoting fair competition among suppliers. "ePerolehan is perhaps the most direct and effective way for a company to leverage the Internet to reduce costs, improve productivity and boost profits." Phamaserv Sdn Bhd says they are now able to plan inventory orders with manufacturers since they can now track their procurement progress through ePerolehan's action bulletin board. ePerolehan account manager Suryani Ismail said it has a vital role within this climate of economic uncertainty to intensify effective financial management, transparency and integrity in the public sector – all linked to competitiveness. Under the fourth strategic thrust of the second budget stimulus package, the Government has made it a priority to expand ePerolehan usage. Currently, all government agencies have been mandated to procure goods and services solely through

ePerolehan. Through greater participation by businesses in ePerolehan, Malaysians can look forward to a more efficient government, equitable development and greater national productivity. > For further information, call (03) 7985 7777 / 7888 or e-mail pendaftaran@eperolehan.gov.my. To learn more about ePerolehan and to register, visit www.eperolehan.gov.my. Companies are invited to attend the free supplier registration workshop held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the ePerolehan Training Centre in Shah Alam, Selangor.

Wednesday April 29, 2009

Time to revamp KL transport system

By BAVANI M

THE Kuala Lumpur traffic gridlock is costing the city millions of ringgit each day and congestion costs are said to be causing the loss of 2% of Malaysia's GDP (about RM10bil) every year. Obviously, something concrete must be done to resolve this perennial problem of the city. So, it is no surprise that the new Federal Territories Minister Datuk Raja Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin has declared that the city public transport system needs a review and an overhaul of priorities.

Raja Nong Chik said this in reply to a text message from *StarMetro* which had asked him to comment on the city public transport system. Raja Nong Chik had accompanied Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on an inspection tour of the city recently, when they were exposed to the daily woes of the commuters travelling from one place to another in the city. It was reported that Najib had voiced his concern over the lack of facilities and the serious congestion woes and had ordered that urgent improvements be made.

Raja Nong Chik, however, declined to talk about his plans for the improvements just yet, but promised that he would study the problem and act on the matter soon. Having an effective and efficient public transportation system is a major factor in determining a city's livability standard. Studies have shown that cities in countries with excellent transportation systems are the most liveable ones of the world. At the International Conference on World Class Sustainable Cities 2009 (WCSC'09) round-table discussion last month, the transportation issue was the hot topic where six international speakers and some local experts debated and explored the strategies and best practices that would help turn Kuala Lumpur into a world-class sustainable city. Most believed that the government should direct more attention to the existing public transport services as reducing traffic congestion in the city would contribute to improving the economic well-being of the nation and people. They also agreed that the key area needing improvement is transportation, and if the transportation woes are resolved, other areas will follow through. It was also pointed out that there are many agencies involved in the management of public transportation in the city and that there is a need for one autonomous centralised authority to operate the system like what Singapore, Vancouver and Berlin are having.

The bottom line is that Kuala Lumpur needs to get a grip on its transport problem now, and only then would its residents enjoy a better quality of life. To say that the government is not doing anything is not true as there are plans to construct a new 42km Kota Damansara-Cheras LRT line and to extend the Kelana Jaya and Ampang LRT lines. There are also plans to buy more train coaches and stage buses. But many transport advocates see the whole scenario as overlooking the big picture.

Take the buses, for instance. According to the Association for the Improvement of Mass-Transit in Klang Valley (Transit), the KL bus service is geared towards the peak hours and during the day you can see buses lined up and waiting at the old city areas of KL. "Areas of congestion in old KL can be found at the bus stop areas in Lebuhraya Ampang (Medan Tunku), Jalan Tun H.S. Lee and the Kota Raya area where the Metrobuses are treating the area like their parking garage," Transit adviser Moaz Yusof Ahmad said.

"There is also the Pasar Seni LRT station, the site of the Pasarama Kota, the so-called Klang Bus Stand and the unofficial Seremban bus stand. which block the traffic along the main road," Moaz said.

These buses wait in the areas for passengers, blocking traffic and polluting the surrounding area with their burning diesel fuel. According to Moaz, the solution lies in enforcement to keep buses moving, and building a new staging area for urban buses. He said the DBKL should station officers in the area to monitor the buses, ensuring that each bus should have a maximum 10-minute waiting time before it had to get on the road, whether its passenger load was full or not.

In the long term, a new staging area will have to be built in KL for the urban buses. The best solution is to take advantage of the Puduraya and Plaza Rakyat areas and ensure that there is a hub and staging area for urban buses built there. All improvement to public transport must consider the needs of the elderly, the young, and the disabled and must be designed to make it easier for people to use public transport. Improved access to public transport means that service can be faster, congestion can be reduced, and people will find it more convenient.

Thursday April 30, 2009

Ong promises full disclosure by PKA

By ROYCE CHEAH

PETALING JAYA: The audit report on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) is ready and the Port Klang Authority (PKA) has been given one week to make it public. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said he would contemplate submitting the report to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the Public Accounts Committee after its release. Writing this in his blog

(ongteekeat.net), the minister said that by releasing the audit report by PriceWaterhouseCoopers he would be keeping a pledge he made earlier. "I have pledged to ensure transparency on this issue and I intend to keep my word," he wrote.

He also announced that he had decided to extend the services of PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng whose term of office expired on March 31. "One of his key priorities now is to ensure the release of the report," he said.

Ong, who is the MCA president, said that he had directed the PKA last year to commission an independent and credible firm to look into the PKFZ controversy. "The delay in completing the report is due to several technical issues, including the declassification of key government documents related to the investigations," he explained.

Now that the report was ready, it was only natural for the PKA, which had commissioned the report, to release the findings. On Sunday, Ong hit out at his critics, saying that it was grossly unfair for some "snipers", including certain individuals from certain media, to ignore that declassification had to be sought before the report could be released.

The 405ha PKFZ transshipment hub has been dogged by controversy ever since it was revealed that its original development cost had ballooned from the original less than RM2.5bil to RM4.6bil. Former Transparency International chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam commended Ong for handling the situation very well, "by giving due respect to the PKA and allowing it to release the report."

He said that Ong, by ordering the release of the report, was also ensuring that public interest was upheld. "It is right and proper that he submits the report to the MACC and Public Accounts Committee after it is released," he said. If there was any wrongdoing, those concerned must be brought to book, Navaratnam added.

Thursday April 30, 2009

No attempt to delay PKFZ report, says Lee

By ROYCE CHEAH

PETALING JAYA: There was no attempt by the Transport Ministry or Port Klang Authority (PKA) to delay or stop the release of the audit re-port on the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ). PKA chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat had stressed to the PKA that the report had to be released quickly with all relevant documents declassified to make full disclosure to the public.

“It was the PKA that commissioned the report and likewise the onus to declassify the documents also rests with our port authority. “This has now been accomplished and I think the delay has not been significant given the nature and volume of the documents involved,” Lee said in a statement. He said he would facilitate the process and ensure that the matter was properly resolved so that the PKFZ could move forward without the heavy baggage of the past.

Now that the report on the PKFZ by auditing firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) was completed, the PKA and PWC were now working on the final details for the report to be made public. “I wish to thank the relevant ministries, government bodies and agencies for the cooperation extended to the PKA and PWC in this very tedious exercise. “We at the PKA remain steadfast to the commitment that the Government is accountable to the people and that they have the right to know the truth,” Lee added.

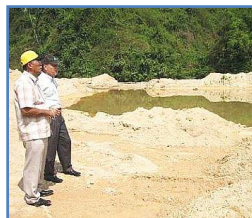
In December, Ong and the PKA held a press conference to release a chronology for the PKFZ project together with statistics showing how the PKFZ had grown. Ong had then said that the PWC report would address whether the project was handled professionally, and if it was cost-effective or exorbitant. He had also announced in May last year that an audit exercise would be carried out following a public outcry over the RM4.6bil “soft loan” given by the Government to revive the PKFZ.

Thursday April 30, 2009

Illegal sand-mining still rampant in Selangor

Story and photos by GEETHA KRISHNAN

ILLEGAL sand-mining is rampant in several parts of Selangor, the latest discovery being a site deep inside Bandar Sungai Long at a place called Bukit Enggang. The excavated area is a 1km drive from the Bandar Sungai Long township through Sections 8 and 11. The sole entry point is closely guarded by some foreigners on the claim that some plots of land in vicinity are privately owned. Dusun Tua assemblyman Ismail Sani went to inspect the site on Tuesday morning, but none of the lorries and heavy machinery were in sight although there was ample evidence of recent sand-mining activity in the area. “I suspect the operators are lying low for a while because I have requested the Hulu Langat Land Office enforcement team to check out the area the day before,” he said.



Larger by the day: Ismail (right) and his special assistant Mohd Yusuf Harun looking at the illegal sand-mining site.

Sungai Long community liaison officer Tony Mak, meanwhile, said several sand-laden lorries were spotted using the route between Sungai Long and Desa Budiman via the SMK Bandar Baru Sungai Long as early as 7.30am. According to Ismail, the other areas where illegal sand-mining was rampant are Bukit Raya, Sungai Serai, Kampung Jaya, Dusun Tua, Sungai Tekali and other sites along Sungai Langat. "The state government has allowed only one company to mine sand in Selangor but the state had failed to consider the fate of the other operators in the industry," he said.



Signs of activity: Bukit Enggang in Selangor is another area where illegal sand-mining has been recently uncovered.

"There was an understanding between the previous state government and the operators where sand-mining was allowed as contra payment for dredging silt and mud-clogged rivers," Ismail said.

He urged the state government to speed up the process of issuing more sand-mining permits and asked that the number of permits be increased and not be limited to just five as announced last year. Ismail said there was increased demand for sand under the economic stimulus package to boost development.