



Thursday March 26, 2009

## **PNSB spent RM1mil on Balkis in 2007, CEO tells panel**

By WANI MUTHIAH

SHAH ALAM: Permodalan Negeri Selangor Bhd (PNSB) spent about RM1mil in 2007 to sponsor a three-day sports event organised by the now defunct Wives of Selangor State Assemblymen and MPs Charity and Welfare Organisation (Balkis). PNSB CEO Datin Khairiyah Abu Hassan, who testified before the Selangor State Assembly's Select Committee on Competency, Accountability and Transparency (Selcat) yesterday, said purchases included sporting apparel for Balkis and the visiting contingent members.

Balkis was headed by former Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo's wife Datin Seri Zaharah Kechik throughout his tenure as menteri besar. PNSB also paid RM45,781.00 worth of souvenirs for VIP guests attending the event. The committee, chaired by Selangor Legislative Assembly speaker Teng Chang Khim, also included Deputy Speaker and Taman Medan assemblyman Haniza Talha, Bukit Antarabangsa assemblyman Azmin Ali, Hulu Klang assemblyman Saari Sungib and Bukit Gasing assemblyman Edward Lee as well as Barisan Nasional's assemblymen Sulaiman Abdul Razak (Permatang) and Ismail Sani (Dusun Tua).

The inquiry also heard that PNSB paid RM34,600 for a Hong Kong trip in March 2007 and RM88,388 for a trip to Tokyo in June the same year. The committee also noted that PNSB only spent RM4,000 for a welfare scheme for single mothers in October 2007 as opposed to the large amount of money forked out to pay for Balkis activities. Khairiyah had also said that PNSB made payments on behalf of Balkis without really knowing who the recipients were.

Friday March 27, 2009

## **Contract officers can head depts**

PUTRA JAYA: The Government will allow contract officers to head departments, provided the candidates have the expertise and experience, Public Service Department director-general Tan Sri Ismail Adam said yesterday. He said this was in line with the Government's on-going policy of bringing in new talent to improve and provide better services to the public. "The bottom line has always been to ensure an efficient, effective and productive civil service," he said when commenting on the appointment of the new director-general of broadcasting Datuk Ibrahim Yahya, who was previously a senior editor of Berita Publishing Sdn Bhd. Meanwhile, Cuepacs expressed reservations over such a policy as it would "demoralise" serving officers, especially the seniors. Its secretary-general Ahmad Shah Mohd Zin said the congress had no objections to contract officers carrying out specific projects, but not as head of departments. — Bernama

**Friday March 27, 2009**

**Sarawak government says it does not condone illegal logging**

KUCHING: Sarawak, constantly under fire by non governmental organisations (NGOs) over allegations of illegal logging and deforestation activities, concedes it is impossible to claim zero illegal trading. Sarawak Planning and Resource Management Ministry permanent secretary Datuk Len Talif Salleh said the state government did not condone illegal logging. He said the illegal trading of logs was relatively small as approval for timber imports was based on valid documents. "While it is not possible to claim zero illegal trading, Malaysia is confident of its systems, policies and procedures which collectively enable the various forestry agencies to check on and verify the authenticity of timber imported from other countries. "This is especially, in respect of logs where stringent conditions have been imposed," said Len Talif, who is also state forests director, in conjunction with World Forestry Day recently.

Len Talif, who is Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) managing director cum chief executive officer, said 65 forest management units were identified under the road map for Forest Management Certification, for which SFC had mandated each of the six, big timber companies to have at least one certified under the scheme. On accusations that the targeted development of one million hectare of oil palm estates by next year, included orang utan habitats, he said, 'Adopt An Orang Utan' was one of the conservation programmes that would be launched this year to ensure the survival of the totally protected species in the state. He said the number of orang utan found in Sarawak was stable, contrary to claims by international media and environmental activists.

**Monday March 30, 2009**

**Save water, save environs, save money**

**By EDWARD RAJENDRA**

SHAH ALAM: The simple acts of fixing water taps and reusing water discharged from washing machines can not only lower consumers' monthly bills but also help the environment. Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya Water Association vice-president Datuk Muhamad Azaham Abdul Wahab said that communities in rural and urban areas must understand that water is a precious resource for everyone. "We are concerned that a lot of treated water is lost around the home due to leaking pipes and dripping taps," he said yesterday at the World Water Day at the Puncak Niaga (M) Sdn Bhd headquarters in Section 13 here. "It may not seem much but it adds up and the owner of the house ends up forking out extra for the monthly bill."

He said fixing water taps could help arrest wastage and in the long term, save money and help the environment. Muhamad Azaham also encouraged housewives to reuse water discharged from washing machines to wash their driveway or even to clean the drains in their compounds

to lower their water bills. He said that a “slow dripping tap” could waste a couple of litres of water an hour and reach almost 20,000 litres a year. “On average, a person uses about 200 litres of water per day, of which five to 10 litres is for basic things like drinking and food preparation,” he added.

Muhamad Azaham said about half of the treated water supplied to urban areas in Selangor ended up as waste water because people “took it for granted.”

**Monday March 30, 2009**

### **Surprised report not tabled in Parliament**

KUALA LUMPUR: Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman is surprised that the Suhakam 2008 report was not tabled in the Dewan Rakyat although it had been submitted. He said Suhakam had met the requirement under the Suhakam Act for the annual report to be submitted to Parliament before the end of the first meeting for the year.

He was responding to Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz’s answer in Parliament on Wednesday that the report had not been tabled because Cabinet had not approved it yet. Wednesday was the last day of the first meeting for the year. “Section 21 does not require Cabinet approval of the report before it is tabled in Parliament.

“The question of Suhakam’s independence was one of the matters raised at Suhakam’s accreditation review,” Abu Talib said on Saturday following his return from Geneva after the review by the Accreditation sub-committee of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on Thursday. “The issue of delay is not for us to comment. It is the responsibility of Parliament to respect the law it passed. I am surprised it has not been placed before the MPs,” he added.

“The intention of the law is for the report to be brought to the attention of the Members of Parliament. “The act of placing it before the MPs is under the control of the Speaker. “The fact that it is not laid in Parliament is for the Speaker to answer. We have no control over the agenda,” Abu Talib added.

**Monday March 30, 2009**

### **PJ council accused of billboard favouritism**

By TAN KARR WEI

BARELY a month after the launch of the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) billboard guidelines, it seems that certain quarters are already finding points of contention against the policy. The

billboard policy initially meant for Petaling Jaya was launched on March 4 but Selangor local government, research and studies committee chairman Ronnie Liu also announced that it would be used for all local authorities in the state. Industry players who initially spoke out against the guidelines during the earlier meetings with the council seemed to be satisfied with the published guidelines during the launch.



**Contentious issue: Two of the three billboards remain at this junction of Jalan 222 and Jalan 14/28.**

Among those in the preparation coordination committee were MBPJ councillor Derek Fernandez, Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Malaysia (AAAA) president Datuk Vincent Lee, Outdoor Advertising Association of Malaysia (OAAM) president Datuk George Frederick, newspaper editor R. Nadeswaran and MBPJ town planning department director Sharipah Marhaini Syed Ali.

The much-debated fee which was calculated based on 30% of a billboard's gross sale income was included as an annexure to the guidelines. It is learned that a stack of letters have been sent to several elected representatives in Petaling Jaya, the Sultan of Selangor and the Menteri Besar. Among the assemblymen who have confirmed receiving the letters were Kampung Tunku's Lau Weng San, Damansara Utama's Dr Cheah Wing Yin, Bukit Gasing's Edward Lee, Seri Setia's Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad and the office of Bukit Lanjan's Elizabeth Wong.

One of the letters signed off by a Suresh R. Menon raised the issue of suspicious actions by the MBPJ, with reference to a decision made at the sustainable development committee meeting held on Dec 18, 2008. In the attached meeting minutes, a decision was made by the committee to take down three billboards along Jalan 222 (at the Jalan 14/48 junction) belonging to three companies because it blocked the view of motorists. However, Suresh alleged that only one billboard was taken down as of March 15, as shown in a picture printed in the letter and alleged that the council showed favouritism in carrying out the decision.

"We are not involved with the billboard issues so it is surprising that we should receive these documents. "I would like to hear from those involved and find out why these issues were raised," Dr Cheah said.

"I have received these letters in my mailbox that support my earlier observations and comments to the media that the guidelines and licensing fee are ill conceived and unfair to the industry. "I have also written to the PJ mayor Datuk Mohd Roslan Sakiman and the MB expressing my concerns on the matter and recommended that the guidelines be suspended until more discussions and all these contentious issues are addressed," added Lee.

Fernandez said the officers and councillors who went on a media bus trip to spot dangerous billboards had identified the three billboards along Jalan 222 as potentially dangerous. "After that, a select committee comprising councillors Robert Tan and Syed Abd Malik Syed Hamid Al Jafree and several planning officers went to get a closer view. "They were of the opinion that one was an immediate threat because it blocked motorists' view. "The other two were not an immediate danger to motorists or pedestrians. "We're waiting for the allocation of replacement sites. "It's a new set of guidelines and we can't bring down all the billboards at one time," Fernandez said.

He said a notice was sent to the billboard's owners to dismantle it but when they failed to take action, the council demolished it instead. "We make recommendations at the Mampan (sustainable development) meetings and send a sub-committee to check the sites. We send at least three councillors with the team to monitor the officers," he said.

He added that operators could appeal the decisions made by the council, provided that the billboards did not pose an immediate threat to the public. Fernandez added that, so far, only one assemblyman had written to the mayor regarding the letters and a reply had been sent. He also said all assemblymen in PJ were welcome at the committee meetings where they could raise any issues they were not satisfied with.

**Tuesday March 31, 2009**

## **Abandoned project poses risks**

Story and photo by **STUART MICHAEL**

AN abandoned apartment project along the main road in Section 20, Shah Alam, is turning into a haunt for drug addicts and an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, in addition to being an eyesore in the otherwise clean and pleasant state capital. Nearby residents and motorists travelling along Persiaran Jubli Perak feel that the authorities must do something to rejuvenate the project or at least clean up the unsightly condition and place guards there to stop the drug activities. Work on the Sri Puteri apartments began in September 2003 but was abandoned just two years later. There is a show house unit at the project site but there is no one manning it.



**Left to rot: The unfinished apartment block in Section 20 in Shah Alam.**

The irony is that just about 50m from the abandoned Sri Puteri project site, work on another project is taking place, with the external structure rapidly taking shape. *StarMetro* visited the Sri Puteri site and found the car park at the abandoned building filled with water, obviously accumulated rain water over the years, with fish swimming in it. Although there was no visible sign of aedes mosquitoes breeding at the place, the mere sight of the abandoned building gives the creeps with stagnant rain water almost everywhere in and around the building. Water has filled up the multi-level basement car park reaching up to the ground-floor level.

Hence, the unguarded project site poses a danger to children who venture into the area to play or even adults going there to catch fish as they could fall into the pool of dirty water, which is believed to be six metres deep at certain points. If someone falls into the water in the building, no one could possibly hear the cries for help as the nearest residential area is nearly 100m away. One wrong step could get the person into a six-metre deep water. This abandoned building is also attracting drug addicts and is an almost perfect hideout for criminals.

Several wooden houses at the Sri Puteri project site that used to house foreign workers are now left to rot. According to the Health Ministry, the PKNS flats in Section 20 are among the 54 hotspots for dengue cases in Selangor and the Sri Puteri abandoned project is located just 200m away. When contacted, Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) public relations officer Shahrin Ahmad said the state government and the MBSA felt sorry for the apartment buyers and would like to revive the project. "We had numerous meetings with the developer but due to the high cost of material and financial constraints, the developer is unable to continue with the project," Shahrin said. "We are looking for new contractors to help revive the project. The Sri Puteri project comprises shoplots and apartments. "I believe the project would be revived if we get the right contractors," he said.

Shah Alam Zone 9 community welfare bureau chairman M. Ghanasegaran suggested that the MBSA turn the abandoned complex into a government hospital or a transport terminal. According to Ghanasegaran, Shah Alam has a population of nearly 200,000 but there is only one government clinic in Section 7. The nearest government hospital for Shah Alam residents is the Tunku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital in Klang, a 45-minute drive when there is no traffic jam. And, it is usually those who are in the lower-income group and have no cars who seek treatment at government hospitals. They have to travel to Klang for treatment either by public transport, which is unpredictable, or by taxis, which is costly.

Ghanasegaran said another proposal was to turn the abandoned complex into the city's transport hub. "So far, Shah Alam does not have a proper bus terminal or station. It is ridiculous for such a huge city with a huge population not to have a proper bus terminal," he said.

Taman Sri Muda resident Pang Chew Kiat, 56, said the abandoned project was located at a strategic location and was ideal for a government hospital or a transport terminal. "With a bus terminal set up there, residents throughout Shah Alam need not worry about irregular bus services any more," he said.

Tuesday March 31, 2009

## **RM500m project to take off in Kampung Baru**

KAMPUNG Baru in Kuala Lumpur can become a new “Golden Triangle” if it is redeveloped with sufficient physical and spiritual infrastructure, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. He said the area needed to be developed not only in terms of housing but also space to generate brisk and high value economy to benefit the people. “God willing, this area can become a comfortable and invigorating place. It will become a new Golden Triangle,” he said when launching the Puncak Baru development project in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Pasar Minggu Kampung Baru yesterday.



**The site: The Puncak Baru project will be built at this location.**

He said the Kampung Baru development should also take into account environmental aspects besides preventing it from becoming an urban slump. On Puncak Baru, Abdullah said it was not the only project in Kampung Baru because other development projects would follow later. “There will be shops and complexes that will be maintained properly,” he said.

The Puncak Baru mixed-development project built on a 1.5ha site belonging to the Kuala Lumpur City Hall takes into account the needs of surrounding residents. It comprises four main components, — a 60-storey condominium tower with 392 residential units, 40 floors of office units, three floors for shopping and businesses as well as an integrated development for the Kampung Baru LRT station and retail space. The RM500mil project will begin in three months and is expected to be completed in four to five years. Abdullah said priority would be given to the Kampung Baru residents to buy the residential units. Also present at the launch was Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique. - Bernama.

Wednesday April 1, 2009

## **Khair Toyo, entourage went on RM1.7mil holiday when MB**

By CHRISTINA TAN

**SHAH ALAM:** Permodalan Negeri Selangor Bhd (PNSB) spent about RM1.7mil for former Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Khir Toyo, wife, children, their maid and the company’s official to tour France, Morocco and United States. PNSB CEO Datin Khairiyah Abu Hassan, who testified before the

Selangor State Assemblys Selcat Committee on Competency, Accountability and Transparency Wednesday, said the trips included two study tours to Disneyland in Paris and Orlando.

Close to RM1mil, including expenses for Dr Khir, his wife Datin Seri Zaharah Kechik, their three children, their maid and a groundlaying, was paid for the tour to Morocco and France. The inquiry also heard that PNSB paid some RM750,000 for the trip to United States, which comprised RM110,000 in suites for Dr Khir and entrance tickets to Disneyland.

Wednesday April 1, 2009

## **Only temporary land titles can be issued, for now: Zambry**

By SAODAH ELIAS

**TAIPING:** Perak Mentri Besar Datuk Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir is actively holding discussions with all the relevant bodies to enable the Chinese and other communities to get titles to their land. He, however, said there were certain issues that needed to be addressed first, especially when they went against the provisions of the National Land Code. In some cases, he added, the state government had issued them with temporary land titles but many still questioned why they were only for 10 years. "They need to understand that that is the law. The provision says that even if the maximum is 60 years, it cannot be issued in one go," he said.

He said the first instalment would be for a maximum of 10, followed by another 10 or 20 or 30, depending on the state government when for renewal came up. He refuted allegations that he was anti-Chinese and had never tried to prevent the community from getting titles to their land. The land issue is one of many raised by the opposition in their campaign rounds for the Bukit Gantang by-election. On promises made by the previous government to issue permanent land title to various quarters, Zambry said he did not know how they had planned to implement them as they were against the provisions under the National Land Code.

"They forgot about the NLC. Although the state and mentris besar have certain power over land matters, when it come to policy matters, it must be agreed by all states. "In this case, if Perak wants to do it, it must also be implemented by other states. "Why did Penang, Kelantan, Kedah or Selangor not want to do it too? So this is a policy matter that must be clarified," he added.

Wednesday April 1, 2009

## **Flat rate on timber royalty in Sarawak**

**KUCHING:** The state government has fixed a flat rate of RM50 royalty on all timber with a diameter of 30cm and above this year. The rate is a RM15 reduction from the RM65 fixed by the state Forest Department four months ago following an appeal by the Sarawak Timber



Association. However, the rates will be revised to RM55 next year and RM65 in 2011. Association chairman Datuk Wong Kie Yik, however, said the government had turned down the association's appeal for a 50% discount on royalty for timber extracted from agri-conversion areas and also for timber with diameters of between 30cm and 40cm. Speaking at the association annual general meeting at Wisma STA here yesterday, Wong urged the Federal Government to exempt the industry from the doubling of levy on foreign workers.

The Government has proposed the higher levy under the second economic stimulus package so as to reduce the number of migrant workers. "Foreign workers are still badly needed in the timber industry as it has been described as a dirty, dusty and dangerous industry which does not appeal to the locals," Wong added.

He said if the Government did not review the levy decision, the industry would be seriously disadvantaged and not be able to meet the government's target of RM53bil in export earnings by 2020. He also said the association was drafting guidelines on environmental management in lieu of conducting environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies for logging in re-entry areas (logged-over forests) and planted forests. "The guidelines are not aimed at changing the current laws and regulations but rather to allow timber operators to carry out environmental protection and management more efficiently."

**Wednesday April 1, 2009**

## **Tender panels revamp**

**By ELAN PERUMAL**

IN a bid to eradicate corruption at the local government level, the Selangor government has decided to allow politicians to be members of the local council tender committees which previously comprised only local government officials. Similarly, senior civil servants will be appointed to the local government good governance and audit committees, previously comprising only politicians as members.

When the Pakatan Rakyat first took control of the Selangor government following the 12th general election in March last year, it was decided that politicians should be barred from being members of the tender committees which decide on the tender bids at local government level. Currently only local government officials such as the council heads, council secretary and heads of departments sit on the tender committees.

According to state local government committee chairman Ronnie Liu, the state administration has decided to revamp the set up to allow a good mix of politicians and civil servants in the tender committees and the good governance and audit committees. Liu said the proposal was aimed at ensuring the committees were able to carry out their duties effectively. He said under the current system, the check and balance process was being done from outside.

“We will be able to be more transparent by having politicians inside the tender committee. Likewise, it will be good to have senior civil servants sit in the good governance and audit committee as their input will be valuable,” Liu told *StarMetro*.

He said in this way, possible wrongdoings could be prevented from within even before a decision was made. “It is always hard to rectify a wrongdoing once it has been committed,” Liu said. He said the proposal to revamp the committees should not be perceived as a failure of the existing system.

Liu said the state was open to new ideas and had been listening to the views from the people and from various quarters. He said the local council finance committee, which was composed of both politicians and officers, would not be revamped. “We want to continuously improve and are willing to make changes to any existing system if there is a need to do so,” Liu said,

“We have been trying out many new things over the last 12 months and we will not hesitate to do so in the future,” he said.

Liu said the proposal to revamp the two committees would be discussed at the state executive council meeting tomorrow.

**Thursday April 2, 2009**

### **Cabinet to tap more info on water tariff**

KUALA LUMPUR: The Cabinet has asked the Energy, Water and Communication Ministry for more information on the water tariff adjustment for Selangor, Putrajaya and the Federal Territory. In a press statement, the ministry said further details were needed to refine the recommendation it proposed before a final decision on the tariff is made. In a related development, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said the state would seek legal recourse if water concessionaires increased tariffs. However, he said it would be the last resort as he hoped the state and the concessionaires could arrive at an agreement.

Khalid, who spoke to reporters after presenting cash gifts to SPM top achievers at the state secretariat building, said this suggestion had been conveyed to Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor. He said the state had also written to Shaziman requesting that the discussion among the concessionaires — Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd, Syarikat Pengeluar Air Selangor Sdn Bhd, Konsortium Abass Sdn Bhd, the Federal Government and the state be continued.

Thursday April 2, 2009

### **RM1mil spent on Khir's trip to France, Morocco**

SHAH ALAM: Permodalan Negri Selangor Bhd (PNSB) spent almost RM1mil for a trip to France and Morocco taken by former Selangor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo and his entourage in 2004. The entourage included his wife Datin Seri Zaharah Kechik, their three children and Indonesian maid. PNSB chief executive officer Datin Khairiyah Abu Hassan revealed this at the Special Select Committee on Competence, Accountability and Transparency (Selcat) inquiry yesterday. She said that among others, RM81,723 was spent on Dr Khir, RM366,000 on a recce team which went earlier to prepare for the trip and RM2,300 for an economy class ticket for the maid.

PNSB also paid an additional RM9,000 for Dr Khir and his family's accommodation during a four-day transit in Dubai. The inquiry heard that PNSB paid RM750,000 for Dr Khir's trip to the United States in December 2007, which included tickets to Orlando Disneyland. An additional RM110,000 was spent on Dr Khir's seven-night stay at a hotel suite in Honolulu, Hawaii. Dr Khir and his family also flew first class, said Khairiyah, adding that the entourage visited Miami Beach, Los Angeles and the Kennedy Space Center. On why the trips were conducted during the school holidays, Khairiyah said Dr Khir, then PNSB chairman, had fixed the dates. Selcat chairman Teng Chang Khim said a police report may be lodged against Dr Khir and Zaharah for failing to attend the inquiry.

Zaharah was the head of the now defunct Wives of Selangor State Assemblymen and MPs Charity and Welfare Organisation (Balkis), which is being investigated for various financial discrepancies. As far as the Contempt of House Act 2008 is concerned, Teng said anyone violating the Act could be prosecuted with the Attorney-General's consent. He added that Dr Khir may be referred to the State Assembly's Privileges Committee for further action.

Thursday April 2, 2009

### **16,000 licences issued to fishermen**

A TOTAL of 16,000 new fishing licences have been issued since October last year to fishermen in the country who use sampans. Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said that of the number, 400 were from Kuala Sepetang near Taiping. "So far we have processed 400 applications. God willing, we will approve 100 more new licences by next week," he told reporters after launching the state level Veterinary Month celebration at Bukit Gantang near Taiping on Tuesday. Mustapa stressed that the approvals were not related to the upcoming by-elections. "It is to legalise the fishermen who had been fishing for years without a licence," he added. He noted that with the licences, the fishermen were now qualified to obtain incentives allocated for them. Among the incentives are diesel subsidy and incentives for their catch.

Friday April 3, 2009

## **RM2m for Socso scheme to help accident victims**

By SIMON KHOO [simonkhoo@thestar.com.my](mailto:simonkhoo@thestar.com.my)

TEMERLOH: The Social Security Organisation (Socso) has allocated RM2mil for a scheme to help Socso contributors find re-employment in the private and public sectors if they suffer from physical disabilities in work-related accidents. Socso board member Abdul Halim Mansor said that all Socso branches nationwide had been given instructions to prepare for the scheme.

Abdul Halim said the Socso office in Kuala Lumpur would implement the scheme first before it was adopted in other states. "The affected contributors will be given physical and skills training in selected fields for them to regain employment. "To expedite its success, Socso is negotiating with the Government and the private sector," he said after presenting benefits and orthopaedic equipment to 16 contributors at the Socso office here recently. Also present was state Socso director Yusoff Ngah.

Abdul Halim said that Socso would introduce a medical check-up scheme for workers aged below 35 years to ensure they were in good health. He said records showed that there were four million Socso contributors registered in that age bracket. "The medical check-up is important to ensure they contribute to society with quality in a productive manner," he said, adding that the cost would be borne entirely by Socso.

On Socso benefits, Abdul Halim said that Socso paid out a total of RM5.9mil in benefits to 2,000 contributors in Pahang last year. He said the bulk of the benefits were for contributors in Temerloh and Bentong involved in work-related accidents, and each district received RM1.8mil.

"For the whole of last year, Socso collected RM555,589.95 from 6,798 employers in Temerloh," he said, adding that members of the public should continue to contribute to Socso as it could lessen their burdens under various schemes, in the case of an accident. He said, despite the economic situation, Socso would continue to pay benefits to deserving contributors with the Government's support

Friday April 3, 2009

## **Four stars for MPK**

By ROSLINA MOHAMAD

KUANTAN: Kuantan Municipal Council (MPK) has become the first local authority in the east coast to obtain four-star rating in a grading system to check the public delivery system of the country's local authorities. At national level, MPK is placed fourth out of 10 local authorities awarded with the same rating. No local authority has qualified for the five-star rating.

MPK president Datuk Azizan Ahmad ascribed the recognition to the hard work of the council's 1,200 staff members, as there were 352 indicators the local authority had to meet. It was a tall order but MPK managed to garner 80.25 marks, he said.

"Four criteria were used to evaluate the public delivery system with the main ones being core services (35%) and management (30%). "Others included customer management (15%), community participation (10%) and public perception (10%)," he told his staff during a luncheon to mark the achievement at Sukpa Indoor Stadium here on Tuesday.

The luncheon also served as a farewell for MPK secretary Mohamad Zainudin Idris, who retired after serving the council for 25 years. Azizan reminded the staff not to be complacent as it would be a challenge to maintain the rating and improve standards and attain five-star rating. He said the ranking would be valid until Dec 31 next year, before a new evaluation was conducted. "I stress the importance of upholding integrity and discipline to meet the five-star rating target," he said.

The rating system was started last year by the Housing and Local Government Ministry involving 98 local authorities from the 144 nationwide. According to Local Government Department official website, only 10 local authorities had obtained the four-star rating.

They were Kuala Lumpur City Hall (84.50), Subang Jaya Municipal Council (84.40), Petaling Jaya City Hall (80.50), MPK (80.25), Shah Alam City Hall (80.10), Johor Baru City Hall (79.40), Alor Gajah Municipal Council (77.45), Malacca City Hall (77.40), Klang Municipal Council (76.20) and Manjung Municipal Council (76.10).

**Monday April 6, 2009**

### **NRD mobile units to visit more remote areas**

LUBOK ANTU (Sarawak): National Registration Department mobile units must step up their visits to remote areas to register those without birth certificates and identity cards, said Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar. At the same time, he urged rural folk to come forward and register if they had not done so. "People in rural areas probably don't think about the need for personal documents. We need to raise awareness that documents are important proof that we are Malaysian citizens," he said.

"So we appeal to people to come forward and register. The later they register births, the more difficult it will be for us to trace their records." For those living in remote or isolated areas, he said the department would send its mobile units to conduct registration exercises.

Syed Hamid was speaking to reporters after presenting birth certificates to 38 recipients from the Lubok Antu district at Rumah Johnson, Kaong Ili, here yesterday. Since being set up in 2004, the mobile units have received 19,447 applications in 94 operations.

Meanwhile, Awa Jimbau, from Nanga Mengkak in the remote Engkari district, was happy to finally receive her birth certificate. "All my five children have birth certificates and I'm glad I now have mine," she said, adding that she applied for it five months ago when a mobile unit visited her longhouse. Saloma Gua, from Rumah Nuya Grunggang, was another pleased recipient. "I feel relieved that I now have a birth certificate," the 39-year-old said.

Monday April 6, 2009

## **State to go after civil servants who smoke in public**

THE Penang Government, in a bid to curb smoking, will beef up enforcement against smokers in public places, beginning with civil servants in government departments and agencies. State Health, Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh said enforcement officers from the state Health Department would make more frequent rounds at these premises as well as other gazetted public places. "The Federal Government has gazetted all government offices, including hospitals, police stations and fire departments, as smoke-free zones. "So, it is only proper for us to enforce the gazette to promote a healthier environment in Penang," he said in an interview yesterday.

He said it would be highly embarrassing if civil servants themselves, especially those wearing official uniforms, were caught violating the ruling. Under the Tobacco Control Regulations 2004, those found guilty of smoking in prohibited areas could be fined up to RM500. For cases brought to court, they could be fined up to RM10,000 or jailed two years upon conviction.

Phee said the state would soon extend its smoke-free zones to cover recreation areas, such as Penang Hill, the Penang Botanical Gardens, Mengkuang Dam, Teluk Bahang Dam, the Penang National Park in Pantai Acheh and the Bukit Panchor State Park. The zones, he said, would also be extended to Hutan Lipur Bukit Penara in Balik Pulau, Hutan Lipur Air Itam Dalam in Sungai Dua, Hutan Lipur Malindo in Teluk Bahang, Hutan Lipur Relau and Hutan Lipur Bukit Mertajam.

He said smoke-free zones in the state included shopping malls, entertainment outlets (excluding pubs and nightclubs), hospitals, lifts, public toilets, air-conditioned public areas like cinemas, restaurants, public vehicles, bus stops, taxi stands and government premises. Phee said the state would talk to operators of *nasi kandar* restaurants, coffee shops and nightspots to convince them to declare their premises smoke-free areas as well. "The police will also take action against underage youths who smoke," he said.

Those under 18 years caught smoking could be fined up to RM1,000 while those caught selling them cigarettes could be fined up to RM10,000 or jailed up to two years.

Tuesday April 7, 2009

## **Selangor wants Balkis funds to be returned**

SHAH ALAM: The Selangor government wants funds collected by the now defunct Wives of Selangor Assemblymen and MPs Welfare and Charity Organisation (Balkis) to be returned to the state. Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim's political secretary, Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, said the state had written to the Malaysian Insolvency Department (MID) regarding the RM9.9mil that was in the association's coffers when it was deregistered last year. The funds are currently being held by the MID.

"We would like to stress that the Selangor government has a right over the funds considering that most of the money was donated by the state and its agencies," Nik Nazmi said in a statement yesterday. When contacted, Nik Nazmi said the state government had engaged a lawyer to write to the MID regarding the funds. Meanwhile, former Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo said Balkis was a non-governmental organisation and all donated money belonged to the NGO.

Tuesday April 7, 2009

## **Patients forced to sleep in corridors of Klang's hospital**

KLANG: The Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital here is in critical condition as overcrowding has caused unhappiness among patients, some of whom have been forced to sleep in corridors. Family members have expressed concern over the situation as the overcrowding and shortage of staff could jeopardise the well-being of those warded. Klang MCA division chief Datuk Teh Kim Poo, who visited the hospital yesterday, said there was an urgent need to find an immediate solution to counter this problem which had reached a "critical level".

"Overcrowding could cause infection because of the physical contact between the healthcare workers and patients. At the same time the nurses are overburdened with work and they could burn out," he said.

Teh added that he would discuss the matter with Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai on the proposed new wing that could accommodate 120 beds. "We will also get the ministry's and private agencies' help to provide ambulances and medical equipment for the hospital," he said.

Hospital director Dr Ghazali Hasni Md Hassan said overcrowding was unavoidable as the hospital accepted patients not only from Klang but also Sabak Bernam, Tanjung Karang, Banting and even Shah Alam. "We are discharging some patients early so that they can recuperate at home," he said.

Dr Ghazali said the hospital also had a day-care ward where patients who had minor surgeries were discharged within the same day. "Our children's wards have only 138 beds but we take in 152 patients and our maternity ward delivers one baby every two hours," he added.

Wednesday April 8, 2009

## Shameful landmarks along busy Port Klang street

Story and photo by ELAN PERUMAL

A BLOCK of shophouses at Jalan Kem in Port Klang left abandoned after a fire three years ago has been giving the neighbourhood business operators and residents the jitters. Although it has been three years since the shophouses were razed, there has been no sign of any remedial work being done by the authorities. The deplorable condition of the burnt shophouses along Jalan Kem, one of the more popular and busy streets in the port town, is surely a blot on its image. The business operators and residents claim that shady characters such as drug addicts were frequenting the place. At the same time, a row of vacant shophouses across the road at Seri Berambang is also causing a lot of concern for the residents, especially those living at the Seri Berambang low-cost flats.



**Eyesore: The block of shophouses that were razed three years ago on Jalan Kem.**

The structural remains of the Seri Berambang shophouses, completed about five years ago, are rotting away and it has the look of a war-torn building, with overgrown creepers and lalang inside and around it. The presence of a vacant land next to the building resembles a mini jungle as it is filled with wild trees and bushes have contributed to the unpleasant sight. This vacant lot was earlier occupied by a row of shops that had been demolished by the authorities following a fire.

Saify Store operator Hussein Sharaf Ally, 58, said the abandoned building and the vacant land had marred the image of the area. He said this was one of the most important streets in the town as an elevated highway linking the port to Kuala Lumpur and West Port was running over the road. "Jalan Kem is a historical street and I have been operating my shop in this area for about 40 years," he said.

Hussein said that the authorities should demolish the building and clear the vacant land. A trader who identified himself only as Ong blames the unsightly building for the poor business in the area. He agrees with Hussein that the building should be demolished and suggested that a new complex be built in its place to give a new lease of commercial life to the area. "Our business has dwindled over the years due to many factors and we don't want to lose more of our customers who are apparently put off by the wretched sight of the abandoned shophouses," Ong said.

According to S. Velu, 57, who stays in a flat opposite the building, the authorities have not done anything to the building since the fire three years ago. He also said that the building should be



demolished as its site was a potential aedes breeding ground. “We don’t feel safe in such a situation, especially with the high number of dengue cases in our area in recent years,” he said. When contacted, Klang Municipal Council (MPK) public relations director Norafizah Mahfuz said that the local authority would investigate the complaint before taking the necessary action.

Wednesday April 8, 2009

## **Raja Mahadi Fort falling apart**

**By EDWARD RAJENDRA**

THE Raja Mahadi Fort, an impressive landmark next to the Klang Municipal Council (MPK) in Klang, is in urgent need of reconstruction as the pillars to the entrance are crumbling. Councillor Lim Lip Suan said the entrance should be reconstructed urgently as it is a tourist attraction and also because the fort’s entrance depicted the councils emblem. Klang has a number of tourist spots like the oldest Chinese Kwan Yin temple, Our Lady of Lourdes Church built in 1926, the Sultan Sulaiman Mosque, Kota Bridge and the Raja Mahadi Fort.



**Of historical value: Lim at the entrance of the Raja Mahadi Fort that is in need of urgent reconstruction.**

Lim said he would highlight the matter to MPK’s Culture and Tourism committee to ensure that the monument is preserved for future generations. The 141-year-old earth fort or what remains of it is situated at Bukit Kota. Built by Raja Mahadi as a defensive fortification against Raja Abdullah (his rival in a power struggle for the control of Klang district), the earth fort was used as a vantage point to look out for enemy ships that sailed through to Pangkalan Batu, a barter trade port. This fort has withstood the onslaught of time since the fight between the Malay sultanates more than 100 years ago.