

Prime Minister works out specifics on national Key Result Areas

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS and DHARMENDER SINGH

PUTRAJAYA: Twenty-four hours after detailing the specifics of his national Key Result Areas (KRAs), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak yesterday chaired back-to-back meetings with five lead ministers assigned to oversee the smooth implementation of each area. The sessions, each lasting 30 minutes, began at 9.15am where he chaired five delivery taskforce (DTF) meetings — on improving public transportation, reducing crime, combating corruption, improving rural infrastructure and raising the living standard of the poor.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon and Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Sidek Hassan for each meeting with the respective lead minister — Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, Datuk Shapie Apdal and Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil. The meeting with the delivery taskforce on affordable and quality education was not held as its lead minister Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is in Uganda to attend the 19th Global Smart Partnership Dialogue 2009.

In his opening address, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of delivery and ensuring that the *rakyat* would benefit from efforts taken by the Government under the national KRA programmes. On Monday, Najib announced details of the national KRAs, including efforts to reduce street crimes by 20% by the end of next year, setting up of special courts for the purposes, updating policies, procedures and enforcement in combating corruption and ensuring all pupils are able to read, write and count when they enter Year Four by end of 2012.

The KRAs, among others, also promised the paying out of welfare cash aid on the first day of each month from next January, building 1,500km roads in Sabah and Sarawak, boosting water supply coverage to 90% and electricity coverage to 95% in the two states by 2012 and adding 35 sets of four-car trains to operate on the Kelana Jaya LRT line by the end of 2012.

Wednesday July 29, 2009

Kong Choy to testify before PAC over PKFZ issue today

By LEE YUK PENG

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Transport Minister Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy is scheduled to appear before the hearing held by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) today on its probe into the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project. PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid confirmed that Chan, the former MCA deputy president, is to testify before PAC. "Only one witness was called for today's meeting to be held at Parliament building," said Azmi.

On July 15, Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik, who was Transport Minister from 1986 to 2003, testified before PAC. It was reported that Azmi had revealed to the press that Dr Ling had testified to signing the letter of support for the PKFZ project on the advice of the ministry's secretary-general and its legal adviser at that time. Dr Ling, said to be one of two former Transport Ministers who would be interviewed over the PKFZ issue, was questioned for two hours from 11.15am.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat also testified before PAC on July 16. It was reported that he did not reveal the names of those involved in PKFZ. Chan took over the portfolio from Dr Ling between July 1, 2003 to March 18 last year. He was succeeded by Ong. PKFZ, a transshipment hub built on a 405ha site in Port Klang which also houses warehouses, office blocks and a four-star hotel, became a subject of controversy after it was exposed that the development cost for it had ballooned from RM2.5bil to RM4.6bil.

Wednesday July 29, 2009

Government urged to give helping hand to boost tourism industry

PETALING JAYA: Business strategies and rescue policies need to be implemented immediately to boost the inbound tourism industry during the current economic slowdown. Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association president Datuk Albert S. S. Tan said the economic slowdown had adversely affected the sales of most travel agents involved with domestic and inbound tourism. "Unless the Government and the Tourism Ministry take immediate steps by implementing rescue policies, these agents are in danger of going out of business due to overheads and operating losses," he said yesterday.

Commercial banks, he added, should be encouraged to extend special facilities that could ease cash flow and also provide a more amenable repayment schemes. On security, Tan said deploying more police personnel in high tourist density areas would help prevent street crime such as snatch thefts and overcome tourist's negative perceptions on crime rates in Malaysia.

Wednesday July 29, 2009

Curious case of a bridge to nowhere

By GEETHA KRISHNAN



TOURISTS to Putrajaya are told that the garden city, which is also the federal administrative capital, has eight bridges. There has, however, always been curiosity over the ninth bridge in Precinct 4. The structure was indeed built as a bridge but it was intended for the delayed Putrajaya Monorail project. Described as the missing link in the developing public transport network in Putrajaya, the project has been hanging in the balance since 2004 when it hit a snag due to federal budget constraints.



Sill in the works: A sign for one of the 26 stops drawn up for the Putrajaya Monorail network outside the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.

The network blueprint was to have two monorail lines, 13.2km for Line 1 and 6.8km for Line 2. What is ready is Phase 1 with a 9km track and a 4km underground tunnel with seven stops. The planned 26 stops included the Putra Mosque, the Education Ministry, Putrajaya Hospital, the Putrajaya International Convention Centre, the Alamanda Shopping Centre and Precincts 9 and 14.

Seven park-and-ride facilities were designed to complement the monorail service to allow public servants and visitors to travel freely within Putrajaya. The monorail was also meant to integrate with the Express Rail Link (ERL) service running from KL Sentral in Kuala Lumpur to the KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang. In a recent interview with *StarMetro*, Federal Territories Minister Senator Raja Datuk Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin said: "There will be a need for it in the future, especially when Putrajaya develops further," but added that it would depend on the economy recovering.

Initial costs were estimated at RM400mil but this was five years ago. With the bridge, elevated track and tunnel slowly succumbing to the ravages of time and weather, the initial cost will balloon but the new figure has yet to be released.



Sill in the works: A sign for one of the 26 stops drawn up for the Putrajaya Monorail network outside the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.

Contents of the feasibility report prepared by an independent consultant which conducted a three-month study last year remain off limits while the population count in Putrajaya is at 55,000 and rising. Perbadanan Putrajaya (PPj) president Tan Sri Samsudin Osman has been a strong advocate for the project and has repeatedly urged the government to reconsider its move to delay the project. "Putrajaya needs a world-class public transportation system with foreign missions set to open their doors here. "There is also an international school," he said, adding that 18 foreign missions have inked agreements with PPj for land parcels.

Most of the civil servants interviewed declined to give their names but felt that the monorail system would benefit Putrajaya in the long run as it was the new federal administrative capital. By banking on the monorail and bus network in its masterplan, Putrajaya offers limited parking space to reduce the number of cars on its roads. The Core Island where the Palace of Justice is based alongside several ministries such as Finance, Entrepreneurial and Cooperative Development, Agriculture and Agro-based Industries and Federal Territories only offers 30% parking space. In lieu of the monorail situation, more parking spaces have been opened up.

The new 1,403-bay facility near the Express Rail Link (ERL) station in Precinct 7 complements the acute shortage at the P&R facility in Precinct 1. More bays will also be available in Precincts 13 and 14. PPj has also made plans to beef up its bus service with 104 more buses bought with the RM70mil allocation under the 9th Malaysia Plan. A growing population and residential precincts that are either fully developed or at an advanced stage of development will benefit from this.

Wednesday July 29, 2009

Moves to improve corporate governance at PKFZ (Updated)

By TEH ENG HOCK

PUTRAJAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) ad hoc committee on administration and corporate governance has announced eight recommendations to improve the running of PKA and its subsidiary, the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ).

The recommendations are:

- > Restructuring the PKA board composition, where a third will consist of independent non-executive directors
- > Making the CEO or the general manager of PKA and PKFZ more accountable to his respective boards
- > Establishing a supervisory committee on ethics and integrity, headed by an independent non-executive director
- > Strengthening the role of the internal audit department, with an audit committee accountable to the board and not the CEO or the general manager
- > Establishment of a risk management committee
- > Strengthening the role of the tender committee, chaired by an independent director
- > Establishment of business principles of integrity and governance to be adhered to by the management and
- > Adoption of measures to ensure compliance to good governance practices and anti-bribery programme.

The measures were included in the first part of the committee's report, which also examined the governance of the PKA which it found to be "weak." Transparency International Malaysia president Datuk Paul Low, who chaired the committee, released the report on Wednesday. Also present were PKA board chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng.

Low said the second part of the report would be released in stages over the next six months. Citing audit firm PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory Services (PwCAS) review on the project, Low said there were many instances where the general manager bypassed the PKA board. "This lack of submission to the authority of the board not only violates basic practice of accountability in corporate governance but undermined the fiduciary responsibility of the board," he said.

Besides making the management more accountable to the board, the committee also recommended that different individuals hold the position of CEO or general manager for

PKA and PKFZ. Low said the separation of powers was necessary because PKA had a regulatory role while the PKFZ's role was commercial. He said board members of PKA and PKFZ should also be kept independent of each other, although there might be some common directors.

On the independent non-executive directors, he said they cannot be an appointed representative of a governmental agency, a political appointee, a nominee of the Minister, hold an executive position, or connected to a licensee or subsidiary of PKA. Lee said board members would be briefed on the report during a meeting next week, during when they would also decide if they wanted to adopt the committee's recommendations. "Personally, when the Minister agreed to the formation of the committee, it is quite clear he does not want this (PKFZ fiasco) to happen again. We will implement the recommendations of the committee but it is not up to me to decide alone," he said.

Act on it, says Transport Minister

In Putrajaya, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat advised the PKA to act on the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on administration and corporate governance immediately. To ensure that the recommendations are followed through, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat had suggested that the PKA invite a member of Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) to sit on the board for six months. He revealed that the PKA had responded positively to his suggestion. "Among the recommendations that I find particularly interesting in the report are that one-third of the boards of both PKA and PKFZ Sdn Bhd should be made up of independent non-executive directors. "I also welcome the suggestion to have the general manager of PKA be more accountable to the board. The establishment of the supervisory committee on ethics and integrity could also build and strengthen good governance culture at all levels in the organisation," he said.

The ad hoc committee, which was chaired by TI-M president Datuk Paul Low, delivered their report at the Transport Ministry. Ong responded via his blog (www.ongteekeat.net) and called the report "an important milestone" in efforts to adopt international best practices in corporate governance. He said it was important that individuals at all levels in PKA have a sound understanding and awareness about transparency and good governance. "Towards this end, I have advised PKA to conduct two seminars on transparency and accountability – one for the PKA board and senior management officials, and another for all staff of PKA and PKFZ. "We may be starting with baby steps but it represents a giant leap forward in turning the project around," he said.

The committee, set up on June 10, also comprises Malaysian Institute of Accountants immediate past president Nik Mohd Hasyudeen Yusoff, Malaysian Institute of Corporate Governance secretary-general Paul Chan and National Audit Department deputy director Saadatul Nafisah Bashir Ahmad.

Wednesday July 29, 2009

Rightfully, A-G's office should do audit

THE Selangor Government has directed an internal audit on the spending of state allocations by state assemblymen. While it is stated that the objective is an attempt to dispel allegations of misappropriation of funds by some of them, it is also the right step and an important one towards practising accountability and transparency.

The audit should be done by the Office of the Auditor-General as it is one of his specified duties as prescribed in the Audit Act. If a private accounting firm is appointed, it could be perceived that the state government does not have confidence in the expertise and independence of the Auditor-General.

Further, professional fees payable to the private accounting firm could also be perceived as a waste of taxpayers' funds or that the private accounting firm may be more sympathetic to the PKR-led Selangor government. It is heartening to note that the audit team will start its work soon and that its report will be presented to the state within a month, after which it will be made available to the public.

The MACC is also currently in the process of investigating allegations of misappropriation of state funds by seven state assemblymen. Thus, there is a possibility that there may be duplication of audit. The main function of audit is to ensure that public funds are disbursed in accordance with prescribed procedures, approvals and in a manner that is cost-effective and cost-efficient.

It would be interesting to know if leaders in the public and corporate sectors and regulatory authorities are transparent and accountable regarding the disbursement of public/shareholders funds that are allotted to them or under their management. The call for transparency and accountability should only be given to others if those calling for such transparency and accountability are themselves practising these qualities.

It is of greater importance today that the qualities of corporate governance, integrity, ethics and transparency are not only talked about and practised but are also seen to be practised by political and other leaders.

GURSHARAN SINGH,

Kuala Lumpur.

Thursday July 30, 2009

PKFZ and PKA board under fire at two hearings

PUTRAJAYA: Strong criticisms were levelled at the PKFZ management system and the Port Klang Authority board by two separate bodies investigating the transshipment hub for failing to take adequate measures to prevent the “fiasco”. The ad hoc committee on administration and corporate governance set up by the Transport Ministry found that the PKA management did not bother to consult with the board which at the same time did not question such decisions.

The committee, chaired by Transparency International Malaysia president Datuk Paul Low, also recommended the PKA board to implement eight changes to improve its own management and the running of PKFZ. Among the changes was to restructure the PKA board composition, with third to consist of independent non-executive directors.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat reacted by asking PKA to follow the recommendations and also to appoint a member of Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) to sit on the board for six months. The Public Accounts Committee, meanwhile, described the handling of the PKFZ project as incompetent and that there was much for the parliamentary committee to further investigate. Former Transport Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy was quizzed by the PAC yesterday especially over three letters of support for the project.

Thursday July 30, 2009

Incompetence in PKFZ ops, says PAC chief

KUALA LUMPUR: There have been elements of incompetence in the handling of the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ) project, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) said. PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said more investigations were needed before the committee gave a final report to the Government and Parliament before the Dewan Rakyat sits again in October.



Hot issue: Chan (centre) being surrounded by the media after attending the PAC hearing on the PKFZ project at Parliament House yesterday

“Generally, based on the PAC findings on the issue, the running of the PKFZ project was carried out by incompetent people. “This is not our conclusion yet, because we are calling more people for their statements before we can finish the enquiry in the next few months,” he told reporters after questioning former Transport Minister Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy during a hearing on the project at the Parliament House yesterday.

Azmi said the PAC would call Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail on Aug 12. He added that officials and former officials from the ministry, including a former secretary-general, and the directors of the Port Klang Authority board would also be called. Azmi said Chan was questioned mostly on the three letters of support he gave to the PKFZ during his tenure as minister. A fourth letter was given to the PKFZ by former Transport Minister Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik earlier.

Dr Ling had told the PAC earlier that the letter he issued to facilitate the financing of the PKFZ was not tantamount to a government guarantee. Azmi said Chan was asked on how decisions were made, particularly in the approval for the issue of bonds to raise funds for the project. He was also questioned on the significance of the supporting letters which were interpreted as guarantee letters and the rationale for giving them to the Port Klang Authority.

“Chan said they were called supporting letters as agreed by local and Commonwealth legal experts. “The PAC cannot make a conclusion on what the letters should be termed because we are not the body that decides on that matter,” he added.

It was reported that Chan had signed three letters of support during his tenure as minister which allowed the developer, Kuala Dimensi Sdn Bhd, to issue RM2.375bil worth of debt papers to raise funds for the PKFZ project. Azmi said Chan was responsive and cooperative during the enquiry, which he attended although he was unwell. Chan left the meeting at 1.30pm. “I’ve nothing to comment. I’m a retired man,” Chan said.

The former minister arrived at Parliament House at 10.55am, smiled, and greeted the media before entering the enquiry room. He came with several people, one of them believed to be a lawyer. There were also assistants carrying a bag of documents. PAC deputy chairman Dr Tan Seng Giaw said there was a lack of transparency and accountability in the project. “At the moment, we see that the project didn’t adhere to financial procedures. “Chan tried his best to reply to our questions. Some questions he didn’t answer,” he added.

Thursday July 30, 2009

PKFZ: Ong suggests TI-M member to sit on PKA board

PUTRAJAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) has been told to act on the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on administration and corporate governance immediately. To

ensure that the recommendations are followed through, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat had suggested that the PKA invite a member of Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) to sit on the board for six months. He revealed that the PKA had responded positively to his suggestion. "Among the recommendations that I find particularly interesting in the report are that one-third of the board of directors of both PKA and PKFZ Sdn Bhd should be made up of independent non-executive directors. "I also welcomed suggestions to have the general manager of the PKA be more accountable to the board. The establishment of the supervisory committee on ethics and integrity could also build and strengthen good governance culture at all levels in the organisation," he said.

The ad hoc committee, which was chaired by TI-M president Datuk Paul Low, delivered its report at the Transport Ministry. Ong responded via his blog (www.ongteekeat.net) and called the report "an important milestone" in efforts to adopt the international best practices in corporate governance. He said it was important that individuals at the PKA have a sound understanding and awareness about transparency and good governance. "I have advised PKA to conduct two seminars on transparency and accountability – one for the PKA board and senior management officials, and another for all staff of the PKA and PKFZ. "We may be starting with baby steps but it represents a giant leap forward in turning the project around," he said.

The committee, set up on June 10, also comprises Malaysian Institute of Accountants immediate past president Nik Mohd Hasyudeen Yusoff, Malaysian Institute of Corporate Governance secretary-general Paul Chan and National Audit Department deputy director Saadatul Nafisah Bashir Ahmad.

Thursday July 30, 2009

Panel recommends eight steps for good governance

By TEH ENG HOCK

 [Improving corporate governance of PKFZ](#)

PUTRAJAYA: The Port Klang Authority (PKA) ad hoc committee on administration and corporate governance has announced eight recommendations to improve the running of PKA and its subsidiary, the Port Klang Free Zone (PKFZ).



Interest generated: Lee (second from right) looking at a copy of the administration and corporate governance report for part one together with Low while other ad hoc committee members Nik Mohd Hasyudeen (left) and Paul W. Chan look on.

The recommendations are:

- > Restructuring the PKA board composition, where a third will consist of independent non-executive directors;
- > Making the CEO or the general manager of PKA and PKFZ more accountable to the respective boards;
- > Establishing a supervisory committee on ethics and integrity, headed by an independent non-executive director;
- > Strengthening the role of the internal audit department, with an audit committee accountable to the board and not the CEO or the general manager;
- > Establishment of a risk management committee;
- > Strengthening the role of the tender committee, chaired by an independent director;
- > Establishment of business principles of integrity and governance to be adhered to by the management; and
- > Adoption of measures to ensure compliance with good governance practices and anti-bribery programme.

The measures were included in the first part of the committee's report, which also examined the governance of the PKA which was found to be "weak". Transparency International Malaysia president Datuk Paul Low, who chaired the committee, re-leased the report yesterday. Also present were PKA board chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng.

Low said the second part of the report would be released in stages over the next six months. Citing audit firm PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory Services (PwCAS)'s review on the project, Low said there were many instances where the general manager bypassed the

PKA board. "This lack of submission to the authority of the board not only violated the basic practice of accountability in corporate governance but undermined the fiduciary responsibility of the board," he said.

Besides making the management more accountable to the board, the committee also recommended that different individuals hold the position of CEO or general manager for PKA and PKFZ. Low said the separation of powers was necessary because PKA had a regulatory role while the PKFZ's role was commercial. He said "the CEO or GM for PKA ought to be nominated or appointed by the board and the minister to approve it only on the recommendation by the board". He said PKA and PKFZ board members should also be kept independent of each other, although there might be some common directors.

On the independent non-executive directors, he said they could not be an appointed representative of a governmental agency, a political appointee, a nominee of the minister, or hold an executive position or be connected to a licensee or subsidiary of PKA. Lee said board members would be briefed on the report during a meeting next week where they would also decide if they wanted to adopt the committee's recommendations. "Personally, when the minister agreed to the formation of the committee, it was quite clear he did not want this (PKFZ fiasco) to happen again. We will implement the recommendations of the committee but it is not up to me to decide," he said.

Friday July 31, 2009

Four councillors to sit on MBSA tender board

FOUR councillors will sit on the Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) tender board this term. Last year, the committee consisted of only senior staff of the city council. The councillors representing the PKR, DAP, PAS and an NGO will be teaming up with the previous team comprising the mayor, deputy mayor, finance department director, the council legal adviser and a technical officer. The councillors have yet to be named. Mayor Mazalan Md Noor said this after chairing the city council's full board meeting yesterday. "Having councillors in the committee will enable a check and balance before any decision is made," he said.

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 decides on the tender bids at the local government level. However, the decision was reverted to the earlier system, thus allowing councillors, who are also party members to be part of the decision makers involving tender bidding within the council jurisdiction area. Among the responsibilities of the tender board is to weigh and give approval to tender bids involving contract worth RM500,000 and above.

Friday July 31, 2009

MBPJ finding ways to reduce its expenditure

THE PETALING Jaya City Council (MBPJ) is looking at ways to reduce its expenditure for the year 2010. At present all departments in the council have submitted their budget requirements and this amounts to RM330.07mil. Petaling Jaya mayor Datuk Roslan Sakiman said during the full board meeting yesterday that due to the current economic slow-down, the council expects to receive only about RM250mil. "We are now looking at various ways to reduce spending," he said.

He added that the heads of department and councillors would be meeting next week to examine the proposed budget thoroughly. Roslan said the budget would be based on the "zero based budget" strategy whereby all projects would start with a new budget. As for the final report on the Jaya Supermarket collapse which occurred on May 28, he said the council had yet to receive anything from Ikram. The full-board meeting also included the three new councillors Terence Tan, Tiong Boon Keong and R. Selvarajan.

Friday July 31, 2009

October completion for 49 Kulaijaya projects

JOHOR BARU: All 49 projects managed by the Kulaijaya Municipal Council that received allocations from the Housing and Local Government Ministry are expected to be completed by October this year. Council president Ismail Karim said that half of the projects were completed while the rest were expected to follow suit after Hari Raya Aidilfitri. He said the projects covered drainage systems, roads, street lights and facilities such as playgrounds and multipurpose halls using funds allocated last year.

The drainage system has been in dire need of improvement since the end of 2006 when the Batu 21 area was badly hit by floods. "The projects were made possible by allocations from the ministry amounting to RM12.5mil. "The council collected RM44mil in revenue in 2008 but this was not enough for us to carry out the projects," he said at a briefing for Kulai MP Tan Sri Ong Ka Ting during his visit to the council office in Kulaijaya here on Tuesday.

The projects are in preparation for Kulaijaya becoming a transportation hub for the southern region after Senai International Airport is upgraded. Ong said his ministry would allocate an additional RM2.2mil for the development of nine new villages in his constituency.

Friday July 31, 2009

Bank Negara: Increase in SME loans signals better economic climate

By DAVID TAN

Growth signals improving economic climate, says Bank Negara official

GEORGE TOWN: The number of loan applications from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country grew by about 30% in the second quarter this year compared with the preceding quarter. In terms of outstanding loans in the SME segment, there was a 2.9% decline to RM118bil in the second quarter from RM125bil in the first quarter, said Bank Negara corporate communications department director Abu Hassan Alshari Yahaya. "This increase in loan applications and decrease in outstanding loans reflect the improving economic climate in the country," he said after a dialogue session between Bank Negara and financial institutions, business chambers and associations. Under the Bank Negara SMEs Assistance Guarantee Scheme, some RM850mil had been approved for 4,189 SMEs to date, he said, adding that the approval rate was 82%. Under the Federal government's RM5bil working capital guarantee scheme, about RM3.4bil had to date been disbursed to 2,681 SMEs, he said. "Also under the Federal government's RM5bil industry restructuring financing scheme, some 73 companies have received RM230mil," Abu Hassan said.

In line with Bank Negara's efforts to improve customer relations, it is establishing an information and services advice walk-in centre (BNMLINK) at all its branches in Penang, Johor Baru, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and Kuala Trengganu. On complaints from SMEs, Bank Negara received a total of 433 complaints in the first six months of the year, compared with 317 a year ago. "Some 302 complaints were related to accessing finance. Some 77%, or 232 cases, were effectively resolved. Of this 232 cases, 45% were resolved in favour of the customers, resulting in banks agreeing to lower instalment payments or extending the repayment tenure," Abu Hassan said.

On access to financing for households and retail customers, for the January to June period, Bank Negara received 256 complaints, of which 65%, or 166 cases, have been resolved. "Of the cases resolved, 65% were resolved in favour of the customers," he said. Abu Hassan added that overall, the number of consumers seeking information and assistance had increased. "Some 70,447 consumers sought assistance from the central bank in 2007. This doubled to 139,258 in 2008 and for the first half of 2009, we have seen a 78% increase in the number of consumers served compared with the corresponding period in 2008. "Assistance provided by Bank Negara includes checking of individuals' credit status and reports, and classification on fees and charges," he said.