



Thursday April 9, 2009

Perak DOE: We have nothing to hide

By CHRISTINA KOH

IPOH: The Perak Department of Environment (DOE) will cooperate with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission if it decides to investigate a report over alleged clearing of a 2,000ha area in Pondok Tanjung for a Boer goat-rearing project. State DOE director Abu Hasan Mohd Isa said they had nothing to hide and would open their books to the commission. The Perak Environment Association lodged a report with the commission on Tuesday over the clearing of the land, accusing DOE of refusing to take action against the Veterinary Services Department for allegedly carrying out logging activities at de-gazetted parts of the forest reserve near Taiping. "I really don't understand what the Perak Environment Association is trying to do. All these allegations are nonsense," he said.

The association also took DOE to task for supposedly failing to get an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report before approving the project. Abu Hasan said an EIA report was unnecessary for the project because it was not a hilly region and that the size of the project did not require it. "The Veterinary Services Department also did not log the area at all. When they came in last year the land was already cleared," he said, adding that he explained all of this during a meeting chaired by Public Complaints Bureau chairman Senator T. Murugiah earlier this year. "He was satisfied with the reasons I gave. So, what is the fuss about now? As far as I am concerned, the case is closed," he added.

Association president Abdul Rahman Said Alli had condemned the clearing of trees to make way for the project.

Thursday April 9, 2009

Ultimatum for billboard owners

By FAZLEENA AZIZ

THE Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has given owners three months to clarify the legal status of their billboards or it will demolish them. KL mayor Datuk Ahmad Fuad Ismail told a press conference yesterday that all billboard owners have to confirm the legal status of their advertisements with the DBKL. At present, there are 1,109 billboards in the city, including 127

identified as illegal billboards. The DBKL is taking proactive measures to curb the mushrooming of billboards around the city.



Billboards aplenty: A file picture of billboards located along the Kuala Lumpur side of the Sprint Highway

Its strategy involves various aspects, including licensing, location, land, submission of planning and visual. “We want the billboard owners to come forward and show us their contracts. We will still give some time until their expiry date,” Fuad said.

Fuad said that from the discussion with the Housing and Local Government Ministry, they have concluded that the location, design and visual were important factors to be considered when approving a billboard. “Safety is a top priority. We do not want a billboard to be too close to the road and distract drivers. “The aesthetic value is also a great concern and we do not want billboards to dominate the city’s look,” he said.

Fuad said that the DBKL was aware of the concerns raised by the people and was taking immediate action to resolve the matter. He said the DBKL would take action on those who failed to adhere to the rules. Housing and Local Government Ministry town and country planning director-general Datuk Mohd Fadzil Mohd Khir, who was present at the press conference, explained some of the stipulated guidelines pertaining to erecting a billboard

Friday April 10, 2009

Najib’s seven new ministers

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak’s new and trimmed down Cabinet consists of 29 ministers in 25 ministries. The new Cabinet is smaller than his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s 32 ministers and 27 ministries. Najib dropped eight ministers and appointed seven new faces. Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who won the Umno deputy presidency in last month’s party elections, is the new Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister.

Najib, who took his oath of office as Prime Minister on April 3, retained the Finance portfolio. The Umno president also reduced the number of party ministers from 22 to 19; while other component parties held on to their previous numbers – except for Gerakan. Its president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon joined Najib’s team as a Minister. In the previous Cabinet line-up, there was no minister from Dr Koh’s party.

Najib abolished two ministries – Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development; and Energy, Water and Communications. Instead, he set up a new ministry, Energy, Green Technology and Water. He also made a minister in the Prime Minister's Department responsible for unity and performance management.

Dr Koh, who is among the seven new faces, is the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Unity and Performance Management. Malaysian Armed Forces' Religious Corp Director Maj-Gen Datuk Jamil Khir Baharom is another new face. He has been appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Islamic Religious Affairs.

Other new ministers on board are Datuk Ahmad Husni Mohamad Hanadzlah (Second Finance Minister), Umno Wanita chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil (Women, Family and Community Development), Datuk Anifah Aman (Foreign) and Lembah Pantai Umno division chief Datuk Raja Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin (Federal Territories). Of the seven new faces, four were made senators and sworn in as Dewan Negara members after Najib unveiled the line-up. They were Dr Koh; Jamil Khir, Shahrizat and Raja Nong Chik.

The eight ministers dropped are Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar (Home); Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said (Tourism), Senator Tan Sri Muhammad Taib (Rural and Regional Development), Senator Datuk Amir-sham Abdul Aziz (Prime Minister's Department), Datuk Ong Ka Chuan (Housing and Local Government), Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed (Works), Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique (Federal Territories) and Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad (Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs). Shahrir had earlier resigned his post.

MCA vice-president Datuk Kong Cho Ha, previously the Deputy Finance Minister, was promoted to a full minister in charge of Housing and Local Government, taking over from Ong. Of the 40 deputy ministers, nine are new faces.

They are Jerlun MP Datuk Mukhriz Tun Mahathir, (International Trade and Industry); Puteri Umno chief Datuk Rosnah Abdul Rashid Shirlin (Health), Dr Mohd Puad Zarkashi (Education), Senator Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin (Finance), Senator Heng Seai Kie (Information, Communications, Arts and Culture), Senator Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun (Women, Family and Community Development), Datuk Lee Chee Leong (Foreign), Ahmad Maslan (Prime Minister's Department) and Datuk Razali Ibrahim (Youth and Sports).

Friday April 10, 2009

Najib promises a transparent and accountable Government

 **PM: Ministers' performance to be reviewed every six months**

PUTRAJAYA: A Cabinet to serve the people is how Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak described his new line-up of ministers, whose performance will be closely monitored through

key performance indicators (KPI). Saying the era where the Government imposed excessive controls and adopted the attitude of 'government knows best' was over, he added his Cabinet promised to take on efforts to build a Government "for the rakyat, and one which will serve the needs of the people".

The Prime Minister pledged his Cabinet would serve with a sense of integrity and high standards to preserve public trust, talent and ability needed during challenging times. "My Cabinet will also serve with loyalty to their party, the Government and most importantly the country; and with passion to renew our country for a new century," he said in his address prior to announcing his highly-anticipated Cabinet yesterday.

The Prime Minister added he had "seen and heard a desire for renewal and change; and for a Government that responds to the needs of the people and prepared to serve future generations. "I am proud to have selected 28 men and women for our new Government. I am confident they share the same commitment to spur the country to excellence. "This is the team we hope will mirror our strength and the society's diversity through Barisan Nasional that represents all from all corners of the country," he said.

He also announced a series of reforms to be undertaken by the Government to ensure better delivery to all Malaysians. This included the introduction of the KPI and a more streamlined ministerial infrastructure. "My Cabinet will not merely be a new team with new faces but equally a repositioning of roles and portfolios. "It will also mark a new approach towards a transparent and accountable Government, focused on delivery for the people," he stressed.

Najib also had a message for his ministers. "Do remember that the people are hoping that we work tirelessly and continuously for the sake of our commitment towards 1Malaysia. "They also want us to constantly hear their grouses and learn from them. We have been given the honour to serve the people and the nation. "Therefore, we must accept the honour with humility and dedication. Never rest in our commitment to 1Malaysia. We must never let the people down," he said.

On the KPI, the Prime Minister said it would focus on impact and not input, on outcome and not output to ensure "value for money public delivery system", adding that a new unit, led by Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon, would monitor the KPI. "Ministers and senior civil servants would be responsible towards their own performance based on the KPI while the 40 deputy ministers would be given specific scope of duties. "I will direct each minister to prepare a clear KPI on their job scope as well as for their deputies within the next 30 days. I will personally evaluate their performances every six months," he said.

Later after attending a tahlil prayer, Najib called on Umno members to change their methodology. For example, he said, the Opposition had resorted to new methodology during the by-elections in Bukit Gantang and Bukit Selambau while Umno was still using the old approach. "This (to adopt new methodology) will be a very important agenda for us and how we are going to do it we will have to discuss at the supreme council meeting soon," he said.

Monday April 13, 2009

Govt banks on local economy as exports fall

IPOH: The Government wants to increase domestic consumption to offset the decline in exports which in January fell by 27%, said Second Finance Minister Datuk Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah. He said other measures besides those in the 2009 Budget and stimulus package it would take to tackle the economy are to review monetary policies and statutory reserves. He said the Government wants input from all sectors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on how best to tackle the current economic crisis.

Saying that the Government does not know everything, he said: "As the Finance Minister, I must network and establish partnerships with all sectors of the economy, so that they can voice out their ideas and views on how to face the current economy." He said the diverse input would be used to draw up Budget 2010. "Without everyone's input, the decisions (arrived at) might not be the best for all," Ahmad Husni told reporters after visiting his constituency in Tambun yesterday.

Monday April 13, 2009

Khaled: KPI may be misinterpreted if made public

JOHOR BARU: The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) system to be applied to ministries should not be made public as it may lead to inaccurate deductions. Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said that the results of the KPI were to assist the Government to measure and monitor its performance. "That is an administrative matter. It's not to be exposed," he told reporters after launching a blood donation drive jointly organised by the Barisan Nasional component parties - Umno, MCA and MIC - and the Lions Clubs of Johor Jaya and Masai. He also said the public may not make an accurate assessment as various ministries were evaluated under different KPIs.

Mohamed Khaled pointed out that for instance, the KPI for the Defence Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry had differing criteria for assessment. He also said publicly announcing KPI results may lead to rankings, which may then be interpreted as the only thing that matters.

However, in the final analysis, it is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's prerogative on whether or not to make the KPI public. "I believe there is a need to measure what we are doing and how successful we have been," he said.

Mohamed Khaled added that the public universities had also been given the task to come up with their own KPI systems to ensure the quality of education.

Monday April 13, 2009

Illegal sand mining still rampant in Selangor

RAMPANT illegal sand mining activities in the Kuala Langat district is costing the Selangor government millions of ringgit in losses annually. The sand mining activity, believed to be one of the biggest in the state, is being conducted on a plot of state-owned land behind the Genting Sanyen Paper Mill, off the Banting–Nilai highway.

The mine is situated next to more than 6,000ha of forest reserve, an orang asli settlement and a brick making plant. Checks revealed that the sand theft activity was rampant and had been going on for many years in the area.



Hard evidence: When the authorities visited the site, a lorry dumped this load of sand before speeding off. It is estimated that an average of 200 trucks daily are transporting sand out from the mine which is about 20ha in size. The mining activity stretches to about 10km around a mining pool in the area. According to a state government source, the extracting of sand from mining pools in the area was something that goes on until late at night. He said the activities were particularly rampant in the evening, and on weekends and public holidays. “Loads and loads of sand are being transported out daily,” he added.

In their bid to stay away from authorities, the source said the activity which started in the morning normally gained momentum after office hours. He said the Kuala Langat District Office was aware of the activity and had conducted several raids against the culprits in the past. He said there had been a series of enforcement raids but they had failed to stop the thieves. “The mining activity is being operated by a syndicate which is well-organised and they provide protection for those who are involved in the theft. “They provide cover for the trucks and the mining workers by hiring thugs including the service of tontos,” he said.

The source said the tontos often operated from outside the area and provided information whenever they felt the presence of the authorities in the area. He said there had been also cases of the tontos intimidating enforcement officers or those who they felt were causing a threat to their activities. “The tontos, who operate with four-wheel-drive vehicles, will trail government vehicles that are moving towards the sand mines and will do everything possible to stop the authorities from doing their duties. “There have been cases of windscreens being smashed and officers receiving threats from these thugs,” he said.

State local government committee chairman Ronnie Liu, when contacted, agreed that a lot of money was being lost through the illegal sand mining activity. Liu issued a stay away warning to the sand thieves or they would have to face the law. He said it was a serious offence for people to indulge in sand theft on government land. "I advise these people to lay off with immediate effect and apply to the state for permits to extract sand from these mines. "We are planning to open up all the sand mines in the state and issue new licences to more companies," he said

Monday April 13, 2009

Terengganu spending RM2.2m on ubi gadong research

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Terengganu government has allocated RM2.2mil to Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia (UDM) to conduct research on an intoxicating yam called *ubi gadong*. Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Said said the research was important as food products from the yam could increase the income of farmers. "After the research, we may make food like cakes from the yam and name it the official food of the state," he said after chairing the weekly state executive council meeting here last week.

Ahmad said the state would allocate RM1mil to UDM for the research this year and the balance next year. Besides its use in cakes, he said that an extract from the yam could be used to make birth-control and hormone pills. "We want UDM to speed up the removal of toxins from the yam as it takes four days to do so before the yam is ready for cake-making," he said.

There are 1,137 species of yam in the world and research has been done on it in the United States since 1753. — Bernama

Monday April 13, 2009

Have open tenders for all projects, Govt urged

KUCHING: The Malaysian Institute of Architects wants the open tender system to be introduced for all government projects. Its president Lee Choi Wah urged the Public Works Department to open such projects for tender as practised in Singapore and other countries. "Let us begin by having one project by each ministry and department in each state being opened for tender from all Malaysian architects," he said at the opening of a building trade expo in the Permata exhibition hall here recently.

Lee said, for some important public buildings, tenders should be opened for international competition to get the best designs. "We regret the practice of procurement through negotiation and design-and-build contracts which have not proven to work well with their tendencies towards corrupt practices," he said.

Lee said that government departments and agencies allocated projects under the stimulus packages should implement them speedily. He said this was vital to help the industry weather the storm during the economic slowdown. In Sarawak, he said the approved projects included the expansion of Sibu Airport, deepening of Miri Port, repairs to infrastructure damaged by floods, upgrading of schools, and construction of the proposed Lawas training centre and tourism facilities.

In his speech while opening the expo, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said that construction of industrial plants, commercial and residential property and infrastructure work in the Sarawak Corridor for Renewal Energy would be carried out. He said, together with the projects approved in the stimulus packages, this would help the private sector weather the economic turbulence while easing the people's burden.

The text of Taib's speech was read by State Housing Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg. Taib urged the building industry to adopt the industrialised building system as it was cost-effective for large projects and would help shorten the completion time.

Tuesday April 14, 2009

Ceiling falls at Putrajaya health clinic

PUTRAJAYA: A chunk of ceiling measuring about 14 sq metres collapsed at the Putrajaya health clinic building during heavy rain yesterday. A clinic official, who refused to be identified, said water which collected on the ceiling caused it to collapse at 5.30pm. "Fortunately, there was no injury or casualty in the incident," he added.

The clinic, however, was closed for its after office hours services from 5pm to 9.30pm. The clinic official said they were waiting for the investigation report from the Public Works Department to determine whether it was safe to use the building. It will remain closed until further notice. On Saturday, lightning was believed to have caused a fire to the roof at the Orthopaedic Ward 3C of the Putrajaya Hospital. Three other wards at the hospital were also closed.

Tuesday April 14, 2009

KPIs to keep track of V-Cs and varsities

PUTRAJAYA: Universities and vice-chancellors will have to be on their toes as they will be monitored closely soon. According to Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, performance is a must and the ministry would prepare its own key performance indicators (KPIs). "Implementing KPIs will provide easy indication for the ministry to analyse

how universities and their vice-chancellors have fared,” he said at the ministry’s appreciation ceremony. “The data can also serve as input for further improvement.

“I will elaborate more during the ministry’s monthly meeting that will take place in the coming fortnight. Anyway, the universities were already told to come out with their KPIs last year,” said Khaled.

The announcement is in accordance with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak’s instruction for ministries to prepare their KPIs within a month. Present with Khaled were his two deputies, Dr Hou Kok Chong and Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah. When asked how it felt to be the only Umno minister who retained his Cabinet post, Khaled chose to downplay the matter. “I think that it is purely coincidental and there is nothing to it,” he said.

Tuesday April 14, 2009

Rivers under threat

Stories by BAVANI M

IN most modern cities, rivers within their vicinity have become the focal point of business, resulting in heavy development and commercialisation of these primary natural resources. The Seine River in Paris, the Singapore River in the Lion City, the Chao Phraya in Bangkok and the Thames in London, to name just a few famous ones, have all been turned into tourist destinations with massive commercial development around them.

In all these cities, businesses flourish along their river corridors and the aesthetic values the rivers offer to the city denizens such as scenic beauty, solitude, natural environment cannot be described with words but need to be experienced. But, there is a heavy price to pay for the massive economic development and the blooming commercial activities along these rivers and within their vicinity.



Ugly sight: Rubbish from Sungai Klang stuck underneath the Masjid Jamek LRT Station.

These rivers are slowly being killed by the unrestrained development which is often accompanied by massive pollution and other ecological damages. Kuala Lumpur has its share of rivers, and its two main casualties are the Klang and Gombak rivers, but all is not lost yet as the federal government has pledged to rejuvenate the two rivers. A technical report on ways to

rehabilitate the two rivers has been completed recently and is awaiting for a decision on implementation from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) in the Prime Minister's Department.

The report is the result of an extensive study and research conducted by the Federal Territories Ministry into various measures required to clean and regenerate the two of Klang Valley's dirtiest rivers. Meanwhile, Malaysia can learn something about the rejuvenation of rivers from South Korea. At last month's international conference on World Class Sustainable Cities 2009 (WCSC 2009), South Korean delegate Kie-Wook Kwon from the Seoul Metropolitan Government presented a paper on *"Riverside Development & Restoration of Cheong Gye Cheon River in Seoul"*.

He spoke of how the South Korean government implemented an inspiring project to rehabilitate the rivers in Seoul. Kwon told *StarMetro* during a recent interview that both the Klang and Gombak rivers could easily be rehabilitated. "It is feasible since the rivers in KL are free of traffic, unlike those in Seoul," he said.

Kwon cited the Han river as an example where water was pumped from the upstream of the Han River into the Cheong Gye Cheon River in Seoul to treat the river. "In KL this would not be a problem as one only has to deal with water quality, but it can be done," he said.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) Drainage and River Management Department director Hooi Yoke Meng agreed that rejuvenating both rivers could be done, but pointed out that it would cost a lot of money. "Our main priority is flood mitigation, quality control is secondary," he said.

In the case of the Han River, Hooi pointed out that it had cost the South Korean government some US\$300mil, which is more than RM1bil, to rehabilitate and the rejuvenation project only covered a 6km length of the river. "The question is are we willing to spend that kind of money for our rivers? Hooi asked. The government's recent stimulus package is only RM60bil and I would think that the government would have to prioritise," Hooi said.

According to Hooi, the draft Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 (KLCP2020) recognises that rivers, other than being a mere conduit to convey storm water, have also amenity and aesthetic values and, hence, places emphasis on improving, enhancing these values. Hooi said that measures to improve the quality of the rivers had been considered and consolidated in plans. "Rivers are a good resource to a city and there is potential in developing the river corridors into tourists attraction," he said.

But this would take time and money and is not a feasible plan for now. Perhaps for the time being, the government should take an educational approach to solve the current urgent pollution problem. Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Ahmad Fuad Ismail, a passionate advocate for clean rivers, had said on numerous occasions that people should change their perception of rivers and look at them as a resource rather than their rubbish dumping ground. Hence, educating the public on the importance of keeping the rivers clean is probably a much more effective long-term solution.

Tuesday April 14, 2009

Move will put an end to illegal advertisements

By YIP YOKE TENG

THE All-Petaling Jaya Residents Associations Coalition (APAC) said the move to do away with the Prime Minister's or Cabinet ministers' photos on billboards was a good one. Its chairman Liew Wei Beng said it would help prevent some advertisers from making use of billboard featuring ministers or state executive councillors to cloak its illegitimacy. "Certain outdoor advertisers tend to include faces of ministers on billboards to send out an impression that the structures had been approved by the local authorities but in fact they were not," he said.

"However, I think it is still fair to feature ministers when it comes to government campaigns as long as the billboards are legal," he added.

He pointed out that many Petaling Jaya residents had observed that there had been fewer billboards featuring Selangor state government leaders since last year after Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim discouraged advertisers from doing so. Bandar Sri Damansara chairman Ravindran Raman Kutty said the act showed that the Prime Minister had grasped what the people really wanted. "The Prime Minister knows that the young people are not interested in the faces of politicians," he said.

"Instead, the people want to know how have the politicians helped to settle their woes and how they can be more easily accessible," he said.

Ravindran suggested that billboards and banners should instead include contact details of public projects' contractors, so that the public could lodge their complaints directly to the parties responsible when they faced problems such as potholes or faulty streetlights. Bandar Utama Residents Association chairman Datuk Manpal Singh Sacdev said it was a good move as the people want to see real results, not publicity stunts. "Any publicity from a politician should be from the works he or she has accomplished, not through billboards or newspapers," he said.

"They should do with less of such act that is a waste of money, and more of going to the ground and getting things done," he added.

Tuesday April 14, 2009

Selangor plans to legalise sand mining activities

By ELAN PERUMAL

IN a move to eradicate sand theft in Selangor, the state government plans to offer more sand mining permits. This is to enable the state government to earn revenue from the mining

activities rather than lose out to syndicates extracting sand illegally. *StarMetro* reported yesterday that the illegal mining activities had cost the state millions of ringgit in revenue. The front page article highlighted rampant illegal sand mining activities at the Kuala Langat district by syndicates. The report stated that a 20ha land near the Genting Sanyen paper mill inside the forest reserve area has become the target of the illegal operators. The state has come under fire from critics who claim that the move to streamline the sand mining activities to only one company had resulted in others carrying out sand mining work illegally.

The Pakatan Rakyat-led state government had earlier cancelled the sand permits awarded to private companies in a move to increase its revenue from the sand mining activities. In turn, it has introduced a company, state-owned corporation, to carry out the mining activities in the state so that profits can be channelled directly into the state fund. State local government committee chairman Ronnie Liu said the state government had previously limited the sand mining activity to only one company to streamline the industry. However, he said, the state had decided to revert the decision by offering more permits to more companies. "We realise that it is not easy to control the illegal operators who are very organised and therefore legalising them will be one of those things that we are planning do. "It is easier to control the operators if they are legalised," he said.

Liu said the state was in the process of finalising the details and the new guidelines would be ready in June this year. "We have received a lot of applications from the private companies who are interested to extract sand from the various mines," he added.

Thursday April 16, 2009

KPI test in November Ministers

By MAZWAN NIK ANIS and SIM LEOI LEOI

KUALA LUMPUR: Ministers under the Najib administration will face their first performance evaluation under the key performance indicator (KPI) concept in November. Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who announced this after chairing his maiden Cabinet meeting in Putrajaya yesterday, said he had spelt out to his ministers what he expected of them.

Among others, he said they would be judged by their integrity, willingness and preparedness to serve and their ability, saying he had reminded them to give their best always and to have "job satisfaction." "They must build a good esprit de corps among themselves," the Prime Minister said, describing the meeting as "lively".

Najib said it had been agreed that Khazanah Nasional would help with the drawing up of KPI elements, saying that ministers could use the evaluation results in November to review their performance and resolve problems. As the Cabinet was the people's line-up, he said every minister must be capable of fulfilling the people's high expectations and hopes.

Najib said he told the ministers not to work with only their communities in mind but to give their assistance to every ethnic group. "The bottom line is that any decision should be made with the interests of the rakyat in mind although it is important for the Government to continue with private sector-friendly policies.

"I have told the Cabinet members that with the current political situation, the people have become more critical and they should not assume that it's still business as usual. There must be change and renewal. "I emphasised on the need for them to hold discourses and dialogues with various groups so that any decision will really have the people's interests at heart," he told reporters at his residence in Jalan Langgak Duta here.

Asked if any minister would be dropped if they failed to hit the minimum requirements of the KPI, Najib said the Cabinet was fully aware that the future of the Government depended on them and the way it performed. On the dissatisfaction expressed by the MIC on its representation in the new Cabinet line-up, the Prime Minister said the needs and wishes of every ethnic group should be considered.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin said of the meeting: "We were reminded to give our best and to make changes and reforms in areas we feel necessary." Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek summed it up by saying that Najib wanted ministers to improve on their efficiency.

Thursday April 16, 2009

Housing woes top the PCB list

KUALA LUMPUR: Housing problems and local council issues make up the highest number of complaints received by the Public Complaints Bureau, says Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator T. Murugiah. Housebuyers, he said, were burdened with additional charges due to stalled or abandoned projects and when their houses are not issued with the Certificate of Fitness or are damaged in floods. He said public officials should go to the ground to find out the exact issues affecting the public, otherwise the department would not know which issue to address. "For example during the recent Bukit Gantang by-election, I was chided by a homeowner who said his complaints of frequent floods in the housing estate had fallen on deaf ears," he said.

Other complaints received by the department were on citizenship applications, identification documents and public amenities. "The centre receives about 300 complaints every day, of which 85% have been resolved," he said, adding that a five-working-day time frame had been set to allow the department to resolve complaints from the public.

Murugiah was speaking to reporters after visiting the bureau's one-stop centre located at Jalan 2/12d, Kampung Seri Batu, Jalan Ipoh here yesterday. The centre, he said, was located in the heart of the city to make it easier for the public who would otherwise incur additional expense to get to the bureau's headquarters in Putrajaya. Murugiah said some of the poorer complainants had even asked him for money to pay for taxi and bus fare to go to Putrajaya. The centre will be open on Tuesdays from 9am onwards.

Thursday April 16, 2009

National management for solid waste disposal

Stories by BAVANI M

SOLID waste management, including the collection of garbage, road cleaning, grass cutting and drain sweeping, will now be undertaken by the National Solid Waste Management Department under the Housing and Local Government Ministry. The department would take on a regulatory as well as management role from all local authorities nationwide, including the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL). The move is to standardise solid waste management to increase productivity as well as efficiency in order to provide better service.



Hot spot: The hawker stalls and restaurants along Jalan Alor generate a lot of waste.

"We are not washing our hands from the responsibility, but will work with Alam Flora and the department to deal with the garbage problem in the city," Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Ahmad Fuad Ismail said, adding that the transfer of responsibility would start in June. According to Fuad, there are about 5,300km of drains in Kuala Lumpur and cleaning them has been one of the biggest headaches for the DBKL. "It is not easy keeping these drains clean as it is the usual place that people throw rubbish," he said.

Fuad said that rubbish from the hawkers, constructions debris, and public utility cables were the major factors that contribute to dirty drains. He said that garbage had been one of the city's perennial woes and, based on consumer feedback and his dialogue sessions with the community, it had always been a big concern to the KL residents.

Fuad made the announcement at the weekly meet-the-press session at the DBKL yesterday. Also present were National Solid Waste Department chief executive officer Datuk Zaini Md Nor, department director-general Nadzri Yahaya and Alam Flora chief executive officer Datuk Zahri

Abdul Ghani. According to Nadzri, with the implementation of the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act, waste management will be streamlined nationwide and this will also include laws and regulations. "Basically it lays down what needs to be done, collections, schedules, and fines and penalties, as well as monitor service level," he said.

Nadzri said that, for example, under the new law for illegal dumping, the maximum fine could be up to RM200,000.

Thursday April 16, 2009

RM30mil sales expected

By ZULKIFLY MOHAMAD

THE northern region Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA) has projected a turnover of about RM30mil in the sale of fruits and vegetables produced by farmers in the area this year.

FAMA northern region director Mohd Ariffin Awang said of the total, RM9mil was expected to be recorded by farmers in Penang, RM5mil in Perlis and the remaining amount by farmers in Kedah.



He said Penang farmers would concentrate on producing vegetables such as spinach, kangkong, okra and sawi while those in Perlis and Kedah would harvest fruits like rambutan, cempedak, mangoes, bananas and pineapple.

"We have signed agreements with 100 farmers in the northern region under our Farming Contract Programme to ensure a consistent supply of vegetables and fruits to meet market demand. "We just signed contracts with nine farmers under the program-me and they will be responsible for supplying 600kg of vegetables daily beginning in July. "We have guaranteed them a good price for their produce. What they need to do is ensure a consistent and quality supply year-round," he said.



Mohd Ariffin was speaking to reporters after signing the contracts with the nine farmers at the Penang Agricultural Department's Permanent Food Product Park in Tasek Gelugor recently. He said each farmer could expect to earn about RM3,000 monthly. He added that the 100 farmers involved in the programme were working on 1,000ha of land in the three northern states.

Penang Agriculture Department director Abdul Nasir Hassan said the department had applied for a 80ha plot next to the Permanent Food Production Park in Ara Kuda, Tasek Gelugor, as part of its expansion plan. "We have submitted our application for the land which belongs to the Penang Regional Development Authority (Perda) but have yet to receive any reply," he said.

Thursday April 16, 2009

Keeping the jewel of Iskandar Malaysia always shining

Comment by NELSON BENJAMIN

RECENTLY, more than 500 Umno leaders from the state were taken on a tour of projects in the mammoth Iskandar Malaysia project. The delegation, led by Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, was taken on a boat cruise from Danga Bay to the Puteri Harbour waterfront in Nusajaya and also visited the Johor State New Administrative Centre (JSNAC). This was the first time such a large Umno delegation, mainly grassroots leaders, were seeing the project taking shape since its launch with great pomp in 2006.



Impressive: Guests visiting the new state assembly hall in the Johor State New Administrative Centre in Nusajaya recently.

The leaders were given an extensive presentation about how the projects were progressing and how the people, especially bumiputra entrepreneurs, would benefit and gain from other opportunities. The half-day event impressed many of the leaders and they snapped photographs, especially inside JSNAC. The complex, which will be Johor's new administrative

capital, is expected to be named Kota Iskandar during its official launch by the Johor Sultan today.

The sprawling 129ha complex, which features Moorish-Andalusia architecture, comprises the new Johor State Legislative Assembly building, the Mentri Besar's and state secretary's offices, Dataran Mahkota (Ceremonial Plaza) and two clusters of state government office complexes. The total cost is RM1.5bil and it will take several years to be fully developed. Some state offices from the present complex in Bukit Timbalan, Johor Baru, have already started moving to Kota Iskandar.

The project is undertaken by UEM Land Bhd's subsidiary Cahaya Jauhar Sdn Bhd, a joint venture company of the Johor government. Most state agencies will operate from the complex in the coming months while the offices for Federal Government agencies will be completed within the next two years. To ensure JSNAC is accessible at a short travel time, a six-lane 30.6km coastal highway costing more than RM1bil is being built to link Johor Baru and Nusajaya.

Nusajaya assemblyman Datuk Aziz Sopian feels the highway will spur development in the two areas. While the relocation of more than 1,000 government servants to Kota Iskandar will spur development in Gelang Patah and Nusajaya, Malaysian Indian Business Association president P. Sivakumar hopes the Government will not neglect Johor Baru city. "A lot of shops in Johor Baru closed down after the new Sultan Iskandar Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex was opened at the end of last year," he said.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak must have a good set of advisers to ensure the projects in Iskandar Malaysia are continued," he said, adding that too much had been invested in the project. While Kota Iskandar is poised to mirror Putrajaya, it is important for the Government to build the infrastructure, including a hospital, fire and police stations and a bus terminal, similar to that in Presint 7 in Putrajaya.

No point having international-class buildings and architecture, which are talked about internationally. When a person or investor is sick or in trouble, he need not have to travel many kilometres to seek assistance. Efforts should be taken to ensure that public amenities are centralised and not inconvenience the people.

Aziz said, while plans for the amenities were in the pipeline, he hoped to get the support of the relevant agencies to speed up the development. "It is going to be an important growth area for investors and not just as an administration centre. "To ensure it continues to develop, I will work with all the relevant agencies," he said.

Another aspect, which the Government has to look into seriously, is building and infrastructure maintenance. There is no point in having first-class facilities and third-class maintenance. While much of Kota Iskandar's architecture looks stylish, especially the woodwork, it will require regular maintenance because of Malaysia's humid weather.

The Government should look into forming a body similar to Perbadanan Putrajaya, which acts as a one-stop centre to provide information to people visiting the area via information counters or its websites. Efforts should also be taken to promote Kota Iskandar as a tourist destination.

Johor Tourist Guides Association and Malaysian Tourist Guides Council president Jimmy Leong felt the centre could be promoted for day-trippers. Kota Iskandar, dubbed the Crown Jewel of Iskandar Malaysia, is among the first projects to be completed under the project. It is of paramount importance that everything runs smoothly and it is well maintained to ensure the “jewel” never loses its shine.

Thursday April 16, 2009

Sarawak councils may impose fees for billboards

SIBU: Sarawak’s 24 local councils may follow their peninsula-based counterparts by collecting fees from billboard advertisements as a new source of income. State Environment and Public Health Minister Datuk Sri Wong Soon Koh said the Ministry would look into this possibility. Speaking after opening a two-day seminar for local councillors from the central zone here, he suggested that the local councils explore ways within the legal framework to augment their annual allocations.

He said the local councils, unlike their counterparts in the peninsula, could not expect developmental grants directly under the Government’s economic stimulus packages. Because of constitutional factors, the state’s local councils were not part of the national system or under the federal Housing and Local Government Ministry, he said.

“However, my ministry hopes to meet the new Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Kong Cho Ha to request for more funds,” he said. — Bernama

Friday April 17, 2009

Two new EPF policies to counter fraud

KUALA LUMPUR: The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has implemented two new policies as part of efforts to combat fraud and wrongdoings. Its public relations head Nik Affendi Jaafar said the policies, called anti-fraud and whistle-blowing, were aimed at enhancing the prevention and detection of fraud. “The policies empower EPF staff and management to better uncover instances of fraud and deal with potential wrongdoings such as in cases involving fraudulent withdrawals,” he said in a statement yesterday. To date, a total of 43 court summonses have been filed for fraudulent withdrawals with nine members already found guilty for involvement in making fraudulent EPF housing withdrawals.

Under the Act, those found guilty are liable to a maximum three years' jail or a RM10,000 fine or both. Nik Affendi advised those who wished to apply for withdrawals to deal directly with the fund which offered its assistance for free. The fund also introduced a new anti-fraud hotline for members to lodge reports. Members can call 03-2616-2121 during working hours from Monday to Friday.

Friday April 17, 2009

Ministry may revive 3,500 school projects

MUAR: The Education Ministry will try to revive the 3,500-odd school projects approved under the 9th Malaysia Plan but stalled due to the increase in fuel prices last year. Deputy Minister Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong said the construction sector was affected when world fuel prices rocketed to over US\$135 (RM486) per barrel. But since the prices had dropped to the current US\$40 (RM144), the projects would be revived with priority given to the urgent ones like the SMK Sri Muar where a building was partially demolished to build two blocks of three-storey buildings.

"The work stopped when the price of fuel shot up which forced cost of building materials to increase," he said during a visit to the school yesterday. On the use of English in teaching Mathematics and Science, Dr Wee said Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin would be meeting the parties who are against the move. He said Muhyiddin wanted a detailed and thorough study before deciding on the matter.

Friday April 17, 2009

More government agencies expected to shift to Cyberjaya

Story and photos by CHARLES FERNANDEZ

WITH the recent entry of several non ICT-based government and government-linked companies (GLCs), like the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (Mampu) and the Public Services Department (PSD), Cyberjaya is slowly moving away from being an information communication technology (ICT) hub. The intelligent city was created to complement the newly launched Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1997, but with the recent launch of the MKN purpose-built buildings at the MKN Embassy Techzone, more government agencies are expected to make Cyberjaya their preferred address.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan, who launched Block D of the MKN Embassy project, said that ideally, Cyberjaya should be an ICT hub but one had to be willing

to change in order to survive in the light of the uncertain global climate. “We must change to enjoy a business presence within an ecosystem,” he added.

Sidek said he was happy that MKN and the Embassy Group of India, which had a 40% stake in the project, were bringing about balanced development in Cyberjaya.



Purpose-built: Sidek (left) launching the MKN Embassy Techzone in Cyberjaya.

Emkay Group executive chairman Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal said the MKN Embassy Techzone project, consisting of two phases of development, would encompass a campus-like concept to provide a conducive working environment for the knowledge workers. “We hope with the completion of the project, more government agencies, including ICT companies, both local and foreign, would make the Cyberjaya Flagship Zone (CFZ) their business address.

Mustapha said the strategy was to lease the buildings first and then sell them. He said that since last year, Emkay had sold Blocks A and B to Amanah Raya Bhd and were in the process of selling Block C to another government agency. Phase One will consist of four office blocks with a total floor space of 250,000 sq ft (23,226 sq m) and will be completed early next year, while Phase Two, with six office blocks comprising a total floor space of two million square feet (185,806 sq m) is expected to be completed within the next five years.

The Embassy Group of India is involved in the construction of office buildings mainly in Bangalore, and to date it has provided a total floor space of 19 million square feet (1,765,150 sq m) for ICT giants like IBM, Microsoft, Sun-Microsystem, Fidelity, Target and ANZ Bank.

Friday April 17, 2009

Govt seeking ways to prevent frequent toll rate hikes (Update)

By WANI MUTHIAH

KLANG: The Economic Planning Unit (EPU) will look into methods of preventing toll hikes once every three years and present its findings to the Government. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said he had instructed the EPU to come-up with a comprehensive solution to counter the toll hike issue given that it was a big burden to the people and the Government.

Najib told a press conference after opening the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia's (ACCCIM) 63rd annual general meeting here on Friday that increases in toll rates was something that was much disliked by the people. To a question if acquiring PLUS Expressways Bhd might be one of the options considered to prevent escalating toll rates, Najib said it was too early to say but added that the Government was looking at every available option. He said the government was aware of the urgency to have a quick and comprehensive solution to tackle the matter.

To a question on electricity and liquefied natural gas tariffs, Najib said the Government would also look into it from time-to-time. When asked when the next power tariff review would take place, Najib said he would study the matter first. He added that whatever measures taken should be holistic in nature, with due consideration given to all relevant parties, including Tenaga Nasional Bhd, the industries and consumers. He said the national capacity as well as the country's oil and gas reserves must also taken into consideration.

Saturday April 18, 2009

Najib: By-elections draining resources

By WANI MUTHIAH

KLANG: Too much effort and resources are being wasted by holding by-elections when the nation should be concentrating on strengthening its economy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said. "It is different if an elected representative dies but resignations are political decisions which can also be regarded as a political ploy," he said.



Speaking at a press conference after opening the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysias (ACCCIM) 63rd annual general meeting, he said the people resent by-elections that were held deliberately. He was commenting on the impending Penanti state assembly by-election in Penang which fell vacant following the resignation of the deputy chief minister I Mohammad Fairus Khairuddin. "By resigning, an elected representative has reneged on his commitment to serve," he added.

"By right, the focus should be on strengthening the country's economy and protecting the people's interest. We must be moving forward for the nation's future," Najib said.

When asked if Mohammad Fairus had betrayed his constituents with his resignation, he said it was up to the people to judge what had transpired. "The people are smart now and can make up their own minds," he added.



Congratulations: Najib presenting a certificate to Siti Norsyamiera Samsudin who scored 9As in last year's PMR after delivering his speech at the ACCCIM annual general meeting in Klang yesterday as (from left) ACCCIM president Tan Sri William Cheng, Siti Norsyamiera's parents Nora Osman and Samsudin Hashim and MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat look on.

To a question if a recent article in a Malay vernacular paper, which called for the Malays to unite and stand-up against the demands of the non-Malays contradicted the 1Malaysia concept, Najib said it depended on personal interpretation. However, he said he did not want any form of extremism in the country including racism as moderation should be practised in every aspect. He reminded the people that Islam was a religion which encouraged moderation in thoughts and actions.

Najib said 1Malaysia could be interpreted from many perspectives but the thrust of it was of staying together and developing trust and mutual respect among the races as well as working together as one nation.

Saturday April 18, 2009

EPU to tackle highway toll issue

KLANG: The Economic Planning Unit (EPU) will look into ways to reduce the burden on the people paying the thrice yearly hike in highway toll. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak

said paying toll was something which the people disliked and the EPU had been directed to come up with a comprehensive solution to the issue. He was speaking at a press conference after opening the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia's 63rd annual general meeting here yesterday. Asked if acquiring PLUS Expressways Bhd might be one of the solutions, Najib said it was too early to say but the Government was looking at all options.

He said the Government was aware of the urgency to have a quick and comprehensive solution to the matter. Najib said the Government would also look into electricity and gas tariffs from time-to-time. On when the next power tariff review would take place, he said measures taken should be holistic in nature with due consideration given to all parties, including Tenaga Nasional Bhd, the industries and consumers.

He said the national capacity as well as the country's oil and gas reserves must also be taken into consideration. In Kuala Lumpur, Works Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor urged the EPU to consider ways to help the low and middle income groups burdened by the toll collection. In welcoming the directive for the EPU to tackle the toll issue, he said it was in line with the Prime Minister's 1Malaysia slogan of "People First, Performance Now."

"I am confident that the EPU will conduct a thorough study as well as look at the Government's financial capability in tackling the issue. "At the same time, they also have to look at the sanctity of the contracts between the concessionaires and the Government," he told reporters after the handing over of duties between him and former Works Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed.

Shaziman praised Mohd Zin for coming up with the *Tekad Setahun* book, which outlines the Ministry's achievements from March 2008 until February this year. Mohd Zin thanked his former staff for their support and expressed confidence that Shaziman would continue taking the Ministry to greater heights especially in implementing the economic stimulus package.

Saturday April 18, 2009

PLUS sets up RM54m traffic monitoring centre

PETALING JAYA: PLUS Expressways Berhad (PLUS) has set up a RM54mil Traffic Monitoring Centre to ensure a safer and more comfortable journey for motorists. The centre, which serves as the heart of traffic operations for PLUS network, is being dubbed the most sophisticated traffic monitoring centre in the country as it is equipped with advanced technology from the United States, Belgium, Germany, France, Switzerland and Malaysia.

PLUS chief operating officer Nik Airina Nik Jaffar said: "The main function of the centre is to collect and send out realtime traffic information to highway users through radio stations, the PLUSLine and electronic message board like the Variable Message Sign."



The nitty-gritty: PLUS Traffic Management Centre employee Ahmad Amer Wakidi showing how the system works to Nik Airina (left) and managing director Noorizah Abd Hamid. The centre, she said, would also monitor the movements and operations of PLUSRonda vehicles, manage the Intelligent System equipment such as Variable Message Sign and Automatic Vehicle Detection System. The Intelligent System can provide the estimated travel time from one toll plaza to another. "Closed-circuit television are being installed on the expressway and at toll plazas to monitor the traffic situation," said Nik Airina.

Nik Airina said 110 PLUSRonda vehicles are being equipped with the Global Positioning System for tracking of vehicles to facilitate co-ordination of help in the event of a breakdown. Some 25 personnel would be on duty on normal days and the number could be increased to 35 during peak days, she said, adding that 40 task force personnel from the headquarters and 350 Rela members could be mobilised to assist at toll plazas and rest areas during peak days. The centre operates around the clock and covers more than 60% of the country's toll highways.

19 April 2009 (Sunday)

Residents cry foul over development projects

PADANG BESAR: Residents here are crying foul over the implementation of development projects in their area, claiming that they have adversely affected their quality of life. The residents claimed that since work on the doubletrack railway project and widening of the Padang Besar road started, the area was now prone to flash floods. This was among the problems raised by the residents at a dialogue with Padang Besar Member of Parliament Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters later, Azmi said development projects were planned to benefit the people, and therefore the interests of the local community should be taken into account before the projects were carried out. On complaints of flash floods, he said they were due to a poor drainage system and also the closing of a retention pond near the Padang Besar railway station.

Azmi, who is Public Accounts Committee chairman, said the relevant departments and agencies should hold dialogues with local residents to obtain their feedback before projects were to be carried out in their area. – Bernama

Monday April 20, 2009

Pahang MB ordered to pay logging firm RM63mil

KUANTAN: The Pahang Mentri Besar has been ordered to pay a logging firm RM63mil for breach of contract, after the state government failed in its bid at the High Court here to strike out a writ of mandamus pertaining to a judgement sum ruled by the Federal Court on Sept 17 last year. The High Court also ordered the payment be made, with costs, to Seruan Gemilang Sdn Bhd within 14 days beginning Monday. Seruan Gemilang, which filed the writ on Oct 15 last year, had named the Mentri Besar as respondent and stated that the Pahang government had failed or refused to pay the sum despite the Federal Court order.

On March 20, it was reported that the Pahang government refuted the writ because the state government and forestry department were named as parties in the original suit while the Mentri Besar was never a party in the cause. Justice Abdul Halim Aman, in his written judgement, said a mandamus was a command that binded a person issued with the order to fulfill the obligation. He added that at this stage, it was not a matter of litigation but a force of the order which made it mandatory for the state government to abide. On Dec 9, 2002, Seruan Gemilang filed a suit against the Pahang government and the state forestry director seeking RM31mil in damages for breaching a logging concession contract relating to the extraction of timber logs from a 4,000ha land belonging to Umno in Bebar, Pekan.

The Kuantan High Court decision on May 25 last year ordered them to pay RM37,127,471.60, with interest from April 5, 2000, to the company for breach of contract. The Pahang government and state forestry director applied for leave to appeal against the decision, which was rejected by the Court of Appeal. The Federal Court on Sept 17 last year affirmed the Court of Appeal decision. Meanwhile, state legal adviser Datuk Mat Zara'ai Alias said the Pahang government would file an application for a stay of execution on Tuesday, at the Kuantan High Court. He said the state government would also file an appeal to the appellate court against the decision made by the High Court on Monday.

Tuesday April 21, 2009

Government wants more open tenders to cut down on graft

By NELSON BENJAMIN, MEERA VIJAYAN and GLADYS TAY

JOHOR BARU: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak wants to cut down on direct negotiations for government procurement contracts. He said this method of awarding contracts should be replaced with open or restricted tenders. "Opting for the tender system will curb corruption and bring back the people's confidence in the Government," he said when addressing civil servants in Johor during his one-day visit here yesterday. "A lot of people will like direct negotiations but I want it reduced," he said.

Najib urged the government servants and people's representatives not to be arrogant and to be humble and go down to the field to listen to the people's woes. He also said that there should not be too much pomp when representatives turn up somewhere. He said that he would continue with some of the policies implemented by his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration which are good for the people and development of the nation. One such project was Iskandar Malaysia, he said, stressing that the new leadership would continue its commitment to develop the multibillion ringgit project into a new growth area.

Najib, who was on a one-day working visit to the state, said the project was visionary and it was also time to create a new growth area in the country. He said Iskandar would be another choice for Malaysians to go to besides the Klang Valley, which was already overpopulated. He said the Government would also direct foreign direct investments to Iskandar.

Najib also acknowledged the importance of cooperation between the federal and the state governments. He added that this was not the time for political polemics and it was important that Johoreans did not feel that they were not getting any benefit from Iskandar. Najib said the people should look at the positive aspects of Iskandar, such as job creation and bringing in high-tech investments. There would also be eco-tourism and medical -tourism projects and an international higher education centre.

On his 1Malaysia vision, Najib said he had no intention of re-inventing the wheel, saying he would continue to focus on the targets set by his two predecessors. After the function, Najib, together with Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, had an audience with the Johor Sultan at Istana Bukit Serene.

Tuesday April 21, 2009

Pahang to settle RM63mil owed to logging firm

By ROSLINA MOHAMAD

KUANTAN: The Pahang Mentri Besar has been ordered to pay a logging firm RM63mil for breach of contract after failing in its bid at the High Court here to set aside a judgment sum affirmed by the Federal Court on Sept 17 last year. The High Court also ordered the payment be made, with costs, to Seruan Gemilang Sdn Bhd within 14 days from yesterday.

Seruan Gemilang, which filed the writ on Oct 15 last year, had named the Mentri Besar as respondent, stating that the Pahang Government had failed or refused to pay the sum despite the Federal Court order. On March 20, it was reported that the Pahang Government refuted the writ because it and the forestry department were named as parties in the original suit, and the Mentri Besar was never a party in the case.

Justice Abdul Halim Aman, in his written judgment, said a mandamus was a command that bound a person issued with the order to fulfil the obligations. He added that at this stage, it was not a matter of litigation but force of the order, which made it mandatory for the state government to comply. "The state government claimed that it was wrong for the applicant to name the Mentri Besar as the respondent in its writ of mandamus but, legally, being the state's executive chief, there is no violation of the law or procedures," Justice Abdul Halim said.

"The applicant had acted accordingly because being a member of the administration as stipulated in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution, the Mentri Besar is also the council's executive chairman, and the financial portfolio falls under his purview." He also said that there was no finance minister's post in any state except Sabah and Sarawak, meaning that a Mentri Besar had full control to instruct that any payment be made.

Justice Abdul Halim said a series of hearings had been held in open court and all parties were given sufficient opportunities to raise their cases, including in the Federal Court. "The thing that is emphasised here is justice, not technicalities," he added.

On Dec 9, 2002, Seruan Gemilang filed a suit against the Pahang Government and the state forestry director seeking RM31mil in damages for breach of a logging contract relating to the extraction of timber logs from a 10,000-acre concession belonging to Umno in Bebar, Pekan. The Kuantan High Court on May 25 ordered them to pay Seruan Gemilang RM37,127,471.60, with interest from April 5, 2000, for breach of contract.

The Pahang Government and state forestry director applied for leave to appeal against the decision, which was rejected by the Court of Appeal. The Federal Court on Sept 17 last year affirmed the Court of Appeal's decision. Meanwhile, state legal adviser Datuk Mat Zara'ai Alias said the Pahang Government would file an application for a stay of execution. He said the state government would also appeal against the decision of the High Court.

Wednesday April 22, 2009

RM1.57bil spent on maternity leave yearly not likely to contract, says MEF

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian employers spend about RM1.57 billion annually in providing 60 days of maternity leave, a seminar on gender equality was told. A study undertaken by the Malaysian Employers Federation showed that each confinement cost about RM7,500. The amount comprised RM3,000 in wages and RM4,500 in overtime allowances. In his paper on maternity protection, reconciling work and family responsibilities, federation vice-president A. Ramadass said that under existing laws, employers bore this cost for up to five surviving children.

He said the total cost would escalate to RM2bil, if the maternity leave were to be increased to 84 days, as was the case in Singapore. However, he pointed out that in Singapore, for the first two confinements, the employers paid for the first eight weeks while the additional four weeks were funded by the Government. For the third and fourth confinements, the Government paid for the full 12-week maternity leave. The two-day seminar which began yesterday, was organised by the Human Resources Ministry, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation. It was attended by about 50 participants from various government agencies, trade unions and non-governmental organisations.

Lactation consultant Nor Kamariah Mohamad Alwi told the seminar that mother's milk provided an incalculable immunity protection and was a natural way of nurturing the future generation. She said breastfeeding also provided significant health benefits to the mother. Nor Kamariah said the World Health Organisation recommended exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and that it be continued up to two years with complementary foods. — Bernama

Wednesday April 22, 2009

Happy with open tender plan

PETALING JAYA: Having open tenders for government procurement contracts will inspire the people's confidence in the Government. Integrity Institute of Malaysia president Datuk Dr Mohd Tap Salleh said that although the tender system might not necessarily result in cheaper deals, it would be more transparent and accountable. "Even if it costs more, people will be happy because it is fair and accountable. It augurs well for the Government," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said on Monday that he wanted direct negotiations on government procurement contracts reduced with more open or restricted tenders. Dr Mohd Tap said that a week before he became Prime Minister, Najib attended a forum organised by the institute and told participants that he favoured the open tender procurement procedures. "I am glad that he followed through," said Dr Mohd Tap.

However, Centre of Public Policy Studies chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam asked Najib to clarify his message, saying that direct negotiations should be completely replaced by the tender system. I am discouraged by what he said. (From what) I had understood, a policy decision had been taken to do away with negotiated tenders.

“He used the word reduce. It can imply that civil servants can go ahead (with direct negotiations) and it is business as usual. And if the biggest and most attractive tenders are awarded on a negotiated basis and not on open or restricted basis, it will encourage corruption rather than reduce it,” he said.

Navaratnam said there was no reason for adopting the tender system completely, adding that restricted tenders should only be accepted under rare circumstances. “Once you break the system of tenders, you are asking for trouble,” he said.

Wednesday April 22, 2009

Ministry and agencies get five-star rating awards

PUTRAJAYA: The Works Ministry, which is the first and only ministry to score five stars under the government’s star rating system, received its award here yesterday. Five other agencies - the Royal Malaysia Armed Forces, the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit the Implementation Coordination Unit, the Public Service Department and the Health Ministry’s director-general office also received the same accolade.

The Works Ministry and the five agencies won the rating after an assessment conducted on all 27 ministries and 11 agencies last year. Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Sidek Hassan said the objective of the system was to give due recognition to agencies that had shown excellent performance in organisational management. “For other ministries and government agencies that have yet to receive the five-star rating, I hope they will work hard and take the Works Ministry and five other agencies as their role models,” he said in his speech, which was read out by PSD director-general Tan Sri Ismail Adam at the ceremony.

Sidek said an inspectorate team from Mampu would conduct spot checks or “mystery shopping” to ensure that those awarded with the five-star rating maintain their standard and continue to be dedicated.

Wednesday April 22, 2009

Why Syabas repair work suspended

I WOULD like to inform all water consumers in Selangor and the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya that the programme to replace old pipes and link pipes as announced in local newspapers on June 29 and 30, 2006 would not proceed following a directive by the government. The directive also covers other repair work planned under the third phase that was supposed to begin on Jan 1, 2009.

The suspension of the RM2.6bil programme is due to a revamp of the water management sector in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya by the federal and state governments. The suspension of these programmes which involves a high allocation would have direct effect on consumers especially those that involve crucial work such as pipe replacement.

Consumers can obtain an update of the programmes that were suspended as Syabas has prepared a detailed list of the projects that has been halted following the government's directive. The list would also be advertised in local dailies, printed on posters in Syabas offices and also through pamphlets published by Syabas.

On behalf of Syabas, I would like to apologise to consumers for not being able to fulfil the promises and commitment that I have given in relation to these projects, which are stalled as a result of the suspension directive made by the government. The period of the suspension is not known and it depends on further instructions from the government. It is hoped that the consumers remain patient while the matter was being resolved. However, Syabas will continue on work which is not subjected to the suspension order.

Consumers are advised to contact the Syabas Customer Service Centre (Puspel) if they are facing any problems or difficulties that they are facing relating to water supply. They can contact the Puspel hotline at 1-800-88-5252.

Tan Sri Rozali Ismail, Executive chairman, Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd