

1. Education Ministry gets 8,000 queries over blueprint

JOHOR BARU: The Education Ministry has received around 8,000 suggestions and comments from various quarters over its Higher Education Blueprint, says Deputy Education Minister P. Kamalanathan.

Describing the amount of feedback as overwhelming, Kamalanathan said it came from various quarters including students, lecturers, industry players and the general public.

"We have had six roadshows so far. To me, this shows how the people are concerned about education, not just about primary and secondary, but also tertiary.

"The feedback is not just about criticism, but also suggestions on how to improve the system," he said after a three-hour townhall meeting on the blueprint at University Teknologi Malaysia here yesterday.

Kamalanathan admitted that there were weaknesses in the present system, but was optimistic that the blueprint, which would be launched by the Prime Minister next month, would be able to iron out the issues.

He also expressed confidence that ultimately, the blueprint would complement public and private universities, polytechnics and community colleges.

The blueprint, which has 10 core thrusts, covers the post-secondary and lifelong learning education ecosystem of both the private and public sectors to produce graduates that are well-rounded and grounded.

The blueprint is intended to allow Malaysia to compete with the growing global education landscape - all the way up to 2025.

2. Government launches grants to woo women back to workforce

PETALING JAYA: In an effort to raise the participation of women in the workforce, the Women, Family, and Community Development Ministry, together with TalentCorp, has launched a grant to encourage companies to employ women who have taken career breaks.

The grants were announced by Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim as part of the Career Comeback Programme, launched at Connexion@Nexus in Kuala Lumpur.

The grants, namely the Resourcing Grant and the Retention Grant, are structured to drive companies to attract and retain women who have been on a career break for more than six months.

The Resourcing Grant is available for companies that have implemented or enhanced a recruitment program targeted at women returnees, and the grant will be used to co-fund 75% of the recruitment costs incurred.

The Retention Grant, however, is for companies that have successfully hired and retained women returnees for more than six months, with a grant equivalent to one month of the returnees' salary.

"We understand it can be challenging and daunting to look for a job after time out of the workforce," said TalentCorp CEO Johan Mahmood Merican.

"We hope to ease this process by connecting jobseekers who are women returnees to potential employers. By giving them targeted incentives, we can encourage employers to expand their talent pool and at the same time provide career opportunities for women looking to return to work," he said.

The launch was held during the Career Comeback Fair, which saw more than 30 participating employers connecting with over 500 women keen to re-join the workforce.

The fair also included a panel session featuring women returnees who had successfully made a career comeback.

Among them included Vanitha Subramaniam, who advised mothers looking to get back into the workforce to focus on their strengths and interests as an individual.

"As women, we need to be less judgmental of ourselves. We shouldn't feel less worthy or guilty if we want to do something for ourselves.

"Ultimately, we need to find what works for each one of us. Be able to recognise your strengths and what you think you can still work on to improve," said Subramaniam, who is a mother.

Currently, Malaysia's rate of female participation in the workforce is at 52.4% - one of the lowest among Asean countries. The target for Malaysia is to increase this number to 55% by the end of the year.



Friday March 6, 2015

3. Leading think-tanks hail PM's call for probe into 1MDB account

PETALING JAYA: Several leading think-tanks have applauded the Prime Minister's directive for a probe into the accounts of 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB).

Tan Sri Dr Michael Yeoh, co-founder and chief executive officer of the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (Asli), said: "It's a good and timely move that can lead to greater accountability, transparency and better governance of 1MDB."

He stressed that the audit must be thorough and cover 1MDB's dealings, including its offshore transactions.

"The audit must be exhaustive and completed expeditiously," he said.

Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) president Datuk Akhbar Satar (*pic*) said the audit was a good start in clearing doubts surrounding 1MDB's deals.

"It's a good start and shows that at least something is being done to allay concerns over 1MDB's dealings," he said.

He added that the probe must be carried out immediately, with the Auditor-General's Department allowed to do its job without any hindrance.

Akhbar said a special task force should be set up to take further action if the audit detected any misconduct.

"It is still too early to say if such a task force will be needed as this will depend on the audit's findings," Akhbar added.

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief operating officer Tricia Yeoh said the audit must be free from political interference.

Noting that the Prime Minister is the chairman of the 1MDB board of advisers, she said she hoped there would not be any conflict of interest that could impair the results of the audit.

Yeoh said the audit was timely as it would lead to better scrutiny of government-linked companies and state enterprises.

Asli chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam said the audit would help overcome the public's doubts over 1MDB's dealings.

"This is a clear indication that the Prime Minister wants to know the truth and let the public be assured through the Auditor-General's probe," he said.



Friday March 6, 2015

4. PAC wants A-G to focus on five crucial points in probe

PETALING JAYA: The Public Accounts Committee wants the Auditor-General's Department to focus on five "crucial points" in its probe of 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB).

PAC chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan said investigations must include issues surrounding 1MDB's source of RM2bil funding to settle its loans with several local banks, the PetroSaudi deal and injection of RM3bil by the Finance Ministry.

The department should find out whether proceeds of 1MDB's investment in Cayman Island were channelled back into the country and the reason for the change in the international auditing firm to approve the sovereign body's accounts.

"The A-G must address these points in the investigations. They are crucial issues which need answers as they relate to 1MDB's dealings," he told *The Star* yesterday.

He welcomed Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's directive for the audit, and said it should start immediately without interference.

"It is a positive initiative by the Prime Minister towards transparency and accountability. The investigations must be thorough and carried out immediately without outside interference from any quarters," he said.

Asked if a time frame should be set for the investigations, Nur Jazlan said it was up to the A-G to fix the scope and terms of reference.

5. No protection if misconduct detected in 1MDB, Najib assures Umno leaders

PETALING JAYA: Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has given the undertaking that no one will be protected if any misconduct is detected in the running of 1MDB.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri, who was tasked with speaking to reporters after Najib had briefed some 160 Umno division chiefs on 1MDB at a closed-door meeting at Putra World Trade Centre on Sunday, said all those present at the meeting "fully supported" the explanation given by Najib.

Ismail said Najib gave the assurance that he would ensure that "no one would be protected" if misappropriation in the government-backed fund was discovered.

"This means that there is nothing to be protected by the Prime Minister and there is nothing that the government is trying to protect. This is what the president has explained and all division heads are satisfied with the explanation," said Ismail.

According to Ismail, Najib said the 1MDB accounts had undergone a more detailed "forensic audit," and no elements of misconduct, fraud or embezzlement were discovered by audit firm Deloitte.

Najib, after the weekly Cabinet meeting, had directed that the 1MDB accounts be scrutinised by the Auditor-General and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to ensure a clean bill of health.

"The commitment of the president is the same as that decided by the Cabinet. The president has explained that we will not protect anyone if misconduct is found within 1MDB," said Ismail.

Ismail said the additional steps and explanation by Najib, who is Prime Minister, was necessary amidst "accusations and slander" hurled on him on 1MDB.

He said Najib had called for solidarity and the strengthening of Umno ahead of next year's party elections.

He said Sunday's meeting was a "usual meeting" and arranged by the division leaders for the purpose of hearing a response from the party president on current issues.

He said it would be part of a biannual meeting to be chaired by Najib.

According to Ismail, the estimated 160 division chiefs accepted Najib's explanation and there were no questions from the floor. Umno has 191 divisions throughout the nation.

Notably absent from the meeting was Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Kedah Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir and Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin.

Ismail said Mukhriz, who is Jerlun Umno division chief, had to accompany the Sultan of Kedah at a function.

However, Ismail explained that the absence of other division chiefs was due to their prior commitments and should not be interpreted to mean anything else.



Monday March 9, 2015

6. MACC to probe any 1MDB wrongdoing

SHAH ALAM: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will investigate the accounts of 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) if there is any indication of irregularities and wrongdoing involving the strategic investment fund.

MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Abu Kassim Mohamed (*pic*) said the commission would await the full report on the matter from the Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) before taking any action.

"Look back at the government statement by the prime minister. The audit will go inside (and investigate), check, and they will present it to the (parliamentary) Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

"If there is a case (of irregularities), they will bring the matter to the law enforcement body (MACC)," he told reporters after witnessing the signing of the Corporate Integrity Pledge at the Computerised Vehicle Inspection Centre (Puspakom) at Section 28 here.

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is Finance Minister, said in a statement that the A-G's report would be passed for transparent inspection to the PAC, which is fully bi-partisan.

7. IGP: Police, A-G, MACC task force to probe 1MDB

KUALA LUMPUR: Police have joined the Attorney-General's Chambers and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate allegations of misconduct in 1MDB.

Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar said a task force comprising the three agencies was set up last week.

"The task force was set up three or four days ago and investigations are on going.

"We will investigate any allegation of misconduct which has been reported to the authorities," he told reporters after signing the letter of acceptance between the Malaysian government and University of Derby at the Cheras police academy.

To a question, Khalid affirmed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak was among those the task force would investigate.

Last week, the Cabinet was briefed by 1MDB and its auditors Deloitte on a number of allegations made against the strategic investment fund.

Najib, who is Finance Minister, said in a statement that a report by the Auditor-General would be passed for transparent inspection to the Public Account Committee, which is fully bi-partisan.

8. IGP: Police to probe 1MDB only if audit reveals discrepancies

PETALING JAYA: Police investigations into the 1MDB controversy will only commence if the Auditor-General discovers any discrepancies in its books, said Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar. *(pic)*.

In a statement, the Inspector-General of Police said that they would only commence investigations if the audit uncovered any discrepancies.

Khalid also clarified media reports which quoted him suggesting that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is the chairman of 1MDB's board of advisers, would be questioned regarding the issue.

"What I actually meant was that the police will speak to all whom we believe can help shed light on the case. Be that as it may, the focus would be on the decision makers in the company," he said.

"I also wish to reiterate that these actions will only commence if the report discovers discrepancies and indications of wrongdoing. Otherwise, investigations will not ensue," he added.

Khalid also cautioned all parties against lodging reports without any basis, saying that police will take action against those who deliberately waste the police's time and resources.

"Please allow due process to take its course," Khalid said.

Khalid added that the said task force will be headed by the Attorney-General's Chambers to allow pooling of resources in facilitating investigations.

"This will be more effective than carrying out separate investigations," he said.

Khalid said in addition to the commercial crimes division and the Attorney-General's Chambers, the task force also includes personnel from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

It was reported that a three-panel task force had been set up to investigate allegations of misconduct involving 1MDB.

The task force, which was set up a few days ago, consists of investigators from the Attorney-General's Chambers, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and the police.



Wednesday March 11, 2015

9. 'There will be no conflict of interest'

PUTRAJAYA: Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang has given his assurance that there will be no conflict of interest in the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) probe.

Ambrin said his department would submit its report to the bipartisan parliamentary Public Accounts Committee and not Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Najib is also Finance Minister and 1MDB advisory board chairman. The Finance Ministry owns the strategic development company.

Responding to a question at a press conference here, Ambrin said: "Since the focus is on the accounts, we will look at all of them, previous accounts included."

He said that his department had been given a "broad mandate".

Ambrin said it would do whatever was needed, including roping in external expertise or calling in Najib "if necessary", for the audit.

He said the department would give the audit priority and hoped his team would be left to do the job professionally.

Ambrin stressed that the auditing of government companies was not new to the department and was provided for under the Audit Act.

"We are no strangers to company auditing. We have experience in auditing government companies. Let us do our job professionally, quietly," he said.

Ambrin said the department began investigating 1MDB as soon as the prime Minister ordered the audit last week.

1MDB and its auditors Deloitte were called to brief the Cabinet on the state of the company and responded to questions, including from the Prime Minister and his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Najib then ordered the Auditor-General to independently verify 1MDB's accounts, and said the company would face legal repercussions if there was any wrongdoing.

Ambrin said that no timeframe had been set for submitting the report to PAC as the audit should not be rushed.

"I agree that time is of the essence and we are giving this priority, but we need to balance speed with accuracy," he added.

On whether the department would also ask for email and other such records for the probe, Ambrin said: "We will do whatever is necessary within our means."

He said he had met 1MDB president and group executive director Arul Kanda, who pledged to cooperate fully in the investigation.

Asked if Arul handed over any documents to him or if they had just met for coffee, Ambrin quipped: "Not coffee, I had Milo."

"He has not presented (any documents yet) but my team has already started work," Ambrin added.

1MDB, established by the Government in 2009 to drive strategic investments, has come under heavy criticism for accumulating heavy debts.



Wednesday March 11, 2015

10. Najib: Malaysia's external debt tripled to RM740bil due to 'new loan definitions'

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's external debt has swelled to RM740.7bil in the third quarter of last year from RM196bil in the final quarter of 2013, the Dewan Rakyat was told.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is also the Finance Minister, in a written reply said that the sharp increase was due to a new definition in debt reporting, in use since last year.

"The new definition was in line with international debt reporting. This includes external offshore loans, public enterprises and the private sector," he said to reply to a question by William Leong Jee Keen (PKR-Sepang).

Leong had asked the Finance Ministry to reveal the reason why the country's external debt stood at RM740.7bil and its impact on the country's economy.

Najib said the external debt, based on the new definition, showed the level of Ringgit denominator security debt held by foreigners, comprising two-thirds of the increase of external debt.

"This is because of the depth, openness and attractiveness on Malaysia's financial market," he said.

The Finance Ministry also reveal that the Government's debt as at Dec last year stood at RM582.8bil or 54.5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"From the total, 97.1% or RM566.1bil was domestic debt, while the remaining RM16.8bil or 2.9% was external debt.

"The Federal Government's financial debt remains manageable and can be categorised as at a modest position," he said.

The Government, he said, remains committed to ensure that the debt level remains under the 55% limit of the country's GDP.

11. Asean's trade growth likely to exceed global average

KUALA LUMPUR: Asean's total trade growth this year is likely to exceed that of the global average by 2-3 per cent, said International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

Last year, average global trade grew by 5.9%.

"ASEAN is a growing market. We believe, with the accelerated growth of Asean economies relative to others in the world, its trade growth is going to be higher than the global average," he added.

Mustapa told a press conference this after opening the Asian Business Forum 2015 here today.

On investment, Mustapa said ASEAN would gradually increase its market share of the global foreign direct investment (FDI) flow to between 11-12% from the current 10%.

Total FDI drawn by Asean in 2013 was at US\$122.38 billion, of which US\$21.32 billion came from investments within Asean members.

For Malaysia, the minister said the momentum of the local trade growth would move in tandem with Asean mostly at three per cent.

"Malaysia is expected to see more investment coming from Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines this year, given the improvement in our business landscape and continuous economy stability," said Mustapa.

Earlier, in his speech, Mustapa said 2015 is an important year for Malaysia given its chairmanship of Asean, and the country would focus on enhancing awareness of the regional grouping to the general public.

He added Malaysia would also increase its investment figures by addressing the opportunities and challenges that are part of Asean.

12. UMW Oil Gas eyeing over RM5b contracts

KUALA LUMPUR: UMW Oil and Gas is actively bidding for contracts with its management eyeing 22 contracts worth RM5.4bil, according to CIMB Equities Research.

It said on Monday that following its communication with the company's president Rohaizad Darus last Friday, UMW-OG was still actively seeking contracts.

The research house said Rohaizad shared two key updates. Following the expiry of contracts for Naga 2 and Naga 3 in late March 2015 and early April 2015 respectively, management will take advantage of the downtime to dry-dock the jack-ups, putting them out of action for up to three months.

"The dry-docking cost is around US\$15mil for each jack-up. In addition to Naga 2, Naga 3 and Naga 6, two more jack-ups - Naga 5 and Naga 7 - are expected to have one- to three-month gaps in between contracts this year," it said.

CIMB Research said the operations of Naga 1 and Naga 4 were going smoothly. The contracts will expire in FY16 and FY18 respectively.

"Our target price drops as we lower our FY15-17 EPS to impute the asset downtime and dry-docking costs. We continue to value the stock at 15x CY16 P/E, on par with our target market P/E. We keep our Add call, with a successful Middle Eastern foray as a potential re-rating catalyst," it said.

CIMB Research pointed out the current low oil price environment was far from ideal but it was encouraged by management taking the challenges in its stride.

"Management is pressing on with its aggressive approach to ensure all its assets are contracted, bidding for 22 contracts worth RM5.4bn as at Feb 2015. Of the 22 contracts, eight are domestic and the rest are international.

"The split between long-term and short-term contracts is 36:64. The company's order book stood at RM1.8bil as at Dec 31, 2014.

"The plan to venture into the Middle East by year-end is intact," it said.

CIMB Research said Naga 8 might be deployed to facilitate the new venture. The jack-up, which is expected to be delivered in September 2015, was 76.44% completed as at February 2015.

"We advise investors to accumulate UMW-OG shares, given the current share price weakness. The company has evolved from a local player to a major force to be reckoned in Southeast Asia. It is now on the verge of a new phase of international expansion, with the potential securing of a contract in the Middle East," it said.

13. 'Ali Baba' tactic used in corrupt naval supply deals, says MACC

IPOH: Initial investigations into a case involving allegedly corrupt practices by Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) staff and civilians in naval procurement jobs found that one of them had used the "Ali Baba" tactic to carry out supply deals with the RMN.

A source from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said one individual was using other people's names in the procurement of parts for the navy fleet.

"The navy deals with about 2,500 companies. But we are now focusing our investigations on 20 to 30 of these companies." "We believe the individual is controlling them," he said in an interview.

He added that the MACC was also checking other companies' involvement.

The magistrate's court here yesterday extended the remand of six RMN personnel and a group of civilians suspected of corrupt practices in naval procurement by three days.

Assistant legal officer Wong Lok Hai granted the extension yesterday to 11 of the 15 suspects to enable the MACC to investigate the matter. Four civilians were released.

The suspects had been remanded for seven days since March 9.

Last week, six RMN staff, including a husband and wife holding the rank of lieutenant commander, were arrested for alleged graft at the Lumut naval base's dock procurement section.

They were believed to have splurged on expensive cars, watches and several properties.

The activities attracted MACC investigators, who questioned their sudden excessive spending on luxury items way above their pay grade.

Nine civilians, aged between 20 and 60, who were working for companies supplying items to the navy, were also detained.

It was also learnt that the suspects might have been involved in these illegal activities for more than five years.

14. Wee: Fair allocation of govt funds for all schools

KULAIJAYA: The Government has never marginalised any type of school, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong said.

He said the Government had always stressed the importance of education as a key factor to ensure the country became a high income nation within the next several years.

He said the Barisan government had always been fair in allocating financial assistance to all schools.

"Whether it is a Chinese, Tamil or national school, the Government never fails to help. All schools in Malaysia receive the same per capita grants given by the Government," he said after officiating at the ground-breaking ceremony of SJK(C) Pei Cheng Kulaijaya near Bandar Putra here yesterday.

Dr Wee, who is MCA deputy president, said for Chinese schools, their respective board of governors were responsible for spending the funds allocated to the schools.

He said the board was held accountable if it mismanaged the allocated funds.

"Each month, the board has to send its financial report to the Education Ministry as this will help it get more financial assistance from the Government in the future," he added.

On the event, Dr Wee said the school was originally located in Pengerang but due to development there and the number of pupils, SJKC Pei Cheng was relocated here.

"The school was under-enrolled and it had to be moved to ensure it would not close down," he said.

Dr Wee said the Government had allocated about RM5mil to the school board, adding that the first phase of construction was expected to be completed by the year-end.

15. Economic growth in Asia to remain strong

HONG KONG: The economic growth in Asia will remain strong this year and next year cushioned by soft commodity prices and recovery in major industrial economies.

According to new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on Tuesday, it forecasts Asia will attain gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.3% in both 2015 and 2016. Last year, the Asian region posted GDP growth of 6.3%.

ADB chief economist Shang-Jin Wei said policy makers in the Asian region are cutting costly fuel subsidies due to falling commodity prices.

"This is a key opportunity to build frameworks that will support more inclusive and sustainable growth in the longer term," she added.

In the Southeast Asian region, sub-regional growth is expected to increase to 4.9% and 5.3% in 2015 and 2016 respectively from 4.4% last year.

ADB said This is due to the expected economic recovery of Thailand and Indonesia as well as the subregion benefiting from lower inflation and rising exports.

Furthermore, in South Asia, growth is anticipated to expand to 7.2% and 7.6% in 2015 and 2016 respectively due to strong pick-up growth in India.

"Both Bangladesh and Pakistan are following through with wide-ranging economic reforms that include efforts to overcome power shortages, though political challenges may limit progress in 2015," it added.

On the other hand, softer commodity prices and accommodative monetary policy would also support growth in Japan and euro area.

"Japan and euro area economies are forecast to expand by 2.2% and 2.4% in both 2015 and 2016 respectively," the ADB report said.

The report added that the improving external demand from these economies as well as expected pick-up of growth in India could offset the slowdown growth in China.

16. No huge price increase after GST comes into force, says Hasan

PUTRAJAYA: Consumers will not see a huge increase in prices following the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), said Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Minister Datuk Seri Hasan Malek (*pix*).

He said this was because businesses had pledged that they would not exploit the new tax scheme, which comes into force on April 1, to increase charges and prices.

"We have had many engagements with trader associations and chambers of commerce including the FMM (Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers) and Malaysian Retailers Association (MRA) on GST.

"We explained to them that they must comply with the regulations that they must ensure their net profits are within a certain margin from Jan 2 until June 30 next year.

"They have been told that if their net profits go beyond the margin, that is profiteering and they will face action under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act," he said after receiving the compliance pledge signed by the associations and chambers of commerce here, Thursday.

Among the associations that signed the compliance pledge are FMM which was represented its president Datuk Seri Saw Choo Boon, MRA by its council member Datuk Wira Ameer Ali Mydin, Petrol Dealers Association of Malaysia (PDAM) by its president Datuk Hashim Othman and Federation of Malaysian Malay Petty Trader Associations president Datuk Ramli Norani.

By signing the compliance pledge, members of the associations and chambers of commerce have agreed not to use the GST as an excuse to manipulate or increase prices, not to increase the net profit margin between Jan 2 and June 30 next year, keep and maintain records in line with requirements and conduct business ethically.

17. MACC confirms arrests of 16 over purchase of naval assets

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has confirmed the arrests of 16 suspects, including six Royal Malaysian Navy officers, over alleged corrupt practices in procuring naval assets and parts.

A total of 240 accounts worth RM23mil, including RM5mil in stocks, were also frozen and items - RM200,000 in cash, several luxury watches (Loius Vuitton, Patek Philippe, Tag Heuer and Frederique Constant) and 13 luxury vehicles comprising Lamborghini, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Audi - were seized.

MACC director of investigation Datuk Mohd Jamidan Abdullah said the suspects were nabbed on March 9 and 11 in Kuala Lumpur, Manjung, Ipoh and Lumut.

"The naval officers hold the rank of Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander, Naval Lieutenant and Senior Aircraftman while the rest are business owners and their middlemen," he said in a statement here yesterday.

Jamidan said the suspects were released after being remanded for between seven and 10 days.

"Investigation is still ongoing. They are being investigated under Section 17(a) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009, Section 4 (1) of the Anti-Money Laundering Act, Anti-Terrorism Financing Act 2001 and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001," he said.

On Tuesday, the navy had transferred six of its officers suspected of corruption.

This comes after staff from the RMN Lumut base were arrested over corrupt practices in procuring naval assets and parts.

MACC, which found the officers living a luxurious lifestyle beyond their pay grade, also arrested nine civilians who were suppliers and contractors to the navy.



Thursday March 26, 2015

18. Najib: 1MDB has RM5bil debt with local banks

KUALA LUMPUR: 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) has a total of RM5.037bil in loans with local banks in Malaysia, says Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

In a written reply to Mohd Rafizi Ramli (PKR - Pandan), he said the total was as of January this year.

"Up to January 2015, the total amount of debts by 1MDB with local banks is RM5.037bil," Najib said in a brief reply dated Wednesday.

Mohd Rafizi had asked Najib to state the loans undertaken by 1MDB with local banks.

The Opposition MP had also asked the Prime Minister to state the latest audit findings by Bank Negara Malaysia for each of the loans.



Friday March 27, 2015

19. MACC: Naval graft case may involve more people

KUALA LUMPUR: The investigation into the 16 suspects, including six navy officers, arrested over corrupt practices in procuring naval assets may take a week or may be longer because more people could be involved.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) investigations director Datuk Mohd Jamidan Abdullah said the MACC would need more time to complete it.

"We have to complete the investigation before any decision is made. There is investigation carried out on other individuals, including senior officers.

"We have to thoroughly look through the testimony against the six who are being investigated and there is a big possibility others are involved," he said after the completion of a course for MACC officers here yesterday.

However, Mohd Jamidan said the MACC had yet to determine if more people would be arrested.

"When we look at the acquisition in the contracts, there is irregularity and the contract was for three years from 2012.

"Besides that, it involved middlemen who acted for the navy officers," he said.

On Wednesday, the MACC announced that it had arrested the 16 and frozen 240 accounts with RM23mil, including RM5mil in stock.

It also seized RM200,000 in cash and luxury watches and impounded 13 vehicles comprising Lamborghini, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Audi.

The suspects were arrested on March 9 and 11 in Kuala Lumpur, Manjung, Ipoh and Lumut.

They are being investigated under Section 17(a) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009, Section 4 (1) of the Anti-Money Laundering Act, Anti-Terrorism Financing Act 2001 and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001.

20. Govt has no plan to peg ringgit

KUALA LUMPUR: The government has no plan to peg the ringgit against the US dollar to address its depreciation, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chua Tee Yong said.

He said the current situation is different from the financial crisis in 1997-1998 when such measure was taken as the country's economic condition now is on a strong footing.

"The current situation is driven by global development that have also affected other countries in the region.

"What is important our economic activities are not affected and a drastic measure like pegging the ringgit is only for extreme situations and we are not embroiled in the quandary," he said when replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Seri Abdul Ghafur Salleh (BN-Kalabakan) at the Dewan Rakyat today.

Chua said Bank Negara Malaysia also has provisions to prevent speculation of the ringgit.

Earlier, he said as depreciation of the ringgit would lead to higher production costs due to rising prices of imported raw materials, the impact would be absorbed by the prices of raw materials which would be lower due to slumping oil and commodity prices.

"Crude oil prices have dropped by 47% while food prices decreased by 12% since September 2014.

"Hence, the impact on costs for manufacturers is under control. This is reflected from the Producer Price Index that dropped by 3.5% between September 2014 and January 2015," he said.

However, Chua said the impact on the inflation rate is small as imports of goods, excluding petrol and diesel, accounted for 7.2% of the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

He said the economy is still on a strong footing, recording a sustainable growth of six per cent in 2014 compared with 4.7% in 2013.

The growth resulted from various initiatives taken by the government to diversify the economy and improve its resilience and competitiveness, he added.

"The economic growth is driven by domestic demand and strong fundamentals like low unemployment, robust financial system and high international reserves which stood at US\$109.2 billion dollars (RM381.5 billion)," he said.

21. BHIC gets additional RM531mil government contract

KUALA LUMPUR: Boustead DCNS Naval Corp Sdn Bhd, a 60%-owned unit of Boustead Heavy Industries Corp Bhd (BHIC), has received an additional contract with a ceiling value of RM531.2mil from the Government.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, BHIC said the contract was for the in-service support (ISS) for two units of Prime Ministers class submarines for the Royal Malaysian Navy.

It said the additional contract value for the extension of the ISS contract would commence yesterday to May 31, 2017.

"The ISS contract will have a material effect on the earnings of BHIC group for the financial year ending Dec 31, 2015, and will contribute positively to its future earnings," it said.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, BHIC executive deputy chairman and managing director Tan Sri Ahmad Ramli Mohd Nor said the contract would allow the company to continue the maintenance of the two submarines prior their refit.

"The first vessel is due to commence its refit by year-end," he said.

BHIC is a subsidiary of Boustead Holdings Bhd, which is a subsidiary of the Armed Forces Funds.