

1. Selangor Sultan wants hospital projects to be delivered on time

SHAH ALAM: Selangor Ruler Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah wants all projects in the state, especially hospitals, to be built within the stipulated time frame.

"The agencies responsible for the projects must supervise the implementation closely as well as take care of the projects' maintenance," said Sultan Sharafuddin in his speech during the official opening of Hospital Shah Alam here Thursday.

He also reminded that all facilities in old hospitals must be well looked after to prevent any untoward incident from happening.

Sultan Sharafuddin added he wanted every hospital in Selangor to have efficient fire prevention systems that were in good working order.

"Every faulty equipment must be replaced immediately so that it would not be a risk to patients and medical staff," said Sultan Sharafuddin.

He also advised all medical personnel and hospital staff to be prepared at all times to handle any possible emergencies that may occur.

On another matter, Sultan Sharafuddin advised the people to be cautious and not to use medication, which was not endorsed by the Health Ministry.

"The rakyat must be wise in choosing the best to protect their health so that there won't be any regrets because of a mistake or excessive intake of prohibited items," he said.

Sultan Sharafuddin also said he hoped doctors and medical specialists would continue to serve in government hospitals and medical facilities as a service to the people.

"Only in government hospitals can the masses receive affordable and effective treatment and specialist care," said the Ruler.

He said the government, in turn, must provide the necessary initiatives to doctors and staff who serve in government medical facilities.

Also at the launch were Sultan Sharafuddin's consort Tengku Permaisuri Norashikin Abdul Rahman, Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali and Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Subramaniam said Hospital Shah Alam had recorded 45,458 patients who visited the specialist clinic from Jan to Sept this year.

"Patients arriving at the emergency department numbered 61,679 whilst the number of births recorded were 5,062," said Dr Subramaniam.

He added there were 16,439 admissions for the same period with a bed occupancy rate of 74.58%.

Dr Subramaniam also said 3,287 surgeries had been carried out at the hospital.

The hospital was finally completed early last year after a seven year and four month delay because the first company which was granted the project in 2007 could not deliver according to schedule in 2010.



Tuesday, 6 December 2016

2. Najib: KL-Singapore high-speed rail deal to be inked next week

ISKANDAR PUTERI: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has described the progress of the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) project as "well and good".

Najib, who is also the Finance Minister, said that Singapore had requested for a bit of time as the country required the approval from its president.

"(Singapore) Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has called me and asked for a little bit of time to brief their president," he told reporters after launching the 10th anniversary of Iskandar Malaysia at Educity here Tuesday.

Najib said under the Singapore Constitution, the guarantee of such project would need the approval from the president.

"We will be signing the agreement next week, I think. He (Lee) is coming to Kuala Lumpur," he added.

Both countries have been discussing the agreement for more than a year.

Recently, Najib said Malaysia and Singapore were on track to sign an agreement on the HSR project by early December and the international tender to supply the HSR trains could be called by the fourth quarter of next year.

Malaysia and Singapore inked the historic HSR agreement on July 19, 2016, signifying that in the next 10 years, travellers will be able to reach the end destination between the two cities in just 90 minutes.

The line is expected to consist of eight stations, namely Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Seremban, Ayer Keroh, Muar, Batu Pahat, Iskandar Puteri and Singapore.



Thursday, 8 December 2016

3. 1MDB: No discussions with China on IPIC repayments

KUALA LUMPUR: 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) is not in talks with China to make repayments to International Petroleum Investment Company (IPIC), said its chairman Tan Sri Dr Mohd Irwan Serigar Abdullah.

"I am the chairman of 1MDB, and as I know, there is no such thing as us talking to China about this.

"Nobody talked to us," he told a press conference here Thursday.

Dr Mohd Irwan was referring to a *Financial Times* report Wednesday that claimed 1MDB was getting China to help with repayments to IPIC, a company owned by the Abu Dhabi government.



Saturday, 10 December 2016

4. MACC investigating high profile cases in Kelantan

KOTA BARU: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is investigating more than three high profile corruption cases in Kelantan involving losses of millions of ringgit, said MACC Kelantan director Datuk Moh Samsudin Yusof.

Moh Samsudin said that the investigation involves organisations, individuals and senior government officials and is in its early stages.

"The cases are in relation to tampering with government revenue, hindering revenue collection, incurring government losses and carrying out development projects without following the rules," he said

Moh Samsudin added while speaking to reporters after opening the state-level 2016 International Anti-Corruption Day celebration on Saturday that those involved in the cases should come forward to assist in investigations.

He said that from January to December, the MACC has opened up 31 investigation papers linked to reports of corruption by various parties in the state.

"Investigations into 19 of the cases have been completed but we have not started on the remaining 12 cases," said Moh Samsudin



Thursday, 15 December 2016

5. IMF sees Malaysia growing at 4.5% in 2017

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's economy is seen growing at 4.5% in 2017 on strong private consumption but will continue to suffer from weak commodity prices and slowing private investment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday.

Malaysia has been buffeted by poor demand for its exports of commodities and liquefied natural gas over the past year. In January, the government cut spending and revised its 2016 growth forecast down to 4.0-4.5% from 4.0-5.0% in January.

"While the Malaysian economy has adjusted well to lower global oil prices, sustained low commodity prices add to the challenges of fiscal consolidation," said IMF's Daisaku Kihara, who led a two-week consultation mission to Malaysia in early December.

While Malaysia is a marginal oil exporter, it is the world's third largest exporter of LNG, contract prices for which are linked to crude prices.

"Heightened global financial stress could potentially spill over to domestic markets," Kihara said in a statement.

The IMF says Malaysia has performed well "despite significant headwinds" stemming from structurally weak growth in developed and emerging markets, and expects 2016 growth to come in at 4.2% aided by a diversified economy and a flexible exchange rate.

Medium term growth is seen at 4.5 to 5.0%.

Malaysia's ringgit, however, has been Asia's worst performing currency in recent weeks, at one point losing nearly 7% against the dollar following Donald Trump's US presidential election win on Nov 8.

To stem the decline, Malaysia's central bank stepped in and warned of "prompt supervisory intervention" against any individuals or banks engaged in ringgit trade in the offshore non-deliverable forwards (NDF) market.

Kihara says the current monetary policy "is appropriate in the baseline scenario of moderate growth, low inflation, and external uncertainties", but stressed the need for careful calibration to support growth while maintaining financial stability.

He said Malaysia has made "significant progress" towards its goal of achieving high-income status, which need continued efforts towards structural reforms to boost longer-term economic growth.

But Malaysia will need to keep an eye on its "relatively high" household debt, and stay on track on its fiscal consolidation drive and goal of slashing its budget deficit to 3.0% in 2017, Kihara added.



Sunday, 18 December 2016

6. Eight construction works packages for Pan Borneo Highway launched

MIRI: An additional eight packages of construction works worth a total of RM12.55 bil for the Pan Borneo Highway were launched on Sunday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak launched these work packages here, witnessed by Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, local politicians, and community leaders.

The eight additional packages are located at various locations stretching from the southern Sematan district to Miri in the north and near the Lawas border.

Najib said the Federal Government will allocate RM 12.55 billion for these eight new packages.

"The main contractors to handle these packages will be Sarawakians," he said.

Four other packages had already been launched in the southernmost regions of Sarawak.

In total, RM 16.9bil of federal funds have been approved for these packages, which are the first phase of the Pan Borneo project.

The first phase will be completed by 2021, said Najib.

The second phase will be through Brunei and onwards into Sabah state, he added.

Adenan thanked Najib and the federal government for their commitment in realising the project that he said would provide more efficient and smoother land links for the 1000km route of the state.



Monday, 19 December 2016

7. Cuepacs' demand for review of civil servant allowances to be brought to Cabinet

KUALA LUMPUR: A few of Cuepacs's demands, such as the reviewing of civil servants' allowances, will be brought to Cabinet, said Datuk Ser Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (*pic*).

The Deputy Prime Minister said he would ask Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Richard Riot to bring up the issues at this Wednesday's Cabinet meeting.

"I will remind the Human Resources Minister to bring up the issue of allowances, which has not been reviewed in 14 years, to the Cabinet," said Dr Ahmad Zahid in his opening speech at Cuepacs' 27th Congress on Monday morning.

Cuepacs president Datuk Azih Muda had earlier listed several demands for the Government to look into.

Among the other proposals by the civil servants' union was for the Government to provide insurance coverage for civil servants, and to introduce time-based promotion.



Tuesday, 20 December 2016

8. Senior cop claims trial over ill-gotten RM2mil

JOHOR BARU: A senior police officer from Bukit Aman has claimed trial at the Sessions Court here to seven charges of using RM2.08mil received from illegal activities.

In the first five charges, Deputy Supt Mohd Ismail Syed Merah, 53, is alleged to have used some RM1.55mil on life insurance plans for himself and his daughter Nur Aqilah Mohd Ismail.

He allegedly committed the offence through an agent from MAA Takaful Bhd in Jalan Tun Razak here between Sept 4, 2014, and Feb 26, 2015.

The father of two also allegedly transferred RM529,570 on Oct 8, 2015, and Dec 28, 2015, to two banks in Johor through one Tan Kim Tee's account.

Mohd Ismail was working at the Bukit Aman police headquarters' logistics department at the time.

He was charged under Section 4(1)(a) of the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (Act 613).

The offence carries a jail sentence of not more than 15 years and a fine not less than five times the amount involved or RM5mil, whichever is higher.

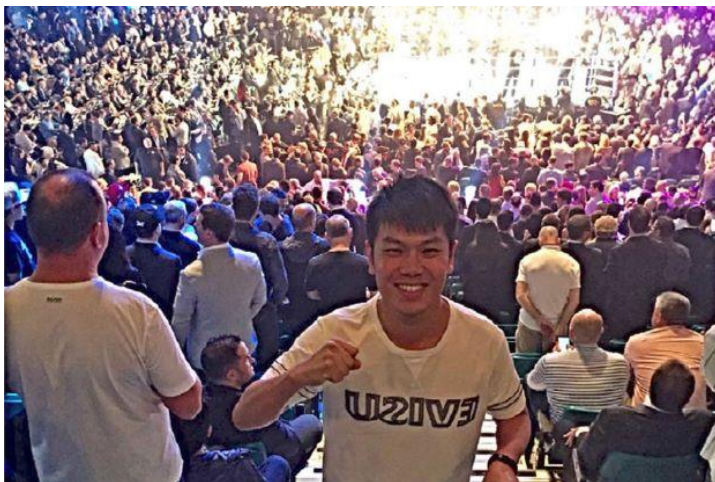
Mohd Ismail pleaded not guilty after the charges were read out.

Judge Mohd Fauzi Mohd Nasir set bail at RM100,000 with one surety for the seven charges.



Wednesday, 21 December 2016

9. Ex-BSI banker Yeo Jiawei found guilty in case related to 1MDB scandal



Ex-BSI banker Yeo Jiawei has repeatedly downplayed his close ties to elusive Malaysian businessman Low Taek Jho, better known as Jho Low. The Straits Times

SINGAPORE: Ex-BSI banker Yeo Jiawei was found guilty for his role in the most complex, sophisticated and largest money-laundering case involving billions of dollars alleged to have been misappropriated from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

Singaporean District Judge Ng Peng Hong on Wednesday handed down the verdict against Yeo after a 12-day trial last month on four counts of attempting to pervert the course of justice. Seven other charges, which concern cheating, money laundering and forgery, will be dealt with next year.

Sentencing will be at a later date.

Yeo, 33, has repeatedly downplayed his close ties to elusive Malaysian businessman Low Taek Jho, better known as Jho Low, who is also under investigation here and elsewhere over money-laundering claims linked to 1MDB.

The Singaporean had been employed by Swiss-based BSI as a wealth planner here between December 2009 and July 2014. He allegedly amassed S\$26mil (RM80.66mil) from various sources, including illicit schemes to defraud BSI while he was an employee.

Yeo is the third person to be convicted in Singapore's 1MDB probe. Yvonne Seah Yew Foong, a former BSI private banker, was sentenced last week to two weeks' jail and a fine of S\$10,000 (RM31,000) for helping to forge documents and failing to report suspicious transactions, allegedly related to Jho Low. Her supervisor, Yak Yew Chee, is serving an 18-week jail term after being pleading guilty in November for similar offences.

Yeo is accused of facilitating illicit transactions involving 1MDB that led to the closure of BSI here. One charge alleges that after his release on police bail, he arranged a meeting on March 27 this year in Pergola Cafe at Swiss Club in Swiss Club Road with his associate, Samuel Goh Sze-Wei, and Kevin Swampillai, BSI's head of wealth management services.

Yeo allegedly told them to lie to the police by saying that funds transferred by Goh to Bridgerock Investment and GTB Investment, beneficially owned by Yeo and Swampillai respectively, were Goh's investments.

After he left BSI, Yeo is alleged to have continued with illicit transactions connected to the case. Some of these were allegedly conducted through legal and corporate services provider Amicorp Group.

Yeo was concerned that Amicorp employees Jose Renato Carvalho Pinto and Mun Enci Aloysius, who had received instructions from him in relation to these transactions, would be interviewed by the CAD.

He allegedly told Carvalho to dispose of his laptop, and to "not travel to Singapore to avoid being interviewed" by the CAD.

Yeo was also charged with "abetting" Carvalho to tell Aloysius to lie about not knowing of Yeo's dealings with Amicorp if he was questioned by the CAD. - The Straits Times/Asia News Network



Thursday, 22 December 2016

10. Ten nabbed for sale of fake MyKad in Sabah

KOTA KINABALU: Two masterminds were among 10 people arrested by the National Registration Department (NRD) for the issuance of fake identity cards (MyKad) in the state.

The suspects were arrested at a hotel and a house in Kampung Tanjung Batu in Tawau during a six-hour overnight operation that begun late Wednesday night, NRD Investigations and Enforcement director, Mohamad Yusri Hashim said.

The two masterminds were locals aged 44 and 50 years-old respectively.

A 30-year-old woman who took pictures and fingerprints of the applicants as part of the scam was also arrested.

The NRD also seized 29 fake MyKad, fake US\$17,100 currency, fake RM200 currency, two vehicles, and equipment to take fingerprints of the applicants.

"We also seized bank cards, driving licences, eight mobile phones, a book containing up to 500 names of fake MyKad applicants and bank receipts worth tens of thousands ringgit," he told reporters Thursday.

The remaining seven suspects were members of one Indonesian family who were arrested at Kampung Tanjung Batu in Tawau, he said, adding that they were believed to be agents who sold the fake identity cards for the syndicate.

The identity cards were sold to foreigners in Tawau, Kunak and Semporna.

11. Wan Junaidi: Big dip in illegal bauxite mining in Pahang

KUCHING: There is a possibility that illegal mining of bauxite is still taking place in Felda Bukit Goh, Pahang, although there is no conclusive evidence.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (*pic*) said he noticed several heaps of bauxite, as if they were stockpiles, during a recent aerial surveillance of the area.

However, he said he did not notice any movement of vehicles, lorries and excavators.

If there is any illegal mining taking place, it may not be as rampant as thought, he added.

"This leads to two possibilities. Either there is there is some illegal mining or the heaps of bauxite were left behind before the moratorium was imposed," he told reporters here Friday.

Dr Wan Junaidi, who is also Santubong MP, said his ministry is not against any form of mining, as long as it is conducted according to rules and regulations to protect the environment.

"Mining creates wealth. Natural resources must be harvested based on international standards and sustainable management.

"When we exploit our mineral wealth, we must not pollute the environment," he said.

It was reported yesterday that the moratorium on bauxite mining in Pahang has been extended to March 31 next year. It is the fourth extension since the moratorium was first imposed early this year.

Dr Wan Junaidi was reported as saying that some 2.95 million tonnes of bauxite remains which is yet to be cleared and exported.

He said there have been notable improvements in cleanliness and pollution in Pahang since the moratorium took effect.

12. Cops recover fake USD, RM notes from Mykad syndicate member

TAWAU: Police discovered fake notes in a house in Taman Bukit Bintang here on Wednesday following the arrest of a man during a special operation by the National Registration Department (NRD).

Tawau police chief ACP Fadil Marsus said police found fake RM100 notes and fourteen RM50 notes in a room which had been occupied by the 44-year-old suspect.

"All these notes were kept in a drawer of a wardrobe in his room," he said here.

The suspect was earlier picked up at a hotel car park here following his alleged involvement in a fake MyKad syndicate in the town as well as neighbouring districts.

ACP Fadil said in the 10.30pm operation led by the NRD Investigation and Enforcement Division director Mohamad Yusri Hashim, they found fake currencies when inspecting a Naza Citra car the suspect was in.

"During the inspection, they found 171 fake USD100 notes and two fake RM100 notes," he said.

Fadil said the man would be remanded for four days to facilitate investigations.

In the six-hour operation, the NRD detained 10 individuals including two Indonesians and a Filipino men, all of whom are believed to be involved in the MyKad syndicate, at the hotel compound and in Kampung Tanjung Batu.

The police seized 29 fake MyKads, RM3,839 cash, a Naza Citra and Proton car, thumbprint scanner and a notebook gadget containing software to process information of clients.

Also seized were ATM cards; driving licence; eight mobile phones containing information pertaining to MyKad forgery; a book containing between 400 and 500 names of fake MyKad buyers; and transaction records since early this year.

13. Three to be charged Thursday in RM3.3bil Sabah water scandal



KOTA KINABALU: Three people are expected to be charged Thursday in connection with one of the country's biggest graft investigations involving alleged abuse of power in the siphoning of RM3.3bil of federal funds for water development in Sabah.

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency sources have confirmed that the three would be charged at the Sessions Court here. They declined to identify the suspects.

It is understood that the former director of Sabah Water Department, who has been suspended from his duties, will be among those slapped with charges of corruption, abuse of power and money laundering.

It is understood that the Attorney General's Office has given the green light to charge three of the suspects in connection with the case where investigators uncovered over RM114mil in cash, property, jewellery, local and overseas banks accounts that were allegedly linked to the duo.

The sensational corruption case came to light after raids were made at the office and home of the 54-year-old director and his 52-year-old deputy on Oct 22.

Shocked investigators allegedly found RM45mil in cash in the director's house and some RM3mil at the office of the other.

The massive probe nearly crippled the department when investigations went down to the district levels.

MACC also arrested the deputy director's 55-year-old brother, a businessman and a former state water department deputy director appointed as an adviser to the state Finance Ministry on water issues.

The investigations led to the suspension of the two top water officials and the department has transferred nearly 15 engineers at both state and district levels implicated in the probe.

MACC investigators claimed that the suspects were siphoning RM3.3bil funds meant for water projects in Sabah since 2010 through a network of companies linked to their families. They were also probed for abuse of power.

In late November, MACC deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki said they had analysed 8,000 payment vouchers between 2008 and 2016 from "tens of thousands of documents."

Azam said apart from the two top officials, also detained were 26 others and another 23 divisional and district engineers.

The MACC recorded the statements of 200 witnesses in their probe where they have seized or frozen some RM114.5mil of cash, bank accounts, unit trusts and other assets within and outside the country.



Wednesday, 28 December 2016

14. NGOs want Selangor MACC to disclose status of investigations into water deal

SHAH ALAM: Three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) want the Selangor chapter of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to disclose the status of its investigation into the takeover deal between the state government and Syarikat Pengeluar Air Sungai Selangor (Splash).

Failing which, Suara Malaysia, Batas Malaysia and Gapenas Selangor, will report the Selangor MACC to the Public Complaints Bureau, which is under the Prime Minister's Department.

The group's spokesman Zamil Ibrahim, who is Suara Malaysia adviser, said they had lodged a report with the state MACC about the water deal between the Selangor state government and Splash 43 days ago, but were yet to receive any feedback on it.

"We have given Selangor MACC 14 days to comply with our demand and if they don't we will report the agency to the bureau," said Zamil.

He added that an official letter had been handed over to the state MACC to immediately reveal what the agency had done to date in regards to the report.

Zamil said the initial report was lodged because there was a big difference between the amount offered to Splash by former Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim and current Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali.

"We feel Azmin's offer is favouring Splash and not the consumers and this is not right," said Zamil when met at the state MACC office in Wisma PKPS here on Wednesday.

Zamil said the group had stated in the report that it wanted the Selangor MACC to investigate why Azmin's offer to take over Splash was RM2.7bil as opposed to Khalid's offer of RM250.6mil.

"We have given all the necessary figures and documents to the Selangor MACC," he added.

He claimed that Selangor MACC had yet to call Khalid, Azmin or Splash's Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah for questioning.

"Tan Sri Khalid has said that he is prepared to come to the MACC office anytime, so why hasn't he been called yet?" asked Zamil.

Zamil said the MACC should not treat the matter lightly as it involved the interest of the people.

He added the three NGOs did not also want the MACC to lose the people's trust and confidence for not doing the necessary.

Meanwhile, the Selangor MACC officer who received the letter from Zamil informed him that the NGOs' report had been forwarded to the commission's headquarters in Putrajaya.

MACC was not available for comment at time of writing.

15. Customs to collect extra RM3bil from errant firms

JOHOR BARU: The Customs Department, which has collected about RM37bil in Goods and Services Tax (GST) so far this year, is expecting an extra RM3bil next year from businesses that flout the regulations.

Deputy director-general (enforcement and compliance) Datuk T. Subromaniam said tax officers had visited about 20,000 out of the 430,000 GST-registered businesses as of September.

The department, he said, would visit 200,000 business premises nationwide next year and expect another RM3bil in tax to be collected.

Speaking to reporters yesterday at the launch of Customs Blue Ocean Strategy (CBOS), Subromaniam said that investigation papers had been initiated against some 4,000 errant companies since GST was implemented in April last year.

About 400 companies have been brought to court.

Some of the offences, such as failure to submit account statements or declare GST collection, were committed by businesses such as sundry shops, restaurants, construction contractors, hardware shops and entertainment outlets.

"There are cases where businesses would charge customers GST but failed to forward the tax to the Government. There were also those who made a false declaration so that they could pay a lower tax amount," said Subromaniam.

"It is not our intention to bring businesses to court. So, my advice to them is to adhere to the law and do what is right."

Those found guilty, he said, could face a penalty of up to 40% of the unpaid tax amount.

Following the CBOS launch yesterday, 10 teams of enforcement officers visited three business premises each to conduct spot checks on accounts and GST registration details.

A 24-hour eatery in Taman Adda Heights was found to have made a false declaration about its monthly income, putting it at RM2,000 but the department estimated the earnings to be RM6,000 a month.

16. NGOs want MACC to reveal status of Splash deal probe

SHAH ALAM: Three non-governmental organisations want the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to disclose the status of its investigation into a takeover deal between the Selangor government and Syarikat Pengeluar Air Sungai Selangor (Splash).

"We have given Selangor MACC 14 days to comply with our demand.

"Otherwise, we will report them to the Public Complaints Bureau (which comes under the Prime Minister's Department)," said spokesman Zamil Ibrahim for Suara Malaysia, Batas Malaysia and Gapenas Selangor.

Zamil Ibrahim, who is Suara Malaysia adviser, said his group had lodged a report with the state MACC about the water deal between the Selangor state government and Splash 43 days ago but had yet to receive any feedback.

A letter had been handed to the state MACC, seeking the commission to immediately reveal what it had done on the case so far.

Zamil said the group had stated in its report that it wanted Selangor MACC to investigate why Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali's offer to take over Splash came up to RM2.7bil compared with his predecessor Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim's offer at RM250.6mil.

"We feel Azmin's offer favours Splash and not the consumers. This is not right," Zamil said at the state MACC office in Wisma PKPS yesterday.

He said that his group had given all the necessary figures and documents to the Selangor MACC.

Zamil claimed that Selangor MACC had yet to call Khalid, Azmin or Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah of Splash for questioning.

"Tan Sri Khalid has said that he is prepared to come to the MACC office anytime, so why hasn't he been called yet?" Zamil asked.

The Selangor MACC officer who received the letter from Zamil informed him that the NGOs' report had been forwarded to MACC's headquarters in Putrajaya.

17. Jakim urged not to extend halal certification to premises



A McDonald's notice clarifying its allowance only for halal-certified birthday cakes

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) has been urged not to overstep its boundaries by extending the halal certification to premises instead of just the food.

Following McDonald's Malaysia's recent announcement that only halal-certified cakes are allowed into its premises, Centre for a Better Tomorrow (Cenbet) co-president Gan Ping Sieu said there should be no restrictions on diners bringing in non-halal food into halal eateries.

He said Jakim's halal-certification only applies to the food served at F&B outlets and not the premise itself.

"While eateries have the right to ban patrons from bringing in outside food, the decision should be based on commercial considerations and not whether the food is halal-certified or not.

"In this respect, Jakim should not overstep its boundary by accrediting 'premises' instead of 'food'," Gan, a former deputy minister, said in a statement on Friday.

He said McDonald's decision on allowing only halal birthday cakes into its premises in order to preserve its halal-certified status, would open the floodgates for more areas, such as public transportation and schools, to be classified along halal and non-halal lines.

"This will only segregate the people along religious lines, especially at a time when there is a need to enhance unity in the face of rising extremism," Gan said.

Cenbet also expressed concern that the halal issue had become a divisive national discourse in the last few months, after a similar outcry over Auntie Anne's having to replace its 'pretzel dog' with a different name in order to obtain halal certification.

"It is time for those in power to step up to the plate and display political will and not fall into the temptation of political pandering at the expense of dividing the people further," Gan added.

On Thursday, McDonald's Malaysia issued a statement saying that only halal-certified cakes would be allowed at its premises nationwide in keeping with the requirements of its halal status granted by Jakim.

The popular fast-food chain said that it had made an exception to the long-standing 'no outside food policy' in the case of birthday cakes brought by patrons, but added that the cakes must be halal-certified.



Saturday, 31 December 2016

18. Spotcheck finds express bus companies to be in breach of the law

KUALA LUMPUR: A spotcheck by the Transport Ministry on express buses at Terminal Bersepadu Selatan found a number of bus companies to be in breach of the law.

In one case, a bus which was scheduled to head to Singapore was discovered to not have a second driver on board.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai (*pic*) said a compound had been issued to the bus company over the incident, adding that driver would not be allowed to begin the journey until the company assigned a second driver to join him.

It is a requirement for all buses to have a second driver if a journey is more than 300km, he said.

Among the other offences discovered were express buses with worn tires and buses carrying motorcycles in their luggage compartments.

On the fatal bus accident in Johor on Christmas Eve, Liow said a preliminary report showed that the driver was speeding and had driven for some eight hours without a second driver.

He said legal action would be taken on the bus company.

Earlier, a group of reporters and photographers faced a scare when one of the escalators at the terminal suddenly stopped and started to move in the opposite direction.

Officers from the Road Transport Department and other agencies were also on the escalator when it malfunctioned.

However, no one was hurt in the incident.

Liow had just got off the escalator when the incident took place.



Saturday, 31 December 2016

19. Najib: Nation's economic plan on track despite challenging 2016

PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has reminded all Malaysians that despite a challenging 2016, the Government is committed to building a more prosperous and equitable Malaysia.

He said the country's economic plan was working, as evidenced by independent assessments carried out by the world's top economic experts, and urged everyone not to fall for smear campaigns carried out by certain groups for their own political gains.

"Assessments such as these are independent and conducted by the world's top experts. They reflect the true picture of Malaysia - contrary to the smear campaigns of those who have been trying to commit economic sabotage against their own country just for their own selfish political objectives," Najib said in a New Year's message on his blog, Saturday.

He said Malaysians should be proud of the growth the country was achieving, highlighting the latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) report which concluded that "despite headwinds, the Malaysian economy continues to perform well".

The IMF report also praised Malaysia for making "significant progress toward achieving high-income status", and Najib said this is the economic reality of Malaysia instead of the false stories being propagated.

"Fake news and the proliferation of false stories has become a worldwide phenomenon, and is a grave problem in our country as well," he said.

The Prime Minister also acknowledged that the IMF's assessment may seem remote to Malaysians who are struggling to afford a decent life, adding that this was why [Budget 2017](#) would pay greater attention to the needs of the Bottom 40 and Middle 40.

He said that the large-scale infrastructure projects planned for Malaysia, such as Bandar Malaysia, Tun Razak Exchange, the East Coast Rail Link, the High Speed Rail, and the Pan Borneo Highway would ensure long-term sustainability.

"The Pan Borneo Highway, for instance, will not only connect Serundong in Sabah to Semantan in Sarawak, it will also help re-energise numerous towns along the way.

"I am determined to see this project through as I know the sheer number of communities, many of whom I have visited, that will benefit from it," said the Prime Minister.

Najib said Malaysia would also continue playing a leading role on the international stage, and bringing attention to global issues such as the Rohingya and Palestinian plight.

"At home and abroad, we continue to be at the forefront of the fight against extremism and radicalisation.

"We suffered our first IS-linked attack in June, and only the tireless dedication of our brave police and armed services have prevented there being more," he said.

He also paid tribute to the unforgettable performances of Team Malaysia at the Olympics and Paralympics Games in Brazil.

"While all of our athletes are worthy of mention, to have won our first two gold medals was a truly historic achievement, and one which swelled the hearts of all Malaysians," he said, adding that the coming together of all Malaysians in support of the national team was a true reflection of 1Malaysia.

"A nation confident in ourselves, celebrating our diversity, proud of our successes, and always looking to ensure that all our brothers and sisters are fully part of this great journey that Malaysia is on.

"I ask all Malaysians to be united in this spirit, and I wish you a happy, safe and prosperous New Year," he added.