

Thursday, 3 November 2016

1. PM, Auditor-General, government to raise preliminary objections in Azmin Ali's case

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the Auditor-General and the Government will raise preliminary objections in the judicial review application by Datuk Seri Azmin Ali to declassify the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) report.

Azmin, who is the Selangor Mentri Besar, is seeking to declassify the A-G's report on 1MDB, which is classified as an official secret.

Senior Federal Counsel Suzana Atan told reporters they would soon file the objection after meeting High Court (Appellate and Special Powers) judge Hanipah Farikullah in chambers Thursday.

She said the court fixed Nov 18 for case management pending further direction.

In his application, Azmin named Najib who is also the Finance Minister, Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang and the Government as respondents.

Azmin, who is also PKR deputy president, is applying for a declaration that Najib acted in conflict of interest in directing Ambrin to classify the 1MDB audit report as an official secret.

He is asking for a declaration that Ambrin's classification of the report as an official secret under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) was unlawful and ultra vires the Federal Constitution, the OSA and the Audit Act 1957.

Azmin also wants an order from the court compelling the respondents, officers or agents to declassify the 1MDB report and release it to the public.

2. MACC to nab GLC manager©MACC Strategic Communication Division 2014

Datuk Azam Baki: Confirms the investigation into the case.

PETALING JAYA: A general manager of a government-linked company will be picked up soon by the anti-graft authority for alleged abuse of power and taking bribes.

Sources said the man, who has held the position for several years, was being probed by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for apparently living a lavish lifestyle beyond his means.

It was learnt that he had also supposedly amassed several upmarket properties under his name.

"Initial investigations showed the suspect took a substantial amount of bribes from several contractors to have work assigned to them on certain projects.

"This is despite the projects being delayed or not completed within the stipulated time," said one source.

The sources also said that the suspect had abused his position and power by sacking subordinates who refused to be in cahoots with him.

The MACC started investigating the general manager after a tip-off, it was learnt.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki, when contacted, confirmed that it has opened an investigation into the case.

He commended those who stand against corrupt practices.

3. TPPA in danger of collapse after its biggest critic wins US presidency

KUALA LUMPUR: The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) faces its biggest challenge with the election of its major critic Donald Trump as US president. The agreement will collapse without the participation of United States, said its prime mover in Malaysia, Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

The International Trade and Industry Minister explained that for TPPA to be ratified, it needs at least six countries, accounting for 85% of the combined gross domestic product of the 12 signatories.

"Without the United States, there will be no TPPA," he said when met in Parliament yesterday.

He added that failure to carry out TPPA may affect the Malaysian economy.

"We went into TPPA for the overall interest of Malaysia. To be a part of this process, to do more trading, as we believe that this will help trade and investment for Malaysia.

"Among the reasons why we joined was to get access to Mexico and Canada, countries that we haven't gotten access to," he said.

He, however, was quick to add that it was too soon to make an analysis on the matter.

Trump's shock victory stunned capital markets around the world with investors seeking safe haven assets such as gold to brace the period of uncertainties.

In an immediate after-effect Asian stock markets fell, with Bursa Malaysia performing relatively better than most other markets, shedding less than 1%.

The US dollar index, which measures the strength of the currency against a basket of currencies, spiked to more than 1,207, largely due to the weakening of emerging market currencies and strengthening of safe-haven currencies such as the Yen and Swiss francs.

The ringgit fell to RM4.224 against the greenback, a nine-month low since Feb 25. Gold spot prices went up by almost 5% to US\$1,337 (RM5,645) as investors sought shelter in safe haven assets in the period of uncertainty.

Ministers and chief negotiators of TPPA countries are expected to meet in Peru soon to take stock on the fate of the agreement.

International Trade and Industry secretary-general Datuk J. Jayasiri, who was Malaysia's chief TPPA negotiator, said there was no indication so far that Washington under President Barack Obama would not table the Bill in the US Congress for ratification.

"All indications from US Trade Representative Michael Froman is that they are working hard to table it. The US has its own domestic process and for Malaysia we will continue the process of amending our laws," he said.

Peru will host the annual Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit on Nov 19 to be attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Obama is also expected to attend.

American Malaysia Chamber of Commerce (Amcham) executive director Siobhan Das said US business investments would continue to find a home in Malaysia.

"Amcham supports all efforts that enable free and fair trade between all parties, and looks forward to working with the new administration to grow US business interests in Malaysia," said Das.

Malaysian Association for American Studies (MAAS) President Prof Dr K.S. Nathan believed that Trump would try to fine tune but would not scrap the agreement.

"They may renegotiate some aspects of it but I don't see Trump pulling back on the TPPA or even the North American Free Trade Agreement".

The US Embassy's *charge d'affaires* Edgard Kagan explained it was still possible that TPPA would be approved by US lawmakers.

"There are different views on trade in the US. President Obama is committed to the TPPA and we will just have to see what happens," he said.

In theory, the TPPA could still be ratified by Congress during its "lame duck" session.

This is the session which takes place after the US presidential election but before the inauguration on Jan 20 next year.

4. Director held, accounts with RM39mil frozen

PETALING JAYA: A director of a government-linked company (GLC) has been detained by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for alleged abuse of power and corruption.

Sources said the 50-year-old "Datuk" was picked up at his house in Shah Alam at about 12.30pm yesterday.

He was taken to the MACC headquarters in Putrajaya to have his statement recorded.

The suspect is expected to be taken to court and remanded to assist in investigations.

Apparently, the MACC froze several bank accounts belonging to the suspect and several of his family members.

Sources said the accounts contained as much as RM39.3mil, believed to be proceeds from questionable deals.

More assets and other properties are expected to be seized.

"We believe the cash is ill-gotten wealth from kickbacks received when he held the position of chief executive officer in a GLC since 2010.

"He resigned from the post last year and was appointed a director in another GLC," said the source.

The suspect is believed to have awarded projects worth nearly RM50mil to several companies during his stint as the CEO.

Presently, he is still a director in a GLC but it is not known if any "questionable deals" have been awarded.

The MACC is expected to call up and question GLC staff members and other witnesses, as well as contractors who were awarded projects.

The case will be investigated under the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act and Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki confirmed the arrest but declined to elaborate as investigations were ongoing.

Azam said MACC was committed to fighting graft and nipping all forms of corruption in the bud.

Last week, the MACC detained a 56-year-old general manager of a GLC at his house in Seremban to assist in a corruption probe.

In that raid, cash amounting to RM30,000, two cars - an Audi TT and a Toyota Hilux - and a Harley Davidson motorcycle were seized while several bank accounts with RM2.5mil were frozen.

Also picked up were a managing director and a chief executive officer - both aged 51 - of two companies.



Monday, 21 November 2016

5. AG Report: GIC needs to review SPV objectives

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government Investment Companies Division (GIC) needs to investigate, and if necessary amend the objectives of special-purpose vehicles (SPVs) in the Memorandum and Articles of Association in line with the mandate of their establishment.

The recommendation was made in the Auditor-General's Report 2015 Series 2 issued on Monday.

The report also advised the GIC to establish guidelines or rules in managing the SPVs under the Minister of Finance Inc (MoF Inc) for reference purposes.

"This is to ensure that the GIC's role as the Government's main investment entity achieves its objectives and runs more effectively," the report said.

The GIC is responsible in monitoring the Government's investment in SPV companies.

The report also found that SPV companies generated operating income of RM1.082bil, RM2.266bil and RM5.901bil in 2012, 2013 and 2014, respectively.

It said the SPVs' assets rose from RM49.30bil in 2012 to RM57.05bil (2013) and RM64.95bil (2014), while their liabilities also showed an upward trend in 2013 and 2014 at 14.4% and 13.5%, respectively.

The report said that profit before tax of 12 SPV companies was declining from 2012 to 2014, adding that the pre-tax profit of the SPVs in 2014 dropped by RM259.65mil, while that of 2013 decreased by RM60.07mil compared with the previous year.

The report said of 19 SPVs, only KL International Airport Bhd paid dividends of RM100mil for 2013 and RM30mil for 2014 to the Government.



Monday, 21 November 2016

6. AG Report: Unqualified contractors blamed for delay in Mindef's Sukhoi service centre project



Sukhoi Su-30MKM fighter jets doing a fly-by at Padang Merdeka Kuching, Sarawak. - Filepic

PETALING JAYA: The construction of a RM73mil service technical centre (STC) for the maintenance of Sukhoi SU-30MKM fighter aircraft at TUDM Gong Kedak, Terengganu Air base was less than satisfactory, according to the 2015 Auditor-General's Report (Series 2).

The report revealed that a slow construction progress during the first 10 months which resulted in a takeover by a nominated sub-contractor on Jan 15 last year.

"The progress of the project within the first 10 months between March and Dec 2014, was not satisfactory as it only reached 3.3% progress compared to its target of 39.1% based on the actual working schedule," said the report.

The construction of the centre was part of the Government's obligation under a countervailing programme for the acquisition of Sukhoi SU-30MKM fighter aircraft which includes an issuance of aircraft components with the Federal State Unitary Enterprise (Rosoboronexport), Russia.

The project consisted of a hangar building, ADZ bay, POL store, AGSV/E garage, shelter, ramp service, apron area and a special equipment procurement site.

The Defence Ministry (Mindef) on Apr 15 had engaged the Public Works Department (JKR) as the implementing agency for the project.

"The construction of the STC is to ensure that Sukhoi SU-30MKM fighter aircraft will always be at an optimum level to be operated during mission or training purposes," said the report.

The Ministry of Finance Malaysia (MOF) had appointed Sharikat Pembinaan Setia Jaya Sdn Bhd (SPSJ) as the contractor, with a contract value of RM71.49mil through a "Design and Build" approach.

"SPSJ was selected via a restricted tender process and a Letter of Award was granted on March 10, 2014 followed by a formal contract which was signed on July 7, 2014 within a completion period of 78 weeks.

The report noted that the appointment of an unqualified and financially unsound contractor had affected project implementation and progress.

"The second Extension of Time (EOT 2) was approved even though a Certificate of Non Completion (CNC) has been issued. However, construction works were satisfactory except for a few non-compliance, inadequacies, and defective issues which requires appropriate measures to be taken.

The report recommended that the Defence Ministry ensure that contractors be appointed based on their experiences, qualifications and capabilities to execute the project.

In reply to the Treasury, JKR had issued written warning letters, repeated warning to the contractors during site visits, monitoring coordination, and technical meetings.

7. AG Report: PAC to haul up two ministries in immediate response

KUALA LUMPUR: The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has identified two ministries that will be hauled up immediately over respective weaknesses outlined in the second series of the 2015 Auditor-General's Report tabled on Monday.

The Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry will be questioned for its poor management of the Cooking Oil Stabilisation Scheme, which cost the Government an extra RM2.92mil in subsidies.

The Health Ministry will also be queried over weaknesses in the management of medicinal supplies at health clinics nationwide.

"We will call them up at the next (Parliament) sitting. There are other ministries and agencies we wish to call up as well, but these two are the priority for now," PAC chairman Datuk Hasan Arifin (*pic*) told reporters after a briefing with Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang in Parliament on Monday.

Hasan also announced that the PAC would conduct a follow-up audit on the Education Ministry's 1BestariNet project.

"The PAC will visit schools in urban and rural areas, as well as the interiors, to review the reception and performance of 1BestariNet among students and teachers," he said.

However, he said the committee had no plans to question former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who was education minister when the project first rolled out in 2011.

"We will not call him up because it is not necessary," said Hasan, who is also Rompin MP.

The 1BestariNet project, which would have cost the Government RM4bil over 15 years, had previously come under fire by the Auditor-General and the PAC for failure to deliver on time due to poorly-awarded contracts and suspicious expenses.

The project was supposed to provide 4G broadband connectivity and a virtual learning environment (VLE) to 10,000 schools nationwide.



Monday, 21 November 2016

8. AG Report: Felda's fishy venture spawned RM45mil loss



PETALING JAYA: Felda lost more than RM45mil in a fish farming venture in one of its subsidiaries, the Auditor-General revealed.

The 2015 Auditor General Report (Series 2) also said Felda lost another RM28mil in four subsidiary and sub-subsidiary companies that were set up without the approval of the Finance Minister.

The companies had been set up to implement the Sturgeon Farming Project, Savaro restaurants and the Schneeballen Pastries Project.

The report said Felda Caviartive Sdn Bhd (FCSB) spent RM47.61mil on the fish farming project, but the returns, including from sturgeon farming and technology transfer, were not realised due to suspension of the project.

FCSB signed a US\$45mil (RM146.25mil) contract with two companies - I2C Hassed Co Ltd and I2C Hassed (M) Sdn Bhd - which exceeded the RM110mil limit approved by the Felda board.

"The terms of the technology transfer service agreement and the design build contract agreement signed between FCSB and the appointed company did not safeguard the interests of FCSB," said the Auditor-General.

Global Settlers Sdn Bhd (GSSB) spent RM8.4mil to open five Savaro restaurants but all of them closed shop after two to three years.

As for Schneeballen Pastry, GSSB made progress payments amounting to RM2.29mil to an unrelated company.

"The payments were also made without sufficient supporting documents and the unrelated company's involvement was not specified in the contract," said the Auditor-General.

He added that the Schneeballen Pastry Project was terminated in October last year and RM6.39mil was paid for contracts and pastry machines.



Tuesday, 22 November 2016

9. Musa Aman: State not informed of projects when ministry under Shafie Apdal

KOTA KINABALU: The state government was never informed of projects undertaken by the Federal Rural and Regional Development Ministry in Sabah when it was headed by a former minister.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman said the ministry dealt directly with state agencies, such as the Water Department, when carrying out projects in Sabah.

He said the usual practice was for Federal ministers to inform the government of projects that their ministries would be undertaking in Sabah.

"But this former Rural and Regional Development Minister did not do so although we had asked repeatedly for such a briefing," Musa told Datuk Wilfred Bumburing (PCS-Tamparuli) at the state assembly sitting.

Although Musa did not name the former minister, it was apparent he was referring to Semporna MP Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, who was dropped as Rural and Regional Development Minister in June this year.

Musa said this was among the reasons why some of the ministry's projects in Sabah, costing millions of ringgit, did not benefit the rural communities.

"In Tongod, Pulau Sebatik near Tawau and Pulau Gaya near Semporna pipelines were installed but there was no water," he said.

"In Pulau Banggi near Kudat, old pipelines were dug up and reused. And that's the only water supply projects for rural areas," he said.

"That's only water. We also have roads ending up in jungles," Musa added.

Musa said he once visited an isolated village of Long Pasia in southern Sabah and congratulated the people there for having solar power to light up their homes, another project funded by the ministry.

"They turned around and asked me what solar power?" he said adding this was among the many examples of how billions of ringgit provided by the Federal government failed to benefit rural folk.

Musa said these situations arose partly because the projects were "contractor driven."

He said as a result, projects that were less important were carried out first.

Musa acknowledged that the situation was also due to weaknesses in the implementing agencies such as the Water Department.

He said payments for Federal-funded rural water projects had to have the endorsement of the department.

"The question is why did the department certify and endorse payments for projects that it should have known were not completed," Musa said.

He said this happened although the state government had tightened its procedures in the approval of contracts.

Musa said that while the Federal Treasury allowed department directors to approve projects costing up to RM500,000, the state had placed a limit of RM250,000 for such approvals.

He said since the arrests of senior Sabah Water Department officials over graft and abuse of power allegations, the state has been working with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to tighten procedures.

"Our civil servants must always keep in mind that whatever power entrusted to them is a responsibility and not a privilege to use at their whims and fancy," Musa added.

Nearly a dozen department officials, including its director, a deputy as well as divisional and district engineers, were being investigated in a massive graft probe.

The MACC had also seized some RM200mil in assets including nearly RM60mil in cash from the suspects.



Wednesday, 23 November 2016

10. **MACC calls up more witnesses in Labuan federal agency probe**

PETALING JAYA: Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission has questioned six new witnesses in its ongoing corruption probe involving a Labuan federal agency director.

They comprised civil servants and members of the public.

So far, no new arrest or seizure of assets and other properties were made.

Investigations were now focusing on contracts and value of projects which were awarded by the director, aged 59, since he took the job about two years ago.

It is learnt that graft busters were in the midst of going through bundles of seized documents in the investigations.

The director and two contractors, in their 40s, were still held in remand in Labuan until Nov 28.

Graft busters have so far traced one project valued at RM12mil involving the construction of a food court in Tg Purun in Labuan.

The suspect was said to have solicited for RM100,000 from the two contractors as kickbacks for the award of the project.

MACC deputy chief commissioner (operations) Datuk Azam Baki said more witnesses would be summoned to give evidence as the probe progresses.

The case is being investigated under Section 17 (a) of the MACC Act 2009 for offering and receiving bribes.

A total of 12 bank accounts with cash amounting to RM889,000 belonging to the suspect and several family members had been frozen.

The MACC was also in the midst of tracing cash amounting to millions of ringgit which allegedly being transferred out shortly before the suspect was picked up.

The ill-gotten wealth was said to have been amassed from contracts worth millions over the past two years.



Wednesday, 23 November 2016

11. Fraud in Felda Global Ventures

PETALING JAYA: [Felda Global Ventures Holdings Bhd](#) (FGV) has discovered fraud in its 50%-owned unit in Turkey, which has incurred a stock loss of RM57mil. This contributed to FGV's net loss for its third quarter ended Sept 30 widening to RM94.86mil from RM33.9mil a year ago.

FGV shares plunged 11% at yesterday's close, while its warrants suffered bigger losses.

"In line with my call for greater transparency and good governance, we will continue our 'clean-up' efforts and provide for potential impairments if any, going forward," chief executive officer Datuk Zakaria Arshad said in a statement.

He assumed the position in March and has set out to improve FGV's bottomline and save RM100mil in costs by the end of the year.

"We had started reviewing and communicating with management of the said subsidiary that suffered the stock losses in the third quarter. Subsequent to this, potential fraudulent acts were uncovered in the said subsidiary and these acts are currently a subject of forensic audit," Zakaria said.

He did not identify the subsidiary.

It is believed that the fraud was discovered in the middle of this year and that the matter is now the subject of a forensic investigation.

"The fraud entails the manipulation of stock figures and the forgery of signatures of board members," a source said, adding that the units involved are Felda-Iffco Sdn Bhd and its unit Felda Iffco Gida Sanayi.

Felda-Iffco is a major supplier of baking fats and is a 50:50 joint venture (JV) with Dubai-based IFFCO International.

The source added, "There were serious discrepancies in the financial report submitted by the company in question. The chief operating officer of the said company had left and FGV was not aware of the problems until after he left."

According to reports, when the JV was first initiated in 2009, the investment by FGV was RM66mil.

Felda-Iffco had then invested RM60mil to develop its margarine and fats business.

FGV earlier this year had abandoned plans to acquire assets overseas, as it focuses on consolidating its core operations.

Zakaria said yesterday this would mean taking a comprehensive and systematic approach to rationalise its operations.

This may "unfortunately" cause the group to suffer financial impairments or losses in order to address inherent structural and financial issues.

"Nevertheless, I believe there are still tough decisions to be made before the end of this year, as we begin the first phase of our new strategic plan," he said.

"As I promised in my transition plan, we will not be sentimental about our assets. Where we don't see a meaningful return, we shall cut our losses. I believe we will come out stronger as a result of these tough decisions," Zakaria said.

In a related development, it was also reported yesterday that the Federal Land Development Authority or Felda (a related entity under the same group but separate from FGV) lost millions of ringgit due to poor planning and execution of projects.

These include the procurement of the Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data collection services for replanting programmes, the implementation of a broadband project and three other ventures.

The 2015 Auditor-General's Report (Series 2) said the audit carried out between January and June this year revealed that the planning, implementation, monitoring and management of projects by Felda and its subsidiaries were unsatisfactory, while not meeting the stipulated objectives.

FGV's shares and its warrants plunged yesterday on very active trading after it reported that losses had widened in its third-quarter financial statements.

The financial results were released prior to market close, while the fraud was made known after the market closed yesterday.

FGV said the losses were due to a higher fair value charge on a land lease agreement of RM105mil compared to RM12mil previously and the unusual stock loss by the Turkish subsidiary.

FGV's shares closed 20 sen lower to RM1.69, while its warrants FGV-C16 plunged 2.5 sen (27.8%) to 6.5 sen.

FGV-C19 also fell 3.5 sen (33%) to four sen, while FGV-C17 also declined 3.5 sen (36.8%) to six sen.

Revenue for the quarter dropped by 7.1% to RM4.19bil from the RM4.51bil reported last year.

Despite the challenges faced in the third quarter, FGV said it is determined to continue improving its overall performance for 2016.

Zakaria also said that the transition plan revealed in the previous quarter had shown positive outcomes.

"For this quarter, the group's crude palm oil production recorded an increase of 19% to 783,000 tonnes in tandem with the increase in the fresh fruit bunch (FFB) yield from 3.97 tonnes/ha in the preceding quarter to 4.14 tonnes/ha in the current quarter.

"Our oil extraction rate (OER) also increased to 20.95% in the current quarter compared to 20.40% in the preceding quarter. This strong FFB growth and improvement in the OER is a result of the improvement in FGV's age profile," he added.

"We have reduced our administration cost by 4% this quarter compared to the previous quarter and 32% compared to the same quarter last year through several austerity measures implemented throughout the organisation. As a result, we are on track to achieve the target of RM100mil cost savings by end-2016," Zakaria said.



Thursday, 24 November 2016

12. Home Ministry bans 21 publications

PUTRAJAYA: The Home Ministry has banned 21 publications under Section 7(1) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

The books included *Isu Semasa Dalam Risalah: Kahwin Campur Antara Muslim dengan Non Muslim; Islam and Homosexuality Volume 1; Mencontohi Para Wali; Syi'ar Manifestasi Tuhan Dalam Wanita; Mereka Adalah Teroris; Ibnu Taimiyah: Rekam Jejak Sang Pembaharu; Kitab Berlian Syahadat; Sejarah Syeikh Abdul Wahab Tuan Guru Babussalaam; Misteri Alam Arwah: Persiapan Menjelang Ajal dan Kisah-kisah Mayat; Senjata Mukmin; Sabda Rasulullah S.A.W: Mahdi Aku Ada Dua Tanda; Kissing Cousins? Christians and Muslims Face to Face; A Treasury of Asian Literature, What Went*

Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East; Nomad: From Islam to America A Personal Journey Through the Clash Civilisations; and Lesbian Sex Positions; Sexual Intimacy for Women and The Whole Lesbian Sex Book.

Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Alwi Ibrahim said in a statement that two of the publications were banned through a government gazette notification dated July 4 and the rest, dated July 18.

"All the publications are seen to be harmful or misleading to the public, especially the younger generation, besides being categorised as deviating from the true teachings of Islam," he said.

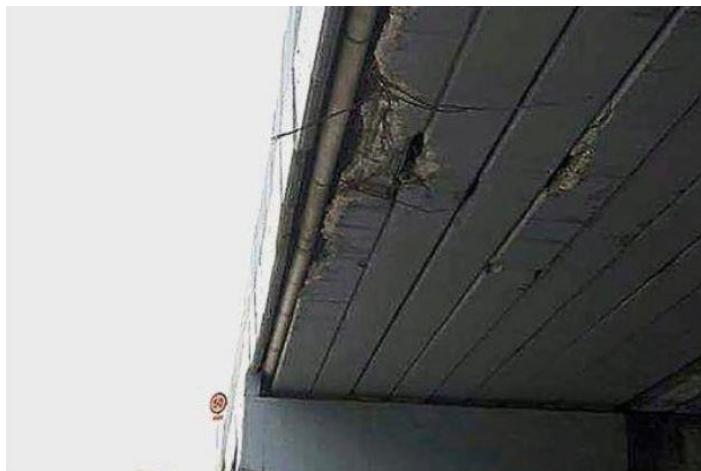
He said anyone caught printing, importing, reproducing, publishing, selling or distributing the publications could be prosecuted under Section 8(2) of the Act.

People who find the publications in the market can notify the Publications Control and Quranic Text Division at 03-8886 8047 (telephone) or 03-8889 1682 (fax) or moha.spab.gov.my (website).



Friday, 25 November 2016

13. Concern over crack on bridge



Cause of anxiety: The crack at a bridge near Jalan Masai Lama is making road users jittery.

JOHOR BARU: A 20m-long crack on a bridge near busy Jalan Masai Lama here is making road users jittery.

The fissure is believed to have been caused by drivers of trucks and lorries who ignored the height limit over the past nine months.

Taxi driver T. Siva Kumar, 51, first noticed the crack under the 100m-long bridge about two months ago when he dropped off a passenger at a hypermarket nearby.

"I use that road almost every day to pick up and drop off customers as I am staying in Taman Megah Ria, which is only a few kilometres from the bridge.

"I always get jittery when I pass under the bridge as I often see concrete pieces falling off the bridge," he said when met at the site yesterday.

Another road user, Nur Anis Maressa Esa, 25, attributed the crack to heavy vehicle drivers who ignored the height limit.

"I hope the problem will be resolved soon as the situation could worsen, especially during the rainy season, and pose an even bigger danger," she said.

Johor Baru City councillor Tan Tuan Peng, who highlighted the matter, said the council had met up with the state Public Works Department over the matter after receiving more than 30 public complaints.

A department official said one of the metal beams on the bridge was badly damaged by heavy vehicles.

He said a proposal would be submitted for the repair work which would take three months.



Tuesday, 29 November 2016

14. Malacca, Johor govt officers remanded in bribery probes

MALACCA: A senior state government officer, who is a Datuk, was remanded for four days to facilitate investigations into alleged corrupt practices.

The 55-year-old was brought to the magistrate's court by Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) officials before a remand order was issued by assistant registrar Syarina Shaarani @ Tan.

It was reported that the civil servant was believed to have asked for kickbacks in exchange for approving projects.

The MACC had also frozen the suspect's bank account with millions of ringgit.

"MACC is expected to detain several other individuals in connection with this case (soon)," said a source.

In JOHOR BARU, a state land assistant officer was remanded for six days till Dec 4 on Tuesday.

MACC state director Datuk Simi Abdul Ghani told Bernama that the suspect, in his 50s, was detained at the agency's office around 2pm on Monday.

"We are also in the process of studying the source of his assets," he said.

He said the suspect is believed to have used his position to obtain land through land offices in other districts besides acquiring land via ownership transfer.

The suspect was found to own 16.75 acres of agricultural land, 68 acres of joint venture land, housing lot and luxury residences in a number of districts in the state.



Wednesday, 30 November 2016

15. Lee: Singapore, Malaysia have made very good progress on high-speed rail agreement

SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong says Singapore and Malaysia have made very good progress on a bilateral agreement on the Singapore-Kuala Lumpur High-Speed Rail (HSR), and hopes both sides can sign the agreement when he and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak meet at the Leaders' Retreat.

"It is a very ambitious, very complicated and a very expansive project, in terms of scale. We have to try our best to anticipate what the likely issues are, when we build it, when we operate it, and have a clear understanding on how we will deal with it if a situation arises," Lee said in an interview with the chairman of Malaysian state news agency Bernama Azman Ujang on Monday.

"The first thing is to have a sound agreement between the two countries on the basis of how the project is structured, how it is going to be executed, and how it is backed by the two governments," said Lee in the interview, the transcript of which was released by the Singapore Prime Minister's Office Wednesday.

"That is the first requirement, that we have a very good agreement which sets out clearly a sound basis to build and operate the system."

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

"We are almost there, and I hope that when I meet Prime Minister Najib at the next retreat, we will be able to sign the agreement," he said.

On Tuesday, Malaysian Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Abdul Rahman Dahlan met Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan, and Abdul Rahman said on Instagram they met "to harmonise last minute details of the Bilateral Agreement on Malaysia-Singapore High Speed Rail project before signing ceremony in December".

A memorandum of understanding for the HSR project was signed in July this year by Khaw and Abdul Rahman, and it was witnessed by the two prime ministers.

Construction for the project is expected to begin in 2018, with trains running in 2026.

Secondly, Lee noted that the project's execution will be very important - designing it, calling for tenders, evaluating the proposals.

"Several high-speed rail systems in the world have been lobbying very hard to get this contract - the Japanese, the Koreans, the Chinese high-speed rail," he noted.

"Each has its strengths, and we will have a very difficult decision evaluating the bidders who come along and deciding which one is the best overall."

Asked about the cost-sharing of construction, PM Lee said things like that had to be clearly specified, and it was one of the items that made the project complicated.

"When you have two authorities involved, you have to decide how to partition, where the line is drawn. I build my part, you build your part, and we have to meet at the same point," he said. "If it does not meet then we have a big problem."

PM Lee added: "It is complicated but there is a will. And there is a good will, and we would like to make it succeed."

He was also asked if a third bridge between Singapore and Malaysia - which some in Malaysia had suggested recently - is necessary with the HSR project.

Lee said there are currently no plans for it.

"We are not currently planning for a third bridge," he said. "I have seen some statements in Malaysia suggesting one, but the high-speed rail is a very ambitious project. I would focus all my energies doing that one before we launch a new big project."

As for an update on two joint projects between Singapore and Malaysia, in Marina South and Ophir-Rochor, Lee said: "Both buildings are coming up and rising steadily. I read that they have reasonable sales so I think the projects will succeed."

The developments were born out of a land-swap agreement, where Malaysia gave up control of its railway land that ran through Singapore in exchange for a Malaysia-Singapore joint venture involving six land parcels near the Central Business District.

He also noted the Afiniti Medini Wellness centre project in Iskandar was making progress.

Lee was also asked how Singapore tries to remain corruption-free, as well as the Presidential Election next year, which will be reserved for Malay candidates.

He noted that civil servants and ministers are paid a fair salary to minimise temptation, adding: "You come in, you cannot expect to get rich in the government, but you should not become poor because you had to do public service."

The People's Action Party, from the start, also wanted to "run a clean system, a clean civil service, and a clean political leadership".

"We have been quite unsparing in enforcing that. Whoever transgresses, whether it is senior or not, whether it is a civil servant or a minister, we have to investigate and consequences have to follow," he said.

The public has also come to expect its government to run a clean system.

"The public attitude is very important. Because without that, if the public accepts that it is a normal way to do business, that if you are in power then these are perks of the office, that will be a very different situation even if we have the laws," said Mr Lee.

As for the presidential election, he said the Government did not have a specific candidate in mind, "but we know there are people who will qualify".

"There is no shortlist. It depends who comes forward. It is not for the Government to arrange. It is for the candidates to come forward," he added.

Asked whether Singapore could see a non-Chinese PM, Lee said: "It could happen in our lifetime." He cited how Barack Obama became president, saying: "It is a long process but it is possible and I hope one day it will happen."

"The racial patterns of voting is something very deeply ingrained. It is so in Malaysia; it is so in Singapore, perhaps less so in Singapore but it exists," he added.

"If you look at America, even in this election, it was quite clear that the different ethnic groups had very different voting patterns. So that is a reality of human nature which we have to accept." -
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