

PBA Holdings could be in serious trouble next year

If Beris, Muda dams in Kedah are not filled up, says CEO

BY SUPRIYA SURENDRAN

GEORGE TOWN: PBA Holdings Bhd, the holding company for Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd, said it could be in "serious trouble" next year if the Beris Dam and Muda Dam in Kedah, which are designed to release water into Sungai Muda, are not filled up.

Sungai Muda is Penang's primary source of raw water. PBA chief ex-

ecutive officer (CEO) Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said PBA's business model is sustainable on the principle that its dams are kept full.

"Our business model is sustainable in the sense that we ensure our dams are full by the end of the year. As of today (yesterday), our Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam are around 50% [full].

"What is a cause of concern to us is our main source of water, Sungai

Muda and the two dams (Beris and Muda). Beris is currently 29% full and the Muda Dam is at 32%. We are very concerned about this, and we could be in serious trouble next year if these two dams are not filled up," he told reporters after PBA's annual general meeting yesterday.

"The prolonged dry season caused by the Super El Niño lasted five months. We cannot continue business as usual without cloud

seeding as the Super El Niño has reduced rainfall by 70%. We need cloud seeding to [make up] for this 70%, if not the northern region will not be ready for the dry season in 2017," he stressed.

Jaseni said these are preventive measures needed for the future, and are in line with Penang state's policy of not practising water rationing. At present, PBA's operations are going on normally.

Chua: 18,457 bankruptcy cases reported last year

KUALA LUMPUR: Most bankruptcy cases recorded between 2011 and last year were due to personal loans and hire purchase vehicles, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chua Tee Yong told the Dewan Rakyat here yesterday.

He was replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Datu Nasrun Datu Mansur (BN-Silam), who wanted to know what the government is doing to control the use of credit cards among the younger generation to thwart bankruptcy.

Chua said a total of 18,457 bankruptcy cases were reported last year.

In explaining credit-card debt, he said to control credit-card usage, Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) had set certain conditions, including a minimum income of RM24,000 per annum for cardholders.

Statistics show that the credit-card application approval rate is between 50% and 60%, not 80%.

"In fact, statistics show that the credit-card application approval rate is between 50% and 60%, not 80%," he said.

Responding to the original question from Datu Nasrun on the government's initiative to ensure total household debt is manageable, Chua said BNM has implemented various progressive measures to curb the rise of household debt since 2010.

He said, the Pengurusan Wang Ringgit Anda programme and Credit Counselling and Debt Management Agency were implemented to enhance awareness and skills in financial management.

According to Chua, until the end of last year, the total household debt in the country was RM1.03 trillion with 80% of the banking system and 20% of non-bank financial institutions, covering 89.1% of the gross domestic product. — *Bernama*

Malaysians waste 15,000 tonnes of food daily

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians waste 15,000 tonnes of food daily, including 3,000 tonnes that are still fit for consumption and should not have been discarded.

Deputy Agriculture and Agribusiness Industry Minister Ngeh Gumbek said the increasing food wastage, especially during festive seasons, should not be made a habit and should be curbed.

"Research conducted by the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) shows that 28.4% of the padi produced is wasted. As for fruits and vegetables, 20% to 50% are thrown away," he said after opening the "MySaveFood" forum here yesterday.

Ngeh said the government through MARDI is conducting several programmes nationwide to educate the public on the impact of food wastage on the people and the country.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations senior enterprise development officer Dr Rosa Rolle said the Food Loss and Waste (FLW) Standard will be launched next month in a bid to address the challenges of quantifying food loss and waste.

"The FLW Standard will enable a wide range of entities, countries and other regions to account for and report in a credible, practical and internationally consistent manner, how much food loss and waste are created and identify where it occurs, thus enabling the targeting of efforts to reduce it."

Rolle said the development of the standard is being coordinated by the World Resources Institute together with the Consumer Goods Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. — *Bernama*

Zahid: Special law to empower border security agency

BUKIT KAYU HITAM: Special legislation is to be formulated to enable the Malaysian Border Security Agency (Aksem) to enforce security control along the Malaysia-Thailand border, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

He said the draft legislation is expected to be tabled in Parliament at the end of this year.

The new act would empower Aksem to enforce the law pertaining to border security, said Ahmad Zahid, who is also the home minister.

"The preliminary draft has been prepared by the legal adviser to the home ministry. We will have the Attorney-General's Chambers scrutinise the draft and we will work with the states bordering Thailand before tabling it in Parliament," he told a press conference after the launch of Aksem at the Bukit Kayu Hitam Aksem Complex in Kedah yesterday.

"We have to obtain feedback from the state governments and the people as we want to apply the legislation for the long term," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said that for the time being, Aksem would operate as an administrative entity with the enforcement back-up of the National Security Council.

The new act would enable Aksem to operate on its own in a com-



Ahmad Zahid showing the logo of Aksem that he launched at the Bukit Kayu Hitam Aksem Complex in Kedah yesterday. Photo by Bernama

prehensive and more effective manner, he said.

Asked whether a new border fence would be constructed to replace the old one erected in the 1970s, Ahmad Zahid said the government would have to consider several issues in this matter.

"We cannot only consider the cost but will have to see how many problems we can solve, particularly the smuggling of drugs, firearms and subsidised goods," he said.

The Malaysia-Thailand border stretches over 646km, but only 11 km of that length is fenced.

Ahmad Zahid also announced that the Malaysian Border Security Agency had been renamed Malaysian Border Control Agency, and that SAC Datuk Mohamad Ismail had been appointed its first director-general.

Mohamad was the chief of staff of Special Forces of the Eastern Sabah Security Command. — *Bernama*

Sarawak still needs RM24.8b to build 4,402km of roads

KUCHING: Sarawak still needs 4,402km of roads to be built at a total cost of RM24.8 billion to connect more than 1,000 existing roads in the state.

Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr James Jemut Masing said the 4,402km of roads proposed to be built means that it requires RM1.9 billion a year to build 338km of roads.

"That is a very tall order but if we

do it together, I think we can make it," he said at a press conference after officiating at the Road Connectivity Lab 2016 here yesterday.

Masing, who is also state infrastructure development and transportation minister, said the road projects would connect all the 5,000 settlements in Sarawak.

"Whether the government has the money to build those roads or not is another question. But out of

interest I am telling you that Sarawak alone collects approximately RM2 billion a year in GST (goods and services tax) while we need RM1.9 billion a year to build the roads until 2030.

Masing said proper discussion would be held on whether some of the GST money could be used to build the roads, adding that he would bring up the suggestion for discussion with the state government.

Masing said the government would ensure that all existing roads would be upgraded or repaired to make for safe and comfortable travel. On the poor condition of the Ba'kelalan Road, Masing said it was built under the Jiwa Murni project, which was cheaper than the JKR grade R1 road, but he gave an assurance that the road would be upgraded when the funds are available. — *Bernama*