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Economic Overview

Key statistics	Latest release	Previous rate
Quarterly GDP growth	5.9% (2Q2006)	5.5% (1Q2006)*
Annual GDP growth	5.3% (2005)	7.1% (2004)
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	3.3% (Sep-06)	3.3% (Aug-06)
Industrial Production Index (IPI)	138.4 (Aug-06)	137.5 (Jul-06)
Base Lending Rate (BLR)	6.72% (Oct-06)	6.72% (Sep-06)
Exchange rate: RM to US dollar	RM3.648 (31/10)	RM3.685 (29/09)

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia & Bank Negara Malaysia

- Growth of the US service sector slowed to its weakest pace in more than three (3) years in September. The private sector was hiring at a steady but unspectacular rate whilst factories showed orders were stagnant in August. In view of this, US Federal Reserve is unlikely to raise interest again and could lower them in 2007 to re-energize the economy.
- Malaysia's exports in August rose 14.8% year on year to RM53.49 billion, the highest monthly figure so far and were also 5.9% higher than the preceding month. Imports in the same month grew 17.7% to RM43.35 billion compared with the same month last year and were 4.5% higher than July, 2006.
- Inflation could average less than 3% next year if the price of crude oil continues to fall and the current economic conditions prevail according to Bank Negara Malaysia governor. The central bank has kept the key overnight policy rate unchanged at 3.5% during its monetary policy meeting in September, 2006.
- Bank Negara indicated that despite the expected moderation in global growth in the second half of 2006, the latest economic data showed Malaysia's economy continued to grow at a steady rate.
- Malaysia's industrial production growth was below market expectations and its slowest pace in four months in August, 2006. The Industrial Production Index (IPI) for August rose by 5% year on year to 138.4 as compared with 131.8 in August last year.
- The US economy slump will weaken the economy more than previously forecast. The economy grew at an annual rate of 2.5% last quarter and will maintain that pace in the final three (3) months of the year, according to the median forecast of 82 economists surveyed from October 2 to October 10.

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 - 14 years on, no sign of building
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- Water tariffs for consumers in Klang Valley will go up by 15%. However, it will not affect 42% of Klang Valley residents who consume less than 20 cubic metres of water per month. The industrial sector, which consumes a lot of water, will have to pay higher water bill.
 - The Agriculture and Agro based Industry Ministry had approved 184 applications worth RM1.1 billion for various tax incentives under food production projects as of last year. The loan approval was for the period from 2001 to last year. The ministry received 230 applications for incentives worth RM2.3 billion during the period.
 - The sales value of Malaysia's manufacturing sector expanded 12% or RM4.8 billion, to RM44.9 billion in August from RM40.1 billion in August last year. However, it was RM1.4 billion or 2.9% lower than the RM46.3 billion recorded in July 2006.
 - The Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) has revised its gross domestic product (GDP) forecast this year to 5.6% from 5.2%. The upward revision was attributed to the better than expected performance in the US, European Union (EU) and Japan, which pushed up Malaysia's exports. For 2007, MIER maintained its earlier forecast of 4.8% primarily due to weaker external demand from the US, EU and Japan, while China may experience slower growth next year. The official forecast by the government for the GDP growths in 2006 and 2007 is 5.8% and 6%, respectively.
 - World oil prices increased by 74 US cents to US\$ 58.39 per barrel after the key player of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Saudi Arabia expressed support for a cut of one (1) million barrels per day from its current production.
 - The Cabinet Committee on Investment has fast tracked approval for investments worth RM40 billion for the next five (5) years. The investments will come from three (3) companies including RM11 billion from a foreign owned company. The other two (2) are local companies with foreign participation.



INVESTMENTS

IBM makes Malaysia Asean hub

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IBM Corp has picked Malaysia as the regional hub for its Asean IBM Innovation Centre (ICC), which the company has named Kuala Lumpur ICC. "IBM chose Malaysia due to the country's strong developer base and the excellent IT infrastructure and facilities here," IBM Malaysia managing director Voon Seng Chuan said after the opening of Kuala Lumpur ICC yesterday. Sited at IBM Malaysia's new office in Bandar Utama, the ICC will provide the tools and hands-on support that will help IBM business partners to build, port and test their solutions and industrial applications on IBM hardware and software platforms. "The investment in this centre includes skilled resource, equipment, state-of-the-art facilities and networking amounting to US\$3mil," Voon said. The Kuala Lumpur ICC is one of IBM's 32 ICCs worldwide and the sixth in the Asia-Pacific after Seoul, Tokyo, Bangalore, Shanghai and Sydney.

(The Star-4th October 2006)

SNC to build RM20 million plant in Shah Alam next year

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SNC Corp Sdn Bhd, a plastic seal lock and pallet specialist manufacturer, plans next year to invest around RM20 million in a plant in Shah Alam to produce new range of plastic seal locks. Established in 2001, SNC operates a pallet plant in the Klang Valley and a plastic seal lock manufacturing facility in Shah Alam. The two generate some RM8mil worth of products per annum. Managing director B.H. Saw said the company wanted to focus on the market in the northern region, especially in Penang where a lot of multinational corporations would need plastic seal locks. "We have already set up a sales and marketing office in Penang to promote our plastic seal locks in the northern region," he said, adding that SNC had two other sales offices in the Klang Valley. Saw said the company would introduce a new generation of pallet locks, tamper-evident security tape and new designs of plastic seal locks next year. "The new factory, when it is ready, will concentrate on manufacturing these new products.

(The Star-4th October 2006)

Media agency opens office here

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Media agency PHD launched its Malaysian office recently as part of a major global expansion of its network across Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. PHD, part of the Omnicom Media Group, started its market roll out in the first quarter to this year. PHD plans to provide its clients in Malaysia an international experience, couple with local country expertise.

(New Straits Times-5th October 2006)

Brady to make Penang regional hub

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Brady Corp, a global manufacturer of signs and labels, has expanded its Penang plant to make it a significant manufacturing hub in the region. It moved the plant to a new site and set up shop on 16,500 sq metres in Bayan Lepas Free Industrial Zone as part of this commitment, Brady Asia-Pacific vice-president Allan Klotsche said. The firm had invested RM30 million over the last four years in new facilities to support the growing demand for its identification and specialty tapes, graphics and safety products. Klotsche said Brady's major customers included multinational corporations, which were based in Penang. "We intend to further develop our Penang facility to make it a significant manufacturing hub as there is an increase in demand for safety labeling," he said.

(The Star-6th October 2006)



Oracle eyes expansion to JB, Penang

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Oracle Corp (M) Sdn Bhd (Oracle Malaysia) is expanding its operations in “non-metro” cities including Penang and Johor Bharu. Speaking at a media briefing, Oracle Malaysia managing director V.R. Srivatsan said the rollout in cities outside the Klang Valley was to strengthen the company's presence in other pockets of opportunities and in line with Oracle Corp's worldwide expansion plan. “We are also evaluating other cities,” he said, adding the company had identified Penang and Johor Bharu as fast growing cities with vast opportunities to gain new business, particularly in manufacturing and logistics. Srivatsan said the cities enjoyed some of the highest economic growth rates. Penang, for instance, was home to many top manufacturing companies. Oracle's partners in Penang include Orisoft Technology Bhd, PannaAge Technology Sdn Bhd, Brooks Automation Sdn Bhd, Sistem Kompakar Sdn Bhd and Computer Systems Advisers (M) Bhd.

(The Star-6th October 2006)

Frost & Sullivan eyes Asia Pacific

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Frost & Sullivan, a global growth consulting company, plans to set up a third global shared services outfit in Malaysia as part of its expansion plans in the Asian-Pacific region. Pending MSC-status accreditation, the proposed Global Innovation Centre (GIC) will see the company significantly expanding its staff strength in Malaysia from the current 90. The centre will also focus on countries like China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korean. “As a consulting company, nearly 90 per cent of our global workforce is knowledge-based employees. Malaysia's value proposition is its diverse talent pool and skilled human capital which has been one of the major influencing factors for our growth and off-shoring expansion into Malaysia,” David Frigstad, chairman of Frost & Sullivan, said in a statement. He said Government's attractive incentives for foreign companies to set up operations within the MSC played a pivotal role in Forest & Sullivan's decision to house its third GIC in Malaysia.

(New Straits Times-14th October 2006)

Spritzer plans to increase output

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Bottled-water manufacturer Spritzer Bhd says its production of mineral and drinking water will jump 29 per cent to some 180 million litres a year under the group's recently-announced expansion. The RM19 million expansions by the Perak-based firm involve the construction of a new factor on its 16ha site in Taiping to complement its five existing plants in Malaysia. Upon completion, the expansion will improve our competitiveness by increasing the production capacity of still-bottled water (natural mineral and drinking water). The expansion, due for completion by the final quarter of financial year to May 2007, will also increase the output of the group's polyethylene terephthalate (PET) perform by 108 million pieces a year.

(New Straits Times-14th October 2006)

Frontken expects 50 per cent profit growth

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Frontken Corp Bhd, a leading surface metamorphosis technological services provider, is hoping that its net profit and revenue next year will rise more than 50 per cent contributed by new business developments, existing activities and merger and acquisition (M&A) plans. “Our regional expansion includes setting up three small-scale manufacturing plants in Bintulu, Johor Bharu and Sandakan, and four in South-East Asia with a combined investment of between RM6 million and RM7 million,” said Frontken's executive chairman and managing director Willie Wong. The company also plans to expand its businesses in Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, China and Indonesia.

(New Straits Times-16th October 2006)



HSBC unit to use Malaysia as base for takaful ops

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HSBC Amanah Takaful (M) Sdn Bhd aims to use Malaysia as the centre of the group's takaful business worldwide by basing certain offshore and international activities here. "We are considering using our dedicated takaful company in Malaysia to branch out and go to other markets," said its chief executive officer Keith Driver. The move means that HSBC Amanah Takaful would probably apply for an international takaful operator licence (ITO) and centralise its global takaful activities in Malaysia. "We have a competitive advantage in Malaysia. We have a takaful company, favourable fiscal initiatives that make it attractive commercially for basing in Malaysia and the support of a strong Islamic finance business which can help make sure resources are available to make it happen," Keith Driver said. HSBC Amanah Takaful is a joint venture between HSBC Insurance (Asia Pacific) Holdings Ltd, Jerneh Asia Bhd and the Employees Provident Fund.

(New Straits Times-16th October 2006)

VS Industry makes Johor its hub

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VS Industry Bhd (VSI) is positioning Johor as a centre of excellence, linking its operations in Malaysia with those in China, Indonesia and Vietnam, said group managing director Gan Sem Yam. "Our Johor operations will become an important factor in determining the success of VSI domestically and internationally. Gan stressed that although VSI's main focus now was to further expand its activities in China, its business in Johor was still as important. "Johor will lead the way in product development, especially in the high-end category, and provide human resources training," he said. He added that the company would use its Senai plant as the "training ground" for key management as well as manufacturing staff for its operations outside Malaysia. The importance of both countries for the company is reflected by its decision to maintain two research and development (R&D) departments. Johor's R&D centre has 20 personnel while China's R&D centre has 40. VSI spends 2% to 3% of its total revenue on R&D activities. "It would make better business sense to have only one R&D centre – either in China or Johor – to cut down on operating costs. "However, the management feels that having two R&D departments will place the company in a better position to compete globally," Gan said. Headquartered in Senai, Johor, the group has five plants in the country. It also has one each in Shenzhen and Qingdao and 11 in Zhuhai, China, and one each in Hanoi and Jakarta.

(The Star-16th October 2006)

St Gregory Spas plans Second outlet

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St Gregory Spas, which opened its maiden Malaysian outlet in Penang last month, is planning a second outlet in Kuala Lumpur next year, said chief operating officer Tan-Wee Wei Ling. She said the company would look into setting up the second St Gregory Spas at the Grand Plaza Parkroyal Kuala Lumpur. "We prefer establishing our spas in hotels. This is because hotels have a comprehensive range of supporting facilities and infrastructure. "But if there are suitable premises outside a hotel in the country, we will certainly also look into that opportunity," she said after the launch of St Gregory Spas at Grand Plaza Parkroyal Penang. She is also executive director of Hotel Plaza Ltd, the company that owns the Parkroyal Hotels & Resorts brand name. Tan-Wee said the company spent about RM1.5mil renovating the 7,000-sq ft St Gregory Spas in Penang. Founded in Singapore by Tan-Wee in 1997, St Gregory Spas now has five outlets in Singapore and four in Japan. There are plans to establish St Gregory Spas in South Korea.

(The Star-18th October 2006)



Sime plans biodiesel plants in Johor next year

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Conglomerate Sime Darby Bhd plans to build its first palm oil-based biodiesel plant in Johor next year, with an annual capacity of 100,000 tonnes. While the quantum of investment for the planned plant is not available, it generally costs about RM40 million to build a 60,000-tonne biodiesel plant. Sources said the group is still mulling over where to site the plant – either in Pasir Gudang or Kempas.

(New Straits Times--28th October 2006)

RETAIL'S CORNER

Jusco's largest mall in SE Asia

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Bandar Bukit Tinggi, which is fast establishing itself as the catalyst that attracts people from outside to Klang, will be home to the largest Jusco mall in South-East Asia. The mall which will be known as AEON Bukit Tinggi Shopping Centre is taking shape on a 26ha site and is expected to be ready in about a year to meet the needs of the middle class and those who seek an upmarket experience. Besides those from the southern parts of the Selangor royal town, consumers from other areas such as Port Klang, Banting, Shah Alam and Subang Jaya are expected to patronise the shopping mall which is strategically located on Jalan Langat, about 500 metres from the Klang interchange via the KESAS Highway. This shopping complex will be the third largest Jusco Mall after two others in Japan. It occupies a total gross area of 2.1 million sq ft and will have a built-up area of 1 million sq ft, said WCT Land Bhd chairman Datuk Chua Soon Poh. Work on the complex, which started in June, Chua said, was scheduled to be completed in Nov next year, Chua said, adding that the complex would have three levels of retail floor and three levels of elevated parking space.

(The Star-3rd October 2006)

Fifth Segafredo coffee outlet

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Coffee chain Segafredo Zanetti Espresso is expanding in Malaysia with the opening of its fourth Penang outlet in Juru Auto-City, Bukit Mertajam, in November. Segafredo Zanetti Espresso (M) marketing and development manager Allain Loo said the chain was also embarking on a branding exercise. He said Segafredo was an Italian-based coffee chain with its own coffee plantation, blending and roasting facilities worldwide. "In Malaysia, we have four outlets - three in Penang and one in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. "As part of our expansion plans, we will have an outlet in Ipoh by next year, followed by a few more outlets in Kuala Lumpur," he said, adding that "slow and steady" was the chain's expansion strategy. The company set up its first outlet, in Pulau Tikus, more than seven years ago. "In the next five years, we should have a total of 15 outlets nationwide," Loo told a press conference on Sunday to welcome Segafredo Zanetti Espresso Worldwide (Asia) grand chief barista Ilija Naumovski, who was in town for a visit to the chain's local baristas.

(The Star-4th October 2006)



Complex operating without CF or business permit

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Dataran Pahlawan Melaka Megamall is the latest and touted as the largest, shopping centre in the state – has been operating without a business licence since it opened late last month. The Malacca City Council, saying it cannot accept any development that is without a certificate of fitness, has been issuing summonses – carrying a fine of RM250 – for the alleged offence daily since Sept 25. Without the certificate, mall developer Lianbang Ventures Sdn Bhd cannot proceed to apply for the business licence. Mayor Datuk Zaini Md Nor has refused to issue the certificate, stating that work on the external features of the mall – staircases, wiring, piping and landscaping – were still not complete. “I will continue to fine the developer until works on the external features are completed,” he said. Built on 7.7ha of leasehold land along Jalan Merdeka, the centre comprises single- and five-storey shopping areas, with more than 600 retail lots. The mall takes its name from Dataran Pahlawan, a public square with nearby bazaars, open walkways and shopping zones. More than 30 shoplots have opened so far.

(The Star-4th October 2006)

Eraman eyes more brands for its airports

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Malaysia Airports (Niaga) Sdn Bhd, commonly known as Eraman, is in talks with several famous fashion brands to set up outlets at airports under its management, said its director Umar Bustaman. He said Eraman would bring more top brands to give variety to its customers after successfully getting Spanish fashion company MNG (MANGO) on board. MANGO’s outlet would be located at the KL International Airport and likely be opened at the end of this month, he said in an interview. MANGO has more than 865 stores in 81 countries. “We are talking to a few more foreign top fashion names and hope to wrap up deals with them,” Umar said. Well-known brands that have established presence at Malaysian airports include *Tie Rack*, *Burberry* and *Lanvin*. Eraman, an airport-retailing operator, operates in KLIA, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Penang and the low-cost carrier terminal (LCCT). Umar said Eraman’s business at the LCCT in Sepang was good. He said passengers, especially those in international flights from Thailand, Indonesia and Macau, were generous spenders at Eraman’s outlets, spending an average of RM170 per person. Eraman manages 12 outlets at the LCCT including two duty-free shops and five food and beverage outlets.

(The Star-4th October 2006)

Cold Storage to be anchor tenant at Solaris Mont' Kiara

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GCH Retail (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd will open another Cold Storage supermarket in the country at Solaris Mont' Kiara Phase 2, a retail and commercial development by property group Sunrise Bhd. Cold Storage will be the anchor tenant, occupying 25,000 sq ft of a planned 560,000 sq ft retail and commercial space. A total 79 shoplots has been developed under the first phase of Solaris Mont' Kiara. GCH Retail chief executive officer Datuk John Coyle said the new supermarket is scheduled to open in December 2007. GCH Retail, a unit Hong Kong-based Dairy Farm International Holdings Ltd, has opened two Cold Storage supermarkets in Penang and at Subang Parade shopping centre in Petaling Jaya so far this year. A third scheduled to be opened at Berjaya Times Square shopping centre in Kuala Lumpur next week, bringing the total to 12 by the year-end. Apart from Cold Storage, the group currently operates 62 Giant stores and 194 Guardian outlets across Malaysia. Coyle also said another seven Giant stores will be opened in the country by the end of the year.

(New Straits Times-7th October 2006)



Dairy Farm unit confirms talks to buy Makro

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GCH Retail (M) Sdn Bhd, a unit of Hong Kong-based Dairy Farm International Holding Ltd, has confirmed that it is in talks to buy rival Makro Cash & Carry Distribution (M) Sdn Bhd stores in Malaysia. GCH owns the Giant, Cold Storage and Guardian retail outlets in Malaysia. Makro Malaysia, which is planning an exit from the country, had on September 4 opened the bidding process for its eight local stores. These outlets are in Shah Alam, Cheras, Selayang, Penang, Seremban, Seberang Prai, Johor Bharu and Ipoh. The bidding exercise was closed at the end of last month.

(New Straits Times-7th October 2006)

Grand Prix City Sale to start tourism year

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Round-the-clock shopping, shuttlebus services connecting major complexes and unbeatable discounts. These are among the attractions the Tourism Ministry is planning for Visit Malaysia Year 2007. To meet 20.1 million tourist targets, the ministry hopes to draw visitors away from shopping paradises like Dubai and Hong Kong. Shopping is one of tourism's most important revenue earners in Malaysia, accounting for RM7.7 billion of the RM31.9 billion in total receipts last year. This is an increase of 13.7 per cent compared with 2004, when shopping contributed about RM6.6 million. Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor said there would be more aggressive campaigns, roadshows and other events next year. There will be three mega shopping carnivals. This starts with the Kuala Lumpur Grand Prix (KL GP) City Sale from March 24 to April 22, followed by the Mega Sale Carnival from June 15 to September 2 and the Year End Sale (YES) from December 1 to January 1, 2008. Pempena Sdn Bhd, wholly-owned by the ministry, will develop "Shopping and Holiday" packages which may be thrown in during the low hotel occupancy season. "This would not only fill up the empty rooms, but would also encourage more spending," Adnan said. Other efforts being considered are weekly midnight sales. This involves getting shopping complexes to keep their premises open after midnight at least once a week. Also under consideration is a shuttlebus service to make commuting between shopping destinations easier. On the Year End Sale carnival, he said an additional event known as the Kuala Lumpur International Street Busters Festival would be included to attract shoppers. It would include street performances and acrobat show.

(New Straits Times-11st October 2006)

Retailers more upbeat on sales

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Malaysia's retail sales growth forecast for 2006 has been revised up slightly to 7.5 percent, from 7 per cent. The upward revision was based on the sector's better performance during the first half of the year, says the Malaysia Retailers Association (MRA). According to MRA's latest Malaysia Retail Industry Report, retail sales growth for the first quarter of 2006 doubled its forecast of 4.4 per cent to end at 9.6 per cent. For the first half of 2006, retail sales grew by 9.5 per cent, despite rising interest rate and low consumer confidence level. The best performer was the supermarket and hypermarket sub-sector with a growth of 18.3 per cent. The fashion and fashion accessories sub-sector grew by 2.8 per cent, while the furniture and electrical & electronics sub-sector expanded by 3.5 per cent.

(New Straits Times-11st October 2006)



Taking franchise industry forward

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The top-ranked franchise in most categories includes Subway, Curves, the UPS store, Jani-King and Jackson Hewitt Tax Service. The diversify of these businesses – sandwiches, weight-loss centres, postal services, commercial cleaning and tax preparation services respectively – reinforces the typically wide choice available for the building franchisee. The Ministry has registered 260 locally-developed franchise systems, out of which only 63 are Bumiputra-owned. Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP), Perbandaran Nasional Bhd (PNS) has been tasked as the sole agency to oversee all franchise activities in the country. The Government has allocated RM12 million under the 9MP for PNS to boost the industry. Over the period, it aims to create 50 franchisors and 1,000 franchisees. PNS has allocated RM300 million over the next five years to assist about 200 franchisees per year. Last year, the agency approved a total of RM2.8 million loans, and the figure is expected to reach RM12.4 million this year. Among the world's successful franchise businesses are Starbucks, McDonald' and 7-Eleven. Locally, Nineteen O One Sdn Bhd, which serves American-style hotdog, is fast gaining popularity.

(New Straits Times-11st October 2006)

Hektar-REIT gets Securities Commission green light for listing

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Hektar Group has received Securities Commission (SC) approval to float its properties, Subang Parade in Selangor and Mahkota Parade in Malacca via a real estate investment trust (REIT). The REIT, to be known as Hektar-REIT, is due to be listed on Bursa Malaysia's main board by year-end, chairman Datuk Jaafar Abdul Hamid said in a statement yesterday. Hektar-REIT has a combined property value of RM523mil and a total net lettable area (NLA) of 957,025 sq ft as at May 2006. Jaafar Abdul Hamid said Subang Parade was acquired for RM223mil in August 2003 while Mahkota Parade was purchased at RM146mil in April 2004. Hektar Group has three subsidiaries - Hektar Premier Sdn Bhd, Hektar Black Sdn Bhd and Hektar Klasik Sdn Bhd. Hektar Premier fully owns and manages Subang Parade, while Hektar Black fully owns and manages Mahkota Parade. Hektar Klasik, which fully owns a land bank in Nusajaya, Johor aims to develop a new lifestyle shopping centre soon with a planned NLA of one million sq ft. On the company's future plans, Jaafar said his vision was to build a shopping centre management franchise in Malaysia.

(The Star-13th October 2006)

KFC opens 25th outlet in Sarawak

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KFC Holdings (M) Bhd, which is expanding its network in new growth areas in Sarawak, has opened a new restaurant in Matang, its 25th in Sarawak and 363rd nationwide. Another restaurant is expected to open at the newly-upgraded Kuching International Airport terminal building next week, said KFC (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd managing director Tan Cheng Kiat. "We plan for two or three new restaurants in Sarawak next year. We are on the lookout for new development areas," he told reporters after the opening of the Matang outlet yesterday. KFC also operates an outlet each in Kota Sentosa and Batu Kawah new township, both in the Padawan municipality. Tan said it would cost between RM800,000 and RM1mil to set up a new restaurant. He said KFC had recorded strong growth in sales, and hoped to maintain the rate at over 10% per annum. "KFC is traditionally very strong with families. We are now going for the young adult market, and are introducing more snack food," he added.

(The Star-13th October 2006)



KUB invites bids for owner of A&W franchise

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KUB Malaysia Bhd is proposing to dispose of its wholly-owned subsidiary Restoran Kualiti Sdn Bhd (RKSB), which owns and operates the A&W fast-food restaurant franchise in Malaysia and Thailand. KUB said the proposed disposal is the first step in the group's exit from the non-core food and beverage sector. Business Times had reported in June that several parties have shown interest in the A&W franchise, including QSR Brands Bhd, the parent company of KFC Holdings (Malaysia) Bhd. A&W has 33 outlets in Malaysia and 32 in Thailand. "Going forward, the group intends to dispose of KUB Agrotech Sdn Bhd, its palm oil plantation company," the statement added.

(New Straits Times-18th October 2006)

Johor property to be injected into Hektar REIT

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Hektar Asset Management Sdn Bhd yesterday confirmed plans to inject the proposed "lifestyle shopping centre" in Nusajaya, Johor, into the Hektar Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) in the future. The Hektar group plans to build the shopping centre on 50 acres of an 84-acre site in Nusajaya currently owned by Hektar Klasik Sdn Bhd. The hill top project is expected to have 1 million sq ft of net lettable space. However, the injection of the project into the REIT would only take place in a couple of years, because the construction would take "at least two years", Hektar Asset Management chairman Datuk Jaafar Abdul Hamid said.

(The Star-20th October 2006)

Best retail development

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The 1 Utama Shopping Centre was recently conferred the Fiabci Malaysia Property Award 2006 for Best Retail Development. The judging criteria included overall project quality, architecture and design, development and construction, community benefits and environmental impact, finance and marketing. 1 Utama also won the Platinum Award for Shopping Complex of the Year in the Retail World Excellence Awards 2006-2007, the National Creativity & Innovation Award 2005, and Best Mall 2004 & 2005 in KLue's Best of 2004 and 2005 Survey. The centre piece of the mall is the innovative Rainforest – the first to be incorporated in a Malaysia shopping centre. The four-storey tropical Rainforest comes equipped with a suspension bridge, *koi* ponds and giant aquariums for shoppers to get close to nature.

(The Sun-20th October 2006)

Padini setting up more outlets to boost sales

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Padini Holdings Bhd, the retailer of *Vincci* shoes and *Padini* apparel, is setting up an additional six concept stores and five stand-alone outlets nationwide to boost group revenue for the financial year ending June 30, 2007, said finance director Chan Kwai Heng. "We have so far confirmed opening one concept store each in Queensbay Mall in Penang, Warisan Square in Kota Kinabalu and Pavillon in Kuala Lumpur. "We have yet to decide on potential locations for three more concept stores, as well as on the stand-alone outlets," he told *StarBiz* via an e-mail interview, adding that investment for each outlet would be about RM15mil. The company currently has 120 outlets nationwide. In addition, Padini intended to follow Jusco's expansion into the suburban areas to widen its geographical reach for consignment sales. Also in the pipeline are new brands for the lower-end consumer market to be launched by end-2007, Chan said.

(The Star-20th October 2006)



6% retail growth seen for Q4

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Retail Group Malaysia Sdn Bhd (RGM) estimates the retail industry to grow at 6% for the last quarter of this year. RGM, which released the Malaysia Retail Industry Report on behalf of the Malaysia Retailers' Association recently, expects growth of 5.1% in the third quarter. RGM added that the retail industry expanded 9.5% during the first half of this year despite rising interest rates and falling consumer confidence. For the first and second quarters of 2006, the retail industry grew 9.6% and 9.2% respectively. "Retail sales during the first two quarters of this year managed to outpace gross domestic product growth over the same periods. The national economy expanded by 5.5% and 5.9% during the first and second quarters of this year respectively," RGM said. The supermarket and hypermarket sub-sector was the best performer among the retail sub-sectors with 18.3% growth during the first six months of this year. This sub-sector registered 15.2% and 21% growth in the first and second quarters of 2006 respectively. The department store-cum-supermarket sub-sector was the next best performer, expanding by 9.6%. RGM has also revised upwards the retail sales growth rate for this year to 7.5%. For next year, it has a forecast of 8%.

(The Star-24th October 2006)

13 new Giant outlets within two months

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GCH Retailer (M) Sdn Bhd will open 13 new Giant supermarkets and hypermarkets in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia in the next two months as part of its business expansion nationwide. The operator of Giant supermarkets and hypermarkets had acquired five supermarkets, one superstore and two hypermarkets from three different operators in Kota Kinabalu. It also acquired a hypermarket in Sandakan recently. It will reopen the outlets as part of its chain next month, chief executive officer Datuk John Coyle said. The unit of Hong Kong-based Dairy Farm International Holdings Ltd will also open four new hypermarkets – one each in Malacca, Segamat and Kulai in Johor, and Sri Manjung in Lumut, Perak – before Christmas, he told *StarBiz*. Coyle said the company picked Sabah for its business expansion as the state's retail market had huge untapped potential. "For a start, we will invest RM50mil to manage and operate the hypermarkets and supermarkets there," he added. Currently, Giant has two supermarkets in Kota Kinabalu – one in Wawasan and the other in Karamunsing. Coyle said GCH also aimed to open six hypermarkets and supermarkets in Kuching, Sarawak, and six in the east coast states next year. GCH operates 28 hypermarkets and superstores, 35 supermarkets, 200 *Guardian* outlets and 13 *Cold Storage* outlets nationwide.

(The Star-24th October 2006)

Consumers more cautious on spending

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The retail scene will remain competitive for the rest of the year as consumers become more cautious on spending their hard-earned money, according to Aeon Co (M) Bhd finance general manager Poh Ying Loo. "At the same time, more retail outlets are being established. Everyone wants to capture a piece of the market," he told *StarBiz*. "Jusco is an established name, having been in Malaysia for the past 22 years. Our strengths include the strategic locations of our outlets and our emphasis on customer service," Poh said. Remaining optimistic on the long-term prospects of the retail industry, he said Aeon was always on the lookout for opportunities to open more stores nationwide. Meanwhile, The Store Corp Bhd is also positive on the retail sector in the near term. On how the company addressed competition, group finance director Chang Yen Huei said: "The fact that most of The Store's outlets are based in secondary towns instead of the ultra-competitive Klang Valley has always been one of our strengths. "In many towns, The Store is the biggest retailer. Not many retailers can match our network and number of outlets, as we have 80 in every state in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. Furthermore, The Store group comprises a combination of supermarkets, department stores and hypermarkets," he added. On expansion plans, Chang said *The Store* had recently completed the acquisition of the Fajar chain of supermarkets and department stores in Peninsular Malaysia.

(The Star-24th October 2006)



Red Quali Cafe to roll out franchise plan

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Local family restaurant chain Red Quali Café said it plans to capture a 5 percent share in the country's fast food market by 2008. Director Arif Alif Iskandar said the target is achievable as the company will be rolling out its own franchise plan within the next six months. He said the company is targeting to sign in at least five franchisees by next year and 20 more franchisees by 2008. Arif said the Malaysian food industry is still ripe for the taking. A study conducted by US-based company – Global Agriculture Information Network shows that the country is one of the biggest consumers of chicken in the world.

(New Straits Times-26th October 2006)

SHV shortlists 3 suitors for Makro Malaysia sale

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Dutch firm SHV Holdings NV is said to have narrowed the field of suitors for its Malaysian retail chain, Makro Cash & Carry Distribution (M) Sdn Bhd (Makro Malaysia), down to three, with a decision on the winning bid expected by the middle of next month. Makro Malaysia had on September 4 opened the bidding process for its eight stores located in Shah Alam, Cheras, Selayang, Penang, Seremban, Seberang Prai, Johor Bahru and Ipoh. The bidding period closed at the end of September. Among those said to have made bids include the world's biggest retailer Wal-Mart Stores, US' Costco Wholesale Corp and Germany's Metro Cash & Carry. These retailers currently operate in the region, but not in Malaysia. Existing foreign retailers who have made a bid include the Dairy Farm Group of Hong Kong – currently the largest retailer in Malaysia with annual sales in excess of RM3 million. In Malaysia, Dairy Farm operates the Giant supermarket and hypermarket chain, Cold Storage supermarkets and the Guardian Pharmacy chain. Another existing foreign contender is said to be the UK's Tesco Store. Makro Malaysia will be the second Dutch retailer in three years, after Royal Hold, which managed the top supermarket chain, to exit Malaysia.

(New Straits Times-27th October 2006)

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

'It is for our own good'

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Motorists using the Jalan Universiti/Jalan Dato Abu Bakar roundabout in Petaling Jaya yesterday had to endure inconvenience due to the partial closure of Jalan Universiti. The closure is to facilitate the construction of a 1.2km flyover in the area. Residents of Petaling Jaya and motorists have been warned about the impending traffic build-up and advised to use alternative routes, and most are expecting a massive jam due to the heavy use of the main arterial road. One of the major concerns about the closure is rushing seriously ill patients to University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC).

(The Star-3rd October 2006)



Chaos at business centre

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Perfect Bird's Nest Quality Products Enterprise general manager Albert Beh, who works in the Medan Putra Business Centre in Bandar Manjalara, said as many as a thousand vehicles came to the area in a day and the motorists had no choice but to double park. Ricky Liew, 57, who often patronises a restaurant at the business centre, said the traffic problem was mainly due to the shortage of parking bays. Federal Territory MCA Youth deputy chairman Yee Poh Ping, who is helping the business operators and visitors to resolve the problem, said the developer did not plan the area properly and this had resulted in the shortage of car parks. Yee said his service centre had submitted proposals to City Hall, one of which requested for traffic improvements on April 6 last year. "The Urban Transport Department had visited the area and it promised to carry out a project to reorganise the car parks and remove the islands," he added.

(The Star-3rd October 2006)

Focus on parking issues

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The monthly rental for parking lots in Selayang will be revised. Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) president Zainal Abidin Azim, who chaired the MPS full board meeting, on Thursday, said there had been many complaints from councillors that those who booked the parking lots after 6pm had forced motorists to remove their cars one or two hours earlier and had even threatened to break the cars' windscreens. Councillor and Taman Templer assemblyman Datuk Ahmad Bhari Abd Rahman suggested that shoplots or even business outlets should only be allowed one parking lot each so as not to inconvenience motorists. Zainal Abidin said they would discuss the issue with Suasa Efektif Sdn Bhd, which manages the parking system in five commercial business areas in the municipality, and a work out a well-planned system.

(The Star-3rd October 2006)

New stop planned near mall

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Kinrara assemblyman Datuk Kow Cheong Wei said one of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) stops in Puchong would be located near the IOI Mall. He also said the LRT stop would be within walking distance of the mall and that the Seri Petaling-IOI Mall route would span 17km. He also said the LRT stop would be within walking distance of the mall and that the Seri Petaling-IOI Mall route would span 17km. He said the report was also being studied to ensure there was enough parking for commuters. Seventy-eight percent of the land along the proposed routes belongs to MPSJ and the rest to City Hall.

(The Star-5th October 2006)

End in sight to stench woes

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Occupants of Desa Petaling public flats, who have been living with stench emitting from an adjacent sewerage treatment plant, are assured of fresh air in the future but they have to be patient for now. DAP National Consumer Affairs Bureau secretary Khong Chee Seng, who brought Indah Water Konsortium (IWK) representatives to visit the site on Tuesday, said the company would be implementing temporary and permanent measures to reduce the foul smell. "According to the representatives, the company is constructing a sewerage treatment plant in Bandar Tun Razak and the one here will be upgraded at the same time to be linked to that. With these measures, the smell can be reduced," Khong explained to residents. "That will take two years. In the meantime, the company will carry out temporary measures to make it more tolerable for residents here," he said. Among the temporary measures are covering the drains and manholes, removal of sludge, repair of pipes and "any other measures the resident request".

(The Star-7th October 2006)



Seven want to finish project

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A group of seven buyers (Group 7) of the Jalil Heights - Lestari Perdana housing development can't wait any longer. They have submitted a memorandum of appeal to effect a variation to the statutory Sales and Purchase agreement. With the variation in effect, Frankie Tan, Che Zamrey Mohd Hashim, Dr Abdullah Taib, Ho Choo Ping, Wai Chee Wan, Chin Lam and Tong Boon Seng, want their properties handed over to them so they can take over the construction to complete their properties. The Group 7 feel the variation release is the only way their properties will see completion because for three years the developer managed to complete only 80% of the project. The group, led by Tan, said Zone 1, 2 and 3 were not fully completed while Zone 4 and 5 had been handed over to the buyers. "Most of the houses in Zones 1, 2 and 3 are about 80% completed and for the last 36 months, there has not been any work done on our properties," he said. Tan said the developer had assured them that their properties would be completed on time but after 36 months of waiting, the group wants the Housing and Local Government Ministry to step in. The Group 7 also wants the remaining buyers of Zones 1, 2 and 3 to join them to fully develop all the three zones. "The entire housing project comprise of 272 semi-detached units and is only half kilometre away from Equine Jaya Jusco and 8km from Putrajaya," he said.

(The Star-7th October 2006)

Going downhill

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Penang's Landscape is changing and in the eyes of environmentalists, things are looking bad. The greenery on the hills in Tanjung Bungah, Batu Ferringhi, Paya Terubong and several other areas is fast disappearing. The worst-hit areas run from Tanjung Bungah to Batu Ferringhi, which is already regarded as one of the most heavily developed stretches of resorts and luxury homes in the country. No less than a dozen luxury housing projects have been earmarked for the area and most involve hill and beachside development. Sahabat Alam Malaysia has expressed fears that wide-spread clearing of the hills could lead to serious erosion, landslides and sea pollution. Secretary Meena Raman described the situation, especially along Tanjung Bungah and Batu Ferringhi, as horrific. In August, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said Penang was one of the three states that had been ignoring guideline on hillside development. The other two were Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Three states were still approving projects on hilltops above 300m and slopes with a gradient of more than 35 degrees, contravening the guideline issued in 2002 and revised last year.

(New Straits Times-8th October 2006)

Spring tide forces road to close for eight hours

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About 5km of coastal road in Kuala Perlis was made inaccessible for more than eight hours when a spring tide swept in piles of rubbish there. Kangar Municipal Council rubbish disposal contractor Kasbudi Services Sdn Bhd had to mobilise workers since 7am yesterday to clean up the mess. Supervisor Shahrudin Kasa said the road was inaccessible for more than eight hours before the workers started to clear up the mess. The company had to use a bulldozer to clear the rubbish from the area. His co-worker Ahmad Mohd Noor, who lives nearby, said strong winds made the situation worse when fallen tree branches covered the already messy road.

(The Star-8th October 2006)



Peace returns to Seremban terminal

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The new zoning system, introduced at Seremban's Terminal One bus station last week, is expected to run smoothly within this week as initial protests from bus operators have been ironed out. Aminudin Mansor, group general manager of Panji Timor Sdn Bhd, which manages the station, said two of the operators, Transnasional and Parkmay, had sent letters of undertaking on Wednesday morning stating that they would abide by any ruling given by Panji Timor and the Seremban Municipal Council. On Tuesday, traffic flow at the bus station came to a standstill when several buses blocked the entry and exit points to the area. It was the work of disgruntled bus operators who were against the station's new system. The new zoning system has the bays in the terminal divided into four zones-Kuala Lumpur bus, town bus, inter-town bus and express bus. Payment by bus operators is now per trip compared to monthly charges previously. Charges per trip for the town bus are RM1, RM2 for inter-town bus and RM5 for express bus. A 40% discount is given for bus companies whose buses make more than 100 trips.

(The Star-9th October 2006)

Toll-free Durin bridge will be opened to motorists on Oct 21

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The southern and northern regions of Sarawak, divided by the Rejang river, will be "bridged" by Oct 21 – in time for the festive *balik kampung* rush. The good news is that the authorities will not impose any toll on the new 1.2km Durin bridge – which for years had been the missing link in the 1,000km Pan-Borneo Highway. "The bridge will be opened to traffic on Oct 21. It will also be the last day for the ferry services in Durin, which will cease operations on Oct 22. The more than RM130mil bridge, funded by the Federal Government, took about a decade to complete after the earth-breaking was done in 1996. Brooke Dockyard and Engineering Works Corporation took over the project in 2003 and completed it. On a related matter, Wong said the upgrading of the road between the Sibu airport and Julau into a dual carriageway was progressing well. The nearly RM200mil project is scheduled for completion in late 2008. He said these road projects and the completed Durin bridge would link up areas in central Sarawak, open up more land for development and generate other economic activities. He said Tanjung Manis is home to the country's largest integrated timber complex and will soon have a deep-sea fishing port with processing facilities.

(The Star-9th October 2006)

600 flee flats after landslide in Kuala Lumpur

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Heavy rains triggered a landslide at the back of a row of low-cost flats in Section 10, Wangsa Maju, forcing about 600 residents to flee their units during breaking fast. The residents had to be evacuated to temporary relief centres, as the earth that slipped 50m down a slope seemed to pose a danger to the blocks. Part of the road leading to the flats collapsed. Following the landslide the authorities ordered residents in Blocks B3, B4, B5 and B6 to move out of their homes. Federal Territories Minister Datuk Zulhasnan Rafique said that residents from 160 units of house from the affected blocks have been advised to vacate their homes and they would be temporarily housed at several multipurpose halls in and around Wangsa Maju. According to news reports Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had ordered the contractor involved in the Duke expressway project to carry out remedial work on the affected area and to submit a report on the incident to the ministry.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)



Faulty streetlights worry residents

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Damansara Sutera Apartment residents want nine faulty streetlights in Persiaran Kip Utama in Kepong Industrial Park to be repaired as soon as possible to prevent any mishaps such as robberies or car break-ins. The streetlights have not been functioning for the last two months and residents have been afraid of parking their vehicles along the road (which is outside their apartment blocks) since then. Damansara Sutera Apartment Residents Association KL president Bernard Lim said there had been two car break-ins where the thieves made off with the cars' audio equipment. Damansara Sutera Apartment Residents Association KL assistant secretary Jeffrey Chan Chee Hoe said the darkness caused by the faulty streetlights was dangerous for apartment residents who used public transport, especially women, as they must walk about 1km to the bus stop.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)

Government to build 500 clinics

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The Health Ministry plans to build 500 health and village clinics to meet the needs of a growing population under the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP). Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek said Hulu Langat and Petaling in Selangor had the highest population but the number of clinics was small. "Under the 9MP, we will also upgrade the facilities and equipment in certain clinics," he said. Dr Chua said the Cabinet had given approval to clinics to operate from shoplots as well as the setting-up of mobile clinics in areas that needed healthcare services. He said this would overcome the problem of acquiring land to build hospitals and clinics. "For instance, Jinjang has a population of 300,000 but it only has a health clinic and if we want to build a hospital, we need to look for a proper piece of land," he said, adding that the ratio of population against the number of health clinics should be reviewed. The clinic's medical officer-in-charge, Dr Inthirani Sivarajah, said the clinic had limited facilities such as computers, an ambulance and other vehicles. "There is an average of 380 patients here a day and we need to upgrade our facilities," she said, adding that the clinic had only one ambulance at present. She said the clinic, built in 1977, was upgraded at a cost of RM21mil in May.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)

Residents upset by bazaar

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Residents at Jalan 1/144A, Taman Bukit Cheras, whose houses are facing a Ramadan bazaar, propose moving the market to a quieter site. The bazaar with about 30 stalls has caused congestion and parking problems for the residents, and makes it difficult for them to drive in and out of their homes. Traders park their vehicles in front of residents' houses while shoppers also park indiscriminately due to lack of space. According to him, the bazaar started about three years ago with only several stalls. Now, it has expanded significantly, with many hawkers taking up the lots illegally. He said the residents had brought up the matter with Bandar Tun Razak MP Datuk Tan Chai Ho, who had written to City Hall but no action had been taken. He said the bazaar caused hygiene problems as well. "Alam Flora cleans up the area but sometimes they do it the next day and stray dogs will come that night foraging for food," he said.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)



Spring tide floodwaters in Klang recedes

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The worst of the spring tide is over. High tides brought only ankle-high floods to several areas near the Pulau Ketam jetty in Port Klang yesterday. Drainage and Irrigation Department technical assistant Jamaluddin Sharif said the highest tide reached 6m above sea level at 7.30am yesterday. "Floodwaters covered areas near the jetty, including the Royal Selangor Yacht Club, the former Customs Building and part of the main road leading to the port," he said. KTM Komuter trains were disrupted for a few hours in the morning because the railway tracks were under seawater, he said. He added that the water did not reach the police station which was about 200m from the jetty. The nearby villages were not flooded yesterday although the drains were overflowing because a few bunds had been breached," he said. Jamaluddin said the floods started receding after 7.30am and cleared within half an hour. He said the tide was expected to be lower today, at 5.6m above sea level.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)

Yap: Seri Kembangan main road neglected

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Rapid development in the last few years has seen the town of Seri Kembangan teeming with houses, people, and cars. Motorists plying the main road, called Route 3215, have had to put up with heavy congestion every morning, afternoon, and night. Built as the connecting road between the Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP) in Puchong and the Sungei Besi Highway, Route 3215 is, however, not a highway. Instead, it is a two-lane, dual carriageway. Yet a portion of the road that starts from Taman Universiti Indah right down to the junction of Public Bank in Serdang Jaya is only a three-lane way. "Route 3215 was gazetted as a Federal road in 1996, which means it is under the jurisdiction of the Works Ministry. He added that the Public Works Department (JKR) had appointed a consultant to study Route 3215 in June 2004 and it was subsequently approved for upgrading.

(The Star-10^h October 2006)

All they want is a place to stay

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Residents of the five-storey low-cost flats in Section 10, Wangsa Maju, Kuala Lumpur, who were hit by a landslide on Monday night, were relieved that the authorities had taken a swift decision to relocate them to temporary flats in Air Panas. City Hall announced yesterday that all affected residents of the 160 units of Blocks B3, B4, B5 and B6 would possibly be moved to the nearby Seri Semarak PPR in Air Panas by the weekend. So far, 138 families have registered with the Welfare Services Department at a booth set up in the area. Each family received RM300 from the department.

(The Star-11st October 2006)

Government uneasy over frequent landslides

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An investigation is being carried out on the soil stability of Ulu Klang, Ampang and Wangsa Maju to the northeast of the Federal capital where many landslides have occurred in recent years. Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the Cabinet had instructed that investigations be carried out because of the frequent landslides there. "It all started with Highland Towers but over the last few years, the number of landslides in Bukit Ampang, Bukit Antarabangsa and Bukit Perdana has been frequent and the trend is worrying," he said yesterday. He was commenting on the landslide near four blocks of low-cost flats in Section 10, Wangsa Maju, on Monday which forced the evacuation of 140 people.

(The Star-11th October 2006)



Bone-Chilling warning for high-rise dwellers

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A soil expert, who doesn't want to be named, said the landslide at Section 10, Wangsa Maju on Monday was due to the location of the place which shared the same belt as Hulu Klang and sat on decomposed granite. "Most of Wangsa Maju is considered 'high risk'. "If soil at these areas is not stabilised, more landslides can be expected among high-rise building at slope," he said. Institute of Engineering Malaysia vice-president Tan Yean Chin said hillslope development should be carried out according to guidelines set by the authorities. He said there were four keys factors to be considered for such development – planning; design and analysis; construction; and maintenance. The training and Infrastructure Development Institute, Public Works Department and Minerals and Geo-science Department Malaysia are conducting a study on the flats' foundation and soil structure.

(New Straits Times-12nd October 2006)

Extension woes for 40

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About 40 residents of Bukit OUG Townhouse found themselves in a tight spot after receiving notices from Kuala Lumpur City Hall's Town Planning Department for putting up illegal extensions in and around their property recently. They have been given 14 days to remove the extensions or face a fine. Most of the extensions were done on corner-lot property as well as the backyards. Residents claim the management corporation hired to manage the property had misled them. They said the management company had given them the green light to carry out extensions.

(The Star-12th October 2006)

Kindie site faces ruin

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The plans for a community kindergarten in their neighbourhood materialised well with the construction of a two-storey building. Today, however, the building in Precinct 9, Putrajaya stands desolate and faces ruin. Even the signboard announcing its presence collapsed recently after it was left to tilt for a few months. Although protected by perimeter fencing, the building is showing signs of decay and is overgrown with lalang. The proposed kindergarten sits on a large piece of land beside the main road. According to Borhann, there have been several dengue cases in the neighbourhood. He said there were also plans to build a surau for the area but the piece of land allocated for the building has been vacant all these years. One of the swings in the playground needs urgent attention because the chain holding the seat has broken off and the rusty edge poses a threat to curious children. Worse still if they decide to swing the heavy chain.

(The Star-12th October 2006)

Landslide victims literally picking up the pieces

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Squatters in Kampung Bonu in Sepang are literally picking up the pieces a day after a landslide swept through their village. Thursday's landslide, which began about 8.15am, destroyed 17 houses and a *surau*, and left more than 100 people homeless. Many of the victims are living with relatives for the time being while some are being housed at the nearby Kampung Melawa community hall. Engineers from the Public Works Department (PWD) said the area did not have a solid foundation as it was mostly made up of sand and clay and, as such, was prone to landslides, particularly during the rainy season. "The cause of the landslide was not due to any development but because of a water gully at the top of the slope which resulted in water seeping into the soil," Infrastructure Development Minister Datuk Raymond Tan Shu Kiah said. He also said the authorities may seek foreign expertise to help ensure the safety of slopes and hillsides in areas prone to landslides.

(New Straits Times-14th October 2006)



Haze condition still at moderate level

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The haze condition in the state remains at a moderate level with visibility at about 3km. A check with the state Department of Environment showed that the Air Pollutant In-dex (API) as at 11am yesterday was 65 in Seberang Jaya, while the readings in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Gelugor, and Institut Latihan Perindustrian (ILP) Prai, were at 61 and 57 respectively. Visibility as at 2pm yesterday in Bayan Lepas was 5km, while in Butterworth and Prai, it was about 3km. On Friday, visibility in these areas at the same time was 6km, 3km and 4km respectively. A state Meteorological Services Department officer said showers in the morning and evening today were expected to help clear the haze.

(The Star-14th October 2006)

Fears of flash floods in Taman Midah persists

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Residents of Taman Midah in Pekan Bt 11, Cheras are relieved that the Kajang Municipal Council (MPKj) has upgraded the area's drainage system. However, they are not fully convinced that their flood problems have ended. The residents, who have been experiencing flash floods for more than two decades, fear there is no escape from the floods if there is a continuous downpour. Serdang MP Datuk Yap Pian Hon, who visited the area recently, said clogged drains used to be blamed for the floods in Taman Midah. "Now the problem seems to be at the confluence of Sungai Langat and the main drainage outlet to the river. "The drain meets Sungai Langat at a 90-degree angle and since both are at the same level, water from the drain does not easily flow into the river during a downpour, causing a backflow. "We are proposing that the main drain be widened, raised and diverted at a different angle for an easier flow," said Yap. He said the residents were worried that if this project was not carried out soon, they would have to put up with another flood when the monsoon season began next month.

(The Star-16th October 2006)

Flash floods wreak havoc

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Several roads in and around the city were hit by flash floods during an evening storm yesterday that caused massive jams and, in some instances, caused traffic to come to a standstill. At the height of the flooding, many low-lying areas were in at least one metre of water. Among areas affected by the flash floods were Jalan Travers, Jalan Pantai Baru and Jalan Bukit Pantai in the Bangsar area, Jalan Tun Sambanthan in Brickfields and the Federal Highway leading to the Damansara-Puchong highway. Other affected areas were Jalan Tun Razak, Taman Chamberlain and Mile 2.5th Jalan Cheras. In the Ulu Langat area, waters rose to about knee-high in several houses at Batu 17 in Kampung Seberang. The waters, however, receded within minutes. A City Hall operations centre spokesman said the road from Salak South to the Jalan Mas/Jalan Cheras junction was flooded because a river nearby had overflowed its banks. The downpour also caused traffic congestion that lasted from 4.30pm to 6pm in most parts of the city. The spokesman said traffic eased after 6pm when the water levels receded.

(The Star-16th October 2006)

Two floors of bank damaged

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It looked like a scene out of the *Towering Inferno* movie as firemen on cranes battled the flames at the high-rise Bank Muamalat building. The fire damaged two floors of the bank building in Jalan Melaka. A Fire and Rescue Department spokesman said the fire damaged about 35 per cent of the eighth floor and 20 per cent of the ninth floor. The damaged floors housed the offices for the bank's accounts and finance departments.

(New Straits Times-16th October 2006)



Air goes from bad to worse

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Air quality in the Klang Valley deteriorated yesterday with the API for Kuala Lumpur at the unhealthy level. One other area, Shah Alam, recorded unhealthy API levels while other locations had close to unhealthy air quality readings too. Air quality and visibility improved slightly after a heavy downpour in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. Visibility levels in the Klang Valley and the surrounding areas improved to between 5km and 7km, but this was still below the normal levels of 10km. As of 9pm yesterday, poor visibility of 5km and below was recorded in eight areas while Kuantan and Sri Aman had the lowest visibility at 2.5km. At 5pm yesterday, four locations recorded unhealthy API levels, with Kuala Lumpur having the highest in the country at 103. Forty-five locations recorded moderate API readings, while only two had good air quality readings. The number of areas with unhealthy readings in the southern states of Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca fell from six on Tuesday to only two as of 5pm yesterday.

(The Star-18th October 2006)

Bid to end floods in Kg Kebun Bunga

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The most recent flood to hit Kampung Kebun Bunga was on Feb 26 this year when the water rose up to 1.7m (five feet). Selangor Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) director Lee Loke Chang said one of the reasons why Kampung Kebun Bunga was more prone to floods was its low-lying location. "The area was previously part of Sungai Damansara's flow," he said. According to Lee, among the causes of the floods are broken embankments, spoilt check valves and pumps, accumulation of rubbish, and improper internal drainage system. "DID has been carrying out several projects to upgrade the flow system and construction is under way to build a RM7mil permanent embankment," said Lee. He said a permanent embankment would reduce the risk of floods, but it may still happen due to the occurrence of high tides together with heavy rains, scattered and unpredictable rains, and the possibility of flow system failure.

(The Star-20th October 2006)

Wall on verge of collapsing

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Cracks have appeared on the wall which is supposed to aid water run-off from the 70m high hill along the vital Sepang road which links the city to a five-star resort, the new container port, oil and gas terminal as well as the state's only cement plant. A portion of the wall, built as surface treatment on the hill slope, has also buckled with large chunks beginning to peel off from the hill, posing a threat to motorists driving along the road below. At least one of the concrete slabs have slipped down by 1m and a civil engineer who visited the site two days ago said a week-long downpour could result in a large portion of the surface treatment giving way and crashing down on the road. Attempts were made to cover the cracks with plastic sheets but most of them have been ripped off by wind and rain.

(The Star-20th October 2006)

'We are sick of the floods in TTDI Jaya'

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Residents say that despite water retention ponds and the installation of a house pump meant to automatically channel excess water into Sungai Damansara, the floods still occur. The house pump is installed at high-rise apartments nearby. During the festive week alone, minor flooding had occurred twice – the first on Deepavali eve and the most recent on Hari Raya eve. "Sometimes – like today (Monday) – the pump doesn't work," complained Lai Chooi Meng, a resident of TTDI Jaya for the last 10 years. According to her, the waters had risen to about knee-length following the heavy downpour that evening. "There were two occasions when the guy who held the key to the pump could not be found, while another time, it did not work anyway because there was no gasoline. In the previous flood on Feb 26, residents forked out thousands of ringgit to restore their homes and cars. Residents are tired of having to clean up their driveways of the debris brought in by floodwaters every time there is a downpour.

(The Star-20th October 2006)



14 years on, no sign of building

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A major reason for the persistent congestion in Seri Kembangan town is a lack of parking bays. Many resorts to parking indiscriminately by the roadside and this have caused traffic snarls that other motorists have to put up with daily. Serdang MP Yap Pian Hon said a proper car park was promised to the residents about a decade ago, but to this day, there was no sign of it being built.

(The Star-30th October 2006)

Hundreds cut off by landslip

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Another landslip has occurred in Sabah, this time cutting off road links to hundreds of people in the interior Nabawan district. The landslip, which occurred after heavy rain early last Wednesday, forced villagers in the Kampung Naundak area to trek for up to four hours to get to the main road that links them to Sepulut town and other interior towns in the Nabawan and Keningau districts. Villagers of nearby Kampung Salong, where a bridge across Sungai Saupi had been washed away, said the debris and mess caused by the landslip had yet to be cleared. Residents in Pensiangan, Pagalungan and Salong affected by the landslip are hoping for remedial actions, as it is their only road link to interior towns where villagers carry out their work.

(The Star-30th October 2006)

LRT report to go public

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The findings on the three light rail transit (LRT) train incidents in the past three months will be made public. Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy said the Government would rely on local experts first before bringing in foreign consultants to investigate the incidents. On Aug 23, about 5,000 Putra LRT commuters were stranded for one hour at the Masjid Jamek station when water seeped onto the main train. On Oct 6, the track between Gombak and Ampang was closed for 10 hours when an LRT train stalled between the Datuk Keramat and Damai stations, leaving hundreds of commuters stranded. In the latest incident on Friday, a Star LRT coach overshot the track at about 7am at the Sentul Timur station stabling area, forcing the track to be closed for more than 20 minutes.

(The Star-31st October 2006)

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