



Other news & views

Compiled by C. ARUNO, JO TIMBUONG and R. ARAVINTHAN

'Extend wage subsidy to all'

Offer to those in need and not just MCO states, govt urged

HUAZONG, the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia, has urged the government to extend the recently announced Wage Subsidy Programme 3.0 to states which are not under the movement control order, reported *Sin Chew Daily*.

Its president Tan Sri Goh Tian Chuan said even though they supported the programme, it should be offered to those who need it instead of being allocated according to whether a state is under MCO.

"Even in MCO states, there are businesses that are doing well, whereas there are employers in non-MCO states who are desperately in need of help," Goh said in

a statement.

On Monday, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced that all employers operating under the movement control order are eligible to apply for the Wage Subsidy Programme 3.0 regardless of sectors.

Eligible employers would receive a wage subsidy of RM600 for each of their employees earning less than RM4,000 for a period of one month.

Goh urged the government to also consider extending the programme from one month to three months.

Apart from the programme,

Huazong also recommends that the government offer a discount to those who make early repayments of their PTPTN loans and to extend discounted Internet packages to those sitting for the UEC exams.

> In a bid to ease her parents of their financial burden, a university student agreed to offer sexual services for money but ended up being raped and RM2,000 poorer, the same daily reported.

The 22-year-old student, who is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in International Business, said she contacted a "middle-man" on WhatsApp who claimed he could help her solicit

high-paying clients.

She was asked to pay RM2,000 as an introducer's fee and was soon told to meet a client at a hotel in Cheras.

When they met up, the man agreed that they would not have penetrative sex but went back on his word.

She later lodged a report at the Kajang district police Headquarters and spoke to reporters from the daily on condition of anonymity.

The police suspect that the "client" and "middle-man" are the same person and he is proficient at running similar scams on desperate victims.

Residents turn trash into treasure

AN illegal rubbish dumping ground in Klang, Selangor, has been turned into an urban farm maintained by 31 residents, *Makkal Osai* reported.

The empty lot along Jalan Kebun Nenas in Taman Sentosa which had become a dumping ground was divided into 31 small lots and assigned to local residents.

The residents then began planting vegetables there as part of a new green effort, said Sentosa state assemblyman Dr Gunarajah George.

The assemblyman, who visited the area, gave out gardening tools as a form of encouragement.

Recently, a fishpond was also built there.

> News of a couple getting married in Tamil Nadu, India, went viral after they included an e-wallet payment codes in the wedding invitation, the same daily reported.

Saravanan and Sivashangkari from Madurai, who got married earlier this month, could not invite most of their relatives and friends to the wedding due to Covid-19 SOP.

The couple decided to include QR codes for GooglePay and PhonePay to make it easier for those not able to attend it to give the customary *moi* - wedding money gift.

QR codes were also available at the venue to discourage the giving of cash which may cause Covid-19 transmissions.

Covid-19 remote cure via spells debunked

A PRACTITIONER of Islamic medicine has rubbished claims that Covid-19 can be cured through spells chanted over the phone, *Harian Metro* reported.

Datuk Tuan Asmawi Tuan Umar dismissed the words of a man who claimed he could remotely cure thousands of patients by reciting some spells.

"His claims are unfounded and I'm doubtful that he has cured thousands," he said.

Tuan Asmawi was responding to a recent report of a man charging unsuspecting patients RM100, claiming that he could cure Covid-19 just by reciting spells via phone.

The man is said to have duped two foreign workers.

> Singer Mimi Fly is ready to spread her wings and take off once again as she tries to cope with emotional trauma following her recent divorce.

The 35-year-old former One

Nation Emcees member told *Kosmo!* that she had learnt to be grateful for what she has after exploring Kuala Lumpur city on New Year's Eve.

"I saw how others faced even tougher challenges and that made me realise I have a lot to be grateful for and I have learnt to be kinder to myself," she said.

Mimi has also turned to songwriting in her journey to rediscover herself and plans to put out new materials soon.

> Durian stalls in Jebebu are almost empty as the movement control order has prevented lovers of the king of fruits from enjoying it.

Durian trader Khairul Anuar Zainal Azman said he had no choice but to sell a bulk of the fruit to middlemen to move the off-season produce, *Utusan Malaysia* reported.

"The stalls are very quiet now as customers practise the new normal and bring the fruits to be enjoyed at home," he said.

SEEKING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FORWARD

THE issue of raw material shortage is a major trouble facing the timber industry, but industry players are working hand-in-hand with the government to address the situation - a vital step forward, as plywood products were the second largest contributor (RM3.4bil) to Malaysia's RM22.5bil wood-based products export in 2019.

Describing the acute shortage of raw materials in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as lower rubberwood supply due to increased latex production, the Malaysian Panel-Products Manufacturers' Association (MPMA) chairman Datuk Wira Sheikh Othman Rahman said that plywood and panel manufacturers are facing stiff competition from sawmillers in securing a sufficient supply.

MPMA was established in 1965 to represent its members' interests in the Malaysian wood-based panel industry, through promoting the export of such products, engaging industry stakeholders and working closely with government agencies to drive forward-looking national policies aligned with the wood-based industries.

With the Malaysian Timber Council's Import Assistance Programme - the offshore sourcing programme helps local timber manufacturers to import raw materials by footing some of the freight and handling costs - to partly alleviate the issue, Sheikh Othman said the industry was also looking into alternative raw materials such as oil palm trunk (OPT), coconut trunk, rubberwood and other materials.

He stressed, "The plywood industry is not in good shape now, due to the raw material problem, so we have to go for alternative raw materials or plant new species to create sufficient supply.

"There is more demand for sustainable timber in recent years, as we move towards the direction of zero waste and we can use existing materials such as OPT to produce plywood.

OPT, for one, is a good alternative that MPMA is promoting to produce plywood. Once used for biomass or fertiliser, OPT logs



Industry players need to seek alternate raw material sources.

have proven viable to peel into plywood, although only two manufacturers are able to do so currently.

Moreover, MPMA's committee has been seeking alternative species that can meet the future demand for timber. Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MPMA and Plus Intervest Sdn Bhd in the collaboration of producing tissue culture Eucalyptus seedlings.

This FRIM-MPMA collaboration involves producing tissue culture seedlings of Eucalyptus and other commercial value species for plantation to ensure the sustainability of plant materials and raw materials.

Since 2016, it has been looking into community farming to help communities to plant new wood species with rapid growth such as Eucalyptus, which can be a good source for plywood and panel production.

The Eucalyptus tree produces heavy and

durable wood that can be used as a high-quality raw material for various wood-based products including plywood, pulp, paper, essential oil and energy.

Eucalyptus takes six years to grow, as compared to rubber wood, which takes more than 15 years before the tree can be harvested in plantations.

The Community Plantation Programme - with its pilot started in Batu Kikir, Negeri Sembilan three years ago - has a three-fold objective: The plantations aimed to introduce tree species with rapid growth such as Batai and Eucalyptus to ensure the sustainability of raw wood material as well as to reduce the dependence on resources from the natural forest and raise the income of the B40 community.

For the industry, the planting of new species can help meet future demand for timber by producing raw materials for upstream,



Sheikh Othman: Eucalyptus has good potential for plywood production.

while at the same time enabling downstream players to bring in more revenue.

"The problem we're facing now is upstream, so we need more focus in terms of increasing community plantations in kampung areas with idle or vacant land, by signing them up with a buy-back guarantee to supply the factory.

"The way forward is community farming," he pointed out, adding that MPMA is involved in contractual farming with entities such as Angkatan Koperasi Kebangsaan Malaysia Bhd, which has more than six million members that own a minimum of one to two acres of land.

Meanwhile, he noted that it can also act as an enabler to uplift the livelihood of rural communities and create a generation of Malaysians who know how to plant trees and in turn, appreciate the importance of protecting the environment.