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Share issue for the poor tops Malay news

Ramlan Said

SOME 6,000 poor families will be given Amanah Saham Bumiputera Sejahtera shares under a scheme utilising a RM30 million fund approved by the Government recently.

The nation's two national Bahasa dailies highlighted the move yesterday; Utusan Malaysia as one of its page one stories while Berita Harian had it as its page 6 lead.

Under the scheme, families will be given shares worth RM5,000. Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid, who announced the good news, said participants of the scheme would enjoy more benefits compared to the scheme for the hardcore poor introduced some time ago.

"This new scheme has its own advantages - participants are ensured of higher dividends and they will not be required to repay their loans," he said.

Under the old scheme, 50 per cent of the loans had to be paid back, besides a 10 per cent administrative fee.

Utusan columnist Awang Selamat lauded the introduction of the scheme.

But Awang had a word of caution. "Ensure the 6,000 families are deserving cases and not those pretending to be poor to enjoy the privileges."

Another main issue reported by both dailies is on excessive claims by MPs.

Utusan Malaysia highlighted Backbenchers Club chairman Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed's call on the Government to investigate the matter and to take firm action against MPs who submitted false claims.

Berita Harian reported the Anti-Corruption Agency would investigate the authenticity of the claims.

Excessive claims by MPs came to light following the revelation in Parliament that 14 MPs have submitted claims of over RM10,000 every month.

Topping the list is Pas Jeli MP Mohd Apandi Mohamad who was reimbursed RM132,335.40 last year. He has also submitted claims totalling RM78,356 for the first six months of the year.

Berita Harian also has a report on the latest edition of BusinessWeek featuring articles on Malaysia and its leaders.

The paper said the magazine not only belittled Malaysia's achievements, but also manipulated speeches by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to portray him as a critic of the country's development projects.

In an article titled Malaysia after Mahathir, Berita Harian said BusinessWeek journalist Michael Shari claimed KLIA, designed to handle 25 million passengers annually, would only handle 16 million passengers this year, omitting the fact that the airport was a long-term project.

Shari also claimed that one-third of one of the twin towers was still unoccupied, Putrajaya was empty while Cyberjaya was shunned by investors and now marketed only as a centre for low technology and data processing.