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EIA on highway to hill resorts soon

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Environmental Impact Assessment on the proposed highway linking Genting Highlands, Frasers' Hill and Cameron Highlands will be launched soon, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today.

The EIA would be carried out by the Works Ministry with the help of selected independent consultants.

"It will be launched very soon. There will be no delays," he said after opening the Academy of Sciences Malaysia building in Jalan Tun Ismail.

"After the study is completed, the EIA report will be submitted to the Department of Environment.

"The study will ascertain the impact of the 240km highway project to the environment during and after its implementation, and will contain recommendations on how damage to the ecology can be curtailed."

Despite protests from non-governmental organisations, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said last Friday that the project would go on.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would have to allow development on the highlands so that all Malaysians would be able to reach these places.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu had on Feb 23 said the ministry had more than doubled the initial allocation of RM1.5 million for the EIA on the proposed highway.

Samy Vellu said the high amount spent by the ministry showed that it was serious in minimising any threat to the environment.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Nature Society president Datuk Dr Salleh Mohd Noor said the building of the highway would reduce the attractiveness of the highlands.

"The loss of trees due to the construction and developments associated with it will increase the temperature of the highlands.

"Similar temperature rises in Cameron Highlands coupled with landslips had already affected the attractiveness of the place as a tourist destination."

He said it was in the best interest of the nation that the EIA be carried out objectively and openly while taking into account public opinions.

"The EIA is a legal tool that can justify the development of the highway if it is carried out properly.

"It also acts as a security for the public over the long term."

He said the EIA should not only consider the immediate effects of the construction of the highway but also the long-term effects and the cost of maintenance.

"The highway will not just affect the immediate area but it can also damage the environment and cause flooding in communities located miles away."

Salleh said it was critical that the EIA was done properly.

"Therefore, we welcome the increased funding.

"Ultimately, the findings of the EIA should be the basis for the Government to make a decision whether to proceed with the project or not," he said.

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