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Malacca hopes to be site for bridge to Sumatra

A. Hafiz Yatim

MALACCA, Wed. - Four State Government departments have been directed to study the possibility of building a bridge between Malacca and Sumatra.

Chief Minister Datuk Abu Zahar Isnin, who gave the directive, said Malacca was interested in having the bridge constructed here as it would benefit both countries.

"The departments will have to identify the possible site for the construction of the bridge," he said after chairing the weekly State Executive Council meeting today.

The departments are the State Works Department, State Economic Planning Unit, State Urban and Rural Planning Unit and the State Office of the Peninsular Malaysia Marine Department.

Last Sunday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said after talks with Indonesian President Suharto in Istanbul that Malaysia and Indonesia were planning to build a bridge across the Malacca Straits to link Peninsular Malaysia with Sumatra.

Dr Mahathir and Suharto were in Istanbul to attend the inaugural summit of heads of Government of the group of eight Islamic developing nations.

Dr Mahathir also said that making the proposed bridge a reality would depend on a feasibility study being undertaken, and that it would be implemented if it was feasible.

The Malacca Straits, which separates Peninsular Malaysia from Sumatra, is one of Southeast Asia's vital trading routes.

The narrowest points between the two mainland are only 24km apart. At present, ferry services link the two regions through Kukup in Johor, Malacca and Penang.

Abu Zahar said State Secretary Datuk Wira Abdul Rahman Jamal would head a committee, which will include representatives from the four departments, to look into the recommendations by the four departments.

On July 3 last year, the late Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Abdul Ghani had proposed that such a bridge be built. Four months later, Mohd Zin had announced the State Government's willingness to allocate a 80-ha site in Kuala Linggi for the construction of the bridge.

Abu Zahar said Malacca was willing to co-operate with Johor and Negri Sembilan for this purpose.

The construction of the bridge would also further enhance co-operation among members of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle, he added.

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