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More funds for EIA on highway for highlands

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MALACCA, Sun. - The Works Ministry has more than doubled the allocation for an Environmental Impact Assessment on the proposed highway linking Genting Highlands, Frasers Hill and Cameron Highlands.

Its Minister, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, said the high amount spent by the ministry showed it was serious in minimising any threat on the environment.

"Initially, an allocation of RM1.5 million was made.

"However, since the non-Governmental organisations have said that the amount is insufficient to do a detailed study, the Government and ministry have agreed to increase it to RM3.5 million.

"This shows that the Government is committed and serious in its effort as a detailed study would include recommendations to curtail damage to the ecology and environment," he said.

He added that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had also directed the ministry to ensure that a proper and detailed study be done to minimise costs.

Samy Vellu, who is also the MIC president, said this to reporters after launching the Malaysian Indian Bell Club's 39th annual general meeting at Dewan Taming Sari in the Malacca Municipal Council building this morning.

Also present was the Deputy Transport Minister, Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam who is also the 4B Youth Club and World Assembly of Youth president.

Samy Vellu was asked to comment on the highland highway project. Dr Mahathir, when launching the world's fastest mono cable car system "The Genting Skyway" at Genting Highlands last Friday, had said the project would go on.

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

"We do not want to be merely told that there are places in Malaysia with such temperate climate and natural beauty when we can actually enjoy all these things.

"Its like telling a child that ice cream is delicious, but he cannot taste it ... it can be frustrating," the Prime Minister had said.

Samy Vellu said the project would have to carry on although it may result in a slight damage to the environment.

"It brings a lot of benefit to the people and also tourists as they would have a chance to experience the temperate climate and scenic surroundings," he said.

He added that the project would also help bring more development to the area and increase the country's income from tourism.

The Minister said there were other countries which have similar highway projects.

He stressed that the Government would engage experienced help to do the study and project to ensure minimal effect on the environment.

On reservations from several non-Governmental organisations, Samy Vellu said they are entitled to their opinion.

"If they require us to do a detailed study on this project to minimise its impact than we would certainly comply and oblige.

"However, they should not suggest that the project be stopped in its entirety.

On the coastal highway project linking Banting, Selangor, to Gelang Patah in Johor, he said approval from the Economic Planning Unit is expected within two to three months.

On the Malaysian Indian Bell Club, Samy Vellu stressed that the members have to change their way of thinking as the world had undergone a lot of changes.

"Following this, they have to also change so that more youths would participate in their activities and this would help reduce the number of social problems in the country," he said.

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