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PM wants work on mountain highway expedited

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants work on the highway linking the three hill resorts on the Main Range to be expedited as any delay will result in an increase in costs.

"We hope it (the EIA) can be ready earlier," he said after chairing the weekly Cabinet meeting at the Bukit Tinggi Resort, about 60km from here.

The Prime Minister said there were efforts to deliberately delay the project which in turn would make it uneconomical in view of escalating costs.

"If this is the case, the project will end up a failure."

The 240km-long highway will link Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill and Cameron Highlands on the peninsula's Main Range.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, who was also present, said work on the EIA would begin within a month.

Samy Vellu said the assessment would be carried out by the Public Works Department with the assistance of Minconsult Sdn Bhd, a local consultant firm appointed by the ministry.

"Minconsult will be engaging foreign experts to help in the assessment.

"The company has yet to give me details as to which countries the experts will be from," he said, adding that Minconsult was a very experienced consultant firm.

The Petaling Jaya-based Minconsult was established in 1980 and is also one of the companies in the consortium which will develop Putrajaya.

The EIA will determine the impact of the highway project on the environment during and after its construction, and will contain damage-control recommendations.

Samy Vellu said it was too premature to determine when the EIA would be concluded.

"It is a difficult task. They will have to go through thick jungle and high terrain.

"Minconsult has given a time frame as to when it will complete the assessment but I cannot say whether the study will be completed by then. We will have to wait until the company completes its final report."

He gave the assurance that trees would not be unnecessarily felled during the survey. "The survey will be made on helicopters by experts, therefore, trees will not be cut down indiscriminately."

Samy Vellu said when the EIA is completed, it will be submitted to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment.

"Once the report has gone through the ministry, it will be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

"Work on the highway will only begin after the Cabinet has given its approval."

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.

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