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Mahathir-Bridge

PROPOSED BRIDGE ACROSS MELAKA STRAITS NOT AN EXTRAVAGANCE

By: Mokhtar Hussein

ISTANBUL, June (Bernama) -- The proposed bridge across the Straits of Melaka linking peninsular Malaysia to Sumatra in Indonesia will be designed as soon as possible to maximise its benefits to both countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The prime minister said it would be designed for use not only by vehicles but also by trains and would provide a channel for power and gas supply.

"If it is built, it will not only establish road and railway links but may channel electricity from Sumatra to Malaysia and may accommodate gas pipelines," he told Malaysian journalists, here.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, was in this historical town to attend the summit of the eight developing nations (D-8) yesterday.

In his meeting with Indonesian President Suharto here yesterday, Dr Mahathir conveyed Malaysia's aspiration to build the bridge and received encouraging response from Suharto who expressed Jakarta's willingness to cooperate.

Asked whether this would be another mega project, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't understand this thing about mega projects. If it is done in other countries, it appears small. When we do it, it appears big."

He said all projects planned were aimed at developing the country.

"If, for example, I build a 100m statue of myself and put it in the middle of Kuala Lumpur, maybe it's an extravagance," he said.

He said that just like the construction of airports, the government must think far ahead and make projections of the needs then.

"When we plan, we cannot plan for 1998 or 2000 but up to 2050," he said.

The prime minister said such projects, including the bridge across the Straits of Melaka, would be undertaken by the private sector which knew more about developing them and getting the returns.

"If we depend solely on the government, projects like the Cyberjaya intelligent city, Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) and Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang will not rise," he said.

"The government will not take part in the construction of the bridge. It will be given to the private sector," he added.

He said a study was being conducted on the construction of the bridge, including the location.

Besides air links, peninsular Malaysia is now linked to Sumatra by ferry service between Melaka and Dumai. -- BERNAMA

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