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Proposed highway to proceed only if feasible

Cheah Chor Sooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today the Government will ensure that the proposed highway linking Genting Highland, Fraser's Hill and Cameron Highlands is environmentally viable before proceeding with the project.

Stressing that it was too early to predict the outcome of the project's Environment Impact Assessment, he said if the project was to proceed as planned, it should meet all the EIA requirements.

Speaking at a Press conference after attending a dialogue session with representatives from 13 non-governmental organisations at his office, he said the fact that the Government insisted on undertaking the EIA study at a high cost reflected its commitment to preserving the environment.

"This is the first time we are carrying out the EIA study ourselves without engaging a consultant.

"We are very democratic and we will take note of the EIA report before proceeding with the project ... If we are to go on, we must have very good grounds to proceed," he said.

Law was earlier asked to comment if the project would go on as scheduled even if the EIA report proved that it was not feasible.

He also denied that the Government would simply call off the project due to pressure from individuals and particular groups.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when launching the world's fastest mono-cable car system "The Genting Skyway" at Genting Highland in February, had maintained that the project would go on so that the resorts would be accessible to all Malaysians.

The Works Ministry, which is responsible for the EIA study, had been given a RM3.5-million allocation by the Government to carry out the study, which upon completion, will be submitted to the Environment, Science and Technology Ministry for approval.

"We aim to minimise the impact on the environment by reducing the felling of trees and building tunnels and bridges instead of cutting the hills.

"We take into consideration the national interest and long-term benefits to the people," he said.

On whether the Government had decided on the project's proponent, Law replied: "We do not know yet, but we will certainly take a close look at the EIA report before making a decision."

On the latest development in Tasik Chini, Law said he would inform the Pahang Government on proposals made by NGOs to check the rising water level of the lake which has caused trees on the shore to die.

The Consumer Association of Penang had proposed that the dam near the estuary of Tasik Chini, which was constructed in 1994, be demolished.

"We do not know how the State Government will react to this and other proposals. We are also preparing a paper to explain to the Cabinet the situation at the lake," he said.

On the current hazy condition, Law said he was shown some satellite photographs which had identified some "hot spots" in northern Johor and certain parts of Sumatra.

"We have asked the Meteorological Department and State-level Department of Environment to look into this problem."

On allegations made by lorry drivers that Singapore authorities had intensified checks on Malaysian-registered lorries to curb excessive

emission of black smoke, Law said he was informed by the republic's Environment Ministry that "this is just a normal routine".

"There is no campaign going on, but on our side, we will start taking such offenders to court as well as impose heavier fines of up to RM2,000 for every offence," he added.

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