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Terengganu wants project to proceed

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Wed. - The Pas-led State Government wants the East Coast Highway project to proceed as planned as it will become the catalyst for development, Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang said today.

He said the State Government was prepared to meet and discuss the matter with the Federal Government to iron out any misunderstanding that could disrupt the project.

However, he said, before the meeting could take place, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu should stop making assumptions that the State Government would not allow toll to be collected at the highway, thus declaring that the project would stop at Kuantan instead.

"We can still reach some form of agreement on toll collection," he told reporters after a courtesy call by DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang at Wisma Darul Iman today. Abdul Hadi had earlier chaired the Exco meeting. Also present were DAP vice-chairmen Dr Tan Siew Giaw and Lim Guan Eng and secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock.

It was initially proposed that the RM1.4 billion East Coast Highway be built over a 338km-distance from Karak to Kuantan in Pahang and from Kuantan to Cendering in Kuala Terengganu.

For the first phase, the Government would spend RM830 million. It would cover a distance of 107km, with the first parcel of 57km from Kuala Terengganu to Bukit Besi and the second from Karak to Temerloh.

When the entire project is completed in 2003, motorists will reduce their travelling time from seven to four hours.

On the Deputy Menteri Besar's post, Abdul Hadi said there was no such provision in the State Constitution and this prevented the administration from appointing a Deputy Menteri Besar.

"If there is a necessity, we will give it serious consideration. But at the moment, I can still handle my duties as Menteri Besar and as a parliamentarian," he added.

Abdul Hadi also stressed that the opposition front would not break up despite attempts by the media to create the impression that this would happen immediately after the election.

Lim later told reporters that he was satisfied with the Pas-led State Government, especially its efforts to make its administration transparent and in line with the opposition front's manifesto.

He also commended the move by Pas leaders to declare their assets and said that such a move "should be emulated by (Prime Minister Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) and Barisan Nasional leaders."

Lim also supported Pas' decision to set up the Hisbah committee chaired by former Lord President Tun Salleh Abas to look into complaints made by the people, including any wrongdoing by the State Government.

"The country needs to have this check-and-balance mechanism to safeguard the people's rights," he added.

Asked whether DAP would proceed with legal action against Pas if the latter implemented Islamic laws, including kharaj tax, Lim said: "This (intention to take legal action) has been overtaken by events."

However, his son Lim Guan Eng said Pas had agreed not to implement any Islamic laws or practices without the consent of the non-Muslim community.

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