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Plan to upgrade airport dropped

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Pas State Government of Terengganu and the Transport Ministry have agreed to drop plans to upgrade the Sultan Mahmud Airport in Kuala Terengganu into an international airport.

The decision was reached this morning at a meeting between Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik at the ministry headquarters here.

Dr Ling told a press conference later that the Terengganu Government did not want to go ahead with the development as it could not bear the cost of acquiring the 445 hectares needed for the project.

"The State Government said it was unable to bear the financial burden," said the minister.

"We have both agreed to cancel the development, and will refer this decision to the Economic Planning Unit. The EPU may be calling the relevant parties involved in the intended development for further discussion," he said.

The project was approved in 1998 by the previous State Government led by Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, and in November last year, the project's ground-breaking ceremony was officiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The proposed upgrading was meant to make Kuala Terengganu the regional and international gateway to the east coast, and also serve as departure point for haj pilgrims bound for Saudi Arabia.

Under the proposal, the State Government will bear the cost of acquiring the land while the Federal Government will pay for the cost of extending the runway and building infrastructure to accommodate Boeing 747s.

Hadi and Dr Ling also discussed the building of an airport on Pulau Redang.

"The Pulau Redang airport project is currently on hold, pending the results of an Environmental Impact Assessment. We would like to study the potential impact on marine life," Dr Ling said.

But the ministry agreed to Terengganu's request for the linking of Kemaman Port with the Petronas Kuantan-Kertih Railway.

"The ministry feels it is right for Kemaman to be connected to the Petronas railway line," said Dr Ling.

He added that Petronas had already agreed to the inclusion of Kemaman in its 73km-railway line. The line is expected to be completed in October next year with all costs fully borne by Petronas.

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