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Ministry awaits nod for link consultant

THE Works Ministry is still awaiting for approval from the Finance Ministry on the appointment of a consultant to design the RM2.3 billion Penang Second Link, its minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu told the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

"Work on designing the proposed bridge has yet to start and the ministry is awaiting approval from the Treasury on the appointment of a consultant," he said in response to a question by Chow Kon Yew (DAP-Tanjong). Chow had asked for an update on the Penang Second Link and the Jelutong Expressway project.

To a supplementary question by Chow, Samy Vellu said when completed, the Second Link will span a distance of 24km and will be tolled as the construction of the bridge involved a substantial amount of money.

On whether the Second Link should be named after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Samy Vellu said it is up to the Prime Minister himself whether to name the bridge after himself but usually, he (Dr Mahathir) will not accept it.

On the Jelutong Expressway, he said this is a privatization project implemented by Penang State Government, of which the overall Phase one of the project is expected to be completed by this December.

"The physical work of the project under Phase One is 55 per cent completed as at February this year. The works completed included site clearing, drilling for rubbish sites and earthworks, while reclamation and construction of the bridge have begun," he said.

Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005), Samy Vellu said eight major roads and bridges will be built in Penang.

These projects include widening the overhead bridge above the railway track at Jalan Perusahaan, the facelift on road and interchange at Simpang Juru/Jalan Bukit Minyak, construction of new two-lane overhead bridge adjacent to Jambatan Merdeka, building mains roads and overhead bridge crossing the railway line at Sungai Acheh, facelift of Jalan Perusahaan, road work and installation of guard-rail at 3111 route off Jalan Perusahaan, repair works at route 6 from Mar Vista to Batu Feringgi (design only) and construction of middle ring road.

To a supplementary question by Lim Hock Seng (DAP-Bagan), Samy Vellu said he will ask the Malaysian Highway Authority to pursue on the proposed construction of a motorcycle lane on Penang bridge.

According to Lim, the Government had announced that the project should take off early this year but so far, he said nothing has been done.

\* Bernama reports: THE proposal to make Pulau Tioman a duty-free island will become a reality when five bills on this matter are passed by the Dewan Rakyat.

They are the Free Zones (Amendment) Bill 2002, Excise (Amendment) Bill 2002, Customs (Amendment) Bill 2002, Sales Tax (Amendment) Bill 2002 and Service Tax (Amendment) Bill 2002.

The Bills were tabled for first reading in the Dewan Rakyat last week. Copies of the Bills were distributed to the mass media yesterday.

All the Bills contain special provisions on Tioman as a free port, making it the third duty-free island in the country after Labuan and Langkawi.

The Bills define "Tioman" as Pulau Tioman and the islands of Soyak, Rengis, Tumok, Tulai, Chebeh, Labas, Sepoi and Jahat.

According to amendments to the Excise Act 1976, goods manufactured in Tioman should be classified as produced outside Malaysia, and when moved from Tioman to other regions in Malaysia should be regarded as imported into these regions.

Goods manufactured in other regions in Malaysia should be considered as exported when moved to Tioman.

The amendments to the Sales Tax Act 1972 provide for all taxable goods in Tioman to be classified as non-taxable.

\* THE Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has invested in 380 firms listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE), said Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh.

He said among these firms were Technology Resources Industry (TRI) Bhd and Naluri Bhd.

The EPF invested in TRI as the company had the long-term potential in the form of capital returns and dividends, he said when winding up the debate on the policy stage of the Supplementary Supply (2001 and 2002) Bill 2002.

The Bill, tabled by the Finance Ministry on Monday, seeks an additional operating expenditure of RM17.5 billion.

Dr Shafie said EPF's venture in Naluri was only 0.01 per cent of the agency's total investments.

"EPF does not make any additional investments," he said.

During the debate on Monday, Husam Musa (PAS-Kubang Kerian) questioned EPF's move to invest in TRI, which he claimed had suffered losses for four consecutive years.

When seeking clarification from Dr Shafie yesterday, Husam said the EPF had increased its investments in TRI from 5 per cent to 13.8 per cent two weeks ago.

"The EPF should have invested in profitable firms with low risks even though yielding only low returns, this is breach of trust on contributors' funds," said Husam, adding that the EPF had also invested in 85 KLSE-listed companies which were running losses.

In his reply, Dr Shafie said he would ask the EPF Investment Panel to study Husam's claims.

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