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Penang Second Link jobs for Bumis

PENANG, Thurs. - Bumiputera contractors can look forward to a sizeable portion of jobs in building what is believed to be the longest bridge in the world, when construction of the RM2 billion Penang Second Link connecting Penang island and Seberang Prai commences.

The Federal Government, which is awaiting approval for a 100 per cent soft loan from the Japanese Government to build the 23km bridge, is intent on awarding a large portion of jobs to local contractors, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said today.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked that special consideration be given to Bumiputera contractors," he said after opening the 26th annual meeting of the Malay Contractors' Association Malaysia (Penang) in Georgetown.

"Two consultant engineers - a Japanese and a Malaysian - have been appointed to finalise the concept," he said.

The proposed bridge-link, which will serve as Penang's second fixed link after the Penang Bridge, is expected to link Batu Kawan on mainland Penang and Batu Maung at the south-western end of the island.

Asked to comment on continuous grouses over the proposed imposition of toll on the controversial Penang Outer Ring Road, Samy Vellu said:

"You cannot enjoy anything toll-free for a long time or the Federal Government will be bankrupt."

Work on the 17km by-pass highway is due to commence next year and scheduled for completion by the end of 2006.

Based on the Malaysian Highway Authority's proposed alignment, 76 private homes, five shophouses, three temples, 70 Government quarters, five shrines, two horse stables, 30 squatter houses and 50 graves at the Batu Gantong Chinese cemetery will be affected by the project.

Samy Vellu added that the country is facing a shortage of skilled foreign workers in the construction industry.

He said the situation was due to the tendency of many skilled foreign workers returning home after about three years here.

"They come here and pick up the various skills, but would leave almost as soon as they have learnt the new trades.

"This is seriously affecting our construction industry, which is the second most important economic sector after the service industry."

Concerned with the situation, he said a working paper to address the problem had been submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers for review.

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