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Mahathir-CIQ

DR MAHATHIR LAUNCHES CONSTRUCTION OF RM1 BILLION LAND AND RAIL BRIDGE

JOHOR BAHRU, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the construction of a land and rail bridge, which is part of the RM1.26 billion Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) Complex project at the Johor Causeway here.

The launching was done through video conferencing as the Prime Minister was at the official opening of the Johor Customs Tower in Larkin, some 10km from the CIQ project site.

During the video conferencing, Dr Mahathir also asked Public Works Department (PWD) Construction Director Anton Sebastian on the progress of the project, which is carried out by Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd.

"Earth works, piling and relocation of water pipes are progressing smoothly, Sir," replied Sebastian, who also told Dr Mahathir that construction works were being carried out 24 hours a day.

The land and rail bridge costing RM1 billion will be completed in October 2005 while the whole CIQ project costing RM1.26 billion in December the same year.

Sebastian said that by January 2006, all these facilities would be fully operational.

In a lighter vein, Dr Mahathir asked Sebastian whether the land and rail bridge could be completed by October 2003 when he stepped down as Prime Minister.

"We need a miracle for that to happen, Sir," was the reply to laughter of those present.

Gerbang Perdana Project Director Rostam Razali, who also took part in the video conferencing, said construction works on the project were ahead of schedule.

The Prime Minister was also presented with granites, the stones used to build the Johor Causeway between 1919 and 1923.

The granites will be put on public display at the federal administrative centre in Putrajaya.

The stones from Pulau Ubin were gathered by diver Govinathan Ramasamy from the base of the Johor Causeway, 80 metres deep in the Straits of Johor.

Also present at the ceremony were Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Gerbang Perdana Chairman Tan Sri Razali Ismail, Gerbang Perdana Managing Director Datuk Yahya Jalil, PWD Director-General Tan Sri Zaini Omar and Customs Director-General Tan Sri Abdul Halil Mutalib.

Speaking at a news conference later, Dr Mahathir said there was no economic interest in the construction of the land and rail bridge that would replace the Johor Causeway.

He said the Johor Causeway had prevented the water from flowing freely in the Straits of Johor, causing it to be dirty.

"There is no economic interest...we need the water to flow freely again, so leisure boats can go back and forth, without having to take a long way," he said in reply to a journalist from Singapore.

On the effect of the land and rail bridge to Malaysia's ties with Singapore, the Prime Minister said: "Well anybody can interpret it in any way they like.

"The problem is that we wanted to build a straight bridge but they don't want (to build the bridge)...not until the year 2007, but we can't wait, It's not our fault."

Following Singapore's refusal, Malaysia was forced to build a crooked bridge on its side to provide gradual elevation for heavy vehicles and at the same time high enough for ships to pass through.

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