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Mahathir-Bridge

GSB PROJECT GOES AHEAD EVEN WITHOUT S'PORE, SAYS MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia will not seek the involvement of Singapore in the Gerbang Selatan Bersepadu (GSB) project, which involves the construction of a land bridge, to replace the existing Johor Causeway linking the two countries.

He said that such an attempt would only delay the project, which is scheduled for completion on Dec 31 2005.

"I think we don't want to involve Singapore in this," he told a media conference after witnessing the signing of a contract between the government and contractor Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd for the construction of a land bridge, a rail bridge and other works involving the GSB, here.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he was still open to the participation of Singapore in the project.

He said that by partly removing the Causeway, water would be able to flow through.

It would be good for the environment and it would probably enable vessels, including those carrying cargo from the Pasir Gudang port to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, to pass through, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the Causeway was now all closed up with only two tiny culverts underneath it.

He said the government had enough funds to finance the project and would not borrow money from outside. However, local bonds would be issued if there was a necessity, he said.

The RM1.1 billion GSB project is located in Bukit Chagar, Johor Baharu, and covers an area of 42.6 hectares. It will have the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) Complex, the JB Sentral Terminal, a road bridge, a rail bridge and internal roads.

The project was initiated with the realisation that the Causeway, which was opened in 1924, is in dire need of upgrading to accommodate the increasing volume of international and local traffic apart from reducing air and noise pollution.

The 1.45km road bridge will have dual four-lane carriageways to accommodate light and heavy vehicles.

A navigational span will be provided with a width of 75 metres and an air draft of 25 metres which allows vessels less than that height to pass through.

The 700-metre rail bridge will include a steel swing-bridge of 150 metres, allowing vessels to pass through the navigational channel and at the same time provides rail services to and from Singapore.

Dr Mahathir said that the bridge to be built was initially straight but now had to be constructed in a crooked manner following a non-favourable response from the other side to the idea of replacing the Causeway.

Rather than a protracted discussion which may well turn into something akin to the water dispute between Singapore and Malaysia, he said the government chose to go ahead with the project by redesigning the bridge.

"So we have to design a bridge which appears a little unusual or else, it cannot gain the right height or inclination. If it's too steep, lorries will not be able to climb, so we have to construct a crooked bridge.

"That's our fate. We can't get the cooperation from people, so we have to accept our own way to resolve the problem," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the contractors would do a good job and

finish the project on time.

"Lately we have not been very happy with contractors because when we give contracts to them they would sell to others. And they do very shoddy work, spending money not on the project but on other things," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the government does not want to be forced to pay sub-contractors directly.

"We hope that the principal contractors will manage the money that they get properly. I hope not a single sen will be lost," he said.

The prime minister was alluding to problems surrounding the construction of computer laboratories at schools in the East Coast.

At the signing, Gerbang Perdana was represented by its chairman, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, while PWD Director-General Tan Sri Zaini Omar signed for the government.

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