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## Year-end start for highway

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Construction of the Kedah Trans-Eastern Interland Highway will commence by the year's end, while designs for the second and third phases will be ready in October.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the three-package highway projects, totalling RM489.5 million in cost, comprise a 44km stretch from Durian Burung to Pedu, a 47km road from Pedu to Weng, and a 25km highway from Weng to Kupang.

The highway would be toll free, and features both dual and single carriageway systems. Existing roads will be upgraded. The project was awarded to Bina Darulaman Berhad-Kerry Construction.

Samy Vellu was asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for the development of the Durian Burung Customs, Immigration and Quarantine complex at the Kedah-Thailand border to be expedited.

On Wednesday, Dr Mahathir pointed out the Thais had already built a road from Songkhla to the area immediately beyond the CIQ complex but local developers had yet to build an access road on the Malaysian side.

The highway would enable travellers to Yala and Narathiwat in southern Thailand to reduce travel time by between two and four hours as it would lead directly to Kedah's second border checkpoint in Durian Burung, Padang Terap and into southern Thailand.

Travelling south, the highway will pass Pedu (Mong Gajah) and Weng to end in Kupang. From there, motorists can continue on the East-West Highway or the Butterworth-Kulim Expressway to join the North-South Expressway.

It will have, as backdrop, a picturesque mountainous stretch of forest reserve, and close to the Muda and Pedu dams, two of the State's four dams.

At present, motorists have to travel north along the North-South Expressway and through the Bukit Kayu Hitam border checkpoint before continuing to Yala and Narathiwat.

The highway, slated for completion in 2005, will complement development in eastern Kedah, which includes the RM130 million second border checkpoint.

The developer of the CIQ complex being built on a 15.48-hectare site is Northern Integrated Agriculture Sdn Bhd, which faces a 2004 deadline.

The company is a joint venture between the Kedah Economic Development Corporation and Gerak Masyur Sdn Bhd, which is under the Bukhary Group.

Samy Vellu was speaking to reporters after presenting excellent service awards to 606 employees of his ministry.

He also said the ministry was appealing to the Economic Planning Unit to revive 300 of 600 projects that had been abandoned following the 1997 economic crisis.

To another question, Samy Vellu expressed optimism that with the economic stimulus package, the construction sector's growth would be higher than projected.

The expansion, he said, would exceed the initial projection of 1.9 per cent, which would contribute RM7.5 billion to the gross domestic product.

The construction sector grew by 2.3 per cent last year and contributed RM7.3 billion to the GDP.