

Penang gov't vs NGOs on public consultation

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The Penang government has refuted allegations by two NGOs that it had failed to channel information to the public on proposed mega-projects for the state, a claim recently published in the media.

The NGOs - Sahabat Alam Malaysia and Consumers Association of Penang - both led by veteran activist SM Mohamed Idris had questioned the "transparency and openness" of the state government, claiming it lacked public consultation on planned infrastructure projects.

But the chief minister's political secretary NONE Mohd Khir (left) dismissed the claim, saying that the state has revealed public information on the projects, while his boss, Lim Guan Eng had attended two consultation sessions with NGO representatives.

"We do not dispute that transparency and openness are very elements in governance," said Zairil in a statement today.

"As a state which practises the CAT (competency, accountability and transparency) principles, we have taken steps to inform the public on the various infrastructure projects," he added.

Zairil pointed out specifically to an article headlined "Kesal DAP tidak salur maklumat kepada rakyat" (Regret DAP did not provide information to the public), published in Utusan Malaysia on Mac 6.

In the report, SM Mohamed had reportedly expressed regret that the state had not provided adequate information to the public on the projects, costing billions of ringgit.

The projects include a 6.5km under sea tunnel from Gurney Drive to Bagan Ajam, a 12 km road connecting Tanjung Bungah to Teluk Bahang, and a few other projects to ease traffic congestion in the island.

The veteran activist added that the issue of transparency and openness related to the project was the most important priority in the initial planning and decision making of a project.

RM5-8billion road project

Zairil said on April 28 last year, a memorandum of understanding was signed jointly by Putrajaya, the Penang government and a Chinese company to build the underground tunnel.

He added that both prime minister's - Malaysia's Najib Razak and China's Wen Jia Bao - witnessed the MoU signing ceremony.

"All projects will be carried out via open tender. Estimated cost is between RM5-8 billion for the four projects but it is expected to be lower as it will be done via open tender," said Zairil.

Zairil said the signing of the MoU was followed by a press conference held at the state legislative assembly on April 29 last year, where the public was asked to state their views on the projects.

On May 10, Guan Eng had once again responded to questions about the projects at the state assembly, he added.

Zairil noted that the state government and local council had received several views on the projects since April 29, while Guan Eng had met and discussed the projects with several NGO representatives, including at the Penang Forum on Oct 16 and Nov 19.

"In the two meetings, SM Mohamed was invited to attend but he was not present and sent a representative," he said.

"That is why it is shocking that CAP could say that there was no consultation with the NGO or public when so much space had been given to discuss the related issues," said Zairil.

"According to our list, we can confirm that CAP representative, Rudhrapathy Vijayavale (Ravi) attended the two sessions," he added.

'It is not public consultation'

When contacted Rudhrapathy said a meeting of NGO reps with CM is not considered "public consultation".

Public consultation include displaying plans and information about state projects, for example, the public is invited to propose their plans for the Penang Botanic Gardens, at level 3, Komtar.

"Yes, we had meetings twice with him but this is merely a meeting between NGOs and the state government, it is not public consultation," he told Malaysiakini.

"During an NGO meeting with the CM, we express our views and grievances and he explains and clarifies his point of views. We have so far stuck on to our views and opinions," he added.

Radhrapathy said at no time during the meetings did the NGO representatives "agree to all" the arguments presented by Guan Eng.

"Despite all our explanation and arguments, the CM fails to listen and goes ahead anyway with his views," he added.

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