

'Don't ink Penang port deal until after GE13'

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Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has urged the federal government to refrain from signing any agreement with Seaport Terminal (Johor) Sdn Bhd to privatise Penang port until after the next general election.

"Let the people of Penang decide in the next general election whether they support or oppose the (BN proposal)," he said in a statement.

It is learnt that the federal government is delaying selling the Penang Port to tycoon Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary until after the polls, due to fears that public opposition to the deal would cost the BN votes.

Lim said the Penang government opposes the "piratisation" of the port for five reasons including the absence of a competitive tender, as only those invited were permitted to make a bid.

"There was no repudiation by the finance minister or transport minister of Penang Port Commission chief Dr Chua Soi Lek's assertion that (Penang) will become a feeder port," said Lim in a statement.

As a feeder port, it will be secondary to Seaport's two other ports in Tanjung Pelepas and Pasir Gudang in Johor.

Lim said there is also no provision to deepen the port channel to at least 15-17 meters before the privatisation is completed. The dredging works will cost RM353 million.

He urged the federal government to prove that it has the people's interests at heart by carrying out dredging works now.

"There was no public consultation with the stakeholders in the shipping industry, the (state) government and the people of Penang," Lim further said.

"There was no disclosure of plans or of amounts invested by Seaport and how the privatisation can benefit Penangites and restore it into a world class regional commercial port."

'Need to avoid legal battle'

Another reason the BN-led federal government must not sign any agreement with Seaport is that, when Pakatan takes over Putrajaya, the new administration should not be "embroiled in legal battles to unwind the deal".

Both Pakatan Rakyat and BN leaders in Penang, as well as members of the business community and other stakeholders, have spoken out against the privatisation project.

The issue was highlighted when state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow announced that a free port status would be part of the coalition's pledges should it win back Penang in the next polls.

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