

Promise of jobs, contracts not enough, says PKR

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The promise of jobs and contracts for local communities affected by the Forest City project in Johor, one of the country's largest reclamation works, is only a short term remedy to its woes, said Johor PKR vice chief Hassan Karim.

He said this in reference to Forest City's statement that it will draft a plan that would offer jobs and contracts to the local communities, following a heated public hearing session for the project last Sunday.

"This is merely a short-term resolution and appears as if to distract the rakyat's attention from the main issue, which is weaknesses in the implementation of the Forest City development project," he said in a statement issued yesterday.

Forest City is a man-made island of nearly 2,000 hectares, almost half of the size of Putrajaya. It will rise in the Johor Straits, southwest of Johor Bahru, where the second link to Singapore is situated.

The project is being developed by Country Garden Pacific View Sdn Bhd (CGPV) which is 66 percent owned by China-based Country Garden Holdings through its Malaysian subsidiaries, and 34 percent owned by Esplanade Danga 88 Sdn Bhd.

Esplanade Danga 88 Sdn Bhd is 64.4 percent owned by the Johor sultan, 20 percent by state-owned Kumpulan Prasarana Rakyat Johor and 15.6 percent by Daing A Malek Daing A Rahaman, who is member of the royal court of advisers to the Johor sultan.

Hassan (left) said the anger at the public hearing from some 200 local villagers was due to the fact that from the beginning, the project had started before proper consultation.

"Without the engagement process with the communities, the rights and welfare of villagers as well as their future and livelihood, particularly among fishermen, were ignored," he said.

He said the project is seen to benefit certain sections of society including foreigners whereas the local populace does not benefit from luxury developments.

Furthermore, he said there were also concerns about compliance towards regulations set by the Department of Environment (DOE).

Hassan urged the Johor government under menteri besar Mohamed Khaled Nordin, which has a stake in the project through KPRJ, to ensure the necessary safeguards for the local community.

He added the Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (DEIA) report should be released to the public on top of conducting sufficient dialogues with the local community.

Pressure group

"PKR will also assist villagers with the setting up of a pressure group to ensure that their welfare is taken care of," he said.

The massive project had proceeded since early this year but was later instructed to obtain a DEIA after Singapore lodged a complaint with Putrajaya over concerns that the project will affect its borders.

Meanwhile, CGPV in a statement said it had proceeded with the project because it received clearance from the DOE to commence reclamation for a pilot phase of 49.3 hectares.

"(We) voluntarily ceased operations in June when we were informed that there were concerns about the Forest City project.

"In line with international best practices, we then voluntarily engaged an independent consultant to conduct a DEIA and hydraulic study on the project," it said.

It added that several focus groups were also conducted between developers and the local community for their feedback on Sept 14, and will be included in the DEIA on top of the Sept 21 public dialogue.

"In September, our independent consultants compiled the first draft of the DEIA report and hydraulic study, following which several focus group discussions were held between developers and local communities on 14 September 2014 to obtain their feedback and concerns about the project to be included in the final DEIA report.

" We will continue to engage the public in open and transparent dialogue to understand their concerns and work together to find ways to manage these concerns.

"Over the course of our project we have regularly reached out to communities to understand their concerns, such as with the fishermen community (since March)," it said.

The Forest City project has an estimated RM600 billion gross development value and will be developed over the course of 30 years.