

'Yes, bridge will be built'

NST – 27/1/2006

Yes, the Johor Strait bridge will be built. Both Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu confirmed this today.

Samy Vellu even said work had started on a RM30 million road to link the Johor Causeway with the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex, where the proposed bridge will begin. Najib said in Lumut that work on the "scenic bridge" across half of the Johor Strait would proceed even though Singapore had yet to give an affirmative reply. However, he said, negotiations with the republic would continue.

"Negotiations with Singapore are on-going and in the event that we are able to conclude the deal successfully with Singapore, the scenic bridge can become a full bridge," Najib said at the ground-breaking of the region's first bio-diesel plant at the Lumut Industrial Park today.

He was commenting on the New Straits Times front-page report today which quoted sources as saying Malaysia was going ahead with plans to build the scenic bridge, formerly known as the "crooked bridge".

Asked what would happen if negotiations with Singapore were not successful, Najib said: "If it is not successful, then it will become a half-bridge or scenic bridge."

He said the design of the bridge would be as shown in today's NST. Samy Vellu, meanwhile, said the bridge would be built across Malaysia's half of the Johor Strait, within the country's boundaries.

He said he had instructed Public Works Department director-general Datuk Wahid Omar last week to issue a letter of intent to the contractor, Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd, on the Government's plan to go ahead with construction of the bridge.

"The Foreign Minister (Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar) had written a letter to me, indicating the directive from the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) to commence the construction of the bridge".

"We will start negotiating with them on the cost of building the bridge as soon as possible. I have asked the Prime Minister, who is also the Finance Minister, for a lump sum payment for the project. We will pay the contractor once and will not be burdened with the possibility of increasing costs".

"I believe I will get the approval from the Finance Ministry, and then we will start work," he said after presenting certificates to 24 contractors who had obtained the ISO 9001 quality management certification.

Samy Vellu said that everything was in place and work was expected to start as soon as possible. He said the cost of the bridge had yet to be determined as the ministry was ironing out the details with the contractor.

Singapore has vacillated over the bridge proposal, despite two rounds of talks between Abdullah and Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. The leaders last met in Putrajaya in

February last year, but no decision was reached. Officials from both sides have also met several times without making any headway. Singapore wants to gauge the project's potential economic effects before joining hands with Malaysia to build the bridge.

Source: New Straits Times | www.nst.com.my