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Work on Pan Borneo route begins

PLEDGE FULFILLED:
1,076km highway
will be a 'game
changer' for Sabah,
Sarawak, says PM

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Datuk Seri Najib Razak being presented with a souvenir after attending the ground-breaking of the Pan Borneo Highway in Bintulu yesterday. With him are Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem and Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof. Pic by Mohd Radzi Bujang

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak broke ground on the Pan Borneo Highway yesterday, a "game changer" for Sarawak's economy.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the RM15 billion highway marks the physical beginning of the fulfilment of a promise made in April two years ago, in Barisan Nasional's "Aku Janji" manifesto for the last general election.

The project, involving the upgrading and construction of new roads along the 1,076km route linking Lun-
du and Lawas in the state, was one of the pledges made by Najib during the last general election.

"I had promised that the government would develop the Pan Borneo Highway if BN was awarded a new mandate from the people. And I was told that the people of Sarawak have been waiting for 50 years for the Pan Borneo Highway (to materialise).

"On this historic day, together with the chief minister (Tan Sri Adenan Satem), I have returned to Sarawak to fulfill that promise," Najib, who is BN chairman, said to resounding applause from the crowd of over 10,000 people who had attended the event at a stretch of the highway between the Nyabau and Bakun junctions, about 52km from here.

Present were Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof, Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal, Adenan and his deputy, Tan Sri Alfred Jabu Numpang.

Also in attendance were several ministers and assistant ministers from the state cabinet.

Describing the Pan Borneo Highway as a "game changer" for Sarawak's economic landscape, Najib said the project would help accelerate the state's business and trading activities, as well as bridging the distance between one town and another.

"In reality, this project is not only about establishing better road connectivity or developing better infrastructure for the people. It is also meant to provide access (for investors) into Sarawak," he said.

Najib also shot down recriminations from detractors, who had

suggested that the project was a waste of public funds.

He said the project was initiated by the Federal Government and would be carried out by 75 construction companies, which are all operated by locals in the state.

"I do not think those who had opposed this project would say the same after seeing the crowd who attended this event."

Later, Najib said the appointment of contractors had followed the necessary procedures, with each having been vetted carefully.

He gave his assurances that the project, which would be constructed in three stages, would be completed according to schedule, without unnecessary delay.

To avoid problems in the future, Najib said the government had adopted the Private-Public Partnership (PPP) approach to ensure that the cost of the project would

not escalate.

"Under this concept, the contractors will bear the cost if the project is delayed and if there are overruns from the original cost. This concept is different compared with other projects, as it will help to

minimise the risk to the government should there be any problems with the project in the future," he said.

Najib also called on all parties to find ways to boost the multiplier effect of the highway project.

Elaborating on the economic prospects of the project, Najib said he wanted every kilometre to generate income for the people.

"We want to maximise the value in terms of its multiplier effect. We have to start planning and identifying entrepreneurs to which we want to offer such business opportunities.

"We must find ways to generate income from every kilometre of the highway, including by looking into types of advertising services that could be provided for future customers," he said.

The initial stage of the project, involving the upgrading and development of a 43km-long road linking Nyabau and Bakun, is expected to be completed by 2017.

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak touring an exhibition on the Pan Borneo Highway in Bintulu yesterday. Bernama pic

Highway will be toll-free

BINTULU: Datuk Seri Najib Razak has promised that the Pan Borneo Highway would remain toll-free.

He said he was aware of the woes besetting people commuting between the two states, that the highway would be the only way for motorists to travel between Sarawak and Sabah, and that there were no alternative routes.

"In the peninsula, motorists have alternatives. They can use the North-South Expressway if they want to save time or opt to use trunk roads if they do not want to pay the toll.

"However, that is not the case for Sarawak and Sabah, as the Pan Borneo Highway will be the only route for motorists travelling between the two states," said Najib yesterday.