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PENANG SOUTH RECLAMATION PROJECT

'IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO DEFEND THE PEOPLE'

Federal Govt won't approve project if it adversely affects people, says Najib

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THE Federal Government will not approve the proposed Penang South Reclamation project if it is not environmentally-friendly and adversely affects the people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said 1,500 fishermen were expected to be affected if the project proceeded.

"Don't tell me we will sit quietly

It is our responsibility to defend the people," he said when opening the Balik Pulau Umno division delegates' meeting yesterday.

Earlier at the "Kenduri Rakyat" event at Politeknik Balik Pulau, Najib said any development which "throws sand into the people's rice bowl" should not be implemented.

He said other alternatives, which could save public funds, should first be considered.

He said the Federal Government set three conditions before allowing Penang to proceed with the project.

"It should not cause losses or impact negatively on the people. If the project affects the rice bowl of the fishermen, we will not approve it.

"Secondly, it should be environmentally-friendly and, thirdly, there should be another alterna-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak greeting people during the Balik Pulau Umno division delegates' meeting in Penang yesterday. PIC BY RAMDZAN MASAM

tive which can save public funds."

Najib said the fishing community can rest assured that the Federal Government would not approve projects which were against the three criteria.

He said the stand of the Federal Government should not be construed as a political move to oppose development in opposition-led states.

"If such is the case, then we would not have brought so many development projects to Penang."

The Penang government has proposed to carry out the reclamation off the southwestern coast of the island as a means to fund its Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP).

The reclamation covering 1,821ha will involve the creation of three islands. The RM46 billion PTMP project to reduce traffic congestion, includes Light Rail Transit, Mass Rapid Transit systems and highways.

The project has drawn objec-

tions from various quarters, particularly environmentalists and the fishing community.

On the "Kenduri Rakyat", Najib said the strong attendance was a strong indication that Balik Pulau and its state constituencies — Teluk Bahang, Pulau Betang and Bayan Lepas — would remain a Barisan Nasional (BN) and Umno stronghold.

"I believe that Balik Pulau people will know how to choose and use their power when the time comes. At the federal level, we have to know how to read the people's sentiment when it comes to choosing (election) candidates."

Najib said he would consider other projects which were needed by the people here.

At the "Kenduri Rakyat", thousands of locals gathered to have lunch with the prime minister.

Present were state Barisan Nasional chairman Teng Chang Yeow, Penang Umno chairman Datuk Seri Zainal Abidin Osman and Balik Pulau Umno chairman

Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya.

The fishing community welcomed the assurance given by Najib.

Fisherman Tan Keng Huat, 51, said he was happy to hear the Federal Government's stand on the reclamation project.

"We're worried about the project as it can affect our livelihood, but now I'm relieved that the Federal Government is on our side."

In **Sik**, the Federal Government has agreed to separate the Sik and Baling District Education Offices (PPD) by next year.

This was announced by Najib to thunderous applause from the 10,000-strong crowd at Perdana Sports Complex yesterday.

The decision was much anticipated by the people here as they would no longer have to travel 45 minutes to get to PPD which was located in Baling.

He also approved a RM3 million allocation for repair work for houses of needy families in the district.

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