

Suspend and review highway deal, Pua tells Pemandu minister
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31 — The DAP's Tony Pua pushed today for minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon to call for the government to suspend the RM7 billion west coast highway deal and review its terms.

The opposition lawmaker said the onus was on now on Koh, as chairman of the government's Performance and Delivery Unit (Pemandu), to ensure the Najib administration's promised transformation processes are fulfilled.

Pua wants the Prime Minister's Office to disclose all the details in the west coast highway deal. — File pic

"Pemandu must demand that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) disclose all details including the concession terms in the award to Europlus especially since the award was made via direct negotiation.

"It has been more than five days since the announcement made by Europlus on Bursa Malaysia and yet the government has been steadfast in its refusal to shed light on the project," Pua said in a statement today.

The Petaling Jaya Utara MP has been leading in demanding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak reveal the details of its direct negotiations with Kumpulan Europlus Bhd (KEuro), a company which, he said, has no experience in building highways, to privatise the national project.

Yesterday, Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) joined the call for Putrajaya to publicly disclose the details of the West Coast Expressway deal, which the watchdog has criticised as opaque.

In a filing to Bursa Malaysia last Thursday, KEuro said its subsidiary, West Coast Expressway Sdn Bhd, had received an approval letter dated the same day from the federal government to build and operate the Banting-Taiping highway for the next 60 years, estimated to cost RM7.07 billion.

The public-listed company also disclosed receiving a RM2.24 billion government soft loan starting from next year and an interest subsidy of only three per cent on commercial loans for a period of 22 years to build the highway apart from the government bearing the estimated RM980 million in land acquisition cost for the project.

"Pemandu must ensure that the PMO is transparent and accountable by explaining the projected profits of the concessionaire [and] the future toll burden to be borne by commuters," Pua said.

He urged the government's internal check-and-balance agency to find out why the government had agreed to a lopsided deal that benefited KEuro and burdened taxpayers.

Pua highlighted the government decision to extend a RM2.24 billion soft loan and up to three per cent in interest subsidy in commercial loans to a company with a troubled financial history to take on the highway project.

He reminded Koh that the minister has a duty to "stop the rot" as seen in the country's declining ranking in Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) over the years to 60th place last year from 56 in 2010 and 47 in 2009.

"The rakyat has been 'taxed' mercilessly with lopsided concession agreements signed with independent power producers, highway operators such as the North South Expressway and the Lebuhraya Damansara Puchong as well as utility companies such as water suppliers," Pua said.

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