

**No EIA, but Johor coastal reclamation projects already underway, say sources**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**June 23, 2014**  
**By Jennifer Gomez**

Despite the absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report and a call for intervention by Singapore, two massive reclamation projects are well underway in the Johor straits that separate Malaysia and the island republic.

The coastal reclamation work has also raised concerns over the effect the project will have on the coastal eco-system and the livelihood of fishermen in the area apart from Malaysia's transshipment hub in the Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP).

An environmentalist who declined to be named questioned how work was allowed to proceed despite the projects being "illegal" in the absence of the EIA report.

Several queries by The Malaysian Insider to the Department of Environment (DOE) on the status of the projects, their impact on the environment and the lack of an EIA report have not been answered.

Johor health and environment exco Datuk Ayub Rahmat had told The Malaysian Insider when contacted that it was unlikely that no EIA report was done for the reclamation projects.

Nevertheless, he said that he was waiting for a report by the state's Economic Planning Unit (EPU) on the matter.

"It is improbable that there is no EIA report if it is indeed required. Even for the Tanjung Kupang reclamation project, a preliminary EIA report has been done, so it cannot be that no such report was done for the other reclamation projects.

"Whether it's a big or small company doing the project, I'm sure they know the law so let's not politicise the issue until we find out the facts and the EPU report is ready, hopefully in a week's time," he had said last week.

The source, however, disagreed with Ayub, saying that as of June 15, 2014, publicly available information on the DOE web portal showed that no EIA report, either preliminary or detailed, was submitted by Country Garden

Pacific View Sdn Bhd for the 2,000 ha project, and by Spektrum Kukuh Sdn Bhd for its reclamation off Tanjung Piai.

According to the source, most worrying of all was the coastal reclamation work stretching over 1,817ha by Country Garden Pacific View, dubbed the Forest City.

The plot near the second link crossing to Singapore has also been given a lot number, Lot PTD 4071, Mukim Tanjung Kupang, Daerah Johor Baru.

A company search in February revealed that one of the directors of Country Garden Pacific View is Datuk Daing A. Malek Daing A. Rahaman, who is believed to be a long-time friend of the Sultan of Johor and is a member of the council of the Royal Court of Advisers to the Sultan.

China's Country Garden Holdings Co Ltd had undertaken its first project in Danga Bay, which covers 20ha of land – for which it paid RM900 million several years ago.

It was reported that Country Garden Holdings and Kumpulan Prasarana Rakyat Johor are jointly undertaking the new Forest City project, which is poised to become a tourism hub.

Two weeks ago, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohd Khaled Nordin had assured the state assembly that the land reclamation for the development of the Forest City project in Iskandar Malaysia would not affect the environment.

He had also said that the state government had issued a notice to the developer, Country Garden Pacific View to prepare an action plan to effectively clear any sediment caused by the reclamation work.

He also reportedly said that the DOE would be closely monitoring the activities carried out throughout the duration of the project to ensure that the environment was not compromised.

The other reclamation project covering 1,410ha near Tanjung Piai, which is the southern most tip of continental Asia, is being undertaken by Benalec Holdings for the purpose of an industrial oil and gas hub.

The Johor crown prince Tunku Ismail Idris Sultan Ibrahim and Daing A. Malek are directors of Spektrum Kukuh, which partnered Benalec in the Tanjung Piai reclamation project.

"There are serious environmental concerns here because the area is surrounded by fishing villages, given the rich sea grass and marine diversity," the source said of the projects.

"Their livelihoods will be affected by the coastal reclamation."

The source questioned how the land reclamation was allowed to be carried out without detailed EIA reports as required under the law for coastal reclamation projects over 50ha in size.

This requirement is stated under the Environmental Quality (prescribed activities) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Order 1987 to be read together with the Environmental Quality Act 1974.

The Edge Review had reported three weeks ago that Singapore's diplomatic feathers had been ruffled over concerns that the Country Garden project would extend the Johor coast around the Second Link right up to the edge of the boundary separating Malaysia from Singapore.

Media reports said Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had written to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to voice his concerns over the project.

Another letter was handed to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Wahid Omar when he was in Singapore recently, according to the report.

The Sultan of Johor, when officiating the opening of the second session of the state assembly last month, had made remarks about the DOE and had said that environment and water issues were state matters.

The sultan had said in his speech that in carrying out development work, environmental issues needed to be given priority and that EIA reports needed to be prepared for development projects.

"However, there are irresponsible quarters who use their powers with the EIA as a weapon to stop a development that does not benefit them.

"For instance, the development project by Benalec, where the MOU was signed three years ago and witnessed by the prime minister himself, has yet to obtain the EIA approval until now," Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar had said.

The sultan had further questioned why certain quarters were bent on delaying the approval, and said that such actions only hindered the development of the state and drove away investors.

"Johor is for the people of Johor and only the people know the conditions and the needs of the state so why are there outsiders who are trying to interfere or even trying to teach us what we should do in our own state?" the sultan had asked.

The Johor ruler had also suggested that the jurisdiction on environmental issues be handled by the state government because it was related to land and water matters.

"A state environmental body should be set up under the Johor state enactment as what has been done in Malacca, Sabah and Sarawak," the sultan had said. – June 23, 2014.

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/no-eia-but-johor-coastal-reclamation-projects-already-underway-say-sources>