

**Pan Borneo Highway a Game Changer for Sarawak – PM
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SIBU, April 17 (Bernama) -- The Pan Borneo Highway is more than a mega project, as it is a project which will bring huge benefits for the people of Sarawak, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said the highway project which had been dreamt of for many years, was the one which could bring rural areas in the state into the mainstream of development in the country.

"This is a game changer which will bring major changes because when rural people are able to access the market and the demand for their products will rise. This will change the economic opportunities in rural areas," he said.

He was speaking at the launch of the Sarawak Pan Borneo Highway project alignment from Simpang Bintangor to Simpang Julau and from the Sibü Airport to Sungai Kua Bridge, here today.

More than that, Najib said psychologically the highway would stimulate the minds and hearts of rural youths into pursuing progress. As such, Najib said he did not want the highway to be like other mega projects which were afflicted with various problems.

"Do not repeat the mistakes of Bakun. Do not give to contractors who cannot contribute but only to capable contractors.

"The people see a big dam and electric cables but the longhouses nearby are still without electricity. Bakun was not built in my time. It was constructed during the era of a person who ruled for 22 years. But that's another story," he said.

Najib said the contracts for constructing the highway were given to local contractors comprising Class F Bumiputera contractors and to also ensure all spill over from the project met the needs of locals.

He said bus stops would be built along the entire highway and there would be places for the rural community to sell their agricultural products.

"If that is not enough, farmers can sell them in Kuching because Sibü will be only three hours from Kuching via the highway as compared to six hours now," he said.

The Prime Minister said the 76.2km alignment in the Sibul division was expected to cost RM1.7 billion and 68 Sarawak Bumiputera construction companies would be undertaking construction works worth RM533.8 million.

At the ceremony, he also presented letters of award and Letters of Intent to 78 construction companies, 77 of them Sarawak Bumiputera companies, for the highway construction works.

Apart from that, Najib and Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, who was also present at the ceremony, handed over compensation to land owners affected by the project.

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