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For Environmental Justice

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Press Release

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Scaling down PSR with federal funding for PTMP is not the answer – Call to scrap PSR and review the PTMP – says SAM

Scaling down the Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project if there is federal funding for the PTMP components such as the Bayan-Lepas Light Rail Transit (LRT) and the Pan Island Link (PIL 1) will not solve the fundamental problems posed by both PSR and the PTMP.

It was reported in the media yesterday that following a meeting with the PKR President Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and the Chief Minister of Penang, Chow KonYeow that was one of the points of consideration.

SahabatAlam Malaysia's (SAM) objection to the PSR and that of the fishermen has been that the mega reclamation project will have massive effects as clearly spelt out recently by the Minister of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry in Parliament who openly admitted (on 16 July) that the reclamation project will destroy and have residual impact on mudflat ecosystems, fishing grounds, turtle landing zones and part of the coral reefs at PulauRimau, which is an important ecosystem for the local marine life.

According to the Department of Fisheries, the reclamation will indeed disrupt the feeding grounds, nursery and main migration route for the shrimps, thus affecting their population. The anticipation of marine ecology degradation outcome of the PSR project was also clearly noted in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the project.

As pointed out by the Agriculture Minister, the livelihood of the 4,996 fishermen will be adversely affected, where 1,442 of whom are traditional Zone A fishermen. He also estimated that 51,184 metric tonnes of marine catch worth RM555 million a year, and 511 aquaculture farmers producing 45,742 metric tonnes of marine fishes worth RM1.67 billion, will all be disrupted by the reclamation. This does not include the revenue brought about by recreational fishery operating in the project area, which is estimated to be worth RM 5.3million per annum, according to the EIA.

A scaling down of the PSR will still affect the very sensitive environmental ecosystem and there will still be serious adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts that cannot simply be mitigated away. As we have stressed before, destroying our precious fishery resources which are vital for our food security for the present and future generations does not make sense. Moreover, any reclamation will still require sand-mining and dredging, and this will also pose additional environmental impacts.

In addition, what has not been given due attention is the effect of sea-level rise due to climate change on the viability and sustainability of the PSR project.

Any reclamation there cannot bring back losses to the ecosystem that are irreparable and irreplaceable. We should be valuing, protecting and preserving these rich coastal and ocean ecosystems, instead of sacrificing them for some fanciful project for the sale of more land, when land is already plentiful on the mainland.

There is a lot of property overhang already in Penang. So we cannot see any justification for more

property development on reclaimed land. Moreover, if indeed there is a need for industrial expansion, then land is available on the mainland in SeberangPerai.

Therefore, the PSR must be scrapped. It is not about scaling back.

On the issue of federal funding for the PTMP, SAM reiterates our call for a fundamental review of the plan.

There are cheaper and better alternatives such as the Autonomous Rail Transit (ART) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) instead of the LRT, which is now estimated to cost more than RM 10 billion.

Moreover, serious issues have been raised about the projected ridership of the LRT, which have not had proper responses from the Penang government.

As for the Pan Island Link (PIL), we have raised fundamental issues about the justification for such a highway at a colossal cost of RM 8 billion for this road which is a gross wastage of public resources that is not a long-term solution for our traffic woes.

The PIL, which is an elevated 6-lane highway will completely ruin the Island's charm as it will be a sight for sore-eyes, with adverse visual impact over green parks and forested hills. No amount of mitigation measures will address how the character of the Island will be changed, with such an elevated highway, which will certainly be an ugly monstrosity.

This is why SAM and other concerned civil society groups have consistently called for an independent review of the PTMP so that a better plan can be put in place which is much cheaper, better and environmentally sustainable to solve our traffic woes.

Seeking federal funds for a transport plan which is not financially and environmentally sound does not make any sense and will only increase the government debt and is a waste of tax-payers' money.

It is time for an independent and fair review of the PTMP and for the PSR to be scrapped. There can be no better solution than this.

**Meenakshi Raman
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