

Tunnel study should include seismic activities

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SEISMIC activities within a radius of 100km should be studied and included in the detailed environmental impact assessment (DEIA) study of the 6.5km undersea tunnel project.

Environmental consultant Abdul Wahid Ghazali said an in-depth geological study on seismic activities was pertinent as Penang was about 50km from the earthquake-prone fault line near Sumatra and it could affect the undersea tunnel.

He said seismic activities emanating from the tectonic plate movement along the Pacific Rim of Fire running through from Sumatra to Japan must be included as part of a risk assessment study although the risk was fairly minimal.

"We are near Sumatra or Aceh where earthquakes measuring more than six on the Richter scale have been recorded together with active volcanic eruptions.

"Although our country is considered stable, we must not dismiss the possibility of this happening. I am not an expert but this is my personal view.

"There have been small earthquakes measuring between 2.3 and 2.5 on the Richter scale in Janda Baik and Bukit Tinggi. The impact is small but we should still study the area and predictable impacts when planning for a tunnel.

"However, there should not be much fear because even Japan which lies next to the fault line has built tunnels and bridges," said the former Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) environmental planning lecturer.

Abdul Wahid said the alignment of the tunnel that would be built between 15 and 25 metres below the seabed has not been ascertained, thus the actual impact on coastal settlement in Bagan Ajam is uncertain.

He said these include the residents in the area and the future of fishermen whose working area would likely be affected if their fishing spots are disturbed during the construction.

"I will be doing the social impact development survey

and have a public dialogue on the project with the people. Any social and environmental issues affecting them would be dealt with.

"We would either report the effects to the state government or the Department of Environment. All these issues must be sorted before the project can take off.

"At this moment, we have no information because the alignment will only be finalised after the feasibility study and DEIA is completed. If too many people are affected, then the alignment would be shifted or diverted," he said.

Speaking after the third public dialogue with Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng regarding the RM6.3 billion integrated road projects in Sungai Dua, he said a joint study with engineers and project proponents would be conducted.

He said "a lot of time and money" would be spent on this effort.

The 68-year-old, who works as an environmental consultant for Consortium Zenith BUCG Sdn Bhd, said they viewed a positive social impact as one that does not affect the communities.

"If it hits the community, then it is a negative impact featuring loss of property, income and houses to be replaced. If relocation was required, it would be carried out by the project proponent with the state's assistance," he said.

Earlier, about six persons out of 300 participants asked 10 questions and gave their opinions on the project that was answered and clarified by Lim who also allayed fears from main-landers who do not want to lose the beach fronting Bagan Ajam.

"We are using land reserved during the Butterworth Outer Ring Road project which was the former government's project. The beach belongs to the people and we won't give that to private corporations," he said.

The dialogue outlined the projects comprising a 4.2km bypass from Gurney Drive to Lebuhraya Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, a 4.6km bypass between Lebuhraya Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu and Bandar Baru Air Itam, a 12km paired-road from Jalan Tanjung Bungah to Teluk Bahang, and the 6.5km Penang-Butterworth sea tunnel.