

# Lucky Bum Bum, unlucky Labuan

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LABUAN: DAP Chairman here, Lau Seng Kiat, said that he was happy that the Bum Bum islanders off Semporna had been rewarded with a proposed RM430 million bridge link even without much asking, while Labuan which had been making vociferous request for it since 1997 did not get it.

"We do not understand the rationale. If the Labuan-Menumbok bridge could not be built due to its cost of about RM4 billion, who is to be blamed for this?" asked Lau.

He said that the bridge between Labuan and Menumbok spanning about 11km was proposed way back in 1997 under the Labuan Development Authority (LDA) Development Plan of 1997-2015.

The estimated cost then of the project was RM550 million where it would be running from the Tg Aru coast here to either Mempakul or Menumbok.

Lau said that the cost was cheap then but since no action or interest was shown, the cost today has reached RM4 billion.

He said that a finding by Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) recently indicated that if the bridge was undertaken later it would cost double.

UMS undertook the feasibility study of the project to be submitted to the Economic Planning Unit.

"Therefore the decision is for the Federal Government to make, whether to build now or the Labuan bridge would remain a permanent dream," added Lau.

He said there was plenty funds in the Federal coffers with the national revenue reaching

RM26 billion last year and a RM4 billion investment in Labuan would be a small fraction.

Comparing Bum Bum island with Labuan, Lau said the island merely had 5,000 to 6,000 voters and about 2,000 homes while Labuan had about 24,000 voters and a population over 90,000 according to the 2010 census.

While the 1.4 km Bum Bum bridge would not generate any economic returns, it would be good for the transportation of agricultural products from the island to Semporna, such as coconuts.

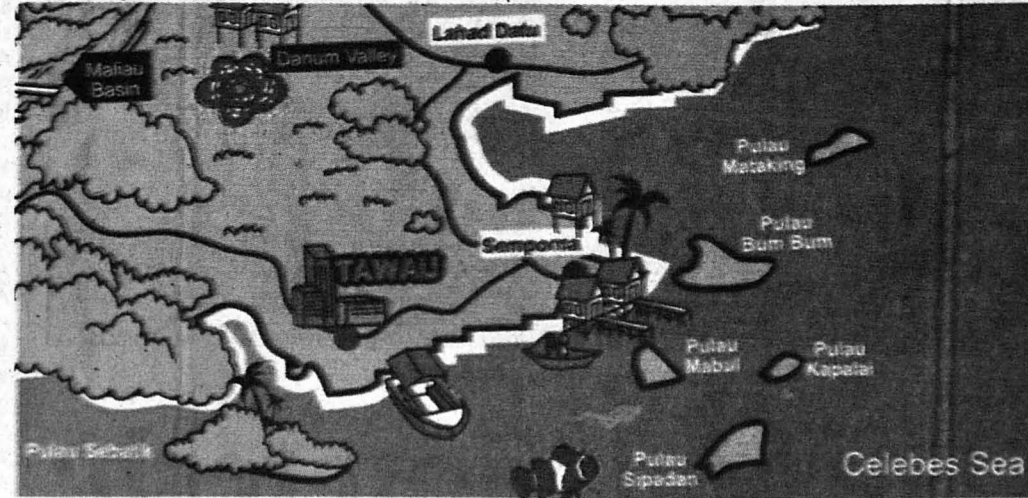
While in the case of Labuan, more than 50 per cent of the consumer products, including construction materials came from Sabah and a bridge would give an additional boost to trade and tourism between Sabah and Labuan.

Compared to Bum Bum, Labuan was also a more important district as it was an International Business and Financial Centre (IFC), an oil and gas hub, home to University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Labuan International Campus and a matriculation college, both of which boosted a student population of 6,000.

Air services were inadequate and so was medical facilities along with other services, a bridge link would ease much of Labuan's traveling inconveniences.

"People could seek flights out from KK to foreign destinations and even to KL, since the Labuan-KL route was usually packed and it would also be easier for those seeking advanced medical treatment in Kota Kinabalu.

Lau recalled that when the government decided not to build the bridge, it was promised that the marine transportation



between the two points would be improved.

He said that early last year, two new licences for ro-ro services were approved by the Sabah government.

He said that more than a year had lapsed and "we don't even see a shadow of the additional services and no one was questioning it, nor the licences had been cancelled and offered to other interest parties...Why? Lau asked.

Since nothing came out of this, Lau said the government stated that the canal between Labuan-Menumbok would be deepened for speedier travel to the points.

He said it was doubtful this would work as it was technically proven that dredging was good for only a certain period of time as it had to be dredged again and this would be costly.

Lau added that those who opposed to the bridge, claiming the island would lose its free port status should not worry because the status could still stay with the establishment of a CIQ facility to monitor movement of goods via the bridge.

"After all, we never can say how long the free port status would stay as recently a Minister (Datuk Raja Nong Chik) had indicated of scrapping the status due to serious loss of revenue to government from cigarettes and beer imported into Labuan. Fortunately the decision was not implemented by the Finance Minister," said Lau.

Lau said unless the promised improvement to travel between Labuan and Sabah comes about, there is a legitimate reason for many in Labuan to ask for the bridge.