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Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng said that the Ministry of Finance as well as the Transport Ministry and both the Penang and Kedah state governments are all in the dark about the details reported in The Star article. — Picture by Shafwan Zaidon

KUALA LUMPUR, 10 June - Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng has harshly criticised local English daily The Star today, accusing the newspaper of having “sowed confusion” with its report that two rival bids are ongoing for new international airports in Penang.

In his statement today, Lim said that the Ministry of Finance (MOF) as well as the Transport Ministry (MOT), and both the Penang and Kedah state governments are all in the dark about the details reported in the article.

“To date, The Star report has only sowed confusion amongst the communications and transport industry, because they failed to disclose who had attended the briefing on accepting the recommendations,” the former Penang chief minister said.

“Unless the MCA-owned The Star can prove that they practice responsible journalism by showing evidence, and that it is not a figment of their imagination that the federal government had considered the proposals, they are on a fishing expedition not worthy of professional journalism.”

Lim also accused the paper of writing a “grossly unfair” report by allegedly giving the negative impression that Putrajaya is considering such a massive project involving thousands of hectares of paddy fields and reclaimed land from the sea.

Lim also stressed Putrajaya’s commitment to expand the existing Penang International Airport (PIA) to accommodate 16 million travellers annually, from its present 6.5 million.

“As for the Kulim International Airport, the federal government is awaiting proposals on its construction through PFI, without requiring any expenditure from the federal government,” he said, referring to private finance initiative.

Citing sources, The Star reported today of rival bids for a North Malaysia International Airport (NMIA) and Northern Region International Airport (NORIA) that are both set to be in Penang.

NMIA is proposed at a 650ha site near the border shared by Kedah, Penang and Perak while NORIA entails reclaiming 5,000ha off the coast of south Seberang Prai.

News of the proposals emerged even as Penang continues to resist the Kedah International Airport over concerns it would jeopardise plans to expand the Bayan Lepas International Airport.