

19/04/2000

Undertake only viable projects, says backbencher

A BACKBENCHER has urged the Government to exercise caution before starting projects, to avoid being burdened with heavy losses.

Datuk Dr Yusof Yacob (BN-Sipitang) said the Government should only consider viable projects.

"We must thoroughly study their implications, the viability of projects, whether they are profitable to undertake or if the Government have to bear losses in the long term."

Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad, which had suffered losses, for instance, should not expect the Government to always subsidise its losses.

"They must either re-schedule their services or cancel destinations that fail to bring in profits."

Yusof said this when debating the Supplementary Supply Bill (1999) 2000 at the committee stage for the Transport Ministry.

He said the Government should also study the viability of the proposed RM30 billion Pan-Borneo railway project.

Datuk Mohd Ali Hassan (BN-Tebrau) said the ministry should make sure that Pelabuhan Tanjong Pelepas remained competitive. The port should be able to provide the best service to customers.

Husam Musa (Pas-Kubang Kerian) questioned the Government's move in privatising KTMB in 1991. He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had once said the privatisation was to ensure KTMB would not continue to lose money.

"However, until 1998, KTMB still made losses. Therefore, the Government must conduct a study on its viability."

Dr Tan Seng Ghiaw (DAP-Kepong) also took KTMB to task for continuing to make losses.

Winding up on points raised by MPs, Deputy Transport minister Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib said there was still no decision on the cost of the project.

"The Government will not allow any party to take advantage of this situation as projects approved by it will benefit both the Government and the public."

On losses faced by KTMB, Ramli said the Government had subsidised the unprofitable Tumpat-Gemas service to cater to locals. In 1998, RM14 million was allocated for this.

"The passengers using this sector are few and we have to cover the high cost of the service. This is because the Government feels it is a service to the people."

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