

Carry out studies before projects are privatised: Fomca

SUN 24 APR 2001

PETALING JAYA, Mon: The government should conduct a thorough study to ascertain which projects are viable to be privatised.

Federation of Malaysia Consumer Associations (Fomca) president Prof Hamdan Adnan said projects to be privatised should be evaluated based on importance and priority.

"The study, among other things, should also evaluate weaknesses in other privatisation projects to ensure the same mistakes are not repeated," he said when commenting on the plans for privatisation of projects as outlined in the 8th Malaysia Plan (8MP) today by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said it is important that public interest be served and protected.

The government should also assure that privatisation, especially in critical services, does not end up being a failure.

The 8MP also states that consumer feedback will be obtained before privatising a project.

On this, ERA Consumer president N. Marimuthu said he hoped the government is serious in its attempt to get public feedback before privatising of projects.

"In the past, the government had made mistakes with regard to this matter.

"A good example will be the privatisation of roads and the implementation of high toll charges by concessionaires which burden consumers," Marimuthu said, adding that the people should decide the toll rate and not the other way round.

In welcoming the "long-overdue" move, he said the government has to be "honest" in getting public feedback by giving the people ample time to air their views and that the views should be considered seriously before a final decision is made.

"For the 8th Malaysia Plan, we do not want it to be merely a public relations exercise with empty promises," he said.

If the government failed in this, Marimuthu said, it will reflect badly on the country, resulting in loss of confi-

dence by foreign investors.

On price stability and electronic transaction, he questioned the government's plan to ensure price stability for goods, especially food, as Malaysia's average food import is RM11 billion annually.

This is compounded by the fact that the agricultural sector has been ignored for the past 20 years.

"Recently, the government has been paying attention to the agricultural sector and we can only see price stability in about 10 years," he said.

He said the government must have a specific mechanism in place to fight trans-border electronic transactions and find ways to redress situations when a person is victimised.

Meanwhile, Hamdan said since electronic commerce is a new thing, a body should be set up to monitor the goings-on and to ensure the people are not victimised.

Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) spokesman said the association is not willing to comment until tomorrow when it has studied the plan thoroughly.