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Railway-Takeover
TAKE OVER KTMB ADMINISTRATION, GOVT TOLD

By: S.Retnanathan

KUALA LUMPUR, March 30 (Bernama) -- The Railwaymen's Union of Malaysia (RUM) has asked the government to take over the administration of Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (KTMB) and place it under its control.

RUM President Abdul Razak Md Hassan said the unanimous decision was made by the union's executive council at its meeting two weeks ago.

"The union has also sent a memorandum on the matter to the Prime Minister's Office on March 20," he told Bernama in an interview.

In the past four years, KTMB was run by Marak Unggul Sdn Bhd, a consortium comprising Renong Bhd, DRB Hicom, Bolton Bhd and Jasa Meta Sdn Bhd.

The government did not renew KTMB's privatisation contract to Marak Unggul. The contract was terminated on Dec 31, last year.

Abdul Razak said the union and KTMB employees were not surprised by the government's decision as Marak Unggul failed to run KTMB profitably since its takeover from mid-1997 to 2001.

In fact, the government continued to bear the financial burden, especially when giving salary adjustment and bonus to employees, he said.

"Under Marak Unggul's administration, many things that were against the terms and conditions of service happened openly. In fact, there were cases of employees being sacked without solid reasons," he said.

To defend the employees' rights as provided for in the collective agreement, the union had to step in several times to advise and explain the situation to the management, said Abdul Razak, who is also Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) Vice-President.

"Our worries and frustrations have been eased when the government announced that it was rescinding the consortium's contract," he said.

In its six-page memorandum sent to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the union had said although privatisation was to ease the government's financial burden, it would be meaningless if the administrators could not manage companies efficiently or only certain parties benefited.

"The practice of only protecting the interests of certain groups does not reflect the reality of the true objectives of privatisation and the country's aspirations," it said.

Abdul Razak said KTMB employees were fortunate that the government still maintained its golden share, thus enabling it to take over the company.

"We feel that only the government can operate KTMB well although minor problems may crop up but they can be resolved," he said.

RUM has about 5,000 members.

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