

Penang's 'outsider' bus service draws flak
Malaysiakini.com
Feb 27, 2007
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The Penang government's decision to surrender control over the state metropolitan transport system to the federal government by allowing RapidKL to start bus operations in the state has drawn flak.

Save Ourselves (SOS) secretary Ong Boon Keong said RapidKL's entrance exposed the weakness of Gerakan Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon's government.

"When the state government can't do its job, it gives up its control to the federal government. It's a total surrender of the Penang people's right to control and operate their own transport system," he added.

RapidKL, a company under Prasarana Negara Bhd - an investment arm of the Finance Ministry, has formed RapidPenang as its subsidiary company to operate its bus services on the Penang island by August this year.

Initially, RapidPenang will deploy 150 new buses to ply both main and supporting routes on the island to complement existing bus operators.

At present, several bus companies such as KGN-Hin, Milan, Transit Link, United Transport Company and minibuses, operate about 200 stage and minibuses in the state.

The introduction of RapidPenang has left local bus operators wondering about their future.

They have ruled out competing with the KL-based company, which is financially sound, in a business that does not reap much profit.

Public duty

Ong said the state government and the commercial vehicle licensing board promised representatives from Citizens for Public Transport (Cepat) at a meeting last year that the new tender for bus operations in the state would be opened to local operators.

"However, the state government has gone back on its word and surrendered the local rights to outsiders," he said.

"We have given up state control over the sewage system, water supply and now buses," he said.

Cepat is local public transport watchdog group comprising 25 non-government organisations in the state, including Aliran, Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) and SOS.

Meanwhile, Aliran treasurer Anil Netto said the government may not be successful in reconstructing the collapsed Penang metropolitan transport system merely by permitting RapidPenang to ply bus routes in the state.

He said the government failed to comprehend the overall woes of the transport system in Penang.

He said system needs improved supporting facilities such as bus terminals, bus stands and basic amenities to cater for the needs of commuters, including disabled.

According to him, the whole metropolitan transport network should be amalgamated to provide efficient, reliable and affordable service to all.

"An ad hoc quick fix solution such as RapidPenang, will not help," he stressed.

He also criticised the state and federal governments for keeping Penang people in the dark on how RapidPenang will operate its buses.

He said RapidPenang should ply both profitable and non-profitable routes as public transportation is "more of a public duty than profit-orientated business venture."

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