

'Mega MRT project likely to cost more'
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If global experiences are to anything to go by, it is likely that the mass rapid transit (MRT) mega-project will cost more than the government's estimate.

Saying this in Bukit Kiara today, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Idris Jala said this is despite the best efforts to keep costs down.

"I'm not trying to make an excuse, but no (MRT) project, without exception, was built below budget," he said.

"We are trying to hard to do that (keep to budget) but every (other MRT project) went above budget as you under-estimate the requirements."

However Idris, who spoke at the Economic Transformation Programme's first anniversary celebration, fell short of revealing the projected cost.

The industry estimate of the Gamuda-MMC spearheaded project is a whopping RM36 billion.

Idris, who is also chief executive officer of the Performance, Management and Delivery Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, added that cost oversight happens.

"It's always the first time, no one does (a MRT project) many times over," he said noting that Malaysia is learning from similar projects abroad to curb costs.

To ensure expenses are kept low, the project is steered by a high-level committee that includes the prime minister and chief secretary to the government.

Idris said that they have roped in experts including those who had worked on the Singapore MRT and London Underground Jubilee Line.

Tunneling work has been tendered out, with bidders from South Korea, Japan, China and Malaysia.

"We are bringing down costs as low as possible and bringing in quality. It cannot be given to gifted amateurs. (With) a project (as) big (as) this, you can't put the safety of future customers on the line."

'I feel good'

He added that hiccups caused by protests of those whose property will be acquired in Jalan Bukit Bintang and Jalan Sultan have been settled by the newly-formed MRT Co.

"Since (CEO) Azhar (Abdul Hamid) joined MRT Co, they have gone to discuss with all landowners in Bukit Bintang etc, and reached a conclusion," Idris told the audience of about 200.

"I won't announce the deal and how it will be done but there is an understanding and I feel good about the progress so far."

He added that, with any project like this, there is bound to be "5 percent who object".

"I am of the thinking that the MRT is absolutely and totally needed for our city; if we don't have it by 2020 this city will choke," he added.

The MRT project will have three lines serving the Klang Valley.

Memo handed over to Nazri

Meanwhile, as a last resort to save their property, the Committee for the Preservation of Jalan Bukit Bintang and Jalan Sultan submitted a memorandum proposing a realignment of the multimillion ringgit rail line to the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya.

However, noting the absence of the prime minister, two busloads of some 60 landowners led by the committee's chairperson, Yong Yew Wei, visited Parliament to hand over the memorandum to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz.

MRT Co had initially appealed to landowners to vacate their premises for six months to allow for tunnelling work for the mega project, instead of a compulsory acquisition of their property.

MRT Co's chief executive officer Azhar Abdul Hamid had also pledged that the traders would be compensated for six months' loss of income.

However, Yong said that they were not convinced that the tunnelling process would only take six months and would not damage their old buildings.

He added that 4 million tourists visited the area in a month and to move the traders out of their premises would result in heavy losses.

However, Nazri said that he will take their grouses to the relevant authorities and fix an appointment with MRT Co for another round of negotiations.

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