

Ultimatum to landowners, despite PM's assurance

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The Mass Rapid Transit Corporation Sdn Bhd (MRT Corp) has issued an ultimatum to landowners along Jalan Sultan, Kuala Lumpur, to sign the mutual agreement on the project by the end of this month.

If they fail to do this, compulsory land acquisition will take place, MRT Corp CEO Azhar Abdul Hamid (left) said today.

"If they don't sign the mutual agreement, we have no choice but to continue the process that is currently slowed down or frozen. Then it will be out of my hands," Azhar told a press conference.

This warning comes despite the assurance from Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak that the government will listen to the people and was willing to change the alignment of the MRT route if the Chinese community was not happy with it.

"If you don't want the MRT to pass through certain areas, we will discuss, we can tweak the alignment in the area," the premier had said during the opening of the 'Malaysia Chinese at the Political Crossroads' conference last Saturday.

Commenting on this, Azhar said the MRT project will not change the route as it had been finalised months ago.

"Yes, of course the PM has said that, but I'm sure he will leave it to the relevant authorities or groups to decide whether whatever is suggested is practical," he said.

The MRT project needs to be completed by July 2017, Azhar said, and the time constraint has put MRT Corp in a very difficult situation, with tremendous pressure from the government to reach a solution on this matter.

'All options taken note of'

Asked on the alternative route proposed by the affected community, he reiterated that the current alignment is the final decision.

"We have taken note of all the options during the pre-finalisation review, and the alignment they proposed is one of the proposals that we had considered, but we have picked the current route."

The Save Jalan Sultan Action Committee has proposed to change the MRT route from Jalan Sultan to Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, which is only a road away from Jalan Sultan, in order to avoid any demolition of heritage sites.

However, Azhar reiterated today that the MRT Corp does not intend to demolish any shoplot in Jalan Sultan but only wants to carry out construction works beneath the shoplots, without causing any adverse impact.

"It's a tunnel, we are not going to demolish the shoplots," he said, adding that the MRT project will only need to acquire the Jalan Sultan land for six months to build the underpass.

"Life can go on as usual without any change even after the tunnelling."

He added that almost all the Jalan Sultan landowners have signed the mutual agreement with MRT Corp, except for two - Lok Ann Coffee Shop and Yan Keng Benevolent Dramatic Association owners.

However, Gamuda-MMC tunnelling expert Ooi Lean Hock had said that it would be unsafe to allow shopowners to continue to operate while tunnelling is in progress as limestone "is unpredictable" and could lead to sinkholes.

"There would also be a degree of settlement when we dig underneath, and as these buildings are very old, their vulnerability is difficult to ascertain," Ooi had said.

It is also understood that tunnelling deeper would add to the price tag, which MRT Prasarana Negara Bhd said it would not be able to confirm until all land acquisitions are over.

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