

MRT Bumi quota shows NEM like NEP, say Pakatan leaders

The Malaysian Insider

August 24, 2011

By Boo Su-Lyn

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak (centre) looking at the map of the MRT during the launch of the project July 8 2011. — Picture by Jack Ooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 24 — The 30 per cent Bumiputera quota for the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) construction packages shows that the New Economic Model (NEM) is no different than the New Economic Policy (NEP), Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers charge.

Syarikat Prasarana Negara Bhd (Prasarana) said yesterday that the nation's largest construction project ever will have fixed reservations for Bumiputera.

The MRT is due to begin operations in January 2017.

"This proves beyond doubt that the NEM is not in the least bit different from the NEP," DAP publicity chief Tony Pua told The Malaysian Insider last night.

Contractors leave the MRT briefing at Dewan Sivik MBPJ May 24 2011. — Picture by Choo Choy May

"All the associated problems arising and related to the NEP over the past few decades — such as declining competitiveness, brain drain — will continue to be aggrieved, if not made worse, by such policies," added the Petaling Jaya Utara MP.

Abdul Malik Azman, Prasarana's head of the MRT Procurement Management Department, told The Malaysian Insider that the quota was part of the government's "national agenda".

The proposed site location of the MRT station near Pusat Bandar Damansara Kuala Lumpur February 4 2011. — Picture by Choo Choy May

The Malaysian Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry and also Malay rights groups had previously demanded Prasarana's stringent contractors requirements were relaxed so that more Bumiputera companies qualified.

Twenty-eight firms including heavyweights such as Sunway Bhd, IJM Bhd and MRCB have been shortlisted for the construction of the first phase of the country's most expensive infrastructure project that is being managed by another Bumiputra joint-venture, MMC-Gamuda.

Abdul Malik has said there were 18 work packages, comprising eight packages for elevated civil works, eight packages for stations and two packages for depots.

He said six out of the 16 packages for elevated civil works and stations, as well as the Kajang depot work package, were reserved for Bumiputeras.

PKR communications chief Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the Bumiputera quota would not benefit Malay contractors at large.

"It'll be the same Umnoputera elite that will benefit," he told The Malaysian Insider.

"We're not saying there are no problems for Malay entrepreneurs...But that doesn't mean the solution is to have the same old policy," added the Seri Setia assemblyman.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin recently assured the Malays that the federal government still prioritised Bumiputera interests in what is seen as a pitch for the government ahead of general elections expected as early as this year. The ruling Barisan Nasional's (BN) mandate expires in 2013.

Critics have accused Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak of diluting his NEM by creating agencies like the Bumiputera Agenda Driving Unit (Teraju), and failing to focus on needs and merit-based affirmative action policies.

But government officials have said the move was necessary as Bumiputera equity in the economy remained low, despite the billions doled out since the NEP began in 1971.

PAS's Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad said Bumiputera quotas were "fundamentally not a problem", but that the affirmative action policy has been abused over the years for Umno's gain.

"If it's done responsibly, some of the Bumi contractors — the real people who are really doing the work — are in a position to do it as efficiently and as cost-effective as everyone else. But, it must be awarded through a competitive-based and transparent exercise which will ensure the fittest and best get the job," he added.

PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar said a massive project like the MRT — which required "quality and high standard work" — should be based on merit.

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