

## **SPAD denies MRT rerouted to save ex-minister's house**

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**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 6 — Project regulators for the Klang Valley's mammoth MRT project said a line was rerouted to save money, not as claimed to save a prominent ex-minister's home.

Yesterday, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers accused the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) of bowing to political pressure for shifting a portion of the Sungai Buloh-Kajang line at Jalan Damansara in the capital city to bypass the bottom of the VIP's bungalow.

According to the opposition MPs, work on the original tunnel site has now been stopped, the tunnel portal relocated and a variation order has been issued to the contractor, ensuring that the line no longer passes beneath the house.

"The allegation is totally false and the item marked on the map as the 'VIP House' is totally incorrect," SPAD CEO, Mohd Nur Kamal, said in a statement tonight.

"The bungalow on the piece of land did not play a part in the evaluation process for the realignment because the original proposed alignment did not affect the building in the first place," he added.

Mohd Nur said that SPAD decided to change the proposed rail line in Jalan Damansara after getting feedback from the land owners for two main reasons: firstly, there was suitable alternative land nearby that allowed it to shift the MRT's original alignment; and secondly, it was more prudent to do so.

"The realignment reduced the amount of land acquisition by over 1,000 square metres," he said.

"This compensation will have to be paid by the taxpayer," he stressed.

The SPAD boss conceded the shift incurred some cost, but maintained it was cheaper than if the original alignment were kept, because it meant the land would be split into two non-connected pieces and the government would have had to compensate a huge amount for the loss of economic potential of the land.

Mohd Nur said the same principles applied for the MRT rail tracks at Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang that have stirred much debate.

SPAD and Prasarana, the government's public transport operator, have been under constant fire from angry traders with businesses located in the historic Chinatown area over the plan to acquire their properties to facilitate the tunnelling portion of the multibillion ringgit rail project.

Suspicion has also arisen over whether the transport regulator's purpose of acquiring the prime land lots was to exploit their commercial value to fund the construction of the MRT, Malaysia's most expensive infrastructure project to date.

SPAD has denied any intention of a "land grab" in its acquisition of Jalan Sultan properties but admitted it could not guarantee that the acquired lots would later be returned to landowners.

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