

Tee Keat: BN can lose votes over MRT dispute
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By Melissa Chi

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 13 — Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat today warned Barisan Nasional (BN) that the coalition could lose votes in the next general elections if it continued to ignore protests over the alignment of the Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT).

The former MCA president said the Chinatown community had been denied a reprieve from the acquisition of their properties in Jalan Sultan while other voices of protest over the same project were “visibly heeded with willingness to review and detour”.

Ong appeared to be referring to a recent realignment on Jalan Damansara, which critics from opposition parties had alleged was to avoid the acquisition of a former Cabinet minister’s property.

“Why should the MRT Co be so adamant with putting the cart before the horse by proceeding with the acquisition process even before public display of the proposed route draws to a close?” he said in a statement.

“All these have so far remained unanswered. Nonetheless, the deafening silence of the authorities on this would only contribute to a PR (public relations) disaster that is detrimental to the ruling coalition in the final analysis, more so in the advent of the 13th General Election.”

While disgruntled shop owners affected by the proposed land acquisition on Jalan Sultan are still lobbying to be heard, the Pandan MP said the reported detouring of the MRT route on Jalan Damansara to avoid the acquisition of a VIP’s villa was “indeed a stark contrast that is thought provoking”.

Yesterday the Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) chairman Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar told opposition lawmakers not to politicise the realignment of the Klang Valley MRT line on Jalan Damansara, insisting the move was not made to save a former minister’s home.

The ongoing land rights dispute has turned into a political hot potato that could delay the country’s most expensive infrastructure project.

The months of discussions, public engagement talks, court challenges, street protests and interventions by civil society groups and politicians across the divide have made no headway.

Traders in Jalan Sultan and Jalan Bukit Bintang — backed by Ong and DAP’s Bukit Bintang MP Fong Kui Lun —yesterday threatened to take their grouses directly to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Putrajaya earlier today promised that buildings on Jalan Sultan would not be demolished, but stopped short of guaranteeing that prime land in the capital would stay in the hands of current landowners.

Ong said MRT Co had given an assurance to return the properties to the respective owners but "devoid of any technical assurance of keeping the historic building" structurally intact and safe for occupation after the tunnelling.

He said the ad-hoc committee of the affected shop owners was reportedly called by MRT Co for negotiation but the proposal of alternative routes was kept off the agenda.

"The owners were only left with one choice, i.e. to succumb to the original offer of granting the contractor a period of six months for tunnelling while the earmarked shop houses are vacated," he said.

He said one of the committee members called the meeting "a monologue aimed at arm-twisting the owners" to come to terms with MRT Co, a Ministry of Finance Incorporated company.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ahmad Maslan denied that MRT Co officials gave "not one chance" to Jalan Sultan traders to present their alternative routes, which would save their properties.

He said the alignment proposed by landowners did not allow for integration with the existing Pasar Seni LRT station, and that curves on the suggested route were too sharp.

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