

Facebook users slam deputy minister for linking 'Chinese firm', Dr Mahathir to ERL price hike

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By Anisah Shukry

Deputy Minister Datuk Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki courted criticism and ridicule on social media today when he linked a "Chinese firm" and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the unpopular Express Rail Link (ERL) fare hike.

The deputy minister in charge of religious affairs wrote in a Facebook post today that he suspected a "Chinese firm" of sabotaging the government by hiking the fare of its trains.

Asyraf said it was public knowledge that this "Chinese firm" has the biggest shares in ERL Sdn Bhd, and grew rich from receiving government contracts during Dr Mahathir's tenure as prime minister.

"I have shared the views of my friends and the people so that the ministry and the government's top leadership intervene and re-examine the increase in public transportation fares, especially the ERL, which is very burdensome for users.

"It is as if there are elements of sabotage by a major Chinese firm, which the public knows received all its wealth through government contracts during the time of Tun (Dr) Mahathir and has the biggest shares in ERL.

"Are companies like these dead inside, that they do not think of the people's suffering and are so greedy that they chase after the highest profit possible while abandoning their bigger social responsibility?" wrote Asyraf on his Facebook.

ERL Sdn Bhd's shareholders are YTL Corporation Berhad, Lembaga Tabung Haji, SIPP Rail Sdn Bhd and Trisilco Equity Sdn Bhd with 45%, 36%, 10% and 9% shareholding respectively, according to its website.

However, Facebook users were quick to rubbish Asyraf's claims, with nearly all the comments on his post showed that they were unimpressed by his attempt to racialise the issue as well as link Mahathir to the fare hike.

"Don't bring up the Chinese or whatever, it's the ministers' responsibility to reduce the burden of the people... when you wanted power, you promised all sorts of things," wrote Ahmad Ikram Mat Ghani.

Nik Lee wrote: "During Tun (Dr) Mahathir's time... hmm. Is that a statement one must release if one is paid by the Najib government?"

Many called for the deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Department to back his suspicions with proof, while others said ERL would not have been able to increase the fares without government approval.

Najmi Ishak wrote: "Ever since he became a senator, Asyraf Wajdi's statements have become very different. (I have) lost respect. The government increased (the fare) and now it wants to blame the Chinese.

"If you really want to blame a giant Chinese firm, show us the profit flow, and how much the government received. Give us facts. A company wouldn't raise the fare without approval from the government."

Some pointed out that the ERL trains were not the only public transportation services that experienced price hikes.

Many also expressed disappointment that an "Islamic scholar" could make such a statement, and warned him that it was verging on "fitnah" (defamation).

Herman Haasan wrote: "How could an Islamic scholar give such a shallow statement? Is the ERL even the main mode of transportation used by the ordinary people, as opposed to the LRT and commuter, which have also seen fare hikes?

"And you link this to TDM (Tun Dr Mahathir)... what is this, Datuk?"

Hazzliff Ghazali wrote: "Thank you for your efforts, Dr... but I am very aggrieved by your post which links the fare hike to the Chinese contracts and Tun...

"And if it's true, I request that Yang Berhormat Dr come up with all the proof so that there is no confusion and slander/prejudice. Thank you once again. Please continue your pure efforts."

Asyraf later edited his posting and removed his comments on the "Chinese firm" and Dr Mahathir.

ERL announced on Tuesday that from January onwards, the fare for a one-way trip between KL Sentral and KLIA/klia2 will be RM20 more at RM55.

This comes after an announcement that toll hikes for PLUS highways are planned for next year.

This year itself, toll rates for 12 highways were increased.

Currently, a one-way trip between KL Sentral and KLIA/klia2 is priced at RM35. – December 4, 2015.

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