

MRT3 to be revisited when country's finances improve

Guan Eng reaffirms that the project has already been cancelled

BY WONG EE LIN & SULHI AZMAN

KUALA LUMPUR: The mass rapid transit Line 3 (MRT3) project may still see the light of day as the government will be revisiting it if the country's financial situation improves, according to Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng.

Nevertheless, Guan Eng reaffirmed that the MRT3 project has already been cancelled. "The prime minister has already said that the MRT3 project is scrapped," he told reporters in Parliament yesterday.

On May 30, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the MRT3 or Circle Line estimated to cost RM40 billion will be discontinued due to the government's burgeoning debt.

Earlier yesterday, Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook said the implementation of the MRT3 has been postponed and not scrapped, to reduce the burden of government debt.

He said the cabinet would deter-

mine when the MRT3 construction would resume but stressed that major projects such as the MRT3 would be given priority when the country's financial position recovers.

"Any such big decision needs to get the cabinet's approval.

"But at present the government's priority is to reduce the rate of national debt first, but for crucial projects like the MRT3, when the country's financial status recovers, it will certainly be given priority to be reviewed," he told Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was replying to a question from Khairy Jamaluddin (Barisan Nasional-Rembau), who asked the ministry to state the rationale and implication of scrapping public transport projects such as the MRT3.

Loke said the government did not deny that the MRT3 project would bring various benefits, but its implementation should be reviewed for optimum results in terms of its cost-benefit in view of the exces-

sively high national debt at present.

He said based on the progress report prepared by MRT Corp in early 2017, the MRT3 is a 40km line that passes through areas such as Jalan Duta, Setiawangsa, Pandan Indah, Salak Selatan, Bandar Malaysia and Kerinchi.

"As the MRT3 line passes through urban centres with high density, almost 80% of the MRT3 line is underground, which contributes to the costly construction cost that is expected to reach RM50 billion," he said.

He said to encourage the use of public transport, thus helping reduce road congestion, the government will prioritise the upgrade of various types of buses in terms of service quality and network. It would also improve the KTM Komuter system in the Klang Valley via upgrading and repair works.

"The postponement of the MRT3 project gives us the opportunity to review our budget priority, in which the government will give new focus

on improving bus services and infrastructure development not only in the Klang Valley but also throughout Malaysia in line with the government's manifesto to improve the quality and coverage of public transport services," he added.

To encourage more to commute via public transport services, Loke noted that the unlimited access card to public transport at RM100 a month will be introduced early next year.

In June, it was announced that the monthly pass would need to be reviewed before it could be implemented.

"The monthly pass is to encourage more people to use the MRT as well as buses which are already available," said Loke.

"We want to encourage more of the public to use the existing public transport facilities, as the MRT has been seeing an average of just around 146,842 daily commuters, about one-third of its 450,000 capacity," he added.