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Mahathir-train (With Pix)

PM CONFIDENT LUXURY TRAIN WILL BOOST TOURISM

KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- <sup>93</sup> Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that the introduction of the Eastern and Oriental (E & O) Express, a luxury train service, linking three Asean cities -- Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok -- would further boost Malaysia's tourism industry.

"He could envision that this project would bring in a lot of tourists," Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said.

Dr Ling was speaking to reporters after the Prime Minister witnessed the arrival of the luxury train at the Kuala Lumpur Railway Station here today.

Dr Mahathir, who is known to have a passion for trains, had been very supportive of the project since it was brought to his attention, he said.

Dr Mahathir was elated when he was informed that train, with five carriages, arrived, he added.

He said the Prime Minister was very impressed with the RM50 million (US20 million) E & O Express, owned and operated by the Bermuda-based Malay-Siam Royal Mail (MSRM) and managed by Venice-Simplon-Orient Express (VSOE) Ltd. -- more

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Mahathir-train 2 Kuala Lumpur

The service, reminiscent of the "Orient Express" in Europe, was expected to attract 18,000 tourists to Malaysia annually.

Dr Ling said the "money-making machine" would commence operations on June 27.

The 41-hour journey between Singapore and Bangkok, which includes two nights and one full day on board the 22-carriage train is meant for the elite group of travellers who were willing to pay US\$1,000 (about RM2,500) for a one-way trip

The "luxury hotel on wheels", designed to recapture the romance and mystique of the 1930s, could accommodate 130 passengers.

There would be sleeping cars, two bar cars, an observation car, boutique, service baggage car and at least 40 service staff. Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) would provide the locomotive for the coaches on a twice weekly schedule.

Dr Ling said the interior decor of the coaches, which earlier arrived from Singapore, had been remodelled to reflect the Asian culture. -- more

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Mahathir-train 3 (last) Kuala Lumpur

Passengers travelling on the train between Singapore and Bangkok could make stopovers at other strategic stops in Malaysia like Ipoh and Butterworth in Pulau Pinang.

Dr Ling said Malaysia Airlines (MAS) would help promote the train service, especially in its First Class packages.

VSOE Chief Executive Officer Nicholas Varian told reporters that 80 per cent of the train's passengers would be from Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia.

The fares, which would vary according to the type of cabin, would include meals and entertainment.

He said commercial operations would begin on Sept 19 after the preview trips in June.

KTMB general-manager Datuk Abdul Rahim Osman and YTL Corporation Berhad Managing Director Datuk Francis Yeoh accompanied the Prime Minister.

YTL holds a 32 per cent stake in the luxury train service. -- Bernama  
ES LDB

▼17/05/13-18MST