

Dr M unhappy with rail project delay

By Manan Osman
and Leslie Andres

KLANG, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, unhappy with the delay in the construction of the RM1.5 billion double-tracking electric commuter train project, said today he hopes to find a solution at tomorrow's Cabinet meeting.

Dr Mahathir said he had frequently asked KTM Berhad when the project would be completed and the answer had always been "soon".

He said the delay would mean that there would be an inevitable increase in costs and besides, commuters in Kuala Lumpur would have to bear with the traffic congestion much longer.

The Prime Minister said he and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik would discuss the matter with other Cabinet members to find a way of overcoming the problems.

He could not say when the project would be completed and declined to state a deadline for the completion as it had been postponed a few times.

Dr Mahathir said that according to the schedule, the Rawang-Kuala Lumpur sector should have been completed by the end of 1994, but even the sub-station was still not ready.

"Because of the numerous problems, the project seems to progress at a very slow pace and until now it is not certain when the tracks can be opened," he said after visiting the double-tracking project here.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by Dr Ling and KTM Berhad managing director Datuk Abdul Rahim Othman, earlier took a 45-minute ride in an inspection car from Kuala Lumpur to Klang.

He also inspected the recently delivered coaches for the electric commuter trains at the Kuala Lumpur railway station.

He said KTM faced a lot of problems in the implementation of the project which could not be overcome in a short period.

Among the problems were the lack of co-ordination among the various groups involved in the project, too much bureaucratic red tape to the extent of creating difficulties in decision making, too many contractors and problems posed by squatters occupying railway land, he said.

Dr Mahathir was also disappointed with the contractors who could not keep to the schedule.

Some, he said, could not carry out their work because of the absence of consultants.

The contractors are the Indian Railway Construction Co Ltd, who are doing the track-laying and the civil works, Sapura Holdings Sdn Bhd, the contractors for the signalling system, and ABB Australia, the contractors for the electrification together with Sapura Holdings.

Asked whether the Government planned to call for new tenders for the project,

No plan to call for new tenders

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Dr Mahathir said the process would further delay the project and furthermore there was no guarantee that the new contractor would be better than the present one.

He also said that the country's first electric train which can travel at a maximum speed of 120km per hour, might not be able to run at its full capacity as there were numerous problems that needed to be resolved.

This, he said, included inexperienced personnel who needed more exposure before they could undertake the service efficiently.

Dr Mahathir said he had directed all parties to concentrate on their job so that the work on the project could be accelerated.

Dr Mahathir said he did not think the project a failure but considered it as a learning process.

He said the Government's experience in the double tracking project had not changed its stand towards other projects being implemented or planned.

He said the North-South Expressway project was completed very much ahead of schedule and the contractor awarded the tender to widen the Kuala Lumpur-Karak Highway started

earth reinforcing works soon after it won the tender.

Dr Mahathir also criticised people who refused to use overhead bridges to cross railway tracks despite the many reminders and warnings.

"They want the bridges to be constructed in front of their houses.

"Do we have to wait for someone to be run over by the trains before using the overhead bridges?"

"When one day someone is run over by the train, the people will certainly blame the Government," he said.

The electric commuter train which covers 150km of double track, is powered by a 25,000-volt overhead catenary system which will be controlled by state-of-the-art multi-million ringgit signalling and communications system.

The service named "KTM Komuter" will initially interface with the public transport system through 22 stations and 18 halts and later will operate in conjunction with the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system.

The double track runs from Rawang in the north through the outer ring of Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley to Seremban in the south, with an east-west line from Sentul to Port Klang.

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