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Dr M launching LRT service tonight

Sager Ahmad

IT is all systems go for the opening today of the RM3.5 billion Star-LRT system - the first operating intra-city people-mover train system whose construction started in 1994 - by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir will go on a 24-minute ride from the Sultan Ismail Station along the 11.8km southern extension to the futuristic-looking Bukit Jalil station at 8pm.

Zainal Abdul Ghani, chief executive officer of the concessionaire, Sistem Transit Aliran Ringan Sdn Bhd, said Dr Mahathir would be launching the whole system at the RM23 million station which has a soft membrane roofing designed by a local architect to blend with the Bukit Jalil sports complex.

He said the historic occasion would be witnessed by guests and officials who would later get on 200 electric buggies - the Perusahaan Otomobil Elektrik (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd or Poem, for the opening of the sports complex by the Prime Minister.

Zainal said he was happy that the whole LRT System One under his charge, that runs for 27km through 25 stations, has been almost 100 per cent completed on time and within budget and "almost" unaffected by the economic downturn.

He said the service to Bukit Jalil was given top priority and was completed first early this year while all the civil engineering work on the northern extension to Sentul Timur has been completed and testing would commence in August.

"I am happy that Star will be the main and the easiest mode of transportation to the Commonwealth Games venue and the Games Village during the Games between Sept 11 and 21.

"We completed the southern extension early this year and have been testing the whole system - track, signalling, the train, the safety aspects and staff training - from April and we are fine-tuning everything from now until the Games," he said.

Zainal said the Star-LRT utilises a proven and reliable system and the whole system has not compromised on safety. He added that among the features was centralised control at the Ampang depot using the latest on-line monitoring system.

"The control centre in Ampang uses the latest system in tracking the trains and could isolate troubled spots along the track from there while power on the track could also be cut manually," he said.

"Among other safety features are the immobility of the train if the mechanical door is not properly shut while the door will not open while the train is in motion as the compressed-air mechanism is operational then."

The Phase One of the system that runs for 12km between Ampang and Sultan Ismail stations started its revenue service on Dec 16, 1996 and the Phase Two runs for 15km and has 12 stations.

Zainal said all stations have been aesthetically-designed in keeping with the tropical climate of the country and being open and airy give good cross-ventilation.

He said stations also have open vistas to the outside taking advantage of natural lighting. The use of curved roofs or large spans and cantilevers create spacious areas with minimum columns and obstructions

for passenger movement.

He said while the wide overhang for stepped roof over the staircase in elevated stations gives a feeling of lightness and some even observed that it evokes the impression of a bird about to take flight.

"The Bukit Jalil Station is the largest among the 25 stations with white membrane roof over the platform blending well with a stadium at the sports complex and it is easily washable using water jets.

"The membrane roof diffuses the sunlight on the platform during the day, while giving out a soft glow during the night and we have sought to give the feeling of spaciousness, expansiveness and drama that accompanies sporting events.

"This is achieved by using large spans, lightweight materials, light colours, exposed steel roofing structures, strong lines and diagonals formed by the stairs and escalators leading up the platform," he said.

Zainal said as more customers try the system and find it convenient, reliable, predictable and fast, they would value the system.

He added that from yesterday, some 29 million passengers have used the service along the 12km stretch.

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