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PM launches first light rail system in country

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight officially launched the nation's first light rail transit system, the STAR-LRT, which forms System 1 of the Klang Valley's integrated network.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said for a mass transit system to succeed it must provide frequent service and stick strictly to its schedule.

He said when commuters were assured of getting service frequently, at determined times and within short intervals, a mass transit transport system would get good response from the public and develop further.

Speaking at the STAR-LRT's Bukit Jalil station, Dr Mahathir said there should ideally be only one light rail system for Kuala Lumpur but because Malaysian investors were small and had insufficient capital and experience, it was necessary to have four systems by four different companies.

"I hope there is integration between the different systems so as not to pose problems to users."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir took a 24-minute ride on the RM3.5 billion system from the Jalan Sultan Ismail station in the city to its RM23-million Bukit Jalil station, a distance of 12km.

He was also invited to drive the train ferrying him, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, his wife Datin Seri Ena Ling, senior government officials, foreign dignitaries, members of the Press and STAR-LRT staff.

System One is run by Sistem Transit Aliran Ringan Sdn Bhd (STAR), which started operations on Dec 16, 1996. Since the beginning of its operations, STAR has carried about 30 million commuters.

Phase One of the STAR-LRT System One covers a 12km stretch between Ampang and Jalan Sultan Ismail and serves 13 stations along the route.

Phase Two is a 15km extension of Phase One, comprising two sections - A and B.

Section A is an 11.8km southern extension from the Chan Sow Lin station to Komanwel Station while Section B is a 3.2km northern extension from Sultan Ismail station to Sentul Timur station.

Dr Mahathir said the system, which would transport passengers to the Bukit Jalil Sports Complex during the Commonwealth Games, would be a big test of its capability and efficiency.

"Take this as a challenge and ensure every part works well and smoothly. Remember many foreign visitors will use this transit system and what they see and experience will reflect on us as hosts of the Commonwealth Games."

He said the ability of STAR to complete the LRT project ahead of schedule was proof that Malaysian companies were capable of carrying out their duties well.

The Prime Minister later launched the Natural Gas Vehicle taxi called the "Enviro 2000", which was developed by Petronas.

He also witnessed the official handover of the Enviro 2000 by Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin to Sukom Ninety Eight Berhad chairman Jen (Rtd) Tan Sri Hashim Mohamed Ali. Petronas is sponsoring 400 NGV Taxis for Sukom's use during the games. Dr Mahathir was driven in one of the taxis to the National Sports Complex.

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