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RM2b ERL project expected to be completed in 2002

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WORK on the RM2 billion Express Link (ERL) service between KL Sentral and KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang is progressing well, with 35.8 per cent of the project completed, ERL Sdn Bhd (ERLSB) executive chairman Datuk Mohd Nadzmi Mohd Salleh said.

"The progress of our work is very encouraging and to date, we have completed 53.8 per cent of civil works and 20.3 per cent of system works.

"By the end of the year, we aim to achieve 80 per cent completion of the civil works. We are trying to expedite the works and try to complete ahead of time," he said at the laying of the foundation for ERL maintenance and administration centre in Sepang yesterday.

The ERL, which commenced in 1997, is expected to be completed by January 2002. It would be a high speed, non stop air-rail daily connection service between KLIA and the Kuala Lumpur City Air Terminal at KL Sentral, Brickfields.

The project is being undertaken by ERLSB, a joint venture between TH Technologies Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Tabung Haji and YTL Corp Bhd.

Mohd Nadzmi said the ERL service incorporates a comprehensive "Air-Rail Intermodality Concept" to provide convenient, smooth and seamless connection between airline services and ERL to the city centre, and to facilitate inter-connection between road, air and road transportation.

"The KL City Air Terminal in KL Sentral, Brickfields which will house these facilities will be fully completed in two years' time," he said.

Once completed, he said air travellers can check-in and check-out in KL City Air Terminal.

To provide the check-out service, major logistic issues needs to be addressed and ironed out.

"The handling of checked baggage is often the most difficult aspect of setting up a service due to aviation security considerations and to meet the Customs requirements.

"This would require the involvement and cooperation of all the parties such as Malaysia Airports Bhd as the airport operator, airline companies, ground handlers, the Customs and various other third parties as we are interdependent on each other," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who officiated the laying of the foundation, said currently, there are four air-rail operators providing similar services as KL City Air Terminal.

He said the Heathrow Express in London was the first to offer this service in 1998, followed by the Hong Kong Airport Express, Arlanda Express in Stockholm and Oslo's Airport Express.

He said the Heathrow Express recorded a 20 per cent share of airport users, Hong Kong's Airport Express carries 51 per cent of Chek Lap Kok's and Oslo's Airport Express achieved a very high market share of 38 per cent within two months of opening.

As such, he urged those involved in the ERL project to take proactive measures to ensure smooth running of the ERL facilities when operational by 2002.

"Malaysia must not only show that it can build state of the art infrastructures, but demonstrate that these facilities work efficiently and flawlessly from the word go," he said.

Meanwhile, Mohd Nadzmi said the company's first train will be rolled out in Vienna, Austria in April 2001 and will undergo a series of tests before

arriving in the ERL maintenance and administration centre in October 2001.

Later Abdullah unveiled the livery for the ERL train, which has been approved by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The ERL trainsets are the flagship of the ERL-Commuter Rail Service (CRS). While the ERL will be a non-stop service between KL Sentral and KLIA, the CRS will stop at three intermediate stations which are Salak Selatan, Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.