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NSE a landmark undertaking

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IT HAS been described as a "ready reminder of Malaysia's drive and progress towards a developed nation status by the year 2020."

The North-South Highway - comprising the North-South Expressway (NSE) from Bukit Kayu Hitam to Johor Baru, the New Klang Valley Expressway from Bukit Raja to Jalan Duta and the Federal Highway Route 2 from Batu Tiga to Sungai Rasau - was the single largest privatization project in the country.

It was undertaken by Projek Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan Bhd (PLUS), which holds the concession to operate and maintain the NSE, which stretches a total of 847.7km.

A wholly-owned subsidiary of United Engineers (Malaysia) Bhd, PLUS was incorporated on June 27 1986, under the name "Highway Concessionaires Bhd" It changed to its present name on May 13 1988. It is today recognised as a major service provider in the Malaysian transportation industry.

It was in that same year that UEM was awarded the concession to finance, design, construct, manage, operate and maintain the whole of the NSE.

The concession was subsequently assigned to PLUS under a novation agreement signed between the Malaysian Government and UEM on July 20 1988.

The NSE starts at Bukit Kayu Hitam in the north and ends in Johor Baru in the south, linking all major cities on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia between Thailand and Singapore.

In addition, two other adjoining expressways complete the total 847.7km of inter-urban toll highways referred to collectively as the NSE under PLUS' concession, namely the North Klang Valley Expressway and Federal Highway Route 2.

Constructed in phases over a period of seven years, the NSE was officially opened on September 8 1994 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, signalling the coming of age of Malaysia's road transportation system.

The immediate benefits of the project were most evident in reductions in congestion and travelling time experienced by expressway users, especially during festive seasons when the traditional "balik kampung" phenomenon manifests itself in the form of peak traffic volumes as Malaysians return to their hometowns to celebrate the holidays.

Other benefits in the form of economic development were perhaps less apparent in the early years but became more and more visible as new townships and industrial parks began to take shape along the length of the expressway and trade and tourism enjoyed a new era of growth.

Today, the NSE connects to other major expressways such as the North-South Expressway Central Link and the Malaysia-Singapore Second Crossing, enhancing even further the level of accessibility to the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia via major ports of entry into the country.

Fully operational in February 1994, the NSE was completed 15 months ahead of schedule.

This in itself proved to be a noteworthy achievement, earning PLUS the honour of being awarded the Prime Minister's Quality Award 1995.

Traversing through terrain ranging from soft alluviums in the padi fields of the northern state of Kedah to the rolling hills and mountains bordering the Main Range in the central region of the peninsula, the NSE formed a landmark undertaking by local consultants and contractors alike.

Assisted by internationally recognised foreign counterparts, Malaysian

consultants rose to the occasion, producing innovative designs such as the concrete viaducts used to carry the expressway over peat swamps in the southern region between Yong Peng and Skudai.

Toll collection on the NSE operates on two systems, namely a closed- and an open-toll system.

PLUS has also introduced two options for electronic payment of toll in an effort to increase user convenience, facilitate speedier transactions, increase throughput at toll plazas and reduce manpower costs.

They are the Touch 'n Go and SmartTAG systems.