

Govt proceeding with development of rail transport system

SUN 2 JAN 2002

JOHOR BARU, Mon: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government is proceeding with the development of a rail transportation system, including the implementation of a double tracking electrified rail system from here to Padang Besar.

He said even though it would cost billions of ringgit, it would be an investment which would contribute to the country's economy.

"Maybe the return for KTM (Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad)

will not be much but through this railway service, more destinations will enjoy added value," he said when commissioning the project for the extension of the rail link from Kulai to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) at Wisma PTP here.

Mahathir said the cost of the double tracking electrified rail system is substantial as even the rail link extension project stretching 31.5km costs RM500 million.

"That's for a single track... for double tracking, it will cost bil-

lions of ringgit," he said.

He said the rail transportation system was becoming popular not only to ferry goods but also for passenger travel.

Even-though travelling by air would take a shorter time compared to taking a train, getting to the airport and going through the embarkation process would also take a long time.

It is vital that the government build a good and efficient transportation system as the spin-offs from such projects will benefit the economy and the people.

"We foresee more people using the trains once KTMB complete the double track electrified rail system between Johor Baru and Padang Besar," he said.

"Trains are gaining popularity as a mode to transport goods and commuters as it is a cheaper form of transportation and reduces travel time as compared to taking flights as one can save money and time travelling to the airport.

"We cannot think in terms of direct profits from the train ser-

vices but the spin-offs from having a good railway system."

Mahathir said the government has agreed to spend government funds in assisting PTP in deepening its waters so that the port can accommodate another six berths and larger volumes of containers that will benefit the economy.

He said the handling of containers between PTP and Port Klang had reached six million containers currently, compared to one million containers handled at Port Klang 10 years ago.