

Mahathir: JB-Padang Besar railway line to go on

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GELANG PATAH: The government is proceeding with the construction of a double track railway line from here to Padang Besar.

The system will see electric trains operating at speeds of up to 180km an hour on what can be likened to a dual carriageway for trains.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that the "double-tracking" of the entire Johor

Baru - Padang Besar stretch was part of a move to develop the country's rail transport system.

Double tracking involves the construction of a second parallel line to the existing single line track and allows simultaneous travel in both directions by trains.

The proposed stretch will have the required infrastructure for electric trains to run.

A present the double track

sector on which the electric KTM Komuter trains run covers 143 km in the Klang Valley, linking Kuala Lumpur with Klang, Rawang and Seremban. A project to extend the line from Rawang to Ipoh is underway.

With the extension of the double track, rail travel times will be reduced.

"Once this project materialises, we only need about two and a half hours to travel from

Singapore to Kuala Lumpur and this is a lot of time saving," Dr Mahathir said when launching the new rail link from Kulai to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) at Wisma PTP here.

The 31.5km single track rail for goods trains, built at a cost of RM460mil, links PTP with KTMB's main track.

Dr Mahathir said it was clear that rail service could be very efficient and while

Malaysia could not afford to have very fast trains that travelled at speeds of 280km an hour, in time it would be possible for the country to be serviced by trains which reached speeds of 150km to 180km an hour on such a system.

He said the double tracking and electrification of the entire North-South railway line would cost billions of ringgit but would contribute to the nation's economy.

"Maybe the returns for KTM (Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad) will not be much but through this railway service, more destinations will be value added," he said

Dr Mahathir said the government was not thinking only in terms of direct profits from the train operations but also of the spin-off effects that such a project would bring.