

PM: Government willing to spend billions on rail links

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By Carol Murugiah
news@nstp.com.my

GELANG PATAH, Mon. — The Government is willing to spend billions of ringgit to develop modern and extensive rail links, including investing in electrified double track to fast track the country's progress, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Government, he said, has identified rail transport as a cata-

lyst capable of adding value to existing industries apart from contributing to the birth of new townships and housing estates.

Dr Mahathir said investing in electrified double track spanning the country's length and ultimately linked to other countries was a judicious and prudent use of Government funds.

Although returns from the multi-billion ringgit investment in rail links would not be much, the spillover effect of an efficient transpor-

tation would compensate for the losses.

He cited the emergence of new townships when the North-South Expressway became operational and the boom in the tourism industry with the construction of the Sepang International Circuit as examples of the spillover effect.

"It will take us some time and a lot of expenditure, but it is a worthwhile investment.

"We cannot think in terms of direct profits, but look at the spinoffs

(instead).

"The Government is willing to spend a lot to improve and develop our transportation system."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the launch of the new Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd rail link project to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas at the port today.

Also present were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, PTP chairman Datuk Mohd Taufik Abdullah and chief

executive officer Mohd Sidik Shaik Othman.

The 32km line is a single track linking PTP with the Gelang Patah railway station and subsequently the national rail grid.

It was funded under the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

The project, awarded to India-based Ircon International Ltd, was completed over a 30-month period at a cost of RM460 million.

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It can be expanded into an electrified double track should the demand for commuter services arise in the future.

The Prime Minister had earlier taken a train ride from the Gelang Patah station to PTP's cargo terminal, a journey which lasted about 15 minutes.

Dr Mahathir said that rail transport was a more economical means

of cargo and passenger transportation.

It is gaining popularity worldwide as evident in the Trans-Siberian Railway system linking Europe to North Asia via Russia.

"Nowadays, the train is increasingly popular not only for goods and container transportation, but for passengers, too.

"We expect more people to use the train after the completion of the double tracking railway system

(linking Johor Baru to Padang Besar in Perlis)," he said.

The rail link development, however, said Dr Mahathir, would not adversely affect the aviation industry as air travel remains the fastest mode of transport in the country.

He said rail travel had its advantage over air travel in being able to transport goods and passengers to and from central locations directly without additional hassle and time lost in waiting.