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Mahathir-Rail

M'SIA TO IMPLEMENT JB-PADANG BESAR DOUBLE TRACKING ELECTRIFIED RAIL SYSTEM

JOHOR BAHRU, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that 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 that even though it would cost billions of ringgit, it would be an investment which 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 enjoy value added," 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.

Dr Mahathir said that the cost of the double tracking electrified rail system was substantial as even the rail link extension project stretching 31.5 kilometres cost RM500 million.

"That's for a single track...for double tracking, it will cost billions of ringgit," he said.

The prime minister said it was very clear that rail service could be very efficient and while Malaysia could not afford to have fast trains that travel at a speed of 280km an hour, in time it would be possible for the country to be serviced by trains which travel at a speed of 150km to 180km an hour.

Dr Mahathir said that when the double tracking electrified rail system is in place, the travelling time from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur would be as short as two-and-a-quarter hours to two-and-a-half hours.

"It would take us quite sometime to do it and would require a lot of expenditure but I expect that it would be a worthwhile investment," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in undertaking such a project, the government does not think in terms only of the direct profits from the train operations but also of the spin-off effects from having a good railway system.

Relating it to the North-South Expressway project, he said that tremendous growth happened along the highway where new townships and industries sprang up attracting investments as spin-off effects.

"In the end, of course the people will benefit and the country will benefit and we will grow much faster," he said.

That was why, he said, the government was prepared to spend a lot of money to improve and modernise the country's transportation system.

Dr Mahathir said this was the foresight of the government which was prepared to make investment in the implementation of infrastructure not only for direct profit but also to generate economic growth.

"It is not by accident that Malaysia has grown much faster than most other developing countries. It has grown because we have made very prudent use of whatever funds we have," he said.

The prime minister said that the rail link extension project was an example of a high-cost project which could generate greater economic growth whereby the rail link service would enable the PTP to handle a higher volume of cargo and containers.

The PTP, launched by Dr Mahathir on March 13, 2000, chalked a five-fold growth in the handling of containers from only 418,218 TEUs in 2000 to 2.05 million TEUs last year.

Dr Mahathir congratulated the PTP management for its success which contributed towards the growth in the handling of containers in ports throughout the country.

The prime minister said that 10 years ago he had been told that Malaysian ports handled only one million containers whereas the port in a neighbouring country handled 12 million containers.

But currently, he said, between the PTP and Port Klang alone, they handle six million containers.

-- BERNAMA

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