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## City within a city

By Eddie Lee

COME 2008 when the KL Monorail glides into the KL Sentral Station, it will complete the final link to make KL Sentral a truly integrated urban transportation hub.

Now lying in wait at the periphery of this ultra modern hub for human traffic movement, the Monorail's KL Sentral station in Brickfields will, when the link is completed, be integrated with the KLIA Express, KTM InterCity, KTM Komuter and Putra LRT services.

"Construction of the (Monorail) link and station will begin early next year," said Shahril Ridza Ridzuan, group managing director and chief executive officer of Malaysian Resources Corporation Bhd (MRCB), the company developing KL Sentral.

The management of KL Monorail has agreed to extend the tracks into KL Sentral, which currently handles about 15 million passengers annually. This figure is expected to grow to 100 million passengers by 2020.

The Monorail station will be housed within the retail mall that is being developed as part of the ongoing plan to turn KL Sentral into a city-within-a-city: with hotels, convention and exhibition centres, condominiums, office towers and business suites forming a complete work, live and play environment.

Estimated to cost RM450 million, the yet-to-be-named retail mall will feature a hypermarket, department stores, cineplex, retail outlets and serviced apartments. Located on a five-acre site, it will have a nett built-up area of one million square feet.

"We want a good tenant-mix and are now talking to a few interested parties to take up the hypermarket space.

"We're also in active negotiations with a number of foreign retailers for space in the retail complex, in order to add colour and diversity," Shahril Ridza said.

The Monorail is seen as vital to the success of the retail complex, as exemplified by the Putra LRT in Suria KLCC and more recently, KTM Komuter's link to MidValley MegaMall. KTM is chalking up record passenger arrivals at its new MidValley station, while Putra LRT's second highest passenger disembarkation is at KLCC.

"KL Sentral will have a bigger catchment area with the daily operation of the Monorail. People disembarking here can virtually enjoy all things under one roof - shopping, recreation and leisure," said KL Sentral Sdn Bhd's chief executive officer, Chan Chee Meng.

To complement the development, a convention and exhibition centre is being set up. Estimated to cost between RM80 and RM100 million, it will be situated next to the hub's hotel complex, where the Hilton and Le Meridien are located. The 424-room six-star Le Meridien will open its doors soon.

KL Sentral is also building four office blocks with a gross floor area of 849,790sq ft, scheduled for completion in 2006. It will contain an office tower with a nett floor area of 157,000sq ft and house 158 strata units that will occupy 496,444sq ft of space.

Also under way is a 30-storey office tower with a gross floor area of 453,000sq ft. Incidentally, the RM161 million building has already been sold to Lembaga Tabung Haji.

In the pipeline are another four office towers with a gross floor area of 1.3 million square feet, incorporating a six-storey clubhouse sitting on 84,000sq ft of land to meet the recreational needs of the community.

A condominium block that will be launched there next month will house 600 units ranging from 850sq ft to 2,500sq ft each. These units will be targeted at the professional group as well as young families looking for the convenience of working and living within the city.

When fully developed in 2012, KL Sentral will have a population of half-a million living and working at a premier KL address - a vision of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to turn the old railway marshalling yard, staff quarters and warehouses into a modern, vibrant transport hub that will also be a city-within-a-city.

"The name KL Sentral was coined by Dr Mahathir himself," said Shahril Ridza. "With the KL International Airport coming up, we needed a transport hub in KL to connect directly with the KLIA."

An integrated transport hub was seen as critical to the success of KLIA. Even the design of KL Sentral was conceptualised by Kisho Kurokawa Architect & Associates, the same team that designed the KLIA.

"The idea was to raise the standard of transportation in the country and to link up a brand new modern airport with a brand new part of the city," he added.

The entire KL Sentral development is being undertaken by Kuala Lumpur Sentral Sdn Bhd (KLSSB), a consortium led by MRCB, which has a 64.38 per cent stake, while the remaining equity is held by Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (26 per cent) and Syarikat Pembinaan Redzai (9.62 per cent).

In exchange for building the railway station, KLSSB was awarded the development rights over the surrounding land.

The KL Sentral Station, the integral part of the development, was the first to take off in 1997. Construction was completed in early 2001 and the transportation hub started operations in April that year.

When completed, KL Sentral will be the epitome of a world-class working, living and leisure centre.

And, at its very heart, lies the state-of-the-art transportation hub that will make KL Sentral the nucleus of the nation.

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