

PM bumps Dr M again, says public transport took backseat to Proton

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National car manufacturer Proton often finds itself pinned in the middle of the collision between Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In his speech this afternoon, Najib once again raised the issue when he accused his predecessor, whom he did not name, of neglecting public transportation due to the drive to put more Proton cars on the road.

"Without casting aspersions on one of my predecessors who led for 22 years, there is not enough focus on public transport. The focus was on more cars; more passenger cars, more Proton cars on the road. Of course, there is a limit.

"There is nothing wrong with pushing passenger cars, but you need to have an efficient, reliable and affordable public transport system anywhere in the world," he said when launching the Land Public Transport Symposium 2016 in Kuala Lumpur.

Last week, Mahathir, who conceived Proton, accused Najib of wanting to bankrupt the automotive company in a bid to erase his legacy.

However, several quarters, including Communications and Multimedia Minister Salleh Said Keruak denied this, and reminded the former prime minister of the colossal government loan extended to Proton to reverse its ailing fortunes.

In his speech today, Najib outlined some of the achievements and works in progress to improve Malaysia's public transport system particularly in the areas of rail transport, buses and taxi services.

Among others, he claimed that Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd is close to turning a profit for the first time since Malaya's independence, and he hoped to see this happen soon.

"KTM can be profitable. Imagine, KTM has never been profitable since independence. Never. But, it is at the cusp of being profitable.

"This is a remarkable turnaround. Why? Because we have introduced a system that the public wants. This is what I want to see happen soon – a profitable KTM," he told the audience.

He said the rail company's KTM Komuter service was previously overburdened and inconvenient to its passengers.

Since March 2012, he said, the government invested RM1.89 billion to boost KTM

Komuter's capacity by adding 38 six-car train sets, leading to a 45 percent increase in its ridership from 96,798 daily in 2012 to 141,281 daily in 2015.

In addition, the train's punctuality had also improved – from 76 percent to 90 percent, he said, while train frequency increased from 30 minutes to 15 minutes during peak hours.

"However, since June this year, we have not been able to keep up with this record as steps are being taken to increase the safety and efficiency of the service by upgrading ageing infrastructure.

"RM1.41 billion is being invested in the rehabilitation exercise of the 20-year old Klang Valley double-track. I wish to reassure affected commuters that once completed, a safer, more comfortable journey, and better frequency in services (will be provided)," he added.

Also released during today's event is the Land Public Transformation Commission's (SPAD) Land Public Transport Journey 2010-2015 report.

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