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ECRL boon to east coast

> Project will spur economic spin-off benefits for Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan: Najib

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KUANTAN: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak has described the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) as a "game and mindset changer" for Malaysia as it will significantly cut rail travel time to and from the east coast.

He said the journey from the Integrated Transport Terminal in Gombak, Selangor to Kota Baru in Kelantan was expected to be less than four hours compared to the average eight hours and even up to 12 hours or more during festive seasons, thus making ECRL a comfortable alternative transportation medium.

"The ECRL project also sets the tone for an economic spin-off effect and positive social impact for east coast states.

"It will be a catalyst for economic equality between the west and east coast as it will stimulate investment, spur commercial activity, create jobs, facilitate quality education and boost tourism in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan."

Najib was speaking at the ECRL groundbreaking ceremony at the ECRL KotaSas central station project site yesterday, Bernama reported.

ECRL, the nation's longest rail project with a total of 688km of rail link costing RM55 billion would be built by the China Communications Construction Company, a leading transportation infrastructure group named as the third top international contractor in the world, with Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd as the project owner.

Malaysia also received attractive financing terms for ECRL, with 85% of the project financing, including a soft loan of 3.25% from China Exim Bank, with a moratorium period of seven years, while the balance 15% would be funded through a sukuk programme managed by local investment banks.

Najib said the ECRL alignment would also promote the development of industrial areas and the growing trend of "Transit Oriented Development", that would nurture compact residential districts and commercial centres along the rail stations.

"The viability of ECRL is undisputed as it is estimated that the service would be used to ferry 5.4 million passengers and 53 million tonnes of cargo annually by 2030 as the primary (mode of) transport between the east and west coast," he said.

Najib described the development of ECRL as timely, with the ongoing expansion of the Kuantan Port into a deep-water terminal that would soon be able to cater to larger vessels of up to 200,000 deadweight tonnage or 18,000 twenty-foot equivalent unit container ships.

Najib said the government would ensure ECRL would be completed successfully in 2024, as promised.