

# Better rail links 'more critical'

## Dr M: Existing connections to be improved rather than build HSR

CYBERJAYA: Malaysia is mulling the idea of having a high-speed rail (HSR) service from Johor Baru to Penang or even to the border with Thailand in the future.

For now, the government wants to focus on improving the existing railway system through electrification and double tracking, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Explaining why there was no urgency for the HSR plan, he said: "For Malaysia, the HSR is not necessary for now, especially when it is only within Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. If travel time is six hours or more, I think HSR is the answer.

"So we will not build the HSR just yet. But we will want to improve the quality and the services of our existing railway system. That can be done and has been done to some extent by double tracking and electrification."

He was responding to a question at a dialogue with the Malaysian Rail Industry Corporation (Maric) yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the government might in the future proceed with the plan to have the HSR and would determine if having the service from Johor Baru to Penang and to the Malaysia-Thailand border would be necessary.

The HSR was an initiative by the previous administration to introduce a 90-minute train journey between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

However, the Pakatan Harapan government decided to suspend the project for two years until May 2020 and had reimbursed Singapore S\$15mil (RM46mil).

The railway line between Padang Besar in Perlis and Gemas in Negri Sembilan is now fully electrified and double-tracked.



**Keeping track:** Maric president Datuk Dr Mohd Yusoff Sulaiman speaking with Mahathir at a rail engineering industry display during TECHMART REL 2019 in Cyberjaya. - Bernama

Once the Gemas-Johor Baru Electrified Double-Track Project (EDTP) is completed in 2021, the main trunk line on the West Coast railway line will be an electrified double track system.

The now resumed East Coast Railway Link (ECRL) project, which will link Port Klang in Selangor to Kota Baru in Kelantan, will also be an electrified double track network.

It is set for completion in 2026.

Responding to queries from reporters later, the Prime Minister, when asked whether Singapore agreed to have the HSR service up to the Thai border, said the republic was just thinking about having it to Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia had asked for two years before resuming talks on the HSR.

He said for now, the government's plan was to improve the quality of

the railway system so that travelling by train could be at a higher speed.

"Our investment for now will go towards upgrading the railway system through electrification and double tracking right from the Thai border to Johor Baru," he said.

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