

Govt to focus on driving rail transport

PM hopes improved railway services will encourage people to use it more

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KUALA LUMPUR: The government will focus more on improving the railway network and services in the country, says Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Railway services, he said, had been underutilised in the country and he hoped that more people would use it in the future.

"Rail could also be used to transport freight, especially big items, and it is safer compared to the lorries used to transport goods.

"In the future, we hope to have a developed rail system such as in Japan, (South) Korea and China.

"Our intention is to reduce the use of private vehicles on the road and increase the use of rail, especially for long-distance travel.

"During festive seasons, we have to improve the frequency," he said after launching the National Transport Policy (NTP) 2019-2030 here yesterday.

Also present was Transport Minister Anthony Loke.

In Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said, passengers sometimes had to endure a long wait for the next train.

"We invested a lot in rail, but it is



Eye on the future: Dr Mahathir at the launch of NTP 2019 with Loke (third from right) and Deputy Transport Minister Datuk Kamarudin Jaffar.

not used. It is the same as buying an airplane but keeping it on land.

"Rail is a big investment and it has to be used as frequently as possible," he said, adding that the government would get advice from Japanese experts on the matter.

He also said if there was a need to add railway lines, the government would do so.

On the RM4bil Rapid Transit System project to link Johor Baru and Singapore, he said it would proceed despite taking some time.

However, the proposed high-

speed rail project from here to Singapore will be postponed for two years due to cost concerns.

Dr Mahathir noted that the movement of freight by rail (up to July) increased by 200,000 tonnes compared with the same period last year.

"More people are also opting for (KTM's) ETS, LRT, MRT services and so on.

"The government will continue to improve the quality of rail services for both passengers and freight by upgrading the existing rail networks and developing new rail

lines such as the (spur line from Arau, Perlis) link to Bukit Kayu Hitam and the Port Klang-Serendah bypass," he said.

He added that the government was also in the process of acquiring new ETS and monorail sets to improve passenger services.

On NTP 2019, he said it was an important plan that set clear and detailed directions for the country's transport sector to drive growth.

"NTP 2019 will aid the provision of a quality transport system. This will help the government in fulfilling its aspiration to make Malaysia a developed nation," he said.

He noted that the emergence of new technologies such as e-commerce, the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence had changed people's lives and challenged them to accept and utilise the new technologies for national development, including the transport sector.

"Technological developments, such as e-commerce, need to be fully leveraged by all parties, including transport industry players and entrepreneurs to benefit the economy," he added.

The government, said Dr Mahathir, was also concerned about the ageing population and serving those with special needs.

"The convenience level at all stops, stations and terminals, regardless of land, air or sea - all of them need to be compatible with an ageing society.

"The facilities should be in line with the population's physical capabilities," he said, adding that the increasing population and the migration of rural people to the cities also needed to be taken into consideration by the government.

Meanwhile, Loke said NTP 2019 was developed through close collaboration between the government and private sector several years ago.

"We have taken into account the latest trends in the transport sector such as the increasing urbanisation, the technology shift that changes the way we live, communicate and transport goods and passengers.

"Also, there have been changes in the international shipping and aviation industries," he said, adding that the transport sector was an important enabler for economic development and people's well-being.

Loke said the good public transport infrastructure laid down since the '90s had propelled the country forward in terms of development.

"It is now a challenge for us to optimise the infrastructure and make them better," he added.