

End of traffic congestion may be a rail-ity

GEORGE TOWN: Penangite Muhammad Najib Rohim, 42, watched the official launch of Penang's Mutiara LRT Line in the densely populated Bandar Sri Pinang, just about 300m from his home, with a big smile of satisfaction.

He said the project was long in coming, and he felt sure that the LRT would alleviate the chronic traffic congestion plaguing the state.

As a lawyer, Muhammad Najib does his commuting at the most inopportune times to get to court on time, and he felt sure that the LRT would take a load off Penang's road infrastructure.

"I am certain this project will ease commuting for Penangites and visitors alike. It might even become a tourist attraction," he said.

Accountant Audrey Lim, 33, was there too and was also grinning from ear to ear.

"I must drive from my house in Sungai Ara to my office in Gurney Drive, so I know this LRT represents a major step forward in enhancing public transport and improving overall mobility for Penangites.

"I have high hopes that the LRT will ease the traffic gridlock in the city," she said yesterday.

According to a GPS navigator, Sungai Ara to Gurney Drive is a 16km commute, and Lim said it would take her well beyond an hour to drive that distance, even longer during holiday seasons.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow, in his speech, revealed that the state government was "nearly at the point of giving up" due to the lack of commitment and support from previous federal government administrations.

He said this changed with the establishment of the Madani government.

"This support reflects a spirit of unity and fosters collaboration grounded on the principles of Malaysia Madani, shaping the direction of public transport," he said.

While the Klang Valley launched its first LRT line in 1996, open talk about either an LRT or monorail in Penang first appeared in the news only in 2007.

Now that it is launched officially, the cost is worked out to be RM13bil, funded by the Federal Government, and it should be fully completed by 2031.

MRT Corp chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Zarif Hashim, in a press conference, said the first construction agreement was expected to be signed tomorrow at MRT Corp headquarters.

"We will announce the first contractor who will sign the agreement with us.

"There are three main contractors. The contract for the rail



Forging ahead: Anwar (third from left) looking at a map of the Penang LRT Mutiara Line project during the groundbreaking ceremony in George Town. With him are (from right) MRT Corp chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Zarif Hashim, Loke, Chow and Bashir. — CHAN BOON KAI/The Star

system itself has already been allocated and is currently in process.

"This process will take about four months, concluding in April.

"We expect the systems contract to be awarded by the third quarter of this year," he said after the groundbreaking ceremony by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday.

The LRT Mutiara Line project will span 29.5km with 21 stations, including a provisional station at Penang South Reclamation Island A (PSR-A).

The project is poised to strengthen regional connectivity, enhance mobility, and support Penang's economic growth for decades to come.

Also present at the official

launch were Transport Minister Anthony Loke and MRT Corp chairman Tan Sri Bashir Ahmad Abdul Majid.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister also took a trip down memory lane when he visited Jit Sin Independent High School in Bukit Mertajam, where he had taught Bahasa Malaysia as a temporary teacher.

He said that as a former student of the Malay College Kuala Kangsar, where all students were Malays, he gained valuable experience being a temporary teacher at the school.

Greeted by students and teachers led by principal Tang Eng Hoe, Anwar sang the first verse of the school anthem in Mandarin and then brought extra cheer after

being taken to the classroom where he had taught the national language.

He also announced an extra RM1mil for its coffers, saying this was in recognition of the school's efforts in improving the standard of Bahasa Malaysia and pursuing excellence in education.

Anwar said this was in addition to the RM320,000 allocated to the school under the overall RM20.16mil package for 63 Chinese independent schools nationwide.

The Prime Minister said the money was allocated to Chinese independent schools as a gesture of appreciation for their loyalty in upholding the national language, adding that each school would receive RM320,000.