

# NEW STRAITS TIMES

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## MRT CONVENIENCE AROUND THE CORNER

Hundreds of thousands of Klang Valley commuters are set to have a transformational experience with the start of the MRT operations between Sungai Buloh and Semantan tomorrow. The prime minister, who will launch the service today, says the completion of Phase 1 of the megaproject is a signal proof that the economy is in good shape.

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Pic by Hafiz Sohaimi

## 'MRT line proof of economic strength'

**PHASE 1 COMPLETED:** Failed nations can never realise projects like this, says Najib

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**T**HE government's ability to complete a mega project with advanced technology like the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) is a clear proof that the economy is in good shape.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said it was also a concrete answer to baseless accusations hurled at the government that Malaysia was a failed and bankrupt country.

"How could a failed and bankrupt country build and realise a mega project like MRT?"

"This is a big project with a very modern and advanced technology, which could never be built by a country which will go bankrupt," he said in his blog, NajibRazak.com, on Tuesday night.

Najib said he had focused on improving public transportation as he believed that no country in the world could develop without a proper system for the facility.

He said the town areas would be congested and people would feel suffocated if they relied only on private vehicles.

"One of the main things that my administration has stressed is to improve the existing public transportation into a more modern, efficient and integrated system.

"Although Malaysia, especially Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley, has a public transportation system

with several transit networks providing services to the people, there are many problems and there is room for improvement," he added.

Previously, he said, the public transportation in the city was chaotic with unconnected networks, while the rail system was not well integrated and comprehensive, with weak connections among the networks.

He said the rail service also faced legacy problems that required fast solutions, such as lopsided concession agreements.

"It (the rail system) also did not take into consideration highly populated areas and the link to housing areas," he said.

To overcome the problem, he said, the Land Public Transport Commission was established to draft the National Land Public Transport Master Plan, a comprehensive 20-year plan to transform the sector into a first-class facility.

Among the main projects, he said, was the MRT.

"This is a mega project which costs billions of ringgit.

"But, it was implemented at the right time and will help change the landscape of Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia," he said.

He said Malaysia must ensure that the public transportation system in its cities was at a par with those in developed countries.

"I'm lucky to have visited many of the cities and a similarity they share is their public transportation systems are very efficient and modern,

with excellent connection of the rail and bus networks."

He said the MRT project was also set to change the people's lifestyle as public transportation becomes a daily norm, with the MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) line being one of the projects.

"There are many other projects which have been and are being planned for the long term," he said adding that the MRT project would be the initiator, mover and driver of modern mode of transportation to push Malaysia forward.

The prime minister is scheduled to open the first phase of MRT SBK line covering 12 stations between Sungai Buloh and Semantan today.

Meanwhile, in another post yesterday, Najib said detailed studies on various aspects had been undertaken when plans for the MRT were conceptualised.

He said this included emphasis on first- and last-mile connectivity.

Touching on the existing public transportation system, he said, it could not be denied that while the country had first-class infrastructure, most existing facilities were not well maintained, resulting in

frequent breakdowns.

"We have been hearing people lamenting about this problem for years. Trains not keeping to schedule, dilapidated and packed coaches, and also connectivity, which was not user-friendly.

"The government has all the while been encouraging people to use public transportation, but, at the same time, was unable to overcome the shortcomings faced by commuters."

He said while people were encouraged to take trains, commuters faced problems getting to the stations from their houses.

"All this were legacy problems which I inherited from the previous leaderships, which failed to plan for long-term public transportation for the convenience of the people.

"That is why as I have mentioned in my previous blog postings, among the first actions I took as prime minister was to undertake the transformation of the public transportation sector as one of the main focuses for the country," he said, adding that the government had undertaken many steps to achieve its target of improving services.

He said the MRT project was ready for public use starting tomorrow.

"The first phase of the MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang (SBK) Line will cover 12 stations from Sungai Buloh to Semantan, 112 feeder buses covering 256.3km at hotspot areas including KL Sentral, Subang Airport and also residential areas with dense communities, namely Subang Bestari and Kota Damansara.

"This initiative gives consumers choices, whether to leave their vehicle at home and use the feeder buses to get to MRT stations and to their final destination in the city, or to drive and use the Park-and-Ride facility provided at selected MRT stations," he said.

Najib added that initiatives such as this were an extra effort by the government to reduce reliance on privately owned vehicles and to encourage use of public transportation in daily life. **Additional reporting by**

**Tharanya Arumugam and Awaina Arbee**

**Page 1 pic: A Mass Rapid Transit train at the Semantan station during a test run yesterday, ahead of the service's official public opening tomorrow.**