

Centre of excellence for rail sector in the works

KUALA LUMPUR: The Transport Ministry is planning to set up a dedicated academy for skills training development for the rail transport industry. It was high time that the government, operators and industry regulators pool their resources to set up the academy with the aim of creating a sustainable talent pool for the industry, said minister Anthony Loke. "We're at the planning stage. I believe Malaysia has the talent and resources to set this up," he said.

Loke said industry operators such as Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (KTMB), Prasarana Malaysia Bhd, Express Rail Link Sdn Bhd and Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd as well as industry regulator Land Public Transport Agency (APAD) each have their own training centre or academy. "It's scattered now so we want to pool everyone together and create a national centre of excellence," he said.

He said the previous government had mooted the idea of setting up a National Rail Centre of Excellence but it did not materialise. Loke hoped the new one would be efficient, sustainable and beneficial to the industry.

The ministry, he said, had not discussed the cost of setting up the academy yet but it could use an existing facility in Batu Gajah, Perak, for the venture. "The facilities are already there. It is just about upgrading the status of the centre and turning it into an academy with the right qualifications for skills training and certification," he told reporters after attending the Women In Rail Malaysia Leadership Conference.

Meanwhile, Loke said the newly revived East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) is set to be relaunched on July 25. "It is our hope that we fully utilise the project for the benefit of the Malaysian economy, not only at the construction stage but (in future) link up of the railway network with the ports to ensure industrialisation will take place along the railway corridor," he said. Malaysian companies, he said, were also set to play a larger role as they would take on 40% of the project's civil works.

The ECRL was put on hold for several months from July 2018 as terms of its construction were renegotiated. Former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had presided over the project's groundbreaking ceremony in Pekan in August 2017. The project was revived after Malaysian Rail Link Sdn Bhd and China Communications Construction Company Ltd (CCCC) signed a supplementary agreement in Beijing in April. Under the new deal, the project's development cost was brought down from RM66bil to RM44bil and the previous 688km line was also shortened by 40km.

Loke also hinted that there might be "good news" in about two months concerning the Rapid Transit System (RTS) connecting Johor Baru and Singapore. "It is my hope to see the RTS take place.

“I believe if there is a will, we can always find creative solutions. “I am thankful that our friends in Singapore are very pragmatic and cooperative in helping us find a solution to the problem,” he said. The RTS was put on hold until the end of September but Loke said he was confident that an agreement would be reached before then.

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