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RAILWAYS

PM urges low-fare policy on subway

AMORNRAT MAHITTHIROOK

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha wants new electric rail routes in Bangkok to offer affordable fares for the poor so everyone can equally use the faster, pollution-free mass-transit system.

The current fares of 14-42 baht are too high for low-income earners in the capital, so the electric railway operator, Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (MRTA), will be ordered to find ways to reduce the rates, Gen Prayut said yesterday as he presided over the start of test runs for the Purple Line between Bang Yai in Nonthaburi and Tao Pun in Bangkok.

"My policy is to reduce inequality among people, so low-income earners can have the opportunity to use the electric train service," Gen Prayut said.

The 26km Bang Sue-Bang Yai Purple Line has 16 stations, four park-and-ride centres and one depot. SET-listed Bangkok Metro Plc has received a 30-year concession to operate the line, which is expected to serve up to 60,000 commuters an hour/

direction.

The service, which is scheduled to officially open on Aug 12 next year, is expected to charge fares of 16-40 baht, according to media reports.

However, following Gen Prayut's price policy, the MRTA will have to devise measures giving people from all walks of life access to the electric-rail system.

The prime minister said the huge infrastructure project should be designed for maximum use, even if additional lines, requiring lower amounts of investment, are needed to serve low-income earners.

The Purple Line will be tested privately for several months before opening to the public to try free of charge in May.

Gen Prayut suggested the MRTA should also consider designing stations that include retail and parking space to generate income to offset the investment cost.

That, in turn, could lead to cheaper fares, he said.

The premier also wants the rail-system contractors to source parts from Thailand, where possible, to strengthen the economy.



The Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (MRTA) launches a 5km test run, from the maintenance depot to Bang Yai station, of the Bang Sue-Bang Yai Purple Line. The train service will open officially on Aug 12 next year. WICHAN CHAROENKIATPAKUL