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KUANTAN: The East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project's Kuantan Tunnel breakthrough is scheduled to be achieved in October before the 2.8km tunnel is fully completed in the first quarter of next year.

The Kuantan Tunnel, located in Jabor, near here, is the longest of the ECRL tunnels in Section B, which includes the 1.1km Paka Tunnel and 871m Dungun Tunnel, both in Terengganu.

Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL) construction manager (Pahang) Khairi Khalid Abdul Rahman said once the breakthrough was achieved, the tunnel's permanent lining would be fully laid out.

"The Kuantan tunnel breakthrough is expected to be completed in October and the permanent lining will be done within three to four months.

"A total of 36 tunnels will be built for the ECRL project in Pahang. Five tunnel breakthroughs have been achieved, but they mostly involve short tunnels between 190m and 600m," he said after ECRL's Aidilfitri

open house here yesterday.

Drilling and blasting work for the 11.8m diameter Kuantan tunnel project, which began on Oct 7, 2019, adopts the New Austrian Tunnelling Method, the world's most widely used underground construction method.

With the Swedish-made double-arm jumbo drilling machine, tunnelling is done from two ends, then meeting in the middle.

Khairi Khalid said excavation work for the 16.39km Genting Tunnel in Bentong, which will begin this month, was scheduled to be completed in 2024.

"Work on the Genting Tunnel began in 2021, but the two tunnel boring machines will only begin excavating this month. They will carve out access via the Titiwangsa range to connect Bentong and Gombak. Breakthrough will take two years."

On the progress of the ECRL project, he said the 665km rail project was 28.57 per cent complete up to March and despite uncertain weather, work in Pahang was going smoothly according to schedule.