

23 MAY 1996

Ling-Viet

LING IN VIETNAM FOR TALKS ON RAIL AND PORT LINKS

By: Rachman Nordin

HANOI, May 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik began a three-day visit to Vietnam today during which he will have talks on the country's inclusion in the proposed Singapore-China trans-Asian rail link and cooperation between key Malaysian and Vietnamese ports.

Dr Ling's arrival in Ho Chi Minh City -- Vietnam's commercial hub in the south -- was received by the Vietnamese deputy transport and communications minister Nguyen Tan Man.

A spokesman of the ministry's foreign relations department said Dr Ling is scheduled to visit the city's Saigon Port, the country's busiest, tomorrow before coming here for talks with his Vietnamese counterpart Bui Danh Luu on Saturday.

Dr Ling is leading a 20-member delegation comprising senior Foreign Ministry, railway and port officials as well as businessmen.

Analysts said the talks could lead to Saigon Port playing a feeder role to Malaysia's Port Klang and vice versa.

Because of its strategic location serving land-locked regions of the Mekong River basin riparian states, including Cambodia, northern Thailand and Laos, Saigon Port will gain from such collaboration, they said.

There will also be spin-offs from such collaboration for Kuantan and Kemaman once these Peninsular Malaysia east coast ports are linked by an overland expressway to Port Klang.

Dr Ling is the second Asean minister to come here over the last two months to discuss Vietnam's inclusion in the proposed Singapore-China rail network and putting its implementation stage into high gear.

Last April, Thai Foreign Minister Kasem S. Kasemsri announced Thailand's support for Vietnam's inclusion in the rail network.

A brainchild of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the concept of a regional rail network was endorsed at last December's Asean Summit in Bangkok.

Asean has also brought China, South Korea and Japan into the scheme which was raised and backed at the inaugural Asean-Europe summit early this year.

The proposed rail network was envisioned to start in Singapore and pass through the major capitals in the region to Beijing.

Last February, Vietnam re-opened its rail link with China after more than 17 years since a brief but bloody war between the two communist neighbours.

The resumed 68-seat Hanoi-Beijing train service runs twice weekly and the fare for the 58-hour journey is US\$68 (RM170) for hard seats and US\$149 (RM372.50) for cushioned seats. -- BERNAMA

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