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Ling sees likely rail route to Kunming

TRANSPORT Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik has identified "one very likely route" as the most feasible and the fastest route to realise the Trans-Asia Railway project linking Singapore to Kunming in southern China.

The route - between Singapore-Kuala Lumpur-Bangkok-Poipet-Sisophon and Phnom Penh and across the border into Lok Ninh in Cambodia, Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi and Kunming - is a strong possibility because it has only two gaps and a flat terrain.

The two gaps along the route are a 48km gap between Poipet and Sisophon and a 450km gap between Phnom Penh, Lok Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City.

The terrain is very even, without any hills, mountains or other physical barriers, "so there is no need for lots of bridges or tunnels to be built. The corridors have already been identified, and the ballast is already in place except that the rails were taken out due to the war," he told reporters after opening the Asean Federation of Forwarders Association (AFFA) workshop in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

Dr Ling said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was informed last week on the three possible routes for the 5,513km project.

The project was first mooted by Dr Mahathir at the fifth Asean Summit in Bangkok last December.

He said the second possible route is Singapore-Kuala Lumpur-Bangkok-Vientiane-Kunming, but it has about 500km of hilly terrain and would be very costly to develop.

The third possibility is from Singapore-Kuala Lumpur and Thailand and across the three pagoda passe, which is part of the old railway built over the River Kwai and is located on the borders of Thailand and Myanmar, then on to Yangon, Mandalay and then Kunming.

"We will consult the three consultants who are currently conducting their studies as to which route is the most feasible. Personally, I think the Cambodia-Vietnam route might be the fastest possible one to see the Trans Asia project become a reality.

"The whole masterplan is to have a network of railways in the region that will benefit the Asean countries, but that will take time because of the topographical studies that have to be conducted on the terrain first and finding financiers who are interested in coming forward to invest in this important piece of infrastructure," he said.

This will add tremendous impetus and economic spinoffs for the countries because it would facilitate trade between nations, he added.

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