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Rail link to Kunming for good of all: Ling

Michelle Sheares

MALAYSIA, which will spearhead the Trans-Asia Railway project linking Singapore to Kunming in southern China, will carry this out for the benefit of Asean members, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said.

"We must be sincere in demonstrating that although the Malaysian private sector will be taking the lead in this project, we are not doing it for our own gains, but also for the good of all the other countries involved as well," he told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after the weekly Cabinet meeting.

"Malaysia will only spearhead the negotiations for the project, but we will make sure that other countries involved also reap the benefits also," he said.

He added that the project is open to participation by any other interested Asean countries and also to the countries which are involved directly in the project. Dr Ling said countries like Cambodia and Vietnam can participate by giving up some of their land for the project.

Dr Ling said when he briefed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad two weeks ago on the three possible routes for the 5,513km link, it was decided then that the railway project should be realised as soon as possible.

Dr Ling has said one of those routes has been identified as the one which will make the Trans-Asia Railway project a reality in the shortest time.

This is the route which runs through Singapore-KL-Bangkok-Poipet-Sisophon-Phnom Penh-Lok Ninh-Ho Chi Minh City-Hanoi-Kunming.

It was singled out as the best possibility because it runs over fairly flat ground and has only two gaps, a 48km gap between Poipet and Sisophon, and 450km between Phnom Pehn, Lok Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City.

The minister added the Cabinet had decided that the KTM Bhd consortium comprising DRB Hicom, Renong and Bolton Properties will visit the countries involved, such as Cambodia and Vietnam, and puts together a commercially viable package for these countries.

He said, for example, this package could take the form of redevelopment or rebuilding of the railway stations or the running of restaurants or duty-free shops.

He said the returns from the business could then be used to finance the project, especially patching up gaps in the railway line in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Dr Ling said this project, which will attract foreign investors and tourists to Cambodia, will act as an impetus for it to return to peace soon.

He added that a group of experts will be holding a 3-day meeting on the railway project in Malaysia from September 28 to 30.

On his trip to Mongolia and Kyrgystan from September 8 to 14, Dr Ling said he is expected to sign an air services agreement with Mongolia.

He said a Malaysian team led by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) has been sent to Kyrgystan to study various aspects of the country's economy, such as tourism, manufacturing, agriculture and banking, to see how the two countries can cooperate further.

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