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10 Asean ministers to sign accord

THE 10 Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) transport ministers are expected to sign Protocols 3 and 4 of the Asean Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit during the Fifth Asean Transport Ministers' Meeting currently being held in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the agreement and the ministerial understanding on the development of the Asean Highway network project are now ready to be signed by the 10 transport ministers.

"Asean transport officials will then be expected to conclude the rest of the protocols for the Asean Framework Agreement to ensure that the agreement can be operationalised next year," he said in his speech at the Asean Transport Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi yesterday.

"This is a gradual yet remarkable achievement in preparing ourselves to face a more challenging task to fulfil the vision and the commitment of our leaders to build a unified, prosperous and peaceful Asean in the next millennium," he added.

On the progress of the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link Project or the Trans-Asian Railway Project, Dr Ling said the feasibility study has been concluded and the draft final report has been received.

"The report will be circulated to all Asean member countries and a technical expert working group meeting will be convened in due course to discuss the report.

"My sincere hope is that the discussion can be concluded and the result of the study can be tabled to the upcoming Asean Summit as this will mark another milestone in Asean cooperation, that is the laying of the rail network throughout the region," he added.

The Trans-Asian Railway, stretching 5,513km of railway track between Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and China, was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Fifth Asean Summit in Bangkok in December 1996.

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