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#### Talks with DRB-Hicom to extend Komuter service

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Works Ministry will begin negotiations soon with DRB-Hicom Bhd to extend the KTM Komuter service to Batu Caves from Sentul.

Its Minister, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, said the extension work included the construction of a double track line and commuter station at Batu Caves.

"Once the track is completed, KTM will operate its regular Komuter service which is expected not only to cater to residents in the Batu Caves, Selayang and Gombak areas, but also to draw more tourists to Batu Caves," he told reporters while attending the Thaipusam celebration at Batu Caves today.

DRB-Hicom Bhd leads a consortium, Merak Unggul Sdn Bhd, which consists of Renong Bhd, Bolton Properties Bhd and Jasa Meta Sdn Bhd. Merak Unggul currently manages the rail company.

At present, a single track links Sentul with Batu Caves and is used for freight and special trains during Thaipusam, while KTM's commuter service runs between the Sentul-Port Klang and Rawang-Seremban sectors.

Batu Caves is one of the main tourist attractions in Selangor. It sees more than 2.5 million tourists annually, out of which more than 300,000 are foreigners.

Samy Vellu, who is also the MIC president, said since the commuter service would be operating on a regular basis, the ministry would permanently close the railway gate crossing near Sungai Batu in Batu Caves.

He said a flyover would be built over the Sungai Batu railway crossing at a cost of between RM30 to RM40 million.

However, he was unable to reveal the cost of the double track line and when the project would begin.

He said the new commuter track in no way affected the Government's plan to construct a cable-car at Batu Caves which is expected to run from the foot of the steps to the top of the limestone cave within which is the main temple and focus of Thaipusam celebration.

He also said DRB-Hicom had agreed to donate a RM50,000 motorised buggy which would be used by the devotees in future to pull the chariot bearing the statue of Lord Muruga from the Sri Maha Mariamman Temple in Jalan Tun H.S. Lee to Batu Caves.

Samy Vellu also said he had discussed with the various State Governments that Thaipusam be declared a public holiday and was waiting for a reply from the Kedah, Pahang and Malacca State Governments.

"Once we get the consent of all States, we will leave the matter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for consideration," he said.

At present Thaipusam is a State holiday in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Johor.

(END)