

21/09/2000

Trans-Asian rail project's status to be known next week

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THE status of the proposed trans-Asian railway project linking Singapore and Kunming in China will be known next week.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the feasibility study on the project, of which Malaysia is one of the key players, is completed and will be submitted to the Cabinet next Wednesday.

"The briefing to the Cabinet will be done by the consultant companies appointed to undertake the feasibility study," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after the weekly post Cabinet meeting.

Malaysia is one of the countries that is helping fund the studies on the proposed 5,513km Trans-Asia rail link from Singapore to Kunming. The project is estimated to cost RM1.5 billion.

"The study is complete and will be presented at the next Asean summit. The summit will then decide what would be the next step," he added.

Dr Ling said it takes a long time to complete the study as it was difficult to get feedback from other participating countries.

In the case of Malaysia and Thailand, it is easy to gather information but for countries that have gone through wars such as Laos and Cambodia, it is difficult to get economic figures for forecast.

In April 1999, two Malaysian railway consultants KL Consult and Zaaba Consultancy conducted the study on the project which encompasses engineering, economic, facilitation and environmental components.

Trans-Asia rail link will connect Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar with China and eventually Russia and Europe. The railway project was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the 5th Asean Summit in Bangkok in December 1996.

On another development Dr Ling said the Ministry and the Road Transport Department (RTD) have agreed not to delay the process of issuing valid licences for the drivers with fake commercial vehicle licences if they come forward to confess to the authority.

This priority will be granted particularly to drivers of commercial vehicles such as lorries to ensure that they would not have to take a long time to go on with their job, he said.

On August 26, the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) exposed a syndicate which issued some 100,000 "flying licences". To date, the ACA has arrested more than 30 people in connection with syndicates including RTD staff and operators of driving schools. The ACA gives a 30-day grace period to motorists to surrender their illegally-obtained driving licence. The deadline is September 26 this year.

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