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KTMB-CAMBODIA

KTMB EXPLORING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN CAMBODIA

By: Johnny Chan

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5 (Bernama) - KTM Berhad (KTMB), Malaysia's national railway company, is exploring the possibility of venturing into Cambodia to prepare for the eventual establishment of the Trans-Asia Rail Link.

"At this point of time, the governments of the participating countries in Asean are already pursuing the Singapore to Kunming (China) rail link project with the setting up of various working groups and appointing consultants to study the engineering feasibility," said KTMB freight services general manager, Abd Radzak Abd Malek.

Asean governments are also trying to get donor countries to invest in the rail link project, which Malaysian prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had taken a keen interest as well.

Recently a Royal Railway of Cambodia delegation visited Malaysia to forge closer links with KTMB and evaluate rail operations in this country.

Abd Radzak said, "The proposed Trans-Asia Link route has a missing 48km link within Cambodia from the Thai border town of Aryanprathet to Sisopon in Cambodia. (The Khmer Rouge had destroyed the old rail link between the two points at the height of the civil war).

"Engineering studies have been done by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), which is now looking at the possibility of getting funds from donor countries or any financial institution willing to fund the project."

"As the Trans-Asia Line project is definitely on, KTMB does not want to lose out on opportunities that will unfold when the time comes," said Abd Radzak. "We're looking at the business prospects in Cambodia. We've to get ourselves ready for it."

On their part, Cambodian railway officials are keen to learn from Malaysia's experience in rail cargo transportation.

"They intend to start block train services running on the 240km line between Phnom Penh, the capital, to the Port of Sihanouville on the coast."

On the engineering feasibility studies on the Trans-Asia Line, Abd Radzak said consultants had submitted their report to the State Railway of Thailand and that "further deliberation will be at the Asean governments level."

"What is going to happen next is only looking for the funding part of the project. Thailand has been given the task (to look for the funds)."

The cost has not been revealed. But for the missing link part, a single track has estimates ranging from RM30 million to RM50 million. The feasibility studies cover soil tests, rail alignment, the number of bridges and stations.

The Trans-Asia Line envisages a rail connection for both passengers and cargo from Singapore passing through Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos to Kunming in southern China.

Few people in this country perhaps know more about rail cargo transportation than Abd Radzak, a hands-on railwayman, who has been credited for much of the present success of the Malaysia-Thailand landbridge (containerised rail) services.

Talking to him about his rail cargo services gives one a distinct impression that he keeps in touch at all times with his officers on the ground about what is going on throughout the entire network within Peninsular Malaysia and southern Thailand as well.

Even though KTMB locomotives do not go beyond Padang Besar, the

undercarriage with the containerised goods go as far as many inland container depots in Thailand.

"I'm very confident the Trans Asia Link will become a reality," said Abd Radzak. "Our optimism is partly based on the success of our experience in establishing the landbridge across the border to Thailand." -- BERNAMA

SC SHY