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India seeks our help to build port

PULAU INDAH, Mon. - The Indian Government wants Malaysian private port operators to construct, own and manage a new transshipment hub port on the island of Vallarpadam near Cochin.

Its Shipping Minister, Vedprakash P. Goyal, said those undertaking the project would be given 30 years to run the business before it would be handed to the Government of India.

During the 30-year period, the Indian Government and the operator will share revenue, he added.

He was speaking after paying a courtesy call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his office in Putrajaya today.

Goyal and his delegation comprising Shipping Ministry secretary M.P. Pinto, additional private secretary to Union Shipping Minister Ram M. Agarwal, Cochin Port Trust Dr Jacob Thomas chairman and Indian High Commissioner to Malaysia Veena Sikri also paid a courtesy call on Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

They later took a guided tour of Westport led by its executive chairman Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam.

Goyal said he discussed with Dr Mahathir about forging further business ties.

"I also took the opportunity to invite Dr Mahathir to India at his earliest convenience."

Goyal said he also discussed Malaysia's investment in India's developing port sector with the Prime Minister.

"We are keen on constructing the long-delayed new transshipment hub in Vallarpadam. This is an excellent location as it is on the international shipping route which passes Colombo," he added.

The project which includes construction of 600-metre long berths, will cost about US\$500 million (RM1.9 billion).

Goyal said whoever undertook the project must start work by July and complete it within two years.

"There is a lot of unexplored potential in Vallarpadam."

India currently handles 2.5 million TEUs per annum at its 140- odd minor ports with the major privatised ports being Chennai, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Tuticorin. The fourth privatised port will be Vallarpadam.

Meanwhile, Gnanalingam said he was interested in the proposal extended to build, own and manage Vallarpadam.

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