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Asean's partners may fund part of trans-Asia railway

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THE proposed construction of the "missing links" in the RM9.5 billion trans-Asia railway through Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos is expected to be funded by Asean+3 partners China, Japan and South Korea, apart from Asian Development Bank loans.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has spoken to leaders of the three countries and they were willing to assist Asean materialise the project that would link Singapore to Kunming, China.

The proposed 5,500km link would include the double-tracking project from Johor Baru to Padang Besar, which is expected to be completed in 2008, and the present tracks in Singapore, Thailand and southern China.

"It is Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam which need assistance from richer countries which have good financial institutions offering low interest rates," Dr Ling told reporters after launching ACP Industries Bhd's railway sleepers factory near Ipoh yesterday.

Also present was Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali.

Dr Ling expressed confidence that the countries involved could settle the loans as the repayment period was up to 40 years.

There are several gaps in the proposed route that runs through Cambodia including a 48km stretch from Poipet to Sisophon and a 240km stretch from the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, we already have a railway track and so do Thailand and China," Dr Ling said.

He said used railway tracks and bridges in countries where replacement work is being done would be used for the construction of the missing links.

Asean, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, groups Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

On the double-tracking project between Rawang and Ipoh, Dr Ling said it would be ready by the end of 2004 and the express train service would begin by early 2005.

"We are starting from eight sites and there is no problem to complete it as scheduled," he said.

Dr Ling said two consortiums, one from India and another from China, would construct the double-tracking railway line between Ipoh and Padang Besar, and between Seremban and Johor Baru, respectively.

He added that the Government has no plan to extend the double-tracking project to the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia as there was no sufficient demand.