

Talks to ensure 5,000km link stays on track

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HELSINKI: A meeting will be held in China in November to seek its cooperation in ensuring the proposed 5,000km railway line from Singapore to China will reach Kunming as originally planned, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said a working group, chaired by Malaysia, would hold discussions with Chinese officials to secure their support for the US\$15bil (RM54.9bil) Singapore-Kunming Rail Link.

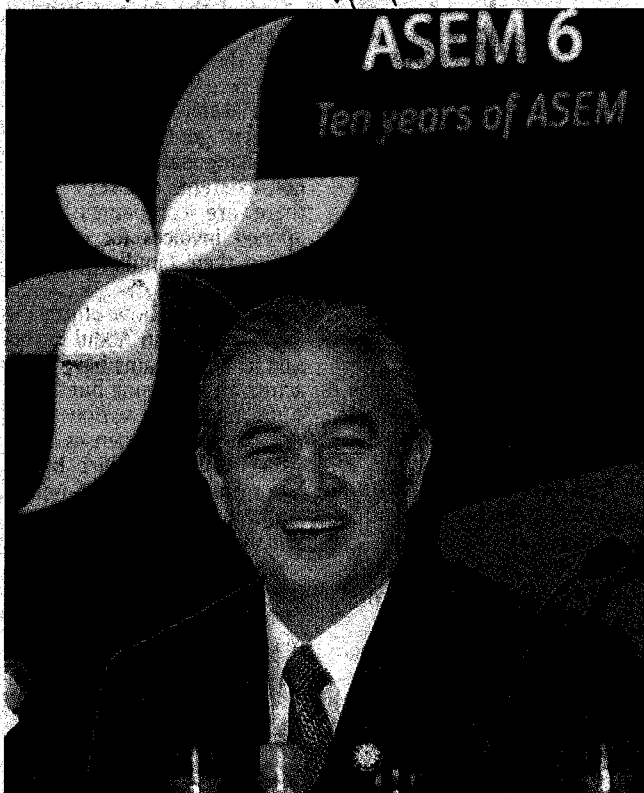
"The Asean-China Summit next month is also expected to discuss the issue as well as the financing problems affecting the missing links in Cambodia," he told Malaysian journalists here yesterday after meeting his counterparts from Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam on the project.

Abdullah, who arrived in the Finnish capital on Saturday to attend the Sixth Asia-Europe (Asem 6) Summit which began yesterday, said Malaysia had provided rails and sleepers for the construction of the 48km missing link between Sisophon and Poipet in Cambodia.

He said the equipment had been sent to Thailand which would transport them to Cambodia.

The rail link, spanning seven countries covering Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar, was proposed during the Asean summit in 1995 with Malaysia as project coordinator.

Earlier, Abdullah took part in the Asian Leaders meeting with



MEETING THE MEDIA: Abdullah attending a press conference with Malaysian journalists in Helsinki yesterday. — Bernamapic

China, Japan and South Korea before attending the opening ceremony of the two-day Asem summit by Finnish president Tarja Halonen at the Helsinki Fair Centre.

Abdullah said the leaders expressed support for the Asean Secretariat to become a member of the Asem process in order to play a greater role in the grouping.

With the Asean Secretariat in Asem, it can act as coordinator for the benefit of all members of Asean countries, he said, adding

that the proposal to enlarge the process received support from all the leaders.

Earlier, there were reports that Asem's European partners are pushing for Romania and Bulgaria to join the process once they become EU member states next year.

Abdullah also held talks with his Polish counterpart Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who expressed satisfaction with bilateral relations but hoped to correct the trade imbalance which was largely in Malaysia's favour.