

Thailand-Japan rail project gets cabinet green light



Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha visits a high-speed railway line in Tokyo in February. The memorandum of cooperation for a Thai-Japanese partnership to build a high-speed rail line linking Bangkok and Chiang Mai will be signed today.

The rail development partnership between Thailand and Japan is moving ahead, with the draft of a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) given the go-ahead by the cabinet yesterday.

The MoC covers the construction of a new 635-kilometre rail route for high-speed trains from Bangkok to Chiang Mai and 574 km of metre-gauge double-track rail routes running a route including Kanchanaburi-Bangkok-Chachoengsao-Aranyaprathet at the Cambodian border, linking up with the country's key industrial zone on the Eastern Seaboard.

Transport Minister Prajin Juntong will represent the Thai government in signing the MoC with Japan today.

Deputy government spokesman Veerachon Sukhonpatipak said Thailand and Japan would also jointly conduct a feasibility study on rail development linking Mae Sot in Tak province via Phitsanulok, Khon Kaen and Mukdahan, covering 718 km.

After the signing ceremony, Japanese rail experts will visit Thailand next month and work with the authorities to carry out surveys of the routes and designs, which will take about six months, Deputy Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith said.

Other issues such as financing are expected to be finalised by year-end, he said.

In a related development, the cabinet approved a draft strategic plan yesterday for public-private partnerships worth 1.41 trillion baht, mainly in infrastructure and public transportation services.

The five-year plan (2015-19) prepared by Boston Consulting Group (Thailand), which was hired by the State Enterprise Policy Office, will be announced later in the Royal Gazette.

Sansern Kaewkamnerd, another deputy government spokesman, said the plan would be divided into two categories — enterprises that deserve joint private investment and those in which the government supports the role of private investment.

The first category covers six enterprises including city's rail mass-transit development, tollways, ports, high-speed trains, telecommunications network development and high-speed internet systems.

The second category covers 14 enterprises including inter-city motorways, inland container depots, joint ticketing systems, business development and space management at airports, water management, irrigation, waste treatment, public education institute development, public health development, medicine and medical equipment development.

The government also supports private investment in infrastructure development for science, technology and innovation, digital economy-related enterprises, convention centres and housing projects for low-income earners, the elderly and the disabled.

Mr Sansern said if state agencies wanted to invest in the first category, they needed initial approval from the Public Private Partnership Committee.

