

DEVELOPMENT

PM dusts off South Land Bridge plan

CHATRUDEE THEPARAT

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha yesterday ordered a new feasibility study into a proposal to build a land bridge between the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea, seen as a potential key part of a new major economic development plan in the South.

Thailand now needs to build a new economy after having heavily relied on the export and tourism sectors, which are currently being seriously disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, he said.

The development of a transport link between the Andaman Sea on the western side, and the Gulf of Thailand on the eastern side, is part of the government's national development strategy, he added.

"I think this project will benefit the country's economy in the long term," he said yesterday.

The existing Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) alone isn't enough and the government is looking for new megaprojects to invest in for the country's 20-year national development strategy, he said.

The EEC began five years ago and its construction will take time to finish, he added.

According to the government's proposal, the land bridge project will stretch 100 kilometres long and consist of a road and a railway to link up sea

ports on the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea.

This new economic development project would be similar to those special economic development area plans in other regions, which are considered an important mechanism to drive the government's new economic ambitions forward, said government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri.

At the cabinet meeting yesterday, Gen Prayut also instructed all agencies concerned to study other potential for large economic development projects in the South, said Mr Anucha.

The government has already approved the budget that will be allocated to the Ministry of Transport to study the possibility of building up two new deep-sea ports, one for the Andaman Sea and the other for the Gulf of Thailand.

An additional budget has also been approved for a related study into a proposal to construct a double-track railway between Chumphon and Ranong, which, if built, is believed will play a significant role in boosting the development of other related businesses, including logistics.

A previous study carried out during the Thaksin Shinawatra administration found that 1.5 trillion baht would be needed to fund the construction of a land bridge between Pak Bara deep-sea port in the Andaman Sea in Satun, and an area of the Gulf of Thailand in Songkhla's Chana district.

In that study, the 1.5-trillion-baht budget was projected to cover the costs of constructing a railway, a motorway, a petroleum and gas pipeline system, and at least two special economic development areas for both heavy and light industries.