

S. American transcontinental railway to benefit many

by Mao Pengfei, Chen Weihua

RIO DE JANEIRO/BEIJING, June 1 (Xinhua) -- As China, Brazil and Peru recently announced the decision to conduct feasibility study on a proposed transcontinental railwayline in South America, government officials, experts and industry insiders all advocate that environment protection should be put in the first place.

The proposed mega project, connecting Brazil's Atlantic coast and Peru's Pacific coast, aimsto save transportation time across South America while reducing the cost of shipping from Brazil to China.

Since the proposed railway line will go though the Amazon rain forest, environment protection has been put as the priority even in the initial phase of the feasibility study.

During the research phase, evaluation on the project's effect on environment and methods toalleviate it will be the priority, said Wang Guoliang, director of Overseas Business Management Department at China Railway Eryuan Engineering Group (CREEC), who is also a member of the joint study team for this project.

According to Wang, all the evaluations, including its effect on rare species, soil and water conservation, cultural relics and life of local residents will be conducted according to the environment law.

The team will try to balance the technical requirement, financial feasibility, social and economic benefit and environment-friendly need, via thorough studies.

"Brazil has extremely severe environment laws. Any project to be undertaken in Brazil must observe these strict laws," said Charles Tang, chairman of the Brazil-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Experts also believe that in the long run the railway will make more contribution to the environmental protection than road system.

Automobile exhaust has been a main cause of air pollution, while railway can do a better job, said Hu Jianping, a senior engineer with CREEC.

"Among all the modes of transportation, railway is probably the most efficient, the most environmentally friendly," said Gao Zhikai, director of China National Association of International Studies.

"Even based on that, we still need to give the top priority to the environmental protection, especially if the railway line will go through the forest from Brazil all the way to the Pacific coast, so I would say that China and South American countries need to sit down together and very carefully go over all these details and make sure eventually all of us are winners," Gao said.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also emphasized the importance of environmental protection in his speech at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) during his four-nation tour to Latin America which ended last week.

The cooperation between China and Latin America is based on mutual respect for each other's culture and protection for the environment and biodiversity. Chinese equipment can meet the environmental protection requirements, said Li.

The proposed route, which extends about 5,000 km, includes 2,000 km of existing railway and 3,000 km to be constructed. Upon its completion, Brazil's products will have easier access to the Asian market and millions of tons of cargo will also be brought to Peruvian ports.

Latin American countries will get many jobs created through the project, Gao said, "poverty will be reduced, and millions of people will be better off. If China can do this over the past 30 years, I truly believe people in Latin American countries can do equally well or even better."