



State Railway of Thailand History

Background , Foundation Day Railway Company , Who commanded the Department of Royal Train



From the distant ages of the past up to the time when the city of Bangkok was chosen as the new capital of Siam, with the exception of the water-borne traffic along rivers and canals, the only means of inland communication in the country had been those borne by animals such as oxen, buffaloes, horses, elephants with howdahs and bullock-carts, which had indeed been very popular among the people of that time for their daily use in travelling as well as in transporting goods from place to place. Communication by rail was still then completely unknown.

As days rolled by and finally during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), a Royal Proclamation pertaining to the construction on the first state railway line in Siam from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima in the Northeast was issued on March 9, 1891. The Ministry of Public Works, under the auspices of His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, had engaged Mr. G.M. Campbell, a distinguished businessman from England, to undertake the construction of this railway line. The "Foundation Laying" ceremony was presided over by King Chulalongkorn on March 9, 1891. The opening day of the first rail service from Bangkok to Ayutthaya, March 26, 1894, was considered as a red-letter day ever to be remembered in the annals of the Royal State Railways of Siam.

The office of the Royal State Railways of Siam was first established under the control of the Ministry of Public Works in October 1890, and was divided into two departments, namely the Northern and Southern Railways which controlled the networks of the east and west banks of the Chao Phaya river respectively. Its responsibilities were then to administer all state railway functions, to supervise and control private railways in accordance with the provisions of the concession granted to each of them. The director-generals of the two departments and most of their principal staff were Europeans. In order to cut down management expenditure while improving the organization, the two railway departments were finally merged into one and known as the Department of the Royal State Railways of Siam since June 5, 1917. The new Department was entrusted to the direction of Prince Purachatra of Kambaengbejr who was

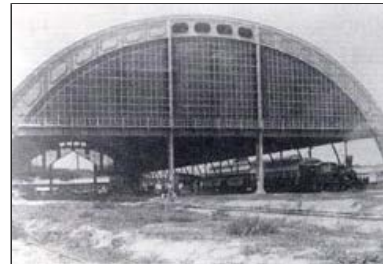


appointed its first Commissioner-General. It was greatly due to his ability, unstinted hard-work, and to the support of his colleagues that the Department was significantly enlarged and modernised. It was he who introduced the first diesel locomotive to the system in 1982 and his far-sighted initiation was carried over through generations



under a decentralisation program which was finally completed in 1976, some 48 years later. At the time of the merging of the Northern and Southern Railway Offices, The East Bank System still adopted a standard gauge of 1.4435 m, different from that of the West Bank system which was of 1.00 m gauge. This created a great deal of inconvenience to the progress of the enterprise itself. A Royal


Decision was, therefore, given for the unification of gauges, that is to say, all new state railway lines were to be built to meter gauge, and all existing 1.435 m. lines to be converted within ten years into meter gauge in uniformity with those of the the railways in the neighbouring countries, i.e., Malaysia, Burma and Cambodia. The conversion was commenced on November 20, 1920 and completed in the year 1930.



As regards the progress of the railways development at the end of King Chulalongkorn reign (1868 - 1910) the total length of lines open to traffic amounted to 774 km. At the end of King Vajiravudhis reign (1910 - 25), the length was increased to 1,804 km and by the end of King Prajhipok's reign (1924-30) and King Anandhamahidolis reign (1934-46), 418 km and 259 km Respectively were added. Total length of the lines was 2,481 km in 1946. The fact that the Royal State Railway of Siam did gradually develop and eminent rate in bestowing progress upon the country is beyond doubt. However, the far East theatre of World War II at last broke out in 1941 and Siam inevitably fell into its terrible clutches. Railway buildings, lines and bridges as well as rolling stock and workshops were air-raided and destroyed almost throughout the whole Kingdom. With the coming of peace in 1945 the once well organized Royal state Railways of Siam emerged from the tumult of destruction only to survive under the help of ruins. Restoration program was immediately planned by the Government to bring the Railways back to the pre-war condition, and to hasten its development for the benefit of the public which was the impassioned spirit of its venerable creator King Chulalongkorn.

In 1951, the Royal State railways of Siam became a state enterprise by virtue of the State Railway of Thailand Act B.E. 2494 (1951). It now has a total route length of 4,041 km. At present, the Railway of Thailand is the largest state enterprise of Thailand in terms of manpower with a total staff about 26,412 (Officers = 10,354; Technical, skilled labour and others = 16,058).

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