

Fast train to S'pore 'good idea'
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A fast train between Malaysia and Singapore is a "good idea", Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was quoted as saying Monday ahead of a meeting with his counterpart from the neighbouring city-state.

"I think the train is a good idea," Abdullah told Singapore's The Straits Times in an interview.

The government last year received a private proposal from Malaysian property and utility firm YTL Corp for a high-speed train link. Transport minister Chan Kong Choy said in March that the proposal was still being evaluated.

The government would "help facilitate" such a project but would not finance it, The Straits Times quoted Abdullah as saying ahead of Monday's meeting with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in Langkawi island.

"Second, we should look at the impact it has on other sectors, like our highways and airports. But if a case can be made, it would be good to have," Abdullah said.

An existing rail service from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore takes about seven hours, while the fast train would make the journey in 90 minutes.

Asked about controversial plans to build a bridge between the two countries, Abdullah told the newspaper: "As economic ties grow, everyone will want to see better links between Malaysia and Singapore."

Malaysia last year ditched long-fought-over plans to build the span to replace an ageing causeway, saying Singapore's demands for airspace access and sand for reclamation projects in return for its agreement were unacceptable.

Two-day retreat

On Friday Abdullah said in Malaysia that while both countries have "a different approach" to the subject, eventually more bridges would have to be built to cope with increasing traffic flow.

Construction of the span has been among a number of unresolved bilateral issues the two neighbours have squabbled over for years.

Others include the price of water supplied to Singapore, the future of Malaysian-owned railway land in the city-state and rival territorial claims to a rocky islet off Malaysia's southern Johor state.

"I believe bilateral relations with Singapore have improved," The Straits Times quoted Abdullah as saying in the interview.

But he said some political issues need to be resolved and he has told the foreign minister to begin negotiations.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the two-day "retreat" will be the

first between the two leaders.

"The retreat will be an opportunity for the two prime ministers to discuss possible new areas of cooperation and build on the long-standing close ties between the two countries," the Singapore ministry said in a statement.

Relations have often been stormy since Singapore left the Malaysian federation in 1965 over ethnic issues but they have undergone a marked improvement in recent years, especially in economic cooperation.

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