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'Malaysia, Singapore like tongue and teeth'

CONJOINED FUTURE: On the occasion of Singapore's 50th National Day, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak reflects on the ties that bind Malaysia with its southern neighbour

FIFTY years ago today, Singapore became an independent state. As a 12-year-old, I was aware of the significance of Malaysia gaining a new neighbour and of our two countries settling our bound-

aries — both to continue independently on the adventure of independence, with all the opportunities and perils that developing nations faced in the 1960s.

Of course, we had a special interest in Singapore; history and geography bound us together. We have a Malay proverb for it,

sedangkan lidah lagi terigit, or we are like tongue and teeth. In other words, we were destined to be conjoined and need to cooperate, not compete.

Over the decades, we observed Singapore's progress. And we, too, mourned the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew in February.

His vision underpinned Singapore's advances, and he was ad-

mired by friends and critics alike. Southeast Asia lost a statesman when he died. His presence is missed during landmark celebrations, but his legacy is secure — it is the Singapore of today.

Malaysia and Singapore have had differences, but we have always achieved the most when we worked pragmatically together — and we have much to be proud of.

In 1967, we were among the five founders of Asean, an organisation that has kept peace in the most eth-

nically and religiously diverse region on Earth.

We came together in the Five Power Defence Arrangement in 1971; we cooperated closely at the United Nations in the 1980s to ensure a settled future in Indochina; and today, we are linked in so many ways.

Take trade cooperation, for instance. We are each other's second-largest trading partner after China.

In 2014, Singapore was Malaysia's second-largest trading partner globally and the largest trading partner

in Asean. Singapore was also the second-largest source of foreign investment in Malaysia in 2014, and I am pleased that while Iskandar Malaysia and Penang have been the main focus of investment from Singapore, Singaporeans are now also beginning to look further afield, including Sabah and Sarawak.

In terms of tourism, the total number of visitors to Malaysia from Singapore in 2014 was 13.9 million — an increase of 5.7 per cent from 2013.

But, we want even more of you to

visit us, and this year, Tourism Malaysia is hoping we can attract 14.5 million guests from Singapore.

The changed approach between our two countries was emphasised soon after I became prime minister.

The win-win solution of the Points of Agreement in 2010 — after a 20-year deadlock — was an example of how we chose to move forward in a spirit of mutual benefit and put a longstanding stumbling block behind us.

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