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PRIME NEWS

Najib, Lee in talks to enhance ties

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RESOLVING ISSUES: Govts to firm up details of HSR project and Friendship Bridge

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ISSUES related to improving connectivity between Malaysia and Singapore, and an agreement to tap Singaporean expertise on urban search and rescue practices will be among the highlights of the 6th Malaysia-Singapore Leaders Retreat here today.

The governments of both countries are also expected to firm up details of the High Speed Rail (HSR) project which will connect Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, the Friendship Bridge and also witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the Cooperation in Developing Urban Search and Rescue Capabilities.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is leading the Malaysian delegation which includes six cabinet ministers, will engage in discussions with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong, that will further improve strong bilateral ties between the two neighbouring countries.

Lee is expected to announce the HSR terminus in Singapore, following Malaysia's announcement last year that it would have its terminus for the mega project in

Bandar Malaysia in Sungai Besi.

The three options for the terminus in Singapore are Tuas West, Jurong East and the City Centre.

Malaysian High Commissioner to Singapore, Datuk Husni Zai Yacob, said details such as the dual locations of the customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) checkpoints for both nations, frequency of the high-speed trains and depots are on the agenda for discussions.

"The Singapore terminus for the high-speed train is expected to be announced and its details will be known at the retreat.

"This includes the dual location CIQ, as well as the frequency band and location of the depot," he told Malaysian reporters ahead of the two-day retreat, which began last night.

The Friendship Bridge, which was mooted by Najib and Lee at last year's Leaders Retreat in Putrajaya, was another top agenda.

The bridge, which will complement the existing Causeway and Second Link, is an iconic project that will help ease traffic flow and the movement of people between the two countries.

About 84,000 people use the Causeway daily, averaging about 2.5 million a month.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at a dinner in conjunction with the 6th Malaysia-Singapore Leaders Retreat in Singapore yesterday. Bernama pic

Husni said the Friendship Bridge would include a rail and road crossing and was a project that signified the good relationship between the two nations.

"It will be an iconic project that signifies the importance of the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. It will be a modern bridge which will incorporate road, rail and pedestrian crossing."

Malaysia's National Security Council and Singapore's Civil Defence Force will sign a memorandum of understanding in the Cooperation in Developing Urban Search and Rescue Capabilities.

Husni said the cooperation between the agencies would involve the Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART) and in other areas.

"The cooperation we are looking

for involves search and rescue operations in urban area as (Singapore) has experience and expertise in this. We will, and we are learning from the best practices," he said.

Another MoU that will be signed between the two countries is the Supplemental Agreement to the Agreement for the Construction and Operation of a Ferry Terminal and the Operation of a Ferry Service between Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

Husni said such efforts to boost connectivity bodes well, especially following the recent decision to increase the frequency of the Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad shuttle service between JB Sentral and Woodlands.

The train service, which can accommodate 300 passengers per trip, is now up to 16 services per day from the previous four, due to huge

demand from Malaysians, Singaporeans and tourists who use the service.

Najib is scheduled to meet the representatives of the Malaysian Association in Singapore and attend a dialogue session with top business leaders and another session with the Malaysian community in Singapore.

He is expected to deliver a keynote address at the Economic Society of Singapore (ESS) annual dinner tonight.

Last year, Singapore was Malaysia's second largest trading partner globally and the largest trading partner among Asean member countries with a total trade of RM194.52 billion (US\$59.5 billion), between the two countries. This year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Singapore.