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'Bilateral ties at their best'

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STRONG BONDS: PM praises relations with Singapore, describes it as the best in history

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THE bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Singapore is at its best in history, thanks to the effort by both governments in placing priority on the people's interest.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the warm ties between the two countries had enabled both sides to enjoy economic and security benefits.

"I am delighted that relations between Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and I, and therefore, between our two governments, are now so warm. Indeed, I think it would be no exaggeration to say they have never been better in our countries' history.

"This closeness, and the agreements that follow, are of tangible economic and security benefit to all Malaysians and Singaporeans. This should be the priority of national leaders — ideally the people's interests above all else," he said in his speech entitled "Malaysia-Singapore: The Ties That Bind" at the annual dinner of the Economic Society of Singapore here last night.

Around 700 people attended the dinner, which coincided with the Malaysia-Singapore 6th Leaders' Retreat. Present were Lee and his wife, Ho Ching, Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Malaysian High Commissioner to Singapore Datuk



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak** delivering his speech during a tea reception at the **6th Malaysia-Singapore Leaders' Retreat** in Singapore yesterday. **Bernama pic**

Husni Zai Yaacob, and Malaysian and Singaporean cabinet ministers.

Najib said the ties between both countries ran deep and went back a long way, and whatever issues that arose were always addressed in the interest of its peoples.

"We are not just neighbours. Throughout the shared history of Malaysia and Singapore relations over the last five decades, it is clear that our two nations are intertwined and, in particular, enjoy very strong people-to-people connectivity.

"Singapore's Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong yesterday reminisced with me over lunch about the time he spent in Temerloh, Pahang, when he was a child, as his parents had moved there from Singapore during the Japanese occupation when he was 4 years old.

"Countless Singaporeans and Malaysians have stories to tell about

living in' or visiting each others' countries. In fact, many of them have family members and close relatives in both countries."

Najib said as neighbouring countries, differences of opinions would arise but both sides had managed them and moved forward.

"We have a Malay proverb for it: *Sedangkan lidah lagi tergigit*. We are like tongue and teeth. In other words, we are close and need to work together to find positive solutions."

He cited the resolution on the Points of Agreement in 2010 over the Malaysian railway land in the republic, which was reached after a 20-year deadlock.

"It was an example of how we chose to move forward in a spirit of friendship and mutual benefit, and put a long-standing stumbling block behind us."

On Singaporean investments in

Malaysia, Najib said the bulk of them were focused on Iskandar Malaysia and Penang, but there were also Singaporeans who had started investing in other economic corridors in Malaysia, including in Sabah and Sarawak.

"We welcome this, as it supports Malaysia's move up the value chain and spurs innovation, both of which are crucial in sustaining our economic momentum."

When speaking to reporters earlier, Najib said he wanted to see greater economic integration between Malaysia and Singapore.

"This means investments from both sides, freeing up the flow of goods and services, even professionals working between the two countries and doing away with non-tariff barriers, for example. That will help strengthen our economic integration."