

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	20 JULY 2016

PM: HSR will transform economy

NST-20/7/2016

MoU SIGNED:

Project will develop towns along rail's path, says Najib

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MALAYSIA and Singapore yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding to develop the High-Speed Rail (HSR) link that will drastically cut Kuala Lumpur-Singapore travel time to just 90 minutes.

The MoU marks the firmest commitment yet by the two governments to the iconic and most ambitious project by the two close neighbours after their leaders embraced the idea three years ago.

The 350km-long HSR link, Southeast Asia's first, will deploy super-fast trains that will run at an operating speed of 320kph, with a design speed of 350kph.

At the signing here, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong hailed the project as a "game-changer" that would transform the economic landscape and the way of life of the people along the corridor.

"Beyond the numbers, if you look in terms of the big picture, this project will bring about a tremendous change," said Najib.

He said this would not only benefit the Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, but the towns in between.

"All these towns along the way will see a new impetus in terms of their economic development. So when you ask the question of how it's going to impact our economies, the short answer is that it will be a



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong witnessing the signing of a MoU for the HSR project by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department **Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan** (right) and Singaporean Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Minister **Khaw Boon Wan** in Putrajaya yesterday. Pic by Fariz Iswadi Ismail

game changer," he said.

Lee also spoke of the economic benefits that would come from being "next door to one another, 1½ hours away".

"That means opportunities for our tourists, opportunities for people from other countries... you can get both destinations for the price of one," the Singapore leader said.

Both governments have set an ambitious 10-year target to develop, construct and roll out the project.

It will be a tight timeline, given the scale and complexity of the infrastructure, which will have eight stations along the way.

"We will put our efforts in a collaborative manner and work closely together so that the deadline is met," said Najib.

He also said the tender process for the project would be fair, transparent and objective as "the image and

integrity of both countries will be at stake".

The MoU was signed by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan and Singapore's Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan.

Also present were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai and Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

MyHSR chief executive officer Mohd Nur Ismal Mohamed Kamal told the *New Straits Times* that the business model for the HSR would be based on Malaysia's lessons from European models.

"The way the railway industry works in the UK, it will increase the probability of having a reliable operator who will focus purely on operation and ensuring the best service for the people.

"For the HSR here, there will be separation of AssetCo and InfraCo. The InfraCo is MyHSR, who will pay for civil infrastructure, while the AssetCo will be managed by a private consortium. We will call for an international tender for the most suitable private consortium," he said.

Nur Ismal also said tenders for consultancy would be rolled out next month, while for the systems work, the tenders would be called towards the end of next year.

"We expect tenders for civil work to come out in 2018," he said.

Najib said the MoU would be superseded with a bilateral agreement between the two countries. It is expected to be signed by the end of this year.

The HSR line will begin in Bandar Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, and end at Jurong East in Singapore, and will include a double-track on a standard gauge powered by high-

speed technologies.

It will have eight stops, a terminus each in Bandar Malaysia and Jurong East, and six transit stations in Putrajaya, Seremban, Ayer Keroh in Malacca and Muar, Batu Pahat and Iskandar Puteri (formerly Nusajaya) in Johor.

At least 30 sets of eight-car trains may be required to serve the line. There will be three types of services: express, domestic and shuttle, the latter between Iskandar Puteri and Jurong East.

There will be two operators for the services: one for express and shuttle, the other for the domestic service.

The MoU included key points of agreement on the project, including the technical parameters, commercial model, customs, immigration & quarantine clearance, safety & security matters, regulatory framework, as well as project management. **Additional reporting by Azura Abas**