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Malaysia, Singapore ink HSR deal

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'GAME-CHANGER':
Project will bring nations even closer, say leaders

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MALAYSIA and Singapore yesterday sealed a landmark bilateral pact to develop Southeast Asia's first-ever High-Speed Rail (HSR) network linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Hailed as a "game-changer" for the two neighbouring states, the 350-km link will cut travel time to just 90 minutes from more than four hours by road.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his Singapore counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, witnessed the signing of the agreement to develop the mammoth project, with the trains slated to run by Dec 31, 2026.

The eight-station line will link both cities via a 25m-high bridge over the Johor Straits.

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

It was also witnessed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, and Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean.

Both leaders said the project would help bring the two nations even closer together, improve connectivity, deepen people-to-people ties and provide a catalyst for further economic cooperation.

"Towns along the way will definitely see improvements in terms of economic activities and the project will definitely open a new landscape in terms of bilateral relations," Najib said.

The agreement formalised technical safety and security requirements, commercial, financing, procurement regulatory frameworks, as well as Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) arrangements for the HSR.

Lee said there was a strong political will to ensure the project was successful.

"It is a complex project and we are making long-term commitments, but there is strong political will on both sides to ensure the project is done right and is a success... I look forward to taking my first train ride to Putrajaya in 10 years time," Lee said.

"It is an important milestone in our relationship. Like Najib said, it will transform the way we interact, socialise and do business and for the better," he said.

"Gives both sides big stakes to keep the relationship stable and warm," the Singapore leader said.

Both governments will issue a joint tender for a Joint Development Partner by early next year and will call for an international tender for the supply of HSR trains late next year.

"We will be issuing tender in the next quarter for the project delivery partner and the international (HSR) tenders will be issued by the fourth quarter of 2017," said Najib.

A bilateral committee will be established to oversee all aspects of the project, which affect the cross-border train services and all other matters set out in the agreement.

There will be a non-stop service between the two terminals — Bandar Malaysia and Jurong East — and a shorter shuttle service between Jurong East and Iskandar Puteri in Johor. There will also be a domestic service from Bandar Malaysia to Iskandar Puteri. It will make stops at five stations along the way — Putrajaya, Seremban, Ayer Keroh, Muar and Batu Pahat.

There will be two operators, one for international services and the other for domestic services. The tenders for the two operators will be called later.

Most of the line, 335km of it, will be in Malaysia. Only 15km will be in Singapore.

The CIQ will be co-located in three sites — Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Iskandar Puteri. **Additional reporting by Hashini Kavishtri Kannan**

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong witnessing Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan (seated, right) and Singapore's Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Khaw Boon Wan signing the High-Speed Rail deal in Putrajaya yesterday. With them are Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, and Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean.