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M'sia inks deal on high-speed rail

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Bilateral agreement signed with Singapore, project to be completed in 2026

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SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA



Historic signing: Najib and Lee witnessing the bilateral agreement between both governments on the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore HSR project in Putrajaya. Abdul Rahman (front right) and Khaw (front left) signed on behalf of their governments. Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (back right) and Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean (back left). — MOHD SAHAR MISNI/The Star

PUTRAJAYA: The inking of the agreement on the High Speed Rail (HSR) project marks a new dawn in the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore.

With both governments committed to its success, the HSR, which is expected to be in operation in 2026, is the game-changer that would see the two countries work closely more than ever before.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong witnessed the historic signing of the bilateral agreement for the project at the end of the Seventh Annual Leaders' Retreat here yesterday.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan and Singapore's Minister for Transport Khaw Boon Wan signed on behalf of their respective governments.

Addressing the media at a joint press conference later, Najib described the signing as momentous and that the project would change the relationship between the two countries.

"It will change the way we conduct business, the way people move and also lifestyles.

"We have managed to overcome challenges and issues in a relatively short time to have the agreement signed today (yesterday) and this reflects our commitment to get the ball rolling as soon as possible."

Echoing Najib's sentiment on how important this project was for both countries, Lee described it as

"a significant milestone in our relationship".

"As the Prime Minister said, it will transform the way we interact, socialise and do business.

"It gives both sides a big stake in keeping the relationship stable and warm. We have a long way to go due to the complexity of the project and we are making a long-term commitment.

"But there's a strong political will on both sides to ensure that the project is done right and is a success.

"I look forward to taking my first

train ride to Putrajaya in 10 years' time," said Lee.

The agreement formalises various aspects of the project, including the technical, safety, security and financial areas, as well as the regulatory framework and the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex for the HSR.

The two countries would award a joint tender for a development partner early next year to provide operational and technical advice.

The international tender for the asset company is expected to be

issued by the end of the next year.

Najib said both governments were committed to the deadline, and that although this would be 10 years from now, the time frame was relatively short, given the size and complexity of the project.

"This means we have to work closely together, be very focused and overcome challenges as we move ahead," he said.

Asked how the governments planned to ensure that the project meets its deadline as well as the estimated construction cost, Najib

said the HSR must be commercially viable to get long-term financing, which he was confident would not be an issue.

On whether there were plans to extend the HSR line northwards, Najib replied: "I don't think we should add to the complexity and magnitude of this project. Even the KL-Singapore stretch itself is gargantuan.

"We will just confine to this. We will make sure we deliver according to the time schedule and on budget as well. In fact, it is even better if it's below budget."

On whether the HSR would be a security issue, Lee said it was not possible to close the borders just because there were such problems, but instead, the authorities would have to make the area more secure.

"We already have hundreds of thousands of people crossing our borders every day.

"It is the busiest border crossing in the world. So, we have to manage the problem with close cooperation between the border agencies of both countries.

"This was, in fact, one of the main issues to be discussed and resolved and a clear understanding was reached before we proceed with the project.

"We want to make it clear that it is safe and secure and at the same time, convenient for passengers. I think we have thought long and hard on this.

"We will make it work," said Lee.

Watch the video
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