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'Bidding will be transparent'

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Strong ties: Najib getting a warm welcome from Abe upon arrival at the latter's office in Tokyo. — Bernama

PM assures Japan will get a fair shot at making offer for HSR project

TOKYO: Supertrain maker Japan has got an assurance that it will have a fair shot at bidding for the coveted Malaysia-Singapore High Speed Rail (HSR) project.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said he told his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe that the international bidding process will be "open and transparent".

Confirming that the bilateral agreement with Singapore on the HSR would be signed early next month, he said the bidding would take place in the fourth quarter of 2017.

"This project is uppermost in the minds of the Government.

"All issues are more or less settled," Najib told a joint news conference with Abe after their bilateral talks at the latter's office yesterday.

The Star reported yesterday that Japan was drawing up a special financing package in its bid to be involved in the HSR project.

Touted as South-East Asia's most ambitious infrastructure project, the project will link Malaysia and Singapore over a 340km HSR track.

Malaysia and Singapore have agreed to split the cost of the pro-

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ject, estimated at between RM50bil and RM60bil.

Besides Japan, firms from China, South Korea and Europe are also eyeing the project.

Najib, who is on his third consecutive annual trip to Japan since 2014, also spoke of Malaysia's support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement to be realised.

He said he hoped that US President-elect Donald Trump would not revoke the TPP as he had pledged to during the presidential campaign.

"On the TPP, we are on the same page as Japan. We have passed a resolution in Parliament to participate in the TPP and so the path is clear for Malaysia to go ahead," he added.

Najib wished Abe well on his planned meeting with Trump in

New York today.

"Malaysia and all TPP countries very much hope for a positive outcome," he added.

Earlier this month, Japanese lawmakers voted to ratify the deal which, if implemented, would create a free trade zone encompassing 40% of global GDP.

In his remarks, Abe said he had spoken of Japan's keen interest to participate in the HSR project.

He said he concurred with Najib that the TPP must be carried through, adding that Japan had put a lot of effort into it.

The Japanese leader also discussed security and regional issues with Najib, and said both countries which sat in the UN Security Council shared a similar stand on many international issues.

Both leaders earlier witnessed the signing of an agreement for Malaysia to receive two Japanese ocean patrol vessels for use by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA).

Memorandums of Cooperation were also signed between the Japan External Trade Organisation, Malaysian Investment Development Agency and the Malaysia External

Trade Development Corporation.

Earlier during a lunch meeting with key Japanese captains of industry, Najib urged them to continue investing in Malaysia's growth and development.

He said Malaysia was moving towards being a high-income nation and this opened up lots of business opportunities.

"We are no longer competing at the low technology level and are moving up the value chain.

"Malaysia will continue with its policy of remaining at the forefront of development and I encourage Japanese firms to look at the opportunities available," he said.

The Prime Minister cited renewable energy, green technology and high-tech developments as some of the fields that Japan could exploit.

Also present were Sumitomo Corp chairman Kazuo Omori, East Japan Railway Co president/CEO Tetsuro Tomita, Taisei Construction chairman Takashi Yamauchi, NEC Corp chairman Nobuhiro Endo, Mitsui Co Ltd CEO Tatsuo Yasunaga, IHI Corp CEO Tsugio Mitsuoka, Tokyo Gas Co CEO Michiaki Hirose and Japan Petroleum Exploration Co CEO Hideichi Okada.