

Malaysia to proceed with RTS project

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But construction will only start next year after some issues are ironed out

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JOHOR BARU: Malaysia has agreed to proceed with the Rapid Transit System (RTS) between Bukit Chagar and Woodlands in Singapore, but there are issues that need to be ironed out.

These include inking three new agreements, which are expected to be signed by both countries next year. Construction works for the RTS are also only expected to start next year.

But Malaysia will not be required to pay any further compensation despite the deadline for the second extension ending yesterday.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the new proposed RTS between Malaysia and Singapore would save taxpayers at least RM1.77bil.

"Most of the savings came from land cost involving the proposed station in Bukit Chagar," he said, adding that the land was previously owned by the Johor Ruler.

The new estimated cost for the project is RM3.16bil compared with the original amount of RM4.93bil under the previous government.

"This will be 36% less than the original amount," he said after visiting the Bangunan Sultan Iskandar Customs, Immigration and Quarantine complex here yesterday.



However, Dr Mahathir said a bridge would be a better solution to solve the traffic congestion between both countries.

"The RTS will only solve part of the congestion issue because many motorists from Johor, in particular motorcyclists, cannot bring their motorcycles into the RTS and they would find it hard to travel to work.

"We want to build a bridge but Singapore does not want to agree," he said sarcastically, adding that this problem would persist "until the year 3000".

He also said Johor was a generous state as it had been selling water to the island republic at three sen

since 1926, which had since amounted to billions in losses.

"We are subsidising the people and the government of Singapore but Johor sells Melaka water at 50 sen. It is treating the other state in Malaysia with less generosity compared with Singapore," he said.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said the RTS project could not be immediately started and that he expected construction works to begin only after the three agreements were signed early next year.

He said the agreements expected to be signed between both countries were the amended bilateral agree-

ment, joint venture agreement and sole concession agreement.

Loke stressed that there were no delays in the project and Malaysia would not be paying any additional compensation to Singapore.

He also said Malaysia was now proposing an LRT system similar to the ones in the Klang Valley area.

Loke declined to elaborate further on the proposal, including the revised fare and the size of the station, until the agreements had been signed.

"The government is committed to addressing the congestion issue between Johor Baru and Singapore in a comprehensive manner by

Fielding the media:

Dr Mahathir looking on as Loke speaks to reporters during a press conference at the Bangunan Sultan Iskandar Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex in Johor Baru.

working together with Singapore," he said.

In a related development, a Singapore Ministry of Transport spokesman said Singapore welcomed Malaysia's decision to proceed with the project.

The spokesman said both sides were now discussing the changes to the project.

"As the changes will require amendments to the RTS Link Agreement, the discussions will take some time. Both sides are working hard on this," added the spokesman.

It was reported that Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar has consented to hand over his plot of land in Bukit Chagar to the government without any cost for the RTS project - but with one condition.

He said the RTS project, linking 4km of rail between Bukit Chagar here and Woodlands in Singapore must continue as soon as possible as he understood the plight of the people who needed to commute to Singapore.

The initial six-month grace period approved by Singapore expired on Sept 30. This was followed by a one-month extension granted by the republic, which meant that the Malaysian government was to have made a decision by Oct 31.

The extra time was given without Singapore making any financial demands over the delay.