

PM'S VISIT TO BOOST KL-S'PORE TIES

Anwar, Lee may discuss connectivity, water, as well as trade and investment



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SINGAPORE

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim is visiting Singapore at a time where the republic's relationship with Malaysia is perhaps at its most cordial.

The emotional baggage that had held ties hostage for so long, such as the 1962 Malaysia-Singapore water agreement, has dissipated.

Anwar's last official visit across the Causeway was in September 2018, shortly after Pakatan Harapan came to power.

Anwar, who did not hold any ministerial post in the PH administration, which collapsed in 2020, delivered a lecture at a summit there on the importance of bilateral ties between the two countries.

Today, he will be in Singapore for the first time since being sworn in as prime minister on Nov 24 last year.

He will meet his counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, at the Istana to discuss a wide range of issues.

Hot-button issues may include connectivity, water, as well as trade and investment, including poultry exports and digital economy.

Anwar would also meet President Halimah Yacob, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir at a briefing for Malaysian media here yesterday.

Anwar and Lee will witness the signing of memoranda of understanding to promote cyber data security, as well as digital and green economy.

The prime minister, who will be accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, will also meet the Malaysian diaspora in the republic.

"His visit, at the invitation of Lee, reflects the importance and



An artist's impression made in 2017 of the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail's Iskandar Puteri station. Land connectivity are among the issues to be discussed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his Singaporean counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong. file pic

strength of the relationship between the two countries

"As close and immediate neighbours, as well as partners in Asean, Malaysia and Singapore will continue to work to deepen their cooperation.

"Based on geographical proximity, with the many benefits and some challenges, this relationship is bound by our shared history, cultural similarities and people-to-people ties, including family ties," Zambry said.

He said connectivity, particularly the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) and Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS), as well as water and trade, would likely be discussed by both leaders.

"We have issues that require us to continue to engage among ourselves.

"There are also not complex but straightforward issues, including boundaries and demarcation of our boundaries," Zambry said.

CONNECTIVITY

The two nations may look to restore air links that used to see flights from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore being one of the busiest air routes in the world before the pandemic.

They will also want to boost land connectivity by resuming talks and works on the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore HSR and Jo-

hor Baru-Singapore RTS

Another subject may be on goods and people moving between the two countries on a daily basis via land and water.

As many as 900,000 Malaysians work in Singapore, the Malaysian Employers Federation reportedly said.

Among them, more than a third commute from Johor Baru.

WATER

Water disputes have hit bilateral ties harder than most other rows. The countries, therefore, may want to deepen efforts to resolve them.

The dispute, largely over disagreement on how much Singapore should pay for water from Malaysia, started in 2000.

It was kept under the radar after 2003 until Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's return as prime minister in the 2018 election.

In 2019, Malaysia renewed calls for Singapore to revise the water price.

In September 2021, Malaysia's environment and water minister said in a written reply to Parliament that the review of the water price would resume once the pandemic situation in both countries had "recovered completely".

TRADE (AND POULTRY EXPORTS)

Singapore is Malaysia's second-largest trading partner. The

countries will be happy to bolster trade figures and cooperation, and remove barriers.

Singapore accounted for Malaysia's largest value of exports among Asean nations at RM232.57 billion last year, and was the latter's second biggest source of imports after China.

For poultry, Malaysia — under former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob — had in May last year banned live chicken exports to Singapore to stabilise domestic supplies and prices.

Before the ban, Singapore imported 3.6 million birds a month from Malaysia, one third of its chicken supply.

The export ban has been lifted in phases from October last year,

and some 1.8 million birds are exported to Singapore each month, or about 50 per cent of the total before the ban.

This will be Anwar's third official visit since taking office, after trips to Indonesia on Jan 8 to 9 and Brunei on Jan 24 to 25.

Besides Zambry, Anwar will be joined by Transport Minister Anthony Loke, International Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz and Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil.

Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi will also be part of the delegation.