

# Key events to propel bilateral ties

## Malaysia and Singapore sign historic deal for special economic zone

**JOHOR BARU:** It was a momentous occasion for relations between Malaysia and Singapore with the linking of the country's third crossing with the island republic and also the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the setting up of a special economic zone (SEZ) here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong were present at both of these historic events, with the first involving the completion of the connecting span for the Rapid Transit System Link (RTS) across the Straits of Johor.

The project is on track to be fully operational by Jan 1, 2027.

The span is the meeting point of the project's marine viaduct between Johor Baru and Singapore.

As at Dec 31 last year, the total progress for the construction of the RTS project, which links Bukit Chagar here and Woodlands North station in Singapore, was 65%.

At a joint press conference held

soon after, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said both countries are committed to making the project a success with good cooperation as discussions between the two teams were held regularly.

He said the progress level of RTS marine viaduct construction is currently at 68%, terrestrial viaduct construction at 31%, station construction at 41%, and Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex (CIQ) at 3.22%.

"We are 100% confident this project will run smoothly and will be able to begin operations on Jan 1, 2027. The development of the project is on schedule and we are very committed to making it a success.

"Congratulations to both teams from Malaysia and Singapore who have cooperated well and worked hard to ensure this project runs according to schedule," he added.

Loke said the RTS fares will only be made known when the project nears its completion date.

"The fare price will be set by the responsible party and we will be

notified before the RTS Link is ready and operational. Certainly, the fare price will be competitive and attractive to ensure that users of both countries can enjoy a comfortable cross-border journey.

"Most importantly, RTS will shorten cross-border travel time, especially when immigration checks for both countries are carried out at the same location.

"That is the most important component of this project," he said.

Loke added that the government is open to receiving suggestions, including those from the private sector, for improving connectivity between Malaysia and Singapore, such as establishing a ferry service.

"The matter, however, needs to be agreed upon by both countries because such an initiative involves many components, including infrastructure, facilities and CIQ facilities," he added.

Meanwhile, Singapore acting Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat said construction at the island republic side for the RTS project is

two-thirds complete.

He said the next phase will see the installation and testing of railway tracks as well as signalling and communications systems.

The RTS project is a commuter train network spanning about 4km with stations in Bukit Chagar here and Woodlands North, Singapore.

With a capacity of up to 10,000 passengers per hour in each direction and a journey time of about five minutes between the two stations, the RTS line is aimed at providing an easy and comfortable journey between Singapore and Johor Baru.

Later, Anwar and Lee witnessed the signing of an MOU to set up a SEZ in Johor.

The historic MOU was signed by Economic Minister Rafizi Ramli and Singapore's Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong.

The MOU signing comes just two months after the 10th Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat in October last year.

In a joint statement, Rafizi and Gan said Malaysia and Singapore

have agreed to work towards a full-fledged agreement and provide an update on the SEZ during the two countries' 11th Leaders' Retreat.

"Under the MOU, Malaysia and Singapore will work towards enhancing cross-border flow of goods and people as well as strengthening the business ecosystem within the SEZ to support investments.

"The SEZ rides on the strong growth of Johor and significant investments in the region by Singapore," they said in a statement after the momentous event here.

The two ministers added that, apart from the agreement, Malaysia and Singapore will also explore several other initiatives that will be built towards the SEZ.