

'HSR can be revived with private sector backing'

PUTRAJAYA: The Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) project can only be revived with full participation from private entities and minimal government expenditure, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the government faced several constraints, including unresolved issues that must be prioritised in the public's best interest.

He said all mega projects would be put on hold to prioritise critical infrastructure initiatives.

"Our position (Malaysia) is to invite participation from the private sector because the government has limitations.

"We are focusing on (more) pressing issues such as flood mitigation, education and health-care, which are priorities for at least the next year or two.

"As such, the main project may need to be deferred to allow us to settle some outstanding matters.

"But we are still waiting for promising contributions from the private sector to proceed when necessary," he said during a joint press conference with

Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong.

Anwar said while there had been initial proposals, any decision would only be made once all considerations were thoroughly examined.

"It will only move forward if there is full participation from the private sector and minimal government spending," he said.

It was reported that Japanese firms, including East Japan Railway Co, had opted out of participating in the HSR project ahead of the request for information (RFI) deadline.

It was reported the firms had intended to use the Shinkansen bullet train system in Japan for the project, but decided that it would be too risky to do so without financial help from the Malaysian government.

Wong expressed Singapore's readiness to discuss the matter while awaiting a new proposal from Malaysia should the project be revived.

"As far as the HSR is concerned, it's unfortunate that we could not proceed with it originally. However, we are open to reviewing

new proposals from Malaysia.

"From our perspective, greater connectivity between our two countries is always a plus."

Malaysia and Singapore formally agreed to the HSR project in February 2013, and it was expected to be completed in 2026.

The 350km line was to include stations in Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor.

Following the change of government in 2018, Putrajaya announced the project would be reviewed due to concerns over the cost and financial implications to the country. Work on the project was suspended in September 2018, and in 2021, it was terminated after both governments failed to agree on the changes sought by Malaysia.

Malaysia had to pay Singapore S\$102.8 million as compensation for costs incurred.

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his Singaporean counterpart, Lawrence Wong, at a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday