

Najib opens second Penang bridge, naming it after the King

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The long and winding bridge which connects the towns of Batu Maung on Penang island with Batu Kawan on the mainland is now officially opened. - The Malaysian Insider pic by Hasnoor Hussain, March 1, 2014. The Second Penang Bridge has been named Jambatan Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah after the Sultan of Kedah, the current Yang DiPertuan Agong.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the King has consented the name change for the megastructure to take after his name.

Najib said just calling the RM4.5 billion bridge, which links the island's Batu Maung with the mainland's Batu Kawan, the "Second Bridge" does not reflect the structure's significance.

"Therefore, with the consent of the Yang DiPertuan Agong, the Federal government names this bridge Jambatan Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah," he told a crowd of 10,000 people in Batu Maung, Penang at the opening of the bridge tonight.

Najib, in his speech, also said the bridge will be opened to traffic after midnight and will be toll-free for a month.

He, however, did not announce how much the toll rates will be beginning next month.

It was reported earlier this week that the toll rate for the new bridge will be higher than RM7 but under RM10 for cars.

Spanning 24km, the new bridge is the longest bridge in Southeast Asia and third longest in the world. The idea to build the megastructure was mooted by Malaysia's fourth prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1995.

It was built by UEM Builders and Beijing-based China Harbour Engineering Co Limited (CHEC). Construction started in November 2008.

Jambatan Kedua Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Ministry of Finance Incorporated, is the bridge concessionaire.

Najib said the historic opening of the new bridge is also significant in Malaysia's diplomatic relations with China, that is marking its 40th anniversary this year.

He thanked the Chinese government for giving Malaysia a US\$330 million (RM1.08 billion) loan to build the bridge and congratulated all the builders for making the megastructure a reality.

Najib said the bridge is not only an iconic structure that will be famous in the world, but also a growth driver for Penang and the northern corridor involving Perlis, Kedah and northern Perak.

It will boost economic growth, help create more job opportunities and also ease traffic, he said.

Najib also paid tribute to his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who announced the project in August 2006 under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

He said Abdullah made two meaningful decisions concerning the bridge at the time.

The first was deciding to build the bridge to link the southern parts of Penang island and the mainland to encourage more rapid growth in the areas.

The other was making sure the project still took off after the 2008 political tsunami that saw Penang won by Pakatan Rakyat.

"In 2008, there was a change in government in Penang but Pak Lah (Abdullah) said what is good for the people must be implemented and continued.

"Sometimes, we must rise above our political differences and do what is right for the people. We have big dreams and grand visions for Malaysia," Najib said.

He added that despite differences in political views, cooperation is important for nation building and national development.

Works Minister Datuk Fadillah Yusof said the new bridge, a milestone for the nation, is necessary for Penang.

"Once opened, the new bridge is expected to ease traffic on the first 13km Penang Bridge, which was opened in 1985, by 25%.

"It is estimated that the bridge will see 80,000 to 100,000 vehicles using it daily in 10 years," he said, adding that the strategic cooperation with CHEC also enabled technology, skill and knowledge transfer from the experienced Chinese engineering firm to local contractors.

The time required to cross the entire length of the new bridge is 20 minutes without any traffic jam.

It was reported that the new structure is also the longest bridge in the world with High Damping Natural Rubber Bearing (HRDRB), which enables it to withstand earthquakes up to over 7.5 on the Richter scale. It is also the first bridge in Malaysia to use electric vehicles for patrolling.

The event was also attended by Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Abdullah and his wife Tun Jeanne Abdullah, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, his wife Betty Chew and Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

On February 24, a coalition of 25 Muslim non-governmental organisations in Penang suggested to Putrajaya to rename the bridge after the King. – March 1, 2014.

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