

## **Academician Upbeat On Continued Strong Singapore-Malaysia Ties Under Najib Administration**

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**By Tengku Noor Shamsiah Tengku Abdullah**

SINGAPORE, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- Singapore's 50th year of Independence also marks the 50th anniversary of bilateral ties between the republic and Malaysia.

These are relations that are widely seen as very cordial, and which a prominent academician expects to grow stronger still with Lee Hsien Loong and Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the helm.

Khong Yuen Foong, Professor of Political Science, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, said ties between the two closest ASEAN neighbours had improved a great deal since the time of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The situation between then and now had something to do with the "personalities of the leaders involved", he said without naming names.

"A lot of political and economic cooperation has become possible in the last few years that were not possible during Mahathir's time," said Khong who had served as a professor of international relations at Oxford University for 20 years.

Prof Khong said the close working relationship between Lee and Najib had set the trend for positive joint government efforts on a range of issues.

He noted that the legacy issue of the Malaysian Railway land in Singapore has been resolved, while the sovereign funds of the two countries, Temasek Holdings and Khazanah Nasional, have signed deals on joint property projects in both Singapore and Malaysia.

He was also enthusiastic about the proposed high-speed rail linking Singapore to Kuala Lumpur as announced by Lee and Najib.

"Looking at the attempt to connect from Singapore to Malaysia all the way to Kuala Lumpur, that would be very good...to me that is a very strong sign of a very good economic cooperation that is forthcoming.

"So I am quite upbeat about the relationship (between the two countries) under the Najib administration.

Summarising his views on ties between the two countries, Prof Khong said: "I think there have been a lot of ups and downs since 1965 (when Singapore separated from Malaysia).

"From what I have been able to determine, I think the Singapore-Malaysia relationship has been probably at its most amiable in the last five to six years.

"I think there will always be issues...being closest neighbours (and) given the political baggage on both sides...(but) given the economic growth of both countries at very good levels, I think there are more reasons for more cooperation these days."

He cited two "very important factors" that have enhanced Singapore-Malaysia cooperation.

"One is the civil service - the bureaucracies work together very well below the level of the ministers because they know each other so well," Prof Khong said.

"Secondly, the ASEAN factor is important - ASEAN does create certain norms that make cooperation between members, especially founding members like Singapore and Malaysia, much more possible."

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