

**VERBATIM JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE YAB PRIME MINISTER
DURING OFFICIAL VISIT OF HIS EXCELLENCY LAWRENCE
WONG, PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

By : DATO' SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

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8 JANUARY 2025

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullah dan Salam Sejahtera.

Yang mulia Perdana Menteri Singapura, Lawrence Wong;

Timbalan-timbalam Perdana Menteri;

Menteri-menteri;

Premier; dan

Rakan rakan yang di muliakan.

1. Pada hari ini kita dapat saksikan satu pertemuan yang bermakna di antara kedua-dua negara. And I of course on behalf of Malaysian government and people, wish to express my profound thanks and appreciation to Prime Minister Lawrence Wong for being here for the annual retreat between Malaysia and Singapore.

2. We recorded Singapore no less a neighbour but very important ally and committed in enhancing bilateral relations and we have seen various achievement in all fields than ever and today we have seen a new measures extending beyond the traditional sort of a arrangements into a new areas, including, education, energy and few other investments, of course Singapore remains as our number one in investment and also in terms of trade.
3. And we look forward to enhancing this particularly with Johor Singapore Economic Zone which to me, a spectacular sort of a move within the region, and of course internationally, and I look forward to working well with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on this, how else can we help and work not only to ensure the success of Johor, Malaysia, but also Singapore and jointly in the region.
4. And then we discussed number of issues, including some concerns about maritime cooperation which has been there for some time, but at least that is clear commitment and progress. Similarly, with water discussions, with the reopening the discussions and the technical team will discuss the parameters, we explored and I think the suggestions particularly by Sarawak government on the export of energy using the undersea cable through Semenanjung to Singapore or alternatively, other measures which will require the understanding of our other neighbours.
5. We also discuss the issue of Flight Information Region (FIR), recognizing the needs of Malaysia in terms of its connectivity with the Sabah Sarawak but at the same time requirement of Singapore to

ensure that the performance and activities in Changi and Seletar are unaffected and will be further facilitated.

6. So and thank again for the support for Malaysia as a chairmanship of ASEAN and I look forward to engaging with Prime Minister Lawrence, although he just assume the position of Prime Minister, but I think I met him number of times, exchanges have been extremely clean, friendly and helpful in many ways in terms of our joint effort and commitment to enhance bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore.

7. So I wish you Happy New Year, he just recovered from COVID-19, brilliant and I am extremely pleased and I think I share the sentiments, expressed my colleagues and you see that the number of presence of our Ministers and also the importance accord as a friend as a trusted friend from Singapore and I really wish that we could continue and do more together as to great friendly nations.

Thank you.

Q & A Session

Question 1:

Samantha, BERNAMA, Malaysia

KL Singapore HSR Project revival, should it proceed or not? Why and what's next? and second question is Singapore support and hope on Malaysia Chairmanship of ASEAN?

Prime Minister Lawrence:

As far as the HSR is concerned, it's unfortunate we were not able to proceed with it originally, but we are open to listening to new proposals from the Malaysia side, starting from a clean slate, so that's our position because from our point of view, greater connectivity between our two countries is always a plus, so that's where we are. As far as ASEAN chairmanship is concerned as I mentioned just now, Singapore fully supports Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN. We think it's going to be more important now than ever before for ASEAN to be strong, integrated and united. Because the greater competition that we face is not amongst us within ASEAN, it is outside of the region. Everyone is trying to anchor major projects now in today world where the big economies are all talking about reshoring, on shoring, near shoring. They want the key projects to be nearer to their home economies. So ASEAN has to come together, look at ways in which we can enhance our value proposition and be competitive together, and Malaysia and Singapore can form a very important foundation for a stronger ASEAN. That's why the Johor, Singapore SEZ, the RTS, these are all critical building blocks towards more integrated ASEAN. And where ASEAN is concerned, we are talking about not just more trade and investment linkages, but infrastructure linkages, including the ASEAN power grid. These are all good projects that Singapore will support and we hope under Malaysia's leadership we can make good progress on these projects.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim:

On HSR, our position is of course to invite the participation of the private sector because government has its limitations. We have put the issue of poverty alleviation, flood mitigation, issue of basic infrastructure, education and public health is our priority at least for the next one or two years. So, the mega-projects are going to be deferred primarily because of this commitment to settling some of the outstanding issues dealing with the basic infrastructure, education, health and issues of poverty. But we are still waiting for some promising and positive contribution by the or participation by the private sector to proceed when necessary. There have been proposals, the Ministry of Transportation looking at it, we have decided it will only happen if we have full participation of the private sector with the very minimal government involvement. On ASEAN, I think I've certainly concurred with the views expressed by from Prime Minister Lawrence. That is why the focus should be more in terms of energy, ASEAN energy grid or connectivity in the ASEAN, digitalization framework, in terms of enhancing intratrade and investments within ASEAN, which has been unfortunately lacking. We've been successful in many areas and I think we should commend the contributions by past leaders. But I think the new focus is now mainly on the issue of the importance of strengthening our economic fundamentals as a region and strategic position which are we the new players in the new uncertain geopolitical demands and dictate.

Thank you.

Question 2:

Chin Soo Fang, The Straits Times, Singapore

Good morning, Chin Soo Fang from The Straits Times. Both Prime Ministers mentioned that there were discussions on several bilateral issues. So can we find out more on the status of some of these issues like maritime limitations, water and airspace, and what are the challenges to a faster resolution of these issues on both sides? Thank you.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong:

These are long standing issues and they are complex in nature.

Since I visited last year, at the introductory visit, both Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and I have asked the officials to meet, they have done so across all of these issues on maritime boundaries, on water and on airspace. They have had good discussions. Some progress has been made but we are not ready to resolve all of them yet, because they are complex. And while we would like the resolution to be expeditious, I think it's also important that we give time for the officials to meet, talk to one another, understand each other's positions and come up with an agreement and an outcome that is durable and that is beneficial for both sides. And both the Prime Minister Anwar and I are fully committed to doing so, to having good faith conversations and discussions in a manner that is constructive, that will discuss the issues holistically and make sure that these outstanding matters do not ever detract from our overall relationship. That's why we are still

able to move forward on positive win-win projects like the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and the Johor Bahru–Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS). So we do not want these issues, even if there are differences of views, to detract from the positive projects that we can do together. But where these issues are concerned, we are fully committed to discussing them constructively, holistically, and I am confident that in time to come we can achieve durable and mutually beneficial outcomes across all of them.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim:

Yes, these are complex issues and our positions of course, as Prime Minister Lawrence Wong have said, to deal with it holistically or in a comprehensive manner, so that you see that some areas which is demanded by Singapore, some demanded by Malaysia should be fully considered and the final settlement should be a win-win sort of a position. But this has not in any way, and I agree not only detected but the frustrated any of our positive attitude position on the fundamentals, economic or energy or digital or investments and trade. And to me this has to continue and we can expand this further because this negotiation have been going on for the last few decades. So, I don't think we should wait for the few decades to come. We can always do it, not necessarily next Annual Retreat, we agree that this quarterly basis, we should have you know form of short meeting to review this and in that manner compel our technical team, the experts to deal with it expeditiously.

Question 3:

Madiah, Astro AWANI, Malaysia

What is your message to investors, especially on incentive structure? What incentives will be offered to attract investors and businesses to SEZ? Thank you.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong:

Well, our message, not just mine, I think both Prime Ministers, our message to investors is look at the complementarities between Johor and Singapore, because there are many advantages in coming here and looking at this entire ecosystem, not Johor by itself, nor Singapore by itself, but as an ecosystem that complements one another. And I think there are many strengths that we can harness from both sides that will allow us to enhance our value proposition and make this a much more competitive and attractive venue for businesses to operate from. Certainly on the Singapore side, we've engaged many of our businesses and they are very keen to do more out of Johor and then to combine with the operations in Singapore. We already have existing incentives for businesses who want to expand overseas. So, businesses from Singapore can tap on those incentives, market readiness programs and grants in order to expand and have some operations in Johor that will synergize with their operations in Singapore. But in fact, I think the greater potential for the SEZ is not just about Singapore businesses going to Johor, but it's about both sides working together to attract new investment projects globally. And if we can come together, which we intend to market the SEZ together, promote the SEZ as

a combined destination, Johor – Singapore together, hopefully this will allow both of us to attract even more global investments to our respective countries, enhance the pie, expand the pie, create good jobs for both our peoples.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim:

SEZ is a unique initiative, very rarely do you find two countries working together as a team. You can see any part of the world where two countries decide to work together, promote both countries and attract investments and be seen to be having compact relationship. Both countries led by government that's politically stable with clarity and economic policies and a clear position of policy to attract investments. And not only that, but selective in the sense that investments that we think will affect the demands and dictates for the future. And I think that by itself is a great incentive other than the financial incentive of the infrastructure you're talking about, because you can see any part of the region or the world where two countries work together as a team. It is a rare feed, and we're now expanding this sort of a sentiment and policy towards sub region and ASEAN as a whole.

Question 4:

Nur Afiffah, Channel News Asia, Singapore

We were talking about global economic uncertainties, all eyes on Trump's second term starting very soon, potential tariffs, observers are also looking at heightened superpower tensions. Was this something that was discussed

how Malaysia and Singapore plans to bolster economic resilience, perhaps in areas like the SEZ bilaterally and also regionally within ASEAN?

Prime Minister Lawrence:

We touched on this, not explicitly, but it's at the back of our minds because we all know that we are entering a new era where global tensions are here to stay, geopolitical rivalries are here to stay, and the world is becoming a more dangerous and troubled place. This is not going to go away in the near term it's with us for quite some time to come. And therefore, it's even more important for us to find ways to strengthen our linkages, cooperate on a winwin basis. We are doing this bilaterally as I mentioned just now with the SEZ, RTS and many other projects which we are exploring including on cross-border, electricity trading, digitalization, infrastructure, all the possibilities for us to strengthen our linkages. But we are also hoping that the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Singapore can provide important foundation and building block for a stronger ASEAN, which again we have an opportunity to advance through Malaysia's chairmanship. So, these in the global challenges and tensions are indeed in our minds and I think it's a very strong and powerful motivation for all of us to come together, strengthen our bilateral and regional ties,

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim:

We did discuss last night and for example, to agree the importance of working together bilaterally and regionally to face the more unpredictable sort of a global political environment. Now, we also touch with the point on

complement one another. Singapore has its strength vis a vis some countries, we have our strength vis a vis some other countries. Why can't we work as a team and to assist and complement one another. How do we actually ensure that for the future, I mean predict the future is very difficult, but at least we take adequate measures to strengthen and consolidate our strengthen nationally and bilaterally in two countries and most who with ASEAN and in my exchanges with ASEAN leaders, I can sense new spirit now, we have to strengthen ourselves as a regional force to be able to withstand the unpredictable pressures from other areas or groups or regions. We hope that we should collaborate instead of talking about contentious divisions and tensions. But finally, it is how we deal with these issues and I am, of course, I can't give all the answers. I think what we can do is we do our best for now to strengthen our fundamentals and our force and work as friendly nations to collaborate with all. And that's the position the Malaysia have taken and I see Singapore has its strength and so do we. And why can't we work? These two countries having some sort of a common strategy to assist one another and to work and benefit from each other's strength and I think this is the new attitude we must have other than talking in terms of always a rivalry and unnecessary conflicts. And I think that's only not only the spirit with Singapore, but I see many of our countries within ASEAN, even in our attitude and trying to resolve the more contentious Myanmar conflict. There is the preparedness to try and work together as a team and that's the only thing that we can do, that we are able to do and I do think we can resolve more complex international issues.

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