

S'pore, KL ink milestone pact to build rapid transit link

This and other bilateral projects on the cards underscore excellent ties, say PM Lee, Najib

Royston Sim
Assistant Political Editor

Seven years from now, Singaporeans and Malaysians will be able to hop on an MRT train every eight minutes to get across the border.

The completion of this Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link, following the signing of a legally binding agreement yesterday, is expected to ease the daily congestion at the Causeway.

Other bilateral projects on the cards include schemes to raise the water levels in Johor's Linggiu Reservoir to meet the needs of both countries. And one possibility is a joint hydrometric modelling study of the Johor River.

These projects underscore the excellent relations between their countries, prime ministers Lee Hsien Loong and Najib Razak said, adding that ties will not be affected by domestic developments on either side, including an imminent general election in Malaysia.

Datuk Seri Najib, when asked for his outlook on bilateral ties this year, said: "I don't expect elections to change the nature of relations between our two countries."

Mr Lee said Singapore and Malaysia are constantly looking for new areas of cooperation. "It is a sign of our confidence in each other's future, and commitment to good relations with one another."

The two leaders discussed various issues, including water supply, during their eighth Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat at the Istana yesterday.

They noted that demand for water from Linggiu Reservoir will rise as more developments come up in Iskandar, Johor, and Singapore.

Although the reservoir has filled up in the past year, it is unclear when the next prolonged dry spell will hit, Mr Lee noted.

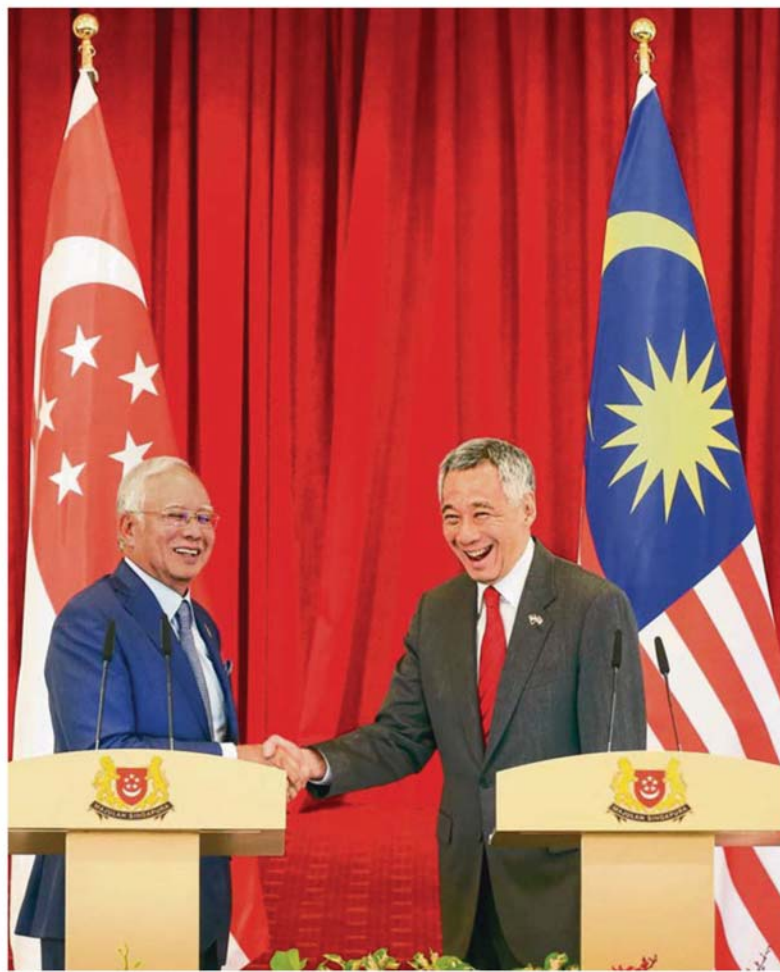
Mr Najib said a detailed hydrometric study will be commissioned to produce technical proposals "to increase the water supply for both Singapore and Johor".

The two leaders also witnessed the signing of the RTS Link agreement by Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure Khaw Boon Wan, who is also Transport Minister, and Malaysia's Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Abdul Rahman Dahlan. This is the second agreement in two years, following the 2016 pact to build a high-speed rail line between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Construction of the 4km link is expected to begin next year.

Mr Lee said the cross-border service will benefit thousands of daily commuters. "It will provide a convenient means for Johoreans to come to Singapore to work or to play, and Singaporeans to go to Johor to study, to work, to shop," he added.

Mr Najib said the link will provide



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong with his Malaysian counterpart Najib Razak at the Istana, where they held a press conference yesterday after the eighth Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

vide "seamless connectivity" and the required capacity.

Up to 10,000 passengers an hour can travel in each direction between Johor's Bukit Chagar terminus station and the Singapore terminus in Woodlands North, where it will join the upcoming Thomson-East Coast Line (TEL).

When the RTS Link begins service, commuters can hop on a train every eight minutes on average.

Trains will eventually arrive every four minutes on average during peak periods. The line will start with five trains, and gradually have a total fleet of seven trains.

Commuters can transfer to the TEL concourse via an underground link, without having to exit the RTS station.

On how both sides will ensure the RTS Link and high-speed rail line will not be affected by political and other changes, Mr Lee said the long-term commitment has been formalised in the binding agreement signed yesterday.

"Whoever is the government on either side, this is an agreement which they inherit... If a subsequent government has other ideas, well, that will have to be dealt with and the agreement will deal with

these contingencies," he added.

Commuters like Ms Chen Zihui who travel regularly to Johor Baru look forward to the RTS.

The 26-year-old bank associate visits her family in Johor Baru every weekend. "Sometimes, I get caught in the jam at the Causeway," she said of the two-hour commute by bus or taxi. "I hope the RTS will reduce my travel time to Johor Baru."

roysim@sph.com.sg

• Additional reporting by Seow Bei Yi

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