

Johor plays vital role in close S'pore-Malaysia links: PM Lee

Its Sultan's support helped keep cross-border supply chains open during pandemic, he says

Malavika Menon

As the key gateway between Singapore and Malaysia, Johor plays a crucial role in maintaining close cooperation and connectivity between the two countries, which was especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

With support from the Johor ruler, Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, Singapore kept supply chains open across land borders with Johor during the crisis, PM Lee said, adding that Singapore also worked with the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation to donate vaccines and medical supplies.

"Singapore and Johor are close neighbours and partners, linked by generations of friendship and kinship," said PM Lee at an official lunch held at the Istana yesterday in honour of Sultan Ibrahim, who arrived in Singapore yesterday on a three-day visit.

Yesterday, Sultan Ibrahim was conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws by the National University of Singapore (NUS) at the Istana in recognition of his contributions to strengthen ties between Singapore and Malaysia.

President Halimah Yacob presided over the ceremony to confer the honorary degree, which is NUS' highest form of recognition for outstanding individuals who have rendered distinguished service and had great impact on a local and global scale.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Madam Halimah wished Sultan Ibrahim a fruitful visit and said they had a good discussion on areas where Singapore and Johor could work together, such as connectivity and food security.

"Singapore and Malaysia are close neighbours with deep ties between our peoples, particularly in Johor. The daily traffic flows across our land borders bear testament to this. There are many areas where Singapore and Johor can work together," she said.

Sultan Ibrahim is accompanied on his trip by Johor Queen Raja Zarith Sofiah, Crown Prince of Johor Tunku Ismail Ibrahim, his wife Che' Puan Besar Khaleeda, Johor Chief Minister Onn Hafiz Ghazi and other state officials.

During the visit, Sultan Ibrahim and his wife were also presented with a new orchid hybrid – the *Dendrobium Ibrahim Zarith* – named in their honour.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Sultan Ibrahim said he hoped his visit would help bolster Johor-Singapore ties and accelerate economic cooperation for the benefit of people in Johor and Singapore.

"It is my sincere hope that my visit will further reinforce the bond of friendship and enhance continued collaboration for the benefit of our two peoples," he said.

"Over the years, the close cooperation and understanding with Singapore in many ways have benefited Johor, especially in its socio-economic development."

In his speech, PM Lee said both Singapore and Johor have moved decisively towards living with Covid-19.

"Cross-border travel has resumed. The Causeway is bustling once more. Family and friends are again visiting one another. Workers, business travellers and tourists are also making trips across the border, boosting the recovery of Singapore and Johor's economies," he said.

PM Lee said efforts to improve connectivity between Johor and Singapore are continuing, such as the start of a new direct ferry service between Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal and Desaru Coast Ferry Terminal, and added that he looked forward to the timely completion of the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System Link project.

He said: "I look forward to work-

ing with Sultan Ibrahim to promote further cooperation between Singapore and Johor. I am confident that with his support, relations between Singapore and Johor will continue to strengthen and deepen."

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Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife, Madam Ho Ching, with Johor Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar and his wife Raja Zarith Sofiah at a ceremony at the Istana yesterday to name a new orchid hybrid – the *Dendrobium Ibrahim Zarith* – in the visitors' honour. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION