

Race to sky: How Japan, Korea built Malaysia's Twin Towers

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 04 October, 2025



Dhaka: When Kuala Lumpur set out to build what would become one of the world's most iconic landmarks — the Petronas Twin Towers — few imagined it would spark a friendly rivalry between two of Asia's engineering giants: Japan and South Korea.

The vision was ambitious: two identical towers rising side by side in the heart of Malaysia's capital, joined by a sky bridge symbolizing unity and balance.

To accelerate progress, Malaysia made an unconventional choice — it divided the work. Tower 1, the west tower, went to a Japanese consortium led by Hazama Corporation, while Tower 2, the east tower, was entrusted to a South Korean consortium headed by Samsung C&T and Kukdong Engineering & Construction.

Officially, there was no race. However, once cranes began to rise in the early 1990s, competition quietly took hold. Each morning, engineers could look across the construction site and measure the other side's progress. Pride, precision, and perseverance became shared values.

Malaysia's own identity was embedded in the towers themselves. The shimmering façades of steel and glass reflected not only the tropical sky but also the country's rich resources and growing metal industries — a proud symbol of a nation transforming its natural wealth into modern strength.

Construction advanced steadily, and by the mid-1990s both towers were complete. Yet among locals and site veterans, a legend still lingers — that although the Japanese team began later, they finished first, by the narrowest of margins: just one day. It is a tale passed down more by pride than paperwork, but one that adds color to the city's skyline.

When the two towers were finally linked by the sky bridge, the rivalry gave way to respect. Beyond being a striking architectural feature, the bridge serves a vital purpose: it stabilizes both towers, allowing them to sway safely in the wind and remain perfectly balanced — a brilliant feat of design and engineering harmony.

Today, the Petronas Twin Towers rise as Malaysia's proudest symbol and a testament to Asian collaboration. Look up, and you will see more than glass and steel — you will see two nations, one dream, and a story that continues to gleam against the Malaysian sky.