

A common

desire

to get

NST 16 DEC 1981

things done

quickly

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with his Singapore counterpart, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, tomorrow is not a "getting-to-know-you" session.

The two leaders know each other and have in the past met for official discussions. The last meeting was in May when Dr Mahathir, then the Deputy Premier, at-

tended the funeral of President Benjamin Sheares.

With this mutual advantage, they will most certainly get down to brass tacks straight away with a minimum of time-wasting preliminaries. There is plenty to talk about, but the leaders' preoccupation will naturally be bilateral relations and Asean.

With Dr Mahathir's vision of Malaysia becoming the advanced industrialised nation in this region, he is expected to vigorously pursue joint economic co-operation for mutual benefit.

In his May 1980 visit to the Republic, Dr Mahathir's predecessor, Tun Hussein Onn, and Mr Lee agreed that this co-operation should be strengthened.

Dr Mahathir and Mr Lee, being both very decisive men, may even identify the specific areas. Mr Lee has stated that the Singapore Government would encourage those industries which are planning to relocate elsewhere to go to Malaysia with its available land and other resources.

The 10-per-cent

participation by Singapore in Kedah's Langkawi Cement is a start.

Malaysia and Singapore enjoy good relations but "there is room for improvement", said Dr Mahathir in a recent interview, adding that "we shall strive to find ways of further improving political and economic relations between the two countries."

Once the two leaders have decided on the areas to be pursued, the high-powered Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) set up last December to "promote and foster closer co-operation between the two countries in all areas" will have a lot to do.

Issues

The IGC, which is directly responsible to the Prime Ministers, is a necessary machinery to solve problems quietly, given the sensitivities between the two neighbours.

"It underlines their commitment to improving the climate of relations between the two countries, by ensuring that minor problems do not, in the process of bureaucratic wranglings, become intractable ones, disregarding the larger interests at stake," said Singapore Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan at the IGC's inaugural meeting.

The outstanding bilateral issues that need to be ironed out by the two Premiers are:

● MALAYSIA'S request for additional land for its naval base in Woodlands which Mr Lee

has agreed to consider favourably. What remains to be resolved are the terms and conditions of the land tenure.

● SINGAPORE'S request for part of the land occupied by Malayan Railway at Tanjung Pagar for the East Coast Jurong Expressway. It is a pressing need to Singapore. The question is an alternative site for Malayan Railway's marshalling yard.

● RETURN of the former Khatib army camp — now used as a store by Malaysia — to Singapore. It is a legacy from the colonial days.

● THE Johore Flight Information Region (FIR). Malaysia is seeking a return of a major portion which is now controlled by Singapore. This follows the improvement of its civil aviation facilities and the development of Senai airport.

Singapore controls all flights into the island from the Indian Ocean, the north-east and the north-west. Aircraft from west to east Malaysia and out of Senai have to get through this FIR and, therefore, need clearance from Singapore.

Dr Mahathir has said he would inform the Singapore Government about the impending standardised time zone for Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak.

It is widely expected that Singapore, for practical reasons, will follow Peninsular Malaysia's time, switch to that of Sabah and Sarawak (half-an-hour ahead) which may be implemented from Jan. 1.

Officials from both sides of the Causeway ex-

pect the two Prime Ministers, who must have taken each other's measure, to be businesslike and to talk on the same wavelength in their discussions for which a whole afternoon has been set aside.

"Both are tough and realistic and want to get things done quickly," says an official.

"This does not necessarily mean that problems will be disposed of hurriedly. They will be frank, with no ambiguity about things. And if any ambiguity should emerge from the talks, it would be deliberate."

Dedicated to their job, the two Prime Ministers are not dissimilar in certain respects in running their administrations.

Potential

A medical colleague says Dr Mahathir "has always hated inefficiency".

Both leaders have a strong conviction that they are able to find solutions to national problems. Both abhor the wastefulness of inefficiency.

This involves good work ethics and a clean administration. Corruption is a cancer. It erodes efficiency and destroys public confidence in public services. This saps the credibility of the Government and the whole nation, which can tarnish the nation's international image.

The two Premiers set high standards. The accent of their administrations is on productivity. They expect their teams to work hard in the service of the na-

tion — to bring about the maximum benefit to the greatest number of people in the quickest way possible.

In the case of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir sees great potential as the country is blessed with an abundance of natural and human resources. His greatest challenge is to motivate the people — not just government servants — to harness these resources to greater effect.

Singapore has no natural resources to speak of and has to rely on the resourcefulness of her people. That is why Mr Lee has never let up in exhorting and driving his people to greater heights of achievement for the survival of the nation.

In his National Day speech this year, Premier Lee summed up the Singapore situation succinctly:

"We have got only one little island — 600 sq. kilometres. You unwind this and you will not drop down on soft padi fields. It is hard concrete and your bones are broken. And it's kaput!

"And you know that Singapore has only one chance and that is to go up — tighter, more disciplined, up the ladder. You unwind this and it's curtains for everybody."

Both leaders have said that Western notions of liberalism and progressiveness often do not fit the needs of the economies of developing countries.

Most advanced countries do not appreciate the problems of developing nations. Certainly, international organisations still arrogate to themselves the prerogative of

telling developing nations what is good for them.

Both nations have made it known at international forums that this is simply not on. Any international arm-twisting will be seen as gross interference.

Dr Mahathir's style — judiciously aggressive and decisive — sets him apart from his predecessors.

Says a ranking Singapore leader of the new Malaysian Premier: "Dr Mahathir does not mince his words. He tells a man off if he tries to be funny. With him around, nobody can play games."

Both countries have stressed the importance of emerging generations maintaining and strengthening the bonds between the two nations.

While the leaders are working on this, the peoples too must play their roles conscientiously. Any remnants of prejudice must be set aside for healthy relations.