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LEAD Causeway

SINGAPORE NOT INFORMED OF PROPOSAL TO REPLACE CAUSEWAY

By: Tan Hock Guan

SINGAPORE, July 6 (Bernama) -- Singapore has not received any official information concerning the possibility of dismantling the Causeway and replacing it with a bridge.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad raised the possibility of replacing the Causeway with a bridge when he launched the JB Waterfront City project in Johor Baharu yesterday.

Commenting on Dr Mahathir's statement, a Singapore Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman said today that Singapore and Malaysia enjoyed warm and close relations.

"We have worked well together on many bilateral projects for our mutual benefit," the spokesman said.

"We will therefore give careful consideration to any proposal which seeks to improve or reinforce this link between Malaysia and Singapore."

The signing of the Johor Straits Boundary Agreement in August 1995 and the ongoing construction of the Second Crossing between Malaysia and Singapore bear testimony to the good cooperation between the neighbours across the Johor Straits.

The Causeway provides a vital link between Malaysia and Singapore.

"It serves as both an important symbol and as a physical manifestation of the special and warm ties between our peoples," the spokesman said.

The dismantling of the Causeway would facilitate ferry services rather than commercial shipping, said the shipping industry.

They said certain parts of the Johor Straits were not deep enough for the bigger ships.

The 1.2km Causeway, built in 1923 by the British, was opened in June 1924 and until today it is the only road and rail link between Singapore and Malaysia.

A Second Link Crossing Bridge is currently being built by the Singapore and Malaysian governments linking Tuas in Singapore and Tanjung Kupang in Johor.

The Second Link is targeted to be completed by the end of 1997.

It was reported earlier this year that the Johor state government was studying the possibility of a third link on the eastern part of the state.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia was reported to be conducting a feasibility study for either a tunnel or a high bridge to link Tanjung Langsat in eastern Johor to Singapore.

The Johor Straits to the east of the Causeway is currently a busy waterway with ships heading for the shipyards in Singapore and Johor while to the west traffic is low and mainly of the smaller sized vessels.

Some 100,000 people now cross the Causeway daily in either direction compared with about 17,000 daily when immigration control was imposed between the two countries in July 1967. -- BERNAMA

THG YBY