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Bridge will boost economic ties

ISTANBUL, Mon: The proposed bridge across the Straits of Malacca, which will link Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, Indonesia, is meant to accelerate economic relations between the two countries, says Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The prime minister said both governments have agreed to the proposal, except for the exact locations for its end-to-end points in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists here today, Dr Mahathir said should the project materialises, it will be designed in such a way that both nations can utilise it to the maximum.

"If we can achieve this, we could establish rail and road links. In fact we may be able to channel electricity from Sumatra to Malaysia. We may even build a pipeline or other things," he said when reacting to the subject which was raised during his bilateral talks with Indonesian President Suharto on Sunday.

Both leaders were among eight government leaders attending the inaugural summit meeting of the Developing-Eight 8) which ended here yesterday.

Asked whether this will be another mega-project in Malaysia, the prime minister said: "Actually I don't quite understand about this `mega' thing. If it is done in other countries, it is considered small but when it comes to Malaysia, it is seen as very big.

As to when the bridge would be constructed, Dr Mahathir said it will be implemented when there is enough money to fund it.

And as usual, he said, the Government will not be involved in funding the project and instead will award it to private companies.

"If the private sector can afford (the costs), they can build it because they (have) more expertise in such projects. Apart from that (they also) know how to ensure the returns," he said, adding that projects such as the Kuala Lumpur City Centre, Putrajaya and Cyberjaya will not be possible without the private sector's participation.

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