

Close Malaysia-Singapore ties vital

SINGAPORE'S Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had a brief but fruitful meeting here last Thursday. Though the meeting lasted only two hours, the two premiers were able to reach common ground on several issues of mutual interest.

What is important is that they agreed not to comment publicly on matters affecting the two countries so that bilateral relations would not be soured unnecessarily.

As good neighbours, it is often impossible to see eye-to-eye on everything but at least they must agree to disagree and to concentrate on topics beneficial to the two countries.

Such close co-operation is vital if they are to overcome the present financial

crisis as they are so dependent on each other in so many areas. They should not hesitate to harness each other's strengths to overcome any economic or security obstacles.

Where the people are concerned, there is no such problem. Both governments may quarrel every now and then but the people-to-people interaction has always remained intact.

The fact is that Malaysia will have to look for assistance and co-operation within the region wherever possible to over-

come its present economic predicament.

Singapore still has the financial muscle to lend a helping hand and it is heartening that Goh has promised to look into ways to enable Malaysia to raise funds in the republic to revitalise its economy.

Apart from Brunei, Singapore is the only Asean member which can help out in these trying circumstances. Unfortunately, some member-governments are only good at talking and interfering in other people's business.

Malaysia will have to seek out friends and allies



in the region and outside who can help in rebuilding its economy and billions will be needed for this purpose.

In this respect, Malaysia should be able to raise a few billion in the republic with Singapore's assistance. In return, Singapore will of course expect some co-operation in things it requires.

One of them is water supply to the republic. Malaysia has been supplying this resource to its neighbour for years and will continue to do so in future. Singaporeans should be assured that there will be no change in this arrangement though the price charged would be subjected to negotiation.

It is hoped that with this top-level meeting, other leaders from the two

countries, including the media, will be more careful in their statements and remarks on bilateral issues.

They should not be too sensitive or too quick to react negatively to any policies and announcements issued by both governments which may have an effect on the other.

So long as this protocol is observed, differences and misunderstandings should be reduced to a minimum in future. Their citizens expect their governments to keep things on an even keel and not create unnecessary problems.

At the same time, Singaporeans should be encouraged to continue to invest in Malaysia and also be welcomed to travel here for their holidays as they have been doing so for years.