

31 JAN 1999

Syed Hamid-Bridge

SECOND BRIDGE WILL NOT BE BUILT WITHOUT SINGAPORE'S CONSENT

KOTA TINGGI, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today Malaysia will not build a second bridge to replace the causeway without consent from the Singapore government.

"We cannot move unless there is consent from Singapore. We cannot act unilaterally but with the cooperation, support and consent from Singapore," he said.

He said Singapore would only be notified when all domestic arrangements for the project had been completed by the relevant parties.

"When all information on the project had been provided and agreement from the federal government had been obtained, we will then submit them to Singapore for discussion and agreement," he added.

For the time being, Malaysia would settle all local issues relating to the project before obtaining Singapore's consent and fixing the implementation date, he told reporters who attended his Hari Raya "Open House", here.

"Let us do it properly so that no one will be offended. We want it to be viewed in the interest of Malaysia-Singapore relations as both countries have close relations on several aspects. If we don't handle it properly, it will affect (bilateral) relations," he said.

It has been reported that Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd, a Malaysian consortium, will build the bridge.

Gerbang Perdana is 60 per cent-owned by Merong Mahawangsa Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of IBEX Corp Amalgamated Sdn Bhd, while Diversified Resources Bhd and Detik Nagasari Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Transwater Corp Bhd, each owns 20 per cent of Gerbang Perdana.

The Johor government had identified between 280 and 320 hectares of land in Tanjung Puteri, adjacent to the Johor Causeway, to be reclaimed for the project.

The 1.5km-bridge will enable ships and boats to use freely the Johore Straits which is now closed due to the construction of the 1.2km Johor Causeway in 1923.

Commenting on the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Davos, Switzerland to discuss current issues and bilateral relations, he said Malaysia would try to inculcate the spirit of neighbourliness with Singapore for mutual benefits.

Dr Mahathir and Lee are in Davos to attend the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Syed Hamid said the meeting must be looked at not only in the context of political interest but also to create peace and prosperity besides benefitting both countries in the long-term.

"The attitude shown by the Prime Minister and Lee should be praised. I see there are positive signs towards settling existing issues," he said.

On Jan 24, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore were improving.

"Singapore must maintain the situation, but bilateral problems may not be eliminated completely and when it arises, Singapore will handle it in the best manner possible," Hsien Loong said.

Singapore had given Malaysia a month, beginning last week, to submit the rationale for maintaining the Quarantine, Immigration and Customs (QIC) complex at the railway station at Tanjung Pagar.

Singapore wants Malaysia to recognise the republic's rights on issues pertaining to the QIC before discussions on bilateral issues between the two neighbouring countries could be initiated.

-- BERNAMA

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