

# Plans for new bridge to go ahead

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**JOHOR BARU:** Malaysia will proceed with the construction of a new bridge to replace the causeway on the Johor side despite the lack of cooperation from Singapore.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew had been informed of the construction of the 25m-high bridge at a private meeting some time ago.

"I've spoken privately with Lee Kuan Yew on the intention to replace the causeway with a higher bridge so that ships can sail through under it."

He said as Lee was taken in by the project, Mahathir took it as an indication that Singapore would cooperate with its construction. However, Mahathir said, he was informed by Lee that Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was not in favour of the project.

"Because he has a sense of nostalgia over the causeway. He (Lee) said that we (Malaysia and Singapore) can construct the bridge after Goh Chok Tong's

retirement ... this is what he (Lee) told me," he said.

Mahathir said that he had then impressed upon Lee that Malaysia would proceed with the construction even without Singapore's cooperation.

The prime minister said the construction of the new bridge would allow free flow of the Tebrau Straits, which has been blocked after the construction of the causeway almost 80 years ago, and also the natural flow of the Straits of Malacca.

Mahathir said he had to disclose what he discussed with Lee so that Malaysia would not be blamed for not informing Singapore of its plans.

He said the RM2 billion integrated south gateway project would change the landscape of Johor Baru as the southern entry point into Malaysia.

According to project developer, Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd, all components of the project are slated for completion in 2007 but the CIQ complex and the public housing project would be ready in 34 months.