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Back to original design for new bridge replacing the Causeway

June Ramli

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The new bridge to replace the Causeway will resurrect the original design, whose initial rejection by Singapore led to the present curved "half-bridge" idea.

Datuk Yahya A. Jalil, executive vice-chairman and managing director of principal project contractor Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd, said the new bridge design was subject to both countries' agreement.

Singapore's rejection of the original design, which had been put forward during the tenure of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had led Gerbang Perdana to come up with the elevated half-bridge instead.

The new bridge, said Yahya, "will be based upon the original design which includes the twin arch. Any changes after this will be made with the consent of both countries."

He was commenting on the statement by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar yesterday that the country would present a new design for the proposed bridge.

Yahya said the technical details of the bridge would be discussed as soon as possible with Singapore.

"Only when the design is agreed upon by both countries will engineers work on the technical details of the project," he said.

"At present, the design is just a concept."

However, construction of the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex in Johor would go ahead as planned, he said.

Yahya (picture) said the swing bridge for the railway tracks, a design distinct from the elevated bridge, would be built as planned.

He said completion of the full bridge would not be able to meet the proposed Dec 31, 2005 deadline for the curved bridge.

Yahya said the original bridge design was still the best, as it would provide a "full and final settlement" to the issues of maritime traffic through the Straits of Johor.

"The construction of the bridge is on the right track as both countries are seeing eye to eye. We will start building our part of the bridge from Johor, and our Singaporean counterparts will start from their country before we meet in the middle."

Dr Mahathir had proposed replacing the Johor Causeway with a bridge when he visited Johor in July 1996.

The 1.5km bridge would allow ships and boats to move freely through the Johor Straits, as such east-west traffic has been impossible since the 1.2km Causeway was built in 1923.