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Much to be gained from co-operative stance on water

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FRIENDSHIP and goodwill unfortunately do not rank very high in Singapore's foreign policy. Its success so far has been premised on a very keen competitive ethos. Against all odds, Singapore has succeeded marvellously.

A win-lose ethic has become part of its psyche. Being "under siege" is good for keeping people on their toes. What better situation than to use the water issue and portray Malaysia as a big bully.

However, being a neighbour of a country with a professed vision to "prosper thy neighbour", there is much to be gained from a co-operative stance rather than the ultra-competitive attitude.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has rightly pointed out that to deal effectively with Westerners we have to first understand how they think.

The same goes for Singaporeans.

At the risk of being called names, I would summarise their attitudes as follows:

- * Winning is all important, even at the expense of friendship,
- * Business-like and legalistic. There is no place for goodwill.

There is nothing wrong with these attributes, really. But when these attributes are not moderated with a little concern for your neighbour's welfare, problems can arise.

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