

Ties between Malaysia and Singapore improving

Building bridges together

• By Deborah Loh and Farrah Naz Karim
news@nstp.com.my

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. — The tone of Malaysia-Singapore relations has improved over the past 12 to 18 months, and the Prime Ministers of both countries today signalled their intention to build on that momentum.

They want the private sector to collaborate more, including undertaking joint ventures in third countries.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong also agreed on greater co-operation in tourism, transportation and security in the Straits of Malacca.

Abdullah said: "In tourism, we can promote both Singapore and Malaysia together. In transportation, including air transport, we should let our airlines talk to each other."

He was speaking to reporters after having a meeting with Lee and attending a discussion with senior officials from both countries.

Lee was in Malaysia on his first visit as Prime Minister, after assuming the post on Aug 12.

Abdullah described Lee's one-day visit as "a very important event in our bilateral relations".

"We do understand that we are neighbours, close neighbours that cannot be separated," he added.

Lee noted that relations had improved over the last 12 to 18 months.

"We need to build on this and develop more momentum on the co-operation between our two countries," he said.

He said it was necessary for the private sector in both countries to

take up joint projects to stay competitive.

"We are very happy to have them (Malaysian private sector) come in. There's no need for anybody to look over their shoulders.

"Our Governments encourage it and it's to the benefit of both countries because industries are moving and changing," he added.

Abdullah said both coun-



GOOD NEIGHBOURS: Abdullah welcoming Lee at their first official face-to-face talks. — Reuters pictures

tries also pledged to co-operate closely in ensuring the safety of ships plying the Malacca Straits.

"The world community would like to see to what extent we can co-operate to ensure safe passage along the Straits, which is a very important artery for international shipping."

Abdullah said the manner in which both countries responded to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the avian flu was an "indication of a close relationship and understanding".

He thanked Lee for lifting the ban on the import of Malaysian poultry and eggs.

Lee replied: "We thank Malaysia for co-operating with us so that we could get chickens and eggs for our chicken rice and chicken curry. It is a symbol of how closely inter-related our two countries are."