

Detailed account of options available to us

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The Govt's reply

"We are surprised at the views expressed by Dr Mahathir. The Government halted negotiations on the bridge because selling sand to Singapore is not acceptable to the Malaysian public," a Government source told *Bernama*, referring to Dr Mahathir's claim that the Government's priority was to sell sand to Singapore.

On April 25, Tan Sri Fuzi Abdul Razak gave a detailed account on why the Malaysian Government decided to abort the plan to build a bridge to replace the Causeway. The decision was reached after studying four options before the Government.

OPTION 1: Approve the Broad Political Understanding (BPU) and proceed with detailed negotiations to conclude a final agreement.

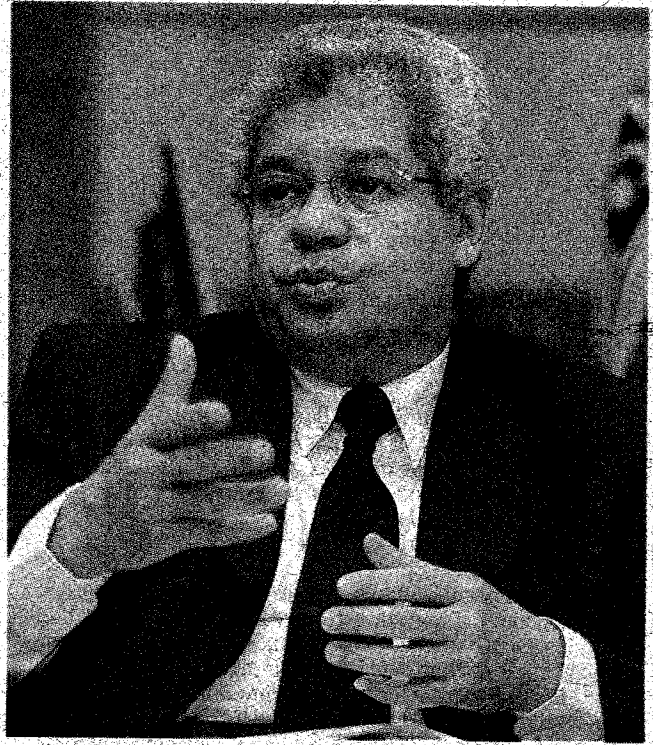
With such a strong mandate, the Government could have gone ahead with the project and persuaded Malaysians later.

But the problem is the lingering concern that too much — sand and airspace — is being given away for the sake of the bridge.

OPTION 2: Proceed with the half-bridge to join the Singapore part of the Johor Causeway. The biggest problem with this option is that expert advice shows the need to consult and obtain approval of Singapore for the relocation of PUB water pipelines in the context of water and separation agreements.

The Attorney-General also points out that if the Malaysian part of the Causeway is demolished unilaterally, Singapore could even halt KTM's use of the remaining Singapore part of the Causeway on account of structural integrity.

This would directly affect the running of railway services to Singapore. Should this continue for six months, KTM land in Singapore would revert to the republic.



Fuzi explained the options on April 25.

OPTION 3: Unilaterally build a half-bridge that can eventually be linked to become a full bridge.

No guarantee that Singapore would agree to build its side of the bridge without a balance of interests. This element of uncertainty would mean that Malaysia would be waiting for the bridge to be linked at Singapore's pleasure.

Such a hanging bridge would become a subject of ridicule and would affect Malaysia's image.

OPTION 4: Not to proceed

with any bridge.

This was the option chosen by the Government, taking into account public sentiment on exporting sand and opening up airspace to the republic.

The Government's decision to scrap the bridge project would prevent both sides from being embroiled in endless political bickering and legal disputes.

The decision is not necessarily a win-lose situation. Malaysia did not lose even if it did not get the bridge.

Singapore too did not get what it wanted — sand and airspace.

Main points of contention:

● Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that he informed the then Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong that Malaysia intended to build a half-bridge to replace the Causeway.

Goh said that he would accept that decision, though he did not think that it was ideal.

Dr Mahathir took this to mean he had Singapore's agreement to build a bridge, since the exchange between both of them was in writing.

● Tan Sri Fuzi put Goh's letter in context. He noted that following Goh's letter, Dr Mahathir wrote to the Singapore PM and said: "I think we have now come to a point where it would be important for us to

prioritise our discussions.

"The approach that both sides have adopted so far in dealing with the outstanding issues in a package has not yielded any meaningful results.

"In view of this, Malaysia has now decided to discontinue the package approach and to give the highest priority to first resolving the long-delayed water issue, particularly the price of raw water.

"Once this issue is satisfactorily and amicably resolved, I am confident that Malaysia and Singapore would be able to move forward much faster in finding solutions to the other outstanding issues that stand in the way of our bilater-

al relations."

After receiving this letter from Dr Mahathir, Goh replied that he had decided to withdraw the concession Singapore was prepared to make as part of trade-offs involving the bridge and related issues.

In a diplomatic note, Singapore explained that the agreement given by Goh was "made in the context of the then ongoing negotiations between the two Governments as an overall package of bilateral issues."

"With the termination of the package negotiations, the underlying basis for the statements in the letter of 11 April 2002 no longer exists."