

## **It's on: Work begins next week, 'Crooked Bridge' is now the 'Scenic Bridge'**

Ravi Nambiar

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JOHOR BARU, Wed. Malaysia is going ahead with plans to build a bridge across its half of the Johor Strait, with work to begin immediately after the Chinese New Year holidays.

Highly-placed sources said the Government had decided not to wait for Singapore's decision on the matter, as the delay was costing Johor a lot in terms of potential growth.

It is understood that the Federal Government has also directed that the structure be referred to as a "scenic bridge" instead of the now commonly-used "crooked bridge".

Gerbang Perdana, the consortium spearheading the project, has positioned a crane barge at the bridge abutment, in the middle of the Johor Strait.

The latest development, it is learnt, follows a high-level directive from the Federal Government to proceed with construction.

Singapore has vacillated over the bridge proposal, despite two rounds of talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong.

The leaders last met in Putrajaya in February last year, but no decision was reached. Officials from both sides have since also met several times without making any headway.

Singapore wants to gauge the project's potential economic effects before joining hands with Malaysia to build the bridge.

The sources said the plan for now was to build the elevated crossing within Malaysia's territorial waters in the Johor Strait without demolishing the Causeway.

"We will make a decision on the Causeway later. What is important is to build the scenic bridge as quickly as possible," said the source, adding that the project was targeted for completion in early 2008.

The time frame is of strategic importance, as this would be in tandem with the Federal Government's plans to turn south Johor into a "mega-hub" by 2008.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, giving a glimpse of things to come under the plan yesterday, said it would be an integrated growth corridor with exciting new infrastructure and buildings, costing billions of ringgit.

The timing is also crucial because of the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex nearing completion in Bukit Chagar here as an integral component of Johor's Southern Integrated Gateway (SIG) project by Gerbang Perdana.

The CIQ, which will be manned by staff from 17 government departments and agencies, will be fully operational by September.

While waiting for the scenic bridge to be completed, a temporary access road is being built to divert all Causeway traffic to the CIQ.

Another aspect of the SIG is JB Sentral, which is designed to become the railway and public transport hub of Johor Baru. Work on this is in progress.

When the idea of a bridge was first floated in 2000, it assumed the form of a 1.4km straight elevated crossing.

This was projected to cost RM640 million, with Singapore bearing half the cost.

Source:

[http://www.nst.com.my/Current\\_News/nst/Thursday/Frontpage/20060126075531/Article/index\\_html](http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/nst/Thursday/Frontpage/20060126075531/Article/index_html)