

The Scenic Bridge: 'Dissenting views won't change our decision'

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KUALA LUMPUR: The dissenting views, even from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, are not going to make any difference.

They won't affect the decision not to proceed with the bridge project across the Johor Strait. Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said although democracy meant there would be differing views, he did not think they would change the Government's decision. The most important thing, however, was to ensure that there was no fight or argument about this, he added.

He said when there was a leadership change, people had to accept that the current leadership might not make the same decisions as the old guard.

"This does not mean we base our decisions on feelings. We have our own rationale."

He said those who did not agree with the Government's decisions should not raise sentiments that could harm unity. Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir was aware that selling sand to Singapore was not unheard of.

"The proposal to sell sand was made by Singapore, not us.

"Sand was not on the plate because Singapore wanted a balance of interest," Syed Hamid said.

Selling sand was still at a proposal stage before the bridge project was scrapped so "it is not quite true to say that we negotiated on the sand", he told reporters after a luncheon with delegates of the 6th Malaysia-Republic of the Philippines Joint Commission Meeting.

"What I don't understand is that he (Dr Mahathir) knows that the sale of sand has been done before to Singapore," he said, adding that much reclamation in Singapore used Malaysian sand during the 1980s and 1990s.

Dr Mahathir had criticised the explanation given by the Foreign Ministry's ambassador-at-large, Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, calling it a "rambling explanation that serves only to convince that the Government's priority and intention is to sell sand to Singapore". Fuzi had said that scrapping the bridge project was the best option given the strong opposition to Malaysia selling sand to the republic and allowing the use of Malaysian airspace by Singapore's air force. Syed Hamid said the difference in the negotiations this time was an intention to have things better regulated and controlled so that the environment remained protected, "the very thing that he (Dr Mahathir) is talking about".

Asked to respond to Dr Mahathir's claim that Malaysia did not need Singapore's approval to build the bridge, he said:

"The very fact that Tun is talking like an advocate shows that it is very litigious.

"Someone with a high standing and who is highly respected by the rakyat has the right to

express his disagreement. But the issue should not cause a situation that could lead to a political crisis when our country is stable and secure," he said.

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