

Malaysia, Singapore to continue bridge talks

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. — Malaysia and Singapore will continue to discuss the proposal to build a full bridge to replace the Causeway, with regard to the “trade-offs” the city state was hoping for.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Wisma Putra would discuss the concessions sought by Singapore, including permission to use Johor’s airspace for its defence forces’ training, and the sale of sand from Malaysia.

“Our negotiations with Singapore have not been concluded, it is being handled by the Foreign Ministry,”

he said after attending the Internal Security Ministry’s monthly assembly today.

He was asked to comment on Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar’s statement yesterday that Singapore was seeking concessions from Malaysia in return for agreeing to jointly build a bridge across the Johor Strait.

Syed Hamid elaborated on the matter at a separate function here this morning, saying negotiations between officials from both countries on the construction of the bridge would be held as planned.

“The next round of talks will be held soon, just wait. At this juncture, nothing has been finalised yet,” he said.

It is understood that the meeting will be held either at month-end or early next month in Singapore.

Syed Hamid dismissed claims that Singapore was being too demanding, noting that its request on the trade-offs had its own sensitivities and officials from both nations would continue to discuss the issue at their next round of talks.

He said Singapore had been requesting the trade-offs since for-

mer Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s time.

“This is not new. The same issue was brought up during Dr Mahathir’s time but there were no answers.

“We want an understanding, we want to maintain good bilateral relations (with Singapore). Please give officials from both sides a chance to discuss.”

Syed Hamid said that even if negotiations failed and “we have exhausted all avenues, we will not forsake the sovereignty of the people and our country”.