

# Pak Lah explains why

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia decided to stop the construction of the "scenic bridge" meant to replace the Malaysian half of the Causeway because of legal implications and complications, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister also stressed that the negative response of the people towards the conditions set by Singapore as a trade-off was another reason for cancelling the project.

He said the Cabinet deliberated on the project at its weekly meeting yesterday and felt that there would still be legal implications and complications to resolve later should Malaysia proceed with the project.

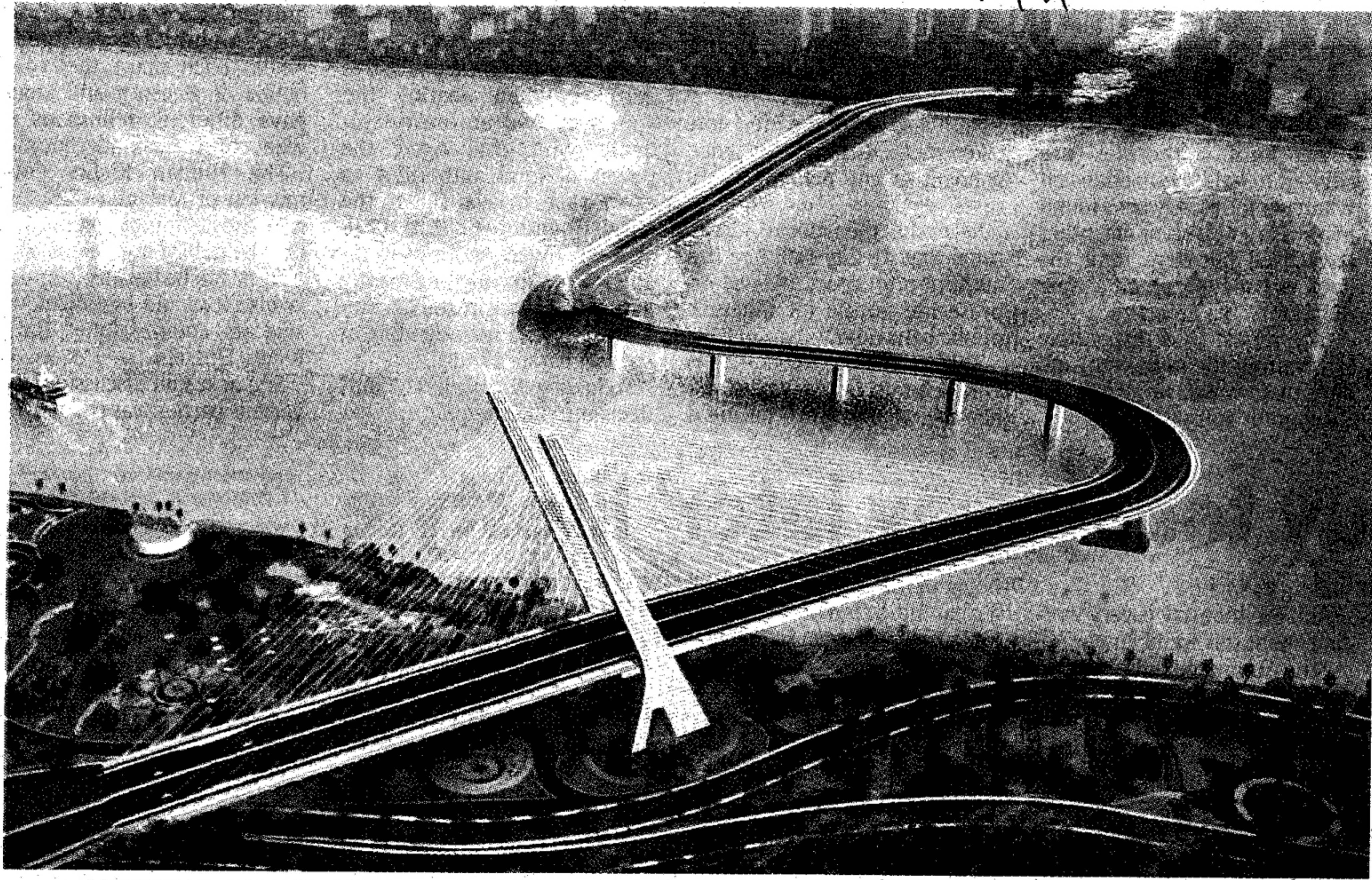
"Problems will arise when we cut the Causeway, the water pipes and railway track and connect them to the new bridge. The problems will continue," Abdullah told Bernama when asked to explain why Malaysia did not just build the bridge on its own territory without negotiating with Singapore.

He stressed that the Government's decision to cancel the bridge project was a political decision for the sake of the people, and not due to pressure from Singapore.

He said the Government had taken into consideration the sentiments and views of the people who were largely unhappy with Singapore's conditions for sand and the use of airspace in return for agreeing to build the bridge.

"We are not pressured by anybody. We think of what our people want. If the people do not want, then we need not go through with it.

"We want to do things for the people's convenience. If it causes problems and misunderstanding, it is not right to go ahead with it," Abdullah said, adding that the people were not prepared to accept the terms.



**CONCEPTUAL LINK:** An artist impression of the scenic bridge that was supposed to replace the 84-year-old Causeway.

"I have decided to listen to the people. This is a very serious matter and to ignore the feelings of the people is not good. This is the Government of the people, for the people, by the people."

According to Singapore's *Straits Times*, the republic's Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo said Malaysia's decision came as "quite a surprise" as both sides were negotiating and making progress.

Yeo added that his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar called him at about 1pm yesterday to inform him about the decision by the Malaysian Cabinet.

Syed Hamid however told him they had taken into account

domestic considerations.

"We respect this decision of the Malaysian Government and I'm sure our bilateral relations will continue to be very good.

"There are so many areas where we are cooperating and I have a very good relationship with Syed Hamid. I hope that between the two of us, we can continue to promote good relations between our two countries," said Yeo.

Speaking at a press conference after visiting the Rural and Regional Development Ministry yesterday, Abdullah said this was the first time the Cabinet had a thorough discussion on the bridge issue to determine whether negotiations with Singapore should continue.

Singapore had from the beginning imposed conditions on sand and airspace, he said.

Abdullah also stressed that there would be no more negotiations on the bridge, sand and airspace with Singapore from now, and added that there were still other bilateral issues that needed to be resolved.

Asked to describe the current status of Malaysia's relations with Singapore, the Prime Minister said: "Just the same. This is only one issue.

"The Malaysia-Singapore relationship does not depend only on the bridge. The bridge does not resolve bilateral issues between the two countries."

Abdullah said the Government had earlier announced

that the construction of the bridge would go on as planned because it looked feasible at that point in time but many Malaysians, mainly Johoreans, were against the terms imposed by Singapore.

"If we continue with the project, it will become something that the people are not happy with and it will forever be a project that will be questioned," he said.

"Therefore, it is better that we continue to use the Causeway, which is what Singapore wants. They do not want a bridge. Nobody loses anything (this way)," he said.

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