

Growing bilateral ties

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Langkawi cruise for Abdullah and Lee

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong will be on a cruise off Langkawi next Tuesday for an informal get-together amid the strong bilateral relations and growing confidence with each other.

The informal meeting will see Lee being hosted to lunch on a Star Cruises ship after a delegation meeting at a hotel in Langkawi.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid said there was no fixed agenda for the meeting to allow for a freewheeling discussion between the two leaders.

"It is very flexible, I am sure the Singaporean leader has got something to talk to our Prime Minister, and on our side, we want to talk about certain things.

"That gives room for the leaders to look into some of the areas that they consider important that they are able to add value to the currently strong relations.

"The environment is very good, the chemistry is there, so it has never been better than it is now," he told *The Star* in an interview here yesterday.

Lee is scheduled to arrive in Langkawi on

Monday with several Cabinet ministers and depart for home the next day. He made an official visit to Malaysia two months after he took over the leadership in August 2004.

When asked on Malaysia's expectations of the meeting, Syed Hamid said whenever leaders of Malaysia and Singapore met, the expectations were high.

"But what we want the public to know is that this is not a 'negotiation' meeting between the two prime ministers.

"It is just that the Singaporean Prime Minister expressed a desire to visit Malaysia, then our prime minister invited him and an appropriate date and location were fixed for the get-together," he added.

On outstanding bilateral issues including water sold to Singapore, KTM Berhad land in Singapore and the use of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore Air Force, Syed Hamid said these issues could not remain outstanding.

"What better time when the relationship is so warm as it is now. While we develop strong relations, we should see how we can move forward.

"Singapore has been asking whether we can take relations to a higher level. Malaysia has no problems with that as we have shown that relations can be improved," he added.