

Foreign Minister replies to Dr M's allegations

NOT - 30/6/2006.

Shifting sands



Syed Hamid:
No truth to
Tun Dr M's
claims that
Malaysia
offered to
sell sand
and allow
the use
of its
airspace to
Singapore

Dr M was PM
from 1981-2003

Issues of sand sale and use of airspace were first raised by Singapore and NOT Malaysia as claimed by Dr M'

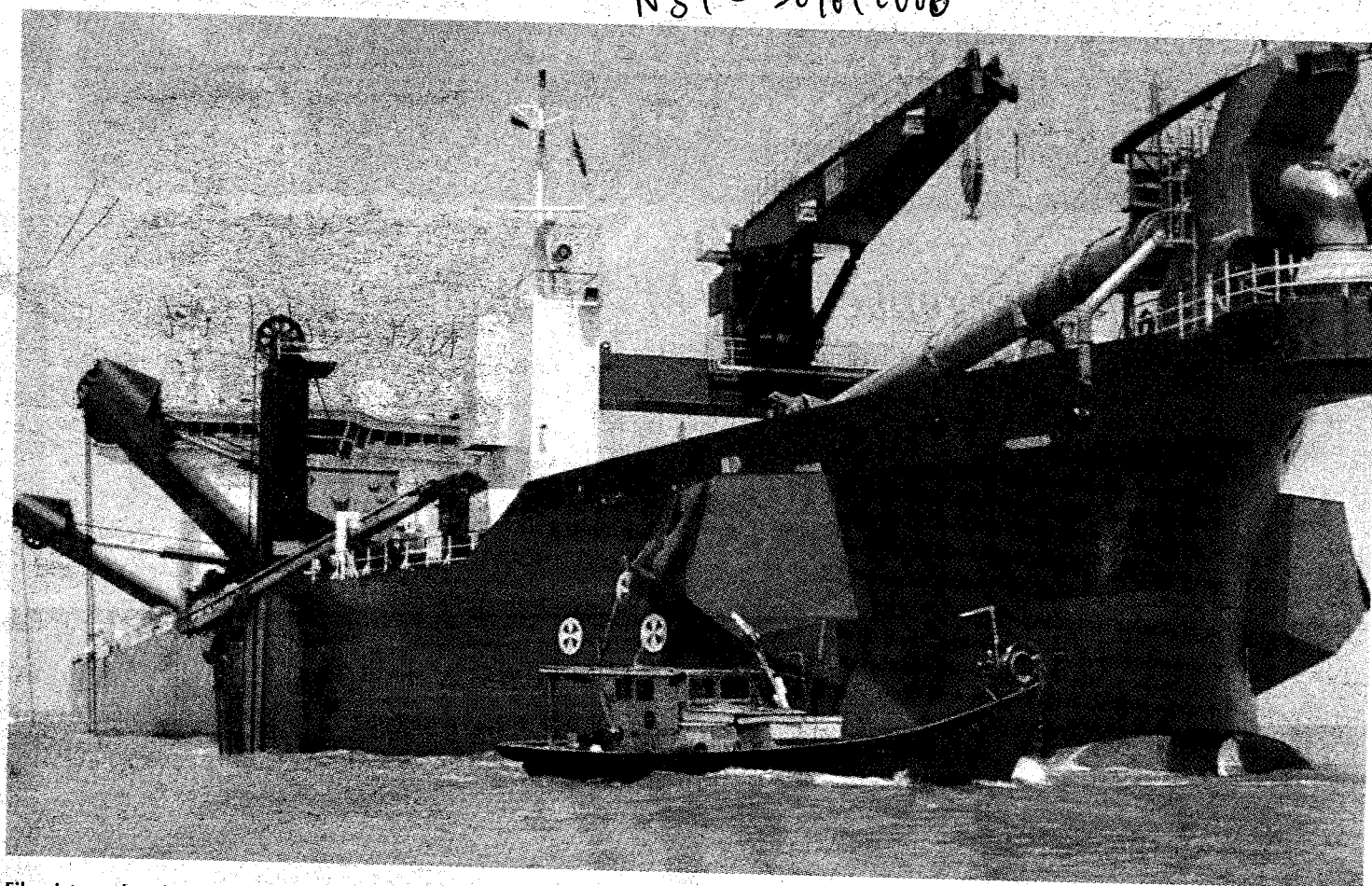
Issue of airspace usage not new as it had also been discussed between 1998-2002. Dr M himself included it as a bargaining chip during negotiations between the two countries.'

Sand was also sold to Singapore DURING Dr M's administration

In fact, Malaysia continues to sell silica sand to Singapore at this point. But compared to the sale during Dr M's time, we have set more

'Dr M's claim on sand, airspace baseless'

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File picture showing a dredge mining sand off Punggai near Kota Teluk Ramunia in Kota Tinggi, Johor.

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia did not offer to sell sand or allow its airspace to be used by Singapore as claimed by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir's claim was baseless and devoid of any truth as it was the republic that made the approach on both issues during negotiations over the bridge to replace the Causeway.

"Both these issues were raised as political quid pro quo based on the principles of equitable interests to enable Singapore to agree with the proposal to build a bridge to replace the Johor Causeway," he said in a written reply to Parliament.

Syed Hamid was replying to questions from Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur), Salahuddin Ayub (Pas-Kubang Kerian) and Abdul Fatah Harun (Pas-Rantau Panjang), who wanted to know why Malaysia took the initiative of offering the sale of sand and the use of its airspace to Singapore.

Dr Mahathir had accused the Government of lacking courage and selling out by not going ahead with the plan to build a bridge.

He said the Abdullah adminis-

tration had offered to sell sand to Singapore — an allegation challenging the Government's assertion that it did not go ahead with the project because of strong objections from Malaysians to the sale of sand to the republic.

The Cabinet has decided that it will respond factually to Dr Mahathir's various allegations. Yesterday was Syed Hamid's turn to deflect some of the former premier's criticisms.

He said the issue of allowing the republic use of Malaysian airspace was not new, and had been discussed in the context of the bilateral issues package from 1998 to 2002. "Tun himself had included the issue as a trade-off during the discussions held between the countries."

At a meeting in Putrajaya on March 1, 2005, Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong had repeated his request to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to allow the Singapore Air Force use of Malaysian airspace.

Goh also brought up the sale of sand, and asked Malaysia to sell sand to Singapore again.

During meetings held between September 2005 and March this year, only two of the five privileges sought by the republic were considered: the right to search-and-rescue, and the use of the Northern Transit Corridor.

Syed Hamid said the right to search-and-rescue was offered as a trade-off in line with international practices, while the right to the Northern Transit Corridor was for the purpose of transiting to the South China Sea so that Singapore Air Force aircraft would not intrude into Malaysian air-space.

On the sand issue, he said the Government had considered the request by Singapore after taking into account that Malaysia had sold sand to Singapore during Dr Mahathir's administration.

"Sand is still being sold by Malaysia, that is, silica sand," he said. "However, compared to the sale of sand during Dr Mahathir's administration, Malaysia has submitted more stringent conditions."

They included the quality of sand, location, royalty payments, issuance of licences, Federal and State Government procedures, regulations on sand extraction, and effective enforcement to protect the national interest.

But since the Government decided not to proceed with the bridge project, it no longer needs to consider granting airspace or selling sand to Singapore.

As directed by the Prime Minister, Syed Hamid said his ministry would come up with detailed explanations on the issues raised by Dr Mahathir on the bridge, sand and airspace.