

# Dr M: Singapore agreed to bridge without any conditions

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The spat between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the government over its decision to scrap the building of a bridge to replace the Johor causeway continued yesterday with the former premier saying he did not buy the reasons why it could not be built.

He said when he was prime minister, his then Singapore counterpart Goh Chok Tong had accepted his proposal to build the bridge on the Malaysian side unconditionally.

But because Singapore was unwilling to make a decision on building its side of the bridge to replace its side of the causeway, he told Singapore that Malaysia intended to build a bridge on its side to land on a part of the causeway also on the Malaysian side.

"The Singapore side of the causeway will not be touched. The connection will continue to be between the retained portion of the causeway. There was no condition attached to this acceptance, no mention of sand or airspace," said Mahathir in a 16-point statement.

He was responding to a statement by Foreign Ministry Ambassador-at-Large Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak on Monday that the decision to axe the project was the best option given the public sentiments against Singapore's demand for the sale of sand by Malaysia to Singapore and the use of Malaysian airspace by its air force.

Ahmad Fuzi had said the decision helped prevent the two sides from being embroiled in endless political bickering and legal disputes.

"Tan Sri Fuzi's rambling explanation about the bridge serves only to convince that the government's priority and intention is to sell sand to Singapore. If it is not allowed to do so, then Malaysia will not get its bridge," said Mahathir.

He said it was clear and recorded in writing that he proposed to build a bridge on the Malaysian side and the Singapore prime minister accepted it.

## Singapore needs Malaysia more: Mahathir

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"Thus a unilateral decision became bilateral when Singapore acceded and accepted. Any change must similarly be agreed to by both sides," he said.

As such, Mahathir said, Singapore's adding of conditions more than two years later would constitute unilateral change.

"Malaysia can reject the new condition and insist on Singapore honouring the agreement between the two prime ministers," he said.

He reiterated that the Malaysian bridge would land on the Malaysian side of the causeway and the only way Singapore could prevent traffic from the Malaysian portion of the causeway into the Singapore half is to put a barrier across the causeway border.

"This would certainly be an unfriendly act. It would be Singapore cutting its nose to spite its face," he said.

"The damage to Singapore business would be at least as bad as that which Malaysia may suffer. But in reality, Singapore needs Malaysia more than Malaysia needs Singapore. We have our ports and airports to replace Singapore ports, airports, and other services."

He said there was no need to doubt Malaysian rights in its own territorial waters

but the government did not do its best to reject the conditions set by Singapore.

"It gave in supposedly because the Malaysian legal authorities believe Singapore is in the right. It would be interesting to read the grounds for the attorney-general to conclude that Singapore has what amounts to extraterritorial rights and Malaysia has no sovereign right within its own territorial waters," he said. - Bernama

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