

Sand talks started

under Dr M

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Sand and airspace talks started under Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR: Negotiations on airspace and sand with Singapore took place even during the administration of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and were done at the request of Singapore, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Syed Albar told Parliament yesterday.

He said this in a written reply to questions from several MPs who had asked why Malaysia took the initiative to offer sand and airspace.

Mahathir also had attacked the government for offering sand and airspace.

"Statements by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Malaysia was the one who first offered to sell sand and to allow Singapore to use our airspace are baseless and not true at all," Syed Hamid said.

He added: "Tun (Mahathir) himself had put (*memasukkan*) this matter (sand and airspace) as one of the trade-off issues during their meetings on the packaged deals involving both countries.

"It was Singapore and not Malaysia

At the Dewan Rakyat

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which broached the subject of allowing the sale of sand again and the use of Malaysia's airspace.

"Both issues were raised as a means of political *quid pro quo* based on the principle of mutual interests in getting Singapore to agree to the construction of a new (straight) bridge to replace the Johor causeway."

Syed Hamid said the airspace issue was nothing new but had in fact been discussed by both countries in their bilateral meetings in the form of a package deal between 1998 and 2002.

And on March 1, 2005, during a meeting between Singapore's Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi in Putrajaya to discuss outstanding issues, Goh repeated the republic's request that Malaysia allow the use of Malaysia's airspace by the republic's air force.

Syed Hamid said that during the subsequent senior officials meeting of both countries between September 2005 and March this year, only two of the five special requests sought by Singapore were considered by Malaysia after obtaining the green light from the Malaysian Defence Ministry.

The two privileges were the request for search-and-rescue and the Northern Transit Corridor, he said.

"Even then, the right of search-and-rescue was offered based on the principle of reciprocity and is in line with international practises," he said.

"The Northern Transit Corridor was mainly to be used as a transit point to the South China Sea and that the Singapore Air Force would not hover in Malaysian

airspace."

He said conditions were also imposed by the Malaysian Defence Ministry on the use of the Northern Transit Corridor to ensure Malaysia's interests were preserved.

On the sand issue, Syed Hamid said the government had given due consideration to the requests of Singapore, after taking into the fact that Malaysia had for a long time in the past sold sand to Singapore under the administration of Mahathir.

"Sand is still being sold to Singapore at the moment, but only restricted to the sale of silica sand," he said.

Syed Hamid said compared to the sale of sand done under the administration of Mahathir, Malaysia had imposed stricter sale conditions during their bilateral meetings.

"These conditions were in regards to the aspects of sand quality, location, royalty payment, license issuance, Federal and state government

procedures, regulations on sand mining, related terms and conditions, as well as effective enforcement to preserve the country's interests," Syed Hamid said.

He said that despite this, the government in the end took into

account the sentiments of the people not to proceed with the bridge project.

"This meant Malaysia did not have to consider giving airspace and selling sand as was requested by Singapore," he said.

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- Syed Hamid