

'Can't negotiate or smile with S'pore'

► KUALA LUMPUR

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SINGAPORE was not spared in Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's talk yesterday, during which he called the country a "calculative nation" and said it was pointless negotiating with it.

On the issue of the bridge project to replace the Causeway, he spoke at length about how it was useless for Malaysia to try and seek Singapore's agreement on the matter.

"If you want to deal with Singapore, to the extent of playing golf and patting each other on the back, that is okay. But with Singapore, you cannot negotiate or smile," he said.

He added that he rarely visited Singapore, and not once since retiring.

He said he had known Singapore for 22 years and charged that the country thought only of itself.

"I give you an example, Seameo (South-east Asian Ministers of Education Organisation)," he said.

"In a meeting in the Philippines, we suggested increasing the budget. Singapore was asked to contribute an additional US\$10,000 (S\$16,000) a year.

"It said it no longer wanted to be a member. Just because of US\$10,000, it is willing to break ties

"They are calculative, even one cent they count."

He gave no details of when this

took place, nor did he offer any evidence to back up the point.

In view of this attitude on the part of Singapore, he argued, the negotiations for the bridge were doomed to fail.

But he added that he did not believe Malaysia had called off the talks simply because of public opposition to the trade-off of selling sand to Singapore.

Tun Dr Mahathir said that Singapore had wanted Malaysia to sell 1 billion cu m of sand over 20 years in exchange for its agreement to build the bridge.

He said it was clear that someone would benefit greatly from the contract to supply sand.

Even if sand was sold at just RM1 (44 Singapore cents) per cubic metre, the total price would be RM1 billion, he said.

Thus, when the sand trade-off was no longer possible because of public opposition, the government lost interest in the bridge, he charged.

It did not pursue other options, including building a half-bridge without Singapore's agreement, because its real interest was the sale of sand and not the bridge, he claimed.

"This is my suspicious mind," he said.

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