

PRESS RELEASE

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JOINT PRESS STATEMENT BY THE HON DR AHMAD MATTAR, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, SINGAPORE AND THE HON DATUK AMAR STEPHEN K T YONG, MINISTER OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT, MALAYSIA AT HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR ON 11 OCTOBER 1986 AT 11.45 AM

As part of a regular exchange of visits between Singapore and Malaysia, the Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar, Minister for The Environment, Singapore, made an official visit to Malaysia from 9 to 11 October 1986 at the invitation of the Hon Datuk Amar Stephen K T Yong, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment, Malaysia.

During the visit, the Singapore delegation held fruitful discussions with their counterparts in Malaysia on environmental issues of common interest. The Singapore delegation visited several places of interest including the Nuclear Energy Unit at the Puspati Complex, the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), Kuala Lumpur City hall, the Islamic Centre and the central market.

During the discussions on environmental issues of common interest, the Ministers touched on a variety of subject areas. Both Ministers agreed to the tentative agenda for the forthcoming Third ASEAN Environment Ministers Meeting to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia in early 1987. At the same time, Malaysia's proposals to include some projects of mutual benefit in the ASEAN Environmental Programme III (ASEP III) received a positive response from the Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar.

The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar informed that Singapore is successfully completing the task of cleaning up Singapore river and Kallang Basin. The Hon Datuk Stephen Yong acknowledged Singapore's success and expressed the need for assistance to clean up the Klang River. The Singapore Minister responded by extending an invitation for Malaysian environment officers to be on attachment for a short period in Singapore. In addition, Singapore Environment Ministry officials could be sent on special assignments to the Department of the Environment in Kuala Lumpur to study the situation and provide advice/recommendations on how the Klang River could be cleaned up effectively.

On toxic and hazardous wastes management, the Ministers expressed great concern that such wastes, if not properly managed, would pose serious threats to the environment, public health and safety. It was felt that Singapore and Malaysia could jointly study the matter and draw up guidelines and strategies to enable both countries to formulate policies and plans which would lead to mutually agreed management procedures to safeguard the environment and the public. Furthermore, the Minister agreed that there should be continuous exchange of information and knowhow to upgrade national capabilities and capacities to deal with hazardous wastes.

Both Ministers also discussed the administrative and technical complexities of dealing with hazardous chemicals, particularly problems related to transfrontier movements of such chemicals which require cooperation and technical support of both countries involved. The recent acid spill incident at the Causeway and the Bhopal incident in India are cases in point that stress the urgent need to formulate specific guidelines and rules with respect to handling, storage, transportation, distribution and usage of such chemicals, particularly in Malaysia. In this connection, the Hon Datuk Stephen Yong expressed the necessity to learn from Singapore its experience in this matter.

The Ministers reviewed the steps taken to reduce the level of lead in petrol in both countries. The present level of lead in petrol allowed in Singapore and Malaysia is 0.4 G PB/L. Singapore will reduce the lead content in petrol to 0.15 G/PB L with effect from 1 June 1987, while Malaysia will do so from 1 January 1990. Both Ministers were of the opinion that Singapore and Malaysia should exchange data, information and experience related to this matter as a first step towards considering the possibility of conducting a joint study on introducing unleaded petrol. The joint study would assist both countries to ascertain the feasibility of such a move.

The Hon Datuk Amar Stephen Yong informed that Malaysia intends to hold a seminar to discuss the different approaches and experience in Singapore and Malaysia relating to environmental planning. Speakers and participants from Singapore would be invited. The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar expressed interest in the proposal and assured that his Ministry officials would take an active part in the proposed seminar.

On the subject of environmental education, the Ministers shared their respective experience and programmes to enhance public environmental awareness, particularly among the younger generation. The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar welcomed the request by Malaysia for Singapore officials to be attached to the DOE for a two-week period to share and discuss ways and means to improve and devise better and more effective programme for the public.

The Hon Datuk Amar Stephen Yong suggested that informal visits and dialogues be arranged for technical officers from the environmental agencies of both countries. Such contacts and technical meetings, which would focus on specific priority areas, would facilitate sharing of and learning from each other's experience. The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar concurred with the above suggestion.

The Ministers took note that a technical committee has been set up under the revolving fund committee to prepare the joint oil spill combatting procedure and to conduct an exercise in 1987 to test the procedure in the Straits of Malacca.

The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar and his delegation were briefed by officials from the Agriculture and Health Ministries with regard to the problem of residual pesticide in vegetables and radiation in imported food items, and actions taken by Malaysian authorities to safeguard public health and safety.

The Hon Dr Ahmad Mattar and the Hon Datuk Amar Stephen Yong agreed that the discussions and exchange of information have helped and will continue to promote closer cooperation between Singapore and Malaysia. They are convinced that the series of regular visits between them would contribute positively towards environmental management aimed at creating a wholesome environment and a better quality of life for the peoples of Singapore and Malaysia.

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