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The Singapore–Malaysia water relationship: an analysis of the media perspectives

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Abstract This paper explores the role of the media in the Singapore–Malaysia water relationships, focusing on the water negotiations during the 1997–2004 period. Detailed examination of reports from the print media of Singapore, Malaysia and international sources constitutes the basis for a discussion of the roles the media have played between the two countries. The analysis shows how the media slowly evolved from being mainly a reporter to becoming an active platform for communication between the interested parties, acting both officially and unofficially, as well as directly and subtly, leading to shaping public opinion in either of the two countries, particularly regarding their water relationship.

Key words media; water; negotiations; agreements; Johor; Malaysia; Singapore

Les relations Singapour–Malaisie en termes d’eau: une analyse des perspectives des médias

Résumé Cet article explore le rôle des médias dans les relations Singapour–Malaisie en termes d’eau, en se concentrant sur les négociations de l’eau au cours de la période 1997–2004. L’examen détaillé des rapports de la presse écrite de Singapour, de Malaisie et de sources internationales constitue la base pour une discussion sur les rôles que les médias ont joués entre les deux pays. L’analyse montre comment les médias ont lentement évolué d’une posture essentiellement de journaliste à une plateforme active pour la communication entre les parties prenantes, agissant à la fois officiellement et officieusement, ainsi que directement et subtilement, conduisant à façonner l’opinion publique dans l’un ou l’autre des deux pays, notamment en ce qui concerne leurs relations en termes d’eau.

Mots clefs médias; eau; les négociations; accords; Johor; Malaisie; Singapour

1 INTRODUCTION

Singapore is a city-state of 4.987 million inhabitants with a land area of 710.3 km² (Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, 2010). A developed country with a rapid rate of economic growth, an open-door policy for foreign investment, and clear priorities on economics for major decisions related to its development, Singapore is currently one of the most developed countries in Asia with a per capita GDP second only to Japan (World Bank, 2010). Malaysia, located north of Singapore, has a population of 28.31 million people and an area of 330 803 km² (Department of Statistics, 2010). With a robust economic recovery process underway, the country’s medium-term growth outlook focuses on

the implementation of structural reforms that will unleash its innovation potential, shifting the sources of comparative advantage from low costs to high value.

Singapore and Malaysia have established unique bilateral relations. Their geography, historical heritage, economy and culture have contributed to an intricate and closely interdependent relationship. Both the countries, together with then independent Sabah and Sarawak, were once united as the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. The merger soon failed and Singapore became independent in 1965. From that date on, Singapore’s lack of natural resources to support its economic growth and social development, mainly in terms of water resources, made the leadership of the country aware of the importance of developing and implementing clear

visions, long-term planning and forward-looking policies and strategies that would provide it with enough flexibility to achieve its increasingly ambitious development plans (Ghesquière, 2007; Yap *et al.*, 2010).

With very clear objectives in mind, national water strategies in the city-state have comprised the formulation and implementation of innovative policies, increasingly more efficient water management practices, well-planned development of local resources, heavy investment in desalination and extensive re-use of wastewater (Tortajada, 2006; Ching, 2010; Lee, 2010; Luan, 2010). Additionally, for decades, long-term water conservation practices have focused on catchment management practices, mixes of economic instruments and very well-targeted education programmes that have been adapted to the present and foreseen future needs of the city-state.

A historically important source of water for Singapore has been imported water from Johor*, Malaysia, which will last, at least, until 2061. Four water agreements have been signed with that purpose: in 1927 (no longer in force), 1961, 1962 and 1990, allowing Singapore to import water from Johor and allowing Johor to buy treated water from Singapore (see Appendix A). These agreements illustrate a history of consistent cooperation between the two countries on the issue of water, even when their “water relationship” has not been exempt from serious disagreements and differences in opinion at different times in history (see Kog, 2001; Long, 2001; Kog *et al.*, 2002; Lee, 2003, 2005, 2010; MICA, 2003; NEAC, 2003; Chang *et al.*, 2005; Saw & Kesavapany, 2006; Sidhu, 2006; Dhillon, 2009; Shiraiishi, 2009; Luan, 2010).

Throughout the years, an important player in shaping the water relationship between the two countries has been the media. The media has acted both as a reporter and as a vehicle of communication, both officially and unofficially, to its own public but also to the interested parties in the other country. At some point, the media has been described as provocative on both sides (MICA, 2003; Chang *et al.*, 2005), contributing to “heighten emotions” in both countries (Chang *et al.*, 2005, p. 3).

The fundamental importance of the media in regard to the water relationship between the two countries lies in the fact that, except for very few primary documents publicly available, such as those released by the Government of Singapore in 2003 (MICA, 2003), public information on the Singapore–Malaysia

water relationship has been available primarily through the media. A clear indication is that the overall studies on this topic rely, sometimes heavily, on information disseminated initially in media reports.

The objective of this paper is thus to analyse the perspectives and roles of the print media in the Singapore–Malaysia water relationship, mainly at the time when bilateral water negotiations were extensively covered (1997–2004). The management of the media in Singapore and Malaysia by the respective governments is beyond the scope of this paper, and has been analysed extensively elsewhere (e.g. Ang 2002, 2007; George 2007; Kenyon 2007; Kim 2001).

The sources consulted for this analysis are from Singapore and Malaysia, as well as international. These sources are as follows:

- Singapore media: *Berita Harian* (Malay); *Berita Minggu* (Malay); *The Business Times*; *Nanyang Siang Pau* (Chinese) and *The Straits Times*.
- Malaysia media: *Bernama*; *Mingguan Malaysia* (Malay); *New Straits Times*; *Oriental Daily News* (Chinese); *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese); *The Star and Utusan Malaysia* (Malay).
- International media: *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*; *BBC Monitoring*; *Birmingham Post*; *Business World*; *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*; *International Herald Tribune*; *Newsweek*; *The Economist*; *The Independent*; *The Korean Herald*; *The Nikkei Weekly*; *Xinhua*; *Waste News*.

Before analysing the Singapore–Malaysia water relationship as viewed by the media, a general overview of the media industries in both countries is presented.

2 THE MEDIA IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

The media industries in both Singapore and Malaysia are highly regulated by the respective governments. Characterized by numerous brands, but owned by a few companies, media content may not differ significantly from one medium to another. Both media structures are also described to have pro-government tendencies, which might have implications on the industry’s attitude and reporting. While, ideally, coverage on the water relationship in both countries should be impartial, objective and factual, in real terms, reporting reflects to a significant extent the views held in their respective countries, a reason why portrayal of the events related to water negotiations may not necessarily be the same.

*The older spelling “Johore” is used in some references.

2.1 Singapore media

There are effectively only two print media companies in Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and MediaCorp. The SPH is a predominantly print media company, while MediaCorp, though mainly a broadcasting company, has one newspaper in circulation. The SPH has a 40% ownership of the MediaCorp Press, and MediaCorp Press owns a substantial stake in SPH. Even though both companies are private groups, their management is linked to the government, generally holding a government-favourable stance (Ang, 2002; Tan, 2010).

Media market ownership in Singapore is often described as monopolistic (Ang, 2007; Tan, 2010). Except for *Today*, which is owned by MediaCorp Press, all print media is owned by SPH. The SPH publishes 17 newspapers in four languages and has 77% of the readership in Singapore above 15 years old. The several newspapers are as follows: *The Straits Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Business Times*, *The Business Times Weekend*, *The New Paper* and *The New Paper on Sunday* (in English); *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Zaobao Sunday*, *Lianhe Wanbao*, *Shin Min Daily News*, *zbComma* and *Thumbs Up* (in Chinese); *My Paper* (English and Chinese); *Berita Harian* and *Berita Minggu* (Malay); and *Tamil Murasu* (in Tamil). *The Straits Times* is considered to be the most influential English newspaper in Singapore. In August 2010, it was the newspaper with the largest circulation, with 365 800 copies distributed per day (SPH, 2010).

The broadcasting media is dominated by MediaCorp, owned by Temasek Holdings, the government's investment arm. Internet-related media in Singapore is less restricted than print media, but is subject to controversial licensing regulations (Ang, 2007).

Media regulation in Singapore is extensive. The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (Government of Singapore, 1974) requires publishers to renew licenses yearly. Media companies are also required by law to be public entities with no single shareholder controlling 12% or more of a newspaper company without first obtaining government approval. Furthermore, the government has the legal authority to approve ownership and transfer of management shares that hold higher voting power in these companies. Publication that is "contrary to the public interest" is prohibited under the Undesirable Publications Act (http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?&actno=Reved-338&date=latest&method=part).

2.2 Malaysian media

In Malaysia, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) not only is the leading political party but also owns most of the main newspapers. Print media in Malaysia is in English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. The major companies are the New Straits Times Press (NTSP) and the Utusan Melayu Press (UMP). The NTSP publishes English newspapers, such as: the *New Straits Times*, *New Sunday Times*, *The Business Times*; as well as *Berita Harian*, *Berita Minggu*, *Harian Metro* and *Metro Ahad*. The Malay-based press holding UMP circulates *Utusan Melayu*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *Mingguan Malaysia* and *Utusan Zaman*. Besides UMNO, other political parties, such as the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), are closely linked, in terms of ownership, to the media (Kim, 2001). Similar to Singapore, although there are numerous newspapers available in Malaysia, these are controlled by a few companies that are connected to the ruling party coalition (Shriver, 2003). In general, mainstream print media is not critical of the government (Kenyon, 2007).

Radio and television are also government-owned and controlled. The Internet, though still subject to some form of control, is the least restricted type of communication channel. However, the government has banned several websites and is known to employ a surveillance system that restricts access (Kim, 2001). Through the Communication and Multimedia Act, licensing for Internet providers is also required and provides for legal actions against content that is considered to be defamatory and false.

The Internal Security Act and the Printing Presses and Publications Act give mandate to the government in controlling the media. The Internal Security Act restricts coverage of matters that are considered a threat to national interest and security (Kenyon, 2007). The Printing Press and Publications Act stipulates both granting and withdrawal of media licenses. Under this bill, where media publishers have to renew licenses yearly, the government has the discretion to withdraw licenses without any obligation for explanation (Kim, 2001).

3 SINGAPORE-MALAYSIA WATER RELATIONS AS VIEWED BY THE MEDIA

Before presenting the perspectives of the media, it is important to introduce the situation regarding water negotiations during the 1997-2004 period,

as addressed by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts of Singapore (MICA, 2003) (see also Appendix B for a chronology of developments):

The story began in 1998. Crises, they say, bring people together; so it was that at the height of the Asian financial crisis, the two countries began negotiations on a “framework of wider cooperation”. Malaysia wanted financial loans to support its currency. To enable it to carry its domestic ground when acceding to the request, Singapore suggested that Malaysia give its assurance for a long-term supply of water to the Republic. Malaysia eventually had no need for the loans, and so negotiations turned to other matters of mutual interest. In particular, Malaysia wanted joint development of more land parcels in Singapore in return for relocating its railway station away from the current site at Tanjong Pagar.

Over the ensuing three years, more items were bundled into the negotiation package. Singapore added one request: resumption of its use of Malaysian airspace for military transit and training. Malaysia added three more: replacing the Causeway with a bridge, early withdrawal of the Central Provident Fund savings for West Malaysians working in Singapore and a higher price for the water it presently sells to Singapore.

Officials met; leaders corresponded; Singapore’s Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew took pains to visit Malaysian leaders at the capital, Kuala Lumpur

The water negotiations came to the forefront of the Singapore–Malaysia cooperation framework as early as 1995, and in connection with talks on the Malayan Railway and Malaysia’s plans to invest in an electric train that would connect both countries (*The Business Times* (BT), 6 June 1997). By 1996, Malaysia’s willingness to supply water to Singapore, contingent upon its domestic needs, was publicly announced (BT, 6 June 1997). This was reinforced in the two-day visit of Singapore’s Prime Minister Goh to Malaysia in February 1998, where both countries released a joint communiqué re-affirming this (NST, 4 April and BT, 10 April 1998). The details of the new agreement were set to be refined within a 60-day period after the official visit. However, this deadline was not met because both parties could not reach an accord on the details (BT, 30 June 1998).

In 1998, the water negotiations were linked to a financial recovery package between Singapore and Malaysia that the latter subsequently passed in favour of a package approach for outstanding bilateral issues (BT, 18 December 1998). This package linked the issue of water to the negotiation of other bilateral issues including: “the Malayan Railway land in Singapore, the relocation of the immigration checkpoint for the Malayan Railway, the use of Malaysian airspace by Singapore aircraft, the transfer of Malaysian shares no longer traded on CLOB International to the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, and the early release of CPF (Central Provident Fund) savings of Malaysian workers” (BT, 18 December 1998). There was very little media coverage reported on the status of the negotiations at that moment. Around the same time, Singapore conducted feasibility studies to source water from Indonesia (BT, 15 June 2000 and 21 Aug. 1998; *Straits Times* (ST), 16 Jan. 1999).

In September 2001, Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir reached an in-principle agreement to resolve a host of outstanding bilateral issues, including water (BT and ST, 5 September 2001). New to this agreement was the replacement of the Causeway bridge in favour of a railway tunnel that would connect both countries (ST, 5 September 2001). Official proposals and counter-proposals were exchanged between the two countries, followed by a new round of bilateral talks in July, September and November 2002. Several factors, such as delinking water from the package deal, the price of water and Malaysia’s right to review the price of water, stalled the process. The package deal approach was subsequently dropped for an individual approach by the third round of talks in November 2002. However, no deal was reached. Malaysia only wanted to discuss the current price of water, while Singapore also wanted the issue of future water supply included in the agenda (ST, 21 November 2002). The impasse led to discussions that circulated in the press about seeking legal resource to resolve whether Malaysia had a right for a price review (ST, 21 November 2002).

In January 2003, Singapore released official letters from the negotiations in an effort to clear matters (MFAS, 2003). Several of these letters were published in Singapore’s *Straits Times* (ST, 26 January 2003a,b; 28 January 2003) and also were made available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAS, 2003). This decision was heavily criticized by Malaysia (*New Straits Times* (NST), 28 January

2003), who released, in July 2003, a week-long series of advertisements on the dispute titled “Water: The Singapore–Malaysia Dispute: The Facts” (NEAC, 2003; NST, 13 July 2003).

Soon after that time, the official negotiations stopped. Malaysia stated that it would still honour current agreements but that negotiations were over (ST, 2 August 2003). In contrast, Singapore expressed intentions of letting the first of the water agreements expire in 2011 (NST, 6 August 2002).

A host of additional factors also affected the bilateral water relations. These included the quest of both countries to be independent from each other in terms of water: Singapore wanting water self-sufficiency and Johor’s aims to be independent from Singapore in regards to water treatment; the possibility for Singapore to source water from Indonesia; the development of the water industry in Singapore supported by the production of NEWater¹ and desalination plants; and reclamation efforts in Singapore which were affecting Malaysia, and the dispute over Pulau Batu Putih/Pedra Branca.

3.1 Coverage of water relations

When analysing the role of the media in the Singapore–Malaysia water relationship, it is fundamental to consider the prevailing historical and political context between the two countries at specific times. Regarding bilateral issues, experience has shown that media coverage, in general, does not necessarily follow the philosophy of the media as a public sphere where “citizens discuss and deliberate matters of common interest and public concern, and hold the state accountable” (George, 2007, p. 94). In bilateral issues, the media tend to be rather nationalistic with homogeneous views which focus primarily on the interests of their own countries and reflect the views of the respective states. The case of the Singapore and Malaysia media was no different.

The coverage of the water negotiations across the two countries evolved over time. At first, coverage was dominated by news articles portraying positive images of cooperation during the bilateral negotiations, and frames were consistent across Singaporean and Malaysian news. Later on, however, coverage grew increasingly negative and framing of the issues soon differed. The local interest grew with the proliferation of opinions and editorial articles

alongside the news articles. Bilateral negotiations soon became a domestic political issue, and the leaders used the media to clarify and explain the status of negotiations to their respective public.

It is important to mention, at this point, that mass media coverage of political issues is normally, and necessarily, selective. The media depends on frames to give coherence to relatively brief treatments of complex issues through selective views, choosing to highlight certain items and ignore others, frequently looking for consensus or disagreement on certain issues. Since the number and variety of issues that an audience can appreciate on specific subjects is normally limited, public debate is constrained on matters even when they are relevant, simply because citizens tend to focus on specific issues when constructing their opinion. In the case of the Singapore–Malaysia water relationship—as one would expect to be the case in any normal bilateral relations—the media could decide to transmit mainly the views of the own establishment with a clear objective to form a favourable public opinion.

Jürgen Habermas, the German sociologist and philosopher, argued that the function of the media has been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate in the public sphere, into shaping, constructing and limiting public discourse to the themes approved by media groups (Kellner, 2000). Nevertheless, one could equally argue that citizens trust their elites, and, in this case, also their national mass media, on bilateral issues, because they perceive them to be credible sources of information. In addition, as discussed by Andina-Díaz (2007, p. 66), the influence of the media is “*neither as significant as it was first thought to be, nor as minimal as was subsequently assumed*”. This is because citizenry does not necessarily follow the media blindly or accept passively all views as presented, since people have their own motivations and own biases which may or may not coincide with the views presented by the media. Consequently, as important as the media is to shape public opinion, and as consistent as the messages of the media can be with their respective establishments looking to shape public opinion, a fundamental player in the equation is the readership. Citizens are not necessarily mere spectators who allow the media to mould their opinion: they normally make use of their own perspectives and expose themselves to material with which they normally agree, often interpreting

¹ NEWater is recycled water which has become a fundamental resource to ensure secure and sustainable use of water in Singapore (see Tortajada, 2006; Soon *et al.*, 2009; Ching, 2010; Luan, 2010)

Table 1 The role of the media in the Singapore–Malaysia water relationship, 1997–2004.

Media role	Period	Media content		Media framing
		Bilateral news	Composition of print media	Comparative media coverage
As reporter	First 1997–1998	Mostly positive content	News articles	Consistent
As reporter and platform for communication	Second 1999–2001	Increasingly negative content	News articles, opinions, editorials, forums and letters	Consistent with slight framing of news
	Third 2002–2004	Mostly negative content	News articles, opinions, editorials, forums, letters and pamphlets	Water negotiations were framed differently

the media content to reinforce their own views and perspectives.

For this analysis, the period covered (1997–2004) for the bilateral negotiations has been divided into three parts following the media’s evolving role (Table 1). The media’s traditional role as a reporter of events is clear in the early phase of the water negotiations that is covered by the first period. The second and third periods include the increased role of the media as a communication platform. Nonetheless, while the second period demonstrates the media’s role for clarification of facts for interested groups other than officials, the third period is identified by the media playing the role of an unofficial medium for communication between the governments of Singapore and Malaysia.

Each of these periods is discussed in detail in the following sections. This includes media portrayal from different news sources as well as the consistency of both *media content* (consistency of news content regardless of media source) and *media framing* of the news (assessment of the portrayal of the media content between different sources where the same media content may be presented or highlighted in different ways defining and constructing a political issue or a public controversy). This analysis also includes classifying the data as positive, negative or neutral, and making a comparison between the three different media sources.

3.2 The media as a reporter

During the early phase of the negotiations (1997–1998), the media played largely a reporting role wherein news articles gave an account of the proceedings of the water negotiations between the two countries. Only the offices of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of each country were directly involved in the negotiation process. In addition,

there was a consistency in terms of the *content* that the Singapore and Malaysian media covered. This period mainly featured positive news coverage on the possibility of further cooperation on bilateral water agreements. Highlighted in these years were the countries’ signing points of agreement (BT, 6 June 1997) with Singapore willing to buy water from Malaysia and the latter willing to supply water to Singapore beyond 2061 (NST, 4 April 1998 and BT, 4 August 1998). By mid-1998, there were some negative news items on the stalled talks due to a failure to reach an agreement between the countries, and a change from linking the water deal to a financial assistance package to a host of other bilateral issues (BT, 18 December 1998). In spite of this, news coverage was still consistent in terms of content between Singapore and Malaysian and international media sources.

During this first period, media framing did not differ significantly between the two countries. However, there was a different choice of words between the Singaporean and Malaysian media with the same content being portrayed in different lights. For example, Singapore news reported that the UMNO youth “calls for suspension of talks” (BT, 4 August 1998), while, according to the Malaysian news, the UMNO youth “urges the Malaysian government to be firm” in dealing with Singapore (NST, 4 August 1998). Another difference was when Singapore news reported that Malaysia had “agreed” to continue to supply water to Singapore (BT, 6 November 1998), while Malaysian news stated that it would “not cut off water supply to Singapore” (NST, 5 August 1998). Regarding the loan assistance, Singapore news reported that Malaysia “sought Singapore’s help” (BT, 6 November 1998), which it eventually chose not to take (BT, 18 December 1998), while Malaysian news reported that it had told Singapore that it “does not need the funds offered by Singapore” (NST, 18 December 1998). Thus, even though media contents in the two countries were fairly

similar, the framing of the issues did differ across the two countries.

For these years, although there was consensus among the leaders to cooperate, there was no policy certainty, because no agreement could be reached. It is, thus, not surprising that in the first period, the media in both countries mainly played a role as informative reporter.

3.3 The media as a medium for communication

The media's role changed as it increasingly became a medium of communication between the two countries. During the second period (1999–2001), the media's role as a medium of communication was mainly for interested groups in the negotiation process other than official representatives. Finally, throughout the third period (2002–2004), the media's role further expanded when it served as an unofficial medium of communication between the two governments on the water negotiations. These aspects are discussed below.

3.3.1 The media as a medium of communication for stakeholders other than official representatives During the second period, 1999–2001, the media played a second role. From a media coverage that was dominated by news articles, this period saw an increase in opinion and editorial articles that became gradually more negative in both countries.

There was still a general consistency in terms of media content in Singapore and Malaysia. The nature of the media coverage extended beyond just reporting, becoming a medium for communication and clarification. The media played a role in addressing concerns raised by both sides. For instance, Malaysian opinion articles portrayed the unfairness of the situation and how Singapore was benefiting from the existing water deal (NST, 23 February 1999). Singapore opinion articles in turn portrayed how Singapore was not profiting from the deal while Malaysia was (ST, 3 March 1999 and NST, 17 June 1999). In addition, Johor's own interest in meeting its own water needs before Singapore's were also raised in the Malaysian Press (NST, 7 and 8 June 1999). This was then addressed by the Singapore media, reiterating that the country's water demand was contingent upon Malaysia satisfying its own needs first (BT, 11 June 1999). Thus, the media served as a platform for communication and clarification for the population of both countries.

Around this period, media coverage also voiced concerns on the over-dependence of Singapore and Malaysia on each other (ST 2, December 2000, and

BT, 24 April 2001). This might have contributed to other initiatives at this stage, where Singapore floated the idea of starting a partnership with Indonesia as an alternative source of water supply (BT, 15 June 2000, 15 February 2001 and ST, 2 July 2000a, 2 July 2000b), and of investing in more desalination plants (ST, 15 and 22 March 2001). It was also reported that Malaysia had decided to build a water treatment plant in Johor to reduce reliance on receiving treated water from Singapore (BT, 19 August 2000).

Given these events, media content was fairly consistent across the two countries and, even though it served to clarify and answer concerns raised by both sides, it covered roughly the same topics. Nevertheless, by then, the number of negative articles started to increase and the prolonged negotiations, which did not result in any agreement, may have facilitated this increased role of the media as an avenue for clarification. To some extent, this was to be expected given the increasing interest of the public in both countries on the status of the water negotiations. Compared to the first period, when only the official parties relayed information to the press, this interval saw various groups, such as Malaysia's UMNO youth group and Singapore's Worker's Party, expressing their thoughts and views on the water negotiations (NST and BT, 4 August 1998; ST, 7 September 2001).

The exchanges between the Singaporean and Malaysian media, which were absent in the coverage of the international media, show the beginning of the framing of the water negotiations. On the one hand, Malaysia started portraying how the past water deals were in favour of Singapore (NST, 8 June 1999) and how Singapore was profiting from them (NST, 10 and 17 January 2001). On the other hand, Singapore started to portray how both countries had benefited from the agreements (NST, 17 June 1999) and how it was not profiting from the water deals (ST, 3 March 1999; NST, 17 June 1999). Thus, within this role as a platform for communication and clarification, the media became a conduit to address the other country's concerns.

Though this period still projected an overall consensus among the leaders to cooperate, the degree of agreement began to change. For example, while there was a general consensus among the leaders, media coverage started to depict diverging and negative opinions. The prolonged negotiations were also an indication of heightened policy uncertainty. The media gradually became more focused on clarifying the respective government's views on various issues related to the negotiations, compared to its earlier role as a one-way (media to the public) reporter.

3.3.2 The Media as an unofficial medium of communications In contrast to the 1997–1998 and 1999–2001 periods, when communication and clarification were the primary roles of the media, during the third period, from 2002 to 2004, the media's role changed even further, when it started to serve as an unofficial medium for communication between the governments of Singapore and Malaysia. Furthermore, a distinct framing of the news was also more evident, where negative views were expressed on the Singapore–Malaysia bilateral ties. There was now a significant increase in the editorials, opinions and letters on the water negotiations.

The analysis below illustrates how the media played an unofficial role as a medium for communication between the two governments, and how the Singaporean and Malaysian media framed the news.

(a) Unofficial medium for communication between governments

In one example, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid of Malaysia released news to the media about seeking legal recourse and cancelling negotiations with Singapore as early as October 2002 (BT, 25 October 2002; ST, 25 October 2002; NST, 14 October and 30 November 2002). However, no official notice was forwarded to Singapore, with the Foreign Minister indicating that the newspapers knew where Malaysia stood in seeking legal recourse (ST, 3 December 2002). Another instance was the agenda of the negotiations on whether it would include both current and future water abstraction by Singapore or only current water requirements. Malaysia stated that it would only discuss the price of current water (ST, 20 November 2002), while Singapore stated that both current and future water must be on the agenda (ST, 21 November 2002). Following the media reports, Singapore sought official clarification from Malaysia's Foreign Ministry to confirm the status of future water talks (ST, 1 December 2002). These examples illustrate how Singapore and Malaysia utilized the media as a platform for unofficial communication with each other.

In addition, the media played a role in delivering subtle signals and messages between the two governments. These signals captured the sentiments of both sides, which might or might not have come out during the official negotiations. For instance, when the Singapore media featured consecutive articles on NEWater's

safety and quality (ST, 12 July 2002; BT, 12, 17, 26 July 2002), Deputy Prime Minister Lee talked about the possibility of NEWater replacing the water imported from Johor (ST, 13 July 2002), and Foreign Minister Jayakumar announced that water would no longer be a strategic vulnerability for Singapore (ST, 29 July 2002). On the other side, Malaysian media also delivered subtle signals to Singapore when Foreign Minister Syed Hamid said that NEWater would not affect Malaysia's stand in the negotiations (The Star, 18 August 2002), and Prime Minister Mahathir informed the media that Singapore was free to stop buying water from Malaysia (NST, 7 August 2002). Indirect signals, such as Johor officials negating the relevance of NEWater to Singapore's water security (ST, 11 August 2002), and a Malaysian MP's suggestion of selling sewage water to Singapore instead (ST, 3 October 2002), signalled Malaysia's position in the negotiations amid changing water dynamics.

Therefore, the media played an unofficial platform not only for communication on bilateral negotiation topics, such as the agenda and arbitration, but also for sending subtle signals to both countries. With the growing interest in the water negotiations, the media also served as a platform for both parties to explain and educate their domestic constituencies about the progress of the negotiations. The speech of Singapore's Foreign Minister Jayakumar to the Parliament detailing the water talks was published in the newspapers (ST, 26 January 2003c). Simultaneously, several of the letters from which the Foreign Minister quoted extensively were released to *The Straits Times* (ST, 26 January 2003a,b, 28 January 2003). These letters were also archived and posted on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (MFAS, 2003). Malaysia published a week-long series of advertisements on the issue, stating its position in the water talks (NST, 13 July 2003). This information was also compiled and made available on Malaysian government websites (NEAC, 2003). Furthermore, Malaysia made these copies available for sale to the public (NST, 20 July 2003). It is in these publications that the Singaporean and Malaysian media's framing of the water negotiations became more consistent and evident.

(b) Media framing of the Singapore–Malaysia water relations

Both Singapore and Malaysia portrayed different perspectives of the water negotiations that became most evident in the third period. These perspectives were valid, but incomplete when viewed and read separately. An informed public needs to understand both sides of the situation. More often than not, however, the media seem to have reported what the two governments wanted their respective public to know about their respective policies.

Not surprisingly, both the Singaporean and the Malaysian governments portrayed themselves as the more reasonable partner in the bilateral talks. Each party claimed that the other was publishing inaccurate information. Malaysia claimed that Singapore published false information on the water issue (BH, 26 July 2003), and that its reports were misleading and did not accurately reflect the developments (*Sin Chew Daily* (SCD), 29 January 2003). Meanwhile, the Singaporean media reported how Malaysia ignored crucial facts (ST, 15 July 2003) and published false answers in its advertisement blitz (BH, 28 July 2003).

The divergent framing of the critical issues from Singapore and Malaysia is discussed in the next section.

3.3.3 The Singaporean media on water relations: Singapore is consistent and reasonable The Singaporean media portrayed Singapore as a consistent and reasonable negotiating partner in the water negotiations. It repeatedly framed Singapore as very accommodating, giving in to Malaysia's changing requests (BT, 16 October 2002; ST, 29 July 2002). It highlighted how Malaysia had been inconsistent and unreasonable in the negotiations: changing their nature, changing the agenda and changing the price of water.

– *Changing the nature of negotiations* The extension of the water contracts was first tied to a financial arrangement (BT, 6, 17 and 24 November 1998). It was then that Malaysia requested to drop the financial issues and instead adopted a package-deal approach to include a host of outstanding bilateral issues between the two countries (NST, 18 December 1998; ST, 24 July 2002). This approach linked the water issues to the early withdrawal of the Central Provident Fund for Malaysians, the relocation of the Malaysian Immigration checkpoint in

Singapore and the use of Malaysian airspace by Singapore (BT, 18 December 1998). It was also Malaysia that added new issues into the agenda, such as the proposal for a new bridge to replace the Causeway (ST, 26 January 2003c; ST, 4 September 2002). In the end, it was also Malaysia that unilaterally dropped the package approach (ST, 3 July 2002; BT, 3 July 2002). Even then, Singapore was still willing to continue negotiations with Malaysia (ST, 24 July 2002 and 26 January 2003c).

- *Changing the agenda of water negotiations* Focusing specifically on water, Malaysia often changed the “goalposts.” The original talks were on the extension of the water agreements after the 1961 and 1962 contracts had expired (BT, 30 June and 6 November 1998; NST, 4 and 18 April 1998). Malaysia was the party that wanted to include the prevailing agreements on the table through a price revision for water, and for the price review to be retroactive (ST, 3 July and 24 July 2002; BT, 3 July 2002). Later on, it was also Malaysia that wanted to discuss only the price of current water and not of future water (BT, 9 and 12 October 2002; ST, 12 October 2002).
- *Changing the water price* Malaysia constantly changed its offer as to the price Singapore should pay for importing water (BT, 1 and 4 February, 8 July, 2002; ST, 8 July 2002). From an agreement of 45 sen per 1000 gallons in 2000, Malaysia changed its asking price to 60 sen per 1000 gallons in 2001 and then to RM 3 per 1000 gallons (ST, 26 January 2003c). Together with the shift from a package approach to dealing with the water issue separately, the changing water price added to the protracted negotiations on water. It is important to mention that Singapore is subsidising the cost of treated water to Johor. Singapore is selling treated water at the rate of RM 0.5 per 1000 gallons, although it is costing Singapore RM 2.4 per 1000 gallons (<http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/press/pedra/faq.html>).

The Singapore media reported how Singapore had been reasonable and accommodating to Malaysia's changing requests (BT, 16 October 2002; ST, 29 July 2002). However, the negative publicity about the negotiations prompted Singapore to set the record straight by publishing official correspondence between the parties concerned (ST, 26 January 2003c). The speech of Foreign Minister

Jayakumar and the additional information released through the letters further indicate how the media had framed the situation.

3.3.4 The Malaysian media on water relations: Malaysia wants a fair price The Malaysian media portrayed Malaysia as the more reasonable partner, who only wanted a fair water agreement with Singapore (NST, 21 July 2003). Likewise, the publication of its booklet “*Water: The Singapore–Malaysia Dispute: The Facts*” (NEAC, 2003) also solidified this framing. This booklet highlighted how Malaysia had been a cooperative partner, willing to supply water to Singapore as long as a fair agreement was made.

- *Willingness to supply water to Singapore* Malaysia repeatedly expressed its sincerity in supplying water to Singapore even after the 1961 and 1962 agreements had expired (NST, 4 April and 5 August 1998; 2 September 2002; 7 February 2003). The governments of Pahang and Johor also expressed the same view (NST, 25 June 1998; ST, 21 January and 1 October 1999).
- *Desire for a fair agreement* Malaysia was just requesting a fair and reasonable arrangement with Singapore, and asking for a fair price (NST, 15, 19 and 21 July 2003, 29 January 2002). Instead, Singapore had been profiting from Malaysia due to the low cost of water supplied by Malaysia and the high price Singapore was charging for treated water subsequently supplied to Malaysia (NST, 13 March 2000, 10 January 2001, 22 January 2002). To make progress, Singapore should accept Malaysia’s right for a price review (NST, 4 September 2002, 16 July 2003).
- *Reasonable Malaysia, unbending Singapore* It was Singapore that was being unreasonable and refusing to accommodate Malaysian requirements which were fair and just (NST, 13 March 2000). Singapore repeatedly turned water into the pivotal issue in negotiations that forced Malaysia to delink water from the package approach (NST, 22, 23, 26 January 2002, 8 September 2002).

The Malaysian media reported how Malaysia was very reasonable toward Singapore, only asking for a fair price for its water. To counteract Malaysian aims, Singapore published official correspondence between the leaders of the two nations. This forced Malaysia to react and inform the Malaysian population on its views of the situation through an information campaign.

4 THE MEDIA, ITS VIEWS AND THE WATER RELATIONS

When discussing the role of the media in the Singapore–Malaysia water relationships, it is essential to understand the historical and political context between the two countries at specific times.

Historically, water has always been considered a very important part of the Singapore–Malaysia bilateral agenda and, as such, water agreements have been signed in different years between 1927 and 1990. Later on, water became part of the so-called “package deals”, where discussions included several other issues. In 1995, for example, water was discussed in connection to the Malayan Railway and the plans Malaysia had to invest in an electric train that would connect both countries. In 1998, water negotiations were linked to a financial recovery package that included the Malayan Railway land in Singapore, the use of Malaysian airspace by Singapore’s aircrafts, the transfer of Malaysian shares no longer traded on CLOB International to the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange and the early release of the Central Providence Fund savings of Malaysian workers. In 2001, water was discussed together with the replacement of the Causeway bridge in favour of a railway tunnel that would connect both countries. Finally, in 2002, the bilateral talks were stalled, because it was proposed by Malaysia that water should be discussed separately from any package deal, and because of the discussions in regard to the right of Malaysia to revise the price of water well after the date stipulated in the water agreements signed by the two parties. During all this time, one would have expected the historical and political situations prevailing between the two countries to have influenced the views and opinions as well as the “sentiments”, and even the “tone”, of the media when covering the news, even if these were supposedly solely about water.

Overall, the main role of the media has been to publicize and inform the public on the water negotiations, mainly from the viewpoints of the respective national interests, which is to be expected on bilateral issues. This publicity has been effective to the point that other groups, both private and public, that were not party to the official negotiation process, expressed their own thoughts and opinions on what their governments should do. For example, there was an increase in the number of interest groups, such as the UMNO youth group, the PAP (People Action Party) (Yap *et al.*, 2010) youth group, the PAP Opposition party, NGO groups, the Malaysian military and research institutions, that expressed their

opinions on the issue. The increased media coverage and the larger number of interested stakeholders even prompted the Singaporean and Malaysian Foreign Ministries to explain the details of the protracted talks to their citizens. In fact, the complexity created by the emergence of so many new players impelled the officials to ask the public to stop interfering in this matter (SCD, 20 January 2003).

As the discussions on water between Singapore and Malaysia evolved over time, the views of the media and their coverage on the topic of water also changed, shaping the public perception on this issue in both countries. Initially, media coverage in both countries played both an informative and a constructive role, with positive images of cooperation and consistent framing in the news. This was a period that was dominated by news articles. Later on, the media became a vehicle of communication for interested groups other than officials, publishing news articles, opinions, editorials, forums and letters. Media coverage was consistent, with a slight amount of news framing, which gradually became more negative in both the countries until the framing of the issues differed. Finally, the 2002–2004 period witnessed the most intense coverage on the water discussions, when the media became a vehicle of communication for officials in both the countries (with news articles, opinions, editorials, forums, letters and pamphlets). The frame of the news was very different in the two countries, with predominantly negative news on both sides of the Causeway. During this last period, the perspectives presented by the media of both countries were valid, but incomplete, when read separately, with the net result that the readers were getting only a partial view of the situation.

By and large, the local interest in the two countries grew with the proliferation of opinions and editorial articles. When bilateral negotiations became a domestic political issue, the leaders used the media to clarify and explain the status of negotiations to their respective public, trying to make their views clear for their own citizens, but also sending “unofficial” messages to interested parties in the other country. Clearly, with the growing interest in the water negotiations, the media also served as a platform for the countries not only to inform their citizens but also to educate them on the progress of the negotiations.

As mentioned earlier, mass media coverage of political issues is normally, and necessarily, selective. The media normally depends on frames to give coherence to relatively brief treatments of complex issues through certain views, in which they select to

highlight specific items and ignore others, often looking for consensus or disagreement on certain matters. Nevertheless, as important as the media is to shape public opinion, and as consistent as the messages of the media can be with their respective establishments, citizens normally make use of their own perspectives, listening to some information and disregarding some other, depending on whether they agree or not with the views presented. It so happens that citizens often interpret media content to reinforce their own views.

The view on the role of the media can be more comprehensive if considered within its multifaceted relationship with the State and the public, with the three actors being equally important in the equation. In the water relationship between Singapore and Malaysia, the media has been a dynamic actor—a role which has evolved with time during the course of the bilateral negotiations—but also has taken on the attitude of the citizens in both countries. While the media of each country has portrayed the water negotiations in different lights, playing important roles in terms of reporting on policies and politics, the readers have also played an important role mainly in terms of supporting their own countries, often willingly accepting the viewpoint of the establishment, considering it to be acting according to their national interests. The role of the media would be partial only if considered in isolation, without acknowledging the role of the readers, since, frequently, both of them voice the ideas, ideals and concerns of the other.

5 FURTHER THOUGHTS

Relationships between Singapore and Malaysia have “undergone a sea change” during the last decade or so (Chang *et al.*, 2005, p. 1), with bilateral relations improving significantly with the change of leadership in Malaysia in 2003. Stronger bilateral ties have been characterized by greater contact and cooperation between the leaders, officials and businesses. Synergies are developing and include, but are not limited to: economic cooperation, trade and investment; increasing private sector participation in strategic investments, corporate purchases and joint business ventures; cooperation on security matters; movement of technical experts across borders; promotion of tourism and sport-related activities; exchange of students; and improved relationships between civil society groups in both countries (Saw and Kesavapany, 2006; Sidhu, 2006). With the objective to promote better understanding and bilateral ties among the citizens of both countries, circulation of newspapers on

“both sides of the Causeway” has been re-initiated after some 30-year ban of each others’ newspapers (Saw and Kesavapany, 2006, p. 17).

Bilateral negotiations have also resumed with the aim to solve the several outstanding issues, considering all the various alternatives. In 2004, it was agreed, by Singapore’s former Prime Minister Goh and then Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, that future discussions between the two countries should be based on the consideration of mutual benefits on any proposal that would be discussed. It was also agreed that the issues that had not been resolved should not delay cooperation in other areas (Saw and Kesavapany, 2006). With the political environment more positive between the two countries, relations are in a new phase where both the countries want to resolve bilateral differences. This has already resulted, for example, in the amicable solution of the land reclamation dispute. In April 2005, Malaysia withdrew the case against Singapore from the International Tribunal of the Law of the Seas. Singapore agreed to make adjustments to its reclamation works, and compensated Malaysian fishermen for losses due to the works. Both countries signed an agreement, on 26 April 2005, that Johor Straits form a “shared water body” (Sidhu, 2006, p. 88). Malaysia also discontinued the project on the bridge to replace the Causeway on 12 April 2006. Finally, the dispute on the sovereignty of Pedra Branca was also solved when the International Court of Justice ruled in favour of Singapore.

In terms of the media, it should be noted that Singapore and Malaysia resumed talks on outstanding bilateral issues in 2005, and decided not to divulge the details of the negotiations through the media (MFAS, 2005). Both countries have agreed that details of the negotiations on water should not be discussed with the media. It has been recognized that it would not be helpful to publicize the details of the negotiations to avoid heightening expectations, as happened on earlier occasions, as well as to avoid media frenzy on whatever issues had been discussed, as had been the case in the past (and would be the case once more in the media reports on the “scenic bridge” case presented in Saw and Kesavapany, 2006, p. 6–7).

Former Singapore Prime Minister Goh is quoted to have said that “*due to the sensitive nature of issues both sides have agreed to keep discussions in private instead of negotiating through the press—as it has been the case in the past*” (Agence France-Presse, 17 October 2004, in Sidhu, 2006, p. 87). The low-key and private nature of the discussions that have been held are considered as clear signals of the willingness

of both countries to solve bilateral problems between them, as well as to avoid the media capitalizing on these issues, as it did in the past (Sidhu, 2006). A private setting or “quiet diplomacy” has clearly been accepted by both the countries as the best alternative to achieve progress (Lee, 2010).

The ties between both the countries are deep-rooted and are based not solely on water but on a multiplicity of others factors. As noted by Mr Tan Gee Paw, current Chairman of the Public Utilities Board of Singapore, “*There is much that both countries can gain by working together. Our common interests far exceed our bilateral differences*” (BBC World Debate on Water, Singapore, 30 June 2010).

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Appendix A Singapore–Malaysia Water Agreements

The water relationship between Singapore and Malaysia dates as far back as 1927, decades before both countries gained independence. Even though the water relations have not always been perfect, the four water agreements illustrate a history of consistent cooperation between the two countries in the issue of water. These agreements, of which only the 1927 one is no longer in force, allow Singapore to source water from Malaysia, and for Malaysia to buy back treated water from Singapore. This relationship has secured water supply for Singapore and brought water infrastructure development to Malaysia through Singapore investments in Johor.

The following table summarises the water agreements between Malaysia and Singapore.

Table A1 Water Agreements between Singapore and Malaysia.

Water Agreements	Parties to the agreement	Water agreements details
1927	The Sultan of Johore and the Municipal Commissioners of the Town of Singapore	The agreement allows Singapore to rent 2100 acres of land in Gunong Pulai at 30 cents per acre per year, and “take, impound and use all the water which from time to time may be or be brought or stored in upon or under the said land” at no cost to the municipality. Singapore also had the right to lay and maintain the necessary waterworks to transfer the water. The Government of Johore could request the supply of 800 000 gallons of water per day, if necessary, at 25 cents per 1000 gallons.
1961	The Johore State Government and the City Council of the State of Singapore	Under this agreement, the Government of Johore reserved the lands, hereditaments and premises situated at Gunong Pulai, Sungei Tebrau and Sungei Scudai in the State of Johore for the use by the City Council. The City Council shall pay to the Government an annual rent of \$5 per acre. The Government of Johore shall not for a period of 50 years alienate or do any act of deed affecting the said land or any part thereof during such term. The Government of Johore agreed to give the City Council the full and exclusive right and liberty to enter upon and occupy the land, and take, impound and use all water from the Tebrau and Scudai rivers, as well as to construct the necessary water works, reservoirs, dams, pipelines,

(Continued)

Table A1 (Continued)

Water Agreements	Parties to the agreement	Water agreements details
1962	The Johore State Government and City Council of Singapore	<p>aqueducts, etc. The City Council would supply to the Johore Government, if and when requested by the Government, a daily amount of water not exceeding at any time 12% of the total quantity of water supplied to Singapore over the Causeway, and in no case less than 4 million gallons. The quality of the water would have to be of accepted standard and fit for human consumption. The City Council would pay to the Government, 3 cents for every 1000 gallons of water drawn from the State of Johore and delivered to Singapore, and the Government of Johore would pay to the City Council 50 cents for every 1000 gallons of pure water. When the City Council had to provide the Johore Government with raw water, it would pay 25 cents for every 1000 gallons of the water supplied. These clauses are subject to review after the expiry of 25 years time. Prices can be revised in the light of any change in the purchasing power of money, cost of labour and power and material for the purpose of supplying the water. In the event of any dispute or differences arising under the provisions of this clause the same shall be referred to arbitration as provided in the agreement.</p> <p>The Government of Johore agreed to demise unto the City Council all and singular specific lands in the State of Johore for a period of 99 years. The Government granted the City Council “the full and exclusive right and liberty to draw off, take, impound and use the water from the Johore River up to a maximum of 250 million gallons per day”. The City Council would supply to the Government a daily amount of water drawn off from the Johore River not exceeding at any time 2% of the total quantity of water supplied to Singapore, the quality of which would always be of acceptable standard and fit for human consumption. The City Council shall pay to the Government 3 cents for every 1000 gallons of water drawn from the Johore River and delivered to Singapore. The Government would pay to the City Council 50 cents for every 1000 gallons of pure water supplied. Should it be necessary for the City Council to supply raw water to the Government, this would pay to the City Council 10 cents for every 1000 gallons of the raw water. The price can be revised after the expiry of the agreement in 25 years’ time, and in line with the rise or fall in the purchasing power of money, cost of labour, and power and materials for the purpose of supplying the water. In the event of any dispute or differences arising under the provisions of this clause the same shall be referred to arbitration as provided by the agreement.</p>
1990	The Government of the State of Johor* and the Public Utilities Board of the Republic of Singapore	<p>The Johor Government agreed to sell treated water generated from the Linggiu Dam to PUB in excess of the 250 million gallons per day of water under the 1962 Johor River Water Agreement considering that PUB agreed “to build at its own cost and expense the Linggiu Dam and other ancillary permanent works in connection therewith and thereafter to run, operate and maintain at its own cost and expense the dam, reservoir and ancillary permanent works”. The Agreement shall expire upon the expiry of the 1962 Johore River Water Agreement. However, it can be extended beyond the original terms should the parties agreed to it. It was agreed that PUB shall purchase treated water at the price of either the weighted average of Johor’s water tariffs plus a premium which is 50 percent of the surplus from the sale of this additional water by PUB to its consumers after deducting Johor’s water price and PUB’s cost of distribution and administration of this additional water, or 115 percent of the weighted average of Johor’s water tariffs, whichever is higher”. The quality of the treated water supplied to PUB under this Agreement shall conform with the prevailing World Health Organization’s guidelines for drinking water. In terms of land, the Johor Government agreed that the State land to be used for the catchment area and the reservoir of approximately 21,600 hectares shall be leased for the remaining period of the 1962 Johore River Water Agreement. The premium for the land shall be calculated at the rate of M\$18,000 per hectare and an annual rent at the rate of M\$30 for every 1000 square feet of the said land. The annual rent will be subject to any</p>

(Continued)

Table A1 (Continued)

Water Agreements	Parties to the agreement	Water agreements details
		revision imposed by the State Authority under the provisions of the National Land Code of Malaysia (Act No. 56/65). PUB agrees to pay MS\$320 million as compensation for the permanent loss to the use of the land, the loss of revenue from logging activities in the form of premium, royalty and cess payment and the one-time up front payment for the leasing of the said land, inclusive of rentals for the remaining tenure of the 1962 Johore River Water Agreement. Any dispute or difference between the parties which cannot be resolved amicably by discussions between the parties shall be settled by arbitration in accordance with the Rules of the Regional Centre of Arbitration at Kuala Lumpur at that time.

* Spelling as in the Agreement.

Sources: see the several water agreements and the Constitutions of Singapore and Malaysia for further information: The Agreement as to Certain Water Rights in Johore between the Sultan of Johore and the Municipal Commissioners of the Town of Singapore signed in Johore on 5 December 1927; The Johore River Water Agreement between the Johore State Government and City Council of Singapore signed in Johore on 29 September 1962; The Tebrau and Soudai Rivers Agreement between the Government of the State of Johore and the City Council of the State of Singapore signed on 1 September 1961; Agreement between the Government of the State of Johor and the Public Utilities Board of the Republic of Singapore, signed in Johore on 24 November 1990; Guarantee Agreement between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore signed in Johore on 24 November 1990.

APPENDIX B

Chronology of key developments

17 December 1998	PM Goh agreed with PM Mahathir's proposal to resolve outstanding bilateral issues, including long-term supply of water to Singapore, together as a package.
March–May 1999	Officials from both sides met three times, but made little progress.
15 August 2000	At a four-eye meeting in Putrajaya, SM Lee and PM Mahathir reached an agreement on a list of items including the price of 45 sen per 1000 gallons for current and future water. This was the first time the issue of current water was discussed as part of the package. Singapore also agreed to discuss Malaysia's proposal to build a new bridge to replace the Causeway as part of the package.
24 August 2000	SM Lee wrote to then Malaysian Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin confirming the list of items which he and PM Mahathir had agreed to.
21 February 2001	PM Mahathir replied to SM Lee that "Johore believes that a fair price would be 60 cents (<i>sic</i>) per mgd (<i>sic</i>) of raw water" and that this "should be reviewed every five years" (He meant 60 sens per thousand gallons).
23 April 2001	SM Lee noted in his reply to PM Mahathir that there were two main variations from their oral understanding reached in August 2000. These were PM Mahathir's proposal of 60 sen for raw water and the mix of raw and treated water to be supplied.
4 September 2001	SM Lee met with PM Mahathir for a second time in Putrajaya. At a joint press conference, they announced that they had agreed on the basic skeleton of an agreement. SM Lee explained that Singapore had offered to pay 45 sen for current raw water in return for assured raw water supply from Malaysia beyond 2061.
8 September 2001	SM Lee wrote to PM Mahathir to follow-up on their September 4, 2001 discussion on Malaysia's proposal for a bridge to replace the Causeway.
21 September 2001	SM Lee wrote again to PM Mahathir concerning other issues in the package. Singapore affirmed its proposals to revise the price of current water from 3 sen to 45 sen per 1000 gallons, in return for Malaysia agreeing to supply water, at 60 sen, beyond the expiry of the existing agreements, in 2011 and 2061. The 60 sen price would be reviewed every five years for inflation.
18 October 2001	PM Mahathir now said Johor wanted 60 sen for water sold to Singapore. He also suggested that Singapore compensate Malaysia with more land parcels, should the KTM rail service end in Johore Baru.
10 December 2001	SM Lee replied to PM Mahathir to clarify Singapore's proposal on the bilateral issues and to seek clarification on the additional railway lands referred to by PM Mahathir. He expressed the hope that PM Mahathir would consider the long-term significance and value of retaining the railway link between Malaysia and Singapore. He requested PM Mahathir to set out Malaysia's position on the package of issues so as to establish a clear framework for officials to work on.
5 February 2002	Prompted by repeated Malaysia comments to the media that existing Water Agreements were unfair, Singapore conveyed a Third Party Note to register its deep concern over those remarks.
4 March 2002	PM Mahathir conveyed yet another new pricing proposal for water – this time a three-stage proposal. The asking price was now 60 sen for water from 2002 to 2007, RM3 from 2007 to 2011, and RM3 adjusted for inflation every year after 2011. As for the treated water Johor now buys from Singapore, Malaysia proposed that the price be raised simply from the current 50 sen to RM1, with no price review mechanisms.

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APPENDIX B (*Continued*)

11 March 2002	SM Lee wrote to Dr Mahathir noting that the latest proposals had changed completely from those agreed upon early. He would therefore have to study the implications of Malaysia's new offers before responding.
11 April 2002	PM Goh wrote to Dr Mahathir, conveying Singapore's response to the latests proposals. He said that for the sake of good long-term relations, Singapore would supplement the existing Water Agreements by producing its own NEWater. Since Malaysia did not accept Singapore's earlier offer of 45 sen for current water and 60 sen for future water, Singapore proposed to peg the price of future water to an agreed percentage of the cost of alternative source of water, which was NEWater. He also suggested that PM Mahathir's letter of March 4, 2002 and PM Goh's reply of April 11, 2002 form the basis for further discussions between the respective Foreign Ministers and officials.
1–2 July 2002	The two Foreign Ministers and their officials met on Putrajaya. Malaysia invoked the Hongkong (spelling in the printed text) model, in which Hongkong pays China RM8 per thousand gallons for its water. Singapore said it was willing to negotiate a price review provided this is done as part of a package even (t)hough it believes Malaysia's right to review expired in 1986 and 1987. It also pointed out that unlike Singapore, Hongkong does not have to bear the infrastructure and maintenance costs of drawing water.
2–3 September 2002	The Foreign Ministers met a second time, in Singapore. This time, Malaysia proposed a formula that resulted in a price of RM6.25 per 1000 gallons for current raw water. Malaysia also proposed that discussions on future water take place only in 2059.
8 October 2002	PM Mahathir told PM Goh while both were in Putrajaya that Malaysia wanted to "decouple the water issue" from the other items in the package. PM Goh responded that if the water issue was taken out of the package, then Singapore would have less leeway to make concessions on other issues.
10 October 2002	PM Goh received a letter from PM Mahathir dated October 7, 2002, in which Malaysia declared that it had decided to discontinue the package approach. Dr Mahathir did not mention that he had written this letter when he spoke to Mr Goh on October 8, 2002.
14 October 2002	PM Goh replied to PM Mahathir. He noted that since Malaysia wanted to discontinue the package approach, Singapore would have to deal with water and the other issues on their stand-alone merits and no longer as a package.
16–17 October 2002	Senior officials from both sides met in Johor Bahru to discuss the water issue. But Malaysia wanted only one aspect of water discussed – the price of current raw water. Singapore reiterated that Malaysia had lost its right to the review, but it would agree if Malaysia agreed also to discuss the supply of future water. Singapore also asked Malaysia to explain how it had arrived at the price of RM 6.25 it was asking for. It said that going by the terms of the Water Agreements, any review would result in a price of not more than 12 sen in 2002. Malaysia could not provide a satisfactory explanation.

Source: MICA (2003, Annex C, pp. 82–83).

Note: The version available at <http://app.mfa.gov.sg/data/2006/press/water/event.htm> is somewhat different to the printed version in the wording of the events and also in the detail in which it describes the several events. The version available on-line also includes comments on two meetings on 14 and 25 March 2002, which are not included in the printed version and therefore are not included in this table.