

CPM CAN'T RETURN

PM: Let them stay in Thailand

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KUALA LUMPUR. Sat. — Malaysia prefers members of the outlawed Communist Party of Malaya to be resettled in Thailand after they abandon their armed struggle.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said there had been suggestions to allow CPM members to be resettled in Malaysia but he added that "we must consider national interests."

"As I have said before, the Thai Government is willing to take these people," the Prime Minister told reporters after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting today.

"We do not have any objections if they stay in Thailand, and this is the result of negotiations between us and Thailand.

"What is important is that there must be some effort to end the CPM's armed struggle which had been going on since 1948."

Under a Thai amnesty programme, army officials have

been negotiating with CPM leaders for the surrender of about 1,200 terrorists operating at the Malaysia-Thai border.

Reports from Bangkok said negotiations with the CPM fell through on several occasions over the term "surrender." CPM had insisted that it would never surrender.

The reports said the CPM agreed to end their 41-year-old armed struggle after Thai Army Commander-in-Chief Gen Chaovalit Yongchaiyudh promised to provide written assurances for their safety and their right to Thai citizenship.

According to the reports, the former terrorists could, under the terms of the agreement, settle near the Malaysia-Thai border. One report said the former terrorists might also have the option of returning to Malaysia if they choose to.

Two days ago, a report from Bangkok said CPM leader Chin Peng would fly in from China soon to ratify the agreement with Thai army officials.

No date was given for the formal announcement of the agreement or Chin Peng's trip to Bangkok.

Malaysian army officials, according to reports, fear that if CPM members are settled near the border, they would continue their activities inside Malaysia.

Replying to questions on the reported CPM surrender and resettlement, Dr Mahathir said the Government did not intend to hold talks with the CPM because it was outlawed.

"We do not have any links with the CPM, so the question of talks does not arise," he said, adding that the Government had only "indirect contact" through the groups negotiating with the CPM.

He acknowledged that Malaysia was working with the Thai Government to end the activities of the communist terrorists at the border.

"But the matter is still under discussion ... between us and the Thais who are familiar with the CPM we are still considering what we should do," Dr Mahathir said.

NOV 1989