

JDA draft expected by May

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MALAYSIA and Thailand are expected to complete the final draft for the proposed joint operations in the oil- and gas-rich Joint Development Area (JDA) by May.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a news conference on his return from Pattaya yesterday that both countries have agreed that their officials will complete the draft before the next session of their respective parliaments. Thailand's Parliament sits in May while the Dewan Rakyat's next sitting is scheduled for June.

"I'm confident it can be done.

There are some minor problems, but nothing that will come in the way of the joint agreement," he said. The Prime Minister added that a signing ceremony will be held once both parliaments approve the draft.

Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Ahmad Kamil Jaafar told reporters there will be "active talks" between the officials between now and the Thai parliamentary session in May.

He had said in Pattaya over the weekend that there were differences over the question of sovereignty and civil jurisdiction. As these issues in-

involved constitutional changes, both authorities will have to seek Parliament's approval. "Once both parliaments approve, the operation is on."

The proposal for joint operations in the 7,300 sq km JDA, located in the Gulf of Siam north of Kelantan, was agreed to in 1979. Last year, authorities from the two countries agreed on the fundamentals of the operations, including a 50:50 production-sharing formula for all oil and gas discoveries within the area. An agreement had been scheduled to be

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initialled between Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Thai Premier Tun Chatichai Choonhaven last Saturday, until the issues of sovereignty and civil jurisdiction.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the meeting with Tun Chatichai led to several agreements between the two nations. One immediate accord was the signing of documents on ferry services between Takbai and Pengkalan Kubor to promote people to people ties and tourism.

Among other things, Thailand and Malaysia also agreed during the weekend to accord freer road access for their respective exporters into Singapore and Laos, to hold further talks on cooperation in the motor industry, and to expedite the implementation of the proposed Oriental Express which will link the two countries by rail to Singapore.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Tun Chatichai also agreed to maintain the General Border Committee, despite the recent success in ending communist insurgency along the border between the two countries. The committee will assume its existing scope of terms and reference.