

Dr Mahathir on detention of forestry workers by Bangkok

# Arrest: Reasons sought

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Government has asked Bangkok to provide reasons for the arrest and detention of eight Kelantan State Forestry employees. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today. He said both Governments were continuing talks in an attempt to resolve the issue amicably.

It was reported yesterday that the Thai border patrol was holding the eight officers at Muang police station near Narathiwat, south Thailand, for trespassing and felling trees at a national reserve in the Sukhirin district.

A Wisma Putra official confirmed that 11 officers were detained on May 29.

Subsequently, three of them were released, including State Forestry director Johari Baharuddin, 48. He was released on a 500,000 baht (about \$55,000) bail yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was awaiting details on the incident from the Thai authorities.

He said the Malaysian officials could have accidentally entered Thai territory or the Thai border patrol police could have accidentally strayed into Malaysian territory.

sist their counterparts in the investigation.

Confirming this, Kelantan police chief SAC Yaacob Mohamed Amin said in Kota Baru his officers were in Thailand to assist the State Government to negotiate the release of the eight men.

A spokesman for the Weng police station in the Narathiwat province in south Thailand said the officials were carrying out investigations with their assistance.

He said the eight, who are still being detained at the station, were in good health, but declined to elaborate on the incident.

The eight still under detention are Haji Jusoh Abdul Rahman, Haji Syed Azhar Syed Musri, Encik Jusoh Salleh, Encik Jusoh Che Mat, Encik Sidik Salleh, Encik Ramli Abdullah, Encik Yaakob Awang and Encik Mustafa Ibrahim.

Encik Johari met State Secretary Datuk Haji Hassan Yusof today and briefed him on the incident.

*Bernama* reports that CID Director Datuk Zaman Khan is expected to go to Kelantan tomorrow to help in investigations into the detention of the officers.

Sources from the Kelantan police operations room in Kota Baru said Datuk Zaman Khan was expected to meet the Tanah Merah OCPD to get more details on

"We are still investigating the matter, said Dr Mahathir who was asked to comment on the incident. He was speaking to reporters after opening the Merdeka Studio Complex of the National Film Development Corporation here.

In Jitra, Kedah, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayob said the Cabinet would discuss the arrest of the 11 before the issue was referred to the Malaysia-Thai General Border Committee.

Speaking to newsmen after opening the Sekolah Sultan Abdul Halim's former students association, Datuk Megat Junid said the problem had to be resolved on a Government-to-Government basis.

"We have a joint general border committee and this problem has to be referred to the committee for an amicable solution," he said.

Malaysian police officials are now in Thailand to as-

the matter.

Encik Johari, who was released yesterday, went to office today but declined to speak to the press.

State Secretary Datuk Haji Hassan Yusoff chaired a special meeting on the matter but declined to meet reporters who waited outside the conference room.

A spokesman of the Royal Thai Consulate-General in Kota Baru also refused to comment on the issue when contacted.

Meanwhile, sources said the three officials who were released claimed that they were on the Malaysian side of the border when they were "arrested" by the Thai border police patrol.

They also alleged that the officers and the vehicles were taken across the Malaysian-Thai border at Igunpoint where pictures were taken to appear as if they were involved in the felling of trees inside Thai territory.