

PM: Talks yes, but not pact

By CHOI TUCK WO

VIENTIANE: Malaysia will continue to oppose any move to link human rights and labour issues with trade despite having signed an agreement to form a new body to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT.)

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday while Malaysia could discuss such matters, it would continue to disagree on their linkages with trade.

Malaysia would not agree to any move by developed coun-

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tries to include issues like minimum wages, environment and human rights in their trade agenda, he told journalists at the State Guest House at the end of his three-day official visit.

On Malaysia being one of the signatories to the agreement for discussions on such issues, Dr Mahathir said: "Discussions yes, but not agreement."

He was commenting on the signing of the agreement by 125 countries on Friday to set up the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to replace GATT from Jan 1.

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Last month, the United States and France claimed that exports from developing countries were cheap due to allegedly exploitative labour practices which kept wages down.

On Malaysia-Laos relations, Dr Mahathir said both governments would look into the possibility of having air links to forge closer ties.

"Although MAS has concluded an air services agreement with its Laotian counterpart, there is neither Laotian flights to Kuala Lumpur or MAS flights here.

"We have to study the com-

munication between Laos and Malaysia in terms of traffic and telecommunications."

Dr Mahathir described his visit as successful as it had enabled leaders of both countries to establish good personal contacts.

He said there were plenty of opportunities for Malaysian businessmen to enter into joint ventures here.

On his talks with Prime Minister Khamtay Siphandone, he said they discussed how best the two countries could cooperate for mutual interest.

"From now on, there will be

more visits by members of both governments," he said.

In the morning, Dr Mahathir visited the Laos-Australia-Thailand Friendship Bridge, about 20km from here, which links Laos with Thailand.

On Sunday, Tenaga Nasional Bhd signed a memorandum of understanding with Electricite Du Laos (EDL) — which is the state electricity board.

The scope of co-operation included generation of power, transmission, distribution, management, training and refurbishing of EDL's training centre.