

21 FEB 1996

Mahathir - Thailand

KL WILLING TO DISCUSS WALL ISSUE WITH BANGKOK

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is willing to resolve through diplomatic channels the problems that have arisen with Thailand over Malaysia's construction of a wall along its international boundary with that country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the talks could determine whether there had been any violation in the construction of the wall.

Speaking at his Hari Raya open house at his residence "Sri Perdana" here, he however said the issue could probably be misunderstood if both countries talked through the press.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the statement by Thailand's Foreign Minister Kasem S. Kasemsri as published in several Thai newspapers last week that there was no valid reason for the 27 km wall.

Kasem was quoted as saying that such a wall was not good because it showed the country building it did not want to be friendly with its neighbour.

The Thai Foreign Minister was also reported as saying that the International Court of Justice at the Hague could be asked to rule on Malaysia's construction of the wall if there was no agreement in talks between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.

Kasem, who allegedly compared the "Malaysian Wall" to the Great Wall of China and the Berlin Wall, was also reported to have said Thailand would only take the matter to the World Court after having its Arbitration Committee "study the conflict".

He also said the wall would not prevent dadah trafficking or illegal trade along the border as claimed Malaysian officials.

Kasem was optimistic that the KL-Bangkok talks would be successful, although he said it was unlikely the matter would be raised during the Asia-Europe Meeting in Bangkok on March 1 and 2.

A Thai opposition Member of Parliament, Supat Thammapetch had also claimed that the border line drawn by Malaysia for its wall may affect Thai territory on the continental shelf and that if no settlement was reached, Thailand "may lose many islands", which the Thai Foreign Ministry denied.

Asked whether work on the wall, which is scheduled for completion in September, would proceed Dr Mahathir repeated that Malaysia would discuss the matter with Thailand.

Meanwhile 21 members of Thailand's Parliamentary Military Committee led by its Chairman General Sirithi Wapan inspected the wall today.

Their visit comes two days after a similar visit to the wall by Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister General Chavalit Yong Chaiyudh.

Members of the military committee as well as the Governor of Satun Province Anucha Mekkaweat spent about 45 minutes inspecting the wall.

The military officials came in three helicopters which landed about 500 metres from the wall.

They also inspected the international boundary demarcation stone near a fresh water prawn breeding pond belonging to Thai nationals.

Several Malaysian officials including the police were also at the border today when the Thai delegation was visiting.

On Feb 19, Chinese New Year Day, the Thai Deputy Prime Minister inspected the wall accompanied by senior Thai military and police officials.

Chavalit was reported to have expressed satisfaction over the situation at the wall and had said that the matter raised earlier had been resolved. -- BERNAMA

ES AD AAM