

07 MAR 1996

Mahathir-Mekong

MALAYSIA TO DO STUDY ON MEKONG BASIN DEVELOPMENT

By: Zainoor Sulaiman

HANOI, March 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will conduct studies to identify development projects which can be implemented in the Mekong Basin, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The findings will be made available to the countries concerned, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and other parties wishing to invest or participate in the development of Mekong Basin, he told Malaysian journalists after calling on his Vietnamese counterpart Vo Van Kiet here.

Among the possible projects were development of water resources like irrigation and hydroelectric power generation and on tourism, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Vietnam strongly supported Malaysia's role and initiatives in the development of the Mekong Basin as decided by the Asean summit in Bangkok.

Vietnam also backed the Asia-Europe summit's decision to entrust Malaysia with the responsibility of studying the implementation of a rail network from Singapore to Europe via Hanoi, southern China and Beijing, he said.

He said in his discussions with the Vietnamese delegation led by Kiet, both sides agreed to intensify bilateral cooperation in various fields, including economic, cultural and social, tourism, education, security and defence matters.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with the investment and progress made by Malaysian investors in Vietnam.

In efforts to be a good corporate citizen in Vietnam, Malaysia would continue to explore new fields to venture into, including mining.

Dr Mahathir said Vietnam had bauxite and other mineral ore, adding that a German group was making studies on the mining of iron ore.

He reiterated Malaysia's desire to extend whatever help possible to improve the well-being of its Southeast Asian neighbours to ensure regional peace and stability.

On defence and security cooperation with Vietnam, he said although there was no defence cooperation yet between the two countries, efforts towards this end should be stepped up because as neighbours their sea boundaries may overlap.

"It is necessary for us to have talks so that any dispute can be settled through negotiation," he said.

He said the two countries needed to cooperate to ensure the security of areas around them, including the South China Sea.

Asked whether joint military training would be held, he said such exercises had been conducted with several countries but there were no plans yet to have one with Vietnam.

However, he said Vietnam could send its military officers for training at the Malaysian Defence College.

On proposals to boost cooperation in tourism, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wished to study the areas with potential for development, especially hilly spots like the Da Lat in southern Vietnam.

He said Malaysia had offered to use its reforestation project experience in Sabah to help Vietnam replant its forests, especially areas destroyed by agent orange during the war.

On training and education, he said Malaysia offered training opportunities for Vietnamese officers to improve their efficiency in administration and management.

Malaysian universities and other institutions of higher learning could set up branches in Vietnam, he said. -- Bernama
ZS YBY