

13 OCT 1996
Abdullah-Viet
SECOND MALAYSIA-VIETNAM JOINT COMMISSION MEETING

HANOI, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- When Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi arrives here Thursday for high-level talks with top Vietnamese government officials, bilateral relations between Malaysia and Vietnam are set to soar to greater heights.

The last boat people from the now-closed Sungai Besi refugee camp in Kuala Lumpur were repatriated under the United Nations orderly departure programme about three months ago and Malaysia is now among the top 10 investors in Vietnam.

With a clean slate, Malaysian officials at the second Malaysia-Vietnam Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) are hoping to identify new areas of cooperation and expand on the existing ties.

"There are no major outstanding issues that merit the attention of the JCM and we hope to expand our cooperation further in all fields," Malaysian ambassador Cheah Sam Kip told Bernama.

He said one outstanding issue in the past that was an irritant was the boat people problem and that matter had been resolved.

The second JCM between Malaysia and Vietnam would monitor and give impetus to the cooperation agreement between the two Asean neighbours, Cheah said.

Abdullah will head the Malaysian delegation to the talks while his counterpart, Nguyen Manh Cam, will lead the Vietnamese side. Both were also co-chairmen of the previous JCM.

The agenda of this Saturday' meeting will cover all aspects of relations between Malaysia and Vietnam, the youngest Asean partner which joined the regional grouping in July last year.

The two foreign ministers are also expected to take the opportunity to discuss regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Abdullah is also expected to make courtesy calls on Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Do Moi.

Besides reviewing the progress of cooperation between the two neighbours, the JCM will in particular discuss trade and investment issues.

Malaysia is Vietnam's seventh largest investor with a total of about US\$930 million (about RM2.32 billion) in 49 projects. During his three-day stay here Abdullah is scheduled for meetings with the Malaysian business community in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Since Malaysia established its resident embassy in Hanoi in 1976, Malaysia-Vietnam relations had improved steadily, in particular over the last few years, as reflected in the exchange of several high-level visits involving the Yang di-Pertuan, Agong Tuanku Ja'afar, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and party leader Do Moi.

The inaugural meeting of the Malaysia-Vietnam Joint Commission was held in Kuala Lumpur in September last year, two months after Communist Vietnam joined Asean.

The Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation Agreement concluded between both countries in April 1992 provides for the establishment of a ministerial-level joint commission.

However, the present close ties between the two countries did not happen overnight and were not without problems.

One analyst said: "It is true that the saga of the Vietnamese boat people has ended as far as Malaysia is concerned but Malaysia is also

claimant, along with Vietnam, to parts of the Spratly group of islands in the South China Sea."

That potential flashpoint in the region had more or less been doused by bilateral cooperation and agreements in the joint exploration of oil and gas deposits in the South China Sea between some of the countries involved, he said.

Another issue that could crop up in the sidelines, he said, would be the "bureaucratic problems" which was hampering business activities.

During the last JCM Malaysia wanted Vietnam to iron out these technicalities which included the delays in the approval of licences and permits which is also faced by all the countries involved with Vietnam.

This was echoed recently by Asean's secretary-general Datuk Ajit Singh at an investment seminar in Ho Chi Minh City two months ago when he said, "one of the basic commitments for participating Asean economic activities is transparency, that is the law, rule and regulations have to be transparent."

Malaysia and Vietnam have so far signed 13 bilateral agreements which could serve as a useful foundation for future business dealings. -- BERNAMA

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