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Border disputes to be resolved (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysia and Thailand have agreed to resolve all disputes pertaining to the demarcation of their common border within 60 days.

Prime Ministers Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh who met for bilateral talks today agreed that the outstanding issues be resolved under the "no gain and no loss" principle for either country.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who briefed reporters on the meeting, said extensive discussions on the border demarcation has been held at various levels for the past 15 years and since problems are limited to only a few areas, both countries are confident of meeting the deadline.

"Since the basic principles for the demarcation have been agreed upon, officials of both countries need to work out a formula to solve the disputed areas. It will be a win-win situation," he said at the end of the meeting between the delegations of both countries.

Chavalit arrived today with a 42-member delegation comprising permanent secretaries of various ministries and senior government officials for a two-day visit.

The members of his delegation include secretary-general to the Prime Minister Boonchang Veerommai, Foreign Ministry's permanent secretary Saroj Chavanviraj and the Defence Ministry's permanent secretary General Yuthasak Sasiprapha.

This morning, Chavalit and his wife Khunying Phankrua Yongchaiyudh were welcomed by Dr Mahathir and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali at Parliament Square where Chavalit was accorded a ceremonial welcome. He was then introduced to Ministers, Deputy Ministers and members of the diplomatic corp.

Chavalit inspected a guard of honour mounted by three officers and 104 soldiers from the First Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment which was led by Mejar Hamdi Abdul Rahman.

The Thai leader and his wife were also granted an audience by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Jaafar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah.

Abdullah said both the governments would also consider paying compensation in the event buildings owned by the respective nationals end up on the other side of the border once the demarcation exercise is completed.

He said the two countries agreed that in areas where the Golok river is deemed to be the boundary separating the two countries, permanent markers be placed to ensure that the border does not shift with changing course of the river.

"These measures are to ensure that there would be no future problems once the demarcation exercise is completed," he said.

He said Malaysia and Thailand would use the joint development approach along the border to ensure there are more projects in the area which can benefit the people of both countries.

"Since this approach has been successfully adopted to develop oil and gas industries off the shores of both countries, the two Prime Ministers feel it would be appropriate to hasten the pace of development along the border," Abdullah said.

Saroj, who was at the Press conference, said his country placed much

importance on resolving the border demarcation issue quickly and on Feb 17, he held talks with Wisma Putra secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad where they discussed ways to resolve some of the problems.

He said the Thai authorities would work closely with their Malaysian counterparts to resolve the disputes before the 60-day deadline but added that the Thai Parliament would have to approve the final agreement on the boundary issue.

Abdullah said that the issue of illegal immigrants crossing into Malaysia from Thailand was not discussed at today's meeting but added that the matter may be discussed by the two Prime Ministers during tonight's dinner hosted by Dr Mahathir for the visiting leader and his delegation.

Representatives of both countries also agreed to establish a joint committee on trade and a joint business council apart from re-activating the joint committee on agriculture to increase trade and cross-investments.

Abdullah said the two delegations discussed the Malaysian proposal to build a land-bridge linking northern Penang, southern Kedah and southern Songkhla and agreed to hold further discussions since Thailand has a similar proposal.

It was also agreed that the land-bridge should accommodate road, rail and gas pipeline links and further discussions be held on the siting of a deep-water port close to the land-bridge.

On the sale of natural gas to Thailand, Abdullah said, the Thai delegation had wanted the price of the gas to be reduced and Dr Mahathir has agreed to take up the issue with Petronas.

The issue of allowing Malaysian commercial vehicles to pass through Thailand to destinations in Indo-China was also on the agenda and both sides agreed to look into the regulations that may need to be relaxed.

Dr Mahathir also briefed Chavalit on the rail-link between Singapore and Kunming in China and the Thai leader hoped that the project would be expedited as it would bring tremendous benefits to the region.

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