

01 MAR 1997

Thailand-Wrap-up

CHAVALIT'S VISIT PERKS UP M'SIA-THAI RELATIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- Although the visit of Thai Prime Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to Malaysia was short, it has achieved much to iron out problems which have somewhat "plagued" a relationship that has long been characterised as warm and friendly.

For one, the issue of the demarcation of the common border took centre stage during bilateral discussions between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Chavalit on Thursday.

In a matter of hours, they agreed that disputes pertaining to the demarcation of the common border, which have dragged on for 15 years, would be resolved within 60 days.

Both sides agreed to resolve the problem based on two principles -- to mark a permanent border that will not be altered by the shifting positions of the rivers (used as border marks) and to jointly develop border areas that are difficult to demarcate.

Malaysia and Thailand share a 647km border which has long been a source of angst in relations between the two countries.

Malaysia has also built two sections of walls, one in Perlis and another in Kedah, to help mark the boundary which sometimes snakes up heavily forested hills before plunging into steep ravines and other contours of the land.

Malaysia contends that the walls, apart from serving as boundary line, also help to keep the movement of smugglers and illegal immigrants into the country in check.

And to help Malaysia curb the influx of illegals making their way here through Thailand, Dr Mahathir said yesterday that Thailand would tighten the issuance of transit visas to foreigners.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has also disclosed that senior Malaysian and Thai officials have begun preliminary discussions on how to tackle the problem of illegal entry at the common border.

On another matter, both sides agreed to further discuss the proposal to build a land-bridge as the two countries have their own plans.

Despite being close neighbours and members of Asean, trade between Malaysia and Thailand leaves much to be desired with the bilateral trade figure last year standing at about RM13 billion.

Thai ambassadress to Malaysia Suchitra Hiranprueck said the from January to November last year, Thailand exported goods worth 46,311 million baht to Malaysia and imported 84,440 million baht worth of goods namely crude oil, wood products, computer parts, cathode-ray tubes and electrical appliances. (100 baht = RM10.30)

To promote more trade, both sides agreed to establish a joint trade committee, a joint business council and to revive a dormant joint agricultural committee.

Chavalit, in his address at a gathering organised by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia and The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Bhd yesterday, also called for more direct investments in Thailand by Malaysia.

Abdullah summed up Chavalit's visit by saying this: "A lot was achieved in his two days here, which goes to show that both leaders have good understanding." -- BERNAMA

MAM JK