

27 FEB 1997

Mahathir-Thailand

FOREIGN WORKERS' ENTRY MUST FOLLOW LAW, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia needs foreign workers but their entry and presence must be in accordance with established procedures, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

He said the workers must also observe Malaysia's laws and regulations.

Dr Mahathir took the opportunity to express Malaysia's position on the subject of illegal immigrants in his speech at a dinner in honour of visiting Thai Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh at his official residence Sri Perdana here.

"We therefore appreciate the cooperation extended to us by close friends and neighbours such as Thailand in order to curb the entry of illegal immigrants into Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir and Chavalit, who is on a two-day official visit, held talks on various bilateral and regional issues at the Prime Minister's Office in the afternoon. His visit is also in the context of a traditional familiarisation tour to meet his counterparts in Asean after taking over two months ago from Banharn Silpa-Archa.

Congratulating Chavalit on his appointment, Dr Mahathir said he was delighted that one who is "a familiar personality and a friend of Malaysia" is at the helm of affairs in neighbouring Thailand, a country with which Malaysia has had long and close ties.

Dr Mahathir was pleased that bilateral trade had grown steadily from US\$3.8 billion in 1994 to US\$4.9 billion last year, an increase of 28.4 per cent.

Despite this, Dr Mahathir said the level of investments between the two countries was not impressive given the numerous opportunities and incentives. He hoped that there would be a marked improvement in this area of cooperation.

"There is a need to foster strategic linkages between our entrepreneurs and captains of industry in order to create partnerships in economic development, not only at national but also at regional and global levels," he said.

In his return speech, Chavalit agreed that both countries must work together as close neighbours and effective partners.

"We must join hands as well as extend them to assist other countries in the region," he said. He described his discussions with Dr Mahathir this afternoon as very constructive and fruitful.

Chavalit said he looked forward to attending the informal Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur later this year. -- BERNAMA

AZZ AAM