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Thailand-Border

MALAYSIAN-THAI BORDER PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED WITHIN TWO MONTHS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Thailand today agreed that a 15-year-old border demarcation problem between the countries should be resolved within the next two months, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Thai counterpart, Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, today outlined two principles to be used in solving the problem.

"The first is to establish a permanent border which will not be changed due to the shifting nature of the geographical location of a river because of flood," he told reporters after a two-hour bilateral meeting between Malaysia and Thailand at the Prime Minister's office here.

The second principle is to take a joint development approach so that any disputed areas along the border would be developed together for mutual benefits based on a win-win situation.

Abdullah said the demarcation problem arose mainly because both countries used rivers as border marks and these posed a problem because the rivers keep changing as a result of flooding.

He said, consequently, the common border in the future would stick to the permanent border mark although there might be further changes in the location of a river.

Abdullah said: "Within 60 days, we'll be having a permanent border and we won't be bothered later on because the rivers begin to shift."

When there was a need for some compensation to be paid resulting in the exchange of certain places between both sides, he said the details of such compensation would have to be worked out.

"These two principles will enable us to resolve the very little remaining problem areas along the Malaysia-Thailand border that we have to tackle," he added.

Thai Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Saroj Chavanaviraj who attended the joint press conference said the border sections which came under discussion today included the Golok river area which had not been surveyed for demarcation.

Admitting that it would be a difficult task, Saroj expressed the hope that the demarcation exercise would be completed within the stipulated timeframe.

"The intention is that we would like to settle this as soon as possible. It will go a long way in the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Thailand," he said.

Saroj also said Thailand would have to get a final approval from its Parliament before accepting any decision on the demarcation.

On the proposed construction of landbridges by both countries, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir called for some coordination as Malaysia proposed that a landbridge be built from somewhere north of Pulau Pinang and south of Kedah to Songkhla in Thailand whereas Thailand had a similar plan in the Pattani region.

The Malaysian proposal involves a starting point where the establishment of a deepwater port is being planned.

Abdullah, however, said both leaders agreed that whatever landbridge that would be constructed should provide three main facilities, namely road and rail links as well as gas pipelines.

On land transportation, Abdullah said both leaders agreed that it be

improved to further facilitate the movement of people and goods between the two countries as well as to other neighbouring countries.

Touching on economic relations, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir and Chavalit agreed that efforts should be made to increase both bilateral trade volume and mutual investment.

He said towards this end, both sides agreed to establish a joint trade committee and a joint business council as well as reviving the dormant joint agricultural committee.

Abdullah also said Dr Mahathir promised to discuss with national oil company Petronas on a Thai request to buy gas produced by the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Authority at a lower price.

To a question, he said both sides did not discuss the issue of illegal immigrants coming into Malaysia through Thailand.

Chavalit arrived here this morning to begin a two-day official visit to Malaysia at the invitation of Dr Mahathir. -- BERNAMA

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