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PM calls for more joint projects with Thailand

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BILATERAL ties between Malaysia and Thailand in terms of investments are not as impressive as that of trade and this is despite the numerous opportunities and numerous incentives offered in the two countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "It is my hope that there will be a marked improvement in this area of cooperation in the near future."

In a speech at the official dinner Dr Mahathir hosted for visiting Thai Premier Tan Sri General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh last night, the Prime Minister said: "There is a need also to foster strategic linkages between our entrepreneurs and captains of industry to create partnerships in economic development, not only at the national but also regional and global levels."

Dr Mahathir said the two countries have also turned a potential area of conflict - the overlapping continental shelf area - into one of shared benefits by creating the Joint Development Authority to exploit and equitably share the non-living resources.

In addition, Dr Mahathir hopes that the country's close friends such as Thailand can assist in curbing the entry of illegal immigrants into the country.

"Malaysia needs foreign workers but their entry and presence must be in accordance with established procedures as well as Malaysia's laws and regulations," he added.

On regional matters, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wants the early realisation of an Asean-10 to spur market growth.

"The new Asean members (Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) will soon grow economically and together Asean will have a market of some 500 million people. Even if the per capita is small, the purchasing power of 500 million people will be considerable," he said, adding Asean has achieved remarkable and enviable success in regional cooperation in its 30-year history.

He pointed out that Asean has now become a forum capable of sustained cohesiveness upon which various issues of common concern can be effectively addressed and managed.

"Malaysia and Thailand are not big nations but we have shown the commitment and courage to participate and contribute positively in the various multilateral organisations. We will be that much more effective when we work in concert, for example, through Asean.

"I am convinced that the depth of mutual understanding and trust between our two countries has significantly contributed to the overall peace and cooperation in the region," he added.

Dr Mahathir said over the years, Malaysia and Thailand have managed to overcome problems, especially on border issues through bilateral mechanisms such as the annual Joint Commission Meetings and the General Border Committee.

Chavalit, who is leading a 42-member delegation on a two-day official visit to Malaysia, said Thailand is looking forward to attending the informal Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur this year.

"It will be a timely opportunity to discuss the future cooperation of both countries and accelerate the pace of regional progress.

"This includes the development of a trans-Asian transport network which is one of Malaysia's significant regional initiatives," he said, adding

Thailand stands ready to act as a bridge between Asean and other countries in mainland South-East Asia and in bringing progress to the Mekong subregion.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir and Yongchaiyudh met for two hours to discuss various issues, including the demarcation of the Malaysian-Thai border, the proposed linkage between land bridges in southern Thailand and northern Peninsular Malaysia, and the sale price of gas from the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area.

The two leaders also touched on the progress of trans-Asian rail link, development of a deepwater port and the possibility of more joint development activities.

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