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Talks to centre on Sungai Golok and Bukit Jeli

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Bilateral discussions over the demarcation of Malaysia's and Thailand's common border will centre around the two main areas of dispute - Sungai Golok and Bukit Jeli in Kelantan.

The Foreign Ministry's secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad told the New Straits Times today that existing problems arose from geographical features which had changed since the original demarcation agreement, called the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, was signed in 1909.

"In the case of the area around Bukit Jeli, there was some disagreement over the on-the-ground interpretation of the treaty. A stream that had been identified by the treaty as a marking point, for example, may have dried up or changed course."

He said that Sungai Golok had similarly changed its course over the years, and that it had not been included during the last round of re-surveying because officials had found Malaysian and Thai villages on both sides of the river.

The villagers had built their homes to accommodate the course of the river, although geographical changes meant they were technically living on the wrong side of the border.

Kadir said both Governments had acknowledged these and other similar problems as genuine errors, and that the new agreement to resolve all demarcation disputes would result in permanent markers that would remain in place even if there would be further changes to the landscape.

"We will need to re-survey Sungai Golok to determine features like its deepest point or its centre. This might take a year, but in the meantime both sides will decide in principle what will be used as a basis of demarcation.

"Malaysia and Thailand will also rectify any corrections in existing border fences or walls," he said, adding that both sides would resolve all outstanding issues.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Thai counterpart Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh had agreed that all disputes pertaining to the demarcation of the common border would be resolved within 60 days.

He said since problems were only limited to a few areas, both countries were confident about meeting the deadline.

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