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Malaysia-Thailand

THAI PM HEADS DELEGATION FOR GBC MEETING

KUALA LUMPUR, June 2 (Bernama) -- Thai Prime Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh will head a 30-member delegation to the three-day 39th Malaysia-Thailand General Border Committee (GBC) meeting here beginning Thursday.

Senior officials from both sides will meet over the next two days to lay the groundwork for the meeting which is expected to cover several issues related to their common border and review past security arrangements.

Chavalit, who is also Defence Minister, had attended previous GBC meetings in the past as he was the former Supreme Military Commander of the Thai Defence Forces.

He will be accompanied by Deputy Army Chief-of-Staff Lt Gen Chokechai Hongthong and Director-General of the Police Department Gen Pracha Promnok.

Malaysia will be represented by Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar who will lead a 25-member delegation which includes Armed Forces Chief Gen Tan Sri Ismail Omar, Chief of Staff Jen Datuk Nawi Alias and Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Norian Mai.

Syed Hamid and Chavalit, who is scheduled to arrive on Thursday morning, will co-chair the meeting, the first since 1994.

Officials said the meeting was expected to focus on cross-border movement of people and prevention of smuggling activities along the 647-km long border shared by the two countries.

An agreement is expected to be endorsed on the last day of the meeting.

The Thai News Agency today quoted the daily Bangkok Post that Chavalit was expected to hold informal talks with Malaysia to discuss the security problems stemming from people holding dual nationalities.

The newspaper quoted an army source as saying that Thai Army Chief Gen Chettha Thanajaro has instructed his representative for the meeting, deputy Army Chief-of-Staff Lt Gen Chokechai Hongthong, to urge Malaysian authorities to support the army's suppression drive against terrorism in the southern provinces of Thailand.

The authorities have found it difficult to track down terrorists as their dual nationalities had helped them to take refuge in Malaysia after stirring up unrest in Thailand.

But the source cautioned that the nationality issue might be too sensitive to be brought into the meeting. So it is likely that informal talks will be set up to deal with the problem.

Chavalit had discussed border issues with his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, during his visit here at the end of February this year.

The two leaders agreed, among others, to jointly develop border areas that are difficult to demarcate.

This was followed up by an agreement by the two countries signed on March 8 for the Golok River Mouth Improvement Project that would also help to determine a more precise boundary demarcation.

The GBC was set up in the 1970s to counter the communist threat along the common border.

Malaysia and Thailand also conducted joint naval, air and army exercises annually under the auspices of the GBC. -- BERNAMA

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