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Association set to boost KL-Bangkok ties

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysia-Thailand relations got a boost today with the formation of the Malaysia Thailand Association, enabling both countries to work together to enhance co-operation in various areas, including economy.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the MTA would complement its counterpart, the Thailand Malaysia Association, which was established on Sept 17 in Thailand.

"Malaysia and Thailand are close neighbours. Apart from sharing a common border, both share numerous cultural, social and religious affinities that have bound our people together.

"Thus both the MTA (in Kuala Lumpur) and the TMA in Bangkok can play a meaningful role to focus their objectives on economic and commercial initiatives besides striving for social and cultural ones," he said.

Abdullah's speech was read by his deputy Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad who was at the launching of the association at the Thai embassy in Jalan Ampang. Also present were Thai Ambassador to Malaysia Suchitra Hiranprueck, MTA president Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar and TMA president Tan Sri Kasem Kasemsri.

Abdullah said the proposal to establish an association to bring together Malaysians and Thais was mooted by former Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-Archa during a visit to Malaysia in 1996.

The proposal was subsequently endorsed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and current Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai during the former's visit to Thailand in April.

On a nostalgic note, Abdullah said Thailand was one of the few countries that Malaysia first established diplomatic relations with immediately after independence.

He said the MTA would have the advantage of a large network of contacts from which they could develop and increase business opportunities and work towards boosting the economies of both countries.

He also expressed his confidence in the association, saying that it would be successful in fostering closer relations and better understanding between the peoples of the Malaysia and Thailand.

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