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Bid to revive barter trade with Myanmar

PENANG, Thurs. - Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said today he would take up the issue of reviving Myanmar-Penang barter trade at the next National Economic Action Council meeting.

Koh said he would raise the issue with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Home Minister, as it was related to national security.

Koh said he had spoken to Dr Mahathir a few times about the matter over the past three years.

The barter trade was suspended by the Government in 1994 due to an influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar.

The State Government, he said, had always supported efforts to revive the activity and had even encouraged a consortium to set up facilities on Pulau Jerejak.

"The Home Ministry had tacitly agreed to our suggestion then that Pulau Jerejak be used as a centre for barter trade with Myanmar.

"However, the Home Ministry changed its mind and objected to the proposal later," he said when asked to comment on an appeal by Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce president Tan Sri Tan Kok Pin to revive the barter trade.

According to Tan, the suspension had led to a loss of RM600 million in annual turnover.

Barter trade between Penang and Myanmar had been practised since 1950s, with Myanmar traders bringing in rubber, beans, marine products, teakwood for electrical appliances, diesel fuel, biscuits, cooking oil and other consumer products.

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