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DR MAHATHIR & THAI PM TO WITNESS INSTALLATION OF GAS PIPELINE

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Thai counterpart Chuan Leekpai are expected to witness the signing ceremony for the installation of a gas pipeline at Songkhla in southern Thailand next month.

Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan said the agreement signing for the joint venture project would be between Petronas and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand.

"The agreement will be signed in Songkhla sometime soon, maybe later next month and we are working on the assumption that both prime ministers can be there together," he said.

Songkhla will be the landing point of the gas pipeline, which will be built from Songkhla-Pattani Narathiwat down to the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, connecting the East Coast Corridor's pipeline system.

He said this to reporters after meeting with Foreign Minister Datuk Ahmad Abdullah Badawi at the latter's office here today where they discussed bilateral, regional and international issues.

Surin, who became foreign minister last November, is scheduled to call on Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim tomorrow as well address Malaysian captains of industry at a luncheon organised by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia.

"Once the agreement for the gas pipeline has been signed, (the parties) will go into production very soon. This is extremely an encouraging development for both Thailand and Malaysia," he said.

During the talks lasting more than an hour, the ministers also discussed projects in the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand-Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), where both Surin and Badawi agreed there was potential for numerous projects.

However, Surin said "both the governments (Malaysia and Thailand) want to proceed at a pace that the current economic situation allows."

"We were very ambitious before but we have to be realistic, given the current economic situation," he said.

The ministers also discussed ways to develop human resources at the border areas of both countries to enable people living there to derive maximum benefit from development projects within the "growth triangle."

"The idea to help develop human resources in the area is to make these people capable of participating in both the governments' development efforts. We do not want them to be marginalised or be kept away from any development efforts," he said.

Meanwhile, Abdullah has described that his first meeting with Surin today as successful where their discussions centred on a number of issues, both bilaterally and regionally. -- BERNAMA

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