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Surin-Fund

MALAYSIA AND THAI TO SET UP HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FUND

HAADYAI, April 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Thailand today agreed to set up a human resource development a fund with an initial sum of 10 million baht (about RM1 million), Thai's Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan said today.

He said the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area Human Resource Development Fund would provide financing to students to pursue studies in Science and Technology as well as to help people in the region to tap development opportunities in the southern Thailand and northern Malaysia region.

He was speaking at a joint press conference with his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at a hotel here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahatir Mohamad and Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai discussed the matter in their meeting earlier.

"The human resource development had never been discussed at any Malaysia-Thailand bilateral forum or fora and today the two leaders agreed to set up a fund," said Abdullah.

Dr Surin said all the four parties involved in the Joint Development Area (JDA) - PTT (Petroleum Authority of Thailand), PTTEP (a subsidiary of PTT for oil exploration and production), Triton (Thai's oil company) and Petronas (Malaysia's oil company) would contribute 2.5 million baht (about RM250,000) each to the fund.

PTT, PTTEP and Triton would contribute in cash while Petronas in kind through training in the Petronas education framework, he said.

He said both leaders also agreed to allocate some places in universities for students using scholarship from the fund.

Both governments would also consider contributing to the fund which would be administered by JDA, he said.

Dr Surin also said all issues pertaining to the Padang Besar border demarcation had been resolved and the two leaders and a memorandum on that would be signed soon.

He said Chuan also proposed the closing time of checkpoints at three borders -- Padang Besar, Betong and Sadau -- be extended by both countries to further enhance the movement of people and goods.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had proposed the use of facility card in the form of smart card for better border crossing.

Dr Mahathir also told Chuan that Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had agreed in principle with the concept which could be extended throughout Asean region, he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir and Chuan also agreed in principle to abolish volume quota for the transportation of perishable goods from Thailand to Singapore through Malaysia.

Under the existing agreement which was signed between Malaysia and Thailand in 1979, volume of goods is limited to 30,000 tonnes a year.

Thai Prime Minister, he said, agreed in principle for reciprocal arrangement not to impose limit on the transportation of perishable goods from Malaysia to Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia through Thailand in future.

A new agreement would be outlined by the two countries soon, he said.

On the development of mechanism to settle trade account between the two countries using their respective currencies, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir wanted Finance Ministers of both countries to set up the mechanism soon.

Abdullah said there was acceptance on the use of the Ringgit in some

areas along the Thai border.
-- BERNAMA
JM ABG