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Thai-Malaysia HRD fund proposed

HATYAI, Wed: A 10 million baht (100 baht = RM10.20) human resource development fund will be set up for the people in Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia to acquire the necessary skills to participate in the Joint Development Area (JDA) of the two countries.

The fund, to be administered by the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Authority (MTJA), will consist of contributions from the four entities participating in the JDA.

They are Petroliam Nasional Bhd (Petronas), Triton Oil, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT), and PTTE International Ltd.

Briefing reporters after the bilateral meeting between the two countries here today, Thai Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan said Triton Oil, PTT and PTTE have agreed to contribute 2.5 million baht each to the fund.

"Petronas has agreed to contribute in kind by providing opportunities for training in Petronas' education framework. This includes engineering, technology and management," he said.

The Malaysian and Thai delegations, headed by their prime ministers Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Mr Chuan Leekpai, held closed-door discussions for over one hour.

Surin said the fund is expected to grow in the future, and will eventually include Indonesia as well. Its funding will be discussed in the framework of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the meeting was very successful with discussions on many subjects, particularly on the joint development between both countries.

Abdullah said there was also a proposal by Dr Mahathir that with increased business activity across borders, it is possible that a facility or smart card can be used to facilitate frequent border crossing.

With regards to transportation of perishable goods across borders, Surin said both prime ministers agreed in principle that transportation of such goods from Thailand through Malaysia to Singapore should be unlimited in volume from now on.

The present agreement on transportation of goods, signed in 1979, limits the volume to 30,000 tonnes a year.

Abdullah said another memorandum envisaged relates to the border demarcation at Padang Besar.

"All issues on demarcation have been resolved and will now be translated in the form of a memorandum between the two countries."

He said both prime ministers also decided that the finance ministers of Malaysia and Thailand should come up with a mechanism to settle trade accounts, in line with the decision by both governments to trade using their respective currencies.

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