

25 APR 2000

IMT-GT

M'SIAN GOVT TO CONTINUE ECONOMIC AID TO SOUTHERN THAILAND

By: Roslan Ariffin

NARATHIWAT (Southern Thailand), April 25 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian government would continue its efforts to help develop four regions in South Thailand -- Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla and Yala -- as part of efforts to assist the neighbouring country, entrepreneur development minister, Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz, said today.

He said the government had been providing various forms of assistance, including helping youths to be trained for the industrial sector.

"The government may study the possibility of setting up an investment secretariat to launch co-operation between Malaysian and southern Thai entrepreneurs in various types of businesses," he told reporters here at the end of a two-day visit here. Narathiwat is 125km north of Kota Bharu.

The minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Paduka Dr Hamid Othman, also accompanied Mohamed Nazri.

Mohamed Nazri said the government and his ministry would continuously try to help southern Thailand as part of its efforts to assist people here, especially Muslims, following the establishment of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT).

"This is our approach in helping our neighbouring countries because we feel that what happens there will also have an impact on us like what had happened during the regional financial crisis which started in Thailand and then spread to Malaysia," he said.

Nazri said he felt that southern Thailand like Narathiwat had prospects for industry because of its rich resource base besides the relatively cheap land.

"To date, Malaysian investors had neglected prospects in the region because they thought what was available in Narathiwat was already available in Malaysia. But this was not to be so," he said.

He said Malaysian investors in reality did not have complete information on the region which had its advantages like easy source of labour, cheaper land prices and raw materials which were yet to be fully exploited.

"I have been just informed that in Sungai Padi here, there is clay suitable for the ceramic industry and there is no ceramic factory here because Malaysian investors did not know about the availability of the resource."

There was also no furniture plant here although there was an abundance of rubber wood, he said.

Mohamed Nazri said Malaysia's exports to Thailand were on the rise and totalled US\$2.6 billion last year. Malaysia imported US\$2.5 billion worth of goods from Thailand at the same time.

Mohamed Nazri said in order to quicken the investment process here, the Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Malaysia (DPMM) Kelantan branch and other trade associations should have discussions with their counterparts here.

He felt that two-way trade could be enhanced when the governments of both countries provided support.

Earlier, the vice governor of Narathiwat, Pracha Taerat, said 104 youths from various areas here would undergo a one-year training course at various Giat Mara centres and the Mara Skills Institute.

This is the second year of the programme and there was a pioneer batch of 45 trainees last year.

Mohamed Nazri said the programme was to prepare the youths for various

industries when they were established in this region.

"Our prime minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) has personally informed Thai prime minister Chuan Leekpai on the success of the programme. They are thankful to the Malaysian government for such efforts and have even asked us to include non-Muslim trainees," he said.

"We welcome the suggestion from the Thai prime minister and we will increase the number from time to time," he said.

Nazri said there was difficulty in selecting non-Muslim candidates and they needed to know the Malay language and a little English in order to be successful in the programme. -- BERNAMA

RAR SHY