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**Thai PM to
discuss closer
economic ties**

BANGKOK, Wed: Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra plans to discuss closer regional economic cooperation with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his one-day visit to Kuala Lumpur on April 24, a Thai spokesman said.

Thaksin's secretary Suranand Vejjajiva said Thaksin will hold talks with Mahathir on how Asian economies, heavily dependent on the state of the United States economy, should weather the slowdown in the US and Japan. "If Asian economies can help each other during the slowdown, they will not have to follow the US sluggishness."

Thaksin will convey Mahathir's ideas to China during his two-day visit to Hongkong from May 8, officials said.

He is due to meet with Hongkong chief executive Tung Chee-hwa and other senior officials, and with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Thaksin will further discuss the ideas in future meetings with the leaders of South Korea and Japan. "Asia Pacific is a massive market with a huge economy and its members can't afford to walk separately," Suranand said. - Reuters