

Offshore exploration work to be speeded up

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THAILAND will expedite offshore exploration work to ensure natural gas will be available to both Malaysia and Thailand by the middle of next year.

Songkhla Province Vice-Governor Yongyuth Sangchandr said both countries had started erecting production platforms at the offshore area at the sea.

Exploration work would begin once the Environmental Impact Study was completed soon, Yongyuth said at his office here yesterday.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had also given an assurance that "whatever issues or obstacles will be resolved at the soonest possible time".

Thaksin, who was on a one-day visit to Malaysia yesterday, had also requested Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to expedite the implementation of the project.

Under the project, the gas explored offshore will be pipelined through the Songkhla province into Malaysia.

Yongyuth said there were no problems, except on some environmental and socio-related issues.

Expressing confidence that any delay would be resolved soon, he said:

"We had come a long way since the idea was first mooted in 1979 and can only ill-afford to let things go wrong now."

"You can be assured exploration would go ahead and the gas delivered as scheduled," he added.

The RM3 billion Trans Thai-Malaysia Gas Pipeline project was to supply gas from southern Thailand to Peninsular Malaysia.

The project is a 50-50 joint venture between Malaysia's Petronas and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand.

The offshore oil exploration area called Joint Development Area (JDA) covers 7,520 sq kilometres.

The "25 years of high reserves" in the Gulf of Thailand is about 150km from Kota Baru in Kelantan.