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KL-Bangkok reaffirm close ties

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysia and Thailand today reiterated their close ties and pledged to continue co-operation in various fields, including mutual economic development.

This was disclosed after a meeting between Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and his Thai counterpart, Dr Surakiart Sathirathai, at Wisma Putra today.

Speaking to reporters after the 75-minute meeting, Syed Hamid said both countries felt that their bilateral relations were important to each other.

"The Thai Foreign Minister spoke about bilateral ties being good and there was co-operation at multilateral levels in East Asia and South Asia, and about mutual interests in economic development.

"We discussed the gas pipe line, border matters and co-operation in fishing."

Syed Hamid said both countries agreed that in matters where there were problems, the two sides would try to resolve them through personal contacts and not wait for official meetings.

Asked if there was discussion on involving Thailand in the national reconciliation efforts in Myanmar, Syed Hamid said Thailand congratulated Malaysian efforts in the matter which included Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with the Myanmar leadership and the work done by the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Myanmar Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

"He is happy to see that Malaysia can play a role and they are also willing to help."

Meanwhile, Sathirathai said Malaysia was his first visit abroad since his current appointment in the new Thai government and that his visit was to reiterate the importance of Malaysia as Thailand's immediate neighbour.

He said both sides discussed bilateral issues like increasing co-operation at border checkpoints and having more communication among countries in the Asean region, South Asia and East Asia.

"We also discussed the possibility of countries which were victims of the financial crisis to get together and look at issues like the so-called global financial architecture that could be more responsive to developing countries."

Asked about the two countries' ties with Myanmar, Sathirathai said Thailand was in agreement with Malaysia in placing "great importance" on immediate neighbours.

Asked about his new government's policy towards Myanmar, he said Thailand's policy on neighbouring countries was to build more trust among themselves and to adhere to the principle of non-intervention adding that Thailand welcomed the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar.

On another note, Syed Hamid was asked about Malaysia's position in the US State Department's recent report on Malaysia's human rights.

He said Malaysia's position was very clear as it had been saying all along that nobody should tell Malaysia how to practise human rights.

"We think there is some amount of bias and misreporting where conclusions and opinions are made about human rights practices in the country.

"We do not believe that when the report was drafted, it took into account all views. We do not agree with the report. The report has certain

inclinations."

Syed Hamid said drafters of the report only looked at the political and civil aspects of human rights performance and only got information from some quarters while ignoring the other points of view.

Syed Hamid said religious freedom in the country was well practised, including political party freedom where there were more political parties here than in the United States or any of the Western countries.

Asked if Malaysia had responded to the report, Syed Hamid said there was no need to give credence to the report.

"We should be proud and not have to defend ourselves every time. Our track record is good. We have free elections where members of the Opposition can be Members of Parliament and where the Opposition can rule certain States.

"Why should we feel like we are in the witness box?" he said.

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