

Rousing welcome at checkpoint

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DANOK: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Ministers were given a rousing welcome when they arrived at this border town for the first joint Malaysian-Thai Cabinet meeting in Haadyai yesterday.

More than 1,000 Thai civil servants, schoolchildren and the public lined the streets and waved Malaysian and Thai flags to greet the Malaysian VIPs as they passed the Thai immigration checkpoint for Haadyai.

They also carried banners with the words *Welcome to Thailand* and *Selamat Datang*.

Dr Mahathir, was welcomed on arrival here by Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai.

The Prime Minister and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived in a double-decker bus from Alor Star about 11.10am.

They were seated right at the front of the top deck with Dr Mahathir holding a video camera.

From here, Dr Mahathir went on the remaining part of the journey to Haadyai in a car with Surakiart while Dr Siti Hasmah went in a different vehicle with Surakiart's wife, Khunying Suthawan Sathirathai.

Also in the delegation were Kedah Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain and his wife Datin Seri Sharifah Hamidah Syed Hamid.

In a press statement released by the Office of Thai Premier Thaksin Shinawatra to mark the Cabinet retreat, Thailand said its border authorities would open two new customs checkpoints to facilitate cross border trade along the common boundaries of both nations.

The first checkpoint is located at the Ban Prakop in Ha Thawi district of the Songkhla province which borders Durian Burung in Kedah.

The second is Buketa Bridge in the Waeng district of the Narathiwat province which borders Bukit Taa in Kelantan.

The additional two will complement the existing seven Thai customs border

checkpoints which are located at Sadao (Bukit Kayu Hitam), Padang Besar (Perlis), Sungai Golok (Kelantan), Betong (Perak), Wang Kelian (Perlis), Tak Bai (Kelantan) and Satun (Langkawi).

Meanwhile, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said Malaysia and Thailand were expected to work much closer to boost tourism for mutual benefit instead of rivalling each other.

Both sides are keen to pursue joint-promotions and joint-packages following discussion at an informal full Cabinet meeting between the two neighbours.

Among the proposals

raised were easing border crossing regulations for tour bus operators from the two countries and expanding the present routes used by the buses in ensuring that tourists can see more of each other's country.

Other proposals discussed at the Malaysia-Thailand Cabinet retreat in the Dusit JB Hotel here were for the national carriers of both countries to conduct joint-promotions and develop new packages for their high frequency routes.

"Thai Airways and Malaysia Airlines would jointly promote tourism attractions in both countries and share the cost of promotion," Abdul Kadir said.