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Agreements on education, information technology to enhance co-operation

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Malaysia and Vietnam today signed agreements to clear the way for better co-operation in education and information communication technology.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said bilateral talks with his Vietnamese counter-part Phan Van Khai today covered issues on labour, trade, investment, agriculture, biotechnology and security co-operation to stop trans-border crime.

Abdullah and Phan then witnessed three signings at the Prime Minister's Department - the Comprehensive Co-operation in the 21st Century agreement, a MoU on Co-operation in Education and another MoU on Co-operation in Information and Communication Technologies.

The documents were signed by Vietnam's Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Education and Information Technology at a closed-door meeting between Malaysian and Vietnamese delegations of Government officials and businessmen.

Earlier, in a private meeting, Abdullah said he assured Phan that he (Abdullah) would continue to build on the good ties with Vietnam established by his predecessor, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

At a Press conference later, he said the education agreement would enable both countries to exchange scholars and educators while the ICT agreement enables Malaysia to share manpower and experience with Vietnam.

A Malaysian trade and investment mission will head for Vietnam in June.

"While we want our investors to expand trade and investment," he said, "we also hope the Vietnamese will increase their interest in Malaysia."

Malaysia is Vietnam's 12th largest investor with 144 projects worth US\$1.3 billion (RM4.94 billion) as of last October.

Both leaders also agreed to increase the frequency of Malaysia Airlines' flights to Vietnam - an agreement Abdullah hoped to sign soon.

They also discussed the potential for Petronas to get involved in Vietnam's oil and gas industry, which Abdullah said remained the best bilateral co-operation.

On security, both nations agreed to stop cross-border crimes like money laundering and drug trafficking.

Abdullah said for the Fifth Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) which Hanoi would host in October, Malaysia will ensure that all Asian countries have the same stand on issues.

Asem comprises 10 Asian and 15 European nations.

Asked if overlapping claims to the Spratly Islands were discussed, Abdullah said: "No, not at all."

Phan's visit reciprocates Abdullah's January visit to Vietnam.

Earlier, Phan was given an official welcome by Abdullah.

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