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Progress made on Limbang issue

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Malaysia and Brunei today inched closer towards resolving the outstanding issue pertaining to the land and maritime borders off Limbang during a closed-door discussions between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, who is on a four-day working visit here, were engaged in cordial talks on bilateral, regional and international affairs of mutual concern.

"The issue of the land and maritime border demarcation in Limbang was also touched upon, and it is very encouraging to note that both leaders were very positive in the discussions pertaining to the matter.

"Actually it's not a dispute ... it's an area where there are land boundaries and maritime boundaries where we want to draw a permanent boundary that both parties could live with. This is a sensitive matter because it involves the future, so we are looking at satisfying both sides," Syed Hamid told a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department here after the meeting.

He said Malaysia and Brunei shared the view that it was more beneficial for both nations to jointly explore the available resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Limbang.

Asked if the matter could be resolved before Dr Mahathir leaves office in October, Syed Hamid said: "We wish it was resolved yesterday, we have submitted our eight-point memorandum to Brunei during the last meeting between the leaders and we will wait for the official response from Brunei before moving on.

"Whatever it is, we are not treating this issue as a dispute but more of a 'discussion' on how best we can find a balanced outcome, which would prove beneficial to both of us."

Syed Hamid said as far as Kuala Lumpur was concerned, the only discussion was on the demarcation of the maritime border due to overlapping claims.

The issues that had been discussed in previous meetings between the leaders were the land-border demarcation in Limbang and maritime matters such as the dispute over an oil field and the EEZ off the Borneo coast.

Syed Hamid said during the meeting today, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah also confirmed he will attending the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit to be held here in October.