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### Convergence across borders

A STRATEGIC alliance between Malaysia and Thailand appears to be in the making following the positive chord struck at the Malaysia-Thailand technology and business partnership dialogue in Langkawi. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Thai counterpart Thaksin Shinawatra are clearly in accord on the need to explore cross-border collaboration.

The synergy is almost perfect for the forging of a deeper political and economic alliance between the two traditional allies. Their common frame of reference, built on historical ties dating back centuries and a more recent appreciation of commonalities, is a catalyst to the realisation of tangible benefits from closer union.

That they have concurred at the very outset that prospective economic co-operation should only involve the very best in human and economic resources indicates pragmatism. Optimising the use of relative advantages on both sides of the border will be crucial to a win-win situation.

There is, of course, added impetus to this convergence of ways in the personal commitment of Dr Mahathir and Thaksin, both proponents of the "prosper thy neighbour" concept. Both are clearly cognisant of the need for nations in the region, especially neighbours, to tackle the vagaries of an increasingly volatile international economic scenario.

This imperative has to be actualised by implementors who should also appreciate the need for caution in the execution of proposals from either side. They have to tread carefully where local sensitivities are concerned. There may be lessons to be learnt from the opposition mounted by Thai villagers to the Malaysia-Thai gas pipeline project. Caution notwithstanding, there must also be the will to push forward with projects that are tailor-made for success. Administrators in Thai provinces and Malaysian States closest to the border should identify opportunities for economic co-operation.

There are innumerable benefits to be derived from a healthy relationship between neighbours based on mutual respect and trust.