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Gas project on despite problems

reports on "Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) 2003" THE Thai Government will go ahead with the Malaysian-Thai gas pipeline project despite its domestic problems.

"I can assure you the project will not be abandoned," Thai Deputy Prime Minister Korn Dabbaransi told a joint ministerial Press conference of the 10th Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) yesterday.

Responding to questions, Korn expressed confidence that Malaysia and Thailand would resolve problems pertaining to the project at a bilateral forum.

"We are monitoring the developments and the situation is under control," he said.

The assurance came after protests by residents of two villages in Chana district, Songkhla province, where the proposed pipeline would pass through.

The villagers, mostly fishermen, claimed that the project would affect their livelihood, disrupt marine life and cause adverse environmental impact.

On Dec 20, about 2,000 protesters clashed with Thai police near Dusit JB Hotel in Haadyai where a joint Cabinet meeting of both countries was to be held the next day.

At the meeting, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had assured Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the pipeline project would not be dropped despite the opposition.

Thai dailies then reported the Thai Prime Minister as saying that "Dr Mahathir trusted Thailand to push the project ahead".

The 352km project, initiated in 1979, is a 50-50 US\$689.8 million (RM2.62 billion) joint venture to explore "25 years of high reserve" natural gas in a Joint Development Area covering 7,520 sq km, about 150km from Kota Baru in Kelantan and 180km from Pattani in south Thailand.

The gas from the Gulf of Thailand will be transported via the pipeline through two villages in the Chana district to Changlun in Kedah.