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Talks over border demarcation with Thais to continue

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Malaysia and Thailand have failed to resolve their border disagreement involving 42.5 hectares at Bukit Jeli in Kelantan, but will continue negotiations.

Following the ninth Joint Commission meeting between Malaysia and Thailand yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said both countries could not come to a consensus on a formula to resolve the matter.

He said a joint subcommittee on co-operation along the border areas would continue to discuss the matter.

The border demarcation problem arose because of geographical features which had changed since the original demarcation agreement, called the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, was signed in 1909.

The area involves 42.5 hectares. The dispute arose in the 1990s when the demarcation was almost completed.

The issue was raised at the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his counterpart Thaksin Shinawatra in Bangkok last July.

It was also discussed at the 41st Malaysia-Thailand Common Border Committee attended by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in May 2001.

Syed Hamid, however, said almost all other major issues were resolved at the commission meeting. Thailand was represented by its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Surakiart Sathirathai.

The two countries agreed to enhance co-operation in trade, economy and security, and fight the trafficking of women and children, and smuggling of drugs.

The meeting agreed to include new areas including co-operation in culture, energy and the recovery of stolen vehicles. They agreed on joint promotion activities in the respective countries to boost tourism.

A framework agreement was also worked out to cover the transit of perishable and non-perishable goods as well as passengers between the two countries.

Malaysia is Thailand's second largest trading partner in Southeast Asia after Singapore. Trade between the neighbours amounted to US\$5.89 billion (RM22.38 billion) in 2001, an increase of 3.9 per cent over the previous year.

The next JCM meeting will be held in Thailand in 2004.

"Given the sustained political will at the highest level, we would be able to resolve the issue amicably," Syed Hamid said after the signing ceremony of the minutes of the meeting.

He said the gas pipeline joint venture was not part of the JCM as it involved two companies. He said Malaysia, however, hoped the project between Petronas and the Thai company would be resolved quickly.