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Malaysia, Brunei to seek solutions to outstanding issues

Saiful Azhar Abdullah

THE dispute over the territorial boundary in Limbang and several other outstanding issues between Malaysia and Brunei could come to an end soon as both Governments have agreed to meet in the next few weeks to work out solutions.

During his meeting with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah at Istana Nurul Iman yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was informed that senior officials from both sides would begin negotiations later this month.

"We hope the discussion will produce results that will benefit both countries," Abdullah later said at a Press conference at the Malaysian High Commission.

"We wanted to solve it, if possible, yesterday. But we couldn't, so we will try to solve it as quickly as possible ...it doesn't mean that we have to solve it by this date or that particular date. If we could solve it earlier, it would be better," Abdullah said when asked whether the long-standing issue of Limbang would be settled before Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad steps down in October.

Several senior Wisma Putra officials, led by secretary-general Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, will be meeting their counterparts either today or tomorrow to discuss the date and venue of the meeting.

Abdullah said the meeting would not focus solely on the Limbang border dispute but also "other matters associated with it (Limbang)".

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the issues were the border demarcation in Limbang and maritime matters such as the dispute over an oil field and the exclusive economic zone off the Borneo coast.

"We hope to solve them as soon as possible and this has been enhanced by the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister had a very good discussion with the Sultan to find ways to solve the problems.

"I have also met the Foreign Minister of Brunei and both parties are keen to resolve the outstanding issues.

"Today's visit by the Deputy Prime Minister will help find solutions to all the outstanding issues."

Abdullah, accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood on the threeday visit, arrived yesterday and had an audience with the Sultan.