

Government concerned about spillover of Thai violence
Malaysiakini.com
March 20, 2007

Malaysia today said it believed the situation in insurgency-plagued southern Thailand was "under control," but expressed concern the violence could spill over its border.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said he would discuss ways of mitigating the crisis with his Thai counterpart, Nitya Pibulsonggram, in a scheduled meeting on Thursday in Malaysia.

"What is happening in Thailand is of course always of concern ... Whatever happens in the southern part may have a spillover effect on us," Syed Hamid told reporters.

"I hope with the visit of the foreign minister on Thursday, we can continue to discuss some of the specific issues and how we should overcome the problem," he added.

"Our concern is to make sure that whatever happens within the domestic domain of Thailand does not overflow into Malaysia."

A report over the weekend said a group of 24 Muslims from Thailand's mostly Muslim southern provinces had fled to Malaysia to escape alleged intimidation by the Thai military amid soaring sectarian tensions.

No influx of people

But Syed Hamid denied this, and said Malaysia was not seeing an influx of Thai citizens.

"There are no new intake of people into our country from Thailand... At present, we cannot say there is an influx of people," Syed Hamid said.

"We have increased security forces to ensure that our borders are safe, to ensure that there will be no infiltration of foreign nationals into our country," he added.

A group of 130 Thai Muslims are already sheltering in majority Muslim Malaysia after fleeing over the border in 2005, an incident that led to a diplomatic tussle between the two countries over their fate.

Thailand and Malaysia agreed last month to boost cooperation in a bid to end three years of separatist unrest in the south of the majority Buddhist kingdom in which 2,000 people have died.