

Up to Thailand to deal with insurgents
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Malaysia said it would help Thailand to resolve the crisis in the kingdom's violence-plagued south, but that it would prefer not to act as a mediator with insurgent groups there.

"We do not want to be involved in mediation, unless there is a need for it if the Thai side said there is a need for it," Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told reporters.

"But I think that it is for the Thais to find ... reconciliation and mediation," he said, asked if Thailand had sought Malaysia's help as a mediator to resolve the crisis.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi met his Thai counterpart Surayud Chulanont in February, with both agreeing to boost cooperation to end three years of separatist unrest in Thailand's southern provinces.

Muslim-majority Malaysia after the meeting said it could act as mediator, while Thailand in March said its neighbour had helped to make some progress in opening talks with Islamic separatists along their shared border.

Hands-off approach

Syed Hamid said Malaysia could share experiences in managing its multi-ethnic mix and resolving poverty, which both countries say is a factor in the southern Thai unrest, but signalled a hands-off approach.

"We are concerned with the situation that is occurring in the south," said Syed Hamid.

"In whatever way that they think that we can be helpful or be of assistance, we'd willing to share our experience and do whatever we can. But it's essentially their internal situation," he said.

Syed Hamid also said there was a second meeting planned between Abdullah and Surayud, but did not have details of a date.

More than 2,000 people have been killed in Thailand's Muslim-majority region bordering Malaysia since the insurgency began in January 2004.

The military-installed Thai government has launched a raft of peace measures, only to see the attacks escalate in the last six months.

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