

**PM to determine return of Thai separatists: Syed Hamid**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Apr 24, 2008**

Malaysia would determine whether it can return two separatist leaders wanted in Thailand ahead of meetings between premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Thai counterpart, Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said today.  
MCPX

thailand pm samak sundaravej and pak lah malaysia visit 240408 01A spokesperson for Thailand's government said Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej would ask Abdullah during a meeting today for the return of the men.

The Thai military say the wanted men, who frequently cross the porous border shared by the two countries, are believed to be in Malaysia.

"It is a matter for the police on both sides to discuss and decide," Malaysian home minister Syed Hamid Albar told reporters.

"The (Malaysian) police would have to investigate and decide if they have done anything that is considered a crime in both countries before they can be extradited," he added.

Authorities in both countries have not revealed whether the two men, whose names have not been released, are being held in custody.

More than 3,000 people have been killed since unrest broke out in Thailand's far south in January 2004. The region was an ethnic Malay sultanate until Buddhist Thailand annexed it a century ago, provoking decades of tension.

### **Rice smuggling**

The southern insurgency and the issue of rice imports are expected to be the key issues for the leaders in their meetings, Malaysian Foreign Minister Rais Yatim said.

International demand for Thai rice has soared after other top exporters Vietnam and India imposed limits on what they sell abroad to ensure domestic supply.

"Rice being the staple food of both countries, it is pertinent for us to have a proper neighbourly arrangement," Rais said.

"Now, we are importing 480,000 tonnes a year (from Thailand), that's 60 percent of our rice imports," he said.

As Thailand was Malaysia's main source of rice imports Rais said he would like to find out from their northern neighbour whether the present arrangement would continue.

"So long as the 480,000 tonnes (are still provided for), that's good enough to start with," he added.

thailand pm samak sundaravej and pak lah malaysia visit 240408 02Samak received a ceremonial welcome at the Malaysian parliament Thursday before heading off to a luncheon

with Abdullah, which will be followed by a one-on-one meeting between the leaders.

They are later expected to chair a meeting between delegations from the two countries on joint development projects, transport links and potential gas pipelines between the neighbours.

Rais said bilateral relations "have always been close", with Malaysian investments in Thailand surpassing one billion ringgit and bilateral trade hitting RM55 billion in 2007.

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