

Pak Lah's visit to Thailand will boost bilateral ties

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THE visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to Thailand is timely and appropriate at a time when the two nations are facing new challenges both on the political and economic fronts.

The problem in the south of Thailand, and the unsubstantiated accusation that we have meddled in the internal affairs of the country in the south has caused some mild tension and mistrust.

Nevertheless, I believe our ties built since the era of the "Bunga Mas" would hold well as we begin to build on our existing foundation towards better relations and understanding.

The damage done to the flourishing "sanctioned illegal" trade at our common borders has greatly affected both sides.

Therefore, the visit of our Prime Minister to Thailand would give him an opportunity to address outstanding issues that have surfaced in recent months and put to rest any contentious issues that have direct-

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ly or indirectly contributed to wrong perception and conclusion on both sides.

I do not see the issues in the south of Thailand as unsolvable as every problem presents opportunities to dig into our resolve to settle them.

It is not a sign of weakness to seek help from our neighbours if we know they have something to offer to help settle the problems, though it is agreed that

non-interference should be the order of the day.

Being a good neighbour, Malaysia has offered to help deal with the problems in the south of Thailand, but, ultimately, it is an internal problem for Thailand to resolve.

Malaysia and Thailand have much to offer politically and economically to the member states of Asean, both regionally and internationally.

Strategically, we are playing our role as a champion of peace, harmony, and security in this region, and I do not see why both nations cannot go a step further in solidifying existing bilateral cooperation and move into other mutually beneficial ventures and domains.

I am sure the visit at such a time like this will give opportunity to seek new ways to better our bilateral ties and remove mistrust, apprehension and scepticism.

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