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# 'Friendship Bridge' opens new opportunities

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■ **By Rosli Zakaria**  
news@nst.com.my

**JELI:** The "Friendship Bridge", jointly opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Thai counterpart Surayud Chulanont yesterday is expected to improve bilateral exchanges in the border region of the two countries.

The opening ceremony, held in the middle of the RM9.2 million bridge that spans over 120 metres across Sungai Golok, will usher in increased economic activities in the towns of Bukit Bunga in Kelantan and Ban Buketa on the Thai side.

The structure is a second link between Kelantan and Thailand, after the first bridge was built in Rantau Panjang 34 years ago.

"It will allow easier contact between our people," said Abdullah.

"Most important of all, it will have social and economic impacts that will mutually benefit both Thailand and Malaysia.

"This is no ordinary bridge. It is a concrete example of a project which had been identified for implementation under the Joint Development Strategy for the border areas established in 2004."

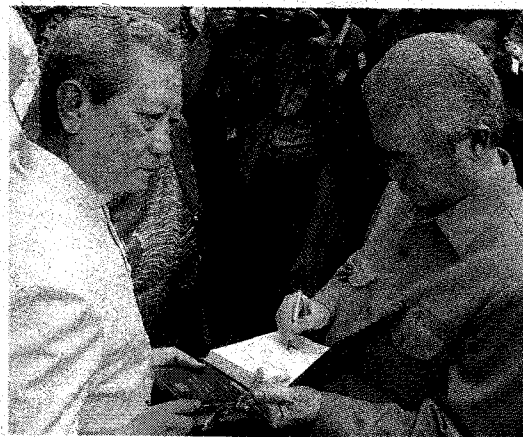
The ground-breaking ceremony for the bridge was held in January and the project was completed on Dec 14.

The bridge is part of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle 2007-2011 action plan to facilitate and promote trade and investment.

"The people of Kelantan will benefit the most, immediately and directly, from the opening of this bridge.

"This relates very well to the special efforts that the government is now undertaking to make Kelantan a new focal point for the development of economic and social activities; including the development of human capital."

Abdullah also reiterated the government's commitment to con-



**Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont signing and exchanging souvenir books at the new bridge.**

tribute to the economic and social development of the people in the border areas.

Apart from the opportunity to participate in the East Coast Economic Region (ECER), Abdullah also welcomed Thailand into the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) for purposes of co-operation in the border areas and bi-

lateral investments.

Thai Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsongkram and his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Home Minister Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad and Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed were among those present.