

PM: MOVE TO RESOLVE THAI CHECKPOINT ISSUES

Malaysia, Thailand leaders pledge smoother traffic flow at Sadao, Bukit Kayu Hitam facilities

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MALAYSIA and Thailand have agreed to resolve pending issues at the border checkpoints here and in Sadao in the next two weeks.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said this was agreed on during a bilateral meeting with his Thai counterpart Srettha Thavisin in Sadao yesterday.

"First, we have agreed on improving traffic flow at the border checkpoints.

"If we look at the Sadao checkpoint, some of the work are moving faster than our side, despite the fact that we began working on our Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) Complex in Bukit Kayu Hitam earlier than Thailand.

"The one that is still pending is road works that have to be completed as soon as possible. However, it is taking a little bit of time since the road alignment overlaps with army territory.

"We have to negotiate and we wish to reach an agreement within two weeks. I don't want this to be delayed because the new Thai administration is showing a more accommodative and friendlier way to turn south Thailand and north Malaysia into a new economic growth area," he said after crossing back to the ICQS Complex here yesterday.

Present were Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor, Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi, Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing and Deputy Home Minister Datuk Seri Shamsul Anuar Nasarah.

Anwar said both governments had agreed to allow four vehicles from both countries to drive a certain distance within both countries.

"On our recent approval for vehicle movement from Thailand



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his Thai counterpart Srettha Thavisin touring the site of a road alignment between the Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) Complexes of Sadao and Bukit Kayu Hitam in Sadao, Thailand, yesterday, PIC COURTESY OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE OF MALAYSIA

between both countries, it has to be based on reciprocity principle in international relations.

"For example, if Thailand is asking for their vehicles to be allowed to travel up to Penang, our vehicles also will have to be allowed to travel a similar distance in Thailand.

"It has been agreed upon, but we will finish the details through negotiation. I want this situation handled in two weeks, and then I want the note to be given over to the Thai side for response, which the Thai side is also doing.

"Otherwise these talks are not going to be resolved. If we are serious about developing this region and benefiting the people, this has to be expedited," he said.

Anwar also reiterated Malaysia's commitment to facilitate peace talks between the Thai authorities and separatist movements in south Thailand.

"There is a minor tension in southern Thailand. Although it is an internal matter, we are responsible in extending our cooperation to ease the tension by asking for an assurance on the southern Thai community's freedom to practise their religion, culture and language subject to Thai laws and regulations.

"I observed the Thai prime minister's willingness to find solutions seriously; we will maintain our position as the principal facilitator under the direction of Tan Sri Zulkifli Zainal Abidin," he said.

On a related matter, Anwar said

both prime ministers had also agreed that the joint task force between both countries be proactive in holding talks to resolve bilateral issues.

He added that both governments had agreed that the joint task force committees concerning investment, tourism, agriculture and food security, and security would meet regularly.

"We have decided that the committees should not wait for the annual meeting between the prime ministers of Thailand and Malaysia.

"The four committees on investment, tourism, and agriculture and food security, to be led by respective ministers from both countries, will have meetings more frequently," he said.

Anwar also announced that the Thai government had also agreed to the proposed construction of a bridge connecting Rantau Panjang in Kelantan to Sungai Golok in Narathiwat.

"The (Thai) PM has agreed to begin the project at the latest by next year, subject to the environmental impact assessment (EIA) approval and efforts to expedite the process.

"I will inform this development to the Kelantan menteri besar to expedite the process," he said.

Page 1 pic: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim meeting his Thai counterpart Srettha Thavisin in Sadao, south Thailand, yesterday.