

## **Malaysia brings Thailand and rebel group to the table**

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**By ZUHRIN AZAM AHMAD**

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia after brokering a peace deal between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in October has now brought Thailand and a rebel group to the discussion table.

Thailand and the rebel group Badan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) signed in Kuala Lumpur yesterday a General Consensus Document to Launch a Dialogue Process for Peace in the southern provinces, and agreed to invite Malaysia to be the facilitator.

National Security Council secretary-general Lt Gen Pharadorn Phatthanatabutr represented Thailand while the chief of the BRN liaison office in Malaysia, Hassan Taib, signed for the group.

National Security Council secretary Datuk Mohamed Thajudeen Abdul Wahab witnessed the signing.

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia would appoint a senior government official to act as the facilitator.

The Prime Minister added: "A series of dialogues will begin in two weeks in Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia will do everything possible to assist in the smooth functioning of the Joint Working Group so that productive discussions can take place in a harmonious atmosphere.

"Malaysia strongly believes that the establishment of peaceful conditions in southern border provinces of Thailand will bring prosperity to the area, including our side of the border."

He was speaking at a joint press conference with his Thai counterpart Yingluck Shinawatra at the end of the Malaysia-Thailand Annual Consultation.

The dialogue process for peace was the main subject of the consultation held at the Perdana Putra Building.

Najib said Malaysia was fully aware that the signing of the document was merely the starting point of a long process and that much work had to be done with "a lot of issues to be untangled and problems to be resolved".

"I am confident, however, that with goodwill and sincerity from all sides, progress can be achieved and a true momentum for peace can be created.

"We are equally convinced that, after years of suffering, the time has come for the people in southern border provinces of Thailand to have a better life.

"It is time for the area to be transformed into a growth area bringing socio-economic benefits to both sides of the Malaysia and Thai border.

"Rest assured that the people and the Government of Malaysia wish nothing more and nothing less than peace and prosperity for our brotherly neighbours across our border," he said.

Yingluck said that Thailand was looking forward to a lasting solution (to the troubles) in the south.

She added: "It is our wish to promote peace and prosperity in the southern border provinces through a convincing effort.

"In this context, we agreed on putting an end to violence and creating a peaceful and harmonious environment for the benefit of Thai people in the areas.

"The Thai authorities are willing to engage all stakeholders in the process in a good faith."

Yingluck said the peace process needed to move as soon as possible as "resolving the situation" was a very important aspect in Thailand-Malaysia relationship.

"We really appreciate the strong support from Malaysia," she said.

Explaining the role of facilitator, Mohamed Thajudeen said Malaysia would bring all the parties together to start their dialogue.

"We need to introduce the actual personalities who will form the Joint Working Group and this is where we introduce our facilitator as well," he said.

"Then we need to decide the terms of reference to guide the future work of the group."

MNR is one of several rebel groups in southern Thailand, and bringing them together is seen by experts as a major task towards achieving a peace deal.

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