

## **Moves to resume southern Thailand peace talks**

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**From Mohd Haikal Mohd Isa**

BANGKOK, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- Thailand and Malaysia have yet to decide when they will resume the new round of the southern Thailand peace talks following the appointment of former Malaysian Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor as the new facilitator.

Responding to Malaysia's move in appointing a new facilitator to the peace talks, Thailand also appointed Gen Udomchai Thammasarorath to head its peace negotiating team, in place of Gen Aksara Kerdphol.

"It has not been finalised (new talks). Related parties are still working on it," said the head of Thailand's National Security Council (NSC) Gen Wanlop Raksanor Friday when asked by the media whether a new round of peace talks would resume later this month.

Despite the new round of meetings between the warring parties yet to resume, he assured that the Malaysia-led peace talks are still on track.

Wanlop was met by the media after attending a security meeting chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan, who is also the Defence Minister.

Abdul Rahim, 75, took over the facilitator's role from Datuk Zamzamin Hashim, who was appointed by the previous Barisan Nasional administration.

Kuala Lumpur, as the facilitator to the peace talks, has been arranging several rounds of meetings between Bangkok and the Majlis Syura Patani (Mara Patani) which represents several groups in the southern provinces.

The peace talks have been postponed since the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) government came to power in Malaysia following the 14th General Election last May.

However, Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad breathed new life to the stalled peace talks during his two-day working visit to Thailand last month when he pledged Malaysia's help in "whatever way possible" to end the long-running conflict in southern Thailand.

The 93-year-old leader also said the conflict was an opportunity for both countries to display friendship to each other, as well as for Kuala Lumpur to return the favour for Bangkok's help in ending Malaysia's conflict with the communist insurgents years ago.

The armed conflict in Thailand's three southernmost provinces, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, have claimed more than 6,500 lives since 2004.

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