

Malaysia pledges "whatever possible" to end southern Thai conflict

BERNAMA

24/10/2018

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BANGKOK, Oct 24 (Bernama) – Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has pledged Malaysia's help in "whatever way possible" to Thailand to end the cycle of violence in the kingdom's southern provinces.

The conflict in southern Thailand according to Dr Mahathir, who is on a two-day visit to the country beginning today, was an opportunity for both nations to display friendship to each other.

"We pledge to help in whatever way possible to end the violence in southern Thailand. I am quite sure with our strength in working together into solving the problem together, we sincerely want to help reduce and end the problem altogether," he said at a joint media conference with his Thai counterpart Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha at the Government House here today.

Earlier, both leaders and their delegations had held a bilateral meeting at the same venue where they discussed various issues of common interest.

Malaysia is the facilitator for the ongoing peace talks between the Thai government and Mara Patani (Majlis Syura Patani), which acts for separatist groups in the south.

Since 2004, the armed conflict in the four provinces in southern Thailand has claimed more than 7,000 lives.

Former Malaysian Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor who was recently appointed as the facilitator to the peace talks was also present during the joint media

conference.

Malaysia according to the Prime Minister, is grateful for Thailand's assistance when the country battled terrorism and wanted to return the favour in helping Bangkok find a solution to its southern problem.

Besides the problem in the south, Mahathir said he also wanted both countries to increase bilateral trade.

“Bilateral trade which has shown an increase of 17.9 percent in 2018 can be further increased when problems related to bureaucracy at the border crossings are solved,” said the Prime Minister.

More than 70 per cent of the trade between Malaysia and Thailand comprised of trade at the border.

The Prime Minister said the border crossing in Bukit Kayu Hitam will be open 24 hours in order to facilitate more trade between both countries and there were also plans to build two bridges, to connect Pengkalan Kubor and Takbai and Rantau Panjang and Sungai Golok.

The ferry service between Langkawi and Satun is boosting visitor arrivals for both countries and it could further boost trade between Thailand and Malaysia, he said.

On ASEAN, the Prime Minister said the regional grouping is a strong economic region with more than 600 million in population and wanted more efforts to be done to increase intra-trade between its members.

“With 600 million in population, ASEAN is a big domestic market,” he said, adding that ASEAN leaders will meet to discuss on how to increase intra-trade within the regional grouping.

Thailand will assume the ASEAN chairmanship next year.

Meanwhile, Prayut in his remarks, said he had a frank and constructive discussion with his Malaysian counterpart on the peace talks that is being facilitated by Kuala Lumpur.

"I assured him that the dialogue will continue, with Malaysia as the facilitator. It shall be carried out, however, within the framework of Thailand's constitution," he said.

He said, the two countries will expand the scope of cooperation to include other areas such as in border security, economic development and measures to tackle border security issues including terrorism and extremism.

The Thai Prime Minister also said he regarded Mahathir as a statesman, senior leader of the region and the world.

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