

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
Venue : [s.l]
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Title : BILATERAL MEETING WITH H.E. DR. SURAKIART SATHIRATHAI
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THAILAND

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. SURAKIART SATHIRATHAI
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THAILAND,

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE THAI DELEGATION,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

AT THE OUTSET, ALLOW ME TO CONVEY MY SINCERE APPRECIATION AND THANKS TO HIS EXCELLENCY DR. SURAKIART SATHIRATHAI FOR HIS KIND INVITATION TO ME TO VISIT BOTH SADAO AND HAT YAI. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THIS VISIT WILL CONSOLIDATE AND ENHANCE THE ALREADY CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

2. THIS VISIT TO THE SADAO BORDER CHECKPOINT FACILITIES EARLIER THIS MORNING HAS GIVEN US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR BORDER CHECKPOINTS BOTH IN BUKIT KAYU HITAM AND SADAO ESPECIALLY SINCE THE EXTENSION OF THE OPENING HOURS AT THESE BORDER CHECKPOINTS. MY VISIT HERE ALSO COMES 5 MONTHS AFTER THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA HAS DECIDED TO EXTEND THE OPENING HOURS OF THE BORDER CHECKPOINT AT BUKIT KAYU HITAM FOR ANOTHER 2 HOURS UNTIL 12.00 MIDNIGHT. I AM ENCOURAGED TO SEE THAT WITH THIS EXTENSION, THERE HAS BEEN A NOTABLE INCREASE IN THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND CROSS BORDER TRADE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES PARTICULARLY BETWEEN THE REGIONS CLOSE TO THE BORDER.

3. THE STATISTICS ALSO CLEARLY SHOW THAT SOUTHERN THAILAND IS A PREFERRED CHOICE OF TOURIST DESTINATION FOR MALAYSIANS. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SEE MORE THAI TOURISTS VISITING MALAYSIA AND MAKE MALAYSIA AS ONE OF THE FAVOURITE TOURIST DESTINATIONS. AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE COME UP WITH SEVERAL INTERESTING PACKAGES TO ATTRACT FOREIGN TOURISTS TO VISIT MALAYSIA. IN THIS REGARD, WE HOPE THAT BOTH OUR COUNTRIES COULD COOPERATE AND WORK TOGETHER IN ENCOURAGING MORE THAIS TO VISIT MALAYSIA.

4. ON THE BILATERAL FRONT, I AM HAPPY TO NOTE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES REMAINS WARM AND TROUBLE-FREE. PROBLEMS DO ARISE FROM TIME TO TIME BUT WE HAVE MANAGED TO SOLVE THEM AMICABLY THROUGH OUR OWN INGENUITY AND THE DESIRE TO LIVE AS GOOD AND

RESPONSIBLE NEIGHBOURS, FULLY REALIZING THAT OUR INTERESTS ARE OFTEN INTERTWINED. WITH STRICT ADHERENCE TO GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS, OUR TIES ARE CLOSE AND WILL NO DOUBT MOVE EVEN CLOSER. IN THE PAST, THREATS AND CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY NEUTRALIZED BY THE DESIRE OF BOTH SIDES TO WORK TOGETHER. IN THIS REGARD, IT WOULD BE AN ADDED FEATHER IN OUR CAP, IF WE COULD FACILITATE TO EXPEDITE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRANS-THAI MALAYSIA GAS PIPELINE PROJECT. I UNDERSTAND THAT PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN VISITED CHANA DISTRICT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND RECENTLY TO MEET WITH THE LOCAL THAIS THERE AND LISTEN TO BOTH THE VIEWS OF THE SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS OF THE PROJECT. I ALSO RECALL THE ASSURANCE GIVEN BY PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN TO THE HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA DURING HIS OFFICIAL VISIT TO MALAYSIA IN APRIL LAST YEAR THAT THAILAND WOULD RESOLVE THE MATTER WITHIN 3 MONTHS. I AM SURE YOUR EXCELLENCY IS AS ANXIOUS AS I AM TO ENSURE THAT THE PROJECT TAKES OFF QUICKLY TO ENABLE OUR PEOPLE TO REAP THE TREMENDOUS BENEFITS THAT WOULD EMANATE FROM IT.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

5. ONE OF THE LONG OUTSTANDING ISSUES THAT REMAIN TO BE SOLVED IS THE ISSUE OF THE BORDER DEMARCATION AT BUKIT JELI. BOTH OUR PRIME MINISTERS HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO RESOLVE THIS ISSUE AMICABLY IN THE SPIRIT OF GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS. IN THIS REGARD, BOTH OUR OFFICIALS WILL BE MEETING IN KUALA LUMPUR THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS AND FIND WAYS OF RESOLVING THE ISSUE. I AM HOPEFUL THAT AN AMICABLE SOLUTION COULD BE FOUND TO THE ISSUE AND THAT WE COULD MOVE FORWARD IN OUR RELATIONS.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

6. THE PAST FEW YEARS HAD NOT BEEN ECONOMICALLY FAVOURABLE TO BOTH OUR COUNTRIES DUE TO MANY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS SUCH AS THE ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS, THE ECONOMIC SLOW DOWN IN THE US AND THE EFFECTS OF THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS IN THE US. BOTH OUR COUNTRIES WENT THROUGH A RATHER BAD PATCH. ONE WOULD EXPECT, GIVEN THIS GLOOM AND DOOM SETTING, RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES WOULD FOLLOW THE SAME LACKLUSTER PATH. FORTUNATELY, DEFYING POPULAR PROPHECIES AND PROJECTIONS, MALAYSIA-THAI RELATIONS HAD PERFORMED QUITE WELL. BILATERAL TRADE HAS CONTINUED TO INCREASE AND DURING THE PERIOD FROM JANUARY TO SEPTEMBER 2001, IT IS VALUED AT US\$4.7 BILLION. I BELIEVE THAT THE BILATERAL TRADE FIGURE FOR 2001 WOULD SURPASS THE TOTAL TRADE RECORDED IN 2000 WHICH WAS US\$6.7 BILLION. IT IS EQUALLY HEARTENING TO OBSERVE THAT OVER 50 COMPANIES WITH MALAYSIAN INTERESTS ARE CURRENTLY OPERATING IN THAILAND, EMBRACING A WIDE RANGE OF SECTORS. SIMILARLY, THAI INVESTMENT IN MALAYSIA IS ALSO SHOWING ROBUSTLY ENCOURAGING SIGNS. THESE TRENDS PROVIDED AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR US, AND HOPEFULLY FOR OTHERS AS WELL, THAT THROUGH COOPERATION AND GOOD STRATEGIZING, WE WOULD BE ABLE TO RIDE OVER THE WORST OF STORMS.

7. THAILAND HAS ALSO BENEFITED FROM THE MOVEMENT IN TRANSIT OF ITS PERISHABLE GOODS THROUGH MALAYSIA TO SINGAPORE. THIS HAS INDEED INCREASE TRADE WITHIN THE ASEAN REGION. SIMILARLY, WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THAILAND WOULD GIVE ITS FORMAL APPROVAL TO FACILITATE THE PASSAGE OF MALAYSIAN LORRY TRANSPORTERS TO INDOCHINA THROUGH THAILAND AS ASSURED BY PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN DURING HIS VISIT TO MALAYSIA IN APRIL LAST YEAR.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

8. WE ARE EQUALLY CONCERN OVER THE RECENT ATTACKS IN CERTAIN PARTS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND PURPORTEDLY CARRIED OUT BY THE THAI SEPARATIST GROUP. I WOULD LIKE TO REITERATE HERE THAT MALAYSIA IS AGAINST ANY FORM OF TERRORISM. OUR STAND HAS ALWAYS BEEN CLEAR THAT WE DO NOT CONDONE VIOLENCE AND NEITHER DO WE PROVIDE SANCTUARY TO THE SEPARATIST GROUPS. IN THIS REGARD, LET ME ASSURE YOU THAT WE WILL RENDER OUR FULLEST COOPERATION TO THE THAI AUTHORITIES IN COMBATING ALL KINDS OF VIOLENCE.

9. ON THE ISSUE OF TERRORISM, MALAYSIA TOGETHER WITH INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES ARE IN THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING A MECHANISM WHERE WE CAN COOPERATE TOGETHER IN THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES. I UNDERSTAND THAT THAILAND TOO ATTENDED THE RECENT MEETING IN MANILA IN DECEMBER 2001 AS AN OBSERVER. WE HOPE THAT THAILAND WOULD IN FUTURE BE PART OF THE COOPERATION.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

10. I HOPE TO HAVE A MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION WITH YOU THIS MORNING AND ADDRESS THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES THAT EXIST BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. I FIND THAT MY DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUR EXCELLENCY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AMIABLE, FULL OF SINCERITY AND REFRESHING. I AM CONFIDENT THAT MY VISIT TO SOUTHERN THAILAND, DESPITE ITS BREVITY, WILL BE BOTH FULFILLING AND REWARDING.