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Title : OPENING STATEMENT AT THE 9TH MEETING OF THE MALAYSIA-THAILAND JOINT COMMISSION

His Excellency Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai;
Minister of Foreign affairs of Thailand;

Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

At the outset, let me extend a warm welcome to Your Excellency and members of your delegation to Kuala Lumpur for the 9th meeting of the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Commission.

Your Excellency,

2. Our meeting today is indeed timely as it allows us to review the state of our bilateral relations, given the developments that have taken place since our last Joint Commission Meeting in Bangkok in 1999.

3. As a close neighbour, Malaysia regards Thailand as an important partner, both bilaterally as well as in the context of ASEAN and other international fora. We attach a high priority in developing productive relations with Thailand with whom we share both land and maritime boundaries as well as common values and aspirations. The regular exchanges of bilateral visits at various levels and the promotion of people to people contacts have contributed significantly to the strengthening of our relations and to fostering closer interactions between our two countries. In this regard we note with satisfaction the personal rapport that exist between our two leaders. Indeed the commendable initiative made by the Honourable Prime Minister Thaksin in holding a Joint Cabinet Retreat in Hat Yai in December 2002 had not only made it a unique and historic occasion, but also productive in providing the necessary push and impetus to enhancing Malaysia-Thai relations in all fields.

Your Excellency,

4. I am pleased to note the presence of a large number of officials from both sides at this JCM. This not only signifies the importance that we attach to this Meeting, but also reflect our seriousness and determination to discuss and resolve issues of common concern. With hard work and commitment, and given the traditional spirit of good neighbourliness, I am confident that we will be able to achieve tangible results to our mutual benefit.

5. I am also pleased to note that even though the Joint Commission had not met for more than three years, the various Committees and Working Groups established under the ambit of the JC have been meeting regularly so as to implement the decisions made by the Commission. Malaysia is particularly happy to see the progress achieved in some areas although some outstanding issues remain to be resolved.

Your Excellency,

6. Being neighbours it is perhaps no surprise to see issues arising from time to time. As old issues are resolved, it is sometimes inevitable that new ones emerge. Such issues could even be magnified or exaggerated by the media. Our primary task therefore is to ensure that these issues are properly managed and do not get out of hand as to unduly affect our bilateral relations.

Your Excellency,

7. Our JCM today is held against the backdrop of uncertainties in the global environment. Numerous challenges lie ahead. But many opportunities also exist. It is indeed to our credit that we have been able to put the 1997 economic crisis behind us and to proceed with our national developmental efforts. Malaysia believe that economic growth and prosperity in both our countries would significantly contribute to the promotion of regional peace and stability.

Your Excellency

8. The Agenda before us covers a wide range of issues. It encompasses, amongst others, border cooperation, land boundary demarcation, cooperation in the areas of transportation, agriculture, tourism promotion, science and technology, education, health, telecommunication, drugs suppression, joint investment, trafficking in women and children and drugs smuggling. These are in fact old issues which have become increasingly complex and which require our utmost consideration. Some new items have also been included, namely cooperation in culture, energy, the recovery of stolen vehicles and the establishment of Islamic Banking in Thailand. Malaysia looks forward to successfully discussing all these items during the JCM. I believe that , given the close collaboration and cooperation that exist between our two countries this Ninth JCM will mark another important milestone in the development of our relations.

Thank you.