

Mara Patani-govt talks to start in 2016

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The new southern peace talks are expected to be officially launched after the New Year, according to the secretary for the Thai peace talks team.

Maj Gen Nakrob Bunbuathong said the team made a three-point proposal to Mara Patani — an umbrella organisation representing southern militants at the peace dialogue — at a meeting in Malaysia from Nov 11-12.

No agreement has been reached and a technical team for the talks will hold a meeting this month before the peace talks are to be officially unveiled after the New Year, said Maj Gen Nakrob, who is also the deputy director of the Internal Security Operations Command's (Isoc) operation centre 5.

The proposal given to Mara Patani includes the designation of a safety zone, Maj Gen Nakrob said.

Mara Patani will select the areas where it believes it can prevent its members from staging unrest.

The group must be confident that security will be in place in the zone since some of its militants and youths still disagreed with the idea, Maj Gen Nakrob said.

Mara Patani needs time to study the idea, though it will probably work out. However, the zone is unlikely to include Bacho

district of Narathiwat, he said.

According to a source involved in the southern peace talks, some areas in Narathiwat could be chosen as the safety zone.

Other issues in the proposal cover the designation of joint development areas as well as the issues of an amnesty, parole or alternative justice procedures.

Maj Gen Nakrob said Mara Patani has also made a three-point proposal to Thai authorities. The group asked for immunity from criminal prosecution for the groups it represents.

The other two proposals were to put the peace talks on the national agenda and to recognise Mara Patani as the main representative of the southern insurgents in the talks.

However, Maj Gen Nakrob said no agreement has been reached on the proposals.

"The key principle for the talks is to move from easy issues to harder ones," he said.

The source said that Thai officials had also asked Mara Patani about its stance on the Islamic State and the group said it has nothing to do with it.

Mara Patani representatives said they do not support the Islamic State group since their ideology differs from that of the jihadists, according to Maj Gen Nakrob.

The officer said Mara Patani has also changed its leader for the talks from Awang Jabat to Masukree Hasim.