

## Cultural Dimension to Develop the Southern Border Provinces



The Government has allocated a fund of 94 million baht to the Ministry of Culture to adopt a cultural dimension to help solve problems in the southern border provinces and carry out local development through arts, culture, and religion.

Permanent Secretary for Culture Apinan Poshyananda said that the Ministry of Culture had worked out its southern border development plan for the 2015 fiscal year, with the adoption of a cultural dimension for peace-building in the deep South.



The plan is in line with the Government's Action Plan on Southern Border Provinces Development, 2015-2017, which seeks to reduce the degree of violence, support peaceful means, improve local people's living conditions, and empower local communities, so that people will live happily in this multicultural society.

Various agencies under the Ministry of Culture have been assigned to implement projects and activities in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and four districts of Songkhla (Chana, Thepha, Na Thawi, and Saba Yoi), in accordance with the Ministry's southern border development plan for the 2015 fiscal year.

Among the projects are the promotion of reconciliation through a cultural dimension, youth models for the khon masked drama, the establishment of an Islamic cultural museum and Al-Quran learning center, and batik creation.

Mr. Apinan said that the Ministry would also promote cultural products of Thailand, or CPOT, in each province. After the products have been developed and become well-recognized, they could be brought to Bangkok to be exhibited, especially at the ASEAN Culture Center.

In terms of religion, he said that people of different faiths should be allowed to join cultural and religious activities together, so that they would be able to learn more about other religions. He believes that the cultural dimension is powerful and could bring about lasting peace.

Thailand is a land where a variety of religions have been practiced with great tolerance. It is home to people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, who live their unique lifestyles and follow their own traditions.

The southern border provinces of Thailand make up a multicultural society, which is the greatest charm of the region. The opening of cultural space to local residents is one way to resolve southern problems, because it would link local people of different faiths and create better understanding among them.

Local residents in the three southern border provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat are predominantly Muslim. They have a distinctive culture different from the culture in other parts of Thailand. It is widely acknowledged that the southern situation is not a religious conflict.

Apart from contributing to the resolving of problems in the southern border provinces and the development of the deep South, the cultural dimension will also bring about social harmonization.