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Mahathir-Asean  
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight it was necessary to strengthen Asean and its secretariat to ensure that its members can be protected from the effects of negative developments in the arena of international politics.

He said only a regional organisation which was strong could offer the most credible arrangement which could help its members comprising small nations to safeguard their interests.

He said to strengthen Asean, five eminent persons had been chosen to examine and make specific recommendations.

Their report would be made available to all member nations, he said when speaking at a banquet in honour of visiting Thai Prime Minister Dr Anand Panyarachun at Sri Perdana here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said that he was pleased with the agreement by all Asean members to study and elaborate on the concept of the Malaysian proposal to set up the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG). -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was proud of the high level of economic, cultural and social cooperation that existed between Thailand and Malaysia, and was determined to further enhance this cooperation by removing whatever obstacles that might remain.

+The necessary mechanism is already in place, in the form of the joint commission and various functional committees established by the two governments, + he said.

He also said that with Dr Anand's support and guidance both countries would be able to achieve the target they had set for themselves.

Dr Anand said Malaysia, as the current chairman of the Asean Standing Committee, played a constructive and pivotal role in exploring new avenues for Asean cooperation, especially at a time when rapid changes were taking place in the regional and international environment.

He said the various ideas and proposals put forth by Malaysia have provided a timely impetus for charting the future direction of Asean, and the moves were highly appreciated by Thailand and other Asean countries. -- more

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It is clear that economic collaboration must now become the forefront of Asean, therefore we must not only seek to strengthen the intra-Asean economic framework but also work to forge a broader coalition with other like-minded nations who share an interest and concern in promoting outward-looking economic cooperation, + he added.

He said Thailand is always open to new ideas and approaches and would give a serious study of Malaysia's EAEG proposal as a possible vehicle for closer consultation and coordination among countries in the region towards an open and free international trading system. -- Bernama

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