

# PM: Only a strong Asean can protect members

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Asean and its secretariat must be strengthened to ensure that its members can be protected from the effects of negative developments in the arena of international politics, the Prime Minister said tonight.

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 recommendations.

Their report would be made available to all member nations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at a banquet in honour of visiting Thai Prime Minister Dr Anand Panyarachun at Sri Perdana.

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.

He said he was proud of the high level of economic, cultural and social co-operation that existed between Thailand and Malaysia, and was determined to further enhance this co-operation by removing whatever obstacles that might remain.

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 co-operation, especially at a time when rapid changes were taking place in the regional and international environment.

Dr Anand, who leads a 15-man delegation, arrived here today on a two-day familiarisation tour of Asean countries.

In their talks earlier, Dr Mahathir told Dr Anand that Malaysia will continue to detain and prosecute Thai fishermen who pass

through Malaysian waters without prior notification.

Dr Anand had earlier asked Malaysia to handle the problem of detained Thai fishermen "flexibly," reports *Zulkifli Talib*.

Both leaders, however, agreed that existing procedures for Thai fishermen to enter Malaysian waters be simplified.

Foreign Ministry deputy secretary-general (1) Datuk Abdul Halim Ali said Dr Mahathir informed Dr Anand that Malaysia had certain regulations intended to protect the interest of local fishermen and for security reasons.

"However, Dr Mahathir pointed out that the regulations were not intended to stop Thai fishermen on their way to fish in Indonesian waters."

Other bilateral issues discussed included the transit of perishable goods from Thailand to Singapore and overlapping TV signals along the border.