

MAHATHIR: NEED TO BRIDGE REGIONALISM

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Asean has now to consider how the non-Asean states of the region can be brought into the regional mainstream, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Regionalism in South-East Asia has to be brought to a higher plane from the process of communication and consultation to that of conscious and organised interdependence between all the regional states," he said.

The Prime Minister said that just as Asean provided for politico-economic interdependence, the relevant elements of Zopfan (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality) and the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation could provide the structured politico-security framework for that organised interdependence between all Southeast Asian states.

Dr Mahathir said the Zopfan Declaration of 1971 was an acceptance on the part of all Asean member states of certain basic principles for extra-regional relations.

The Treaty of Amity and Co-operation of 1976 elaborated on these principles and invited acceptance of them by others in the region.

He said that while regionalism was beginning to assume new importance in international economic affairs, there could

not continue a division and separation of the Indochina countries from the rest of South-East Asia.

Saying that a rapid pace of economic development required an environment of peace and security, Dr Mahathir added that so long as the Cambodian problem remained unresolved it would continue to affect the region.

He said the region was encouraged by the election of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as president of

the Supreme National Council.

He was confident that under Prince Sihanouk's leadership, the Cambodian parties would be able to achieve national reconciliation and reach agreement on a comprehensive political settlement.

Dr Mahathir also said: "It is from a strong Asean base that we should approach the question of peace and security of our immediate wider environment in the Asia-Pacific region."

He said Asean had already made its mark in geo-politics and the regional body's relevance for its regional existence and in international affairs had been proven beyond doubt.

"It is equally important we should make Asean relevant in terms of geo-strategy."

Dr Mahathir said a new strategic environment was clearly developing in the Asia-Pacific following the end of superpower rivalry in the area.