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ASEAN HAS DONE WELL, SAYS DR M

(EMBARGO: For release aft 2000 hours today, Aug 8)

Mahathir - Asean

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- Asean, which turned 25 today, has done well speaking with one voice to enhance the status and influence of its member countries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

But, he added, the six-member grouping needed to widen its base by representing the aspirations of all Southeast Asian countries to face new uncertainties arising from surrounding political and economic changes.

+Whatever were the differences that have kept us apart, these must not be allowed to fester and perpetuate disunity,+ he said in a television broadcast over TV2 to mark Asean's silver jubilee anniversary.

He said the accession of Vietnam and Laos to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia was a logical development of the inherent goodwill existing in the region.

Dr Mahathir said the spirit of Asean cooperation and consultations among its members -- Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Brunei and Singapore -- should be spread to all the countries in the region. --
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Mahathir - Asean 2 (last) Kuala Lumpur (embargo)

+Our experience in Asean in the last 25 years reaffirms our conviction that cooperation and consultations among neighbouring countries not only help to promote mutual benefits but when they speak with one voice it also enhances their status and influence,+ he said.

He said member countries could be justifiably proud of Asean's many regional and international achievements, living up to the vision of its founding fathers.

+Asean is the forum which through regular discussions and consultations, we could strengthen our ties as neighbours and achieve tangible regional solidarity.

+Asean is the vehicle through which we could harness our collective strength and resources to enhance our economic well-being and the quality of life of our peoples,+ he said.

Dr Mahathir said the diverse activities in Asean's name reflected the growing manifestation of its cooperation that augured well for the future of the organisation and the region. -- Bernama