

PM: Vital for private sector to join hands

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BANGKOK: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad wants more private sector co-operation to enhance trade between Asean countries.

Such co-operation would speed up the realisation of the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta), he said at a dinner hosted by Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai at Government House yesterday.

Governments and the private sectors have equally important roles in developing a strong sense of regional purpose so that Afta could be sooner realised, he added.

Afta could accelerate the already expanding intra-Asean trade, and Malaysian and Thai entrepreneurs could contribute immensely to the process, Dr Mahathir said.

On the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, he said the tripartite ministerial meeting in Langkawi last month was a clear mani-

festation of the desire to turn the idea into reality quickly.

"I am confident the growth triangle project will bring about tremendous benefits to all three countries.

"But it is crucial that besides the commitment of the three governments, there should also be active participation and involvement of the private sectors of the three countries for this triangular partnership to work well and succeed," he said.

Dr Mahathir thanked Thailand for supporting the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) proposal, saying the consensus on EAEC from Asean countries demonstrated their ability to address an important issue in a pragmatic manner.

He said Malaysia also welcomed the positive developments in Indochina, as it was important to have stability and prosperity in the region.

"Malaysia, like Thai-

land, sees the need to co-operate with our neighbours in Indochina to enable them to achieve a higher level of economic development," he said.

"We have, therefore, embarked on modest co-operation programmes for these countries. As our resources are limited, we may not be able to fulfil some of the needs of these countries," he said.

"As such, it would be worthwhile for Malaysia and Thailand to work together, possibly even in partnership with other Asean countries, to co-ordinate our technical co-operation programme vis-a-vis these three countries to ensure optimisation of resources and results," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the national reconciliation process in Cambodia under Prince Norodom Sihanouk was encouraging but the prince would need the strong support of the international community to rebuild the country.