

Dr Mahathir urges Cambodia

Invitation to

Ⓟ Foreign Trips

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From A. Kadir Jasin

PHNOM PENH, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived in the Cambodian capital for a three-day official visit today — the first by a Malaysian Prime Minister in 30 years — has invited Cambodia to consider becoming a member of Asean.

Dr Mahathir said with the participation of Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, Asean would blend into a tapestry of regional co-operation, adding that both Laos and Vietnam had taken steps to prepare for their eventual entry into the regional grouping.

Speaking at the State banquet at the Chamcar Mon State guest house, Dr Mahathir said a more united Southeast Asia would make countries of the region stronger and more able to face future challenges.

The dinner was hosted by First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

"It is my hope that Asean would ultimately comprise all the 10 countries in Southeast Asia. Together we can work with the other countries in East Asia to develop a more resilient and progressive crescent of prosperity in this region," Dr Mahathir said.

On bilateral relations, the Prime Minister said now that a new era in Malaysia-Cambodia relations had begun, Malaysia would take every measure to reinforce existing interaction between peoples of the two countries which began centuries ago.

He said: "While relations between Cambodia and Malaysia have always been cordial, this visit is especially historic as it takes place 30 years after the first Prime Minister of Malaysia came to Cambodia."

Despite that, said the Prime Minister, Cambodia had always remained close to "our hearts" and Malaysia had always been concerned with the situation in Cambodia and with the plight of the Cambodians during the years that the country was undergoing the traumas of war.

"But we are happy with the positive results of the efforts put in by friends and neighbours, and, most importantly, the commitment of Cambodians themselves to bring about lasting peace in Cambodia," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia was pleased at having participated in the Cambodian peace process, and in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (Untac) operations, adding that

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peace in Cambodia was vital for the stability and prosperity of the entire Southeast Asian region.

"As the leader of a coalition government, I salute the wisdom of Cambodian leaders in selecting this common course in the building of a peaceful and united Cambodia," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the return of peace to Cambodia and other changes in the region had presented leaders of the region with an unprecedented opportunity to enhance co-operation between and among countries of Southeast Asia.

Dr Mahathir also paid tribute to King Norodom Sihanouk for the role he played in bringing together the Prime Minister of Malaysia (the late Tunku Abdul Rahman) and the President of Philippines (Diosdado Macapagal) in 1964 to reconcile differences

between the two countries. The summit was held in Cambodia.

"To this day, Malaysians remember with gratitude the role played by His Majesty. His Majesty stands in high regard and esteem among Malaysians," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir and senior

to consider joining Asean

Phnom Penh

members of his delegation were earlier received by King Sihanouk and Queen Monique at the royal palace in the heart of the city. The Cambodian King and Queen hosted a luncheon for the visitors.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia admired the commitment of the Cambodian

Government to rehabilitate and reconstruct the country, and pledged Malaysia's support.

He said the presence of Malaysian business leaders and entrepreneurs in his delegation attested to their interest to explore mutually beneficial projects in Cambodia.

"In order to strengthen our co-operation, it is fitting that both countries set up an appropriate framework to facilitate the signing of bilateral agreements between us," Dr Mahathir said.

He invited Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen to make an official visit to Malaysia

"to reinforce efforts at co-operation". Both leaders had been to Malaysia for private visits.

Dr Mahathir and his delegation were met on arrival at Phnom Penh's Pochentong International Airport

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Familiar sight at welcoming ceremony

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by Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen and their wives. Also at the airport was Malaysia's Ambassador to Cambodia, Deva Mohamed Ridzam, embassy officials and their wives.

Adding colour and meaning to the simple welcoming ceremony was the presence of a large group of Cambodian Muslims dressed in the familiar *sarung*, *baju telok belanga* and *songkok*. The women were dressed in *baju kurung* with the older members sporting the *kelubong*.

The Prime Minister laid a wreath at the Independence Monument and later held talks with Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen.