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(Embargo: For release after 8 pm Malaysian time)

Mahathir-Asean

MAHATHIR PROMISES TO CONTINUE ASSISTING LAOS

From Abdul Rahman Sulaiman

VIENTIANE, April 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight promised to continue to support and assist Laos in its development efforts because Malaysia believes that a prosperous Laos means a prosperous Southeast Asia. *overseas tips*

The Prime Minister said a prosperous Southeast Asia was an important prerequisite to peace and stability in the region.

At present Laos is benefiting from Malaysia's Technical Assistance Programme.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's aid to Laos and other developing countries in the region was consistent with her desire to work together closely within the context of regional and South-South Cooperation.

More could still be done to strengthen the friendship and cooperation between the two countries, he said at a dinner hosted by his Laotian counterpart Khamtay Siphandone here. -- more

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Mahathir-Asean 2 (last) Vientiane (embargo)

The Prime Minister described the signing between the central banks of the two countries of the Bilateral Payments Arrangement Agreement this afternoon as an important milestone in the development of economic relations and the promotion of trade between Kuala Lumpur and Vientiane.

He said, the BPA had proven to be a successful mechanism for increasing trade among developing countries.

He was confident that the BPA, together with the investment Guarantee Agreement already signed in 1992, would contribute substantially to the economic relations between the two countries.

On Laos' membership to Asean, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would most warmly welcome her into the regional organisation, when she eventually decides to become a member.

At present, Laos is an observer in Asean.

Reiterating his belief that Asean would be strengthened by the membership of all the Southeast Asian countries, the Prime Minister said now that Laos was already an observer, the path was clear for her to participate in Asean programmes involving cooperation in the various fields. -- Bernama

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