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Asean's youths its greatest investment

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THE youths of Asean are the region's greatest investment for the future, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in Kuala Lumpur last night.

"They should be guided in the best possible way so that they can contribute to the future of the region.

"Let us guide them in the Asean way with the Asean spirit so that they will become good, responsible and worthy citizens of Asean," he said in a videotaped message at a dinner in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of Asean hosted by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said the experiences in leading Asean over the past 30 years should enable the leaders to map the way for those who will be taking up the task of creating a more cohesive and better Asean.

Dr Mahathir also said that as the world is more complex and demanding, Asean leaders should reflect on some of the past problems and difficulties so that repetition will not occur.

"As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, we must be fully equipped to manage the challenges that will come with the new millennium.

"With the right attitude, knowledge and commitment, and drawing from Asean's past lessons, we will be able to surmount the challenges that may emerge.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is proud to be a member of Asean and to have contributed something towards the success of the association.

"We are fully committed to the goals and ideals of Asean and we are confident that Asean will achieve greater progress in the future," he said.

He also said much have been achieved due to the spirit of Asean, doing things the Asean way which means practising consultation and seeking consensus by exercising self-restraint and maintain mutual respect.

"There have been times when our very existence and cohesiveness had been put to the test, but we have always survived and come out stronger.

"In all our undertakings and ventures, the spirit of Asean togetherness prevailed and has been our guiding principle," he said.

The Prime Minister said Asean shall continue to nurture and nourish the principle to ensure greater prosperity and strength.

In his address, Abdullah said Asean's cohesiveness will remain intact, its spirit of togetherness will continue and remain strong, politically and economically, in facing the challenges of the 21th century.

"I am confident and firmly believe that Asean is mature enough to face all the challenges and problems of an expanded organisation," he said.

Abdullah said despite many accomplishments by the grouping, it had not been an easy 30 years.

On many occasions, Asean unity and cohesion were put to the test. Yet, on every occasion, Asean had made its mark and has won international recogniton as a successful enterprise in regional cooperation.

The group, he said, has not only been a proponent of peace but also a catalyst for development.

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