

'Principles must prevail' in ties among nations

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ASEAN countries must adhere to principles governing the conduct of relations among members to overcome the strain in inter-state relations triggered by the economic crisis, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the recovery of the respective Asean economies could only be expedited in an improved regional and international environment, but noted that the crisis severely tested the resilience of member states.

"Our association and relations among members have come under some strain. Asean's responses to the challenges confronting the region have created the impression of an Asean in disarray.

"Malaysia believes that the maintenance of positive inter-state relations must be nurtured. Asean has the wherewithal to pull through this turbulent period," he said in his opening statement yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said 30 years of Asean co-operation had given South-East Asia stability and solidarity which contributed to economic growth and improved standard of living.

He expressed confidence that the Hanoi summit should help create an environment conducive to positive relations and regional growth.

"We will co-operate with our Asean partners to strengthen and to insulate the region from external disturbances as much as possible," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the economic crisis had impoverished Asean economies and undermined national stability with millions of people being thrown out of work.

Businesses had been bankrupted and the social well-being of the people disrupted, he said, adding the financial turmoil had underscored many challenges inherent in globalisation.

"Even as we embrace it, we must be wary of the dangers which accompany it."

Dr Mahathir said the last one year had been most difficult and challenging for all Asean economies and despite their best efforts to prevent a deepening of the problem, the financial turmoil had developed into an economic crisis.