

Asean remains intact, says Dr Mahathir

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in London**

THE 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations is still intact although the regional body may have "been overshadowed" of late by the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"Each Asean member country is also an Apec member, but (within Apec), their stand is not always identical, thus eroding Asean's effectiveness.

"The future of Asean will now depend on how rapidly we recover from the recent (economic) crisis.

"Some of the (Asean) member countries have yet to recover fully," Dr Mahathir said in a dialogue session with participants of the Malaysian-British Partnership for the 21st Century at One Whitehall Place here.

The Prime Minister had earlier presented a keynote address entitled "Strengthening Growth and

Mutual Prosperity" at the event which was jointly organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute, the Malaysian-British Business Council and Asia House.

He later witnessed the exchange of two agreements between Malaysian firms and their British partners.

The first was a joint technology collaboration agreement for broadband and e-commerce smart services in the Multimedia Super Corridor between MiTV Sdn Bhd and Hitachi Europe Ltd.

Another was a lease agreement between DHL Worldwide Express Ltd and Quill Properties Sdn Bhd.

Dr Mahathir also voiced Malaysia's preparedness to assist Indonesia to the best of the country's ability.

"As a big country, Indonesia is not easy to rule, let alone having to cope with pressures from inside and outside.

"We still remain in contact to discuss bilateral issues ... Indonesia will take time to recover," said Dr Mahathir.

To another question if Asean had

any intention to emulate the European Union's single currency concept, Dr Mahathir said:

"The idea is way off for us. If there is any worry, it would be the currency speculators who will get their hands on us and impoverise the whole region."

Dr Mahathir also welcomed British consultancy firms to operate in Malaysia, but urged them to find local partners.

"We see less need now to tap the expertise of foreign consultancy firms, especially in areas where local expertise exists.

"It is also not the Government's policy as we want to check the outflow of our currency, whenever possible."

Later Dr Mahathir visited Harrods.

He also opened the Malaysian Product Centre where Malaysian products are displayed for promotional purposes.

In a short speech to mark the opening of the centre, the Prime Minister said Malaysian goods are competitively-priced and have a high quality which meets world

standards.

He hoped the centre will be a meeting place for Malaysian and British businessmen to promote trade and economic co-operation.

The centre showcases a wide variety of Malaysian goods such as furniture, wood products, processed food, apparel and textile, plastic and household products and handicraft.

It also has conference and meeting room facilities with an audio-visual room for presentation purposes.

The centre is a two-unit four-story shophouse located off Sussex Garden and Edgware Road, about half-a-mile from busy Oxford Street.

Amtek International Limited, a British-based Malaysian company manages the centre and assumes the role of a trade representative to participating Malaysian companies.

The Prime Minister also witnessed the signing ceremony between two Malaysian companies and two British companies for the supply of rubberwood furniture and decorative light bulbs.