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Leaders to launch 'prosper thy neighbour' initiative

ASEAN leaders have agreed to launch an initiative based on Malaysia's "prosper thy neighbour" principle to narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots in the region.

Called the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI), the idea is to help develop areas of education, skills development and training of workers in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

China, Japan and South Korea will also contribute towards the IAI.

"Essentially, (the IAI) provides a framework for regional co-operation through which the more developed Asean members could help those member countries that most need it," Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said yesterday.

"This initiative is guided by Dr Mahathir's principle of 'prosper thy neighbour' and, by so doing, to prosper Asean," he said in reference to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's theory that development is best achieved through expanding the economic pie and, therefore, increasing everyone's share of the pie.

Goh, who is the fourth Asean Informal Summit chairman, said the areas would be the key factors for competitiveness in the New Economy, and to catalyse the IAI, the Asean members would contribute what they could.

To kick off the IAI, he said, Singapore would offer, under a five-year technical assistance programme, several training institutes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, IT "train-the-trainers" courses and training attachments to its educational institutions.

He said Singapore would also increase the number of Singapore scholarships given to Asean nationals.

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