

Cross-border co-operation can help Asean grow faster

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BUKIT KAYU HITAM, Mon.

Greater cross-border co-operation between Asean members will help them grow faster than if each were to work on its own, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Calling on member countries to capitalise on their good relations, Dr Mahathir said peace was what brought shared benefits to the region, including economic benefits.

"Asean is the fastest-growing region among developing countries ... that is before we were attacked by currency traders.

"Even after (the attack), we are a very fast-growing region and this is because we have learnt to live with each other and appreciate that although we are different, there are areas where we can co-operate for mutual benefit.

"I am sure that because we believe in peaceful co-operation between neighbours we will benefit a lot," he said after launching the

Kota Perdana Asean Metropolis of the 21st Century project today.

Dr Mahathir hopes the Kota Perdana project, located on a 3,500ha site at the Malaysia-Thai border, would provide both countries the opportunity to realise the concept of cross-border co-operation within Asean.

"If we succeed here and I'm certain we will, this will be a model for other cross-border co-operation between Asean nations," he said.

Kota Perdana, set to be the region's first industrial metropolis, will house a 1,200ha free commercial and industrial zone that will promote economic activities for commercial, media, information technology and communication, industrial and cargo sectors.

Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia has taken the first step he was certain Thailand would also participate.

"We will build a really modern and well-planned city where we can

offer opportunities not only for Malaysians, but also our friends in Thailand.

"It is our intention to make it easy for Thai workers to come and work here in the day and return to Thailand at night," he said, adding that some 20,000 jobs were expected to be created by the project.

The RM3-billion project by Northern-Gateway Sdn Bhd is expected to attract RM20 billion in initial investments once completed in 2010.

The company is a joint venture between the Kedah State Development Corporation and Benua Bayu Sdn Bhd with the KSEDC holding a 30 per cent stake.

The project comprises approximately 70,000 dwelling units, schools, shops and public amenities to support a population of 330,000.

The project will also see the relocation of the Customs and Immigration checkpoints as well as the 305 Battalion camp.