

SUN, 20 MAY 2002

# Malaysia happy to accept East Timor as Asean member

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia welcomes newly-independent East Timor into the family of nations and will be happy to have the former colony of Portugal as a member of Asean.

"We are very happy for East Timor which celebrates its independence on Monday," the Prime minister said, adding that Malaysia wishes the new country and its 750,000 people well.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad regretted that he would be unable to attend East Timor's independence celebrations as he had to

leave for Japan the same day, but added that Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar is in Dili to represent Malaysia to celebrate East Timor's birth.

"Malaysia welcomes East Timor into Asean," he said when asked whether East Timor would join Asean. He was speaking at a press conference after opening the 56th MIC annual general meeting.

The Malaysian Liaison Office in Dili is upgraded to an embassy effective today, on the occasion of East Timor's independence,

Wismaputra said in a statement.

The Foreign Ministry said the Malaysian and East Timor governments have decided to establish diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level with a view to developing friendly relations and cooperation in various fields.

Both governments have also agreed to provide each other all the necessary assistance to facilitate the establishment and performance of the functions of their respective diplomatic missions.