

Closer Asean ties sought

STAR 28 JAN 2004

BY SUSAN TAM

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Asean friends are confident that it can provide continuous co-operation for security and development in the region, the Prime Minister said.

"The leaders have called for efforts to strengthen ties between the countries, either in safety and security matters or development issues," said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said this was the feedback received during his visits to the different Asean nations recently.

Abdullah said his visits were well received by the leaders as they symbolised the warm ties and friendship enjoyed by the member countries.

Abdullah, who became Premier on Oct 31, said that initially the visits were supposed to be courtesy calls after his appointment. However, the trips were "upgraded" to official visits, with full ceremonial proceedings.

"What is important to me is that I had the opportunity to discuss issues with the leaders and through the discussions I felt that the ties with all countries involved were good," he told a press conference after the launch of the *Unsung Heroes* book written by Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin yesterday. Also present were Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former IGP Tun Haniff Omar. Tan Sri Rahim Noor and Tan Sri Norian Mai.

When asked if the issue of "Asean leadership" was discussed during his visits, Abdullah said: "No, it was not discussed. The term Asean leadership

means collective leadership taken by the countries in the group, which results from co-operation and consensus achieved by the member countries."

He was commenting on his recent visits to countries in the region. To date, Abdullah has visited Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Philip-

pines, Laos and Cambodia.

To another question, Abdullah said he appreciated the co-operation from the other leaders and their pledges to strengthen ties with Malaysia along with efforts to expand areas of co-operation.

On the appointees for the Royal Police Commission, he said he would

only make the announcement once the chosen ones had agreed to take on the job, as the posts were serious appointments.

"Without naming names, I can only say one had apologised and declined the offer while two others told me they needed more time to consider the offer," he added.