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Leaders reaffirm faith in Asean

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Asean leaders reaffirmed their confidence in the grouping in meetings with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during the Prime Minister's tour of the seven-member nations.

The Prime Minister said they also assured him that they would work closely in various fields including regional security and peace.

He said they also wanted the development process in Asean member States to continue uninterrupted.

He had also learnt that their leaders wanted a closer relationship and improvement in bilateral ties.

"They said they wanted to improve bilateral ties to discuss issues that have not been touched upon yet," he said after launching a book entitled Wira Tak Didandang (The Unsung Heroes) at the Memorial Tuanku Abdul Rahman here today.

Among those who attended the book launch were former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, former Inspectors-General of Police Tun Hanif Omar, Tan Sri Rahim Nor, Tan Sri Norian Mai, Cabinet Ministers and dignitaries.

The 191-page book was written by Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin and is priced at RM20.

Abdullah said the general consensus was the need to consolidate their relationship and encourage integration among members.

"In areas where the relationship has to be improved, it will be improved."

He said the existing co-operation among the Asean members was normal and a good indicator of further improvement in relationships.

The Prime Minister described his visit to the Asean countries as meaningful and reflecting the healthy relationship Malaysia enjoyed with its neighbours.

He was earlier asked to comment on his visits to Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Abdullah said his visits were meant to be courtesy calls, but some had turned into official visits.

"However, I had fruitful meetings with the leaders and also with some to discuss matters which cannot be discussed openly.

"Visiting neighbouring countries is a tradition when someone new assumes the post of the country's leadership."

Abdullah added that the visit was to introduce himself to fellow regional leaders and to learn about each other's habits, character and bilateral policies.