

Tun M: Malaysia & Singapore can be 'very effective' in helping ASEAN grow

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SINGAPORE, Nov 12 (Bernama) – Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia and Singapore have a role to play in the Southeast Asian region together and both can be very effective in helping the whole region grow.

The Prime Minister noted that the formation of ASEAN, a 10-nation grouping, “is very important.”

Dr Mahathir is in the island city-state for a two-day official visit beginning today, during which he will join nine other heads of government for the 33rd ASEAN Summit.

He was speaking at the official lunch hosted for him and his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali by his Singapore counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong and his wife Ho Ching at The Istana here.

“If we can remember ASEAN was formed by five countries, including Singapore not mainly because of economic links but because we have to solve problems of close relations with the neighbours.

“When we became independent, we were very aggressive in many instances and we confronted each other. We did not regard each other as friends and neighbours. We see each other as strong competitors who are not going to do any good for us.

“But it happened after the confrontation with Indonesia. Indonesian leaders decided that there was nothing to be gained from the confrontation and they suggested the ASEAN grouping of five countries. And from five, we have grown into 10 countries,” he said.

The premier noted that not many regional associations throughout the world had survived,

unlike ASEAN.

“ASEAN has not only survived but continued to work closely together, and hopefully will continue to do so,” he added.

ASEAN, or The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is a market of 642 million people and growing at a rate of 5.9 per cent, much higher than the global economic growth rate of 3.8 per cent.

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