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Asean must stake its relevance: PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday opened a meeting of Asean foreign ministers here with a call for the regional body to stake its relevance by also helping to address pressing international issues.

"While Asean's priority should necessarily be the fostering of regional peace, security and cooperation, we must also take part in addressing pressing international issues in order to stake our relevance," he said when opening the two-day 39th Asean Ministerial Meeting at the KL Convention Centre.

"We must contribute to the fight against international terrorism. In fact, the scourge of terrorism has also become a menace to the security of our region and the stability of our respective countries.

"Peace and stability in South-east Asia will determine if Asean succeeds or fails as a regional organisation," he said.

Abdullah also said as responsible members of the international community, Asean should not appear indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians.

"The latest developments in West Asia are gravely threatening international peace and security," he said.

He urged Asean countries to tackle international terrorism which disturbs international

order and creates disharmony in the region.

The prime minister also urged Asean not to tolerate the subjugation and repression of the Palestinian people by Israel, saying this has become one of the most profound tragedies of recent time.

"We should condemn Israel's latest use of disproportionate force in Gaza and in the West Bank. We should not tolerate Israel's excessive military reprisals against Lebanon.

"The UN Security Council should take action to call for an immediate ceasefire, deploy a UN peace-keeping force to implement the ceasefire and prevent an invasion of Lebanon by Israel," he said.

He also urged Asean to push for the creation of the Asean Community, saying it is one of the best ways to overcome regional troubles and ensure peace and stability prevails.

He said just as Asean's history mirrored global strategic developments, Asean's future will also be affected by the new wave of globalisation, and the new challenges confronting the regional body are not only economic, social and internal but also strategic and global in nature.

He also said Myanmar's slow progress towards democratic reforms is having an adverse impact on the image and credibility of Asean. - Bernama