

SUN 10 JULY 2004

Enhance bilateral ties with Tokyo, says PM

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Kuala Lumpur looks forward to boosting the good bilateral relations it already enjoys with Tokyo, on the eve of his departure to Japan.

He said this will be conveyed during talks with his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi.

Talking to Japanese journalists here yesterday, Abdullah said discussions with Koizumi may touch on matters pertaining to the enhancement of bilateral trade and investment as well as Malaysia's Look East Policy.

Describing the Asean-Japan summit as important, he said it will be the first time he will be meeting other Asean leaders since taking over from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Abdullah said the Look East Policy has benefited a lot of Malaysian students and young wor-

kers who studied and trained in Japan. This, he said, has been a boon to both Malaysian and Japanese firms.

The prime minister also said Japan and Malaysia are going to have a free trade arrangement "soon".

"We want it as soon as possible. The rest is for the officials to proceed," he said.

Asked on the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse, Abdullah said this should not create fear.

"It is something we'd like to see as a good opportunity."

On Japan's decision to dispatch ground troops to Iraq for humanitarian purposes, Abdullah said that it is entirely up to Japan.

He also said although Malaysia may differ "very seriously" on certain political issues, the overall ties with the US and Australia remain strong.