

'East Asia Summit will not be economic bloc'

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THE inaugural East Asia Summit, which will be held in Kuala Lumpur next month, will not evolve into an economic bloc. That was the assurance given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

The upcoming East Asia Summit will be "mutually supportive" and would "not be in confrontation" with existing organisations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit, said Abdullah.

"The East Asia Summit is merely part of the building block towards promoting better economic ties, free trade and greater economic activities.

"The East Asia Summit will not evolve into an economic block. But member states can pursue bilateral free trade agreements like during the Apec Summit," he told a news conference at the end of the two-day Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting.

The East Asia Summit will be held next month among the 10 member states of Asean as well as China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

To a question, Abdullah said Malaysia would continue to hold discussions with Thailand to find the best way in solving the unrest in southern Thailand.

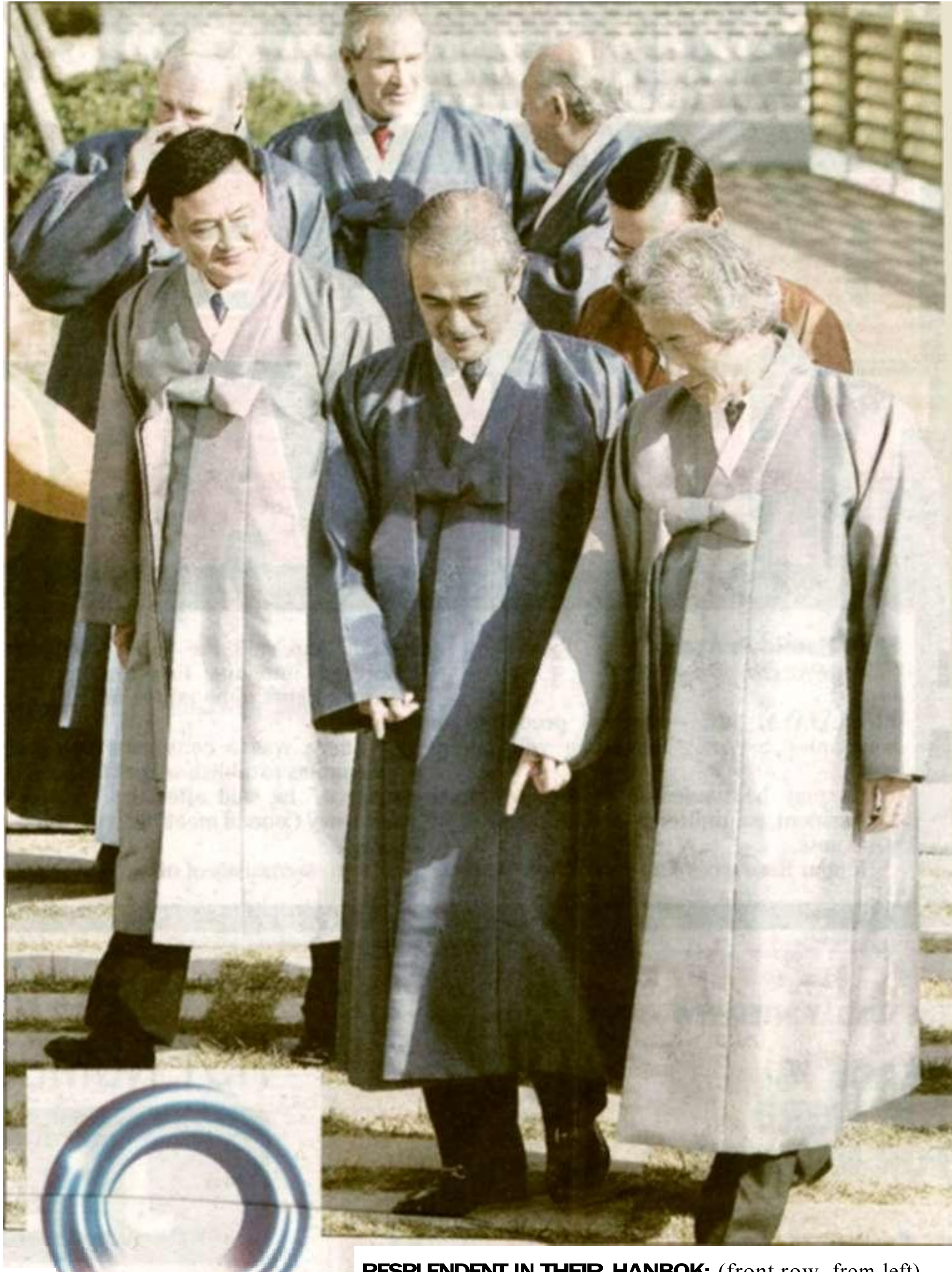
"During a meeting with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (on the sidelines of the Apec Summit). I told him that we will help in whatever way we can because we are deeply concerned with what is happening in southern Thailand," he said.

"But I don't want to reveal what we are doing. It may make negotiations (between Malaysia and Thailand) more difficult.

"However, I would like to see peace and stability in southern Thailand and I am sure he (Thaksin) does not mind that too."

Abdullah also said he was happy with the outcome of the Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting, which saw leaders of the 21 Apec economies agreeing to support a smooth conclusion of the World Trade Organisation's end of next year.

Abdullah said Apec leaders were committed to ensuring that the WTO meeting in Hong Kong next month would be successful in resolving the remaining differences.



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RESPLENDENT IN THEIR HANBOK: (front row, from left) Thaksin, Abdullah and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at a photo-taking session wearing traditional Korean clothes known as the 'Hanbok', in Busan, yesterday. — Reuters picture

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