

PM: Discussion this time was more open, positive

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THE Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) process removed the divide among member countries — it has now reached a “comfortable” level, with good understanding and appreciation of concerns shown by the more developed Europeans to their Asian partners.

This is the observation made by Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Asem commemorates its 10th anniversary.

“I was the Foreign Minister when it was founded but when we get to meet each other quite often, we become good friends. Today, we can discuss mutual issues openly, on so many things and there are no problems at all.

“Take Myanmar, for instance. Its presence was felt this time around ... something that could not be accommodated before and you know why. We are no longer distancing ourselves and talking about someone over this side of the fence.

“Myanmar leaders were given the chance to explain their situation (on human rights issues) and defend themselves. Asem leaders now have better understanding of the overall issues affecting Myanmar.”

This was his summing up of the sixth Asem summit, which ended yesterday at the Helsinki Fair Centre.

Earlier, the Prime Minister, who was the lead speaker in a discussion session entitled “Dialogue Among Cultures and Civilisations”, received praise from other Asem leaders for his forthright approach when he intervened on the humiliation faced by Muslim countries and Muslim societies.



Abdullah at a Press conference on the last day of Asem in Helsinki yesterday. — AFP picture

“I brought it up and (French president Jacques) Chirac said this was serious but he believed in what humiliation could do to people.

“Other leaders then walked up to me and said that I was forthright in what I said. They said this was not the usual diplomatic talk and they appreciated what I had said. They also said they would try to have a better understanding of the issues Muslims are facing together.”

Abdullah focused on the growing loss of trust and confidence between the Christian West and the Muslim world where the developing schism between the two sides had become a very serious issue, affecting international

peace and security.

Elaborating on Islam Hadhari, Abdullah was of the opinion that the approach could lead to a progressive society that was compatible with modernity yet firmly rooted in noble values and injunctions of Islam.

“I told the leaders that the approach has been accepted by everyone in Malaysia because underlying the whole message of Islam Hadhari is a call for equitable development and progress. It is also a call for moderation and tolerance as well as assurance of justice and fairness for all irrespective of their faiths.”

Islamophobia, Abdullah said, must be removed at all costs and the politics of fear disallowed from

dominating relations between the two sides.

“The gulf and misunderstanding between the Western world and the Muslim world must be bridged. This will require nothing less than courage and commitment from both sides.”

Malaysia, he said, was optimistic that given the necessary political will, its experience could be repeated on a wider scale.

“If we are able to view the world as one community, made up of various ethnic and religious groups, and learn from the experiences and sacrifices made by multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, then I believe we will be on track in establishing a peaceful co-existence,” said the Prime Minister.

PERDANA