

Asean's inclusion a boost for Asia-Europe links

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THE inclusion of the Asean Secretariat as one of the six new members of the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) process is set to provide the impetus for closer links between countries of the two continents.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi noted that the secretariat would serve as a co-ordinator and communicator not only for Asean but also Korea, Japan and China, East Asia as well as Europe.

"This is an achievement of sorts for Asean, as through the secretariat, further development of co-operation in many areas between the two continents, particularly Asem member states, can be further accelerated," he told Malaysian journalists covering the two-day summit at the Helsinki Fair Centre.

Apart from the Asean secretariat, the other new additions to Asem are India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Bulgaria and Romania, bringing the membership to 45.

Abdullah said the secretariat would be able to take up the many relevant issues affecting Asean, if need be, to its European partners.

"This secretariat has long been in existence and boasts many experienced and capable officials. I am hopeful that as a new Asem member, a lot more can be done for the benefits and development of Asean countries."

Leaders at the sixth Asem adopted two documents — the Declaration on Climate Change and the Helsinki Declaration on the future of Asem.

The aim of the declaration on climate change is to add momentum to efforts to reach agreements in international climate negotiations while supporting the objectives of the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change and other measures to reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere.



Abdullah being welcomed by Finance Minister Georgina Barrero at the Jose Marti Airport in Havana on Tuesday. Abdullah is in Cuba to participate in the XIV Non-Aligned Movement summit. — AFP picture

The leaders also set guidelines for future Asem co-operation and made recommendations for practical measures to enhance co-operation.

Discussions covered wide-ranging European and Asian affairs where the leaders highlighted several issues, notably terror-

ism, organised crime and ways to address global health threats and risks.

The leaders also re-confirmed their support for a fair, UN-based international system.

The Asem6 summit, attended by more than 1,500 delegates, was the largest ever meeting of

heads of state or government hosted by Finland.

Several Asem-related events which took place in the margins of the summit, no doubt, brought together representatives from Asian and European labour organisations, media and businessmen.