

PM: Get going with East Asian Community

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called for an acceleration of the formation of the East Asian Community.

"We in the region have dallied long enough. It is now time to take the process of building our East Asian Community to new heights and in a new direction," he said when opening the Second East Asian Congress, organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies here yesterday.

Abdullah said nations in East Asia should devote their efforts to economic prosperity, adding that it was a long journey that had just begun.

This is because a great deal of absolute poverty in the world was found in this region, he said.

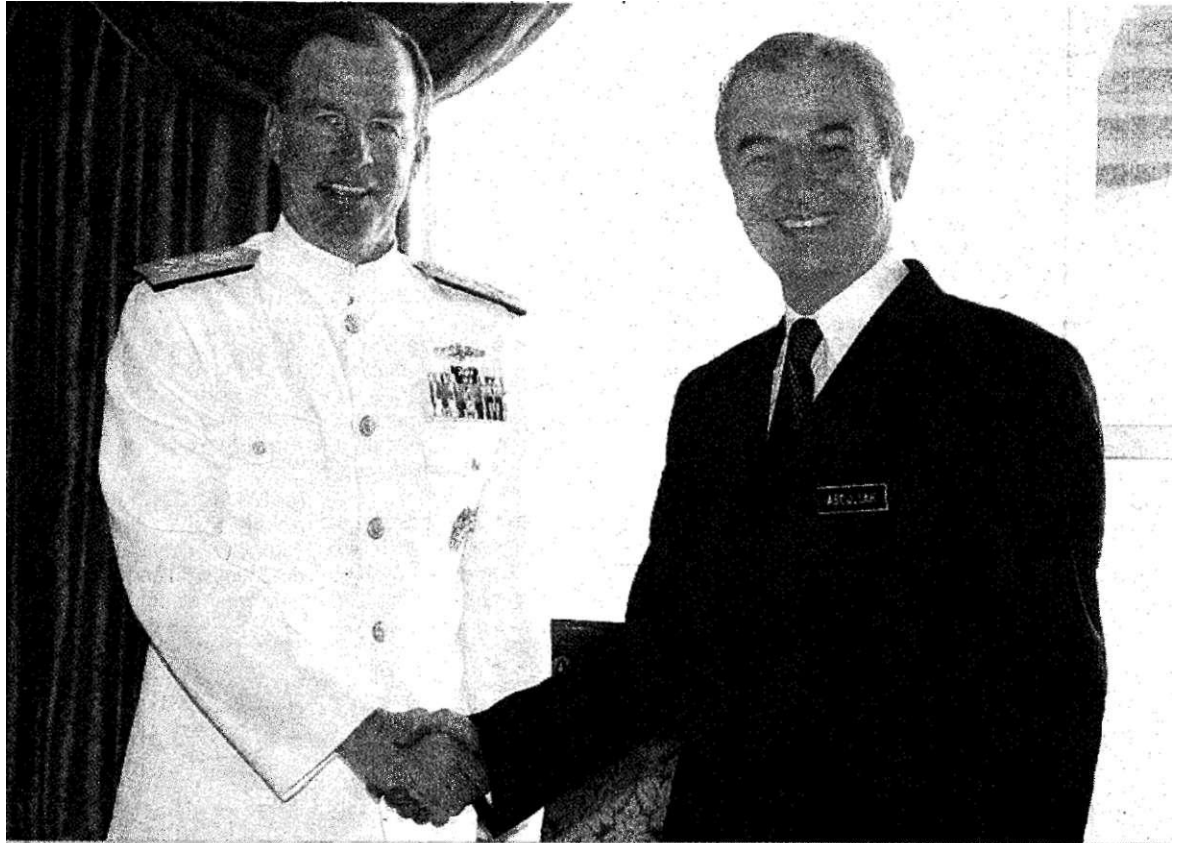
Abdullah also called on these countries to place peace and friendship as priorities, stressing that this must be their overriding imperative.

"When it comes to our priorities, peace and friendship must be the first without equals. Peace and friendship is by far the most important objective of the East Asian Community building," he said, adding it was time to launch the East Asia Peace Community, Economic Community and Diplomatic Community.

The grouping co-operation could be extended later to education, health, human resources and media network developments, Abdullah said.

"An East Asia media network will allow us to understand ourselves through our own eyes rather than through the tinted spectacles and long distance telescopes in Atlanta, New York, London, Paris and Berlin."

He asked the delegates to ponder whether the establishment of an East



WARM GREETINGS: Abdullah meeting Admiral Fargo at Putrajaya yesterday. — *STARpic* by RAJA FAISAL HISHAN

Asia Community needed a lengthy treaty or a simple one, pointing out that the North America Free Trade Area treaty exceeded 3,000 pages while the Bangkok Declaration to set up Asean took up only three pages.

When talking about mutual benefits, Abdullah said ventures that gave excessively lopsided advantage to one without offering a reasonable benefit

to others were not a good idea.

"We need to be more empowered in the world of economics, the world of politics and in the world of ideas and culture," he said, stressing on the commitment to global empowerment.

The Prime Minister hoped the three-day meeting would contribute ideas that could be forwarded to the Asean+3 leaders meeting later.

Earlier, Abdullah had closed door discussions with visiting Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Command Admiral Thomas B. Fargo at his office. Admiral Fargo also met Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

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