

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE: 08 / 08 / 2007

PM: Adopt Asean Charter soon for unity sake

NST- 8/8/2007

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia wants the Asean Charter to be approved and adopted immediately to ensure the smooth establishment of the Asean community.

"The charter should be approved without further delay because this document can strengthen unity and improve the structure of the association," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said on Monday.

The charter, a formal constitution governing the grouping, would smoothen ties between member countries as they must abide by its principles.

Last week, Asean foreign ministers agreed in principle to the draft of the charter. The charter is expected to be ready by next month before it is presented to the grouping's heads of government summit in Singapore in November.

Addressing the nation over television on Monday evening, in conjunction with Asean Day yesterday, Abdullah said the charter had three basic principles which would serve as a tool to forge an Asean community.

"First, member countries must avoid doing anything that will break the (Asean) community's laws. Second, all community

decisions can be enforced. Third, the community must live by the norms and values considered important to its well-being."

Abdullah said he was confident each Asean member could contribute towards the construction of an Asean community if the principles were observed.

"We must prioritise programmes aimed at forging closer ties among Asean citizens."

He encouraged activities geared towards human capital development and programmes that could bring the younger generation of Asean citizens closer.

This was the third year member countries were celebrating the event simultaneously.

"Asean countries have taken 40 years to reach the level of regional co-operation that we enjoy now. Maybe our founding fathers had more hope in us. Maybe our development has not been fast enough, but it is happening."

By taking careful steps, Abdullah said he believed when the Asean community becomes a reality in 2015, it would reflect true maturity.

"Asean is ready to play a more important role in the region, especially at a time when Asia is emerging as an economically competitive region."