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Abdullah: Make Aipa an effective forum

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KUALA LUMPUR: A supra-national system of governance, such as an Asean parliament modelled after the European Parliament, is too grand a scheme for the Southeast Asian grouping at this stage, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday.

Asean countries should instead develop the Asian Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (Aipa) into a forum that can effectively channel public opinion of common interest, he said at the opening of the 28th Aipa.

He also said he hoped the impending Asean Charter will be able to help the 10-member grouping become a community that observes a common set of rules and values.

However, Abdullah did not dismiss the possibility of there being a role for an Asean parliament in the future.

"The Asean parliament may yet be a forum that will come into existence after the process of regional integration has sufficiently matured," he said.

The European Parliament, whose representatives are elected by European Union member states, plays a role in

enacting legislations for the grouping, which affect various areas, such as environmental protection, consumer rights and the movement of workers, goods and services.

After relying on diplomatic consensus for decades, Asean is currently setting up an Asean Charter, which will be the grouping's constitution and create a rules-based community.

Abdullah said the grouping is on the threshold of transforming from an association of regional countries into an Asean community of nations.

"The objective is to make Asean more effective in keeping peace and stability in the region, and more dynamic in supporting its member countries to prosper."

He said the Asean Charter will lend the regional organisation a "legal personality" and give its programmes and projects greater

legitimacy.

"I believe once adopted, the Asean Charter will facilitate and accelerate the formation of the Asean community, which will then become very much a part of the Asean lexicon," he said.

"It is our hope that the Asean Charter will implant three fundamental principals of living as a community - first, members must refrain from taking action which violates community rules; second, community decisions must be made enforceable; and third, a common set of community values must be developed and adhered to," he said.

Abdullah with Asean heads of delegation at the assembly yesterday.

