

# Abdullah: Build on Asean strengths to rival EU

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ASEAN can be more successful than the European Union if members build on each other's strengths, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The prime minister said the East Asian region could also pose a strong challenge to other regional groupings.

"East Asia can be even greater than the EU, depending on how well we co-operate.

The region has its strengths and is rich in resources that can be developed.

"If we work together, we can surmount any challenge," he told the Malaysian Press at the end of the 12th Asean Summit here yesterday.

Abdullah said his assessment of the three-day summit was that the level of co-operation within Asean and with its dialogue partners was improving with all parties seeking to enhance ties further.

"Various proposals were made and agreed upon at the leaders' level.

"It is now up to the senior officials and ministers concerned to translate them into concrete projects," he added.

The last day of the summit was devoted to the 2nd East Asia Summit attended by the 10 Asean members, Japan, China, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

The leaders signed the Cebu Declaration on Energy Security, which seeks to ensure stable and reliable energy supply within the region, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and develop new forms of alternative energy, including biodiesel and nuclear energy.

They also vowed to mitigate greenhouse gas emission through effective policies and measures.

It was also reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had announced a US\$2



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong sharing a light moment as they leave after signing the Cebu Declaration on Energy Security in Cebu yesterday. — Reuters picture

billion (RM7 billion) aid package to help the region become more energy efficient.

"Japan's expertise in this area is very advanced, so there is a lot of potential for us to learn from them," Abdullah said, adding that appropriate steps needed to be taken urgently given the current high crude oil prices.

China, meanwhile, hopes to conclude its free trade agreement (FTA) with Asean soon, and to enhance collaboration in telecommunications, transport and human capital development. It has proposed a centre in Beijing to promote regional trade, investment and culture.

"We also accepted a proposal by South Korea to set up an institute that will help train scientists.

"Their strength is in science and technology, and information technology," Abdullah said.

He said Asean could also learn from the film industries of South Korea and India which had gained acceptance and popularity throughout the region.

Malaysian companies have also benefited from India's rapid economic growth through active participation in its construction and infrastructure sectors.

"Asean wants to see more Indian medicine and pharmaceutical companies operating in the region," he added.

The greatest challenge ahead, Abdullah said, was overcoming the different levels of economic growth in the region, especially in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

"There must be a concerted effort to help these countries develop their infrastructure, telecommunications and eradicate poverty," he added.