

# Grouping set to boost ties with Japan

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ASEAN-JAPAN ties are set to progress to the next level, through recommendations to be proposed by a group of experts by November.

They will set the agenda for better ties besides reviewing the progress of the relationship over the last decade.

Datuk Sri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the proposal came from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the Asean-Japan Summit on Sunday.

The meeting was part of the 12th Asean Summit which ended here yesterday.

"He suggested that since the Asean-Japan Summit is in its 10th year, there should be some assessment of the co-operation and

success achieved thus far," the prime minister told the Malaysian Press.

The report will be prepared by an Eminent Persons' Group, different from the one that prepared the Asean Charter blueprint, and will be presented to Asean leaders at the next summit in Singapore later this year.

Abdullah said this was Abe's first attendance at the regional summit since becoming prime minister and the Asean leaders were interested to hear his views on Japan's ties with the 10-member grouping.

"Clearly, he views ties with Asean as an important and will continue with the various programmes that we have already es-

tablished," he added.

Japan was a member of the Asean+3, together with China and South Korea, which had also shown considerable achievements over the years, Abdullah said.

So far, there had been 48 various conventions, agreements and memorandums signed under this group covering 11 sectors, he said.

"This is very commendable, especially when you consider that within this group, there are countries of different political ideologies and levels of economic growth," Abdullah said.

The prime minister said such collaboration was possible because of Asean's policy to engage

and deal with countries rather than exclude them.

"No country is seen as a threat. Every country is seen as a possible contributor to the future stability and prosperity of the region."

Abdullah said he had been part of the Asean+3 process ever since the first meeting in Kuala Lumpur when he was foreign minister and had witnessed the growth of the group through the years.

"We should value this arrangement and view the Asean+3 as the basis of forming an East Asian community," he said.

Asean comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and the Philippines.