

Manmohan and Pak Lah discuss trade issues

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CEBU CITY: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi held bilateral talks with his Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the 12th Asean Summit.

The two prime ministers took time off from their busy schedules yesterday to meet for 30 minutes at the Shangri-La Mactan Island Resort.

It is believed that their discussions included the free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between Asean and India, which will see a significant doubling of Asean-India trade if successful - from US\$15bil (RM52.7bil) in 2005 to US\$30bil (RM105.5bil) this year.

The negotiations, however, have hit some stumbling blocks, mainly due to Asean's dissatisfaction over India's exclusion list, which includes trade items important to the grouping's members. Initially containing 1,414 items, the list was pruned to 560 items before being reduced further to 490.

Asean, at its Economic Ministers' Meeting earlier last week, had warned India that negotiations would be stopped if the issue could not be resolved.

Abdullah also attended the 10th Asean+China Summit yesterday and witnessed the signing of the Trade and Services Agreement of the Asean-China Free Trade Area, the Plan of Action to Implement the Beijing Declaration on Asean-ICT Co-operative Partnership for Common Development and the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Asean Secretariat and China's Ministry of Agriculture on Agricultural Co-operation.

The Asean-China pact has created the world's largest free trade area of 1.7 billion consumers with a combined economic output of about US\$2tril (RM7tril) and total trade estimated at US\$1.2tril (RM4.2tril).

In addition, the Prime Minister

FTA negotiations

WHAT: Bilateral talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh.

WHERE: At the Shangri-La Mactan Island Resort in Cebu City

TOPIC: It is believed that the talks included the free trade agreement negotiations between Asean and India which will see a significant escalation of trade from RM52.7bil in 2005 to RM105.5bil this year.

attended the Asean+Korea, Asean+India, Asean+Japan and Asean+3 Summits and then joined the other leaders for a gala dinner hosted by Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her husband Jose Miguel Arroyo.

Meanwhile, leaders of the 10 Asean nations have pledged to build a concerned community, which, among other things, will effectively address issues related to the survival, development, protection and participation rights of children.

Under the Cebu Declaration towards One Caring and Sharing Community, the leaders have also pledged to encourage the equitable and effective participation of women in all fields in the Asean community-building process.

The declaration also stamped their commitment to promoting identity building in support of an Asean community by undertaking initiatives to foster the "we feeling" among the people of Asean.

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