

Abdullah: We are friends through thick and thin

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TIES with Indonesia are now at their best as both countries commemorate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The prime minister said both countries enjoyed strong and close co-operation in areas ranging from trade, plantation and banking to telecommunications and education and their roles in Asean, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Speaking at Istana Merdeka yesterday after he was conferred the *Bintang Republik Indonesia Adi Pradana*, the republic's highest honour for foreign leaders, Abdullah said Malaysia was Indonesia's largest investor last year with investments totalling US\$2.2 billion (RM7.75 billion), an increase of 28 per cent from the previous year. Two-way trade also reached US\$5.9 billion last year.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who presented the award to Abdullah, also referred to the two countries' close ties.

The prime minister said: "Our relations have gone through ups and downs, yet ties have remained close and warm. What is needed is to take them to further heights."

Saying that Malaysia was not a fair-weather friend, he stressed the relationship would continue during "good and bad times".

The same message was conveyed by Abdullah at another function where he was presented the *Lencana Tunas Kencana* award by the Indonesian Scout movement, Pramuka, for his contributions to the movement.

"People-to-people relations between our two countries have always been warm and positive. For me, Malaysia and Indonesia are like brothers," said Abdullah, who is honorary supreme president of the Malaysian



President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presenting Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with the Bintang Republik Indonesia Adi Pradana, the republic's highest honour for foreign leaders.

Scouts.

At the conferment ceremony, Susilo expressed confidence that any issue between Malaysia and Indonesia could be overcome as both countries had established a strong foundation in their relations.

Susilo said he and Abdullah took the opportunity to evaluate progress and co-operation in areas such as immigration, trade, education and defence.

"I would like to thank Abdullah and the Malaysian government for not only making jobs available to thousands of Indonesians but also for providing educational facilities for 34,000 children of Indonesian plantation

workers in Malaysia.

"Malaysia also showed its generosity when it extended assistance during difficult times, like the tsunami, earthquakes and floods."

Later, Abdullah said other sectors that could be tapped for the benefit of both countries were tourism and biofuel.

On multiple-entry visas for Malaysian students in Indonesia, Abdullah said an agreement had been reached.

The prime minister said Susilo also touched on the joint development of Kalimantan, especially in the management of its vast peat lands.

He said this was crucial as peat land was susceptible to fire.