

PM: Relations at highest point

Malaysia and Indonesia celebrate 50 years of ties

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JAKARTA: Relations between Malaysia and Indonesia are at the highest point ever as both countries celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Asked if the warmer diplomatic climate between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta was partly due to the personalities involved, Abdullah said: "Well, everything has to do with personalities involved. Both of us believe strongly in substantive cooperation and both are aware of this need."

On several unresolved issues pertaining to the contents of the memorandum of understanding on Indonesian workers in Malaysia, the Prime Minister said: "It is implementation that is at fault. The policy is not the problem."

Abdullah said in his bilateral meeting with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, both agreed Malaysia and Indonesia needed to work closely in managing peat soil in Kalimantan, a regular cause of forest fires and thus haze in the region during hot seasons every year.

Earlier, after being conferred the highest Indonesian award for a for-



Honourable scouts: Abdullah, Indonesian First Lady Ani Yudhoyono and Susilo walking together before an award ceremony in Jakarta, yesterday. Abdullah received a medal of honour from Susilo. — AFP

eign leader at the Istana Merdeka, Abdullah said Malaysia and Indonesia were friends in the truest sense of the word.

"We are not fair-weather friends. We have remained friends through good and bad times as proven by

our willingness to help each other during the recent floods that hit our countries," he said.

Abdullah, who arrived on Wednesday, received the *Bintang Republik Indonesia Adi Perdana* from Susilo. The award is the most pres-

tigious ever presented by Indonesia to a Malaysian leader.

Concurring with Abdullah, Susilo said the close ties between the two countries meant each was willing to share not only laughter, but also tears.

»We have remained friends through good and bad times«

DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

Malaysia, said Susilo, was also Indonesia's biggest investor, with investments topping US\$2.2bil (RM7.7bil) last year and two-way trade almost breaching the US\$6bil (RM21bil) mark, a 28% increase from 2005.

"Our relations have gone through ups and downs and yet ties have always remained close and warm."

Indonesia, said the Indonesian President, was grateful to Malaysia for not only making available jobs to Indonesians but also for educating their children.

"More than 34,000 Indonesian plantation workers in Malaysia are now assured of good education for their children. Malaysia has provided them with the schooling facilities while our Government has sent over 1,000 teachers," he said.

Later in the evening, Abdullah, who is the Malaysian Federation of Boy Scouts' honorary president, together with Susilo, received the *Lencana Tunas Kencana* medal from Indonesia's scout movement, the Pramuka Republik Indonesia.