

Abdullah: Asean and EU must enhance ties

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KUALA LUMPUR: Asean and the European Union (EU) must work to take advantage of the growing economic opportunities now and in the future, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In urging this, he said both parties must first acknowledge that the current strategic relationship could not remain at the present level because the groupings ran the risk of becoming less relevant to the people's needs.

"We need to look at how to advance initiatives that will have a broader benefit to both regions as a whole," he said last night in his keynote address, entitled *Enhancing the Asean-EU Partnership*, at the Bank Negara Euro Conference.

He outlined three key thrusts to push the partnership forward.

These are strengthening economic and financial ties, being more flexible and sensitive to developments in the partner region and developing a strategy for the expansion of economic and financial relations that are mutually beneficial.

Abdullah also emphasised the importance of grooming the young of both regions to be acquainted much earlier with the EU and Asean concepts because they would be future decision makers.

Earlier at another function, Abdullah said Malaysia is merely scratching the surface of its potential as a food-pro-



WARM RECEPTION: Abdullah shaking hands with Bank Negara Malaysia Deputy Governor Datuk Ooi Sang Kuang at the Bank Negara Euro Conference dinner in Kuala Lumpur last night. Behind Abdullah is Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

ducing country, therefore, there should be more urgency to transform our agricultural sector into a high-tech industry.

Abdullah said there would be "gross neglect" if Malaysia did not fully utilise its strengths to provide for the world's

food and agro-based needs.

"The direction we should take is clear.

"The only question we must ask ourselves now is whether we are moving fast enough in that direction," the Prime Minister said in a speech read

out by Agriculture and Agro-Based Industries Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, at the opening of the Malaysia Agro-Bio Business Conference 2005.

Abdullah called for greater urgency among stakeholders to move the agricultural sector to a high-tech level.