

Go beyond trade, PM tells East Asia

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BY WONG SAI WAN

TOKYO: East Asian countries must move beyond trade and economic ties to consolidate the integration already achieved among them so far, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said there was a need to enhance political co-operation to ensure peace, stability and internal development in the region.

"If we can integrate and co-operate diplomatically, we will definitely be enhancing our position and role in the world," Abdullah said in his keynote address, entitled *Asian Regional Integration - Making the Next Quantum Leap* at the 10th Nikkei Conference on the Future of Asia here yesterday.

Several former Asian leaders, including Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Philippine president Fidel Ramos, are also participating in the conference.

Abdullah suggested that the Asean + 3 (with Japan, China and South Korea) forum be turned into a regular summit of the East Asia Economic Community.

"This new arrangement will provide leaders a greater sense of integration of East Asian countries and secure at the same time a pragmatic platform for regional co-operation in the sphere of economics, politics and diplomacy.

"This will be the quantum leap to new heights and to new directions. This will raise the comfort level among the participants of Asean + 3 to a greater height of trust and confidence among them," he added.

Abdullah said the annual meeting of leaders from Asean + 3 was symbolically, politically and diplomatically important.

He pointed out that East Asian regional integration was already a reality but needed such a "quantum leap" to achieve the ultimate objective of creating "an Asian community of deep and resilient peace, of dynamic and sustainable prosperity."

"Our model of both co-operation and integration must be democratic and egalitarian, not hegemonic or imperial," the Prime Minister said.

Abdullah said that while the private



WARM WELCOME: Abdullah shaking hands with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at Koizumi's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. — APpic

sector had been the prime mover of the integration of the region, East Asian governments needed to be proactive by giving this sector a helping hand.

"We must ensure that the institutions and the rules and regulations help rather than hinder the private sector," he said.

Calling the present East Asian integration a unique phenomenon, he said the region had massive trade integration "almost without inter-governmental co-operation."

"Now, I believe that it is time for our governments to proactively act to launch a host of East Asian inter-governmental co-operation ventures," he said.

Abdullah also suggested that the much-touted Asian Monetary Institution be established.

"If there are still reservations about the immediate establishment of the institution, we should at least seriously consider the immediate establishment of a think tank, the Asian Monetary Institute as a precursor to the institution," he added.