

Call for a united front

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PM: Asean can exert more influence with a unified voice

KUALA LUMPUR: It is time Asean economies adopted a united front on international economic issues, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said that unless Asean decided to formulate group positions and exert its influence as a group, members would remain only marginal players.

"The more united we are as an economic player, the bigger will be our role in steering the process of the global trade talks," he said at the opening of the 38th Asean Economic Ministers (AEM) meeting yesterday.

Abdullah pointed out that projecting the Asean economic role at the global level was a necessary part of the process of building an Asean Economic Community (AEC) at regional level.

He said Malaysia supported the move to advance the date of creating a single market of the AEC from 2020 to 2015 because there were "now even more compelling reasons" to do so.

"If we do not hasten the creation of that regional single market, Asean may run the risk of losing its position as an important investment destination.

"We must take the necessary steps to protect our position as a competitive production base, and as an important economic entity, in the global trading environment," he said.



ONE FOR THE ALBUM: Abdullah talking animatedly to Myanmar National Planning and Economic Development Minister U Soe Tha (second from right) and Philippines Trade and Industry Secretary Peter B. Favila during a group photo before opening the AEM meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With them are (from left) Brunei Foreign Affairs and Trade Second Minister Pehin Dato Lim Jock Serig, Cambodia Senior Minister and Commerce Minister Cham Prasidh, Indonesia Trade Minister Dr Mari Elka Pangestu, Laos Industry and Commerce Minister Dr Nam Viyaketh and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz. — Bernamapic

He noted that Asean's external trade reached almost US\$1 trillion (RM3.7 trillion) in 2004.

Abdullah said the objective of an Asean economic community was a stable, prosperous and highly competitive economic region. This would in turn reduce poverty and socio-economic

disparities, and improve the overall quality of life in the area.

He believed that Asean countries were able to cooperate thus far because they adopted a pragmatic approach, which meant that they were able to continually adjust and respond to the challenges of the rapidly chang-

ing regional and global economy.

Abdullah said that as the Asean economy became increasingly integrated into the global economy, it also needed to monitor developments in other regional groupings and the initiatives taken by Asean's major trading partners with others.