

Marking 15 years of China-Asean ties

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BEIJING: Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be among 10 Asean leaders to attend the China-Asean Summit in Nanning, Guangxi on Oct 30 to commemorate the 15th anniversary of China-Asean relations.

And more than just a high-power gathering to exchange views and chart the course of future cooperation of the region, the historical event will also be a getting-to-know-you session between interim Thai Prime Minister Gen Surayud Chulanont, his Asean counterparts and the Chinese host.

The Nanning Summit will be Surayud's first meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jia Bao and probably his first with some of the Asean leaders.

Tong Xiaoling, counsellor in charge of Asian affairs at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, told a media briefing on Friday that the leaders would sign a joint statement which will review the progress made in bilateral and regional cooperation and also outline development strategies in the fields of politics, security, economics and culture.

She said the focus of the statement

would be a reaffirmation of the setting up of the China-Asean free trade zone by 2010.

She said all 10 Asean leaders would participate in the opening ceremony of the 3rd China-Asean Expo, a day after the summit, while six Asean leaders would also take the opportunity to visit China either before or after the summit.

According to a report, trade between China and Asean member countries rose 23% to US\$130.7bil (RM494.9bil) in 2005, with Malaysia as the biggest trade partner.