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FORGING GREATER RAPPORT: Abdullah making his keynote address at the Second East Asia Congress yesterday.

'Asean must get its own house in order'

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SERI KEMBANGAN, Mon. — Asean can support the process of building an "East Asian Community" by "getting its own house in order" and transforming Asean+3 co-operation into full-fledged collaboration, Centre for Strategic and International Studies Indonesia co-founder Jusuf Wanandi said today.

In his paper on "Challenges to the East Asian Community and the Moves Forward", Jusuf said Asean, in co-operation with South Korea, could again play an important role in accelerating the East Asian Community process as Japan and China were currently not in a position to do so.

He said the vision of the East Asian Community had three main strategic objectives:

- To create a regional institution that could accommodate a rising China as a constructive member of the region.
- To assist in the normalisation between China and Japan, "the two major powers in the region and two potential leaders of the East Asian Community".
- To alleviate the possibility of future confrontation between the United States and China when the latter is a superpower in its own right.

Jusuf was speaking at the Second East Asia Congress, held at the Palace of the Golden Horses and opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Accelerated co-operation within

Asean and Asean+3, Jusuf said, could help ensure that these three important objectives could be achieved within a reasonable time.

"It is important that Asean also start to vigorously implement the vision of the Asean community, because only then will it have credibility and have its role in developing the East Asian Community accepted," Jusuf said.

Meanwhile, Professor Zhang Yunling, director of the Institute of Asia Pacific in China, warned that East Asia should feel the pressure to speed up community-building through regionalism as it was emerging as one of the most important global trends.

Zhang said East Asia should learn from the European Union's three most valuable successes, which were political reconciliation among previously divided countries, institution-building, and creating balanced interests among less competitive sectors and less developed economies.

"The significance of European regionalism is that all European countries have been gradually absorbed into a united and highly integrated Grand Europe by a single market, currency and super political system," Zhang said.

One of Zhang's proposals was to enhance existing interdependence through devices like Free Trade Agreements or Comprehensive Economic Partnerships.

He hoped regional leaders could set up an official experts group to conduct a feasibility study on such arrangements.