

EU invites Abdullah to address Asem

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KUALA LUMPUR: The European Union (EU) has invited Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to deliver a keynote address at the Sixth Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) to share the country's experience in race relations and inter-faith issues.

Finnish ambassador to Malaysia Lauri Korpinen said the EU looks forward to Abdullah's attendance as it wants the prime minister to share the Malaysian experience in race relations and take part in the Asem inter-faith dialogue in Helsinki, Finland, on Sept 10 and 11.

Speaking at a press conference at the European Union office here yesterday, he said several heads of government will take part in the dialogue, which will be used to promote better understanding

between different faiths and cultures. Finland currently holds the EU presidency, which is rotated every six months.

"After 10 years in existence, we want Asem to move forward to a more concrete level and we are encouraging partners to have more concrete projects. We want to bring the communities in Asia and Europe closer," Korpinen said.

He pointed out that Abdullah is leading a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-societal country.

At the same press conference, ambassador Hanna Lehtinen, head of the Asem6 secretariat (America and Asia), said the secretariat had approached Abdullah and to date the indications were that he would attend the meeting.

"We also want him to talk about

the Islam Hadhari concept, which promotes moderate Islam. It is about learning from others. We have something to learn and teach each other," she said.

Asem is a cooperation forum for Asian and European countries, initiated to strengthen dialogue and interaction between the two regions based on equal partnership.

It comprises 59 partners, including 25 member states of the EU, the European Commission, 10 Asean states, China, Japan and South Korea.

Themed "Global Challenges Joint Responses", Asem 2006 would witness discussions on sustainable development, intercultural dialogue, globalisation and policy matters. - Bernama