

PM: Focus on collaboration

The Star - 11/12/2006

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia and Australia should now focus on new areas of collaboration within a framework of cooperation that is more binding, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Such cooperation, he said, would stand the test of time and was based on mutual trust and confidence.

"We've had ups and downs in our bilateral relations. But the solid foundations of our cooperation, particularly in matters of defence, education and trade, have remained strong," he said.

Abdullah said both countries could add value to the collaboration that already existed and should pursue a policy of openness in building beneficial relations with each other in these areas.

"We may need to encourage the private sectors of both countries to do more between themselves," he added.

He said he was certain that both Governments were ready to interact more with the private sector to achieve this purpose.

Abdullah was speaking yesterday at the official dinner in honour of the Australian Prime Minister John Howard who is leading a 12-man delegation on a three-day official visit that began on Wednesday.

Citing education as an example, Abdullah said Australia was a popular destination for young Malaysians seeking quality tertiary education.

"Malaysia has also poised itself as a hub for education and learning. Our two countries can expand cooperation in education by encouraging greater collaboration among and between Malaysian and Australian universities and institutions of higher learning."

Abdullah welcomed more Australian students to study in Malaysia and called for more exchanges among parliamentarians.

"We can increase fellowship programmes involving think-tanks, universities, the media and civil society," he added.

Both countries should continue to work for increased trade and investment because there was still a lot of room for

expansion, Abdullah said, adding that agriculture and agro-business could be another area of collaboration.

"Malaysia hopes Australia would consider allowing more agriculture products from Malaysia to enter Australia. After all, Australia is presently the second largest supplier of food to Malaysia," he said.

It was crucial for Malaysia and Australia to have complete agreement on the need to work together to establish stability, peace and prosperity not only in the immediate region but also in the world as a whole, he stressed.

Malaysia and Australia would continue to work on areas such as countering the threat of international terrorism, stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, preventing environmental degradation and managing natural disasters and infectious diseases, he said.

Howard commended Malaysia for being a moderate and competitive Islamic country that had an important role to play.