

## 'Asean needs to cooperate to meet challenges'

By NOR ASMAH MOKHTAR

ASEAN diplomats need to stress cooperation, friendship and consensus to enable them to face challenges aimed at weakening the seven-country grouping.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Asean diplomats must work hand-in-hand because there are challenges which must be faced and dealt with together.

"Asean members cannot work individually. The challenge is enormous, and we have to meet it collectively. We must act as a region.

"We are clearly lacking the resources — manpower, funds and information — to counter such moves individually ... we need to work as a regional forum," he said after opening the Junior Diplomats Course in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He cited attempts by some countries to use non-trade issues like human rights, democracy and environment to "weaken" Asean.