

Pak Lah: Junior envoys should learn the ropes

PETALING JAYA: Junior diplomats have been told to learn the intricate workings of the diplomatic world to succeed in the foreign service.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said they must be mentally and physically prepared to face the challenges in international negotiations on trade, human rights and environmental issues.

"You will face pressures from major powers on these issues. So you must sharpen your diplomatic skills to counter this," Abdullah told 28 young Asean diplomats attending a *Forum for Junior Asean Diplomats on International Affairs* yes-

terday.

"As part of the Asean family, it is essential to work together and learn from one another," he said in his opening address.

Later, when asked to comment on a foreign newspaper report about a suggestion from the Philippines to open the Asean Free Trade Area to all countries by 2000, Abdullah said this proposal must first be discussed by all parties concerned.

Under this proposal, Asean would remove tariffs on almost all imports, regardless of their origin, by the year 2000.

Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations director-general Datuk

Ghazzali Sheikh Abdul Khalid said Vietnam was participating for the first time in this forum since its inception in 1992.

"The participants who have about three years in the diplomatic service, will be given hands-on training in the two-month course ending June 29," he added.

Ghazzali said the young diplomats would be attached to their respective missions for a week to deepen their understanding of the foreign service, while the Malaysian participants would be sent to the Malaysian consulate in Medan.

Each Asean country is represented by four diplomats.