

Three-year time frame 'on Japan's aid to Asean

Act fast, PM tells businessmen

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By **KALIMULLAH HASSAN**

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said Malaysian **businessmen** have to **"think quickly and identify projects fast"** to take advantage of Japan's **US\$2 billion** (about **\$5 billion**) aid package to **develop Asean's private sector.**

"I advise our private sector to think quickly. Otherwise, the money may go to others," he told

Minister Noboru Takeshita said the AJDF would extend more favourable conditions "than usual."

Most of the two-step loan is expected to be pegged at 0.5 per cent lower than the Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan, normally at three per cent.

Dr Mahathir said Mr Takeshita also paid him a courtesy call. "We had very cordial discussions on improving our bilateral relations."

He welcomed Japan's initiative in providing the aid package.

Dr Mahathir also praised Philippine President Corazon Aquino for the "well organised summit and the good reception we got".

On the tight security for the summit,

reporters on his return from Manila where he attended the two-day Asean heads of Government meeting.

The money will be disbursed through a yet-to-be-established Asean-Japan Development Fund (AJDF) over the next three years to finance private sector enterprises in the six Asean countries.

Dr Mahathir said there was no particular sum set aside for individual countries.

"It is up to us to identify projects within these three years and take advantage of the aid package," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the aid package was special because "for the first time, the loans are for the private sector and not for any infrastructure of the Government.

"The private sector can borrow the money at low interest rates. I believe the private sector will use this opportunity to develop local industries or have joint ventures.

"The aid package will certainly increase Japanese investment in Asean," he said.

At a dialogue with Asean heads in Manila yesterday, Japanese Prime

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he said the precautions were necessary and should be appreciated.

He said it was probably because of the tight security measures that "the summit went smoothly."

Dr Mahathir added that "Manila was calm when we were there and I believe the situation will prevail".

Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik and Trade and Industry Minister Datin Paduka Rafidah Aziz, who attended the ministerial level meetings at the summit, returned together with Dr Mahathir.

They were greeted by Cabinet Ministers, top Government officials and relatives on arrival.