

Dr M: Consensus on trade liberalisation

# Apec more realistic

**From Zainoh Ahmad and Zainul Arifin in Osaka**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Apec ministers' consensus on the Osaka Action Agenda on how to liberalise Asia-Pacific trade by early next century reflects their commitment to the forum.

He said Apec was important and had good prospects as long as members recognised and were guided by the unbinding nature of Apec's decisions which left it to members to voluntarily implement them.

"I see no problem in the Action Agenda to translate our resolve to liberalise our trade being adopted by the informal leaders' meeting tomorrow," he told a Press conference.

He said he expected it to be adopted, unless other parties tried to include late changes to the draft document which the officials and ministers had cobbled during their meetings.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia might have been called many things during the course of the meetings, among them *maverick* and *gadfly*, but considering that the economies reached a consensus on the draft showed that they agreed "with us".

He said it meant that they agreed with Malaysia's insistence on Apec's decisions to remain unbinding and also that com-

mitments to them were voluntary.

The Prime Minister arrived last night and spent the whole day in bilateral discussions with the Prime Ministers of Thailand and Japan, the Mexican President and Taiwan's special representative to Apec, Dr Koo Chen-fu, who called on him separately at his suite.

He said the stand of these economies were not much different from that of Malaysia especially on the question of flexibility and they agreed that "Apec is now more realistic with regard to its goals."

Asked whether Malaysia, after having put Apec

Dr M doesn't blame Clinton for staying away: P2

back on track, would play a more active role in the forum's businesses, he said: "We have always been playing an active role but at the same time we have to put our views across."

On why Malaysia kept on harping on the "unbinding nature of Apec" and "voluntary commitment", he said it was not just Malaysia, adding that other members felt the same way but could not or unwilling to articulate them.

He said the leaders had to heed their constituents — their people. Japan, China, South Korea and Tai-

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 2, COL 1

is encouraging  
**istic**

## PM: Secretariat necessary

[ ] FROM PAGE ONE

wan had strong farm lobbies which could not be ignored by the leaders.

In Japan, for instance, voters of the rice farming prefecture of Saga go to the polls tomorrow in a by-

election while the Apec leaders are meeting at Osaka Castle.

"We cannot ignore people who elect us," he said.

To a question whether he would consider efforts being made to improve the

Apec secretariat as one way of institutionalising the forum, he said it might be so but in a forum of the stature of Apec a secretariat was necessary.

"We cannot always be seen as getting in the way," he added.