

Osaka Declaration lists initial 'downpayment' of tariff cuts, reducti

Jump-starting Apec agenda

From Zainon Ahmad and Zainul Arifin in Osaka

OSAKA, Sun. — The 18 economies of Apec today announced a series of tariff cuts and reductions for 1996 as initial "downpayments" to jump-start the Osaka Action Agenda — the blueprint for trade and investment liberalisation in the Asia Pacific region.

Though much of the concessions are known measures being implemented by the individual members, they also represent the first wide-ranging initiatives to accelerate the progress of trade liberalisation within and outside Apec.

The members, in their Osaka Declaration, said they feel that the concessions would also accelerate the implementation of their Uruguay Round commitments. They would deepen and broaden the outcome of the Round through, for example, acceleration of tariff reductions, early implementation of World Trade Organisation agreements, and pursuance of deregulation.

"This voluntary action will spur and inspire Apec liberalisation," said Japa-

Apec is going to work."

Some of the Western media felt that Apec members were taking unnecessary credits for announcing mostly known measures as concessions which, therefore, amounted to no concessions at all to make Apec work.

On whether the Action Agenda would be implemented, he said: "I don't see any problem in its implementation as we have already taken a step forward towards implementing it."

A reporter asked whether Malaysia in making concessions with the rest of the members had therefore no more reservations about Apec. Dr Mahathir said he still had his reservations and therefore was strongly in favour of the unbinding nature of the decisions made at the forum.

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nese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama reading from the Apec Economic Leaders' Declaration for Action at the end of the informal meeting of the leaders at Osaka Castle.

The one-day Apec Economic Leaders Meeting (AELM) capped the two-day ministerial meeting where the Action Agenda was drawn up and submitted for perusal by the leaders today.

Asean countries announced measures they were already implementing and also measures they would undertake under the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta). Malaysia went a step further and included in her list initial action measures yet to be implemented.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in an upbeat mood on Apec and responding to cynical questions at his Press conference, said: "Whether you like it or not

"The economies of the members of Apec are not equal, even though they participate as equals — where some are more equal than the rest — they cannot hope to compete with the stronger ones," he said.

As host, Japan announced it would accelerate its Uruguay Round tariff cuts by two years (originally to be applied in January 1998), including in the areas of textiles, chemicals and steel.

In his speech to the AELM, Chinese President Jiang Zemin said: "I wish to announce that China will, effective from 1996, drastically reduce its overall tariff level by a margin no less than 30 per cent."

More concessions will be contained in each member's action plan to be presented at the next AELM in Subic Bay, in the Philippines, next year to fulfil their commitments to the Action Agenda to be implemented on Jan 1, 1997, or by the time of the Apec meeting the same year in Vancouver.