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Apec-membership

APEC SHORTENS TIME FRAME TO ADMIT NEW MEMBERS

By: Yong Soo Heong

SUBIC BAY, Nov 25 (Bernama) -- Apec leaders have agreed that the time for admitting new members into the 18-nation grouping be reduced to two years from three years as recommended by Apec ministers earlier.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said they also agreed on Vietnam and Peru as potential members.

He said: "The decision now is that before the Vancouver meeting (next year), we will study and decide whether or not there should be criteria.

"And by the time of the Vancouver meeting, we will decide whether to admit or not to admit these two countries and by 1998 they will be able to attend the Apec meeting in Malaysia."

Speaking at a press conference after the end of the Manila Summit, he said that in the initial recommendation by the ministers, the Vancouver meeting would determine the criteria and the meeting in Malaysia in 1998 would decide on the admission of new members. If a decision was reached, it would be 1999 before the new members could be admitted.

Dr Mahathir said that if criteria were set, there might be countries that felt that they should be automatically admitted.

"That would be a problem because there are lots of countries in the Asia Pacific region. The feeling is that Apec should not become too unwieldy. (If it is unwieldy)...there may not be easy an atmosphere among the leaders."

In view of that, Dr Mahathir said, it might be decided that there should not be any criterion and members would be admitted if there was consensus on the matter among existing members.

Citing a case in point, Dr Mahathir said the present members felt that "Peru should join with no criteria".

He said the choice of Vietnam as a potential immediate member was not on the strength of it being a member of Asean.

Dr Mahathir said Apec leaders felt that if their grouping were to be effective, its membership should not be too large. However, he could not say what the optimum number should be. -- BERNAMA

SHY JK