

Cambodia fails to gain admission

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By HARPAJAN SINGH

HANOI: Cambodia's hopes of being made a full member in **Asean** at the sixth **Asean** summit were dashed last night when the grouping's leaders failed to agree on the timing of Phnom Penh's membership.

The leaders met for three hours over dinner last night on the eve of the summit and decided that Cambodia would be brought into the grouping "in the near future."

Singapore, Thailand and the **Philippines** are said to have stayed rooted in their decision that **Asean** should not rush to admit Cambodia although the six other remaining countries were in favour of Phnom Penh's membership.

However, the leaders reached a consensus that Cambodia must be admitted in the near future to unite South-East Asia under the **Asean** banner in line with the **Asean** forefathers' vision of an **Asean-10**.

Speaking to reporters after the dinner last night, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "There is a consensus. There are some variations. The Vietnamese Prime Minister will make the announcement."

Philippine President Joseph Estrada told reporters that Cambodia would be admitted at a proper time "but not at this current summit."

His foreign secretary Domingo Siazon explained that "Cambodia won't be sitting as an **Asean** member tomorrow."

Asean foreign ministers forwarded the issue for the leaders to decide when they failed to reach a consensus on Friday whether to admit Cambodia now or later next year.

Cambodia was scheduled to join the grouping in July last year in KL but its membership was postponed indefinitely due to fighting in Phnom Penh.

Earlier on his arrival here, Dr Mahathir said Cambodia should be made an **Asean** member now.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told Malaysian journalists after Dr Mahathir's bilateral

meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Vietnamese Premier Phan Van Khai that the three leaders felt Cambodia should be admitted now.

However, he said the leaders noted there were obstacles since members opposing Cambodia's entry at the summit were also firm in their stand.

"Hun Sen hoped that the issue of Cambodia's senate which would be set up soon would not be used as a reason to keep Cambodia out of **Asean**. He sought Dr Mahathir's support.

"Dr Mahathir and Phan were also of the view that **Asean** would

gain from Cambodia's accession which would not be a threat or problem to **Asean**."

Abdullah said Malaysia was of the view that **Asean** could not be seen to be seeking to determine what should happen in Cambodia's administrative affairs as what was important was that there was a government in Cambodia which had been recognised even by the United Nations.

"The warring factions led by Hun Sen and national assembly speaker Prince Norodom Ranariddh are working together now and have asked that Cambodia be accepted into **Asean**."