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Apec pledge to address social impact of downturn

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THE Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders agreed on the need to address the social impact of the economic crisis through retraining of displaced workers and strengthening the community spirit within the grouping.

In the Apec economic leaders' declaration in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the leaders reaffirmed the role played by human resources development to ensure sustained growth in the Asia Pacific economies into the next Century.

The leaders have endorsed the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Action Programme on Skills Development in Apec that outlines approaches towards a speedy building up of skills base of the region's workforce.

The action programme seeks to encourage greater participation of the private sector in skill development within Apec as well as contribute towards sustainable growth, equitable development and improving the social well-being of the people through skills upgrading.

The action programme outlines approaches towards a speedy building up of skills base of the region's workforce in four specific areas.

The first area is the upgrading of industrial skills base where if done across Apec economies, will contribute toward greater efficiency, enhanced technology flow and increased productivity, resulting in more efficient and effective utilisation of resources.

The second focus, spawning of new entrepreneurs, calls for the thriving small and medium enterprises to be further encouraged.

Meanwhile, the third focus, technology skills for the new millenium, calls for a workforce that is equipped with new skills to match the rapid pace of transformation from an industrial economy to an economy that is characterised by greater use of technology.

The final area, strengthening institutional infrastructure to facilitate trade and investment liberalisation includes the capacity for more effective implementation of facilitation and supervisory measures.

The declaration, which was read out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, stated that the action programme is a significant inroad into public-business collaborative partnership in skills development.

"We have made a commitment to a framework to advance human resources development across the entire spectrum of our work plan ... This programme recognises the value of the contribution of the business sector and underscores Apec's continuing of its outreach to the business community," Dr Mahathir said.

The objective of the action programme on skills development that is attached to the declaration, stated that in the face of current economic crisis, Apec has agreed that there is a need to address the social impact of the crisis.

"As Apec progresses towards a decade of regional cooperation, efforts towards achieving the vision of stability, security and prosperity for our peoples will be further strengthened through an Apec action programme on skills development.

"The objective of the programme is to contribute towards sustainable growth and equitable development, while reducing economic disparities and improving the social well-being of the people, through skills upgrading," he said.

He added that the action programme on skills development, by drawing out

sustained and concerted efforts on skills development with direct impact on the beneficiaries, will contribute towards maximising the potential for economic growth and improving the well-being of the people in the region.

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