

18/12/1998

PM: Positive and practical decisions made at summit

Ashraf Abdullah in Hanoi

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday described the Sixth Asean Summit which ended on Wednesday as successful, saying that positive and practical decisions for the common benefit of countries of the region were made.

In fact, Dr Mahathir said, the summit was more successful than last month's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit in Kuala Lumpur.

He was speaking at a Press conference before leaving for Kuala Lumpur following a four-day stay in Hanoi.

The nine Asean leaders had among others agreed to institute "bold measures" for a quicker economic recovery.

These include accelerating the implementation of tariff reductions between five and zero per cent under the Asean Free Trade Area from 2003 to 2020, with some flexibility.

The bold measures specify short-term steps for regional economic recovery and to regain investor confidence.

In the area of investments, the leaders agreed to extend additional special privileges to qualified Asean and non-Asean investors in the manufacturing sector for applications received from Jan 1, 1999 to Dec 31, 2000 and approved thereafter.

On the possibility of an Asean single currency, Dr Mahathir said all leaders accepted that it would take a long time to materialise.

"But it is an idea that should be examined, especially the setting up of the Asean Currency Unit which can eventually be involved in the Asean currency," he said.

On the Malaysian economy, Dr Mahathir said latest figures indicated that its contraction could be more than the forecast 4.8 per cent.

"This year, the contraction could be six per cent or even more," he said.

(END)