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Dr M: Asean Summit one of the most successful

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his last Asean Summit, which concluded yesterday, was one of the most successful ever.

The meeting of heads of states from the 10 member countries had established a better understanding on wide-ranging issues, said Dr Mahathir, who retires at the end of this month.

"We signed several agreements which will yield very good results. On the whole I am very happy with this meeting. It went on very smoothly and there were no major issues that will break us up," he told a Press conference before flying back to Kuala Lumpur.

On Tuesday, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who is also summit chairman, paid tribute to Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said Asean also had a very fruitful dialogue with China, South Korea and Japan, all of whom had expressed support for Asean and its projects.

He also welcomed China and India's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation, saying it would ensure the region's peace and stability.

On the Asean Concord II, signed by all Asean heads of state and government on Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said it would enhance greater unity among member countries.

"Asean is now talking about the East Asian Economic Community. That is progress. When we first suggested the idea, we were forbidden from talking about it," he added, with obvious reference to the objection to the idea by the United States.

Asked about Australia's role in the region's affairs, Dr Mahathir said the country had made it known that it wanted to be the "deputy sheriff" in this part of the world.

"It is very difficult to get along with the deputy sheriff who is always looking over your shoulders. Australia must decide whether it is in Europe, America or Asia.

"If it is Asia, there is no problem. As far as I am concerned, Australia is not Asia," Dr Mahathir said.

To a follow-up question on why race was a factor, Dr Mahathir said it was Australia which could not think beyond racial lines.

The Prime Minister also said China was growing as an economic powerhouse.

He said China, with no history of colonising other countries, should not be viewed as a threat.

"We were not colonised by China, which is so close to us and other Asean countries. We were colonised by a country 8,000 miles away."

He said there is vast opportunity to be tapped in China.