

ASEAN SUMMIT CLOSES WITH ECONOMIC EMPHASIS.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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MANILA, Dec 15, Reuter - South-East Asia's leaders cemented their alliance on Tuesday, ending a summit meeting with a declaration short on political contention and long on the urgency of forging economic unity.

Political analysts said the smooth passage of the two-day Manila summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations had also served as a much-needed shot in the arm for the Philippines.

Fears for the safety of the visiting leaders of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei overshadowed the seven hours of talks. Warships of the Indonesian, Malaysian and Philippine navies enforcing a five-mile (eight-km) cordon sanitaire in Manila Bay beside the summit venue.

The declaration that ended the meeting laid down the framework for four separate economic agreements that seek to dramatically expand sluggish intra-ASEAN trade, freeze and eventually roll back non-tariff barriers impeding the free flow of goods within the region, offer incentives for more joint industrial ventures and protect ASEAN investments against arbitrary seizure or nationalisation.

The leaders also pledged to liberalise the use of ASEAN currencies in trade in order to conserve scarce foreign exchange and coordinate strategy on the primary commodities that provide the bedrock for the region's economies.

The summit declaration repeated ASEAN's stand that Vietnam must withdraw from Kampuchea and fleetingly mentioned the problem of Indochinese refugees in the region.

But it firmly stated that ASEAN would intensify its efforts to establish South-East Asia as a zone free of nuclear weapons. MORE CK KC

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