

# Wooing countries to back economic grouping

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia will continue with its effort to attract as many East Asian countries as possible to participate in the proposed East Asian Economic Grouping, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said it would not be discouraged by attempts from any quarters to stop the effort to establish the EAEG.

Dr Mahathir said no

deadline has been set for the formation of the EAEG, adding that Malaysia would persevere with the exercise to get the EAEG established.

He was commenting on a foreign news agency report which said that the United States was trying to discourage some countries from joining the EAEG. He was speaking to reporters after opening a two-day conference on Labuan as an international offshore

financial centre here today.

He added that Malaysia would not approach the United States over its reported attempt to influence an Asia-Pacific country not to join the proposed EAEG.

Dr Mahathir said: "We have heard about it but it is not for us to talk to the US about it. When the US set up its common market with Canada, we did not interfere and we were not asked about it."

Asked whether the US move would make it more difficult for the formation of the EAEG, he said that Malaysia (as proponent of the idea) was ready to face any resistance and difficulties.

All countries have their own interests and gave priority to them, he said.

The proposed EAEG is aimed at enabling East Asian countries to plan trade programmes that

would widen markets and improve trade relations among members.

Earlier, in his opening remarks at the conference, Dr Mahathir said: "It is with the sense of wanting to forge closer relationships between nations in the region that Malaysia has recently proposed the formation of an EAEG.

"We are pleased to note that many nations have expressed their support for this idea which, we believe,

once implemented, will inject even greater dynamism into the region and ensure balanced and free trade."

So far all the six Asean countries have given full endorsement to the EAEG concept.

North Korean Prime Minister Yon Hyong Muk, who arrived here yesterday for a four-day official visit, also expressed full support for the EAEG.