

PM: EAEG won't negate roles of Apec, Asean

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reiterated that the proposed East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG) will not negate the roles of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) and Asean.

The EAEG, mooted by Malaysia in December last year, is proposed not as a trading block but with aims to gain more leverage in trade negotiation arenas such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt).

"The grouping is proposed to enable member countries to gather and meet to come up with a common stand at negotiations of the Uruaguay Round and other Gatt and international trade negotiations," he told a news conference after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who is also the Umno president, was asked to comment on moves by the US to discourage other countries, including Japan and Indonesia, from joining the grouping.

Unlike Apec which is formed in 1989 to group together countries in Asean, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Korea and the US, the EAEG exclude the participation of the US. The US has voiced concern over the proposed grouping which it said will undermine the momentum behind Apec's initiative.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia will not do anything to counter the US move, other than to continue explaining the rationale behind the proposal to set

up the grouping. He is not surprised by the US attitude because, according to him, the US did not like "other people setting up a body in which the US did not participate".

The Prime Minister added that Malaysia will explain to Japan on the EAEG proposal when its Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu visits the country at the end of April. "Japan has not rejected the proposal but has yet to decide on it," he said.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz is scheduled to go to Japan in April to hold talks with her Japanese counterpart and the Japanese Foreign minister on the EAEG proposal.

At the meeting, the Umno Supreme Council accepted into the party's fold four former Semangat 46 members, including two elected representatives. They are former Semangat's youth chief and Member of Parliament for Pasir Mas Ibrahim Ali, Sungai Pinang Assemblyman Nordin Salleh, former Semangat Tumpat division youth chief Azmi Ali and division committee member Abdullah Nor.