

# Mahathir: NZ can join grouping

By Paul Gabriel

ALOR STAR, Sat. — New Zealand can join the proposed East Asian Economic Grouping if East Asian countries do not object, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia would welcome New Zealand's inclusion although the grouping was meant for East Asian countries.

"Malaysia's policy is to promote free world trade and to stifle unfair trade practices," the Prime Minister told newsmen after a briefing at the Kubang Pasu district office.

Dr Mahathir, who proposed the formation of the grouping, was asked about a recent *Far Eastern Economic Review* report that Malaysia and New Zealand had contradicted each other on whether or not New Zealand had been invited to join the grouping.

The report said the Malaysian Government had denied that New Zealand had been asked to join the grouping after New Zealand Trade Minister Philip Burdon had told the magazine he received the "unexpected" invitation during routine discus-

sions on bilateral issues on March 15.

The report also stated that Malaysia's "coolness" towards Australia had manifested itself in a number of visits being deferred and a Malaysian Cabinet decision last October to suspend non-essential co-operative projects with Australia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would try to maintain "a proper" relationship with Australia.

He said Australia had criticised Malaysia as "barbaric and uncivilised" when action was taken against Australian

drug traffickers, and as "undemocratic" when *Operasi Lalang* was conducted to curb unrest.

"Australia considers itself as being more superior than us, that we are backward and less civilised," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was puzzled by this attitude as Australia profited from its advantage in the balance of trade.

To a question on why such problems had not come up during the past Australian administration, Dr Mahathir said the Government did not wish to blame any quarter.