

# Up to Asean to decide

WSunT 19 MAY 1991

By  
**Tengku Sariffuddin  
Tengku Ahmad**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Asean will decide if it should invite the United States to join the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG).

He said the question of US participation in the EAEG was not for Malaysia alone to decide but for all of Asean to consider.

"As far as I know, all Asean leaders have expressed their support for the EAEG," he said when asked by reporters whether the US would be invited to participate in the grouping.

Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali had earlier sent off the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Prime Minister, Dr Marian Calfa, and his wife, Madam Jirina Calfova, at Carcosa Seri Perdana.

US Vice-President Dan Quayle had been reported as saying in Washington yesterday that the formation of an Asia economic grouping that excludes the United States was "counter-productive".

Mr Quayle, who spoke to journalists before leaving for a three-nation tour of Asia, said the US did not welcome the idea of the country being excluded from participating in any kind of economic development talks.

He said the US considered itself involved and engaged in the Pacific region.

Asked whether he agreed that any economic grouping without the US would be counter-productive, the Prime Minister replied in a light-hearted manner that he thought so.

He said: "I think so too because the EC (European Community) is also without the US. We will like to have

a world economic grouping and have no restrictions on trade."

Earlier, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, commenting on the same issue, said Mr Quayle's statement was an admission by the US that the EAEG was a good concept despite its objection.

He said Malaysia was not anti-US. On the contrary, he added, Malaysia wanted good relations with that country.

However, he said, this would not be possible if one partner tried to dominate the other.

"The fact that they (US) want to join EAEG at last shows that the concept is a good one. But America is not in East Asia," he told reporters before hosting a luncheon for Dr Calfa and his delegation at a hotel here.

He said the US wanted to be involved in the EAEG and other economic groupings so that it could exert control over these organisations to serve and protect its own interests.

He reiterated that Malaysia was committed to the principal of free trade and the formation of the EAEG would further enhance global trade.

He said the US, which upholds the same principal, should not be suspicious of the ability of Asian countries to form their own economic grouping.

Datuk Abdullah said the latest US statement clearly showed that Mr Quayle was "out-of-date" when he claimed that several Asean leaders had rejected the proposal mooted by Dr Mahathir.

He said the Asean Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) this week had set up a working group to discuss a concept paper on the EAEG prepared by Malaysia.