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PM: EAEG CONCEPT CAN BE MODIFIED

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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia was prepared to consider modifications to the form of its proposed East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) should take.

Malaysia was open to suggestions, he told a press conference after opening the 23rd Asean Economic Ministers Meeting (AEM) here.

He had been asked to explain what he meant when he said in his address that Malaysia would understand if consensual endorsement of the proposal was not possible at the AEM.

+There are many ways to skin a cat,+ he told reporters, adding that if it was not possible for countries in East Asia to support the idea in its proposed form, Malaysia would have to consider looking at other forms.

The EAEG proposal is on the agenda of this AEM which will consider endorsing it as an Asean proposal.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said in his address that Malaysia valued its friendship with its South East Asian neighbours above everything else and that it did not wish to embarrass anyone.

He said at the press conference that the United States would support the EAEG in due time. +Give them time to appreciate the goodness of the EAEG,+ he added.

On Japan's support, the prime minister said Japan might +have other problems+ as it had not been able to come out in full support.

+Whatever we can do, we'll do we cannot force people to join,+ he replied when asked about Japan's position on the EAEG. -- Bernama