

KL to pursue EAEC set-up without Japan

MALAYSIA will continue to pursue the formation of the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) despite the setback that Japan is unlikely to join it, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said it is Japan's right whether to join or not. But the reasons given for not joining are because of pressure from the US. "We cannot accept the US as a member because it is not an East Asian country.

"There is nothing we can do. But it is okay. It is just that our influence is not as strong as the US," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told a news conference at the end of the Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He said: "We will continue to move forward towards the formation of the Caucus with our Asean partners and all other nations which fall into the category of East Asian nations."

Asked whether Japan, without the pressure, is keen to join the EAEC, the Prime Minister said that from discussions he had with some Japanese officials, public and private, there are some who are keen. "But it shows that Ja-

pan is unable to because of being pressured by someone not to do so," he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who lambasted the Bar Council for their role in misleading the American Bar Association (ABA) on the issue of the removal of former Lord President Tun Salleh Abas said: "I am quite sure that what we say in this assembly will be conveyed to the ABA, the World Jewish Council and others but with the facts twisted. They will tell a half-truth story. We should not compromise anymore on this issue.

"Whatever course of action that is taken will be in accordance with the provision of the Federal Constitution. We obey the Rule of Law," he said.

On the possibility of amending the Federal Constitution with regards to the role of royal families in politics and business, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "We have not reached a level to consider such a move."

This year's general assembly again saw several Umno delegates expressing concern over the role of the royal families in politics and business.