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MALAYSIA AGAINST FORMAL APEC SECRETARIAT, SAYS PM  
Mahathir - Apec

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8, (Bernama) -- Malaysia is against any move to set up a formal secretariat for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia was, however, agreeable to the establishment of a coordinating body.

The move to have a formal secretariat was being extensively discussed by the APEC senior officials meeting in Bangkok.

+We do not think there should be a formal secretariat, only a coordinating body,+ he said when asked to comment on the talks among the officials who were also thinking of having an Asean country to host the secretariat.

+We don't want to formalise Apec. That's our view,+ he told reporters after attending a dialogue session at the national seminar on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Bank Negara here.-- more

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Mahathir - Apec 2 Kuala Lumpur

At the on-going APEC senior officials meeting preceeding the ministerial meeting in Bangkok beginning Thursday, there was talk of either Singapore, Thailand or Indonesia being the host of the secretariat.

APEC, which comprises the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the six Asean countries

-- Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines. -- was set up for economic and trade cooperation between the member countries.

APEC member countries outside Asean were said to have generally agreed that an Asean member should host the secretariat.

Responding to questions, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia considered APEC +an entirely different feature+ from the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), campaigned for by the Asean countries.

The Prime Minister also said he explained the objectives of the EAEC to visiting Japanese International Trade and Industry Minister Kozo Watanabe who called on him today.-- more

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Mahathir - Apec 3 Kuala Lumpur

At the meeting, Dr Mahathir said, Watanabe expressed his +fears+ that the EAEC might be misunderstood by the US and other countries.

+But, as far as we are concerned, there cannot be any misunderstanding. If it is misunderstood we'll find time to explain,+ he said.

While the Japanese Government was still being negative to the proposed EAEC, Dr Mahathir said the private sector in Japan appeared to be more interested in the caucus, especially following the formation of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA).

Despite repeated assurances of NAFTA being non-protectionist, the Prime Minister said NAFTA would lead to imposition of certain conditions against goods produced by non-member countries to enter its market.

This, he said, would incur additional costs for other countries including Malaysia.-- more

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Mahathir - Apec 4 (last) Kuala Lumpur

+A free trade group is essentially an area where goods can move within the area freely, goods coming from outside will have a disadvantage,+ he said when asked to comment on a statement by Canada's Minister of International Trade Michael Wilson that other countries outside North America could join NAFTA.

Dr Mahathir said : +We have yet to see the meaning of (NAFTA's) free trade, can everybody join.. can Europe join..can Japan join?

+If so, then it is not a free trade area anymore. It's just a group with no privileges,+ he said.

Wilson was reported to have said any country could become a member provided it adheres to the NAFTA provisions.

NAFTA, comprising Canada, the US and Mexico, is seen by Malaysia as a restrictive and protectionist grouping.

The Prime Minister said there were also fears that NAFTA would spread to South America. -- Bernama

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