

Malaysia does not want a formal Apec

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is against the setting up of a formal secretariat of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) grouping in the Asean region, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He described Apec as a "different creature entirely" from the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC).

"We don't think there should be a formal secretariat but only a co-ordinating body. We don't want to formalise Apec.

"That is Malaysia's view," he told reporters after launching a book *Marine Heritage of Malaysia* published by Petronas at Bank Negara here.

The Apec meeting in Bangkok is looking at the possibility of setting up a secretariat in one of the countries in Asean.

On the EAEC, he said Japan would have no choice but to head for East Asia if it was shut off from Europe and the North America Free Trade Area (Nafta).

Labelling Nafta as a trade bloc, he said Malaysia and Japan could not understand the "free trade" advocated by the grouping since not every country could join it.

Japan had indicated yesterday that it would strongly oppose Nafta at the Apec ministerial meeting this week.

Its International Trade and Industry Minister Kozo Watanabe had said Tokyo was against all forms of regional trade bloc and protectionism.

Dr Mahathir said Japan was still rather "negative" about the EAEC although the Japanese private sector was interested in it.

Asked about his meeting with Watanabe, he said the latter had expressed fear that the EAEC might be misunderstood by the United States and other countries.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was willing to spend more time explaining the EAEC to erase any misunderstanding.