

PM: No reason now for Japan and

Change in US

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By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today welcomed the statement by US President Bill Clinton that his country did not object to nor oppose the formation of the East Asia Economic Caucus.

The Prime Minister said he also hoped to see the American President who had said he (Clinton) wanted to meet Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir, asked to respond to Clinton's statement, said: "I wrote to the US President informing him I would not be attending the Apec meeting in Seattle.

"Now that he says he is prepared to meet me, I hope one day I will be able to meet him."

Dr Mahathir said he did not know whether Japan and South Korea would change their stand on the EAEC now that the US had made its stand.

"Previously, the two countries did not want to be committed but now that the USA has made its stand clear, there is no reason for them not to join the EAEC," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has to study closely the developments that would take place after the Apec meeting and also the decisions taken by the North America Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) members.

He said any decisions and actions taken by the two groups should not adversely affect Malaysia's trade and economy.

Clinton's stand on the Asean initiative is more accommodating compared with the previous administration. The Bush administration had rejected the EAEC outright, saying that it split the Pacific right

down the middle.

Asked to comment on reports by certain sections of the Australian Press concerning him and the just-concluded Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting, Dr Mahathir said he did not understand the attitude of Australians who had shown their anger over his decision not to attend the conference.

He said the Australian media had been using derogatory terms to describe his decision.

"In fact the United States of America should be offended and not Australia.

"Australian journalists have been calling me all sorts of names, including *mamak*," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

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The Prime Minister said the journalists responsible for writing all the articles over Malaysia's absence at the Apec meeting were ill-mannered.

Asked how he intended to respond to the newspaper articles, he said there was nothing that he wanted to do.

"If they lack manners, what can we do? If children are ill-mannered, we can smack them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the claim by Australia that it is part of Asia is meaningless because Australians do not have the values of respect and manners as Asians do.

"How can Australia claim to be part of Asia when Australian journalists lack manners?"

"It is difficult for us to love Australia," he said.

stand hailed

South Korea not to join EAEC