

Dr M: US using Apec for trade war

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overseas trips.

By WONG CHUN WAH

NEW DELHI: The United States is using the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) to fight a trade war with the European Community and Malaysia wants no part in it, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He added the United States was using Apec to balance the influence of the EC although initially Apec was not intended to "balance" anybody.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a luncheon hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked by an Indian businessman for his views on the recent Apec summit in Seattle which he did not attend.

"We cannot be a part of that act because that is in the interest of the US," he

added.

"We want trade relations with the EC and we have certain access into the EC because of the fact that we are a developing country."

Malaysia, he said, did not want to be used and "our relationship with Apec is not that good."

Dr Mahathir hoped that Apec would come back to its original objective and that it should not be a formal body.

He said when the Apec summit was called, the proposal came from US President Bill Clinton and not from Apec.

"It was proposed by the US President after the G7 (Group of Seven) meeting in Tokyo," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the fact that Clinton acted on his own indicated a dominant role by the US President in Apec.

He said the heads of

government of Apec should have been consulted and they should discuss the merits and demerits of such a meeting.

"If I were to announce that we should have a head of government Apec meeting in Kuala Lumpur, I am sure nobody will come," he said in jest.

He said another reason he stayed away from the Apec summit was because of the objection to the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC).

He said by setting up the EAEC to include Chi-

na, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, Asians would have greater clout at international forums.

"On one hand they oppose the EAEC and on the other, they are using Apec to balance the influence of the EC," he said.

On a suggestion by a participant for a Malaysian-Indian joint-venture in the auto industry, Dr Mahathir said it was time for developing countries to put their cars on the roads of developed nations.

Dr Mahathir recalled that in 1967, while visiting

Harvard in the US, he had told an American that one day Japanese cars would be seen in the streets of the US.

"The man replied that (my prediction) would not happen in your lifetime," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were many opportunities for the production of cars and its components between the two countries.

Dr Mahathir said India was producing 150,000 Marutis (the Indian national car) annually in a country of 800 million.

"That is very small. Our

plant, which started off with 80,000 cars a year in 1985, will produce 150,000 by next year for a population of 18 million," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Britain was Proton's best overseas market and Malaysia had sold 16,000 units last year.

On the stringent visa requirements for Indian visitors, Dr Mahathir said it was no longer a problem — genuine businessmen had no cause to worry because the measure was taken to halt illegal workers.