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Mahathir-FAEC

MALAYSIA HOPES JAPAN NOT INFLUENCED BY US

KUALA LUMPUR, June 17 (Bernama) - - ⁹⁴ Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, disappointed with the American stand against the proposed **East Asia Economic** Caucus (EAEC), hopes Japan will not be influenced by Washington.

The Prime Minister is also upset with the change in stand by the Clinton administration which had earlier said it would be open-minded towards the Asean proposal.

Foreign press reports said Washington's latest opposition to EAEC would make it difficult for Japan to accept Asean's invitation to join the caucus. But, Japan is waiting to be formally informed by the US.

Commenting on the development, Dr Mahathir questioned the rationale of the US stand.

He said EAEC was not a trade bloc or formal forum but merely a loose establishment for economic co-operation.

"We are very disappointed because, previously, the Clinton administration appeared more open minded," he told reporters after launching the World Islamic Civilisation Festival '94 here. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and its Asean partners had repeatedly explained that EAEC was not a trade bloc and they would continue to do so.

He also said Malaysia did not understand why EAEC was rejected- "Is it because of our colour?" he asked.

He said Malaysia would not allow the differences over the EAEC, originally mooted by Malaysia, to jeopardise its relationship with the US.

"We will use our friendship to explain our stand (to the US)," he added.

Dr Mahathir had said Malaysia-US ties were set, for the better after his meeting with President Clinton during his recent visit to the US.

Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Abdullah Badawi said Malaysia hoped to get a clearer picture from Japan at the upcoming Post-Ministerial Conference of the Asean Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok later this month.

He said Japan had agreed that it would discuss the matter after Asean had formalised the establishment of the EAEC. "We hope they stand by their decision." - - R e r n a m a

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