

# PM: Apec apparently moving too quickly

**From Zainon Ahmad**

JAKARTA, Sat. — Malaysia today poured more cold water on efforts to institutionalise the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum two months before its next summit, seen as another step towards structuring it.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here that from the number of meetings being held, it was apparent APEC was moving too quickly and that it was clear where it was headed.

"We never want to see, we don't want to see Apec ever becoming a structured organisation," he told a Press conference before his departure after a two-day visit.

Dr Mahathir, who did not attend the meeting of heads of governments of Apec in Seattle last year but has stated that he would be attending the Bogor meeting in November, said Malaysia did not want it to become something like the European Community, the North Atlantic Free Trade Area (Nafta) or blocs.

On other Asean leaders agreeing to the institutionalising of Apec, he said sometimes at such meetings Malaysia might go along with other countries on an issue even though it did not agree

with it.

"But sometimes we have to seek exemption from taking part in something that we don't agree with. So we hope it will not come to that.

"But on our opposition to Apec being made into a trade bloc, we are standing firm on it — it is our strong stand and we will not take part in any trade bloc related to Apec."

The Prime Minister said while it was moving towards becoming institutionalised and dominated by the rich and strong nations, those who fear its institutionalisation should speak out against it.

Russia qualified to be a member as all other littoral states of the Pacific Ocean, as its name suggests, should qualify to become members irrespective whether their governments are democratic or otherwise and whether their human rights records are good or otherwise.

It should be just a loose forum, just as it was agreed at its launching in Canberra in 1989, to enable members to discuss common problems and to seek solutions to common issues.

He said it should meet only when there is a need with no fixed timetable. Already there is a Singapore-based secretariat, numer-

ous committees with regular meetings and a third summit has already been planned for next year in Tokyo.

"There should not be fixed meetings of heads of governments, fixed meetings of ministers and officials unless there is a need for such meetings," he said, adding that "there should be no fixed timetable as far as we are concerned".

Responding to a question seeking his views on the proposal by President Suharto that a 1995-2010 timetable be agreed to by Apec to reduce trade barriers among members, he said the proposal was not official yet but he had been briefed about it by the Indonesian leader.

He said any effort to reduce barriers and improve trade is welcome and added that developed countries should, however, reduce their barriers first while more time be given to the developing countries.

"But what we don't want to see is it developing into a trade bloc just as we don't want to see the EAEC becoming a trade bloc. But, of course, the international media has been saying that EAEC is a trade bloc, but we have no control over what they say."