

EAEC can still be formed, says PM

By Alex Choong

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it was up to Asean and the countries that support the proposed East Asia Economic Caucus to proceed with its establishment although Japan has yet to commit itself to be a member.

He said it did not matter whether Japan joined the EAEC now or after it was set up.

"We have an open door policy," Dr Mahathir said in reply to questions by reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Subang on his return from a five-day working visit to Kyushu.

He was asked to elaborate on his explanation on the EAEC to the Japanese and whether time was running out for Japan to join the caucus.

Dr Mahathir said it was still too early to say how the Japanese would react to his explanation and time was not running out for Japan to join the EAEC.

"What is important is that I have been given the opportunity to speak direct to the people of Japan in several television coverages."

Dr Mahathir said he got about three hours of air time during his visit there.

On his 22-minute interview with the Japan National Television in Fukuoka yesterday where he explained the EAEC, he said he was told that station had an audience of about 30 million during prime time. The programme was carried live by the station.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad to note that the Japanese were ready to listen to clarifications on the EAEC.

He said there were still certain quarters which had wrong perception of the EAEC. "Even the Japanese television and radio interviewers did not fully understand what the EAEC stands for."

He said these quarters thought that the EAEC was against the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) or that it was Apec versus the EAEC.

"I had to explain that the EAEC was not in confronta-

'Media coverage of Japan visit a boost for tourism'

□ FROM PAGE ONE

tion with Apec but it was merely a caucus within Apec," he said, adding that such misunderstandings could be due to the lack of coverage on the subject by the media there.

"The question of whether the EAEC is anti-Apec was posed to me during a radio interview just before I left for home this morning."

Dr Mahathir described the Japanese journalists' lack of understanding of the EAEC as genuine because the same question had been raised when he was interviewed in Fukuoka and other places he visited.

Asked by a reporter about Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's visit to Japan last month where Keating was reported to have tried to influence Japan into not supporting the EAEC, he said:

"There are countries which do not support the EAEC and some even go to the extent of seeing it does not get off the ground. They also do not want to see Japan joining the EAEC."

Dr Mahathir said these countries felt that if Japan did not join, the EAEC would not materialise.

"They think that if the EAEC is established without Japan's participation, it will be weak."

Asked about the Japanese media coverage on his visit, Dr Mahathir said he must admit that unlike the Australian media, it did not try to "interfere or distort" his views.

He said he was also glad attention was given by the Japanese interviewers on Malaysia.

"It will help our tourism ... it is an advertisement," he said with a smile.

On his visit to a prefecture in Oita City (Oita is twinned with Kedah) which practises the "One Village, One Product" concept, he said the Government would invite experts from Oita to visit Kedah, particularly to look into industries that could make use of bamboo.

Dr Mahathir said he had brought back a lot of samples of bamboo products to show those who had an interest in them.

The Japanese, he said, were interested in buying bamboo products from Malaysia as the cost of production in Japan was higher.

At present, the Japanese are buying bamboo products from Taiwan.

"It is up to the people here to tap the Japanese market."

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub and Home Ministry officials were at the Bunga Raya lounge to welcome Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

As Dr Mahathir was heading for his car, an official from the Kiara Equestrian and Country Club showed him pictures of a Turkmenistan horse which has died.

The brown stallion, Sailandar, was presented by Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov to Dr Mahathir when the former visited Malaysia in June. The four-year-old horse of Akhaltekin breed arrived here on July 24 and was kept at the club grounds.