

Call to allow others in the Pacific Rim to join forum

PM: Apec must not be a club for rich nations

**From
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JAKARTA, Wed. — Apec must be prevented from turning into an exclusive club for Pacific rim industrialised and rich developing countries, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

This can be done by members ensuring that Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) forum is properly administered and that they exert their influence to balance that of the rich nations like the United States and Japan.

"Apec is a useful organisation and there is merit in the regional grouping but member countries must ensure that it does not become a closed community," he told a packed Press conference before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after attending the Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting (AELM) in Bogor yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said other Pacific Ocean littoral countries like Peru, Columbia,

Ecuador and Vietnam and Pacific island nations should be allowed to become members.

He said the wealth and resources of the region should be shared fairly by every country in the region so that the poor countries could also be able to benefit.

The Apec leaders yesterday declared their intention to liberalise their trade by the year 2020.

Malaysia, however, weakened the Bogor Declaration by submitting a list of reservations as an annexure to it.

Host Indonesia had expected the declaration, read by President Suharto, to be accepted without reservations. It was the recommendation of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG).

One Indonesian reporter asked that since Malaysia had expressed reservations, it was not in full support of Apec and therefore should consider leaving it.

"We are not withdrawing from Apec. It has merit but it is just that we want to ensure that it does not become a closed regional or-

ganisation," said the Prime Minister.

"Malaysia trades with the whole world and as such we do not want to be confined to any particular organisation no matter how big it is.

"The East Asian region remains open to everyone, and by the same token we expect organisations like the European Union, for instance, to remain open. Eventually we will have only one bloc — a global bloc."

To another question, he said: "Apec is not a trading bloc and we have made sure that it remains that way by adding the annexure."

Another Indonesian journalist said adding that annexure showed that Malaysia disagreed with the Bogor Declaration. Does not Malaysia take into account its relation with Indonesia by submitting its reservations?

Dr Mahathir said: "In the first place it is wrong of you to say I disagreed with the declaration. There was con-

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PM: Drawing attention to problems

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sensus among all the leaders on the declaration which contains the trade liberalisation timetable.

"I added the annexure to draw attention to certain problems that may be faced if we are too rigid with the dates. We still agree but we feel we should be given flexibility. It should not be binding."

Many other leaders had expressed similar reservations but only Dr Mahathir submitted a written one which was included as an annexure. Indonesia did not object.

"The Indonesian side did not object to what I said, as much as I did not object to what they said," he added.

He said probably the Indonesian side did not say it as

Malaysia, which usually sticks its neck out, had already said it.

One journalist said Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating supported what Dr Mahathir said that a number of leaders raised the same reservations as the Malaysian side but he said there was no annexure.

Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know but my understanding of what was said was that my list of reservations was an annexure to the declaration. In fact this formula was made by President Suharto."

When he met Suharto before the meeting, the President said if all the viewpoints of the other leaders were included in the declaration it would be difficult to sort them out.

"He thus said should

some leaders express different views, they must list them and present them for inclusion as annexures to the declaration and that was precisely what Malaysia did," he said.

A *Washington Post* journalist asked Dr Mahathir whether he could now "declare victory" against President Bill Clinton who now appeared to be more concerned about developing countries whose interests the Prime Minister had consistently defended internationally.

"I won't go to war with the United States despite your urging," said Dr Mahathir.

"You are interpreting my actions and assuming that I like to quarrel with a lot of people. Actually, I don't want to quarrel," he added.