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Mahathir-EAEC

MAHATHIR HOPES COOPERATION IN PHUKET WILL INCREASE EAEC MEMBERSHIP

ALOR SETAR, Feb 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes that the cooperation shown in Phuket, Thailand, by the prospective members of the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) preparing for next month's Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) will encourage more nations to join the caucus.

"We will see whether the cooperation among the EAEC countries will benefit other nations.

"If it brings benefits, I hope the countries that are still reluctant to join the EAEC will decide to join it," he told reporters after arriving at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport, here, to break the fast with the people in Jitra.

He was asked to comment on a news report that the EAEC had become a virtual reality when the foreign ministers of 10 countries, which are prospective members, met informally in Phuket last Saturday to prepare for Asem, the meeting of European and Asian leaders, in Bangkok on March 1 and 2.

The report said that the foreign ministers were in consensus over the agenda for Asem.

On Japan, which appears to be still reluctant to join the EAEC, Dr Mahathir said that country must consider the matter carefully.

He said Japan also faced the pressure exerted by Europe and the United States on all countries to open their markets to the developed nations.

"All countries, including Malaysia, must open their markets so that the developed nations can move into the developing nations as if they are citizens of the latter...get national status.

"I do not know whether Japan will accept it if the United States gets into Japan freely," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that whatever Japan's stand, that was its problem, but Malaysia was not prepared to let that happen.

Because of that, he said, Malaysia felt that if Japan cooperated with the EAEC nations, its market might be protected from the pressures of the other developed countries. -- Bernama