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Grouping to have 3 new members

VANCOUVER, Wed: The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) will have three new members next year - Russia, Peru and Vietnam - followed by a ten-year moratorium.

The leaders have agreed that 21 members are sufficient for the grouping of countries located in the Pacific Rim. However, Philippines President Fidel Ramos came up with a quick reply to soothe the sentiments of nine other countries which had submitted their applications and are eager to join Apec.

"The moratorium is not intended to dismiss or offend any country. But the leaders agreed that 21 members are optimum for Asia-Pacific or it could get too unwieldy," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the decision had to be reached as the leaders realised that the issue needed to be resolved once and for all here.

In addition, he said, Apec felt 21 members are enough as having too many might just impinge on the level of intimacy that exists presently among the member economies.

On Russia's entry, Dr Mahathir said sooner or later, it had to engage itself with the rest of the world and although it has been looking towards the West, its "body" is in Asia.

Russia's participation, he said, would "add spice" to the discussions and differences in views and perhaps, contribute to balance the different interests in Apec.

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