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Apec appreciates need to give poor nations more time, says PM

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is pleased with the outcome of the Apec meeting, saying he was much happier than he had ever been with the organisation.

The Prime Minister had reservations about Apec and was called a recalcitrant by the then Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating for not attending the first leaders' meeting hosted by former United States President Bill Clinton near Seattle in 1993.

Australia had first mooted the idea of Apec in 1989 and even then he had not supported its formation.

For the first time the Apec meeting did not focus entirely on market opening measures. Being the first international gathering of leaders after the Sept 11 attacks the main agenda and focus was on terrorism and terrorists.

In previous meetings the focus had been market-opening measures and no consideration was given to the plight of the poor and developing economies.

Dr Mahathir told a Press conference here yesterday that the ninth leaders' meeting hosted by China appreciated the different levels of development in member economies and the need for poorer countries to be given more time to adjust.

Dr Mahathir pointed out there was inequality among the members as Apec was made up of the richest economies in the world and a number of developing countries as well.

The combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the 21-member economies is over US\$18 trillion and they account for 43.85 per cent of global trade.

Now there is a feeling that developing countries should get time to adjust and at this meeting there was no talk of market opening measures and discussion on the global economy was only in passing.

Dr Mahathir said he gave his views on the need for infrastructure development in developing countries, which has multiplier effect on the domestic economies. This was demonstrated by the North-South highway, which has given rise to new townships and new businesses.

Citing the example of the proposed railway link between Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Kunming in China, he said it would improve Asean and also benefit the developed countries as they would gain from the construction and improved markets.

Dr Mahathir suggested that developed countries build the infrastructure and employ locals, instead of providing funds for projects. In this way at least they would see the project and there would be no question about the allocation being misused.

Asked about the slowing global economy and the impact of the Sept 11 attacks, he said it had affected consumer confidence and this would affect the economy.

On Malaysia's response, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister said the Government was looking to the domestic economy for increased activities.

That was why it had offered incentives in the budget as well as announced two stimulus packages totalling RM7.5 billion. He hoped businesses would not raise prices as this would negate the desired effects of the stimulus packages.

On his meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Dr

Mahathir said the Japanese leader was interested in Malaysia's stand on terrorism, and asked about the recent arrests of several people for militant activities, Dr Mahathir explained that the Government had sufficient evidence.

Koizumi also expressed regret about not visiting Malaysia and hoped to do so as soon as possible.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir visited the Haier Group which produces household appliances in 49 facilities throughout the world, including Malaysia. Among the items that impressed the Prime Minister was the 3D television with signals from ordinary TV stations. He also visited the Qingdao Port developed by the Germans.

It is the largest commercial port in Shandong province and serves the high-tech industrial parks and economic and technical development zone.

Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali attended a dinner hosted by the Governor of Shandong Province, Li Chunting.