

# EAEG, says Dr Mahathir

(on the success)."

To a suggestion whether it was safe to surmise that Japan's support for a more formalised Asean+3 indicated the idea for the grouping was now accepted by all, Dr Mahathir said anyone was free to make assumptions.

Japan, following objections from its main trading partner the US, did not offer its support when the idea of an EAEG was first mooted.

But on Tuesday, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi gave his commitment towards realising the idea of close economic co-operation among the 10 Asean countries, Japan, South Korea and China.

On when the proposed Asean+3 secretariat in Kuala Lumpur would be set up, Dr Mahathir said this would take place once all Asean members gave the nod.

On whether there was any objec-

tion from Asean members, Dr Mahathir said if there was any, Malaysia would like to hear about it.

"If they disagree, we would like to know the areas they agree on. It is like reaching some sort of consensus," he said when asked whether a consensus was needed from the regional grouping for the setting up of the secretariat.

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## There's no indication of US objection to

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PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was no indication that the United States was opposing the formation of the East Asian Economic Grouping.

Unlike the strong objection from

the US when the idea was first mooted 12 years ago, the Prime Minister said the administration of President George W. Bush had not shown any opposition to a unified East Asian grouping.

Speaking at a Press conference at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang upon his return from a five-day visit to Japan and South Korea, Dr Mahathir said: "The Bush administration is not saying

that they are opposing.

"Moreover, we find South Korea has shown great interest to set up Asean+3 which will eventually evolve into EAEG.

"President Kim Dae-jung has also expressed his views on the importance of having the EAEG."

Asked how he felt that his brainchild was finally turning into reality, Dr Mahathir said: "It is still Asean+3 ... I don't have any feeling

# PM impressed with Korea's rapid recovery

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To a contention that the US or any major economic power should not oppose the EAEG as developed nations had their own groupings like the European Union and North America Free Trade Area, Dr Mahathir said it had always been Malaysia's stand that such an opposition was unfair.

"We have been saying this for a long time. They have the EU and Nafta, so why can't East Asia have EAEG. Despite this, the opposition (then) continued and they did not want it to be established except with the participation of certain countries."

But he said he did not see such pressure being applied now.

On his visit to South Korea, the Prime Minister said he was impressed with the country's rapid economic recovery. It registered a 5.7 per cent growth in the first quarter, with many industries attaining success like the automobile industry.

"They managed to sell 1,000 units of the Hyundai four-wheel drive a month in the United States and it is the same with other models.

"They produce 2.6 million cars a year, a huge figure for a country of 46 million people and one which has yet to be recognised as a developed nation.

"Their ability to manage their economy is clearly evident. We will expand our Look East policy to Korea, especially by sending (more) students to the country."

On whether he would accept an invitation to the Vatican by Pope John Paul next month, Dr Mahathir said the matter would be discussed at the next Cabinet meeting.

He said an announcement would be made later.