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Back EAEG openly, Dr M tells Asia

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia urged Asian countries yesterday to openly declare their support for an East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said East Asian countries should come out and say they are from the EAEG, instead of hiding behind the term "Asean plus Three" (Japan, China and Korea).

"There may be some nervousness among some countries but we want countries to come out openly and say they want to have the EAEG," he said during a question and answer session at the First East Asia Congress.

The EAEG was first proposed by Mahathir in 1990 as a zone of coope-

ration, peace and prosperity

Mahathir said the first step in realising the idea is for countries in East Asia to say "yes" to EAEG.

"Once you are able to say that, then we can start setting up institutions focusing on East Asia cooperation. We can then talk, learn and work with each other."

In his speech earlier, he also proposed the development of an East Asian Community of Common and Cooperative Peace and Prosperity

Such a community, he said, must be developed to ensure the needs and aspirations of East Asia are heard.

Lamenting that those in East Asia do not have a voice and clout when decisions that determine their present and future are made, he said the community must be empowered within its own region to play its

rightful role in the world.

"The community must be based on mutual benefit, respect, egalitarianism, consensus and democracy

"(There should be) no self-centred selfishness that is interested only in squeezing our neighbours dry. Prosper thy neighbour, not beggar thy neighbour. No unequal treaties. No forced intimidation," he said.

Urging East Asian countries to act now, Mahathir said too much time has already been lost.

"Make hay when the sun is shining, not when it has started to rain.

"Politically, in many ways it has already started to drizzle. We must make peace long before we need to make peace," he said.

More than 1,500 participants from Asean countries, Japan, Korea and China attended the congress.