

Goh: Australia not part of East Asia

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SINGAPORE: Australia is not an "indigenous member" of East Asia, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has said amid renewed debate about the Western nation's role in the region.

"Within East Asia, countries are debating whether Australia is an Asian country or a European country in Asia," Goh told the World Economic Forum's East Asia summit in Singapore on Sunday evening.

Goh emphasised that Singapore had signed a bilateral free trade agreement with Australia and the two nations had close economic links.

"But Australia at this stage is not quite yet regarded as an indigenous member of East Asia," he said.

His comments come after the

Indonesian government reportedly barred Australian Prime Minister John Howard from attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations annual summit in Bali last week, according to *The Australian* newspaper.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, long an outspoken critic of Australia, fired a typical barb during the Asean summit, describing the country as "some sort of transplant from another region".

At the same forum Singapore's Minister of State for Defence Cedric Foo said governments and businesses must cooperate more in the fight against terrorists, who are increasingly focusing on soft targets to disrupt global trade.

"The transnational terrorism of today is very much different from the one of the past," Foo said on the second day of the gathering.

Foo highlighted the car bomb blast on the Indonesia tourist island of Bali in October last year, which killed 202 people, and a similar attack on the JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta two months ago that left 12 people dead as obvious examples of the increasing focus on soft targets in Asia. - AFP