

Change mindset, Australia told

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BANGKOK: Australia should make more attempts to identify itself with Asia if it wants to be considered part of the region, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"Australia keeps playing up this idea about it being 'deputy sheriff' (of the region) and things like that. This is not appreciated by Asian countries," he said.

He was asked by an Australian journalist during a press conference at the end of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit to comment on recent statements made by South-East Asian leaders that the country would not be accepted as being part of the region.

Dr Mahathir said Asian countries could not accept a partner that behaved like a policeman.

"We must have an equal partner, one which sees eye to eye with our perception of things and one which is not advising us on what we have to do to become more democratic and criticising our sys-

tems," he said.

He said such behaviour "doesn't sound very Asian", noting that Asian countries did not go around teaching others how their countries should be run.

To an earlier question on why his relationship with successive Australian prime ministers have been bad, Dr Mahathir said that situation was not his doing.

"It is not because of me," he said, which made journalists at the press conference laugh.

He said there seemed to be a fondness among leaders in Australia, including current Prime Minister John Howard, to make "nasty comments", such as calling him recalcitrant.

"He even cast questions over our judicial system as if we do not understand law and justice. "In fact, we do. We have a better history of treating our aborigines, for example."