

EAEC should not inhibit Apec: Evans

By Patvinder Singh

Petaling Jaya, Mon: The East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) should not diminish or inhibit Apec which has an important role in bridging the Pacific and uniting two great economic regions that may drift apart.

Visiting Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said this in a question-and-answer session after delivering his address, *The Birth of An Asia Pacific Community*, at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations.

Present was Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and institute director-general Ghazzali S.A. Khalid.

Evans said the EAEC should evolve as a caucus within Apec. "Apec is the main game and should remain so. A globally liberalised world is best for all players."

He said Australia's relationship with Malaysia is not solely based on sentiments and some shared Commonwealth history but also trade and investment, security, and cultural and personal contact.

Evans, who has been an Australian cabinet minister for over 10 years, said last year was a watershed year as it saw the transition from theory to reality of the idea of an Asia-Pacific community in the light of the Apec summit in Bogor and the Asean Region-

al Forum last year.

He said the Asia Pacific community should not be like the European Community with a customs union and a single internal market and hopes an Apec agreement on the basic framework for trade liberalisation can be reached in Osaka this November.

Evans said the United States' role as a "balancing wheel" is acknowledged but said the smaller countries of the region, including those of Southeast Asia, Indochina, and Australasia must unite into a more cohesive grouping.

"There is an explosion in 'Asia consciousness' in Australia with the media full of serious Asian stories and supplements."