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NGOS CALL FOR ENVIRONMENT-BASED APEC PLAN

MANILA, Nov 6 (Bernama) -- This month's APEC summit in Manila is doomed to fail unless it adopts an environment-based trade liberalisation framework, a Philippine group said today.

The Caucus of Development NGOs (Code-NGOs) said trade and investment liberalisation agenda should be within the framework of sustainable development.

"Sustainable development is not only about environmental protection, but also about social stability and equitable economic growth," it said in a paper furnished to Bernama here

Code-NGOs, the nation's umbrella group of 5,000 NGOs, said that contrary to some misconceptions, the concept of sustainable development was an all-encompassing principle and that environmental protection was only one of its components.

It warned that given their present direction, APEC's trade liberalisation measures would result in more destruction of the environment and more income inequality in the Asia-Pacific region.

It said there were three contending visions on APEC, one of which - being espoused by the United States - was to convert the regional bloc into an "open and free trade" area not later than the year 2020.

The second, proposed by Japan, was to moderate trade and investment liberalisation and instead pursue broader intra-regional multilateral economic and technical cooperation.

The third, put forward by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, called for an Asian approach to Asia.

But Code-NGOs said Mahathir's proposal "is dormant and has encountered resistance from other Asian countries that have strong trade activities with the west."

On the other hand, many APEC member-states were unhappy with the US vision because it underpinned America's dominant role in the region's socio-economic and political activities, it added.

It said the Japanese vision was viewed with skepticism by APEC countries because it would lead them to over-dependence on Tokyo for external financing and technical assistance through grants.

"The best option is to adopt sustainable development as the over-arching philosophy in the conduct of trade among the Apec members," it added. -- BERNAMA

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