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WTO-Japan

JAPAN DENIES ACCUSING MALAYSIA IN WTO TELECOMMUNICATIONS ISSUE

By: A.S. Morita

TOKYO, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- Japan has denied accusing Malaysia of being a stumbling block to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) accord on telecommunications.

Japan's Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) officials said yesterday Japan did not blame Malaysia if the accord was not signed by Saturday, in Geneva as had been expected by other nations that had offered to liberalise their telecommunications sector.

"There must be obviously some misunderstanding or misreporting over Japan's position," said Hagimoto, a Japanese official involved in WTO negotiations on telecommunications.

Hagimoto, who is head of the Trade Policy Office, International Policy Division, International Affairs Department in the Minister's secretariat, said Japan would not force or pressure any country in making unilateral liberalisation of telecommunications service, and "its unthinkable for our government negotiation team in Geneva to accuse or blame Malaysia."

He told Bernama that Japan did not blame the United States, Canada, or Mexico.

"Japan has offered 100 per cent liberalisation of the telecommunications service sector to any foreign company in Japan so that competition could benefit Japanese consumers," he said.

He added that "we could only hope for the accord to be signed at the earliest possible date, and the key factor here is the United States, whose attitude can now determine whether or not the accord could be signed by Feb 15."

Responding to news reports, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged Japan not to accuse others of being stumbling blocks to the WTO accord on telecommunications.

Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying that "Japan too has problems...so we all have to be patient. There is no need to accuse each other."

Japanese officials said that generally speaking, Malaysia was a leading country in Southeast Asia and a major player in the field of telecommunications.

"As such, she is naturally expected to join the negotiation table and take active part in the talks of this service sector... As Malaysia's friend, Japan is concerned that she (Malaysia) appeared to the eyes of other nations as the only major country in East Asia which did not make any offer," they said.

There are some 54 countries out of the 130 WTO members states which have made offers of various degrees in their respective liberalisation efforts.

Indonesia made an offer on Jan 31, while Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong have also offered their liberalisation plans.

Asked whether the accord could be signed by Saturday, Hagimoto said he was not sure, "but its possible that countries concerned would make the final decision at the last moment just in time for the deadline, otherwise the deadline could be postponed for another three months or six months, instead of waiting for the year 2000."

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