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KL against using group to open up economies

MALAYSIA is against the use of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) to pressure countries to open their economies, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said.

She said this in response to a question on the concerns raised by Japan that Apec will be used as a platform to pressure it towards liberalisation.

Speaking to reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday after the opening of SMI Showcase '98 and Apec Cross Border Linkages by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, she said the issue of flexibility deals with such concerns.

"We would not want anyone to use Apec to open our economies or anybody else's but we would like to see Apec used by everyone to open up markets for mutual benefit.

"All of us want to open up our markets as and when we can and that is why the flexibility principle comes in.

"And we took note of the concerns of countries including Japan on the need for flexibility. We could not resolve in detail a decision on what the flexibilities were so we asked officials to do it by September. It is as simple as that," she said.

At the Apec trade ministers' meeting in Kuching early last week, it was agreed that there will be flexibility in the implementation of an early trade liberalisation plan.

Apec's plan for early voluntary sectoral liberalisation (EVSL) involves trade in nine priority sectors and six other areas and is part of a bigger plan to free trade in the Pacific by 2020.

The EVSL is a sectoral approach which was inspired by the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) to accelerate Apec towards this goal.

Rafidah added that ways and means have to be devised when expanding the coverage of the EVSL among World Trade Organisation (WTO) members as the ITA is beyond the WTO initiative.

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