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ASEM-TRADE

ASEM LEADERS AGREE WTO TALKS MUST REFLECT "OVERALL BALANCE"

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SEOUL, Oct 20 (Bernama) -- East Asian and European leaders who opened talks here today are likely to come to terms on the World Trade Organisations (WTO)'S new round of multilateral trade negotiations, paving the way for improved market access opportunities for the developing and least-developed countries.

The leaders who are attending the two-day Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) beginning today, are set to endorse the Chairman's Statement, calling for the negotiating agenda to reflect "an overall balance, which responds to the interests of all WTO members, including developing country members".

"This would more likely be achieved by an inclusive approach to the agenda setting, with no 'a priori' exclusion of subjects of interest to individual WTO members, seeking to secure the WTO's continued relevance in the globalised world economy," according to the latest draft of the Chairman's Statement.

To this end, the leaders stressed that strong political will and greater flexibility as well as open and constructive dialogue among all WTO members would be necessary to lay the ground for the necessary consensus decision on the launching of a round, the document said.

They underlined their commitment to work together to promote further liberalisation and to strengthen and develop rules through the new round of trade talks.

"They agreed to intensify their efforts with other WTO members to launch such a round at the earliest opportunity," the document said.

Yesterday, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia will host the WTO Trade Facilitation Conference.

Welcoming the positive and constructive manner in which the negotiations under the built-in agenda have so far been carried out, the leaders recognised that "a more meaningful and balanced results within a reasonable time frame could be achieved if negotiations were conducted as part of a new round".

In this regard, there was also a general understanding among them that further progress in the mandated negotiations would in turn have a positive effect on such multilateral negotiations, it said.

Leaders also stressed that the interests and concerns of developing and least-developed countries should be duly addressed through various means, including through improved market access opportunities and technical assistance for enhanced capacity-building, and addressing issues related to the implementation of Uruguay Round undertakings.

They recognised that full participation in the WTO by Asem partners will strengthen the system and also reaffirmed their support for the acceleration of current accession negotiations of Asem non-WTO members through the exchange of information, experience and technical cooperation that would be based on mutually acceptable market access commitments and adherence to WTO rules.

The leaders also welcomed the achievements of the Asem Trust Fund (ATF) in helping alleviate the impact of the economic and financial crisis on affected Asian countries.

The called on Asem finance ministers in their meeting in Kobe, Japan in January 2001 to determine the modalities for a Phase Two ATF.

Upon assessing the vulnerability of the international financial market, leaders also agreed to take further measures to strengthen the

international financial system and ensure long-term stability, stressing the importance of domestic financial reform and corporate governance.

"They agreed to make every effort to put the principle of orderly financial liberalisation into practice," the draft of the Chairman's Statement further said.

The leaders expressed strong expectations that the third Asem Finance Ministers' Meeting in Kobe would make further substantial developments in monetary and financial matters.

Asem is made up of 10 East Asian countries, including Malaysia and 15 European nations as well as the European Commission.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is attending the third Asem here. -- BERNAMA

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