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RAFIDAH-WTO

DOUBTFUL APEC WILL AGREE TO NEW WTO ROUND IN BRUNEI, SAYS RAFIDAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- APEC economies meeting in Brunei are unlikely to agree to a fresh round of talks under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) without a credible agenda of interest to both developed and developing economies, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, said here today.

Besides this, developing countries are dismayed with unresolved issues hanging from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the predecessor to the WTO, the Minister of International Trade and Industry, said.

"I have very serious doubts about anything shaping out of Brunei or after Brunei simply because in Geneva, there is yet any sign of a credible agenda that is of interest to both developed and developing countries," she said.

Geneva is the headquarters of the WTO where the trade talks are held.

Speaking at a press briefing on the 12th APEC Ministerial Meeting scheduled to be held in the oil-Sultanate from Nov 12-13, 2000, she said some major countries like the United States were still reluctant to deal with issues affecting developing countries such as anti-dumping.

"And there are still extraneous issues being attempted to be smuggled into the WTO discussions," she added.

Rafidah also pointed out that outstanding problems from the Uruguay round, like implementation issues and the ability to meet obligations, have not been resolved.

"You can't bring in a new agenda unless outstanding problems are out of the way," she said.

She was replying to a question on Washington's intention to use the APEC summit on Nov 15-16 to press the leaders to renew their promises for a new WTO trade round.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will fly to Brunei next week to attend the APEC leaders' gathering.

Rafidah also said that the U.S. was ill-prepared to press for a new round of WTO talks since it has yet to decide on a new president.

"Unless the presidency is resolved, you don't know who is going to run the country and who is going to lead trade delegations in any negotiations in the WTO," she said.

Stressing that APEC decisions are non-binding, Rafidah said anything that binds the 21-APEC economies like bringing down tariffs to a certain level is "all academic."

"APEC is not about cutting tariffs or forcing market opening. But when you have non-binding programmes that are so beneficial like the pre-approved multiple entry visa cards for businessmen, people will participate," she said.

As for globalisation, she said it was unstoppable but collective management of the process was needed so as to bring benefits to all and prevent distortion to individual economies and to existing market operations.

In this way, developing countries would not suffer much as they are ill-prepared for the onslaught of globalisation, added Rafidah.--BERNAMA

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