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Bush envoy allays concerns over US-Malaysia trade ties

A TOP envoy of President George W. Bush has allayed concerns over US-Malaysia trade ties following Malaysia's criticism over the military attacks on Afghanistan, saying that the countries' bilateral trade remains intact.

"The answer is no. Our trade ties are based on close economic relationships," visiting US trade representative Robert B. Zoellick said, when asked whether Malaysia's opposition to the US-led attacks would jeopardise trade ties between the two countries.

Malaysia condemned the attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11 but criticised retaliation against Afghanistan.

"I don't believe it's going to be jeopardised. I'm here because Malaysia is an important trade partner (for the US)," Zoellick told a Press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He pointed out that the United States annual trade with Malaysia was valued at about US\$38 billion (RM144 billion) and that the world's largest economy is Malaysia's number one foreign investor.

Zoellick, who was on his way to the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit in Shanghai, had earlier met with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Zoellick said he told Dr Mahathir that the United States was grateful for Malaysia's support against terrorism despite internal challenges.

"We understand that the Government of Malaysia faces tensions. There is no doubt there are problems Dr Mahathir has to manage. The support we have received in a number of areas, if anything, strengthens the ties between the two nations.

"(Hence), I don't see anything that would affect our relationship. As for the differences in view, these are understandable."

He said Dr Mahathir and Bush would meet on the sidelines of this weekend's Apec summit to discuss the attacks as well as other issues.

Zoellick said he told Dr Mahathir that the United States' fight was against terror and not a war against Islam, and noted that the Prime Minister has been sympathetic to the United States on the attacks on the US.

"President Bush has explained about the issue we have and why we are going to war against terror with other countries.

Zoellick said he was satisfied with the meetings with Dr Mahathir and other Malaysian leaders.

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