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US-TRADE  
US-M'ASIA TRADE WILL NOT BE AFFECTED, SAYS ZOELLICK

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- US Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick said current developments after the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States will not affect bilateral trade between Malaysia and the US.

This was premised on the fact that trade relations between the two countries had always been good, he told a media conference here today.

Zoellick, a member of US President George W. Bush's Cabinet with the rank of ambassador, serves as the president's principal trade policy adviser and chief trade negotiator.

On Sept 11, two planes packed with passengers and fuel slammed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, killing more than 5,000 people, while another crashed into the Pentagon, the US military command headquarters. The jetliners were said to have been hijacked by terrorists earlier.

The US government has blamed Osama bin Laden for the attacks and is at present engaged in retaliatory strikes against the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan which has been suspected of harbouring him.

Zoellick also thanked the Malaysian government for supporting the US in its quest to detain those responsible for the attacks.

As for the annual Apec Forum meeting to be held in Shanghai next week, he said among other things, the US would focus on the accession of Taiwan and China into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the launch of a new trade rounds at the WTO ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar next month besides discussing the terrorism issue.

Asked whether trade between Malaysia and US could be jeopardised due to the different views taken by prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad where he condemned the Sept 11 terrorist attacks, but at the same time criticised the US military campaign against Afghanistan, Zoellick said:

"I think our trade is based on good relations. We (Malaysia-US) are good partners in terms of investment and trade, so I don't believe that it (difference in views) would affect (trade) in anywhere," he said.

"We understand that the Malaysian government faces tensions here with internal challenges, there's no doubt when you read in the newspaper about the problems he has to manage. The support that we have received in a number of areas has strengthened our relations with Malaysia," he said.

He added that he had mentioned to Dr Mahathir when they met this morning that Malaysia was a model (country) which supports regional stability, both in political and economic terms.

"Malaysia is certainly an Islamic country, which provides a model of leadership because of its modern economic development that demonstrates powers, multi-ethnic people, ranges of products in international economy and promotes knowledge economy. It has been a success story," he said.

He also said that the US government is grateful for the support from Dr Mahathir and the Malaysian government, and as for the difference in views, he believed that both government will work out the issues together.

"We know and I certainly know that it is a difficult circumstance for Malaysia to be in at the moment. We appreciate all the support that we have received," he added.

As for the annual Apec Forum to be held in Shanghai this week, he said that among other things, the US expected issues pertaining to the accession of Taiwan and China into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the launch

of a new trade rounds at the WTO ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar next month to take centre stage.

He also expects discussions on matters concerning transparency and trade facilitation besides the terrorism issue.

Zoellick also said that he did not see any reasons why the Doha meeting must be postponed.

In fact, during the trade ministers meeting in Singapore over the weekend, they have all agreed that the meeting scheduled in Doha should go on.

"I don't know anybody who is suggesting that the Doha meeting should be postponed, in fact quite to the contrary we believe it should go forward," he said.

He added that launching a new world trade rounds can help address international issues, mostly in relation to global economic slowdown, and help re-establish confidence in the international system.

Earlier, Zoellick called on Dr Mahathir and conveyed to him President Bush's appreciation of a letter sent to him last week by the Prime Minister on his counter-terrorism proposals.

He stated that the President was keen to meet Dr Mahathir to further discuss the issue at the Shanghai Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Forum.

Zoellick had also met Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today. -- BERNAMA

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