

21 OCT 2001

MAHATHIR-WTO

WTO MUST HAVE PROPER AGENDA, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

SHANGHAI, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is insistent that any new round of negotiations under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have a proper agenda, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Determining the agenda is very important because if we don't have a proper agenda, it may be possible that some may bring in extraneous matters, things not related to trade," the prime minister told a media conference here today.

He said "if that happened, it would have an adverse impact on poorer countries."

"We are going to Doha and are going to make our views heard there," he said.

He said the ministerial meeting scheduled in Doha in Qatar would consider the agenda for the next round of negotiations under WTO.

He said that at the APEC meetings here, there was now a willingness to be flexible among the developed economies.

"Before they (APEC) were very rigid. They were always talking about market opening, market opening, market opening."

"But now, these things are not so prominent in the discussions in APEC and I am quite sure our views would be heard at the WTO," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that Malaysia would definitely want to support the next round of negotiations at the WTO if the agenda was acceptable.

On the other hand, Dr Mahathir said that there were many promises in the previous global trade talks which have not been kept.

"We hope that the agreements reached at the Uruguay Round would be implemented even if we have to talk about the new WTO round. The previous agreements still remain valid and they should be implemented."

When asked on the seemingly different attitude of the United States towards market opening, the prime minister said "that maybe, it has something to do with the change in government."

"Obviously, government policies differ when the government is formed by different parties," he said.

"The present government seems to be a little bit more concerned about the weaknesses of the developing countries and not too insistent that everybody complies with the same rules, regulations and practices so that the benefits can accrue (only) to the most competitive and most powerful," he said. -- BERNAMA

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