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APEC-WRAP-UP

APEC MEXICO RECOGNISES MALAYSIA'S ANTI-TERRORISM EFFORTS

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LOS CABOS, Oct 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's on-going fight against terrorism probably received the highest ever recognition thus far when US President George W. Bush proposed that Malaysia host a Regional Training Centre to Counter Terrorism at this year's Apec summit which ended here Sunday.

Bush made the proposal during his meeting with Asean leaders on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Forum leaders' summit on Saturday.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who represented Malaysia at this year's leaders' summit, said he believed that the country's experience in these matters, especially the preventive aspects, was important.

The training centre, scheduled to be set up sometime next year, would focus on projects aimed at enhancing the capability and ability of each Asean country in dealing with terrorist movements.

Kuala Lumpur's move to counter terrorism had taken place way back before terrorist acts became vogue in the aftermath of the Sept 11 terror attacks on the US when Malaysian security forces had to deal with the Communist insurgency prior to Malaysia's independence in 1957.

Besides Abdullah, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar was also present at the Apec gathering while International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz led the Malaysian delegation to the ministerial meetings.

Observers felt that Bush's announcement came at the most appropriate moment, when, Malaysia, with its predominantly Muslim population, had found it rather irksome to see Islam being equated with terrorism.

At various international fora, Malaysia has been critical of the irresponsible labelling of Islam and terrorism, and had continuously used these platforms to inform the world that heinous acts of terror were committed by extremists and deviationists, irrespective of their beliefs.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia has continuously stressed on the need to identify the root causes of terrorism if the international community wanted these problems to be tackled for good.

Although the two-day summit at the beach resort on Mexico's Baja California peninsula hosted by Mexican president Vicente Fox was devoted to discussing fighting terrorism, a statement issued after the gathering fell short on calling for identifying the root causes of terrorism.

However, Abdullah had during the Apec leaders' retreat, warned the international community that failure on its part to carefully address three major issues -- Iraq; Palestine and Israel; and terrorism -- currently affecting the Ummah could trigger unfavourable responses from Muslims.

"It (the failure) can trigger an adverse reaction, particularly if action taken is seen as being unfair and prejudiced against Muslims. This could further anger Muslims," he had said.

He dismissed the notion that poverty was the cause for the spread of hatred among Muslims against non-Muslims. Abdullah countered that it could be due to systems or institutions that alienated or deprived Muslims, or seemed prejudiced against or unfair to them, even in measures taken to combat terrorist activities.

"Naturally, Muslims would get angry and such anger could lead them to

resort to any form of action (and) it can even breed terrorism," he had said.

Apec leaders, in their eight-page declaration issued after the meeting, had, among others, called for strengthened international co-operation to support the region's efforts to eliminate terrorism and restore economic confidence in the region.

Although terrorism was very much in the spotlight at Apec Mexico, the meeting did not lose sight on trade and market liberalisation, a goal that the 21-member economies had chosen to adopt.

In calling for the support of the multilateral trading system, the leaders had urged Apec ministers to continue negotiating for open markets, foster economic growth and reduce poverty, particularly in developing countries, promote sustainable development and provide opportunities for everyone.

The leaders welcomed the launch of the new multilateral trade negotiations in Doha, Qatar and encouraged all economies to pursue the trade talks in all areas of the Doha Development Agenda so that the Jan 1, 2005 deadline to conclude such negotiations would be met.

"We agree that these negotiations hold the prospect of real gains for all economies; and particularly developing economies in the areas of agricultural reform, improved market access for goods and services, and clarification and improvement of trade disciplines," the leaders said.

They also called for negotiations to abolish all kinds of agricultural exports subsidies, and unfair export prohibitions and restrictions.

The leaders' declaration also spelt out their willingness to promote more open, diversified and competitive Apec financial markets, including the development of regional bond markets.

They commended their Finance Ministers' initiative to organise policy dialogues to identify impediments to the development of securitisation and credit guarantee markets and to develop detailed actions plans and to report the progress to Apec Leaders in 2003.

Apec 2003 will be hosted by Thailand, which also chaired the fourth Apec meeting in Bangkok 10 years ago.

Set up in 1989, the 21-member Apec groups Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the US and Vietnam. -- BERNAMA

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