

Terrorism reigns over trade issues

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BANGKOK: Whether the 21 member countries admit it or not, trade has already been pushed to the backseat for this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit which begins today.

Based on events in the run-up to the summit, it is terrorism that is steering the direction of the forum, ahead of any other matter although Apec has a long string of matters to discuss.

A sample - trade and investment facilitation, economic and technical co-operation and capacity building activities, creating a knowledge-based economy, building a global financial architecture and focusing on new growth enterprises, salvaging the Doha Development Agenda, reform of



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the organisation, Myanmar and the nuclear threat from North Korea.

But all these seem to be blur, against the dominance of the security issue especially after Saturday's US offer of a US\$5.4mil (RM20.5mil) fund to fight terrorism in the region, as a juicy carrot to motivate members to join its bandwagon.

Most Asean nations are unhappy over the US' "hijacking" of the agenda with the emphasis on security but only

Malaysia has been consistently vociferous in its stand.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has to use his deft diplomatic skills to bring the summit back to the other vital issues during the two retreats for leaders, scheduled for today and tomorrow.

He has conceded that there were differences of opinion from Asean.

For US President George W. Bush, attendance at the summit after whistle stop visits to selected Asian countries would show that he is still very much engaged globally.

China's new President Hu Jintao would use the opportunity to stamp his mark in the region.

As for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will make his last appearance, the bet is that he would go out with a bang - as usual.