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RAFIDAH-WTO

M'SIA WILL ENSURE WTO IS FAIR TO ALL, SAYS RAFIDAH

KUALA KANGSAR, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will ensure that all World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations abide by its principles and do not favour only the developed countries.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said that each WTO issue raised for negotiation should not run away from the basic principles of fairness, importance and flexibility which provide room to developing nations.

This would mean that the negotiations are more towards undeveloped countries where they have the basic necessities for market access, she said.

"For example, agriculture and its related products, which are important to them (smaller countries), ought to have more access into the rich countries," she told reporters after officiating the Felcra Co-operative annual general meeting at the Kampung Bendang Kering Felcra Complex here today.

At the South African International Dialogue (SAID-Global 2003) at Ezulwini, Swaziland, which ended last night, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Mozambique President, Joachim Chissano, have been given the trust to submit SAID-Global 2003 firm stance on global trade issue to the WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico next month.

Dr Mahathir said that this would give SAID a chance to make its stand in one voice so that the rights of the developing nations would not be pushed aside.

Rafidah, who is also the Kuala Kangsar Member of Parliament, said that she was confident that SAID's stance would be directly submitted to the WTO and that she herself would relay the intention to the organisation as it is important to abide by the WTO negotiation principles.

"The main disputes now are those related to issues on restrictions of products to the markets of developing nations. They are not only agriculture and its related products but also pharmaceutical goods where the United States insists that a list of the diseases, which can be granted obligatory licences, are prepared beforehand," she said.

"We are of the view that we don't have to wait until the list is completed, just issue the obligatory licence. We can list two or three diseases like AIDS for the moment and then include others later," Rafidah said.

She said that every country should realise that they cannot veer away from the basic principles or else nothing would be resolved.

"The principles could be translated in tax cuts and different tariff rates between the rich and poor countries, and more preferences should be given to undeveloped nations," she said.

"The one good thing in the WTO is that if one country disagrees in whatever form, the negotiation will not succeed. It requires a 100 percent agreement," she said.

Rafidah said that Malaysia would only agree to a negotiation which it felt would benefit everyone.

"We will agree if the gains far outweigh the costs and not the other way round. Of course, there will be expenses incurred but they must be minimal," she said. "We will always analyse the cost factor first before anything else." -- BERNAMA

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