

23 OCT 2003

APEC-WRAP-UP

BANGKOK APEC MANAGES TRADE AGENDA DESPITE U.S. PUSH FOR SECURITY

By: Siti Hawa Othman

BANGKOK, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- The fact that the leaders at the just-ended APEC informal leaders summit had given priority on re-starting the Doha round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations showed that meeting was somewhat successful despite the United States succeeded in pushing security matters to the fore.

This showed that the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Forum was at least stick able to its original objective of promoting economic issues despite having to deviate to accommodate the US which had been harping on the need to discuss security.

The leaders had reaffirmed the primacy of the multilateral trading system when the WTO issue was contained in the front page of the Bangkok APEC Declaration.

They also stressed on the urgent need for flexibility and political will by the governments to re-start the Doha Development Agenda (DDA).

But other economic matters like reforming the global financial architecture and Asian bonds took a backseat. Even Thailand's agenda to speed up free trade at an earlier date to achieve the targets set at the Bogor APEC Summit drew poor response as member countries wanted to move at a pace they were comfortable with.

The US flexed its muscles by pushing for the security agenda into the Bangkok Apec talks as it wanted to stress its position on the war against terrorism.

President George W. Bush succeeded in getting the Bangkok Apec Declaration to outline actions to eliminate transnational terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These include adopting strict domestic export controls on man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and collaborations between APEC's Counter Terrorism Task Force, the Counter Terrorism Action Group (CTAG) of the Group of Eight (G8), the United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee and other relevant agencies.

Malaysia had strongly objected to security issues making its dominance and maintained that APEC should stick to trade matters. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said security was important in terms of getting economies to grow but did not agree on military action.

Dr Mahathir left his last APEC Summit as prime minister with a notable quote: "We want fair trade, not free trade for globalisation. Fair trade can be free but free trade can be unfair."

It clearly reaffirmed Malaysia's steadfast position and quest towards equitable trade between developed and developing countries and that APEC should be about things economic. -- BERNAMA

SHO SHY