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APEC-Scenario  
TRADE MATTERS SIDELINED AT APEC

By: Siti Hawa Othman

BANGKOK, Oct 21 (Bernama) - With United States President George W. Bush seemingly winning with his security issues at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit here, he has not spared Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad by making an issue of the latter's remarks on the Jews.

Calling the Prime Minister's remarks reprehensible and hateful, he managed to divert the attention of the press from the sole issue of trade, which was supposed to be the purpose of this very Apec meeting.

The Israeli Embassy here also could not choose a better time to release a statement on its letter to the Editor of The Nation daily, saying that the speech by Dr Mahathir at the 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Putrajaya, Malaysia, brought no honour.

The Bangkok Post, meanwhile, front-paged Dr Mahathir's exclusive interview in which he said his statement at the OIC Summit had been taken out of context.

A top US business official recently told Bernama at the sidelines of the Apec meeting that Dr Mahathir was a man who always said what he thought.

"But business (business circles) always try to understand that it wasn't because he had bad feelings about the US but because he had strong beliefs where his country was going," Ernest Z Bower, President of the US-Asian Business Council said.

Nevertheless, what Bush or the US had to say has made the headlines in Bangkok.

The local dailies as well other press reports which had in the early days of the Apec meeting hinged on trade, the Doha round and on achieving speedier free trade goals, are now splashed with security matters and of how Bush is winning his anti-terror campaign.

Apec, which should be a forum to deal with trade, has turned into a security meeting with Bush pushing his war on terror at the Apec Leaders Summit.

The leaders draft statement as reported in the local dailies mentioned two things on trade - to work towards the outcome of the Doha round and to make Apec's trade agenda more supportive of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Security issues, however, received priority over trade matters with the draft highlighting the need to eliminate terrorist groups that threaten Apec economies, oppose weapons of mass destruction, control man-portable air defence systems and increase energy security.

Apec has indeed been bogged down with other matters, despite the resentment from some Asian nations, especially Malaysia, which wanted the grouping to stick to trade issues.

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