

19/10/2003

Don't overload Apec with new issues, says KL

reports on "Apec 2003" by Syed Nadzri; Kamarul Yunus
MALAYSIA has cautioned the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation that it is in danger of an overload if its work portfolio continues to expand beyond trade and business.

It suggested on the second day of the Apec Ministerial meeting yesterday that guidelines be drawn up to maintain the grouping's effectiveness.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said while Malaysia supported the need for a review of the Apec process, it should only be focused on its core competency of trade facilitation and reducing the costs of doing business.

"We should not overload Apec with new issues that are beyond our capacity to manage well or risk spreading our capacity too thin," she said.

"Right now there are too many things - more than we can chew," she added during a break.

The concern came in the wake of an increasing number of non-trade specific issues finding their way into the Apec agenda such as security, health and anti-corruption.

Rafidah said in some cases, security issues like the call for a ban on man-portable air defence system (MANPAD), which is a shoulder-held rocket launcher, were just to meet specific domestic considerations of particular economies.

The day's proceedings dealt mainly with counter-terrorism measures and secure trade among members.

"Malaysia's opinion is that Apec should not go into realm of security per se, but we should be doing what we need to do to collaborate to eliminate terrorist activities that hamper economic activities," Rafidah said.

Malaysia also expressed concern during yesterday's meeting over knee-jerk reactions by some member countries in dealing with issues like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak earlier this year and MANPAD, which was used to fire at an Israeli jetliner in Kenya last year.

Rafidah said issuing blanket travel advisories on SARS and proposing a ban on MANPAD were examples of knee-jerk reactions.

Apec, which groups 21 economies of the Pacific Rim, will have its leaders' summit tomorrow.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is due to arrive today and will almost immediately speak at the Apec CEO business summit, a parallel meeting.

Bilateral meetings with several Heads of Government are being arranged on the sidelines of the summit.