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Forum delegates call for consensus

DELEGATES to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Business Forum want governments and the private sectors of the 114-member countries to come up with a consensus before the Fifth World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Ministerial meeting.

They have adopted a statement to constitute a joint group of the WTO, composed of representatives from the two sectors to meet immediately to evolve a consensus of NAM member countries for the upcoming WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico scheduled for Sept 10 to 14.

Forum's organising committee chairman and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) chief executive officer Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh said there were a lot of issues relevant to the developing nations that needed to be considered during the WTO meeting.

"The consensus reached would represent the voice of the developing nations at WTO," he said.

Former president of the Asean Chambers of Commerce and Industry Dr Jose Concepcion said the joint group would discuss strategies, focus on common issues and work towards the same direction.

Former Asean secretary-general and distinguished research fellow of Universiti Malaya's Asia-Europe Institute Tan Sri Ajit Singh said the objective of the proposed group was to strengthen the position of the developing nations in the WTO.

"It is good for the joint group to look at issues and adopt a common position on most of the issues," he said.

The proposed joint group is one of the five recommendations included in the statement adopted by delegates to the two-day NAM Business Forum which ended yesterday.

Overall, the delegates adopted a statement aimed at boosting business co-operation among NAM member countries and facilitating trade and investment exchanges.

Yeoh said the statement, which was submitted to the NAM Secretariat yesterday evening, is set to be forwarded to NAM leaders attending the summit.

Underscoring the belief that business flourished best in an environment of peace and stability, the group noted that the promotion of regional and bilateral business partnership would serve as a catalyst for South-South co-operation and for peace.

Yeoh said the 700 delegates of the forum found the event to be useful, informative and insightful, and believe it could further contribute to strengthening of co-operation among NAM member countries.

Besides the joint group, the other four recommendations adopted by the forum's delegates are:

- * To institutionalise the NAM Business Forum as part of future NAM Leaders Summit and that all future host nations organise similar business forums as a means to promote peace, mutual co-operation and business opportunities;

- * To consider the creation of a Business Council on South-South Co-operation to promote the agenda of multilateral and bilateral business and trade relationships among NAM nations, as proposed by incoming NAM chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad;

- * To urge governments of NAM member countries to proactively engage their respective business communities as partners-in-development, and to

support initiatives of their private sectors, in building smart partnerships, technology sharing and transfer, infrastructure development, job creation and the diversification of exports and markets; and,

* To urge both governments and the private sector to accelerate the use of electronic commerce to facilitate trade and investment linkages, including the NAM business portal developed by India. Expressing satisfaction over the Business Forum and consensus reached over the statement, Confederation of Indian Industry director-general Tarun Das described the inaugural forum, as the birth of "an institutional and international baby".

"We commit to support Asli as we go forward to ensure that this baby is healthy, strong and it does useful work.

"The baby is born here in Kuala Lumpur and will grow here over the next three years," Das said, adding that the confederation looked forward to working with Malaysia and other NAM countries in this regard.

Meanwhile, Ajit said previous criticisms that NAM served as only a "talk-shop" could be deflected, via the concrete number of proposals and recommendations made at the business forum.