

Compromise for success

Abdullah: Be flexible to ensure fruitful WTO talks

BY CHOI TUCK WO

VALLETTA (Malta): Malaysia wants both developed and developing countries to show their flexibility and commitment in ensuring the success of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong next month.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said developed nations must work harder and not be too rigid in their negotiations, particularly on agriculture and market access.

Developing countries must also display the same spirit so that the WTO conference would be a success, he told Malaysian journalists after attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)'s second day retreat on Saturday.

Abdullah said the issue of agriculture subsidies had been discussed at length during the last WTO conference in Cancun (Mexico) but no agreement was reached.

He noted that the opening of the developed countries' market to developing countries would be good in the long run.

On the position of small countries in the Commonwealth, the Prime Minister said they agreed to provide them with assistance to help them take part in international trade.

There was also a proposal that the Commonwealth secretariat meet with developed countries to get their support to set up a fund to help the small nations, he said.

Abdullah said the leaders also discussed the latest developments on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in Comm-



HELPING HAND: Abdullah shaking hands with Mwanawasa on Saturday. During their meeting on the sidelines of CHOGM, the Prime Minister promised to help Zambia develop its palm oil and rubber industries. — *Bernamapic*

onwealth countries.

He said such programmes were not only important for schoolchildren but also for the public.

"It is important to overcome the problem of the digital divide because it can cause a certain group or the society to feel they have been left behind," he said.

Abdullah added that the digital divide could lead to poverty in this age of ICT and new industries such as biotechnology.

He said Malaysia's e-community would not succeed and the e-government would fail if the people did not know how to use ICT facilities.

Abdullah also said Malaysia would send experts to Zambia to assist in the development of its palm oil and rubber industries. This was in response to

Zambian President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa's request for help during their meeting on the sidelines of CHOGM.

Meanwhile, the 53-member CHOGM wants the WTO Ministerial Conference to reach agreement on the elimination of all forms of export subsidies by 2010.

In the Valletta Statement on Multilateral Trade released on Saturday, the heads of government urged developed countries to demonstrate the political courage and will to give more than they receive in the forthcoming round.

Such an approach was necessary, particularly in the negotiations on agriculture and market access, as their (developed countries) own longer term prosperity and security depend-

ed on it, they added.

Saying that agriculture was the most distorted sector of world trade, they were determined to pursue significant progress towards fuller and more meaningful subjection of agriculture production and trade to multilateral disciplines.

The grouping took note of the US offer on agriculture and hoped the European Union and others who maintained high levels of agricultural protection would respond in the same spirit.

The leaders also welcomed the progress achieved in the Doha Round over the last two years but expressed concern about the pace of negotiations.

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