

Abdullah: Open WTO to all nations

The Star - 19/11/2005

BUSAN: The World Trade Organisation should not be an "exclusive club" but an organisation open to all nations, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He pointed out that not all countries were trading nations or in the position to afford imported items.

"We talk about trade liberalisation, yet many perceive that only developed nations stand to gain from it all. Developing nations did not get the same profit. So perhaps, there is some injustice. I stressed the importance to reflect justice to all nations," he said during the leaders' retreat yesterday.

He also spoke about the need for developed countries to take part in the capacity-building programme, saying that before poorer nations exported

any of their products, they needed factories to manufacture the goods.

"Otherwise, there will be no investment and no products to be sold. In this context, the programme is vital," Abdullah said.

He said that only when developing nations started to produce and sell their products that they could play a role in the free trade process.

"Just like golf, there should be a 'handicap' for such nations. If all are judged on a level playing field, they will surely lose out," he said.

On Europe's refusal to lower agricultural subsidies, resulting in developing nations finding it impossible for their agricultural exports to compete there, Abdullah said: "Europe has its own stand and Bush also stood firm. Thus,

Apec's stand is that now, the ball is in Europe's court."

The premier also held bilateral talks with Mexican President Vicente Fox Quesada, Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong and Chilean President Ricardo Lagos Escobar on the sidelines of the Apec summit yesterday.

On former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's upcoming meeting with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, most probably to discuss the insurgency problem in southern Thailand, Abdullah said: "I was told about it. I think it is a good thing and, hopefully, there will be a method of resolution."

Abdullah also said he was touched when the heads of states offered their condolences over the recent passing of Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood.