

Malaysia and US to talk next month on elusive FTA

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WASHINGTON: The United States and Malaysia will discuss next month the best way to continue working on a free trade agreement after formally missing a March 31 deadline to finish the pact, US trade officials said on Friday.

"A Malaysian team will come to the United States in mid-April for consultations.

"We look forward to concluding a high-quality, comprehensive FTA and obtaining legislative approval for such an agreement," Steve Norton, a spokesman for the US Trade Representative's office, said in a statement.

The United States launched talks on a free trade agreement with Malaysia, its 10th largest trading partner, a year ago.

Although both sides had been optimistic of reaching a deal by early 2007, the talks were delayed by a change in Malaysia's lead negotiator and hesitation to open its government procurement market to more US firms.

After the last round of talks last month, Malaysian officials said they needed to reach a new political consensus on how to proceed.

"Resolution of that process is a necessary step before the negotiations can continue," Norton said. — Reuters