

Miti eyes chief negotiator for US talks

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is set to appoint a senior official of the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) as its chief negotiator for talks with the United States.

Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, who disclosed this, said a deputy secretary-general will helm the task.

He said the government had received approval to send its chief negotiator to engage with the US counterpart.

"We will start negotiations soon after a non-disclosure agreement is signed," he told reporters at the ministry's Hari Raya open house held here yesterday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was present at the event.

Asked who would be the country's chief negotiator, Tengku Zafrul said it would be one of Miti's three deputy secretary-generals - Mastura Ahmad Mustafa (Trade), Datuk Hanafi Sakri (Industry) or Bahria Mohd Tamil (Investment and Management).

On his trip last week to Washington, Tengku Zafrul said discussions with Trump administration senior officials, Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, went smoothly.

"Both sides agreed that we proceed with negotiations," he said, adding that further details would be presented at the National Geo-Economics Action Centre (NGCC) meeting to be chaired by the Prime Minister today.

Tengku Zafrul said the Cabinet



Festive fun: Anwar sharing a light moment at Miti's Hari Raya open house. Looking on is Tengku Zafrul. - YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

would be briefed ahead of formal discussions with the US government.

He said both Malaysia and the United States agreed that negotiations were the best way forward, instead of retaliatory tariffs.

The minister said Malaysia's role in the global supply chain, particularly in sectors such as semiconductors, was recognised as crucial by both countries.

"Many companies involved are actually complementing each other, not competing directly. Both countries agreed on the

importance of economic security as protecting technology and intellectual property rights is paramount," he added.

Outlining the broad framework of the negotiations, Tengku Zafrul said discussions will cover four main areas - tariffs, non-tariff barriers, trade imbalance and economic security.

"The objective is to reduce tariffs, though it is impossible to reduce it to zero. We need a win-win solution," he said.

"We also discussed non-tariff barriers, mainly in the agricul-

tural sector, and ways to ease them.

"On the trade imbalance, currently we have a surplus of about US\$25bil (RM109bil), down from US\$40bil four years ago.

"They want us to continue reducing it, but not immediately," he revealed.

On the economic security front, Tengku Zafrul stressed the need to ensure technologies developed or manufactured in Malaysia were properly safeguarded, proposing mechanisms such as a Technology Safeguard Agreement.