

# PM urges Apec to stick to trade, not N. Korea

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AS the big power nations tried to hijack the Apec summit to push security issues such as Korean diplomacy, Malaysia led smaller nations in a call for the grouping to stay focused on its original role — fostering trade.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in a keynote address to top business leaders at the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation CEO summit here yesterday, said the regional grouping needs to return to its role as an instrument for members in the region, spanning China to Chile, to promote economic growth through a freer and fairer flow of trade.

“The most urgent priority is to refine the role of Apec in the emerging regional architecture and make it a more effective process for regional co-operation in its specific field,” said the prime minister, who arrived here late on Friday for the two-day Apec summit of leaders that began yesterday.

As the mainly Western media reported that President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and US officials were loudly pursuing Korean diplomacy on the sidelines with South Korea, Russia, China and Japan, there were few signs of any breakthrough on the Korean issue or how the issue might really touch other Apec members.

Apec leaders are expected to issue a statement today expressing concern about North Korea's nuclear testing and missile launches, officials said.

Abdullah said the issue of nuclear proliferation in North Korea is important, and must be addressed, but there are other equally vital issues that Apec should look at. Among these is the phenomenal rise of China and India, and the challenge they pose to the ability of many countries to continue to attract much needed foreign investment.

“It is fuelling political and security apprehensions in some coun-

tries. Certain major structural imbalances are yet to be addressed, and the future economic stability remains at risk,” he noted.

It is important, he said, for Apec to come to a proper and correct appreciation of the challenge or perceived threat posed by a rapidly prospering China, as some countries adopt “hedging” strategies that would hold back full regional co-operation.

At Apec, Malaysia and some other nations have been pushing for security issues of another kind — issues strictly related to enabling trade and investment.

Officials and trade ministers

laid the foundation for Apec leaders to focus on counter-terrorism measures to improve business mobility with better border and aviation security, enable secure trade and adopt measures to control the cross-border spread of avian flu and flu pandemics.

But all was not lost on the trade and economic co-operation front, as top leaders were on the verge of agreeing on a stand alone statement pledging their readiness to make deeper concessions to put the derailed Doha Round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) free trade talks back on track.

After the first day of their retreat yesterday, Apec leaders declared they were ready to jumpstart the collapsed Doha Round.

“We have an urgent need to break the current deadlock and put the negotiations back on a path towards a timely conclusion.

“We are determined to resume without further delay negotiations to achieve a balanced and ambitious outcome that works for all WTO members.”

The leaders also called on other key non-Apec players in the talks, such as the European Union and India, to make similar gestures to resume the Doha Round. The Doha Round failed in July after four years of negotiations, when the US, the EU and some developing countries failed to reach a consensus on cutting farm subsidies and tariffs.

The trade agreement being negotiated by the WTO is important for Malaysia because its trade is more than double its gross domestic product, making freer trade and greater market access vital for continued economic success.