

US, Bahrain sign trade pact

Agence France Presse

From correspondents in Washington

September 15, 2004

THE US and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement today, in a move aimed at boosting economic and trade ties in the Middle East.

The agreement, which still must be ratified by the US Congress, was signed by US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Abdulla Hassan Saif.

If the agreement goes into effect, it would result in an immediate lifting of duties on 100 per cent of consumer and industrial products and 81 per cent of US agricultural exports.

"Bahrain will open its services market wider than any previous FTA partner, streamline digital trade, protect intellectual property, facilitate government procurement and provide for effective enforcement of labour and environmental laws," the US trade representative's office (USTR) said in a statement.

Two-way trade was \$US887 million (\$1.28 billion) in 2003, according to USTR, with US exports totalling \$US509 million (\$732.85 million).

"This new trade opening will expand opportunities for exports of aircraft, machinery, vehicles, pharmaceutical and agricultural products such as meats, fruits and vegetables, cereals, and dairy products," USTR said.

Zoellick said the deal with Bahrain is part of an effort to build a Middle East Free Trade Area with the United States.

"With the hand of US economic partnership, the United States will embrace and encourage reformers across the region," he added