

More openness in FTA talks sought

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Dubai-- The UAE authorities have been urged to be more transparent in handling the Free Trade Agreement talks with the United States.

Although the Ministry of Economy met representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the private sector, no one was allowed to see the draft agreement or examine minutes of important issues discussed, Dr Habib Al Mulla, chairman of the Dubai Financial Services Authority, was quoted as saying by a Gulf News report.

The issues should have been discussed openly, said Al Mulla.

He regretted that the UAE negotiating team did not include the private sector in the negotiations. This was because of a US condition that only officials could represent the UAE, said the report.

Al Mulla argued it was possible to overcome this, however, by forming private sector consultant teams to support the official negotiating team.

"It is important to know the terms of any agreement, and the privileges given by the UAE to American companies," said Al Mulla.

Al Mulla also noted that the US had the option of freezing the agreement even after it was signed, if it was not approved by the Congress. The UAE does not have this option, as the agreement is presented to the Federal National Council for information only, he said.