

Developing states keen to salvage WTO talks

AFP, Geneva

Developing countries appear keen to salvage something from the wreckage of recent WTO talks in Mexico ahead of an increasingly untenable 2005 deadline, but some feel the United States and Europe lack an equal desire to move forward.

World Trade Organisation (WTO) members are due to regroup informally on Tuesday for the first time since last month's ministerial meeting broke down amid deep divisions between rich and poor countries.

The body has until December 15 to revive the current round of trade-enlargement talks, due to conclude by January 1, 2005, and Carlos Perez del Castillo, chairman of the

WTO's general council, has spent the past few weeks shuttling between different parties to find common ground.

"Cancun (in Mexico) was a little disaster but not the end of the process," said Chile's WTO ambassador, Alejandro Jara.

Negotiations there stalled when bickering over cross-border investment and competition added to a more fundamental dispute about richer states' farming subsidies and the high tariffs on agriculture imports by developing nations.

"We all hope to be able to continue our work here (at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva) even if it has become harder," Jara said.

Chile belongs to a new alliance of developing nations led by India,

Brazil, Argentina and South Africa that was created in the build up and aftermath of Cancun to push for reductions in trade-distorting subsidies on farm products supported by powerful players such as the United States and European Union.

"The environment in Cancun made it difficult to negotiate," recalled Eduardo Perez-Motta, WTO ambassador for Mexico, another member of the so-called "Group of 20-plus."

"But that does not mean we cannot pick up the pieces," he insisted.

Prior to Cancun, the group of developing nations produced a proposal on agriculture to negotiate with the United States and the EU, which had also devised a plan.

WEF aims to unlock stalled globalisation process

AFP, Singapore

More than 800 business leaders and politicians will gather in Singapore on Sunday for the World Economic Forum's (WEF's) annual East Asia summit with globalisation again under the spotlight.

Singapore is one of the most ambitious advocates in Asia of free trade and its hosting of the influential forum comes amid a fierce arm wrestle between rich and poor nations over the inequities in the globalisation process.

WEF Asia director Frank-Jurgen Richter told reporters ahead of the summit that the failure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancun, Mexico, last month would be one of the big issues discussed in Singapore.

"Especially after Cancun there

are many questions now," Richter said.

"Should we go ahead with globalisation? Is maybe Cancun a signal that globalisation is coming to a stop?"

Richter said the answer was a clear yes in favour of continuing with globalisation.

The WEF, a renowned pro-globalisation body, released a survey to coincide with the three-day summit asserting that most people in Asia, supported the process.

Its key finding, from a poll of nearly 8,000 people across 10 Asian countries, was that more than half of the people in Asia believed that economic globalisation had affected their lives in a positive way.

The findings appeared to jar with the views of the newly powerful bloc

of poor countries, the so-called G-22, who asserted forcefully in Cancun that rich nations were exploiting them through globalisation.

One of the biggest areas of concern was the devastating impact the subsidies paid by rich countries - primarily the United States, Japan and those from western Europe -- to their farmers had on poor nations.

With the Cancun failure, which many believe has derailed the Doha timetable of January 2005 for implementing many global trade policies, Richter said there would be an increased focus on bilateral and regional free trade agreements (FTAs).

"Indeed free trade agreements are rising in popularity among Asian nations," the WEF said in a briefing paper on the Cancun failure.

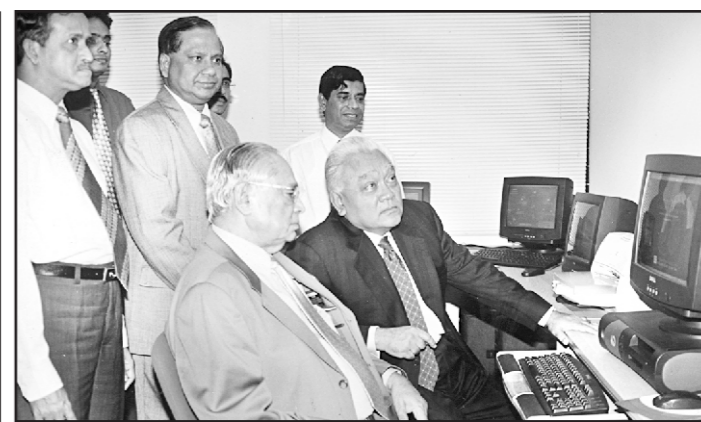


PHOTO: MUTUAL TRUST BANK

Mutual Trust Bank Chairman Syed Manzur Elahi, Vice-chairman Samson H Chowdhury, Managing Director Mosharraf Hossain are seen at the inaugural ceremony of the bank's in-house software development for foreign exchange transactions and returns recently.



PHOTO: DUTCH-BANGLA BANK

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited Managing Director Md Yeasin Ali hands over a payment order worth Tk 15.5 lakh to Shoaib Ahmed, secretary of ministry of industries and chairman of Dhaka University Economics Department Alumni Association, at a programme held at the department on Thursday in Dhaka. Dhaka University Vice Chancellor SMA Faiz is also seen in the picture.



PHOTO: HOTELS INTL

Shafiqul Islam, secretary of ministry of civil aviation and tourism and also chairman of Hotels International Limited (HIL), the owning company of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, presides over the annual general meeting of the company on Thursday in Dhaka.



PHOTO: ISLAMI BANK

Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited Chairman Shah Abdul Hannan speaks at a daylong conference of heads of zones, corporate branches and branches under Dhaka south and north zones in Dhaka on Friday.

Pakistan's first Islamic mutual fund launched

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani financial house Saturday launched the country's maiden Islamic mutual fund, conforming with an Islamic Sharia law prohibition on interest, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz said.

Al-Meezan Investment Management Limited will put its units on the sale on Monday.

"By introducing a Sharia-compliant fund, the management has provided an opportunity to the general public to invest in Islamic (financial) instruments," Aziz said at the launching ceremony.

To start-up the Meezan Islamic Fund, the company has raised 520 million rupees (around nine million dollars) from banks and other financial institutions.

The fund is aimed at meeting the rising demand of investors who want investments based on Islamic laws, the minister said.

Central State Bank of Pakistan monitors Islamic investments to ensure they comply with religious law. Under Islamic law, lenders are not allowed to earn interest and they have to share profit or loss borne by the creditors.

G-22 calls for fair process in trade liberalisation

AFP, Buenos Aires

The developing countries that torpedoed WTO talks in Cancun over agricultural subsidies called for a fair global trade liberalization Friday and sought to deflate passions that flared last month.

Ministers and officials from Latin America, Asia and Africa that form the G-22 bloc met here in a bid to maintain their unity and momentum following the collapse of the talks in the Mexican resort, amid a bitter dispute with richer nations over farm subsidies.

However, cracks have appeared in the group, which includes China, India, Brazil and South Africa. Peru withdrew last week and Guatemala has also pulled out. Many did not send ministers to what was billed as a ministerial meeting.

Despite this, members who were present here demanded that World Trade Organization (WTO) liberalization proceed in a fair manner, and stressed that agriculture remains a "central part" of future talks.

"We agree that the multilateral

system of commerce is essential in order to continue the process of commercial liberalisation on a just and stable basis," the group said in a declaration signed by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Mexico, Paraguay, South Africa and Venezuela.

They said the contentious sticking-point of agriculture and farm subsidies would form a key part of future talks.

The Cancun talks fell apart when wealthier nations, like the United States, refused to cut export subsidies and roll back production subsidies on agricultural products.

"The meeting today (Friday) sought to deflate the confrontational language" seen in Cancun, Argentine foreign minister Rafael Bielsa told reporters at a press conference here.

"It wasn't a meeting of the G-22, or the G-X, or whatever you want to call it, but of countries that have a common vision on agricultural negotiations," Bielsa explained.

CURRENCY

Following is Saturday's forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank

TT/OD	BC	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
58.7300	58.7800	USD	57.8500	57.6801	57.6110
70.3057	70.3655	EUR	67.4010	67.2031	67.1226
98.6312	98.7151	GBP	95.4178	95.1375	95.0237
41.3988	41.4340	AUD	39.2744	39.1590	39.1121
0.5459	0.5464	JPY	0.5270	0.5254	0.5248
45.1145	45.1529	CHF	43.7600	43.5716	43.5194
7.6936	7.7062	SEK	7.2416	7.2203	7.2117
44.7842	44.8223	CAD	43.3853	43.2579	43.2061
7.6055	7.6120	HKD	7.4732	7.4512	7.4423
34.2609	34.2900	SGD	33.3968	33.2987	33.2589
16.1204	16.1342	AFD	15.6229	15.5770	15.5584
15.7864	15.7998	SAR	15.3042	15.2593	15.2410
9.7098	9.7181	DKK	8.8408	8.8149	8.8043

Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar

Indian rupee	Pak rupee	Lankan rupee	Thai baht	Nor kroner	NZ dollar	Malaysian ringgit
45.38	57.375	94.39	39.010	6.9722	0.6503	3.80

STOCK