

China secures WTO entry, backs developing nations

AFP, Doha

China won admission Saturday to the World Trade Organization, capping 15 years of tortuous negotiations, and immediately threw its weight behind the cause of developing nations.

The chairman of a WTO ministerial conference under way here, Qatari Economy Minister Youssef Hussain Kamal, banged a gavel to officially mark WTO endorsement of Chinese membership.

Delegates in a packed hall at the meeting in the Qatari capital Doha greeted the decision with a standing ovation.

No vote was taken. A consensus on China's entry was assumed after no objections from WTO members were raised to the proposal.

"After 15 years of difficult negotiations, we finally came to this historic moment," Chinese Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng said.

China supported the struggle by WTO members in Doha to bridge deep divisions and draw up an

agenda for talks to lower worldwide barriers to trade, Shi told the conference.

But he insisted on a better deal for developing countries, whose dissatisfaction with the meagre fruits of world trade so far threatens to block a deal here.

"We need to face up to the obvious defects of the existing multilateral trading system so as to reflect the interests and demands of developing countries in a more adequate fashion," Shi said.

New trade negotiations must avoid widening the gap between rich and poor and give special consideration to the need for developing countries to open their economies more slowly, he said.

Beijing will formally sign its accession documents Sunday before ratifying the agreement. China becomes a full member of the WTO only 30 days after ratification.

WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell explained that when the organization's secretariat receives China's articles of ratification,

Beijing's official admission will be effective 30 days later.

"There's a very good chance that that will happen within this calendar year," he said.

"It has been a long process for China," US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick told the conference.

"In admitting China to the WTO we took a decisive step in shaping the global economic and commercial system," he added.

China would gain by strengthening its exposure to the outside world, Zoellick said. WTO members in turn would get access to the 1.3 billion people in the Chinese market under internationally accepted rules.

"This decision is an historic one and the WTO's greatest leap towards becoming a universal organisation," European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy told the meeting.

Countries in the WTO are hoping China will give a shot in the arm to the world economy, sliding

towards recession after the September 11 suicide attacks in the United States shattered consumer confidence.

China's entry also has the potential to usher in change, even painful upheaval, at home.

China made far-reaching concessions to gain admittance to the global trading system, which it left in 1949 when the communists took power.

Beijing has already agreed to eliminate all agricultural export subsidies upon admission to the WTO -- something the European Union and Japan refuse even to countenance.

China is also to cut domestic agricultural support to 8.5 per cent, well below the developing countries' ceiling of 10 per cent.

Analysts have warned that exposure to outside competition could have unwanted social consequences, as inefficient state companies shed workers and cut other costs to keep up with their foreign rivals.



PHOTO: ACI TRADING

Azmal Hossain, Executive Director of ACI Trading Ltd, is seen along with Peter Lindsay, Dr Anand Aminbhavi of Uniqema Asia Pacific, Jehangir B Nawaz and Altaf Hussain Chaudhry of ICI Pakistan at a seminar on textile auxiliaries held at a local hotel Friday.

US isolated at WTO on anti-dumping steps: Japan

AFP, Doha

Japan said Sunday that Washington's insistence on imposing punitive "anti-dumping" duties on certain imports has left the United States isolated at a WTO ministerial meeting here.

"I am somewhat encouraged by the fact that most of the delegations, with one exception (the United States), talked about the importance of starting negotiations on anti-dumping measures," a senior Japanese official said.

World Trade Organization ministers are in the third day of a five-day conference here aimed at forging an agenda for a new cycle of trade liberalization talks -- where Japan wants the anti-dumping issue to be prominent.

But the United States refused Saturday to lay down its anti-dumping weapon in the interests of expanding global trade.

Repeated US anti-dumping reprisals against imports it deems to be excessively cheap or harmful to its industry have unleashed a furious reaction overseas, particularly Japanese steel makers.

But the US public is deeply sceptical about the value of trade liberalization and US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick has said he risks losing its support if the WTO restricted the use of anti-dumping measures and countervailing duties for subsidised imports seen to harm US companies.

The Japanese official noted that the United States itself had suffered from anti-dumping actions imposed by its trading partners.

"Between 1990-2000, anti-dumping cases have tripled. China is the number one target, with 341, but the number two target is the United States" with 195 in that period, he told a press briefing.

"The point is that American exports are also becoming victims of anti-dumping practices (and) procedures by ... countries which are often developing countries.

"So we have been talking with our friends in the United States. It has become even more important that we try to improve and seek more clarification about anti-dumping procedures," he said.

ACI seminar on textile auxiliaries held

ACI Trading and ICI Pakistan Ltd have organised a seminar on Creating Value with Textile auxiliaries at a local hotel Friday, says a press release.

The seminar was attended by 50 technical personnel from various textile mills.

Azmal Hossain, Executive Director Trade of ACI Ltd, emphasised the commitment of ACI and ICI Pakistan to provide superior services and quality products to meet the requirement of customers.

Peter Lindsay, Business Manager Textiles, and Dr Anand Aminbhavi, Industry Manager Textiles from Uniqema Asia Pacific, highlighted the cost saving technique productivity improvement through right processing of textile auxiliaries.

The seminar was also attended by Jehangir B Nawaz, General Manager and Altaf Hussain Chaudhry, Business Development Manager of ICI Pakistan.

National Bank opens 73rd branch in Thakurgaon

The 73rd branch of National Bank Limited (NBL) was inaugurated in Thakurgaon on Thursday, says a press release.

Habibullah, Chairman of the bank, formally inaugurated the branch.

Habibullah, in his speech, said, "The branch will play important role for economic development of Thakurgaon."

Rafiqul Islam Khan, Managing Director of the bank, called on businessmen of the locality to take the advantage of information technology-based modern banking service of the NBL.

Directors Khalilur Rahman, Md Shamsuzzoha and Shahadat Hossain Salim also spoke on the occasion.

Modasser Hossain, President of Thakurgaon Chamber of Commerce & Industries, and Advocate Asghar Hossain, President of Thakurgaon Bar Council, also attended function.

EBL workshop on communication skills held

A day-long workshop titled "Communication & Negotiation Skills" was held at Eastern Bank Training Academy on Saturday, says a press release.

K Mahmood Sattar, Managing Director of the bank inaugurated the programme.

A total of 25 executives of the bank from all over the country took part in the training programme conducted by prominent Indian management consultant Sharu S Rangekar.

On the concluding session, A M Shaikat Ali, Director of the Bank, distributed certificates among the participants.

The workshop was a part of EBL's initiatives to improve quality of service to the customers.

BASIC Bank cuts interest rates

BASIC Bank has reduced its interest rates to encourage export and industrial development, says a press release.

In compliance of Bangladesh Bank circular the bank has also reduced the interest rates at 7 per cent from 10 per cent on readymade garments, frozen food and agro-based industry loans. Reduction of interest rates on other items ranged from 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent.



PHOTO: NBL

Habibullah, Chairman of National Bank Limited, inaugurates the 73rd branch of the bank in Thakurgaon on Thursday. Directors Khalilur Rahman and Md. Shamsuzzoha, Managing Director Rafiqul Islam Khan and Deputy Managing Director Mustaque Ahmed of the bank are also seen.

WTO ministers renew push for common ground

AFP, Doha

WTO ministers searched for common ground on global trade here Sunday and prepared to welcome Taiwan into their midst a day after celebrating the historic admission of China to the World Trade Organization.

Delegates entered the third day of their five-day conference still far apart on several critical issues, any one of which could doom their bid to forge an agenda for a new cycle of wide-ranging negotiations to lower trade barriers.

A senior WTO official and conference sources reported no noticeable shift in some of the entrenched national and regional positions after a full day of consultations and declarations on Saturday.

"We have not seen any movement for the time being," a Canadian source said.

But ministers were expected to set aside differences and approve by consensus the accession of Taiwan to the 142-member Geneva-based WTO.

Taiwan's big step follows that of arch-rival China, which on Saturday concluded a 15-year march to

become part of the global trading system when delegates unanimously endorsed its membership in the WTO.

The Chinese government will sign the accession document on Sunday, after which it must be ratified. Beijing's official admission will take effect 30 days after the articles of ratification are presented to the WTO secretariat.

Three days into the conference, which is being held under rigid security measures in a luxury hotel along the Gulf, delegates by all accounts have yet to show much flexibility.

US negotiators later Sunday hoped to meet developing country counterparts to bridge a sharp disagreement over the right of poor nations facing public health crises to override WTO rules protecting drug patents held by big pharmaceutical companies.

Developing countries are demanding a looser interpretation of copyright regulations but have encountered stiff resistance from the United States, Switzerland and other industrialized powers who say patent protection encourages companies to invest in research and development.



PHOTO: EBL

Picture shows AM Shaikat Ali, Director of Eastern Bank Limited, with the participants of a day-long workshop on Communication & Negotiation Skills held at the bank's Training Academy. K Mahmood Sattar, Managing Director, is also seen in the picture.

50 WTO members oppose purely commercial approach to agriculture

AFP, Doha

Some 50 countries attending a WTO ministerial conference here on Saturday called for the group to take non-commercial aspects of agriculture into consideration when debating farm subsidies.

Ministers in the World Trade Organization were holding their first full day of negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha to forge an agenda and timetable for multilateral talks on lowering trade barriers.

The 15-nation European Union and a number of other countries are resisting demands by the United States and its allies in a bloc

known as the Cairns Group that government subsidies aiding farmers to export their production be abolished.

Washington maintains that such assistance distorts trade and hampers the ability of poor countries -- unable to offer subsidized prices -- to compete in global markets.

The European Union counters by citing the "multifunctionality" -- or uniqueness -- of agriculture and says some level of subsidies is necessary to preserve rural societies and economy.

"I am really convinced that agriculture cannot be considered as any other industry," said EU

Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischer.

Mauritius Agriculture Minister Pravin Kumar Jugnauth maintained that "non trade concerns are universal and there is no north-south divide on that matter."

A draft declaration under debate by ministers here does not give "non trade concerns the consideration they deserve," said South Korean Trade Minister Doo-Yun Hwang.

Among the countries backing the EU are Norway, Iceland, Israel, South Korea, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, Senegal, Ivory Coast, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Mauritius and Madagascar.

CURRENCY



China slashes foreign currency deposit rates

AFP, Beijing

China has decided to slash the US dollar deposit interest rates for the ninth time this year and does not rule out further rate cuts in the future, state media said Sunday.

The People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, will reduce the one-year US dollar deposit interest rate to 1.25 per cent from two per cent with effect Monday in response to rate cuts abroad, the Xinhua news agency said.

"Interest rate changes in global financial markets are the main reason why the central bank has cut rates nine times this year," Xinhua said.

"It's a normal reflection of the way interest rates on foreign currency deposits in China move in sync with rates in overseas financial markets," it said.

The move affects interest rates on deposits of up to three million US dollars, the agency said.

The move comes after the US Federal Reserve sliced half a percentage point off its key rates Tuesday to their lowest level in 40 years.

Xinhua noted that the Fed had left the door open to more rate cuts in a further effort to revive the shell-shocked US economy.

"Therefore, the possibility remains that China will continue to cut interest rates on foreign-currency small deposits in accordance with rate changes abroad," Xinhua said.

The latest US Fed cut was followed by rate cuts last week by the Bank of England and the European Central Bank.

Along with slashing US dollar deposit interest rates, the Chinese central bank has also decided to cut one-year euro deposit rates to 2.0625 per cent from 2.5 per cent, according to Xinhua.

The central bank also will cut deposit rates for the British pound, the Hong Kong dollar, Canadian dollar and Swiss franc, the news agency said.

The central bank's eighth foreign-currency deposit rate cut on September 22 failed to impress the markets, as Shanghai B-shares, traded in US dollars, closed 0.3 per cent lower on the first trading day after the reduction.