

Bringing fairness to global trade

From each LDC according to its capacity, to each LDC according to its needs

DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA

OUR shared concern about the current nature of the governance of global trade, our uncompromising resolve to make the voices of the civil societies heard in this process, and our common will to contribute to the shaping of the emerging multilateral trade regime, have brought us all together in this International Civil Society Forum.

Our plan to hold this Forum at this period in time in Dhaka is not without reason. The Forum is taking place on the eve of a very important inter-governmental meeting. As we know this meeting brings together the Trade Ministers of the majority of the LDCs in Dhaka to deliberate on forging a possible common stance for our countries in the forthcoming WTO Ministerial Meeting to be held in Cancun, Mexico during September 10-14 of this year. Accordingly we are convening this Forum now and here, because we feel impelled to project the voices of civil societies from across the LDCs before the policymakers assembled at the Second LDC Trade Ministers' Meeting in the expectation that this will be given due consideration. Whilst we feel we have something important to say which needs to be heard at the same time we like to extend our support behind the good work of our Trade Ministers who have to reflect the interests of their fellow citizens.

the complex nature of the global polity, we recognise our governments are quite often constrained to adequately assert their rightful positions in the international fora. This is why our Forum seeks to strengthen the legitimacy of the LDCs' demands by demonstrating this solidarity with the common aspirations of our respective states and their citizens.

Marginalisation of the LDCs

We meet at an opportune moment when the multilateral trading system will be subjected to intensive scrutiny and important decisions. However, I would not be doing justice to our experience in recent years, if I fail to mention here that we feel both frustrated and betrayed by the global multilateral trading regime as it continues to evolve in our time and before our very eyes.

It is true that the theoretical arguments favouring the freeing of trade remains compelling, tempting

many to argue that the advantages of international trade remain the only issue where there is a convergence of opinion among all economists! Empirical evidence, however, lends little credence to the assertion that more trade automatically translates into higher welfare for the greater number of people. The experience of the LDCs -- both in the GATT and in the WTO compels us to state unequivocally that the jury is still out on the question of whether trade ameliorates or accentuates poverty, and whether trade diminishes or deepens inequality, among countries and among people within countries.

We are meeting in a time when 800 million people of our world go hungry each day and 170 million children under five years of age suffer from malnourishment. Whilst it is true that some countries have indeed been able to take advantage of trade, for the 49 LDCs the experiment with liberalisation of trade, spanning three continents and as many decades, and the resultant outcome from this process, has been mainly one of disappointment, verging on disillusion. The LDCs have seen their combined share in global trade decline from 2 per cent in the 1960s to 1 per cent in the 1970s and then from 0.8 per cent in the 1980s to the current level of 0.4 per cent. During this period the ranks of the LDCs have almost doubled from 25, when such a substrata among the developing countries was first identified, to their current number of 49.

Our experience of these past years has been that the global trading regime is making our developmental effort more difficult -- the potential opportunities have remained largely elusive, compliance requirements have continued to be expensive, so that only the attendant risks have been too real. It is therefore clear that we in the LDCs do not need immiserising trade; we need a trading system that contributes to and enhances the developmental and livelihood opportunities of our countries and our people.

Double standards of global trading regime

An overwhelming number of the LDCs were induced to join the WTO because they were persuaded to believe that it is a rule based organisation with an enforceable dispute settlement mechanism. Who does

not recognise that the rule of law is most needed by the weak and the vulnerable in the face of arbitrary and discriminatory actions by the arrogant and the powerful. However, we regret that these rules, which were supposedly approved through the mythical "one country one vote" based consensus, have delivered an imbalanced, inequitable, and, quite often, unethical global trading regime. Let me cite a few of illustrations culled from some recent authoritative studies.

An average person in a developing country selling a product in the world market confronts barriers that are roughly twice as high as those faced by the counterparts in industrial nations.

Tariff rates for textiles are usually among the highest in the developing world. Precisely because of this, France with its \$24 billion of

equivalent to 3 per cent of the workforce of the importing countries, would generate an estimated increase in world welfare of over \$150 billion per annum.

Application of EU standards, which may reduce health risks by approximately 1.4 deaths per billion persons a year, could decrease African exports by 64 percent or US\$ 670 million, in contrast to regulations set on the basis of an international standard.

As we all know not a single LDC has been successful becoming a member of the WTO since its establishment in 1995. You may know that the acceding LDCs are being pressured to take on obligations which are much higher than those accepted by the founding members of the WTO. In this context, the absurdity of such global rules is

Notwithstanding the Iraq war, Cancun will definitely be different from post-9/11 Doha. If in Doha there was a collective urge to uphold the credibility of global economic governance after the terrorists attack in the USA, Cancun may witness a more savage expression of unilateral trade measures drawing inspiration from the attack on Iraq which was not mandated by the United Nations. Admittedly, this is not the finest hour of multilateralism.

diversified exports to the USA pays \$331 million as import duties per annum whilst Bangladesh, with its exports of readymade garments of \$2.4 billion, ends up paying almost the same amount.

Farm subsidies of more than \$300 billion per year allow food crops exported by farmers in the OECD countries to be sold at prices which are 20-50 percent below the cost of production, thereby undermining farmers in developing nations.

USA provides a cash subsidy to each rice farm household amounting to \$75,000 a year.

European citizens are supporting the dairy industry with subsidies of 16 billion Euros a year. This is equivalent to more than \$ 2 per cow per day whereas half the world's population lives on less than this amount. EU surpluses of milk and milk products are dumped on world markets using costly export subsidies, which destroy people's livelihoods in some of the world's poorest countries.

An increase in developed countries' quotas, on the inward movements of both skilled and unskilled temporary workers,

possibly best epitomised by the rejection of the WTO membership by the small island country, Vanuatu.

Post-Doha developments

As I have mentioned earlier, the need to keep the good fight going is also reemphasised by the fact that post-Doha developments have hardly been encouraging for the LDCs. We are seriously concerned with the failure to meet mandated deadlines set in Doha in most of the areas, including Implementation, TRIPS and Public Health, GATS and Agriculture. The WTO missed another December deadline for agreeing on a new package of "special and differential" measures which would have given the developing countries more leeway in implementing some of their Uruguay Round commitments. We are in great doubt about the commitments of the major developed countries to deal seriously and in a timely manner with these issues.

Our enthusiasm generated by the gains from the declaration on TRIPS and Public Health was rapidly dissipated when we found this gain was under threat because of interpretative ambiguities which constrained the developing countries from taking advantage of these

gains, not least because of the pressure from the multinational corporations.

We have witnessed how the US Farm Bill introduced shortly after Doha Ministerial flouted both the letter and the spirit of the WTO and we have also seen the roll-back in the liberalisation of trade in agricultural goods through EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

We have also observed with alarm how the WTO rules are being undermined and often violated thanks to the increasing trend of bilateralism -- bilateralisation of the negotiations in the GATS within the WTO system as well as through various bilateral and plurilateral agreements. Often LDCs are faced with a no win situation -- they suffer both because of multilateralism and also from violation of multilateralism!

there is a need to mainstream trade in development as proclaimed by the new hobby horse of the international financial institutions -- the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). However, we also think that *mainstreaming development in trade is no less important than mainstreaming trade in development*. The eighth goal of the Millennium Development Goals endorsed by all 189 member countries of the UN talks precisely about such an imperative and commits the global community of nations to the task of making appropriate use of trade policy to reduce global poverty. As countries are asked by the donor community to undertake their PRSP exercises as a precondition for availability of aid, we must re-emphasise the need to strengthen the development dimensions of the global trading regime.

Importance of Cancun

The forthcoming WTO Ministerial promises to be a jubilee of a sort: it is going to be the fifth of its kind; and it will also define how the first decade of the WTO will turn out.

There are at least five reasons, which make the forthcoming Cancun Ministerial so crucial as far as the LDCs are concerned. *Firstly*, Cancun provides us the first opportunity to put under scrutiny the negotiations that have been taking place in Geneva on the Doha Development Agenda. *Secondly*, the LDCs will be able to reflect on the feasibility of the conclusion of negotiations by 2005 on a number of agenda items. *Thirdly*, the Ministerial will provide scope to highlight once again the continuing practice of double standards by the developed countries when WTO rules conflict with their trade interests. *Fourthly*, it has become more important than ever before to demonstrate the unity of the LDCs as a group when the efforts to divide the group by providing arbitrary and discriminatory market access have become more pervasive.

Finally, the Ministerial is the ultimate chance to progress LDC interests in the ongoing negotiations

Mainstreaming development in trade

We are seriously concerned with the fact that in the name of policy coherence the multilateral institutions are coordinating the mechanisms of pressure on the LDCs and the developing countries. By policy coherence, we understand removing conflicting demands of the multilateral institutions on the national governments which undermine the special status of the LDCs as well as appropriate their policy making space.

Similarly we do not disagree that

War on terror and suicide bombing

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

A series of suicide bombings - in northern Chechnya on 12 May and eastern Chechnya on 14 May, at three expatriate housing compounds in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on 13 May and in Tel Aviv, Israel on 18 and 19 May -- has caused serious concern for US and British administration.

As a precautionary measure the British government requested British Airways to cancel its flights to Kenya for an indefinite period, as there is a possibility of threat to launch attack on British citizens. Similarly, Americans were advised by the State Department to defer non-essential travel to Kenya and to carefully review plans to visit East Africa in general. According to one report, this alert came as the Lebanese army in cooperation with Syrian forces smashed a plot to attack American embassy in Beirut to kill the Ambassador.

Earlier, Australia and New Zealand warned their citizens to be on guard while travelling to Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, East Timor and Brunei. This warning came in the wake of bombing in Bali nightclub in Indonesia in October last year that took lives of more than 200 people including many Australians.

Meanwhile, Bush Administration warned its citizens not to travel to Sabah, one of the States of Malaysia as they apprehend terrorist attack on American citizens. According to latest information, both America and Britain decided to close down their embassies in Saudi Arabia because of fears of terrorist attacks in spite of close cooperation from Saudi Government to track down the plotters. The decision was taken on the basis of "credible information" received about imminent attack, according to a spokesman in the State Department. It seems that terrorist threats are looming large over British and US citizens all over the world.

Terrorism in any form is condemnable and not acceptable as a means to resolve conflict. Terrorism, according to Webster's New World dictionary, means the use of force and violence to intimidate as a political policy. If we accept this definition, Palestinians, Chechens, Kashmiris, Moros, and Tamil Tigers are in fact using force and violence to achieve their political ends.

Let us look at the conflict rationally and logically. In the conflict-

ridden Israel-Palestine area, when Israelis murder a Palestinian, it is seen as justified. When Palestinian kills an Israeli, it is called terrorism. The reality is that Israelis practically control the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip with battalions of heavily armed military. In the process the power of Palestinian authority has been reduced to non-contiguous pockets of limited control. Life is precious, no one is willing to die for nothing. According to Islamic tenet, suicide is a sin. A devout Muslim cannot commit suicide. Why then the Palestinians mostly are carrying out suicide bombing? The clashes between Palestinians and immigrant Israelis have been over land. The series of peace process initiated by the United States or Norway have failed to end the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The situation actually aggravated by US policy of condoning unabated Israeli incursion into Palestinian territories and atrocities amounting to State sponsored terrorism while condemning retaliatory actions by Palestinians as an act of terrorism.

Palestinians continue to protest 'Israeli control of every aspect of Palestinian life, expropriation of Palestine land, bulldozing of Palestinian homes, exploitation of cheap Palestinian labour and rapid expansion of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land.' Finding no other alternative extremist groups among Palestinians launch suicide bombing to convey the message that Israel must vacate their land. Rightly or wrongly Palestinians believe that they are fighting for national liberation and they could be successful in driving out Israelis from their territories.

Muslims all over the world condemned the attacks on World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001. This condemnation was based on religious and humanitarian grounds. No political or religious cause could ever justify these terrible crimes. The Bush administration in fact was urged by Muslim American Society on 18 September 2001 to make sure that factual evidence, that meets international standards, must be established beyond reasonable doubt before any response plan is developed or executed. Muslims in America believe that retaliation must be limited to the perpetrators, they are accomplices and network of associ-

Unless and until America abandons its double standard policy with regard to the Middle East issue, one cannot rule out the possibility of throwing suicide bombs and adopting other means of destruction by desperate elements... The spurious war has caused devastating effect in the world as has been reflected in the annual report of the Amnesty International. It said that "the war on terror, far from making the world a safer place, has made it more dangerous by curtailing human rights, undermining the rule of international law and shielding governments from scrutiny."



ates. These were certainly good points, and should have been taken into consideration before war against Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network was launched. Osama bin Laden was presented by American administration as mastermind behind the attacks without proven evidence. It may be pointed out that many Muslims lost their lives in these attacks and no member of Jewish Community was reported to have succumbed to injury following the attacks on WTC. According to one report, members of this particular community were conspicuously absent on the day of mayhem at WTC.

Lyndon La Rouché, presidential candidate for 2004 elections, in his article *Zbigniew Brezezinski and September 11* wrote that the assertion, that Osama bin Laden directed the events of September 11th, is, of course, purely a 'conspiracy theory', in support of which no scientifically

plausible proof has been presented publicly, to the present day. La Rouché examined further the nature of events that led to his conclusion: deep investigation of the longstanding, increasing levels and aggressiveness of activity of Israeli spies inside the USA, including notorious, years-long mega penetration of the security of the Clinton White House by the agents of the Israeli intelligence services, points to the likelihood of at least a significant, if coincidental Israeli role in creating the environment from which the events of September 11th were launched."

His interesting observations are: "Trying to defend what are considered useful lies, will undermine that credibility in the end perhaps with terrible consequences. ... On the issue of Iraq the United States also used false and fabricated documents in the Security Council to prove that Iraq possesses weapons

of mass destruction and has been collecting certain materials for production of nuclear arsenal. Reports by Chief UN Inspector Hans Blix and Director General International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) El Baradei have exposed United States to international ridicule and mockery."

As the shrill Bush-Rumsfeld propaganda campaign depicting Baghdad as a seat of evil went on apace, the CIA knew full well that two decades of war, sanctions and arms inspection had reduced Saddam's Iraq to a tottering paper tiger. In his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 19 March 2002, CIA Director George Tenet neither singled out the Iraq threat, nor described it with particular urgency. And during the Iraq debate in the Congress in October Tenet told the lawmakers "the Iraqi President is unlikely to strike the US unless provoked."

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The psyche of terror threats has been haunting the minds of American and British people. Many of them residing abroad are having sleepless nights. In the words of the Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad "they are afraid of their own shadow, afraid to come here (Sabah), afraid because they know there are many people in this world hating them."

I would like to conclude by quoting Booker prize winner novelist Arundhati Roy: "The United States government is waging a spurious war on terror that is costing Americans their freedom and democracy."

The spurious war has caused devastating effect in the world as has been reflected in the annual report of the Amnesty International. It said that "the war on terror, far from making the world a safer place, has made it more dangerous by curtailing human rights, undermining the rule of international law and shielding governments from scrutiny."

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat



All health information to keep you up to date

Alternative medicine

All forms of medicine aim to ease human suffering and improve quality of life. They differ only in their approaches to treatment. The blending of eastern medicine and western medicine can maximise the effectiveness of modern western and traditional Chinese treatments.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has, over the past 20 years, grown by almost 200 per cent. Its practices are now being heralded as the missing link in modern medicine.

Dr Ka Kit Hui, at the Centre for East-West Medicine at LA (USA), applies the medical principles and practices of both east and west, with amazing results for his patients. There is currently four-month waiting list to see him.

Patients are evaluated by highly qualified clinicians and put on a management plan which is carefully monitored. Results from herbal medicine in areas such as cancer, pain management and age-related problems are proving dramatically effective using both western and eastern medicine.

Sydney-based Australian herbalist Eileen Whittaker has claimed thousands of success stories using her herbs and Bach flower remedies. She has become a health practitioner to the stars, and has even treated members of the British royal family.

More and more general practitioners in the developed world are employing eastern techniques and methods, and even insurance companies such as Medibank are covering many aspects of eastern practices.

There are numerous herbal dietary supplements on the market today. Good Medicine interviewed three experts in order to sort out the supplements which are "helpful" from those that are "harmful" and those that are just plain "hype".

Did you know?

FBI healthcare fraud investigations in USA increased five-fold from 1991 to 1996.