

WTO publishes draft for Cancun meet to spur stalled trade talks

AFP, Geneva

The World Trade Organisation on Friday published a model of key decisions for ministers to take at an upcoming meeting in Mexico to revive stalled global trade talks.

The draft text released just under two months before the Cancun meeting is described by its authors as "somewhat skeletal" in nature and covers 23 areas of the Doha trade talks, according to a copy obtained by AFP.

But it stresses that none of the points have been agreed by the 146 members.

"It (the text) does not purport to

represent agreement in whole or in part, and is without prejudice to any delegation's position on any issue," the draft text said.

WTO member countries launched the 'Doha Development Agenda' of trade liberalisation talks in Doha, Qatar in November 2001 and it is due to be completed by January 1, 2005.

The text confirms ministers' determination to conclude the round on time.

But, said the draft text's authors Uruguay ambassador Carlos Perez del Castillo, who is chairman of the WTO's ruling general council, and WTO Director-General Supachai



Ansar Uddin Ahmed, managing director of National Housing Finance and Investment Limited, and Abdus Salam, managing director of Dom-Inno Builders Ltd, sign an MoU on behalf of their organisations on Wednesday in Dhaka.



Global Insurance Ltd Chairman SM Abdul Mannan speaks at the conference of branch in-charges and executives of the company in Dhaka on Friday. Managing Director Aftabuddin Shah presided over the conference.

PHOTO: NATIONAL HOUSING FINANCE AND INVESTMENT LTD

PHOTO: GLOBAL INSURANCE LTD

Panitchpakdi, the "somewhat skeletal nature of this first draft is a reflection of the reality of our present situation".

"It reflects how far we still have to go in a number of key areas to fulfil the Doha mandates," it added.

The points include the highly sensitive area of agriculture, considered by many as key to the overall success of the trade round, where members have been too divided so far to meet an end-March deadline.

The draft text lays down as an objective that ministers will agree so-called modalities, or the targets

for reducing subsidies and opening up markets in the farming sector, at the September 10-14 Cancun meeting.

But it contains no details or figures.

Another objective set out in the draft is a decision on resolving a problem over access to medicines for poor countries lacking their own pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity.

Members failed to reach an end-2002 deadline after the US blocked

the Doha Development Agenda.

Previously visa fees ranged from 30 dollars for a one-time visit to 80 dollars for multiple trips within the year to the land of Mount Everest.

The visa waiver applies to Chinese and citizens of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which besides Nepal includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

"The visa fee for visitors from the SAARC region and China has been waived to develop Nepal as a regional tourist hub," Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani told reporters.

Indians, who make up more visitors to Nepal than any other nationality, until now required visas only if arriving by air, with those crossing by land needing only to present identification.

The new visa rules were enacted in the annual budget which went into effect Thursday. Lohani said the budget included 20 million dollars to provide loans to ailing industries, including tourism.

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