

Vital poll pledges

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tion cares little about strengthening democracy by implementing the fourpledges.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed keeps saying that the judiciary would be separated within the coalition's tenure and the anti-corruption commission bill passed in the next session of parliament. Yet, sessions begin and end without passage of any bills. And, he never stops claiming that the credit for initiating the process of establishing an independent human-rights commission and ombudsman goes to the incumbent government.

For the last 28 months, the government's only success on this front has been preparation of drafts on the issues that are either pending with the parliament standing committees or the cabinet committee or have been left on the back burner.

SEPARATION OF JUDICIARY: Despite constitutional bindings to separate the judiciary from the executive wing of the state, no government has ever taken concrete steps to implement them. In 1995, nearly 500 judges of the lower judiciary filed a writ with the High Court to separate the judiciary. After four years of legal battle between the government and lower court judges, the highest tier of the judiciary finally asked the government to implement its 12-point directive.

Since then, three successive governments including the caretaker administrations had time extended afresh on 15 occasions by the Appellate Division on different pretexts. In no instance did the government cite any logical grounds to the court for seeking time petitions. And it seems that the government will take more time from the Supreme Court in the future. In such a case what will the court do? With no executive power to exercise, it can only warn the government like it did before.

Now the question comes whether at all will the government implement the directives? The law minister once said it would take at least six years to separate the judiciary, while his deputy argued that it is not a public demand to implement the directives. He also told the press in presence of the law minister that a referendum was mandatory should the government separate the judiciary from the executive. Such comments only go to show that the fate of the judiciary separation hangs in the balance.

In 2001 the caretaker government finalised the process to separate the judiciary. All necessary drafts were prepared for final approval at the last Advisory Council meeting slated for October 2. But after the October 1 general elections, the ruling BNP chief Khaleda Zia asked Chief Adviser to Caretaker Government Latifur Rahman over telephone to leave the issue for her political government. Khaleda also said that BNP's election manifesto had promised judicial separation. Accordingly, the move of the caretaker government on the matter ended on that day.

Last week, eminent lawyer Dr. Kamal Hossain pleaded with the High Court to issue a contempt rule against the government for not implementing the 12-point directive even four years after the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court had issued it.

ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION: The government is also sitting on its hands on the formation of an independent anti-corruption commission.

No less than six months have passed since the government placed the bill on the commission in parliament on July 10. But the body is still in the making, as the ruling coalition bought time on the pretext of seeking opinions from the civil society that raised allegations of bias against two

ministers, who were included on the commission's selection committee.

The coalition could have sought opinions from the civil society before it placed the bill in the House. On top of that, three months have gone by since the government decided to seek public opinions, but little has happened to pave the way for formation of the commission. As recently as Saturday, the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry discussed the bill but took no decision.

HUMAN-RIGHTS COMMISSION: The draft bill of a National Human Rights Commission, prepared about a year ago, is also gathering dust at the Cabinet Division.

The government formed a cabinet committee led by the law minister on December 10, 2001 to prepare the draft bill.

After a series of meetings, the committee finalised the draft and sent it to the Cabinet Division on January 23 last year and the bill was placed before the cabinet meeting on January 29 same year. However, the cabinet sent the bill back to the law ministry for further scrutiny. Since then the draft bill is pending at the ministry.

THE OMBUDSMAN: In 1980, the government passed an act for installation of an ombudsman, and after 22 years, on January 6, 2002, the coalition government brought the act into force through a gazette notification.

However, on February 11, 2002, the law ministry proposed to the cabinet for amendments to some provisions of the act, which in turn formed a committee to scrutinise the bill. Since then no-one knows what has happened to the bill.

In an interview with The Daily Star in May last year, the law minister said the issues are not that simple to be executed overnight and the press quoted him as saying that implementation of the four pledges are not in sight, to which the minister sent a rejoinder in exasperation. Seven months on, the coalition's election pledges are far from being implemented.

Interestingly, the government has recently moved to raise the number of seats in parliament, which will require it to go for as sensitive a measure as bringing amendments to the constitution. But, it needs no such move to live up to its promises of separating judiciary and forming the commissions and office of ombudsman, which could go a long way to better governance in a country riddled with corruption, injustice and infringement of human rights.

Anti-Ahmadiyya

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stressing non-violence and tolerance.

The sect breaks sharply with mainstream Islam by not insisting Mohammad was necessarily the last prophet.

Irene said there were "two Bangladeshes": one that has witnessed "a growth in abuse without accountability," including attacks on the Hindu minority, and another with dedicated groups committed to women's rights, children's rights and other issues.

She said the problems in Bangladesh, which is deeply polarised between its two major parties, did not originate with the election of Khaleda Zia in 2001.

"Bangladesh has for some time now seen a failure of governance," she said.

More than 100,000 people are taking part in the World Social Forum, a yearly meet of anti-globalisation activists.

PP still skips court for not having judge of his choice

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A special public prosecutor (PP) at the First Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression (FSTPWC), Dhaka has refrained from attending hearing of cases for not having a judge of his choice.

Hearing of 200 cases was adjourned and about 300 accused in these cases were left to suffer, as PP Abul Khayer did not attend court for six days.

Judge Dumdiah Sarker at the first tribunal handed over his charge to Kazi Rahamat Ullah, the judge of the second special tribunal, after he was transferred on January 12. And the PP has been absenting since then. He however sent two of his assistant PPs to the court yesterday after some dailies carried the news of his unprecedented boycott.

Several advocates requested him in vain to attend the court. "That court is not for me. I will not attend any hearing in that court," Khayer said to lawyers and The Daily Star yesterday.

"I am ready to hear the cases, but I cannot do it without hearing the prosecution," Judge Rahamat Ullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked about the matter Dhaka Bar Association President Mohammad Ismail said, "Law and justice do not permit such whimsical act. He is certainly obliged to attend the hearings as per order of the judge," Ismail said.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan PP Abdullah Mahmud Hasan said he would ask PP Abul Khayer to attend the hearing today.

"If he does not follow my instructions, I will try to proceed with hearing by making arrangements with the judge or with the authorities concerned," he said.

Dolphins

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and were hunted for use in traditional healing, for the alleged medicinal properties of their flesh.

In addition, the experts said Indian interference with river flows into Bangladesh had increased water salinity.

They were alerted to the salinity problem when they noticed a salt-water dolphin species living in the Sunderbans.

Experts at a recent seminar arranged by the WDCCS and WCS said viable dolphin populations existed in the Sunderbans and the Karnaphuli river system. Their recommendations will be formally presented to the government.

Meanwhile, the IUCN has built watch-towers in Manikganj and Madaripur and is encouraging local people to observe and appreciate dolphins.

Padma Bridge

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Bangladesh through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, headed.

He expressed satisfaction over proper utilisation of Japanese assistance, reforms undertaken by the present government and economic momentum gained under the leadership of Khaleda.

Thanking the governor for his country's support, particularly for constructing the Jamuna Bridge, Khaleda hoped for Japan's cooperation in developing indigenous technology.

She also requested Japan's private entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh particularly in textile and ICT sectors and offered investment incentives.

Khaleda apprised him of success and achievements of her government in a number of sectors including women education and empowerment, poverty alleviation, ICT and agriculture.

She also requested Japan to import more items and goods like jute and jute products, silk, nakshi kantha, ceramics and leather.

The JIBC governor said that Japan will continue its support. He appreciated Khaleda's speech at the international business conference Saturday.

Khaleda yesterday also met the visiting EU trade commissioner, trade ministers of Indonesia, Turkey and Zimbabwe, a delegation of the International Chamber of Commerce led by its global chairman and secretary general and Indonesian ambassador.

Saifur

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never agree with or oppose each other on contentious issues, the increased number would only worsen the chaos.

Saifur shot back: "It's our political culture that needs a change. It's not a problem of numbers. Even if we have 50 members, chaos can be there. To put an end to chaos, we need to improve our [political] culture. We have to change this attitude that we will not go to parliament unless we are elected to office."

The press also asked him whether the government move to increase the number of seats contradicts its plans to cut down on the number of ministries from 38 to 22. The minister said the downsizing of the number of ministries is being done as part of the on-going administrative reforms.

"There is no relationship between the size of the government and parliament. When we formed a parliament of 300 seats, the population was seven crore, now it is 15 crore. Because of the huge population rise, the current number of public representatives is too inadequate to properly address their problems."

Close down PMO

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for quality improvement: taking growth-supportive, poverty reduction-oriented and low-waste programmes.

Comprised of seven members, Perc worked for two years and published two interim and two special reports that detected huge anomalies in government expenditure and suggested measures to cut the waste.

It recommended lowering the number of ministries to 22 from 38 and suggested a set of ways to cut down ministry costs including dropping left parties in Ramadan.

Such parties are contrary to the spirit of the holy month of restraint, it added.

"I'll arrange a meeting between the Perc members and the prime minister soon for fast implementation of the recommendations," the finance minister said.

"I believe it will convince the prime minister and encourage her to implement the findings of the report."

Saifur said a dual-approach would be followed to realise the suggestions: recommendations that can be implemented at the ministry level would be realised through inter-ministerial meetings and big issues would be tackled at the cabinet-level.

"For instance, when the closure of a ministry comes up, the issue of employees should be discussed. It

requires an overall consideration," Saifur explained.

Perc also recommended integration of revenue and development budgets under a mid-term budget structure.

To improve cost management, waste should be controlled in the revenue sector and the last day of monetary disbursement should be May 31 instead of June 30 to that end, the report said.

It identified a raft of problems in the development budget.

Perc observed that projects under the development budget had little relations with government's mid-term development goals and there was a domination of unapproved projects.

As the number of state-owned enterprises decreased, the government should merge similar corporations to save costs.

The government should stay away from forming municipalities in the next five years and focus on fulfilment of basic conditions instead, the report said.

It should focus on collecting municipal taxes and stop grants to the municipalities failing to collect less than 75 percent of the taxes.

Perc reiterated its position on maglev train project, saying it was an untested and highly expensive technology that the nation cannot afford.

AL not going to JS

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Dhanmondi office.

The JS, in which the ruling BNP-led four-party coalition enjoys an overwhelming two-thirds majority, is set to amend some vital provisions of the constitution to raise the number of JS seats from 300 to 450, including 50 reserved for women. Several important bills are expected to be passed in the session too.

"How long will you stay here if all of us hurl abusive words at you?" Hasina asked Ramendu Majumder, who suggested the AL had better join parliament.

"To want to speak for people and to protest misrules of the present government. But the situation is so grave that even the opposition leader was asked to submit notice before delivering speech in the House," Hasina said.

The former prime minister was also critical of the press for what she said was its not publishing reports on 'misdeeds' of Tariq Rahman, eldest son of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. "Nobody dares to run reports or write columns against Tariq Rahman. If it was my son, I am sure every page of the newspapers would have been full of reports against us."

Referring to the closure of Rajshahi University after a gunfight

between two pro-government student fronts, reduction of businessmen in Chittagong and killing of a journalist in Khulna, the opposition leader said people now want a change of government as the present one of the two-year rule is plagued by deteriorating law and order and unabated corruption.

Hasina urged the cultural activists to join hands with the AL in its movement for its 15-point charter of demands. "Free cultural activities will never be possible without true democracy in the country," she noted.

She accused late president Ziaur Rahman of patronising anti-liberation forces and war criminals in the country.

Syed Shamsul Haq, Nasir Uddin Yusuf, Kabari Sarwar, Samudra Gupta, Mamunur Rashid, Golam Qudus, Liakat Ali Lucky, Tarana Halim and Falguni Hamid spoke, among others.

Meanwhile, the AL chief is scheduled to visit Khulna tomorrow.

She will talk to the family of slain journalist Manik Chandra Saha and exchange views with local journalists at Khulna Press Club. Hasina will join a mourning rally at 3:00pm to be held at Shaheed Haidis Park.

Opposition rejects

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shadowing the role played by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

AL lawmakers were not present in the House to listen to the speech but gathered copies. Other opposition parties did join the session as usual.

Briefing newsmen at his Sangsad Bhabhan chamber yesterday evening, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said, "We're rejecting this speech as it has no reflection of peoples' hopes and aspiration and no future guideline for the country. There is not even any hint of the heap of failures of the coalition government."

Hamid said while mentioning Sheikh Mujib's name in his speech

President Iajuddin Ahmed did not address him as 'Bangabandhu'. He added that the president rather distorted the nation's history by according the honour of declaring the Liberation War to late president Ziaur Rahman.

Jatiya Party (Ershad) Presidium Member Golam Mohammad Kader was also critical of the way Zia's name was mentioned and the way all credits for the Liberation War were conferred on him in the speech. Kader said, "It's a pure mixture of falsehood with the truth."

GM Kader noted that the president's speech tried to project many achievements to the credit of the ruling alliance, though many of those developments were accomplished during the previous regime.

Chairman of another Jatiya Party faction Anwar Hossain Monju, MP, shared the AL view, the speech had no reflection of the current political situation and no future guideline.

Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League chief Kader Siddiqui, MP, termed the speech dull and without any new substance. Siddiqui also found the claims of the government's achievements made in the presidential speech in contrast with realities like downsides in law and order and price spiral of essentials.

Manik's killers

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The senior staff correspondent of New Age, Manik -- known for his vigorous writing on crime and against gangs that stalk people in the southwest -- was killed in a bomb attack, 50 yards off Khulna Press Club.

"Manik was not only a journalist but also my friend. He was a brave journalist and social worker. He had no enemy. We are shocked at his death," the ministers said.

The parliamentary body did not discuss law and order, but focussed on the activities of the narcotics department.

"We could not discuss law and order as the issue was not on the agenda," Abdul Mannan, chairman of the committee, told the newsmen.

The Daily Star staff correspondent from Khulna reports: Khulna journalists yesterday submitted memorandums to Deputy Commissioner Aftab Hasan and Additional Police Commissioner Sajjad Hossain, demanding arrest of the killers of Manik.

Both the deputy commissioner and the additional police commissioner assured them of efforts to arrest the killers.

The main opposition Awami League-enforced daylong hartal in the industrial city in protest at the murder passed off, bringing life to a virtual halt.

Security was tightened in and around the city with deployment of Bangladesh Rifles personnel.

3 shot in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals caught a mugger from a gang after they shot a tannery trader at Hazaribagh, while at Subadda in Keraniganj extortionists shot two brothers yesterday.

Tannery trader Zakir Hossain is receiving treatment at Sikder Medical College Hospital, while the mugger, Ratan, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after a mob beating.

Zakir was taking Tk 3 lakh to his house when the muggers waylaid and gave him a hint. But they failed to snatch the sum as locals rushed to the spot and caught the Ratan with a revolver.

A case was filed against Ratan, son of Abdus Sabur of Bhokta in Louhajang, Munisganj, and his three accomplices.

At Keraniganj, the extortionists blasted bombs and opened fire on Monir Hossain, 49, and his brother Ekhlash Uddin, 34, owners of Mayer Doo Saw Mill, when they refused to give them Tk 20,000. They were admitted to the DMCH.

In another incident, ATM Abdul Halim of Malibagh Chowdhurypara found the lock of his room broken when he returned home at 3:30pm yesterday. The burglars stole cash, gold and other valuables said to be worth about Tk 2 lakh from his house.

Clash at SBMCH

4 JCD, BCL men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Kotwali police yesterday held two Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and as many Bangladesh Chhatra League activists of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barisal following clashes between the rival student fronts.

Police arrested Tanvir and Shahinur Alam Sumon of the JCD and Nilanjana Das Pronab and Abu Jafar of the BCL at a picnic at Kakata beach.

They were sent to jail in the afternoon.

On Saturday, supporters of the JCD and BCL ransacked some rooms of their rival groups and injured Sumon, Tanvir, Badal and Mustafiz.

Police were deployed at the SBMCH campus.

Fire guts N'ganj spinning mill

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Fire at a spinning mill gutted cotton and machinery reportedly worth Tk 3 crore and burnt two who included eight injured, at Fatulla in Narayanganj on Saturday.

The fire, believed to be originating from an electric short-circuit, engulfed Neat Cotton Composite Mills at Baraibhag at about 9:30pm, fire brigade officials said.

Labourers tried to control the quick flames with the mill's fire-fighting system. Later firefighters from Mandolpara and Habiganj units joined and tamed it after three hours.

48-hr blockade

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programme on January 6 as their ultimatum for fulfilling the demands ended without any positive response from the government.

Indigenous people, who returned from the refugee camps in Tripura, India after the signing the peace pact of 1997 brought out a huge procession supporting their two-day hartal programme yesterday afternoon in Khagrachhari, our correspondent reported.

They have also announced that if the government does not meet their demand immediately, they will observe hartal for 72 hours from February 7.

Meanwhile, different platforms for Bangalee settlers including Parbatya Bangalee Chhatra Parishad (BCPC), Parbatya Gana Parishad (PGP) and Parbatya Oikya Parishad (POP), have announced resistance programmes. Some leaders of the BNP and Jamaat were seen in a procession of the settlers, our Khagrachhari correspondent added.

The leaders of the Bangalee people reportedly had a meeting yesterday with a high-profile national leader of the ruling BNP regarding their resistance programme.

These organisations of Bangalee settlers in the hill districts have announced similar programmes in Rangamati and Bandarban.

Zia

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On the eve of the anniversary, President Prof Iajuddin Ahmed in a message paid tributes to the memory of late Zia.

In observance of the anniversary, the BNP has drawn up a 10-day programme, beginning today.

The BNP and its different front organisations will hoist party flag atop all offices today, offer feteah and place wreath at the mazar of Zia at 9:30am.

In the afternoon, the BNP arranges a discussion at Mahanagar Natya Mancha and illuminates its party offices in the evening.

BNP Secretary General and IGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has asked leaders and workers of all units to observe the programme with due respect.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy also organises a discussion and cultural programme on its premises at 3:00pm today. Politicians, educationists, cultural activists, journalists and others will participate in the discussion.

The Zia Shishu-Kishore Sangathan places wreath and offer feteah at the mazar of Ziaur Rahman at 9:00am.

Conducive climate

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increase the volume of exports from these countries, Lamynoted.

The press conference was held at the end of his two-day visit to Bangladesh at the office of the EC Delegation in Bangladesh.

Underscoring the need for diversification of export items, the EU trade commissioner observed that Bangladesh's export sector was fragile for being heavily dependent on textiles and readymade garments.

Lamy described regional integration, domestically generated growth, increasing revenue earnings and inflow of foreign direct investment as keys to economic development of a country like Bangladesh.

The EU trade commissioner also laid emphasis on improving the country's image.

Problems relating to perceptions about Bangladesh in the developed world were very crucial and have to be worked out, he said. "We can provide help through market access, but there is competition in the market, which has to be gained through utilising various advantages like a hardworking labour force."

He felt other developed countries like US and Japan also should provide duty- and quota-free access to goods from the LDCs, including Bangladesh.

Lamy declined to make any comments on the political situation in Bangladesh but said, "We often get news of violence from Bangladesh which means political tension is high here."

Lamy had a hectic schedule during his stay in Dhaka. He attended the two-day international business conference organised by the International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh (ICC-B) that

ended yesterday. The EU trade commissioner also held bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan and Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury on the sidelines of the high-profile meet.

On the existing trade between Bangladesh and the EU, the EU trade commissioner informed that the balance of trade was in favour of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh achieved a trade surplus of 2.8 billion euro in the last fiscal year, in which it exported goods worth 3.2 billion euro to EU countries and imported goods worth only 700 million euro from there.

Lamy also thinks there is an urgent necessity for resuming the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations. "We should start the WTO talks as soon as possible." He said the EU would try to raise the Singapore issue and reach a consensus on issues of discord.

He also observed Bangladesh and EU had no difference of opinion on the question of WTO negotiation.

The EU commissioner, however, ruled out the concept of a preserved market for the LDCs in post-quota regime after 2004, saying such a provision did not fit in the WTO arrangements.

Lamy welcomed the recent development of striking a free trade agreement -- Safe -- in the South Asian region. This kind of regional integration will enable the member states to develop significantly, he observed.

Pascal Lamy left Dhaka for New Delhi yesterday afternoon. He will attend a conference of Asian trade ministers in Indonesia Wednesday on the last leg of his visit to the region.

Int'l confce ends

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organised the two-day conference to commemorate 10 years of its presence in Bangladesh.

The conference was attended by representatives from 37 nations including India, China and France but not the United States and was billed as the largest gathering of trade officials after the failed WTO talks in Cancun, Mexico, last year.

With only 11 months to the deadline to conclude Doha Development Round negotiations, the conference also urged the WTO to launch confidence-building measures before going for fresh talks.

The failure of Cancun talks, which fell part in September last year due to the unbinding stance of both the rich and poor countries, has given rise to mistrust and suspicion among the two sides, they said.

The WTO should come up with new negotiation strategy and persuade the two sides into reaching a compromise deal on at least one issue to provide the much-needed breakthrough in the stalled talks.

As rich countries are in advantageous position they should take initiatives first. They may resolve the demands of African cotton farmers and cut subsidy margins on agriculture on their own, which would prompt poor nations to budge from their stance on other trade issues concerning the rich, the speakers said.

WTO Director General Supachai Panitchpakdi hoped that the out-standing issues of trade talks could be resolved before the December 31 deadline.

"We are making ground works for restarting the talks afresh. As trade talks are complex in nature, it will however be a hard task for negotiators to meet the deadline."

The developed and developing countries need to be flexible for the success of talks. The WTO talks also need support of businesspeople and non-governmental organisations which will be most affected by agreements," he said.

The WTO chief said when the next round of talks starts in February, issues of the least developed countries including mobility of natural person of Bangladesh will be placed.

EU Commissioner for Trade Pascal Lamy said the poor countries should not be disappointed at the collapse of Cancun talks as there are enough scope for their demands to be met on mutual agreement in the coming round.

"The Cancun debacle will not help anybody and everyone feels it should start sometime after March or April this year," he said.

"The EU is planning to carry further its reforms in common agriculture policy to pave the way for reducing farm subsidy," he said.

"The EU will be flexible on some issues to help in restarting the WTO talks."

"Let us shoot high and hard for real results by March or April; indeed let's try to get where we should have

been in Cancun," he told delegates Sunday.

"We know the content; there are no surprises out there. It really is a matter of political will, deciding we are going to do it, and getting on with it," Lamy said.

He urged the other rich countries to follow the EU's "everything but arms" policy toward the LDCs. "We want the rich countries offer access [to their markets] at zero duty for 50 percent of their imports from poor countries," he said.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said bilateral and multilateral trade regime should go together. "Bilateral or regional and multilateral trade agreements cannot be alternatives," he said, calling for comprehensive trade talks encompassing all issues and interests of both poor and rich states.

Sri Lankan Minister for Commerce and Consumer Affairs Ravi Karunanayake said multilateral trading system is the best option for poor countries as it can provide equitable benefits.

Indonesian Minister for Industry and Trade Rini M Sumarno Soewandari said rich countries must reduce farm subsidy to unlock the stalled trade talks.

Turkish Minister for Trade Ali Coskun