

Zoellick hopes for framework WTO agreement by end July

AFP, Geneva

US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick said Friday he wanted members of the World Trade Organization to reach a framework agreement on trade liberalization talks by the end of July.

Zoellick told a press conference here that he had backed a proposal by Singapore Trade Minister George Yeo aimed at restarting the talks, which have been blocked ever since WTO negotiations in Cancun, Mexico fell apart in September.

He said he had supported Yeo's suggestion, "that is, trying to set a goal of agreement on the frameworks that we debated in Cancun by late July," adding that such an accord could lead to a meeting in the summer of the general council of the Geneva-based WTO.

Zoellick, who is on a world tour to promote a resumption of the Doha round of trade talks, said he saw "encouraging signs that 2004 may not be a lost year."

The Doha round, launched in late 2001 in the Qatari capital, sought an agreement on reducing or eliminating barriers to world trade by the end of 2004. But momentum has foundered on disputes, notably over the fate of agricultural export subsidies, and there had been fears that in a presidential election year the Bush administration would be disinclined to make concessions.

Discord over government support for agriculture contributed to the collapse of WTO ministerial talks in Cancun, and Zoellick on Friday stressed that "agriculture is absolutely the key."

As he had done at the start of the year in a letter to the 145 other members of the WTO, Zoellick urged countries to set a date for the total elimination of agricultural export subsidies.

"We'd be willing to eliminate them tomorrow," he asserted. "I don't think Europe is."

"To help the EU (European Union) along, the US can agree to eliminate the subsidy element of export credit, which we have offered to do ..."

"But I think it is only reasonable to expect that the EU will have to do this in steps ... and if they can agree that they will eliminate all export subsidies -- but that the timing can be determined as the negotiations go on -- perhaps that gives them room to go forward."

He said the United States was "willing to have very significant

cuts in domestic subsidies, but I need to get Europe and Japan to cut theirs and get closer to our numbers."

Zoellick maintained it was necessary for developing countries, some of whom belong to a loose association known as the Group of 20, to open their markets just as it was essential for access to be improved in the developed world.

"From the discussions at least I've had so far with most of the G20 countries I think there is a recognition of that combination."

Zoellick was to meet EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy in Paris later Friday and was to travel to Costa Rica on Monday for a meeting with the Cairns Group, made up of 17 major agricultural exporters opposed to subsidies.

Farm trade nations to meet in Costa Rica on stalled WTO talks

AFP, Sydney

The 17-nation Cairns Group of agricultural exporters meets in Costa Rica next week to discuss ways to kick-start the stalled Doha round of global trade liberalisation negotiations, Australia said yesterday.

Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile said the three days of talks starting Monday in San Jose come a "crucial time" for rescuing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations.

"Unless there is meaningful progress on agriculture over the next few months, the Doha round will go nowhere in 2004," Vaile said in a statement.

"Everyone will lose if WTO members lose sight of the main game -- genuine, long-term reform and liberalisation", he said in a statement.

WTO members are preparing to resume the so-called Doha round of

multilateral trade negotiations following the failure of a September ministerial conference in Cancun, Mexico, that collapsed largely over the issue of agricultural subsidies in the European Union and the United States.

The Cairns Group, comprising Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay, has been leading the battle to eliminate farm subsidies.

"As a leading voice for agricultural reform since its formation in 1986, the Cairns Group has a central role to play in getting the agricultural negotiations back on track to deliver a strong outcome that meets the ambitious reform objectives set out in the Doha Declaration which launched WTO negotiations in 2001," Vaile said.



PHOTO: ISLAMI BANK
Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited Chairman Shah Abdul Hannan and Vice-chairman Nazir Ahmed are seen with the participants of an orientation programme on 'Internal Control and Compliance' organised by the Audit and Inspection division of the bank in Dhaka on Wednesday.



PHOTO: NCC BANK
National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited Managing Director M Aminuzzaman speaks at the inaugural session of a second phase training on money laundering organised for the bank's officers in Dhaka on Tuesday. Kazi Md Shafiqur Rahman, deputy managing director, and Md Omar Chowdhury, director (training) were also present.

EU sees chance for farm trade progress

REUTERS, Washington

EU Farm Commissioner Franz Fischler Thursday offered a glimmer of hope for stalled farm trade talks and said there was a chance rich and poor countries could strike a framework agreement on agriculture by summer's end.

World Trade Organisation talks have been bogged down since last September, when trade ministers meeting in Cancun, Mexico, failed to agree on an overall blueprint for global trade negotiations that are scheduled to wrap up by the end of this year.

New rules to further open global agriculture trade by reducing countries' domestic and export farm subsidies and lowering import barriers are a central issue in the global negotiations.

Fischler, speaking to the European Institute in Washington, noted that the US presidential election in November and the arrival of a new set of EU commissioners in

October left only a few more months as "a period where we can make progress" this year.

"The agriculture sector is not so far from agreement" on an overall blueprint, Fischler said. He said he was "not totally pessimistic" over the talks.

Fischler was spending Thursday and Friday in Washington, meeting with US Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, World Bank officials and delivering a speech to an Agriculture Department conference.

US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in recent weeks has been trying to jump-start the lagging WTO "Doha Round" trade negotiations. American and European officials were in African this week trying to narrow differences with poorer countries.

The EU is under intense pressure to end export subsidies for agricultural goods, which are seen as hurting farmers in developing countries.

Japan, S Korea to hold FTA talks next week

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and South Korea will hold their second round of talks for a free trade agreement in Tokyo next week, the Foreign Ministry said Friday.

The three-day meeting will start on Monday following their first round of negotiations in Seoul in December, when they agreed to hold talks every two months.

The South Korean delegation will be headed by Deputy Minister for Trade Kim Hyun-Jong, while the Japanese side will be led by Ichiro Fujisaki, deputy foreign minister for economic affairs, the ministry said.

During the meeting, the two countries are to hold sub-committee

meetings to discuss trade in goods, trade barriers, services and investment, the ministry said.

Japan has agreed with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines to start talks on bilateral free trade pacts and its first such deal, with Singapore, took effect in November in 2002.

Japan had been reluctant to conclude bilateral trade agreements due to its hard line over protection of farm products, in particular rice, but it has shifted its position following deadlock in World Trade Organisation talks and China's active overtures to neighbour countries in the region.



PHOTO: MERCANTILE BANK
Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Muhammed A (Rume) Ali, Mercantile Bank Limited Chief Advisor Lutfar Rahman Sarkar, Managing Director M Taheruddin, Deputy Managing Director M Nurul Islam, and Senior Executive Vice President AKM Shahidul Haque along with the branch managers and divisional heads of the bank pose at the inaugural session of a workshop on 'Managing Core Risks in Banking' organised by the bank recently in Dhaka.

3G handsets Nokia confirms talks with NTT DoCoMo

AFP, Helsinki

Nokia, the world's leading mobile phone maker, confirmed on Friday reports in the Japanese press that it was in talks on selling next-generation 3G phones to the country's telephone giant NTT DoCoMo.

"I cannot confirm any commercial agreement yet ... but we are discussing bringing Nokia's 3G terminals to the Japanese market (with DoCoMo)," Kari Tuutti, spokesman for Nokia mobile phones, told AFP's financial news subsidiary AFX News.

Earlier Friday the Japanese daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun had reported that NTT DoCoMo hoped to offer low-price 3G handsets made by Nokia.

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