

Trade talks stumble ahead in time-honoured fashion

AFP, Geneva

As 147 nations grappled with agriculture and struggled to move ahead with global trade talks at the WTO Wednesday, many in the trading community have the feeling they have seen or heard it all - or much of it - before.

"The same major trading countries are stumbling over the same issues," said John Weekes, a former negotiator for Canada at the World Trade Organisation.

Even if the Geneva meeting is successful, few believe that the Doha round of trade negotiations, launched in the Qatar capital in 2001, will be completed by the due date of the end of the year.

But that would be par for the course.

Beneath the doom-laden headlines, attempts to reform and broaden global rules for free trade through rounds of negotiations from Tokyo to Torquay have rarely been on schedules since 1947.

The Uruguay Round of trade talks, which set up the World Trade Organisation in 1995, took seven-and-a-half years to complete from their launch in 1986, twice as much as originally scheduled.

"Whether they did the deal or did not during meetings, they managed to carry on. No round of trade nego-

tiations has been abandoned," a trade source told AFP.

Agriculture was a key element in the Uruguay Round. Although it is also at the heart of the intermediate step negotiators are trying to achieve by Friday in Geneva, they are largely dealing with leftovers that countries failed to agree on about two decades ago.

"I think there has been progress in agriculture in the sense that it is now on the agenda," said Jean-Pierre Lehmann, an international economic analyst at the IMD business school.

"The Japanese, the Europeans, the Americans, the Norwegians, the Swiss and so on have always hoped that somehow agriculture would go away. Well, it's not going to go away," he added, referring to wealthy subsidising nations.

For about 30 years, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO's predecessor, focused primarily on piling down barriers for industrial trade because it was dominated by the big economic powers.

"Agriculture is one of the most contentious issues in the trading system, because every country, large or small, rich or poor, has a stake in it," the trade source said.

The architects of the international financial and trade system

initiated at Bretton Woods in 1944 had included agriculture in their planning, according to Weekes.

The system was meant to include a trade organisation alongside the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), to ward off the protectionism that had deepened the Great Depression of the 1930s.

It only spawned the WTO, and a flawed framework for agricultural trade, decades later.

"The barriers it left were high: heavy use of export subsidies, enormous amounts of domestic support plus outrageously high tariffs," Weekes, now a senior policy advisor with law firm Sidley Austin, told AFP.

However, the negotiators trying to dismantle those barriers are confronted with a different environment to their predecessors. WTO rules are written into their laws and the stakes are higher.

The collapse of the Iron Curtain also removed the political trade-offs, while the push for new markets has bred emerging economic powers such as Brazil, China and India, and developing countries want their share.

"I don't recall that in the Uruguay Round, certainly not the Tokyo Round (1970s), that the G-90 (developing countries) took as active a role in the negotiations," Weekes said.

Unions seek emergency talks on textile trade

REUTERS, Geneva

Global labour unions called yesterday for the quick creation of an international forum to head off "jobs carnage" when barriers to open trade in textiles and clothing are lifted next year.

The call reflected mounting concern in both rich and poor countries that after the change trading giant China will grab most of the world market in the sector, driving millions of workers in other nations out of their jobs.

"The international community should create an emergency clothing and textile forum... to put in place a plan of action to head off the crises that will surely emerge," a statement quoting a key union leader in the sector said.

"Who is going to explain to 40 million workers, mostly women in desperately poor countries such as Bangladesh and Mauritius that the jobs carnage in those sectors that will come... is good for them?" asked another leader, according to the statement.

The two, John Evans and Neil Kearney of the two major world groupings of textile and clothing workers, were referring to the winding up on January 1, 2005, of a pact under which countries were allowed to protect national producers in the sector.

Over the past three decades, trade in textiles and clothing has been regulated by the pact, the Multifibre Agreement (MFA) which allows countries to set quotas for imports.

From next year, the sector will come under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules which abolish the quotas and establish tariffs - which cannot be set arbitrarily - as the only instrument to limit imports.

The statement was issued in Geneva by the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the ICFTU, as negotiators at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) struggled to reach a deal opening the way to a new global trade pact.

The WTO has agreed to hold a meeting on textiles and clothing with producer countries and firms on August 3.



Tanveer Madar, managing director of Bangladesh Express Company Limited, licensee of Federal Express Corporation in Bangladesh, gives away a crest to a sales executive at the "Annual Sales Conference-FY 05" of the company held in Dhaka recently. Managers and sales executives of the company were awarded at the function for their performances in the previous year.



Chain superstore Agora, a venture of Rahimafrooz Group, launched a promotional campaign "Value Week" on Monday at both of its outlets in Dhanmondi and Gulshan. Customers will get free items as gift with every purchase during the campaign which will continue until August 6.



The half-yearly conference of the branch-in-charges and executives of Global Insurance Limited was held in Dhaka recently. Among others, Mubashar Hussain, founder chairman of the company, ABM Nurul Haq, managing director, and directors were present at the conference.

SHIPPING

Chittagong Port

Table with columns: Berthing No., Name of vessels, Cargo, L port call, Local agent, Dof arrival, Leaving, Import disch.

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Table with columns: Name of vessels, Date of arrival, L port call, Local agent, Type of cargo, Loading ports.

Table with columns: Tanker due, Name of vessels, Cargo, Last port call, Date of arrival.

Table with columns: Vessels at Kutubdia, Name of vessels, Cargo, Last port call, Date of arrival.

Table with columns: Vessels awaiting employment / instruction, Name of vessels, Cargo, Last port call, Date of arrival.

Table with columns: Vessels not entering, Name of vessels, Cargo, Last port call, Date of arrival.

CURRENCY

Following is Wednesday's (July 28, 2004) forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank

Table with columns: Sell, Buy, Currency, TT Clean, OD Sight Doc, OD Transfer.

Table with columns: Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar, Indian rupee, Pak rupee, Lankan rupee, Thai baht, NZ dollar, Malaysian ringgit.

STOCK

TODAY'S TRADED ISSUES July 28, 2004

Large table listing traded issues with columns: Company, FV/MIL (Tk./No.), Price, Change, Turnover, Share, DSE, CSE, Financial Performance.

Day's Market - July 28, 2004

Table with columns: Indicators, DSE, CSE, 7 days DSE 20 Index, DSE: Last 30 Days Price Index and Turnover, CSE: Last 30 Days Price Index and Turnover.

Non Traded Issues

Table with columns: Company, FV/MIL (Tk./No.), Last Closing Price, Last Trading Day, Last Closing Price, Last Trading Day, Last Closing Price, Last Trading Day, Last Closing Price, Last Trading Day, Last Closing Price, Last Trading Day.

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