

WTO faces daunting task to deliver on trade promises

REUTERS, Geneva

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), with its credibility restored and the Doha Round back on track, still faces a huge task to deliver on promises of freer global trade, officials said Sunday.

A last-ditch deal between the WTO's 147 members, setting out key guidelines for more work, prevented a potentially fatal failure for the round with its offer of deep cuts in rich power farm subsidies and more open markets to boost world growth.

"The multilateral trading system is alive after a period of doubt," said European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, whose pledge to eliminate the bloc's hugely controversial farm

export subsidies helped pave the way to the pact.

The Doha Round, launched in late 2001 with the world still reeling from the suicide plane attacks in the United States, aims to lower barriers to commerce across the global economy.

Its conclusion, the World Bank says, could lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and inject billions of dollars into a still fragile international economy.

But the round was derailed 10 months ago when bitter rows between rich and poor nations, particularly over the farmer's lavish farm subsidies, triggered the collapse of a ministerial conference in Cancun, Mexico, raising fears negotiations would never resume.

In Geneva, the WTO did what it failed to do in Mexico.

"I said in Cancun it (the multilateral system) was in intensive care ... today not only is it out of hospital, it is up and running," Lamy told reporters.

The round was due to conclude by the end of 2004, although few ever took that deadline seriously. But after the latest accord, Lamy said it could be done by the time ministers meet again in December, 2005, in Hong Kong.

But while analysts and business organisations applauded the Geneva deal, which came only after five days of almost round-the-clock wrangling, they warned that the framework accord was short on detail and put off many of the hardest decisions.

"It is clear from the ambiguity ... that important and difficult decisions have been deferred," the National Foreign Trade Council, a US business lobby, said in a statement.

British based advocacy group Oxfam, which campaigns on behalf of poor nations, was equally cautious about how far it went towards achieving the round's supposed main goal of promoting development.

"We are three years into negotiations, yet the results of this meeting fall far short of what is needed to reform world trade rules so that they work for the poor," said Celine Charveriat, head of its Geneva office.



Shahed Noman, managing director of Dhaka Bank Limited, and RV Ramanujam, chief executive of Asian Paints (Bangladesh) Limited, exchange documents after signing a loan agreement for financing Asian Paints Colorworld dealers.



State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain unveils the cover of a book on maintenance of CNG stations at a seminar on "Global trends in CNG & benefits to Bangladesh" organised by Sulzer Corporation recently in Dhaka as Anthony Zwemmer, a Swiss expert on CNG, Subodh S Nadkarni, managing director and CEO of Sulzer India Ltd, Abhay Gulvani, general manager of Sulzer India, and Sabbir Hassan, managing director of Mashiur Rahman & Co Ltd, local sales representative of Sulzer India, look on.

HSBC pretax profit up 53pc

AFP, Hong Kong

Global banking giant HSBC Holdings announced Monday a 53 percent surge in interim earnings, beating analysts expectations, and confirmed that it was planning a major push into mainland China's banking industry.

The bank, headquartered in London and now with extensive business interests across the globe, said in a statement that it had reached agreement on taking a 19.9 percent stake in Bank of Communications, the fifth ranked state bank in China.

"Those discussions have gone well and are at a very advanced stage. We have reached agreement in principle on the terms of our investment," Group Chairman John Bond told reporters at a press conference in Hong Kong.

He said an announcement will be made shortly on terms of the deal. Although Bond declined to be drawn on further details or the amount of the agreement, reports have put the figure at around 2 billion US dollars.

Asia told to up security, investment as shipping trade grows sharply

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asia's shipping trade is expected to grow sharply led by China and India, but the region must enhance security and invest some 27 billion dollars to build over 430 new container berths by 2011 to meet rising demand, shippers and analysts said Monday.

China's booming economy and its emergence as the world's second top container market will boost intra-regional trade, rather than threaten the growth of other Asian ports, they said at a two-day maritime conference here.

The Malaysian Maritime Institute president Jaffar Lamri said Asia remained the dominant player in the global shipping industry, with its container trade projected to grow at an annual average rate of seven percent between 2000 and 2007.

Eleven Asian ports are already among the world's top 20 ports, and contributed 46 percent of the world's total container boxes of 20-foot equivalent-units (TEUs) throughput, he said.

By 2011, he said Asia was expected to handle 206.7 million TEUs, including 64 million in transshipment and this

required large port investments to cope with the growth.

"Over 430 new container berths are required in Asia-Pacific region to handle container traffic in 2011, at an estimated cost of 27 billion dollars," Jaffar told the forum.

He said China was emerging as the world's second largest container market in line with its economic boom and growing trade with the United States, while India was a "sleeping Bengal tiger" that would be a major player if it awakens.

"China and India are leading the industry but I think smaller countries are developing their own niche markets. I don't think China's growth will be a threat to the region. Volume is growing and the industry is big enough for everybody," he said, adding that Indonesia and Thailand have strong growth potential.

Worldwide, he said container traffic was projected to grow from 87.1 million TEUs last year to 94.4 million this year and to 104 million in 2005. By 2010, it is expected to hit 400-460 million TEUs and 510-610 million in 2015.

CURRENCY

Following is Monday's (August 2, 2004) forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank					
Sell		Currency	Buy		
TT/OD	BC		TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
60.4500	60.5000	USD	58.7550	58.5824	58.5123
73.6704	73.7314	EUR	70.1652	69.9591	69.8754
110.8774	110.9691	GBP	106.3289	106.0166	105.8897
43.1794	43.2152	AUD	40.5292	40.4102	40.3618
0.5518	0.5523	JPY	0.5254	0.5239	0.5233
48.0257	48.655	CHF	45.7166	45.5823	45.5278
8.2267	8.2335	SEK	7.4914	7.4694	7.4604
45.9137	45.9517	CAD	43.8503	43.7215	43.6692
7.7578	7.7642	HKD	7.5253	7.5032	7.4942
35.3798	35.4091	SGD	34.0885	33.9884	33.9477
16.5935	16.6072	AED	15.8673	15.8207	15.8018
16.2478	16.2613	SAR	15.5437	15.4980	15.4794
10.2194	10.2279	DKK	9.1659	9.1389	9.1280
205.7382	206.9084	KWD	192.2108	191.6462	191.4169
Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar					
Indian rupee	Pak rupee	Lankan rupee	Thai bath	Nor kronner	NZ dollar
46.38	57.48	103.6	41.280	7.9900	0.6878
Local Interbank FX Trading			Local Money Market		
Local interbank market was active. US dollar was steady against Bangladeshi taka.			Money market was active. Call money rate rose slightly and ranged between 3.75 and 4.25 percent against 3.00 and 4.50 per cent previously.		



The 8th annual general meeting of Mercantile Insurance Co Ltd was held on Thursday in Dhaka with company chairman Abdul Haque in the chair.



BH Haroon, managing director of Ben-Lub (Pte) Ltd, presides over a business meeting between Castrol Dubai and Ben-Lub, sole distributor of Castrol Lubricants in Bangladesh, in Dhaka recently. Among others, Omer Dorman, director, Lubricants, Asad Ayub, regional manager, and Wasim Uddin JJ, area manager of Castrol Dubai, and Nurul Amin, general manager of Ben-Lub, Habibur Rahman Chowdhury, manager, Marketing, and Sumon Brattacharjee, assistant manager, Sales, were present.



Akhtar Hussain, chairman and managing director of Rangs Group of Companies, inaugurates a new showroom of Sony-Rangs in Khulna on Thursday.

STOCK