

Doha agenda and Bangladesh

C. K. HYDER

THE recent Mini Ministerial Meeting on WTO issues held in Paris on the 3rd and 4th May, 2005, which was attended by the Ministers of over 30 countries, has provided hopes for advancement of the Doha Development Agenda. Thanks to the improved proposal of the European Union (EU), there was an agreement in the Paris meeting on the formula for conversion of ad valorem duties. Disagreement on this formula created deadlock in negotiations on agriculture as well as in other areas. The agreement on the formula has provided new hopes for the future and more particularly, for the Doha round. It will be recalled that the Doha round was being threatened mainly due to the differences between the EU and some farm product exporting countries. The EU's proposal marked significant change in its position for which the US Trade Representative termed the EU's new formula as "attractive" and also remarked that with the agreement on trade on agricultural products will help jump-start to restore the atmosphere of trade negotiations. The EU thus provided an opportunity to the Doha round to come back on track and end a period of deadlock. The Doha Ministerial Declaration mandated negotiations on the following issues:

Agriculture; Service; Non-Agricultural Market Access; Dispute Settlement Understanding; WTO Rules (Antidumping, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures including Fisheries Subsidies and Regional Trading); Trade and Environment (Relationship between MEAs and WTO; procedures for exchange of information between MEA Secretariats and relevant WTO Committees and the criteria for the granting of observer status); and market access on environmental goods and services; and TRIPS (system of notification and registration of GIs for wines and spirits).

During the Doha Ministerial Conference, there was no decision as to whether there would be negotiations on Singapore Issues (Trade and Competition Policy, Trade and Investment, Transparency in Government Procurement and Trade Facilitation). Although Doha Ministerial Declaration fixed a time frame for conclusion of negotiations, no agreement was reached on any of the issues before July 2004. The Cancun Ministerial Conference held in 2003 during the mid-term review could not also reach consensus. It is only in July 2004, in a special meeting of the General Council, the WTO Members reached an agreement to make a breakthrough in the negotiation process and agreed on a road map on how to proceed with negotiating mandate. The Decision of the General Council, which is widely known as "July Package" basically drew a road map to eliminate export subsidy in agriculture, reduce domestic support and market access barrier in agriculture and initiate negotiations in trade facilitation dropping other three issues: Trade and Competition Policy, Trade and Investment, Transparency in Government Procurement from the Doha Development Agenda. There was as such no agreement on other negotiating agenda in the July Package.

Development since July 2004

Since the adoption of the July Package, negotiations continued to be held on the agenda. In agriculture, a number of issues, such as final date of elimination of export duty and its rate of reduction, formula for reduction of tariff, formula for reduction of

their WTO members in favour of the LDCs, which can be achieved through: Duty-free and quota-free access to all products of the LDCs; Incorporating duty-free and quota-free access to be provided in favour of the LDCs in the schedule of commitments in order to make them secured and predictable; Making the Rules of origin applicable for the duty-free and quota-free access realistic, simple and flexible to match the industrial capacity of the LDCs in order to make them meaningful; Exempting the LDCs' exports from antidumping, countervailing and safeguard measures.

Free access to movement of United States have provided duty free access to all products of LDCs on autonomous basis. Such facilities have also been improved through relaxation of rules of origin. However, it is observed that no country is willing to provide such access through a binding commitment. There was no commitment in the WTO on non-application of antidumping, countervailing and safeguard measures. In the negotiations on trade in service no countries expressed their willingness to provide free access to service providers especially semi-skilled and unskilled labour.

Regarding the flexibility in under-

on agriculture subsidy has direct bearing on our agriculture sector, the largest employer of the country's labour force.

As of now, Bangladesh bound its tariffs on agriculture products at 200% barring 13 and some other products such as wheat, cheese, milk powder, black tea, rice etc. which are bound at 15 percent, 30 percent, 45 percent and 50 percent. In non-agriculture sector Bangladesh made commitment to reduce its tariffs only on 146 products, which cover only 3 percent of total non-agricultural products. As of now, Bangladesh is allowed to provide domestic support to Agriculture upto 10 percent of value of total agricultural products and export subsidy on non-agricultural products. Bangladesh had to eliminate quantitative restrictions on all products including textiles under an obligation of the WTO. In service sector, Bangladesh made commitment in two sectors: five star hotels and telecommunication service. Bangladesh will have to provide intellectual property right protection by 1 January 2006 for all products except pharmaceuticals.

Given the increasing importance of the external sector and sensitivity of WTO rules on Domestic Policy options, it is essential that Bangladesh actively participates in the Doha Development Agenda. In the run up to Hong Kong Ministerial Conference, it is essential that Bangladesh for its own agenda and in the interests of other LDCs, consider taking the following positions as well as undertake some visible activities to better reflect its position in the negotiations:

- Bangladesh should ask for maintenance of flexibility in domestic support so as to support the agriculture sector.
- In the negotiations on market access for non-agriculture products, Bangladesh should continue to pursue for duty-free access targeting at the market of the United States, the single largest export market of Bangladeshi products.
- For Trade in Services, Bangladesh should continue to pursue for free access of service providers especially of semi-skilled labour;
- The domestic service sector should be fully assessed in order to undertake commitments, in service. In this connection, importance should be given to the service sector, which would bring benefit to the country's economy.
- Similarly, the existing trade facilitation measures should be assessed and the trade facilitation identified. At the same time, the level of commitments should be assessed so that it is in a position to undertake.
- Bangladesh should identify the proposals, which could be considered as remedy to erosion of margin of preferences.

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For Bangladesh, the performance of the external sector is increasingly becoming more important, for which it is necessary to carefully observe changes in international trading system. Changes in international trading system especially in the WTO have direct bearing on the country's domestic policy.



WTO meeting venues most often marked by protests

domestic support etc. are to be settled. However, until May 2005 discussions were held only on the approaches towards conversion of non-ad valorem duties to ad valorem duties. It was agreed in the July package that the LDCs would not be required to make any reduction commitment.

As of May 2005, the total number of initial offers presented is 52 representing 74 members. Some 40 offers remain outstanding not including the least developed countries. Bangladesh has not submitted either any request or any offer list.

The July Package recognizes the importance of adoption of a formula approach in Market Access for Non-Agricultural Products (NAMA). There was an agreement that all non-ad valorem duties would be converted into ad valorem duties. It was also agreed that the LDCs would not be required to participate

ments of Doha Development Agenda are not progressing as per expectation considering the fact that there was an agreement to conclude negotiations by December 2006. It is to be mentioned that there is no progress in discussion on agenda pursued by the developing and least developed countries such as special and differential treatment, and implementation issues.

The next WTO Ministerial meeting is scheduled to be held in December, 2005 in Hong Kong. There is thus an urgency to reach consensus on some elements of Doha Development Agenda. The LDCs led by Bangladesh, should play a facilitating role in this regard.

It will be recalled that in the of negotiations on Doha Development Agenda, the LDCs took a proactive role on the following:

Securing, meaningful and vote on predictable market access by the

natural persons, specially unskilled and semi-skilled service providers, through elimination of all sorts of barriers to movement of natural person;

Allowing Flexibility to the LDCs in undertaking commitments and obligations in order to permit them to adopt policy to meet the development needs;

Technical assistance, including through Integrated Framework, targeted at: Development and diversification of production and export base of the LDCs; Addressing the supply side constraints; Compliance by LDCs to the SPS and TBT requirements of the exporting countries; and Trade policy capacity building.

Offsetting the negative effect due to liberalization measures to be undertaken by the WTO members.

As of May 2005, most of the developed countries except the

taking commitments and obligations, it is observed that in most of the cases, WTO Members are agreeable to provide such flexibility to the LDCs. For example, it was agreed that the LDCs would not be required to make any reduction commitment both in agriculture and NAMA. In service sector, the LDCs would be required to undertake commitment only for fewer sectors and types of transactions, which will be progressive in nature in line with their development situation. However, it is noteworthy that all LDCs have liberalized their trade in goods and service beyond their commitments in the WTO.

Regarding the technical assistance, it is observed that most of the technical assistances, which are channeled through WTO technical assistance fund as well as multilateral, regional and bilateral donor agencies, are basically directed towards human resource capacity building in trade policy issues. Initiatives taken for comprehensive technical assistance through Integrated Framework (IF) did not work well. Although there is a commitment from WTO Members to provide technical assistance for diversification and strengthening the production and export base of the LDCs, TA in this direction is negligible. Regarding the measures for offsetting the negative effect of liberalisation programme, such as erosion of margin of preference due to tariff cuts, no specific proposal has been submitted to the WTO.

Bangladesh's perspective in WTO negotiations

For Bangladesh, the performance of the external sector is increasingly becoming more important, for which it is necessary to carefully observe changes in international trading system. Changes in international trading system especially in the WTO have direct bearing on the country's domestic policy. For example, any decision on tariff reduction if applied for all countries, will have direct impact on revenue collected from import duty and domestic industry and any decision

Let democracy work

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

IF democracy means the citizens of a democratic country are free to do anything and everything they like then it would be the greatest political folly on the part of the citizens as well as their leaders. Because it would then turn the country into a jungle of ferocious fellows. That is why some wise guy had said: "Your liberty or right ends where my nose begins." There cannot be a more simpler and down-to-earth definition of our much-loved rights.

Of course, the most classical definition of democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. It is the people who are suppressed to occupy the centre stage. But what we see today is just the opposite. Today everything is done in the name of democracy for establishing people's rights or basic human rights. But to fight for establishing democratic rights one is not entitled to adopt undemocratic means. It does not mean that when there is a 'hartal' call by a party, its activists would go round to 'teach lessons' to the 'disobedient' venturing to go round with their work, disregarding the hartal call.

Historic exception

However, the recently held CCC Mayoral election of Mr ABM Mohiuddin for a consecutive third term, a glorious hat-trick for him, was wonderfully a historic exception. A peaceful and fair election could be held as the people occupied the centre-stage to run the show and win that they wanted, instead of leaving it solely in the hands of so-called leaders who talk much but agitate more. Mr Mohiuddin, although himself a devoted AL leader, had wisely decided not to fight from his party platform, rather he preferred a neutral citizens' committee as his platform where cross-section of people could assemble without any hesitation. That was the golden key for Mr Mohiuddin's victory. This platform without any political label, coupled with the sincere work done by the security forces, made the sailing smooth. It was rather unimaginable in a country like Bangladesh where political leaders,

We shouldn't forget the old adage that "any Jack ass can kick a barn down, but it needs a carpenter to build it." We should look for an expert carpenter or carpenters to rebuild the broken 'barn' of our democracy. For that we need immediate change of present old and hackneyed leadership. Let the new generation throw up new leadership with broad new ideas to put the derailed democracy on the right track.

particularly of the two major parties, always had kept the pot boiling to serve their purpose and strategy.

But can the Chittagong success be emulated in the rest of Bangladesh in the next general election? Only time will prove that. In undivided India, a great Indian politician had once said that "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow." Can we change this great saying a little bit (with all apology the soul of Gokhale) and say, "What Chittagong thinks today, Bangladesh thinks tomorrow"? A great expectation, no doubt!

Who's fooling whom?

Bangladesh had achieved independence in 1971 from the colonial rule of Pakistan, after making supreme sacrifices in millions of lives and enormous property, being inspired by the right of self-determination of establish our identity in the comity of nations. We crossed the bridge with great hardship but that bridge of faith, devotion and commitment seems to have broken down leaving us in the lurch. Much water had flown down the Ganges since we had achieved independence and became a member of the world body. But have the things moved forward since then? Have we learnt to evaluate the price of democracy in the true sense of the term? It needs a lot of heart-searching and stock-taking to find out 'who is fooling whom'.

Since the fall of one-man rule of Gen. Ershad, who it must be admitted, was successful in, giving some semblance of stability and discipline, we have the experience of enjoying democratic rule beginning in 1991. The next being in 1996 and the third in 2001, which is now on its last leg. Of these, the first government was led by BNP 1991-'96, the second from 1996-2001 by Awami League and the third and incumbent



CCC Mayoral election: Democracy started to work

again by BNP -- all not much satisfaction of the people. And if the upcoming general election to be held in 2006, becomes a nasty game of 'black money' and 'muscle power' to throttle our nascent democracy, then the future of this country and its democratic process is bound to face the worst situation in its history. To quote from Munir Report, prepared by Justice Munir, on the disturbances in the Pakistan Punjab in the fifties: "If democracy means subordination of law and order to political ends, then Allah knoweth the best..." This is a great lamentation by a judge! We agree that Allah "knoweth the best", but the people should also realise, even if late in the day, as to whose game they had been playing as a pawn in their hands, for the ruination of the country and that also in the name of democracy and human rights. Chittagong should open our eyes to read the writings on the wall to foresee the future shape of our

present day politics that thrives on spreading and counter spreading of hate and violence against one another.

Victim of partisan politics

In fact, we have been suffering from a 'desperate disease', making hatred against each other 'the capital' of our politics. Perhaps, that is why we need a 'desperate remedy' to save our country and nascent democracy from ruination. As Editor Mahfuz Anam, in a special commentary (D.S. 14th Anniversary Special, 14 January, 05) had pointed out that "our democracy appears usurped by narrow partisan politics and the 'winner-take all mentality' of election victors is turning the mandate to govern into licence to oppress the opposition." He hit the right chord when he said that "both BNP and Awami League are guilty of sowing the seeds of public suspicion in the electoral process."

Might is right?

As part of our 'desperate remedy' the desperate political disease, the first thing that we would have to do is to vow to give up or totally abandon the habit of posing ourselves as 'omniscient', leaving others in the cold as 'fools.' Hence we must try to learn 'ABC' of democracy from our neighbouring countries, like India, as to how they run their democratic government and how they peacefully change their government through periodic elections, without staging violent demonstrations and burning private and public vehicles and destroying public and private property. We will have to give up the policy of "might is right" and politely accept the people's verdict, as they did in the recent election in Great Britain. It also conveys a big lesson for us.

Can't we follow the democratic norm and form set by the leaders of both the Labour and Conservative Parties? Look, how the leader of the

defeated Conservative Party, Mr. Howard, accepted gracefully the defeat of his party and congratulated Tony Blair for his party's victory. And not only that, Howard also announced his resignation from party leadership, recognising his failure to lead his party to victory. This is indeed a bright example of what true democracy means. Can any of our defeated leaders or party members such an example? Is it possible in our country where leaders carry 'democracy' in their pockets to use in 'emergency' cases?

Where from here?

So the most burning and urgent question is: where from here we go? As a Welsh proverb says "he who would be a leader must be a bridge." Do our present day top leaders serve as 'bridge' for taking the people to the destination of a welfare state? Or, rather they try utmost to break each other's 'bridge' to sink the nation in the sea of chaos and destruction? Enough is enough. Time has come to put a full stop to unbridled 'mobocracy' that rules the roost. During the last several years the country had witnessed enough of horrific scenes of destruction, vandalism, killing, looting and arson. A grand show of black money and muscle power in the name of poor democracy! But now no more.

Conclusion

We shouldn't forget the old adage that "any Jack ass can kick a barn down, but it needs a carpenter to build it." We should look for an expert carpenter or carpenters to rebuild the broken 'barn' of our democracy. For that we need immediate change of present old and hackneyed leadership. Let the new generation throw up new leadership with broad new ideas to put the derailed democracy on the right track. Only new 'carpenters' can build a new 'barn' for the protection and blooming of our nascent democracy from further attacks of any mischievous 'Jack ass', roaming around with wrong and destructive ideas.

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The 'pro-cure' movement

JONATHAN ALTER

AS a cancer survivor with an adult-stem-cell transplant under my belt, I'm not exactly neutral on the issue of embryonic stem-cell research. It may end up being the best chance to save my life. But this column is not about my life or even the lives of millions of others who could be cured of everything from cancer to Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. It's about the political life of this country.

My perspective could be skewed (all politics is local), but I have a gut feeling that President Bush is headed for a serious bruising on this issue, as are at least some of the 180 Republicans and 14 Democrats who voted last week against the stem-cell-research bill that passed the House. These members may look back ruefully on this vote as one that helped get them tossed out of office. After all, every American who has a relative with one of these diseases means nearly every American is beginning to understand the issue in a new way: it's "pro-cure" versus "anti-cure," with the anti-stem-cell folks in danger of being swept into the medical waste bin of history.

One of the things that keeps politics fascinating is that it's always mutating. In 2004, stem-cell research began as a peripheral issue, with almost all Republicans supporting Bush's 2001 compromise (even as the scientific "facts" he cited fell apart) and most Democrats believing it was too morally charged to dwell on. After Ron Reagan's fine speech at the Democratic convention and his mother Nancy's outspoken support for research, the issue moved a few notches higher on the agenda and swung some votes to the Democrats.

Now the brilliant scientific breakthrough in South Korea is further ripening the debate. Last year Bush and his surrogates could plausibly argue that this was all theoretical because any stem-cell cures were decades down the road. Research is always iffy, but today we can reasonably hope that saving lives is much closer. Will the United States be part of the most exciting medical research of our time? With global competitors poised to eat our lunch, a few private and state-funded efforts won't be enough. "You can't do research with your feet bound and one hand tied behind your back," says Jerome Groopman, a professor at Harvard Medical School.

Bioethical Harvard Leon Kass of the University of Chicago conned Bush into seeing the issue as morally complex, but the rest of the world understands that it's simple enough to produce cloning (to create Frankensteins, no; embryonic-stem-cell research (to cure diseases), yes. (The phrase "therapeutic cloning" should be retired.) Enshrining this basic distinction in law is a better bulwark against the "slippery slope" problem than hair-splitting limitations. Most nations understand this. Only Bush bitter-enders and the Pope are in the perverse position of valuing the life of an ailing human being less than that of a tiny clump of cells no bigger than the period at the end of this sentence.

The stem-cell debate has been linked to abortion, as if depriving science of the use of these cells somehow extends "the culture of life." But here the "pro-life" position should argue for therapeutic research. Under Bush's stem-cell policy, 400,000 surplus blastocysts at fertility clinics are eventually thrown in the trash instead of a few thousand being used to enhance life. To be intellectually coherent, Bush would have to shut down all in vitro clinics, depriving millions of infertile couples of the chance for a child. Fat chance.

Most Americans still don't know all these details, but they're beginning to understand that religious extremists are hijacking the political system and robbing us of our essential national character faith in the future. House GOP leaders were annoyed recently when the Republican Main Street Partnership, a moderate group, conducted polls showing support for stem-cell research even in very conservative districts.

The next battle is in the Senate, where Sen. Sam Brownback now says he will filibuster the stem-cell bill. This will split the GOP with stem-cell supporter Orrin Hatch confident he has the 15 GOP votes (along with 45 Democrats) necessary to break the filibuster and get it passed. The votes probably aren't there in either chamber to override Bush's promised veto (the first of his presidency), but publicity from this drama will drive support for federal research even higher.

Unless there's another war, stem cells will become one of the defining issues of the 2006 campaign. Look for smart Democrats to run ads with relatives of the afflicted ("My sister has Parkinson's," "My father has Alzheimer's") pointing out that Congressman X is so extreme, he voted against a bill supported by many Republicans to begin curing these diseases. This will inevitably lead to backpedaling and compromise and the victory of a broad-based "pro-cure movement" that may help save not just my life, but your cousin's or your mother's or your own.

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Where shall we go?

ALDRICK BISWAS

THE parishioners pray to God with adoration. Each Sunday all go to church to attend mass. Prayer service is called mass in Catholic church. Sunday is the day of God--to adore Him, to pray to Him (the Almighty) Christians (Catholics) participate (attend) in mass on Sunday to renew themselves with spirituality.

Habitually, on 3rd June, 2001, Sunday, the Catholics of Baniarchar went to church to attend the mass. Baniarchar is in Gopalganj district (Maksudpur village, post office Jalirpur, Gopalganj-8100). (Italian) Father Mimmo Pietanzo has been giving service to the church as Parish Priest for many years. There are 3,000 Catholics in Baniarchar church jurisdiction. Main occupation of the parishioners' is farming, fishing, handicraft, small scale business, etc. Some of the family members are engaged in service in Dhaka and other places. They came home once/twice in a month. Name of the Baniarchar church is Most Holy Redeemer Church, established in 1938. It's a 67 years old church.

As per religious order, the parishioners go to church to attend mass each Sunday to thank God. On that fateful Sunday everyone was attending the mass. After first reading of the Holy Bible, when the 2nd reading began, the bomb blast occurred inside the church. It was 7:30am, 10 Catholics died on the spot and 26 others were injured. Those who died were Michael Malik (25), Monmoth Shikder (22), Peter Shaha (30), Amar Biswas (25), Binod Das (32), Jalish Biswas (30), Sumon Halder (27), Zintu Mondol (21), Rodricks

Zetra (27) and Sonzibon Baro (28). Last we forget?

After that there was as usual judicial enquiry. And there were condolence meetings, protest meetings, human chain by Christian society and civil society. Government declared investigation team and on 18-2-2002, Justice Bari, the investigation team leader, himself came to Baniarchar to investigate. Then it was stated in the report that the bomb blast was the result of group feud! How convincing was it? Rather such almost vague comments push things into further mystery.

Four years have passed since the Baniarchar church incident, but whither justice? How long shall it take?

Not only Baniarchar Church bomb blast. The Jessore Udichi programme bomb blast, Dhaka Communist Party meeting bomb blast at Paltan, Bangla New Year bomb blast at Ramna Batomul, Sylhet Hazrat Shahjalal's Mazar bomb blast, Dhaka Ganganandhu Avenue Sheikh Hasina's meeting bomb blast and lastly ex-Finance Minister Shah MS Kibria's meeting bomb blast at Habiganj -- all remain shrouded in fog of mystery. Investigation continues and halts, never it is finished credibly. No perpetrator has been caught or punished. Then where shall we go for justice? However, we still wish all the facts are found in credible investigation and the guilty are caught and appropriately punished.

May God give eternal peace to those who have died in the bomb blasts. Amen.

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