

Negotiators start to make Doha round trade-offs

REUTERS, Geneva

Negotiators are starting to make trade-offs between agriculture and industrial goods in the long-running Doha round as they grope towards a deal to open up world trade this year, diplomats said Thursday.

At this stage countries are making demands not concessions but there is now an explicit linkage between the two chapters, a crucial step in reaching an overall deal, they said.

The development is all the more remarkable given the lack of progress this week at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in talks on the individual areas. A meeting of ministers proposed for March or April to reach an outline agreement is where such trade-offs could normally be expected.

In a review over the past two days of a revised negotiating text for industrial goods, so many delegates drew comparisons with the new draft for agriculture, that several negotiators commented that the "horizontal" process of trade-offs had begun.

"I've heard the comment made," said Canada's WTO ambassador Don Stephenson, who chairs the industry talks and drafted the revised text.

"It's a very interesting and perhaps accurate comment," he

told reporters, forecasting the linkages would increase in the coming days and weeks.

Any eventual deal will involve rich countries opening up their food markets by cutting agricultural tariffs and subsidies in return for developing countries cutting industrial tariffs and liberalising services to open up their markets.

Increasingly, however, countries both rich and poor are complaining that what they are being asked to do in one area is out of line with what their partners are doing in the other.

Developing countries argue that the Doha round, launched in November 2001, specifically aims to foster development, and requires developing countries to do less than rich ones.

But they say the proposals on the table require developing countries to make bigger cuts in their industrial tariffs than developed ones would.

They also complain that rich food-importing countries are resisting meaningful reforms of agriculture, with several keeping tariffs on some products well above 100 percent.

Rich countries on the other hand say any cuts in tariffs for developing countries smaller than proposed would make a deal meaningless -- they have to see substantial increases access to develop-

ing country markets to justify their own painful cuts.

For instance Switzerland, whose protected farmers are shielded by some of the world's highest subsidies, said it would want to see a result in industry -- known in trade jargon as NAMA -- to balance the high price it would pay in agriculture.

"The more you push me on agriculture, the more I'll push you on NAMA," the Swiss delegate told Thursday's meeting on industry according to a participant.

The differences are not just North-South.

Angry exchanges between Brazil and Costa Rica over the past two days reflected Brazil's role in the NAMA-11 group of developed countries keen to protect fledgling industries and Costa Rica's position as an export-orientated economy like Singapore or Mexico eyeing an opening of South-South Trade.

At parallel consultations on the agriculture draft, negotiators this week have not managed to reduce any of the 170-odd alternatives it contains to single proposals.

That lack of progress, and the differences over industry, suggests it will not be possible to get workable texts ready for ministers to meet in March or April. Argentina ruled out such a meeting on Thursday because it disagrees with the industry text.

HSBC named world's most valuable banking brand

HSBC has been named the world's most valuable banking brand, according to an annual index of 500 leading global banks.

HSBC beat world's leading banks to the top position in The Banker magazine and Brand Finance's 'Top 500 Bank Brands 2008'. HSBC was the only bank in the entire index to achieve the highest brand rating of triple A, says a press release.

According to The Banker, HSBC's strategy of portraying itself as a large and powerful global bank with a uniform brand identity has been critical to its success. Brand building supported by high profile advertising under the tagline 'the world's local bank' ensures global awareness and appeal.

This recognition follows last year's interbrand study of the world's most valuable brands across all sectors which saw HSBC jump five places to 23, the second best growth performance of the top 40 companies surveyed.

The report states, "Institutions such as HSBC have benefited from their high-growth market businesses by being able to offset their losses with strong revenue results from these areas."

Oil below \$100 in Asia

AFP, Singapore

World oil prices were trading below 100 dollars in Asian trade Friday after a stronger-than-expected rise in US crude-oil reserves calmed supply jitters, dealers said.

In afternoon trade, New York's main contract, lightsweet crude for delivery in April, fell 16 cents to 98.07 dollars per barrel.

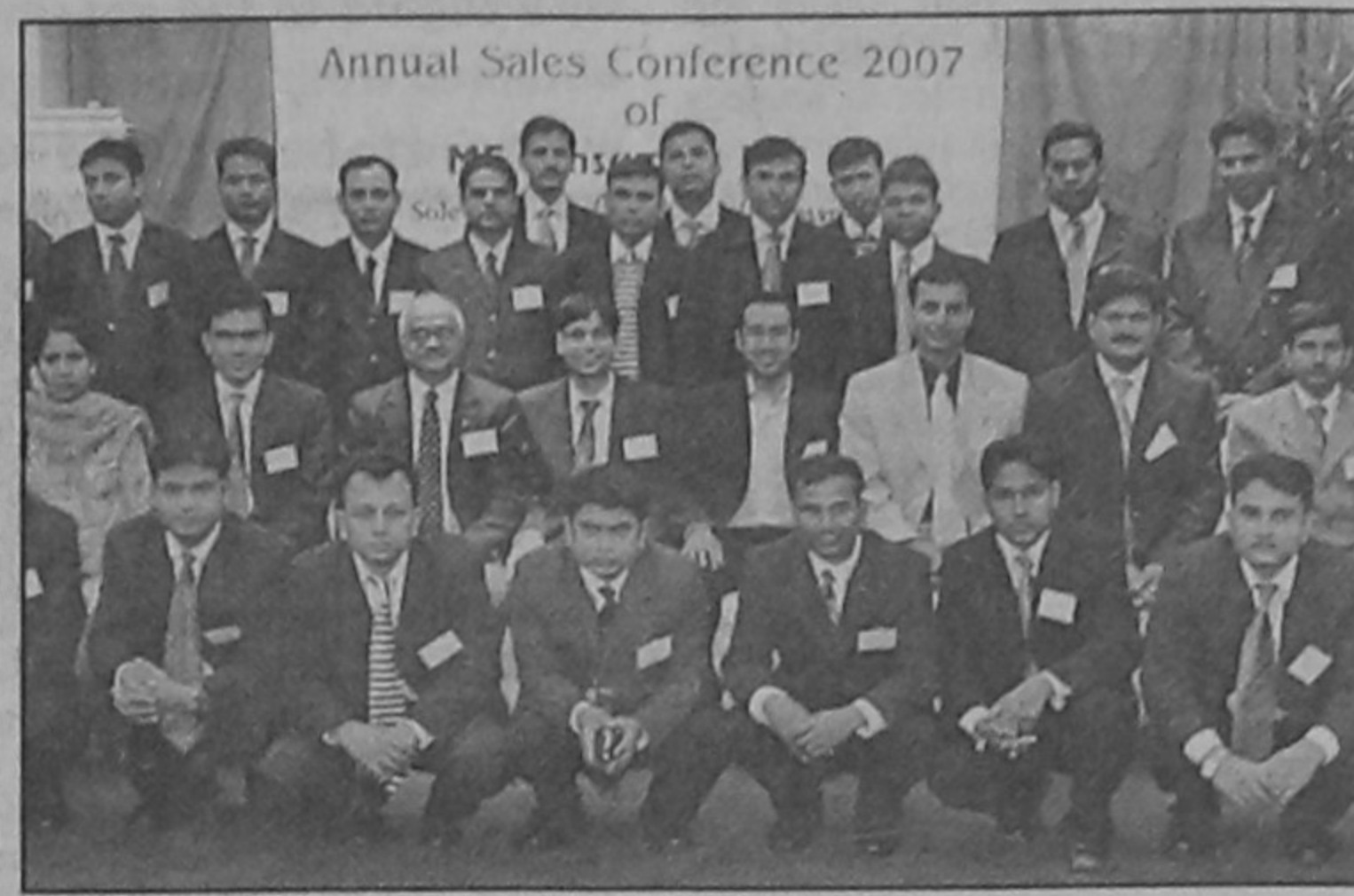
The contract closed 1.47 dollars lower during floor trading on Thursday at the New York Mercantile Exchange.

The March contract had expired Wednesday at an all-time closing high of 100.74 dollars after scaling a peak of 101.32 dollars a barrel.

Brent North Sea crude for April delivery was up one cent to 96.25 dollars a barrel, after falling 2.18 dollars on Thursday. The contract had struck a record summit of 99.22 dollars on Wednesday.



CEO and Managing Director of Janata Bank Ltd SM Ankur Rahman speaks at the 'Branch Managers' Conference 2008' of the bank's Dhaka zone (D region) in the capital recently. Other senior officials were present.



The Annual Sales Conference 2007 of MF Consumers Ltd, the sole importer and distributor of Johnson & Johnson products in Bangladesh, was held recently in Singapore. Senior officials of MF Consumers and Johnson & Johnson India were present at the conference.



Participants in a training session on 'Credit Management on IT Platform' pose for photographs with the senior officials of The City Bank Ltd in Dhaka recently.

US economic gauge weakens

AFP, Washington

A key forward-looking US economic gauge posted a decline in January for a fourth straight month suggesting "weak growth" ahead for the world's largest economy, the Conference Board said Thursday.

The private research group said its index of Leading Economic Indicators fell 0.1 percent in January. Most economists had expected the economic barometer to post such a decline.

"The Leading Index declined for the fourth straight month," said Ken Goldstein, a labor economist at the Conference Board.

"The change in the Leading Index, including the duration, intensity, and dispersion across markets, suggests weak

growth going forward," he said.

The Conference Board cited tumbling stock prices and declining demand for home-building permits as the main reasons for the index's latest drop.

US economic growth slowed dramatically during the fourth quarter of 2007 amid a worsening housing market slump and as a credit crunch swept the financial markets.

The Federal Reserve has slashed borrowing costs since September as it battles to shore up economic momentum, but some economists believe the US economy is likely to slide into a recession.

Goldstein said the Conference Board's latest research suggests the economy is not in recession, but is also not firing on all cylinders.

Weekly Currency Roundup

February 17-February 20, 2008

Local FX Market Local inter-bank FX market liquidity improved slightly during the week; however the BDT remained almost unchanged against the USD.

Money Market Overnight money market remained slightly tight during the week. Range moved from 8.00-9.00, 8.50-9.50. The market was mostly steady near the end of the week.

In the Treasury bill auction held on Sunday, bid for BDT 9,000.00 was accepted compared to BDT 9,000.00 last week. Weighted average yield remained rose slightly for the 91D category T-Bills but was almost unchanged for all other categories auctioned on the day.

International Markets US dollar

The week began with the US dollar lying low against most major currencies, as US economic reports of consumer confidence and manufacturing data rekindled fears that the economy continued to slouch towards recession. The dollar steadied later in the week as investors waited for the release of further US data, which would give clues on the health of the economy. The greenback received some positive views as traders expected that gains in Asian markets and positive impact of relaxed monetary and fiscal stimulus in the US might regenerate growth in the US.

Euro The euro extended gains against the dollar as expectations for the ECB to cut interests faded after last week and fears of further cuts from the Fed loomed over the market.

GBP Sterling fell 0.4 percent against the dollar following Sunday's announcement that Britain had decided to nationalise ailing bank Northern Rock, adding to worries on the health of the UK economy. The currency fell further on Wednesday after the release of the minutes of BOE meeting, which widened possibilities of further rate cuts.

Others The Aussie climbed half a percent to a three-month high above \$0.91 thanks to its hefty yield advantage and expectations that the Reserve Bank of Australia will raise rates from current high rate of 7%. The yen rose on Wednesday with rising concern that credit-market losses will widen prompted traders to reduce holdings of higher-yielding assets funded in Japan.

- Standard Chartered Bank



Habibur Rahman Molla, general manager (Finance and Accounts) of Transcom Electronics Ltd, gives away prizes among the sellers of Philips and Transcom lighting products at a function in Bogra yesterday.

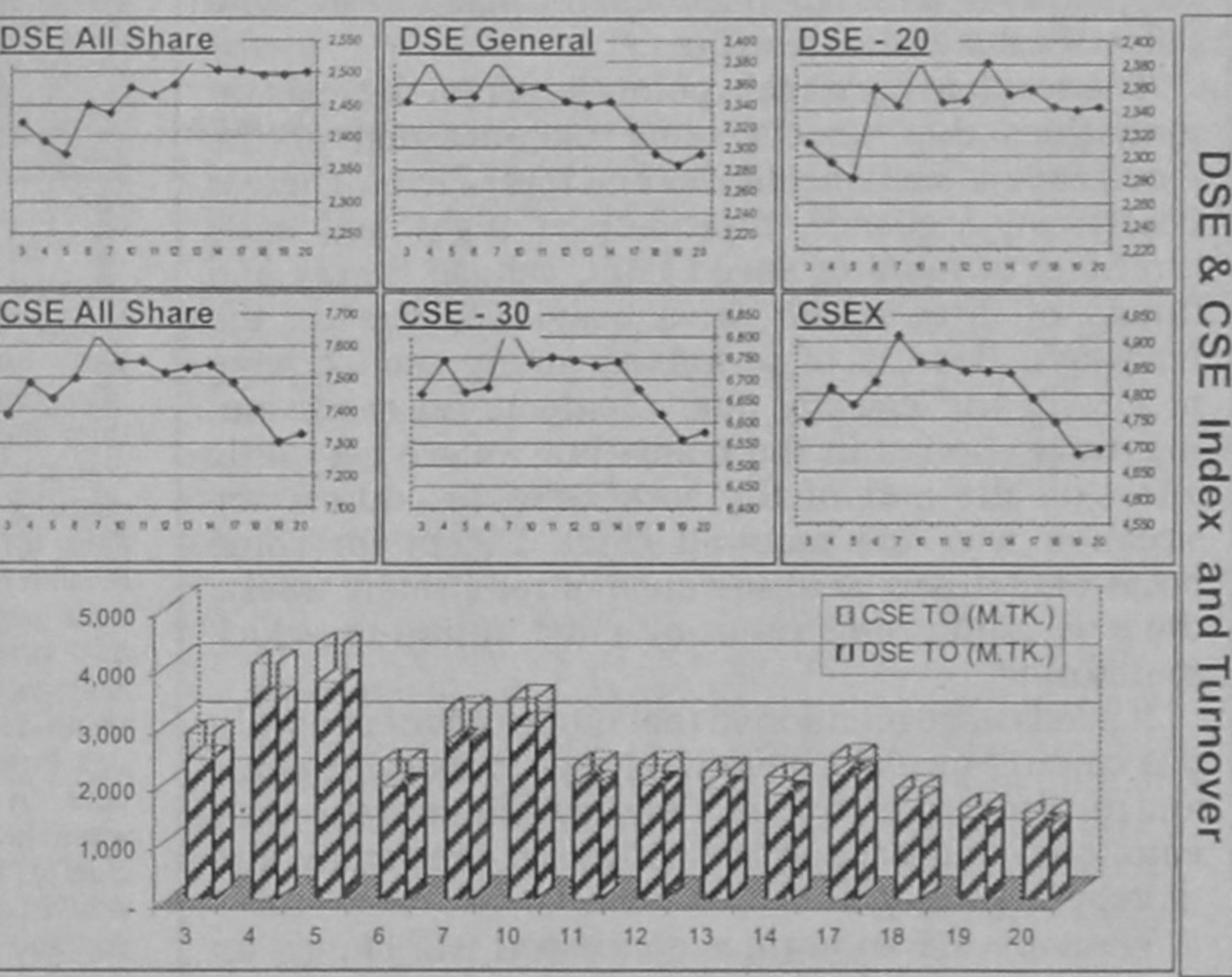
STOCK

TRADED ISSUES OF THE WEEK February 17 - 20, 2008

Table with columns for Company, FV/ML, Price, Turnover, Last AGM, EPS, CDS, and various financial metrics. It lists numerous companies across different sectors like Banking, Investment, Engineering, and Food & Allied.

Market Highlights Week February 17 - 20, 08

Table showing market indices: DSE All Share Index (2400.97651, -0.43%), DSE General Index (2840.21721, -0.43%), DSE -20 Index (2294.87911, -0.206%), CSE All Share Index (7326.00400, -0.285%), CSE -30 Index (6575.80880, -0.241%), and CSE Selected Index (4690.99780, -0.303%).



Turnover Leaders

Table listing top turnover leaders with columns for Company, Volume, Turnover, and C Avg. Includes companies like Jinnata Oil, AB Bank, and Green M F One.

Capital Gainers

Table listing top capital gainers with columns for Company, Price Chn, Close Price, and Turnover. Includes companies like Therapeutics-Z, Mercantile Insurance-A, and 8th ICB MF-A.

Capital Losers

Table listing top capital losers with columns for Company, Price Chn, Close Price, and Turnover. Includes companies like Summit Power Ltd-A, BSC-A, and Imam Buton-B.

Non Traded Issues

Table listing non-traded issues with columns for Company, FV/ML, LCP, LTD, LCF, LTD, Last AGM, EPS, CDS, and various financial metrics. Includes companies like Quasen Silk Mills-Z, Modern Dyeing-B, and Arbee Textile Mills-Z.