

Report No. 88

**'Resumption of Doha Negotiations and
Challenges for Bangladesh'**

Publisher

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision-making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such dialogues at local, regional and national levels. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional group in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The CPD seeks to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country.

In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of the CPD include **The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Trade Related Research and Policy Development (TRRPD), Governance and Policy Reforms, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Investment Promotion and Enterprise Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, Ecosystems, Environmental Studies and Social Sectors.** The CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns. With a view to promote vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of the country, CPD is implementing a **Youth Leadership Programme.**

Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. Pursuant to this CPD maintains an active publication programme, both in Bangla and in English. As part of its dissemination programme, CPD has decided to bring out CPD Occasional Paper Series on a regular basis. Dialogue background papers, investigative reports and results of perception surveys which relate to issues of high public interest will be published under its cover. The Occasional Paper Series will also include draft research papers and reports, which may be subsequently published by the CPD.

As part of CPD's publication activities, a CPD Dialogue Report series is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre. The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue on **'Resumption of Doha Negotiations and Challenges for Bangladesh'**, held on 19 April 2007 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium. The dialogue was organised under CPD's TRRPD Programme.

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Dialogue on
**‘Resumption of Doha Negotiations and
Challenges for Bangladesh’**

The Dialogue

In line with ongoing interest in the area of WTO-related trade negotiations, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised a dialogue entitled ‘*Resumption of Doha Negotiations and Challenges for Bangladesh*’ on 19 April 2007 at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka. The permanent representative of Bangladesh to the WTO in Geneva, *H E Dr Toufiq Ali* made the keynote presentation at the dialogue chaired and moderated by the CPD Executive Director *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*. Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Mr Feroz Ahmed, was present as the *Chief Guest*. After the welcome address by the Chair, *Dr Toufiq Ali* briefed on the current status of the Doha negotiations since the soft resumption of the Davos meeting and also highlighted the challenges that Bangladesh is currently facing. Following the presentation the floor was opened for discussion by participants who included academics, policymakers, entrepreneurs, development activists, and other professionals. This report offers a brief resume of the presentation made by the key presenter and the exchange of views and ideas among the participants which followed the presentation. (A list of participants is attached).

Opening Address by the *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Executive Director, CPD

In his introductory address, the CPD Executive Director welcomed all the participants in the session. He expressed that the session should be looked at as a continuation of the CPD’s activity in the area of trade policy, in particular WTO-related negotiations. He mentioned that the centre has been carrying out research in this area for the last decade. He added that the CPD has been trying to build capacity within and beyond themselves through organising training programmes and dialogues on these issues. Through this process very good working relationships have been developed with the Ministry of Commerce as well as with private sector bodies.

Dr Bhattacharya expressed great satisfaction with the enormous improvement in capacity within the country to understand, appreciate and often to guide trade policy in the area of multilateral trade negotiation. He also pointed out that the private sector has been contributing significantly with critical leadership by the Ministry of Commerce. In this respect he underscored the role of Bangladesh’s Geneva mission which is leading from the front. He particularly expressed happiness to have such an able ambassador and permanent representative, *Dr Toufiq Ali*, who has been leading the interests of

Bangladesh in the WTO. *Dr Toufiq* is currently chairing one of the most critical negotiating groups in the WTO, the Trade and Environment group. And in his capacity he quite often plays a very critical role in the ongoing negotiation process.

He informed the house that Bangladesh has once again been nominated the leader of the Least Developed Country (LDC) group. This has created an extra burden on *Dr Toufiq* as well as on the Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce and other private sector partners. He then added that this is an opportunity to know from *Dr Toufiq Ali* about the current status of the negotiations since the soft resumption of the Davos meeting, the major impediments to negotiations, sticking points for the members, potential gains for Bangladesh and other related issues.

He further added that we are talking about various scenarios of conclusion. Among the most popular three scenarios which we hear off and on – one is a complete collapse; people debate whether it would be a collapse of the negotiations or the collapse of the WTO itself. The other is whether we end with the lowest common denominator where we reduce our ambitions and then make a general agreement and declare victory and save the situation. Of course there are the optimists who say neither of these options are possible if you have anything at all - you will either suspend the negotiation or you are going to have a highly ambitious outcome because otherwise nobody will be happy. So whatever may be the case, there are issues like what is there in it for Bangladesh? What are the current challenges? Are we better off without a conclusion? Or we are better off without a high ambition early harvest- a better deal at the very beginning. He then invited *Dr Taufiq Ali* to respond to these issues.

The Keynote Presentation

The keynote speaker, *Dr Toufiq Ali* thanked *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* and the CPD for organising the dialogue on such an important issue. He stated out by saying that there has been a soft resumption of the Doha round in Davos in January 2007, which formally resumed in February. He began with a brief on the underlying reasons for the suspension of the negotiations that formally occurred in July 2006.

He pointed out that the major reasons for the suspension were the issues relating to agriculture despite the fact that they have been the engine that drives the negotiations. It is agriculture where countries are supposed to move fast before anything else. In agriculture there are basically three pillars: domestic subsidy, export competition, and market access. Market access is basically the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers (NTBs). Quota has been the major non-tariff barrier.

Dr Toufiq said that domestic subsidy has been discussed quite a bit. There are problems with domestic subsidy. In July 2006, the range that the G-20 and others asked for and the EC was prepared to negotiate from was roughly close to beginning with about \$12 billion in trade distorting domestic subsidies. The initial position of the US was roughly about \$22 billion but they were quite prepared to negotiate. But somehow there was no meeting of the minds over there. So the Director General, after consulting the chairs of the negotiating bodies (there are basically 8 negotiating bodies in the Doha Round) decided to pull the blood and the negotiations were suspended. After the suspension there was a kind of wait and see attitude.

There was a G-20 ministerial meeting in Rio de Janeiro in September attended by the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the EC Trade Commissioner, and Minister Nakagawa from Japan. But nothing seemed to move. Subsequent to that there was a Cairns group meeting in Australia but again there was no movement. There was a fundamental change in the negotiating format and this change came about in a different way. The G-20 countries (22 countries) are concerned only about agriculture. They negotiate as one group and in general it is Brazil and India who represent the G-20 in the negotiations. There is also the EC and the US. These four countries and groups together are referred to as the G-4. The technical discussions within the G-4 commenced and it was hoped that these technical discussions would ultimately lead to some kind of understanding among them, especially on domestic subsidy and market access and thereafter could be brought to the multilateral frame. Apart from the G-20 there are other groups like the G-6, G-10, and G-11. Until January there was really no desire to resume negotiations.

Fearing total collapse, the Director General decided to resume the negotiations and accordingly recommended that the body resume in December. In February, a formal decision was taken to resume the negotiations. In January 2007 there was a Davos meeting, but there was basically no movement. Since then there have been G-4 meetings, the last one of which was held on April 10-12 in New Delhi, which ended without any significant progress. One of the major decisions taken at the Delhi meeting was to complete the round in 2007. Pascal Lamy, at the development committee meeting in Washington on the 14th of April 2007 attended by the ministers, gave a warning that something had to be done very quickly. Otherwise there would be a risk of failure to build on the progress that had already been achieved.

Dr Toufiq mentioned that there were some other warnings too. In the Cairns Group (an agriculture group comprising 19 countries) meeting held in Lahore, on the 17th of April

2007, they gave a warning that the round was at risk of drifting indefinitely or even failing. The Director General *Mr Pascal Lamy* attended the meeting and said 'I firmly believe that in agriculture we are close to reaching the architecture of a final deal'. Mentioning market access as the major stumbling block he said that market access contains three important elements - sensitive products, special products and special safeguard measures. He also discussed about domestic support and export competition.

Dr Toufiq said that the WTO Director General tried to give a very hopeful sign because otherwise people would give up to begin with. Then he moved on to describe the main stumbling blocks. The recent G-33 meeting in Jakarta referred to special products that the developing countries want to protect. *Mr Lamy* highlighted these as problems and urged all the countries to try and understand these issues.

Dr Toufiq Ali then highlighted the US domestic scene, which is considered fundamental to the negotiations. US has introduced a new draft of the farm bill which deals with agricultural subsidy. But the question that everyone poses is whether the farm bill will subvert the negotiations as it contains lot of elements of subsidy. He thought that it wouldn't because it is a US mandatory requirement, and the bill expires by September 2007. For continuation of the domestic subsidy, the farm bill has to be in place by September. Depending upon the outcome of the Doha round they will change the farm bill accordingly. He thought that the major problem is 'trade promotion authority' which expires on the 30th of June 2007. This is an essential component for negotiations or conclusion of the negotiations. They call it 'Fast Track Authority'. If the US government doesn't have Fast Track Authority from the congress, no country will negotiate because otherwise the agreement can be changed by the congress members, and therefore the whole thing will have to be renegotiated. So the administration takes Fast Track Authority so that the whole agreement without any changes is either accepted or rejected by the congress. At the moment, the Democrats effectively control the Senate as well as the House. This creates a major problem for the US administration. It was hoped that by now they would have submitted a bill for extension of the Trade Promotion Authority, but they have not done so. So it's very likely that following the end of June there will be a period when the US will want to negotiate without any trade promotion authority in place. It is not known whether others will negotiate with the US at that stage. *Dr Toufiq* mentioned that there could be two scenarios relating to the Trade Promotion Authority. The best case scenario may be that a new one will be put in place by September. On the other hand, the worst case scenario may be that it will wait till next year when the US presidential election will be underway and there will be no trade promotion authority until a new US President is in place. The fate of the Doha Round is linked to this process. An AP report of 18th April suggested that in Delhi, when the G-4 and G-6 met, this had nothing about

the Trade Promotion Authority, which was supposed to expire on the 30th of June 2007. They have set a new deadline for the conclusion of the round but the round cannot conclude in the absence of a Trade Promotion Authority of the US government. The AP report quoted a number of people and asked the question as to whether the US administration has shifted its strategy in terms of whether they want a Trade Promotion Authority before the negotiations. There seems to be a shift in the US negotiating position, said *Dr Toufiq Ali*.

He then highlighted the challenges that Bangladesh is currently facing. He said that no country can negotiate alone in the WTO unless they form a group. Bangladesh is in the LDC group and has acted as the coordinator of the LDC groups in the WTO until very recently. In the WTO, the coordinatorship changes every six months and goes to each member state by rotation. The coordinator has a lot of responsibility. This is also an effective way of capacity building. He also informed that Bangladesh is soon going to take over the coordinatorship of the LDC group in the UN system for the next two years. This opportunity will give Bangladesh a great deal to do with LDC coordination in UNCTAD and many other forums. He also mentioned that in the WTO, Bangladesh has both defensive interests as well as offensive interests.

Dr Toufiq Ali then pointed out some important issues. One of these is the offensive interest. First of all, the question of Duty-Free Quota-Free (DF-QF) market access. In Hong Kong, developed countries agreed to provide 97% of tariff lines as DF for LDCs by 2008 or the beginning of implementation, whichever is earlier. They also agreed that by 2006, the countries concerned, mainly the US and Japan, will notify about the means by which the decision will be implemented in the WTO. LDCs kept up the pressure in Geneva, and the US last year made the announcement and started the process. In January of this year, the USTR asked for public comments and the comments were made. There were 33 public comments from Bangladesh including one from the CPD. But there were also some comments against the DF-QF market access. There were roughly a total of 54 submissions of which 10 were against the DF-QF. Then the USTR asked the US International Trade Commission (USITC) to conduct a study. The US administration asked for public submissions. A total of 11 public submissions were made from Bangladesh— 4 for DF-QF (1 from the CPD, 1 from Women's Age Coalition, 1 from the GoB (Ministry of Commerce), and 1 from a private individual in the US). There were 7 against. The US still has time to implement the 97%. Japan has already moved since Hong Kong. On the 1st of April they announced that 98% of the tariff lines will be duty free up from 86% in the past. In terms of value of trade, as of last year's data, this represents 99% of their imports from the least developed countries. They still want to keep about 107 tariff lines reserved.

The other major offensive interest is in the area of services. *Dr Toufiq* said that we have interests in the movement of less skilled services under Mode 4. On other issues, we have provision for special preferential and differential treatment for LDCs as a departure from the MFN principle. There is no provision for services in the GATS agreement. And on the request offer process, the LDCs as a group has made a request to all countries for categories of skills that we are interested in.

On the issue of defensive interests, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that the LDCs may not be asked for much. He added, however, that there is no room for complacency. There is an erosion of preferences that is taking place as tariffs come down and we have to protect against that. We have been asked to increase our binding coverage. He further mentioned that after the Uruguay round we have provided just 3% tariff coverage. Some LDCs, for example Senegal, have 100% binding coverage. Other countries such as Benin have about 70%. On the other hand, some countries like Tanzania have only 0.3% which is much less than that of Bangladesh. Binding coverage is important because in the event of an import surge, flexibility is needed to protect domestic industries.

Dr Toufiq Ali referred to the very interesting Turkish proposal for slowing down the reduction in tariffs in textiles and readymade garments (RMGs). Looking at this from the perspective of our exports to the EU, he said that our products get duty free entry provided they meet the rules of origin criteria. Now if the tariffs go down, we will lose the preferences that we have, said *Dr Toufiq*. The essence of the Turkish proposal is that the developed countries should reduce tariffs slowly so that the developing countries such as Bangladesh are less affected in terms of time. In the US market, where Bangladesh doesn't have any preference at the moment, the Turkish proposal means nothing. *Dr Toufiq* further said that if we get preferences based on the DF-QF access, the Turkish proposal will be very meaningful because in the US market, our average tariff that is collected on the readymade garments is in excess of 16.5%.

Finally he opined that the Doha round is open at a very critical stage. People really see that if the round isn't completed by this year there is a strong possibility that it will go on to 2009. Therefore everybody wants to complete the round by this year. If the round ends, then Bangladesh will definitely gain from the US and from some other developing countries that are considering providing us duty-free facilities. He particularly emphasized the need for strengthening domestic trade-related research and analysis of the type that the CPD provides. He also mentioned that our negotiators in Geneva require this kind of support from back home.

Thanking *Dr Toufiq Ali* for a very sassing presentation imbued with insights, *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* made a few preliminary comments to begin the open floor discussion. Firstly, he pointed out that there was no real progress since the soft resumption in Davos and even the recent G-4 meeting concluded in Delhi couldn't make any breakthrough. The second point that he mentioned was the fact that agriculture remains the bone of contention, and within that domestic support happens to be the real issue. In this connection, *Dr Bhattacharya* said that the Doha round suffers from interest deficit and mentioned that at these rounds there has to be a critical amount of interest groups for spearheading the whole thing. He further added that the essential liberalisation has taken place in most of the countries and now it is for the developed countries to liberalise particularly in agriculture which is essentially not there.

Another critical issue that *Dr Bhattacharya* raised was the completion date. In this regard he mentioned that it is to be decided whether we should go for a faster completion with low ambition or whether we should argue for delayed or protracted negotiations with a view to have a much more ambitious or fuller outcome. Finally *Dr Bhattacharya* mentioned two other points; Aid for Trade and the market access issue, particularly in the US, and in textiles. He further questioned whether we see any interest in the current initiatives for Aid for Trade as far as Bangladesh's interest is concerned. At the end of the day we will all have to answer what the development in the development rounds is and when it concludes, said *Dr Bhattacharya*. He also mentioned the strategic option that if the round doesn't complete in a due course whether Bangladesh will also diversify this negotiation towards other regional trading arrangements and other bilateral options. These are some of the initial points that *Dr Bhattacharya* mentioned to elaborate and also to excite the minds of the participants.

Open Floor Discussions

Duty-Free Quota-Free Market Access in the US – A Better Negotiation Can Cover Our Export Interests

Discussing duty-free quota-free market access, *Mr Manzur Ahmed*, Advisor, FBCCI, said that the references for Bangladesh are the USITC and the USTR. There are two communications – one by the USTR submitted to the WTO for comments. The USITC is an internal valuation study process and is politically biased and meant to not grant duty-free access; rather its purpose is to find excuses not to grant such duty-free market access. He mentioned that we must take this issue into cognizance. He further added that we should address 97% along with the phrase 'facing difficulties' not from the '97% facing

difficulty'. If we put together 97% facing difficulties then we get a stronger position. For exclusion there should be a good reason for positions of facing difficulties and the WTO has contingency measures for addressing any sector facing difficulty. He opined that we should take this approach in the DF-QF market access talks. He also said the "WTO forum is closed and they are trying for Friday markets. And the Friday market is bilateral regional trade negotiations". He further mentioned that whether we have a policy option for free trade agreements with the US, Japan and others where duty-free market access is rather difficult to attain.

Discussing the issue raised by the Former Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, *Mr Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury*, on the progress of DF-QF market access, *Dr Toufiq* said that we are still stuck at the 97% level. He added that Japan has already gone beyond 98% and we are urging some developing countries particularly China, India, and Brazil. *Dr Toufiq* informed the house that these countries are already in the process of providing DF-QF facilities to Bangladesh soon. Brazil has already made commitments to do something very soon.

With regard to 97% DF-QF market access, Former Secretary and Former Economic Minister of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, *Mr Abul Kalam Azad*, said that the US has already provided 83% of their tariff lines duty free. He further mentioned that the LDCs in general do not have the capacity to cover the 97% tariff lines. So, a better negotiation with the US would cover our major export interest by this 97%. *Mr Azad* therefore, emphasised the need for strong negotiators in Washington DC and in the Geneva mission. For that matter he suggested that the Ministry of Commerce should select candidates that have an appropriate background and other necessary qualities for our foreign missions and negotiate strongly with our US counterparts. *Mr Md Shamsul Haque*, Director General, Multilateral Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also reiterated the need for strong, efficient and knowledgeable negotiators in our missions abroad.

USITC Submission – A Statutory Requirement in the US

Discussing the USITC submission, Former Secretary and Former Economic Minister *Mr Abul Kalam Azad* said that it is a statutory requirement in the US. When the US government wants to give trade preference or tariff concession or something like that, the administrator asks the USITC for an impact assessment. Then they go for submissions from different people and organizations concerned. The USITC authority thinks that duty-free access provided to the LDCs will have no adverse impact on the US economy or US industry. Therefore, the US government has been implementing this through the formal

way of submissions to the USITC. With regard to the documents for submission he believes that quality is what really matters.

Canadian Proposal – The Most Preferential One

With regard to the rules of origin issue the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries Secretary *Mr C K Hyder* said that the Canadian proposal has been the most preferential as well as the conducive one so far for Bangladesh in terms of value addition requirement (25% value addition required). Talking on the issue, *Dr Toufiq* said that within Bangladesh there is lack of consensus about the proportion of value addition requirement and mentioned that it is a very complex issue. There are complications, there are economic rationals on each side but we have to come to an agreement, said *Dr Toufiq*.

Diversification of Exports is a Better Option than Depending on Concessions

Former Secretary of Commerce *Mr Ghulam Rahman* said that without special concessions for Bangladesh, particularly in the RMG sector, the Turkish proposal would not help much. He, however, suggested that instead of depending heavily on the international community for concessions, our focus should be on diversifying our exports. We should work for becoming competitive and that is how we can take the advantage of the WTO system. For that end he emphasised addressing certain important issues such as the problems at the sea ports, corruption in the country, and the high cost of doing business.

IPR Laws for Development of Our Traditional Cultural Expressions

Dr Toufiq, mentioned that one of the major purposes of his current visit to Bangladesh is preparing an inventory of the traditional cultural expressions in Bangladesh, which includes the full range of folklore, dances, songs, artistic expressions, sports, and all activities of that nature. He mentioned that to identify these expressions they organised seminars with eminent experts of the country. Based on the findings, they are preparing a report which will be published by the Intellectual Property Organisation.

Negotiations at the WTO

Expressing disagreement with the point that no country can negotiate alone, *Mr Manzur Ahmed*, member, FBCCI, said that Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kenya and some other countries are doing very well in different disciplines of WTO negotiations. Most of their submissions are quite wise and acceptable. He further mentioned that the Turkish

proposal that is cited here is not a group proposal. We have our own problems which are not similar to other LDCs. Adding to this *Mr Sheikh Morshed Jahan*, Assistant Professor of IBA, Dhaka University, said that for negotiations we have to have a common shared goal. He also pointed out that this is probably one of the biggest challenges that we are facing and if that is the case, we cannot come into a common term. We should then dismantle and we should regroup using some other criteria. *Mr Manzur* further added that even in the case of duty-free market access, all LDCs are not on equal footing. He reiterated the need for an independent outlet for Bangladesh to negotiate for its own interest because the interests vary from one country to another.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said that it is very important, particularly in the case of bilateral negotiations to have the capacity to negotiate. Otherwise, there is the possibility of losing the negotiations. Considering it a skilful art, he emphasised the need for training to develop this quality. He further mentioned that currently there aren't too many bilateral negotiations going on in the world. He also cautioned against the pressure for bilateral negotiations from individual industries.

Responding to *Mr Farooq Ahmed*, Secretary of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Dhaka regarding the change in negotiating strategy, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that the strategies are determined based on the situation. The techniques of negotiations have changed; some of the countries are trying to resolve the issues and bring them into the multilateral process.

Talking on the CPD Research Director *Prof. Mustafizur Rahman's* concern of whether there has been any improvement in the negotiating position of the LDCs due to the movement from the previous green room process of negotiations that generally excluded the interests of the LDCs to joining different groups such as G-20 and G-19, *Dr Toufiq* said that there is no way that all the 151 members in the WTO can negotiate together. Countries always negotiate as part of a group. He also added that as a Chair of a negotiating body he remains present in the green room and protects the interests of Bangladesh to the extent possible.

Responding to another question posed by *Professor Mustafiz* as to whether there is any progress with regard to the sensitive list, special products and safeguard measures, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that the G-33 is responding to the needs. He further added that they are no longer talking of excluding roughly 20% of the products there, rather talking about criteria on which to base some products that are to be excluded and further studies are going on in the G-33.

The Swiss Formula Has Been More or Less Accepted

Responding to *Dr Selim Raihan*, Assistant Professor, Dept of Economics, Dhaka University, on the issue of the Swiss formula and its coefficients for the developed and developing countries, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that there has been quite a bit of debate over this issue which is still continuing. He informed that the Swiss formula for the reduction in tariff is more or less accepted. He, however, thinks that the coefficients for the developing and the developed countries will not be settled until the very close of the negotiations because a lot of things go into the process such as erosion of preferences.

Agricultural Liberalisation Remains the Defensive Interest of Bangladesh

Dr Raihan wanted to know whether agricultural liberalisation has been considered as one of the defensive interests because as a net importer of agricultural products, Bangladesh may suffer from higher import prices. In response, *Dr Toufiq* said that the NTBs have become the focus in the recent years because the Swiss formula faced problems and therefore people started looking at other issues where progress could be made. He added that the concern over the issue of net food importing countries in agriculture, food aid, net food importing countries, and their concerns are still there and are really very important.

Labour and Environmental Standards in the Negotiations

Commenting on *Dr Bhattacharya's* concern over the labour and environmental standards issue, *Dr Toufiq* thought that the Democrats in the US would not introduce it in the WTO. Rather they would bring it up only in the bilateral FTAs. They have used it with regard to the FTAs with Columbia and Peru, and with Panama it is still being negotiated. In effect they will include this issue in bilateral negotiations as they did in the Korea negotiations. With Malaysia, the negotiations are still underway, and they could not finish it by the 30th of March which was the deadline for submission for the current TPA authority.

Advanced Bio-Technology for International Competitiveness

Dr Abdur Razzaq, Senior Scientific Officer, BARC pointed out that as a centre of origin, Bangladesh is a good source of bio-diversity. He expressed concern over how we are dealing with trees in relation to agriculture and how we are protecting our rights in trees. There has been a tremendous advancement of bio-technology and therefore it has become very difficult to compete internationally with our old technology. He further mentioned that many western developed countries are using our gins and bio-diversity for improving their varieties using their technology.

Aid for Trade for the LDCs

Despite the fact that the WTO is not a development agency, the 'Aid for Trade' issue has been taken up in the WTO because of insistence for involving the supply side issues, said *Dr Toufiq*. In the WTO, what has been agreed to is the monitoring mechanism in Aid for Trade. Dr Toufiq also informed that on the 14th of April, Chancellor Gotten Brown made an announcement that about \$75 million has been allocated for the 50 LDCs for this purpose.

Can Agriculture Negotiations be Unbundled?

'Agriculture is the stumbling block for the suspension of the negotiations and I understand the Doha round comes as a package – accept it as a whole or you reject it' said the Former Secretary and Former Economic Minister of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, *Mr Abul Kalam Azad*. He further added that there has been a paradigm shift in the world of agriculture where food is used as fuel. This will raise a lot of issues, lot of political and economic consequences, which will eventually affect domestic subsidy.

Discussing the issue of un-bundling the agriculture negotiations, *Dr Toufiq Ali* opined that both the US and the EC would be happy and would love to keep it out of the negotiations. He said that everything has to be agreed upon together. Agriculture cannot be negotiated to the exclusion of all other issues, nor the other issues can be negotiated to the exclusion of agriculture. There are too many offensive interests of countries in agriculture. The Cairns group, Brazil and many other countries have offensive interests in agriculture and they will not allow it.

There was a comment on the movement from food to the production of fuels. In this regard *Dr Toufiq Ali* referred to an interesting article written by Mr Fidel Castro where he looked at the consequences of the US policies in giving attention to corn and other products for ethanol as a supplement to their fuel needs for motor cars etc., and perhaps as a way the US can reduce reliance on imported oil. President *Fidel Castro* criticised this policy saying that it will lead to a diversion of land to products such as corn which will get subsidy and which will be used for the production of ethanol. As a result, food production will suffer. 'The Economist' has also supported President Castro and mentioned that there is a real threat that food price will go up if we continue this policy of concentrating on food crops for providing fuel. *Dr Toufiq* also maintained that if food prices do go up, Bangladesh will be a potential sufferer. Therefore, he reiterated the importance of diversification of our exports, which *Mr Ghulam Rahman* already

mentioned in his discussion. He further added that no country has developed based only on agriculture. There should be industrial products as well. The terms of trade against agriculture vis-à-vis industrial products have always been against agriculture. Therefore we have to go for greater value added industrial products. And that is the only way we can develop using exports.

Low Domestic Subsidy in Bangladesh Agriculture

Discussing domestic support to agriculture by developed countries, BARC Senior Scientific Officer *Dr Abdur Razzaque* mentioned that agriculture has been the stumbling block and also the prime issue for negotiation. Referring to the suggestion for diversifying our agriculture, *Dr Razzaque* said that Bangladesh's agriculture is quite diversified. Rather he stressed the need for increasing productivity. He mentioned that as a net food importing country there is hardly anything to benefit from in the negotiations. Rather a conducive policy for enhancing productivity will create opportunity for diversifying our exports. Talking on domestic subsidy, *Dr Razzaque* referred to the example of Japan where domestic subsidy in agriculture exceeds contribution of agriculture to their GDP. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, in percentage terms, the subsidy provided to the agriculture sector is extremely low and is therefore making no significant impact on agriculture. He thinks that this is one of the major reasons for decline in agricultural productivity in the last 4-5 years.

Has the Doha Round Fallen Apart?

Appreciating *Dr Tawfiq Ali* for updating the audience before the forthcoming Hong Kong ministerial meeting, Former President of the DCCI *Mr M A Momen* asked *Dr Tawfiq Ali* whether the Doha round has really fallen apart. He further asked whether he would agree to what has been discussed so far? What to get out of this rut? What would Bangladesh as an LDC need to do? Shall we focus more on our further trade liberalisation? Shall we back track from our expectations and ambitions that have been spelt out here or still continue to intensify our negotiations with our partners. In this regard he referred to the comment of Director of the DCCI, *Mr Asif Ibrahim*, that when all the so called big beasts were trying to move around we did not do much, rather scaled us below par.

The US on the Progress of Bangladesh

Mr Carter Wilbur of the US Embassy thanked the CPD and the distinguished speakers for a very informative discussion. Expressing the full support of the US government to the WTO and hopes for a successful conclusion to this round, Mr Wilbur said that all the

participating countries come into this with their own domestic agendas. Everybody has domestic constituencies that they have to satisfy. That is an addition to core international principles that we are all trying to uphold. US domestic policy is not very special. Talking on the USITC submissions, he appreciated the government of Bangladesh for participation in the American government process by making submissions to the trade representatives in the USITC. He added that this is a part of how they make the best decisions at the United States government level which is a part of their domestic policy. He expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Bangladeshi economy which has already shown its ability to survive the demise of the Multi Fibre Agreement. He added that it is still going strong despite the challenges that we all know about. Diversification, improving efficiency, all these things would put us in a position where we could negotiate from a position of strength.

Services Sector Issue in the GATS Agreement

Discussing the services issue, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that services negotiations are important for Bangladesh. He pointed out, however, that these are a bit different from the rest of the negotiations. He further added that in services in the GATS agreement what happens is countries make requests to other countries or groups and others respond to those requests. Once the offers are accepted, these become applicable to all countries on the MFN principle. Now the LDCs want special priority in this area. They want the offers made to the LDCs to be exclusive for the LDCs. So this means that the current architecture of GATS has to be changed. There are ways of changing it. You can change the agreement itself, but no one wants to fiddle around with the agreements because if you want to change the agreement then you have a very serious problem. Then the question of waiver comes up. You can get a waiver for the countries or you can have some kind of general determination. Now even with respect to the goods, there is a waiver for developing countries. It's called the 1979 'enabling clause'. It is there and allows for making special provisions for certain groups of countries. *Dr Toufiq* pointed out that two proposals have been made - one for changing and one for trying to get a waiver. He mentioned that we are trying to get a waiver on this and also going through the request offer process simultaneously. He also maintained that there hasn't been much progress. He pointed out, however, that there are demographic changes going on around the world – aging populations and other problems. There will soon be a need to recognize that there will be a demand even in the host countries for labour from developing countries and there are only a few developing countries that can provide labour at this stage. He also said that in the near future we will have problems with shortage in supply of labour as our population growth rates have been falling very rapidly although we are currently able to supply labour.

Discussing the services sector issue, MCCI Secretary Mr C K Hyder said that Bangladesh has a vital interest in Mode 4. He then asked whether there is any progress relating to unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

Can Doha Round Lead to Poverty Reduction

Responding to Additional Secretary, DCCI, *Ms Ferdous Ara's* concern over the poverty reduction issue, Dr Toufiq Ali said that there is no way that the Doha Development Round itself can lead to poverty reduction because the WTO is not a development agency. In this regard he added that the policies followed by the individual countries are important to take advantage of the export opportunities created through WTO.

On the trade liberalisation issue raised by Former President, DCCI, *Mr Momen*, he said that trade liberalisation *per se* cannot develop a country. Liberalisation has to be done in stages and for that matter maintaining the policy environment is very important. In this regard, *Dr Toufiq Ali* referred to an article by *Professor Danni Roderick* of Harvard University in which the author concluded that the ones destroying the Doha negotiations and the process of the WTO are those who are reducing the policy space of the developing countries.

Bangladesh's Share of World Trade

Responding to BARC Senior Scientific Officer *Dr Razzaque's* question on the size of Bangladesh's share in world trade, *Dr Toufiq* said currently it is about 6-7% per year and has been expanding at a fairly rapid pace. Bangladesh's exports have also been rising quite rapidly although its share in world trade has been quite insignificant - below 0.01% level – in comparison with India's share of over 1%.

Need for a Ministerial Meeting

Responding to the issue raised by the DCCI Director *Mr Asif Ibrahim* as to whether there is any need for a ministerial meeting, *Dr Toufiq Ali* said that in the last ministerial held in Livingston, Zambia, the first item of our demands was DF-QF market access. There is an African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). There are 34 least developed countries in Africa, of which only 26 are eligible for AGOA. Among these 26 members there are problems due to which they cannot benefit from the AGOA facilities. Also, these countries really want the rules of origin amended on a permanent basis or at least on a predictable and lasting basis.

Address by the Chief Guest, Mr Feroz Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Commerce

In his address the Chief Guest of the session, *Mr Feroz Ahmed*, thanked *Dr Toufiq Ali* and other speakers who have real knowledge about the ongoing issues in the WTO, in international trade and also our economic activities. He also expressed satisfaction with the comments of the participants on different aspects and said that he was enriched as some of the issues had really provoked future negotiations on different aspects of our economy. Expressing great hopes about the WTO, he said that the Doha round has really been welcomed by all of us because it has centred on our interest. He also mentioned that it has actually given us hope for development through trade and in different other ways. Showing concern about the suspension of the Doha round, *Mr Ahmed* said that this has put a challenge to the multilateralism which was being conducted under the WTO. There was a growing concern that it would encourage bilateralism in regional trade negotiations because of this suspension. He revealed his apprehension that the countries lagging behind in such endeavours would be deprived of achieving gains from real market access opportunities. He thought that the suspension of negotiations provided breathing space for the LDCs in the WTO negotiations and deprived LDCs from getting benefits from early harvest of implementations from decisions taken. LDCs are exempted from reduction commitments in agriculture and NAMA. Also, they are not required to make any commitments for opening up their service sector. Therefore, the suspension of the Doha round would have no impact on undertaking commitments in agriculture, NAMA and service sectors. On the other hand, the modalities in agriculture and NAMA would be adopted. It would in turn reduce the global tariff on agriculture and NAMA. which in turn would reduce the GSP facilities that LDCs have been currently enjoying in the markets of the developed countries. He pointed out that due to global reduction of domestic support and export subsidies, food prices would increase and would affect Bangladesh negatively as we are a net food importing country. These would in turn have adverse effects on the balance of payments position of Bangladesh and the other LDCs. He mentioned that because of being a net importer and recipient of food aid, Bangladesh would not be greatly affected by the failure of the negotiations.

Mr Ahmed also mentioned that the implementation of the TRIPS agreement would not also be affected by the suspension of the Doha round although it would delay the service modalities for LDCs which had been adopted in September 2003.

Regarding the challenges that Bangladesh is currently facing, *Mr Ahmed* said that at the moment, negotiation has been officially resumed on 7th February 2007, but the real negotiations and engagements are far from expectations. Unless real flexibilities are

shown by the US and the EU in agriculture, uncertainty would still remain regarding the success of the Doha agreement. Considering the political context prevailing in those countries, particularly with the presidential election in the US to be held in the next year, it is assumed that WTO negotiations would not proceed much as the EC and the US would not be likely to undertake any meaningful commitment on agriculture. He mentioned that the Doha round is the development round, and if Bangladesh fails to reap meaningful benefits from this round of negotiations it would miss a real opportunity to gain from the multilateral trading system. It is therefore important for all of us to participate in the Doha negotiations intensively and cautiously. He added that Bangladesh would prioritise its options and actively participate in negotiations in specific areas taking into consideration the financial and human resource constraints. Bangladesh would also put its efforts in the early implementation of the decision of DF and QF access in a way which will be commercially meaningful to the LDCs. He mentioned that the government of Bangladesh has recently submitted a report to the USITC explaining the justification for according DQ-QF access to Bangladesh. He said that it is now a major challenge for LDCs to include meaningful text on DF-QF in the agriculture and NAMA modalities. He particularly thanked the BGMEA, BKMEA, FBCCI, DCCI, MCCI and other stakeholders including the CPD and others who participated in formulating the government's position paper submitted to the USITC.

Mr Ahmed said that Bangladesh should demand the implementation of the rules of origin for receiving improved market access through simplified and realistic rules of origin as the current one is a bit complicated. In this regard, the government is also talking to stakeholders such as BGMEA and BKMEA. He also mentioned that BTMA has another standpoint and therefore there is need for convergence of these divergent interests. He thought that we should have a uniform stand on this to set our strategy as how to demand and how to actually simplify these rules of origin to the best of our interest.

He also mentioned that the LDCs have submitted a revised request on Mode 4, and special priority on access for LDC service providers to the best of our interest. He pointed out that in this Mode 4, Bangladesh really has a very big stake because of the abundance of less skilled and semi-skilled labourers. He emphasized the importance of raising the voices of the LDCs from all concerned irrespective of the private or public sector for meaningful implementation of the LDC modalities. He further mentioned that Bangladesh should also continue to identify service sectors where it could ask for market access under Mode 4. In this regard he mentioned a study being conducted on the service sector to see the benefits, and hoped that within four months a report may be submitted and we will be able to identify our position.

He expressed that LDCs should focus on the negative effects of the reform programme on least developed and net food importing developing countries. He also pointed out that it must be ensured that there are no impediments in food aid during an emergency situation. The provision of a 'save box' for emergency situation food aid must not be subject to prior conditions of notifications in case of extreme urgency. Discipline for food aid in non-emergency situations is also a major challenge for the LDCs. Neither emergency nor the non-emergency food aid is to be tagged with the commitment for the elimination of export subsidy by 2013, said *Mr Ahmed*. If appropriate, food aid should be monetized to implement food security activities. He emphasized the need for technical and financial assistance for improving productivity and infrastructure in the LDCs who generally lack the capacity and strength to diversify their products, either exportables or agricultural production. To meet the requirements of SPS and TBT there is a strong need for capacity building. In this regard he also recognized the importance of identifying Bangladesh's trade related supply side constraints and collaboration with the WTO and other concerned parties for ensuring a dedicated proportion of the proposed 'Aid for Trade' package which is designated for LDCs taking into account their economic, financial, administrative and trade needs. He also pointed out that financial and technical support under Aid for Trade should be disbursed from new resources and must not be subject to traditional aid conditionalities. Non-tariff barriers should be identified and effective steps should be taken to resolve them in multilateral forums. Participation in the negotiations on rules is another area where the country should actively involve. Another important challenge that *Mr Ahmed* mentioned is developing a moratorium on safeguard measures and anti dumping actions against LDCs for facilitating exports.

Talking on the selection of commercial counsellors for the foreign missions, *Mr Ahmed* said that there is a definite procedure for selecting the commercial counselors. An inter-ministerial committee is there consisting of the Secretary Foreign Affairs, the Secretary Establishment, along with the Secretary Ministry of Commerce, Chaired by the Hon'ble Minister of the Ministry of Commerce to do this job. He also maintained that because of the deficiencies in our bureaucracy, it is not always possible to get the specialised officials in the appropriate places. He said, however, that through the WTO cell of the Ministry of Commerce, they have been trying to build up resourceful persons to actually handle the complicated issues relating to WTO matters and subjects under negotiation. *Mr Ahmed* informed that the WTO cell was created a few years back and so far 17 officers have been trained on a long-term and medium-term basis. He, however, recognized the problem of retaining the trained officers for a long time. Regarding capacity building in assessing the needs in diversifying trade, export and others even in export diversification, *Mr Ahmed* said that the Ministry of Commerce has been

implementing about eight technical projects in different fields in collaboration with our development partners.

Concluding Remarks

In making concluding remarks, Chair and Moderator of the dialogue *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* said that everybody in the dialogue has gathered valuable knowledge on the process and the issues and the current status of the Doha negotiations. He gave special thanks to the Commerce Secretary for laying out some of his thoughts, particularly the government's current negotiating position in broad terms, and *Dr Towfiq Ali* for responding to many of these issues. He then pointed out the major conclusions which he had drawn from the discussion.

The first point that *Dr Bhattacharya* mentioned was the interest and active engagement of Bangladesh in the Doha Development round. He added that Bangladesh has great interest in the wholesome, successful, fuller and faithful completion of the Doha round.

He then mentioned that Bangladesh should continue its technical work in as much detail as possible in the area of DF-QF. In this regard he referred to certain other issues that include the broader product list on the rules of origin, the issue of preference erosion on the latest revised list of the Mode 4 proposals on GATS, and the issue of how to protect the country as a net food importing developing one. In addition, he also mentioned the non-tariff barriers and other issues.

The third point that he mentioned was that there is no hurry for the conclusion of the Doha round. He preferred to have a longer protracted negotiation than to hurry and conclude a relatively non-ambitious deal. He considered the completion of the round by the end of 2007 as a totally over idealistic and an over ambitious proposition because the countries are yet to reach any agreement on the basic architecture and on the modalities of the negotiations.

The fourth point that he mentioned was that the countries in favour of promoting multilateral trade negotiations have become the conservatives. He therefore said that we will continue to look into the WTO as an alternative, but at the same time will also explore avenues of trade negotiation as it stands difficult, costly and very risky. However, he said that despite this situation, Bangladesh should not stay away from the other regional groupings and also the sub-regional possibilities which are taking shape particularly in Southeast Asia bringing in China and others. For that matter we should

look for all the growth centres and get market access over there and keep our options open through bilateral, regional and sub-regional groupings.

The fifth point that he made was regarding capacity building. In this regard, he referred to a report published in the Daily Star where it was mentioned that 30 people were trained under the WTO Regional Trade Policy programme and only 3 could be retained at the Ministry of Commerce. The coordinator of the WTO Regional Trade Policy courses also expressed concern over this issue and said that they train people but are not retained there for a reasonable length of time so that they could make contributions. Therefore Dr Bhattacharya emphasised the need for creating a much more substantive economic cadre who would look after it. He also mentioned that our progress has been very low compared to the demand and said that it is time that we talk about national capacity, not only the government's capacity, bringing in other resources which are available across the country, from the private sector and technical expertise and blend them and try to protect the interest of the country in a fuller way. Reiterating the need for building capacity he cautioned that if there is no critical capacity within the government, the rest of the capacity will not be utilised as well.

For who we are doing all these things was the final point that *Dr Bhattacharya* made in his concluding remarks. He further said that we have to make sure that at the end of the day people of Bangladesh lying below the poverty line get the benefits from this market access and see if the benefits are going to a selected group of entrepreneurs or to those who are associated with the industry. Making it happen is the real challenge he thinks. Currently the major benefit being percolated to the poor is through the labour market because of the employment issue. The next step will be to integrate the poor through the product market, which essentially means that the products of the poor have to be exported, not only their labour. He also mentioned that the savings of the poor can be reinvested in the export market. We have to integrate the capital market and the savings of the poor and convert them into investment. For the success of these initiatives he stressed the need for improvement in governance and improvement in the corruption situation as these play critical role in improving the linkages. He urged upon the government to make those policy perspectives more clear. *Dr Bhattacharya* requested all concerned to do analytical work and take this issue forward. He believed that this will give us much more moral strength to argue for market access in other countries. With that challenging proposition he concluded the dialogue and thanked all the participants for being present.

List of Participants
(In alphabetical order)

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<i>Mr Farooq Ahmed</i>	Secretary, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI)
<i>Mr Ahsanuzzaman</i>	Research Associat South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM)
<i>Mr S M Shakil Akhter</i>	Senior Assistant Secretary, General Services Wing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<i>Major General A T M Zahirul Alam, rcds, psc</i>	Commandant, National Defence College (NDC)
<i>Mr Mahbub Alam</i>	Research Associate, South Asian Network on Economic Modelling
<i>Mr Ib Albertsen</i>	Business to Business Coordinator, Royal Danish Embassy
<i>Dr Toufiq Ali</i>	Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the WTO, Geneva, Switzerland
<i>Lt. Col (Retd) M Anisuzzaman</i>	Managing Director, Global Fabrics (Pvt.) Ltd
<i>Mr Afsarul Arefeen</i>	Joint Secretary, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI)
<i>Mr Md Abul Kalam Azad</i>	Former Secretary and, Former Economic Minister in Washington Bangladesh Secretariat
<i>Mr Ahmed Wasimul Bari</i>	Assistant Professor, School of Business Victoria University of Bangladesh
<i>Mr M A Baset</i>	Director, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Director, Southern Knitwear Limited
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<i>Mr Zahidul Hoq</i>	Vice President, BKMEA
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<i>Mr Khalid Hossain</i>	Policy Officer, Oxfam GB
<i>Advocate Molla Moqbul Hossain</i>	Secretary , United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB)

<i>Mr C K Hyder</i>	Secretary General, MCCI
<i>Mr Asif Ibrahim</i>	Director, DCCI
<i>Mr Sheikh Morshed Jahan</i>	Assistant Professor and Chairperson, Development and Policy Research Centre, Institute of Business Administration (IBA)
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<i>Ms Azreen Karim</i>	Lecturer , Department of Economics, East West University
<i>Begum Sharifa Khan</i>	Deputy Director (WTO), Ministry of Commerce, GoB
<i>Dr Mostafa Abid Khan</i>	Deputy Chief, Bangladesh Tariff Commission
<i>Dr A Qayyum Khan</i>	President, France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Managing Director , Bureau Veritas Bangladesh
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(In alphabetical order)

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<i>Mr Rabiul Haque</i>	Reporter, Jai Jai Din
<i>Mr Sk Nazmul Hoque Saikot</i>	Staff Reporter, ATN Bangla
<i>Mr Monir Hossain</i>	Staff Reporter, News Network of Bangladesh (NNB)
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<i>Mr Hasan Imam Rubel</i>	Staff Reporter, The Prothom Alo
<i>Mr Fakhru Islam Haroon</i>	Staff Reporter, The Samakal
<i>Mr Didarul Islam</i>	Reporter, The Bangladesh Today
<i>Mr Aminul Islam</i>	Staff Reporter, The Daily Amader Shomoy
<i>Mr Sohikul Islam</i>	Reporter, Bangla TV
<i>Mr Humayun Kabir</i>	Staff Reporter, The Financial Express
<i>Mr Golam Kadir</i>	Reporter, STVus
<i>Mr Md Jasim Uddin Khan</i>	Staff Reporter, The Daily Star
<i>Mr Abdul Majid</i>	Staff Reporter, The Sangbad
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