

2 Poor Countries Agree Common Demands in Trade Talks

06/02/03

By Anis Ahmed and Nizam Ahmed

DHAKA, June 2 (Reuters) - The world's poorest countries on Monday adopted a charter of demands to present at world trade talks later this year, including unrestricted market access and easier movement of manpower to developed countries.

The charter, agreed after a three-day meeting in Bangladesh and called the Dhaka Declaration, also wants developed nations to end restrictions on food imports and cut agriculture subsidies to spur export of farm products from least developed countries (LDCs).

The declaration formed a common stance for the next round of world trade talks scheduled for September in Cancun, Mexico, said Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury of Bangladesh, which coordinates the 49-member LDC group.

The 16-point charter said the LDCs continued to be marginalised by decline in multilateral trade and expressed disappointment at slow implementation of commitments made by trade ministers and by the international community in the recent past.

"(We are) disappointed with the slow progress of implementation of (commitments) to help least developed countries secure beneficial and meaningful integration into the multilateral trading system and global economy," it said.

Chowdhury said: "We demand easy (maybe temporary though) movement of manpower, unrestricted market access, flexibility of rules of negotiation and exemption of LDCs from anti-dumping."

The LDCs want an end to farm subsidies in developed countries, Chowdhury added.

"Farming is the main livelihood for more than 70 percent of our population. Yet this sector is unable to contribute significantly to our external trade, on account of distortions," he told the meeting's concluding session.

"The developed countries continue to subsidise their agriculture to the tune of about \$1 billion a day."

Restrictions on trade in farm products are key issues in poor nations, which are under pressure to allow in manufactured products from other countries under global trade liberalisation but face severe restrictions or subsidised competition when they export food.

The European Union, whose lavish Common Agricultural Policy costs about half of its annual 100-billion euro annual budget, is a prime target of food producing nations, which also include the United States and the Cairns Group of 18 food-exporting nations.

Chowdhury urged the developed countries to open at least three percent of their labour market to workers from poor countries.

"Such opening would fetch benefits to LDCs between \$150 billion and 200 billion annually," he said. "This is almost two-thirds of the total benefits of complete liberalisation of trade in all goods," he added.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said she hoped the Dhaka meeting -- which coincided with a summit of the world's largest economies, the G8, in France -- would devise a mechanism to get a fair share for LDCs in global trade.

Copyright 2003, Reuters News Service