



WTO Special

The Coming days are going to be extremely tough for developing countries. The Hong Kong Declaration has set punishing deadlines for almost all the negotiation issues. Developed countries to coerce the Southern countries to enter into agreements while completely ignoring developmental concerns may use these stringent deadlines. The other major worrying factor is the manner in which the decisions may be taken in the future. According to the timelines given in the declaration all the major decisions such as finalization of the modalities in Agriculture and NAMA have to be taken in the next couple of months. This suggests that these decisions will be taken in the General Council of the WTO as against a Ministerial Conference. This is not a plausible proposition. The political heads of countries i.e. the Ministerial Conference should take decisions on all the issues that may have serious ramifications for countries and global trade.

However, the WTO secretariat is citing logistics as the major reason for not organizing another Ministerial in the next couple of months. This implies that the General Council in Geneva will take all the major decisions in the presence of political heads of selected big countries. Then, these decisions will be forced upon the rest of the WTO membership. This happened in the past, when the General Council agreed on a framework agreement in July/August 2004 to take the Doha Round Forward and then this decision was presented to all the WTO members who had no choice, but to accept it. Such a decision making approach does not augur well for the democratic credentials of the WTO.

Important Timelines Proposed by the Hong Kong Declaration for Negotiations in 2006

Overall

Conclusion of the Doha Round *2006*

Agriculture and NAMA

Finalization of the modalities *30 April 2006*

Submission of draft schedules *31 July 2006*

Services

Submission of outstanding initial offers *as soon as possible*

Submission of plurilateral requests *28 February 2006*

Submission of second round of revised offers *31 July 2006*

Submission of final draft schedules of commitments *31 October 2006*

TRIPS

Reviewing progress towards settling the conflict between *31 July 2006*

TRIPS and CBD