

*Check Against Delivery*

Remarks by  
His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo  
President of the Republic of Guyana  
at the Meeting of  
Ministerial Representatives of the G90  
in Georgetown, Guyana

June 3 - 4, 2004

On behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I wish to extend to you a warm welcome to Guyana. I wish to say a special word of welcome to our colleagues from the region and especially those from Africa and the Pacific who took at least two days of travel to get here.

Mr Chairman, the people of Guyana like the people in countries represented here today, are quite concerned with developments arising out of trade negotiations. Living in a small economy heavily dependent on a few basic commodities as sugar, rice, rum, and bauxite, they are worried about the uncertainties regarding the outcome and direction of the negotiations at the WTO.

They have seen how the WTO decision on bananas has severely impacted on their brothers and sisters in the Caribbean region, and, with each passing day, they wonder what would emerge from the present legal assault on sugar in the WTO, the impending CAP reform of sugar in the European Union and the general threat from other sources to the commodity arrangements that we have lived under for almost half a century.

I can only empathize with them and promise them that my government is doing and will do its utmost to try and protect their jobs and basic livelihoods. Your presence here today is all part of this effort, and yet another attempt to try to build solidarity with other commodity-dependent nations with similar interests in safeguarding their economies and the well being of their peoples.

All of you can bear testimony to how hard we have tried over the years to convince our trading partners and the international community in general of our plight as commodity producers. Yet, our cries keep falling on deaf ears,

and many nations - some big, rich and powerful - continue to remain highly insensitive to our plight.

We have no choice but to keep up the struggle, and it is this spirit that prompted the delegations of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, recently to suggest on behalf of the Commodity Exporting Developing Countries (CEDCs) that there was an urgent need for WTO Members to address the problem of the persistent decline in prices of primary agricultural products and its impact on their trade and economic development.

Guyana is fully conscious of the unenviable fate that has befallen these commodity producers. We keep asking what has become of President Chirac's initiative to ensure stable and remunerative commodity prices. A few years ago many of us looked forward to it gaining wider support among the international community but today it seems to have fallen off the radar screen.

In this climate of deteriorating commodity prices, hesitant world economic recovery, and uncertainty surrounding the war in Iraq, vulnerable economies as ours are being called upon to make further commitments in the WTO. We are already overstretched with our Uruguay Round obligations, many of which require substantial and unavailable budgetary support to fully implement.

We have strongly supported the multilateral system and firmly believe that if guided properly, it could be made to work in the interest of developing countries who are in need of a rules-based world with more stability and predictability. In spite of the failure in the negotiations, we have come out of Cancun with even more faith in the capacity of the WTO to promote development in the future.

We shudder to contemplate an alternative world of diminished multilateralism and rampant unilateralism in which developing countries will not be in a position to successfully negotiate adequate terms of access.

I would like therefore, to reiterate our firm belief in multilateralism and especially the new multilateralism which we are about to forge. This meeting is yet another strategic effort to give birth to a more development-friendly multilateralism in which the rules are flexible and we are permitted to enjoy the policy space necessary to advance our development.

Mr Chairman, we cannot afford to meet the many obligations for tariff reduction that are being requested of us at this moment. We have been asking before, at and after Cancun for accommodation to deal with the difficulties we encounter as poor, weak and vulnerable open economies.

Let me just remind you of one of these problems. As developing countries, we do not have an array of border instruments to defend our agriculture and industry. We cannot afford to use contingency measures as anti-dumping and countervailing duties which are costly and invite retaliation. Emergency trade remedies are also not available to us since they require considerable administrative work and above all, put us in the firing line of retaliation and calls for compensation.

We cannot also afford the subsidies of rich nations. We are therefore left with our bound tariffs as the only practical means of defending our agriculture and industry. To demand further concessions from us on this is to leave us defenceless in a world characterised by large agricultural and industrial producers whose scale can quickly swamp our production and wipe out our producers literally overnight.

Mr Chairman, we have tried in the WTO under the small economies programme and under special and differential treatment to convince our partners to take into account the well documented vulnerabilities of small developing countries but we have had limited success so far.

We are still trying to persuade them of the need to address these vulnerabilities. For us to benefit from the evolving trading arrangements, we require more binding commitments on our long-standing preferences. Without the current preferential margins and tariff quota access we now enjoy on our commodities, we will be wiped off the map by the large and more competitive producers. The assurances we sought in Cancun on long-standing preference have remained elusive and we are forced to keep on trying until we can knock on a more receptive door.

Your deliberations over these two days will try to set up a common platform from which we can go forward with the necessary solidarity. I am confident that this solidarity and unity will emerge. It already has its historic roots in the Georgetown Accord which laid the foundation for ACP solidarity and intra-ACP cooperation.

A new G90 platform will give hope to millions who live in our countries. It will add political and moral strength to our cause and send the right message to our trading partners. It will also surely sustain us in the tough negotiations in the months and years ahead.

We need to act with dispatch and with conviction to ensure that the new Framework Agreements currently being examined for adoption in July go beyond Cancun and provide us with the security we need in the WTO.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I do hope that you would not forget to enjoy the hospitality of Guyana and partake in all the Guyana has to offer. The Government of Guyana remains at your disposition to make your stay as comfortable as possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all success in you deliberations.

I thank you.

Office of the President  
Georgetown

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