

# Regional consultation calls for collective position at MC9

The 9th Ministerial Conference of the WTO (MC9) is due to be held in Bali, Indonesia from the 2nd - 3rd December this year. Going forward from the 8th Ministerial conference held in 2011, there are high expectations from MC9 to deliver on the Doha Development Agenda through multilateral trade reform.

Since the beginning of 2012, regional groups across the world have been in consultation with their members to discuss the positions they will adopt at MC9. Colombo too, will play host to a regional meeting of the SAARC Commerce Ministers from the 21st to 23rd August. They will endeavor to formulate a common position for the SAARC region in time for MC9.

In line with this, the coastal town of Marawila plays host to a congregation of the regions brightest and most prominent economists and trade experts from 2nd to 3rd July.

They will come together with the aim of creating an input document of recommendations that would feed in to the SAARC Commerce Ministers meeting in August. This consultation is organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment (SAWTEE), and is supported



First day of the discussion in progress

by OXFAM, UNESCAP, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. "Road to Bali" conference is an effort to provide an expert voice that will contribute to a common regional position, in time for the MC9. The region is represented by a variety of stakeholders, including think tanks, private sector, public sector, and the media.

Dr. Saman Kelegama, Executive Director of the IPS, delivering the welcome address stated that the SAARC region should be prepared to adopt a position much like they did at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit, where representatives from the region spoke "with one voice."

Executive Chairman of SAWTEE, Dr. Posh Raj Pandey, reiterated the sentiments expressed by Dr. Kelegama and added that "the primary objective of this meeting is to contribute to the common negotiations of SAARC countries in the coming Commerce Ministers meeting from a development perspective." Also speaking at

the event, Ziaul Hoque Mukta, Regional Policy Coordinator at OXFAM GB, reiterated the fact that "regional integration will help overcome constraints and help achieve a common goal."

The conference will be looking at the issues surrounding regional

needs on agriculture and food security; climate change; trade facilitation; aid for trade; intellectual property rights; and the issues of Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

At the drawing to the close of the first day of discussions, the need for a collective position was reiterated as being of paramount importance. It was identified as being imperative in terms of being able to give the region a distinguishable voice, in the midst of trade giants with big voices such as the US and EU, and which is therefore expected to increase the bargaining power of the region as a whole.

While the need has been identified, the way forwards remains tenuous. Fitting the needs of the SAARC member countries in to one common 'basket,' is a daunting task. The fact however, remains, that SAARC countries need not see each other as competitors in this effort, but as partners in an effort to receive a 'leg-up' in the road to equitable development.