

Doha: let us get away from realm of one-upmanship

From Mr Thomas R. Vant.

Sir, A defeatist attitude surrounds the World Trade Organisation negotiations on the Doha development agenda (DDA) that is painful for the world to watch. WTO members' failure to agree on their self-imposed April 30 deadline (report, April 24) for a deal on agriculture and industrial goods took no one by surprise. It was merely the most recent chapter in a long story of missed opportunities to show real commitment to delivering the great benefits of free trade to the world.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development business community does not have the luxury of taking a defeatist stance or playing the blame game. The 8m-plus companies our members represent urgently need meaningful results from the DDA. The WTO round is all about new opportunities for economic growth, promoting

development, creating jobs and prosperity for us all, but especially for the less developed countries. It is in the hands of trade ministers from developed and developing countries to create these opportunities through the genuine and mutually beneficial liberalisation of trade in agriculture, industrial goods and services. Failure to conclude the round would squander the achievements made to date and would dissolve the very substantial welfare gains ahead for developed and developing countries. And, as Jorma Ollila and Peter Sutherland say ("Business is fearful as Doha nears the precipice", April 24), it would also seriously undermine the credibility of the multilateral trading system, which has been the greatest achievement to date of international co-operation in the economic arena.

By missing the end-of-April deadline, negotiators have again kicked the can further down the road,

making the end of July the likely "make-or-break" moment. For practical reasons, the negotiations must be concluded by the end of 2006. Time is running out. Therefore, policy leaders must now take the process out of the realm of one-upmanship and give negotiators the green light they need to make a real difference. Pushing aside the remaining stumbling blocks in key negotiating areas may be difficult, but it is certainly achievable with far-sighted vision and determination on the part of policymakers. What countries and business – and all of us as citizens – have to gain at the end of the day makes this effort seem small in comparison.

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