

### Decline in the Interest of Economic Powers in the Apex World Trade Body

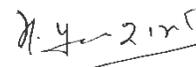
The apex multilateral trade body, the World Trade Organization (WTO) appears to have lost its sheen, as none of the industrialized countries has shown any interest in the election for the post of new Director General of this apex trade body, which was created after a long fought battle for more than seven years in the Uruguay round in 1980s. The election for the 2nd term for the post of Director-General too had been so complicated with a bitter battle that, the term of the Director General had to be splitted into two, for the twin nominees of the industrialized countries versus the developing countries.

This time it is quite strange that in the race for this top slot of the apex trade-body of 157 trading partners, there is no nomination from the US, Europe, China, India and Russia, the major economic powers or the larger nations of the world. Ever since the creation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1946, this is for the first time that the Euro-American countries of the northern hemisphere have shown no interest in the election for this trade body providing framework of rules for the global trade and allied matters. There are three Latin American nominees one each from Mexico, Brazil, and Costa Rica, and the other six candidates are from Indonesia, Jordan, Ghana, Kenya, New Zealand, and South Korea. The present Director General Pascal Lamy, the French incumbent is completing his term on August 31, 2013, who has held this position since 2005. The new incumbent has to resume office from September 1, 2013. The next biannual ministerial conference is also scheduled to be held 3-6 December 2013 at the Indonesian capital Bali. In view of protracted failure of talks since Doha round in 2001, and more truly even since the Seattle conference of 1999, till the Geneva conference of 2011, the significance of the Bali conference has increased. But, the lack of interest among the industrialized countries in the election for the post of Director-General is a precursor to the likely lacklustreness of the Bali conference as well. Though, it may also be a tactical move of the industrialized countries to avoid overheated electioneering, just to get their agenda pushed through an incumbent from a developing country, with the specific purpose to pacify the emotions of developing countries, which might reverberate when the agenda of the transnational corporations of the industrialized countries is pushed by their own nominee.

With respect to the final election, it is also being contemplated that two out of the three Latin American candidates, bidding to head the World Trade Organization might retire from the race and rally behind one regional figure, portraying the best chance of his being elected. It is quite likely that the Mexico's candidate might lead the trade body. But, Mexico is not going to have a cake walk. Brazil has nominated Roberto Azevedo, a well experienced negotiator having represented Brazil at the trade club. While Costa Rica has proposed its Trade Minister Anabel Gonzalez. Since, Brazil is Latin America's largest economy, and has presented a candidate to lead this 157-member organization in 2005 as well. Though, splits within the region over whom to support had weakened its case last time. This time there has been a strong sentiment that the WTO's top job should go to an African, Latin American or Caribbean candidate, since, all but only one head of this 17-year-old trade body i.e. the WTO has been from developed countries. This is also going to come true as there is no other contestent.

Further, the Bali conference is going to be held at a time when the Neo-liberal Economic Policies being pursued, are being questioned even in the industrialized countries after the global meltdown and Euro Zone Crisis. The asymmetric developments in trade, commerce and industry, creating crises and macro-economic imbalances with wide deficits along with miseries and joblessness for vast masses has begun to arouse doubts about continuing these. So, whoever becomes the Director-General of the WTO, he has to pursue an agenda for balanced world order to take care of the aspirations of vast disadvantaged masses. The multilateral trade agreements coming under the domain of the WTO and responsible for these asymmetries in manufacturing, trade and balance of payments, including intellectual property ownership-led monopolies, leading to mass resentment have to be renegotiated. Therefore, the member countries should display keenness to elect most suitable incumbent for this key position.

The candidates contesting for this apex trade body will now have to present themselves before the general house and the WTO members will have the opportunity to ask questions to the candidates about their perceptions and modus operandi. By May 31, 2013 the WTO members shall have to agree on, who is to become the organization's next Director General. The current Director-General, Pascal Lamy would leave his post on August 31, who is holding this post since 2005 and this new incumbent shall have to assume charge from September 1, 2013. He shall have tough time to resolve the sharp difference persisting since the Doha round of 2001.



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