

S'pore pledges to continue efforts to forward Doha Round

By **LEE U-WEN**

[SINGAPORE] While the Doha Round of trade talks remains stalled after 10 long years, there is still a chance to build on the developments and achievements so far to reach a new deal – provided all economies are able to work together in this spirit.

This was the view of Singapore's ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh, who pledged the Republic's ongoing effort to continue to work with all like-minded parties to find the best way forward.

Prof Koh made these points at the launch of the Singapore Chair of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Chairs Programme, an event that formally welcomed the National University of Singapore (NUS) – as the Singapore Chair – into an exclusive group of 15 global universities.

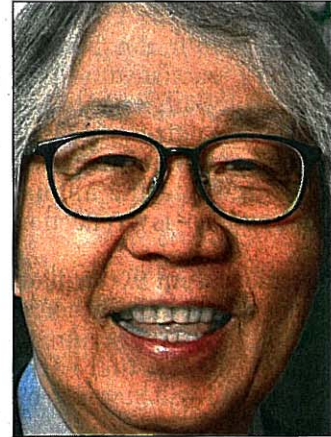
This WTO programme, first launched two years ago, aims to support and promote trade-related academic activities by universities and research institutions in developing countries.

In his speech at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel yesterday, Prof Koh said that it was “imperative” that countries be able to see beyond their domestic difficulties and continue to push for multi-lateral trade liberalisation.

“We must, however, always guard against any back-sliding and resist the temptation to raise trade barriers or resort to protectionist practices in the absence of an overall (Doha) agreement,” he said to his audience of academics, diplomats, business leaders and WTO officials.

The Doha round was launched in late-2001 with the goal of helping poor countries prosper through trade. The WTO's members, however, have disagreed over how much wealthy countries should cut farm subsidies and tariffs on farm and manufactured goods in exchange for developing countries opening their own markets in agriculture, manufacturing and services.

As it stands, talks in Geneva are gearing up towards pursuing a strong



Prof Koh: *Calls for all economies to guard against any back-sliding*

outcome for the WTO's ministerial conference this December.

“In Singapore's view, the outcome should include a pronouncement on a pragmatic way ahead for the Doha Round, recognising all the political realities of the day,” said Prof Koh.

Also speaking at the event, WTO chief economist Patrick Low hailed the WTO's close relationship with NUS, which took off four years ago when the university hosted the high-level Regional Trade Policy course that saw government officials across Asia come to Singapore for training in the area of trade policy.

The Doha Round, meanwhile, is expected to come under the spotlight once again during the inaugural WTO Policy Dialogue, a three-day conference that begins this morning.