Why India is right to back out of WTO’s landmark Bali package

New Delhi has decided it does not trust the assurance from the US and EU that food security negotiations will follow a trade agreement.

Rohan Venkataramakrishnan
Jul 20, 2014 · 06:15 pm

The World Trade Organisation has been around for almost two decades now, yet last year’s Bali package agreement, aimed at streamlining
simplify and standardise port procedures, was expected to have impact valued at $1 trillion on the global economy. Now the Bali package is on the rocks – and India is responsible.

India signed on to the package, as did 158 other WTO nations, after much debate and wrangling over its exact provisions. Yet on Thursday last week the National Democratic Alliance government explicitly stated that it cannot trust the United States and the European Union’s promise of promoting free trade while safeguarding its own developmental objectives – particularly food security – at the same time.

India now accuses those countries of hastily pushing through the trade facilitation agreement, while paying lip-service to food security assurances that will later be junked.

“There is growing disenchantment, anguish and anger in [our] domestic constituencies and a sense of deja vu as once again they see the interests of developing countries being subordinated to the might of the developed world,” India said, in a statement at a WTO meeting in Geneva earlier this month. “In round after round, developing countries have been called upon to concede more and more, with little being offered in return. But hope springs eternal and it was that which has spurred
The protocol for the Bali package was supposed to be finalised by the end of July, but as India had made its opposition clear, other emerging nations have begun to register their objections.

**Skewed Growth**

The conflict has two fault lines. The first is the very idea of trade facilitation. Putting in place such a system would undoubtedly liberate trade and spur growth, but this is likely to be unevenly skewed in favour of the developed world. Poorer countries will have to spend a great deal of money to upgrade their ports and customs facilities to bring them up to US and EU standards, and then prepare for their internal markets to be substantially rocked by the introduction of outside goods.

“This means that while we still don’t have binding international rules on, say, the right to water, corporations would have the ‘right’ to have their products exported into developing countries quickly, easily, and cheaply,” wrote Deborah James, director of international programs at the Centre for Economic and Policy Research.

The WTO has promised to set aside money to help poor countries, particularly some African
corpus of funds for developing nations this week. Additionally, the G-20, a group of 20 major economies, argues that the trade facilitation agreement would be the basis of up to $1 trillion in economic activity. It would also create 21 million jobs, 18 million of which would be distributed between the signatory developing nations.

**Not Just Trade**

The Bali package has two other pillars beyond trade facilitation: agriculture and the needs of the least developed countries. These three pillars were supposed to be taken forward equally when coming to an agreement, but the talks have focused almost solely on trade facilitation. Since last year’s Bali declaration there have been 20 meetings on trade facilitation and just two on agriculture.

This is crucial because India and other developing countries believe that the only way of ensuring they benefit from the Bali package is if development and agriculture are linked to free trade. Once trade facilitation is legally binding India and other developing countries would lose the leverage they have in their own spheres of direct interest.

“The pace of implementation of the Bali
unacceptable," said India’s statement in Geneva.

**Food Security**

While India is championing the cause of the least-developed countries, its primary focus is an agricultural agreement on food security. WTO rules mandate that countries cannot subsidise more than 10% of agriculture because it would distort the market, and the organisation has various other rules on minimum support prices for farmers and stock holding limits for grains. Simply the Food Security Act ensures that India’s agricultural subsidies could exceed these limits.

The Bali agreement sought to give India some leeway on this matter by putting its food security programme in an Amber Box – which means that other countries agree to a “peace clause” and will not legally challenge India subsidies even if they do breach WTO limits for the moment. This gives the organisation four years to work on a broader agricultural resolution.

**Double Standard**

India would like to put the entire programme into what in WTO parlance is known as the Green Box, making food security programmes completely legal rather than just permissible. China has also supported this position. It has also been convincingly argued that the position
BertheLOT has argued for some time now that the United States has placed most of its hefty subsidies in the Green Box, while also under-notifying the amount of agriculture it subsidises.

Desperate negotiations are now on at the G-20 summit to get India to back down from its demand for a concrete declaration on food security, but New Delhi seems confident of its position. For the moment, this means the WTO’s signature agreement – the Bali Package – is not going to be delivered any time soon.

We welcome your comments at letters@scroll.in.

You’d be forgiven if you assumed that the largest festival of Indian classical music would be held in India. But since 2012, the Bengal Foundation in Dhaka has been hosting a massive five-day affair that is now emerging as perhaps the most-attended Indian classical music festival in the world.

Simply called the Bengal Classical Music Festival, the event is held in Dhaka’s Army Stadium and...
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last year, the organisers had to close registrations at 35,000 people.

“This year, we will be able to stretch the audience capacity to 50,000, and we have received registration queries from across Bangladesh as well as India,” said Luva Nahid Choudhury, the director general of Bengal Foundation, a non-profit cultural trust that has been promoting traditional music, dance, art and literature in Bangladesh for the past 25 years.

In comparison, Pune’s Sawai Gandharva festival – founded by the late Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and widely considered one of India’s largest classical music festivals – draws an average of 15,000 attendees every year.
November 27 to December 1. Although the event is free, online registration is mandatory and begins on November 3. For five evenings in a row, the concerts at the festival will begin at 6 pm and continue all night up to 5 am, just before the morning *namaz*.

In the 55 hours of programming, the festival will feature nearly 50 prominent Bangladeshi and Indian artistes, including vocalists Kishori Amonkar, Ulhas Kashalkar and Girija Devi, flautist Ha ...

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[In numbers] New Maharashtra assembly has lowest number of Muslims ever

But state has elected highest number of women legislators.

Deepika Chhillar, Rohini Singh and Neha Yadav
Today · 01:00 pm
A lot of quick explanations have been thrown around to explain the results of the recent Maharashtra assembly elections: the continued effect of the Modi wave, the anti-incumbency effect, the snapping of alliances, the engineering of defections before the campaign. But to measure the impact of these assertions, it is necessary to back them with data.

While the Modi wave cannot be measured due to the sweeping character of the assertion, we can provide data on some other indicators of the Bharatiya Janata Party’s success and of other parties’ fortunes and misfortunes.

We can also look as the state of representation of women and minorities to see whether these elections mark a departure or a continuation
Elections in India have attracted larger numbers of candidates over the years. A large part of this rise is due to the increase in the number of independent candidates and of micro-parties. Despite the rise, however, the number of effective candidates and of parties represented in the assembly has been stable over time.

Another way to measure the effectiveness of candidates is to look at the number of candidates who forfeit their deposits – meaning those who have gained less than one-sixth of the total votes polled in their constituency.

These elections confirmed the trend of the increase in the total number of candidates, a trend that was also visible in the late 1980s and...
Most of the candidates forfeiting their deposits are independents or micro-party candidates. If we break down the data among the main pa ...
The results of the preliminary examination for the civil services were announced recently. What will the future batch of civil servants look like? Considering the current employment data for the Indian Administrative Services, they will be overwhelmingly male, speak Hindi as their first language and are likely to be engineers.

Mayank Jain
Today · 12:00 pm

Photo Credit: http://www.lbsnaa.gov.in/
For every 20 male IAS officers, there are only three female officers. Since 1974, India's steel frame has incorporated only 687 women compared to more than 3,000 men.

Northward ho!

Together, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh contribute almost a quarter of India’s civil servants. Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state, has been represented by 619 officers over the last four decades. Bihar is the home state of over 400 officers.

Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have sent 250 IAS officers each.
officers. Kashmiri, Dogri and Mizo have been reported as mother tongues by between 10 and 20 people in the services. Surprisingly, there were no speakers of Rajasthani in the ranks.

However, Hindi is the most common first language, with more speakers than the next nine most-spoken languages. Tamil and Telugu have more than 250 speakers each, and stand at the second and third places in the list.
DEBATING FUNDAMENTALISM

Pakistani illustrator writes to Ben Affleck on radical Islam: 'Your heart's in the right place but...'

Creator of book 'My Chacha Is Gay' tells American actor he shut down the opportunity for a productive dialogue on radical Islam.

Scroll Staff
Today · 10:14 am
Last fortnight, *Gone Girl* star Ben Affleck caused a storm when he got into a heated debate with US TV host Bill Maher and American author Sam Harris over their views on Islamic radicalism. Appearing on the show *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Affleck attacked Harris for suggesting that Islam was a "mother lode of bad ideas" and skewed Maher for maintaining that liberals fail to condemn the lack of personal freedoms, especially for women and LGBT minorities, in the Muslim world.

The actor claimed that Maher and Harris were being racist and were making generalisations about Muslims. "How about more than a billion people who are not fanatical, who don't punish women, who just want to go to school, have some sandwiches," he asked. "It's stereotyping."
Trending on Scroll

earned Affleck a great deal of praise from progressives.

However, not everyone agreed with Affleck. In an open letter this week, a Canadian illustrator and blogger of Pakistani origin named Eiynah politely and eloquently explained why she believes the actor is wrong.

Dear Ben,

I am writing to you today as a woman who was born and raised in Islam. I saw your discussion with Bill Maher and Sam Harris, and I must say you did me a great disservice that day. Your heart was in the right place, of course, and it was lovely of you to step up and defend "my people".

What you really did though, perhaps inadvertently, was silence a conversation that neve ...
VIRAL ALERT

Infection projections: how the spread of Ebola is calculated

Estimating the pace of the virus's advance is vital to controlling it.

Jonathan Keith, The Conversation
Today · 08:00 am
Trending on Scroll

The number of reported Ebola cases is doubling roughly every five weeks in Sierra Leone, and in as little as two to three weeks in Liberia. The number of reported cases globally is projected to reach 10,000 by the end of October. The actual number of cases may be twice the official figure. So how are such figures estimated – and what can bioinformatics do to help control the disease?

The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa appeared suddenly and spread rapidly, and is thought to have started with a single animal-to-human transfer in December last year. It’s an example of an emerging infectious disease: one that has newly appeared in a population or has undergone a rapid increase in incidence. SARS
EIDs are often zoonoses – animal diseases that have infected humans as hosts and become transmissible. Such “host-switching” events can happen anywhere at any time, and preparedness to respond rapidly and effectively when this occurs is an important aspect of public health policy.

One parameter that epidemiologists use to quantify the rate of a disease’s spread is the basic reproduction number: R0 (R-nought).

This is the number of new cases generated on average by each infected individual, in idealised conditions. Diseases with R0 less than 1 are not likely to become epidemics, but those with R0 more than 1 have the potential to spread exponentially.

Current estimates for Ebola indicate an R0 of around 2 – higher than the R0 of some strains of influenza – although it varies between regions.

Other parameters that determine the spread dynamics of a disease include the length of time the disease takes to incubate, and the period of time during which diseased individuals are infectious.

A key parameter is the proportion of cases that
overwhelmed medical personnel might fail to accurately record all interventions.

Lack of beds and medical staff mean patients have been turned away.

This is important not only because under-reporting reduces the effectiveness of management strategies, but also because it can influence estimates of the other parameters mentioned above, particularly if there is variation in reporting levels across regions.

Attempts have been made by the Centre for Disease Control to estimate the degree of under-
cases in Guinea is about 1.5 times the reported figure, with corresponding factors of 2 for Sierra Leone and 2.5 for Liberia.

(The WHO hasn’t published the methodology used to estimate these figures: they may be little more than guesses.)

Putting the pieces together

Bioinformatics plays a key role in detecting, monitoring and responding to EIDs.

In the case of Ebola, the bioinformatics community has responded rapidly. For example, the current outbreak of Ebola in Sierra Leone was first detected in May, but by September a study reported sequencing 99 Ebola virus genomes from 78 patients diagnosed with the disease between late May and mid-June.

The process of sequencing a genome involves assembling many thousands of short sequences – gene fragments obtained from all over the genome. Algorithms for assembling genome sequences detect overlaps between fragments, and align and merge them to reconstruct the sequence of the whole genome.

Bioinformaticians have been developing and
By the end of September this year, the UC Santa Cruz Genomics Institute had released a new Ebola genome browser with an alignment of 148 individual viral genomes, including 102 from the current outbreak. This was a monumental effort: UCSC researcher Jim Kent led a team that reportedly worked around the clock in the last week of September to produce the browser.

Such genome browsers will undoubtedly accelerate global efforts to develop a vaccine and antiserum.

One of the advantages of having whole genome sequences is that they can be used to reconstruct the family tree (phylogeny) of Ebola.
or current management strategies.

They can also be used to estimate parameters that govern how rapidly the virus spreads, in terms of both number of cases and geographic range.

These can, in turn, be used to forecast the future course of the epidemic and predict the impact of various management strategies.

There are many other ways in which bioinformatics contributes to the management of EIDs. Genomic sequence analyses can lead to a better understanding of the biology of a disease, the features that make it pathogenic, and potential drug targets or clinical interventions.

A recent survey of Australian life sciences conducted by Bioinformatics Resource Australia EMBL (BRAEMBL) found that bioinformatics is seen by many laboratory scientists as core to their work, but also identified marked community concern about a lack of expertise and access to expertise in bioinformatics.

In light of the importance of bioinformatics in managing EIDs, and its growing role in facilitating research in the life sciences more generally, it is important that students and early
Bioinformatics is, and will continue to be, a core component of the international response to Ebola and other EIDs, and patients, medical staff and those close to them need all the help they can get.

This article was originally published on The Conversation.

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Iraqi army and Kurdish fighters gain ground against Islamic State militants

News from around the world.

Scroll Staff
Today · 04:15 am

Iraqi forces recapture strategic town of Jurf al-Sakhar near Baghdad

Iraqi armed forces retook the strategic town of Jurf al-Sakhar near Baghdad on Sunday, defeating the Islamic State (IS) militants in a battle that lasted for almost two weeks. The strategic town, located just 80 kilometers southeast of the capital Baghdad, was the last major area under IS control in Iraq. The victory comes as part of a larger offensive launched by the Iraqi army and Kurdish fighters to retake control of the region and push IS back deeper into Syria. The gains are significant not only for the Iraqi government but also for the US-led coalition fighting IS in the region. The US military has been providing aerial support to the Iraqi forces as they work to drive IS out of Iraq.

Photo Credit: Mandel Ngan / AFP
to the capital, besides stopping them from infiltrating the mainly Shi'ite south. Kurdish fighters in north, allied by United States-led air strikes, also made significant gains against Islamic State militants. The latest clashes have killed 67 Iraqi soldiers and 300 IS fighters.

**Woman hanged in Iran for killing her alleged rapist**

A 26-year-old woman, convicted of murdering a man she accused of trying to rape her as a teenager, was hanged to death in Iran on Saturday. Reyhaneh Jabbari was hanged to death, at dawn on Saturday after failing to secure a reprieve from the murder victim's relatives, within the 10-day deadline set by Iranian law. Both the United States government and the European Union condemned the actions of Iranian authorities.

**Brazil to hold presidential polls today**

Brazilians will vote on Sunday to elect as their president either incumbent Dilma Rousseff or opposition candidate Aecio Neves, setting the stage for the country's tightest election in decades. Surveys released on Saturday by various polling firms gave Rousseff a four- to six-percentage-point lead over Neves. The election pits Neves, a pro-business senator promising to revive a stagnant economy, against
Death toll due to Ebola rises up to 4,922

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