

By a strange irony, we now have the chance to close a deal at Doha

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From Prof Jagdish Bhagwati.

Sir, Apropos your editorial “[Life after Doha](#)” (April 19) prematurely announcing the death of the Doha Round, and Alan Beattie’s further thoughts on how to bury the corpse (“[Time to limit the Doha damage](#)”, Comment, May 3): it is worth remembering that the declarations of multilateral trade negotiations and their closings require political leadership. And this leadership can reflect, taking shrewd advantage of opportunities that arise fortuitously from nowhere.

The failure to launch the Doha Round at Seattle, where the World Trade Organisation meeting failed amid chaos and mayhem, was followed by the US exercising leadership, under President George W. Bush, to launch the Round at Doha two years later, by taking advantage of 9/11. It was considered to be a symbol of our determination to reaffirm our values, which include an open economy and society.

By a strange irony, Osama bin Laden’s assassination nearly 10 years later presents an opportunity to close the round, again in affirmation of the same values. What a glorious opportunity this presents to a much-strengthened President Barack Obama finally to emerge from his eloquent silence on Doha and to address and convince the unions that wrongly attack openness in trade for their stagnant wages or for unemployment. Equally important, he needs to confront and seek moderation from the insatiable business lobbies that keep up the cry that “there is not enough on the table for us”; as Adam Smith, Milton Friedman and John Kenneth Galbraith reminded us, corporate interests and national and international advantage are not always congruent.

After a year’s hesitation, President Bill Clinton fought like a lion for the Uruguay Round. President Obama can do no less. Let us make opening Doha and closing Doha a lasting, unwitting legacy of Osama bin Laden.

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