

Doha development round in jeopardy, says Nirmala Sitharaman

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Nairobi: India today expressed fear that the WTO's Doha Development Agenda (DDA) appears to be in jeopardy and stressed that history will judge us (WTO ministers) poorly if inequities in global trade are allowed to perpetuate.

The reform process, which was started after the Uruguay Round in the form of the Doha Round, appears to be in jeopardy. Negotiations have spilled over in Nairobi, which makes matters very complicated, Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The manner and haste with which important negotiating meetings are being convened does not inspire confidence, she added.

The minister was addressing the plenary at the 10th ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) being attended by 160 trade ministers of the member countries of the global trade body.

As trade ministers, history will judge us poorly if the outcomes of the DDA perpetuate inequities in global trade, she said, adding that it was vital to keep the aspirations of millions of people living in the developing world in clear focus.

India was prepared to constructively contribute in all areas within the framework of the negotiating mandates and the core principles of the WTO, she said, adding we must act with a sense of common purpose and urgency.

She stressed that this ministerial must clearly re-affirm the DDA and all ministerial declarations and decisions taken since 2001, when the Doha Round was launched. These are all important. Let us not waste time negotiating which of these we should reaffirm and welcome, she added.

Sitharaman said it is everybody's duty to safeguard the legitimate interests of poor farmers and the food security of hundreds of millions in developing countries. We cannot continue with the rhetoric of a development agenda without even a reasonable attempt to address issues which are of primary concern to developing economies, she said.

For decades, a handful of farm lobbies of some countries have shaped the discourse and determined the destiny of millions of subsistence farmers of the developing countries, she said.

The reduction in the massive subsidisation of the farm sector in developed countries which was the clear cut mandate of the DDA is now not even a subject matter of discussion today, leave aside serious negotiations, she added.

Sitharaman said that due to these concerns, the G-33 has strongly argued the case for an effective special safeguard mechanism (SSM) for developing countries and for changing the rules relating to public stockholding for food security purposes.

These are not new issues. We are disappointed at the cavalier manner in which these issues are being pushed into the future. On the other hand, there is a sudden inexplicable zeal to harvest export competition. On this, we are told that there is convergence when in fact, there appears to be little, she said.

Developed countries and few developing nations are pushing to eliminate export support given by countries like India to boost their agriculture exports.

On the other hand, India is pitching for SSM which would help in protecting the interest of poor farmers in case of sudden surge in imports or dip in prices.

- PTI