

WTO MAY EASE CURBS ON INDIAN GRAIN EXPORTS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: World Trade, WTO and issues involved

India has been criticised in the United States, as well as by several other countries, for failing to take a stronger stand against Russia and for not directly condemning its aggression against Ukraine. The U.S. has also been pressuring India to not increase its purchases of Russian oil at this time.

Moscow has offered and sold oil at a discounted price to New Delhi in recent weeks. However, a very low proportion (1%-4% based on estimates from Indian and the U.S. officials) of India's energy imports come from Russia. The U.S. has offered to help India replace Russian oil with oil from elsewhere.

Understanding realities

Responding to a question on the interplay of India's significant defence relationship with Russia and its growing and significant trade relationship with the United States, in its decision to not call out Russia by name for the invasion of Ukraine, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman pointed to India's geography.

She said that there was an understanding in Washington of India's geopolitical realities and "this recognition [by the U.S.] that there is a friend there [in India], but the friend's geographical location has got to be understood and a friend cannot be weakened for any reason".

"It's not as if India has a choice to relocate itself," Ms. Sitharaman said, describing various challenges India faced along its northern and western borders – a reference to China and Pakistan.

Calibrating position

"India certainly wants to be a friend. But if the U.S. also wants a friend...the friend should be not weakened," she said.

"So we are taking decisions, we are taking calls, we are taking a calibrated position because we need to be strong where we are given the geographical locational realities."

Citing developments like the India-United States '2+2' meetings, the Biden-Modi summit virtual meeting last week, and India's consideration of the soon-to-be-announced Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) - the Biden administration's economic cooperation framework for the Indo Pacific, Ms. Sitharaman said she was seeing "more and more windows of opportunities opening", rather than the U.S. keeping India at a distance because of India's "calibrated" stance with respect to Russia.

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