

INAUGURAL SESSION OF WTO MINISTERIAL MEETING BEGINS IN NEW DELHI

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Ministry of Commerce & Industry

Inaugural Session of WTO Ministerial Meeting begins in New Delhi

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Senior officials of participating countries at the inaugural session of the WTO Ministerial Meeting

Commerce Secretary, Dr. Anup Wadhawan, welcomed senior officials of participating delegations from Developing and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) who are meeting in New Delhi over two days to discuss key issues and challenges facing the multi-lateral trading system.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Commerce Secretary said that the existential challenges to the multilateral rules based trading system are manifested in a spate of unilateral measures and counter measures, deadlock in key areas of negotiations and the impasse in the Appellate Body. The logjam in the Appellate Body is a serious threat to the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO and the implementation function of the Organization. The fundamentals of the system are being tested through a tide of protectionism around the world, vitiating the global economic environment. The situation does not bode well for developing countries, including the LDCs.

The harm that the institutional failure due to the collapse of the Appellate Body will cause will be felt more in Developing Countries including LDCs who need the protection of the rules based system more than developed countries. There is an urgent need to engage constructively to preserve the system and come up with constructive solutions to the problem.

The situation in the WTO has spurred a strong discourse for reforming the WTO, which unfortunately is characterised by a complete lack of balance. The reform agenda being promoted does not address the concerns of the developing countries. The discussions in the meeting being held in New Delhi give a chance to reaffirm the resolve to keep development at the centre of the reform agenda. The reform initiatives must promote inclusiveness and non-discrimination, build trust and address the inequalities and glaring asymmetries in existing agreements. These asymmetries are against the interest of developing countries including LDCs. There is a need to work together to put issues of importance for developing countries and their priorities in the reform agenda.

There has been no active engagement or movement on key issues of concerns for developing countries including LDCs in the negotiating agenda. Agriculture remains a key priority for a large membership of WTO representing the developing world. However, there is a strong push to completely relegate existing mandates and decisions and work done for the past many years, to the background.

Discipline on fisheries subsidies are currently under negotiation at the WTO with intense engagement to understand the issues and work out a meaningful agreement by December 2019. The MC11 decision on fisheries subsidies clearly mandates that there should be an appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing countries. It is important for developing countries including LDCs to collectively work for a fair and equitable agreement on disciplines in fisheries subsidies, which takes into consideration the livelihood needs of subsistence fishermen and ground realities in our countries, and protects our policy space to develop capacities for harnessing our marine resources.

India believes that developing countries need to work together to protect their interests in the WTO negotiations through preservation of the core fundamental principles of the WTO. The two-day meet gives an opportunity to the participating countries of developing a shared WTO reform proposal on issues of priority and interest for developing countries. This will help in building a common narrative on issues of importance for Developing Countries including LDCs.

In two-day meeting following issues are likely to be discussed:

- Finding a solution to the ongoing impasse in the Appellate Body on an urgent basis.
- Issues of importance and priority for developing countries including LDCs in the reform agenda.
- How to reinvigorate negotiating agenda on issues of critical importance for developing countries?
- How to ensure effective S&D for all developing countries including LDCs?

Today's senior officials' discussions will feed into the Ministers' deliberations tomorrow, on 14th May 2019.

The two-day meeting is an effective move by developing countries to positively influence the outcome of WTO reforms by making development at its core and exploring all means of saving multilateralism.

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