

Canada urges WTO deal on e-com, SMEs

Infrastructure push: Canadian pension funds are keen to invest in smart cities in India, said Mr. Champagne. Reuters

Canada plans to pitch for a global deal to boost trade involving e-commerce and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) besides norms that will help eliminate gender barriers to trade, at the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Ministerial Conference to be held next month, Canada's Minister of International Trade, François-Philippe Champagne said.

In an interview, Mr. Champagne said, "Canada will be pushing [for a] gender declaration... to favour more women and women entrepreneurs in trade. We are going to be pushing for [norms on] SMEs and e-commerce. We are very committed [to these] because we think these elements are real enablers for greater trade and [an agreement on these] are possible at the Ministerial Conference." The next Ministerial Conference, which is the WTO's highest decision-making body, will be held between December 10-13 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

On the possibility of WTO members agreeing for inclusion of a work programme on 'investment facilitation', he said, "We will see."

'Expedite FIPPA'

On bilateral issues with India, Mr. Champagne said Canadian pension funds were keen to invest in the development of infrastructure and smart cities in India. However, he said, "what is slowing down the level of (Canadian) investment (in India) is that we haven't yet finalised the bilateral Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPPA)." "That is why I was telling [commerce and industry] minister Suresh Prabhu that we need to quickly finalise the FIPPA." Mr. Champagne, who on Monday also met Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, said, "... it is in the best interests of Canada and India to finalise it [FIPPA] to bring a new momentum in our relationship."

On whether the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism, which, among other things, enables investors to sue governments before international tribunals and seek huge compensation for the economic harms they suffer due to reasons including policy changes, will be included in the FIPPA, he said, "when there is a will there is a way."

He further said, "Both Jaitley and I are lawyers, so we have, I think, established a way forward, which takes into account the interests of Canada and the reality also from the Indian side. I am confident that, on that basis, our chief negotiators will be able to make progress." When queried if the ISDS provisions in the FIPPA would ensure a balanced outcome or whether it would be in favour of either investors or the State, Mr. Champagne said, "You will find a win-win outcome because that's what we want. Canada stands out as the flag bearer of progressive and inclusive trade." Asked whether Canada was keen on signing the FIPPA before the India-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), he said, "I want both. [But] on the FIPPA, the negotiations are more advanced, and so I spoke to Jaitley. We agree on what are the remaining issues... [and] on how to resolve them. So we have told our chief negotiators to get on with it." On the CEPA, he said, "we need to engage in discussions... From the Canadian side we are equally committed because, blame me for being ambitious ...we need to look at the full potential of our relationship."

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