

Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering, New Delhi, 20 March 2018

Concluding Remarks, on his own responsibility, by the Chair, Shri Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, India

In concluding this Informal World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Gathering, attended by Ministers and high-level officials from 53 Members representing a broad spectrum of the WTO membership, and with warm thanks to all participants for their contributions, I would like to summarize my impressions from our discussion as follows:

1. Participants expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Government of India for organizing the informal gathering of trade ministers to discuss the current challenges facing the WTO and the way forward.
2. Participants welcomed the fact that, in spite of challenging circumstances, some positive results were achieved at MC11. At the same time, disappointment was voiced about the lack of further convergence and outcomes.
3. In almost all interventions, a need to preserve and enhance the functioning and credibility of the rules-based multilateral trading system as embodied in the WTO was emphasized. In particular, almost all the participants sought expeditious and immediate resolution of the impasse in the appointment of Appellate Body members - an issue that was viewed to be adversely affecting the credibility and functioning of the WTO. In this context, in some interventions the utility of negotiating multilateral trade rules, at a time when WTO members are unable to enforce existing rules due to the impasse in the Appellate Body, was questioned.
4. In many interventions deep concern was expressed at the serious threat posed to the credibility of the WTO rules and some of its cardinal principles, such as non-discrimination, by the cycle of recent unilateral trade measures and proposed counter-measures. In some interventions the need for WTO members taking urgent and coordinated action to address the underlying issues was highlighted.
5. The need for all developing countries, including LDCs, to benefit from Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) provisions in future trade agreements was emphasised in many interventions. While this was contested in some interventions, the need to find ways of addressing the issue in a balanced and unemotional manner acceptable to all was emphasized by some participants. Many suggestions including developing countries selectively opting out of S&DT, and adopting a case-by-case approach to S&DT, were made in a few interventions. However, it was the view of some participants that implementing these suggestions would further exacerbate the differences between members and therefore be futile.
6. In many interventions the importance of achieving progress on the Doha issues, especially agriculture, fisheries subsidies and domestic regulation in services,

while seeking to address the differences on the basis of pragmatic and flexible options, was emphasised.

7. With reference to agriculture, issues related to reforms in domestic support, a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security purposes, cotton and an agriculture special safeguard mechanism were identified as areas of priority in some interventions. Further, the need to address historical asymmetries and imbalances in the Agreement on Agriculture was also highlighted.
8. With reference to the decision on Fisheries Subsidies, the importance of concluding negotiations by 2019, was voiced by several countries. It was highlighted that this would also help in achieving SDG 14.6.
9. In many interventions it was emphasised that open, transparent and inclusive discussions within the joint initiatives by the proponents of issues such as Electronic Commerce, Investment Facilitation, Gender, MSME etc., would deepen the understanding of issues and benefit all members. However, this was questioned in some other interventions, wherein it was reiterated that all negotiations at the WTO must follow the fundamental principle of multilateralism and that any other approach represents a threat to the multilateral trading system.
10. In some interventions the importance of enhancing the work of the regular WTO bodies and the need for a renewed focus on transparency and notifications was highlighted.
11. Ministers reaffirmed that the WTO plays an important role by bringing stability and predictability to the multilateral trading system. It was recognised by almost all the participants that it is the collective responsibility of WTO Members to address the challenges facing the system and putting it back on a steady and meaningful way forward so that it continues to serve the people of our countries.
