

India to hard-sell TFA in services at WTO 'mini-ministerial' in Oslo

fe Bureau

New Delhi, Oct 3: Trade ministers from 20-odd key nations would assemble in Oslo for a two-day meet, starting October 21, to shape the future course of action for the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman could make a fresh pitch for greater liberalisation in services and drum up support for India's bid for a trade facilitation agreement (TFA) on services at the WTO, sources told *FE*.

The minister could also press for a reaffirmation of the 2001 Doha Development Agenda by WTO members, apart from seeking concrete work plans on a special safeguard mechanism (SSM) for developing countries to protect their farmers from a spurt in imports, and on a permanent solution to the issue of the government's grain procurement and food security in India.

WTO director general Roberto Azevedo is also expected to attend the Oslo meeting.

The Doha Round of negotiations has remained stalled since 2008 over differences between developed and developing nations, primarily over the huge trade-distorting subsidies being given to farmers by the rich countries. India had expressed its disappointment over the lack of a unanimity in reaffirming to conclude the Doha Agenda after the Nairobi ministerial in December last year.

India recently floated a concept paper on the TFA in services at the WTO. The Indian move is aimed at developing a broader framework governing global services trade, just like a TFA on goods.

A TFA in services would focus on issues like liberalised visa regime, long-term visas for



Commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman

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business community and freer movement of professionals for the greater benefit of both India and the world, among others. It could also focus on all issues concerning the services sector within the WTO framework, which could also include dispute settlement mechanism in such trade.

India's decision to submit the concept paper followed an informal meeting of trade ministers from 25 WTO members on the sidelines of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ministerial council meeting in Paris earlier this year, where the WTO director general welcomed India's proposal for the TFA in services.