

'Allow Kamal Nath to negotiate'

The head of a leading global nongovernment group says wealthy developed countries are not allowing Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath to negotiate freely at the world trade talks in Geneva.

'The on-going mini-ministerial of trade ministers in Geneva to take forward the Doha Round of negotiations has reached a critical stage and India is getting increasingly marginalised. It is not just due to huge pressure from the rich nations to open up its markets for agriculture and industrial goods but more because our trade minister is not allowed to negotiate freely,' said Pradeep S. Mehta, Secretary General of CUTS International, a leading consumer policy research and advocacy group, which works on trade and regulatory issues.

'I am not allowed to negotiate' is what Kamal Nath reportedly said Monday. This is symptomatic of the negotiating style which the rich follow to brow beat the poor, just overwhelm, otherwise call them spoilsports,' said Mehta, whose organisation advises the government on trade issues.

Mehta said most of India's concerns on market access in agriculture and industry have been either rejected or diluted, including objections by Indian industry to the application of anti-concentration clause on flexibilities in industrial goods.

'Kamal Nath has asserted that these talks are becoming more like advancing the interests of prosperous classes while ignoring those whose livelihood security depends crucially on trade and trade-related matters,' said Mehta. In contrast to the current talks that are scheduled to end Wednesday, Mehta said Kamal Nath was able to 'work wonders' at the Hong Kong ministerial meeting in 2005.

'It was he who convened a meeting of all developing and least developed countries (the Group of 110 countries) at Hong Kong which salvaged the Doha Round from the brink of a collapse and yet without compromising on the interests of the poor. Even leaders of our Left parties praised him for his statesmanship with a pragmatic approach,' Mehta pointed out.

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