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The Centre for WTO Studies was set up by the Department of Commerce, Government of India in 1999. The intent was to create an independent think tank with interest in trade in general and the WTO in particular. The Centre has been a part of the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade since November 2002. The Centre provides research and analytical support, and allied inputs to the Government for WTO and other trade negotiations. The Centre also has its own body of publications, and conducts outreach and capacity building programmes by organizing seminars, workshops, and subject specific meetings to disseminate its work, create awareness on recent trade topics and build consensus between stakeholders and policy makers.

India rejects WTO push for new global e-commerce rules

D. Ravi Kant, Live Mint

Geneva, October 17, 2017 : India has rejected fresh efforts by a clutch of countries led by the European Union (EU), Japan, Canada and Australia to negotiate new global e-commerce rules under the aegis of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

During an informal meeting at the WTO on Monday, the EU, Canada, Australia, Chile, Korea, Norway and Paraguay, among other countries, circulated a restricted draft ministerial decision to establish "a working party" at the upcoming WTO ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires and authorizing it to "conduct preparations for and carry out negotiations on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce on the basis of proposal by Members".

India fears that new rules could provide unfair market access to foreign companies, hurting the rapidly growing domestic e-commerce platforms. A key demand by the developed countries is to make permanent the current ban on customs duties on global electronic transactions—they were suspended in 1998.

Presumably playing on India's mind is the previous WTO deal on the Information Technology Agreement, under which it agreed to abolish tariffs on hardware, squeezing the domestic electronics manufacturing industry.

Responding to the latest proposals by the developed countries, India asked the sponsors to stick to the existing mandate set out in the 1998 electronic commerce work programme.

"According to us (India), negotiations on rules and disciplines in e-commerce would be highly premature at this stage and like a leap in the dark, especially given the highly asymmetrical nature of the existing e-commerce space," India's trade envoy J.S. Deepak said during the meeting, according to a person who asked not to be identified.

The one-page draft proposal circulated by the developed countries and reviewed by *Mint*, says, "The Working Party shall establish its own procedures and shall report periodically to the General Council".

Prior to the latest proposal from the EU and other members, Japan and Russia also circulated their respective submissions seeking to establish a "working group".

Japan claimed that all "existing WTO Agreements apply to electronic commerce". According to it, even issues such as the free flow of data located on computer servers without data localization requirements, permanent moratorium on customs duties, non-disclosure of source code and prohibition of forced technology transfer will come under the purview of future negotiations as and when they are launched.

Several issues raised by the US overlap with the arguments posed by Japan. However, on Monday, the US refrained from joining the debate.

Deepak said that India wants to continue with the current work programme of 1998 because it remains "exploratory and non-negotiating".

More importantly, India has linked the extension of moratorium on e-commerce transactions till 2019 to "a similar renewal of moratorium on TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints". TRIPS is an agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rightsA large majority of developing countries supported India's stand. The African Group of more than 50 countries, while rejecting any new institutional arrangement, said that it was willing to "agree to continue the exploration of issues under the 1998 Work Programme".

Rwanda, which spoke on behalf of the African Group, said the proponents for e-commerce negotiations made a flawed case by "advocating for new multilateral rules on new issues such as e-commerce". By suggesting a "false narrative", the sponsors seem determined at "kicking away the development ladder" as set out in the Doha Development Agenda. "The multilateral rules as they are, are constraining our domestic policy space and ability to industrialize," Rwanda argued. "In our view, the Work Programme has not been tested to warrant a change in its structure."

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Is globalization going to be unravelled?

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Live Mint

October 27, 2017 : Globalization is getting very bad press in industrialized countries. From being touted aggressively only 10 years ago as a "win-win" development for all, it is now blamed for these economies' ills. Recent election results suggest that the elites in these countries are thoroughly discredited. Inevitably, this has extended to the expertise traditionally associated with them. There is a real danger of ill-conceived populist solutions gaining traction.

Does globalization have a future?

Globalization is not dead but it does seem headed for a reset. It was all about freer movement of capital, people and trade. The movement of private capital continues much as before with two qualifications. First, worries about global financial stability are pervasive. Second, traditional multilateral development banks such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) enjoy little support. The movement of people, an important aspect of globalization, was never free, except for the highly educated. Even that is now being restricted. The US administration is restricting H-1B visas, turning back Mexican migrants, and making work visas for foreign students more difficult. None of this violates any treaty. Brexit is an example of repudiating a treaty in order to restrict European immigration. There is opposition to non-European immigration in many European countries .

Trade is the area most governed by treaty obligations, and there is clear evidence of regression in this area. Many countries introduced protectionist measures after the 2008 financial crisis. These covered only 3% of global trade at the time and it was thought they would be eliminated as the situation normalized. Instead, the coverage has increased to 5%. The US, once the flagbearer of trade liberalization, is withdrawing from trade agreements agreed earlier such as Trans-Pacific Partnership, North American Free Trade Agreement, and the free trade agreement with South Korea. Its commitment to the multilateral trading system is also in question as it has yet to appoint an ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has also not approved replacements to vacant positions in the WTO Dispute Settlement Body, which is one of the most important operational arms of the WTO.

What should we do?

The anti-globalization backlash in the West must not be allowed to swamp the recognition that globalization has been good for developing countries. These countries have grown faster than the industrialized countries, and increased their share in global gross domestic product (GDP). That is precisely what inclusive globalization should have delivered. The big gainers have been Asian countries, led by China, but India is also in this group. The end result has been a huge reduction in global poverty, and a reduction in inter-country inequality, even if inequality within countries has increased. In other words, globalization has made the world more inclusive.

We should therefore push to build support for a new inclusive “Globalization 2.0” which addresses the problems without throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We are unlikely to gain traction on migration though that is an important issue. However, on both finance and trade, there is scope to make a difference.

Global cooperation on financial issues

One of the successes of globalization is that private sector flows in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign institutional investor (FII) flows have become much more important than flows from the World Bank Group and the ADB. Industrialized countries interpret this to mean that countries like India no longer need the World Bank/ADB. This is incorrect. There is a case for giving these institutions a new mandate: helping achieve the infrastructure needs of economies like India which have just entered the bottom of the middle-income category.

The ADB has recently estimated that India needs to spend $4.4 trillion on infrastructure from now to 2030. With the present annual level being $120 billion, this implies a huge increase in infrastructure investment over the next decade and more. This is only possible if we can attract private investment into infrastructure development through some form of private public partnership (PPP). Industrialized countries typically argue that there is enough capital in the private capital market to finance infrastructure projects provided implementation problems such as land acquisition, forest clearances, environmental impact clearances, etc., are overcome. These constraints are indeed important, whether the project is implemented by the public or private sector. However, the private sector will face special problems of financing because of perceived risks. This is where international financial institutions can help. They can bring in international best practice in the design of PPP contracts and suggest mechanisms of dispute resolution which would meet public approval. Most importantly, by taking a financial stake in the project, they can help reassure private investors that PPPs will not be interrupted or changed arbitrarily.

The Group of 20 finance ministers recently appointed an Eminent Persons Group under Singapore deputy prime minister TharmanShanmugaratnam to make recommendations on reforms of international financial institutions. We should urge the group to recommend a major expansion of lending capacity of the World Bank and the ADB to enable them to provide long-term finance for PPP projects in infrastructure. The case becomes especially strong if the infrastructure is green and designed to cope with climate change.

Trade policy issues

We need to remain committed to maintaining an open trade policy and not be distracted by the noise about increased protectionism in the West. It is unlikely that we will be subjected to significant protectionist action. We are located in a part of the world that is expected to grow the fastest, and enjoy the fastest growth of trade, and there is no rising tide of protectionism here. On the contrary, there is a strong push for integration in the form of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and its six partners (Japan, Korea, India, China, Australia and New Zealand).

We have traditionally viewed multilateral trade negotiations under the WTO’s auspices as the best way of liberalizing trade. This remains true, but with the Doha Round all but officially dead, we have to recognize that progress on the multilateral front is highly unlikely. It is therefore particularly important to get the RCEP concluded successfully. There is a strong impression among RCEP countries that Indian industry is pressurizing the government not to come to an agreement. This needs to be countered.

Industry needs to be reassured that genuine problems will be addressed. The goods and services tax (GST) takes care of the absence of a level playing field vis-à-vis state taxes. However, the problem of inverted tariff structures remains. This can be resolved by reducing duties on inputs where these are too high. Since tariff reductions under the RCEP will come into force over a period of time, we have enough time to get our tariff structure into shape. If Indian industry knew what we propose to do, there would be less opposition. This cannot be done by the commerce ministry but by the finance ministry.

Looking ahead, Globalization 2.0 will pose new problems in trade. In future trade negotiations, industrialized countries are likely to focus less on tariff reductions and more on harmonization of standards. We have traditionally viewed these “behind the border” issues as inappropriate for trade negotiations. Economic theory does not suggest that unified standards for all countries at different levels of per capita income is ideal. However, the pressure to move in this direction will be difficult to resist, especially when it is done to protect the consumer. Examples are specifying the types of dyes used in cloth used for garments, or specifying the type of additives permitted in the case of food products.

Standards can become a new form of protectionism, since products that don’t meet the standards will be denied access to industrialized country markets. We can always refuse to harmonize our domestic standards and leave it to our producers who want to export to adopt higher standards. However, this presents two problems. First, if our competitor countries join trade groups which harmonize standards, the group may impose stricter tests for exports from countries that don’t harmonize, which would make our exports less competitive. Second, if we retain lower standards at home, firms that want to export will have to incur higher costs, putting them at a disadvantage in the domestic market, since their domestic competitors will not have to incur these costs. Since the RCEP does not deal with standards (at least not yet) there is a case for getting in now, so that if and when the standards issue is raised, we will be inside rather than out.

A new twist in globalization 2.0 will be the role of industrial policy. The successful exporters of the past—Japan, Korea and China—did not simply follow a passive policy of lowering tariffs and waiting for market competition to do the rest. They followed a much more active industrial policy and it is argued that we need to learn from that experience. There is a lot that government must do in terms of providing infrastructure and a supportive policy environment and we need to do much more of that. However, industrial policy also means singling out firms that could be potential winners, and extending to them special favours and subsidies. Given our democratic polity, and the pervasive suspicion of crony capitalism, it is doubtful whether we can do this. But there is a lot we can do proactively to do much better in a world of Globalization 2.0.

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India cautions against linking safeguard provisions to food security solutions

D. Ravi Kant, Live Mint

Geneva, October 30, 2017 : India has cautioned against what it says are un-implementable transparency and safeguard provisions that are being sought to be linked by some countries to an agreement on a permanent solution for public stockholding programs for food security (PSH)—a core Indian demand — at an upcoming meeting of trade ministers in Buenos Aires.

Developing countries led by India and others want world trade rules to ensure that they will not be challenged legally if they breach a country's agreed limits for trade-distorting domestic support, such as minimum support prices for crops.

The matter tops the agenda of trade ministers who are set to gather in Buenos Aires for the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) 11th ministerial meeting on 10-13 December.

The European Union (EU), Brazil, Australia, Canada, Pakistan and Paraguay, among others, want PSH to include stringent "transparency and safeguard provisions" in order to ensure that stocks procured under the programme do not leak into the international market and thus end up influencing global prices.

On 25 October, the WTO director general Roberto Azevedo held a closed-door meeting with a dozen trade envoys from the EU, Norway, India, Russia, Indonesia which coordinates the G33 Group, Turkey, Korea, Dominica, Kenya, and Egypt among others to discuss the elements in the PSH.

At the meeting, India's trade envoy J.S. Deepak suggested that the interim agreement on PSH hammered out in December 2013, in Bali, Indonesia, had in any case imposed stringent transparency provisions on developing countries, according to an African trade official who was present.

Except for one or two countries like New Zealand, the major industrialized countries will find it difficult to comply with the transparency provisions set out in the Bali agreement on PSH programmes, Deepak maintained, according to the African official.

India demanded that the permanent solution must not contain "disproportionately stringent" transparency and safeguard provisions that would make it impossible to use, the official maintained.

So far, the G-33 coalition in which India and China are key members, the EU and Brazil along with a group of countries, and Russia among others have circulated proposals on how to finalize the permanent solution. The EU and Brazil maintained that such a solution must include stringent transparency provisions along with domestic subsidy cuts for farm products.

India had already rejected the linkage between the permanent solution and cuts in domestic far support at a meeting of informal heads of delegation on 24 October.

The prospects for an outcome on cutting domestic support look bleak as members remain sharply divided while the pressure for an effective permanent solution for PSH programmes has intensified. India has built a large coalition of countries to take the case forward for a simple and effective permanent solution for public stockholding programmes, the African official maintained.

India’s stand on balanced transparency and safeguard provisions was supported by Indonesia, Turkey, Korea and Kenya at the meeting.

The EU said it is in favour of a permanent solution for PSH programmes along with an outcome on domestic support while Norway said the permanent solution must be close to the interim solution that was agreed in Bali.

In response to India’s demands for workable transparency provisions, Azevedo suggested that if India opens up the Bali agreement on transparency or safeguards then it will have to offer something more in other areas, according to a European official who asked not to be quoted.

In a new proposal circulated on 25 October, Russia suggested that while it can agree to lower the bar on transparency provisions it will need stringent safeguard provisions to ensure that China and India do not export wheat or other products to international market from their public stocks, said a person who is familiar with the Russian proposal.

Meanwhile, in a separate meeting of select trade envoys convened by Azevedo on 25 October to discuss the domestic subsidy cuts, India and China made it clear that their proposal for eliminating the most trade-distorting farm subsidies must remain as the basis for further negotiations.

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India flags concerns over linking food security steps with agri subsidies cut

D. Ravi Kant, The Hindu

Geneva, October 26, 2017 : India has warned that a meeting of trade ministers in Buenos Aires in December will run into “serious consequences”—even “jeopardizing” the outcomes—if the European Union (EU), Brazil and other countries insist on linking New Delhi’s core demand for safeguarding public stockholding programs for food security with a quid pro quo cut in agricultural subsidies, people familiar with the development said.

“Any efforts to foster a linkage that a PSH (public stockholding) outcome is linked to agricultural domestic support” will “have serious consequences including jeopardizing...outcomes,” India’s trade envoy J.S. Deepak told his counterparts at a meeting of the heads of delegations on Tuesday, according to a person who asked not to be named.

The World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) 11th ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires is scheduled to take place on 10-13 December.

Developing countries led by India and others want world trade rules to ensure that they will not be challenged legally if they breach a country’s agreed limits for trade-distorting domestic support, such as minimum support prices for crops.

The European Union (EU), Brazil and others have proposed that the PSH must be finalized along with their proposal for reducing the overall trade-distorting farm subsidies on a percentage basis.

Effectively, the EU and its allies are asking India and other 47 members of the Group of 33 countries, including China, to make a ‘payment’ for the mandated permanent solution for public stockholding programs by agreeing to their proposal on domestic support.

In trade negotiations, a payment implies that a country must enter into a trade-off for an outcome it is seeking by agreeing to a demand from the other.

“Let me emphasize that the mandate on this (i.e. permanent solution for PSH) is absolutely clear, there is no linkage and the issues have to be kept on separate tracks,” Deepak said, according to another person from Africa.

Without naming industrialized countries such as the US, EU, Japan, Norway and Switzerland among others, Deepak said the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture “is skewed in favour of a few developed members and provides considerable space and flexibility for them to provide (farm) subsidies and further, to concentrate (farm) subsidies on a few products.”

India and China issued a joint proposal for eliminating tens of billions of dollars of what are called most trade-distorting farm subsidies or Aggregate Measurement of Support in the industrialized countries—a step they say can be prelude to a credible reform of the global trade in farm products.

The joint proposal by India and China was supported by more than 100 countries at Tuesday’s meeting.

“Proposals that only expect developing countries to share the burden but also reduce the S&D element are not acceptable to us,” Deepak cautioned. S&D is short for special and differential treatment, which give developing countries certain special rights.

Over the last several months, major industrialized countries such as the US and the EU have indicated the need to curtail special and differential flexibility that are aimed at helping poor farmers in developing countries through subsidies in Article 6.2 of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture.

The coordinator for the African Group of more than 50 countries, François Xavier Ngarambe of Rwanda, said at Tuesday's meeting that the African Group supports the elimination of "all historical imbalances," including the elimination of the most trade distorting farm subsidies by developed countries—an Indian and Chinese demand.

Like India's Deepak, South Africa's trade envoy Xavier Carim, who is the chair of the WTO's General Council, also warned that "while the complex technical questions will not easily be resolved... the most serious risk to an outcome on public stockholding (at Buenos Aires) is the linkage being made to the one proposal on domestic support (by the European Union and Brazil)."

"We need to be frank here," said Carim, emphasizing that the proposal by the EU and Brazil "will not achieve consensus because it does not establish a fair or equitable basis for future work." He warned that "the linkage thus risks derailing possible progress on public stockholding, with possible knock-on consequences."

India, along with a large majority of countries also issued several markers for the Buenos Aires meeting on controversial issues that could negatively impact developing countries, including attempts to launch negotiations for rules in electronic commerce, investment facilitation, and disciplines for small and medium enterprises.

On e-commerce, India said, "We do not support setting up of a new horizontal Working Group (as proposed by the EU, Japan, Russia, and several other industrialized as well as some developing countries) which could result in a top-down approach."

New Delhi said it will support a two-year moratorium for not collecting customs duties on electronically traded goods and services "subject to a similar renewal of moratorium on TRIPS (trade-related intellectual properties) non-violation and situation compliants (by the US and Switzerland)."

India expressed sharp concern over the "continued impasse" created by the US in blocking the selection process for filling three vacancies at the WTO's highest court for resolving global trade disputes.

Without naming the US, India said "any systemic issue raised by any member could be dealt with separately and there should be no linkage with the selection process of the appellate body members which can affect the effectiveness, autonomy and impartiality of the dispute settlement mechanism, a key pillar of the WTO."

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RCEP trade ministers from India & other countries to meet in Manila in mid-November

The Economic Times

October 31, 2017 : Trade ministers of 16 RCEP countries, including India and China, are expected to meet in Manila in mid-November to take stock of negotiations for the proposed mega agreement, an official said.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a trade pact among 16 countries that aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights.

"The meeting is likely to take place on the sidelines of th, to be held from November 9," the government official added.

The ministerial-level meeting assumes significance as several issues related to the goods and services sector are yet to be resolved.

In the recently-concluded 20th round of talks in South Korea, member countries deliberated on the stalled issues.

The members have yet to finalise the maximum number of tariff lines or products on which countries would eliminate duties.

The bloc comprises 10 Asean members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos and Vietnam) and their six FTA partners India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Indian industry and exporters are apprehensive about the presence of China in the grouping. They have stated that lowering or eliminating duties for China may flood domestic markets with Chinese goods.

India's trade deficit with China stood at USD 51 billion in 2016-17. Which is why, India wants certain deviations for such countries. Under such deviations, India may propose a longer duration for either reduction or elimination of import duties for such countries.

India is also pressing for greater market access in the services sector, particularly easy movement of professionals.

Talks for the pact had started in Phnom Penh in November 2012. India already has implemented a free trade agreement with the Asean, Japan and South Korea.

It is negotiating free trade pacts with others, including Australia and New Zealand.

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India to boost trade ties with Latin America, South East Asia

Arun S., The Hindu

New Delhi, October 25, 2017 : India is looking to further diversify its trade to relatively newer markers in Latin America and Caribbean Islands as well as South East Asia.

In this regard, Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu is slated to visit Cuba and Panama this week to strengthen trade and investment ties with countries in Latin America and Caribbean Islands. Besides, a major meeting is being planned — likely to be held in late January, 2018 — with the trade Ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc.

India's bilateral trade with Cuba is minuscule at just $43.18 million in 2016-17. Of this, India's exports to Cuba were worth $41.87 million, and imports from that country were only $1.31 million. The Indian government has provided Line of Credit to Cuba the tune of $173 million for projects including milk powder processing plant, bulk blending fertiliser plant, power co-generation project and wind farm.

India and Cuba will also look at improving coordination on critical international trade matters including those related to the World Trade Organisation-level negotiations. Mr. Prabhu's Cuba visit coincides with the (Trade) Fair of Havana in which several Indian export firms are participating. Mr. Prabhu is also expected to meet his counterparts from Cuba, Panama, Barbados, Suriname and Haiti.

On ties with ASEAN member countries, the government said India-ASEAN trade has risen to $70 billion in 2016-17 from $65 billion in 2015-16. The aim now is to ensure that bilateral trade touches $200 billion by 2020. According to industry body Assocham, (India's) trade deficit with ASEAN had risen from $0.5 billion in 2005-06 to $14.6 billion in 2015-16.

The government also said ASEAN accounted for around 12.5% of investment flows into India since 2000. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into India from ASEAN between April 2000 to May 2016 was $49.4 billion, while FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015, was $38.67 billion, it added.

ASEAN and India also have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost investments, as well as trade in goods and services. Besides, India and ASEAN are involved in negotiations for a mega-regional FTA called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with five other countries including China, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. To ensure that Indian firms become a part of regional value chains and production networks, there is an India-initiated Project Development Fund with a corpus of $77 million to improve the prospects of Indian projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam.

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Keen on expanding bilateral trade with India: Minister

The Economic Times

London, October 26, 2017 : Britain is keen on expanding its trade with India, a minister said today, asserting that there is scope to further strengthen the "thriving" bilateral economic relationship.

Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mark Field, who recently returned from a visit to India, said "during my visit I saw for myself the strength of the India-UK partnership".

"Our economic relationship is thriving and we want to expand our 16 billion pound bilateral trade, generating jobs and developing skills," Field told members of the Indian Journalists' Association.

He said the UK was one of the largest G20 investors in India and Indian companies have already created 110,000 jobs in the UK, making them Britain's second largest international job creator.

Field said there were 1.5 million Indians in the UK who contribute richly to the British society.

Over 470,000 Indians come to the UK each year to visit, study or do business in the country.

"And with no cap on student visas, we continue to attract the best and brightest students to our world class universities - 160,000 Indian students over the past ten years," Field said.

He also said that Britain's strong relationship with India will continue even after Brexit.

"Our message is that it is business as usual," he stated.

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India-UK Future Tech Month to promote innovation ties

The Economic Times

London, October 30, 2017 :The UK government's Department for International Trade (DIT) will observe November as "India-UK Future Tech Month" and hold a series of technology-focused business activities in Britain and India.

The series of events are aimed at showcasing the very best UK technology and innovation to a high-quality Indian audience, including buyers, investors, and central and state- level government officials, the DIT said.

"November marks one year since British Prime Minister Theresa May led her first overseas trade mission to India, and two years since Prime Minister NarendraModi's landmark UK visit.

"The time is right to redouble our commitment to matching India's technology demands with the UK's very best offer, encouraging UK companies to look to India and to encourage Indian companies to grow their businesses in the UK," British High Commissioner to India, Sir Dominic Asquith said.

The diplomat expressed confidence that the 'India-UK Future Tech' month would inspire British businesses to "Think India" and expose India's most ambitious businesses to the "breadth and depth of the UK's tech expertise".

As part of the initiative, the DIT would take more than 60 Indian companies in 10 sectors on a tour of UK-wide business hubs in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leicester, Coventry and London.

The move aims to inspire new partnerships, strengthen technical collaboration and land business deals, in areas as diverse as data analytics, Internet of Things, ICT services, advanced manufacturing, electric vehicles, automotive, healthcare, life sciences, food and drink and creative industries.

The centrepiece of the series has been highlighted as the India Zone at the Innovate 2017 summit, to be held next week in Birmingham.

It brings together partners from the Indian government, including Invest India, the Indian High Commission in the UK, and the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, along with state governments of Karnataka and Kerala.

The focal theme of the programme is "India s Innovation and Technology Needs The UK s offer".

"India's technology sector is set to triple in the next 10 years. Our Prime Minister has listed 'Digital India' among his top priorities. We share longstanding deep commercial partnerships with the UK, which we are keen to build on even further. Together India and the UK have the potential to transform many areas including financial technology, cyber security, skill development and R&D," said Amitabh Kant, CEO NitiAyog.

He highlighted that India was in the midst of a digital revolution and was inching towards an "even more cost- effective digital economy".

"We have one of the largest digital skilled work forces globally, and are keen to partner with the UK on domestic digital skill development and technology exchange. I see the UK's potential as limitless; India is already the fourth- largest investor in the UK with a staggering 31 per cent of investments in the technology and telecom sector," he added.

Innovate UK will comprise of a range of informative sessions to showcase market opportunities in India, launch the Birmingham element of Invest India's 'Access India' programme, and provide information on professional services and ease of doing business in India. This will be supported by thought- leadership sessions on India s 'trillion-dollar' digital opportunity and a panel discussion on data analytics, internet of things and big data.

"Innovate 2017 is an excellent platform to showcase the existing strong UK-India innovation links and foster further important business collaborations for the benefit of both our economies. I look forward to welcoming the Indian delegation to our event in Birmingham and hope it will generate some significant business deals and partnerships," said Innovate UK Chief Executive Dr Ruth McKernan.

In India as part of tech-month series, DIT is bringing innovative UK healthcare diabetes companies to the Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India 45th Annual Conference in Bhubaneswar later this week and then taking them to meet Indian companies in Chennai.

DIT is also bringing an Oncology trade mission to the Indian Cancer Congress in Bengaluru and the same mission will participate in the India-UK Healthcare Forum in Mumbai later this month. AK SMJ

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Asian Business Leadership Forum's 10th anniversary aims to boost Indo-UAE ties

The Economic Times

October 28, 2017 : The Asian Business Leadership Forum (ABLF), the region’s key influential leadership platform that promotes a collaborative spirit across the continent, marks its 10th Anniversary Edition with a leadership day on November 22 in Dubai, close on the heels of second round of Indo-UAE strategic dialogue.

Showcasing India as a key partner through the years, the ABLF has endeavoured to strengthen this bilateral friendship and has pledged its full support to further take the collaborative ties to the next level. The second round of Indo-UAE strategic dialogue is being held between October 28-29. While India is being led by MJ Akbar at the Dialogue, UAE is being led by UAE MoS for Foreign Affairs Dr Anwar Gargash.

Over the years, the leadership forum has recognised and showcased a number of Indian leaders who have contributed to the impressive economic growth in India, the fastest growing developing economy in the world. The event has showcased Asia's best business enterprise, and it positions the region as the new business epicentre of the world.

The Indo-UAE bilateral ties have touched a new high in the recent years, with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's recent State visits to India in 2015 & 2016 and Prime Minister NarendraModi's historic visit to the UAE in 2015, when the countries agreed to strengthen ties in several key areas such as trade and investment, IT and electronics as well as security and counter-terrorism.

"India enjoys close and multifaceted bilateral ties with the UAE, anchored on regular high-level visits and extensive people-to-people contacts. The visits of Prime Minister, Shri NarendraModi to the UAE in August 2015 and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India in February 2016 and subsequently as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations during January 2017 have elevated the relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Our well-balanced bilateral trade amounting to US$ 53 billion makes UAE our third largest trading partner while for the UAE we have been the largest trading partner. The UAE is among the top investors in India in terms of foreign direct investments. It contributes significantly to India's energy security and has been the fifth-largest supplier of crude oil to India in 2016-17. About 2.6 million-strong and vibrant Indian community forms the largest expatriate group in the UAE," according to MEA statement.

The ABLF has been under the Royal Patronage of Sheikh NahayanMabarak Al Nahayan, Cabinet Minister and Minister of Tolerance, UAE, since its inception in 2007 and is hosted in association with the UAE Ministry of Economy.

Given Asia's continued economic surge, the theme of this year's ABLF Series is 'The Evolving Face of Asia: The rise of future-focused leadership'.

The leadership day gets underway with an innovative forum where leaders from across the world will discuss subjects like climate change, the global humanitarian crisis, education, healthcare, new media, the rise of a new financial ecosystem, and entrepreneurship.

Speaking about the event, Malini N. Menon, Founder and Managing Director of IEDEA, the architect of the leadership forum series and a member of the ABLF Executive Council, said, "With over 46 nations of Asia featured in our initiatives through the years, our focus has always been to recognise leadership excellence and facilitate networking at the highest level while creating valuable content, generating information and linking opportunity to active engagements across governments, corporates and institutions. This year, we are showcasing the torchbearers of the region who recognise the need to support, adapt and leverage contemporary global narratives to achieve sustainable development."

The theme of the ABLF leadership day reflects the energy and profile of some of Asia's brightest minds who will be speaking at the event, including NavdeepSuri, India's Ambassador to the UAE; Dr Sultan Al Jaber, UAE Minister of State, CEO of the ADNOC Group and Chairman of Masdar; Tsuyoshi Nakai, CEO, Japan Cooperation Center Petroleum (JCCP), and ReemEbrahim Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation and Managing Director, Expo 2020.

The Forum opens with speakers addressing the global crisis of climate change in a session titled 'The Earth and Us', which will witness a dialogue between the frontrunners of the sustainability and clean energy narrative, H.E. DrThani Bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment, and Dr Chun-Yuan Gu, President, AMEA Region, ABB, to name a few.

There is a session 'The Global Humanitarian', keeping in line with the UN Global Goals and the UAE's move to mark 2017 as the Year of Giving. This session features the first woman to lead the national assembly in the UAE, DrAmal Abdullah Al Qubaisi, President and Speaker, Federal National Council (FNC), UAE, and India's 2014 Nobel Peace laureate, KailashSatyarthi, among others. Mona Al Marri, Director General, Government of Dubai Media Office will be among the speakers at the next session, touches upon the grave subject of 'The Responsibility Protocol of New Media'.

Arundhati Bhattacharya, Former Chairperson and Managing Director of the State Bank of India, Palamadai S Jayakumar, Chairman and Managing Director, Bank Of Baroda, and Sunil Kaushal, Regional Chief Executive, Africa and Middle East, Standard Chartered Bank, will speak on the penultimate session, 'The Disruption of the Financial Ecosystem'.

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Morocco looks to diverisfy ties with India; eyes strategic partnership

The Economic Times

October 28, 2017 :Morocco, fast emerging as north Africa's economic leader and a major source of phosphates for India, is keen to diversify its cooperation with India including in tourism sector targeting high-end tourists and filmmakers.

In 2015 the two countries decided to elevate bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership and are now working to include new areas of cooperation to the partnership including tourism, besides the traditional ones of fertiliser, chemicals, automobiles, renewable energy and construction.

Morocco is taking specific steps to target the Indian tourism market, according to CEO of Moroccan National Tourist Office AdberrafiaZouiten who was on a weeklong trip to India this month.

"Morocco wants to open up more and more to India, one of the emerging countries, and hopes to capture the attention of a large number of Indian tourists and make them visit the kingdom including filmmakers," according to Zouiten. Number of popular Bollywood films have been shot in Morocco during the past few years.

In Morocco, there is lot of interest in Indian art and culture, especially Bollywood. The Marrakesh International Film Festivals (MIFF) regularly screen Hindi movies and invite Indian actors.

The Moroccan Tourism authority has been able to open a regional office in Delhi in a record 10 days-time by obtaining necessary permit from local authorities. The opening of this office is a result of fruitful cooperation between the two governments.

"Indo-Moroccan relations have been strengthened, particularly after the historic visit of King Mohammed VI to New Delhi in October 2015 as part of the third India-Africa Forum Summit," according to Zouiten. King Mohammed VI was the first Head of State to arrive in Delhi and last to leave India. On the occasion, he held extensive discussions with PM NarendraModi.

Morocco with its variety of tourist attractions wants to position itself in India – a growing office -- through the Delhi office.

It may be noted here that India is the largest Asian recipient of Moroccan governmental investment. The return of Morocco to the African Union earlier this year after three decades would add further momentum to Africa-India relations. Morocco is emerging as a key counter-terror and de-radicalistion partner for India in North Africa.

Relations between India and Morocco go back to the 14th century when the famous traveller and writer from Tangier, IbnBatuta travelled to India. In modern history, India was active in the UN supporting the Moroccan freedom movement.

India is one of the major markets for Moroccan phosphate and its derivatives. Other main items of export to India are metallic ores and metal scrap, semi-finished products and inorganic chemicals. The main items of India's exports to Morocco are cotton yarn, synthetic fiber, transport equipment, pharmaceuticals, agricultural implements, chemicals, spices and manufactured metals.

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India asks US to review its position on totalisation pact

RuchikaChitravanshi, The Economic Times

New Delhi, October 27, 2017 : India has asked the US to revisit its position on totalisation agreement and raised concern at the 11th Trade Policy Forum at Washington, DC, over protectionist measures which could have an adverse impact on trade in services.

Commerce and industry minister Suresh Prabhu, during his discussion with the US trade representative Robert Lighthizer on Thursday, adopted a firm stance on issues ranging from trade deficit to price control for medical devices, officials said.

They said Prabhu made a strong pitch for India's need to bring about a reconciliation between the demand for optimum medical facilities and affordable healthcare to a large number of people. The minister stressed that life-saving drugs and devices and their supply are of utmost concern for any developing country.

"India desires to address the concerns of providing affordable healthcare to its citizens and, at the same time, work towards striking a balance between affordable healthcare needs and introduction of high-end technology," Prabhu said, according to one of the officials, who did not wish to be identified.

Prabhu, according to the official, also said that American companies and manufacturers of medical devices should come forward for establishing manufacturing facilities in India.

Responding to the US's concerns on trade deficit with India, Prabhu said exports of both countries to each other's territories have grown over the same pace for the past three decades.

"In spite of huge difference in the size of the economy as well as per capita income, the US happens to be the second-largest exporter to India... Any issue of trade deficit has to be viewed in the larger context of the growing economic and strategic partnership between both the countries," the official quoted Prabhu as saying.

As per estimates by an industrial body, investments made by 100 top Indian companies in the US run over $17.9 billion.

Prabhu, the official said, raised problems faced by Indian services sector companies in obtaining H-1B and L-1 visas for their employees owing to annual caps, higher visa fees and high rejection rates.

An Indian who is working in the US and has contributed to social security from his salary does not receive the contribution back on his return to India, the minister said. India is expecting a positive outcome on a social security agreement and a visa regime.

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Chile favours India's candidature to APEC: former President Eduardo Frei

Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, The Economic Times

October 26, 2017 : Chile is open to support the candidature for membership of India in APEC but all the resolutions for the entry of a new country its decided by all the members of the group, pointed out former Chilean President Eduardo Frei ahead of APEC Summit in Vietnam next month.

Chile has an open economy and a stable institutional and political system, who installs a healthy business environment. With the 10 trade agreements signed between Chile and Latin-American countries, the possibilities to export and make business in the region are maximized, Frei told a select group of media here during his visit to push Indo-Chile economic partnership.

"Even more, Chile is one of founders of the Pacific Alliance, the most successful integration movement of the history of the Latin American region. Actually, its functions are becoming to been a platform of political articulation, economic and commercial integration and projection to the world, with emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region," noted Frei

" I would like to express that the Trade Agreement that India and Chile was established in 2007, and then expanded in 2017 is not a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), it's a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA). The nature of this Agreement is relative minus ambitions of an FTA, because it's does not contain chapters related intellectual propriety, electronic commerce, gender issues, environment or investment, among others. The entry on force of the PTA plus, has been the 16th of May of 2017, only 5 months ago. For this reason, today, is difficult to highlight an increase in trade on either side."

"Nonetheless, I trust, that the PTA Plus will increase the trade, in the same way that the exported non-copper products have triplicated from US$ 51 millions in 2006 to US$ 178 millions in 2016."

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India eyes trade deals with Central American, Caribbean countries

Sidharata Roy, October 23, 2017 : India is looking to expand its trade footprint in America with initial discussions initiated in the government for a possible free trade agreement (FTA) with Caribbean and Central American countries and a logistics hub in PanamaBSE 0.83 % to help shipment of goods. The move comes with fresh overtures to Cuba, which is returning to the global mainstream.

Sources told TOI that a plan for Indian logistics centres in Panama has been discussed internally. The Central American country is a major shipping and airline hub and the facility can be useful to encourage warehousing facilities to enable Indian goods to be delivered 'just in time' to companies in the region.

Although it's still in initial stages, a section in the Centre believes that it would be useful to explore a trade agreement with Carricom, the 15-nation trading bloc, along with a limited deal with the Central American countries, the sources said. While India had earlier tried to diversify its trade basket with a focused scheme for Latin America, the move has seen limited impact. The region's share in India's exports is less than 3%, with Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Columbia and Peru accounting for over 70% of this.

Commerce & industry minister Suresh Prabhu is making a rare visit to Cuba, where India is a partner country for the Havana Trade Fair, and is due to meet his Cuban counterpart apart from trade ministers from Suriname, Barbados, Dominican Republic and Haiti, sources told TOI. He is also expected to meet Cuban president Raul Castro, and the first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party. He then goes to

Panama, where a logistics hub — something that China has already done — is expected to figure on the agenda.

Describing it as a “winwin” deal, the tropical farm produce from the Caribbean countries is unlikely to put pressure on India’s farm sector, a no-go area as far as opening up is concerned, sources told TOI. On the other hand, government officers said, a trade agreement can open the doors for Indian companies to provide lowcost medicines, automobiles, engineering, textiles and leather products.

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Paper industry hit by duty-free imports

M. SoundariyaPreetha, The Hindu

Coimbatore, October 21, 2017 : A sharp increase in import of paper and paperboard, especially writing and printing paper, this financial year has turned into a matter of concern for the domestic industry.

Import of coated paper, which totalled 45,492 tonnes in February this year, shot up to 73,792 tonnes in July. In the same period, import of uncoated paper too rose from 13,347 tonnes to 32,887 tonnes, according to data with Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (PMA).

Impact of trade pacts

Import of paper and paperboard [excluding newsprint] has been steadily on the rise for the last six years,” said RohitPandit, secretary general, PMA. “Import of these items from ASEAN countries have grown almost 43% in volume in the last six years. Imports from South Korea alone have risen 58%.”

Since 2014, there has been no import duty on paper and paperboard from ASEAN countries. Under the India-Korea CEPA, the basic customs duty has been reduced gradually with a 0% target by January 1. Between April and July this year, the growth in imports has been more than 40%, he said. In the writing and printing paper segment, import of coated, uncoated, and copier papers is significant, he added.

“The domestic industry in India has started feeling the impact and the government should increase import duty on paper and paperboard to 20%,” the the Indian Agro & Recycled Paper Mills’ Association has demanded.

R. Krishnaswamy, vice-president of the association, said that for wood-based paper mills in India, the cost of wood is ‘very high’. If it is $100 a tonne in India, the price of wood in Indonesia, with which Indian suppliers compete, is only $40 a tonne. Hence, the price of paper is also lower, he said.

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