

invoked the provisions of Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 with the view to renegotiating the margin of preference afforded to WTO Members on rice.

International Trade Talks

12. SHRIMATI N.P. DUGRA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the US trade representative, Mr. Robert Zoellick, has urged the member-countries of the WTO, in the second week of January, 2004, to restart the stalled International Trade Talks;

(b) if so, the details of the statement made by him; and

(c) Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGO VAN): (a) to (c) In his letter, dated 11 January, 2004, addressed to the Trade Ministers of WTO Member countries, Mr. Robert B. Zoellick, United States Trade Representative, gave his assessment of the state of play of the on-going WTO negotiations under the Doha Work Programme which were affected due to the stalemate at the Cancun Ministerial Conference and made some suggestions for way forward in these negotiations. He suggested that WTO Members should focus further work on the core market access issues, namely agriculture, non-agricultural products and services. In addressing these market access issues, special and differential treatment provisions for developing countries should be incorporated. On agriculture, he pointed out that the Doha Work Programme can be successful only if an agreement on elimination of export subsidies by a certain date could be reached. The US Trade Representative also proposed that the WTO Members could agree to a 'framework' on negotiations by the mid-year 2004 with a Ministerial Conference planned for the year-end. India is receptive to the idea of a framework agreement by July 2004, as being proposed, as it could be useful in tracking movements in the on going negotiations, provided, however, that it will not compromise India's national interests. The framework agreement should satisfy three basic criteria, namely, conformity with the Doha Ministerial mandate; these must be clear and unambiguous; and must not constrain possible trade-offs in future

negotiations. The framework should cover not only market access issues but also provide a roadmap for resolution of outstanding implementation issues relating to the existing WTO agreements and the special and differential treatment issues on which there has been little progress since the adoption of the Doha Work Programme.

Free trade among SAARC countries

13. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in the first week of January, 2004 SAARC countries have signed an agreement to allow free trade among the member-countries to eliminate trade barriers and bring down the tariffs;

(b) whether any time-frame has been fixed to operationalise the free trade;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) how India is going to safeguard its interests on sensitive items?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGO VAN): (a) Yes, Sir. The SAARC member countries have signed the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area during the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 6th January, 2004.

(b) and (c) As per the provisions of the Agreement, the Agreement shall enter into force on 1st January, 2006 upon completion of formalities, including ratification by all Contracting States and issuance of a notification thereof by the SAARC Secretariat.

(d) The sensitive items will be put in the Negative List of India on which no tariff concession will be extended.

Restoration and conservation of temple in Angkor region of Central Combodia

14. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state: