

'India, Brazil unity crucial to success of WTO talks'

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GENEVA/LONDON -- Unity between India and Brazil is crucial to break the deadlock and resist attempts to divide developing countries at world trade talks, a former Indian trade negotiator said here Friday.

"The effort of the United States and the European Union has been to create division. India and Brazil, who have very different interests, must resist such attempts for the sake of all developing countries," Atul Kaushik, a senior former commerce ministry official, said.

Kaushik told IANS known differences among members of the influential Group of 20 developing countries (G-20) should be kept out of the negotiating room at the World Trade Organization here.

Kaushik, who has negotiated for India on intellectual property rights and environment, named India and Brazil in particular as the countries with divergent interests in agriculture.

Brazil has "offensive agricultural interests" - where it would like all countries, including India, to lower tariffs and other barriers to its farm exports.

India, on the other hand, has "defensive interests" in agriculture, which means it would like to retain as many of these tariffs and barriers as possible in order to protect the lives of its estimated 600 million small farmers.

"India and Brazil are the two developing countries at the centre table, and they will be taken seriously only if they remain united," said Kaushik, who now heads the Geneva Resource Centre of CUTS, an international non-government body working on international issues of trade.

CUTS is part of the Indian government's Trade Advisory Committee.

Kaushik has also submitted a memorandum to G-20 negotiators in Geneva saying they must ensure that the current round of negotiations end up benefiting developing countries.

But he said Brazil's powerful agri-business sector had intervened at least twice during recent negotiations to try and persuade their government to "step away from an alliance with China and India" and he praised the Brazilian government for resisting such pressure.

Brazilian farmers, representing the most productive sector of their country's economy, feel Indian positions on manufacturing and services - where India has offensive interests - have complicated negotiations.

However, he said: "It became apparent to Brazil early on in the life of the G-20 that it had to work in tandem with other developing countries in order to achieve its own offensive interests in agriculture."

"This maturity has to prevail till the end game," he added.