

Keep fisheries out of Nama'

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With the WTO ministerial conference scheduled to start in Hong Kong from December 13, the marine industry has sought removal of fisheries from the non-agricultural market access (Nama) negotiations.

According to exporters, it was completely unacceptable that such environmentally and socially sensitive sectors like fisheries and natural resources were subject to the same negotiating rules as footwear and toys.

The policy space available for developing countries to use trade as a development tool had shrunk dramatically. If the developed countries had their way in the current Nama negotiations, this space would shrink further jeopardising the jobs and livelihoods of a large section of people involved in small-scale and artisanal fishing. Incidentally, unlike in the WTO, fisheries were placed under agriculture in India.

Any reduction in bound and applied tariffs in fisheries and natural resources was likely to have a wide-ranging negative impact like factory closures, job losses, environmental degradation and depletion of marine and coastal resources. India had broken ranks with the majority of the developing countries in Nama negotiations by accepting proposals for tariff binding and reduction, and sectoral negotiations which sought to reduce tariffs down to almost zero in areas like fisheries.

The current Nama proposals did not sufficiently address non-tariff barriers and technical barriers to trade which were the main forms of protection given by developed countries to their markets.

Further tariff reductions would not lead to greater market access for developing countries, but would accentuate their de-industrialisation by ensuring greater market access for developed countries, the exporters warned.

The government should fight for the rights of developing countries to protect their fisheries sector as required to enhance national development, employment and livelihoods, they said.