

Title: Statement regarding start of the third ministerial WTO conference in Seattle, U.S.A.

17.15 hrs.

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE): Hon. Speaker Sir, I rise to make a statement in response to comments made and concerns voiced by hon. Members on the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation, which began in Seattle yesterday.

The Ministerial Conference was to begin at 10.00 a.m. However, due to demonstrations and disturbances, including teargas shelling, the inaugural session could not start. Even the US delegation could not arrive at the venue and the inaugural session was abandoned.(Interruptions)

Most of the Ministers from different countries could not even attend the lunch hosted by the Director-General, WTO. It was decided that the plenary will be set up at 3.00 p.m. It could start only at 3.40 p.m. Ministers could not use their cars due to disturbances and had to walk to the venue.(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: What is this? Shri Sunil Khan, hon. Prime Minister is speaking.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: The Commerce Minister of India made a statement just after 5.00 p.m., that is, 6.30 a.m. Indian time. A slightly longer version of the statement was also circulated.

I beg to place on the Table of the House the statement made by Shri Murasoli Maran, Minister of Commerce and Industry at the WTO Conference.

Our basic position in the Seattle Ministerial Meeting is:

1. We are not in favour of a wide-ranging new round of negotiations, often called the Millennium Round.

2. We are opposed to relating with trade :

(a) Core Labour Standards,

(b) Environmental issues,

(c) Coherent Global Architecture,

(d) Investment issues,

(e) NGOs' involvement in WTO negotiations, and

(f) Competition policy.

3. We are prepared for a few new items being taken up for negotiations provided implementation issues arising from the Uruguay Round are also resolved to our satisfaction.

These are the matters for negotiation in Seattle and I have no further information to share with the House at this moment.

I assure the hon. Members that India's national interests will be fully protected and promoted at the Seattle negotiations.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY (MIRYALGUDA): Sir, may I seek one clarification?

MR. SPEAKER : No.

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