

JOINT STATEMENT
Inaugural Session of US -India Trade Policy Forum

New Delhi, November 12, 2005

The Minister of Commerce and Industry of India Shri Kamal Nath and U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Rob Portman co-chaired the inaugural session of the US-India Trade Policy Forum in New Delhi on Saturday, November 12. The Forum meeting was preceded on November 11 by a full day of intensive consultations between senior officials drawn from concerned departments from the two countries.

The establishment of the Trade Policy Forum was announced during the visit to U.S. in July this year by Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. It is designed to expand bilateral trade and investment relations between India and the United States. Multilateral issues such as the ongoing Doha Development Round negotiations also were featured in the Forum. The Trade Policy Forum will be part of the overall Economic Dialogue between India and the United States.

The agenda for this first meeting of the Forum included discussions on Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers; Agriculture; Investment; Services; Intellectual Property; and the Doha Round.

Discussions on all these issues took place in a constructive spirit. Both sides emphasized information gathering in this first meeting of the Forum. Each side sought a clearer understanding of the other's policies in the areas covered by the agenda.

After reviewing bilateral issues of interest to each side in these areas, Minister Nath and Ambassador Portman agreed on a series of next steps with a view to facilitating and promoting greater trade and investment flows between the two countries. The two sides agreed to establish focus groups on Agriculture, Tariff/Non-Tariff Barriers/Services, Investment and Innovation & Creativity, that will meet on a regular basis, functioning under the supervision of the Forum vice-chairs Commerce Secretary S.N. Menon and Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Karan Bhatia.

Concerning the Doha Round, both sides expressed the hope that the wide gaps in the negotiating positions of WTO members can be narrowed. As the Hong Kong Ministerial approaches, renewed energy and commitment will be needed to bridge these gaps. Both sides agreed that this challenge should not lower the ambitions for the Round and they looked forward to the successful completion of the Round by the end of 2006.

The next meeting of the Trade Policy Forum will take place in 2006 in Washington D.C.