

India seeks WTO members' synergy for level playing field in e-commerce

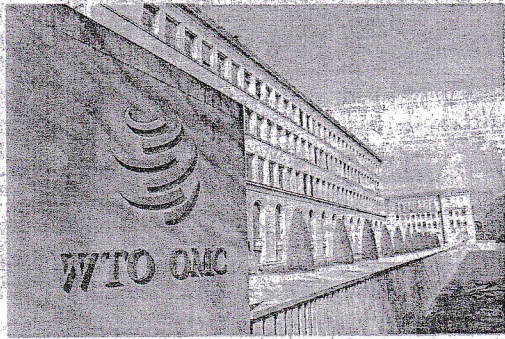
REACHING OUT. It has asked developing nations including LDCs to specify constraints in adoption of policies

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India has made a pitch at the WTO for member countries to work together to check the dominance of a handful of MNCs in the growing e-commerce business across the world. This could be achieved by promoting competition in the digital markets and enhancing co-operation between regulatory authorities, it said.

New Delhi's paper on correcting the uneven state of play in global e-commerce, submitted to the WTO's General Council prior to the Ministerial Conference in February 2024, is important, especially in the light of attempts being made by a group, led by rich nations, to push a plurilateral (small group) pact on e-commerce rules.

"E-commerce has a potential to drive future economic growth. However, the benefits of this growth are currently unevenly divided in favour of a few large MNCs. In these circum-



stances, unless due care is taken, the benefits of e-commerce would be limited only to a few who are already in a position to take advantage of the growing e-commerce market," per the communication submitted by India on 'promotion of competition in e-commerce'.

'PRINCIPLES VIOLATED' Many developing nations, including India and South Africa, have been opposing the plurilateral talks on the grounds that these violate the WTO's basic principles

of collective decision-making. They argue that multilateral rules on e-commerce cannot be negotiated till developing countries have their domestic policies in place to check the dominance of MNC players.

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In the paper, India said that members should share their experiences in promoting competition in digital markets and also propose how co-operation can be enhanced between regulatory authorities so as to promote competition in e-com-

Unless due care is taken, benefits of e-commerce would be limited only to a few, the WTO has cautioned in its paper focussing on 'promotion of competition in e-commerce'

merce. In India, e-commerce giants such as Amazon and Flipkart, have been facing investigations by the Competition Commission of India against alleged cases of anti-competitive practices.

"Various countries are in the process of exploring how to face these formidable challenges' (posed by MNCs) and which domestic policies would need to be framed to provide the necessary support for enabling domestic players to come up and have their fair share of the market. Regulators in

different jurisdictions working within different legal and constitutional frameworks often have different approaches to cope with these challenges. However, the global nature of the internet and online digital businesses makes close collaboration between regulators imperative," the paper underlined.

FEEDBACK SOUGHT

India also asked developing countries, including LDCs, to point out the constraints being faced by them in adoption and use of policies to ensure competition in the e-commerce space. India asked for suggestions on initiatives that could be taken to build their capacity and capability. It also asked members to specify what role can be played by WTO in promoting competition in e-commerce.

The MC12 of the WTO decided to reinvestigate discussions under the WTO Programme on Electronic Commerce (WPEC), particularly in line with its development dimension.