

USTR says market access to India has improved

By **Daily Excelsior** - April 18, 2024



WASHINGTON, Apr 18: India has opened up its market to the American farming industry in as many as 12 different categories which will provide a growing opportunity for US exporters, the top trade official has told lawmakers as she defended the Biden administration’s policies after some influential senators raised the issue of unfair practices by foreign countries.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai, responding to a series of questions from the senators during a congressional hearing on trade convened by the US Finance Committee, said that the Biden administration has secured USD 21 billion in market access over the last three years.

“That includes the 12 tariff categories with India, a growing market, growing opportunity for US exporters,” she said on Wednesday.

“We are opening markets for hard-working American families and communities, especially our rural communities,” she said.

“For example, after the US and India terminated seven WTO (World Trade Organisation) disputes, India agreed to remove retaliatory tariffs on several US products. This means improved access for chickpeas, lentils, almonds, walnuts and apples, benefiting farmers across our country, including in Michigan, Oregon, California and Washington,” Tai said.

This means more market access for turkey, duck, blueberries and cranberries benefiting the farmers in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts and Minnesota, she added.

“Trade should work for all Americans. Our goal is to stop pitting Americans against each other in our trade policy and this is why we are taking unprecedented steps to incorporate more voices into trade policymaking,” Tai said.

Tai said enforcing trade rules continues to be a priority this year for the administration.

“We will continue to level the playing field for American workers and businesses. We are vigorously enforcing our trade agreements, defending American jobs, and making sure more people enjoy the benefits of trade,” she said.

Responding to a question from Senator Bill Cassidy on a whistleblower’s allegations of forced labour in the Indian shrimp industry, Tai said she has raised this issue with her Indian counterpart.

“It’s not an easy conversation. We will continue to champion this particular issue,” she said.

India has dismissed allegations of poor working conditions and safety standards in the shrimp industry, with a commerce ministry official saying India’s 548 seafood units are regularly inspected and monitored by various government agencies.

Indian shrimp exporters follow a robust regulatory and safety regime, as it helps them to ship quality marine products to developed regions like the US and Europe, the official said in New Delhi earlier this month.

Cassidy also raised the issue of rice subsidy by India.

“There’s also a concern from our rice people who say if it were not for Indian subsidies of rice, they would have roughly USD 850 million more in export,” he said. Senator Ron Wyden, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, alleged that India’s wheat subsidies are distorting prices and directly hurting American farmers.

“Without enforcement, our trade laws aren’t worth the paper they are written on,” he said.

“India’s wheat subsidies are distorting prices and making it harder for Oregon’s farmers to compete in the Asian market. Mexico’s illegal fishing practices are hurting the environment and its harmful energy regulations are undermining American clean energy suppliers,” he said.

“China has a rap sheet of unfair subsidies and trade practices so long, we’d be here until dinnertime just to get through it...Every single one of these unfair practices by foreign countries is directly hurting workers and companies in the United States,” he said.

“There’s a lot more USTR can be doing with the tools it has – whether that’s raising issues directly with trading partners, starting dispute settlement, or opening 301 investigations into unfair trade practices.

“That’s the only way to hold trade cheats accountable and level the playing field for American workers and businesses,” Wyden said.

Senator Steve Daines said that the US has been a leading producer of lentils and access to India is very important for its farmers.

Ranking member Mike Crapo from Idaho targeted China for unfair trade practices and charged that the USTR had not taken any action against them.

“USTR has yet to take a single enforcement action against China, period. Whether at the WTO or under section 301 or under the Phase 1 deal. Nothing,” he said. (PTI)



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Edited, Printed, Published by Kamal Rohmetra and owned by Excelsior. Executive Editor Neeraj Rohmetra. Printed at Excelsior Printer Pvt Ltd, Janipura, Jammu and published from EXCELSIOR HOUSE, Janipura, Jammu 180007 (J&K).
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