

India to take up visa issue at WTO

By **Mail Today Bureau**
in New Delhi

INDIA has submitted a proposal to the World Trade Organisation pressing for a global agreement in conducting services-related trade amid countries' tightening of visa norms, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday.

"Countries are now very clearly raising protectionist walls as regards service trade. And it is time that we have a global framework within which trade in services can happen. We will be actively pursuing our proposal in the WTO," she said.

She referred to the examples of the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, which are enforcing stricter rules visa for skilled professionals.

The trade facilitation agreement in services proposal is aimed at liberalising rules for movement of professionals, and other steps to reduce transaction costs to boost growth of the services sector.

India is pitching for this pact in the WTO as the services sector contributes over 60 per cent to the GDP and 28 per cent to total employment.

The move is aimed at developing a broader framework governing global services trade, just like a similar pact implemented by the WTO on goods trade.

Sitharaman said, "India wants all the member countries to study the proposal before the forthcoming ministerial meeting of WTO in December at Argentina".

Talking about the executive order signed by the US President Donald Trump on H1B visas, she said America has committed certain number of these visas to India and we would definitely want America to honour that commitment.

However, the minister said, she is in touch with the Indian industry on these issues amid fears that the new American visa regime would make visas more expensive and restrictive.

She further said that Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who is in the US, would take up the matter with the US administration.

It is not just the US, but several countries now adopting such measures, she said adding the government and the industry need to work together on the issue.

Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

