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Article Title: India asks for WTO protection from outsourcing bans  
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WASHINGTON: India wants a new world trade pact that would prevent the United States and other countries from taking steps to ban companies from outsourcing jobs, a top Indian official said on Wednesday.

Proposals in the U.S. Congress in recent years to ban outsourcing have sent off "alarm bells" in New Delhi, Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath said.

To prevent those from becoming law, India wants the United States to lock in current U.S. legislation allowing companies to move jobs offshore as part of any new world trade agreement, he said.

"We are very concerned with the U.S. binding the current situation because all these noises just keep coming," Nath told reporters after a speech to the U.S.-India Business Council. "(The issue) needs to be once and for all put behind us."

India's booming technology capital of Bangalore has become a global symbol for the outsourcing phenomenon. The city of 6.5 million accounts for at least one-third of India's \$16 billion software and back-office service outsourcing industry, which employs more than 900,000 people.

Concerns about outsourcing are based more "on emotions than economics," Nath said. Both countries benefit when U.S. companies can lower their costs by tapping India's plentiful, well-educated work force, he said.

On Tuesday, the United States submitted a revised offer in World Trade Organization service negotiations that would lock in the current access that foreign financial services companies have in the U.S. market and expand access for foreign firms in areas such as telecommunications, computer and related services, higher education and transportation.

The proposal appeared to be silent on outsourcing, although a spokesman for the U.S. Trade Representative's office was unable to immediately confirm that.

The United States did not offer any new market access for foreign temporary workers -- another priority area for India in the WTO services talks.

Nath said he had not yet seen the latest U.S. offer, but said Washington would need to provide more short-term visas for business travelers as part of a new world trade pact.

"I'm not talking immigration," but business visits of less than a year to work on company projects, Nath said.

The issue is a sensitive one for the United States because many lawmakers view work visas as a back-door immigration channel and strongly oppose including any U.S. commitments to increase them as part of trade pacts.

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