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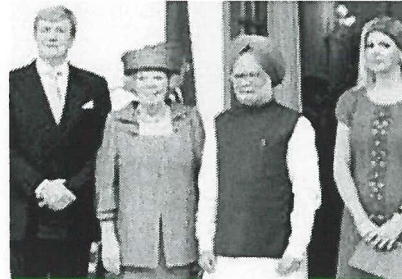
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Kamal Nath slams critics of labour practices

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NEW DELHI • Indian Trade Minister Kamal Nath hit out yesterday at **European critics** of his country's labour practices including allegations of child workers saying they damaged the nation's image abroad.

Nath said he had discussed the issue with Dutch economic affairs minister, M J A van der Hoeven, who is accompanying Queen Beatrix on a state visit to India.



Dutch Queen Beatrix (second left), Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Crown Prince Willem Alexander of Netherlands and Crown Princess Maxima in New Delhi yesterday. (REUTERS)

"I have brought to the attention of the minister the (European non-government organisations) NGOs who have been publishing reports which are not correct ... which have been established by pictures and other documentation," Nath told reporters.

"Both of us will communicate with each other and remain in close contact with each other to see that this issue is resolved at the earliest," he said.

The "false reports impact on the credibility of the Indian government," Nath said promising to take "serious note" of the subject.

Nath's comments follow his junior colleague Jairam Ramesh warning exporters last week that India's hand-made carpet industry was in danger of being listed as "products of child labour" in the United States.

Last week, an Indian supplier to clothing retailer Gap promised to clean up labour practices after reports highlighted maltreatment of workers at its manufacturing units.

Van der Hoeven agreed that "it was important that right facts are communicated" as both India and the Netherlands had substantial bilateral investments.

The issue also follows a spate of product recalls by China including toys and baby cribs, that have sullied the "Made-in-China" brand in the United States and around the world.

Van der Hoeven said Dutch companies were eager to expand on the \$2.7bn in two-way trade with India reached in 2006.

In January, India's Tata Steel snapped up Anglo-Dutch steel firm Corus for \$13.7bn.

Meanwhile, Queen Beatrix was accorded a ceremonial welcome earlier yesterday by Indian President Pratibha Patil.

The Queen, who last visited India in 1986, will discuss trade and political ties with Patil and premier Manmohan Singh before visiting the southern IT hub of Bangalore, an Indian foreign ministry statement said.

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