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# India, China & South Korea on same page in RCEP talks

Kirtika Suneja, Financial Express

New Delhi, 18 November 2013: India has found allies in China and South Korea on the crucial issue of scheduling of commitments in the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, where a majority of countries involved are asking for one schedule of commitments from Asean nations and treating them as one entity as opposed to New Delhi's demand for different schedules.

Ever since the RCEP negotiations were launched in November 2012, India has sought differential commitments for trade in goods, services and investment for the participating countries as all of them have different markets.

“Generally, there should be one schedule but we want differentiation and flexibility. China and Korea also have the same position as us because we are the larger markets of the region. India is playing a significant role by not agreeing to one schedule,” said an official involved in the negotiations.

Differential schedules mean India's offer to one Asean nation will be different to what it offers to another Southeast nation instead of treating all Asean countries at par and vice versa.

RCEP is an ambitious partnership, involving ten Asean countries and six FTA partners namely India, China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. It is meant to be a comprehensive arrangement involving agreements in areas such as trade in goods, services and investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement and other issues to be identified during the course of negotiations.

“This differential schedule will protect Indian markets from Chinese imports as India would have the liberty to offer larger access to other countries and not so much to China,” said an expert.

“More than differential schedules, the real benefits of RCEP for India arise from patents on traditional knowledge and that is what India should negotiate for,” said Abhijit Das, head and professor, Centre for WTO Studies at Indian Institute of Foreign Trade.

In fact, analysts said because of this stance, the ambitious agreement may miss its December 2015 deadline. “There is a sense of disappointment in partner countries as India does not have a strategy and is not willing to give anything. India's wish-list is restricted to mode 4, which is not sustainable. We need an aggressive agenda on the RCEP front,” said Biswajit Dhar, director-general, Research and Information System for Developing Countries.

However, on the issue of delays, the commerce ministry official said: “We are only discussing the contours of the agreement and it is premature to talk of delays.”

The first round of RCEP negotiations was held from 9-13 May in Brunei Darussalam. Negotiations for the RCEP FTA continued to make good progress at Round 2 in Brisbane in September. The next round will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from January 20-24.

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# 16 Asia-Pacific nations discuss tariffs at 3rd round of free trade talks

Kyodo News

Kuala Lumpur, 21 January 2014: Sixteen Asia-Pacific countries began their third round of free trade talks Tuesday, with tariff-related issues on the agenda.

Negotiators from the 10 ASEAN member states and their six regional partners -- Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea -- will hold working group meetings on trade in goods, trade in services, and investment during their four-day gathering.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership framework negotiations are aimed at creating one of the world's largest free trade areas encompassing almost 30 percent of global gross domestic product, half of the world's population and over a quarter of world exports.

China's chief negotiator Sun Yuanjiang, in his opening remarks as "facilitator" of the six non-ASEAN countries, said, "We will try to work in very practical and efficient ways so that we can soon achieve our goal."

The RCEP negotiation partners aim to wrap up talks by 2015. They held their first round in May last year in Brunei and the second one in Brisbane, Australia, last September.

The six non-ASEAN countries in the negotiations already have FTAs with ASEAN, which is comprised of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The latest session comes after the 12 countries involved in the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade talks, led by the United States, missed a 2013 deadline for sealing a pact.

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# **RCEP important agreement for India: Commerce Secy**

Indian Express

New Delhi, 5 April 2014: The mega free trade agreement — Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is an important pact for India and industry should equip itself to avail the opportunities which would emerge from this, a top government official Friday said.

Allaying industry concerns over free trade agreements that India has implemented with other nations, Commerce Secretary Rajeev Kher said that businesses should take advantage from these pacts. Speaking at a Ficci-CUTS function, he also asked all the departments to involve in the process of enhancing exports.

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