India to seek support for food security proposal at WTO

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NEW DELHI: India has objected to some of the clauses in the trade facilitation agreement and sought support for the developing countries’ food security proposal at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Senior officials from WTO member countries are in Geneva to prepare the ground for the forthcoming Bali ministerial meeting.

“There are certain things that we cannot do and even the developed world knows we cannot concede on those,” said a commerce department official.

Trade facilitation measures require countries to improve infrastructure at borders, standardise procedures and rules and cut red tape to allow seamless trade.

New Delhi is averse to some provisions due to the high cost of compliance and requirement of additional infrastructure and investment obligations that some countries may not have the capacity to meet.

India has also opposed the condition of keeping adequate time gap between the publication of new or amended tariffs and their coming into effect. Decisions on tariffs are part of the Finance Bill and announced in the budget for immediate implementation.

The country, however, has extended support proposals on customs cooperation and mandatory return of the rejected consignment to the exporter, instead of the current practice of destroying goods at EU ports.

In the latest rounds of talks, India has also made it amply clear that if there is no forward movement on G-33 nations food security proposal, trade facilitation would also not move.

The G-33 proposal wants subsidies, which are a part of the procurement for public stockholding for poor and marginal farmers, to not be regarded as a prohibited subsidy by the WTO.

“Our proposal serves the dual purpose of buying from resource poor farmers and providing food security to our people. Since the US and the EU are continuing to give out billions in the form of farm subsidies that they had committed to do away with in the Doha round, our demand is totally justified,” the commerce ministry official added.