

India wants 20 yrs to cut tariffs under RCEP

Move Part Of A Plan To Protect Domestic Industry From Cheap Chinese Imports

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The government on Tuesday said it wants a 20-year window to reduce import duty on several products under the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement to create the world's largest trade bloc, as part of a plan to shield domestic industry from an onslaught of cheap imports from China.

Commerce and industry minister Suresh Prabhu told reporters that India had conveyed its position during the recent meeting of trade ministers, while maintaining that the negotiations will not conclude this year, as was suggested by countries such as Singapore that are keen to rush in with the agreement.

"The RCEP negotiations will not end in 2018. It has been agreed at the level of leaders... It will continue in 2019 as well and we will have opportunity to work on all issues," the minister told repor-

ters, adding that India has reiterated its insistence on linking the goods negotiations with services, which will ensure that in return for a reduction in import duties, there will be easier access for Indian nurses, software professionals and auditors.



Apart from India and China, RCEP will include Japan, South Korea and the Asean countries along with Australia and New Zealand. Prabhu said India wants to have a separate dialogue with China, Australia and New Zealand, with which it does not have free trade agreements. The idea is to remove import duty on as many products as possible with a lower coverage for goods imported from the three countries. "Significant flexibility is there for members. Now,

we need to work upon them," a government official said.

Similarly, the government claimed to have scored a victory of sorts in pushing its case for easier movement of professionals under the services agreement that will be part of RCEP.

India wants to have a separate dialogue with China, Australia and New Zealand, with which it does not have free trade agreements, says Suresh Prabhu

At last week's meeting in Singapore, negotiators have agreed on the broad contours of a package including goods, services, investments, rules of origin and intellectual property rights, where talks are proposed to be speeded up with a view to conclude the dialogue by the year-end.

Prabhu also sought to comfort domestic industry, promising discussions with stakeholders on the list of products where duties will be reduced.