

China to keep general tariff level at 9.8% in 2009

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China would keep the country's general tariff level at 9.8 percent next year, the same as in 2008 and in 2007, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) announced Wednesday.

The nation will lower import tariffs on five commodities, including fresh strawberries, from Jan 1, the ministry said in a statement, adding the limited scope and margin of lower tariffs was the reason why the general tariff level was left unchanged from that in 2008.

The tariff level for farm produce will be maintained at 15.2 percent and that for industrial products at 8.9 percent, according to the statement.

Macro control leverage

The ministry said tariffs on specific items would also be adjusted to support four sectors -- agriculture and rural development, technologies that will benefit industrial upgrading and equipment manufacturing, energy and environment conservation, and the industries of textile, steel and fertilizer that are in difficulties.

The nation would impose temporary import tariffs on animal feedstuff and some large farming equipment as well as spare parts, the MOF stated, without providing further details.

It also said the country may cancel the temporary import tariffs on pork, among others, and resume most-favored nation rates based on market demands.

However, the country will continue to impose seasonal export tariffs on fertilizers like carbamide and impose special export tariffs on some compound fertilizers, in order to meet domestic demands first.

While speaking of support for the troubled textile, steel, and fertilizer industries, the ministry said the nation would levy lower import tariffs on "raw materials that have huge demand in domestic production" in the form of lower temporary tariffs, without giving further details.

The ministry said the nation would impose lower import tariffs on some technology products, such as ion exchange membrane, and key equipment and spare parts that are essential in promoting new technologies.

The country would also continue to levy lower temporary tariffs on equipment, as well as spare parts, that are useful in conserving the environment, while keeping in place temporary export tariffs on energy- and resource-consuming products, such as coke and wood pulp, and those on energy products, such as coal and crude.

The ministry also announced lower tariffs next year with a number of countries, including Pakistan, New Zealand, and Singapore, a move aimed to boost bilateral and multilateral trade with other countries to fight falling exports amid the ongoing global crisis.

MOF official Bai Jingming said the country had been increasingly employing tariff policies to adjust macro control policies over the past few years.

WTO commitments fulfilled

The ministry also said that China was almost at the finish line in respect to honoring the commitments of cutting tariffs it made upon joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001.

China's general tariff level has been lowered by more than 35 percent since the country's accession to the WTO, down from 15.3 percent in 2001 to the present 9.8 percent.

The tariff level had been substantially lowered in the five years since 2001, to reach 9.9 percent as early

as in 2005.

"It is very important for Chinese exporters at such a time of crisis, if overseas countries could fulfill their commitments of market access for Chinese products, which should be effective at the same time when China fulfilled its promise to reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers," Mei Xinyu, a trade expert with the Ministry of Commerce, told Xinhua.

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