

Name of Paper : THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Published at : NEW DELHI

Dated : - 8 MAR 2012

US Hauls India to WTO on Poultry Ban

AMIT SEN
NEW DELHI

The US has dragged India to the World Trade Organization for banning poultry products in alleged violation of trade rules, but Indian officials say the country is ready to defend its measures in the formal consultations expected to begin soon.

India claims that the import ban is aimed at preventing avian influenza, but it has not given scientific evidence in line with international standards on avian-influenza control, US Trade Representative Ron Kirk said on Tuesday after requesting consultations with India under the dispute settlement provisions of the WTO.

"India's ban on US poultry is clearly a

case of disguising trade restrictions by invoking unjustified animal health concerns. The United States is the world's leader in agricultural safety and we are confident that the WTO will confirm that India's ban is unjustified," Kirk said.

India banned import of live poultry and poultry products in March 2007 from countries where avian influenza was reported.

The US poultry industry has been eyeing the over \$3-billion Indian poultry market. The United States is the world's second largest exporter of poultry products with a \$5 billion worth of shipments last year.

Indian officials contacted by ET, however, said that India's health concerns

were real as the country was still fighting avian-influenza, or bird flu. Fresh cases of the flu have been detected in Tripura and an alert has also been issued in the neighbouring states.

"Our experts have observed that symptoms of low pathogenic avian influenza might go unnoticed and controlling the infection could become difficult," the official said.

There is no data available that could confirm that low pathogenic avian influenza could not mutate into highly pathogenic avian influenza, he added.

India banned import of live poultry and poultry products in March 2007 from countries where avian influenza was reported. The ban, notified by the Director General of Foreign Trade, covered import of live chicks, ducks, turkey and

other newly hatched Avian species.

"Over the last few years, the US has repeatedly asked India to justify its claim that a ban on products from the United States is necessary. To date, India has not provided valid, scientifically-based justification for the import restrictions," the USTR said.

Seeking formal consultations at the WTO on a issue is the first step in filing a full-fledged dispute. If the party concerned is not satisfied with the consultations, it could ask for a dispute settlement panel which would give a verdict after hearing arguments from both sides.

If the verdict goes against India, it will have to withdraw the ban, failing which the US will be allowed to impose retaliatory restrictions on India's imports.

