

AmCham calls for resumption of trade

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A staffer arranges beef products in a supermarket in Taipei yesterday.

PHOTO: PICHI CHUANG, REUTERS

The American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei (AmCham) yesterday called on Taipei and Washington to resume the long-stalled Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) talks now that the controversial issue of Taiwan's restrictions on US beef imports has been resolved.

In a statement issued yesterday, AmCham welcomed the announcement that Taipei and Washington had reached agreement on a protocol on the liberalization of imports of US beef products into Taiwan.

"The protocol removes what had been a major irritant in the bilateral economic relationship. AmCham now urges the two governments to quickly schedule the long-delayed next round of TIFA talks, which should take place in Taipei," AmCham said.

"TIFA talks have proven in the past to be a highly useful vehicle for the two sides to discuss trade and investment-related issues in detail, moving bilateral economic relations forward to the benefit of both economies," the statement added.

At a separate setting yesterday, Minister of Economic Affairs Shih Yen-shiang (石錫山) said TIFA talks are expected to resume by the end of this year now that the issue of beef imports from the US has been resolved.

Shih said he recently reported to Vice Premier Eric Chu (吳敦義) about the importance of renewing TIFA talks and said that under the TIFA dialogue framework, Taiwan will seek to talk about e-commerce, product verification and other issues.

Shih's remarks echoed those made by William Stanton, the top US envoy to Taiwan, who said on Thursday that as soon as the beef issue "hurdle" was cleared, TIFA talks aimed at strengthening bilateral economic and trade relations between Taiwan and the US could be resumed.

Taiwan and the US signed the TIFA in 1994 as a stepping stone to a Taiwan-US free trade agreement. Under this framework, meetings were held once or twice a year until July 2007.

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Nefeterius Akeli McPherson, senior media affairs liaison of the Office of the US Trade Representative, welcomed Taiwan's decision to lift the ban on US bone-in beef from young cattle.

The latest development is conducive to a resumption of the TIFA talks, McPherson said.

“We look forward to seeing both sides getting the opportunity to communicate, since there are so many trade issues to be settled,” she said.

Meanwhile, a Washington-based Taiwanese official cast doubt on whether the new round of TIFA talks will take place this year, given that the US government is running a tight schedule for the rest of this year, including an annual meeting of the China-US Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade, a visit to China by US President Barack Obama and the APEC leadership summit.

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