

PARTICIPATION REPORT OF THE DELEGATION OF INDIA TO THE 15TH
SESSION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR ASIA
(21-24 NOVEMBER 2006, SEOUL, KOREA)

The Indian delegation to the 15th Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia was led by Shri Rajesh Bhushan, Director, Ministry of Health &FW and consisted of Shri Prashant Goel, Deputy Secretary, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industries, Dr. Surinder Kumar, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Shri Arun Kumar Srivastav, DADG (PFA), Ministry of Health & FW. This session of CCASIA was organized in Seoul, Korea from 21-24 November 2006 and was attended by 19 Member countries of the Asian region, 3 observer countries and 1 international organization. The session was chaired by Dr. Cheri Ho Lee, Korea University and was inaugurated by Dr. Chang – Jin Moon, Commissioner, Korea, FDA.

The draft report of the 15th session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia Meeting (with amendments, additions and deletions as adopted in the final session on 24-11-2006) is annexed (Annexure-A).

The brief summary of India's interventions (detailed interventions of India were circulated in the meeting as CRD 4 and CRD 12) on various agenda items and the decisions taken are as follows –

(1) **Adoption of the Agenda (CX/Asia06/15/1)** – CCASIA adopted the provisional agenda with the following three additionalities under agenda item 8 (Other Business and Future Work) – proposals to undertake new work on the standard for chilly sauce (proposed by Thailand), standard for edible sago palm flour (proposed by Indonesia) and proposed draft strategic plan for the CCASIA (proposed by Malaysia). It was also agreed to discuss revision of the Food Category System of GSFA (proposed by Indonesia) under agenda item no. 2 and to discuss exchange of information and expertise on food testing facilities among member countries (proposed by Bhutan) under agenda item no. 4.

(2) **Matters arising from the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other Codex Committees and Task Forces (CX/Asia06/15/2)** – Under this agenda item the draft strategic plan was discussed. This draft plan was circulated for discussion and comments of all Coordinating Committees as a result of the decision taken by the 29th Session of CAC (July 2006, Geneva).

India referred to its detailed comments in CRD 4 and emphasized the following points –

- (a) Codex sessions should be distributed evenly across the year in order to facilitate effective participation of developing countries with limited human resources.
- (b) The relevant variability limits (referred to under goal 2, paragraph 11 of the draft strategic plan) should not be finalized until data from developing countries is available.
- (c) The Codex Trust Fund should be utilized also for providing financial support for participation in capacity building training programmes.

In respect of aforesaid point (a) on behalf of the Codex Secretariat it was pointed out that Codex Sessions are held throughout the year in all the months except the months of June, July and August. In respect of point (b) it was pointed out by Codex Secretariat that the issue of lack of data from developing countries in relation to risk assessment was addressed specifically in paragraph 22 of the working principles for risk analysis (Codex Procedure Manual Book), hence there was no need to delay the process of fixing the variability limits till such time that the data from developing countries is available. In respect of point (c) it was pointed out that some regional training activities have been funded by the Trust Fund.

While reviewing the issue of Committee structure and mandates of Codex Committees and Task Forces CCASIA did not support the proposals to limit the number of Codex sessions as well as to limit the number of meetings of active subsidiary bodies of Codex. The Committee also agreed that any comprehensive review of Codex Committee structure should not be limited to commodity committees but should also include horizontal committees (this specific view was also expressed by India in CRD 4). The issue of conversion of regional standards into worldwide standards was also discussed and the Committee decided that – Coordinating Committees may be entrusted with initiating work on commodity standards that need expertise from the region upto step 5, whereinafter the draft standard would be considered by the Commodity Committee concerned and would be submitted to CAC for adoption as a worldwide standard.

In respect of proposal 11 regarding the use of “Private Standards” by Codex, the concerns of India (as reflected in CRD 4) were also shared by other delegations. In response to India’s suggestion that the phrase “Private Standards” be substituted by “Standards set by international Intergovernmental organizations” (i.e. ISO) it was pointed out by Codex Secretariat that the phrase “Private Standards” was intended to cover international non-governmental standardization bodies.

In respect of the specific proposal of CC Latin America and Caribbean to add to its terms of reference, an additional item – “to promote the adoption of regional positions on strategic subjects” India supported this proposal. Japan and China however, took the stand that the phrase “Strategic Subjects” was not clearly defined and therefore the proposal of CCLAC cannot be supported. There was no consensus on this issue.

In respect of the specific role of the regional coordinators and the members of the Executive Committee of CAC, elected on a geographical basis, there was no consensus.

In respect of revision of Food Category System (FCS) of the General Standards for Food Additives (GSFA) Indonesia pointed out that the paper to be finalized by the electronic working group chaired by Indonesia would be circulated to all members in January 2007 for their comments.

3(A) Proposed Draft Standard for Gochujang (Step 3) – The product Gochujang is of no direct relevance to India since it is neither produced nor consumed in a significant manner in the country. Gochujang is dark red pasty fermented food manufactured through saccharifying grain starch with powdered malt. CCASIA after consideration agreed to forward the draft standards for Gochujang to CAC for adoption at Step 5. It also agreed to recommend to CAC to finalise the standards in the Committee on Cereals, Pulses and Legumes.

3(B) Proposed Draft Standard for Ginseng products (Step 3) - The product Ginseng is of no direct relevance to India since it is neither produced nor consumed in a significant manner in the country. Ginseng products are derived from fresh Ginseng routes which are cultivated for commercial purposes and are used as foods. CCASIA after consideration agreed to forward the proposed draft standard for Ginseng to the CAC for adoption at Step 5. It also agreed to recommend to CAC to finalise the standards in a relevant Commodity Committee preferably in the Committee for Processed Fruits and Vegetables.

3(C) Proposed Draft Regional Standard for Fermented Soyabean Paste (Step 3) – This is fermented food whose essential ingredient is Soyabean (boiled or steamed Soyabeans mixed with salt and others). CCASIA agreed to hold the proposed draft standard at Step 4. The Committee also agreed to establish an electronic Working Group led by South Korea. India is a member of this electronic Working Group. The revised text would be circulated for comments at Step 3 prior to the next session of CCASIA.

3(D) Proposed draft Standard for Non-fermented Soyabean Products (Step 3) – Several delegations stressed the need to clarify the types of products (i.e. Soyabean Milk/Beverages, Soyabean Curd, Tofu, Soyabean Film etc) covered under this head. CCASIA agreed to establish a Electronic Working Group chaired by China and Thailand. India is a member of this Electronic Working Group. The Committee agreed to return the proposed draft standards to Step 2 for redrafting.

4. Activities of FAO and WHO complementary to the work of the CAC including capacity building (CX/Asia 06/15/7) – FAO and WHO outlined the main activities in the area of food quality, food safety, risk analysis, capacity building etc. conducted by both the organizations since the last session of CAC. The delegation of India indicated that with the support of FAO and WHO, manuals on GMP, GHP and HACCP in several food sectors had been developed and an on-line course on food safety had been designed and initiated with an academic institution, which was a very effective approach to capacity building. The delegation noted that further technical assistance was required on risk analysis, monitoring of contaminants and the detection of genetically modified material. The aforesaid sentiments of India were also echoed by South Korea and Sri Lanka.

5. Information on National Food Control System and consumer participation in food standards setting (CX/Asia 06/15/8) – The Committee was informed of the status of National Food Control System and participation of consumer groups / bodies in national standard setting. It was intimated on behalf of India that the Codex Contact Point is located in the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. The composition of the National Codex Committee includes all relevant ministries and all concerned stakeholders, including the industry and representatives from the consumer organizations, who participate and contribute in examining the working documents and to finalizing the comments of India. A website of National Codex Committee is also maintained (codex-india.nic.in).

6. Information on use of Codex standards and related texts at national and regional levels (CX/Asia 06/15/9) – Several delegations shared information on the use of Codex standards and related texts at national levels in the Committee. It was pointed out on behalf of India that India has harmonized Indian standards taking into consideration the Codex standards, Codes and Guidelines, wherever available. The standards have been harmonized in the following areas: general provisions of food additives, fish and fishery products, sugar, confectionery, chewing gums, bubble gums, labeling provisions, definition of infant food and infant milk substitutes, Good Manufacturing Practice. However, India is having difficulties with the implementation of these standards due to instant need for labs to keep pace with advancements in analytical techniques.

7. Nomination of the Coordinator (CX/Asia 06/15/10) - The issue of nomination of a Coordinator for Asia in place of South Korea was informally discussed on 20-11-2006, before the meeting of CCASIA in a meeting which was attended by Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, India and China. Indonesia expressed its desire to be the Regional Coordinator. India reiterated its earlier position that it would be ready to discharge the responsibilities of the Regional Coordinator only if it is unanimously asked to do so. India also expressed its view that it would want an extension in its tenure as a geographical representative in the Executive Board of CAC. While Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand extended their support for the extended tenure of India in the Executive Board, China pointed out that it too wanted to become the geographical representative in the Executive Board of CAC. Eventually it was decided that while Indonesia would be the Regional Coordinator, India would get an extended tenure in the Executive Board whereinafter the candidature of China in the Executive Board would be supported.

CCASIA unanimously agreed to nominated Indonesia as the Coordinator by the 30th Session of the Commission.

8. Other Business and Future Work (CRD 3, CRD 6) – CCASIA discussed and agreed that Thailand would prepare a proposed draft standard for chilly sauce for comments and consideration in the next session.

CCASIA discussed and agreed that Indonesia would prepare a proposed draft standard for edible sago palm flour for comments and consideration in the next session.

The delegation of Malaysia introduced the proposal to develop a strategic plan for Asia. The delegation of India supported this draft plan and expressed the need for further debate on it. The only country to raise concern was Japan which expressed the view that the phrase referring to “the need for developed members to accelerate and extend technical assistance to developing ones” should be deleted. It was decided that the draft strategic plan for CCASIA would be circulated in a separate circular letter for comments and would be considered at the next session.

9. Date and Place of next session – This would be fixed after consultation between the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Coordinator.