

# Clinton signs China trade bill

*Beijing hails signing, looks forward to better ties*

WASHINGTON, Oct 11: President Bill Clinton signed a law Tuesday in a bill that permanently normalises trade relations with China and could yield billions of dollars in new sales for US farmers, manufacturers and service companies, reports AP.

"This is a great day for the United States, and a hopeful day for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world," Clinton said just before signing the legislation in a ceremony on the White House South Lawn.

"In case you all have forgotten, this was hard to pass. This was a lot of trouble," Clinton said. But he told lawmakers who came to witness the signing that they will not regret their decision to approve the bill.

"I do think this is a good economic deal for America," Clinton said. "But by far, I think, the most important reason to ratify this agreement is the potential it gives us to build a safer, more integrated world."

Increased competition inside China, however, is expected to result in massive layoffs, especially in China's state-run companies.

The House approved the legislation normalising trade relations in May; the Senate passed it on Sept. 19. The measure revises a law from the mid-1970s that subjected trade relations with communist states to annual reviews.

The legislation is an outgrowth of a US-Chinese agreement last fall under which China, as a condition for entering the World Trade Organization, agreed to open its markets and reduce tariffs.

Clinton has argued that the more China opens its markets to US products, the more fully it will unleash the potential of China citizens.

It is China's 1 billion residents that US business is eyeing.

Labour, conservative groups and human rights campaigners

had argued that the annual review allowed the United States a chance each year to pressure China on human rights, trade practices and weapons exports.

After it enters the WTO, China's tariffs on US-made goods would drop from an overall average of 25 per cent to 9 per cent by 2005. Negotiations at the WTO's Geneva headquarters, however, recently stalled after three weeks of discussions in which the Chinese negotiators appeared to be backpedaling on agreements made with the United States or other nations.

"We remain engaged with the Chinese about implementing PNTR. There are some very important issues we have to address," White House press secretary Jake Siewert said Tuesday. US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky has been in touch with them and we will continue to talk about the im-

portance of implementing this agreement in a way that actually makes it work, and so the Chinese government not only lives up to the spirit of the agreement, but to the letter of the agreement.

Barshefsky is set to leave as early as this week for Beijing to help clear the way for China's initiation into the WTO.

Barshefsky spokeswoman Amy Stilwell emphasized Monday that Barshefsky's trip was not aimed at reopening any parts of the deal the United States made with China last November. The Chinese know that the only way they will enter the WTO is by sticking to the terms of their agreements, she said.

"She (Barshefsky) is not carrying any new proposals with her," Stilwell said.

Meanwhile, a report from Beijing says China welcomed US President Bill Clinton's signing of a bill that ends the annual debate on Beijing's trade status, saying the move would foster better overall relations.

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Ending the annual review of China's trade privileges "benefits the advancement of China-US trade cooperation and the continued forward development of relations between China and the United States," Xinhua said.

The annual review had been a source of added friction between Beijing and Washington, perennially at odds over Taiwan, weapons proliferation and the US military presence in Asia.

China's US foes used the annual review to pressure China on rights, trade practices and weapons exports, drawing furious accusations of wrongful interference from Beijing.

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