CHINA HAS finally agreed to remove restrictions on beef export from India. A top official in the Commerce ministry said Beijing, which has sent quality inspection team to India earlier to examine buffalo meat facilities, has cleared 14 abattoirs for importing meat from here.

Making China agree for direct import of bovine meat from India has been a top priority for Indian government since Narendra Modi government took over in May 2014. Officials said China has been buying Indian beef from Vietnam in the last few years and New Delhi was not getting any advantages in terms of changing the bilateral trade. Sources said Ministry hopes that the export of beef would make a considerable change in the bilateral trade deficit. India's trade deficit with China increased to $52.69 billion in 2015-16 from $48.48 billion in the previous financial year.

"We have been lobbying hard to make China agree on importing buffalo meat directly from India. Chinese traders were using Vietnam for channelling their meat trade and Vietnam's buffalo meat import has gone up more than its consumption," said the official. Vietnam is the number one destination for India's buffalo meat export and in 2013-14 it was 5,24,370 MT and it rose to 633800.24 MT in 2014-15.

Inspectors of Ministry of Agriculture had sent a team to China in May 2015 under the leadership of Director General of Animal Husbandry, Livestock and Fisheries, which included abattoir experts from the Joint Director, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, New Delhi, and Joint Director, Animal Husbandry, Livestock and Fisheries, New Delhi, in the company of the director general.

With the world's largest population, China's consumption of meat has been rising. According to the NGO WildAid, Chinese would consume nearly half of world's beef by 2030. It also says the average Chinese eats around 170 g of meat per day, up from less than 30 g in 1978. "It's a huge market for India. We have been working really hard on it," official said.

China signed an MoU for importing bovine meat from India in 2013 during Premier Li Keqiang's visit, but has not lifted the restrictions yet.

"After moving at a very slow pace, finally they have cleared 14 centres for its import. This is a positive move and we hope once the restrictions are over, they will clear more centres. Indian buffalo meat - mainly of water buffalo - is considered to be cost competitive and much better quality than what's exported from countries like Brazil," said the official. The country has exported 13,14,158.05 MT of buffalo meat products to the world for the worth of, Rs 2,6681.56 crore and the main export destinations are Malaysia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq apart from Vietnam.

With the world's largest population, China's consumption of meat has been rising. According to the NGO WildAid, Chinese would consume nearly half of world's beef by 2030. It also says the average Chinese eats around 170 g of meat per day, up from less than 30 g in 1978. "It's a huge market for India. We have been working really hard on it," added the official. Last year, Beijing has lifted a 13-year complete ban on import of beef from the US.

After Prime Minister Modi's visit to China in May 2015, the matter was raised by New Delhi following which China had agreed to send its quality inspectors to see if Indian slaughter houses adhere to the required quality norms. The joint statement issued after PM's visit, has said that both sides will take necessary measures to remove impediments to bilateral trade.