

Implementation of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement key to boost global trade, says experts

NEW DELHI, 21 July 2017: The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the World Customs Organization Mercator Programme Approach to Implementation provide an overview of the TFA, the key steps required for accession to and compliance with the TFA, bringing forth the lessons learnt and best practices, which could serve as support and potential capacity building tool for successful TFA implementation.

This was stated by **Mr. Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General, World Customs Organization (WCO)**, while addressing a conference on **'Trade Facilitation Agreement: Learning from Implementation Experiences'**, organized by **FICCI jointly with the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), Ministry of Finance, Government of India and The World Bank in partnership with FFAI, DCCAA and EICI.**

Mr. Mikuriya said that the recently released National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) by India comprises concrete steps for moving the agenda ahead and fixes accountability and time frame for accomplishing the plan. The key lies in implementation of the action plan. Speaking about connectivity, he said that customs was known for connecting the borders and India has a strategic position as a transit point and should connect with its neighboring countries.

Mr. Mikuriya said with TFA would simplify procedures and enhance competitiveness making economies more vibrant leading to increase in revenue. Also, WCO was looking at leveraging digital technology to support e-commerce in future and disseminating information. He added that collaborative approach, dialogue and capacity building were needed and WCO was conducting awareness programmes for seamless implementation of TFA.

Ms. Vanaja N Sarna, Chairperson, CBEC, Ministry of Finance, said that the National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) has adopted 76 point NTFAP, which is a reflection of the Government's commitment to implement the TFA. The NCTF comprises stakeholders from the Government and private sectors including the trade community. She added that TFA would change the global trade scenario and streamline the processes while supplementing India's reform agenda.

Ms. Sarna said that the National Plan would be monitored by the Steering Committee, the operational arm of the NCTF, co-chaired by the Revenue Secretary and Commerce Secretary. The plan would be reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary. She added that the Action Plan not only covers the activities coming under the TFA but they go beyond the ambit of TFA, which have been defined as TFA Plus category.

Dr Junaid Kamal Ahmad, Country Director, The World Bank, said that for India to achieve its aspirational goal of becoming a high middle income level economy, trade facilitation will play a key role. Besides, dual integration – internal and external – was necessary for India to ensure it

was on the growth path of economic development. He added that India was moving from trade control to trade facilitation.

Dr Ahmad said that with global and domestic integration, it was critical to undertake policy reforms, infrastructure development and build capacity to enable TFA to work. Also, India needed to strengthen its position in the value added chain as countries such as China were far ahead of India. He added that implementing the agreement is likely to boost global trade, with the biggest gains being felt in the poorest countries.

Ms. Ananya Ray, Member (Customs), CBEC, Ministry of Finance, said that the objectives to be achieved by National Action Plan were improvement in ease of doing business by reduction in cargo release time and cost, move towards paperless regulatory environment, transparent and predictable legal regime and improved investment climate through better infrastructure. Trade facilitation has become synonyms with ease of doing business, she said.

Dr A Didar Singh, Secretary General, FICCI, said that the TFA was a major milestone for the global trading system. It would benefit industry, trade, investment and people. The new agreement entails that new standards and processes have to be adopted and would lead to reduction in logistics cost and enable smooth movement of goods across borders.

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