

**Press Note on Assumption of the Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific Region
for the World Customs Organisation (WCO)**

India has assumed the Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific Region for the World Customs Organisation (WCO) and will be heading the region for a period of 2 years from 2018 to 2020. The flag of Vice Chair was handed over to India from the outgoing Vice Chair, Fiji in the Council Session at WCO, Brussels, held from 28th-30th of June 2018. To mark the assumption of Vice Chair Office, an event was organised on 16th July, 2018 at Le Meridian, New Delhi by CBIC in partnership with CII. The event was attended by customs delegates of more than 30 countries of Asia Pacific Region along with representatives from other Government agencies and the trade.

The Hon'ble Minister of State for Finance, Sh. Shiv Pratap Shukla was the Chief Guest for the occasion. WCO Secretary General, Dr. Kunio Mikuriya attended the assumption ceremony as a Keynote speaker. The Customs Heads of Japan, Mr. Atsushi Iizuka, and Fiji Mr. Visvanath Das, were present among the dignitaries.

In his opening address, Sh. S. Ramesh, Chairman, CBIC, expressed his gratitude to WCO and member countries and stated that India has been associated with WCO since 1971 and has been contributing for the integral development, and promoting people to people contact among the member countries in the Asia Pacific Region. He also mentioned that in the present times, the rapid growth of international trade has amplified the relative importance of border procedures in cutting down transaction costs. Trade Facilitation is seen as the key enabler for simplification and rationalization of procedures and reduction of barriers to the movement of goods across the border. India is committed to the path of trade facilitation and has undertaken several reforms in the last few years to reduce the time and cost at the border for clearance and release of goods. He highlighted that for the next two years, India shall have four strategic guiding principles, i.e., greater communication and connectivity within the region, Harness Technology Advancements, give voice to the aspirations and priorities of the membership and evolve consensus on core issues.

In his speech, the Secretary General WCO, thanked outgoing Vice Chair of AP region, Fiji and appreciated the good coordination among the A/P Member

administrations and expressed his confidence in the successful takeover of this role by the CBIC.

Secretary General welcomed India as a new Vice Chair and expressed confidence in India's capabilities of steering Asia Pacific region. He also talked about India's long association with WCO and applauded India's effort in global participation in terms of National Trade Facilitation Action Plan. He thanked India for the support of his re-election as Secretary General of WCO and assured his full support to A/P Region. He also appreciated India's efforts in Risk management, Data Base Valuation and use of the India 'expertise for many African counties. He emphasized the use of technology and requested member countries to use the modules developed by WCO.

The Minister of State for Finances welcomed the WCO Secretary General, and other delegates from various countries. He mentioned that not only do Customs have to balance the twin objectives of facilitating trade and managing these increased risks, they also have to ensure that the entire supply chain is secure and safe. Customs administrations need to become more efficient by reducing the transaction costs associated with Customs formalities, on the one hand, so that trade flows are not unnecessarily restricted. And on the other hand, Customs administrations need to become more effective by developing robust risk management and targeting systems so as to ensure that our societies are protected against the ever-increasing threats of illegal trade, trafficking and money laundering. While Governments in the past decade have been able to find the political will to commit to a structured approach to facilitation of trade, which culminated in the signing of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement, a lot still remains to be done for the actual implementation of the Agreement to ensure that the global economy truly reaps the benefits of trade facilitation. He appreciated the positive role played by CBIC in smooth implementation of GST in the country and simplifying the same within one year and also highlighted innate experience of India in handling the diversities be it cultural, linguistic, economic to its advantage. The same experience will be handy to the tax administration in coping with the varying regional diversities and aspirations of Asia Pacific people on this global stage. He assured his full support to CBIC for the role of Vice Chair. He also admired the brave Custom Officers who laid their life while performing duties.

Sh. Pranab Kumar Das, Member (Customs), CBIC spoke about India's initiatives w.r.t. steps taken by Indian Customs for facilitating trade and "Ease of Doing Business". He highlighted that "in our national trade facilitation action plan, we have a concrete vision in place now for transforming the trade ecosystem towards more expeditious and efficient cargo clearances. This is not just the requirement of TFA but is also required as a step in the direction of Ease of Doing Business, which will hugely facilitate trade under which importers and exporters will be able to lodge documents at a single point, reducing interface with Governmental agencies, dwell time and the cost of doing business. Combination of AEO, DPD and Advance filing of import declarations have significantly reduced the overall cargo release time in imports".

Delegates from Fiji, Japan and Korea congratulated India for assuming Vice Chair and appreciated India's role and contribution at this global platform.

There were also, addresses by Australia, Singapore, GATF and Private Sector on various facets of Trade Facilitation highlighting the theme of – "Customs Facilitating Cross Border Clearances".

The Joint Secretary Customs, Government of India, Sh. Satya Srinivas, in concluding remarks, expressed thanks to the Minister of State for Finance, for his support and time and also extended gratitude to WCO and all foreign delegation for supporting India to become Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific Region for the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

This event marking the opening of Vice Chair office is being followed by an high level seminar on E-commerce Framework of Standards (adopted by WCO recently) for the delegates from member countries of the region.