

Press Release for 29th Regional Contact Point of the WCO A/P

The 29th Regional Contact Points (RCP) meeting of Asia Pacific (A/P) region of the World Customs Organization (WCO) is being organized by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) at Puducherry from 18th to 20th November, 2019.

WCO is the only inter-governmental international organisation engaged in setting up and implementation of principles and standards for cross border procedures and Customs. It is headquartered in Brussels and has more than 180 countries as its members. Globally, WCO consist of six regions, each headed by a member country as Vice Chair of that region of WCO. India is member of Asia Pacific region of WCO and is also currently the Vice Chair since July 2018.

As a mandate of the Vice Chair office, India is organizing the current RCP meeting in Puducherry. The last RCP was organized in Nov 2018 in Jaipur. This is an important annual meeting in the region and is designed to address regional development in a number of areas, to discuss on various issues linked to cross border trade procedures and to enhance communication and experience sharing between the member countries.

Customs delegations from more than twenty five countries of the A/P region, the representatives of regional bodies of the WCO; the Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB), and the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) have arrived in Puducherry to attend this important meeting. The meeting was inaugurated and is being chaired by *Sh. Raj Kumar Barthwal*, Member (Customs) CBIC, India. *Sh. M. Ajit Kumar*, Chief Commissioner, Chennai & *Sh. L. Satya Srinivas*, Joint Secretary, Customs, CBIC are also present from Indian side as a part of Vice Chair team in the meeting.

In his opening remarks, *Sh. Barthwal* highlighted the four strategic guiding principles which are adhered to while working as the Vice Chair of the A/P region, which are:

- ◆ *Greater communication and connectivity within the region*
- ◆ *Harness technology advancements*
- ◆ *Inclusive approach*
- ◆ *Consensus on core issues*

As regional priorities, *he* also emphasized on the key focus areas namely Performance Measurement, Security and Enforcement, Inter-Agency cooperation for Trade Facilitation, Customs Single Window, Small Island

Economies, leveraging Disruptive Technologies and Border clearances for Cruise Ships.

Keynote speaker from the WCO Brussels, *Mr. Takashi SATO*, elaborated on progress being made in WCO on various issues of importance such as Capacity Building, Trade Facilitation, Compliance and Enforcement activities etc and talked about the thrust areas for the region.

Earlier, Sh. Ajit Kumar, Chief Commissioner welcomed all the delegates for the meeting to Puducherry and highlighted cultural importance of the area. He mentioned that in addition to discussing issues of importance for the region and ideas put forth by the member countries, the meeting also have international organisations like UNCTAD, GS1, Global Alliance on Trade Facilitation (GATF) etc presenting the best practices on customs procedures. He laid special emphasis on use of technology to bring compliant facilitation.

The meeting will also have discussions on the results achieved for key focus areas for the region (which include enforcement, security, facilitation, capacity building etc), progress made on different areas of customs procedures and capacity building activities done by WCO and its regional bodies like ROCB, Thailand, RILO Korea, RTCs of the region etc. In addition, various experts from private sector has also been invited to deliberate on technological innovations to strengthen the procedures for compliant facilitation.

The three day meeting will strengthen the leadership role of our country in the region, give wider recognition to CBIC on international platform and also, help in improving bilateral ties with these countries of the Asia Pacific region.