Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Shri Piyush Goyal Calls for Nationwide FTA Utilisation Drive to Expand India's Global Trade Footprint

India's nine FTAs spanning economies with about $60 trillion GDP to provide preferential access to nearly two-thirds of global trade: Shri Goyal

Combined with upcoming FTAs and efforts to deepen market access, India could gain access to 75% of global trade at rates lower than competitors

India's exports reach about $317 billion during April-July, up by $36-37 billion over corresponding period last year

Calls for FTA outreach to reach every district, MSME, trader, entrepreneur, startup and woman entrepreneur

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Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal today called for a focused, inclusive and nationwide effort to maximise the utilisation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to expand India's trade across the world and ensure that the benefits of enhanced market access reach businesses across the country. Addressing the National Workshop on "Leveraging FTAs an Outreach Programme" in New Delhi today, Shri Goyal emphasised the need for a concerted effort to translate India's expanding network of FTAs into greater export opportunities for businesses across the country.

Shri Goyal said the initiative should rapidly take roots across the country and reach the last person, smallest business person, trader, entrepreneur, startup and woman entrepreneur across all 780 districts, big and small. He said every contribution, big or small, would be invaluable in achieving the larger objective of transforming India from a largely inward-looking domestic economy into an international player of significance.

The day-long workshop brought together senior officials from the Central Government, States and Union Territories, Export Promotion Councils and industry associations, with the objective of translating India's expanding network of Free Trade Agreements into measurable outcomes for Indian exporters, particularly MSMEs and first-time exporters.

The Minister said India should become an economy recognised and respected across the world for its contributions and a trusted partner of the world. He said this trust should translate into value and that this value proposition should emerge from collective efforts across the country towards making India a $30 trillion economy by 2047, with a very large share of international trade.

Shri Goyal said India was passing through an important phase of its economic journey and highlighted the first-quarter GDP growth of 7.8% at constant prices. He said achieving 7.8% GDP growth amid uncertainty and tremendous turmoil around the world was a significant achievement. He urged people not to be guided by the "naysayers".

The Minister said the GDP numbers were not made by the government, ministers or bureaucrats, but were determined through an elaborate, ground-up and independent process run by the Ministry of Statistics, which has been in place for decades.

The Minister called for continued, consistent, relentless and outcome-oriented efforts, with greater inclusion to take the entire country along, encourage new entrepreneurs to look at global markets and utilise the tremendous opportunities that have opened up.

Shri Goyal said India's nine FTAs, spanning economies representing about $60 trillion of GDP, would provide preferential access to nearly two-thirds of global trade. He said the other FTAs that India would conclude over the next few months and couple of years, including with Canada, Mexico, Chile, Mercosur, SACU, GCC and Israel, together with efforts to review ASEAN, Korea and Japan or take other steps to secure greater market access, would give India access to 75% of global trade at a rate lower than that of its competitors.

He said a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), FTA or Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) was ultimately about obtaining a rate better than that of India's competition. The absolute tariff number was immaterial and had to be considered in relation to the competition.

Shri Goyal said the trading patterns of the United States and European Union were different, with entirely different costs of operation and labour costs. India therefore had to assess the rates paid by competing countries such as Vietnam and Bangladesh in other markets.

Giving the example of the textile industry, Shri Goyal said India had for years faced difficulty competing with Bangladesh and Vietnam, which benefited from LDC status and FTAs respectively, enabling them to access developed markets at zero or lower duties, while India faced higher duties. He said the situation had now changed, with India securing rates better than those of competing geographies in almost all developed markets, leaving no excuse except performance, which would depend on scale, quality, diligence, maintaining customer trust and timely delivery in terms of quality, schedules and packaging. "The ball is now entirely in our court," he said.

Shri Goyal said the collective effort would involve the government and different line ministries, with the Department of Commerce and DPIIT taking the lead, along with all line ministries. He said that gradually, through engagements, all critical ministries should be involved, including textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and electronics, which have an important role in the journey India has embarked upon.

On FTAs already operational and those coming into force, the Minister said an ambitious target had been taken for the current year. With the India-UK FTA live from July 15, Mauritius, Oman, UAE, Australia and the UK were already live. EFTA, comprising four countries, would also become live, while New Zealand would get live soon, followed thereafter by the European Union's 27 nations.

He said that as soon as the United States was able to provide India a preferential rate in comparison with India's competition, the BTA would be finalised and the finer details announced.

Shri Goyal said India had secured a good deal in all nine FTAs. He said every agreement was a win-win for both sides, while every sensitive sector, including those sensitive to farmers, fishermen, MSMEs and workers, as well as critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, processed agri-foods and agricultural products, had been given a good deal that India could be proud of.

He said the agreements had been well negotiated through deep stakeholder engagement and consultation, with significant protection to sensitive sectors and the ability to export in areas of India's interest and strength.

Shri Goyal said India had set a $1 trillion export target for the current year, representing about 16% growth.

He said exports during the first four months of the current year had reached about $317 billion, compared with $280 billion during April-July last year, representing an increase of $36-37 billion in the first four months itself.

The Minister said exports generally accelerate as the country moves closer to Christmas and peak during the last quarter, from January to March. He said the current trend was a good sign and emphasised the need to sustain the growth.

Referring to the August numbers available so far, Shri Goyal said India appeared to be on course. With collective effort and more opportunities opening up, he expressed confidence that the opportunities would reach every district and every sector with present and future potential.

He said India would expand its product basket, encourage new exporters, help small exporters become large exporters and support even large exporters in every respect possible.

Shri Goyal sought support for the Export Promotion Mission and called for innovative and smart ideas during the workshop. He said the government was also open to ideas and suggestions on critical areas such as regulatory approvals, SPS and TBT approvals, and freight compensation wherever exports from hill areas or the Northeast, including Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal, required support to offset some of their difficulties.

He said wherever the Strait of Hormuz causes a problem, ways should be found to support small exporters particularly.

The Minister said that by 2030, four years from now, India should aspire to meet the target that had been set many years ago. He acknowledged that India had faced COVID, two wars and several challenges, but said the effort should remain focused and India should not give up on the $2 trillion target.

He said that if the target was big, performance would also be good. Even if there were small shortcomings, the outcome should be as close to $2 trillion as possible. He said that setting a target of $1.2 trillion or $1.3 trillion and achieving it would not be enough to serve the country, provide jobs to millions of people and create new entrepreneurs.

Shri Goyal also called for co-location of offices, noting that these offices were in the states and would need to provide support at the state level in the future. He said the momentum and enthusiasm needed to be sustained.

The Minister said opportunities existed across every sector, including engineering, electronics, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, marine, agriculture, gems and jewellery and leather. He said the list was endless.

He also highlighted the opening up of many new sectors in services and said every country was going to the moon, while referring to finance.

Shri Goyal emphasised the importance of technical standards and sanitary and SPS standards. He said India should not become a conduit for anything that was not ethical and must remain a trusted partner of the world.

He said India had to add true value and that the country-of-origin certificate should have value.

The Minister said exporters would be given priority support for the coming 100 BHAVYA parks. Concessions would be given to exporters for allocation to those who committed to higher levels. Facilities needed by exporters for plug-and-play operations would be brought in. Existing clusters through the Export Promotion Mission or industrial parks would also be supported.

Shri Goyal referred to the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's Independence Day address last month, in which enterprises were called upon to ensure that products across sectors reach international markets and exceed, rather than merely meet, international quality standards.

He said this was the way forward and that the country had to take the effort forward in mission mode.

Concluding his address, Shri Goyal offered a number of suggestions.

First, every state should identify products and clusters where FTAs were already benefiting businesses and where benefits remained underutilised, so that the government could assess what support could be provided.

Second, first-time exporters and new products should be identified. He said e-commerce offered MSMEs and first-time exporters a lower-barrier route to enter international markets and that changes had been made to encourage e-commerce to begin exporting on a large scale.

Third, coordination between Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) should be strengthened and EPCs should reach down to their industry. Shri Goyal said he was concerned that engagement between EPCs and industry did not reach the bottom of the pyramid, the last mile and the frontline exporter. He questioned how much the EPCs were taking their messages down to exporters and industry.

He said industry associations similarly had to reach the last person and the smallest unit. Coordination between the government, associations and EPCs should be strengthened, with more and more people from different parts of the country and from every district taken in international delegations to showcase the right products to the right markets. Sectoral delegations, in particular, should be increased.

Fourth, industry associations should set targets for themselves, while EPCs should set more ambitious targets, disseminate information to their members and MSMEs in local languages and through easy-to-consume content, enrol more members and become the fulcrum of support and the real cutting edge of engagement between the government and exporters.

Finally, Shri Goyal said the Department should establish sector- or cluster-wise workshops and a facilitation mechanism with a point of contact at the district or state level. The response timeline for exporters reaching out for support should be very fast, instantaneous wherever possible, and online in every case without the need to travel all the time.

Shri Goyal expressed confidence that working together would generate millions of jobs on the ground, earn billions of dollars in foreign exchange for the country and inspire future generations to enter the export business on a much larger scale.

He said India was transitioning from a developing nation today in the Amrit Kaal to a developed nation by 2047, with a $30 trillion economic footprint.

In his address, the Secretary Department of Commerce Shri Rajesh Agrawal highlighted the core objective of Workshop i.e. bringing all stakeholders together, including Central and State governments, the EPCs, industry bodies. He stated that the breakout sessions were curated to disseminate to all the States the specific opportunities arising in different sectors for their industries.

The addresses reaffirmed the Government's commitment to a sustained, State-partnered approach to export promotion and outlined the Department's roadmap for deepening FTA utilisation over the coming years.

A special address on the Export Promotion Mission (EPM) and the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative highlighted that the Mission is built around pillars designed for easier access to export credit, simplified and digitised compliance, and direct support for FTA documentation, including rules-of-origin certification. The Mission also strengthens awareness of Regional Authorities, and closing information gap that first-generation and MSME exporters most need.

A special address by Chairman ITPO, Shri Jawed Ashraf covered strengthening market linkages for Indian exporters. He emphasised on collaborative action for export promotion. He also highlighted the transformative role that ITPO is playing in supporting Indian exporters.

Another presentation focused on the market opportunities arising from India's recent FTAs. A State-level perspective on leveraging FTAs was also presented by the State of Rajasthan, drawing on ground experience in export facilitation.

The afternoon session comprised six parallel, State-focused breakout groups, with States and Union Territories organised regionally and each session co-chaired by a senior officer of the Department of Commerce and the senior-most State official present. Discussions in each group focused on identifying specific export clusters and products, the practical constraints exporters face in utilising FTA benefits, and the follow-up support required from the Central Government. Key action points from each breakout group were presented at a valedictory session, followed by a vote of thanks.

The workshop is part of the Department of Commerce's continuing effort to strengthen Centre-State coordination on export promotion and ensure that the benefits of India's Free Trade Agreements reach manufacturers and exporters at the district and cluster level across the country.

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