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अध्यक्ष
M. Ajit Kumar
Chairman



भारत सरकार
वित्त मंत्रालय
राजस्व विभाग
केन्द्रीय अप्रत्यक्ष कर एवं सीमा शुल्क बोर्ड
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D.O.No.09/CH(IC)/2020

Dear colleague

As I write to you today, the financial year 2019-20 is behind us while the country continues its strong and nuanced response to Covid-19. The pandemic is a 'black swan' event which has led to new thought processes and creative ideas emerging from our departmental staff. The need for social distancing while remaining connected through virtual space have made all of us more innovative, reposition our work places and redefine our functions. As much as I would have liked to talk about our positive performance during the previous financial year inspite of adverse conditions, I would continue to focus on the department's efforts in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The Government is continuously assessing the situation and taking decisions on various issues to maintain public safety as well as to ensure essential supplies within the country. The Board has also reviewed the functioning and taxpayer-related responses of various Customs and GST Zones separately through Video Conferences on 05th April, 2020. As you are aware that two Board Members and I are part of three separate Empowered Groups of Secretaries looking into Covid-19 related issues. The problems and concerns expressed by the trade bodies and field formations are also being taken up proactively in these fora. As a result, various ministries have quickly addressed our concerns including those on availability of labour at Ports, passes to Customs Brokers, movement and storage of imported goods and conveyances, etc. Customs officers continue to do fabulous work in the frontline and the same has been appreciated within as well as outside the department.

I also visited the New Custom House and Air Cargo at New Delhi on the 1st of April, 2020 both to take stock of cargo movement as well as to ascertain the wellbeing of officers in the field. It is heartening to see the zeal and dedication displayed by our officers in their work. I also take this opportunity to complement various Customs Zonal Chiefs and their teams in proactively flagging and quickly addressing policy and local issues raised by the trade with stakeholders and the State authorities. Further, the humanitarian work of Trichy Customs (Preventive) and CGST Agra officers and many other formations in distribution of essential food/sanitary items to weaker sections of the society is really commendable.

On the GST side, as part of the GST Covid-19 relief package, seven GST notifications giving effect to the compliance-relief package announced by the Hon'ble Union Finance Minister have been issued. The package includes postponement of return filing, reduction of applicable interest rates, extending the period of SVLDRS, extending e-Way bill validity, etc. A clarification in respect of these measures announced by the Government has also been

issued vide Circular No. 136/06/2020-GST dated 03.04.2020. On the Customs side, relaxation has been given of demurrage charges and ground-rent during the lockdown period. Further, based on feedback from field formations, a Circular under Section 143AA of the Customs Act, 1962 has been issued to facilitate trade by relaxing the requirement of furnishing bonds prescribed under various Sections of the Act.

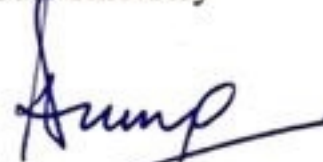
We can visibly see signs of improvement in the steady increase in the clearance of EXIM cargo after the initial negative impact. The increase in numbers on the courier clearance side have also been encouraging. While trade facilitation continues to be our major agenda, the amendments brought to the Foreign Trade Policy by the DGFT during the past few weeks should be kept track of, sensitized to all stake holders and implemented strictly.

Amidst all the positive measures which have been taken for the relief of trade and industry, I must also congratulate the team led by Shri Sandeep Kumar, Pr. DG, DG Systems, for quickly rolling out remote and secured access to the CBIC-GST application over internet to all CGST officers (in phases from 30th March, 2020) to enable them to discharge their duties from home during the period of the current lockdown. The GST zones have also started addressing the tax payers concerns about refunds in right earnest. A focused approach to clear the refund claims of MSMEs as early as possible is needed. The pace has to be stepped up and all such claims above 30 days disposed off before the end of this month. This would address the sensitive issue of cash flow of the industry especially the MSME sector during these difficult times.

The Department is committed to the health and welfare of its officers and this aspect is even more vital and urgent today. I am happy to inform you that, in furtherance of Boards commitment mentioned in my last letter, we have unanimously recommended and got approved a unique scheme from the Department's Welfare Fund for enabling field formations to provide for a safe work environment in terms of PPE, maintenance of hygiene, etc. as well as to render financial assistance to employees at the lower levels should they so require. Community outreach in and around the workplace would also be in the ambit of this scheme. This has been made possible due to the expeditious efforts made by the DGHRD team. Now the onus is on the Zonal Chiefs to ensure that the health and welfare of their officers and staffs are taken care of as they dedicate themselves in rendering effective and efficient delivery of service to tax payers and maintaining supply chains in these challenging times.

with best wishes

Yours sincerely



(M. Ajit Kumar)

To,
All Officers and Staff of Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs