

India not in position to accept Data Free Flow with Trust: Goyal

By TIOL News Service

NEW DELHI, SEPT 23, 2020: Union Commerce and Industry & Railways Minister, Piyush Goyal, yesterday took part in the virtual meeting of the G-20 Trade and Investment Ministers. Making interventions during the meeting, he called upon G-20 to play a leadership role in crafting a pathway to recover from COVID-19, he said that one of the key lessons for all countries is the need to strike the right balance between their external and internal economic policies, with a view to ensuring balanced and sustainable development. He said that India stands ready to engage constructively with all G-20 Members to push an agenda that is inclusive and development oriented.

Mr Goyal announced that India is not in a position to accept the concept of Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT). He said that India is of the view that the concept of DFFT is neither well understood nor is comprehensive enough in the legislation of many countries. “Moreover, in view of the huge digital divide among countries, there is a need for policy space for developing countries who still have to finalize laws around digital trade and data. Data is a potent tool for development and equitable access of data is a critical aspect for us. India, like many other developing countries, is still in the phase of preparing a framework for its data protection and e-commerce laws. Moreover, the existing regulations on which DFFT is sought to be premised, such as uninhibited cross border flow of data, are grossly inadequate to address our concerns on data access. This could further aggravate the digital divide.”, he added. He said that India along with some other G-20 Members, did not participate in the Osaka track last year due to our reservations.

Describing G20 as a significant grouping representing the majority of the world's population, its GDP and trade, Mr Goyal said that we must pursue an agenda that is universally beneficial and also takes into account the interests of Members outside the G-20. He stressed on the need to be sensitive to diverse economic realities.

Mr Goyal said that it is important to recognise the important role of small retailers in sustaining food chains and essential supplies to help sustain lives and economic activity through the Covid-19 pandemic and in future.

Mr Goyal said that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi, India has used the current crisis as an opportunity to usher in bold and transformational reforms in the areas of agriculture, mining, defence, space technology, logistics, financial & other sectors. He said “We are actively welcoming investment in infrastructure creation and our industrial and services businesses. The world is also recognizing the huge opportunities in India.”

Mr Goyal said that India's economic expansion is now premised on the policy of being ‘Aatmanirbhar’ or self reliant. “We seek to make India economically stronger with enhanced capacities that would help us as a trusted partner and contribute better to the world. During this COVID period India has taken major strides in this direction. We have ramped up our daily production of PPE to over half million from virtually nil earlier. We are self-sufficient in testing kits, masks, ventilators, etc. We also ensured equitable and transparent supplies of critical medicines. These measures reinforced our credibility as a reliable, trustworthy and empathetic partner working for the common good”, the minister said.

On the issue of multilateral trading system, Mr Goyal said that India believes that it must be fair, transparent and balanced. He said that reforms must preserve core values and fundamental principles like non-discrimination, inclusiveness, recognition of including Special and Differential treatment, and consensus based decision making. He said that India is supportive of the Riyadh Initiative which seeks to provide support to this reform process. “However, we must recognise that WTO is a member led organization, and the G-20 must not seem to be intrusive and driving the agenda for the multilateral trading system. Rather, our priority should be to correct the asymmetry and imbalance in the existing trading system”, Mr Goyal added.

Describing services as a critical driver of economic activity, Mr Goyal said that for most countries, it contributes to more than half of their GDPs and has been adversely impacted due to the ongoing pandemic. Since the sector is employment intensive and provides livelihood to the many, he said that it is important to prioritise services in the future agenda of the G-20.