

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) – India

17 April 2020

CBIC sensed the gravity of the pandemic and its likely impact on the global supply chain at the very initial stage, and took a number of proactive measures to ensure smooth operation of all customs locations in India viz. seaports, airports, land customs stations, foreign post offices and courier terminals, while following social distancing and other health related guidelines of the Government, issued from time to time.

To prevent spread of COVID-19, India is following strict lockdown. In these difficult times, CBIC is committed to ensure hassle free movement, release and clearance of goods under import, export or transit, and provide maximum possible comfort to trading community and other stakeholders, and the society at large.

In this regard, an illustrative list of measures and actions taken by India is as below:

- (a) 24x7 custom clearance facility has been implemented at all custom formations to avoid any supply chain disruption. (Instruction No.02/2020-Customs dated 20.02.2020)
- (b) Special care has been taken in clearance of passengers coming from affected countries. Separate channels were created at the airports, port terminals and land customs stations for such passengers. Customs officers strictly followed instructions to use masks, gloves and sanitizers.
- (c) All customs formations have been asked to show greater sensitivity in dealing with cargo from affected areas, condone the delay in filing import declarations and waive the late filing fees in genuine cases. (Chairman's letter No.03/CH(IC)/2020 dated 24.02.2020).
- (d) A dedicated single window COVID-19 helpdesk for EXIM trade has been created on CBIC website to facilitate quick resolution of issue(s) faced by importer/exporter.
- (e) A nodal officer has been designated in each customs zone of India who can be approached for any issue pertaining to clearance of cargo. List is available on CBIC website.
- (f) To minimize human interface and maximize social distancing, the OOC (Out of Charge) work, so far performed by an officer, has been assigned to the EDI system. The machine-based automated release of import consignments has been launched throughout India on 05.03.2020. (Circular No. 15/2020-Customs Dated 28.02.2020).

(g) Shipping Lines have been asked not to levy detention charges on containers held up for reasons attributable to lockdown measures. (DG Shipping Order no. 07/2020 dated 29.03.2020).

(h) All major ports have been directed not to levy penalties, demurrage, charges, fee, rental on any port user (traders, Shipping Lines, concessionaries, licensees etc.) for any delay in berthing, loading/unloading operations or evacuation/arrival of cargo caused by reasons attributable to lockdown measures (Ministry of Shipping letter No. PD-14300/4/2020-PD VII dated 31.03.2020).

(i) Likewise, customs airports have been asked for waiving of demurrage charges at 50% by airport operator/cargo terminal operator for the lockdown period. (Order date 01.04.2020 of Ministry of Civil Aviation issued under F. No. AV29012/41/2020-ER)

(j) Zonal Customs Chief Commissioners have asked local custodians (Inland Container Depots and Container Freight Stations) to exempt demurrage charges during the lockdown period.

(k) The time limit for filing of appeal, furnishing of return, or any other compliance under the Customs Act or Customs Tariff Act, which was expiring from 20th March 2020 to 29th June 2020, has been extended up to 30th June 2020. (Ordinance dated 31.03.2020).

(l) In order to address the difficulties faced due to non-availability of stamp papers during the lock-down period, the requirement of different types of customs bond has been dispensed with. Traders can submit undertaking on plain paper in lieu of bond. (Circular no. 17/2020-Customs dated 03.04.2020).

(m) Import clearance of Edible oils and Food Grains has been permitted on the basis of visual examination without waiting for the analysis report. On receipt of analysis report, final No Objection Certificate shall be issued. (FSSAI's direction dated 03.04.2020 issued under F. No. 1-1771/FSSAI/Imports/2018).

(n) Prioritized clearance of critical goods used for fighting COVID-19, such as medical equipment, drugs and pharmaceuticals, testing kits, PPEs, is ensured. Exemption from basic customs duty and health cess has been granted to such goods- ventilators, masks, personal protection equipment, testing kits and inputs used in manufacturing these items. (Notification no. 20/2020-Cus dated 09.04.2020).

(o) A special refund and drawback disposal drive has been launched to provide immediate relief to business entities, specially MSMEs, adversely hit by COVID. (Instruction No.03/2020 Customs dated 09.04.2020).

(p) Goods imported under free trade agreements can be cleared without producing original certificate of origin. (Circular no. 18/2020-Cus dated 11.04.2020).

(q) To make import clearance process more contact less, CBIC has launched edelivery of PDF based Gatepass and Out of Charge copy of BoE to custom brokers/importers across India from 15.04.2020. (Circular No. 19/2020-Customs dated 13.04.2020).

(r) As a relief measure for other countries battling with the pandemic, specific export shipments of critical drugs, pharmaceuticals, testing kits, personal protection equipment etc. are actively facilitated by customs at the borders. Some of these shipments are donation from the Government of India.

(s) CBIC actively coordinated with other Ministries for ensuring that customs operations are declared as an essential service during the lock down period, which has allowed smooth operations at all the customs stations.

(t) In line with the aforesaid, further directives were issued permitting movement of customs brokers and transporters, and allowing functioning of warehouses during the lock down period.

(u) CBIC has coordinated with the port and airport authorities and other custodians to see that ample space is available for storing exim cargo in the customs area.

(v) Importers are being advised to file advance import declaration for expeditious customs clearance, timely payment of duty and take delivery of cleared goods without delay, so as to prevent clogging of customs area.

(w) Requests and documents from importer/exporter are being accepted via email to avoid physical visit and contact between the trade and customs officers. Email address of each customs zones has been notified.

(x) Based on email requisitions, computers and related accessories have been permitted by Customs to be transferred from the bonded premises to residence of employees of Software Technology Park of India to facilitate work from home during the lockdown period.

(y) CBIC and zonal Chief Commissioners are promptly monitoring the situation through video conference with customs stations and trade to resolve any emerging issue.

(z) Customs offices across India have generously contributed in distribution of food and relief material, such as masks, to poor and needy in the lockdown period.

(aa) Regular coordination is maintained with district administration and police authorities for ensuring smooth movement of EXIM cargo, and persons engaged in the process during the lockdown.
