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Message from the Chairman

My dear colleagues:

It is a pleasure to present to you the Ninth edition of the “Asian Council on Trade Facilitation” Newsletter. This publication is a compendium of relevant news, reports, and analysis on recent developments in trade facilitation in Asia Pacific.

This issue features articles on Azerbaijan increasing its share of e-trade, Bangladesh expanding its international business links, Cambodia reducing border check to facilitate trade, and India’s Prime Minister working on opening new export markets, especially in the ASEAN region, a promising market. EU countries are also interested in ASEAN and are building a partnership with Vietnam as well.

Another important report is that of trade talks between the US and India because these talks will bring palpable benefits to the population of these large economies, while Malaysia and Pakistan find new ways to revamp their trade. Indeed, all over Asia, develop and developing economies keep moving towards greater trade opportunities at a lower cost.

This Newsletter shows the continuous inroads of trade facilitation everywhere, reflecting the progress in trade discussions among large economies such as those of the US, China and India. We hope you will find this issue useful and informative.

R. B. Rauniar

*Chairman of Asian Council on Trade Facilitation
CACCI*

Azerbaijan to increase share of e-trade

Azer News, Leman Mammadova, 22 October 2019



Azerbaijan aims to increase the share of e-trade in the domestic market, Ramin Guluzade, the Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies has said.

He made the remarks at the opening of the second Baku E-Trade Forum (BEF - 2019) on October 21 of 2019 organized as part of the InnoWeek - Innovation Week.

Guluzade said that the development of an innovative economy is proceeding rapidly in Azerbaijan. "Approved strategic roadmaps for the national economy and key sectors of the economy are being successfully implemented. This, in turn, as in all areas, creates a favorable environment for the development of e-trade," he said.

He noted that the internet banking is developing in Azerbaijan, and many public and private companies are operating in the field of logistics. "As a result, e-trade offers many products and services across the country through numerous sites and platforms."

Guluzade pointed out that the success has been seen in the sale of travel services, tickets and hotel bookings, information technology, clothing and food through e-trade.

"In general, although the dynamics of the development of e-trade in our country is high, our Internet users mainly place orders on well-known foreign e-trade platforms. Our goal is to increase the share of e-trade in the domestic market, while promoting e-trade entering our national products, in foreign markets," he said.

Referring to the importance of international cooperation in the development of e-trade, Guluzade noted the expansion of cooperation within the framework of the European Commission's initiative to harmonize the digital markets of the Eastern Partnership countries in such areas as the development of legislation for the mutual recognition of e-signatures, cross-border data exchange, and cybersecurity.

"The fact that EU institutions are among the partners of the BEF is also a confirmation of this cooperation," he said.

Delivering a speech, Alim Guliyev, First Deputy Chairman at Central Bank of Azerbaijan, said that in 2018, global retail trade turnover was US\$24 trillion, of which US\$3 trillion accounted for e-trade and accounted for 12% of turnover.

“The previous figure was 10%. By late 2019, e-trade is expected to grow by 21% to reach US\$3.5 trillion, accounting for 14% of retail trade,” he noted.

Guliyev added that in the next five years, e-trade is expected to reach US\$6.5 trillion, accounting for 22% of retail trade.

“According to forecasts, by the end of this year, a quarter of the world's population will be a digital buyer. This is about 2 billion people. Estimates show that by 2040, 95% of the world's population will be trading in digital payments,” he pointed out.

All sectors of the economy are rapidly electronizing with the application of smart technologies in the society. E-trade is an integral part of society. E-trade has become an effective mechanism for linking different sectors such as finance, real sector and IT, due to the widespread use of new technologies. The e-trade platform further enhances the ability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to compete with large corporations. Digitalization provides young people with affordable opportunities to build their own businesses that do not require large financial resources. For this reason, e-trade has become an attractive platform for SMEs.

Later, Orkhan Mammadov, Chairman of the Board of the Agency for Development of SMEs, stressed that the Agency is ready to take an active part in the process of increasing the share of e-trade and to support further initiatives.

The two-day forum, which is organized by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, the European Union and in partnership of PASHA Bank, was attended by representatives of international organizations, government agencies, public organizations, micro, small and medium-sized businesses, investors, experts and startups.

The first day of the forum covered four sessions, including “E-Trade Regulatory Policies in Government and Intergovernmental Approach”, “New technological trends in e-trade infrastructure: prospects and threats”, “Online payment systems and digital solutions” and “Smart” borders: opportunities for trade, tourism and logistics”.

On the second day, trainings will be organized on business models, cybersecurity and data protection, marketing behavior and trends.

BEF, held for the second time in Azerbaijan, is an important platform to discuss the latest innovations and positive trends in the field of e-trade.

Bangladesh - Canada Business Forum

FBCCI, 3 September 2019



The FBCCI President attended the inaugural session of Bangladesh-Canada Business Forum 2019 on September 3, 2019

FBCCI and SBF meet in Dhaka

FBCCI, 25 August 2019



Singapore-Bangladesh Business Networking jointly organized by FBCCI and Singapore Business Federation (SBF) was held on 25 August 2019 at a City Hotel. FBCCI President Sheikh F. Fahim addressed at the program. Mr. Soo Wei-Chieh, Executive Director of SBF led an 11 members Singapore business delegation. Leading Entrepreneurs of ICT, Environment and Urban Solutions, Financial Services, and others from Singapore attended the program. High government officials of Bangladesh were present. Vice Presidents, Directors of FBCCI and leading business persons of the country also joined the program

Impacts of trade facilitation

The Independent, Md. Joynal Abdin, 18 December 2020

Trade facilitation measures increase the transparency of work of the customs and other agencies involved with international trade



Trade is one of the most effective tools of economic development. It facilitates equal opportunities and foster inclusive development in any society. Therefore; global leaders became united and sign GATT (later on established WTO) after the Second World War to reconstruct the destroyed and polarized world. Protectionist world being united under a single umbrella of WTO and liberalized the trade regimes around the world. But dream of the global free market economy is under threat due to multiple political reason.

It is the global leaders (largest economies) who felt free market economy under WTO will cut their competitive edge. Therefore they are delaying to implement their commitments under WTO and using trade weapons to gain political advantages. Non-performing SAARC, Brexit and recent trade war between US and China are the examples of using trade for political motives. But, the developing countries or LDCs has no alternative but to be united for fostering trade facilitation movement under

multilateral, regional even bilateral platforms. Because trade currently represents 30% of world GDP and is estimated to grow to 50% by 2020. The importance of efficiency in trade is especially important for smaller and more trade dependent countries like Bangladesh.

Trade facilitation could be defined in many ways but most prominent definition of the trade facilitation is adopted by the WTO i.e. the simplification and harmonization of international trade procedures, with trade procedures being the activities, practices and formalities involved in collecting, presenting, communicating and processing data required for the movement of goods in international trade. In other word "Trade Facilitation" refers to the simplification, harmonization and automation of international trade procedures, particularly import and export procedures, transit requirements and procedures applied by customs and other agencies. Implementing trade facilitation parameters could help a country to perform better in the Ease of Doing Business too. Not only ease of doing business but trade facilitation could offer following positive impact on an economy:

1. Transparency and predictability:

According to a recent study conducted by a Swedish Agency it is found that, trade facilitation measures increases the transparency of work of the customs and other agencies involved with international trade. It also reduces unnecessary document requirements for international trade. When the European Single Administrative Document (SAD) was introduced and implemented, over

150 different types of special documentation that previously needed manual data input by companies, were removed. It reduce cost of international trade and time requirement. As a result international trade becomes more predictable.

2. Reduced Time for Export / Import:

The more documentation requirement from different agencies increases clearing and forwarding time in the ports and results as port congestion. Determination and payment of customs, duties, fees, penalties etc. in clearing and forwarding functions increases delay in international shipments. But well-coordinated single window pre arrival declaration, determination and payment system can reduce timing in international transactions. Studies shows that, delays in international trade may cause considerable loss for a company. Delay may increase bank interest of 12%, between 3-7% of the total value of the goods.

3. Create Business Opportunities:

Too many licenses, permits, registration, NoCs requirements makes business complex and discourage general people to be entrepreneurs. Long list of license, registration, and permits requirement creates opportunities for the bureaucratic corruption. On the other hand less controlling / easy access to international trade can create multidimensional business opportunities for the citizens. Trade facilitation does not create opportunities for the importer or exporters alone. It also creates opportunities for banks, insurance companies, and freight forwarders, clearing agents, transportation companies, distributors and retailers. Thus a single international transaction

creates business opportunities for the all relevant stakeholders of export or import.

4. Better Customer Value: Trade facilitation helps to create logical competitive environment in the market, as a result companies have to offer better delivery service, after sale service and other value added services to the customers. By providing accurate information and in-time delivery of goods government can control market manipulation by any group. Thus trade facilitation could ensure better customer value in a country.

5. Increase revenue earnings: Hassle free, low cost and less duty trade regime increases frequency and volume of export / import. Thus government revenue earnings will be increased.

6. Stability & Social Security: Trade facilitation can offer quicker delivery and less time consuming in import and export of goods. It reduces the chances of market manipulation, creates fair competitive market mechanism. Thus it can contribute in stable market mechanism and ensure social security in a stable market.

7. Increase Trade Efficiency: Trade facilitation measures can foster development of storage, preservation, transportation, distribution etc. business logistics facilities and services and improve trade efficiency.

8. Increase FDI Inflow: International investors usually enters in an economy

where market mechanism are more efficient and international trade is less costly, quicker and easier. Thus implementation of trade facilitation can increase FDI inflow to a particular economy.

All of the above mentioned positive outcomes may be enjoyed by Bangladesh economy when we can implement the trade facilitation measure like, Harmonization of standards and signing mutual recognition agreements with major trade partner countries; Harmonization of customs formalities and reducing documentation formalities in the port / boarder; Reducing port procedures and establishing functional inter agency coordination; Establishing infrastructure and support services in the boarder / port; Easy release / clearance of goods and access to pre-arrival processing, electronic payment, separation of release from final determination and payment of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges; Automation of total boarder / port formalities with a time bound action plan; Finally, Digitization of clearing and forwarding formalities for less time consumption.

We expect all of the above mentioned actions from the government to facilitate trade and easing the doing business process.

The writer is Acting Secretary, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI)

Royal Group & Fusionex to power up Smart Trade Facilitation in Cambodia

Phnom Penh Post, 17 November 2019



The Royal group, Cambodia's leading conglomerate and Fusionex Group, one of the largest multi award-winning and the leading data technology group in the region, signed a memorandum of agreement where both groups will cooperate in the area of Smart Trade Facilitation in Cambodia.

Neak Oknha Kith Meng, Chairman and group CEO of RGC, emphasized that the Royal Group via its subsidiaries (WING, CELLCARD and EZECOM) is the leading digitalization, payment provider, internet service provider and partner of choice in Cambodia. RGC is partnering with Fusionex Group, a world-class leader for pioneering technologies in Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Smart Trade Facilitation to power up trade facilitation for the Kingdom of Cambodia.



This cooperation between the two leading groups will help to bring the know-how and expertise in areas of Data Analytics, Big Data, AI and Smart Trade Facilitation to Cambodia which will be a welcome impetus to support economic growth in the Kingdom and encourage cross-border trade.

Bangladesh's exports to India remain dismal

The Daily Star, Refayet Ullah Mirdha, 4 October 2019

Despite sharing a long border, Bangladesh is still a very tiny source for merchandise for India due to a lack of diversification of products and non-tariff barriers.

India's annual merchandise import amounts to US\$500 billion, in which Bangladesh's share is only 0.2%, or a little above US\$1 billion, even though duty-free facilities have existed since 2011 for all local products save for 25 alcoholic and beverage items.

In fiscal 2018-19, Bangladesh's merchandise shipments to India were US\$1.24 billion, crossing the US\$1 billion-mark for the first time, according to data from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Garment items dominate Bangladesh's exports to India as its demand among the growing middle-income customers is high. Bangladesh also exports home textile, processed food, cement, furniture, leather and leather goods, but the volume is very small.

Country-wise, India's topmost import destination is China, constituting nearly 14% of its imports. India imports machinery, industrial raw materials, textile fabrics and food items from China.



The other top import destinations are the US, the UAE, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia, according to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) of India.

Region-wise, Asia accounts for the highest imports of more than 60% while Europe constitutes a little above 16.36%.

India's main import items are crude, gold, petroleum products, coal, pearl, precious metals, telecom instruments and organic chemicals.

However, Bangladesh does not have those products. Still, exports from Bangladesh are growing mainly for the duty-free facility for garment shipments.

Bangladesh's garment export to India is on the rise thanks to the presence of global retail giants like H&M, Zara, Mango, Walmart in the neighbouring country. All the retailers source from Bangladesh heavily.

However, Abdul Matlub Ahmad, president of the India Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said some 40 Indian companies have their operations in Bangladesh and they send back the goods produced here to India, especially to the Northeastern states. "This is one of the major reasons for the high exports to India from Bangladesh," Ahmad said.

The non-tariff barriers (NTB) and anti-dumping duties on jute have had a detrimental impact on Bangladesh's export to India, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

A lack of adequate trade facilitation is the most important NTB for operators on both sides, Rahman said. Imports from India are mostly raw materials for Bangladesh's export-oriented sectors, particularly the apparel industry.

Notably, 87% of Bangladesh's exports to the US are garment items, which are, in part, made of cotton, yarn and fabrics imported from India, according to Rahman.

Thanks to this, Bangladesh has a significant trade surplus with the US: \$6.1 billion in 2018. "But reducing the bilateral trade deficit with India remains a major point of contention in the Bangladeshi policy circle and public opinion."

Bangladesh has not been able to take advantage of India's growing appetite for imports. Indian imports exceeded US\$400 billion in 2018. "India is importing many items from the global market but not from Bangladesh. Bangladesh is exporting these same items to the global market but not to India."

Policymakers must remove the barriers to the bilateral trade flows through appropriate policies, Rahman said.

About 50% of bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India takes place through land ports. The border points are not crossing points — they are control and checkpoints.

Goods need to be unloaded and reloaded in 'no man's land', leading to delays and cost escalation. In the absence of mutual recognition agreements, goods have to wait for several days until inspection results come from laboratory facilities in distant testing centres.

Cambodia to end border check

The Cambodia Daily, Phnom Penh Post, 16 January 2019



Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen has unveiled a new campaign to boost economic independence and reduce the reliance on preferential trade statuses offered by advanced countries, saying the government will provide better trade facilitation and eliminate unnecessary procedures.

At a gathering of 5,000 Cambodian journalists, Hun Sen revealed a series of trade facilitations and announced a plan to relieve Camcontrol from its inspection duties at border checkpoints to reduce the burden for businesses.

‘Use of tech making Indian tax system more efficient’

Hindustan Times, 28 January 2020

Union minister of state for finance and corporate affairs Anurag Singh Thakur also appreciated the response of customs officials to the dynamics of changing ecosystems worldwide.

Union minister of state for finance and corporate affairs Anurag Singh Thakur

said the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC)'s use of technology for greater efficiency, accountability and transparency in the tax administration helped India in improving its rank in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index



From left: CBIC chairman John Joseph, minister of state for finance and corporate affairs Anurag Thakur and revenue secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey felicitate an awardee during the International Customs Day in New Delhi (Sanjeev Verma/HT Photo)

In the ever-changing dynamics of trade and technology, it is necessary for the taxmen to remain innovative to facilitate stakeholders, he said while addressing CBIC officials at 'Investiture Ceremony and International Customs Day 2020'.

"We have witnessed a critical rise in India's standing in the Ease of Doing Business rankings," he said referring to the contributions made by the CBIC in improving systems and processes pertaining to the cross-border trade. With concerted efforts of the CBIC, India would further improve its Ease of Doing Business ranking, he said.

India climbed 14 notches to the 63rd position among 190 countries in the World Bank's Doing Business 2020 report that was released in October 2019.

Speaking at the ceremony, revenue secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey emphasised on enhancing trade facilitation and the role of other stakeholders, including other government agencies.

CBIC chairman John Joseph highlighted recent initiatives of the customs for enhancing trade facilitation in line with the Action Plan for implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement of the World Trade Organisation ratified by India.

"Officers of the CBIC are fully committed towards hassle-free trade and taking India to newer heights in Ease of Doing Business rankings."

Thakur gave away awards to CBIC officers and staff for their meritorious

services on the occasion. The Presidential Award of Appreciation and the World Customs Organization's certificates of merit were also presented to the distinguished officers of CBIC.

In 1962, the government instituted the Presidential Award to recognise meritorious services of the customs and Central Excise Department officers. The award is given to them for rendering meritorious service that even involves risking their lives.

Thakur appreciated the response of customs officials to the dynamics of changing ecosystems worldwide. "Customs are doing well because they

work as a team besides adapting and evolving, especially in a large and diverse country like India,' he said.

He said the 2020 theme of International Customs Organisation itself highlights the changing nature and role of customs nowadays. The theme of International Customs Day, celebrated on 26th January every year, is dedicated to the contribution of customs towards a sustainable future where social, economic, health and environmental needs are at the heart of our actions, with the slogan "Customs fostering Sustainability for People, Prosperity and the Planet".

‘India, Thailand progressing at rapid pace’, says PM Modi in Bangkok

[Hindustan Times, 2 November 2019](#)

‘Sawasdee PM Modi’ was organized by Thai Indians, in close coordination with the Indian Embassy in Bangkok.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a three-day visit in the midst of renewed diplomatic efforts to convince India to support signing of a mega trade deal involving 16 Asia-Pacific nations to facilitate creation of the biggest free-trade region in the world.

The PM is addressing the Indian community in Bangkok at an event titled ‘Sawasdee PM Modi’. ‘Sawasdee PM Modi’ was being organized by Thai Indians, in close coordination with the Indian Embassy in Bangkok. “Sawasdee” is the word Thai people use for greetings and goodbye. It is derived from Sanskrit word svasti (well-being’).

Follow highlights here:

- We have recently allowed the OCI Card holders to be enrolled within the National Pension Scheme. We are working to make Consular services more efficient: PM Modi

- From Space technology, bio-technology or pharma, the association between India and Thailand is growing at a rapid pace. Recently, our government took an important step for research & development in sync all ASEAN countries: PM Modi



- I am happy that you're playing a key role in empowering the economy of Thailand. India, is one the world's fastest growing economy. India is working to become a \$5 trillion economy in the next five years: PM Modi
- A direct flight has been started from Varanasi, my constituency and the world's oldest cultural hub, to Thailand. It has also garnered a lot of fame. We also want to connect North East India to Thailand. We want to develop it as the gateway for SouthEast Asia: PM Modi
- India and Thailand are progressing at rapid pace, together. At least 300 flights fly between the two countries weekly. At least 18 destinations in Thailand are connected to India, and the average flight time is between 2-4 hours: PM Modi
- People attending Sawasdee PM Modi event in Bangkok, give standing ovation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he speaks about abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.
- One of the key elements of our government is to strengthen the ties with ASEAN countries. For that, we have formed the Act East Policy, says PM Modi.

- For the first time, in 2018, leaders from all 10 ASEAN countries came to India to participate in India's Republic Day Celebrations
- Textile had a key role in our trade centuries ago. Tourism is playing that role now. For people of Thailand, India is turning into a tourist site rapidly. India has jumped 18 places on the global tourism index in the last few years, says PM Modi.
- The Kartarpur Corridor will open on November 9 and pilgrims will be able to visit the Kartarpur Sahib directly. I invite all of you to visit India and the Kartarpur Sahib: PM Modi
- The Guru Nanak Garden made here is a commendable effort from the Sikh community here. Guru Nanak Ji's thoughts is a legacy for the entire humankind across the globe. It is a special responsibility on us Indians to share our heritage with the entire world: PM Modi
- Commemorative coins have been released on the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. I have also been told that 50 years ago, the 500th anniversary of Guru Ji was celebrated amid huge fanfare, says PM Modi.
- In the last 5 years, we have connected every Indian to a bank account and provided electricity. We are working to provide water to every family. By 2022, when India celebrates 75 years of independence, we are working to ensure a house for every poor in India, says PM Modi.
- The world's largest healthcare scheme, Ayushman Bharat, is providing 50 crore Indians free health-coverage worth Rs 5 lakhs. The Yojana recently completed 1 year, 60 lakh people have already availed to free medication through it, says PM Modi
- PM Modi says on Gandhi Ji's 150th birth anniversary, India announced itself open-defecation free. Also, every poor's kitchen is getting smoke-free. We have provided 8 crore homes free LPG connections in just 3 years. This number is bigger than Thailand's entire population.
- When a decision is right and is taken with the right mentality, it resonates with the entire world. I can hear it in Thailand. This standing ovation from you is for the Parliament of India: PM Modi
- We are now working towards making the impossible come true. They were unimaginable. India has taken a massive decision to free itself from separatism and terrorism, says PM Modi
- For the first time in 60 years, a government has been awarded a bigger mandate by the people of the country after completing its first five years of governance, says PM Modi

- The reason behind this is the highs India has reached in the last 5 years
- 60 crore voters polled in this year's Lok Sabha polls, the highest electoral event in the history of the world. Every Indian should be proud of it. For the first time in Indian elections' history, women have matched men in terms of number of voters: PM Modi
- PM Modi says the transformation that India is undergoing at the moment is exactly why the people of the country chose me to become their prime servant for the second time in the Lok Sabha polls earlier this year. They blessed me with more votes than they did last time
- You can now tell your foreign friends that you hail from India and tell them to witness the speed at which India is progressing. You must have noticed even in Thailand that whenever India speaks, people listen with attention, says PM Modi
- We (India and Bangkok) are very close to each other not only on the basis of language but also the sentiments. You told me 'Sawasdee Modi', this has connection with the Sanskrit word 'Swasti' which means welfare, says PM Modi
- The relation between India and Thailand is not because of any particular government; no single government can be credited for this relation. Every moment shared between two countries in the past has built and strengthened this relation: PM Modi
- PM Modi says, "Indians across the world keep in touch with their peers in India. I am happy about that. My countrymen feel a sense of pride when they get to know about the achievements of the country in the last five years.'
- Have you ever thought that our relations became so strong? What is the reason behind the strong bond that India and Thailand share? The history has united us and has developed our relations, says PM Modi
- PM Modi says we are fortunate that India has shown our gratitude to her through Padma Bhushan award and Sanskrit Samman.
- The affinity, the royal family of Thailand has for India, symbolizes our deep friendly and historical relations. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn is an expert in Sanskrit language and has a deep interest in the culture, says PM Modi
- To address the Indian community at this event, I am in Thailand, among you all. But I don't feel that I am in a foreign land. The ambiance, the attire, everything here makes me feel at home: PM Modi

- The entire world recently celebrated the festival of Diwali. A lot of people from Eastern India are here in Thailand. Chhath Puja is being celebrated in India. I want to wish all Indians and Thais a very happy Chhath Puja, says PM Modi
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi releases a commemorative coin marking the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev and also releases a Thai translation of Tamil classic 'Tirukkural'.
- PM Modi interacts with Indian diaspora at 'Sawasdee PM Modi' event
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives on stage at the 'Sawasdee PM Modi' community event at Nimibutr Stadium in Bangkok.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives at the 'Sawasdee PM Modi' community event at Nimibutr Stadium in Bangkok.
- Thailand: People arrive at Nimibutr Stadium in Bangkok for 'Sawasdee PM Modi' event.

ASEAN reintroduces online trade consultancy service

[The Jakarta Post](#), Norman Harsono, 10 April 2019



The ASEAN Secretariat reintroduced its ASEAN Solutions for Investments, Services and Trade (ASSIST) program, which manifests as a website where companies can submit questions and complaints related to intra-regional trade.

Paolo Vergano, trade facilitation expert at the ASEAN Secretariat, told reporters and businesspeople in Jakarta that the reintroduction was necessary as the website had only received six cases since

its launch four years ago.

"ASSIST is free. It's much cheaper than hiring a lawyer in the disputed country and accessing its government," he said.

The program, which was initiated by ASEAN and funded by the European Union, is designed to be a one-stop hub for all companies registered within an ASEAN member state.

All registered Indonesian companies can use the ASSIST website to resolve uncertainty or seek solutions related to trade with other Southeast Asian countries. Such companies can expect to wait a maximum of three months between submitting a question and receiving a response, as the questions are relayed directly to governments.

Vergano stressed that unlike the World Trade Organization dispute settlement mechanism, “ASSIST is not about deciding who is right and who is wrong but it is for issues more consultative in nature.”

In that sense, ASSIST neither has the authority to change member states’ trade regulations nor improve their trade management.

Nevertheless, Iskandar Panjaitan, who represented the Trade Ministry, welcomed ASSIST. “[Indonesia’s] research and development (R&D) sector, for example, is not that productive yet so it would be better to import R&D services to support our industries. Especially as we enter Industry 4.0,” he told reporters. (bbn)

ASEAN backs India’s rising role in Indo-Pacific region

[The Hindu Business Line](#), PTI Bangkok, 3 November 2019



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi smiles next to Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha at the ASEAN-India Summit on the sideline of the 35th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok (Reuters)

The endorsement of India's role assumes significance as it came in the midst of geo-political power play in the Indo-Pacific region and escalating territorial disputes between China and a number of ASEAN countries.

In a significant indication of India's rising profile, the 10-nation ASEAN clearly appreciated New Delhi's growing role in the Indo-Pacific region as the two sides, with a combined GDP of US\$ 5 trillion, vowed to further broaden strategic ties and deal with major challenges like of terrorism collectively.

In his address at the annual India-ASEAN summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about the mutual coordination between India's vision of the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN Outlook for the strategically key region which has been witnessing growing Chinese assertiveness.

Modi also talked about cross border terrorism, spread of violent extremism and the situation in the South China Sea, and underlined the need for greater cooperation between India and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to unitedly confront major challenges facing the region.

"I welcome the mutual coordination of the Indo-Pacific Outlook between India and the ASEAN. India's Act East Policy is an important part of our Indo-Pacific vision. The ASEAN is and always will be the heart of our Act East Policy. Integrated, organised and economically developing ASEAN is in India's basic interest," Modi said.

Officials said the biggest takeaway from the 16th India-ASEAN summit was acknowledgement of the ASEAN leaders about India's growing role in the Indo-Pacific for the first time after the bloc came out with an "Outlook" for the region.

The endorsement of India's role assumes significance as it came in the midst of geo-political power play in the Indo-Pacific region and escalating territorial disputes between China and a number of ASEAN countries.

"All the ASEAN countries appreciated India's growing role (in the Indo-Pacific) region and that India's growing role is a factor of peace and stability in the region. That is the broad approach of the ASEAN," said Vijay Thakur Singh, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs.

Earlier, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said his country was ready to work with ASEAN countries to ensure peace, security and stability in the South China Sea.

Singh said the issue of South China Sea was discussed at the summit and it was noted by both sides the importance of promoting a rules-based order in the region including through upholding adherence to international law.

In his address, the prime minister said India is committed to further strengthen partnership with the ASEAN through stronger surface, maritime and air-connectivity and digital-link.

"US\$1 billion line of credit will be useful for physical and digital connectivity. Our

intention is to greatly increase the traffic of people for study, research, trade and tourism. To achieve this goal, India is ready to increase partnership with the ASEAN in the area of mutual interests,” he said.

The ASEAN region along with India together comprises combined population of 1.85 billion people, which is one fourth of the global population and their combined GDP has been estimated at over US\$5 trillion.

Modi said India is also ready to further increase capacity building and partnerships in areas of agriculture, science, research, ICT and engineering.

“I welcome the recent decision to review the ASEAN-India FTA. This will not only

make our economic relations stronger, but our trade will also be balanced” he said.

The prime minister also announced that India would be looking at creating an endowment of Rs 50 million (US\$690 thousand) for promoting exchanges between faculty as well as students under India-ASEAN network.

Singh said the ASEAN leaders spoke of India as a long-term friend and a dynamic partner and complimented India’s contribution in the peace and stability of the region. The leaders also welcomed India’s support to the centrality of the ASEAN and India’s programmes and projects which support ASEAN master plan for connectivity.

India-US trade talks in full swing: Sitharaman

[The Hindu Business Line](#), PTI New Delhi, 20 October 2019

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the negotiations between India and the US on a trade deal are going in “full speed” and expressed hope that an agreement will be structured soon.

The trade deal negotiations briefly came up for discussion during a pull aside between Sitharaman and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin at the IMF headquarters.

“In fact, I broadly mentioned it to Secretary Mnuchin, but that is something on which the Commerce Minister and Mr (Robert) Lighthizer (US Trade Representatives) are working. My inputs are that the negotiations are going in full speed and there’s a great intensity with which both sides are engaging and hopefully the deal will be structured soon,” Sitharaman said.

India is demanding exemption from high duties imposed by the US on certain steel and aluminium products, resumption of export benefits to certain domestic products under

their Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), greater market access for its products from sectors, including agriculture, automobile, auto components and engineering.



Cormoros' Finance Minister Said Ali Chayhane, India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Germany's Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and Japan's Finance Minister Taro Aso prepare for a group photo during the IMF and World Bank's 2019 Annual Meetings of finance ministers and bank governors in Washington D.C. on October 19, 2019 (Reuters)

On the other hand, the US wants greater market access for its farm and manufacturing products, dairy items and medical devices, and cut on import duties on some ICT products. The US has also raised concerns over high trade deficit with India.

Responding to a question, Sitharaman said a totalisation agreement with the US has always been on the cards.

A totalisation agreement seeks to eliminate dual taxation with regards to social security and medicare taxes in the US. An official release issued said Sitharaman had a “fruitful” dialogue with Mnuchin.

Attracting investments

Sitharaman said she will prepare a blueprint for international companies that are looking beyond China to make India as their preferred investment destination.

She said industry leaders who are contemplating getting their businesses out of China are “definitely considering India as the pitch”. Therefore, she said, it might be important for the government to now see and meet up with a lot of industry leaders and invite them to India.

Iran, China confer about customs cooperation

Tehran Daily, October 11, 2019



TEHRAN – Iran and China discussed expansion of customs cooperation and trade facilitation in a meeting between Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua and Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mehdi Mirashrafi, IRIB reported.

In the meeting, the Chinese ambassador stressed his country's willingness for expanding trade relations with Iran.

"Iran is one of China's largest trading partners. A large number of goods are annually traded between the two countries, so expanding these relations is one of the most important issues for China and we will do our best to improve our relations," Chang Hua said.

The Iranian official, for his part, offered suggestions such as exchanging customs information, holding mutual staff training programs, reinforcing the

Silk Road project, establishing a common trade gate, using the two countries' shared experiences, exchanging X-ray images and etc. in order to facilitate customs cooperation between the two sides.

He further suggested that the officials from both sides gather in a meeting every six months to discuss relevant issues and find ways to further improve the relations.

According to the customs reports, with 24.37% share of Iran's total imports in H1 of the last Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22) China is Iran's top importer of non-oil goods.

Iran's non-oil exports from March 21 to September 22 last year stood at 70,009 tons valued at \$20,948, which shows a 10.55% decrease in terms of value and a 22.5% increase in terms of weight compared to the same six-month period in 2018.

Meanwhile, China was the top exporter to Iran in the same six-month period with 25% share of Iran's total imports, valued at \$5.304 million.

South Korea, Mercosur bloc hold 5th round of FTA talks

The Korean Herald. Yonhap, 10 February 2020

South Korea held the fifth round of free trade talks with a group of South American countries, including Brazil, with a goal of striking the deal this year.

The two parties kicked off the five-day talks in Montevideo, Uruguay, to exchange ideas on ways to achieve a mutually beneficial bilateral pact, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy.



Yonhap

The previous meeting was held in South Korea's southern port city of Busan in October last year.

South Korea agreed with the four member states of the South American trade block Mercosur -- Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay -- in 2018 to launch trade talks. Venezuela's membership has been suspended since 2016 for failing to meet

the group's standards.

During the meeting, South Korea and Mercosur plan to discuss details on areas of the agreement, including customs, intellectual rights and quarantine procedures, according to the ministry.

The bloc accounts for a whopping 70% of the population of South America and for 76% of the region's gross domestic product.

The combined trade between the two parties reached US\$10.8 billion in 2019, up 5.6% from a year earlier. South Korea's outbound shipments to the region came to US\$5.3 billion, down 0.1% over the cited period.

South Korea mainly ships chips, auto parts and cars to Mercosur, and imports vegetables, materials and iron ore.

Asia's No. 4 economy has been pushing to expand its free trade network to ease its heavy dependence on China and the United States, which together account for roughly 40% of exports. This year, South Korea also awaits the final signing ceremony of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its dialogue partners -- South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand -- effectively reached an agreement in November last year.

Malaysia, Pakistan keen to enhance trade in commodities

The Sun Daily, Bernama, 12 January 2020



KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysia and Pakistan are keen to further explore ways to enhance trade in commodities as well as avenues to further expand Malaysian palm oil's share in Pakistan.

A statement issued in conjunction with Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok's (pix) official visit to the country said the minister and Pakistan's Advisor for Commerce, Textile, Industry and Production and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood took the opportunity in a bilateral dialogue to explore various issues of common interest to both countries.

During the meeting, both leaders emphasised the excellent cordial bilateral relations and further explored areas for enhancing trade.

"For example, Pakistan is a net exporter of rice, fruits and other produce that are required by Malaysia and Abdul Razak Dawood encouraged Malaysia to consider instituting trading practices that could allow smoother passage of these products into Malaysia.

"On her part, Kok highlighted that Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) exporters from Sri Lanka enjoyed lower duties whereas Malaysia's higher quality MDF was subjected to higher import tariffs," she said.

Other product opportunities were also discussed and both leaders agreed to convey these matters to the concerned authorities.

Meanwhile, she said Pakistan is a key importer of Malaysian palm oil and products - in 2018, it imported 1.16 million metric tonnes (MT) of palm oil valued at RM2.97 billion (US\$710 million.)

She said that the commodity has the potential for a higher uptake in Pakistan given that its local production of oils and fats meets only around 20% of its consumption needs.

"It thus depends heavily on imports to meet growing domestic demand and consumption. Demand has been increasing at a rate of 4.5% per year for the past seven years, due to increasing population, income and consumer spending.

"Palm oil is widely used for the manufacture of vanaspati (ghee) and it is also the preferred raw material for the food industry in Pakistan, especially for frying and in confectionery items," she added.

Taiwan Invest facilitates billion of dollars in trade and investment

Taiwan Invest, 16 January 2020

A good Chinese New Year for the three major programs for investing in Taiwan. NT\$864.1 billion invested by 339 companies!

InvesTaiwan approved US\$120 million by GMT Global Inc., Materials Analysis Technology Inc., and Aviocast Inc. during the joint review meeting of the 51st Action Plan for Welcoming Overseas Taiwanese Businesses to Return to Invest in Taiwan and the 19th Action Plan for Accelerated Investment by Domestic Corporations.

Since the Action Plan for Welcoming Overseas Taiwanese Businesses to Return to Invest in Taiwan was implemented on January 1, 2019, a total of 169 Taiwanese businesses have invested US\$23.8 billion and created 59,148 employment opportunities.

After the Action Plan for Accelerated Investment by Domestic Corporations was implemented on July 1, 2019, a total of 42 companies invested approximately US\$3.12 billion, which is expected to create 6,869 domestic employment opportunities. Now, the two plans combined with the Action Plan for Accelerated Investment by SMEs have attracted 339 companies with investing approximately US\$28.8 billion and creating 1,476 domestic employment opportunities.

The smart manufacturing solutions of GMT Global Inc., a major manufacturer of automation parts, are extensively applied in the electronics and semiconductor industry. The high tariffs of the trade war have significantly impacted X-Y table, and linear motion guide products, and the trade war caused quite a few Taiwanese businesses to return to Taiwan.

The company thus decided to invest US\$26.6 million to purchase automated mechanical equipment for its plants in Buxin, Yuanlin, Changhua and Changhua Coastal Industrial Park, increasing the ratio of its production in Taiwan to disperse its risk and serve end customers that return to Taiwan. GMT Global Inc. started out as a mold manufacturer and transitioned into the automation parts and molds market, gaining a competitive advantage through highly customized parts with a 95% local content rate.

It is a frequent winner of the 10 Taiwan Excellence Awards and Taiwan SMEs Innovation Award. GMT Global Inc. supplies the multi-lens modules and touch modules to its major end customers, including Apple, Huawei, OPPO, Foxconn, Innolux, Xinjoke, Xiaomi and other first-tier manufacturers in the mobile phone market. Besides, its customers in China account for over half of its revenue.

The company has been actively expanding into the automobile applications, semiconductor, optical fiber, and biomedical industries in recent years to lower its concentration in a single market. This investment will achieve the goal of a smart factory, and create 50 domestic employment opportunities.

Materials Analysis Technology Inc., a major semiconductor testing company, will invest US\$73 million to purchase advanced processing testing and analysis equipment for its five laboratories in Hsinchu and Tainan, in order to respond to changes in the global situation and market. It will recruit about 200 domestic professionals to increase its service capabilities.

The company utilizes its technology and cost advantages to expand into the European, American, and Japanese markets, providing testing and analysis services to IC, flat-panel display, optoelectronics, testing and packaging, nano devices and materials companies. It is the best partner of the R&D department of the high-tech industry, and is trusted by major international semiconductor companies.

As the U.S.-China trade war becomes a tech war, both sides are accelerating the independency of their semiconductor supply chain. And, Taiwanese wafer fabs and Japanese semiconductor equipment manufacturers continue to develop advanced process scaling technology, driving large demand for 7nm to 5nm and next generation 3nm. Besides, related end product applications will flourish with the whole world entering the 5G era.

Driven by these three major market trends, Materials Analysis Technology Inc. will continue to deeply develop in Taiwan with advanced processes, automotive electronics, and 5G industries as its main development direction, fully introduce intelligent functions, and achieve the goal of a comprehensive intelligent laboratory.

Aviocal Inc. is the only private company in Taiwan that has obtained an international aerospace aluminum casting certification, and is also one of very few casting companies in the world with both dry sand mold and precision casting processes. It also has five other certifications including aerospace AS9100 quality management system certification and NADCAP special processes.

Its customers can be found throughout Europe, America, and Asia, including the Safran Group, Honeywell, GE, United Technologies, SPP, KHI, and ADIC. Aviocal Inc. is a member of Taiwan's A-Team 4.0, and has received purchase orders for the new trainer aircraft from the Indigenous Fighter Plane Program. In order to accelerate the development schedule, meet new-type parts development and mass production orders, the company will invest more than 500 million to promote the intelligentization of production bases in Taichung Industrial Park, upgrade casting technology, introduce automated equipment and automatic detection systems for improving quality.

It will transform the traditional casting factories to a smart factory that combines safety, environmental protection and efficiency, attracting more aerospace talent.

Micron: Successful investment in Taiwan

[Taiwan Invest](#), 12 January 2020



Mixed reviews on Pacific Trade deal, Pacer Plus

[The New Zealand Herald](#), 20 September 2019

Pacer Plus has been promoted as a hybrid development and trade deal, with the primary benefits going to the nine Pacific countries that have signed the deal.

The deal includes a new "Readiness Package" to support Pacific businesses to access new markets and reach required bio-security or food standards, as well as an extension to the Recognised Seasonal Employer

Scheme (RSE) from horticulture and fruit picking into areas like carpentry.

But Fiji and Papua New Guinea have not joined, and some commentators dispute the value of Pacer Plus to Pacific countries when discussing it on the latest episode of the "On the Map" podcast.

Former Green MP and trade commentator Barry Coates refutes the claim that Pacer Plus has generated additional money for the Pacific. He believes money has been diverted from areas like health and education, towards trade facilitation.



(Photo: 123RF)

"If you really want to help the Pacific, why not have a requirement for Australia to stop their protections that prevent fruit and veggie exports from the Pacific to Australia.

"It's meant to be a free-trade deal, and Australia is the worst offender." Keawe Woodmore, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, refutes there is no new money.

"NZ\$55 million (US\$34.7 million) has been allocated to support Pacific industries to make the most of Pacer Plus. Absolutely that is new money - plus the NZ\$740 million (US\$467 million) additional money for aid announced in 2018."

And Australia, just like New Zealand, has a right to protect their bio-security,

whether human, animal or plant life, he says. "We don't want something coming into our country that might have an impact on our important native and flora."

Keawe says New Zealand's role under Pacer Plus is about identifying the barriers to exports and supporting Pacific Island countries to either get rid of those barriers or focus on products that can reach the standards to be an exporter.

"Tariff reductions for those Pacific Islands who have signed Pacer Plus will take place over 35 years. That's two generations, so not a sudden change. It's a shift over time.

"It's about shifting to a new normal. Tariff revenue is not necessarily sustainable in the long term."

Former trade negotiator and partner at Navigator Limited Peter Faafiu questions the effectiveness of New Zealand's aid - or trade - in the Pacific. "What's missing are the underpinnings that need to go under aid or trade.

"For example human rights, good governance, dealing with corruption. There's a massive domestic violence issue across the Pacific, for example, particularly in PNG.

Gender equality is non-existence, and civil society space is shrinking. There are 22 million people in the Pacific, and

there are some great stories of success, but also a big question mark around some of the funding going into Pacific Island countries."

Faafiu says three million people in the Pacific don't yet have an income that can sustain basic needs. "If you look at the key indicators like poverty, economic development, basic education and health - I don't think they've improved a lot in the last 50 years.

"It's hard to do the 'nice to haves' if you don't have the basics right."

Huge potential for greater EU-Vietnam cooperation in trade and investment

[Vietnam Business Forum, 30 January 2020](#)

EVFTA and EVIPA are expected to help Vietnam become a hub for European investment in the ASEAN region and give Vietnamese companies privileged access to Europe's 500-million-strong consumer market, and Vietnamese citizens greater access to high-quality European goods. On the occasion of Tet holiday 2020, Vietnam Business Forum has conducted an interview with Mr. Nicolas Audier, EuroCham Chairman, with respect to EU-Vietnam cooperation in trade and investment. Lien Bui reports

How do you evaluate Vietnam's administrative reform and business, investment environment?

Throughout 2019, the Government has continued to reform Vietnam's trade and

investment environment. It has done so through an open and receptive relationship with foreign business and international chambers of commerce, for instance in the Vietnam Business Forum (VBF), Advisory Council for Administrative Procedure Reform (ACAPR), as well as EuroCham's annual Whitebook events.

The continued streamlining of business conditions and reforms to the legal framework is making Vietnam an even more attractive place for foreign enterprises to invest and do business, and EuroCham is pleased to support the Government in its efforts to reform the business environment and attract more investment from foreign enterprises.

What potential exists for trade and investment cooperation of both sides?

There is huge potential for greater EU-Vietnam cooperation in trade and investment in the future.

The EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA) were signed last June in Hanoi, in the presence of the Prime Minister of Vietnam and EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom.

This historic event takes us one step closer to ratification, with the last and final steps being votes in the European Parliament and Vietnam's National Assembly in the New Year.



Once ratified and implemented, the EVFTA will phase out tariffs and barriers to trade. Over the decade-long implementation period, around 99% of tariff lines will be eliminated, which will boost trade and investment and help Vietnam further align itself to international standards on everything from labour rights and environmental protection and from food safety to legislative reform. In short, the free trade agreement will give Vietnamese companies privileged access to Europe's 500-million-strong consumer

market, and Vietnamese citizens greater access to high-quality European goods from pharmaceutical products and medical devices to automobiles and wines & spirits.

The EVFTA is the most comprehensive and ambitious free trade agreement ever concluded between the EU and a developing nation, and once it has entered into force, it will help Vietnam become a hub for European investment in the ASEAN region.

How would you cooperate with VCCI to improve business connectivity of Vietnam and EU?

EuroCham and VCCI have had a long and positive record of cooperation. The support of the VCCI has been instrumental in helping our chamber to build effective relationships with the Government of Vietnam and its Ministries and, in doing so, better support our members.

Now, with ratification of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) on the horizon, subject to positive votes in the European Parliament and Vietnam's National Assembly, we hope to take this cooperation one step further so that both sides can take full advantage of this historic agreement. In particular, we hope to soon establish an EU-Vietnam Business Council to ensure a smooth implementation of the EVFTA on the ground, using the combined knowledge and experience of our two organizations to ensure that the provisions agreed to in principle are followed in practice.

What is your feeling about the culinary culture, festivals, customs

and traditions of Vietnamese traditional Tet holiday?

Tet is one of the occasions which makes Vietnam such a unique, attractive, and welcoming place for foreigners to live and do business. Of course, many of our members come to Vietnam because it is a fast-growing market with significant opportunities for trade and

investment. However, the reason so many of them stay and build their lives here is the wonderful culture, cuisine, and traditions of Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. Tet is, of course, the most famous of these, and I am sure that EuroCham members are looking forward to spending Tet with their families and enjoying the traditions of this special time. Thank you very much!

First Vietnam-Australia economic partnership meeting held

[Vietnam News, VNS, 30 November 2019](#)

SYDNEY - The first Vietnam-Australia Economic Partnership Meeting (EPM) was held in Adelaide under the co-chair of Vietnamese Minister of Industry and Trade Nguyen Trí Dung and Australian Minister of Trade, Tourism and Investment Simon Birmingham.

The event, to be held annually in rotation, aims to promote trade, investment and development partnerships between the two countries.

The event highlights a joint statement issued by the two countries on August 23 during the Vietnam visit by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, targeting the building of an economic co-operation strategy to become top 10 trade partners and doubling two-way trade.

The event also aims to reinforce the joint commitments of both sides in trade facilitation and economic connection, helping the two countries optimise opportunities from newly-emerging markets. At the meeting, the two sides focused on measures to bolster bilateral trade, investment and development co-operation, as well as innovation.



Vietnamese Minister of Industry and Trade Nguyen Trí Dung speaks at the first Vietnam-Australia Economic Partnership Meeting (EPM) was held in Adelaide (VNA/VNS Photo Huu Tuyen)

They discussed global and regional matters as well as multilateral issues related to ASEAN, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the World Trade Organisation, the Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement.

Vietnam confirmed its determination to work with Australia to enhance trade, investment and development co-operation between the two countries, meeting the demands and interests of each country and contributing to peace, stability, co-operation and development in the region.

Concluding the event, Dung and Birmingham signed a joint statement. Vietnam will host the next meeting this year.

About CACCI:

Founded in 1966, the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) is a regional non-governmental association principally composed of the national chambers or associations of commerce and industry in Asia and the Western Pacific. Its current membership of 29 countries and independent economies cuts across national boundaries to link businessmen and promote economic growth throughout the Asia-Pacific region. CACCI holds Consultative Status in the Roster Category of United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Published by: The Secretariat, Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry

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