



Workshop on Trade Facilitation on Services

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The two day workshop on Trade Facilitation on Services organised by the World Bank Group in partnership with the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry concluded today. The workshop provided an excellent platform to discuss the various issues related to facilitating trade in services among global experts from the World Bank, the WTO, OECD, academics from reputed research institutes, private sector, government officials, and industry representatives from India and abroad. There was consensus on the imperative to facilitate trade in services. On the way forward, the participants suggested some alternate approaches as against India's proposal to address trade facilitation in services through a consensus based standalone agreement on Trade Facilitation in Services (TFS) as a services counterpart to the goods specific Agreement on Trade Facilitation (the TFA). While India's preference is to respond to the challenges confronting Trade in Services in a comprehensive manner, giving equal consideration to the various barriers impeding the full potential of trade in services, we welcome further thoughts and engagement on the various different approaches through which trade facilitation in services could be addressed.

Some participants suggested that while trade facilitation is important, the level of ambition should be raised by addressing market access barriers as well for realizing the full potential for global trade in services. The relevance of Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) for developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was also discussed. Some participants have voiced concerns that the Indian draft proposal includes contentious elements on Mode 4 including disciplines on immigration and social security measures, disciplines on data protection as a barrier to cross border flow of data critical for supply of services through mode 1, cross border insurance coverage, etc. India emphasized the critical relevance of these elements for realizing the full potential of trade in services.

It was recognized that this workshop is being held at a very opportune time, when we are increasingly hearing protectionist voices from across the globe. In such critical times, institutions like the World Bank and business community have a special role to play in identifying and propagating fair and equitable practices for promoting free and fair trade. The open and free-wheeling deliberations at the workshop and the lessons emerging from it are valuable in taking forward the initiative to facilitate trade in services.

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