

Centre considering 100% WFH across all SEZ units, says Piyush Goyal

The move is expected to create employment opportunities in small cities and increase the export of services

Shreya Nandi | New Delhi September 13, 2022 Last Updated at 21:29 IST



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said the government would look into the industry's demand to allow 100 per cent work from home (WFH) for employees of units in special economic zones (SEZs).

The move is expected to create employment opportunities in small cities and increase the export of services, he said. "We had permitted work from home in SEZ units during Covid times. It was appreciated by all and it also helped in pushing our services exports. It was \$254 billion last year. This year also there will be a jump in that," the minister said after the Board of Trade meeting.

The statement comes months after the ministry allowed 50 per cent of the total employees in units SEZs, including contractual workers, to work from home. At present, WFH is permitted for a maximum period of one year in a SEZ unit.

Goyal was chairing the first meeting of the newly reconstituted Board of Trade that advises the government on policy measures related to the foreign trade policy (FTP) in order to achieve the objectives of boosting India's trade. The meeting was attended by state ministers, commerce secretary, industry department secretary, DGFT, all major trade and industry bodies, as well as export promotion councils and industry associations.

The meeting took place weeks before the announcement of the new FTP and at a time when some moderation is being witnessed in India's export growth.

An official statement said the meeting focused on export target setting, the upcoming FTP as well as the strategy and measures to be taken in order to take forward domestic manufacturing and exports.

The minister said the export competitiveness of states and Union Territories needs to be enhanced to meet India's ambitious international trade target of \$2 trillion by 2030.

During the meeting, presentations were made on India's import-export performance, restructuring of the department of commerce, free trade agreements and the way forward, states export performance, districts as export hubs, among others.

Exporters raised sector-specific concerns. In the meeting, Engineering Export Promotion Council of India (EEPC) Chairman Mahesh Desai urged the government to withdraw export duty on selected steel items as it will be especially helpful for the MSMEs that have a significant contribution in India's engineering exports.

Dedicated production-linked incentive scheme for MSME sector, guidelines for rupee trade with Russia and alternative payment mechanism for Myanmar were some of the key suggestions by EEPC India during the meeting.

Desai also requested the government to relook at the rates under RoDTEP and give full rebate on the taxes that still remain in the export production chain.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council said few steps need to be taken to improve export performance, such as the need for stabilising raw material prices—raw cotton— and ensuring sustainable availability, PLI scheme for apparel, among others.