

Record of Discussions (RoD)

Virtual Meeting on DEH Implementation Drive held under the Chairmanship of the Commerce Secretary

Date: May 20, 2026

Time: 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM

Venue: Virtual (Video Conference), chaired by the Commerce Secretary, Government of India

A virtual meeting on the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) Implementation Drive was held on May 20, 2026, from 12:30 PM to 2:00 PM under the chairmanship of Shri Rajesh Agrawal, Commerce Secretary, Government of India in the presence of Director General, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). The meeting was attended by Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries (Industries/Commerce), District Magistrates/District Collectors, General Managers of District Industries Centres (GM-DICs), representatives of Export Promotion Councils (EPCs), partner agencies, and officials of DGFT Regional Authorities (RAs).

Welcome Address and Introduction

2. The Director General, DGFT, extended a warm welcome to all Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, District Collectors, GM-DICs, EPC representatives, and partner agency officials. He introduced the context of the meeting, noting that the Commerce Secretary had specifically directed that the drive be taken to its logical conclusion and that the meeting was intended to bring the senior-most State administrative leadership into a direct, coordinated engagement with the DEH initiative.

Context and Opening Remarks by the Commerce Secretary

3. At the outset Commerce Secretary set out the following context and direction, namely:-

- India's exports have grown steadily and reached approximately USD 863 billion this year, reaching over 230 destinations globally with a rapidly diversifying product basket — ranging from Alphonso (Maharashtra) mangoes

to Amrapali (Odisha) and Chausa (Uttar Pradesh) varieties. India's export capacity is broadening both in products and geographies each year.

- To increase India's exports in the next five years, the unique potential of every district must be leveraged. Cross-border e-commerce now enables even small-value, unique items from any district to reach global buyers directly, and the DEH drive is the institutional mechanism to achieve this.
- The Export Promotion Mission (EPM), with an outlay of Rs. 25,060 crores for FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31 and encompassing ten components under Niryat Protsahan (financial) and Niryat Disha (non-financial), provides the comprehensive support framework. This support must now be systematically unlocked at the district level through the DEH institutional structure.
- DEH is not a funding scheme but a coordination and convergence framework that bridges information asymmetry, builds the capacity of new and existing exporters, and channels Central and State Government support to the grassroots. India has nearly five crore MSMEs, but fewer than 50,000 are active large-scale exporters — the gap is not one of potential but of structured facilitation.
- Three objectives drive DEH: (i) bridge information asymmetry between global trade opportunities and district entrepreneurs; (ii) build capacity in understanding export processes and scheme access; and (iii) systematically link district exporters to EPM support instruments through the DEPC mechanism.
- India has signed nine Free Trade Agreements covering 38 economies (approximately 50% of world GDP) over the recent six-year period. FTA opportunities must be communicated at the district level so that exporters in the right positions can leverage them effectively.

Presentation on DEH Implementation Drive

4. The Director General, DGFT, made a detailed presentation on the implementation framework of the DEH initiative and as a first step, the drive covering 120 priority districts has been envisaged. The key points highlighted during the presentation were as follows:

- The 120 priority districts have been identified based *inter alia* on DEAP adoption status, export performance, export potential, and strategic value, including GI-tagged products and sectoral strengths.
- The districts have been categorised into three tiers:
 - Tier A (35 districts, >USD 100 million exports) — deepen diversification and e-commerce scaling.
 - Tier B (51 districts, ~USD 10–100 million exports) — DEAP activation, scheme linkages, and platform onboarding.
 - Tier C (34 districts, <USD 10 million exports) — first-time IEC registrations, artisan cluster identification, and leapfrog strategy.
- The implementation drive has been structured into three phases, namely Foundation, Activation, and Deepening, covering DEPC reactivation, exporter outreach, e-commerce onboarding, buyer-seller interactions, and performance monitoring.
- The State Export Promotion Committees (SEPCs) and District Export Promotion Committees (DEPCs) were identified as the key institutional mechanisms for implementation of the drive at the State and district levels, respectively.
- Eleven partner agencies, including ECGC, EXIM Bank, SIDBI, NABARD, NCGTC, CGTMSE, CBIC, India Post, Lead District Banks, EPCs, and DICs, have been assigned district-level responsibilities under the DEH drive.
- The Export Promotion Mission (EPM) components, including financial and non-financial support measures such as interest subvention, collateral-free guarantees, trade finance, market access support, testing and certification assistance, inland freight support, trade intelligence, and overseas warehousing support, were highlighted for deployment at the district level.
- Cross-border e-commerce was highlighted as a major opportunity area for India, and the DEH drive aims to leverage MoUs with e-commerce platforms for onboarding MSMEs, artisans, and GI-product clusters onto global e-commerce platforms, with a target of onboarding at least 100 MSMEs per district.

- India Post's Dak Niryat Kendras were highlighted as an important mechanism for supporting export logistics in districts lacking conventional freight infrastructure.

Open Floor – Discussions and Suggestions from Participants

5. Following the presentation, the floor was opened for questions, suggestions, and interventions from participants. The key points raised were:

- The representative of **Government of Uttar Pradesh (Ms. Shivangi Singh, Deputy Commissioner, Export Promotion)** informed that District Export Action Plans (DEAPs) have been prepared for all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh. A critical constraint flagged was the lack of product-testing laboratories for ODOP-identified products. She requested that mechanisms be put in place to pool Central and State Government funds for quality-testing infrastructure at the district level. In response, the DG, DGFT, noted that the EPM, along with schemes of APEDA, MPEDA, and Commodity Boards, provide funding that can be converged to address such critical gaps once identified through the DEPC process.
- The representative of **Government of Jammu & Kashmir (Shri Vikramjeet Singh, Secretary, Industries)** informed that J&K has established an NABL-accredited laboratory providing unique product identification codes for export certification and has tied up with J&K Bank for export-dedicated branch banking. Two persistent challenges were flagged: (i) DEAPs require regular updates, but districts lack the data capacity to maintain them; and, (ii) dedicated district export facilitation cells staffed by experts are required for artisan-level hand-holding.
- The representative of **Government of Chhattisgarh (Secretary, Industries)** informed that a single-window export portal has been integrated within the Invest Chhattisgarh platform, FIEO-linked MSME export training is underway, and a Project Management Unit (PMU) has been constituted to support exporters in accessing credit facilities. He requested that district-wise export data from Special Economic Zones be made available to States for more granular targeting.

- The representative of **Government of Odisha (Secretary, MSME Department)** informed that Odisha is planning Reverse Buyer-Seller Meets for select districts, leveraging RAMP scheme funds, in coordination with the FIEO team from Kolkata. District-level committees will be re-activated, and the DEH agenda will be placed before the next monthly District Collectors' VC meeting.
- The representative of **Government of West Bengal (Trade Facilitation Officer, Ms. Tara Mukherjee)** informed that West Bengal has identified six priority districts with specific product clusters and confirmed active engagement with the DEH framework to finalise export classifications for the identified districts.
- The representative of **Apparel Export Promotion Council – AEPC (Secretary General, Shri Mithleshwar Thakur)** highlighted a structural concentration wherein only 52 districts contribute 80% of India's exports while the bottom 383 districts contribute barely 1%. E-commerce was identified as the most viable entry point for district-level exporters to bypass traditional procedural barriers. Specific suggestions included: (i) e-commerce Help Desks in every district leveraging the Amazon-DGFT MoU; (ii) district-level export facilitation centres staffed by Niryat Mitra-type experts; (iii) common testing and compliance centres; and, (iv) introduction of a 'district of origin' field in Shipping Bills to enable granular district-wise export data tracking.
- The representative of **Council for Leather Exports – CLE (Smt. Pallavi Dubey)** recommended including representatives of leading international testing and certification bodies as standing invitees to DEPC meetings, to provide exporters with current information on quality standards applicable in target markets, particularly advanced economies with stringent regulatory requirements.
- The representative of **Federation of Indian Export Organisations – FIEO (Shri Ajay Sahai, DG)** informed that FIEO has already identified 20 districts for intensive DEH engagement and submitted the list to DGFT, and is open to supplementing EPC efforts in additional districts. FIEO suggested a pilot-and-replicate model in order to achieve visible results in one district per State and then scale systematically to the remaining districts.

- The representative of **NABARD** confirmed that District Development Managers (DDMs) from all 120 priority districts participated in the meeting. NABARD affirmed full institutional alignment with the DEH drive and committed to deploying DDMs as standing members at every DEPC meeting and to facilitating Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) proposals and FPO linkages from agri-export clusters.

5.1. While summing up the discussion, the DG, DGFT, noted that over 350 stakeholders from district, State, and Central levels had converged in the meeting. He emphasised that there is no dearth of funding and that the challenge lies in convergence. He called upon all GM-DICs to initiate district-level export facilitation centres, urged DGFT Regional Authorities to take initiative in organising meetings at district level, resolve grievances and stressed that the drive must go beyond awareness to one-on-one support for identified exporters.

Overall Directions and Action Points

6. The Commerce Secretary concluded the meeting by summarising the following key directions and action points:

For State Governments (Chief Secretaries / Principal Secretaries – Industry and Export):

- Ensure that district-level export promotion is integrated into the State governance agenda. Constitute all remaining DEPCs within two months and convene at least one SEPC meeting per State within three months. Provide strategic leadership to align State industrial subsidies, cluster development programmes, and other State funds with the DEH drive for joint delivery.
- Issue a State Scheme Convergence Note mapping State incentives, ODOP, and sectoral schemes to DEAP product clusters in each priority district.
- Co-own the e-Commerce Export Summits organised by DGFT Regional Authorities in priority districts, and direct State MSME and Industries officers to attend and co-organise.
- Ensure monthly DEH review at the State level and share a quarterly State DEH Progress Report with DGFT Headquarters.

- Facilitate sharing of district-level industry and export data with DGFT, wherever possible.

For Industries and Export Commissioners:

- Function as the operational leader for the DEH drive in the State.
- Ensure monthly SEPC meetings are held regularly with DGFT Regional Authorities and district-level officials in attendance.
- Monitor the frequency and quality of DEPC meetings and provide active support to District Collectors and GM-DICs.
- Facilitate district-level support in areas such as packaging, cold storage, warehousing, transportation logistics, and connectivity.

For District Magistrates / District Collectors:

- Reconstitute dormant DEPCs, chair monthly DEPC meetings, and fully empower the GM-DIC as Member Secretary.
- Form a dedicated district-level export promotion team and personally chair monthly DEPC meetings.
- Ensure that the DEAP is reviewed, updated, and converted into measurable targets with clear timelines.
- Identify and engage District Export Champions (successful exporters) as mentors and catalysts for new exporters.
- Actively leverage DGFT Regional Authorities, State officials, EPCs, and industry bodies as partners in the DEH drive.
- Build a progressive exporter ecosystem: Vendor → Exporter → Large Exporter.

For DGFT Regional Authorities (RAs):

- Serve as the primary operational support to District Collectors, GM-DICs, and State authorities for all aspects of the DEH drive.
- Ensure active participation in DEPC meetings across all 120 priority districts.
- Organise awareness workshops in each district on DGFT schemes, EPM components, and FTA opportunities.

- Conduct demonstrations of the Trade Connect Portal and Trade Intelligence and Analytics (TIA) Portal and provide login access to all States and districts.
- Map Commodity Boards and EPCs to specific districts as per DEAP-identified clusters, with field officers attending the respective DEPC meetings.
- Compile and share a national-level RA officials' contact directory with all District Collector offices.
- Prepare and share a consolidated multilingual compendium of all relevant schemes (DGFT, ECGC, EXIM Bank, EPM components) with district officials, including application procedures.

For Export Promotion Councils (EPCs):

- Engage actively with district-level institutions as resource and partner agencies.
- Participate in DEPC meetings and provide sector-specific guidance, market information, and facilitation support.
- Assist in identifying potential exporters and supporting them in accessing scheme benefits and market linkages.

Forthcoming Steps:

- Operationalise the national DEH monitoring dashboard on the Trade Connect e-Platform, tracking new IEC registrations, DEPC meeting compliance, e-commerce onboardings, and district-wise export value growth.
- A digital compendium of all relevant Central and State Government schemes, including application procedures, to be compiled and shared by DGFT with all district officials.
- All district officials to be provided access/credentials to the DEH portal/dashboard, with functionality being finalised.
- State-wise presentations on leveraging India's nine Free Trade Agreements to be organised specifically for District Collectors and GM-DICs.
- Monthly monitoring of district-wise export performance (number of exporters and export value) to be undertaken by DGFT against defined KPIs.

- A focused national workshop with State Industries/Commerce Secretaries and select District Collectors to be organised in August–September 2026 to review the 90-Day Drive outcomes and plan Phase-II.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.
