



September 05, 2018

24th RCEP AUCKLAND ROUND FROM 17-24th OCTOBER 2018¹

In the 6th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Ministerial Meeting held on 30-31 August, 2018, in Singapore, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Suresh Prabhu, led the Indian delegation. The Ministers attending the meeting took stock of the state of negotiations across the various negotiating Groups and Sub-Working Groups. The Chair of the Trade Negotiating Committee, Mr. Pak Iman Pambagyo, made a detailed presentation on the state of play of RCEP negotiations and sought ministerial guidance and direction on pending issues. The Ministers acknowledged the good progress made in the negotiations so far with successful conclusion of 4 chapters, namely (i) Economic and Technical Cooperation; (ii) Small and Medium Enterprises; (iii) Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation; and (iv) Government Procurement. The Ministers endorsed 'The Package of Year End Deliverables' and urged the negotiators to intensify their work with a view to narrowing gaps and finding balanced outcomes in the negotiations as it moves forward. On key pillars of the negotiations, the Commerce Minister defended India's interests effectively and secured maximum flexibilities.

In Goods, the negotiators have been tasked to work on the ASEAN's Non-Paper on Trade in Goods Market Access Negotiations, which is to be considered as the working assumption paper. Commerce Minister reiterated the need for providing adequate flexibilities on various elements of the Non-Paper, such as exclusion, reduction, staging and deviations. Accordingly, it was agreed that member countries will intensify bilateral pairing process on requests and offers basis on these elements and determine the ambition level of each country to the mutual satisfaction.

In Services, Suresh Prabhu emphasised on the importance of maintaining quality and commercially meaningful offers across all Modes. In a significant development, all member countries agreed to establish the linkage between Mode 4/ MoNP and the Services text. While welcoming this linkage, Union Commerce Minister urged member countries to make quality offers by 5th October 2018.

In Investment, the Commerce Minister underlined the importance of negotiations focussing on the application of Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) and mentioned that clarity on its application would lead to further movement in the Investment Chapter. At India's behest, it was agreed that ISDS will not apply to MFN and PPR. All member countries are expected to submit their revised Reservation Lists without broad sectoral carve outs.

The Ministers directed that the negotiations on all these issues be intensified during the 24th RCEP Auckland Round from 17-24th October 2018.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is a mega regional free trade agreement being negotiated amongst 16 countries, comprising 10 ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and six ASEAN FTA partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. So far 6 Ministerial Meetings, 5 Inter-sessional Ministerial Meetings and 23 Rounds of the Trade Negotiating Committee at the technical level have been held.

¹ Available at: <http://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1544889>

THE RESERVE BANK INTRODUCES INTERNAL OMBUDSMAN SCHEME, 2018 FOR SCHEDULED COMMERCIAL BANKS²

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had, in May 2015, advised all public-sector and select private and foreign banks to appoint Internal Ombudsman (IO) as an independent authority to review complaints that were partially or wholly rejected by the respective banks. The IO mechanism was set up with a view to strengthen the internal grievance redressal system of banks and to ensure that the complaints of the customers are redressed at the level of the bank itself by an authority placed at the highest level of bank's grievance redressal mechanism so as to minimize the need for the customers to approach other fora for redressal.

As a part of this customer-centric approach, to enhance the independence of the IO while simultaneously strengthening the monitoring system over functioning of the IO mechanism, RBI has reviewed the arrangement and issued revised directions under Section 35 A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 in the form of 'Internal Ombudsman Scheme, 2018'. The Scheme covers, inter-alia, appointment / tenure, roles and responsibilities, procedural guidelines and oversight mechanism for the IO.

All Scheduled Commercial Banks in India having more than ten banking outlets (excluding Regional Rural Banks), are required to appoint IO in their banks. The IO shall, inter alia, examine customer complaints which are in the nature of deficiency in service on the part of the bank, (including those on the grounds of complaints listed in Clause 8 of the Banking Ombudsman Scheme, 2006) that are partly or wholly rejected by the bank. As the banks shall internally escalate all complaints, which are not fully redressed to their respective IOs before conveying the final decision to the complainant, the customers of banks need not approach the IO directly. The implementation of IO Scheme, 2018 will be monitored by the bank's internal audit mechanism apart from regulatory oversight by RBI.

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² Available at: https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/BS_PressReleaseDisplay.aspx?prid=44900