

## With an eye on smuggling, FM Sitharaman wants North-East custom stations to be electronic by Dec

*According to Sitharaman, cigarette smuggling was "killing" people as well as the small Indian industry.*

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The finance minister was speaking at the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs Investiture Ceremony in Guwahati on July 21.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has called on finance ministry officials to ensure all Land Customs stations in the North-East region of the country are enabled electronically by the end of 2023 to help clamp down on smuggling of illicit items such as gold, drugs, and cigarette sticks.



Speaking at the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Investiture Ceremony in Guwahati on July 21, Sitharaman said the North-East region was crucial because of the border it shared with Myanmar, Tibet, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. The region houses 25 functional Land Customs Stations – facilities that provide transit, customs, immigration, and cargo handling services for the movement of goods and passengers – of which 15 are enabled with Electronic Data Interchange.

Electronic Data Interchange is the exchange of information with foreign trade partners via a standardised format.

"I would like 25 done within December of this year. It is not a big challenge for CBIC," the finance minister said.

"I really fail to understand why we would want to consume more time in making the rest of those Land Customs Stations electronic. We should do it at the earliest. It helps us to get a better picture of what's moving in and out. And also the moment you do electronic, there is a lot more transparency," she added.

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