

MASCRADE 2024

FICCI's Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Activities Destroying the Economy (CASCADE) organized the 10th edition of its International Conference: MASCRADE 2024 – Movement Against Smuggled and Counterfeit Trade on September 25-26, 2024 in New Delhi.

Addressing the two-day event, Mr Ravneet Singh Bittu, Minister of State for Food Processing Industries & Minister of State for Railways, Govt of India, emphasized on the need of harsh penalties and cracking down heavily on the nexus of people engaged in illicit trade and activities.

Mr Bittu asserted that co-ordination between various enforcement agencies is key to overcome the battle against the nefarious elements ruining our economic growth. "Together, we build resilient economies, fostering global collaboration to combat these threats with robust initiatives. Let's safeguard Bharat's future together," he added. He further stated that the opinions and views of FICCI CASCADE's report will help the government to come down heavily on illicit trade activities.

"Punishment is necessary, and it is important to instil fear in the minds of perpetrators that harsh penalties are in store for them if they engage in illicit trade activities," Mr Bittu noted.

Mr Rajiv Talwar, Special Secretary to the Govt. of India and Member (Compliance Management), Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), said, "CBIC is serving as the fulcrum in the movement against counterfeit goods and smuggling. We have built a technology-driven risk management portal with very wide capabilities that help us predict possible smuggling operations. CBIC field officers are making on an average 60 detections a day with the help of this portal." Mr Talwar added that over 3,000 people have been arrested in the last 15 months and foreign products worth Rs 40 crore were seized.

Mr Anil Rajput, Chairman, FICCI CASCADE, said, "Consumers have and will continue to remain the prime focus group for both legal and the illicit players. In today's technology-dominated landscape, artificial intelligence has assumed great significance and at present we are witnessing the positive impact of this technology on our businesses and society. However, the time is not far when we will find rogue elements entering the fray and creating a challenge that could become an unmitigated disaster for industry and society alike. I believe the mantra called 'SECURE' framework which stands for Surveillance, Enforcement, Capacity Building, United Front against illicit trade, Rigorous Punishment, Entire Ecosystem built on simplicity- when looked at in totality, will provide a 360-degree addressal of the complicated issue of illicit trade."

Mr Pranab Kumar Das, Director, Compliance and Facilitation Directorate, World Customs Organization, said, "In addition to the vital role played by the World Customs Organization (WCO) in stimulating the growth of legitimate international trade, its efforts to combat fraudulent activities are also recognized internationally, especially against smuggling and counterfeiting. Enforcement against illicit trade remains a very important area for Customs, as it provides solutions and appropriate responses to disrupt criminal networks."

Mr Arun Chawla, Director General, Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA) and Former Director General, FICCI and Think Tank Member, FICCI CASCADE said, “To build resilient economies, it is essential to adopt both preventative and proactive measures that integrate international cooperation, technological advancements, and stringent legal frameworks. The focus is on fostering cross-border partnerships to combat these illegal activities, ensuring that economic growth is sustained while simultaneously securing the integrity of global supply chains.”

Hon’ble Mr Justice Sanjay Karol, Judge, Supreme Court of India, highlighted the debilitating impact smuggling and counterfeiting have on the nation’s economic and social aspects. Delivering the valedictory address on Day-2 of 10th edition of ‘MASCRADE’, organized by FICCI-CASCADE, Justice Karol said, “Smuggling and counterfeiting continue to jeopardize economic stability, social security and integrity of the nation. Smuggling and counterfeiting often lurk undetected amidst a host of other economic and social problems but continue to erode substantial portions of legitimate businesses, resulting in substantial economic and social damages.”

Justice Karol emphasized that the use of technology is essential to combat the menace and highlighted the importance of robust inter-state collaborations. “Utilizing QR codes will help safeguard consumers and address the issues of smuggling and counterfeiting. Social media intermediaries also play a crucial role in this fight. We must strengthen our inter-state collaborations, and I am pleased to note that over the past ten years, these collaborations have been solidified at the international level,” he stated.

Hon’ble Mr Justice Navin Chawla, Judge, Delhi High Court, said, “Smuggling and counterfeiting affect the day-to-day lives of citizens in various ways. These activities constitute a \$2 trillion shadow economy, resulting in significant economic losses for the nation. This menace needs to be addressed uniformly by the legislature, judiciary, and executive. I assure you that all three branches are doing everything possible to combat this issue.”

Justice Chawla added that consumers need to be aware that buying illicit products may result in short-term gain but is a long-term loss for them as well as the nation.

Dr Anju Rathi Rana, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice, Govt of India, said, “Illicit trade encompasses a wide range of activities like drug trafficking, smuggling, counterfeiting and human trafficking. According to UN, these activities account for 5 per cent of global GDP, which is an alarming figure and calls for immediate action. In order to combat illicit trade, India has to adopt a comprehensive set of strategies. These strategies should primarily focus on fostering public awareness and implementing joint task forces for coordinated action against perpetrators of illicit trade.”

The 10th edition of MASCRADE saw participation from several senior functionaries from leading international organizations, such as World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC), US Department of Homeland Security and Danish Patent and Trademark Office, among others.

During the two-day conference, experts from India and abroad made highly informative presentations and spoke at multiple insightful plenaries, highlighting the significance of empowering consumers to take on the battle against illicit trade by boycotting smuggled and counterfeit goods.

Enforcement officers, school children and journalist were felicitated at the anti-counterfeiting and anti-smuggling awards ceremony before drawing curtains on the 10th edition of MASCRADE.