

# Tussle over secrecy delays compilation of trade data



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The department of commerce is staring at a crisis as it has not been able to generate crucial foreign trade data for nearly two weeks now, amid differences with the revenue department over secrecy of customs data, people aware of the matter said.

The Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), which compiles and publishes trade statistics, has not been able to process and validate the crucial daily and weekly trade data. This is because the electronic portal of customs — Indian Customs Electronic Gateway (ICEGATE) — has not been sharing key information such as shipping bill number and date, bills of entry number in the daily trade return since October 7,

one of the persons cited above told *Business Standard*.

“Daily and weekly alerts have already been delayed because of masking of these data fields,” the person cited above said.

The details are critical in linking the data pertaining to invoices and multiple items within a shipping bill or bill of entry and data pertaining to amendments carried out in shipping bill or bill of entry at a subsequent date. Daily trade return is the day-to-day data that the DGCIS receives from customs. Without the number and date of the bill of entry as well as the shipping bill, DGCIS, which comes under the administrative con-

trol of the commerce department — will not be able to finalise the aggregate data and publish foreign trade statistics.

Compilation of daily and weekly statistics is regularly analysed by various government departments and ministries, including the department of commerce, Prime Minister’s Office, and inter-ministerial committee for monitoring of export and import.

The development comes in the backdrop of India’s merchandise exports witnessing 4.8 per cent year-on-year rise to \$35.45 billion in September, reversing its earlier estimate of a contraction for the first time in 19 months. Any delay in the compilation of trade data can also

adversely affect policy response, at a time exports growth from the country has started slowing due to recession fears in developed economies.

Over the last few days, senior government officials from the department of commerce have already had hectic meetings with officials from the department of revenue to resolve the matter. The revenue department, on its part, has been citing reasons pertaining to trade data security for not sharing the information. On the other hand, the department of commerce’s view is that the DGCIS is legally empowered to collect data under the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008.

The department of commerce has also urged that the revenue department’s IT arm Directorate General of Systems and Data Management to resolve the matter urgently.

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