

MRA celebrates the International Customs Day

The International Customs Day (ICD) was celebrated by the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) at the Custom House, Mer Rouge on Tuesday, 26 January 2021. Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development was the Chief Guest to the celebrations. MRA stakeholders from both the private and public sector joined Mr Sudhamo Lal, Director General of the MRA for the official ceremony.

To mark the International Customs Day each year, the WCO Secretariat dedicates a theme that is pertinent to the challenges facing the global Customs community. The theme of this year is dedicated to the united efforts of Customs to emerge from the coronavirus crisis and support people and businesses by strengthening the global trade supply chain, reinforcing collaboration, harnessing technology and putting “people” at the centre of the transformation process. The slogan for ICD 2021 is “Customs bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a sustainable supply chain”.

A series of projects were launched on this occasion. These are highlighted below:

1. **Baggage scanners in the Port Area**

To further enhance control on crew members, workers and other persons exiting the Port Area, baggage scanners have been placed at the Mauritius Container Terminal (MCT) and the Mauritius Ports Terminal (MPT).

2. **Body worn camera**

MRA Customs has embarked in an innovative and fully automated project with the purchase of body worn cameras and setting-up of network connectivity from port area to customs headquarters. These cameras will be used by examining officers during the examination of goods. The cameras are fitted with audio, wi-fi, storage capacities and real time viewing of images functionalities.

The use of body worn cameras will boost trade facilitation as well as remove the discretionary powers of examining officers to allow delivery of goods which will thereafter be given by a panel of officers who will be posted at the headquarters. This will no doubt enhance integrity of the organization.

Examining officers will be able to communicate with the officers at the headquarters concerning issues related to Valuation, Tariff Classification, IPR infringements, prohibited and restricted goods, counterfeit goods and illicit goods in real time.

3. E-courier

Though Customs is receiving electronic manifest data for all postal and courier consignments, the assessment of category 3 consignments has remained a manual process. This is a major shortcoming for Customs in terms of control, availability of statistics and management of payments. With the upsurge of online transactions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent reduction of the exemption threshold for goods imported by Post or through a Courier Service, from Rs 3000 to Rs 1000, the Customs Department was urged to come up with an electronic solution for the submission and processing of assessment for such consignments.

An e-Courier platform has been developed to cater for the following:

- Interfacing with proprietary systems operated by courier operators for system-to-system submission;
- Submission of individual assessments or in bulk from the platform by Courier operators;
- Submission of individual assessments from the platform by members of the public;
- Online payments of duty and taxes by both operators and members of the public in addition to cash payment facilities, and
- A dashboard for the real-time monitoring of the status of assessments.

The system will be designed with user-friendly, question-driven interfaces which will allow the general public to easily file their assessments.

4. Implementation of a Mobile Application to Raise Drug Awareness in Mauritius

The development of a mobile application by the MRA Customs Department is launched for raising drug awareness in the Mauritian community.

This mobile application will be hosted on Apple Store and Android Store and will feature a collection of drug awareness, drug prevention and treatment, rehabs locations, success stories which can support the community at large. The App is expected to provide support and educate people on reduction of drug dependency for students, communities and drug addicts.

The name for this App is “DrugFreeMoris”.

The development of this mobile application is done in-house. The collaboration of the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been sought to supplement the contents of the features of the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

5. Implementation of an Online Platform for the Control of Precursor Chemicals along the Supply Chain

The aim for the development of an online platform by the MRA Customs is to control along the supply chain substances used in the illicit manufacture of psychotropic substances and dangerous drugs.

This platform will be hosted as an e-Service on the MRA website where all transactions from import to the end users of precursor chemicals will be captured to enable MRA and the Ministry of Health and Wellness and other enforcement agencies to exert a proper control of these substances along the supply chain and target any diversion for illicit purposes.

Development of this platform by MRA is in line with the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking which states that ‘a centralised database to monitor in real time the importations and sales of precursors and dangerous chemicals and at the same time to flag to the Dangerous Chemicals Control Board and the Pharmacy Board of the excessive sale to a certain person/company over a certain period of time’. The development of this application is being done in-house with the collaboration of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

6. Implementation of an Online Platform for Sharing of Information on Small Boats and Yachts at Regional Level

The development of an online platform by MRA Customs Department is done for sharing of information on small boats and yachts and on their movements in regional waters for enhancing controls. The information on small boats and yachts will be used to target the high risk boats and yachts on arrival.

The development of this mobile application is being done in-house. The collaboration of other Customs Administrations of the region will be sought to facilitate exchange of information at international level through Customs Mutual Administrative Assistance Agreement and other information exchange instruments.

7. **Launch of the Disaster Preparedness Guide (DPG) in line with the provisions of the National Disaster Scheme**

The DPG provides a proactive approach in terms of risk reduction and preparedness by identifying critical vulnerabilities likely to impact on the MRA and putting in place appropriate counter measures to mitigate them. The Disaster Preparedness elaborates on detailed procedures in place and actions required in case of different natural and man-made disasters including epidemic/pandemic disease. This DPG also comprises of an IT Business Continuity Plan which clearly stipulates procedures for recovery of critical information systems and related data connectivity infrastructure.

The Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development recognised the efforts of MRA Customs to be on the front line during the lock down period to ensure an uninterrupted flow of goods and medicines into the country. He congratulated the MRA non-Customs to manage Government’s Wage Assistance Scheme and Self Employed Assistance Scheme to provide financial resources to the needy. MRA has continued to support workers, self-employed and businesses in the tourism sector through the continuation of these Schemes, he added.

Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy stated that “Mauritius ranks at the 13th position in the Ease of Doing Business of the World Bank and is ahead of countries such as Australia, Finland, Canada and Germany amongst others. In the Doing Business sub-index where MRA is the main stakeholder, that is, Ease of Paying Taxes, we are fifth in the World, out of some 190 countries. This ranking recognises the excellent job done at the level of the MRA to facilitate the payment of taxes and the tax refund process”.

Mr Lal, in his speech highlighted that besides clearance of normal goods, Customs expedited clearance of over 50 relief consignments of medicines and sanitary equipment. He added that the COVID-19 has given the MRA the opportunity to explore new work methods such as work from home which has given proven results in fulfilling the strategies of the government successfully.

The MRA donated sports wheel chairs to the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, sports and Recreation on this occasion. The ceremony culminated with the award of eighteen World Customs Organisation (WCO) certificates of merits to MRA officers and external stakeholders who have been supportive of MRA’s challenge during the sanitary lockdown.