

FOREIGN TRADE POLICY TO FOCUS ON DISTRICTS

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The commerce ministry plans to focus on district-led export growth in the proposed [foreign trade](#) policy for the five years through March 2026, aiming to help small businesses and farmers explore export opportunities through e-commerce and digital marketing platforms.

"The first draft of the foreign trade policy (FTP) will be ready by 15 February and then consultation will be held with finance ministry. It will be released by 31 March for the five-year period beginning 1 April," a commerce ministry official said seeking anonymity.

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The policy aims to provide assistance to exporters through doorstep delivery of timely and relevant information, promote artisans, farmers, handicrafts, handloom and other cottage industries and reduce transaction cost at various stages of the export cycle.

"The initiative to make districts export hubs includes preparation of export strategy by all states, product and service identification in each district, including mapping of GI (geographical indication) products, the constitution of district export promotion panels, preparation of district export action plans and identification of agricultural and toy clusters," the official said.

As part of the strategy, an institutional mechanism will be set up in each district in the form of district export promotion committees (DEPCs) that may be headed by the collector or district development officer, co-chaired by the designated regional authority of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), with various other stakeholders as members. The primary function of DEPCs will be to prepare and act on district-specific export action plans in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders from the Centre, state and district levels.

The department of commerce, through the regional authorities of DGFT, has engaged with states to take forward the initiative in the districts to implement it in a phased manner. As part of the consultative process to formulate FTP, a board of trade meeting was called by trade minister Piyush Goyal on 2 December in which ministers and officials from various state governments, and representatives from chambers of commerce and export promotion councils participated.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his 2019 Independence Day speech, had first proposed the vision to transform districts into export hubs.

"Each of our districts has the capacity equal to a small country. We need to understand this power and channelize this potential. And why should each district not think of becoming an export hub? Each district has its own handicraft, and each district has its unique specialities," he had said.

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