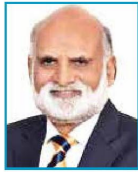


Fighting the felony

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It has now been established beyond doubt that illicit trade is growing exponentially, and is increasingly putting the individual, societies and economies in harm. It is called the invisible enemy, a pure evil, that causes immense damage and compromises the safety and security of nations the world over by fuelling the terror machine and organised crime networks.

According to several estimates, the global economy is losing more than USD two trillion annually due to smuggling, counterfeiting and other forms of illicit trade. Nations are increasingly recognising the threat posed by this illegal business and are intensifying their efforts to create an effective deterrence against such activities. In India, FICCI CASCADE (Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Activities Destroying the Economy) is at the forefront of generating awareness on the detrimental impact of smuggled, contraband and counterfeit products amongst the consumers and citizens, building capacities of law enforcement agencies, proposing reforms, sharing best practices and providing knowledge and support to the industry members about this menace.

Over the years, FICCI CASCADE has been encouraged by the support of several international organisations which have worked assiduously in addressing this issue at the global level, and this eventually led to the emergence of MASCRAD (Movement Against Smuggled and Counterfeit Trade) in 2013. Since its inception, institutions such as WIPO, UNODC, Interpol, OECD, WCO, UKIPO, USPTO, US Department of Homeland Security, JETRO,



It is important to lower the detrimental impact of illicit trade on the financial, industrial, and societal health of our country

Australian Border Protection, TRACIT, HMRC, Italian Law Enforcement and others have joined hands with this initiative to fight and heighten our response against illicit trade.

MASCRAD has been the only forum in India which has played a pivotal role in creating awareness about the horrifying magnitude of this danger. It has also helped find tangible solutions and chalk out a sustainable roadmap to blunt the impact of this unholy activity. In addition, with the objective of encouraging and acknowledging the works of our law enforcement agencies, each year MASCRAD and FICCI CASCADE felicitate the best performing officers for their outstanding achievements in the prevention of counterfeiting and smuggling and enforcement of anti-smuggling and anti-counterfeiting laws.

Every year, this dialogue has focussed on different facets of illicit trade and has tried to address it in the best possible manner. The previous six editions included:

1) 'Trade in Counterfeit, Pirated and Smuggled Goods- A Threat to India's National Security and Economy' (Sep-

tember 2013).

2) 'Illicit Trade- Threat to National Security and Economy' (January 2016).

3) 'Illicit Cross Border Trade in Goods- Impact on Economy and Consumers' (December 2016).

4) 'Protect Your Brand Globally Fight Counterfeiting, Smuggling and Piracy' (October 2017).

5) 'Ensuring Brand Security for Sustained Businesses and Employment Generation' (November 2018).

6) Containing Counterfeiting, Smuggling and Piracy: A Winning Strategy (September 2019).

This year, the theme of the conference was 'Impact of Counterfeiting and Smuggling on Personal Health and Safety'. After the deadly run of the COVID-19 virus the world over in 2020, and its severe consequences that we continue to face in all dimensions of life. It became critical to understand and gauge the impact of smuggling and counterfeiting on public health and safety in the backdrop of the pandemic. While governments across nations were committed to fighting the Coronavi-

rus, the criminals viewed this crisis as an opportunity to expand and intensify their illegal operations. MASCRAD 2021, therefore, intended to devise actionable and innovative solutions to reverse the rising tide of counterfeit, smuggled and spurious products. It was also important to generate increased awareness amongst stakeholders, and underscore the point, that if the spread of illicit trade is not checked, the consequences will be disastrous for societies and economies alike, especially in a post-Covid era. It also became important to expose the proponents of illicit trade, and their complete disregard for humanity and ethics even when the world was reeling under this tragedy.

With health taking centre stage over the past year, this edition of MASCRAD was inaugurated by Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Health Minister of India. The minister highlighted how the methods by which spurious, misbranded, and adulterated drugs which enter the distribution channel have become complex, and how the industry must play an active role to help identify and plug these loopholes. He also agreed that reviewing current regulations related to smuggling and counterfeiting, using the latest technology to aid security forces and enforcement agencies, raising the penalties for those committing this crime, along with the allocation of more financial and human resources to counter this activity are important areas where adequate thrust should be given.

The two-day event which was held on January 21-22 witnessed wide participation from policymakers and stakeholders. Key issues such as illicit trade amid public health crisis, flag-

ging morale of genuine industry, placing public health and safety at the heart of the fight against smuggling and counterfeiting, funding of terrorism by illicit trade and accelerating actions against criminals were discussed in detail.

The forum also shared the best practices which have introduced positive results to contain this problem and promoted the need for international enforcement cooperation which is vital for nations to mitigate this challenge. I am also of the firm belief that strong indigenous brands are bound to reduce the country's dependence on foreign products. They will also subsequently demotivate the advocates of illicit trade by considerably reducing the footprint of foreign products in India, and eventually severely denting their profits and lowering their morale.

With top-class ideation during MASCRAD 21, I have no doubt in my mind that in the times ahead, we will be able to make steady and meaningful headway in understanding, engaging, and considerably lowering the detrimental impact of illicit trade on the financial, industrial, and societal health of our country. The IMF has recently projected an impressive 11.5 per cent growth rate for India in 2021, making India the only major economy of the world to register double-digit growth this year. However, we cannot afford to lower our guard and need to stay ahead of the curve while dealing with this enemy that remains unfazed and extremely determined.

The writer is the Chairman, FICCI CASCADE and Senior VP, Corporate Affairs, ITC Ltd. Views expressed are personal