

RASP INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS

First Export Checklist: 23 Steps Before Your First Shipment

The complete pre-flight checklist every Indian exporter needs before sending their first container abroad. Built from 20+ years of real EXIM experience, updated for FTP 2023-28.

What you get	
01	Complete pre-export compliance roadmap
02	Documentation you must have (with links)
03	Pro tips from 500+ first-time export clients
04	Red flags that delay shipments by weeks

PHASE 1 OF 4

Foundation: Get your legal paperwork right

Before you ship anything, Bharat treats you as a recognised exporter only if you have the right registrations. Skip any of these and your goods will sit at the port.

1

PAN Card (Company or Proprietor)

Get a PAN in the name of the entity that will be the exporter of record. For partnerships or LLPs, company PAN. For sole proprietorship, your individual PAN is fine.

Tip: The name on PAN must match bank account and IEC exactly.

2

GSTIN Registration

Compulsory if turnover exceeds threshold or you want to claim input tax refunds on exports. Export under LUT (Letter of Undertaking) avoids paying IGST upfront.

Tip: Apply for LUT separately each financial year.

3

Current Account with AD Category-1 Bank

You need a current account with a bank authorised to deal in foreign exchange. This is where export proceeds will land. FIRC (Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate) comes from here.

Tip: Ask the bank if they charge for BRC and FIRC. Some charge heavily.

4

IEC (Importer Exporter Code)

The 10-digit DGFT-issued code. You cannot legally export from Bharat without it. Free online application at dgft.gov.in. Usually takes 1 to 3 working days.

Tip: Keep IEC linked to the correct PAN and bank account. A mismatch blocks shipments.

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AD Code Registration at Port

Your bank issues an AD Code letter, which you register with customs at each port you plan to export from. Without AD code, customs cannot process your shipping bill.

Tip: Register at multiple ports if you ship via JNPT, Mundra, Chennai, etc. Takes 2 to 3 days per port.

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Digital Signature Certificate (DSC)

Class 3 DSC needed to sign DGFT, customs, and GST filings electronically. Buy from eMudhra or Sify. Valid for 2 years.

Tip: Get it in the name of an authorised signatory, not the proprietor if you have separate directors.

PHASE 2 OF 4

Product setup: Classify, certify, and protect

The wrong HS code costs lakhs in missed incentives. Missing certifications block entire markets. Get this phase right before you spend on logistics.

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HS Code Classification

Every product has a unique 8-digit HS (Harmonized System) code. Wrong code = wrong duty rate, wrong incentive rate, wrong buyer searches.

Tip: Check Indian Trade Portal, CBIC tariff schedule, and DGFT RoDTEP rates together. They do not always align.

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RoDTEP / RoSCTL / Duty Drawback Eligibility

Verify which incentive scheme applies to your HS code. RoDTEP covers embedded taxes (most goods). RoSCTL is apparel-specific. Duty Drawback covers customs duty on imported inputs.

Tip: You can often claim RoDTEP + Duty Drawback together. Do not leave money on the table.

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Product Certifications

Many markets need specific certifications: CE mark for EU, FDA for USA food, BIS for some goods. Missing certification = rejected shipment at destination.

Tip: Research destination-country requirements before quoting the buyer.

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RCMC (Registration-cum-Membership Certificate)

Issued by the relevant Export Promotion Council for your product category. Required to avail most export incentives, participate in trade fairs, and get MEIS/RoDTEP benefits.

Tip: Choose the right council. FIEO is general-purpose; product councils like APEDA, CAPEXIL, Spices Board are sector-specific.

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Phytosanitary / Fumigation Certificate (if needed)

For agricultural, plant-based, or wooden-packaged goods. Issued by DAC before shipment. Mandatory for most food and plant exports.

Tip: ISPM-15 fumigation is required for wooden pallets going to EU, US, and most markets.

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Certificate of Origin (CoO)

Preferential CoO lets your buyer claim zero or reduced duty under FTAs like CEPA, ASEAN, SAARC. Non-preferential CoO is for general origin proof. Get from chamber of commerce or DGFT.

Tip: For UAE, use CEPA CoO to save buyer 5 to 25 percent duty. Big relationship win.

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Buyer and contract: Lock the deal, then ship

First-time exporters rush into shipping before the deal is watertight. Buyer disappears after container leaves port and you are stuck with a non-negotiable bill of lading.

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Verified Buyer Check

Never ship to an unverified buyer. Use Dun & Bradstreet, Indian embassy verification, or ECGC Buyer Rating Report. Check buyer website, LinkedIn, and trade references.

Tip: If buyer pushes for large quantity on first order with 0% advance, walk away.

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Payment Terms (Sort This First)

Preferred order: 100 percent advance (rare), LC (Letter of Credit), DP (Documents against Payment), DA (Documents against Acceptance), Open Account. Open Account is risky for first deals.

Tip: For first order with a new buyer, 30 percent advance + 70 percent against BL copy is a fair middle ground.

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Incoterms 2020 Agreement

Decide EXW, FOB, CFR, CIF, DAP, DDP. Each shifts cost and risk differently. FOB is most common for containers. CIF for small shippers who want to include freight in price.

Tip: EXW is cheapest for you but gives buyer control. DDP is maximum responsibility (and markup) for you.

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Proforma Invoice + PO Agreement

Proforma invoice has exact quantity, HS code, unit price, INCOTERM, payment terms, port of loading, port of discharge, packing details. Buyer sends signed Purchase Order against it.

Tip: Get buyer to sign every page. Disputes later will reference this.

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ECGC Credit Insurance

ECGC (Export Credit Guarantee Corporation) covers 80 to 90 percent of buyer default. Essential for open account or deferred payment exports. Premium is nominal.

Tip: Worth every paisa for any export above INR 10 lakh.

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LC (Letter of Credit) Review

If buyer offers LC, get it issued through a reputed bank. Review for discrepancies BEFORE shipping: spelling, port names, dates, documents required. A mismatched LC is worthless.

Tip: Negotiate for irrevocable, confirmed LC from first-class bank. Avoid LCs from unknown regional banks.

PHASE 4 OF 4

Logistics and shipment: Move the goods safely

By now paperwork is done. This phase is where first-timers lose money to delays, demurrage, and damaged cargo. Get a good CHA before you even book your first container.

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Appoint CHA (Customs House Agent)

A licensed CHA handles your shipping bill, customs clearance, and coordination with freight forwarder. Do not try this yourself on first export. Good CHA saves 10x their fee in avoided mistakes.

Tip: Ask for their recent shipping bill examples in your HS code. Not all CHAs handle all products well.

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Freight Forwarder + Booking

Forwarder books container space, issues house bill of lading, coordinates stuffing. Get quotes from 3 forwarders. Rates vary wildly, especially for less-than-container (LCL) loads.

Tip: Direct bookings with shipping lines (MSC, Maersk, CMA) are cheaper if you ship full containers (FCL) regularly.

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Packing + Labelling Compliance

Follow buyer spec and destination rules. ISPM-15 wooden pallets, correct language labels, hazmat diamonds if applicable, origin marking ("Made in India"), FDA labels if food.

Tip: Take photos of every pallet before sealing. Claim disputes later often hinge on this.

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Shipping Bill + Let Export Order

CHA files Shipping Bill on ICEGATE. Customs examines (physically or document-only) and issues "Let Export Order" (LEO). Without LEO, your container cannot leave.

Tip: Keep Shipping Bill number safe. It drives your RoDTEP and Drawback claim downstream.

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Post-Shipment: Collect Your Money + Incentives

After shipment: get BL from forwarder, negotiate docs through bank (if LC), wait for export proceeds, get e-BRC from bank, then file incentive claims on DGFT portal.

Tip: RoDTEP e-scrip is auto-issued. Duty Drawback requires separate claim. File within 3 months of shipment.

BONUS: WATCH OUT

5 Red flags that kill first exports

	Red Flag	What it costs you
01	HS code mismatch between shipping bill and GST invoice	Customs hold and denial and future scrutiny. Always reconcile codes
02	Payment term changes after shipment	Buyer asks for DA instead of agreed LC after container sails. Rejection
03	Freight forwarder without direct shipping line tie-up	Middleman forwarders mark up 20 to 40 percent on freight. Always
04	Missing country-specific certification	Goods cleared at origin but stuck at destination. Happens frequently
05	Bank not authorised for the currency or country	Some regional banks cannot clear USD or EUR smoothly, or can't

Stuck on any of these 23 steps?

Book a free 30-minute consultation with Rasp International.
 20+ years of Bharat EXIM experience. 500+ first-time exporters served.

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This checklist is a general guide based on FTP 2023-28 and DGFT notifications as of April 2026. Export rules evolve. Always verify current regulations at dgft.gov.in, icegate.gov.in, and cbic.gov.in before filing. For deal-specific advice, consult a qualified EXIM consultant.

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