

PARLEYS ON EASING RESTRICTIONS

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DPIIT consulting States to further ease curbs on retail, manufacturing

Inputs being passed on to Home Ministry, which will take the decision, say officials

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New Delhi, April 22

The Department for Promotion of Investments and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is holding consultations with State governments to discuss the extent to which retail trade and manufacturing can be eased further in the extended lockdown period.

“While the government has reversed the decision to allow e-commerce companies to trade in non-essentials, an attempt is on to identify, with the help of States, additional items that can be allowed to be retailed both by brick-and-mortar shops and through online platforms,” a government official told *BusinessLine*. Suggestions on easing some of the constraints faced in manufacturing activities, such as movement of workers, fixing of responsibility in case of infections and availability of movement passes and e-passes are also under discussion.

The official added that the DPIIT, which was holding reg-

ular meetings with State officials to assess the ground situation, was giving its feedback to the Ministry of Home Affairs. “The MHA will take all the decisions on easing of the lockdown based on inputs and the health situation,” the official said.

Essential services

The lockdown, which was extended till May 3, has been eased for manufacturing activities in rural areas and other specific zones from April 20 while certain essential services such as plumbing and electrical works have also been permitted subject to State permits.

On Tuesday, the MHA gave an order allowing shops to sell text books for students, fans and agricultural inputs.

“More items may follow depending on the kind of demands put forward by the States and the problems highlighted by them,” the official said.

Retailers and e-tailers may be sparring over level-playing field but both the sectors seem



Plea for expansion Retailers and e-tailers want the essential products list to be expanded to address evolving consumer needs

to be in agreement that essential product list under the extended lockdown needs to be expanded with the evolving consumer needs.

“The sector and the government need to closely partner with each other to initiate non-essential home delivery, non-essential retail in green or non-affected zones and shopping at malls which are equipped to maintain the highest safety standards,” said Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO, Retailers Association of India.

Not opening up non-essentials, which constitute half the total retailed items, can have serious implications on 20-25 million employees and 125 million people working in non-essential retail, he said.

In March, industry bodies had sent a list of essential items to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs which recommended that work from home enablers such as mobile phones, laptops, power banks, cable, mouse and repair services, infant products, small kitchen appliances, essential lighting items, innerwear, etc, be included in the list. Meanwhile, the durable industry also believes that besides fans, air conditioning products should be allowed to be sold.

“The impact on non-essential retail will be longer and financial support for the next 6-9 months will be needed for the sector to emerge from this crisis without permanent scars,” Rajagopalan added.