

If States say yes, e-comm players can sell all goods

Allow us also to home-deliver all items, demand brick-and-mortar retailers

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From next week, e-commerce companies are free to deliver all goods, including those not marked essential, provided they get the necessary permits from State government authorities, top officials have said.

Brick-and-mortar retailers, however, argue that allowing e-retailers to sell all products while restricting others to essential items is an unfair arrangement, and have made a case for allowing all retail shops to home-deliver all items.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has identified e-commerce as a commercial establishment that will be allowed to function in the lockdown period, now extended till May 3," an official involved in the framing of the guidelines told *BusinessLine*. "It is implied that they can deal in all items. The Centre does not have to list every product. Of course, necessary permits from State governments will be required — they can also implement stricter norms."

Each State is expected to shortly issue its own notifications following the MHA's revised guidelines.

Ready and waiting

Some of the leading e-commerce players are already readying their warehouses and staff to begin delivering items beyond staples, food and hygiene products.

A spokesperson for Amazon India said, "We are working closely

with all our partners - brands, manufacturers, sellers, small businesses and local shops - helping them offer the most-needed products to customers. While we will increase selection that customers can safely shop from their homes, we will also continue to ensure safety of our delivery associates and teams at our facilities."

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), however, has taken up cudgels on behalf of other retailers. It has written to Home Minister Amit Shah and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, pointing out that it will be "highly unfair" to allow e-commerce players to deliver all goods while not allowing their brick-and-mortar peers to do so.

The Retailers Association of India, too, has asked the government to allow all forms of home delivery across retailers. "Allowing this for all retailers, and not just e-commerce players, will facilitate

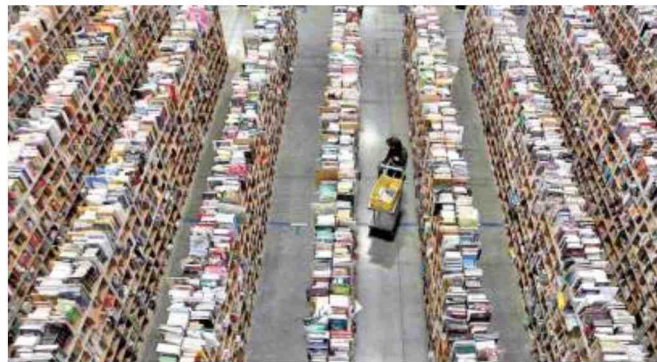
the availability of all goods at the doorsteps of customers," it said.

All eyes on State guidelines

Avneet Singh Marwah, Director and CEO, Super Plastronics Pvt Ltd, which sells Thomson-branded TVs exclusively online, said: "We will need to see how States implement the e-commerce guidelines in the coming days."

Already, Rajasthan and Maharashtra have issued clarifications saying they will allow the delivery of all goods, said a senior executive with a leading e-commerce company. "In the run-up to April 20, we expect other States also to issue their own guidelines," the executive added.

"We are already speaking to brands and our merchant partners so that they can go live with all categories on Paytm Mall," said Paytm Mall's Senior V-P Srinivas Mothey. "There will be a massive demand for electronics and mobile phones and accessories as many of our consumers have been reaching out to us with queries."



Coming soon Some e-commerce players are already gearing up to begin delivering items beyond food and hygiene products REUTERS