N1. IT ministry asks MHA to consider mobile products as essential goods after industry demand

Hindustan Times- 30 April 2020

... Aarogya Setu, a Covid-19 tracking mobile application developed by the MeitY's **National Informatics Centre**, *has been downloaded a record eight crore times. The mobile manufacturing industry, which is staring at an estimated loss of over Rs 20,000 crore because of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, has urged the MeitY for broadening the definition of essential goods*

The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has urged the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to consider broadening the definition of essential goods and include information and communications technology (ICT) products while deferring to a plea from the mobile manufacturing industry.

On Wednesday, IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that the ministry has taken note of mobile manufacturers' concerns and has drawn the MHA authorities' attention to them. The minister made the statement after holding a meeting with industry players, associations, and chambers of the electronics goods market.

The mobile manufacturing industry, which is staring at an estimated loss of over Rs 20,000 crore because of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, has urged the MeitY for broadening the definition of essential goods in a bid to allow online and offline sales of mobile device and networking products.

They have also pleaded with the ministry that all authorised sales and service centres of all electronics goods be allowed to resume their services.

Pankaj Mohindroo, chairman of the Indian Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA), said that the industry is facing a severe crisis due to the viral outbreak. "The industry is in deep trouble. Production losses are estimated to be around Rs 20,000 crore. All companies' plants are closed. Exports losses have gone up to Rs 2,500 crore and 2.5 crore mobile phones are lying unrepaired. Our meeting with the minister ended on a note of cautious optimism. Hopefully, the government will take immediate action by including the mobile manufacturing industry as an integral part of essential goods," Mohindroo said.

Prasad announced during the meeting that Aarogya Setu, a Covid-19 tracking mobile application developed by the MeitY's National Informatics Centre, has been downloaded a record eight crore times. The minister said that electronics factories should be opened in a calibrated manner.

Prasad has asked the electronics goods companies to ramp up production of medical electronics such as ventilators because of the equipments growing demand to treat Covid-19 patients. He also urged the IT sector to take advantage of three new government schemes that would be launched soon to attract global investments and strengthen the industry in a post-Covid-19 world.

"The minister said that the country's domestic demand is going to be huge, as the lockdown restrictions have increased people's dependence to transact via the digital medium. He asked the industry to increase exports to cater to growing global demands," said an official, who was present at the meeting.

Industry players told Prasad that major electronics manufacturing clusters in Noida, Greater Noida, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh are facing local restrictions because of their presence

in high-risk Covid-19 zones. Prasad, however, allayed their concerns and told them that he has already had a word with respective states seeking their cooperation.

Mobile phone manufacturers such as Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Foxconn, Lava, Wistron, Oppo, Flex, Sterlite, Micromax, Deki Electronics, Tejas Networks Ltd, and, Panasonic, etc., attended Wednesday's meeting, which took place a day after Prasad held talks with all his state counterparts.

Industry bodies, including the ICEA, Manufacturers Association for Information Technology (MAIT), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMeD), Telecom Equipment Manufacturers Association of India (TEMA), Ph.D. Chambers, and Indian Telephone Industry Limited (ITI), among others, also attended the meeting.

News Source: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/it-ministry-asks-mha-to-consider-mobile-products-as-essential-goods-after-industry-demand/story-wXAGKkKufrKuL5Uzn8pEGP.html

N2. NIC conducts 54,000 video conferencing sessions for better governance in lockdown

Express Computer. 30 April 2020
NIC has created a permanent video conferencing setup at the PM's residence and at the PMO at South Block. In its bid to ensure that the government functions smoothly, the Centre's, National Informatics Centre *(NIC), has facilitated over 54,000 video conferencing ...*

Coronavirus pandemic has not only forced the people to remain indoors but also created the necessity of adopting modern technology tools to connect with the world digitally.

Video conferencing has become the new normal under the lockdown, imposed due to coronavirus pandemic, that has wreaked havoc in the world and made people do 'work from home'.

In its bid to ensure that the government functions smoothly, the Centre's, National Informatics Centre (NIC), has facilitated over 54,000 video conferencing sessions of over 1,40,000 hours, involving 2,20,000 sites/users across the country held at all levels of governance during the lockdown.

NIC's video conferencing (VC) services are helping the government officials to connect effectively with each other, thereby ensuring minimum physical contact and exposure during stay-at-home duration.

The most noticeable among all is the video conferencing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi where he interacts with various heads of the governments, Union Territories and heads of international organisations, to get the latest updates on Covid-19. NIC has created a permanent video conferencing setup at the PM's residence and at the PMO at South Block. The VC facility is also available from over 2000 studios across the country including state and districts, district/UT and ministry/department at the Centre over NICNET.

NIC says that its staff did extensive groundwork to facilitate a series of video conferencing sessions for the PM from his residence during the lockdown period, to line up participants from diverse fields like healthcare, defence, home affairs, and disaster management among a plethora of others.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (MeitY) technical arm has got VC coordinators in every state, who facilitate VC services in these unprecedented times and ensure flawless, secure communication with password protection, unique conference ID to access VC services.

NIC through its technology driven digital solutions assists the government to carry out essential tasks during the lockdown and combat these challenging times.

NIC's wide range of services include video conferencing, e-office, networking, messaging, ServicePlus, web hosting (data centre, cloud) to the centre, state governments and district administrations.

The web based video conferencing setup is capable to facilitate virtual meeting among officers, either point to point or with multiple officials together.

The President and Vice President are also using this service to interact with Governors, Lt Governors and administrators of all states and Union Territories to discuss Covid-19 issues.

The healthcare sector is one of the key sectors where VC service has played a phenomenal role in the lockdown. The service is being used by the medical experts to provide necessary training to the

doctors, nurse, volunteers, and Asha workers to make them competent into helping in the nation's fight against the corona pandemic.

A number of dedicated Covid-19 web rooms have been created to facilitate VCs. These are being effectively used by senior government officials for monitoring and reviewing Covid-19 preparedness and planning in their respective regions. These web rooms help the government officials to connect effectively with each other using any electronic gadget from anywhere, anytime and ensure minimum physical contact and exposure.

NIC VC services are also used to launch and implement the new ICT initiatives under the Centre's flagship program — 'Digital India'. Cabinet ministers, state ministers and Chief Ministers used this service for the launch of applications like ePass, Dashboards to tackle Covid-19 situation. Recently, the Union Minister for Law & Justice, Communication and Electronics& IT along with Tamil Nadu CM, used this service to launch 'Covid-19 Self Registration and Early Response System'.

The service was also used by Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to unveil the special Covid-19 SUM hospital at Bhubaneswar in Odisha.

The Centre had launched web-based high definition VC services in 2011 for conference over desktops even in low bandwidth environments, including Wi-Fi and 4G public network. The Web (desktop) VC can be used from home using the laptop, desktop and mobile phones.

The video conferencing services are also being used extensively by the Supreme Court, High Courts /District Courts. Countrywide desktop video conferencing infrastructure was created under e-court project to facilitate HC/District Courts/Jails for hearing using VC technology. This project helps to make faster delivery of case, saves enormous amount of time and expenditure on unnecessary movement of jailer/police personnel, avoids unpleasant incident that can happen during the transit.

The Supreme Court passed guidelines for the functioning of the courts via video conference, to follow the social distancing guidelines while maintaining constitutional role and these sessions shall be supported by NIC VC service.

However, it must be noted that the service NIC's VC services are already in use by the High Courts of Odisha and Rajasthan, and some of the other states at various levels.

Lately, the VC service was made available in all courts, jails in Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh. The VC facilities also equipped the courts in the twin UTs with the capacity to receive evidence and submissions from witnesses or persons involved in court proceedings in circumstances where it would be expensive, inconvenient or otherwise not desirable for a person to attend a court in person.

News Source: https://www.expresscomputer.in/egov-watch/nic-conducts-54000-video-conferencing-sessions-for-better-governance-in-lockdown/54502/

N3. Margao: MMC's website logs out, locals can't pay taxes

Times of India- 30 April 2020

... the purpose on account of the lockdown, financial demands couldn't be sent to the NIC (National Informatics Centre) for updating the records," an official said.

MARGAO: Residents of Margao wishing to pay their house tax online haven't been able to do so as the facility for online payment is out of order. And as the municipality is working with skeletal staff, most services, including cash counters, aren't fully functional.

The Margao Municipal Council's (MMC) chief officer Ajit Panchwadkar maintained that the online facility on its website was functional, but attempts made by TOI to get to the online payments section proved futile.

'Clerical staff only go to office bi-weekly'

Senior MMC officials, however, acknowledged that there were certain administrative issues that have resulted in problems with online payments. "As the annual budget couldn't be passed as no meeting could be held for the purpose on account of the lockdown, financial demands couldn't be sent to the NIC (National Informatics Centre) for updating the records," an official said. "We brought the issue to the notice of the NIC, and we have been told that the problem is redressed and that house tax and trade tax payments can now be made online." The MMC's website is maintained by NIC.

However, several residents told TOI on Wednesday that the MMC's online payment facility was simply not working.

Sources said that people wishing to make cash payments too aren't able to do so, as cash counters are closed. While only senior officials are required to attend office on a daily basis, 'clerical staff are required to report to office only twice a week', sources said.

News Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/margao-mmcs-website-logs-out-locals-cant-pay-taxes/articleshow/75462869.cms

Telegraph India- 30 April 2020

"These RTIs were transferred to the National Informatics Centre*," he said, referring to the government's digital support arm. "It is inherently problematic that the ..*

The government on Wednesday made the "Aarogya Setu App" mandatory for all its employees — including outsourced staff — with a directive that each one leave for work only if the coronavirus-tracking app gives a "safe" or "low risk" status.

The decision to shift gears on Aarogya Setu's use, from appeals and encouragement to a diktat, has set alarm bells ringing among privacy advocates and cyber security experts who see it as more of a tool of mass surveillance that would in all likelihood outlive the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government's stated rationale in making the app mandatory for all its employees — including those working in autonomous and statutory bodies besides public sector undertakings — is to break the chain of transmission of the virus.

According to the office memorandum issued by the department of personnel and training, if the app shows a message that an employee has a "moderate" or "high risk" calculated on the basis of Bluetooth proximity (recent contact with an infected person), then he or she should not go to office but self-isolate for 14 days or till the status becomes "safe" or "low risk".

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) — a collective that champions digital rights — said the office memorandum issued required mandatory use. "Hence, there is a clear inference now that Aarogya Setu is not voluntary. This undermines the autonomy of users," it said.

"The scope of this order is not limited to Central Government offices and includes PSUs and autonomous statutory bodies. Hence, there are reasonable and foreseeable risks of Aarogya Setu being made mandatory for more classes of users beyond government employees," the IFF added in a statement.

While recognising the larger healthcare priorities in play right now as the world battles the pandemic, the IFF is of the view that the core defects in the design and implementation of the app cannot be overlooked. "Aarogya Setu has a direct impact on the privacy, cyber security of every user. It becomes significant for government employees whose each movement will be tracked. These issues cannot be accounted for by a privacy policy. It requires significant legal & technical changes," it said.

Apar Gupta, the IFF's executive director, told The Telegraph it was clear now that Aarogya Setu was being used as an e-pass system, much like the Chinese system where every movement is tracked as part of the strategy to combat the virus; thereby introducing a degree of coercion into what had started out as voluntary.

First, people were encouraged to download it, then it was showcased as an essential to be a corona-warrior — introducing an element of peer pressure — and now this, he said.

One of the core defects, according to Gupta, is that the health ministry is not involved in the app that is supposedly crucial to the health of Indians in the face of the pandemic.

Gupta said the IFF had filed multiple RTI queries with the health and family welfare ministry seeking information regarding the legislative framework, guidelines and governmental committees governing the use of the Aarogya Setu app, especially with regard to the safeguards in place to ensure user data protection and privacy.

"These RTIs were transferred to the National Informatics Centre," he said, referring to the government's digital support arm.

"It is inherently problematic that the Health Ministry does not have the relevant information as this raises serious concerns about the intention behind the collection of data by the app which has been publicised as an app providing essential health services," the Foundation said.

News Source: https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/coronavirus-outbreak-wake-up-and-smell-aarogya-brother/cid/1769118

M1.   Prasad exhorts electronics industry to explore new opportunities

Economic Times. 30 April 2020

Union Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday exhorted the electronics industry to explore the new opportunities that are arising out of adversity and make the country the global hub of electronics manufacturing.

New Delhi: Union Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday exhorted the electronics industry to explore the new opportunities that are arising out of adversity and make the country the global hub of electronics manufacturing.

During a meeting with electronics industry associations, chambers and prominent industry players, Prasad asked the electronics industry to take advantage of the opportunity and new schemes notified by the ministry, attract global investment and strengthen the sector. He emphasised the role of the medical electronics industry that is at a point of a complete turnaround.

The ministry officials presented the current Covid-19 situation and it was announced that the Aarogya Setu app has reached around 8 crore mobile phones in the country.

The efforts made by the the ministry to handle the situation in the short term, medium term & long term perspective to minimise the effect of Covid-19 were presented during the meeting.

It was also mentioned that major electronics manufacturing clusters are facing local restrictions because of their presence in high risk zones like Noida, Greater Noida, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh.

Officials also appreciated the support received from the industry in formulation of new schemes for promotion of electronics industry and SOP Guidelines for Covid-19.

The Union Minister apprised the industry that the requests regarding broadening the definition of essential goods to ICT products, retail/online sale of ICT essential goods, authorised sales and services of ICT essential goods has already been taken up with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Under the newly notified schemes of the MeitY to promote electronics manufacturing, the Central government will provide a financial support of Rs 50,000 crore for ESDM industry. Further, he mentioned that MeitY's initiatives like Aarogya Setu, Aadhar, Digital payments etc. have played a very important role in fighting against Covid-19.

Industry representatives presented the "Restart, Restore and Resurgence" model to capture the global opportunity in the Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector.

The majority of the participants appreciated the new trilogy of schemes of MeitY, namely, PLI, SPECS and EMC2.0; to support the electronics manufacturing sector. Industry raised various issues related to working of factories, logistics, export, supply chain disruption and demand shock due to Covid-19.

Prasad instructed the ministry officials to extend full support to the industry and liaison with states/UTs for reopening of electronics manufacturing facilities.

The meeting was attended by major associations i.e. Manufacturers Association for Information Technology (MAIT), Indian Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA), Electronic Industries Association of India (ELCINA), India Electronics & Semiconductor Association (IESA), Consumer Electronics & Appliances Manufacturers Association (CEAMA), Indian Printed Circuit Association (IPCA), Electric Lamp and Components Manufacturers Association of India (ELCOMA), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMED), Telecom Equipment Manufacturers Association of India (TEMA), PhD Chambers, and Indian Telephone Industry Ltd (ITI).

It was also attended by various Industry leaders in mobile, consumer electronics, telecom and other segments of electronics manufacturing such as Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Foxconn, Lava, Wistron, Oppo, Flex, Sterlite, Micromax, Deki Electronics, Tejas Networks Ltd, Panasonic.

News Source: https://telecom.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/prasad-exhorts-electronics-industry-to-explore-new-opportunities/75462833

Other IT News
30-April-2020

O1. Lengthy lockdown will kill more people than Covid: NR Narayana Murthy
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
Murthy said India could see more deaths due to hunger if it continues to stay at home.

O2. 4G Tender: Government raps BSNL, warns of action
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
The telecom carrier has mandated potential bidders to have at least Rs 8,000 crore revenue in the past two consecutive years, a condition that made local telecom companies frown.

O3. Side effects of Covid-19: Widespread adoption of telemedicine
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
From driving behavioral change to encouraging doctor-patient collaboration, telemedicine's time in the sun has proved beneficial as a collateral benefit of Covid-19.

O4. How hackers have been bypassing Google's security checks on Play Store for years
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
Research firm Kaspersky Lab has warned users about the ongoing campaign in which various malicious apps present on the Google Play Store spy and steal user data. A campaign called PhantomLace has been active from last four year and is still going on.

O5. Google launches website to help users avoid COVID-19 online scams
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
The website is currently available in Hindi and English, and the content will soon be rolled out in other regional languages.

O6. Andhra Pradesh: Govt to manage farmers' financial aid through kiosk network
Economic Times. 30 April 2020
The Andhra Pradesh government is going the technology way on a massive scale with the sole aim of enabling the farmers to utilize funds effectively