



## Vital IT network getting ready

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FOR all the excitement surrounding the launch of the India's biggest economic reform, there is a cloud of uncertainty surrounding the most critical piece of the new regime — the preparedness of the GST Network. While the government and the organisation's top management have repeatedly asserted that the network is ready, many, including industry bodies like Assocham and even some GST Suvidha providers, have warned otherwise.

Other issues like a pending security clearance from the Home Ministry and the planned late release of some vital software components are also raising concerns. The GST Network, a privately controlled company with 51 per cent private sector shareholding and 49 per cent government, is the nodal point where tax returns under the GST will be filed by every company with business over ₹20 lakh.

A great part of the concern industry representatives feel are driven by whether the IT infrastructure is completely ready. Assocham for example, raised the issue of a constantly 'down' GSTN server during the registration window. "This raises the huge question as to whether the IT infrastructure has been appropriately tested. It also raises questions as to whether this system can survive in the GST era when it had undergone maintenance during the second phase of migration when the traffic was restricted only to migration," Secretary General D S Rawat pointed out.

Other issues have been raised by the GST Suvidha Providers

(GSP) themselves. A group of 34 companies contracted to provide the IT infrastructure needed for GSTN, GSPs have complained about the tight schedule.

One GSP Express contacted said that while the government and GSTN have given them the specifications for the software, GSPs would "get the APIs for the software only as late as June 29. This will make it very difficult because we have to get it up and running before the first filing is made. It is good that there is an extension of deadline for the first two months."

APIs (application program interfaces) are used to develop software for GST related programs for businesses. While

the GSTN has been releasing API specifications in a staggered manner, without the live API to be provided on June 29, no software testing can be done. "This makes the window for software testing

very small and bugs are sure to come," said a senior GSP board member.

Another issue is the pending security clearance from the Home Ministry for GSTN, which is yet to come. However, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has dismissed that this would be an issue, brushing it off as a "procedural matter". Jaitley has also firmly ruled out any delay in the rollout and GSTN officials like chairman Navin Kumar have said that the GSTN is infrastructurally ready and that allegations of unpreparedness are "unfounded", pointing out that the network performed well all through the registration window, when 66 lakh business registered on it out of 80 lakh odd assesseees.



FRUITS, VEGGIES EXEMPT FROM CERTIFICATE

# Packaged Organic Food May Need Govt Stamp

FSSAI has invited suggestions to draft rules, formed first time for category

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**New Delhi:** Your organic rice, pulses and condiments would now be certified — with something more than the green label.

All packaged food marketed as organic would now need the stamp of approval of notified certification authorities, and must contain full and accurate information on their organic status, according to draft regulations of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

This is the first time FSSAI has formed regulations for this category of food, which is an expanding industry in an increasingly health-conscious India. According to a study by Assocham and TechSci Research, a non-government body, the current market (pulses and bulk food grains) is at \$500 million, up from about \$360 million in 2014.

"Organic food products are either grown under a system of agriculture without the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, or made from organically produced raw materials," the draft said.

Raw commodities such as fruits, vegetables and cereal grains that are not processed and marketed directly from a farmer/producer or producer organisations to the consumer do not need the certificate.



The industry welcomed the move. "This is a good first take. It will give reasons to consumers to have some more confidence. Going forward, there will surely be more refinement," said N Balasubramanian, CEO of 24 Mantra Organic.

The draft proposal offers two choices for items that claim to be organic: The produce must comply with the provisions of the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) administered by the central government. Alternatively, the items must comply with Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India), run by the ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, or any other system or standards set by the food authority.

The regulator has put the draft regulations in public domain for suggestions.