

Companies eye single-window for faster clearances

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NEW DELHI: The proposal by a company looking to set up a vehicle scrappage facility in Gujarat, which promises all clearances in 60 days, may be a test case for the National Single Window System that currently combines 500 approvals from 18 central agencies and 2,500 from 10 states that are currently on board.

There are at least two other companies looking to follow the lone applicant. The new window, which saw a soft launch a few weeks ago, has so far seen 27 entities register on the portal, which is supposed to be a one-stop shop for any entity looking to set up shop in the country.

“The government’s plan is to let anyone sitting in any part of the world find out all the approvals that may be required, both at the central and the state level, and then help them navigate through the process,” said Aditya Sharma, CTO at Invest India, which has put together the platform based on its own experience in hand-holding overseas companies that have invested in the country in the past.



But it took over a year for the government’s investment promotion agency to put in place the online mechanism. Sometime in April 2020, it put its own experience in dealing with government departments and the states to list out all the approvals that are required. This was then validated by the agencies.

The next challenge was to get the departments and the states to the platform. While several do not have online approval systems, there are others which are in the process of upgrading, while a third set such as the ministries of environment and corporate affairs has highly advanced platforms. As a result, Invest India is now in talks with several states and agencies such as the Drug Controller to put in place their platforms, some from scratch.

“Technology has been deployed in the past too. What we have sought to build is a dynamic platform where everyone can come on board and whatever changes are required in the forms or processes can be done fairly quickly,” said Sharma.

Just when the commerce & industry ministry, which is the agency driving Invest India, thought it was ready to launch the platform the second wave of Covid struck. And, then the glitches in the income tax portal, put together by Infosys, surfaced, prompting the ministry to seek more testing.

Even now, the platform is far from complete. To begin with the universe of states that are ready to join is only 14 at the moment, with 10 currently on board. Similarly, several central ministries are yet to come on board, although 14 are expected to join soon.

Some of the states missing currently —Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana and Tamil Nadu — are among the biggest investment destinations in the country. What has made it more complicated is that it is not just Nagaland that does not have a single window platform but even Delhi doesn’t have one. Others such as Haryana allow online filing, but the processing is offline.

So, all that investors can do is get the details online but go back to paper filing. The problem is more complicated for those looking to operate in multiple states. The National Single Window System allows investors to, say, fill a form for electricity connection in one state and the data is then used, along with the required documents, to file in other states too.

Even if other agencies come on board, the challenge will be to get officers to clear applications filed through this portal to be treated at par with those filed offline or directly with the department or the state. But with the status of applications tracked online, chances are officers may not be ready to take chances.