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Let's define essential list: Industry

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NEW DELHI: Industry leaders on Wednesday pitched for a universal list of essential services that should remain functional across states, a suggestion that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman promised to look into, while urging companies to watch the situation for the next few days before assessing the situation for the current quarter.

Sitharaman, who met representatives from Ficci and CII, was informed about some of the challenges being faced by businesses due to lockdowns imposed by states. Some of the industry captains suggested that there should be a common list of essential goods and services across states so that everyone doesn't come up with their own interpretation and list.

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For instance, the Centre must ensure that every state should mandate how insurance companies or non-banking finance

companies should function during these lockdowns. "Some states are allowing their offices to open, some are not," said an executive.

O₂ Supply To Ease After Imports: FM

- CII members say they are looking to produce 1 cr vials of Remdesivir against current capacity of 36 lakh
- Ficci pitches for support for MSMEs
- FM Nirmala Sitharaman says oxygen supply being monitored at district levels, situation will ease post imports
- FM appreciates industry's efforts in tackling Covid crisis

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Similarly, businesses want the government to ensure that the supply chain does not get affected, a challenge, which took a lot of effort to deal with when a nationwide lockdown was imposed in March 2020. For instance, states recognise that food processing is part of essential goods but they often do not consider the packaging facility to go with it or the printing on packets to be part of the entire chain, creating problems for businesses.

While Sitharaman reiterated that micro-containment zones and vaccinations would help tide over the crisis, she promised full support to industry.

“Industry is watching out and I would want you (industry) to keenly observe what is going on and we are together with the industry in (fighting) this (pandemic). I am sure all of us together will understand how best to now ramp-up and sustain the growth momentum, which all of us are keen to see between the last quarter and this quarter. I would request the industry to watch the next few days a bit more carefully, and then assess for yourself what this quarter is going to be like,” the FM said during the meeting with Ficci.

She also said that the government was making all efforts to ensure supply of oxygen, especially to a dozen “hard-stressed” states, with monitoring even at the district level.

“The government has exempted all inter-state movement of oxygen tankers, exempted from registration and permits, they can operate round the clock, and cylinder filling plants are operating 24 hours to fill the gaps with necessary safeguards,” Sitharaman said, while promising adequate supplies to industry once the medical requirement had met. She said the move to import will also ease the pressure.

Similarly, she said that Remdesivir capacity was being more than doubled from 36 lakh vials a month to 78 lakh vials with the government providing rapid clearances for new capacities, stopping exports, stopping exports of APIs and formulations used in the manufacture of this life saving drug, and allowing EoUs and manufacturers located in SEZs to also sell in the domestic market.