

IT companies allowed functioning with 50% staff during lockdown 2.0

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- **IT industry features in the list of select activities allowed to operate during lockdown.**
- **E-commerce companies have also been allowed to run.**

NEW DELHI: As the second phase of national lockdown began from today, the Narendra Modi government issued fresh guidelines allowing all IT, IT-enabled services (ITeS) and e-commerce companies to function from April 20. While the IT sector has been asked to work with upto 50% strength there is no such cap for e-commerce companies. Vehicles used by e-commerce operators are also allowed to run after getting the necessary permissions.

"Digital economy is critical to the services sector and is important for national growth. Accordingly, e-commerce operations, operations of IT and IT enabled services, data and call centres for government activities, and online teaching and distance learning are all permitted activities now," the revised guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) read.

Information technology and business process management (IT-BPM) companies have asked most employees to work from home with very few staff being present at locations to handle critical workloads.

IT and ITeS industry body Nasscom said BPM, GCC and parts of IT industry are operating at maximum 70% capacity utilisation in wake of the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus infection in the country. To cut down on salary costs, it has demanded that IT companies should be allowed to pay bench employees only minimum wages along with statutorily entitlements.

Nasscom had also urged the Centre last week to reimburse the payroll cost of employees who were on "paid leave" on account of any COVID-19 related lockdown measures till March 31, 2021. Nasscom has also sought other concessions and facilities including tax relief.

Besides allowing all agriculture related activities, the ministry has also allowed sectors like manufacturing, industrial units with access control in SEZs, export oriented units, industrial estates, townships to function from April 20.

The permitted industries have been asked to make arrangements for stay of workers within their premises or adjacent buildings for social distancing.

Exemptions given from April 20 will not be applicable in COVID-19 hotspots or containment zones, the guidelines said.