



NEWS ALERT

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Curbs On Import Of used E-Goods Via Charity Route

In a step taken to check dumping of used electronic items from other countries in India, the Centre has restricted the import of second-hand laptops, computers and other e-peripherals through the charity route. Until now, import of such items for donation to government schools, charitable hospitals, libraries and publicly-funded R&D projects had been free. While such imports were restricted (but not banned) in general as hazardous items, community information centres and adult education centres run by the government were allowed to bring them in freely. Such imports would now be allowed on a case-by-case basis.

Every Poor Counts: Block-Level Picture To Capture Real Suffering

The government will compile figures at the district and block levels to arrive at a more accurate identification of poor for better targeting of welfare schemes. So far, the poor in India have only been counted at the national and state levels. The Planning Commission has commissioned a study which will come up with these relevant numbers soon. The count will complement the new poverty lines calculated by the Tendulkar committee which has given poverty cut-offs at the national and state levels. The more disaggregated count is crucial as food and other entitlements for the below poverty line is determined by these cut-offs.

The food security act, which will ensure a given minimum quantity of cheap food to the poor, will be implemented based on the new poverty lines and the fresh BPL census to be carried out soon. The block-level exercise is part of the government's over-all efforts to improve the process of identifying the poor and ensuring that its welfare schemes are availed by those it is meant for.

It has already decided to abandon the old rural poverty line which threw up grossly inadequate numbers of rural poor for a new one suggested by a committee headed by S D Tendulkar. As per the new poverty line, the proportion of poor in the country (based on the data from the National Sample Survey figures of 2004-05) is 41.8% compared to 28.3% projected earlier.

The rural development ministry is also in the process of carrying out a fresh BPL census for identifying poor households as the present list is faulty and excludes some genuinely poor families while including a number of non-poor.

The government will exempt some equity purchases by leading private sector lenders such as ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank from being counted as foreign investment, but these firms will continue to sport the 'foreign bank' tag. Non-strategic equity investments from the banks' treasury operations or from the conversion of stressed corporate debt will not be counted as foreign investment, said a government official privy to the development. But the government is unlikely to make any change in its foreign investment policy that counts an entity as foreign owned if overseas investment in it exceeds 50%. Both ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank have more than 50% foreign investment, which make them foreign banks under the new investment norms. Overseas investors can hold up to 74% in private banks.

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