

# Govt signals easing of cattle rules

**SLAUGHTER** Centre plans new meat markets, says it will not push states to enforce norms

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**NEW DELHI:** The Centre will not push states to enforce new rules that made it virtually impossible to buy cattle for slaughter, and will allow separate meat markets so that exports don't hurt, a top government law officer said on Thursday.

Additional solicitor general P Narsimha's comments signal an accommodating stand by the government after critics slammed the new rules as trying to dictate food habits with a backdoor ban on beef.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court gave the government two weeks to say why the rules shouldn't be struck down as unconstitutional. The court is

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P NARSIMHA, ASG

hearing a bunch of petitions challenging the move that was put on temporary hold by the Madras high court two weeks ago.

"There is no beef ban in the country today... in view of the interim order by the Madras high court the central government is of the view that the rules are stayed across the country," Nar-

➤ We will put a positive action in place to address every concern and ensure that not even a single person has heartburn on the issue

HARSH VARDHAN, Union minister

simha told Hindustan Times.

"The government is in the process of inviting objections from stakeholders... It will also form meat markets keeping the demands of importers in view."

Environment minister Harsh Vardhan too said the government will look into all the complaints "in full depth and honesty".

The new rules have crimped supplies to the country's ₹1-lakh crore meat and allied industries and hurt mostly Muslim meat and leather traders who face mounting violence by increasingly assertive cow vigilante groups. Farmers have also been deprived of a traditional source of income from selling non-milch and ageing cattle.

"The reason I think the government is revisiting the rules is the economics of the meat industry. But the government needs to consult a livestock economist... someone who can tell the government about the impact of social policies on economic behaviour," said Himanshu Upadhayay, School of Development faculty, Azim Premji University.

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## Cattle trade

The controversial rules triggered protests and beef fests across India with several states—such as Kerala and West Bengal—saying they wouldn't implement the order as the government can't dictate food habits. Even some of the ruling BJP's own allies in the northeast—where beef is part of the daily diet—have raised objections.

One of the demands of the meat industry is the exclusion of buffalo from the list of animals governed by the new rules.

The petition, filed by an NGO, argues that the rules framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act are against public interest. The petition also noted that only state governments were empowered to make laws on cattle markets and fairs, which rendered the new rules arbitrary, illegal and unconstitutional.

The court will hear the case again on July 11.