



#### ● BATTLING CYBERCRIME

## Keeping data safe from prying eyes

India saw 457% rise in cybercrime in five years: Assocham-NEC study

FE BUREAU

**CRIME HAS BEEN** transforming itself to match the technological development happening across the globe. Since the invention of computers and internet, crime has evolved from its physical version to a digital one. Introduction of IT Act in India in 2000, amended in 2008, was the turning point where the government started focusing on the digital side of crimes, that is, cybercrime.

According to a recent Assocham-NEC study titled *Digital Policing - Smart Policing for Public Safety*, India has witnessed 457% rise in cybercrime incidents under the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 from 2011 to 2016. Between 2012-17, the number of internet users in India grew at a CAGR of 44% making it number three globally after USA and China. IT security firm Symantec ranked India among top five countries to be affected by cybercrime.

A robust three-tiered structure comprising Central Cyber Cell, District Cyber Cells and Police Station Cyber Teams across the entire jurisdiction of National Capital Territory has been put in place to deal with cybercrimes and to handle the growing menace of cyber frauds and online harassment, using technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Facial Recognition, IoT etc., to identify and catch suspects/criminals. However, implementation of these technologies is not on a national level but on a state level, which makes it very important for the central government to fund and support state level law enforcement agencies to utilise technologies to upgrade their policing methods, noted the joint study.

The study said that implementing new policing technologies will enable access to personal information, assisting in the delivery of personalised and better public services. It will help in fighting crime, protecting public security, reducing burden on businesses and citizens and tackling social exclusion through early intervention.

The government and multiple law enforcement agencies have taken the lead in curbing growing cyber crime. In addition to establishing cyber labs and training the officers, additional development in terms of detecting and resolving cyber crime has to be added in the current arsenal of the law enforcers.

# THE NEW FOOD FACTORIES INSIDE INDIA'S ORGANICS TRADE

On 1 January 2019, India joined a group of roughly 50 countries which mandates consumer-friendly labelling for organic products. Will it work?



(Left) The groceries section with organic items at a retail outlet. A file photo of customers buying organic vegetables at a farmers' market in Mumbai.

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In a bid to maintain good health, Manisha Bhardwaj, a software professional working in Noida, and her banker husband, Sakal Bhardwaj—both turning 40—have decided to bring some changes in their lifestyle and food habits. The couple has not only joined a gym to lose weight but has also completely switched to organic foods—ranging from organic fruits, vegetables, pulses to organic rice.

"Earlier, I was buying vegetables from a local vendor. But now, I order vegetables and fruits from websites that sell organic stuff," said Manisha Bhardwaj. "In grocery stores too, my first preference is organic foods now," she added.

The Bhardwaj family is not the only one undergoing this kind of transformation. Annu Gupta, a yoga and fitness trainer, also ensures that she buys all her vegetables and fruits from a local farm in Faridabad, which claims to be organic and supplies produce across Delhi-NCR.

Because of an emerging class of relatively affluent customers like Bhardwaj who have increasingly started to prefer grocery items that are deemed safe and healthy, organic food is a booming business. The market is niche and most Indians are still price conscious. But there is already a significant amount of money at

the organic status of the product. Also, any such product should carry a government quality assurance mark and the new Jaivik Bharat logo, which is meant to distinguish organic products from non-organic ones.

The regulations, which were pending for nearly 2 years, could transform a nascent and important market segment in significant ways. They would immediately have an impact on entities like Mother Dairy Fruit & Vegetable Pvt. Ltd which has been rapidly expanding its organics presence in retail—with the recent introduction of an organic line of products in over a 100 stores across Delhi-NCR alone. Beyond the slew of businesses which sell organic products, the country also has an estimated 800,000 organic farmers—the largest in the world. "The rules will regulate the organic food market in India as manufacturers will have to follow stringent regulations now onwards," said Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Things will take some time to settle down though, cautioned Agarwal, since not many people know about the new logo and the online sale of organics is still a big question mark.

Pesticide residue is also an issue since it is difficult to trace whether a food item that is claimed to be organic is actually free of pesticides all along the value chain. Besides, organic food which is marketed

through direct sales to the end-consumer by small producers or producer organizations (annual turnover less than ₹12 lakh) are currently exempt.

"Only time will tell how these [the new rules] are enforced," said Mukesh Gupta, director, operations, at Morarka Organic Foods Ltd. "Usually, the intention of the government

## MINT SHORT STORY

### WHAT

Driven by an emerging class of affluent customers, the organic food business in India with a significant amount of money at play. The market is projected to touch ₹10,000 crore by 2020.

### BUT

The expansion of the segment has its own challenges. There are manufacturers who claim they are selling organic products, but there is no guarantee that what is being claimed as organic is actually organic.

### NOW

India has mandated labelling for organic products. No person will be able to manufacture, pack, sell, market or otherwise distribute or import any organic food unless they label the package with complete and accurate information.

trolling fraudulent activities in the whole system. There are several farmers and manufacturers of food items that claim to be selling organic products. This has been a totally unregulated area in India. There is no guarantee that what is being claimed as organic is actually organic but with the new regulations in force, the organic market will be streamlined and properly regulated. Proper enforcement though may take some time," said Agarwal.

### ORGANICS TRACK RECORD

While customers in India have been purchasing organic foods largely based on trust, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has caught several

## A QUICK GUIDE TO NEW ORGANIC STANDARDS

► A genuine organic food item will have the 'Jaivik Bharat' logo

► The logo is an identity mark to distinguish organic products from non-organic ones

► Since the existing state of the food industry is far from perfect, a new label may not change much, at least for some time

► Guaranteeing high standards of quality would require an extensive testing regime, as health-conscious consumers, who invest their faith in organics do so assuming that the product is free of all pesticides

► The product may be fake organic if it

► Claims it is organic but does not have a 'Jaivik Bharat' logo

► Is procured from an unknown farm that doesn't comply with organic farming practices

► Is sold online by a firm that doesn't have an FSSAI food licence



जाविक भारत

Both non-organically grown and organically grown foods should be safe to consume. In India, most companies in the organic food business are located in Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities. The Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) in 2017 surveyed over 100 companies in the sector, located in major cities. According to the ICRIER report, nearly all the firms pointed out that there is a prevalence of fraud and malpractices in the organic business. These malpractices can be of different types, the most serious of which is mixing organic products with conventional products.

### THE PESTICIDE PROBLEM

It is precisely because the existing state of the food industry is far from perfect that the introduction of the new label may not change much, at least for some time. "In India, we are still at a nascent stage when it comes to food safety," said Pankaj Agarwal, co-founder and managing director, Just Organic, an organic food manufacturing company. "Organic is just another layer of safety, where not only the extrinsic safety but also the intrinsic safety of the food is to be ensured," he said.

But to guarantee such standards of quality would require an extensive testing regime, particularly because health-conscious consumers who invest their faith in organics do so assuming that the product is free of all pesticides. Given India's realities, that could hurt certain well-intentioned players.

"Despite precautions taken by organic producers, there could be traces of [pesticide] residue, given that neighbouring farmers might be using chemicals and the drift might land in the organic farmers' field," said Kavitha Kuruganti, convener of ASHA (Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture) and a safe food

this has become a lucrative business. fly-by-night operators, Kuruganti said. The ministry of agriculture survey in 2015 had found traces of pesticides in samples collected from various outlets across India including organic ones. Litigating consumer points on quality would become significant issue for the regulators.

### POSSIBLE WIN-WIN

But despite these challenges, the organic business could emerge as a win-win for consumers, farmers, as well as the industry. Though the organic market is expanding at the fastest rate in the food segment, opportunities are also emerging in textile and beauty and personal care. The food segment alone is expected to grow by 25-27% every year. While the early phase of growth was fuelled by the export market, now we are seeing the domestic market catching up, she said.

"The higher price that we pay for organic food is certainly worth the money spent for various reasons. If you don't pay more, you might end up paying far more for medical treatment. Secondly, food has always been kept cheaper than it ought to be, and that has been a major source of several problems for farmers," Kuruganti said. "When we make a paradigm shift toward organic farming and food system, there is no reason to repeat the past mistake of keeping food cheap," she added. This, then, could be one way out of the agrarian crisis, supported by consumers.

"The people who buy organic foods in India are mostly health-conscious consumers who go for organic food even though they pay more expensive than conventional food. They do not mind paying a little extra for the comfort of knowing that they and their families are safe from the perils of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and a safe food

