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## **City to see digitisation of ration cards by March**

Pune and Hyderabad will be the first cities in the country to start computerised fairprice shops. In Pune, the project of digitisation of ration cards for all 1,100 shops will start by March next year, said Apurva Chandra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India.

After a meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday, Chandra said an “expression of interest” will be drawn out for the purpose.

“We have just discussed the project. We were supposed to get the project rolling in August but due to the polls, we postponed the plan. The project will start next year in both Pune and Hyderabad,” he said.

Private companies will be roped in to give an unique identification number that will keep a check on malpractice in fairprice shops. “Earlier we had thought of a pilot project in Pune, but now we have decided to start it for the entire city. The Expression of Interest (EOI) is being drawn out for the companies,” he said

On his earlier visit to Pune, he had announced that the cards could be

also used to get domestic LPG cylinders. He said the smart cards are based on the Unique Identity Number concept for consumers of PDS kerosene and domestic LPG in the country.

The pilot project was to be launched in Pune and the experience and information garnered during the exercise was to be shared with the Unique Identification Number Project to be launched in the country.

The smart cards would work as unique identification cards and form an important database for the UID project. The proposed system would enable fairprice shop owners to issue kerosene and track the stock real time. The city has nine lakh registered ration cardholders and nearly 12 lakh LPG connections in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad areas. Earlier, the idea was to test the system at one fairprice shop and replicate it in the remaining shops.

However, a district officer said it would be rolled out simultaneously for the entire city. The project was to start on August 15, but was delayed due to the elections. "We should be able to roll it out by mid-March," Chandra added.