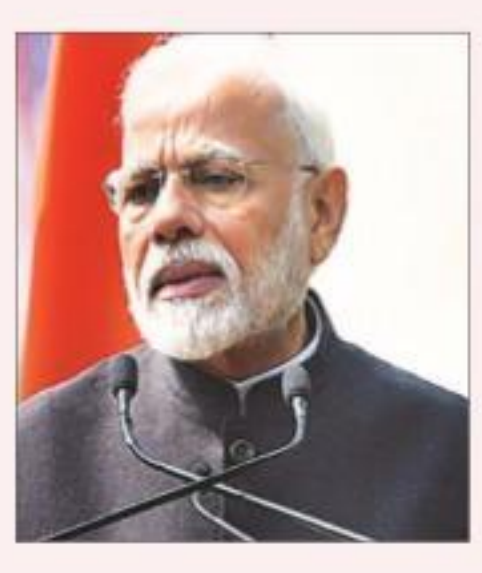


PM seeks nation's forgiveness for tough decisions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi on Sunday sought the nation's forgiveness for imposing a monumental lockdown on the country, saying it was a question of life and death and expressed confidence that "we will definitely win the battle" against the coronavirus menace that has claimed 25 lives in India so far.



was the "only way left".

In his monthly Mann ki Baat radio address to the nation, Modi also praised the front-line workers in the fight against the virus as well as countless workers in the essential services who are ensuring the country doesn't come to a complete standstill in the 21-day lockdown announced on March 24.

"I seek forgiveness ... I strongly feel, you will forgive me. When I see my poor brothers and sisters, then I definitely feel that they would say what kind of prime minister is this who has put us in this trouble. I specially seek their forgiveness. You had to undergo problems. I understand but there is no other way out to fight the coronavirus for a country with a population of 130 crore," he said. "But this is a battle for life and death."

According to the health ministry update released an hour before Modi's address, India has recorded a total of 979 cases and 25 deaths so far.

The prime minister said looking at what the world is going through, this (lockdown)

"After all, the safety of you and your families has to be ensured. Once again, I apologise for any inconvenience, any hardship caused to you," he said.

To drive home his point, Modi referred to an ancient Indian adage that means an illness and its scourge should be nipped in the bud because when it becomes incurable with passage of time its treatment is very difficult.

He also described as "unfortunate" incidents where some of those suspected coronavirus carriers under home quarantine are being ill-treated or ostracised by others.

"I am greatly pained to learn of these instances. This is very unfortunate. We need to understand that in the current circumstances, we need to ensure social distance, not human or emotional distance. These people are not criminals," he said.

He pointed out that these people are merely suspected to be infected with the virus.

● AFTER LOCKDOWN

PMO sets up high-level panels to restore normalcy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

THE PRIME MINISTER'S Office (PMO) on Sunday constituted 10 different high-level committees to suggest measures to ramp up healthcare, put the economy back on track, reduce pain and misery of people as quickly as possible post the 21-day lockdown imposed to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

These committees looking after various aspects will work under the overall guidance of PK Mishra, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, sources said.

The initiative is being viewed as a proactive step by the government to deal with multiple challenges, which the outbreak of pandemic Covid-19 has posed and made the country to deal with emergency situation, they said, adding these groups will also work on strategy for restoring normalcy in their respective sectors, including healthcare, in the shortest possible time frame.

The panel on the 'Economy and Welfare' headed by economic affairs secretary Atanu Chakraborty has been tasked to address the concerns of various sectors, including both formal and informal segments of the economy — hit hard by the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent lockdown.

The panel is expected to suggest various relief measures to put economy back on



track as soon as possible, the sources said.

Special emphasis will have to be welfare schemes for the poor who have suffered a lot on account of the lockdown, they said, adding poor and vulnerable section of the society has been the key focus of the government and top priority will be given to deal with the challenges before them in the coming days.

Besides, two other working groups under the leadership of NITI Aayog member VK Paul and environment secretary CK Mishra will work on preparedness for medical emergency, seamless supply of medicine, medical equipment and hospital availability.

They have been entrusted with the task of mapping of hospitals across the country

and medical facility of public sector undertakings and other government agencies, including police forces and Army, are roped in to deal with emergency situation post lockdown.

Already many agencies, including government school, universities and Railways have committed for setting up isolation ward. In addition to this, the sources said, the panel would also focus on augmentation of trained medical professionals and capacity building.

Suggestions are also solicited on increasing capacity for manufacturing of ventilators and other medical equipment. Research and Development in the medical field is another focus area for the panel, they added.

Committee under VK Paul

Peak power demand slips 28% to 118 GW since March 20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

PEAK POWER DEMAND in the country dipped over 28% to 117.76 gigawatts (GW) on Saturday compared to 163.72 GW on March 20, showing the impact of nationwide lockdown amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

National Load Dispatch Centre data showed that in actual terms, the peak power demand met has come down by about 46 GW since March 20, which would further aggravate the ailing electricity generators whose outstanding dues stand ₹88,311 crore as of January this year.

The peak demand met was down mainly due to lower demand from industry and state power distribution companies (discoms) across the country due to the lockdown to fight against Covid-19.

According to the NLDC data, the peak demand met was 163.72 GW on March 20, which came down to 161.74 GW on March 21. This dropped sharply to 135.20 GW on March 22 due to a call for 'Janata Curfew' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The data also showed that the peak demand met improved slightly to 145.49 GW on Monday but fell again to 135.93 GW on Tuesday and subsequently to 127.96 GW on Wednesday. The power demand met further fell sharply to 120.31 GW on Thursday and to 115.23 GW, indicating continuous slump in demand.



However, there was little improvement on Saturday as the peak demand met rose slightly to 117.76 GW.

The peak power demand met is the actual highest energy supply during the day across the country. In view of the Covid-19 outbreak, the government has imposed lockdown for three weeks from March 25.

"This slump in power demand is unlikely to improve drastically till middle of next month. Besides, the government has asked the power generators to keep on supplying power even if they don't pay for next three months. More, the penalty on late payment has been removed till June 30. In these circumstances, there would be pressure on power generating firms to ensure uninterrupted power supply 24x7," an industry source said.

The spot power price touched a three-year low of 60 paise per unit for supplies on Wednesday on the Indian Energy Exchange due to low demand.

The average spot power price is hovering around ₹2 per unit at electricity exchanges. Peak power demand met was 168.7 GW in March 2019.

Covid-19: DGCA suspends alcohol tests for all aviation personnel, including pilots

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

AVIATION REGULATOR DGCA on Sunday said it was temporarily suspending breath analyser alcohol test for all aviation personnel, including the pilots, hours after an Air India union made the request saying these tests could aid the spread of coronavirus.

The decision came hours after SpiceJet said that one of its pilots, who did not fly any international flight in March, had tested positive for the virus.

The DGCA said in its order that due to the "extraordinary" circumstances over Covid-19 and directions issued by the high courts in Delhi and Kerala, the breath analyser tests for "all aviation personnel" were temporarily suspended "at all airports till further orders".

"Every aviation personnel, who is reporting for duty, is required to submit an undertaking in respect of the fact that he or she is not under the influence of alcohol and that he or she has not consumed alcohol/psychoactive substance in last 12 hours from the time of reporting for duty," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) stated.

The regulator noted that if the undertaking submitted by the aviation personnel is violated, his or her licence or approval will be suspended for a period of three years.

It also said that airlines



The decision came hours after SpiceJet said that one of its pilots, who did not fly any international flight in March, had tested positive for the virus

should carry out random checks for pilots and cabin crew members to ensure the compliance of Section 24 of Aircraft Rules, 1937, which talks about prohibition on consumption of psychoactive substances by aviation personnel.

As per the rules, all aviation personnel such as pilots, ground handling staff and air traffic controllers have to undergo breath analyser (BA) tests from time to time.

Earlier in the day, the Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA) had told the DGCA through a letter that "continuing BA Tests in these circumstances is extremely dangerous" as the machine for the test remains the same and droplets or aerosols of infected pilots may infect the healthy.

The letter from the ICPA,

which is a union of Air India's pilots who fly on domestic routes and short-haul international routes, came after SpiceJet said one of its pilots has tested positive for the virus.

As India is currently under a 21-day lockdown to curb the spread of the virus, all domestic and international commercial passenger flights have been suspended till April 14.

However, carriers such as Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet have been permitted by the DGCA to fly special flights to transport test kits, medicines, relief materials and Indians coming from abroad for quarantine.

Approximately, 1,000 people have tested positive and 25 people have died due to the coronavirus till now in India, according to Union health ministry data.

Coronavirus: Govt says contribution to PM-CARES Fund to qualify as CSR spend

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

CONTRIBUTION BY CORPORATES to PM-CARES Fund will be considered as social welfare spending under the companies law, the government has said amid ongoing efforts to deal with the situation arising out of the coronavirus outbreak.

Under the companies law, certain classes of profitable entities have to shell out at least 2% of their three-year annual average net profit towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities in a particular fiscal.

"...any contribution made to the PM-CARES Fund shall qualify as CSR expenditure,"

corporate affairs minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a tweet on Sunday.

The corporate affairs ministry, which is implementing the companies law, has issued a memorandum clarifying that the money donated by corporates to the fund would be considered as CSR expenditure.

The government has set up the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES Fund) which would be utilised to deal with any emergency or distress situation like those in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

"The PM-CARES Fund has been set up to provide relief to those affected by any kind of emergency or distress situa-



tion. Accordingly, it is clarified that any kind of contribution made to the PM-CARES Fund shall qualify as CSR expenditure under the Companies

Act, 2013," the ministry said in the memorandum issued on Saturday.

The memorandum comes less than a week after the min-

istry said that spending by corporates to deal with the coronavirus outbreak would be considered as CSR activity under the companies law.

CSR funds could be utilised for various activities related to Covid-19, including those relating to preventive healthcare and sanitation.

Under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, every company having net worth of at least ₹500 crore, turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or a minimum net profit of ₹5 crore during the immediate preceding financial year has to make CSR expenditure.

The number of coronavirus cases in the country has climbed to 979 and 25 people have lost their lives so far.

Pradhan talks to Saudi peer about crude, LPG supplies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

OIL MINISTER DHARMENDRA Pradhan on Sunday discussed global oil market developments and sourcing LPG with Saudi energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman to ensure uninterrupted fuel supplies.

Indian refineries have cut run-rates in view of slump in fuel demand resulting from an unprecedented nationwide lockdown that has shut businesses, suspended flights, stopped trains and driven most vehicles off-road. But the

reduced run-rates of refineries also means lower output of LPG. Cooking gas demand has, however, seen a surge and India is relying on imports to keep supply lines going. Saudi not just supplies crude oil to India but also is its biggest LPG source.

"Had a video conference with HRH Prince Abdulaziz, Saudi Minister of Energy and Mr Amin Nasser, President & CEO @Saudi_Aramco. We discussed about the global oil market developments and on uninterrupted LPG supplies from Saudi Arabia to India," Pradhan tweeted.

IBBI eases timelines within 330-day deadline for insolvency process

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

PROVIDING LEEWAY TO resolution professionals amid the coronavirus outbreak, IBBI has relaxed the timelines to be followed under the overall 330-day deadline for completion of insolvency resolution processes.

Against the backdrop of the 21-day lockdown to curb spreading of coronavirus infections, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has amended certain regulations. The lockdown period would not be counted for the purpose of

timelines set under the IBBI regulations for Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), according to a notification.

"Every activity in a CIRP has a timeline. In view of the national lockdown, it may not be possible for an insolvency professional to continue to conduct process, for members of committee of creditors to attend the meetings, and for prospective resolution applicants to prepare and submit resolution plans, within the specified timeline.

"We have therefore amended regulations to provide

that the period of lockdown shall not be counted for the purpose of timeline for any activity in a CIRP," IBBI chairperson Ms Sahoo told PTI on Sunday.

IBBI is a key authority in implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

Sahoo also clarified that the flexibility is subject to overall time limit available under the Code. There is a deadline of 330 days for completion of a resolution process. There is no change to timelines given in the Code and it is "relaxation of timeline given in the regulations," he noted.

Shipping lines not to impose container detention charges on EXIM shipment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

TO MAINTAIN PROPER supply lines at seaports and facilitate unhindered cargo movement, the government on Sunday asked all shipping companies not to collect any detention charges on export-import (EXIM) cargo in the wake of the situation arising due to coronavirus outbreak.

Shipping companies have been asked not to levy any container detention charges on import and export shipments till April 14.

The decision was taken after delays were reported in evacuation of goods from ports due to disturbance in the downstream services.



"In order to maintain proper supply lines at the Indian seaports the shipping lines are advised not to impose any container detention charge on import and export shipments for the period from March 22, 2020 to April 14,

Shipping companies have been asked not to levy any container detention charges on import and export shipments till April 14

2020 (both days inclusive)," an advisory issued by the directorate general of shipping said.

During this period, shipping lines are also advised not to impose any new or additional charge, it said, adding the decision is purely a one-time measure to deal with the present disruptions caused by spread of Covid-19.

"The government is taking all-round actions to fight against Covid-19 and its nega-

tive impacts on the economy," said shipping minister Mansukh Lal Mandaviya.

Due to delays in evacuation of cargo, some cargo owners have either suspended their operations or are finding it difficult to transport goods or complete the paper work.

The government has imposed a complete lockdown in the country for a period of 21 days till April 14 in the wake of outbreak of deadly coronavirus.

India has 12 major ports — Kandla, Mumbai, JNPT, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Ennore, VO Chidambarnar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata including Haldia — which handle approximately 61% of the country's total cargo traffic.

Labour ministry allows EPF withdrawal amid lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, March 29

THE LABOUR MINISTRY has allowed over 6 crore subscribers of retirement fund body EPFO to withdraw an amount not exceeding their three months basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account in view of the lockdown to fight Covid-19.

Besides, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) also introduced online claim settlement facility without manual intervention on Saturday morning for all KYC complaint subscribers during the lockdown.

The ministry has issued a notification in this regard on March 28, 2020, to amend the

Over 6 crore subscribers of the retirement fund body can withdraw an amount not exceeding their three-month basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account

Employees' Provident Fund Scheme 1952, a labour ministry statement said.

The decision is taken in view of lockdown across the country to fight Covid-19. The notification permitted non-refundable withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or up to 75% of the amount standing to the credit

of their EPF account, which ever is less, the ministry said.

The Covid-19 has been declared pandemic and therefore employees working in establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952 are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable advance.

A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been inserted in the EPF scheme, 1952.

The amended Employees Provident Fund (Amendment) scheme, 2020 has come into force from March 28.

Following the notification, EPFO has issued directions to its field offices for promptly processing any applications received from members to help them fight the situation.

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