

TESTING TIMES

'Lack wherewithal to do tests free of cost'

They expect govt to come up with modalities for sustainable Covid-19 testing

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Humanitarian in intent but impractical to implement — I fear testing will plummet. — KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW, CHAIRPERSON, BIOCON

WITH THE SUPREME Court directing that private labs should conduct coronavirus tests free of cost, many laboratories expect the government to "come up with modalities" so that they can sustain testing facilities in the wake of burgeoning demand in the country.

Dr Arjun Dang, CEO of Dr Dangs Lab, said, "We endorse the Supreme Court's judgment, which aims at increasing accessibility to Covid-19 testing and to make it affordable for the common man".

The whole process of testing for coronavirus also entails immense infection control measures like personal protective equipment, viral transport media and the need to keep sanitation and employee safety in mind at every step, he said.

"Private labs are barely able to recover costs at the government-mandated cost of ₹4,500. Keeping this in mind

we hope the government comes up with modalities so that testing in private laboratories remains sustainable," said Dang.

Dang said his lab is currently following the apex court's order and doing the test free of cost while awaiting further clarity from the government.

Agreeing with Dang, Dr A Velumani, chairman and managing director of Thyrocare Technologies, is of the opinion that "private labs do not have the wherewithal to do this costly test free of cost".

"It is duty of the government to reimburse the costs and we do not mind working without profits," he said. Velumani said, the court in its order, has indicated that, "government should find a way and we are awaiting for the directions". "If

the government doesn't subsidise, it would be a huge setback in the fight against Covid-19," he said.

In a big relief to the poor, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed that private labs should conduct coronavirus tests free of cost, observing they need to be philanthropic in the hour of national crisis.

The government had fixed ₹4500 for private labs for screening and confirmation tests for Covid-19. The top court in its interim order said the Centre should immediately issue directions for carrying out free Covid-19 tests in NABL accredited labs or any agencies approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

It took note of the Centre's submission that government laboratories are conducting these tests free of cost. A day after the court ruling, Biocron chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw on Thursday said it is "impractical" to implement the Supreme Court's order to make all coronavirus tests free, expressing concern that it will lead to plummeting of tests as private labs cannot run their business on credit.

Mazumdar-Shaw, however, offered a contrarian view to that of the apex court through her tweets. "Humanitarian in intent but impractical to implement — I fear testing will plummet," she said referring to the order of the apex court. She described the order as "a judgement that will severely affect testing. Pvt labs simply cannot be expected to run their businesses on credit".

Enough stock of essential goods for lockdown period, assure retailers

THE RETAILERS ASSOCIATION of India (RAI) on Friday assured that there is enough stock of grains, pulses and other daily essentials for the lockdown period and beyond.

Asking citizens not to resort to panic buying, the retailers body said the entire government machinery at the central, state- and local-levels has been working relentlessly along with the RAI and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth supply of essentials.

"There is enough stock of grains, pulses and other daily essentials for the lockdown period and beyond. There is no need for citizens to believe otherwise and engage in panic buying," the RAI said in a statement

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The RAI further said it, along with its members, is working closely with various state governments and with the Centre to resolve supply concerns with regards to essentials as they arise at the earliest.

"All stakeholders are working at war footing with the sole intent of ensuring citizens are safe and comfortable and do not face any hardships for accessing daily essentials," RAI said.

—PTI

Paytm launches corona insurance policy jointly with Reliance General

FE BUREAU Mumbai, April 10

PAYTM ON FRIDAY announced the launch of novel coronavirus insurance policy in collaboration with Reliance General Insurance. The general insurer, which had launched a dedicated Covid-19 Protection Insurance cover few days ago, is being offered a group platform with a wide range of sum-insured options from ₹25,000 to ₹2 lakh.

In the past, insurers likes Star Health and Allied Insurance, ICICI Lombard General Insurance and Digid Insurance had launched dedicated insurance covers for the viral disease. However, Reliance General Insurance offers 'Travel Exclusion Removal', which is an add-on that offers waiver to the 45-day travel exclusion policy and enables the insured to claim 100% of the sum-insured if they test positive.

Rakesh Jain, ED & CEO at Reliance General Insurance, said, "Looking at the current crisis, Covid-19 Protection Insurance is a much-needed product

Govt to give life cover of up to ₹35L to FCI officials, labourers: Paswan

THE UNION MINISTER for consumer affairs, food & PD Ram Vilas Paswan on Friday announced a life insurance cover of up to ₹35 lakh per person to over 1 lakh FCI officials and labourers in case they succumb to Covid-19 within six months of performing duty from the day of lockdown on March 24. State-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the Centre's nodal agency engaged in procurement of

food grain at a minimum support price (MSP) directly from farmers and distributes the same at a subsidised rate to over 81 crore ration card holders in the country.

Currently, there is a provision to provide compensation to family members of FCI officials in case of death due to terrorist attack, blast, mob violence and natural disasters. However, regular and contractual labourers are not included. —PTI

offers 100% of the sum insured in lumpsum on positive diagnosis of Covid-19 and 50% of the sum-insured during quarantine. Anyone aged between 3 months and 60 years can avail the policy

On the other hand, the group health cover offered by ICICI Lombard is priced at a premium of ₹149 per employee and provides a sum insured of ₹25,000, including value added benefits such as health assistance and CHAT/virtual assistance, teleconsultation and ambulance assistance.

The products by Reliance General Insurance and ICICI Lombard will be offered on the group platform. While individuals can buy Star Novel Coronavirus Insurance Policy by Star Health and Allied Insurance, a benefit policy to cover all those who test positive for the current pandemic novel coronavirus and require hospitalisation. The Star Novel Coronavirus policy is available under two sum insured options of ₹21,000 and ₹42,000 at premiums of ₹459 plus GST and ₹918 plus GST, respectively.

Reimburse staff lockdown 'paid leave': Nasscom urges govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Hyderabad, April 10

IT AND ITES industry body Nasscom has urged the Centre to reimburse the payroll cost of employees who were on "paid leave" on account of any Covid-19 related lockdown measures till March 31, 2021, among other concessions and facilities.

According to a memorandum, covering issues related to various ministries also, submitted to finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the apex body of the Indian IT industry also urged the government to exempt IT-ITeS establishments from payment of statutory bonus for FY 2020-2021 and allow cross utilisation of SEZ and STPI locations for business continuation planning (BCP) scenarios.

The body requested the FM to allow expenses incurred by companies in enabling work from home (WFH) for its employees as an eligible business expense.

Telecom infra firms ask BSNL to clear ₹1,500-cr dues at once

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New Delhi, April 10



TELECOM INFRASTRUCTURE COMPANIES have asked state-run BSNL to clear dues totalling ₹1,500 crore on urgent basis, saying they are unable to meet critical expenses necessary for maintaining the telco's network. The non-payment, the firms said, so far has already resulted in mobile service outage at various parts of India.

The group of eight infrastructure firm under the aegis of industry body Tower & Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA) has written to BSNL chairman and managing director P K Purwar on Thursday, seeking clearance of dues as they are facing problem in paying for electricity, diesel, batteries procurement, etc for maintaining the telecom PSU's network which led to service outage in several areas.

"The situation has become highly critical now with total outstanding dues from BSNL

amounting to approximately ₹1,500 crore, which has been pending for long. We are looking forward to an urgent intervention and support from the CMD, BSNL in the matter," TAIPA director general TR Dua said. He said the telecom infrastructure companies are already facing financial woes and working hard to manage networks during the ongoing lockdown period. A query sent to BSNL in this regard did not elicit any immediate response.

TAIPA has sought urgent intervention on behalf of Indus Towers, ATC Telecom Infrastructure, Bharti Infratel, Tower Vision, Sterlite Technologies, Space Telesink, Applied Solar Technology and Coslight India. Of the total, BSNL owes ₹606.4 crore to mobile tower firm ATC, ₹488 crore to broadband technology firm Sterlite Technologies, ₹127 crore to Indus Towers, ₹118.2 crore to Tower Vision and ₹100 crore to Bharti Infratel.

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