



WORLD P6
**WUHAN MARKS SOMBRE
TOMB SWEEPING FESTIVAL**

WORLD P6
**FACE MASKS RECOMMENDED
BUT WON'T WEAR ONE: TRUMP**



PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM BENGALURU, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND NEW DELHI

OPEC+ MEETING DELAYED ON NEW SAUDI, RUSSIA RIFT

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia, or Opec+, delayed a meeting aimed at ending the oil price war, as Riyadh and Moscow traded barbs about who's to blame for the collapse in oil prices. The alliance was tentatively aiming to hold the virtual gathering on April 9 instead of Monday as it previously intended, a delegate familiar with the matter said. Producers needed more time for negotiations, said another. Saudi Arabia and Russia had indicated they wanted other oil countries to join in any output cuts, complicating efforts to call a meeting.

ECONOMY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS P5 HDFC Bank's advances rise 21%, deposits 24%

The country's largest private sector lender, HDFC Bank, in its quarterly update said its advances grew 21 per cent in the quarter ended March 31 (Q4FY20) while its deposit base grew 24 per cent in the same period. In absolute numbers, the bank's advances aggregated to ₹9.93 trillion in Q4FY20 compared to ₹8.94 trillion in Q4FY19.

WORLD P6 After gasoline, jet fuel, virus may hit diesel next

Diesel has risen in value relative to crude oil in recent weeks. But its star is starting to fade, with its premium to crude oil recently dropping in trading hubs around the world. As refiners try to maximise output of the fuel and with only a finite amount of land-based storage, it may be just a matter of time before the market starts to collapse.

ECONOMY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS P4 I-T dept extends time for filing TDS forms

The Income-Tax Department has allowed individuals to submit Form 15G and 15H for the current fiscal year after June 30, to mitigate the hardship of people. Forms 15G and 15H are filed by persons whose incomes are below the taxable threshold. Exemptions can be claimed from tax deduction at source on interest income.

CORONAVIRUS EFFECT P3 IAS officers call for ₹5-10 trn spending

The government needs to increase fiscal spending on health infrastructure to around ₹5-10 trillion and ensure supply of essential commodities to the poor and vulnerable, a group of senior IAS officers and district collectors has said in a survey to the Prime Minister's Office. They also suggested an extension of the lockdown.

IN DEPTH Motives behind a massacre



In 1919, British soldiers opened fire at unarmed people at a park in Amritsar and killed hundreds of them. Now, a book by historian V N DATTA throws light on the intentions behind the shooting

ICMR for rapid tests in Covid hotspots as infections zoom

Daily tests doubled to 10,000; about 1,000 cases with Tablighi links reported: Govt

SOHINI DAS & PTI
Mumbai/New Delhi, 4 April

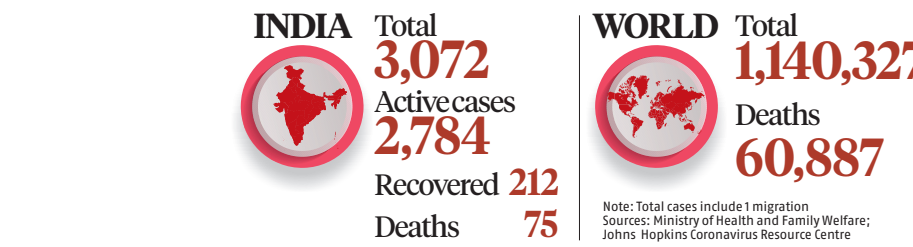
As the number of coronavirus deaths and active cases rose sharply on Saturday, India's apex health research body issued an advisory saying containment centres across the country start conducting rapid antibody tests to detect the infection. These tests use a blood sample and give the result within minutes.

Cases of the pandemic crossed the 3,000-mark in the country after a record jump in infections in the past 24 hours, while 13 new fatalities took the death toll to 75, the Union health ministry said. The active cases stood at 2,784, while 212 people were either cured or discharged, it said.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has already approved a bunch of rapid test kits for launch. While some of them belong to Chinese manufacturers, others are approved by the US and EU authorities. On Saturday, the Council said cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) to be monitored in health facilities and all people symptomatic of ILI to be tested using rapid antibody tests. This may be followed by a real-time PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test using throat or nasal swabs. The ICMR also recommended that even if the antibody test was negative, there should be a follow-up test after 10 days.

The health ministry admitted that clusters of Covid-19 had appeared in many states, including Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Karnataka, Telangana, and the Union Territory of Ladakh.

22,000 RELATED TO TABLIGHI QUARANTINED



Relatives of a person, who was detected Covid-19 positive in Guwahati's Spanish Garden residential complex, being taken to a quarantine centre in Assam

GOVT'S CONTAINMENT PLAN

- Social distancing, quarantining, isolation
- Extensive contact tracing and testing
- Active surveillance of clusters
- Operationalising surge capacities of hospitals
- Deployment of rapid response teams
- Psychosocial support

Twitterati push 'grid' to top over today's show

SHREYA JAI
New Delhi, 4 April

Social media has been on fire over the nationwide lights-off event coming up on Sunday at 9 pm. While power grid operators brainstormed through Saturday to handle the nine-minute blackout, rumours of a likely grid collapse flew thick and fast on social media platforms. In fact, 'grid' emerged among the top-five trends on Twitter with political leaders, engineers and sector consultants crowding the space with points and counterpoints.

The power ministry is, however, confident that the national power grid is prepared to handle fluctuations ranging from 12-15 gigawatt (GW). Measures are in place to ensure nothing goes wrong, according to the ministry. The concerns being aired on social media platforms and elsewhere came alive after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday appealed to the public to switch off lights for 9 minutes at 9 pm on Sunday, and instead light candles, torches or mobile flashlights outside their house to show solidarity during the lockdown.

Anticipating a significant fluctuation in power demand for a short duration, the power ministry along with the Power Grid Corporation of India (PGCIL) and Power System Operation Corporation (POSOCO) have been busy drafting a plan for managing the grid and efficient supply.

Even so, political leaders have issued statements fearing a collapse of the national grid if lights are switched off for nine minutes across the country. "If all lights are switched off at once, it might lead to failure of grid. All our emergency services will fail and it might take a week's time to restore power," Maharashtra's energy minister Nitin Raut said on Saturday.



The PM has asked the public to switch off lights for 9 minutes on Sunday, and light candles and lamps

POWER MINISTRY'S ADVICE TO PUBLIC

- Switch off only lights at your house
- Do not switch off other household equipment such as fridge, TV, fans, etc
- Streetlights and electricity supply to hospitals, police stations and other essential services will not be shut
- All states, regions, generators and grid operators to be on alert

Govt extends validity of e-way bills

Centre defers application of 10% ITC under GST

DILASHA SETH
New Delhi, 4 April

The government has extended the validity of e-way bills that were set to expire during the 21-day lockdown, put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), addressing companies' fears that their goods transported through trucks could be confiscated by the authorities.

The Centre has also deferred the application of restricted input tax credit (ITC) of 10 per cent under goods and services tax (GST), providing relief to industry, which has been struggling with cash flow. The validity of e-way bills that were set to expire between March 20 and April 15 has been extended till April 30 to help companies facing supply-related issues with orders stuck in transit in most cases. "Where an e-way bill has been generated and its period of validity expires during the period 20th day of March, 2020 to 15th day of April, 2020, the validity period of such e-way bill shall be deemed to have been extended till the 30th day of April, 2020," the finance ministry said in a notification issued late on Friday.

Under the GST regime, e-way bills have to be generated if goods worth over ₹50,000 are transported.

Cairn invokes force majeure on exploration

Vedanta arm cites lockdown, seeks relief from govt on OALP timeline

SHINE JACOB
New Delhi, 4 April

The ongoing countrywide lockdown, implemented to contain the spread of Covid-19, has hit the plans of Cairn Oil and Gas, compelling the country's largest private sector oil producer to approach the government to invoke the force majeure clause. The company wants an extension of timelines for the blocks it won under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) rounds.

Cairn has bagged 41 blocks under the OALP Round I auction and five blocks each under Round II and Round III since 2018. In addition, it has also got two areas under Round II of the Discovered Small Field (DSF) policy. These blocks are spread across Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. According to a government source, not just the Vedanta arm, but several companies under the OALP and DSF rounds have also invoked force majeure.

"Cairn has sought an extension of OALP exploration timelines because the lockdown has caused the stoppage of seismic surveys and related activity. This is in addition to delays in issuance of petroleum exploration licences (PEL) and environmental clearances," said a source close to the development.

Since December, several companies have been in a spot as seismic equipment got stuck in China and other countries owing to the Covid-19 outbreak. Cairn got a mining lease for a couple of blocks, while seismic surveys were being initiated in some blocks in Assam, Gujarat and one of the offshore areas. According to sources, other companies that have invoked force majeure are Mumbai-based Oilmax Energy and Dubai-based South Asia Consultancy FZE. They want an extension of timelines to meet various commitments under the exploration stage.

"The delay in seismic works means prospect identification, drilling, and appraisal too will get delayed. Coronavirus and lower crude and natural gas prices are making the exploration and production business unviable," said an industry source.



EXPLORATION TROUBLES

- 51 Number of blocks won by Cairn in OALP rounds
- 94 Total blocks awarded across four OALP rounds
- 11 Blocks spread over six states on offer under OALP V

136,790 sq km Area awarded till OALP IV

OALP: Open Acreage Licensing Policy

OYO SUSPENDS PAYMENTS TO HOTELS

STATE GOVTS, RLYS PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE LOCKDOWN EXTENSION

State governments and Railways are preparing for a possible extension of the lockdown. Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope to have said. However, the minister revised his statement later in the day. Meanwhile, within hours of announcing that it was preparing for restoration of its services once the lockdown ends on April 14, the Railways on Saturday afternoon said no final decision had been taken on the issue. ARCHIS MOHAN reports

Lockdown has brought lives of a large section to a standstill, with shops shut and people hesitant to go out

ISHITA AVAN DUTT Singur, 4 April

On the road adjoining the Singur Bazar area, Lakshmiakanta Ghosh waits expectantly for customers to walk into his sweet shop, Rakshamatata Mistanna Bhandar, but no one does. He is now at the end of his hope. "In the next one hour also, no one may come," Ghosh says, with a sense of helplessness.

Since the West Bengal government allowed relaxations for sweet shops during the lockdown earlier this week, there have hardly been any customers, making the owners anxious.

Ghosh owns eight cows and two buffaloes. The daily cattle feed for each costs about ₹200. Right now, the loss per day is ₹1,500-2,000. Is there a point in keeping the shop open? "Either way, we will lose," he explains, "as about 15 litres of milk is being wasted every day." He adds: "If this continues, we

might have to sell cows or buffaloes."

But Ghosh understands why customers are giving the shop a miss. "People are not stepping out. They only visit the bazar for grocery and essential shopping. Sweets are probably last on their list of priorities," he says.

In the line of shops that run along the road, the sweet shop is one of the few that are open. A usually buzzing hamlet in the Hooghly district, Singur is not taking any chances in view of coronavirus.

A few metres away from Ghosh's shop, Radhakrishna Mistanna Bhandar is constrained by the supply of flour - the main ingredient in sweets. The shop normally sources it from Arambagh, about 56 km away. With the lockdown, local sourcing is the only solution. But demand is such, only a fifth of the supply will suffice.

The lockdown has hit Singur's inhabitants hard in more ways than one. Aurobinda Das, 45, is finding it hard to get

labourers to work on his two- agricultural land. His vegetable produce has come down by half

labourers to work on his two- agricultural land. His vegetable produce has come down by half. "Labourers would have done the treatment on the land and the yield would have been much higher. Like children, they need to be looked after," Das says.

But potatoes have given him good prices. Singur produces around 2-3 per cent of West Bengal's total potato production. The state is one of the largest producers of potatoes in the country. The store loading of potatoes has just been completed.

Das's income is down by many notches while prices of daily items have gone up. "It is possible to make ends meet like this," he asks. But he has heard that from the next week, he will get free ration.

As part of the relief package in the wake of coronavirus, the West Bengal government has decided to offer free ration till September. People getting subsidised rice at ₹2 a kg and wheat at ₹3 a kg will now

get it free. The maximum cap is 5 kg a month. But Das and his family need close to 1 kg of rice a day.

Seventy-year-old Ajit Bagui has been told that the 16 kg of rice at ₹2 a kg that he receives as dole will be clubbed and given later. He has received ₹2,000 a month, though.

Bagui is an unwilling farmer, or one who resisted giving up land for the Nano factory, and didn't collect compensation. In Singur, some farmers were always more equal than others. They receive 16 kg of rice at ₹2 a kg and ₹2,000 a month. Since the Supreme Court verdict that quashed the land acquisition for the factory, and ordered return of land to the farmers, Bagui has been farming on his 10-cottah plot. He has grown paddy, but is handicapped by the shortage of hands.

Of the 1,000 acres allocated for the factory, 400 acres was used for agriculture. Bagui says, "Times are not good, I have to borrow to keep things going." Turn to Page 4