

Manufacturing in Industrial Hubs may Restart Soon

Govt looks to allow construction, production of medical gear in safe & controlled conditions

Anandita.Mankotia@timesgroup.com

New Delhi:

The government is considering resuming manufacturing in industrial townships with controlled entry and exit and dedicated medical facilities, allowing construction activity with labourers living on site, and production of medical and healthcare related equipment as test cases before it opens up the economy gradually, officials said.

With a near consensus emerging out of the 'virtual' meeting on Saturday between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and state chief ministers for extending the lockdown, the government is thrashing out fresh guidelines which would underline its approach of saving lives and livelihood, officials said.

"With some three weeks of complete lockdown, the idea now is to begin some industrial activity, construction, and production/supply of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals in a safe and controlled environment," a senior official in the know told ET.

As an example of controlled business activity, government officials noted that certain electronic manufacturers in the country such as Foxconn have dorms in their factories.

Government departments and ministries have held consultations with industry representatives and on that basis, lists of sectors that could be opened up are being prepared.

This will be subject to approval from the home ministry and the PMO.

Minimal Manpower

Under consideration are allowing resumption of activity for companies/MSMEs (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises) with export commitments, but with minimal manpower and necessary movement of materials.

For big companies in sectors such as textiles, automobiles and electronic manufacturing, it has been proposed that 20-25% capacity in single shift may be considered, subject to proper sanitation and social distancing norms.

"All units in SEZs and EOUs may be permitted to start with minimum manpower and proper sanitisation and distancing norms..." an official said.

Sources said the Department of Promotion of Industry and Trade has also told the home ministry that more manufacturing activities, which are essential for the economy and providing liquidity to the people, should be allowed once the final decision on the extension and nature of the lockdown is taken. Other industrial segments that may start operating over time include production of heavy electrical items like transformers and circuit vehicles, telecom equipment and components, compressors and condenser units, defence ancillary units, pulp and paper units, all types of food and beverages, fertilizer plants, cement plants, paints and dyes, and automotive units.

Items such as production of pressure cooker gaskets, pharmaceutical items including surgical gloves, rubber coated aprons, trolley wheels for hospital sector, and catheters may also be allowed, the officials added.

“All units in SEZs and EOUs may be permitted to start with minimum manpower and proper sanitisation and distancing norms...” an official said.

The government will come out with standard operating procedures - of social distancing, regular disinfecting and periodic temperature checks throughout the day, which will be backed up by supply of adequate testing kits in the facilities that are opened. These sectors will be opened gradually and possibly in phases.

Officials acknowledged that there would be challenges to opening up the economy in stages. For example, to resume operations at a steel plant, it would need coal supplies. “... there will be some inventory available but soon there would be a need to transport more,” said an official.

The heads of all the 11 empowered committees had a meeting with senior officials of the PMO on Friday to take a stock of the situation.

The medical fraternity at the meeting continued to push for an extension of the complete lockdown, saying that April end to mid-May may see Covid-19 positive cases peak in the country.

In the previous meeting, there was a consensus among the heads of all the empowered committees to gradually unwind the lockdown.