

Delhi reopens a crack amid gloomy economic forecast for India

NEW DELHI — The Indian capital, which just weeks ago suffered the devastating loss of its economy, with one of the world's most infectious daily and night, is making its first steps back toward normalcy.

Officials on Monday reported that the government has approved manufacturing and construction activity, allowing workers to return to their jobs after six weeks of staying at home to avoid infection. The move came after a sharp drop in new infections, led by the official numbers, and as hospital wards emptied and the supply of medicine and supplies has eased.

Life on the streets of Delhi is not expected to return to normal immediately. Schools and many businesses are still closed. The Delhi Metro system, which reopened after last year's nationwide lockdown, has suspended services.

But the city government's easing of restrictions will allow people like Ram Nandan Gupta and his employees to begin returning to work — and, more broadly, to start to repair India's ailing, pandemic-damaged economy. Mr. Gupta, a construction company owner, may replace the migrant workers who fled Delhi when a severe wave of the coronavirus struck in April, but he was confident that business would return to normal soon.

"Immediately we will not be able to start work, but slowly in six to 10 days we will be able to mobilize labor and material and start the work," said Mr. Gupta, who is also the president of the Builders Association of India in Delhi.

At least one million people in Delhi's construction sector will be able to start a job soon. Even a small opening represents a growth by city officials. Just 3 percent of India's 1.4 billion people are fully vaccinated. Because of limited health infrastructure and public reporting, the state of the pandemic in rural areas — including some just outside Delhi — is largely unknown.

Experts are warning that the fall in Delhi may be just a respite, and not the end of the second wave.

By week's end, the number of new cases in Delhi was rising, reaching a peak of 2,197 new COVID-19 infections on April 20. Nearly one in three coronavirus tests came back positive. Hospitals full beyond capacity, turned away thousands of people seeking treatment, with some patients dying outside the gates. Cremona, the professional last time for Haryana, spilled over into empty lots, with so many bodies buried that Delhi's also started an ash pit.

The government in India's capital appears to be over, at least for now, at least for the moment in the country. The city reported 486 new cases on Monday, and about 400 deaths of the disease cases and both were near zero.

Officials in Delhi, and around India, did a round to create a balance between pandemic prevention and economic stability.

On Monday, India relaxed a new set of measures that showed the country's economy grew by 1.6 percent for the three-month period ending in March.

But economists say those measures, which reduced activity before the full impact of the first case would be felt, are likely unsustainable in the near future.

The Ministry of Finance and Program Implementation also forecast India's gross domestic product would shrink by at least 7.5 percent over the financial year that began in April.

Experts point to two main reasons India's prolonged lockdown and its vaccination rate, which has fallen to just over a million doses a day more from

economy would be even more pronounced in rural areas.

"As things stand now, the scale, the speed and the spread of COVID-19 may again prove a growth back to the economy," said Dr. Suresh Kumar Bhatia, the principal economist at India Ratings and Research, a credit rating agency.

Dr. Bhatia added that the country's stagnant growth forecast for the financial year will be worse over the next 12 months.

The lockdown that began on Monday was another year in a row as the nationwide lockdown imposed by India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, last year, which pushed millions of people out of cities and into rural areas, often on foot because rail and other transportation had been suspended.

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Trans-Afghan railway line project to benefit central Asian region



KABUL — The Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project, agreed by Russia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan earlier this year, would transform the geo-economic dynamics of the entire Central Asian region.

The project would be the first step in linking the Central Asian transport network with Pakistan's network of roads, railroads, and airways.

Further enhancement of economic cooperation would provide an opportunity for the people and countries of the two continents to come closer," he further added.

While exchanging views on the Commission's situation, the Chairman said that the effective cooperation and security measures need to be taken to ensure the operation is at the earliest, so life will not be disrupted.

The Kabul Times

Pakistan considers stimulus package to Support economy

Pakistan's finance ministry is considering a stimulus package to support the economy, according to people familiar with the ministry.

Newly-appointed finance minister Shaukat Tarin is leading the initiative, which may be necessary, fiscal or both, but the people making it will be identified as the discussion is private.

The South Asian nation is expected to expand 3.9% in the year ending June from a near contraction in the previous period. Still, the government is wary of a fresh wave of the coronavirus pandemic, which has already killed 203,000 people and cost \$1.3 billion in lost output.

The stimulus package includes measures in collaboration with the central bank to package targeted aid to the poor, and one of the people, Pakistan has already disbursed 203 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion) in cash handouts to the poorest segment of society, while the central bank has provided multiple support packages.

Tarin was appointed in April just as Pakistan started to face a third wave of coronavirus cases, prompting authorities to order a week-long shutdown followed by another in the commercial capital Karachi.

Kyrgyzstan's prime minister in mine corruption case

MOSEOW — Kyrgyzstan's security services have detained a former prime minister in connection with an investigation of corruption in the country's gold mining sector.

An attorney from the State Committee for National Security did not give details of the potential charges against the former prime minister, who was prime minister in 2011-12.

Kyrgyz media reported that Aynalyn Bimbayeva, a former prime minister, also was detained Monday in the case.

The investigation centers on the Kyrgyz gold mine, which has long been a controversial operation in Kyrgyzstan because of alleged environmental violations and claims that the government should nationalize it.

In early May, the parliament passed a law allowing the state to take control of the mine for three months from its 40-year lease.

The mine accounts for more than 12% of the former Soviet Central Asia economy, according to Reuters.

Sri Lanka faces disaster as burning ship spills chemicals on beaches

Sri Lanka is facing the worst environmental disaster in its history after a cargo ship carrying toxic chemicals spilled across the island's coast.

The fire on the X-Press Pearl, a Singapore-registered ship, broke out on May 25 and has been burning ever since.

The 22 passengers were evacuated from the ship, which was damaged by fire and is sinking in the sea.

The plastic pellets used to make plastic have been found in the water, and the government has ordered a ban on plastic.

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