

Need to open industry across zones amid Covid-19 lockdown: CII to govt

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Earthmovers are seen on Andheri flyover to complete the repair work as instructed by the state government during a nationwide lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, in Mumbai. Photo: PTI

Industry should be allowed to operate across the country and not just outside 'red zones', the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) told the government on Tuesday, a day after some segments were allowed to resume work.

The Home Ministry order classifies areas of large outbreak, or clusters with a significant spread of the virus, as 'hotspots' or red zones.

The CII has pointed out the need to define hotspots clearly and publish the list on a real-time basis.

CII also wants the government to allow industry to operate throughout red zones, barring the specific containment zones where very few activities are currently allowed. The body also wants the government to review such hotspots regularly at the district and larger city level and if found safe, allow businesses. On the flipside, once an area becomes a hotspot, CII has questioned whether firms would need to close down suddenly.

The body also drew the government's attention to the fact that small firms don't clearly know the process of restarting business. "It needs to be mentioned that no specific permission would be required from the state government / local authorities to start manufacturing activities in the permitted list. The firm should be required to only inform the relevant authorities through an email," CII told the government. Otherwise, it warned a flood of applications would create delay in kick-starting the economic activities.

Need for detail

The need for proper Home Ministry model guidelines separately for industrial areas, rural areas and micro, small and medium industries have also been flagged by CII. It has also sought permission for local transport like mini vans to ferry material at the small vendors scattered across markets without the resources to organize delivery. The vast numbers of such subcontractors are small businesses and are essential to the supply chain.

Easier movement of workers has also been stressed. In many cases, workers live close to the Industrial Estates, and should be allowed to walk or bicycle to work and back. The condition to provide accommodation within industrial premises or adjacent to it should be relaxed to include nearby distances of up to 10 kilometers. CII has also batted for arrangements of public transport for employees in essential services may be initiated.

Along with other chambers, CII has sought greater clarification on the operations of export manufacturing and their shipments arguing that all export manufacturing should be allowed. Also, it has pointed out that factories have employees who need to cross multiple borders on a single commute and currently need a plethora of passes. It has suggested that authorities should not insist on a separate pass, but the letter issued by the company should be accepted along with the ID card of the company.

Issues galore

As part of a crucial move, it wants all units that manufacture, process or store 'packaged food & beverages' to also remain open, after important food items like noodles and powdered milks became difficult to find in certain areas.

In the agricultural sector, CII has batted for the inclusion of units that produce nutrients, bio stimulants, farmyard manure, bone meal, soil conditioners, and other agri inputs, to the list of permitted industries along with units making equipment required for operation and maintenance of fertilizer plants.

Along with essential professionals like plumbers and electricians, the CII has now pointed out that repairs and maintenance staff need to be broadly allowed to work. This comes on the back of hundreds of reports of people unable to find repair services for malfunctioning machines at industrial areas while households struggle with stuck elevators and broken water purifiers. The chamber has however, pointed out that operations of e-commerce platforms facilitating such services also be allowed.