

## Daily News Monitor: 24 March 2020

### **1. Finance Bill passed: Scope for fuel tax widened, 'NRI tax' limited**

**Source: Financial Express ([Link](#))**

Parliament on 23 March passed the Finance Bill, 2020, clearing the way for significant changes in the tax laws, including a new monetary threshold for taxing India income of non-resident Indians (NRIs), a broadening of the ambit of 'equalisation levy' to cover non-resident e-commerce operators (like Alibaba) supplying goods and services and reduction in the rate of tax collected at source (TCS) for remitting education loan money overseas. The government also used the Finance Bill 2020 to create room for increasing the taxes on auto fuels by up to Rs 8 per litre. If it opts to fully use the facility, it could raise an additional Rs 1.15 lakh crore or so annually from these products as specific taxes and reduce the revenue gap it is facing.

### **2. Government expenditure system declared as essential service**

**Source: Financial Express ([Link](#))**

Keeping in mind the year-end rush and loosening the purse strings to cope with the impact of coronavirus, the finance ministry on 23 March declared the government expenditure system to be an essential service, thereby ordering all offices connected with the payment functions to remain open on working hours. "This measure will ensure that in these challenging times, the expenditure system functions quickly to cope with any emergent needs," finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman tweeted.

### **3. PM asks India Inc to maintain production lines of essential commodities, prevent black marketing amid coronavirus fight**

**Source: Financial Express ([Link](#))**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 23 March asked Indian companies to maintain production lines of essential commodities and ensure there is no hoarding as well as black marketing in the wake of the country fighting the coronavirus outbreak. Interacting with industry representatives via video-conferencing, Modi said the impact of the pandemic on the economy will be felt for some time to come with several sectors such as tourism, construction and hospitality being hit.

### **4. India's e-commerce sector comes to halt due to lockdowns**

**Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))**

The Indian e-commerce sector has come to a halt across the country including the supply of essential commodities due to various lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19, according

to the e-commerce industry executives. They said there is a lot of police action on the ground and even the interstate movement has been stopped due to which lot of essential items on platforms such as Flipkart, Amazon, Grofers and Milkbasket are not reaching the people. Even food-delivery firms such as Swiggy and Zomato are facing similar challenges due to various lockdowns, according to the sources. "There is a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty. The authorities keep coming up with circulars which are contradictory to the previous ones," said an e-commerce industry executive. "It is more a miscommunication issue due to which there are many challenges that companies such as Flipkart, Amazon, Grofers and Swiggy and Zomato are facing on the ground."

#### **5. India to suspend domestic flights, seeks to lock down coronavirus spread**

**Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))**

To strengthen the nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus, India has banned air travel from 25 March. The prohibition will stay till midnight, March 31. The move is the latest in a round of steps, including banning bus and railway travel, the government has taken. This is the first time India has effected a total shutdown of air transport. The United States did it after the terror attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared corona virus a pandemic. The government used a clause in the Aircraft Act, 1934, to suspend air travel. "Operations of domestic scheduled commercial airlines shall cease with effective from the midnight of 11:59 PM on 24 March. Airlines have to plan operations so as to land at their destination before 11:59 PM on 24 March (sic)," a notification by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation sent to airlines said.

#### **6. Internet speed may slow down on high traffic owing to Coronavirus lockdown**

**Source: Business Standard ([Link](#))**

Brace for not being able to watch movies in high definition or for slower speed while downloading or streaming your favourite over the top (OTT) platforms. At least for a while. And blame it on coronavirus. Three OTT players have responded positively to the request by the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) to reduce bandwidth. The request was made to lessen the pressure on telecom networks that are overloaded with extra traffic generated by the lockdown from the coronavirus. Out of the 11 streaming video companies that COAI wrote to, Disney's Hotstar, Zee5, Viacom 18 and its Voot brand have agreed to reduce bitrates so that telecom networks are under less pressure. The letter, sent a few days ago, asked OTT players to move to standard definition instead of high definition streaming and to remove advertising and pop ups which usually consume high bandwidth

## **7. Coronavirus Fallout: Government puts key economic surveys on hold**

**Source: The Economic Times ([Link](#))**

The government has put on hold various economic surveys including those to measure unemployment and domestic tourism besides a multiple indicator survey, till March 31 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ministry of statistics and programme implementation (Mo-SPI) has been carrying out the Seventh Economic Census since July 29 last year, but the pace of its data collection has slowed. The economic census, which is the only source of information on the significantly large unorganized sector in the country, has engaged around 1 million people in fieldwork.

## **8. As 90,000 NRIs return home, Punjab seeks funds to build Covid-19 isolation wards**

**Source: The Hindustan Times ([Link](#))**

The Punjab government has sought funds from the Centre to build isolation ward and other buildings to treat Covid-19 patients, after 90,000 NRIs returned to state in the past few months. “As we have so many NRIs in Punjab and 90,000 people have come to Delhi in the last three-four months, we have asked for Rs 150 crore from the Centre to help us build infrastructure as well as for isolation wards and other things if there are more cases,” Punjab Health Minister BS Sidhu said on 23 March. He also said that five MPs met Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan regarding the same. According to the health ministry, the number of Covid-19 cases in the country has now climbed to 467, including foreign nationals.

## **9. China ready to help India in Covid-19 fightback, shares info over video link**

**Source: The Hindustan Times ([Link](#))**

China on 23 March reiterated its offer to help and assist India in its fight against the Covid-19 outbreak, which threatens to spread in the south Asian country as New Delhi takes gradual steps to impose a countrywide lockdown. The foreign ministry’s offer of help comes soon after India took part in a Beijing-led video conference over the weekend where Chinese experts shared their epidemic prevention experience with officials from south Asian countries. More than 2000 officials from health departments, diplomatic services, defence ministries and customs from India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Bangladesh participated in it. The Indian government had sent 15 tons of medical supplies to China on an Indian Air Force flight that also took back about a 100 Indians from Wuhan and Hubei on its way back in the last week of February. The Indian medical assistance to China comprised “...masks, gloves and other emergency medical equipment”.

## **10. Coronavirus locks down 30 states, over 500 districts affected: Key developments**

**Source: The Hindustan Times ([Link](#))**

The total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in India has crossed over 400, according to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Nine people have succumbed to the virus till now in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked state governments to ensure that rules and regulations of the lockdown were enforced. “Many people are still not taking the lockdown seriously. Please save yourself, save your family, follow the instructions seriously. I request state governments to ensure rules and laws are followed,” he tweeted. World Health Organisation executive director Dr Michael J Ryan on 23 March said that India has tremendous capacities and called on for New Delhi to be aggressive in its fight against Covid-19.