

# Commerce dept pitches for limited restarting of manufacturing

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The commerce and industry ministry has pitched for resumption of manufacturing activity, Especially for exports, in a limited manner, with companies following safety and other Norms. Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal told representatives from export Promotion councils and trade bodies on Wednesday that his department is in dialogue With various wings of the government, including the home ministry, to allow factories to Start production, multiple sources present in the meeting told TOI.

The issue has also been discussed by the cabinet and in other forums and a decision is Awaited. Over the next few days, the government will decide on extending or ending the Nationwide lockdown, scheduled to end on April 14, although most state governments have advised caution on lifting the curbs. States too need to be on board to restart factories, officials said.

The commerce department as well as several other economic ministries believes that indefinitely stopping production will be detrimental to the economy, as livelihood of millions is at stake, apart from putting pressure on the financial sector and government finances. Sources said the commerce and industry ministry has proposed that a mechanism should be put in place to ensure safety of workers through social distancing and other tools, which could see factories, operate at around half the capacity.

There are suggestions that plants which have facility to house workers or where employees don't have to travel long distances may be given priority, with the owners providing food and proper healthcare and ensuring hygiene. "It is crucial to lift the lockdown for exports as we are losing orders to China and once you lose business to China, it is very difficult to get it back," said Ajay Sahay, director general and CEO at Federation of Indian Export Organization.

"Reopening (factories) has to be given priority due to mass order cancellations. We are hoping that a decision is taken in the next few days," added Ravi Sehgal, chairman of EEPC India, which represents engineering exporters. It has also asked the government to ensure adequate availability of masks, testing and protective gear and facilitate seamless movement of goods and services across the Country.

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