

POLICY REVIEW

Cabinet comes to aid of logistics sector

Port construction fees levied on importers and exporters to be waived for four months

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The State Council has unveiled a slew of policies to help the logistics sector resume work more quickly, with businesses nationwide set to enjoy larger tax and fee cuts and fewer restrictions on operations amid the novel coronavirus outbreak.

A region-specific, tiered and targeted approach must be adopted to encourage businesses in the logistics sector to resume operations, the Cabinet said in a statement after its executive meeting on March 3, adding that any arbitrary restrictions on the resumption of work must be lifted.

Logistics businesses will continue to have their land use tax halved for warehouses that store bulk commodities, and port construction fees normally levied on the import and export of cargoes will be waived between March and June, the statement said.

The government will also lower fees levied on businesses using port facilities and halve incidental charges for businesses using railway freight services, it said.

The meeting passed a decision encouraging insurance companies to lower the burden on the owners of commercial vehicles, ships and aircraft whose operations have been suspended during the outbreak, by way of extending insurance periods and reducing policy renewal fees.

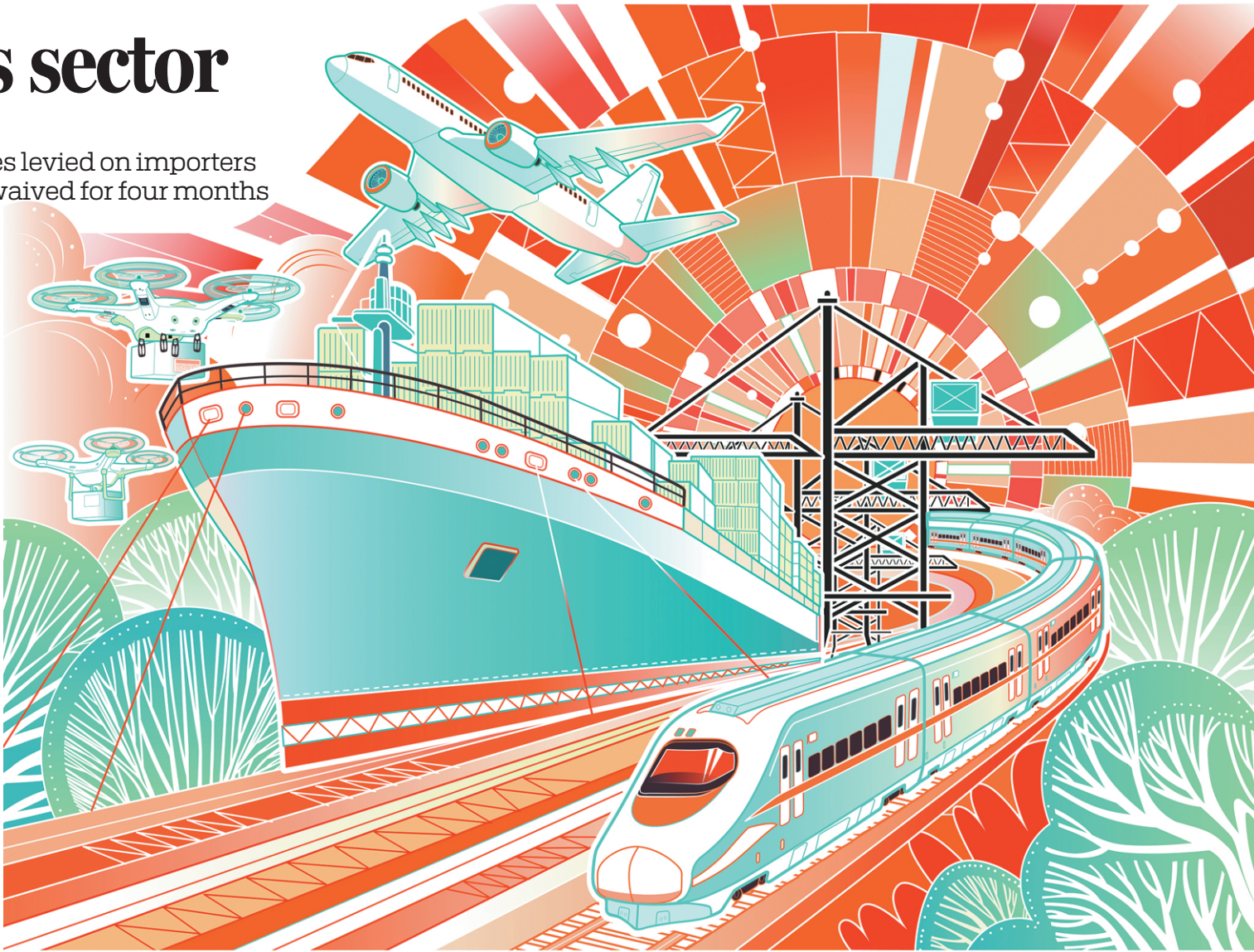
Financial institutions are also being urged to defer interest payments, extend principal repayment periods or roll over maturing loans for toll-road operators unable to repay their debts due to the suspension of tolls, the statement said.

Premier Li Keqiang said at the meeting that clogged logistics networks posed a major hurdle to epidemic control and prevention and the resumption of work and production.

“It is important to cancel various unreasonable curbs as soon as possible,” he said. “Local authorities must offer the same treatment in transport policies to businesses operating under various forms of ownership to remove barriers to delivery to villages and communities.”

The novel coronavirus outbreak has hit the logistics sector hard, including groups such as truck and taxi drivers.

Passenger volume on roads, waterways and air transport dropped by 79.9 percent year-on-year last month, with cargo volume



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down by 26.5 percent, according to the Ministry of Transport. Taxi drivers, including those engaged in car-hailing services, saw orders dropping by 85 percent.

The ministry will encourage local authorities to suspend or waive fees that taxi drivers have to pay to cab companies and adjust taxis' fare systems to protect the interests of drivers, Liu Xiaoming, vice-minister of transport, told a news briefing on Friday.

China has suspended tolls on all roads, bridges and tunnels amid

the outbreak to spur economic activity, and Liu highlighted the need to ensure that truck drivers are the main beneficiaries of the policy.

Liu Jun, deputy head of the State Post Bureau, told the briefing that 90.2 percent of the country's express delivery workers had returned to their jobs, with over 160 million packages being handled on a daily basis — about 80 percent of the normal capacity.

He said express delivery services were expected to return to full

capacity by the end of this week, except for Hubei province, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, where express delivery workers were still unable to enter communities due to prevention measures.

In the long-term, the trend was the development of smart service facilities for express deliveries, and the authorities would roll out steps encouraging the development of such facilities and strengthen weak areas in express delivery infrastructure, he said.

Wang Ming, dean of the National Development and Reform Commission's Institute of Comprehensive Transportation, said the outbreak had highlighted the importance of smart and digital technologies in logistics networks and warehousing.

“The most prominent problem for the logistics sector exposed by the outbreak is the lack of coordination,” Wang said. “The supplier does not know where the demand comes from, and the demand party does not know where to obtain the supply.”

POLICY RESPONSE

Better internet infrastructure needed for online classes in remote areas, ministry says

By WANG QINGYUN  
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Several ministry-level departments, including those responsible for industry and information technology, education, and commerce, have recently responded to issues of public concern.

More effort needed on remote area networks



Local governments and providers of telecommunications services and infrastructure should work to ensure sufficient internet speed for online school courses, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said in a notice.

The notice, released online on March 3, was issued to communications administrations in provincial-level regions, the three major telecommunications companies — China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom — and China Tower, which builds infrastructure such as base stations.

They should address the issue of weak signals for students in remote areas and make internet

access more affordable for impoverished families, the ministry said.

They should keep strengthening the construction of broadband networks and 4G and 5G base stations, speed up their efforts to include remote areas in the networks and make sure schools in areas seriously hit by the novel coronavirus outbreak will have smooth internet access.

Providers of online education platforms should keep improving their performance and the experience of teachers and students using them for online courses, the ministry said.

It said it will test the platforms' performance, including download speeds and the frequency of video buffering, and publicize the results.

The ministry is also encouraging companies to reduce internet service costs for students in impoverished families.

Many universities and schools have turned to online teaching to avoid gatherings of people and reduce the risk of them catching the virus.

**Authorities urged to help graduates find jobs**

Education authorities should help more college graduates find jobs during the employment season, the Ministry of Education said on Wednesday in a notice aimed at mitigating the novel coronavirus outbreak's impact on the job market.

The ministry said the authori-



ties should promote employment at the grassroots level and in sectors such as modern agriculture and public service, adding that they should encourage more college students to join the army.

Also, senior high schools and kindergartens that are badly in need of teachers should hire more college graduates, it said.

The authorities should increase this year's student enrollment for post graduate study, the ministry said.

The quota increase should mainly go to universities and colleges in central, western and northeastern China and majors where research is vital to national strategies or the improvement of people's well-being, according to the ministry.

It called for more online recruitment activities and support for students graduating in Hubei province, the epicenter of the virus outbreak.

There should also be specific plans to promote employment for students from impoverished families or those with disabilities, it said.

The ministry also called for firm opposition to any form of

employment discrimination against graduates, and urged strict prevention of fraud and exploitation.

**Demand for cars and appliances picking up**

The consumer market is starting to turn for the better as the outlook for the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic improves around the country, Wang Bin, an official with the Ministry of Commerce, told an online news conference on Thursday.

The ministry's monitoring of 1,000 retail companies showed their average daily sales in late February were 5.6 percent up from mid-February, said Wang, deputy director of the ministry's Department of Market Operation and Consumption Promotion.

It was the first growth since late January, Wang said, adding that demand for automobiles in late February increased by 14.8 percent compared with mid-February.

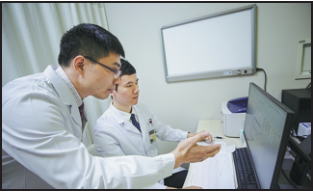
Telecommunications equipment and home appliances also saw increased demand, up by more than 11 percent, he said.

One reason for the increase, Wang said, was that progress had been made in the country's efforts to control the epidemic, thus reducing panic.

Also, companies were speeding up their efforts to resume business, and the market had begun to see more consumer demand, he said.

Policy digest

Guideline seeks to further medical insurance reform



A guideline on deepening reform of China's medical insurance system was unveiled by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Thursday.

The authorities said it would further implement the decisions and plans made at the 19th National Congress of the CPC on establishing a distinctively Chinese system for medical insurance, and solve the problems of unbalanced and insufficient development of medical insurance.

The goal of the reform is to set up a medical security system centered on basic medical insurance and underpinned by medical aid by 2030, the guideline said.

It calls for efforts to improve the treatment insurance mechanism, noting that fair and moderate treatment insurance is an intrinsic requirement for enhancing people's well-being.

The insurance mechanism for medical costs during major epidemic outbreaks should be improved, with measures such as releasing special medical insurance payment policies to ensure that medical institutions can provide treatment before charging and that treatment will not be affected by patients' concerns over fees.

The guideline also urges efforts to make the financing of medical insurance more stable and sustainable, and proposes methods to set up an effective and efficient mechanism for medical insurance payments.

The document also covers the moni-

toring of funds, supply-side reform of medical services and other issues in the country's medical insurance system.

**Well-being of community workers a top priority**

Community workers on the front line of the fight against the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic should be better cared for, according to the leading group of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on coping with the outbreak.

They had been bravely sticking to their posts day and night to implement the decisions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, the leading group said in a notice issued on March 3.

It asked provincial-level party committees and governments, as well as central and State organs to work to improve the well-being of community workers.

They should grant moderate subsidies to the workers while ensuring their current pay. Provincial-level governments should guide cities and counties in designing their own subsidy standards.

The authorities should make sure the workers enjoy insurance in case of occupational injuries, and improve the protective gear they use for work.

They should also reduce their workload. Assigning the same tasks repeatedly and making them fill out an excessive number of forms should be stopped.

The leading group encouraged the use of information technology to improve the efficiency of epidemic prevention and control at the community level.

The authorities should be alert to the physical and mental health of community workers, the leading group said. They should provide them with sufficient rest while ensuring there are enough workers to tackle the epidemic in communities.

*Xinhua contributed to this story.*

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