

## Business

# China wholesale market suspends sales, storage of frozen goods

## Beijing claims coronavirus found on imported products, packaging

**BEIJING:** China's biggest wholesale food market has suspended the sale and storage of chilled and frozen meat and seafood as the government ramps up inspections of cold-chain goods after several new cases of coronavirus infections. The Xinfadi market in Beijing, which was at the center of an outbreak of COVID-19 cases in the Chinese capital in June, has disposed of products and disinfected over a hundred cold storage units and shut down their power, the state-backed Beijing News has reported.

Although Beijing has had no recent locally transmitted infections involving the market or cold-chain food products, the move comes after several handlers of imported frozen food in the cities of Qingdao and Tianjin contracted the virus in recent months. Tianjin is some 132 km south of Beijing while Qingdao is 550 kilometres south of the capital.

Market authorities will also conduct daily checks for the virus at warehouses and cold-storage facilities for fruits and vegetables, the Beijing News also said. The market, a complex of warehouses and trading halls spanning an area the size of nearly 160 soccer pitches, can trade 1,500 tons of seafood, 18,000 tons of vegetables and 20,000 tons of fruit on a daily basis, according to its website.

China has ramped up testing of frozen foods after saying it has repeatedly discovered the coronavirus on imported products and their packaging, triggering large-scale testing of food and staff, the suspension of certain imports and disruptions to trade flows.

Separately, a recent outbreak of more than 400 coronavirus cases in the northwestern region of Xinjiang has been traced back to cargo containers, Wu Zunyou, chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Wednesday. The state-owned Global Times quoted a Xinjiang official as saying the outbreak was linked to containers from Tajikistan. — Reuters



WUHAN: Passengers wearing facemasks walk to their train at Wuhan railway station on Wednesday. — AFP

## Russian oil giant announces start of Arctic project

**MOSCOW:** Russian oil giant Rosneft on Wednesday announced the start of operations for its giant Vostok oil project in the Arctic, part of the country's strategic energy plan which has been criticised by environmentalists. "It is with great pleasure that I inform you of the start of the practical implementation of the project," Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin told President Vladimir Putin at a meeting in Moscow.

He thanked Putin, with whom he has close relations, for the adoption of a law facilitating Russian investments in the Arctic. "The prospecting and exploration work are now underway, in accordance with our timetable," Sechin said, adding that the design work for a 770-km oil pipeline and a port had been completed.

The strategic plan for Russia's mineral resources stretches to 2035 and is banking on growing global demand, though it does predict that natural gas will partially replace oil and coal. "Mineral resources will remain a competitive advantage of Russia's economy, and will determine

the place and role of the country in the world," it says. Environmentalists urged the Russian government last year to stop granting licenses to exploit several Arctic deposits.

The Vostok project, the cornerstone of Russia's Arctic ambitions, brings together several Rosneft activities in the Russian Far North, near the northern sea route that the company intends to exploit to deliver to Europe and Asia. In February, Sechin promised Putin that the scheme would create a "new oil and gas province" on Siberia's Taymyr peninsula, the northernmost part of the Asian continent.

The complete project will represent a total investment of 10,000 billion rubles (\$111 billion), including two airports and 15 "industry towns". The project has also been forecast to create 130,000 jobs and allow access to estimated reserves of around five billion tons of oil. The construction alone will require 400,000 workers, Sechin said.

Last week Rosneft announced the sale of 10 percent of the project to Singapore's Tracterra group, without mentioning a price. The Russian group had previously said that there was interest in the project from India. Sechin said the Arctic endeavor would eventually produce 100 million tons of oil per year. Between now and 2024 he said that 30 million tons would be sent from the Arctic along the so-called Northern Sea route connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. — AFP

## US extends TikTok sale deadline to December 4

**WASHINGTON:** The US Treasury on Wednesday said it had extended by seven days the Nov 27 deadline given to the Chinese owner of TikTok to sell the popular social media platform's American business. "The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) has granted ByteDance a one-week extension, from November 27, 2020 to December 4, 2020 to allow time to review a revised submission that the Committee recently received," a Treasury spokesperson said.

President Donald Trump's administration has expressed national security concerns over the app, claiming it could be used for Chinese espionage and threatening to ban it. The ban has been challenged in courts, including a case in Washington and a separate filing by the app's "creators" in a Pennsylvania court, which blocked the ban on October 30, though the government is appealing that order.

Trump, who lost his bid for re-election

this month, has claimed that TikTok - which has some 100 million US users - can be used to collect data on Americans for Chinese espionage, a claim denied by the company. The White House has said TikTok must become a US firm controlled by American investors to avert a ban. But any plan would likely need approval from Beijing, which has balked at giving up control of its social media star.

China's commerce ministry published new rules in August that added "civilian use" to a list of the types of technology that are restricted for export, which could make it more difficult for ByteDance to sell TikTok, which features clips of everything from dance routines to politics. A deal appeared to take shape earlier this year which would allow Silicon Valley giant Oracle to be the data partner for a newly incorporated TikTok Global, with Walmart joining as a commercial partner.

While Trump signaled his approval for the plan, it has not been finalized and the prospects remain unclear. The developments come amid heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing over trade and national security, with the US administration having also banned Chinese tech giant Huawei from obtaining US technology and from deals involving wireless networks. — AFP