

Nuhur L Khan, managing director of Joules Power Ltd, and Robin Razon Sakhawat, managing director of Robintex Group, exchange the signed documents of a 20-year power purchase agreement at the former's office in Dhaka on Sunday. A 3.1 megawatt peak rooftop solar power plant will be established at Robintex's factory in Narayanganj.

Coronavirus creating solar industry 'crisis': US trade group

REUTERS

The spreading coronavirus is threatening project schedules in the booming U.S. solar industry following a year in which the sector topped natural gas as the nation's top new power source, according to a report published on Tuesday.

Fallout from the pandemic has impacted both supply chains and demand in the fast-growing industry, and the president of the top U.S. solar trade group said its annual market report's projection of 47 per cent growth in 2020 will be ratcheted down in the coming weeks and months. It was still too soon to incorporate the pandemic's impact into the sector's outlook with certainty, the Solar Energy Industries Association said.

"It's really across the board a pretty significant crisis in the solar industry in addition to a significant crisis in the overall economy," Abigail Ross Hopper, president of the Solar Energy Industries Association, said in an interview.

Solar companies are facing not only disruptions to supplies of components such as panels and inverters, but labor shortages as Americans are asked to limit social contacts to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 disease or are forced to stay home due to school closures, Hopper said. In the rooftop solar market, homeowners may be putting large investments on hold for the time being, she added.

The slowdown marks a major about-face for the industry, which has been growing rapidly as states and businesses seek to move away from fossil fuels amid growing concerns about their role in climate change.

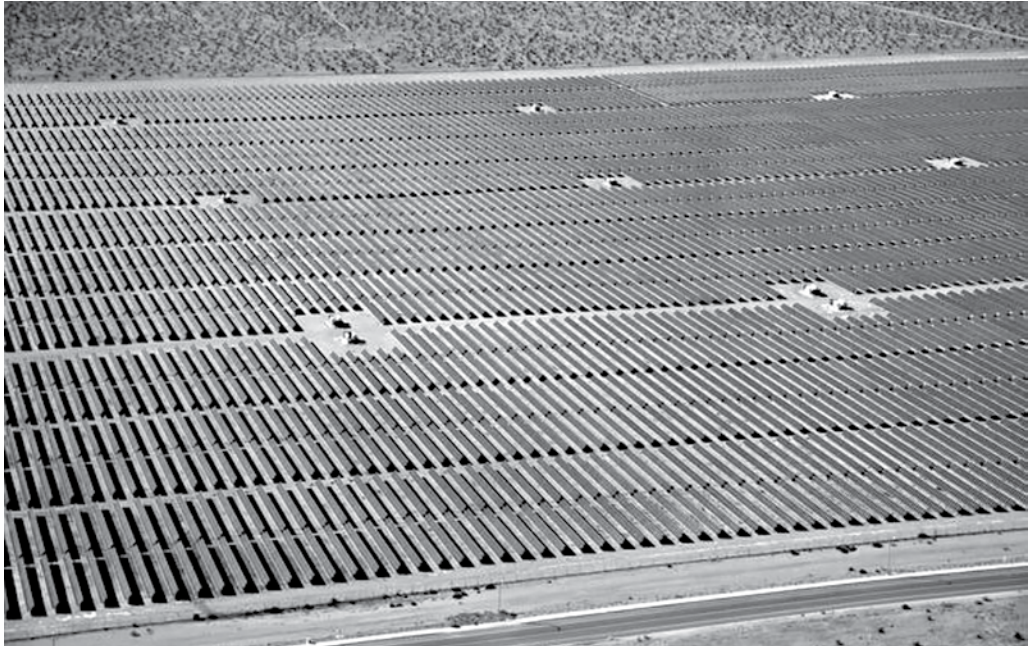
The industry has 10 gigawatts (GW) of utility-

scale projects currently under construction, the report said. Once online, they would generate enough power for about 1.9 million homes.

Last year, the U.S. solar industry installed 13.3 GW of capacity, a 23 per cent increase from the prior year. Utility-scale projects accounted for nearly two-thirds of the market.

Solar accounted for 40 per cent of the nation's

new electric generating capacity, compared with 32 per cent for natural gas and 27 per cent for wind. The residential solar market had its biggest year every for installations at 2.8 GW. The sector benefited from increased demand in California after planned power outages during wildfire season left hundreds of thousands of utility customers in the dark, the report said.



REUTERS/FILE

An array of solar panels is seen in the desert near Victorville, California, US.

Global airlines slash flights as US carriers seek \$50b bailout

AFP, New York

Major world airlines on Monday announced further deep cuts to service as the worsening coronavirus crisis ravages demand, accentuating talk of government support with US carriers formally releasing a plea for a bailout of some \$50 billion.

Citing an "unprecedented" drop in demand that is "getting worse by the day" and "much worse than 9/11," the trade group Airlines for America (A4A) unveiled a wish list including grants, loans and tax relief. "This is a today problem, not a tomorrow problem. It requires urgent action," said A4A President and Chief Executive Nicholas Calio.

The group said the industry was on track to suffer a drop of \$23 billion in liquidity at the end of 2020 under an "optimistic" scenario and a drop of \$53 billion under a "pessimistic" scenario.

"As of the morning of March 16, the pessimistic scenario is looking most likely," the group said.

White House officials have highlighted airlines as a major concern and signaled broad support for a federal plan to fortify the industry.

"We have to back the airlines," US President Donald Trump said at a briefing. "It's not their fault. In fact, they were having a record season." Earlier, European carriers announced additional cutbacks in service due to the crisis.

IAG, owner of British Airways and Spanish carrier Iberia, announced it would slash flight capacity by 75 percent during April and May owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, while Germany's Lufthansa said it would trim seating capacity on long-haul



AFP

Major world airlines on Monday announced further cutbacks on their services as the worsening coronavirus crisis ravages demand, accentuating talk of government support with US carriers formally releasing a plea for a bailout of some \$50 billion.

flights by up to 90 percent, affecting mainly routes to Africa, the Middle East and South America.

Britain's Virgin Atlantic added that it has decided to park 75 percent of its total fleet, and in April this will rise as high as 85 percent. Virgin has reportedly called upon the UK government to inject emergency support totaling 7.5 billion pounds (\$9.2 billion, 8.3 billion euros) to help keep Britain's aviation industry flying.

Shares of European carriers and most US airlines experienced another bruising

session as the economic toll of the coronavirus becomes clearer.

"Last week saw a rapid acceleration of the impact of COVID-19 on global aviation and tourism," Virgin Atlantic warned in a statement.

"The situation is deteriorating at pace and the airline has seen several days of negative bookings, driven by a huge volume of cancellations as customers choose to stay at home." British no-frills carrier EasyJet warned it may have to ground "the majority" of its fleet, urging

governments across Europe to help their airlines maintain access to liquidity.

The airline's CEO Johan Lundgren said "European aviation faces a precarious future," and called for government backing if the industry is to survive.

Irish budget carrier Ryanair meanwhile did not rule out a full grounding as it unveiled stinging flight cutbacks.

IAG said it was taking measures including cuts to non-essential spending, a freeze on recruitment and reducing work hours.

A management shake-up had also been put on hold, noting that Willie Walsh, who was due to step down on March 26, would remain as IAG's chief executive.

Air France will meanwhile slash flight capacity by 70-90 percent over the next two months, while Austrian Airlines will suspend all flights from Thursday, and Finnair is cutting 90 percent of capacity until the situation improves.

The German government on Monday said it is planning to shield companies from going under because of the pandemic, by suspending legal obligations for firms facing acute liquidity problems to file for bankruptcy. German tourism and hotel group TUI said it was applying for state aid to keep it afloat, as it suspended the "majority" of its operations.

Back in London, a spokesman for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson signaled that the government would examine help for affected businesses, not just airlines, via tax authority Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

"HMRC is ready to help all businesses including airlines experiencing temporary financial difficulties due to coronavirus," Johnson's spokesman told AFP.

France could nationalise big companies if necessary: finance minister

REUTERS, Paris

The French government is prepared to use all means to support big companies suffering in financial market turmoil, including nationalization if necessary, the finance minister said on Tuesday.

Bruno Le Maire's remarks are the strongest indication yet that Paris is ready to pull out all the stops to steady the country's biggest companies amid the turbulence unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I won't hesitate to use all means available to protect big French companies," he said on a conference call with journalists.

"That can be done by recapitalization, that can be done by taking a stake, I can even use the term nationalization if necessary," Le Maire added, without saying which companies could be treated as a priority.

Le Maire also welcomed a decision by France's financial markets authority to ban short-selling during trading on Tuesday on 92 French stocks and said the measure could be extended up to a month if necessary.

The ban includes some of France's best known companies such as bank BNP Paribas, carmaker Renault, and airline Air France KLM, which have all suffered steep losses on equity markets in recent days.

Earlier, Le Maire told RTL radio that the government was mobilizing 45 billion euros (\$46 billion) in crisis measures to help companies stay afloat through the virus outbreak, consisting in large part of tax and payroll charge deferrals.

Meanwhile, the government has also pledged to guarantee up to 300 billion euros in total of new loans to companies, which could reduce banks' potential exposure to loan losses. Le Maire said the government would shortly present a budget bill to reflect the new economic reality created by the outbreak, and which would be based on a provisional forecast for a 1 per cent contraction in gross domestic product this year.



Bruno Le Maire

German investor morale crashes on coronavirus fears

REUTERS, Berlin

The mood among German investors slumped in March to levels last seen in the 2008 financial crisis due to alarm at the impact of the coronavirus outbreak, a survey showed on Tuesday.

The ZEW research institute said its monthly survey showed economic sentiment among investors collapsed to -49.5 from 8.7 in February. Economists had expected a drop to -26.4.

"The economy is on red alert," said ZEW President Achim Wambach in a statement, adding that financial experts expect the economy to shrink in the first quarter and think a contraction is also very likely in the second quarter.

A separate gauge measuring investors' assessment of the economy's current conditions decreased to -43.1 from -15.7. Analysts had forecast a reading of -30.0. For 2020 as a whole, most investors are currently expecting a decline in real GDP growth of approximately 1 per cent as a result of the corona pandemic, Wambach said.

The spread of the coronavirus has ended hopes of a first-quarter upswing which had been driven by a solid increase in retail sales and a jump in industrial production in January.

But with the coronavirus infecting a growing number of people and leading to unprecedented safety measures to slow its spread, officials said the government now expects

gross domestic product to shrink this year, in what would be the first contraction since the world financial crisis in 2009.

Volkswagen, the world's largest carmaker, said on Monday it was preparing to shut down its factories as a way to curb the spread of the coronavirus and warned that 2020 will be a very difficult year.

The slump is expected to push down tax revenues while at the same time requiring a massive increase in state spending to help companies bridge liquidity problems and shield workers from unemployment.

Jack Allen-Reynolds from Capital Economics said the ZEW survey pointed to a large decline in GDP.

"Things are likely to get much worse in Q2, when we expect much bigger quarterly falls in GDP than during the depths of the global financial crisis," he added.

The ZEW figures suggested that the German economy could shrink by as much as 4 per cent on the year in 2020, he said.

"So a considerable amount of additional policy support from the ECB and governments will be necessary,"

Chancellor Angela Merkel has vowed to do everything necessary to slow the spread of the coronavirus and counter its impact on the economy, saying that the pledge of not taking on new debt was now secondary.

Etihad adds cargo flights as coronavirus batters demand

REUTERS, Dubai

Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways said on Tuesday it was expanding its cargo network to markets where passenger operations have decreased due to the coronavirus epidemic.

About half of all air cargo carried worldwide normally flies in passenger jets but the grounding of those planes due to the coronavirus outbreak has increased demand for freighters.

"With widespread commercial flight restrictions in numerous international markets, the air cargo environment is evolving daily ... Our optimized summer freighter schedule is designed to significantly boost capacity", Etihad Managing Director, Cargo, Abdulla Mohamed Shadiid said in a statement.

Cargo services are being added to Hong Kong, Hanoi, Singapore, Amsterdam, Milan, Paris, Johannesburg and Nairobi. The state-owned airline said the additional services also included summer increases to traditional cargo destinations.

Rival Emirates said on its website it was temporarily suspending more routes, including to Algiers from March 18 until the end of the month and Mexico City from March 20 to April 30. Smaller United Arab Emirates carrier flydubai said its flights to India were cancelled until the end of the month.



GREAT WALL CERAMIC

Shamsul Huda, managing director of Great Wall Ceramic Industries and Charu Ceramic Industries, attends the dealers' conference of the companies at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka recently.

Italy plans to re-nationalise Alitalia airlines: govt

AFP, Rome

The Italian government said it intends to re-nationalise the bankrupt former national carrier Alitalia under an emergency economic rescue plan for the coronavirus pandemic.

The plan's details were outlined in a government decree published late Monday. Italian media reported that it could cost taxpayers up to 600 million euros (\$670 million).

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's government on Monday agreed a 25-billion-euro rescue designed to shield families and businesses from the economic fallout of an outbreak that has killed more than 2,100

people in Italy.

One of the measures provides for the creation of "a new company wholly controlled by the ministry of economy and finance, or controlled by a company with a majority public stake, including an indirect one" to take over the airline.

Italy's AGI news agency said the government was setting up a 600-million-euro fund to deal with the damage the pandemic has caused to the aviation sector.

Some of the final details of the Italian economic rescue programme are do to be finalised next month.

Alitalia has floundered in the face of fierce competition from low-cost

carriers such as EasyJet and Ryanair.

But analyst warn that it is also too small -- and has too many staff for the number of flights it operates -- to compete with its rivals.

It flew only 22 million passengers and saw its market share in Italy slip to 14 percent in 2018.

Germany's Lufthansa and the Atlanta-based Delta Airlines each carried around 180 million passengers that year.

Alitalia's attempts to secure rescues from either the Italian state railway Ferrovie dello Stato or Lufthansa floundered in January.

The company filed for bankruptcy in 2017.