

PM's Remarks on Way Forward at Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on combating COVID-19

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Thank you Excellencies, for sharing your thoughts on the situation, and the steps you have taken.

We all agree that we are facing a serious challenge. We do not as yet know what shape the pandemic will take in the coming days.

It is clear that we have to work together. We can respond best by – Coming together not growing apart; Collaboration not Confusion ; Preparation not Panic.

In this spirit of collaboration, let me share a few ideas on what India can offer to this joint effort.

I propose we create a COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This could be based on voluntary contributions from all of us. India can start with an initial offer of 10 million dollars for this fund. Any of us can use the fund to meet the cost of immediate actions. Our Foreign Secretaries, through our embassies can coordinate quickly to finalize the utilisation of this Fund.

We are assembling a Rapid Response Team of doctors and specialists in India, along with testing kits and other equipment. They will be on stand-by, to be placed at your disposal, if required.

We can also quickly arrange online training capsules for your emergency response teams. This will be based on the model we have used in our own country, to raise the capacity of all our emergency staff.

We had set up an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to better trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted. We could share this Disease Surveillance software with SAARC partners, and training on using this.

Let us also use existing facilities, like the SAARC Disaster Management Centre, to pool in the best practices among all of us.

Looking ahead, we could create a common Research Platform, to coordinate research on controlling epidemic diseases within our South Asian region. The Indian Council of Medical Research can offer help coordinating such an exercise.

We can also ask our experts to brainstorm on the longer-term economic consequences of COVID-19, and how we can insulate our internal trade and our local value chains from its impact.

Finally, this is not the first nor the last such pandemic that will affect us.

We should also ask our experts to brainstorm, on on the the long term economic consequences of COVID 19 and how we can insulate our internal trade and our local value chains from its impact.

This can help to prevent such infections from spreading across our region, and allow us to keep our internal movements free.

VRRK/AK

