

President and Vice President Hold Discussions with Governors, LGs and Administrators of States and UTs on COVID-19 Response

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Affirming that people of the country have set an example by showing exemplary courage, discipline and solidarity in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, President Shri Ram Nath Kovind has expressed concern over two incidents, the gathering of migrant workers in Anand Vihar and the congregation of Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, both in Delhi, that caused a setback to the efforts.

The President, along with the Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, today held a video-conference with the Governors, Lieutenant Governors and Administrators of States/UTs and discussed ways to contribute to the measures taken by the Government of India and the State Governments in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. The President emphasized the need to ensure that no one remains hungry during the nationwide lockdown.

Today's conference was a sequel to the video conference held on March 27 with the Governors/LGs of select States/UTs on the issue. The Governors and LGs of 15 States/UTs had apprised the President and Vice-President about the situation in their States/UTs in the conference held on March 27. Today, the Governors/LGs/Administrators of 21 remaining States/UTs briefed the President and Vice-President on COVID-19 related efforts. In the conference there was unanimity that there is no scope for laxity or complacency in fighting the invisible enemy. In this context, the President noted with concern the incidents of attacks on doctors, health workers and police personnel in some parts of the country. He wholeheartedly endorsed the Prime Minister's appeal today to all citizens to switch off lights in homes at 9 P.M. on Sunday and instead switch on their mobile flashlights, torches or lamps in an expression of people's solidarity to fight against Coronavirus. He, however, cautioned people not to let their guard down and steadfastly adhere to the practice of social distancing.

In his opening remarks, the President also noted that they had constructive discussions in the previous video conference held on March 27, and several useful suggestions had been made. Some of the praiseworthy initiatives of various states, which were noted in the previous conference, included enrolling retired doctors and medical students, using the expertise of psychologists, inviting the youth to volunteer, monitoring the situation with daily review meetings, setting up hunger help-lines, encouraging home delivery, using stadiums for relief works and quarantine facilities, and involving universities in spreading awareness.

Taking note of the problems faced by the homeless, the unemployed and the weaker sections of society during this crisis, the President said we will have to be extra sensitive towards their needs. He invited other participants in the conference to deliberate upon the ways and means to ensure nobody remains hungry. Acknowledging that this was a big challenge, he added that he was confident the Governors will contribute to the efforts made at the Central and State levels and involve all sections of society.

Moreover, while ensuring that food and other essential items are made available to the needy, care has to be taken that no compromise is made on the question of social distancing, he added.

The President referred to the previous conference in which the role of the Red Cross and other voluntary agencies in complementing the efforts of the Government was discussed. He invited suggestions to involve and encourage maximum participation of the voluntary agencies as well as the private sector in meeting the humanitarian challenge.

In battling the pandemic, our efforts so far have been in the right direction, notwithstanding some incidents,

and we are moving ahead with firm determination, he said in his closing remarks.

The President expressed appreciation of the fellow citizens for their patience and cooperation. He thanked the doctors and all officers and employees who have been serving society, the nation and humanity despite grave risk to their lives. He also expressed his full confidence that the people of the country will continue the campaign against the pandemic with full alertness and firm determination.

The Vice President who conducted the conference laid emphasis on roping in volunteers of the Indian Red Cross Society, social organisations and private sector to mitigate the plight of the poor. He urged the Governors/Lt Governors and Administrators to persuade leaders from different walks of life to come forward and support the most vulnerable sections of society, particularly farmers, as the lockdown coincides with the harvesting season in many states. He pointed out that though the Central Government and the State Governments were taking adequate measures to alleviate people's suffering, it would serve eternal human values for social elites to come forward and support the poor and most vulnerable sections in this crisis.

Uttar Pradesh Governor Smt. Anandiben Patel started off by saying that universities and medical colleges are collaborating to devise methods to attend to the patients on war footing. She also pointed out that online classes for students have begun to enable them to continue with their academic session. She said that the State Government was cognisant of farmers' problems and initiating measures to help them out. Intervening in the discussion, the President urged all Governors to revive units of the Red Cross Society and take their help.

Frequently intervening in the discussion, the Vice President urged Governors/Lt. Governors and Administrators to spread awareness about the measures initiated by the Government in helping farmers in this harvesting season. He particularly asked the Andhra Pradesh Governor Shri Biswa Bhusan Harichandan to see to it that farmers and landless labourers were given succor in these trying times.

Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Shri Girish Chandra Murmu pointed out that the UT administration has been keeping intensive surveillance and has identified hotspots to preempt the outbreak of disease. "We faced problems because of movements of Tablighi Jamaat," he said. He, however, assured that the administration is taking care of migrant workers, students and has also set up adequate quarantine centres. "We are also ensuring food supplies to far-flung areas," he said while responding to a query from the Vice President.

The Ladakh Lt Governor Shri Radha Krishna Mathur expressed concern over rise in cases due to the return of pilgrims from Iran where some of them had been infected. He pointed out that inaccessibility of certain areas and tough terrain make operation rather difficult. He appreciated work of voluntary, religious and social organisations in providing help to people in need.

The Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Admiral D K Joshi ((Retd.) said that 10 positive Covid-19 cases were related to Tablighi Jamaat. All those who participated in the Tablighi Jamaat event are quarantined after identifying them. The Chhattisgarh Governor, Sushri Anusuiya Uikey, said that the state government had launched a comprehensive strategy to check the spread of the disease at the earliest. Referring to farmers' plights, she said that perishable agriculture produces are allowed to be sold in local markets. The Governor, Uttarakhand, Smt. Baby Rani Maurya said that the state had suitably augmented its capacity to meet any situation arising out of the crisis.

The other governors who gave a briefing about the initiatives in their states include the Governor of Goa, Shri Satya Pal Malik, Governor of Odisha, Prof. Ganeshi Lal, Lt Governor of Puducherry, Dr. Kiran Bedi, the Governor of Jharkhand, Shrimati Droupadi Murmu, the Governor of Assam, Prof. Jagdish Mukhi, the Governor of Mizoram, Shri P.S. Sreedharan Pillai, the Governor of Manipur, Dr. Najma Heptulla, the Governor of Meghalaya, Shri Tathagata Roy, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Brig. (Dr.) B. D. Mishra (Retd.), the Governor of Sikkim, Shri Ganga Prasad, the Governor of Tripura, Shri Ramesh Bais, Governor of Nagaland, Shri R. N. Ravi, Lakshadweep Administrator, Shri Dineshwar Sharma, and Administrator of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Shri Praful Patel. Further, Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri Banwarilal Purohit, Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari, Governor of Kerala, Shri Arif Mohammed Khan and LG of Delhi, Shri Anil Bajjal who had briefed the President and Vice-President in the Conference held of March 27, also provided the latest information from their states/UTs today.

In summing up the conference, the President commended Governors/ Lt Governors and Administrators for their insightful views and keeping their ears to the ground to ensure the welfare of people. He extolled doctors

and health workers for serving people in face of grave risk and displaying exemplary courage and conviction. The President once again reiterated that he along with the Vice President would always be available for consultation should such a need arise.

VRRK/KP

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