

Points raised by Shri. Elamaram Kareem MP in the All Party Meeting called by Hon'ble Prime Minister

I am appreciating this decision of Government of India convening the meeting of representatives of political parties to discuss the prevailing national situation. CPI(M) and other left parties were requesting the Hon'ble Prime Minister for calling an All Party meeting since February as the COVID-19 pandemic started spreading in India. The battle against COVID is the battle of India and Indian people as a whole. United activity to prevent the spreading of Corona virus is the need of the hour. We offer our support to the Government on its measures on this regard. All of us together, cutting across political lines, will be able to effectively address the prevailing situation.

The announcement of country wide lock down while it may be necessary, the abrupt announcement caused many difficulties. I would like to point out some of the measures our nation should adopt to address the present crisis and the difficult time which may come after the lock down is over.

Measures to make the citizens economically stable

1. The first COVID case in India was reported in the end of January. Till the date of announcement of lock down, we had around 2 months in hand. This time was not effectively utilised for planning our course of action. The incidents such as migrant exodus and unnecessary panic among the citizens are the result of this lack of planning and lack of awareness among people.
2. The economic situation in the country is not very promising today. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened it. Crores of labourers and agricultural workers who were working for daily wages are starving due to the announcement of lock down and the suspension of the activities they were involved in. The government should immediately transfer Rs. 5000 to all Jandhan accounts, BPL and unorganized workers. Through this only we can ensure this section of the people are able to survive in this crucial time.
3. The central government must provide 35kgs of food grain per family to all migrant workers and poor all across the country. The FCI and government agencies have around 50 million tons of rice and 27.5 million tons of wheat in their stock as on March 1st.
4. In all urban centres, particularly in the large conglomeration of urban slums, provision of food grains and essentials to the needy is urgently required to prevent hunger, starvation and the community spread of COVID-19.
5. Declare harvest of Standing crops as an essential service like Kerala has done, revoke lockdown and provide farmers and agricultural workers protection for the same. Provide harvesting equipments and supply seeds for the coming season free of cost. FCI must be directed to procure at MSP to prevent distress selling.
6. Invoke unemployment benefit clause under MGNREGA to pay allowances for agricultural workers and other beneficiaries losing work due to lockdown.
7. Union Government and State Governments have to take stern steps to curb black marketing and declare maximum retail price of each and every essential commodities in

order to prevent hoarding and artificial price rise. Ensure strict action against the violators. Ensure sufficient supply of essential commodities.

Measures to be taken for preventing the spread

1. Proper health care facilities for the migrant workers and others who have travelled from various parts must be put in place. Effective and hygienic quarantine facilities must be established in all parts of the country.
2. Quarantining the affected people and isolating their contacts are also necessary. For this, Government should immediately improve the facilities in all the government hospitals and if needed take over all the private hospitals and ensure adequate facilities in them. Measures taken by the Government of Kerala can be adopted pan India.
3. The experts in disaster management and public health had made a model predicting the number of hospital beds and ICU facilities that would need to be additionally created. This requires a massive capital investment. The Government of India should allow the expenditure in this regard to be met from the Disaster Relief Fund for states.
4. Contact tracing is also one of the most important things. If the contacts of the affected people are traced effectively and isolated, we can avoid the tragedy of community spreading in India. In this also the steps taken by Kerala can be taken as a model.
5. All the health workers must be provided with personal protective equipment and necessary medical support. Equipments like Ventilators must be acquired urgently on priority.
6. Rapid testing kits must be deployed on a large scale across the country. Currently, India's testing rate is one of the lowest in the world. It is 241 times lower than South Korea. It may be noted that the Rapid testing has already started in Kerala.
7. Government of India should urgently seek medical support and help of countries like Cuba, China and South Korea who are effectively controlling the spread of this virus and have global recognition at this time. Countries like Cuba and China are always ready to extend their solidarity to us in difficult situations.
8. Many countries in the world have announced that the government will guarantee the payment of at least 80 per cent of the salaries being drawn by workers who are now unable to attend work. Government of India should do likewise.

Measures to be taken after the lock down

1. Government should ensure there is no job loss, salary reduction or any type of retrenchment in any sector.
2. The industrial activities and works in construction sectors should be restarted immediately and the government should ensure it in order to save lacks of employees associated with it especially the migrant laborers.
3. There should be enough capital infusion in the economy so that the post lock down recession can be tackled effectively.
4. Agricultural sector should be given immediate attention and the agricultural loans should be written off.

5. Should announce a rehabilitation package for the NRIs who are returning to India from respective countries due to job loss. Government should announce special employment package for these people.
6. For the middle-classes, especially employees, relief should be provided by a moratorium on repayment of loans and the deferring of EMIs.
7. Union and State Governments should take steps to start Government medical collages in all districts immediately.
8. Operate special trains for the migrant workers who were stranded in other states due to lock down to reach their native places.

Demands of Kerala

1. Increase the debt ceiling as a percentage of the states; GSDP, from 3% in view of the extraordinary circumstance. Debt ceiling may be fixed after discussions with the States taking into consideration their unique financial position.
2. Release pending GST compensation arrears of nearly Rs 3000 crore to Kerala immediately as GST collections will dry up this quarter due to extension of dates for filing of returns.
3. Immediately release 50% of Revenue Deficit grant of Rs 15,323 crore, which has been recommended by the 15th Finance Commission for Financial Year 2020-21 for Kerala and accepted by Government of India.
4. Early release of the 15th FC 's recommended grants amounting to Rs 2412 crore for Local Self Governments in the State.
5. Presently, States have only a little room for spending according to their priorities from SDRF. States should be given more flexibility and 'one size fits all' norms should be relaxed at least during this period of unprecedented crisis whose period is uncertain.
6. Since SDRF allocations are based on norms prescribed by the Finance Commission, States like Kerala, which is badly affected by COVID-19, is getting only a very small amount. This should be increased.
7. Smooth procedures for bringing mortal remains of NRIs (who expired not due to COVID - 19 infection) need to be in place. The Government of India may give appropriate directions to the Indian Embassies in this regard.
8. Central assistance provided to the state of Kerala for COVID relief is Rs. 157 Crore. Its is only 1.4% of the total Rs. 11,091 crores allocated nationally. Centre's own report to the Hon'ble Supreme Court says that out of 22567 active government relief camps and shelters all over India, 15541 are run by Government of Kerala. That is, 68.8% of the total camps in India are in Kerala. In this context, the centre should enhance the financial assistance to the state of Kerala.
9. NRIs in gulf countries who lives in Labour Camps are living with very high fear of getting infections. As they are staying as a community housing 10-20 people in a single room, the chance of spreading the infection among all is also very high. Government should inform the concerned Indian Embassies and take steps for necessary

precautionary measures. Embassies should make sure that the concerned nations and its governments are providing adequate attention to people from India who stays in Labour camps especially. Hon'ble Prime Minister should take an initiative on this regard.

I believe that the Government of India will consider these crucial points to effectively tackle the situation. Once again on behalf of my party I am extending all support to the government in the fight against COVID-19.

Thank You.

(Elamaram Kareem)