

## Press Release on Covid- 19 in India

(April 11, 2020)

The whole world is going through an unprecedented crisis due to covid-19 pandemic. The exponential spreading of corona virus across all countries and deaths associated are bothering each and everyone around the world. During these testing and trying times, all countries came up with different preventive and precautionary measures. At this juncture, India, a country of 1.3 billion people, still could able to contain corona cases to around 7000 and less than 200 deaths (as on 11 April 2020) in the 10 weeks since the first COVID 19 case was detected with much lower incidence as compared to global rate. Therefore, I would like to highlight the preventive and precautionary measures undertaken, health crisis preparedness, handling hidden socio-economic costs with these measures and evacuating Indian citizens abroad by Government of India in containing the spread of virus to such a low number compared to many other countries. Even WHO recognized India's Public health response as Pro-active, Pre-emptive and Graded.

2. Preventive and Precautionary Measures:- India started Flight-Screening Systems 13 days before the first case was detected (30 Jan) whereas Italy started screening 25 days after the first case and Spain did that 39 days after its first case. Screening and graded travel restrictions, measures to propagate social distancing, graded stoppage of international flights and suspension of visas were increased step by step from mid-January. India started partial lockdown within 52 days of the first case, with only 451 active cases after WHO declaring virus to be a Pandemic on March 11. India moved to full lockdown on the 55th day of the outbreak with only around 600 confirmed cases, compared to other countries which have undertaken full lockdowns only after cases rose beyond several thousands. This lockdown was truly unprecedented. It has included, for instance stoppage of over 13,000 railway passenger services a day, for the first time in India's history as a Republic, stoppage of all flight services and public transport and so on. And yet India maintained continuity of essential services- power supply, water, energy, food products, banking, even delivering essential goods to India's neighbouring countries. Scientific estimates suggest that without social distancing measures, the reproductive rate would have been 2.5 people per day, but with the lockdown, India could able to reduce social exposure by over 75%, leading to a low infection rate. In other words, without the lockdown, India could have had up to 820,000 cases by 15 April. With the lockdown, India could contain to around 7,000 cases only. More importantly, the cases are largely localized to 78 districts that account for over 80% of the cases.

3. Health Crisis Preparedness:-India upgraded its capacity with 520 dedicated COVID hospitals, with nearly 85,000 isolation beds and 8500 ICU beds, 5570 additional health facilities, which will bring in another 197,400 isolation beds and a further 36,700 ICU beds, 40,000 extra isolation beds by converting 2500 railway carriages. India ramped-up production and procurement of essential PPE sets, ventilators and testing equipment with target of 17 million PPE sets, N95 Masks and tens of thousands of new ventilators including with 32 private companies. India expanded production of pharmaceutical supplies, from anti-pyretic tablets to Hydroxychloroquine to meet domestic needs and of the world. India scaled up testing from one laboratory in January, to 223 labs (157 public labs; 66 private) with over 115,000 samples tested so far. India is also developing Indian testing kits to meet escalated demand for more liberalized testing. India developed the necessary related capacities to use the data generated from testing, including through rapid response teams that will take forward contact-tracing, the use of GIS-based programmes to enhance surveillance, and so on.

4. Socio-economic costs: India launched Pradhana Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana comprising both the Food security and Direct Benefit Transfer of cash to the Poor, Women, Senior citizens, widows, farmers and workers with a package of INR 1.75 lakh crores after the full nation wide lockdown on 25 March. The Food security includes provision of Pulses, Food grains and Fuel. A package of INR 15000 crores is earmarked for Health sector. India launched Insurance scheme for over 22 lakh workers in Government hospitals, health care centres and labs including ward staff, cleaning personnel, technicians, ASHA workers, paramedical staff and doctors. State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) of INR 11000 crores provided for relief & shelter camps and food camps by providing shelters to 1.25 million migrants and food to 7.5 millions so far. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself monitoring the situation from time to time and constant coordination between centre and state governments, India could be able to handle the socio-economic costs efficiently and effectively.

5. International aspects:- Ministry of External Affairs created COVID cell to constantly monitor and coordinate inward and outward movements, evacuation of Indian citizens stranded abroad, and monitor updates on virus spread and precautionary & preventive measures being taken around the world. Prime Minister has held video-conference with SAARC leaders and G20 leaders. India committed US\$ 10 million towards health assistance to SAARC Fund. India cleared commercial and aid supply of key pharma products. India is committed to the larger international effort to find both a vaccine and to improve treatment protocols.

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