

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 400
ANSWERED ON 20.07.2021

TACKLING CRISIS OF COVID-19 AT PANCHAYAT LEVEL

400. SHRI PARVESH SAHIB SINGH VERMA:
SHRI RAMESH BIDHURI:

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has taken any steps to empower panchayats to tackle the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic at panchayat level and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the Government has issued any guidelines to combat spread of Covid-19 in rural areas, if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the details of steps taken for the improvement in the functioning of panchayats in the country; and
- (d) whether the Government has taken steps to encourage the State Governments to devolve substantial powers to Panchayati Raj institutions, if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR PANCHAYATI RAJ
(SHRI KAPIL MORESHWAR PATIL)

(a)& (b) Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has been providing technical and advisory support to the Panchayats towards taking various steps to combat Covid pandemic situation. The States have been advised to enable Panchayats/ Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) to facilitate sanitation and social distancing in the rural areas. It has been advised to Panchayats to take up effective communication strategy for spreading awareness involving display boards, dissemination on Covid appropriate behavior, mass customized communication SMS/whatsapp messages and adherence to appropriate behaviour at the worksites. During the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA) launched by the Government from 20 June, 2020 to 22 October, 2020, the implementing States were advised to utilize the Central Finance Commission Grants in convergence with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in order to provide employment to returning migrant labourers in construction of Panchayat Bhawans and other public infrastructures.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has issued a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) dated 16-5-2021 on 'Covid 19 Containment and Management in peri-urban, rural and tribal areas' which outlines the containment and clinical management practices with respect to Covid – 19 management. The SOP has advocated a multi-pronged approach led by Gram Panchayats (GPs) and engaging other stakeholders for coordinating community action and awareness creation at the village level. MoPR has accordingly advised the states to empower RLBs to implement various instructions contained in the SOP. In order to monitor the various key performance indicators on real time basis, MoPR has recently

launched an online dashboard capturing the key indicators on Covid Preparedness and Covid Response in rural areas at different levels of Panchayats.

To enable the Panchayats to effectively fight the Covid pandemic, MoPR has advised the States to enable Gram Panchayats to utilize the Fourteenth Finance Commission (XIV FC) unspent balance grants and Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC) Basic (Untied) grants for the purchase of masks, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, sanitizers, oximeters, infrared thermometers, oxygen cylinders/concentrators etc. as well as preparation of isolation centre/ Covid Care Centre, creation of additional beds in the Covid Care Centre etc. The expenditure involving larger outlays like group insurance premiums, vaccination costs for the village population, etc. were advised to be met from the Finance Commission Grants with the District/ Block Panchayats.

In order to provide the necessary resources to the Panchayats, the first installment of Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC) Basic (Untied) Grants and Tied Grants for FY 2020-21 were released by Ministry of Finance (MoF) based on recommendations of MoPR, without any pre-conditions to the RLBs. Further, in view of the sudden rise in the Covid pandemic, the first instalment of XV FC Basic (Untied) Grants of FY 2021-22 to 25 States were also released in advance in the month of May, 2021, as a special case, so that these funds could be utilized by the Panchayats for various prevention and mitigation measures to combat the Covid pandemic.

(c) Panchayat, being “Local Government”, is a State subject and part of State List of Seventh Schedule of Constitution of India. The implementation of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution is reviewed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) from time to time through studies and discussions in review meetings with the States. The performance of the Panchayats depends on the extent of powers and resources devolved to them, which varies from State to State. The performance of Panchayats is also monitored by the State Governments. MoPR supports States in building capacities of Panchayats for rural governance. It also helps States in developing guidelines for participatory planning by Panchayats and preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) to bring in efficiency, transparency and accountability for achieving development objectives. Funds are also devolved to the Panchayats based on the recommendation of the Central Finance Commission in order to deliver citizen centric services. Further, with a vision to digitalize Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for empowering rural India, Ministry has developed a simplified work based accounting application– eGramSwaraj (egramswaraj.gov.in) to address various aspects of Panchayat functioning including planning, budgeting, implementation, accounting and monitoring to make them more transparent, accountable and effective as organs of decentralized self-governing institutions. The Ministry has also launched the application of AuditOnline during April, 2020 with a view to ensure timely online availability of audited accounts of Panchayats.

(d) Article 243G of Part IX of the Constitution allows discretion to State/Union Territory (UT) to endow, to the Panchayats with powers and authority including in areas listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, to enable them to function as institutions of local self-governance to prepare plans and implement schemes for economic development and social justice. As the extent and pace of devolution, including the monitoring of functionaries, to Panchayats vary across States, implementation of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution is reviewed by the MoPR from time to time through studies and discussions in review meetings with the States. The States are also regularly encouraged to devolve substantial powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions through advocacy, capacity building and persuasion.
