





Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

 **73rd session of WHO South East Asia Region** **Dr. Harsh Vardhan addresses the Ministerial Round Table Session on COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness**  
**“Pradhan Mantri – Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana will lead to strengthening of the Health Sector in the Country”**

Posted On: 10 SEP 2020 3:11PM by PIB Delhi

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare attended the 73rd session of WHO South East Asia Region (SEARO) through video conference, here today. Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Director WHO SEARO and Dr. Roderico Ofrin, WHO Country Representative for India and Regional Emergency Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme were also present at the event.

Representing India, Dr. Harsh Vardhan offered two interventions in the ministerial round table session on COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness. He first spoke on the three important interventions that were applied to manage COVID – 19 and maintain essential non – COVID health services in India. He later expounded on the strategies that are being applied to ensure that there are increased investments in health and health emergency preparedness and response as well as in International Health Regulation (IHR) core capacities to prevent future pandemics, in the second round of interventions.

Speaking on India’s public health measures to prevent and contain spread of SARS nCoV - 2 since January 2020, he outlined the measures undertaken by the Government of India such as issuing of travel advisories, creation of facilities for quarantine of persons returning from countries which reported cases of COVID – 19, issuing of guidelines for community level surveillance and also scaling up of testing facilities, tracking and testing of all suspect cases, establishment of the three tier health infrastructure in the form of COVID Care Centres (CCC), Dedicated COVID Health Centres (DCHC) and Dedicated COVID Hospitals (DCH) for treatment of asymptomatic to mild, moderate and severe cases of COVID – 19.

Dr Harsh Vardhan also highlighted the increasing domestic production capacity of PPE, ventilators and other medical items required for treatment of COVID – 19 patients which has resulted in India’s resilience in the health sector. He stated that India has developed guidelines for infection prevention and control, testing protocol, clinical management and bio – medical waste management as well as the guidelines to be followed by COVID and non – COVID health facilities. He mentioned about the development of web-based portal for States and UTs to report about testing, hospital admissions, discharged patients, deaths and also to make readily available future estimate of their requirement of medical items for COVID patients. Directives were also issued to all States and UTs to provide non – COVID essential healthcare services.

Speaking on the three important interventions that India undertook for management of COVID and maintain essential non – COVID health services, he mentioned

- a) the country’s exponential scaling up of testing from 1 lab in January to 1678 labs at present which can conduct a million tests daily,
- b) the country’s exceptional effective clinical management provided by the three tier COVID healthcare involving the development of guidelines for asymptomatic to mild, moderate and severe cases by the medical community and their continuous review, updation and dissemination among the practitioners, and
- c) the country’s commitment to provide non-COVID essential care by providing life saving healthcare to patients with chronic ailments, malignancies, blood disorders, the pregnant and the elderly and those with emergent conditions that require urgent attention. Directives were issued to all the States and UTs not to dedicate all their health facilities to treat COVID and identify some of them as non – COVID facilities so that they continue to provide healthcare services to those who require urgent medical care.

During the session, he expanded on the strategies being implemented in the medium to long term to strengthen core capacities under the International Health Regulations of WHO in order to augment the health, health emergency preparedness and response to prevent adverse effects of future pandemics in India. He spoke about India’s flagship ‘*Pradhan Mantri – Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana*’ launched by Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi. Under this scheme, “budgetary investment in health sector has been increased to strengthen healthcare services, health emergency preparedness and response and thereby strengthen IHR core capacities.” This will expand public health infrastructure, improve healthcare service delivery and quality, strengthen disease surveillance systems and outbreak response, enhance bio – security preparedness and population health research, he added.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan further linked these efforts with the broader goal of making India 'Atmanirbhar'(self-resilient) by adopting a co-ordinated approach with States and UTs to work on a common framework. He spoke on the steps taken to enhance bio – medical research and bio – security policies, food and drug safety and thereafter create a coordinated implementation platform responding to multi – sectoral needs including engagement of private sector. Reminding his audience of the self-reliance India achieved in domestic production of PPE, N95 masks and other medical items with close co-operation between government and private sectors, he said the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare along with Ministry of Finance are making efforts to identify and remove bottlenecks to stimulate indigenous technology development under “Make in India” initiative in close consultation with other stakeholders.

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HFV/HFM-WHO-SEARO-73<sup>rd</sup>/10September2020/3

(Release ID: 1652976) Visitor Counter : 83

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