

‘A SCRIPT OF ACTION, RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPASSION’: CHIEF MINISTER ASHOK GEHLOT WRITES ON RAJASTHAN’S FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

The Coronavirus Containment Programme in Rajasthan Has Been Intense and Proactive; Challenges Are Being Met.

As I write this piece, the novel coronavirus has infected nearly 5,200 people in our country and 165 people have died from the disease. More than 400 patients have recovered, thanks to the relentless efforts of our medical practitioners and administrative machinery.

As Albert Einstein once said, in the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity. This is the time to start improving our health-care management, formulating a cooperative Centre-State relationship to build a health-care network, and ensuring that equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE) is available to all practitioners. Rajasthan, for instance, had pathology laboratories during the Swine flu outbreak in the year 2009-10 in each division. These laboratories were augmented without any loss of time this time.

- **Rajasthan fights back**

The Corona Containment Programme in Rajasthan has been the most intense and proactive. As early as February 2020, I chaired multiple meetings and video conferences and also the sensitisation programmes of all cadres of health professionals and administrators.

The Jaipur SMS Medical College was chosen as the nodal centre for the containment programme; it now has 1,200 beds with adequate distancing and adequate supplies of PPE. There are 500 ventilator beds, now being increased to 3,000 beds. The results have been very encouraging. Of 7,000 cases tested, 200 have been found positive, with four unfortunate deaths. The rest have either recovered or are in the process of recovery.

The treatment protocol followed by our experts at the SMS hospital had cured three Italian patients and many more with a track record of no mortality so far solely due to COVID-19 infection. Rapid response teams have been monitoring all the hotspots, tracing contacts and working to isolate cluster zones. Door-to-door screening has been the hallmark of our COVID Containment programme.

Bhilwara: Once the epicentre of COVID-19 infections, Bhilwara has now become a case study in containing the spread of the novel coronavirus. This was one of the very first challenges as we were unaware of the nature and scope of the spread of this virus. Moreover, in most cases where doctors have been a source or carriers of infection, the number of cases had spiralled, making it difficult to contain the spread.

Thus, an uncompromising and firm approach towards lockdown of the district along with a specific structural standard operating procedure was worked out. The Triple-T method, i.e. ‘Tracing, Testing and Treatment’ was made mandatory. Strict adherence to quarantine norms and meticulous screening of more than 32 lakh people, resulted in the curbing of a number of COVID-19 infections in Bhilwara. This very procedure is being followed now for the entire State where more than five crore people have been screened till now. Ruthless containment was the key.

Bhilwara to Ramgunj: Ramgunj is another case in point which is located in the walled city of Jaipur. A congested, dense locality, it makes observance of social distancing very difficult. Hundreds of people from the area have been sent to isolation facilities after the importance of living separately was explained to them in detail. The State has imposed curfew in 38 urban towns and cities, including Ramganj.

I am proud of the fact that our mottoes, “Rajasthan Satark hai” (Rajasthan stays alert) and “Koi Bhuka nahi Soega” (No one shall sleep hungry) have become the war cry in our administration. A “Unity of Command and Unity in Communication” system, which is very useful in dealing with crises, has been implemented. An emergency war-room, with deployment of senior Indian Administrative Service officers and officials from multiple departments, has been activated at the State-level for round-the-clock monitoring. Every district has a similar system.

Rajasthan has identified one lakh beds for quarantine if the need arises. Medical staff due for superannuation has been given extension of services till September 2020. A call centre has received over 18,000 calls regarding lockdown-related grievances; these were resolved in no time. Three additional help lines have been created to deal with medical grievances.

Better planning, synchronised Centre-State action and inter-State coordination could have helped in avoiding migrant workers being put to difficulty. But Rajasthan rose to the challenge and made all arrangements for their food, stay and screening. Cooked food packets for daily wagers, street vendors and needy people who are not covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), are being provided free of cost. Two lakh packets of cooked food were served on April 3, 2020 in Jaipur alone.

- **Social security measures**

A relief package of ₹2,500 crore for the weaker sections and sustenance grants of ₹2,500, for 31 lakh construction workers, factory workers and street vendors, and destitute have been disbursed.

More than 78 lakh social security pensioners have been given two months pension directly into their accounts. A survey of destitute is being carried out to ensure that they do not suffer from a lack of essential rations.

Essential ration supply has been sent to every gram panchayat, so that the patwari/gram Sewak may give it to the people in need. Home delivery of essential commodities is being facilitated. Pregnant and lactating women are being tracked to ensure institutional delivery, immunisation and essential food and nutrition. We have created a helpline to ensure food and fodder for stray animals and birds and our teams are working in close coordination with non-governmental organisations and Gaushalas.

Distribution of free food grains to all beneficiaries of the NFSA is being done in the State. Fifteen lakh small and marginal farmers and the Scheduled Tribe farmers would be given free hybrid seeds (maize and bajra) for the coming kharif crop. Farmers are being provided tractor and farm equipment for harvesting, threshing and other agriculture-related activities free of cost or on very nominal rent.

Interest-free crop loan of ₹8,000 crore will be disbursed in Kharif 2020, which will benefit 20 lakh farmers. Fixed charges in the electricity bills of establishments are being deferred. The State government has also given relief given to the hotel and tourism industry by giving them reimbursement of State Goods and Service Tax for three months up to June 2020 and relaxation in excise fees.

- **Empowering States**

The Prime Minister’s package of ₹1.7-lakh crore is a welcome step. Although additional funds need to be pumped in, preferably prioritising them in proportion to the population and number of COVID cases in respective States, others can be given aid in equitable proportions. This can be executed with the active participation and consultation of the States and also with the Goods and Services Tax Council or on the standards formulated by the Inter-State Council.

The government of India should establish standard protocol to ensure transportation of essential commodities so that the supply chain of essential items is maintained during the lockdown. A one-stop-shop solution should be made available by the government of India to States for the procurement of medical equipment such as ventilators and PPE kits instead of having each State Government running from pillar to post in search of manufacturers and suppliers.

The government of India needs to facilitate sufficient health infrastructure and PPE kits for doctors and medical staff. The Central Health Ministry needs to make it easier to procure them by issuing suitable standardisation and pricing.

- **Looking ahead**

I would like to believe that the world would be a very different place once this pandemic is over. I hope we 'recognise' that the people in the forefront of this fight do not discriminate while saving lives, lending help, and restoring harmony. Their commitment towards their duty and society is the greatest investment in nation-building today. And, therefore, there cannot be a more fitting example than these testing times to realise the importance of compassion and humanity. We are a country with one of the richest examples of heritage, culture, ethnicity and demography. We thrive on our diversity.

So, let us not make the mistake of rising out of the COVID-19 crisis and then succumb to divisive politics. May this pandemic teach us to be better human beings.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **script** (noun) - a plan of action.
2. **compassion** (noun) – concern, consideration, humanity.
3. **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
4. **coronavirus** (CoV)(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
5. **containment** (noun) – an act of keeping something (harmful) under control (it means quickly identifying cases of coronavirus through testing, placing infected individuals in isolation, tracking who infected persons might have been in contact with and potentially quarantining those who came into contact with infection so that the disease doesn't continue to spread).
6. **proactive** (adjective) – dedicated, aggressive, passionate/spirited; foresighted, forward-looking.
7. **novel coronavirus** (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2) (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
8. **relentless** (adjective) – persistent, continuing, constant, non-stop, unrelenting.
9. **machinery** (noun) – organization, system, structure.
10. **in the midst of** (phrase) – in the middle of.
11. **personal protective equipment** (PPE) (noun) – safety gear; protective clothing, helmets, masks or other garments or equipment designed to protect the wearer's body from injury/disease.
12. **pathology** (noun) – a branch of medical science that studies the nature, effects, causes and consequences of diseases.
13. **swine flu** (noun) – H1N1 flu; Swine influenza/flu is a highly contagious disease caused by a strain (type) of the influenza type A virus called H1N1. Swine flu used to only affect pigs and rarely, be passed to humans.
14. **outbreak** (noun) – sudden appearance/occurrence(of a disease); outburst, epidemic.

15. **augment** (verb) – increase, make larger, enlarge, supplement.
16. **chair** (verb) – preside over, lead, control/direct.
17. **sensitisation** (noun) – a quality to be reactive/responsive to something.
18. **cadre** (noun) – members of a group; a small group (of people).
19. **nodal centre** (noun) - primary centre (head office).
20. **ventilator** (noun) – a respirator, a device (used for a patient to breathe).
21. **mortality** (noun) – (in a particular time/for a cause) the rate/number of death.
22. **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
23. **solely** (adverb) – only, simply, merely.
24. **hotspot** (noun) – a place of significant activity.
25. **contact tracing** (noun) - it is defined as the identification and follow up of persons who may have come into contact with a person infected with the virus.
26. **cluster** (noun) – a group (of people considered as a unit).
27. **screening** (noun) – examination, testing (of a group of people for the symptoms of a disease). The process of identifying healthy people who may be at increased risk of disease or condition.
28. **hallmark** (noun) – distinctive feature, indication, sure sign.
29. **epicentre** (noun) – the main point of unpleasant or problematic situation.
30. **spiral** (verb) - increase rapidly, rise rapidly, leap up, escalate.
31. **uncompromising** (adjective) – stubborn, single-minded, head-strong, relentless, resolute, determined.
32. **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
33. **standard operating procedure** (SOP) (noun) – a detailed, written document consisting of step-by-step information on routine activities necessary to complete tasks in accordance with specific regulations or standards.
34. **work out** (phrasal verb) – develop, form, initiate/establish.
35. **adherence to** (noun) – commitment to, attachment to.
36. **quarantine** (noun) – a process of separating out people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease; Quarantine is imposed to separate and restrict the movement of persons, who may have been exposed to infectious disease, but not yet known to be ill.
37. **meticulous** (adjective) – careful, diligent, thorough/scrupulous.
38. **curb** (noun) – restraint, restriction, control.
39. **screen** (verb) – check, test, examine (a person for the presence of a disease).
40. **ruthless** (adjective) – unrelenting, unsparing, unforgiving, inflexible.
41. **key** (noun) - solution, answer, clue.
42. **case in point** (phrase) – example, instance, sample.
43. **social distancing** (noun) – a term means actively avoiding crowded public places, is a key element in decreasing the rapid spread of COVID-19. This is an effort intended to limit exposure by reducing face-to-face contact and preventing spread among people in community settings.
44. **isolation** (noun) – a complete separation from others of a person known or reasonably believed to be infected with communicable diseases.
45. **curfew** (noun) – a rule which is instructing people to stay at home, typically at night.
46. **war cry** (noun) – rallying call, shout call, battle cry (used to get people’s support for a cause).

47. **war-room** (noun) – a place (such as a business headquarters) where all the vital information are gathered and brainstormed with all the key people involved in it (to solve a difficult problem).
48. **deployment** (noun) – the movement of workforce to a place for an effective action.
49. **round the clock** (phrase) – all day and all night (without stopping).
50. **superannuation** (noun) - retirement (discharging someone after having reached a predetermined age or cause to retire someone due to age).
51. **grievance** (noun) – complaint, criticism, objection/protest.
52. **in no time** (phrase) – very fast/quickly.
53. **synchronized** (adjective) – concurrent, coinciding, happening/done at the same time.
54. **inter-** (prefix) – between.
55. **rise to the challenge** (phrase) - to deal with/respond to a difficult situation successfully.
56. **needy** (adjective) – poor/poverty-stricken, underprivileged, impoverished.
57. **sustenance** (noun) – means of support, source of income, support, maintenance.
58. **(the) destitute** (noun) – the impoverished, the poverty-stricken, the poor.
59. **disburse** (verb) – pay out, give, spend/expend.
60. **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
61. **lack of** (noun) – absence, want/need, deficiency.
62. **ration** (noun) – the practice of having a fixed allowance of food, esp a statutory one for civilians (particularly in time of scarcity or soldiers in time of war); allowance, allocation, allotment.
63. **facilitate** (verb) – make easier, make possible; assist, help, aid.
64. **lactating** (adjective) – breastfeeding.
65. **institutional delivery** (noun) - it refers to the facilities like hospitals, trained health care professionals etc. for women for giving birth to child.
66. **immunisation** (noun) – the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine. Vaccines stimulate the body's own immune system to protect the person against subsequent infection or disease.
67. **nutrition** (noun) – nourishment, nutriment, nutrients.
68. **fodder** (noun) – food, particularly dried hay or straw, for cattle and other livestock.
69. **kharif crops** (noun) – monsoon crops; seeds sowing in the beginning (Jun) of the monsoon and harvesting at the end of the season (Oct) in the South Asia.
70. **rabi crops/sowing** (noun) – winter crops; seeds sowing in the beginning (Nov) of the winter and harvesting at the end of the season (Apr) in the South Asia.
71. **harvesting** (noun) – the process of gathering a ripe crop from the fields.
72. **threshing** (noun) - the process of separating grain from a crop.
73. **defer** (verb) – delay, hold off, postpone.
74. **reimbursement** (noun) – money paid back/compensated for the money spent.
75. **pump in** (phrasal verb) – invest a large sum of money in something.
76. **prioritise** (verb) – make a point of, highlight, call attention to (something as very important).
77. **aid** (noun) – help, assistance, support.
78. **equitable** (adjective) – fair, impartial.
79. **supply chain** (noun) – a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final buyer.
80. **procurement** (noun) – collection, acquiring, purchasing.
81. **from pillar to post** (phrase) – from place to place, back and forth, in all directions.
82. **standardization** (noun) - the process of making something as a standard.

83. **look ahead** (phrase verb) – to think about what will happen in the future.
84. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
85. **at/in the forefront** (phrase) – be in a leading position in an important activity that is trying to achieve something.
86. **discriminate** (verb) - differentiate, distinguish, separate; disfavour, be biased, treat differently.
87. **harmony** (noun) – unity, solidarity, peace/goodwill.
88. **fitting** (adjective) - apt, appropriate, suitable.
89. **testing** (adjective) – challenging, tough, difficult.
90. **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.
91. **ethnicity** (noun) – a category of people who identify with each other based on common language, ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences.
92. **demography** (noun) – the statistical study/structure of populations, especially human beings.
93. **thrive** (verb) – grow, develop, progress, advance (vigorously).
94. **succumb** (verb) - give in, submit, surrender, fall victim to, suffer from.
95. **divisive** (adjective) – alienating/isolating, disharmonious, discordant.
