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Follow up on the Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on COVID-19

March 23, 2020

- At the initiative of the Prime Minister, a Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on combating COVID-19 was held on 15 March 2020. The Conference demonstrated the shared resolve of countries in the SAARC region to fight together the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The numbers of COVID-19 cases in all SAARC countries have been growing steadily, further reinforcing the need for all to act in fullest solidarity to address the challenge and mitigate its impact.
- As announced by the Prime Minister, India has since created a COVID-19 Emergency Fund with an initial offer of USD 10 million to meet the costs of immediate actions. The Fund has been operationalized and the requirements of urgent medical supplies and equipment in individual countries in the region are being met through this Fund. It is encouraging that, in the spirit of collaboration, contributions have also been committed by Sri Lanka (USD 5 million), Bangladesh (1.5 million), Nepal (USD 1 million), Afghanistan (USD 1 million), Maldives (USD 200,000) and Bhutan (USD 100,000) taking the total amount in the COVID-19 Emergency Fund to USD 18.3 million. It truly reflects the deeply shared sense of determination in the participating countries to act together.
- SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC-IU), Gandhinagar has set up a website (<http://www.covid19-sdmc.org/>) on COVID-19 for shared use of SAARC countries. The website aims, with the active participation of all member countries, to disseminate reliable information and updates on the evolving situation relating to COVID-19 in the region, and best practices being followed in member countries.
- A Video Conference of senior health professionals of SAARC countries is also proposed to be held on 26 March 2020 to exchange experiences of combating the spread of COVID-19 thus far, including on specific protocols dealing with screening at entry points, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation facilities etc. The discussions in the conference are also proposed to include practical joint action on online training capsules for emergency response teams, setting up of an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal, creation of a Common Research Platform and coordination of research on controlling epidemics within the South Asian region.
- It is India's belief that sharing of resources, expertise, best practices and capacities in these challenging times would go a long way in bringing the countries in the SAARC region closer together.

New Delhi
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