

Video Conference of senior health professionals of SAARC countries on the fight against Covid-19

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The Prime Minister had announced at the Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on 15 March 2020 that health professionals of all SAARC member states could hold a video conference to carry forward collaboration in the common fight against Covid19 at the practical level.

As implementation of that announcement, a video conference of health professionals representing all SAARC countries at the level of Director General of Health Services (DGHS) was held on 26 March 2020. At this conference chaired by the DGHS of India, a wide range of issues relating to Covid19 were discussed extensively with active and purposeful participation of all sides.

On India's part, a comprehensive presentation was made on India's response, covering the aspects of disease surveillance, contact tracing, travel restrictions and evacuation, risk assessment, diagnostics, isolation and quarantine methods and facilities, clinical management of patients, treatment options and protocols and safety of healthcare providers. Likewise, all other SAARC countries shared their own experiences of dealing with the Covid19 challenge in their respective settings. All countries also highlighted their specific vulnerabilities, capacities, best practices, gaps in resources and logistics, private sector participation as well as levels of preparedness. Community engagement and participation was identified as an important element in any anti-Covid19 strategy to augment the large scale emergency measures undertaken by the governments in the SAARC region.

India proposed a shared electronic platform for all SAARC nations to share and exchange information, knowledge, expertise and best practices for jointly combating the coronavirus epidemic. It was informed that considerable work has already gone into the creation of the platform, which could also serve as a multipurpose vehicle to further discuss and conduct activities such as online training for emergency response personnel, knowledge partnerships, sharing of expertise in disease surveillance, including the corresponding software, and joint research for new diagnostic and therapeutic interventions for epidemic diseases. The Indian side proposed that till such time the electronic platform is fully operational, a network of experts representing the Health Services of all SAARC countries may set up on email/whatsapp to enable exchange of all relevant information between the SAARC countries on real time basis.

The enthusiastic and constructive participation by all SAARC member states demonstrated the shared commitment to work together to defeat the challenge posed by the coronavirus epidemic in the region.

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