

Embassy of India

Thimphu

Press Release: Regional Workshop on COVID-19 Management: Experiences, Good Practices and Way Forward with 10 neighbouring countries coordinated by India

In keeping with the spirit of cooperation envisaged by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi in the SAARC Leaders' Conference on 15 March 2020, the Government of India organized a **Workshop on COVID-19 Management: Experiences, Good Practices and Way Forward** with health experts from 10 neighbouring countries on 18 February 2021. This workshop was another of several initiatives implemented by the Government of India to jointly combat the COVID-19 pandemic such as the SAARC COVID Emergency Fund, COINEX (COVID Information Exchange portal), e-ITEC training programmes to share best practices on management of COVID-19, training programmes on clinical trials as well as a customized training programme on the administrative and operational aspects of a safe and effective vaccine-roll out.

2. Prime Minister Modi addressed today's Regional Workshop which witnessed participation from Mauritius and Seychelles in addition to the SAARC member countries i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Prime Minister conveyed his best wishes to the participating countries for fruitful and constructive discussions and made the following suggestions for greater regional cooperation:

- (i) Creation of a special visa scheme for doctors and nurses, so that they can travel quickly within the region during health emergencies, on the request of the receiving country
- (ii) Coordination among Civil Aviation ministries for a regional Air Ambulance agreement for medical contingencies
- (iii) A regional platform for collating, compiling and studying data about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines among the regional populations
- (iv) Creation of a regional network for promoting technology-assisted epidemiology for preventing future pandemics
- (v) Knowledge-sharing of successful public health policies and schemes

4. Dr. Pemba Wangchuk, Officiating Health Secretary of Bhutan, expressed his sincere gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and the people of India for the "precious gift of vaccines" as Bhutan was the first country to receive the vaccine on January 20, 2021. He thanked Prime Minister Shri Modi and the Embassy of India, Thimphu for supporting Bhutan through the pandemic and shared Bhutan's best practices for fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Prime Minister Modi said that if the 21st Century is to be the Asian Century, it can not be without greater integration among the countries of South Asia and the Indian Ocean island countries. He added that the regional cooperation shown during the pandemic has proven that this integration is indeed possible.

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