

Central Government constitutes 6 Inter-Ministerial Teams to make assessment of situation and augment State efforts to fight and contain spread of COVID-19

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The Centre has constituted 6 Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCTs), two each for West Bengal and Maharashtra and one each for Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to make on-spot assessment of situation and issue necessary directions to State Authorities for its redressal and submit their report to Central Government in larger interest of general public. Situation is specially serious in Indore (MP), Mumbai and Pune (Maharashtra), Jaipur (Rajasthan) and Kolkata, Howrah, Medinipur East, 24 Parganas North, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal. IMCTs to focus on complaints of implementation of lockdown measures as per guidelines, supply of essential commodities, social distancing, preparedness of health infrastructure, safety of health professionals and conditions of the relief camps for labour and poor people.

It may be mentioned that if the incidents of violations are allowed to occur without any restraining measures in hotspot districts or emerging hotspots or even places where large outbreaks or clusters may be expected and pose a serious health hazard, both for the population of these districts and for that living in other areas of the country. After analyzing the prevalence of such violations in major hotspot districts, it is clear to the Central Government that the situation is especially serious in the above mentioned areas and expertise of the Centre need to be used.

The Committees have been constituted by the Central Government in exercise of the powers, conferred, inter alia, under Section 35(1), 35(2)(a), 35(2)(e) and 35(2)(i) of the Disaster Management Act 2005. It is reiterated that in the Orders on lockdown measures, as well as in the Guidelines/ Consolidated Revised Guidelines, strict implementation of the lockdown and other measures has been stressed; and Governments of States/ UTs have also been advised that while they can impose stricter measures than contemplated in these Guidelines, they shall not dilute these Guidelines issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

It may be recalled that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in its Order dated 31.03,2020 in the Writ Petition (Civil) No 468 of 2020 is also pleased to observe that (quote) we trust and expect that all concerned viz. State Governments, Public Authorities and Citizens of this country will faithfully comply with the directives and orders issued by the Union of India in letter and spirit in the interest of public safety" (unquote). The observation, which must be treated as directions of the Apex Court, was conveyed to all States/ UTs Governments.

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It is again emphasized that the aforesaid IMCTs will focus their assessment on the compliance and implementation of lockdown measures as per guidelines issued under the Disaster Management Act 2005; they will also focus on issues like the supply of essential commodities, social distancing in movement of people outside their homes, preparedness of the health infrastructure, hospital facility and sample statistics in the District, safety of health professionals, availability of test kits, PPEs, masks and other safety equipment, and conditions of the relief camps for labour and poor people.