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Indian Railways gears up its entire machinery in a big way to take comprehensive measures on prevention of COVID-19 virus infection

Regular reviews by Minister of Railways and Commerce & Industry Shri Piyush Goyal, MoS (Railways) and Chairman Railway Board since 5th March 2020 to bolster preparedness Uninterrupted 24X7 Freight Trains Operations and Running of Parcel Trains to ensure availability of essential commodities throughout the country; From 24.03.2020 to 02.04.2020, more than 4 lac wagons carried supplies to keep the supply chain functional Around 5000 isolation beds in Railway hospitals and 11000 quarantine beds across Railway establishments earmarked for COVID-19 patients; In addition, conversion of 5000 coaches with 80000 beds to serve as quarantine/ isolation facilities initially already taken up, total 20000 such coaches identified Great efforts being mounted to develop in house personal health protection masks and sanitizers; Till 1st April 2020 In

Indian Railways has geared up its entire machinery in a big way to take comprehensive measures on prevention of COVID-19 virus infection. The preparedness levels are being reviewed by Minister of Railways and Commerce & Industry Shri Piyush Goyal, Minister of State for Railways Shri Suresh Angadi and Chairman Railway Board Shri Vinod Kumar Yadav since 5th March 2020. Interactions involving General Managers (GMs) and key officials of Railway Board are being held every day. This helps to coordinate efforts, give directions, take feedback, review progress and maintain effective communication.

Following initiatives have been taken –

1. Uninterrupted 24X7 Freight Trains Operations to ensure availability of essential commodities through the country - From 24.03.2020 to 02.04.2020, more than 4 lac wagons carried supplies to keep the supply chain functional. Of these, more than 2.23 lac wagons carried essential commodities like food grains, salt, sugar, milk, edible oil, onions, fruits & vegetables, petroleum products, coal, fertilizers etc. throughout the country.

Indian Railways Staff are working at various goods sheds, stations and control offices on 24/7 basis to ensure that the supply of essential items for the nation does not get affected. Locomotive Pilots and guards are efficiently running the trains. Key maintenance staff of Track, Signaling, Overhead equipment, locomotives, coaches and wagons are maintaining the infrastructure in good fettle to ensure smooth running of freight trains.

Institutional mechanism has been put in place to escalate issues faced by Zonal Railways in goods train operations and loading/unloading of rakes at goods sheds/parcel sidings to Control Room Set up by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on real time basis through Railway officers as part of the MHA Control Room.

2. Running of Parcel Trains - Transportation of essential items like medical supplies, medical equipment, food, etc in small parcel sizes is going to be very important during the lockdown in the wake of COVID-19. In order to fill in this vital need, Indian Railways has made railway parcel vans available for quick mass transportation needs of E-Commerce entities and other customers including State governments.

3. Relaxation in Demurrage and Wharfage rules: Demurrage and wharfage rules have been relaxed by treating corona virus as a case of natural calamity and invoking the Force Majeure clause.

4. No haulage charge on movement of empty containers and flat containers: In order to maintain smooth flow of goods, haulage charge on movement of empty containers and flat containers has been removed from 24.03.2020 to 30.04.2020.

5. Central Control Centre Set up: Central Control Cell established at Railway Board headed by Director level officer from 27.03.2020 to ensure seamless flow of information and suggestions between Railway administration & general public. The Control Cell is manned round-the-clock to monitor calls received on Rly Helplines – 139 & 138, emails to railmadad@rb.railnet.gov.in and also to monitor trends on social media to communicate and alleviate any difficulties faced by Railway customers & others by taking timely action.

6. Besides 11000 beds for quarantine purposes, around 5000 beds have been exclusively earmarked for treatment of COVID-19 patients in 17 dedicated hospitals and 33 hospital blocks have been identified for treatment. These hospitals and blocks are being made ready for this purpose.

Conversion of 5000 coaches to serve as quarantine/isolation facilities: I.R. is converting 5000 train coaches with 80000 beds across the country to serve as quarantine/isolation facilities for COVID-19. Design has been done, prototype approved and conversion action has been started by Zonal Railways. A total of 20000 such coaches with 3.2 lac beds have been identified for conversion in case of requirement.

7. Procurement of medical equipment, PPEs and Ventilators: Availability of sufficient number of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Ventilators etc would be critical in fight against COVID-19. Action has been taken by Railway zones and production units to procure ventilators, PPEs and medical equipment to meet their needs to fight.

Corona prevention measures at work places: Since freight operations are running 24X7 to maintain essentials and goods supplies, operation and maintenance staff are working round the clock. To ensure safety of these staff and boost their morale, following is being ensured at all workplaces:

(i) Masks and hand sanitizers are being made available to all staff coming on duty. These are also being ensured for contract labourers. Railway workshops, coaching depots and hospitals have risen to the occasion are locally producing sanitizers and masks to supplement supplies.

(ii) Soap, water and washing facilities are being provided at all work places. With local innovations hands free washing facilities have been provided.

(iii) Social distancing is being ensured. Awareness in this regard is being regularly spread amongst all staff like trackmen, locomotive pilots etc

8. Railway Health Services offered to all Central Government Employees: Railway Health Services have been made available to all Central Government Employees across the country on showing their Identity cards at the Railway Hospitals/Health Centres.

9. Contribution of Rs 151 crores by Railway employees to PM CARES fund: Railway employees will donate 1 day's salary equal to Rupees 151 crore to PM CARES fund.

10. Contract engagement of para medical staff: General Managers/CAOs/DRMs have been empowered to engage para medical staff on contract basis to supplement the work force to deal with the situation.

11. Free meals supply by IRCTC base kitchens to the needy: IRCTC base kitchens are providing free meals to the needy with the help of RPF personnel since 28th March 2020. Almost 2.25 lac meals have been served to the needy at 25 locations across the country.

12. Digital enabled payments to contractors and suppliers: All essential payments have been facilitated unabatedly through use of robust Digital IT enabled system in place which facilitated delivery with minimal staff presence. In order to ensure that no hardship is caused to contractual employees all essential payments against contracts are being regularly released. Process has been simplified to facilitate bill payments electronically.

13. Payment to contractual labour and stay arrangements: Regular payment to contractual / outsourced workers in housekeeping/service contracts in lock down period is being ensured. Arrangements have been made for stay and food for staff, both departmental and contractual, stranded in lockdown.

SG/MKV