

Shri. B. S. Yediyurappa
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Karnataka

6th May 2021

Respected Sir,

We write to you with great alarm over the communalisation of COVID response of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, in particular, and the state in general.

The efforts of Shri. Tejasvi Surya, MP (Blore South), Shri. Ravi Subramanya, MLA (Basavanagudi), Shri. Uday Garudachar, MLA (Chikpet) and Shri Satish Reddy, MLA (Bommanahalli) in exposing what they allege is a BBMP Covid Bed allotment scam is to be welcomed. In the natural course, these elected representatives, all from your party, should have filed a police complaint and ensured that the matter is quickly investigated and the guilty brought to book.

Instead, on 4th May, these gentlemen resorted to what can only be termed as outrageous and unacceptable communalisation of COVID response. While Shri Subramanya lashed out at senior BBMP officials **“Are you hiring for a corporation or a Madrasa?”**, Shri. Surya went on to read out names of almost all of the Muslim employees (16 of them) of a private company drafted by BBMP to help in the ‘COVID War Room’, from a total group of 205 employees in the firm. Equally disturbingly, the entire list of employees was put out by these representatives in public domain, against all ethics and illegally too, exposing these young people to all sorts of risks.

Even as this most disconcerting situation was unfolding in public glare and telecast live (and they also held a Press Conference later), their followers viciously attacked senior BBMP officials and doctors because they were either Muslim or Christian. We understand under their pressure 17 Muslim employees of the company have been removed from their posts, without any reason, thus losing their livelihoods in these dire times.

As Chief Minister of Karnataka we urge you to take note of these shocking attempts to communalise the COVID response, ensure these elected representatives take responsibility for their actions, and apologise to all who they have attacked absolutely communally. We also urge you to direct these representatives to pool money from their resources and compensate employees targeted Rs. 50000/- each for agony caused to them. Regardless of these reformative steps, we urge you to order an investigation by the Chief Secretary into the entire incident, and make public the findings with due dispatch.

We also draw your attention to urgent steps needed to address sufferings of those reeling under COVID. In broad terms we suggest the following:

1. The deaths of COVID patients due to lack of oxygen in Chamrajnagar, in Kalburgi, Belagavi and Yelahanka, is unpardonable. The enquiries ordered must be completed with urgency, and made public. Action must be initiated against negligence, and corruption if any.

2. The COVID response strategy must be decentralized so that people are able to access oxygen, physicians, medical care, vaccination, etc. within the ward or panchayat. The entire mechanism should be governed transparently and with accountability.
3. Ward Committees in urban areas and Panchayats Facilitation Committees must be immediately revived with involvement of those who know the local population well and will address them with a culture of care (and without any political considerations), such as local physicians, principals of schools and colleges, leading lawyers and journalists, NGOs (unaffiliated to any political party), etc.
4. People must be able to access help from their homes, be they rich, poor or middle class, and by calling a number that is responsive at the ward/panchayat levels. The current system of calling one number in a district, or in the state, is simply not working and is resulting in avoidable agony and deaths.
5. It should be the duty of the municipal, zilla panchayat and district administration to ensure that all supplies are diligently reached to local government levels, and logistical support extended to ensure all gaps are closed.
6. The Disaster Management Cells at the Ward/Panchayat levels must be immediately activated, as directed by the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka, with participation of community volunteer groups and citizen volunteers and they must be well coordinated with the District Disaster Management Cells. The State Disaster Management Authority, of which you are the Chairperson, must ensure that preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation are performed as part of a continuous process that will cover COVID and future emergencies. Succour to the affected through household visits to monitor their well-being and help for maintaining physical and mental health should be enabled.
7. Karnataka must take a decision, regardless of any financial considerations, to demand Central support to ensure everyone is vaccinated against COVID for free. The fact that the US Government has now decided to participate actively in WTO negotiations to waive IPR over COVID vaccinations must be seen as an opportunity to demand Indian manufacturers supply vaccines at cost (with marginal profit perhaps), and that public sector vaccination plants are revived post haste. Karnataka must take steps to build its own public sector vaccine production capacities in this regard.
8. The entire machinery of the local governments and the state must be so coordinated and conducted that there should be no room for pilferage, misallocation of beds and medical facilities. Simply stated, there must not be any room for inefficiency and corruption. Information regarding availability of vaccines, beds, medicines should be displayed publicly at ward/GP levels and on ward-level websites.
9. The Prime Minister's initiative to make available all medicos (including those in final year MBBS and equivalent medical training levels) to address the pandemic must be taken a step further in Karnataka by ensuring they are facilitated to work at Public Health Centres and Anganwadi levels, and also in every public hospital where there is shortage of medical staff. Adequate budgetary allocations must be made to ensure the entire public health system works to maximal capacity in the shortest period of time.
10. There is an acute need for outreach at the ward and panchayat levels to maintain covid regulations, encourage testing at the first presentation of any symptom and follow immediately next steps in tackling COVID. A public address system can be

an effective way of communicating important instructions for a Covid appropriate behaviour, and also leafleting and poster campaigns to reach every household.

11. Public hospitals at the panchayat and ward levels should be equipped as per Indian Public Health Standards with mandated staff, laboratories for testing samples, generic medicines, basic equipment like X-ray and scanning machines to ensure the poor are not pushed to get tests done and buy medicines outside, take scans in private scanning centres at unaffordable costs, which puts them in irretrievable debts. Covid Care Centres should be set up urgently using public infrastructure like government schools, etc at the ward/panchayat level to provide immediate care and attention to those who have mild symptoms or are asymptomatic and for those who cannot isolate themselves at home.
12. The public health machinery and medical professionals drafted from the private medical sector should reach out to all neighbourhoods and houses. This effort will help both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, to take all precautions at home and in Covid Care Centres and drastically reduce the need for hospitalisation. This step alone will save hundreds of lives and thousands of families needless distress.
13. Ward and panchayat level fever clinics must be completely revived, increased in numbers strictly adhering to covid safety precautions.
14. The state should also ensure availability of fresh masks and hand sanitizers at all public health facilities, not just for staff but also for those visiting the centres for testing, vaccination and general health care. This itself will help reduce infection rates.
15. All hospitals must be inspected by the health department to take stock of the ICU situation, particularly with respect to fire hazard and ensure emergency safety measures are in place. The inspection should also take stock of water and sanitation facilities at all these hospitals. All those functioning under poor conditions must be warned and immediate action must be taken up to fix the problems. With increase in beds at all hospitals infrastructure are being stretched and this will have serious risks.
16. The state must ensure all human resources working in the frontline in treating Covid patients including those living and working in crematoria and graveyards are adequately compensated for their overtime, with benefits and provisions for leave and recuperation.
17. The state must ensure all women frontline workers are provided with enough PPE and sanitary napkins. Managing a period when in a PPE during the peak summer can be extremely difficult, causing discomfort. The least that can be done is to ensure the women frontline workers have at least enough PPE and sanitary napkins to change during the course of their long working hours.
18. The state must appoint mental health counsellors for all front line workers in every ward and provide tele counselling facilities as the frontline workers traumatised by the number of deaths they are witnessing day after day. This is particularly important in addressing the mental health of doctors, paramedics and nurses who are breaking news of demise of loved ones, and will not be able to deal with this stress and trauma any further.
19. The state must ensure all frontline workers are well hydrated and taking good nutrition. All covid hospitals must be supplied with fruits and beverages for all the frontline staff.
20. We will be happy to work with the governments at all levels in ensuring our public health systems are brought to their feet and made to work to save lives now. At the

same time, we urge you to intervene and stop a parallel system of COVID referrals that is being developed by Shri Tejasvi Surya through BJP Yuva Morcha, leaching out much needed medical personnel who are in fact required to help revive public health systems. *At this time, no MP and MLA must be allowed to develop such parallel systems which will result in avoidable chaos, and possibly add to the death toll and misery of lakhs who are already suffering.*

21. The state must make a statement that there will be zero tolerance towards anyone spreading hate and causing communalism.
22. The state must work with NGOs working in diverse sectors such as women, children, senior citizens, sexual minorities, sex workers, disabled, orphans and others to ensure testing, care and vaccination reaches everyone and ensure no one is left behind
23. Philanthropies, foundations and CSR support must be welcomed, channeled and focussed on the above in collaboration with the local governments and NGOs

Endorsed by: