

## **COVID- 19 Recession and Suicides in Kerala**

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The New Indian Express has reported 17 suicides in Kerala in the last six weeks due to COVID-19 related economic crisis. Another report suggests more than 50 suicides so far. This indicates an alarming situation prevailing in Kerala. Though Kerala implemented effective steps to contain spread of the pandemic and speed up vaccination, distribute social security pensions and food kits, the state failed to address the huge loss of employment and the problems emerged due to COVID recession. Of the total workers or employment in Kerala, 38 percent are self employed, 29 percent casual labourers and 33 percent regular wage or salary category. Due to the recession, it is likely that majority of self employed and casual categories of workers have been experiencing persistent loss of employment and income and are in acute financial crisis. But the State government has not taken much steps to address this issue so far. Instead of providing financial support to the self employed and casual labourers who face acute financial crisis, the State government implemented pay revision of government and other public sector staff, the category who were not at all affected by the recession.

In this context, the following suggestions were put forward to revive the economy, and to provide relief and assistance to distressed categories of workers. First, conduct an enumeration of private secondary and tertiary sector units to study the current working status, loss in production and employment and problems faced etc. The units belonging to industry, trade, repair of motor vehicles, transportation and storage, hotels and restaurants, tourism, IT, education, arts, entertainment and recreation and other services are to be studied. Second, based on the enumeration a revival package shall be formulated and implemented to revive the units in each sector or subsector. Third, an important cause of the suicides is the issue related to repayment of money borrowed from commercial banks, Non Banking Financial Institutions (NBFI) and money lenders. The government should extend the repayment of all loans due for repayment for another year including borrowing from money lenders. Forcing immediate repayment of the loan by money lenders, NBFI etc. should be treated as crime. Fourth, those who face acute financial crisis shall be given an emergency loan upto Rs.5000 per person through Kudumbasree or other state financial agencies on personal surety. A new loan scheme should be introduced for the purpose. Fifth, a short term relief should be given to workers who lost jobs due to closure of registered industrial or service units. A monthly relief

of Rs.2000 shall be given to a worker who lost jobs for six months. The State government should bear the financial burden. Sixth, a COVID relief of Rs.2000 per month for six months should be given to all those self employed workers who lost jobs due to imposition of COVID-19 restrictions. The benefit should be given only to the category of worker cum employee.

Mobilize about Rs.20,000 crore for COVID related activities and relief given to the distressed workers during the next six months through the following measures.(1) Postponement of annual plan activities of State during the current financial year 2021-22 (2) Diversion of plan funds of 1200 Local governments for COVID related activities. (3)Postponement of all infrastructural and other development projects for the time being (4) Keep in abeyance of all new proposals relating to salary and pension revision of all other categories of staff such as autonomous bodies, public sector undertakings etc.(5)Postpone the creation of new posts in the government, autonomous bodies and public sector undertaking (6) Abolish unnecessary or non-functional establishments and offices of government and public sector with immediate effect (7) Implement digitalization and e-governance in all areas of administration in the State.