

COVID-19 Pandemic and Development Issues of Kerala, 2021

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1) Protection of ecology, environment and natural resources

The ecology and environment is being destroyed by encroachment and destruction of forest, quarrying of rock or ground, illegal sand mining, reclamation of water bodies and paddy fields for non-agricultural purposes, dumping of solid waste into water bodies etc. The rapid urbanization results in water, air and sound pollution and created acute environmental problems. The two deluges which occurred in 2018 and 2019 caused extensive damage to environment. In this context top priority will be given for protection of the ecology, environment and natural resources.

2) Contain the recent spurt in COVID-19 cases

Kerala has been experiencing an alarming growth in COVID-19 cases in recent months. The COVID-19 cases increased from 6.08 lakhs in December 1, 2020 to 9.32 lakhs in February 1, 2021. The state and the Central government should take urgent steps to contain the rapid spread of the pandemic by taking appropriate steps. Steps should also be taken to speed up the vaccination drive in Kerala.

3) Revival of COVID-19 affected sectors and sections of people

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented recession in all sectors of economy, huge loss in production, employment and income of people and increased unemployment and poverty. Lakhs of Keralites lost jobs and returned from foreign countries and other parts of India. Steps will be taken on a wartime basis to revive the economy from the deep recession and put the economy on the path of economic growth and development. Relief will be given to the various sections of people who lost jobs due to the economic recession. Funds will be mobilized for the purposes.

4) Estimation of loss of GSDP and employment

We do not have any idea about the majority of loss of state income, loss of employment and loss of income of workers in various sectors. The state government

should conduct sample surveys to estimate the loss of GSDP and employment for each sector. For formulating sound policies and actions, this information is vital.

5) Solve massive youth and educated unemployment

The biggest problem facing the state today is massive unemployment, especially among youth and educated. Urgent measures will be taken to address the acute unemployment especially, the youth and the educated through changes in existing economic, employment, education and technology policies. Radical change will be made in the higher education system to equip, the students to take up new generation jobs.

6) Rehabilitation of return emigrants

Lakhs of Keralites who had worked Gulf and other foreign countries lost their jobs and returned home due to the global economic recession caused by the pandemic. Those who had worked in other state also lost jobs and returned in large numbers. Steps will be taken to provide relief to all the returnees who are in crisis. Loans, subsidies and other assistance will be given to those who wish to start business. A special package will be announced to rehabilitate all categories of returned migrants.

7) Improve the fiscal situation

The LDF government in Kerala has been following fiscal policies neglecting resource mobilization for political gains on the one side and resorting to fiscal extravagance to satisfy the demands of powerful vested interest and pressure groups on the other, leading to a vicious circle of persistent low revenue receipts, higher non-plan revenue expenditure (NPRE) and higher rate of revenue and fiscal deficits. The COVID-19 pandemic led recession also made the fiscal crisis more acute. Radical policy changes will be taken to improve the fiscal situation by cutting down unnecessary non-plan revenue expenditure and increase state own tax and non-tax revenue.

8) High rate of poverty: Change in social welfare policies needed

The social welfare schemes and direct benefit transfer (DBT) policies in Kerala are formulated based on the assumption that the share of poor population is small. But the

actual situation is much different. The state has 37.22 lakh BPL families and account for 42.4% of total families in Kerala. And there is the need to expand the various benefits given to the poor sections of population. And a rethinking is needed with regard to social welfare schemes, social welfare pensions and DBT policies pursued in Kerala.

9) IT development

COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way of life and people shifted many of the activities to their homes. Those who worked in government institutions, private firms, IT units etc shifted their work place from their offices to their homes. Schools and other educational institutions resorted to online teaching. Most of the transactions become online. In this situation steps will be taken for the development of IT sector and expansion of internet facilities.

10) Demand for basic infrastructure in rural areas

The pandemic has brought a change in the life style of people living in rural areas and remote areas due to shift in activities to homes. There has been a substantial increase in demand for items such as road transport, drinking water supply, electricity, IT infrastructure, internet, sanitation facilities etc. In this situation, priority will be given for the development of infrastructure items such as roads, road transport, water transport, drinking water, electricity, IT facilities, internet etc in rural areas and remote areas.

11) Urban infrastructure problems

Rapid urbanization is creating serious urban infrastructural problems in almost all municipalities and municipal corporations. Urban infrastructure such as road, road transport, water supply, electricity, sewerage and other items have not developed in tune with the growth of towns and cities. Traffic congestion in roads, waste dumping in road sides and water bodies, lack of drainage facilities, inadequate public toilets etc are the common problems faced in all urban local bodies. The cities in Kerala have not able to collect the solid waste and process it in modern treatment plants. In this context, high priority should be given to develop the urban infrastructural facilities.

12) Development of hilly and coastal areas

The hilly districts of Wayanad and Idukki lag far behind in development of infrastructure such as roads, water supply, electricity, internet connectivity and other facilities compared to other districts. Though Kerala has a long coast line, the state has not able to develop ports, modern fishing, coastal water ways, beaches etc. And high priority will be given for the infrastructural development of hilly and coastal areas.

13) Technological progress

Technological progress is the engine of economic growth and development. The large scale use of the technology is the most crucial factor which determines the efficiency of production in all sectors of an economy. Today outdated technology is used in agriculture, loading and unloading, manufacturing, construction, water transport, coastal water ways, waste treatment etc. So use of better technology promotes investment, production, employment and income generation. In the strategy of development, high priority will be given for technological development in all sectors.

14) Improving quality of higher education

Although the quality of school education in the state has improved, the quality of higher education still remained as poor. Universities, colleges and research institutions in the state have not been able to achieve higher standards compared with national or international institutions. The state also does not have “center of excellence” category institutions. The pandemic has stopped the possibilities of Keralites students to go abroad, to get quality higher education. In this context, education reforms will be implemented in the higher educational sector to raise the standards of institutions to national and international standards.

15) Development of agriculture

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a substantial increase in the demand for locally produced farm products, milk, egg, meat, fish etc. Due to unemployment, a large number of people who engaged in industry and service activities switched to farming and animal husbandry. In this context, high priority will be given for the agriculture and allied activities such as animal husbandry, fishing etc.

16) Revival of industries

The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous development prospects for the IT industry. But at the same time, the pandemic has destroyed a large number of small scale industrial units, marginal units and traditional industries. Though the industrial sector faced acute crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LDF government has not given any significant assistance to the owners of industrial units and workers. Many industrial units were forced to shut down for long periods. In this context, a special package will be prepared to revive the industrial units which are in crisis.

17) Revival of service sector

The lockdowns, travel restrictions, closure of educational institutions and other restrictions imposed in Kerala for months have inflicted heavy damage to production and employment of the tertiary sector in the state. Some of the sectors which are severely affected are trade, repair, hotels and restaurants, tourism, transport, financial services, real estate, professional service etc. And the investors, producers and workers incurred huge losses of income. In order to revive the sub-sector which suffered huge losses, a revival package will be implemented.