

STATEMENT OF SITARAM YECHURY ON FINANCE MINISTER'S COVID PACKAGE

- **Inadequate.**
- **Defeats the aim of preventing 'community-spread.'**

There is no time to waste,

Lives have been uprooted by no planning by Centre before declaring a lockdown despite a two-month warning.

This is not the time to be pre-occupied by 'fiscal deficit'.

If Rs 7.78 lakh crore worth of loans of the rich can be waived off, then clearly there is no dearth of resources.

The priority is to save human lives and defeat the pandemic.

The Rs 1.75 lakh crore package announced today **missed out on a crucial issue of the migrant workers returning to their own states.** We have airlifted Indians from many countries abroad, surely our own brethren should have been provided with food and shelter, to either stay where they are currently or to be transported to their home states.

This failure is defeating the purpose of this 21-day lockdown when big crowds are surging, threatening 'community-spread'. This should be remedied at once.

Though there are some proposals that merit worth like the provision of doubling food-grains, the **provision of free gas cylinders for three months, a one-kg per family of pulses is thoroughly inadequate. The key to resist COVID-19 is good nutrition. This does not serve the purpose.**

The announcement to give Rs 1000 to aged widows and the disabled is too little. All of them need help and assistance to go about their lives. **How will Rs 1000 suffice?**

The insurance cover for health workers come at no cost to the government. There is no clarity if this covers the private sector. What they require immediately is **protective gear, medicines and adequate testing facilities. There is no mention of this.**

Government has announced that each farmer would be given Rs 2000. **But this is the first instalment that is due to them,** under the PMKY (PM KISAN Yojana), announced just before 2019 polls.

The transfer of Rs 500 to Jandhan accounts held by women is too inadequate. We had asked for a direct transfer of Rs 5000 for each month for the next three months, for all Jandhan account-holders and BPL families.

There is no substantial benefit for Workers. **The 24% of monthly wages into their own Provident Fund (PF) accounts does not give them any extra relief - this is their due, their *own* savings!**

WHAT GOVERNMENT MUST DO NOW

- **Hunger and malnutrition can be contained through the provision of ration kits to all the poor, particularly the families of children availing the mid-day meal scheme. Kerala is doing this.**
- **In the face of large-scale layoffs and retrenchment, the government must guarantee the payment of wages for the next three months at the very least.**
- **Farmers must get a one-time waiver on their loans.**
- **This is the harvesting season. Produce must be guaranteed to be lifted at the declared minimum support prices at least and farmers helped to harvest safely. This must be a priority.**
- **For the middle-classes, especially employees, relief should be provided by a moratorium on repayment of loans and the deferring of EMIs.**
- **Credit-availability to self-help groups means nothing for the 6.85 crore households in the country as all their activities have come to a standstill. Help them with money to survive and be healthy.**
- **The enhancement of the MNREGA wages by Rs 20 is a joke. Currently there is no work going on. What they need is direct cash transfers, or payment of wages irrespective of work.**

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