Roles of the Centre and States - COVID-19 Management

What is the issue?

- The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light some fundamental gaps in dealing with medical emergencies as the current one.
- It calls for an assessment of the roles of the Centre and States in this regard.

What should the Centre be clear about?

- Clearly, events like that the current pandemic are national crises.
- They call for concerted efforts by both, the Government of India (GoI) and state governments.
- Denials, finger-pointing, and media management will not help in rightfully dealing with these.

- It is time the GoI realises that health is a state subject.
- The number of employees in the health wing of the GoI is negligible as compared to that in any state government.
- The implication is that if anything good in health or Covid management happens, the credit must rightly go to the state government.
- The GoI must however help the states, motivate them to do better and assist them in their task.

What key role can the Centre play?

- Where the GoI must and can play a major role is in vaccination.
- So far, all vaccine procurement has been by the GoI, which allots vaccines to states depending on the need.
- The task before it is to procure 160 crore doses before December 2021, the stated target.
- This works out to 26 crore doses per month as against the current production capacity of 6 crore.
- The Centre must thus try to augment supplies by encouraging companies to produce more and through imports/gifts.
- It is doubtful whether this can be achieved.
- However, whatever it procures must be allotted to states in proportion to

their eligible population.
- State governments must be involved in this policy.
- The vaccination policy may be left to the state governments based on the allocation.
- The GoI must also augment supplies of critical medical goods in view of their acute shortage, through imports and donations from friendly nations.
- It must distribute them to the needy states transparently and equitably.

What role should the states play?

- State governments have rightly opted for need-based lockdowns and relaxations, which have helped arrest the spread of the virus.
- But lockdowns are not the solution.
- They just buy breathing time for the governments to ramp up capacity.
- State governments must set up efficient and well-functioning control rooms and telemedicine centres.
- This should guide people on home treatment and timely admission to hospitals.
- The private sector can also be fully involved in these efforts.
- It is also important to put in place a standard guidance protocol for health workers and control rooms to guide patients through the disease.

What is the way forward?

- Another wave may be lurking.
- This calls for total co-operation of the central and the state governments and also the public.
- The central government must realise that states are on the forefront in this war, and therefore, play a supporting and proactive role.
- Above all, a high level of transparency on Covid management, particularly on vaccination, beds, supplies, infections and deaths, is essential.

Source: The Indian Express

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