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Ministry of Science & Technology

Dr. Harsh Vardhan exhorts CSIR scientists to develop COVID-19 mitigation solutions to effectively combat the disease

Genetic sequencing was crucial in eradicating Polio; it will help in COVID-19 mitigation also, said Dr. Harsh Vardhan

These are times of war, deliver solutions before war ends, not a routine research project, states Dr. Harsh Vardhan

COVID-19 will give boost to country's resilience and self-reliance and enhance indigenous capacity in developing critical health care equipment

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1. Today Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Science & Technology held a review with DG CSIR, Dr. Shekhar C. Mande and all the CSIR lab directors through video conference of the steps undertaken by CSIR and its constituent 38 labs towards mitigation of Corona Virus outbreak in the country.

2. DG CSIR Dr. Shekhar C. Mande informed that Core Strategy Group (CSG) has been set up in CSIR and the five verticals have been identified under which the COVID-19 related activities are being carried out. These include: Digital and Molecular Surveillance; Rapid and Economical Diagnostics; New Drugs / Repurposing of Drugs and associated production processes; Hospital

Assistive Devices and PPEs; and, Supply Chain and Logistics Support Systems. Dr. Mande also mentioned that 15 CSIR labs are working in close partnership with major Industries, PSUs, MSMEs and other departments and ministries at the time of the crisis in the country.

3. After briefing of all the efforts being made by the CSIR labs in finding a solution for COVID-19, Dr. Harsh Vardhan informed them about the steps being taken by the Government of India in combating COVID-19.

4. Dr. Harsh Vardhan exhorted CSIR scientists and said, "India has high expectations from its scientific community and I am sure that the community will rise to the occasion and deliver in this time of need". He appreciated that CSIR Labs were also participating in testing of swab samples of COVID patients and some of them have started doing genetic sequencing of virus with a target of doing 500 sequencing in coming weeks. Dr. Harsh Vardhan said, "Genetic sequencing is very crucial in identifying the host response as well as identifying population vulnerability to the disease." He said, "These genetic sequencing efforts remind me of Polio eradication movement 26 years back. Towards the fag end of the Polio movement, active surveillance of the country was done to find out the cases of acute flaccid paralysis. That time also, genetic sequencing was used to establish the travel history of polio virus which eventually helped in the eradication of polio."

5. He also appreciated CSIR for partnering with MSMEs, Major industries, PSUs working on RT-PCR machines. He said, "Plasma based therapy is very much needed at this hour. For this, we need to motivate the patients who have recovered from the COVID-19 to donate blood."

6. He also appreciated the work done by CSIR-NAL with BHEL and BEL on Ventilators, Oxygen Enrichment Devices and are also developing 3-D printed face shields, face masks, gowns and other protective equipment. "All these things will help us in next few weeks.", He said.

7. Dr. Harsh Vardhan, however, cautioned, CSIR scientists to develop COVID-19 mitigation solutions keeping fixed timeframe in mind. "These are times of war, CSIR scientists should work to deliver solutions before war ends, they should not treat it as a routine research project". He said, "COVID-19 has also come as a blessing in disguise as it will give boost to country's resilience and self-reliance and enhance indigenous capacity in developing critical health care equipment." He also appreciated the collaboration being done by the CSIR scientists using Video Conferencing tools and reiterated the scientists that while doing research they should continue observing social distancing and lockdown because till such time vaccine is developed by scientists to combat COVID-19, these two remain the most potent form of social vaccine.

8. Dr. Shekhar C. Mande, DG, CSIR, Dr. Anurag Agrawal, Director, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) and Dr. Nakul Parashar, Director, Vigyan Prasara were present in the review meeting with the Union Minister. Directors of remaining 38 CSIR labs attended the meeting through Video Conference.

KGS/(DST-CSIR)

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