Start all economic activities to save livelihoods: CM

At Talks With PM, Kejriwal Suggests Path To Revival With Precautions, Says Lift Curbs In All But 81 Containment Zones

New Delhi: At Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s video conference on Covid-19 with chief ministers, Arvind Kejriwal suggested that all economic activities should be permitted, with the necessary preconditions, throughout Delhi except in the containment zones. The Delhi CM said, the impact of the lockdown on livelihoods and economy would otherwise be severe.

The lockdown has thrown people out of jobs, shut down businesses and industrial units and triggered unprecedented reverse-migration from Delhi. Kejriwal had earlier stated that the novel coronavirus was here to stay and it was time people learned to live with it, adding that Delhi “is ready for it.”

Kejriwal had also recently stated that cessation of economic activities could not be endured for long. He suggested at the PM’s meeting that economic activities were necessary to bring the lockdown-affected lives back on track, while placing restrictions only on the containment zones, of which there are currently 81 in the capital.

In the PM’s video meet, Kejriwal sought a share in central taxes for Delhi, pointing out that the city government was only getting grants instead of a share in central taxes, that too at a stagnant rate of Rs 325 crore since 2005-06 when all other states had received enhanced shares of central taxes.

With all 11 districts reporting Covid-19 cases, the whole of Delhi is in the red zone. The lockdown was extended on May 4 for a further fortnight, and chief secretary Vijay Dev held a meeting with senior officials on Monday to discuss the implementation of central government orders after May 17. Currently, movement of people for non-essential work is allowed between 7am and 7pm, and private offices can open with 33% staff. Domestic workers, sanitation staff, technicians, mechanics, plumbers and electricians can also work. Standard shops are now open, while a limited number of liquor stores are retailing alcohol.

Factories in industrial areas with access control have also been permitted to open alongside IT and IT-enabled services, data and call centres, warehousing, cold storage, private security and facility management services. A Delhi government official pointed out, however, that since the economic activities were heavily inter-dependent, allowing some and restraining others would only lead to partial meeting of economic and commercial targets.

The lockdown has also taken a heavy toll on the state government’s finances. “There is no other way out of this crisis. It is not about government finances, but about the long-term damage to businesses and livelihoods,” an official asserted.

In comparison with Rs 3,566 crore collected as taxes in April 2019, Delhi government has barely managed to accumulate Rs 159 crore in April this year. While around 70% of tax revenues consist of GST and VAT, about 14% comes from excise and a little over 10% from stamp duty and registration fees from sale and purchase of properties.

No new containment zone has been notified in Delhi since April 30, even when the city has reported nearly 4,000 new cases between then and May 11.