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Online Panel Discussion on "Learning from Essentials" on 23rd April organized by The Bengal Chamber

FOOD SECURITY AND HEALTH CARE EMERGE AS TOP PRIORITY IN AN ONLINE PANEL DISCUSSION “LEARNING FROM ESSENTIALS” ORGANIZED BY THE BENGAL CHAMBER

Debasish Chattopadhyay ; Kolkata: It’s been almost 32 days to a nationwide lock down and by this time the population has come to realize the two essential priorities of life—health and hunger. The main focus and concern for society at present are food security and healthcare service as emerged in a panel discussion , “Learning from Essentials” organized by The Bengal Chamber on April 23 as a continuous process of bridging people, services and government to the issues that have arisen from COVID crisis to cope with the new normal environment.

COVID -19 is a clarion call and the vaccine could be the savior as was discussed. The Nation till now has not paid enough attention to healthcare. And one had to decide whether health was more important or wealth. The Pandemic has changed the definition of what is essential and now people will think many times before buying.

Deb A Mukherjee, President Designate, The Bengal Chamber stated, “In the global geo politics, we must have a wider recovery plan for the world. A global resilience alliance is

necessary so that in future such incidents can be dealt firmly. This global partnership is necessary. Let us hope that world leaders will take it in the right spirit.”

This pandemic will surely have a staggering impact on economy. It has forced every enterprise to change their course of operation. In the lockdown period enterprises are using digital platforms extensively. It is evident that with the increase in the use of digital platforms, digital adoption & its pace will increase. Sector by sector changes are happening. Change in delivery model is an example of it. Jayanta Chakraborty, Senior General Manager , Indofil Industries Limited , Co-Chairperson , Agriculture & Rural Development , The Bengal Chamber stated , “While there has been instances of many rural produce being sold to local people in want of better transport to cities, movement of perishable agriculture produce like vegetable , betel vine , flower etc have been allowed to be transported from rural to urban zones under lock down. It is duly notified by Government of West Bengal that the local administration could be approached in case of any disruption. In addition to that Sufal Bangla in collaboration with many FPOs and FPCs are also arranging agriculture produce to Kolkata city and other such urban town.

Also crops have to be sowed and harvested in their unique specific times. Farmers need to be out in fields and this sector cannot do work from home like many sectors. Resources in agri sector are facing challenges that include man power, machinery, seeds, nutrition, and finance. Challenges in manpower for harvesting , transporting seeds from one location to another is a major hurdle which the government is trying to address by giving wagons that transport million tones of seeds to other areas.

Also transporting of fertilizer for upcoming kharif season is proving difficult with restrictions under COVID effect. Due to lock down raw materials for pesticides procured from China has been stopped. Mechanization in Agri sector is the way forward along with digital application that will change the marketing of agricultural produce to e-mandi platforms. Farmers should be given COVID insurance where major premium is given by the state and central governments.

The agriculture sector cannot wait unlike other sectors as it deals with perishable items that are needed for human life sustenance. With shut down of jute mills there is shortage for production of bags that is used for storage and transporting of agri produce. Total revamping of logistics and production of seed hubs across the state and warehousing will play a major role in coming days. Lastly producing quality plant protection chemicals in India should be the focus and need to change the perspective about farmers is the need of the hour he felt.”

Adding to the discussion, Prof.Dr. Rabin Chakraborty, Chairperson. Health Committee, The Bengal Chamber, stated, “Following COVID -19 phase, the two most important societal worry is adequate food and good health care. The need of the hour is to address the COVID

menace and make people educated and aware of the dos and don'ts to follow as they pick up on life after COVID effect by adopting hygiene and care that is for the larger interest of society. General work force in various sectors should practice the use of mask, gloves and maintain comfortable social distancing that will improve consciousness and prevent infection including those working in farm lands. Farmer insurance is a must and community advocacy on safer living and practices are a must to contain COVID. Tele medicine and online consultation by doctors can play a big role for farms based in remote areas.”

Other speakers present were Deb Kumar Basu, Director, Zetadel Technologies Pvt. Ltd. and Chairperson, Manufacturing and MSME Committee, The Bengal Chamber Arnab Basu, Managing Partner-East, Consulting Leader, PricewaterhouseCoopers Pvt. Ltd. and IT Committee, The Bengal Chamber; Gautam Ray, Executive Director (HR & Admin) , CESC Limited and Chairperson. Energy and Environment Committee; * P.K. Guha, MD & CEO, Zuventus Healthcare and Kozi Suzuki, MD, Rohto Pharma (India) Pvt. Ltd. Deb A Mukherjee , President Designate, The Bengal Chamber chaired the Discussion.