

Corona Wave I was bad, Wave II is worse Taking more toll - Time to be more careful and cautious

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“Corona pandemic” masses suffer the most: When all of us were trying to believe that the corona curve was tapering down, and things were coming to normalcy, the second spell has started and this time, the spread is very fast. Even during the first spell, we experienced the inadequacy of the measures from the Government due to which people at large suffered a lot. Workers, particularly the daily wagers, contract workers, migrant workers were the worst hit. Many of them lost their jobs and many of them their livelihood.

About one crore Indian people were infected by the virus and about 150,000 people lost their lives. Bank employees were no exception: Bank employees were also getting infected because they were required to work in the Branches and coming into physical contact with a lot of customers and banking public. From AIBEA and UFBU many issues were taken up to protect the bank employees and number of guidelines, relaxations, financial relief, etc. were secured from the Government, IBA and individual bank managements. With all difficulties, bank employees were doing their best to maintain the banking services. We lost about 600 colleagues in Wave I: In the process, thousands of bank employees were affected by the virus. More than 600 bank employees and officers lost their lives. We are yet to come out of this tormenting agony, anguish and bitterness of having lost our precious colleagues. But once again the virus is spreading as a second wave. And, already daily we are getting disturbing reports, news and information that more and more bank employees are getting affected by the infection. The number of people who have been infected and affected this time is much larger than last spell. Wave II is worse: What is more agonising is that this time the number of bank staff who have lost their lives is also much more. Within two months, we are informed that about 500 bank employees, officers and even Executives have become unfortunate victims of this menacing virus. Pathetic condition: To compound the problem, there is all-round problem for getting admitted in hospitals for want of bed, shortage of medicine, shortage of oxygen, shortage of ICU wards, shortage of ventilator provision in hospitals, etc. Our heart goes in pain when some of our colleagues frantically contact us for getting admission in hospitals, etc. Let us do what best we can: We know Government has fallen short on what they should do, but that is not going to solve the problem now. What is paramount is how in these challenging times, all our Unions can help our members who are facing difficulties. We are proud that our Unions are doing their best in this regard. We must continue this. IBA: We have already brought these issues to the notice of the IBA and bank managements many of whom are also sympathetic. We will continue to take up and pursue these issues with them for relief and assistance. Few days ago, when we were talking to the Chairman of IBA on certain issues, he was expressing his serious concern and anxiety about the plight and circumstances under which bank staff are working today. His feeling of worry was visible. He assured that whatever is in the hands of IBA, it would be done. Bank staff are Covid Warriors: Another challenge which we are facing is with regard to vaccination of bank employees on a priority. It is a matter of consolation that recently the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Home Ministry has appreciated the services of bank employees during the pandemic period and have recognized bank staff as Covid19 Warriors. But till now, neither the Home Ministry nor the Finance Ministry has officially notified to this effect. We wonder why Government is feeling shy to do so. Vaccination on priority: Dept. of Financial Services has sent a letter to the Chief Secretaries of all States on 22-4-2021: “I request you to kindly consider putting in place a special dispensation in your State/UT, to enable the aforementioned employees/staff to avail of vaccination easily and on priority basis”. But our feedback from the field is that no such priority is in place. It is very important that clear cut directives (not request) should be issued by the Finance Ministry or Home Ministry or Health Ministry to treat bank employees on priority for the purpose of vaccination. This issue brooks no further delay. Time to be more careful: We get information now and then that some of our leaders and activists are infected, they have been admitted in hospital, etc. We have also lost some of our leaders due to this virus infection. Hence, we request all our functionaries at all levels to be more cautious in their movements, travel, etc. We should also repeatedly send appeals to the employees to strictly adhere to safety norms like masking, sanitising, social distancing, etc. Panic will not help us but caution and precaution will help a lot. We have already informed that our campaign programmes like signature collection in the mass petition, etc. can be put on hold till we reach normalcy. Let us pass through these trying times. Let us chain ourselves together to break the chain. Employees and their safety are our prime concern now.