

**Media Release**

**SDF hands over Nu 73 million COVID-19 grant to Bhutan**



**Thimphu Bhutan, 16 June 2021** – The SAARC Development Fund (SDF) today handed over the USD 1 million (Nu 73.31 million) to the Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan as COVID-19 emergency grant.

Officer-in-Charge of SDF, Mr. Anuj Goel, presented a cheque of USD 0.5 million (Nu 36.66 million), the first tranche/50 percent of the grant amount, to the Health Secretary Dr. Pandup Tshering. The remaining amount would be disbursed upon 80 percent utilization of the first tranche.

Through this grant, the Health Ministry will strengthen response to COVID-19 and setting up of ICU for COVID centre at the Eastern Regional Referral Hospital in Mongar. The funding will also support purchase of PPE kits, ventilator machines, testing kits, and in further strengthening surveillance, and training of the health staff.

Both SDF and the Ministry of Health executed the Project Financing Agreement (PFA) this week marking the commencement of the project’s implementation. This USD 1 million COVID-19 grant to Bhutan is part of the USD 7.75 million, which the SDF Board had approved last year as COVID-19 Emergency Grant to the SAARC Member States to support the countries in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is funded under SDF’s Social Window – under health thematic area.

“We hope that our support will strengthen COVID-19 response in Bhutan and augment the continuous efforts of all the Member States towards protecting the people of this region during these difficult times,” said Officer-In-Charge, SDF and Director, Social Window, Mr. Anuj Goel.



Health Secretary Dr Pandup Tshering thanked the SAARC Development Fund for the support and said that this funding would not only strengthen services against COVID-19 but also benefit the entire health system, especially the health services in the Eastern Regional Referral Hospital.

SDF received project proposals from seven of the eight Member States – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2020 for the COVID-19 grant. The project originated from the respective Health Ministries of the Member States.

“SDF’s COVID-19 funding will provide Member States with emergency support to enhance the capacity of the frontline workers and health personnel, and help procure important medical goods and supplies,” Mr. Goel said. “We are happy that SDF is able to provide our support to the member countries during these difficult times.”

The SAARC Development Fund, since its inception in April 2010 by the heads of the eight SAARC Member States, is mandated to build regional integration and economic cooperation through project funding in all the eight SAARC Member States through its Economic, Infrastructure and Social Windows. The Secretariat is based in Thimphu Bhutan.

Currently, SDF has 97 projects (in 16 thematic areas) approved under the Social Window with a total fund commitment of over USD 92 million. About 87 of these projects (funds committed USD 81.49million) have been operationalized and some have even completed.

