

INDIA STEERS CLEAR OF WHO FUNDING ROW

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

India on Wednesday refused to criticise the United States defunding of the World Health Organisation (WHO), saying that it was currently occupied with the domestic campaign to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic.

A source indicated that India was not inclined to immediately join the controversy that erupted after the President Donald Trump declared a “halt” to American funding of the WHO.

“At present, our efforts and attention are fully focused on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the world has addressed this crisis, we can revisit this question,” said a source familiar with India’s official decision-making on international organisations.

Mr. Trump on Tuesday suspended his government's funding of the multilateral body accusing it of “severe” mismanagement of the COVID-19 epidemic.

President’s charge

He accused the WHO of opposing travel restrictions to China which he termed “disastrous”.

“Today, I am instructing my administration to hold the funding of the World Health Organisation while a review is conducted to assess the WHO’s role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus... As the organisation’s leading sponsor, the United States has a duty to insist on full accountability,” the U.S. President said at the White House.

The WHO’s latest documents show that the United States is its top contributor with around \$58 million and halting that payment is expected to hit many health initiatives across the world, including in India.

Contrary to India’s stand, the European Union’s top foreign policy representative Josep Borrell Fontelles has “deeply” regretted the U.S. decision, saying, “There is no reason justifying this move at a moment when their efforts are needed more than ever to help contain and mitigate the Coronavirus pandemic.”

Bill Gates’s stand

Microsoft founder Bill Gates too sounded a note of caution, saying “no other organisation can replace” the WHO.

Since March, India has taken the initiative to several countries in the region and beyond by supplying protective equipment and medicines.

According to the WHO's March 31, 2020 assessment, India committed around \$2 million, whereas China committed approximately \$28.7 million.

Budget contributions

The WHO's budget is funded by a mix of assessed and voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions mainly refer to financial support from the member-countries of the world body, which is relative to the member-state’s wealth and population.

The WHO claims that contributions from the member-states had declined over the years and now accounts for less than one quarter of its programme financing. The rest of the resources, it says, is raised through voluntary donation.

The major European economies are among the bigger contributors to the organisation.

There is no reason justifying this move at a moment when their efforts are needed more than ever

Josep Borrell Fontelles EU representative

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