

ONE-THIRD OF RS. 10,990 CR. IN PM CARES FUND SPENT: AUDIT

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The PM CARES Fund collected Rs. 10,990 crore since its inception in March 2020 until March 2021. It spent Rs. 3,976 crore during the 2020-21 financial year, according to the audited financial statement posted on its website. As on March 31, 2021, the Fund had an unspent balance of Rs. 7,044 crore.

The Fund was set up to deal with “any kind of emergency or distress situation, like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected.” During the year, funds were disbursed for COVID vaccine purchase and testing, ventilators, hospitals, testing labs, oxygen generation plants and migrant welfare. Despite an earlier announcement that Rs. 100 crore would be spent on supporting vaccine development, no such disbursement seems to have been done.

The Fund was established on March 27, 2020 and collected Rs. 3,076 crore — including an initial corpus, foreign and domestic contributions, and interest — within the first five days of its existence, before the end of the 2019-20 financial year. In the financial year 2020-21, it received voluntary contributions from domestic donors to the tune of Rs. 7,184 crore and foreign contributions amounting to Rs. 494 crore. Along with interest, and a Rs. 25 lakh refund of unspent balance from the National Disaster Management Authority, the Fund’s total receipts for the year amounted to Rs. 7,193 crore.

On the expenditure side, the largest disbursement of Rs. 1,393 crore went to purchase 6.6 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Another Rs. 1,311 crore was used to buy 50,000 Made in India ventilators for use in Central and State government hospitals. As *The Hindu* has previously reported, doctors and hospitals in several States have raised concerns about the quality of some of these ventilators, with others lying idle due to technical issues.

Other measures to improve infrastructure included Rs. 201 crore spent on installing 162 Pressure Swing Adsorption medical oxygen generation plants inside public health facilities, and Rs. 50 crore to establish two makeshift COVID hospitals in Muzaffarnagar and Patna with 500 beds each, and to set up 16 RT-PCR testing labs in nine States/UTs.

Over Rs. 20 crore was used to upgrade two autonomous institute laboratories under the Department of Biotechnology as Central Drug Laboratories to test and release batches of the COVID vaccine.

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