MHA issued guidelines to allow inter-State movement of stranded migrant workers

More than a month after the nationwide lockdown owing to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued guidelines to allow inter-State movement of stranded migrant workers, tourists, pilgrims, students and others.

Important points

1. Public transport, including trains and buses, continue to remain suspended and the State governments have been asked to appoint nodal authorities to register such stranded persons and facilitate their movement.
2. The MHA said such persons should be kept in home quarantine for 14 days unless an assessment by a medical team recommended institutional quarantine.
3. For individuals who wanted to travel in their private cars, permission should be taken from the State authorities, an official said.
4. “If someone has to cross multiple States to reach their destination, then the State authority where the travel will originate, will coordinate with the respective State authorities and issue a pass accordingly,” a senior Home Ministry official stated.
5. The Uttar Pradesh was one of the first States to arrange for the return of stranded migrant workers to return to their homes.

The guidelines issued by the MHA on April 19 asserted that there would be no inter-State movement of labourers. Following U.P., States like Punjab, Odisha, West Bengal and Maharashtra were coordinating inter-State movement of migrant workers. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had requested the Centre to change its guidelines and allow students and workers living outside to return home.

“All States and Union Territories [UTs] have been asked to designate nodal authorities and develop standard protocols for receiving and sending the stranded persons. The authorities shall also register the stranded persons within their States and UTs. In case, a group of stranded persons wish to move between one State to another State, the sending and receiving authorities may consult each other and mutually agree to the movement by road,” the MHA guidelines said.

The moving person would be screened and those found asymptomatic would be allowed to proceed. “Buses shall be used for transport of groups of persons which will be sanitized and shall follow safe social distancing norms in seating.” The States falling on the transit route would allow the movement of such persons.

“On arrival at their destination, they would be assessed by the local health authorities, and kept in home quarantine, unless the assessment requires keeping a person in institutional quarantine. They would be kept under watch with periodic health check-ups. For this purpose, such persons may be encouraged to use Aarogya Setu app through which their health status can be monitored and tracked,” the MHA said.
The country was initially placed under lockdown on March 24 and it was extended till May 3. With all forms of public transport, including railways, suspended and State borders sealed, lakhs of migrant workers in urban areas started walking hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes. On March 28, the MHA asked the States to stop their movement and arrange relief camps.

Note: The first set of guidelines by the MHA were issued on March 24 under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, invoked for the first time in the country in the wake of the pandemic.