Oxygen prized possession as Haryana, Delhi trade charges

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FAR FROM hospital corridors, the oxygen crisis in the national capital also played out in the corridors of power as Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh traded charges over supply of oxygen to hospitals in the city.

The Delhi government, which had until Tuesday been accusing Uttar Pradesh of curbing supply of oxygen to the capital, was on Wednesday accused by Haryana of stealing oxygen from a tanker.

Haryana health minister Anil Vij said the tanker was on its way to supply oxygen to hospitals in Faridabad. Vij said he had issued instructions that all tankers carrying oxygen across Haryana would from now on be escorted by the state police force.

"I came to know that the tanker was stopped by certain people in Delhi yesterday, while it was on its way to Faridabad for distributing oxygen to certain hospitals. If the governments forcibly start stealing oxygen like this, it will lead to chaos. It is highly condemnable," he said in a video.

Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia responded: "Delhi does not have any oxygen plant so the allegation that we looted their truck is baseless... There is a problem in bringing oxygen to Delhi. I was reading a report which said that the reason for limited supply of oxygen in many hospitals in Delhi today was because the oxygen that was earmarked for Delhi from a plant in Faridabad was monopolised and directed towards Haryana by an official from the Haryana government."

He added: "When the central government has to decide on the quota of oxygen for each state, then state governments should not come in between and hoard oxygen. Similar ordeal took place yesterday in a plant near Modi Nagar (Ghaziabad) when we had to call a senior central government minister. It was only after his help that the oxygen supply reached Delhi," he said.

Later, in the day, the Centre intervened and issued a fresh allocation order of oxygen supplies to each state. "Haryana has now been allocated 107 MT of oxygen," Vij said in the evening.

During the day, facilities such as Manipal Hospital, Dwarka alleged that Linde India Limited, which supplies oxygen to them from their Faridabad plant, had been stopped by the Haryana government from supplying oxygen outside the state. Senior Delhi government officials echoed this allegation, claiming that Faridabad Deputy Commissioner Garima Mittal had stopped oxygen from the plant.

Mittal denied the allegations: "We have not stopped any suppliers from providing oxygen to Delhi, or stopped any vehicles engaged in this. We have received no such orders."

Senior officials from Linde India Limited, however, confirmed there were issues, which were later sorted out. "In the afternoon the Haryana police came to the plant and said that they cannot allow us to send the tankers to Delhi. But this was resolved," said a senior official. The company has been providing oxygen to several major hospitals in Delhi such as RML, Lok Nayak, GB Pant, Apollo Healthcare and Fortis. Over the past few days the demand for liquid oxygen, supplied in tankers, has increased.

"Usually, hospitals have tanks which have, say, capacity to store 10,000 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen; but now they need 50,000 metric tonnes. There is a shortage of O2, but we have been mapping our O2 tankers from various places such as east India, and diverting that supply to Delhi. So we are managing. We need to inject more tankers -- ranging from capacity of 8 to 30 tonnes -- into the supply chain now, and we are working on it," he said. The company sent seven tankers to Delhi after the issue was resolved.

By evening, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal shared some reassuring news, tweeting: "Central government has increased Delhi's quota of oxygen. We are very grateful to centre for this."

According to officials, Delhi was getting 378 metric tonnes of oxygen till Wednesday afternoon, which has now been increased to 480 metric tonnes.