Status report highlights logistical issues faced by N-E region related to Covid-19

The report, a copy of which HT has seen, has highlighted that road blockades were leading to interruptions in supplies of food and other essential items.

A status report of the Centre has highlighted logistical hurdles related to Covid-19, including a lack of testing centres, which some northeastern states like Assam and Sikkim were facing even as the region has reported fewer cases of the disease. Experts have repeatedly called ramping up testing the best way to slow the advance of the pandemic.

The report, a copy of which HT has seen, has highlighted that road blockades were leading to interruptions in supplies of food and other essential items. There is a requirement for more masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for doctors, the report said while underlining the challenges the northeastern states face.

The report prepared with development of north eastern region ministry’s help was submitted to the Centre’s empowered panels on Covid-19. The eight northeastern states--Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura--are home to 45 million people as per 2011 census and have reported 36 Covid-19 cases as of Tuesday.

An official, who did not wish to be named, said that state and region-wise reports were being collected to tackle all logistical issues amid the lockdown, which was on Tuesday extended until May 3.

A second official called the status report from the northeast important since communication between other parts of India and the region were minimal due to the lockdown. “But in the integrated approach to tackle the pandemic, we cannot afford to overlook the problems of the region,” the official added on condition of anonymity.

Assam, which has reported 30 Covid-19 cases and 1 death, has requested expeditious medical
supplies and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s approval for setting up Covid-19 testing labs at Tezpur and Dibrugarh medical colleges, according to the report. The state has said there was no testing facility for the region along the Brahmaputra’s northern banks covering a part of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, it added. The Assam government has argued that such a testing lab there can be very useful for Arunachal Pradesh too. Assam has five testing labs.

An Assam official said testing for Covid-19 is now being carried out at the medical colleges in Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Tezpur, Silchar and Barpeta. “As for the PPEs, we are managing with our own funds and some private donors,” said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Sikkim, which has reported no cases, has requested the Centre to test at least 250 samples and to designate a testing lab for the state. The Sikkim government has highlighted it has been unable to send any samples for testing to West Bengal since April 12 as it was asked not to do so until April 14.

The samples from Sikkim were being tested at North Bengal Medical College and Hospital but it has exhausted all its testing kits.

The status report said the Arunachal Pradesh government has reported that due to road blockades and construction works, the Food Corporation of India and Food Supplies Department were facing problems in replenishing stocks in Upper Subansiri, Tawang, Dibang Valley and Upper Siang districts. These districts are some of India’s remotest with limited communication links.

An official from Arunachal Pradesh health department said they have asked for PPEs, too. “We have enough masks, but we will need more than 15,000 PPE suits to last us the next few months,” said the official.

The remaining states, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram, have not reported any shortage of supplies.

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