Sikkim's first Viral Research and Diagnostic Laboratory inaugurated

Gangtok, May 21 (IPR): Sikkim's own Viral Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (VRDL) is now a reality. The much awaited Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Certified Laboratory at STNM Hospital, Sochaygang (Covid-19 dedicated Hospital), was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) today, in the esteemed presence of Cabinet Ministers, MLAs, MP Luis Shasha, senior officials of the State Government, senior doctors and medical staff of STNM Hospital.

After inaugurating the Laboratory, the Hon'ble Chief Minister inspected the facility in detail. He was briefed about the Laboratory by senior Doctors and Microbiologists.

After the inauguration, the Hon'ble Chief Minister in his brief interaction with the media, stated that the completion and inauguration of Sikkim’s own VRD Laboratory in a record time of 35 days amidst unprecedented challenges and constraints is a huge achievement of the State Government. He extended his gratitude to the entire medical fraternity in the State, and the ICMR, Government of India, for hand-holding the entire process, right from construction to validation. he said that with the establishment of the VRD Laboratory in STNM Hospital, Sikkim will no longer have to depend on other States for Covid-19 and other medical tests.

The Hon'ble Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi for his exemplary leadership and forbearance in battling against the pandemic and to all the frontline medical workers who have toiled hard to combat Covid-19 in the state.

It is pertinent to add here that the VRD Laboratory is situated on the 9th floor of the Covid-19 dedicated Hospital and will have the capacity to conduct 90 tests at a time. Each batch (90 samples) will take five hours to deliver the test results. The initial process of RNA Extraction will take three and half hours, followed by one and half hours of actual testing. The VRD Laboratory will initially be manned by one Microbiologist and two laboratory technicians. Subsequent batches of lab technicians are being trained to replace the present batch in the stipulated time frame.

With the establishment of the VRD Laboratory in the State, samples for Covid-19 will no longer have to be sent to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, Siliguri, for RTPCR testing.

The RNA Extraction Kit and all the required consumables to be used in the VRD Laboratory will go for a final round of validation by the ICMR after which the Laboratory will be fully functional. As per information received from senior health officials, the Laboratory should be in a position to start the process of testing from Monday, the 26th of May, 2020.

It may be mentioned here that 75% of the cost of construction and establishment of the Laboratory was funded by ICMR, while 25% of the cost was borne by Alkem Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. from its CSR fund. The ICMR has procured the equipment and consumables for the Laboratory through the National Institute of Pathology, Noida.

It may be reminded that the STNM Hospital has been conducting regular tests through the TrueNat machines available with the Hospital. Till date, out of 583 samples tested through the TrueNat Testing Machine, 499 samples have tested negative for Covid-19, while the results of the remaining samples is awaited.