



Ministry of Development of North-East Region

# Northeast model of Corona management

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Following is the text of the article written by Union Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region (I/C) Dr Jitendra Singh on Corona Management.

“Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has always accorded highest priority to Northeast. Soon after the Modi government took over in 2014, Prime Minister had stated that every effort would be made to bring the North Eastern region at par with the more developed regions of the country. In the last six years, we have been reasonably successful in "walking the talk" and not only the psychological gaps were bridged but fast pace development activity was also witnessed, thus presenting North East as a model of development.

The cumulative effect of overall high prioritization of Northeast was witnessed even during the current Corona pandemic, whether it was in the form of early and adequate Air Cargo supply of essential commodities or early sealing of border with other countries or highly motivated participation of civil society in observing guidelines like social distancing etc.

The result is that, if under the Modi government in the last six years Northeast emerged as a model of development, in the last six months Northeast has emerged as a model of Corona management.

In fact, the pro-active steps taken by all the North Eastern States coupled with the liberal support offered by the Government of India have helped the region to cope up better compared to rest of India. The statistical evidence of effective COVID-19 management in North Eastern Region is reflected by the table below:

**Table: Weekly Cumulative COVID-19 Status in the North Eastern Region**

Sl. No.	Date	Cases tested	Negative Cases	Positive Cases	Persons Cued	Deaths
1	7.4.2020	2931	2800	32	0	0
2	14.4.2020	5017	4696	38	1	1
3	21.4.2020	9580	9160	53	23	2

4	28.4.2020	16022	15782	55	32	2
5	5.05.2020	22849	21719	88	48	2
6	12.5.2020	37120	34962	235	55	3
7	18.5.2020	60063	57573	291	142	4

The success of the measures taken by North Eastern States is evident from the fact that Sikkim and Nagaland do not have a single COVID-19 positive case till date. Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram had one patient each, which have since been cured. Meghalaya had 13 cases in a hospital in Shillong due to a foreign traveller, which led to one death, but all others have since recovered and Meghalaya is also COVID free now. *In effect, as on today, five states of NE viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim are CIVID-19 free.* The biggest State in North East, Assam has a few cases, but the State has handled the epidemic very well and effectively contained it in local areas. Similarly, both Manipur and Tripura had 2 cases each, which were cured and the States were declared COVID free, however, in the first week of May due to infected migrants, Tripura has seen a large spurt in cases particularly in CAPFs deployed there. Manipur has also seen 5 new case in last 3-4 days related to migrants.

This has been made possible due to prompt response of Central and State Governments in enforcing strict lockdowns; prompt supply of medicine and equipment via Air Cargo and Air Force; quick ramp up of testing facilities and number of testing facilities; upgradation of COVID related health infrastructure and making available essential supplies to all citizens through PDS and the weakest sections of the society through PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

Sikkim and Nagaland did not have any testing facility while Assam had 2 only. Over the period, the number of testing facility has been extended to all Medical Colleges in Assam. The lab in Kohima, Nagaland is now functional and in Sikkim TrueNAAT testing has started while RT-PCR lab would be functional shortly. As a result of extension of testing facilities in the region, the pace of testing in the region has increased from 2931 in first week of April 2020 to 60063 in mid-May, 2020, from an average of 300 per day to 3800 per day during this period. Leading to prompt care and hospitalizations, wherever required.

Lock-down measures in all the NE States were implemented effectively. Not only inter-state borders were closed by the respective States, but also NE States, which shares more than 5000 kilometers international borders were effectively closed by border Guarding Forces and

local public. States have set up Task Force under Chairmanship of Chief Secretaries to monitor the situation. Also, District level Task Force under District Collectors was constituted to monitor the pandemic. Control rooms were set up at district levels. Notable among the NE States was Sikkim, where Inner line permits for foreign nationals were suspended on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 and Nathula pass was closed for local tourists. Further, entry of domestic tourists into the State was suspended on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, which is much before the national lock-down. This ensured that Sikkim which is one of the biggest tourist hotspots has remained free from COVID-19.

A 'red army' of wise old men and women are helping villages across some hill States in the northeast to keep the novel corona virus away. The *gaon buras* (male villager elder) and *gaon buris* (female village elder) – usually referred as GBs from following their predecessors in forming a shield between the villages and the enemy –in this case, the virus are helping the States like Nagaland to combat the epidemic. Assisting the GBs in Nagaland are *dobashi*, the custodians of Naga customary laws, who also wear red coats are salaried government employees since 1842 are working under the State Government to ensure everyone gets to access the necessities.

The Mizo society is one of the most cohesive and disciplined societies of the country. Its uniqueness is reflected in its social institutions encompassing an aware citizenry, NGOs, church and the civil society. In Mizoram people have observed tremendous self-discipline and practice social distancing once out of home. The enforcement of the lockdown on the international border was a humongous task given the porous nature of the border. However, the village societies and local task forces rose to the occasion in managing the inflow of people. Similarly, the migrant workers from far flung parts of the country were accounted for and measures were developed to support them in this period. Almost fifteen thousand guest workers were provided with adequate arrangements for their stay and food throughout the lockdown period.

The state of Manipur taught rest of the country how to effectively ensure social distancing by drawing circles in front of shops. All civil society organizations across NER actively helped to enforce lockdown and social distancing.

Ministry of Civil Aviation (MOCA), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Railways played a key role in providing medical supplies and equipments and essential commodities to the North Eastern States. '**Lifeline Udan**' flights are being operated by MoCA to transport essential medical cargo to remote parts of the country to support India's fight against COVID-19. The essential cargo includes reagents, enzymes, medical equipment, testing kits, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), masks, gloves and other accessories required by Corona Warriors across the country. Through 'Lifeline Udan' supplies for domestic G2G movements of medical cargo to meet the requirements conveyed by state governments using

Air India and Alliance Air have been effective in the region. Pharma, foodstuff and essential commodities required by the household and private sector (hospitals, etc), and also raw materials and machinery required by the Indian pharmaceuticals and medical equipment manufacturing industry were dispatched using all public and private airline carriers and air cargo. Helicopter services including Pawan Hans Ltd have been operating in North East region transporting critical medical cargo and patients. Pawan Hans till 30 April 2020 have carried 2.03 tons of cargo covering a distance of 7,529 kms. A portal for coordinating Lifeline Udan flights was developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) and MoCA in a record span of three days to enable seamless coordination between various stakeholders.

There are no issues in supply of essential commodities and services in the region. As a part of its mission to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in NER during the nationwide lockdown, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) headquartered at Maligaon has operated more than 100 Parcel Express trains so far, bringing various kinds of commodities from major industrial hubs like Delhi, Mumbai, Nagpur, Bengaluru and Kolkata have arrived at Guwahati, New Guwahati, Azara, Changsari, Agartala and New Tinsukia during the last one-and-a-half-months. In many States, Home Delivery Supplies Management Control Rooms with Helpline were set up. State Governments have provided financial assistance to their people those who were stranded outside facing financial hardship on account of lockdown. The State Governments also distributed essential relief to people not covered by NFSA. Distribution of rice to the beneficiaries under 3 (three) schemes viz NFSA, PMGKAY and OMSS(D) is going on through the concerned Deputy Commissioners to both the beneficiaries of NFSA and the non-beneficiaries. Governments are also providing dry ration to the migrants, stranded truck drivers, govt. employees, children and other vulnerable groups. In Mizoram, Covid Task Force have been set up at State, district and local level further below. The local level task force consists of prominent people within each locality. They are part of Young Mizo Association and village/local councils. They have generally ensured smooth supplies of essentials, contact tracing & Social distancing compliance. The supply of essential commodities was maintained without any disruption and discomfort to the common man in Mizoram.

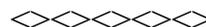
To meet the urgent requirements of medical supplies and equipments, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released Rs. 235.59 crore in March and April to all the NE States towards COVID-19. However, there are certain items and requirements which were not covered under MoH&FW grants. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region came forward and sanctioned Rs. 25 crore to NE States as untied funds to meet urgent requirements, which were not possible to be met under other grants by Government of India..

Central Government has promptly released funds to State Governments to fight COVID effectively. Central Government has so far released a total of Rs. 7923.78 crore to the NE States (Arunachal Pradesh- Rs. 935.28 crore, Assam Rs. 3090.64 crore, Manipur – Rs.

822.22 crore, Meghalaya – Rs. 467.02 crore, Mizoram – Rs. 493.46 crore, Nagaland – Rs. 937.12 crore, Sikkim – Rs. 278.30 crore and Tripura – Rs. 899.74 crore) since April, 2020 under installments of revenue deficits of April and May 2020, first installment of Central Share of State Disaster Response Mitigation Fund (SDRMF) and States Share in Central Taxes.

The announcement of special economic package by the central government to uplift the industry specially the MSME and package for Agriculture including Animal Resources and Fisheries would will improve the livelihood scenario and give a new impetus to the small-scale industry which is the backbone of NER.

The next challenge before the states in NER is to receive its people stranded in different parts of the country who are returning home. Special trains have started arriving and arrangements have been made for travelers to be put in quarantine well before they mix with the community. Extensive testing is being done to isolate COVID positive people and treat them in dedicated facilities. The efforts of the central government and special initiatives of the Ministry of DoNER have won the hearts of people. The region is prepared and to meet any challenges that might arise in the future”.



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