

Unhealthy state of Assam health sector



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In spite of tall talks of Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi and the minister of health and family welfare, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, about record progress in health sector in respect of establishment of health sub centers, appointment of doctors etc; the picture in this sector is far behind the truth. Construction of hospital buildings, payment of salaries and wages, organizing public meetings about awareness and precautions against diseases, can in no case be treated as the progress in health sector.

It may be mentioned here that one health sub centre is required for every five thousand population in both rural and urban areas. Against every five thousand population, doctors, nurses and instruments of health checkups should always be available. According to 2011 census, Assam's population is 3,11,69,272. In order to provide proper health services to this population Assam requires 6,234 health sub centers, but this state has failed to provide health services even to the population of 2001 census, which was 2,66,00,000. As per reports available at the beginning of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) scheme, 5,063 health sub centers should have been established in Assam, but it has 4,592 sub centers only. Even now, there is a shortfall of 471 sub centers. Besides, many sub centers have no proper maintenance. Doctors and nurses are not seen at certain centers. At the same time Assam should have 206 community health centers, whereas it has 103 such centers only. On the other hand primary health centers need 844 doctors against which it has 408 doctors only. The state requires 103 surgeons, but it has 73 surgeons only. Against its requirement of 412 specialists, the state has 365 only.

As regards Assam's claims of giving importance to construction of primary health centers, it is found that 103 centers are still under construction. Similarly the state has failed to provide health services even to the population according to 2001 census. Now, the population according to 2011 census has gone up to 3,11,69,272 as against 2,66,00,000 in 2001 census.. The state's health department has overlooked this fact. This state has the highest mortality rate of children and women in the country. The Nation's BPL population is 26.10 percent and Assam's BPL percentage is 36.09. During last ten years 1,100 people have died of encephalitis.

The Union government has given importance to establishment of Ayush directorate. For this purpose Rupees 1.5 crore has been shown in the budget for 232 appointments on contract basis, but Ayush director and deputy director could not be appointed. There is no city family welfare centre in the state. For improving the health sector even services of NGOs have not been taken adequately. Further, there is no co-ordination in the working of state's health directorate and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). Even there is no evidence of utilization of funds allocated to family welfare head.

Similarly, lakhs of people in Assam at grassroots are deprived of health services. Under NRHM scheme thousand crores of rupees scam have come into the light. Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and NGOs have alleged that in Assam, in the name of purchases of medicated mosquito nets, health department has spent Rs.84.48 crore ignoring all procedures. The mosquito nets, which were purchased by Goa state government at the rate of Rs.199 each, have been purchased by Assam government at the rate of Rs.400 each. Even NRHM Director Prateek Hajela has admitted that in Goalpara district irregularities were found and report in this connection was true. Irregularities have also been found in pulse polio programmes. A number of irregularities have been found in the health department during last few years.

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