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After accepting lapses govt does extensive reviews and course correction around Paro Airport

after the quarantine centers. Earlier Dessups were changed frequently and each new team had to be briefed and trained again.

A team under the National COVID-19 Taskforce had come up with various reviews and recommendations which has already been presented to the National Taskforce.

An official who is familiar with the team's work, on the condition of anonymity, shared some of the review work and the changes that are coming up.

The official said the main problem is not with the quarantine guidelines as everything was there, but the problem really occurred in terms of a sense of complacency, non compliance and no monitoring.

Giving the example of buses he said that bus drivers were supposed to be cordoned off from the passengers and drivers were not supposed to mingle with them, but somehow there was no monitoring.

The committee is looking at transferring air passengers directly to the quarantine centers and minimizing contact for which the committee will be talking to immigration and customs.

There will also have to be better social distancing at baggage handling and minimal

contact.

Things which are already happening in the airport like hand washing and other safety protocol will be re-emphasized.

The committee is also thinking of appointing a focal responsible person among the air crew who will be accountable for two reasons. One is in terms of following safety protocol while in flight and the other is to ensure stricter compliance of the air crews quarantine in hotels while working.

There will also be a safety checklist for bus drivers to follow.

One of the areas that the committee identified requires more strengthening is in terms of manpower and also in terms of ensuring there is monitoring of quarantine hotels and monitoring at both the national and district level.

The official said that the PMO is still managing the overall logistics like transportation and quarantine and the MoH looks after technical support and backstopping, but now to ensure better coordination the Department of Disaster Management will be given an overall role as the pandemic is a disaster in its own right.

He said until the COVID-19 virus is there this arrangement will have to be put in place as

quarantine centers will be required. Apart from better coordination there would also be accountability.

The official said that a challenge for having dedicated Dessups to manage the quarantine center is that it is a voluntary service and people are changed after every few months, however, now within Dessups there will be a dedicated quarantine management team.

At the national level, quarantine management will be given importance with a separate set up.

Apart from a more dedicated and overall professional set up the difference this time around is that a monitoring team will be set up from across agencies that will monitor and even audit quarantine centers, the airport, transport and at the Dzongkhag level.

The official said that one of the issues in the airport was a communication breakdown too as the Dzongkhag had thought that the Department of Air Transport would monitor everything.

In terms of the infectious 27th November 2020 flight the official said it cannot be said for sure that the infection spread in the flight. He said that given the epidemiology in India where there was a wide spread of the virus the people

on the flight may have been infected from Kolkata itself.

However, as a precaution the protocol inside the flights will be made stricter. One is that once you are seated you cannot move around in the plane.

The Cabinet Secretary Sangay Duba said that SOPs and Protocols have been developed. He said the DDM will take a lead role and there will be a separate inspection team.

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is playing an important role in strengthening the protocols and the system.

In response to a question from *The Bhutanese* on lessons learnt from the second outbreak in terms of strengthening Paro Airport logistics and protocols the TAG team listed some major observations.

One is that all the frontline responders need to be placed in the containment centers and put in the quarantine after completing the duty.

A mechanism for regular inspection and monitoring for compliance with the safety protocols needs to be established.

There is a need to reinforce the mechanisms for safer transfer of passengers from airport to the quarantine facility.

And finally safety protocols and SOPs of the transportation systems, quarantine facility and airport needs to be reviewed.

TAG said that based on these recommendations, the required interventions and changes at the ground-level are being made.

Meanwhile the Opposition party Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) as a part of its nine-point submission of suggestions to the government on 16th January pointed to airport quarantine protocol as one of the issues.

The Opposition party said that despite the highest attention to this aspect, lapses continue to occur especially on the front of International Airport quarantine procedures, due to which the second lockdown is widely believed to have been triggered.

The opposition recommended improving and strengthening the transportation and quarantine procedures, including revisiting the agencies to be involved in these logistics, and framing clear delineation and delegation of responsibilities.

The Bhutanese did two investigative stories bringing out various lapses at various levels that contributed to the second outbreak.

Bhutan becomes first country to receive Covishield vaccines from India

Staff Reporter/ Thimphu

An AN32 glided its way into the Paro valley around 3.25 pm today, ferrying Bhutan's first consignment of COVID-19 vaccine.

The aircraft of Indian Air Force delivered 150,000 doses of Covishield vaccines from India, making Bhutan the first country to receive the gift, just four days after India's own massive roll out of the vaccine.

Led by Prime Minister Dasho Dr Lotay Tshering, the health minister Dasho Dechen Wangmo, Foreign secretary Kinga Singye and a few other senior officials received the vaccines at the

Paro International Airport.

The Ambassador of India to Bhutan, Ruchira Kamboj and embassy officials handed over the Oxford-Astra Zeneca vaccine, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

Receiving the vaccine, Prime Minister said it was a gift from a trusted friend, who has been with Bhutan all through the decades and in this pandemic too.

"As we celebrate the arrival of vaccine as the new milestone in our battle to beat the pandemic at home, we applaud the gesture that signifies the compassion and generosity of the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi,

and the people of India for the wellbeing of the humanity," he said.

"It is the display of altruism at best, and an exhibit of India's sincerity in the relationship we cherish," Prime Minister said, adding it comes despite enormous challenges India was facing due to the pandemic.

"It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs, as opposed to giving out only after you have enough."

The PM said the dispatch of the vaccine was the testimony to India's commitment of "neighbourhood first" and its leadership in the global fight

against COVID-19.

He said these supports translate into hope and confidence for all the countries to successfully sail across the pandemic soon.

The contribution of 150,000 vaccines prepares Bhutan to wage forward to protect the people and heal from the destructions of the pandemic, together with the rest of the world. India has also extended timely and generous support through supply of medicines, medical equipment and personal protective equipment since March last year, said the PM.

Meanwhile, the Indian government has assured

to cover the two doses requirement of Bhutan's target population of slightly over 533,500 and has committed to deliver the remaining consignments soon.

Prime Minister said the government and the people of Bhutan are immensely grateful to the government and people of India for remembering us at this time.

"These will all translate into the prayers and prosperity of the people of India, emanating from the grateful hearts of Bhutan," he said. "We thank you."