

BORDER FORCES LACK BASIC AMENITIES

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“Wherever feasible, the possibility of supplying piped regular drinking water to BOPs must be explored. This must be done immediately and a special report submitted within six months,” it added.

A senior ITBP official, however, explained that only 20% BOPs are located at a height of 16,000 feet above sea level, where the water from natural sources can said to be safe for drinking. “The remaining BOPs are located at 9,000-15,000 feet. As you come down, the water gets dirty. Mostly we melt the ice to get water, which is then boiled and made potable. In Arunachal Pradesh, there is a variety of banana that grows in forests which contaminates the soil and ground water leading to liver diseases,” the official said.

High-altitude sickness

Quoting the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the report said ITBP personnel are at risk of several high-altitude health hazards. According to MHA data, in the past three years alone, over 500 were said to be suffering from High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPO), Acute Cerebral Edema and loss of memory. There were over 400 personnel suffering from snow blindness and trench foot.

“The Ministry further informed the Committee that the average recovery time for HAPO, Acute Cerebral Edema, loss of memory is six to 12 months. The average recovery time for trench foot and snow blindness is seven to 15 days,” the report said.

According to a study by the ITBP, approximately 20% of personnel were suffering from high altitude induced hypertension.

Shortage of doctors

Moreover, the Committee observed that there was a large number of vacancies in the medical the report said team and this has adversely impacted the forces.

“At a time when the ITBP personnel suffer from various diseases, the vacancy of eight specialist medical officers and 93 medical officers is quite alarming. There is no reason why there should be such a large number of vacancies at any given point of time, especially for ITBP as it has no other medical access at all because of the area of its deployment and inaccessible terrain,” the report said.

Border roads are critical for security. But only 32 out of 73 roads along the China border are complete, even as ITBP has proposed to construct 96 more roads, according to the Ministry’s admission.

No training equipment

The Committee pulled up the government for not providing basic training equipment to the ITBP personnel. “The Committee is extremely anguished to note that the ITBP who have been deployed in the treacherous hills of the north against extreme weather on the India-China border since the year 2004, have not been equipped with basic training gadgets and facilities, viz., modern equipment like eight-lane firing simulator and interactive touch display. The Committee

feels that the modernisation of the force must be given utmost priority as this force not only has to face any enemy from across the border but also vagaries of nature,” the report said.

To exacerbate, the condition of BOPs of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) deployed along the Nepal and Bhutan border was also not up to the mark. The Ministry, in its background note submitted that most of the units in the SSB do not have adequate supply of electricity, and 328 out of 636 BOPs did not have access to electricity and were dependent on solar sets or generators. In 2016-17, as many as 6,590 SSB personnel were affected by water-borne diseases like enteric fever, diarrhoea and viral hepatitis.

“The Committee observes that around 134 out of 643 BOPs of SSB do not have any type of water filtration system. The Committee is anguished to note that clean drinking water is not available to the SSB personnel posted at more than 20% of the BOPs and considers this as a failure of the Ministry of Home Affairs to provide adequate basic amenities to CAPF personnel. The high incidence of water-borne diseases, with more than 3,000 cases every year, is evidence of this failure,” the report said.

Incidentally the ITBP is 89,433 and SSB 97,014 personnel strong. That's no small force.

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