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## As cities adjust to new normal, tribal children suffer from lack of devices, connectivity



New Delhi: While urban India is trying to adjust to the new normal triggered by Covid-19, the Centre is struggling with mobile and internet connectivity issues to impart education to children from tribal areas and other socially and economically backward classes. With Lockdown 1 on March 23, India had closed its schools and educational institutions.

With Covid-19 cases increasing, schools continue to remain closed. However, the government is worried that

children hailing from remote vilespecially belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will be worst-hit. Many tribal students live and get formal education at the centrally-funded Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS). However, with successive lockdowns, these schools are closed. As per the tribal affairs ministry data, there are 285 EMRS which have 73,391 tribal students (including 36,824 boys and 36,567 girls). The Centre has tried to hold online classes. However, the students do not have devices and hail from remote villages with weak mobile network and connectivity issues. A tribalaffairs ministry spokesperson told ET, “The newly created National Educational Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), a central society for running EMRS, had been closely following the students’ educational progress.

Although there are various challenges reported from the field such as network and connectivity problems and lack of devices, the students and teachers are paving their way through structural challenges in the best possible manner. Schools are witnessing a blend of offline and online modes of learning.” The ministry does not have any data on how many children log in for classes or if these are regularly conducted. When asked how many schools have been conducting classes, the spokesperson said, “Almost all schools are working towards the educational progress of maximum children.” The ministry had worked out a plan thinking schools will be allowed to reopen from

September 1.

However, with the unlock guidelines not allowing schools, the plan has been postponed. Secretary (tribal affairs) Deepak Khandekar told ET, "Once schools reopen, we would have to make concerted efforts to bring these children back to our schools. We have tried our best to run online classes and keep them abreast with some form of school education. But there would be an obvious learning gap."

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