From 5.72 cr in Feb, e-way bills issued falls to 86 lakh in April

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EVEN AFTER the government repeated multiple times that all goods trucks are exempt from movement restrictions, their movement in April fell drastically to 15 per cent of what it was in February. The number in March fell by nearly 30 per cent compared to that in February.

Data of e-way bills issued — which is mandatory for transporting goods worth over Rs 50,000 — shows that even after the Centre allowed movement of all trucks and goods carriers on March 29, goods movement on the road has barely been able to bounce back since the nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 25.

GST Network data shows that against 5.72 crore e-way bills issued in February, only 86.09 lakh such bills were issued in April. These numbers include both intra- and inter-state e-way bills. In March, when truck movement had nearly come to a halt, the total e-way bills issued were nearly 4.07 crore. In the first five days of May, 10.46 lakh bills have been issued. This means that from an average of 19.7 lakh e-way bills issued daily in February, the number slipped to 13.1 lakh daily e-way bills in March, then drastically to 2.87 lakh in April and 2.09 lakh for May so far.

However, it is important to note that the Centre had, in March, extended the validity of all e-way bills issued before March 24, due to the disruption caused by the lockdown. Usually, each e-way bill is valid for a day for a 100-km stretch of the truck’s journey.

The government, in a notification issued on May 5, extended all the e-way bills issued before March 24 till May 31. It had also extended the deadline to file Goods and Services Tax (GST) returns for entities with turnover of over Rs 5 crore by 15 days from the due date without payment of any late fee, interest and penalty. GST returns for transactions in March were to be filed by April 20, which was extended till May 5.

Even as almost all goods movement froze after the lockdown was announced, the government first clarified that movement of essential goods is allowed. Through another order on March 29, it allowed movement of all essential as well as non-essential goods.

In a letter to the chief secretaries of states, Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla clarified that “transportation of all goods, without distinction of essential and non-essential, have been allowed”, giving permission for trucks and goods carrier to move within the states and across states as well.

However, the GST Network data shows that not only has intra-state movement of trucks and goods carriers been severely hit, their movement between states has been affected even more.

While the inter-state e-way bills issued for February and March were about 40 per cent of the total e-way bills for these months, in April, the share of inter-state e-way bills in the total was just 28.3 per cent. Of the 86.09 lakh bills, inter-state e-way bills in April were only 24.43 lakh. For the first six days of May, inter-state e-way bills account for only 30.8 per cent of the total e-way bills.

Interestingly, the Centre is yet to disclose the GST collection figures for April. GST numbers for each month are usually released on the first day of the next month, but the government has deferred the release of the April GST figures. GST mop-up in March 2020 had slid below Rs 1 lakh crore to Rs 97,597 crore, an 8 per cent fall from the March 2019 collection of Rs 1.06 lakh crore.