GUWAHATI, Oct 16 - The Commissionerate of Food Safety will operate a mobile food testing laboratory in the State from next month to strengthen the food safety mechanism. The mobile lab will be equipped with all basic facilities and the required quick testing instruments and rapid diagnostic kits for detection of adulteration in various food samples, particularly milk and milk products, edible fats and oils, water, spices, etc. Besides, experts will also make people aware about how to differentiate original food items from adulterants.

Sources said through these units, 24 tests can be conducted on milk, nine on edible oil, 17 on spices and 11 on other foods. “We had asked for two but the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has sanctioned one such vehicle initially. We hope to launch it next month,” they said.

An official said the mobile labs will basically serve for preliminary surveillance purpose. “During the spot testing, we will get some idea what is going on and then detailed tests can be later done at the main lab. Through the mobile tests, we will know how to proceed. It will save a lot of time taken to collect the samples and bringing it to the lab located at Bamunimaidam,” the sources said.

Each vehicle will have three technical personnel and a driver. “The FSSAI will impart training to the personnel. The authority will bear the recurring expenses of the mobile lab, like on fuel and chemicals used for testing and other maintenance,” the official said.

Though primarily the mobile lab will be deployed in Guwahati, it will also be used during incidence of food poisoning in rural areas.

Food fraud cases have been increasing in the State. Last year, around 610 samples of various food products were tested and of them as many as 42 were found to be of substandard quality, 13 misbranded and 12 categorised as unsafe. Adulteration has been detected in even reputed brands.
The State Public Health Laboratory, the only food testing facility in the State, also serves to four other states of the Northeast.