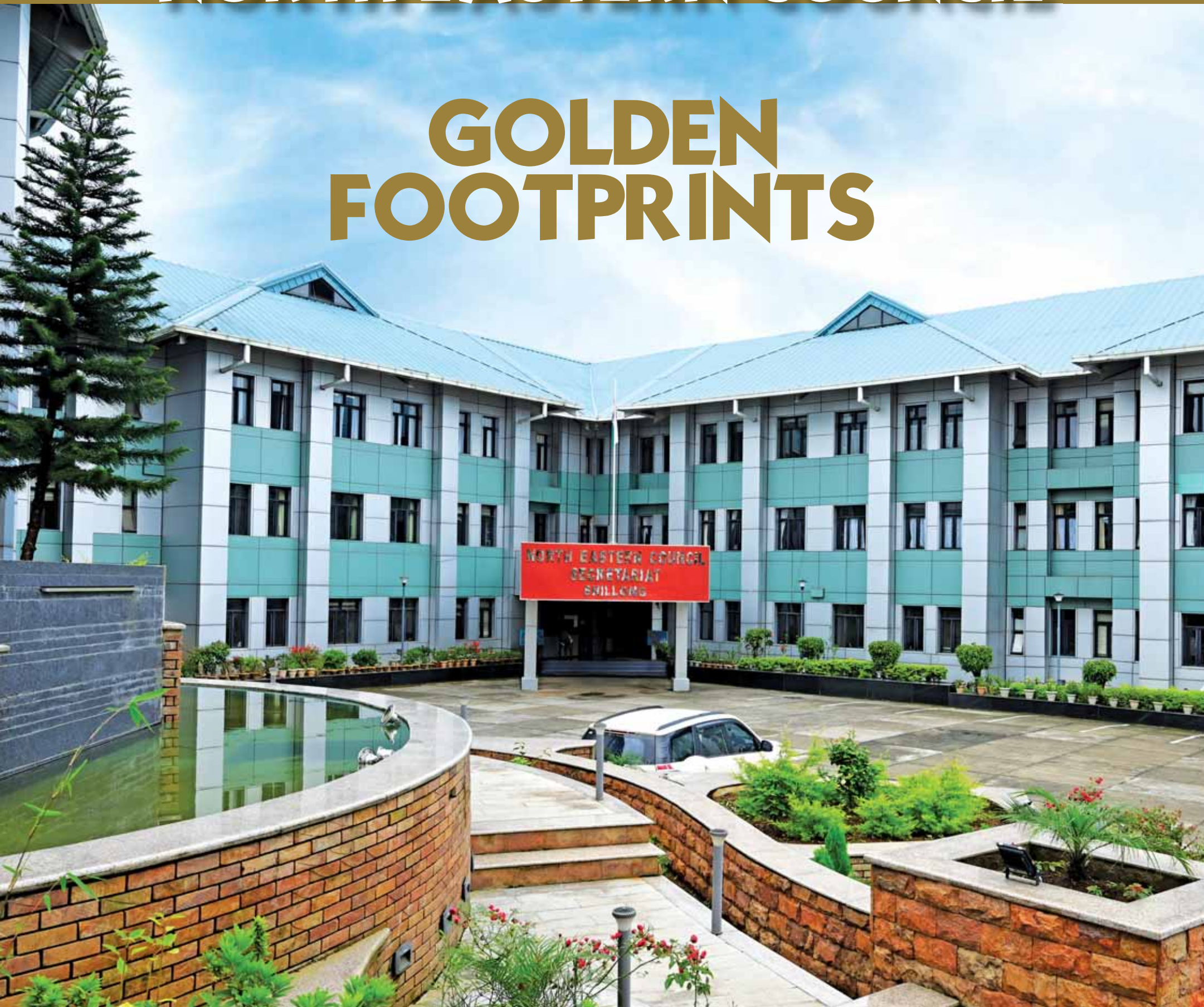


# NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL

## GOLDEN FOOTPRINTS



GLORIOUS JOURNEY OF 50 YEARS



# GOLDEN FOOTPRINTS





Hon'ble Prime Minister, Narendra Modi at the Heritage Village, in Meghalaya on May 28, 2016.

**NARENDRA MODI**  
Prime Minister



7, Lok Kalyan Marg  
New Delhi

## MESSAGE



It is a pleasure to learn that the North Eastern Council (NEC) is bringing out a commemorative document named **'Golden Footprints - Documentation of 50 glorious years' journey'** to mark the completion of 50 years of existence of NEC.

Heartiest congratulations and greetings to everyone associated with the Council, as well as the wonderful people of India's North Eastern region on this occasion.

The Golden Jubilee celebration of NEC is a proud and momentous moment for everyone associated with the organisation during its five-decade journey. The NEC personnel have served the region and the nation with dedication and commitment.

We are taking development to the doorsteps of the people of the North Eastern region. Be it connectivity or culture, infrastructure or investment, textiles or tradition, organic farming or bamboo cultivation, in every domain, we have taken unprecedented steps that are making this region a growth engine for India.

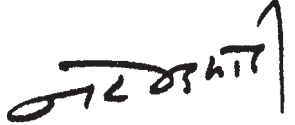
In these efforts, the NEC has played an important role and helped usher in socio-economic growth by creating opportunities for the people of the region.

Now that this beautiful region has begun to see the benefits of peace, progress and prosperity, it is time to further intensify our efforts to ensure greater ease of living and fulfil the aspirations of the people.

The Amrit Kaal of next 25 years provides us an opportunity to fulfil our collective resolve to build a strong, self-reliant India. I am sure that the NEC will continue to add strength to our efforts.

May the commemorative document showcase the Golden Jubilee celebrations, as well as the achievements of the Council over the last 50 years. I wish the North Eastern Council the very best for future endeavours.

New Delhi  
अग्रहायण 09, संवत् 1944  
30th November, 2022

  
**NARENDRA MODI**

**अमित शाह**  
गृह मंत्री एवं सहकारिता मंत्री



गृह मंत्रालय,  
नॉर्थ ब्लॉक, नई दिल्ली

## संदेश



मुझे यह जानकर अत्यंत प्रसन्नता हो रही है कि 'उत्तर पूर्वी परिषद' अपनी स्थापना के 50 वर्ष पूर्ण होने के उपलक्ष्य में स्वर्ण जयंती समारोह मना रहा है और इस अवसर पर **"Golden Footprints - Documentation of 50 Glorious Years' Journey"** नामक पुस्तक का प्रकाशन भी किया जा रहा है।

उत्तर पूर्वी परिषद भारत सरकार की प्रमुख एजेंसीयों में से एक है, जो पूर्वोत्तर के विकास के लिए समर्पित है। परिषद पूर्वोत्तर क्षेत्र के आर्थिक और सामाजिक विकास कार्यक्रमों के लिए नोडल एजेंसी है, जिसके पिछले पांच दशकों में क्षेत्र के विकास के रास्ते में आने वाली बुनियादी बाधाओं को दूर करने के उद्देश्य से एक नए आर्थिक प्रयास को गति देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है।

राज्यों के आपसी व केंद्र के साथ बेहतर समन्वय और सहयोग को बढ़ावा देने के लिए प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी जी के नेतृत्व में क्षेत्रीय परिषदों के महत्व को और अधिक विस्तार और प्राथमिकता दी जा रही है, जिससे राज्यों के समन्वित विकास को प्रभावी गति मिली। पूर्वोत्तर भारत प्राकृतिक सौंदर्य, गौरवशाली संस्कृति एवं प्राकृतिक संसाधनों का एक दुर्लभ संयोजन हैं। इस क्षेत्र की सामाजिक एवं सांस्कृतिक पहचान को बनाए रखने और इसके संवर्धन के लिए हमारी सरकार सतत प्रयत्नशील है।

मैं, इस अवसर पर स्वर्ण जयंती समारोह के सफल आयोजन हेतु अपनी शुभकामनाएं प्रेषित करते हुए पुस्तक के सफल प्रकाशन की कामना करता हूँ।

( अमित शाह )

**G KISHAN REDDY**  
Minister of Culture, Tourism and  
Development of North Eastern Region



Vigyan Bhawan Annexe  
Maulana Azad Road  
New Delhi



## MESSAGE

My heartiest congratulations to the North Eastern Council for documenting and publishing **“Golden Footprints - Documentation of 50 Glorious Years’ Journey”**. This book details the various achievements made by the NEC over the years for the development of the North East Region. Despite many challenges, NEC was able to provide strategic vision to the Region especially in the initial years when the member States were newly created and since then has been instrumental in increasing many iconic institutions and developing basic infrastructure.

The book also details the efforts made by the NEC for creating employment opportunities, uplifting many communities, and integrating the Region with the rest of the country. I am sure NEC will go from strength to strength.

I once again wish NEC all the best for the next phase of its journey.

New Delhi  
16th November, 2022



**G KISHAN REDDY**

**बी.एल. वर्मा**  
राज्य मंत्री, सहकारिता एवं  
उत्तर पूर्वी क्षेत्र विकास



विज्ञान भवन एनेक्सी  
मौलाना आजाद रोड़  
नई दिल्ली



## संदेश

मुझे यह जानकर बहुत खुशी हो रही है कि परिषद द्वारा अपने अस्तित्व के इस स्वर्ण जयंती वर्ष के दौरान **“गोल्डन फुटप्रिंट्स - डॉक्यूमेंटेशन ऑफ 50 ग्लोरियस इयर्स जर्नी”** नामक पुस्तक प्रकाशित की जा रही है। यह पुस्तक एनईसी की वर्षों की यात्रा का दस्तावेजीकरण करती है और यह बताती है कि इसने पूर्वोत्तर के विकास में कैसे योगदान दिया है। एनईसी भारत सरकार का एक महत्वपूर्ण वैधानिक संगठन है और इन पचास वर्षों में इसने इस क्षेत्र और इसके लोगों के लिए बहुत ईमानदारी और प्रतिबद्धता के साथ काम किया है।

मुझे विश्वास है कि यह पुस्तक इसकी उपलब्धियों को गंभीरता से दर्ज करेगी। एनईसी की कहानी उन सेवारत और सेवानिवृत्त अधिकारियों का उल्लेख किए बिना अधूरी होगी, जिन्होंने परोक्ष रूप से दिन-रात काम किया है और अक्सर गुमनाम रहे हैं। मैं उन सभी के बहुमूल्य योगदान की सराहना करता हूँ और एनईसी के भविष्य के लिए शुभकामनाएं देता हूँ।

New Delhi  
10th November, 2022

( बी.एल. वर्मा )

**LOK RANJAN**  
Secretary, Ministry of MDoNER



Vigyan Bhawan Annexe  
Maulana Azad Road  
New Delhi

## MESSAGE



It is a proud moment that the North Eastern Council (NEC) has successfully completed 50 years. It is also bringing out **“Golden Footprints - Documentation of 50 Glorious Years’ Journey”**, a book to document its journey.

It was indeed a privilege to be associated with the NEC as administrative Ministry and to have had a part to play in creating many iconic institutions and landmark projects which have changed the landscape of the Northeast and brought about a quantum shift in the economic well-being of its people.

It may not be out of place to note that with the active involvement of the NEC, the Region could accomplish so much thus far. The NEC has worked hard to touch and make a difference in the lives of common people and marginalized communities of the Region, by enabling their access to the benefits of various government schemes and projects.

I also appreciate that this book would not be just a catalogue of NEC projects but a narration of how NEC has adapted and is helping the NE Region to adopt to the changing needs of the Region.

My best wishes to NEC on this landmark occasion and for all its future endeavors.

New Delhi  
24th November, 2022

  
**LOK RANJAN**

Air Marshal (Retd.)  
**ANJAN KUMAR GOGOI**  
PVSM, AVSM, VSM  
Member NEC



Nongrim Hills,  
Shillong, Meghalaya



## MESSAGE

I have always maintained that the NEC is one organization for which nothing is 'impossible'. It knows the fine art of converting impossible to "I am possible" and this has been demonstrated by its work spread over five decades. The book depicting its 50-years journey is all about the projects which people thought were not doable or too costly to implement, the NEC not only completed them on time but also ensured they were top notch in quality. Thanks to its stringent quality standards and protocols, no project in its half a century long journey has been branded substandard and not withstood the test of time.

The NEC officials are hardworking and committed lot who do not mind burning midnight oil to achieve goals promised by them. For NEC self discipline and timely delivery of projects is everything. The **"Golden Footprints"** is testimony to that. The book though might look easy and debonair but is a result of months of research and meticulous design and content. I have no doubt that this book would inspire many other institutions to undertake such a journey with the same fervor. I congratulate all my NEC friends for publishing such a fantastic book.

Shillong  
5th December, 2022

  
Air Marshal (Retd.)  
**ANJAN KUMAR GOGOI**

**K MOSES CHALAI, IAS**  
Secretary, NEC



Nongrim Hills,  
Shillong, Meghalaya



## MESSAGE

I am very glad to see North Eastern Council (NEC) able to systematically document and trace its developmental journey of the last 50 years with the States and Stakeholders of North Eastern Region (NER), which is brought out in the form of **“GOLDEN FOOTPRINTS - 50 years’ journey of North Eastern Council”**. The book is an outcome of carefully detailed research made and capturing the commendable achievements made by NEC by way of beautiful narratives and photography of excellent photographs spanning across the region. It successfully captured the turns and events over the decades, whereby NEC successfully provided critical needs in realms of infrastructures/ assets creation, establishment of iconic institutions and successful interventions in different sectors including successful livelihood interventions. Looking at the book, I am sure that we all will appreciate that NEC has done fair justice as an Institute and has all the potentials to do equally well and even better in days to come. I honour and thank all who have affectionately contributed so much towards the Council both in the past and present.

I sincerely greet and wish all the respected stakeholders of NEC and the citizens of NER on this 50th year of NEC establishment.

Shillong  
24th November, 2022

  
24/XI/22  
**K MOSES CHALAI**



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## CHAPTER ONE

### NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL: A BEACON OF HOPE

The magnitude of NEC's work and importance has grown by leaps and bounds over decades since its constitution in 1971-72, instrumental as it has been in setting up iconic institutions and infrastructure of substantial public significance in the North Eastern Region



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## CHAPTER TWO

### NORTH EAST INDIA: THE COUNTRY'S EIGHT WONDERS

North Eastern stretch of India is a culturally rich region which has inspired some very important and celebrated musicians, artists, filmmakers and writers. It also boasts one of the highest per capita incomes in Asia. But even today, it happens to be among most unexplored ethnic regions in India



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## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BIRTH OF A NEW ENTITY

Constituted and inaugurated at a time when North Eastern Region, entire country and its neighbourhood were in turmoil, North Eastern Council came as an invigorating force to create a plethora of avenues for all eight States for mutual cooperation and development



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## CHAPTER FOUR

### A DREAM COMES TRUE, AN IDEA TAKES SHAPE

The NEC's novel, significant and permanent presence provided legitimate opportunities to various States and groups in North East India to develop the concept of 'oneness' for the region's overall economic and infrastructural development





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## CHAPTER FIVE | CONNECTING PEOPLE'S LIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

Realising that it was important for North East Region's people to mingle with the outside world, NEC made conscious and sincere efforts to bring more connectivity and opportunities to the region and touch people's lives in a way so as to make a positive impact

## CHAPTER SIX | OVERCOMING THE MOUNTAIN OF A CHALLENGE

The road was rocky due to a resource crunch and cuts in budgetary allocations but NEC relied on innovations and smart cost-cutting measures to fight the odds and come up trumps. And it ensured community participation in developmental projects



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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A BEND IN THE ROAD TO SET NEW PACE FOR THE DECADES AHEAD

The first decennium of new millennium bore fruits of the opening of India's economy in 1990s. It recorded a number of strategic milestones which modified NEC's composition and helped it equip itself for swifter planning and execution of people-friendly schemes across NER



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## CHAPTER EIGHT | NO SPEED LIMITS, ONLY MOMENTOUS MILESTONES ON THIS ROAD TO SUCCESS

Zealously following the "re-orient and upgrade" mantra laid down by the Prime Minister, NEC took rapid strides to develop itself as a state-of-the-art resource centre. Focus is also on the NER's endangered languages and degraded forest areas besides increased usage of space technology for development planning



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## CHAPTER NINE

### WHEN ACTUAL WORTH IS MORE THAN THE SUM TOTAL OF PARTS

As traditional wisdom goes, the might of the fist is much more than the strength of individual fingers. The same holds true for the NEC's sectors which, though poles apart in their functions, complement one another like a well-oiled machinery to perform impeccably



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## CHAPTER TEN

### MDoNER: WHERE MANDATE AND COMMITMENT CONVERGE

The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region has been a game changer in pursuing overall development of the North East, guiding the region to accomplish several milestones and contribute enormously to national growth

## 242 MARCHING TOGETHER

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES & CNA



VISION | 272

### NEC IS FUTURE READY!

Having established itself firmly as an entity of substance for NER's development, the North Eastern Council has its work cut out for the journey ahead. With its focus firmly set on IT and ITES sectors, the Council is future ready to reorient and upgrade itself

# CHAIRMAN OVER THE YEARS



**B. K. NEHRU**  
1.8.1972 TO 18.9.1973



**L.P. SINGH**  
19.9.1973 TO 11.8.1981



**PRAKASH MEHROTRA**  
18.6.1982 TO 28.3.1984



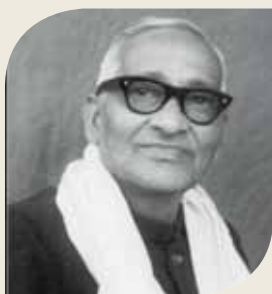
**BHISHMA NARAYAN SINGH**  
16.4.1984 TO 10.5.1989



**HARIDEO JOSHI**  
11.5.1989 TO 26.7.1989



**D.D. THAKUR**  
23.5.1990 TO 15.3.1991



**LOKNATH MISHRA**  
16.3.1991 TO 29.4.1991



**S.N. DWIVEDY**  
30.4.1991 TO 4.7.1993



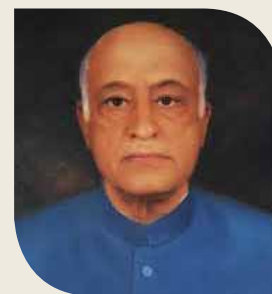
**MADHUKAR DIGHE**  
5.7.1993 TO 20.10.1993



**MATA PRASAD**  
20.10.1993 TO 16.5.1999



**LT GEN (RETD) S K SINHA**  
17.5.1999 TO 1.8.1999



**ARAVIND DAVE**  
2.8.1999 TO 15.11.1999



**LT GEN (RETD) S K SINHA**  
16.11.1999 TO 31.5.2003



**LT GEN (RETD) AJAI SINGH**  
3.6.2003 TO 15.3.2005



**P.R. KYNDIAH**  
16.3.2005 TO 24.10.2006



**MANI SHANKAR AIYAR**  
25.10.2006 TO 22.5.2009



**DR MANMOHAN SINGH**  
23.5.2009 TO 28.5.2009



**B.K. HANDIQUE**  
28.5.2009 TO 12.7.2011



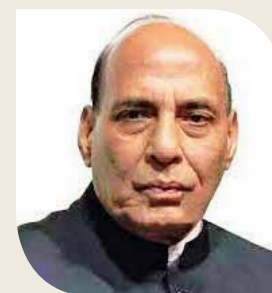
**PABAN SINGH GHATOWAR**  
12.7.2011 TO 26.5.2014



**GEN (RETD) V K SINGH**  
27.5.2014 TO 9.11.2014



**DR. JITENDRA-SINGH**  
9.11.2014 TO 6.7.2018



**RAJNATH SINGH**  
7.7.2018 TO 30.5.2019



**AMIT SHAH**  
30.5.2019 TO TILL DATE



**G. KISHAN REDDY**  
(VICE CHAIRMAN) 2021 TO TILL DATE

# SECRETARIES OVER THE YEARS



**D.K. BHATTACHARYA, IAS**  
01.08.72 TO 23.03.75



**K. MIRANI, IAS**  
23.03.1976 TO 01.03.82



**GYAN CHAND, IAS**  
01.03.82 TO 31.03.83



**P.H. TRIVEDI, IAS**  
24.03.83 TO 11.07.86



**R.K. TIKKU, IAS**  
26.09.86 TO 08.01.90



**D.W. TELANG, IAS**  
12.01.90 TO 31.08.90



**L.M. MENEZES, IAS**  
03.09.90 TO 01.01.93



**H.A.D. SAWIAN, IAS**  
25.07.93 TO 31.08.96



**TAKAP RINGU, IAS**  
01.09.96 TO 19.07.99



**J.S. SYIEM, IAS**  
22.07.99 TO 12.03.2000



**H.W.T. SYIEM, IAS**  
05.04.2000 TO 30.07.02



**P.L. THANGA, IAS**  
05.08.02 TO 12.08.04



**KAMAL TAORI**  
13.08.04 TO 18.07.05



**H.V. LALRINGA, IAS**  
09.08.05 TO 28.02.07



**SUSHMA SINGH, IAS**  
01.03.07 TO 08.08.07



**FALGUNI RAJ KUMAR, IAS**  
09.08.07 TO 03.01.09



**JARNAIL SINGH, IAS**  
01.02.09 TO 02.03.09



**U.K. SANGMA, IAS**  
03.03.09 TO 07.05.13



**AMEISING LUIKHAM IAS**  
07.05.13 TO 12.06.15



**S.N. BROHMO CHAUDHURY, IES**  
24.06.15 TO 09.09.15



**RAM MULVAH, IAS**  
10.09.15 TO 05.11.19



**K. MOSES CHALAI**  
05.11.19 TO till date





A river flows quietly through Arunachal Pradesh's countryside as a couple of traditional boats lie idle in the forenoon sun.

## CHAPTER ONE

# NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL: A BEACON OF HOPE

The magnitude of NEC's work and importance has grown by leaps and bounds over decades since its constitution in 1971-72, instrumental as it has been in setting up iconic institutions and infrastructure of substantial public significance in the North Eastern Region

**W**hen India won Independence from the British in 1947, the 'North Eastern Region' (NER) of British India consisted only of Assam and princely States of Manipur and Tripura. Subsequently, Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh in 1975, and Mizoram in 1987 were formed out of the large territory of Assam. Manipur and Tripura remained India's Union Territories from 1956 until 1972, when they

were granted full statehood by the Centre. Sikkim was integrated in 2002 as the eighth North Eastern Council (NEC) State, long after its inauguration in 1972.

The Council got a major leg-up when Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was set up in September 2001 under Bharatiya Janata Party's regime at the Centre, and later converted into a full-fledged Ministry in 2004. MDoNER is responsible for planning, execution and monitoring developmental schemes and projects in North East India. It is the only Ministry with a territorial jurisdiction and functions to coordinate developmental efforts in North Eastern Region.

It functions as Central Government's nodal Ministry to deal with matters related to the socio-economic development of North East India's eight States, acting as a facilitator between Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments of North Eastern Region in their economic development, including the removal of infrastructural bottlenecks, provision of basic minimum services, creating an environment for private investment and to remove impediments to lasting peace and security. It coordinates with specific Ministries and departments responsible for implementation of programmes or facilitating development initiatives. However, the Ministry or department concerned retains responsibility for the project's implementation.

The North Eastern Council, which is chaired by the Hon'ble Home Minister, with the Hon'ble Minister of the Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) as its vice-chairman, comprises all eight North Eastern States' Governors and Chief Ministers and three Members nominated by the President of India (including Secretary, MDoNER, who is ex officio Member). The NEC Secretariat is headed by a full-time Secretary in the rank of Additional Secretary/





Hon'ble Prime Minister, Narendra Modi speaks at the inauguration of 65th Plenary Session of North Eastern Council, in the presence of the then DoNER Minister, Dr. Jitender Singh and other dignitaries in Shillong on May, 2016.

Secretary to the Government of India. The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) has been urging all Central Ministries/Departments concerned to formulate relevant socio-economic programmes and projects in the region. The Ministries are also invited to spell out their development plans, achievements and ongoing activities in the region during NEC's routine and other review meetings.

The NEC implements two fully funded schemes: (a) Schemes of the NEC; and, (b) North East Road Sector Development Scheme (NERSDS).

### SCHEMES OF THE NEC

The NEC undertakes projects in various sectors like bamboo, piggery, regional tourism, higher education, tertiary health care

(including health education) and special intervention in backward areas, livelihood projects, Science & Technology (S&T) intervention across North Eastern Region, besides survey and investigations and promotion of NER under its 'Schemes of NEC'.

Currently, the 'Schemes of NEC' is 100 per cent Centrally funded. As per Cabinet's approval of January 29, 2020, total allocation/funds available to NEC under it are divided into three components: (a) 30 per cent of NEC's allocation for new projects under existing 'Schemes of NEC' is earmarked for focused development of deprived areas (neglected sections of society and emerging priority sectors in North Eastern States); (b) 60 per cent of the remaining allocation is utilised as State component as per their share on normative allocation basis; and, (c) 40 per cent as Central Component primarily for projects having a regional character.





Union Home Minister and NEC Chairman Amit Shah, inaugurating the 70th plenary session of North Eastern Council in the presence of Minister for MDoNER, Tourism and Culture & Vice-chairman of NEC; G. Kishan Reddy, Minister of State for MDoNER and NEC Member BL Verma; Governor of Assam Jagdish Mukhi & Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam in Guwahati on October, 2022.



## UNDER PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S LEADERSHIP, NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL HAS BECOME AN EPICENTRE OF CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING DEVELOPMENTAL SCHEMES IN THE NORTH EASTERN STATES

—HON'BLE UNION HOME MINISTER AND  
NEC CHAIRMAN  
**AMIT SHAH**

Over the last 50 years, NEC has been instrumental in setting up iconic institutes across North East Region, such as North East Police Academy (NEPA), Shillong; North Eastern Regional Institute of Science & Technology (NERIST), Itanagar; Regional Institute of Paramedical & Nursing Sciences (RIPANS), Aizawl; Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal; North Eastern Regional Institute of Water and Land Management (NERIWALM) in Tezpur; and Regional Institute of Pharmaceutical Science & Technology (RIPSAT), Agartala, among others.

To put things into perspective, during last 17 years (up to March 31, 2022), a total of 1,435 projects worth ₹11,438.29 crore have been sanctioned under 'Schemes of NEC'. In the same period, 738 projects costing ₹6,084.23 crore have been completed and the remaining 623 projects costing ₹5,354.06 are ongoing.



(Above and right) Union Home Minister and North Eastern Council (NEC) Chairman Amit Shah hands over Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose scholarship award to a meritorious student and NEC Secretary, K Moses Chaloi welcomes NEC Chairman at the inauguration of 70th Plenary session of NEC in Guwahati on October, 2022.

## THE NORTH EAST ROAD SECTOR DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (NERSDS)

The Government has been taking a number of steps to develop roads and bridges, which have long-term benefits for NER as roads not only provide inter-State connectivity within and outside any region, but also have a multiplier effect on its economy. The region is now well placed to leverage improved law and order situation, which was earlier a major hindrance to progress.

The improvement in connectivity of NER would facilitate trade within the country and allow NER States to avail maximum

opportunities coming their way through Government's 'Act East' policy. It would provide a much-needed boost to regional exports and lead to closer cultural and economic ties with neighbouring countries as infrastructural improvement has also led to higher aspirations of North Eastern people.

Due to strategic importance of roads and also owing to lack of proper maintenance of some of these important inter-State roads, mainly constructed under NEC's financial support during previous Plan periods, North Eastern Council made a conscious effort to collect information of all such roads. Finally, a shelf of projects under the



The NEC 70th plenary session being addressed by Secretary MDoNER, Shri Lok Ranjan in Guwahati on October, 2022.

nomenclature “Orphan Roads” was identified in consultation with regional Governments. Finally, considering this shelf of projects as the basis, Ministry of DoNER launched an ambitious North East Road Sector Development Scheme (NERSDS) for upgradation of strategically important roads of inter-State nature in North Eastern Region during FY2014-15.

The NEC undertakes gradation of important and strategic inter-State roads under NERSDS based on four criteria: Inter-state roads previously built by itself and other agencies, which are of vital connectivity for one State but of little importance to other States

and hence remained neglected, but with available formation width of road; roads in socio-politically neglected pockets of North Eastern Region; roads important from security or strategic viewpoint but not covered in other programmes; and roads necessary from the viewpoint of market access for agriculture produce and roads of economic importance on gap-filling approach.

Since its inception up to March 31, 2022, a total of 28 projects worth ₹1,974.10 crore have been sanctioned under NERSDS. During same period, five projects costing ₹297.92 crore have been completed and other 23 projects costing ₹1,676.18 crore are ongoing.



AIR MARSHAL (RETD) **ANJAN KUMAR GOGOI**,  
PVSM, AVSM, VSM, Member

**THE NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL  
IS WORKING LIKE A WELL-OILED  
MACHINE TO ELEVATE THE EIGHT  
STATES TO THEIR PRISTINE GLORY. OF  
COURSE, DEVELOPMENT NEVER COMES  
WITHOUT ISSUES. BUT IT WON'T BE AN  
EXAGGERATION TO STATE THAT THE  
COUNCIL IS IN MISSION MODE**

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP

The North Eastern Council's 65th plenary session in Shillong on May 26-27, 2016, was graced by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. In his address, he had this advice:

"There is a need to reorient and upgrade North Eastern Council. You may like to consider developing North Eastern Council as a state-of-the-art resource centre for North Eastern States with necessary resources, knowledge and skills. The resource centre may enable States concerned and the implementing agencies to properly plan and execute projects, promote research and innovations and provide strategic policy vision for the region.





NEC Secretary K Moses Chalaj, chairs a meeting of the Council's senior officials at the Secretariat in Shillong.



**K MOSES CHALAI, IAS**  
Secretary

**OUR TARGET IS TO BE THE  
TRENDSETTER IN AREAS  
OF DEVELOPMENT AND  
INNOVATION. OTHERS  
MAY BE WORKING ON A  
LOT OF INITIATIVES BUT  
THE COUNCIL PLANS TO  
DO INNOVATIVE THINGS  
IN A DIFFERENT MANNER.  
EACH OF THE EIGHT  
STATES HAS A STRONG  
FORTE AND WE WANT TO  
BUILD UP ON THAT**



Women in the North East start dabbling in handloom since early childhood. They are quite adept at it, too.

The North Eastern Council may look into developing a specialised domain expertise either by itself or through an agency model to assist States and Central Ministries in their development planning as also problem-solving skills and strategies. This will enable imbibing of good governance and best practices in the region. The North Eastern Council should also consider focusing on issues in emerging areas of livelihood, entrepreneurship, venture funds, startups and skill development. All this will help in generating jobs.”

Similarly, Union Home Minister and NEC chairman Amit Shah, while addressing North Eastern Council’s 70th plenary in Guwahati



on October 8-9, 2022, stressed the “essential” need for financial discipline of North Eastern States to make Indian economy as second largest globally.

The NEC chairman said insurgency, lack of connectivity and failure of previous Governments to focus on North East Region had hampered its development for decades. “Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Government tried to understand core problems and evolved ways to permanently solve the issues to take North East Region on path of development,” he said. During last eight years of Modi Government’s regime, many efforts have been made to bring peace



**CALVIN HARRIS KHARSHIING, IA & AS**  
Planning Adviser

**FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS, THE NEC HAS STOOD TALL IN THE DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE OF THE REGION. FROM HELPING FLEDGING STATES TAKE SMALL BABY STEPS POST THEIR CREATION, TO HELPING SET UP ICONIC INSTITUTIONS AND BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR ENHANCING SKILLED MANPOWER IN THE REGION, NEC HAS PLAYED ITS PART. FOR THE NEXT PHASE, NEC WILL HAVE TO BECOME AN AGENT FOR CROSS-POLLINATION OF GLOBAL IDEAS AND CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGIES AND HELP THE REGION BECOME INDIA’S NEW ENGINE OF GROWTH**



**GAIGONGDIN PANMEI, IRS**  
Financial Adviser

**DEVELOPMENT  
INTERVENTION IN NORTH  
EAST INDIA MUST BE  
CUSTOMISED TO MEET  
THE UNIQUE AND SPECIFIC  
NEED OF THE REGION,  
AND DEPLOY COMMITTED  
PROFESSIONALS TO  
ACHIEVE OPTIMUM  
OUTCOME ON THE  
INVESTMENT OF SCARCE  
RESOURCES OF  
THE NATION**

to the region, enhance connectivity and give priority to development, he added.

Earlier, on June 18, 2018, then BJP president Amit Shah had said during a speech in Guwahati: “Prime Minister Narendra Modi collectively regards all eight North Eastern States as ‘Ashta Lakshmi’, the eight forms of Goddess of Wealth, and his visionary policies would soon make North Eastern Region the biggest contributor to nation’s GDP.”

Highlighting that efforts are underway under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visionary leadership to bring peace and prosperity to North Eastern Region, Union Minister of State (MDoNER) G Kishan Reddy said the Government is working relentlessly to achieve this end: “North East India has entered its ‘Amrit Samay’ and all



stakeholders, be it Central Government or NER States, need to take complete advantage of this and awaken all possibilities of growth and development within North Eastern Region.” The Minister of State said NER’s development is pivotal to country’s development, across different sectoral areas like railways, roadways, waterways, airways and telecommunications.

On the occasion, Secretary, MDoNER, Lok Ranjan spoke about ‘Vision and Strategy for NER as Growth Engine of our Country’, highlighting several recent reforms undertaken and focus sectors for sustainable and accelerated development of North Eastern Region. The MDoNER Secretary shared deliberations and discussions from first day of this plenary session, which included NEC’s vision and strategy for growth in North East and presentations on ‘Priorities &



A common sight across the North Eastern Region :-  
A farmer planting paddy in his field



**NAVIN KUMAR**  
Transport & Communication Adviser

**THE T&C SECTOR IS  
AMONG THE MAJOR  
SECTORS OF THE  
NEC. CONNECTIVITY  
IS ESSENTIAL FOR  
INTEGRATION OF A  
REGION WITH THE REST  
OF THE COUNTRY AND  
EVEN INTRA-REGION. NO  
DEVELOPMENT CAN TAKE  
PLACE IN THE ABSENCE  
OF A BETTER ROAD  
NETWORK**



(Left to Right) NEC Secretary, K Moses Chalai; NEC Member, Air Marshal (Retd.) Anjan Kumar Gogoi; G Kishan Reddy, Minister of DoNER & Vice Chairman of NEC; BL Verma, Minister of State, DoNER & Member of the NEC and Lok Ranjan, Secretary, MDoNER at 70th Plenary session of the NEC.

Success Stories' of respective States, among others. Secretary, NEC, K Moses Chalai reviewed North Eastern Council's preparedness and modalities, pointing out that North Eastern Council has completed 50 years of existence as he proposed Golden Jubilee Celebrations in NER.

Currently, North Eastern Council is headed by Union Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah, as Chairman with Union Minister (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region) Shri G Kishan Reddy as its vice-chairman, in office since July 7, 2021, and who also looks after the Union Ministries of Tourism and Culture, and is assisted by BL Verma as Minister of State concerned, besides Lok Ranjan as the Ministry's Secretary. North Eastern Council Secretariat is currently headed by its Secretary, Shri K Moses Chalai, IAS.

A few major decisions taken in last five decades across important sectors pertained largely to resolving immediate issues and challenges in North Eastern Region which mainly involved transport problem, manpower development, landscape shift, availability of cattle feed for poultry and dairy farmers, groundwater and irrigation. Another major problem was harvesting the Brahmaputra river's might, which would single-handedly service a major area of North Eastern Region, especially also because different regions were grappling with their own specific problems.

Though racing ahead on developmental parameters, Council was also mindful that traditional value systems like tribal economy, forest maintenance, shifting cultivation and fishery were not ignored or put on back burner.



NEC Secretary K Moses Chalai, Planning Adviser CH Kharshiing and Financial Adviser Gaigongdin Panmei inspect an ongoing project in Guwahati.

As years went by and most basic problems were steadily being addressed, the difficulties also mutated themselves into newer avatars. These included pressure points like marketing and development of agricultural produce; harvesting and promoting non-conventional energy resources; promoting agriculture to enhance production volume; taking maximum advantage of demographic dividends; increasing focus on technology, communications and information systems.

North Eastern Council has worked tirelessly and ceaselessly over last 50 decades for regional socio-economic development, thereby setting in motion a new economic blueprint aimed at removing basic handicaps that stood in path of normal development of North Eastern Region: Its philosophy, formation and how it grew to be the important body that it is today. ■



**SHERRY LALTHANGZO**, IES  
Economic Adviser, CVO (NEC) & CEO (NERCEN)

**IT GIVES ME IMMENSE PLEASURE TO BE A PART OF THE NEC TEAM AT THIS OPPORTUNE TIME AS IT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF DELIVERING YEOMEN'S WORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE NER. AS CEO OF NERCEN, WHEN NEC IS REORIENTING ITSELF AS A MASSIVE RESOURCE CENTER FOR THE NORTH EAST PER THE ADVICE OF HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER IN 2016, I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE NEC WILL PLAY A MUCH GREATER ROLE IN BRINGING ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ADOPTION OF MODERN SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGY, MUSHROOMING OF SMART VILLAGES, HIGHER PER CAPITA INCOME, HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, AMONGST OTHERS- THEREBY INCREASING THE REGION'S GDP CONTRIBUTION. WISHING THE NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL ALL THE BEST**



## CHAPTER TWO

# NORTH EAST INDIA: THE COUNTRY'S EIGHT WONDERS

North Eastern stretch of India is a culturally rich region which has inspired some very important and celebrated musicians, artists, filmmakers and writers. It also boasts one of the highest per capita incomes in Asia. But even today, it happens to be among most unexplored ethnic regions in India

**T**he North East is a special place, a hidden gem. Walk into this world of 'Eight Wonders of India': Nature at its abundance; the most delightful, gorgeous landscape in our country is North Eastern Region. Behold, and you see nature's beauty as if a painter has fulfilled his dream capturing Mother Nature's best creation. Range after range of high hills, deep valleys and rolling meadows amid evergreen plains of mighty rivers flowing down from hills and reaching out to vast swathes of land. The region's culture, festivals, sports, people and natural beauty are mesmerising. The best way to experience it is to explore it yourself and feel its magic. It is home to quite a few of our country's important cities, not to forget



Paragliding at Serchhip, Mizoram | Photo : Zoramthanga.

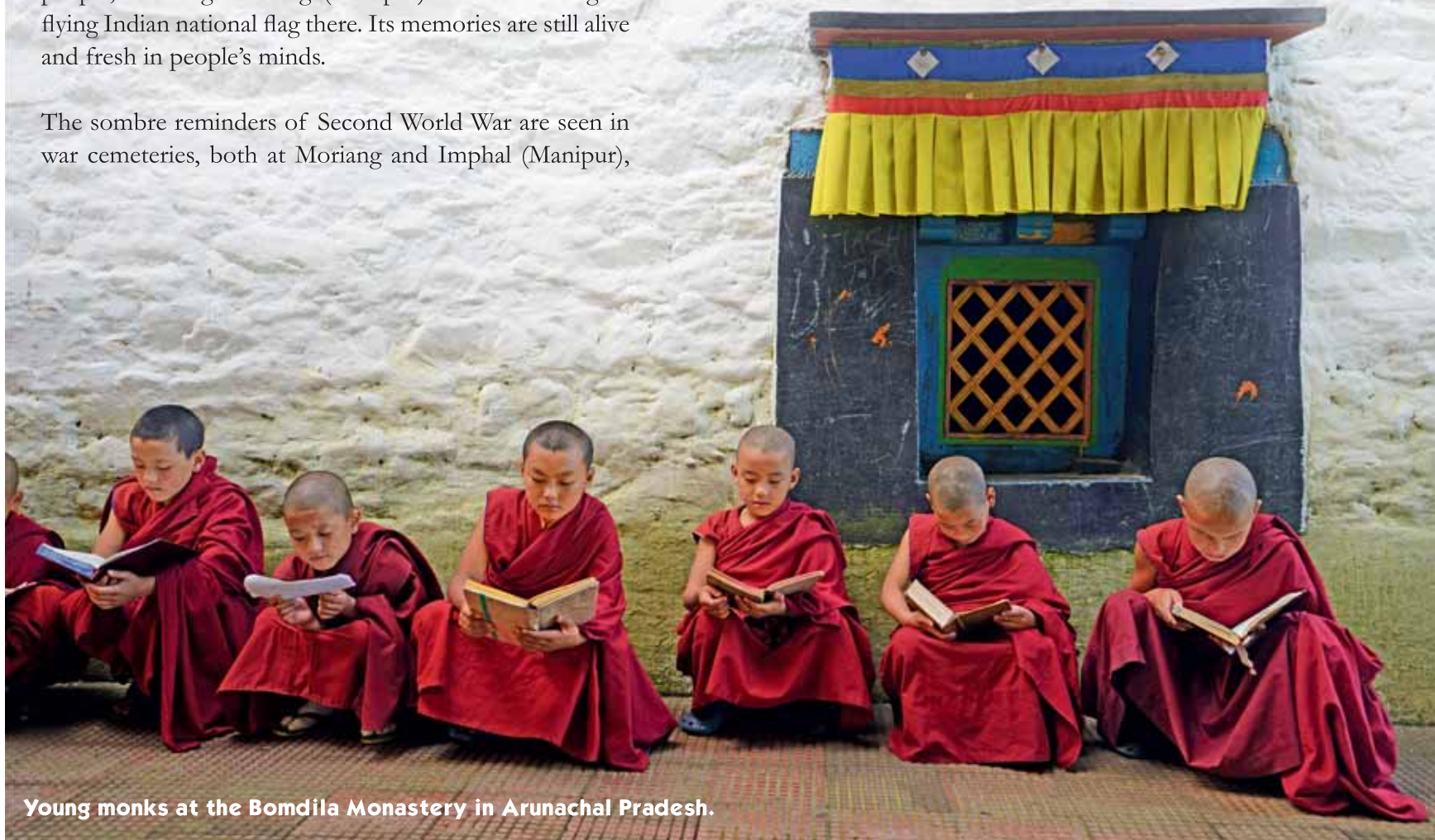


‘fashion capital of India’, Shillong. But there’s a lot more; North Eastern Region has some of the most breathtaking national parks and biodiversity reserves.

The region’s history, however, has witnessed many upheavals. Between late 1930s to 1972, several mega events took place that shook the social and economic moorings of local governance as well as communities. The Second World War deeply affected this region as compared to other parts of our country, with several battles being fought on this soil. The Indian National Army (INA), or ‘Azad Hind Fauj’, of legendary leader Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose left an indelible imprint on the region’s people, reaching Moriang (Manipur) and succeeding in flying Indian national flag there. Its memories are still alive and fresh in people’s minds.

The sombre reminders of Second World War are seen in war cemeteries, both at Moriang and Imphal (Manipur),

**THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY (INA), OR THE ‘AZAD HIND FAUJ’, OF LEGENDARY PATRIOT-LEADER NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE LEFT AN INDELIBLE IMPRINT ON THE REGION’S PEOPLE, REACHING MORIANG IN MANIPUR AND SUCCEEDING IN FLYING THE INDIAN NATIONAL FLAG THERE. ITS MEMORIES ARE STILL FRESH IN THE MINDS OF THE REGION’S PEOPLE**



**Young monks at the Bomdila Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh.**



The crystal clear waters at the Shnongpdeng village in Meghalaya.

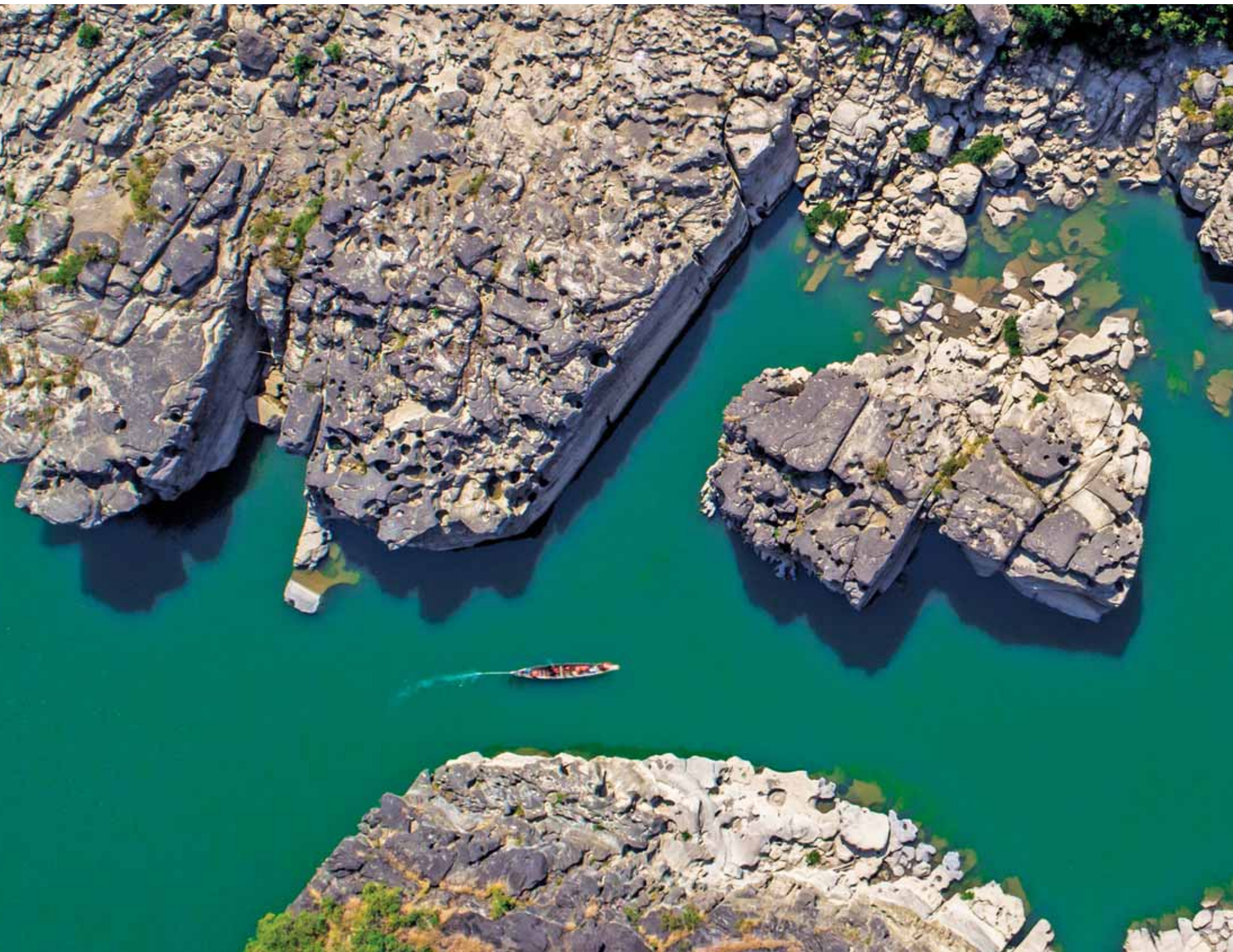


and Nagaland's capital, Kohima. Immediately after war ended, India's Partition on August 15, 1947, delivered a body blow to entire North East India when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was carved out. Although this region didn't experience a huge migration of population on grounds of religion as along its western border, these boundaries created divides on several fronts – geographical, ethnic, economic and religious and, with time's passage, most of these divides became tender and painful.

Partition also disrupted several transport systems like railways, road and inland waterways and snapped commercial linkages. Even educational system and access to seaports across the region were disrupted. The familiar direction of trade and commerce to Kolkata (then Calcutta) and Chittagong seaport, became quite distant or unavailable. People had no option but to turn to several unfamiliar, distant and unknown new linkages and North East Region took a painfully long time to stabilise, and establish fresh links of trade, commerce and transport. The event also made NER a lot more inaccessible, and a small strip of land approximately 20-km wide or 'Chicken's Neck' (Siliguri corridor) became only regional link with other parts of the country.

Soon, one of the biggest earthquakes to have hit globally (measuring 8.7 on Richter scale) was recorded in the region in 1950, creating chasms that swallowed villages, choked or silted streams and rivers and re-charted the course of several others. The aftermath of the Great Earthquake continued for several years.

The decade of 1950s had yet to overcome this turmoil when the flowering of bamboos caused devastating increase in rodent



The Castle of Beino (Kolodyne) is a mysterious place in the interiors of Mizoram forests.



The Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh.

**IN THE 1950S, A DEVASTATING INCREASE IN RODENT POPULATION LED TO SEVERE FAMINE IN CERTAIN AREAS DURING THE EARLY 1960S, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREAS OF MODERN-DAY MIZORAM. THE GOVERNMENT MACHINERY COULD NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESS THE AFFECTED PEOPLE'S PLIGHT AND IT RESULTED IN A LONG-DRAWN INSURGENCY THAT ADDED TO THE REGION'S WOES**

population that led to severe famine in certain areas during the early 1960s, especially in the areas of modern-day Mizoram. The Government machinery could not adequately address the affected people's plight and it resulted in a long-drawn insurgency that added to the region's woes. Almost concurrent to it was the Chinese aggression in 1962, which affected the forward administrative centres, distant outposts and even nearby towns like Tezpur, which went into panic evacuation. To cap it all, coupled with the 1971 Indo-Pak war was the problem of infiltration by Bangladeshi people and migrants.

The sum total of all these upheavals was highly debilitating. Several familiar and known routes and places were severed

while the new connections and markets were distant, costly and unfamiliar and even the common language was less known. All this had a crippling impact on the socio-economic system of the North East. Discontentment manifested as insurgency in different parts of the region. Since the mid-1960s, several new political entities were born and the economic unrest took communal hues that led to geographical break-up of the Assam State based mainly on political and community considerations.

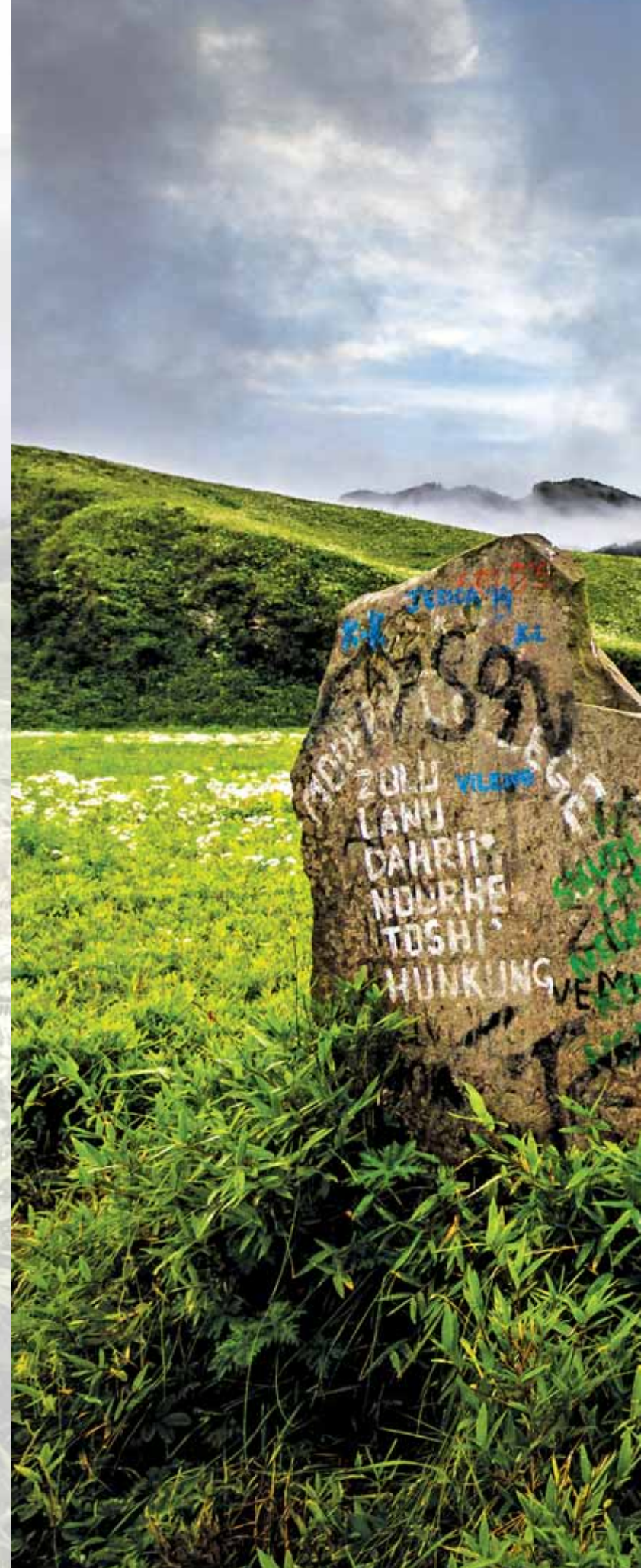
### What is the North East all about?

The North East of India is a culturally rich and heterogeneous region. It has inspired some of the most important and celebrated musicians, artists, filmmakers and writers in India. It also boasts one of the highest per capita incomes in Asia and is an important centre for economic development.

But the most striking aspect of the North East is its people; they have an indomitable spirit and have braved many storms. No wonder that the athletes from the North



Chaam, the ritualistic "Masked Dance" from Sikkim.





The Dzuko valley, well known for its seasonal flowers, flora & fauna.



The Zachu Valley, Sikkim is a picturesque place | Photo : Kusal Gurung

East are among the grittiest from across India. To put things into perspective, the North East has seen it all; conquerors, dynasties and wars, but the people's resilience to survive has always prevailed. They have integrated it into their lives while waking up with ideas of resilience and confronting reality on a daily basis.

The States of North East India are collectively and popularly known as the North Eastern Region (NER). It is the easternmost region of India. It represents both a geographic and administrative division of our diverse nation. The eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura comprise the NER.

At the time of Independence in 1947, there were only three States – Assam, and the princely States of Manipur and Tripura. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland were part of the larger territory of Assam. Eventually, they were carved out to form their own distinct States. Assam was the first to gain statehood with the rest of the country in 1947. It was followed by Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh in 1975 and Mizoram in 1987. Sikkim was added as an Indian State in 1975 and finally integrated with other North Eastern States in 2002. Unlike the process of State formation elsewhere, which took place primarily on linguistic basis, the North Eastern States were formed based on ethnic and tribal identities.



People celebrate the Behdienkhlam festival in Meghalaya.



The traditional folk dance of Nagaland



Young Naga women at a function.

### A brief history of time

Before the British Raj, the North East existed as different kingdoms and was ruled by different kings and chiefs. Buranjis, the manuscripts associated with the Ahom Dynasty, have recorded the 600 years of their continuous rule in Upper Assam, whereas Koch Dynasty ruled in the western and southern parts of Assam.

In Manipur, the history of the Meiteis is well documented. Chronicles like the Ningthou Kangbalon and the Cheitharol Kumbaba give their detailed accounts. In most of these satrap 'kingdoms', the administration and political affairs were looked after by the chiefs of various clans. It was tribal land and so these chiefs were considered the absolute proprietors of all lands within their jurisdiction. Meghalaya was ruled by kings as well as local chieftains. Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh were also under the administration of their respective chieftains. Sikkim, meanwhile, was ruled by the Namgyal-Chogyal dynasty from 1642 to 1975.

In the early 19th century, both the Ahom and the Manipur kingdoms fell to Burmese invasion. The ensuing First Anglo-Burmese War resulted in the entire region coming under British control. In the colonial period (1826–1947), North East India was made a



**A boatman catches fish amid the sylvan surroundings of Tripura | Photo : Shiladitya Saha**



Kynrem falls, Meghalaya.

**BEFORE THE BRITISH RAJ, THE NORTH EAST EXISTED AS SEPARATE KINGDOMS AND WAS RULED BY DIFFERENT KINGS AND CHIEFS. BURANJIS, THE MANUSCRIPTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE AHOM DYNASTY, HAVE RECORDED THE 600 YEARS OF THEIR CONTINUOUS RULE IN UPPER ASSAM, WHEREAS KOCH DYNASTY RULED IN THE WESTERN AND SOUTHERN PARTS OF ASSAM**

part of the Bengal Province. It remained thus from 1839 to 1873, after which colonial Assam became its own province.

### **The land of Eight Jewels**

The NER comprises an area of 262,230 sq km, almost 8 per cent of India's total land mass. The region is also strategically important as it has an international border of 5,182 km. It shares the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region in the north (1,395 km), Myanmar in the east (1,640 km), Bangladesh in the south-west (1,596 km), Nepal in the west (97 km) and Bhutan (455 km) in the north-west.

Guwahati in Assam is called the 'Gateway to the North East' and is the largest metropolis in the NER. Kanchenjunga, the third

highest mountain peak in the world rising to an altitude of 8,586 m (28,169 ft), is situated in the State of Sikkim. The mighty Brahmaputra, also known as Luit in Assamese, is a trans-boundary river that flows through Tibet, India and Bangladesh. It is the ninth largest river in the world by discharge and the 15th longest. About 3,848 km long, the Brahmaputra is an important river for irrigation and transportation in the region.

Also, the largest river island in the world, Majuli, lies in Assam. It is located in the Brahmaputra river, near Dibrugarh, Assam. It is known for the country's first river island district, having a total area of around 880 sq

km. Majuli has been the cultural capital and the birthplace of the Assamese Civilisation for the past 500 years. It is equally famous for its 22 Satras. The Satras conserved antiques like utensils, weapons, jewellery and many other items for their cultural significance.

Mawsynram, a village in the East Khasi hills of Meghalaya, finds mention in the Guinness Book of World Records as the wettest place on Earth because it receives the highest annual average rainfall (around 12,000 millimetres). Unsurprisingly, the area is overwhelmed with lush and greenery, rich with waterfalls and interesting caves carved in limestone by the falling waters.



The Damaro hanging bridge in Arunachal Pradesh.





A Brokpa with his herd of sheep in Arunachal Pradesh.



Lai harooba, the popular festival of Manipur



## The North Easterners

The population of North East India comprises several racial stocks, principally the Mongoloids, the Indo-Aryans, the Australoids or Austric, and the Dravidians; the last named being a very minor group represented by an immigrant population. While the original settlers were the Mongoloids, the Indo-Aryan and other groups arrived later.

There is undoubtedly a dominance of Mongoloid element in the population of the North East. Besides the racial differences, there is a tribal–non-tribal duality recognised by the Indian Constitution to secure certain benefits to the tribal communities to enable them to catch up with the rest of the society in education attainment and the living standards.

Most of the tribes or tribal communities are concentrated in the hilly States. While the tribes of Arunachal migrated to this region at a very early date, the arrival of the Nagas, Kukis and Mizos in the current habitat is relatively recent. Most of the indigenous people in the North East have embraced Christianity, transforming the social ethos and cultural practices of the Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasis and the Garos.

The Bodos are the largest tribal group of the region and mainly confined to Assam. Some who came under the influence of the Royal Koch dynasty call themselves ‘Rajbanshis’, meaning people having a royal lineage. The Kukis of Manipur and Tripura are other important tribal groups.

## Life and livelihood in the North East

The North East of India is practically the hub of the indigenous clothing industry. Eri silk is one of the most traditional silks of the region, particularly in Assam and Meghalaya, and has a unique characteristic. It is made out of the Samiaricini caterpillar. Extracting the cocoon does not kill the silkworm, which gives the Eri silk the name of ‘Fabric of Peace’. The fine qualities of Eri clothes, which get softer every time they are used, makes this silk a preferred choice.



People perform Bihu folk dance with merriment in Assam.



The Deepor Beel wildlife bird sanctuary, Assam.

We all are aware of Benarasi silk and Kanjeevaram silk, but Assam is the only State in India that manufactures three important types of native silk – white Pat silk, Eri silk and Golden Muga, each having its distinct beauty and identity not found in any other silk variety.

Muga silk, also known as the ‘Golden Treasure of Assam’, is another authentic silk variety. The *Antheraea Assamensis* silkworm is endemic to Assam. It finds nourishment from Som and Soalu leaves, and the resulting silk has durability and a glossy texture. Pat silk, also known as ‘Mulberry silk’, is another indigenous silk of Assam. The larvae of Pat silkworms, *Bombyx mori*, prefer the mulberry leaves, resulting in its name.

Mekhela, a two-piece clothing article, is a traditional garment of the Assamese women. Nowadays, a blouse of similar colour and texture is usually worn with the Mekhela. The usual designs of flowers and geometric patterns are standard in sarees across the nation. But it is only in the sarees of the North East where a rhinoceros is woven as a decorative motif.

## Let the festivities begin!

Tribes that populate remote North East India have many rich traditions and faiths, expressed most colourfully during festivals. By far the biggest and most well-known celebration is the Hornbill Festival, which takes place in Nagaland every year, but there are several other similar events across the region. Each one is a chance to showcase the unique culture, dance and music of a State and its people and, although most are relatively new events, these are staged to promote and preserve ancient traditions which are at the risk of dying out as young people increasingly move out of their remote villages to find work and education in distant towns and cities.

The Jon Beel Mela is an age-old traditional fair, a virtual wonder in its own right. The most striking feature of this historic fair is that it has kept alive the system of barter as a means of procuring goods. This fair is organised every year in the month of Magh of the Assamese calendar (mid-January) near the highway town of Jagiroad in Morigaon district. It is organised on the occasion



**THE JON BEEL MELA IS A TRADITIONAL FAIR, A VIRTUAL WONDER IN ITS OWN RIGHT. ITS MOST STRIKING FEATURE IS THAT IT HAS KEPT ALIVE THE SYSTEM OF BARTER AS A MEANS OF PROCURING GOODS. THIS ANNUAL FAIR IS ORGANISED IN MAGH (MID-JANUARY) NEAR THE HIGHWAY TOWN OF JAGIROAD IN MORIGAON DISTRICT**

of Magh Bihu, a traditional harvest festival. The three-day annual event is organised under the aegis of the traditional king of the Tiwa tribe, called Gobha Deoraja, who once ruled the area.

A wide range of pristine customs and practices is associated with the fair. Here, hill tribes such as Tiwa, Karbi, Khasi and Garo, from the neighbouring West Karbi Anglong and Meghalaya and their counterparts from the plains, exchange products directly without the involvement of any money. The age-old tradition of barter comes alive in this unique fair in a spontaneous manner. The fair is also considered an opportunity for maintaining cordial relations between the people of hills and the plains.

The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are one of the oldest tribal communities of the region and are mostly found in the plains and the hills of central Assam. Apart from the village and clan-level socio-political organisations, the existence of some self-governing social institutions headed by chiefs called Rajas (meaning king) are also found in this tribe. Besides being a traditional head of community invested with judicial authority along with a council of Ministers (Darbar) and office-bearers, these chieftains are often regarded as Deoraja, meaning a religious king or a religious head.

Apart from the Jon Beel Mela, a wide range of intangible cultural elements is associated with these institutions including folk customs, beliefs, oral history, legends, artifacts, festivals, ceremonies, judicial procedures, management systems and inheritance regulations. There still are more than a dozen traditional Tiwa kings in existence, along

**Young girls participate in the Shad Suk Mynsiem (The Dance of Peaceful Hearts) festival in Meghalaya.**



The Poumai Naga tribe members at their classical dance display, Manipur.



with their organised kingship institutions. The kingship institution of Gobha is considered the most significant as it used to be the paramount province.

### Weaving happiness into their life, the Khasi way

The picturesque land of Meghalaya has a rich tradition of weaving. The textiles woven and worn by the people of these tribes reflect a variety in terms of materials and weaving processes. The traditional lower garment for both men and women of Meghalaya is a wrapper draped in different styles. The upper garments include shirts, jackets, shawls and others. Meghalaya is also well-known for its traditional Eri silk-weaving practices.

This State is home to three major tribes – Khasi, Jaintia and Garo. The Khasi people mostly live in the Khasi Hills division of Meghalaya. Ryndia, a shawl woven with Eri silk, is a popular textile here. Jainpien is a rectangular piece of thick cotton fabric with stripes. It is a lower garment for Khasi women. They also wear a long-sleeved blouse, called Sopti Mukmor. The colours of the blouse mostly include red, violet, green and black. The Khasi women also use a yellow or saffron-coloured silk cloth, called Dhara. It is worn on the right shoulder and fastened over the left shoulder with pins.

A participant at a yak race in Phalung, Sikkim | Photo : S.T. Wangdi





Umjynru, Mawkynrum, West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.



**CULTURALLY, THE NORTH EAST IS ONE OF THE RICHEST REGIONS IN THE COUNTRY. TRIPURA AND MIZORAM ARE AMONG THE MOST LITERATE STATES, AND YOU SIMPLY CAN'T BEAT THE REGION WHEN IT COMES TO SPORTS AND FASHION. MAWLYNNONG IN MEGHALAYA IS FAMOUS FOR ITS CLEANLINESS, AND SHILLONG IS CALLED THE 'SCOTLAND OF THE EAST'**

Jainboh, showcasing border work with golden threads, is a lower garment worn by the menfolk of this community. The Khasi men also wear a black sleeveless jacket, called Jymphong. This jacket carries an eye-catching art of embroidery with colourful motifs of flowers, leaves and animals. Jainspongkhor is a headdress of the Khasi men. The designs on the Jainspongkhor include geometric figures and various animal motifs.

Despite being one of the culturally rich regions of the country, an unfortunate and incorrect public perception about the North East is its scale of development. However, the fact is that Tripura and Mizoram are among the most literate States in the country; and you simply can't beat the North East when it comes to sports and fashion. Mawlynnong in Meghalaya is famous for its cleanliness, and Shillong is called the 'Scotland of the East'. The reason for this 'underdeveloped' misconception is that till late, the NER was not accessible to general public and people hardly had a chance to explore it. As things open up further, so would the happy mystery of the North East unfold! ■



A beautiful dawn breaks over the panaromic Reiek in Mizoram.



## CHAPTER THREE

# THE BIRTH OF A NEW ENTITY

Constituted and inaugurated at a time when North Eastern Region, entire country and its neighbourhood were in turmoil, North Eastern Council came as an invigorating force to create a plethora of avenues for all eight States for mutual cooperation and development

**T**he era of 1970s was challenging for entire country as it passed through a critical phase. It had already fought three wars, its economy was sluggish, it was struggling to find self-sufficiency in food grains and its meagre resources were threatening its growth story.

Therefore, the enormous historical and geographical events that North Eastern Region (NER) witnessed created a chasm that was too wide to be filled by new political identities, limited resources, technology and framework of time. Apart from these, issues like quite long months of heavy monsoon rain, mighty waters, annual floods, hilly terrain, landslides and remote population groups added to turmoil prevailing at the time.



Stakeholders in rapt attention at NEC's inaugural function in Shillong on November 7, 1972.

Under these circumstances, the formation of a body to look after North Eastern Region's development was urgently and importantly needed. There was a historic necessity for such an entity for furthering North Eastern Region's socio-economic development and for facilitating inter-State coordination so that issues could be solved amicably. Against this backdrop, in 1972, North Eastern Council (NEC) was constituted as a statutory advisory body under NEC Act, 1971.

It was mandated to be an organisation that would develop North Eastern Region and help local people earn a decent living with basic facilities like health, education, connectivity and safety, among others. North Eastern Council is an apex body representing interests, aspirations and concerns of North Eastern people.

Thanks to our statesmen's wisdom and farsightedness, North Eastern Council was constituted and inaugurated in 1971-72 which helped it emerge as a unique institution that facilitated socio-economic development of North East Region.

North Eastern Council was inaugurated by (Late) Smt Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, on November 7, 1972, in Shillong.

Certain extracts from her inaugural speech that have a direct bearing on NEC's rule and performance are:

“In addition to its economic and social problems, North Eastern Region is important to the country because of its strategic situation. The strength and developments of this area are of utmost importance to entire nation.



Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addresses the inaugural function of the NEC in Shillong on November 7, 1972.

“First principle of development is coordinated activity. I have no doubt that various units of this North Eastern Region will gain by such coordinated work.

“This is an organisation of various political units of North Eastern Region, set up under an Act of Parliament, to formulate a coordinated plan for development and welfare. It is not a super Government. It does not abridge the power of States and Union territories concerned in any manner whatsoever. It is not an extension of Union Government. It is an advisory, not a supervisory body. It does not alter the relationship of member units with Central Government. Central Government will not use North Eastern Council to interfere with any or all affairs and functioning of various Governments of this region. I share the hope expressed by the Governor, Shri

BK Nehru, that North Eastern Council will gradually grow into an effective coordinating agency to solve regional problems in an atmosphere of goodwill, responsibility and mutual respect.

“I can assure you that any worthwhile idea that it might propose as being of tangible benefit to North East Region will not suffer for want of funds.”

When North Eastern Council was created, it was an advisory body and had as its members then Governors of existing States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura and Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram and Administrators of Union Territories in North East areas, besides Chief Ministers of these States and Union Territories and one of the Counsellors



Former Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi with then NEC Chairman BK Nehru at NEC's inauguration on November 7, 1972.

to Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh's Administrators. One of the Council members, to be nominated by President of India, was to be hoisted as NEC chairman. After North East Region's Union Territories attained statehood, all Governors and Chief Ministers of these States became Council Members.

North Eastern Council works in close partnership with all regional Governments, besides Coordination and Development Councils (C&DCs), autonomous bodies and other institutions, to improve economic and social conditions across North East Region. It also implements Government of India's programmes, particularly those related to infrastructure development, community mobilisation plan funds, skill development and entrepreneurship facilitation.

North Eastern Council is dedicated to ensuring that funds for North East's development are allocated and utilised in a manner that benefits as many of regional people and economies as possible. A few major decisions over last five decades across important sectors pertain largely to resolving immediate issues facing North East Region, mainly transport problems, manpower development, landscape shift, availability of cattle feed for poultry and dairy farmers, groundwater and irrigation.

The three-year period beginning from 1971 gave birth to new ideas even in horticultural field, which grew tenderly towards a potent youth. But the art of development of horticulture with newer and modern ideas, based on a stable foundation of scientific knowledge,

required enthusiasm and skills among people. This was no doubt necessary for building up on our country's horticultural prosperity.

But there is a mistaken impression that North Eastern Council has a major role in the matter of financial resources for the NER. This is not at all the case. Both statutorily and funding-wise, the NEC has only a limited role in the matter of the region's economic development. In spite of this, since its inception, the NEC-financed projects have made important contributions to the NER's economy, especially in the sectors of power, communications and manpower development, which had been the region's Achilles Heel in all developmental activities.

According to NEC's former Secretary LM Menezes, the Council was instrumental in the first two decades of its existence in setting into motion a new economic endeavour aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development and ushering in an era of new hope in this region which was full of immense potential.

An important, though lesser known, initial role of the Council was to constantly and effectively put forward problems, proposals, schemes and suggestions in respect of the NER to the Central Ministries and organisations concerned. The Council, being a high-powered body with the region's Chief Ministers and Governors as members, gets valuable inputs from all the States and the Council's recommendations carry great weight.

Such interventions by the NEC have yielded good results over the years like the establishment of new railway projects, new air links and improvement of services, Central power projects, improvement



**BESIDES ENSURING FUNDING FOR PROJECTS, THE NEC GALVANISES THE NER STATES TO IMPROVE THEIR IMPLEMENTATION MACHINERY AND DISPEL THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY DO NOT ACTUALLY HAVE THE ABILITY TO ABSORB AND EFFECTIVELY UTILISE FUNDS WITHIN THE GIVEN TIMEFRAMES**



A local woman in her traditional costumes.



of services, new multi-purpose projects, and later also in the activities of the Rubber Board, Coffee Board and Inland Water Transport among others.

Another former NEC Secretary, PL Thanga, ruminates: “We all wanted to do something good, something worthwhile, to improve the conditions in North Eastern Region. Our vision was clear but we went through several tribulations and repeated testing times as we were looking at a larger picture involving entire region and not State-level interests.”



The fortunes of locals in the NER have undergone a sea change since the NEC's inception.

“States did act coy at times on sharing fruits of labour with their neighbours but our work was made easy since all States concerned were also rooting for regional development. Now, looking back, I am happy to note that we have surmounted many a challenge and that Central Government has also appreciated our efforts' seriousness in terms of increased funding as well as active involvement in the region's overall developmental affairs,” he signs off. ■



A man goes out to hunt with his traditional bow and arrow in Arunachal Pradesh.



(Left to right) Tomb Riba, Counsellor, Arunachal Pradesh; KAA Raja, Chief Commissioner, Arunachal Pradesh; Md Alimuddin, Chief Minister, Manipur; SC Sinha, Chief Minister of Assam; BK Nehru, Chairman of the North Eastern Council; Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India; SP Mukherjee, Lt Governor, Mizoram; Capt. WA Sangma, Chief Minister, Meghalaya; SC Sengupta, Chief Minister, Tripura; DK Bhattacharya, Secretary of the North-Eastern Council ahead of the first meeting of the Council in Shillong on November 1972.



## CHAPTER FOUR 1972-80

# A DREAM COMES TRUE, AN IDEA TAKES SHAPE

The NEC's novel, significant and permanent presence provided legitimate opportunities to various States and groups in North East India to develop the concept of 'oneness' for the region's overall economic and infrastructural development

The North East Region's people have always been at forefront of nation building, be it Freedom Movement or making sacrifices for our country's larger cause. The simple-hearted yet determined people have always had aspirations to be recognised for their efforts and given their due. Their dream successfully manifested in 1971 when a radical step was taken to develop North Eastern Region (NER) and integrate it in the real sense with the rest of India by setting up North Eastern Council (NEC).



Then NEC Chairman BK Nehru addresses Council's first meeting in Shillong on November 1972.

While introducing North Eastern Council Bill in Lok Sabha on May 11, 1970, then Home Minister of India stated the Council's objectives plainly as: "When the proposal for reorganisation of Assam was considered, it was thought that there should be a forum where a coordinated and integrated view of entire eastern India can be taken. There are two aspects which need coordinated action: One is the security aspect and the other is development." The Council's

constitution started off a new phase of coordinated and organised efforts for North East's Council's speedy development.

The Council's role was to be advisory but not like that of traditional variety of advisory bodies in operation at during the time in the country. It was to be something novel, significant and permanent.



Participating in a debate on May 11, 1970, an MP advocated the need for providing legitimate opportunities to various groups in North East to express themselves “so that nobody feels dismayed or suffocated, but side by side it is necessary that these personalities are brought together, not only woven together into a web of developmental relationship but, what is more important, exposed to common problems of security”.

**IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THERE BE A FOCAL POINT WHERE PEOPLE WHO WERE ADMINISTRATIVELY DIVIDED WERE NOT EMOTIONALLY BUT RATIONALLY INFLUENCED, AND CLOSELY BROUGHT TOGETHER IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS. SO THE COUNCIL BECAME A SIGNIFICANT PLANNING AND SECURITY ORGAN ON INDIA'S TERRITORIAL FRONTIERS WITH BURMA, BANGLADESH, BHUTAN AND TIBET**

At such a time, it was necessary that there be a focal point where people who were administratively divided were not emotionally but rationally influenced, and closely brought together in terms of economic and security considerations. As a basic logic of things, the Council became a significant planning and security organ on India's territorial frontiers with Burma, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Tibet.

The NEC's first plenary meeting was held in Shillong on November 7, 1972, under Chairmanship of BK Nehru, Governor of the then five North Eastern States. The list of participants included Chief Ministers of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Administrator of Mizoram and the Chief Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh. During the meeting, Chairman Nehru requested all Council members to put forth ideas and suggestions for its work to proceed.

The Chief Minister of Manipur said he welcomed NEC's formation because it would facilitate the sharing of technical knowledge and finance among member States for various development activities. Many of these developmental



(Above and Right) Then Inauguration ceremony of the North Eastern Council with top leaders of the NE States and the first meeting of the NEC in Shillong on November 7, 1972.

projects in his State could not be implemented because of lack of technical staff, he pointed out.

The Chief Minister, Assam, said that North East Region comprising all regional States was geographically a compact area where hill configuration, river systems and valleys was such that North Eastern Council ought to consider schemes of development that were of a regional character. Properly harnessed and controlled,

the region's overall river system could become navigable and help provide power and effect flood control. Water management was, therefore, an important aspect that could be taken up by the Council and which would benefit entire region. Road communication also deserved early attention, he said.

The Chief Minister, Meghalaya, said that his Government had recently sent to the Council Secretariat some specific suggestions



for regional developmental work. It should be useful for the Council to set up some sort of a permanent agency that could conduct feasibility studies for setting up industries and for studying various problems pertaining to rivers' fury and soil conservation, among other things, for entire North Eastern Region.

He laid emphasis on early creation of infrastructure through a number of development activities such as development of roads,

railways network and other transport facilities. He also stressed the need for coordinated action by member States in the region for flood control. He thought that it would be useful for regional States to get together and put forward concrete proposals. He suggested that development of ropeways should be undertaken as well. It is to be seen in this context that since its inception, NEC has focused on improving connectivity in the region as poor connectivity has been a major cause of bottlenecks for all developmental activities.



The Kopili Hydro Electric Project, Umrangshu. The game changer project was conceptualised in 1972 and became operational in 1984.



The road to Kumarghat, Tripura under works in 1978.

The Chief Commissioner, Arunachal Pradesh, suggested that to tackle issues such as power requirement, flood control, communications and transport arrangements, there should be appropriate Regional Boards under the supervision of the North Eastern Council, viz., Regional Power Board, Regional Flood Control Board, Regional Road Transport Board, Regional River Development Board and other similar boards.

The Arunachal Pradesh Administrator also supported the suggestion of the Chief Minister of Manipur that the Council should take positive action to meet the shortage of technical manpower and experts across the region. He felt that it was very important to develop the concept of 'oneness' among the member States for the region's overall economic development.

**ROADS BEING A STATE SUBJECT, THEIR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATES CONCERNED. ASSAM, MEGHALAYA AND TRIPURA HAD A GOOD NETWORK OF ROADS, ALTHOUGH THE CONDITIONS OR SPECIFICATIONS OF MANY OF THESE WERE WELL BELOW THE DESIRED LEVEL. SEVERAL BRIDGES WERE TEMPORARY, MADE OF TIMBER**



The Muga seed farm at Zemabawk in Mizoram in 1978.

Around the time of the NEC's inception in 1972, several important political and military developments were taking place within India and in the subcontinent. River services were restarted after the liberation of Bangladesh by signing an agreement in November 1972. As regards civil infrastructure, attempts were made to improve various airport facilities. Also, since Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura shared their borders internationally, there was a pressing need to synergise relations, resources and common interests within the NER.

The early years focused on the development of basic infrastructure such as surface communication including railways, road and ropeway communications; power generation sector development; soil conservation; industry and land development; and crafts, electricity and



Work in progress at the Ranganadi hydro-electric project, Arunachal Pradesh. The project became operational in 1988.



The first NEC office complex in Shillong.

allied subjects. In spite of all these efforts, a dependable and adequate communications network in the region remained an unfulfilled dream.

The second plenary meeting meant business in earnest and it set the tone for development work where the two most important subjects discussed by the Council were development and improvement of surface communications including power generation, roads, ropeway communications and railways. Regarding the railways, the meeting inter alia resolved that the Government of India be moved to consider the extension of railway lines into Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram which did not have a single rail connection at that time.

The Railway Board should be requested to immediately initiate the requisite surveys to extend the railway line up to at least one point in the territory of each of the above States in consultation with the State Governments and the North Eastern Council, and to complete execution of these lines within the Fifth Five-Year Plan period, the meeting observed. The other items on the agenda were development in soil conservation, animal husbandry and other allied subjects.

Apart from its role in extending the railways network, the Council sponsored and helped in the construction of 1,500 km of inter-State roads during the Fifth Plan at a cost of ₹56 crore and about



Then NEC Chairman BK Nehru addresses the second council meeting in Shillong on 22nd June 1973.

**IN SPITE OF ALL THIS, THE NEC-FINANCED PROJECTS HAVE MADE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NER'S ECONOMY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN THE SECTORS OF POWER, COMMUNICATIONS AND MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

1,700 km of roads for ₹80 crore. In addition, the construction of about 1,600 km of roads of economic importance was taken up during the Sixth Plan at an outlay of ₹120 crore.

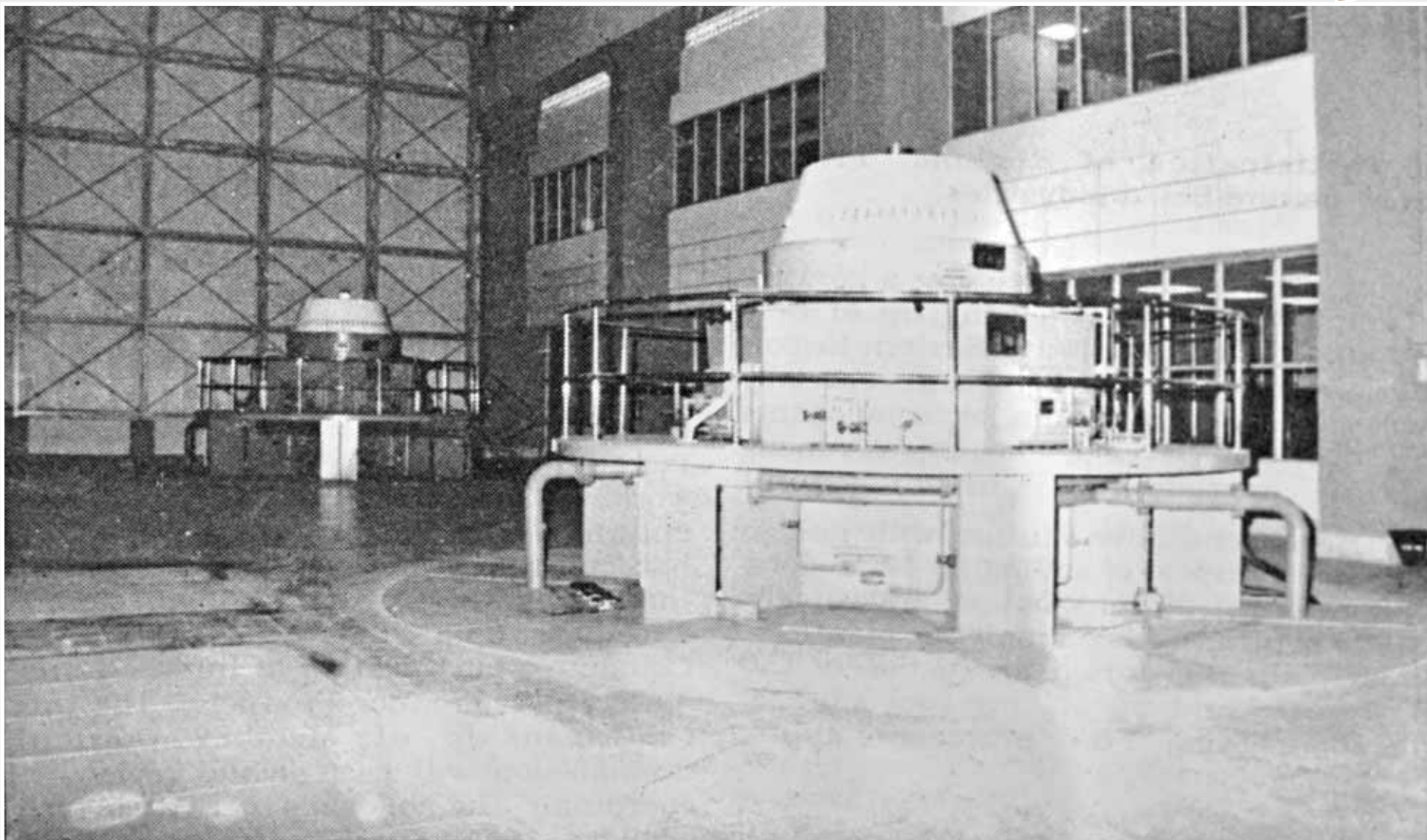
The power sector was given further push during this period when 29 schemes for investigation of the power potential in the region under the Annual Plan (1974-75) were approved, for which a fund allocation of ₹73.75 lakh was made and sanctions communicated to the States concerned. Further, to augment the power needs of the region, the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) was registered in Shillong on April 2, 1976, and the erstwhile Adviser (Power) in the Council Secretariat was appointed the Chairman-cum-Managing Director by the Ministry of Energy.



Power was major issue in the NER, which the NEC has addressed in a successful way.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors was held in Shillong on April 23, 1976. The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone at the Kopili Hydro-Electric Project site on April 25, 1976. The Kopili project, set up with a total installed capacity of 150MW at a cost of ₹243.82 crore, was to be the first major project to be executed by the Corporation. The success of NEEPCO can be gauged from the fact that it subsequently became independent of the NEC and was brought directly under the Government of India. That's certainly a benchmark in the kind of successful stories that the NEC has paved its path with.

**THE COUNCIL ALSO ENTERED  
INTO AN ARRANGEMENT  
WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ATOMIC ENERGY AND THE  
GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM FOR  
THE UPGRADATION OF DR B  
BAROOAH CANCER INSTITUTE  
AT GUWAHATI AT THE COST OF  
₹8.62 CRORE**



The 50-MW generating unit, Kopili Power House. Conceptualised in mid-seventies and became operational in 1988.

Serious efforts for the development of horticulture in a systematic and organised manner were initiated in the Fourth Five-Year Plan. The major emphasis then was on the production of fruits from the angle of improving indigenous production to meet the nutritional requirements of people and the processing industry's needs. With the awareness generated by these developmental activities, the acreage under fruits reached about 18 lakh hectares and production touched about 92 lakh tonnes at the end of the Fourth Plan period. It is considered a breakthrough in the field of horticulture development in view of the earlier dismal record.

Horticulture development received more serious consideration with the introduction of new ideas between 1970 and 1974. The emphasis of development was on increased production with priority for the spread of advanced technology through increasing application of modern inputs, crop protection and improved post-harvest measures in a packaged way on select crops with higher export potential.

The Government of India took direct responsibility in this direction and initiated two Centrally Sponsored Schemes. One of these



Farms in the North East being ploughed for sowing.

schemes was 'Package Programme on Banana', which was designed to cover areas around nine major ports to generate production of about one lakh tonnes of exportable variety. The other scheme was for increasing the production of walnuts in the three principal walnut-growing States of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. Similar programmes were contemplated for apple, pineapple, citrus and mango in select areas in the Fifth Five-Year Plan.



SD Dewan, Deputy Commissioner (Horticulture), Government of India, writing in August 1975 on 'New Ideas & Significant Experiences', stated: "Horticulture plays a significant role both in the economic life of a country and the nutritional requirements of its people. Fruits like apple, mango, mandarins, banana, guava, grapes, pineapple and litchi are important cash crops which contribute not only to a country's national income but also have promising export potential. Use of fruits in the daily diet of people needs no emphasis



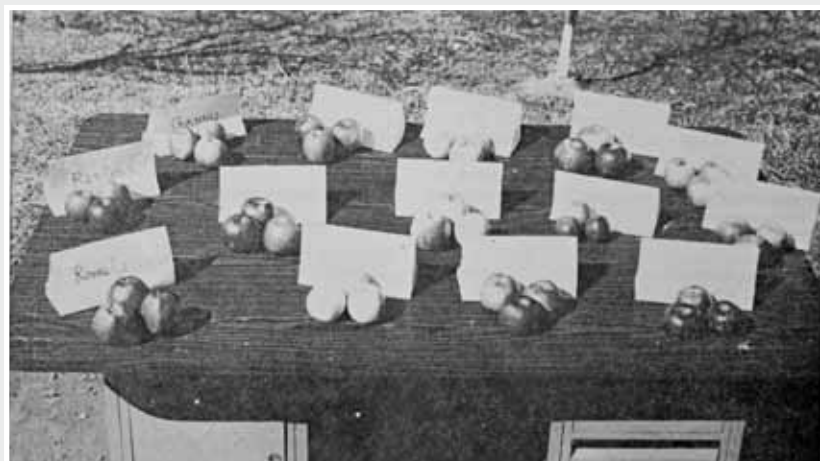
A patient undergoing investigation at Regional Medical College, Imphal, Manipur in 1972

and their rich food value is important for the maintenance and upkeep of people's health. Being the rich source of vitamins and minerals, their use is essential in ensuring a balanced diet."

The overall picture in the agricultural sector in the NER was not all that bright. Growth in this dominant sector had been slow and the pattern and practices continued to be, by and large, old. As part of the Programme for



Training session in progress at Regional Nursing College, Guwahati, Assam in 1977.



Different species of apples on display at the Shergaon horticulture farm in Arunachal Pradesh.



The Swiss breed at the Jalukie Cattle Farm, Nagaland.



A woman busy in rubber budding at Jalukie, Nagaland in 1977.



1975-76, the administrative units of the region stepped up the drive for augmenting production under the Annual Plan for 1975-76. The Plans of the constituent units provided for necessary arrangements relating to crop production and horticulture, including use of manure, fertilisers and seeds, and administrative coordination and extension to ensure that the physical targets were fully achieved.

The NEC has not just been promoting agriculture but was also instrumental in diversifying it by including crops like coffee and potato seeds. Flood control measures were introduced and an agriculture profile was created during the time to prevent degradation of land and water and exploring avenues to harness

available resources into non-conventional energy, utilisation of coal and manpower development. In view of the acute shortage of trained personnel in the agriculture and allied sectors in this region, during the year 1976-77, the Council Secretariat also stepped up the programme of education and training both in degree courses and short-term courses.

### **EFFECTIVE SCHEME IMPLEMENTATION**

A regional meeting was held in Shillong in May 1975 under the auspices of the Planning Commission to discuss certain aspects concerning effective implementation of the programmes in the agricultural sector in the North Eastern Region under the Annual Plan, 1975-76. The meeting decided upon a certain course of action



(Above and right) Then Chief Minister of Sikkim L D Kazi visit Animal husbandry at Junethang and lays the foundation stone of a primary health centre at Pakyong in Sikkim on October 1977.

for the constituent States/Union Territories as well as other agencies concerned for proper implementation of agricultural schemes.

It contemplated that suitable varieties of rice for different areas even within each district should be identified and a programme for their cultivation should be drawn up before the kharif season. It also suggested that suitable cropping pattern and calendar of operations, together with necessary support of inputs for different areas in consultation with the Assam Agricultural University, should be prepared. The course of action also suggested that research efforts by the ICAR and Assam Agricultural University should be intensified to evolve suitable high-yielding varieties of rice for the hill areas.

There was also a suggestion to identify suitable virus-free areas in the region where nurseries could be established to meet the requirements of planting material for horticultural programmes in the region. It was also mooted that in view of the easy availability of groundwater in the region, a large programme of pumping sets, dug wells and private tube wells needs to be undertaken. To start with, the programme can be taken up in compact areas either on individual or community basis. Conditions need to be created for increased utilisation of institutional investment for this purpose. More schemes should be formulated by the States/UTs to avail institutional investment for minor irrigation programmes. That the work of survey and exploration of groundwater resources in the region should be expedited by the Central Ground Water Board

was another important suggestion. In view of the very low rate of consumption of fertilisers in the region, special measures to promote and propagate their use, including subsidising movement of fertiliser by road to remote district headquarters, should be undertaken.

Special efforts were called for on the part of State/Union Territory Governments to promote the establishment of Farmers' Service Societies Programme for integrated credit, services and supplies. The practice of 'jhuming' needed to be replaced by a system of

**IN VIEW OF THE EASY AVAILABILITY OF GROUNDWATER IN THE REGION, A LARGE PROGRAMME OF PUMPING SETS, DUG WELLS AND PRIVATE TUBE WELLS NEEDS TO BE UNDERTAKEN. TO START WITH, THE PROGRAMME CAN BE TAKEN UP IN COMPACT AREAS EITHER ON INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNITY BASIS**

### **'The NER has distinct issues'**

'You all know of my special interest and affection for the people who live in the North East, and indeed in all of our border areas. This North Eastern Council was formed so that attention could be focused on the special problems of this region. Every meeting so far has been in the North Eastern areas; and I think it is a good idea that you have come here; not only does it give the opportunity to others of hearing you and meeting you, but for you also to have a wider perspective and be able to meet different people.

*I am glad to have the opportunity of addressing the Council once again and discussing with you the working of this institution, which is an example of regional cooperation in our vast country.*

In our system, the States are distinct units and each has its problems, but a regional approach helps each unit to solve its problems better. Even in the international sphere, the regional approach is now



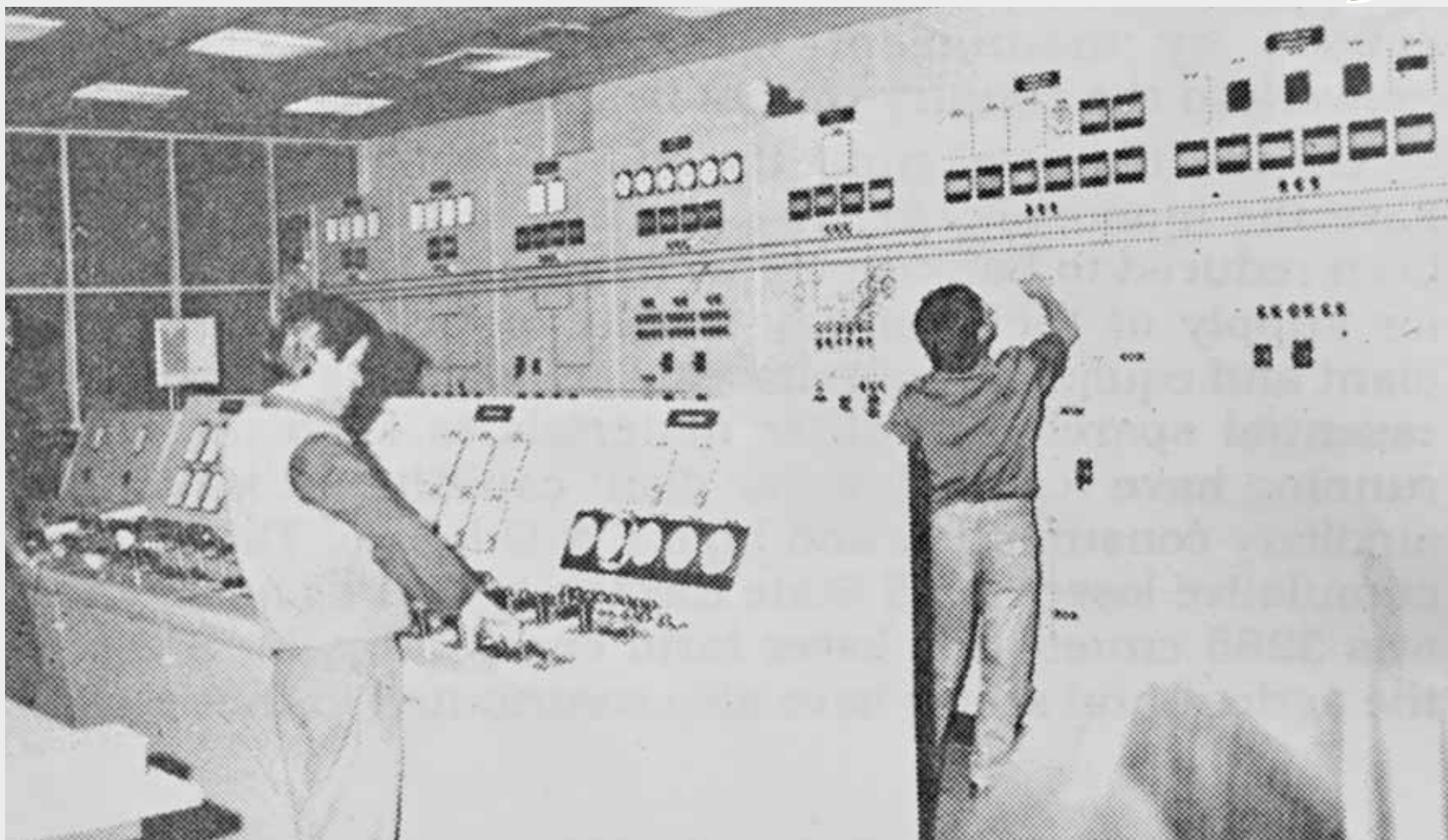
being welcomed. Every one of the States and Union Territories of our North East has its own personality; yet, there is a family resemblance among them. That is why the expression 'Seven Sisters' came to be applied to them. The rest of the country holds the 'Seven Sisters' in special affection.

The complexities and diversities of India are many. They relate to language, to religion, resource endowments and the quality and pace of development. But we are an integrated whole, determined to

survive unitedly in spite of differences. We are constantly trying to resolve these differences. All States and all regions must share burdens and contribute to the development of the country as a whole. The country's progress does not depend only on the speed of the fastest, but must take into account the pace of the weakest. This is why our schemes of development pay special attention on the redressal of regional disparities.

The North East is one of our lesser developed regions. Its resources — physical and human — must be better utilised. The people are impatient for development and we can understand this. The restlessness of the young people increases when they see the advancement in other parts of the country. In the initial stages, the processes of economic development aggravate disparities.'

— *Former Prime Minister*  
**INDIRA GANDHI**  
*Address to the NEC in 1980*



The Kopili Hydro Power Project has been a landmark development in the region. An early initiative of the NEC in mid-seventies.

stable agriculture coupled with horticultural plantation, other plantation crops and productive forestry. The approach to the problem should have the twin objectives of soil conservation on watershed basis and resettlement of ‘jhumias’ by units of village or group of villages and soil conservation organisations in the States/Union Territories were weak and needed to be strengthened.

### REGIONAL INSTITUTES COME UP

One thing that the North East lagged in was the presence of quality institutes. The people had to go all the way to Kolkata or New Delhi for that. The NEC saw it as a major issue and set out to correct it. Till the Ninth Five-Year



Rehabilitation Centre at Regional Medical College, Imphal, Manipur on September 1972.



Senior NEC official's visit the North East Police Academy (NEPA) Complex in 1978.



Trainees at NEPA, Barapani, Meghalaya, in 1978.

Plan, the Council assisted in and promoted several regional institutes such as the North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA). The Academy, which started functioning in July 1978, is engaged in shaping up police officers for equitable, effective and sensitive policing duties. It is dedicated to teaching the police personnel of the North Eastern States and from across the country to safeguard the value of freedom – freedom from disorder, criminal acts and criminals.

Similarly, NEEPCO is a trusted power generation company in the North Eastern Region since 1976, and works to tap the immense power potential of the region. NERAMAC, for its part, is a pioneer marketing organisation in the agri-horti sector set up in 1982. It is involved in supporting farmers right from the fields via markets to the end consumer through registered FPO/FPCs.

To provide a system of education to create technical manpower at various levels for the development of the NER, NERIST was set up as an NEC project in 1986.



The NERAMAC fruit juice concentration plant.

Similarly, the Regional Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Sciences (RIPNS), Aizawl, was set up by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, in 1995 under the NEC. The objective of the Institute is to create and provide adequate paramedical manpower to various health sectors of the NER in particular and to other parts of India and overseas in general.



Regional Institute of Pharmacy at Agartala, Tripura in 1979.

The North Eastern Regional Institute of Water & Land Management (NERIWALM) was established in Tezpur, Assam, by the NEC in December 1989. The main objective of the Institute is to provide capacity building, undertake research and provide technical services to the line departments for improving agricultural production and socio-economic status of the people in the North East.

Having been constructed in Imphal in 1972, the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) is an institution of regional importance catering to the NER's needs in the field of medical education by providing undergraduate and postgraduate courses, bringing together at one place the educational facilities required to train personnel in all medical specialties.

The premier tertiary health care institute, Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH) was set up in 1976 and handed over to the NEC in 1999.



Practical class in progress at the Regional Dental College, Guwahati in 1982.



Mechanical Engineering Workshop, NERIST, Arunachal Pradesh, planned in early seventies and became operational in 1986.



A general view of the NERIST, Arunachal Pradesh in 1984.



Aerial view of North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) that became operational in December 2000.

It has been upgraded to a regional institute with the objective of providing better mental health care and developing manpower in the region.

The North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) was set up in 1983 as a joint venture of the Department of Space (DoS) and the NEC. The Centre provides operational high-tech infrastructure to enable the NE States to adopt space technology inputs into their developmental activities. It also provides developmental support to the NER by undertaking a specific project, utilising space technology inputs – both from remote sensing and satellite communication.

The Bhubaneswar Barooah Cancer Institute (BBCI) in Guwahati is one-of-a-kind centre in the NER. A tripartite



The Bhubaneswar Barooah Cancer Institute (BBCI) in Guwahati.



The Cane & Bamboo Technology Centre, Burnihat, Assam.

agreement was signed among the NEC, the Department of Atomic Energy and the Government of Assam for its overall development in treatment facilities of cancer-related cases and research. The sole objective of the Institute, which came up in 1974, is to take care of the growing number of cancer patients.

The Regional Dental College (RDC), Guwahati, was set up in 1985 to disseminate dental education and oral health services to the NER people. Another Guwahati-based college, the Regional College of Nursing, was established to impart nursing education to the NER.

The Regional Institute of Pharmaceutical Science & Technology (RIPSAT), Agartala, was established in 1979 with financial assistance

from the NEC to impart Diploma-level education in Pharmacy (D Pharma) throughout the NER. Subsequently, the Institute was upgraded to the Bachelor in Pharmacy (B Pharma) course in addition to the D Pharma course.

The Cane & Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC) was incorporated in 2004 with the objective of utilising the NER's hitherto untapped bamboo sector, which is a significant feature of its topography, culture and customary practices since time immemorial. The centre, which involves its creativity and resources in talent scouting, training, technology sourcing and in market linkage for giving a new-age thrust to the age-old bamboo sector, was later renamed as the North East Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC). ■



Engineering Marvel: The hanging bridge at Dite-Dime in Arunachal Pradesh.



## CHAPTER FIVE

1981-90

# CONNECTING PEOPLE'S LIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

Realising that it was important for North East Region's people to mingle with the outside world, NEC made conscious and sincere efforts to bring more connectivity and opportunities to the region and touch people's lives in a way so as to make a positive impact

The journey that began in 1972 was charting out its course in the 80s. After initial years, which were more about understanding and formulating policies that would be vital for North East Region's (NER) development, North Eastern Council (NEC) started working on implementing its ideas on the ground. It was a time when foundation of various institutions was being laid in the country and many projects were being started. A new resurgent North East was taking shape.



A worker collects pineapples.

It was a decade marked largely by landmark developments across almost all walks of life and having large-scale political and social impact: From India hosting Asian Games to the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi following the storming of Golden Temple by Indian Army; from the sending of Indian peacekeepers into war-ravaged Jaffna, Sri Lanka, to the country's tryst with coalition Governments in New Delhi leading to some political instability. The instability, in turn, intensified militancy operations against elected Governments in various North East States and that meant that North Eastern Council had to renew its efforts to bring its population back to the mainstream.

Towards this end, attempts were made to improve connectivity by setting up an important road bridge across Brahmaputra river. Large-scale efforts went into the setting up of Kalia Bhomora Bridge across the Brahmaputra near Tezpur and it was dedicated to the nation by then Prime Minister of India on April 14, 1987. It helped in great measure in the spheres of development and bringing about positive changes in the lives of the region's people.

Sincere efforts were made for overall development of North East Region to make more opportunities available to people. Agriculture is the largest employer in North East Region, which is known for



The workers processing pineapple juice at NERAMAC factory in 1988.

its agri-horti produces like Khasi Mandarin of Meghalaya, Kachai Lemon of Manipur, Queen Pineapple of Tripura and Bhoot Jolokia that has received even the geographical indication (GI) tag. However, the revenue earned from agricultural sector by this part of country remained low as surplus products get wasted due to lack of initiative in processing, value addition and adequate marketing.

In order to maximise its potential for agro food processing, horticulture, floriculture, farming and livestock, NERAMAC was set up in 1982 as a regional apex body for organising processing, marketing and promotion of sales of agri-horticultural produce.

This was a game-changer which helped potential entrepreneurs to get exposure to advanced processing technologies and farmers by providing them with appropriate market linkages as well as remunerative prices for their produces.

There was also an emphasis on the extension of higher education through setting up North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) in Nirjuli, Arunachal Pradesh, in 1984. This would naturally encourage local population to study here rather than heading out. The series of EDPs from 1985 to 1990 organised by National Institute of Small Industry Extension Training (NISITET)



A patient undergoes investigation in Regional Dental College, Guwahati in 1982.



Students at North East Regional Institute of Science and Technology, Itanagar, 1986.

and the role these played in encouraging entrepreneurship too was to ensure that North East Region turned prosperous.

In the 26th Council Meeting, Council Members had expressed concern about under-utilisation of funds during financial year 1985-86 and directed Council's Secretariat to take effective measures for better utilisation of funds. The Council Secretariat accordingly reviewed ground position and took effective measures for better utilisation of Plan funds for 1986-87.

The measures undertaken include periodic review meetings with Chairman, NEC, monthly/weekly review of progress reports of



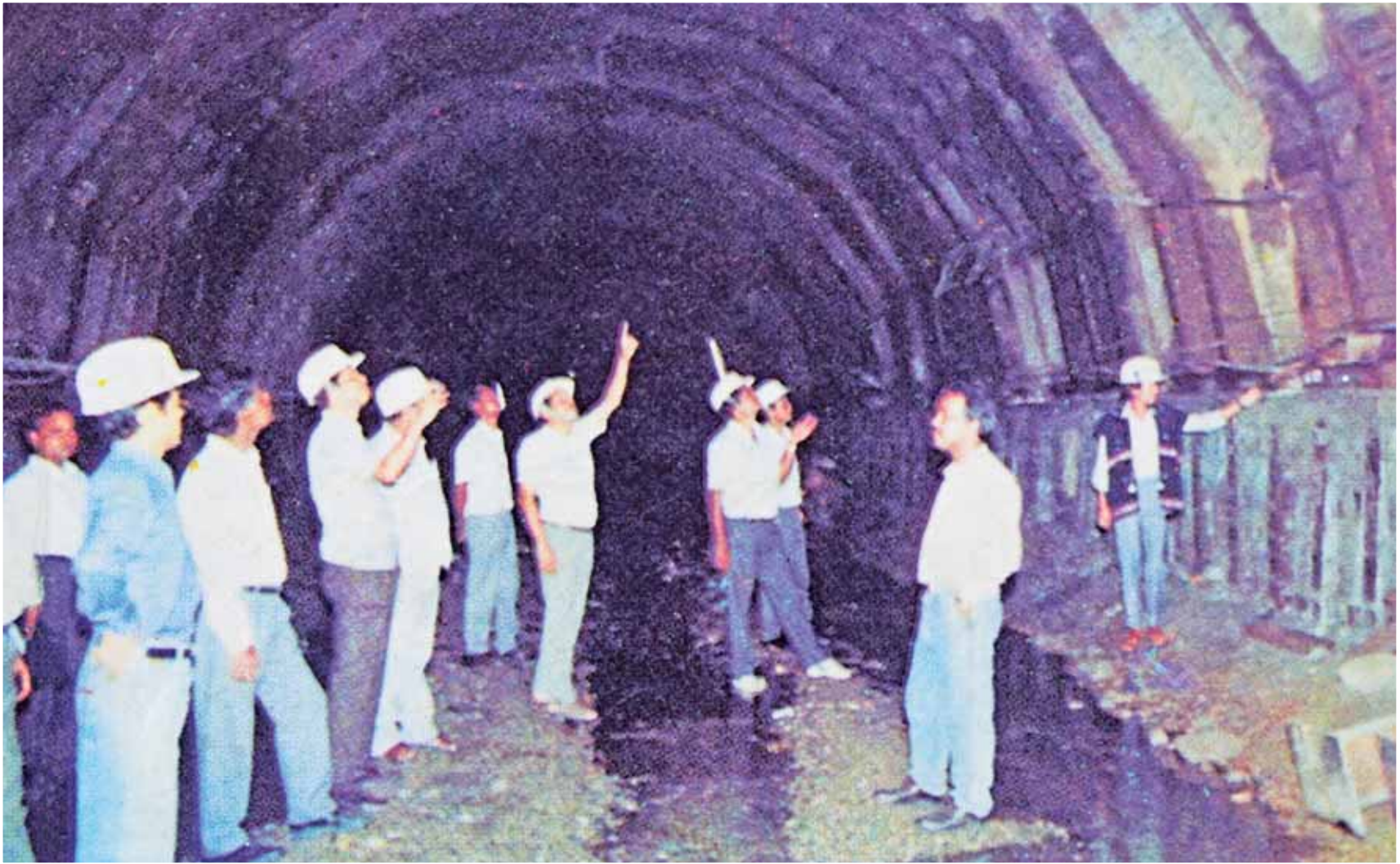
Power transmission lines have connected the NER to a brighter future.



Tribal's make and test their musical instruments.

various sectorial schemes under NEC's Plan, regular follow-up action with Ministries concerned of the Government of India at appropriate levels and coordinated efforts with Development Commissioners of States for resolving cases pending with State Governments and other implementing agencies.

Many important schemes which the Council sanctioned during this period included (1) Ranganadi Hydro Electric Project in Arunachal Pradesh, (2) Gas-based Power Project (Tripura), (3) 132-KV transmission line in Gohpur (Assam) and Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh), (4) Mechanical Cargo Handling Plant in Pandu, Assam, (5) Regional ITI for Women in Tinsukia, Assam, (6) Modernisation of the Imphal ITI in Manipur, (7) Setting up of Linemen Training



Officials inspect an under construction tunnel.

Centre, Mizoram, (8) Setting up of Food and Drugs Laboratory (one each) in Agartala, Shillong and Gauhati, (9) Setting up of Regional Science Museum in Gauhati, Assam, (10) Establishment of Rubber Processing Factory in Tripura, (11) Raising of Dioscorea Floribunda Plantation and Processing for Manufacture of Diosgenin/16-DPA, Tripura, (12) Sub-Tropical Botanical Garden in Nagaland, (13) Regional Buffalo Breeding Farm in Assam and Manipur, (14) Regional Veterinary Biological Centre in Tripura, (15) Regional Piggery Farm in Meghalaya, and (16) Watershed Management Projects (Umtongphar in Meghalaya, Hiriheri in Assam, Lowangleima in Manipur and Dikhu in Nagaland).

### LENDING A HELPING HAND TO FARMERS

The cultivation of potato was confined basically to the two main agro-climatic zones in the NER, viz., the plains and hills. While Assam and Tripura comprised the largest hectareage under potato grown in plains, the rest of the units were mostly confined to the hills between altitudes of 1,500 and 3,500 metres. In the plains, it was taken as a rabi crop while, in the hills, it was spring/summer crop.

In some places (like Khasi hills of Meghalaya), two crops were grown in a year; the first one sown in February-March covering a larger area, and the second in July-August, in a smaller area. In the



A farmer collects potatoes from her field.

**HOWEVER, THE YIELD PER UNIT AREA OF LAND SOWN WAS MUCH BELOW THE OPTIMUM. IT COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE USE OF INDISTINCT VARIETIES HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE LATE BLIGHT DISEASE DURING THE RAINY SEASON AND DEPLETION OF THE SOIL FERTILITY DUE TO CONTINUOUS SOIL EROSION**

hills, the sowing was done in raised beds made along the slopes after burning the beds to prevent infection of soil-borne diseases, such as brown rot. The use of inputs like fertilisers and chemicals gained acceptance gradually.

However, the yield per unit area of land sown was much below the optimum. It could be attributed to the use of indistinct varieties highly susceptible to the late blight disease during the rainy season and depletion of the soil fertility due to continuous soil erosion. However, the introduction of improved varieties like Khufri Jyoti, SLB/Z 405-A, Kufri Khasi Garo etc gained popularity in due course.



A woman harvests paddy in Arunachal Pradesh.



Farmers in the field.

The pace of replacement of local varieties with the improved ones, however, was very slow due to lack of sufficient seed material of these varieties in the North Eastern Region. Khasi hills were the major source of supply of uncertified seed to different units of the region, both in the hills and plains.

Whatever little area was covered under the improved varieties was due to the efforts of the Central Potato Research Station in Upper Shillong, Meghalaya, which supplied breeder/foundation seed to select growers in Khasi hills for multiplication and onward distribution as certified seed to other growers. Some of the States procuring seeds from Himachal Pradesh, but the quantity obtained was quite less and involved heavy investment.