



The traditional bamboo dance has remained a favourite through ages, across the region.

The scope of potato cultivation in the region was realised by the State Departments of Agriculture, and consequently the area under potato increased. The demand for potato seed also increased. The growing demand for potato seed for sustaining the programme undertaken by the constituent units was appreciated by the NEC as early as in 1975, and an ambitious programme of potato seed production was initiated by the Council with the objective of making the region self-sufficient. Under this programme, five regional foundation seed farms for potato were established in five hill States.

With 58,000 hectares under potato cultivation in the entire region during the period, the annual demand of certified seed worked out

to about 1.20 lakh tonnes. Against this, the NEC's regional farms produced in all 1,163 tonnes of F-II seed, which subsequently yielded 5,820 tonnes of certified seed, sufficient to cover about 2,900 hectares annually. This left a clear gap of about one lakh tonnes of seed annually. The gap threatened to become quite large with annual increase in the potato-growing area.

This clearly justified an immediate need for stepping up of the seed production programme in the region to meet the immediate requirement of certified seed. Due to acute shortage of seed stock in the region, instances were not uncommon when unscrupulous traders supplied freshly harvested potatoes from plains in February



Honey being extracted from honeycombs in Nagaland.



as seed for sowing in the hills of this region. The farmers suffered huge losses because of failure of tuber germination.

In order to meet the annual requirement of certified seeds, the region needed 20,000 tonnes of F-II seed. It worked out to 4,000 tonnes of F-I seed, which, in turn, would require 800 tonnes of breeders' seed. Against this, the National Seed Committee on Potato allotted 10 MT of breeders' seed annually to this region. Assuming that the total quantity of breeder seed would be available, the region needed to have 400 hectares area for producing F-I which, in turn, would need to be planted in 2,000 hectares for yielding required quantity of F-II seed.

Based on this, the ultimate requirement of area for certified seed production was 10,000 hectares. It would mean that the area under the foundation seed programme had to be increased in the region substantially from the



Coffee beans being dried by a local farmer.

114 hectares located in the NEC's farms. At the same time, a large area had to be covered under the certified seed programme, involving a large number of progressive potato growers.

The State Departments utilised to the maximum available land area of departmental farms for foundation seed and the National Seeds Committee was requested to ensure the supply of breeder seed in full every year for the region. All this was much needed to make the NER become self-sufficient in potato seed in future.

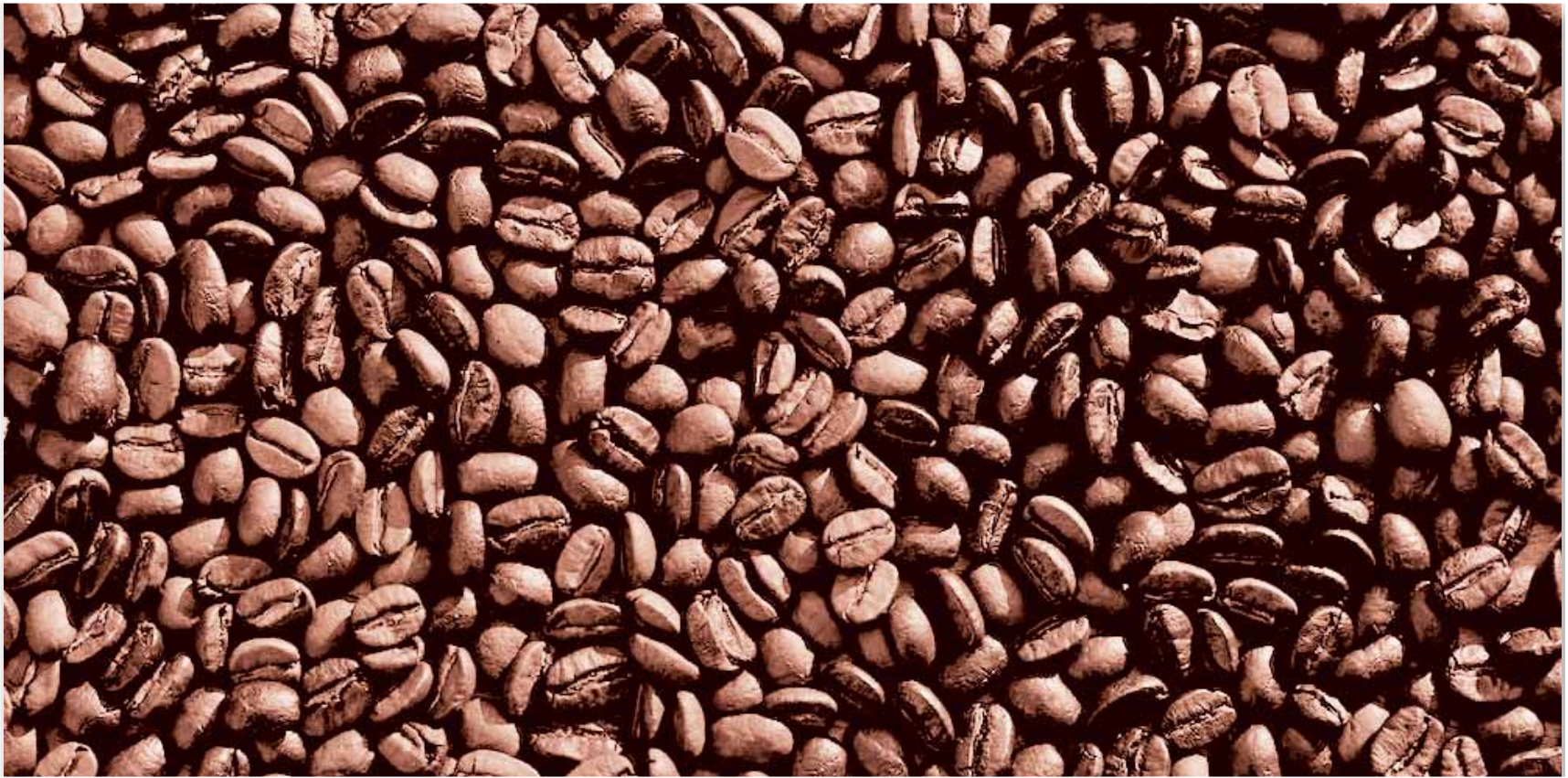
The bulk of potato seed requirement was utilised in Assam during the rabi season. If this requirement had to be fulfilled, the supplies had to come from the seed produced in early spring season in the hills which would be harvested by July-August, and would be fit for sowing in October-November in the plains of Assam and Tripura. This way, the requirement of Assam could be met without

importing seed from other States such as Bihar or Uttar Pradesh and also without storing the seed in cold storage at huge costs.

As such, the need for intensifying the potato seed production programme in the hill States assumed urgency and therefore needed to be given the highest priority. The modalities of expansion of the programme were worked out after taking into account the infrastructure and manpower facilities available in each of the seven units.

PUSH FOR COFFEE

Coffee is a shade-loving tree and hence, the establishment of coffee plantation necessarily meant establishment of a good overhead shade cover. This, therefore, resulted in afforesting the denuded hummed land. The cultivation of coffee and shade trees also helped in reducing soil erosion. It is one of the crops which provided low-volume, high-yield ratio per unit area.



Contrary to the perception, coffee farming is popular in the NER.

Coffee cultivation is a remunerative agro industry. The farmers also need not worry about marketing it since this work was to be attended by the Coffee Board. Taking all these factors into consideration, introduction of the coffee crop in the North East was bound to bring all-round benefits.

The main problem was the availability of trained manpower to establish and maintain coffee plantation for the public sector and to provide the technical knowhow to individual farmers. In this context, the Coffee Board was already providing training facilities for officers at the Central Coffee Research Institute and had by then trained 200 officers from the North East. This apart, training facility had been created at Haflong for providing field training to workers and farmers.

Further, the Coffee Board established coffee demonstration farms-cum-training centres in the North Eastern States. These centres

served to demonstrate proper coffee technology and provide extension service to the farmers and seed centres and training facilities. By the time these facilities were established locally, it was hoped that the availability of extension service or trained personnel will not be faced in the future.

At the time, the high-yielding seed material had to come from down south and there was always a problem of delay in the supply. The Coffee Board, therefore, decided to set up a series of seed blocks in the region to meet the future requirement of seed locally. A number of extension officers at various levels like Deputy Directors, Senior Liaison Officers and Junior Liaison Officers were posted in various States to advise and render technical assistance. The Coffee Board also opened two depots at Guwahati and Haflong for collecting the coffee grown in the region.



Kaliabhomora Bridge against a tranquil background in year 1987.

The NEC ably assisted the States in providing training facilities in coffee culture, providing advisory helps as well as regional facilities like coffee nursery, shade tree nursery and survey of suitable land in the region. Apart from these, the Council also made arrangements to establish a 1,000-tonne capacity coffee processing factory at Guwahati to serve as a model unit for other States. All these factors helped the tribal families to settled agriculture, improved socio-economic conditions as well as improving the ecology through afforestation and soil erosion control.

NEC Chairperson Prakash Mehrotra, at the 22nd Meeting of the NEC on August 26, 1983, said: “Within 11 years, the Council has made a significant contribution towards removing some of the important infrastructural deficiencies in the North East. We have now reached a stage where results are either already visible, or in the

process of becoming so. Many farms have already been set up, the power from Kopili will start flowing very shortly; the Brahmaputra will have another bridge in about two years; the first mini-cement plant will soon start production. The region would open up to a great extent with about 5,000 km of roads taken up by the NEC and, above all, the manpower within the region will get trained to take up the various challenging tasks involved in its overall development.”

The Council reviewed the progress achieved under various schemes implemented during 1982-83 and took stock of financial progress in respect of Annual Plan expenditures for 1982- 83 with an approved outlay of ₹80 crore, which was later revised to ₹90 crore. The classic example of a beneficiary would be Nagaland (a member of the NEC since 1976), which had been subjected to official apathy, neglect and backwardness since 1947. There were



(Above and right) Sukh Ram, then Union Minister for Food & Civil Supplies and Sudhir Ranjan Majumdar, then Chief Minister of Tripura at the inauguration of the NERAMAC fruit juice centrifuge plant in Nalkata, Tripura, on June 1988.

hardly any industries worth their name there, and even education and health care were still pipe dreams. During this period, a number of major schemes were undertaken covering various sectors involving ₹1,287.13 lakh.

Also, there was focused emphasis on the extension of higher education through the setting up of the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) in Nirjuli, Arunachal Pradesh, in 1984. It naturally encouraged the locals to study within the region rather than heading out. The series of EDPs from 1985 to 1990 organised by the NISIET and the role these played in encouraging entrepreneurship too was to ensure that the region turned more prosperous.

Addressing the 28th Meeting of the North Eastern Council at Guwahati on June 8, 1988, the then Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Bhishma Narain Singh, who was also the NEC Chairman,

stressed the importance of closer linkages amongst the NER States, the NEC and the Government of India on the matters of regional planning for an integrated development of the region. He underlined that the NEC had given priority to the construction of roads with a view to removing the transport and communication constraints. The joint efforts of the State PWDs and Border Roads Organisation resulted in the completion of road length of 540 km completed during 1987-88.

The role that transport plays in the opening up of remote areas and helping in their economic development is all the more important in the hilly terrain of the North East, which lacks in such resources. Till even the late 1980s, most of this area, especially Mizoram, was almost cut off and had very little contact with others. Thanks to planned development, this area gradually joined the mainstream of Indian economy. The transformation of these distant hill tracts from the traditional to the new modes of production and marketing



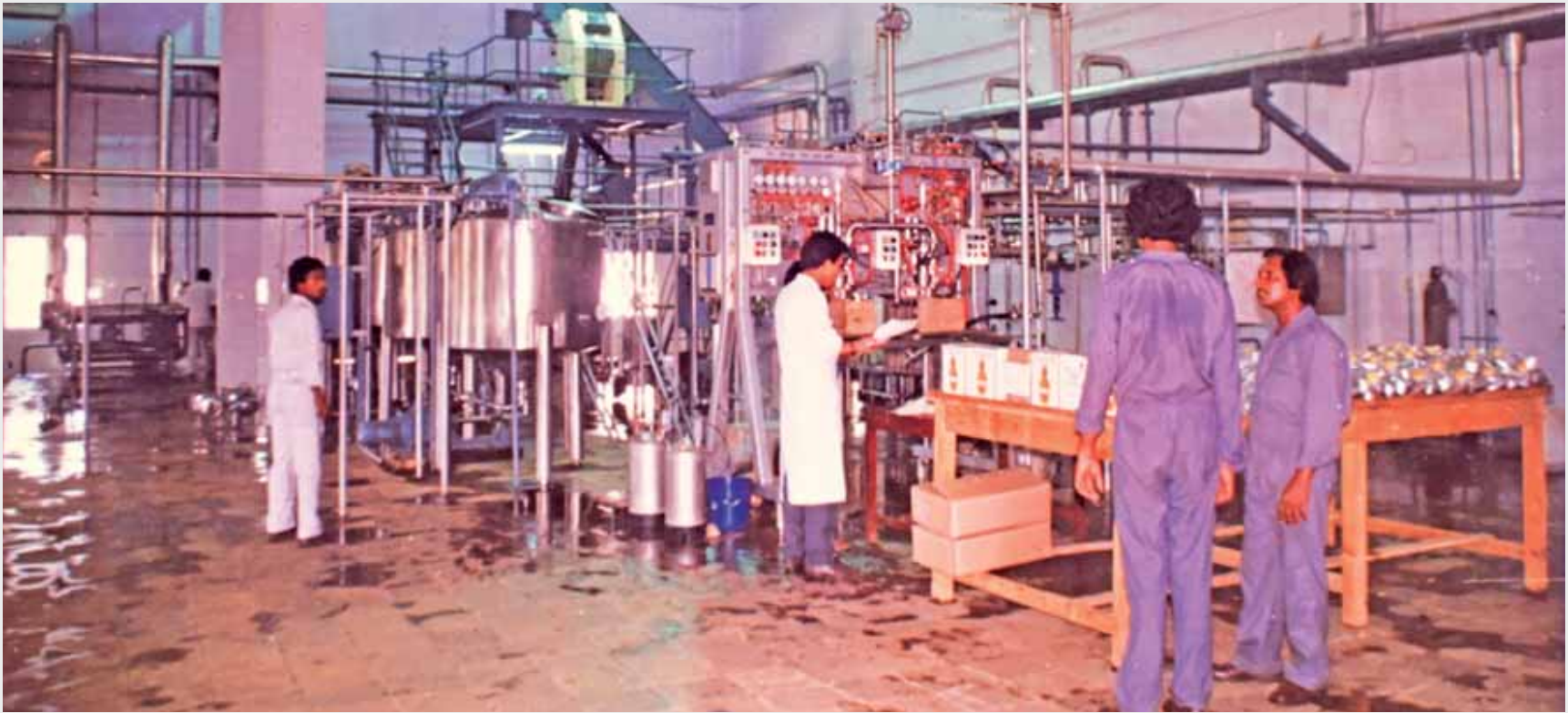
Tea leaves being harvested in Assam.

was quickened because of the special emphasis laid on the various means of transport.

Between 1974-75 and 1982-83, out of the total expenditure on development programme in this region by the NEC — aggregating ₹322 crore — ₹117 crore was spent on transport. It comes to around 37 per cent of the total expenditure, which is fairly encouraging. The annual expenditure figures further reveal that while for most of the period in the 1970s, the percentage annual expenditure on transport averaged around 30, it showed a sudden rise in the 1980s, from ₹15 crore in 1980-81 to ₹38 crore in 1982-83. That is, while expenditure in transport rose by 150 per cent, the total expenditure of the Council during this period rose by 75 per cent (from ₹51 crore to ₹87 crore).



North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Itanagar, 1986.



Inside view of the juice processing unit in year 1988.

Referring to recurring floods, a major challenge in the NER, Bishma Narain Singh said that the disastrous effect of these floods on the region's agricultural development as also on the communication system had been causing serious concern not only to the respective Governments but also to the NEC. In this context, the Brahmaputra Board prepared a project report for a flood control retention reservoir project on River Pagladia as part of the Flood Control Programmes of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Further, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission agreed for taking up a study in the NEC Plan for 1988-89 for implementation of this important project and indicated that under the NEC, 89 Plan funds will be made available for a similar study on a few drainage improvement schemes in the sub-basins of the Barak, which is known for annual flooding. The NEC also got a study completed by WAPCOS for the rejuvenation and development of the Loktak Lake to strengthen the drainage system, which was the primary cause of floods in Manipur.

Giving a brief review of the implementation of the NEC's Plans during 1987-88, NEC Secretary RK Tikku said the Council had proposed to the Planning Commission an outlay of ₹178.37 crore for 1987-88; the Planning Commission finally approved a total allocation of ₹165 crore. He also expressed happiness over the satisfactory position in sanctioning schemes and effective review and monitoring resulting in almost full utilisation of the allocated funds.

Tikku said that the efforts made by the Council had helped the region in removing to some extent the basic infrastructural deficiency in relation to the emerging patterns; the economy had indicated that the activities of the Council over the years had spread to almost all the major fields of economic development. He hoped that with cooperation from all sides, the Council would play a very useful role for the socio-economic development of the region in the decades ahead.

In the animal husbandry and veterinary sciences sector, the NEC approved a scheme for the establishment of a Regional Brown



Fish farming in Manipur, the traditional way.

Swiss Cattle Breeding Farm at Jaluki. A broiler chick-cum-production centre was also agreed to by the NEC, and a Regional Composite Fish Production and Seed Farm was initiated as well.

In the forests sector, a Bud Nursery for Rubber was approved and another scheme for conservation and multiplication of orchids proposed. An integrated programme for the development of sericulture was also initiated. This programme covered survey and test rearing, grainage-cum-training centres, preservation and production-oriented integrated schemes for oak, tassar, mulberry, Eri and Muga silk.

But what could be the reasons for backwardness of States like Assam despite the existence of rich resources — both material and human? There were certain handicaps under which the State's economy was working. The State suffered from inefficient and insufficient infrastructural facilities (power, transport and communications), dearth of entrepreneurial talent and a low rate of capital formation.

The State was way below the level reached by the country, as judged from a number of socio-economic indicators like per capita income

(₹791 against ₹940 — average of 1973-76), net sown area per cultivator (0.9 hectares against 1.8 hectares), irrigated area to net cultivated area (21.4 per cent to 24.6 per cent), yield per hectare of cereals and pulses (986 kg and 395 kg per hectare, respectively, against 1066 kg and 513 kg per hectare), per capita consumption of electricity (35 kwh against 135 kwh) and population per bank office (39,000 against 27,000).

Assam was sorely lacking in terms of per capita bank deposits (₹150 against ₹353), per capita bank advances (₹62 as against ₹241) and percentage of literacy (28.1 against 29.5 as per the 1971 Census). To bring the State on a par with the rest of the country, substantial investment was required. Perhaps, it was not the lack of investible resources that stood in the way of the economic development of the State, but its absorptive capacity that had not been very good in those years.

Therefore, it was necessary to think in terms of increasing the State's spending capacity and making it more development-oriented. There is no dearth of resources; they are only to be exploited to the best advantage of the State. ■



The winding road to Zemithang as seen from a monastery in Arunachal Pradesh.



CHAPTER SIX 1991-2000

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

With a major thrust on land development and its 'People First, Connectivity Must' policy, the North Eastern Council (NEC) was determinedly working to bring about structural changes through the various agencies working in tandem with it. The focus was also on improving lives of tribals and their economy, emphasising the importance of forest wealth and, at the same time, encouraging the usage of Science & Technology in enhancing their living standards.



The 405 MW installed capacity Ranganadi Hydro Power Station is a run-of-the-river scheme with a small pondage to harness the hydro power of Ranganadi River, located at Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh planned in 1988 and became operational in year 2001.



Shri Madhukar Dighe, Governor of Meghalaya and Dr. (Mrs.) I K Borthakur, Principal Adviser, Planning Commission, at National Exhibition on Renewable Energy Utilization in Shillong on October 1991.

Though NEC did everything possible for the welfare of North Eastern Region, it was far from being a smooth ride. But then, lack of resources and restrained budgetary allocations could never dampen its spirits. It always found successful ways to circumvent all crises and go on with projects by employing changes in these and making these more cost-effective.

The Planning Commission had allocated ₹1,160 crore in 8th Plan to NEC. This allocation was much less than the requirement for schemes taken up in North Eastern Council's Plan for 1992-93. The Council needed a minimum of ₹1,800 crore to complete ongoing projects (which were spillovers from previous Plans). Among these were major power generation projects, viz., Ranganadi and Doyang Hydro Electric Projects, important inter-State roads and regional institutions. Apart from this, the Council wanted to take up a few new programmes in productive sectors.



The North Eastern Council thirty fourth meeting on March, 1992 under the presidentship of SN Dwivedy, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh and Chairman, North Eastern Council in Guwahati.

With these ideas, the Council approved a Plan for ₹2,300 crore against which Planning Commission allocated it ₹1,160 crore. The NEC Chairman had repeatedly informed Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman that to complete the power projects alone, the requirement in 8th Plan was ₹760 crore. Similarly, for completing important roads after dropping or terminating a number of others, the requirement was ₹650 crore for 1992-97. To fully operationalise NEC's institutes, viz., North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) and North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA), among others, and to maintain these till the end of 8th Plan, ₹100 crore were required.

A ROUGH PATCH

In a way, 8th Plan outlay caused a major setback to the Council's targets and aims. As a result, important power projects, roads and



A quaint and peaceful village in Mizoram | Photo: Vanlalchhanhima Pangzawl.



Girls enjoy a game of bollyball in Arunachal Pradesh.

institutes could not be completed on schedule within 8th Plan period itself. This low allocation resulted in serious cost and time over-runs in case of power projects, roads and regional institutions and, at this tardy rate, some of these projects threatened to go past 10th Plan though it ran contrary to Planning Commission's intention to complete important schemes within a short period so that the intended benefits could reach people soon.

SPORTS INITIATIVE

The NEC was quick to understand that sports were a surefire way to elevate the stature of the North East across the country. Given the pool of sports talent available in the region which has traditionally been a fertile sporting ground, the NEC wanted to make sportspersons the brand ambassadors of the North East. And it did succeed in its endeavour.

A new scheme on 'Development of Sports and Youth Activities in the North Eastern Region' was sanctioned by the Council with the

objectives of providing financial assistance to organise adventure activities like mountaineering expeditions and Youth Exchange Programmes. Under this scheme, special attention was to be given to the needs of local clubs and sports associations of proven record of performance. The scheme involved a total financial outlay of ₹5 crore. The North East States, though thinly populated, have a rich heritage and talent in sports and other physical activities. But despite this promising potential, the development of sports and physical activities in the region has been somewhat slow.

Youth activities of all kinds require adequate attention, especially given the developments during that time in the region. It was decided that special attention will be given to the needs of small/local clubs/associations of proven record of performance. However, in exceptional circumstances when organisation or conduct of the above-referred activities required some critical infrastructural support, excluding heavy civil construction works and structures, the same could also be considered for part-financing subject to availability of



A bird's-eye view of a town in Mizoram | Photo: David Lalchhanchhuaha

funds. Keeping the basic objectives of the scheme in view, the NEC's financial assistance to various sports and youth activities was to the tune of ₹5 crore during the 8th Five-Year Plan.

Addressing the 36th Meeting of the Council at Itanagar on May 7, 1993, Arunachal Pradesh Governor SN Dwivedy, who was also the NEC Chairman, said the Council had been working steadfastly for the balanced socio-economic development of the NER and also playing a vital role with regard to the security of the vast region. He felt the time had come to make a proper assessment of the work done, particularly to ascertain as to how far the purpose and objective of the Council have been fulfilled and was contributing to the overall progress of the NER's people.

Dwivedy observed that the Centre was now paying adequate attention to the Council and hoped that the Union Minister would take proper steps to strengthen the Council's functioning and ensure that the NEC could play a vital role in the region.



SN Dwivedy, Chairman of the NEC who was also the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, is seen addressing the 36th Session of the North Eastern Council on May, 1993.



HAD Sawian, Secretary, NEC, addressing the senior officials of the Council at the secretariat in Shillong on 26th July 1993 soon after taking over charge.

Referring to the major educational institutes of the region funded by the NEC, Dwivedy said that the NERIST and the RIMS located at Itanagar and Imphal, respectively, had to face acute problems due to the Centre's failure to release the required funds.

The Planning Commission approved a total outlay of ₹265 crore for the Annual Plan 1993-94. In the power development sector, the Doyang Hydro Electric Project and Ranganadi Hydro Electricity Project were at the time under implementation. Moreover, the Doyang and Ranganadi transmission lines were being set up with the NEC's financial assistance. The transmission system in the NER, being maintained with financial assistance from the NEC, included the installation of reactor at Samaguri and Moriani in Assam, besides 132-KV SC lines at Shillong-Khliehriat, Kohima-Doyang

and Lunglei-Lawangthai. An allocation of ₹22 crore was also made during the Annual Plan 1993-94 for setting up a gas-based power project at Rokhia in Tripura.

Among other sectors, manpower development received ₹16.35 crore which also covered the requirement of the fellowship and academic programme, running of the RIMS, Imphal, the NEPA Academy, Umsaw, NERIST, Itanagar, and entrepreneurship development. The Social and Community Services sector was allocated ₹3.38 crore. A scheme for self-sufficiency in animal-origin foods for the NER was also included in the 8th Plan. It was meant to support programmes for poultry and piggery development, with special reference to providing the basic stock and inputs for production of layers, broilers and pigs by farmers in the region.



Scholars undertake research at a laboratory.

The programme envisaged the involvement of private sector and cooperatives as well.

NEC BETS BIG ON SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

LM Menezes, then Secretary of the North Eastern Council, had made an earnest appeal to scientists, technologists and engineers to transfer their knowledge and expertise “from the laboratory to the field” for the greater benefit of farmers and cultivators. Inaugurating a week-long course on ‘Hydrology of Small Watershed’, organised by NERIWALM at Barapani in Meghalaya, Menezes said that a large number of institutions and organisations had come up in the region for the welfare of people but he regretted that the knowledge and expertise in these institutions had not yet been transferred to the field for the benefit of farmers and cultivators. He said that all



Then Deputy Secretary, PBO Warzri (IAS) interacting with officials at NEC, Shillong.



A villager walks solo | Photo: R Lalruatfela



NEC Secretary LM Menezes is seen releasing a Souvenir in connection with a seminar on "THE ROLE OF NERIWALAM" in Tezpur, Assam on October 1990.

these institutions and organisations had to see what they actually contribute and for whom they exist. Also, that it was imperative on their part to work for the greater benefit of the people and it must reach the people in a big way.

Referring to the significance of the training programme, Menezes said that the NER had tremendous amount of water resources and these resources were required to be utilised in a more purposeful and meaningful way so that the development programmes, particularly for augmenting of food production in the region, could be successfully implemented. It was unfortunate that despite the availability of natural resources and their tremendous potential, the NER had to import food grains and dairy items from outside the region, as a result of which hundreds of crores of rupees had to be spent.

There was renewed emphasis on the conservation of water resources, land and water management through setting up NERIWALM, development of power, industries, entrepreneurship and modernisation of small-scale industries. Water harvesting technology was introduced while dairy farming, poultry and fisheries saw improvements with the introduction of technology.



LM Menezes, NEC Secretary in Shillong distributing certificate to an EDP trainee at the valedictory function held at NISIET, Guwahati.

The region was bristling with institutes, universities and research organisations but no major breakthrough in agricultural development had been achieved. Referring to the region's farmers and cultivators, Menezes said they were second to none from the point of view of hard work, resilience and enterprise, but they should be given proper guidance in the matter of new technologies and methods. The NER has to depend heavily on productive sectors like agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture and fisheries for overall development, he felt.

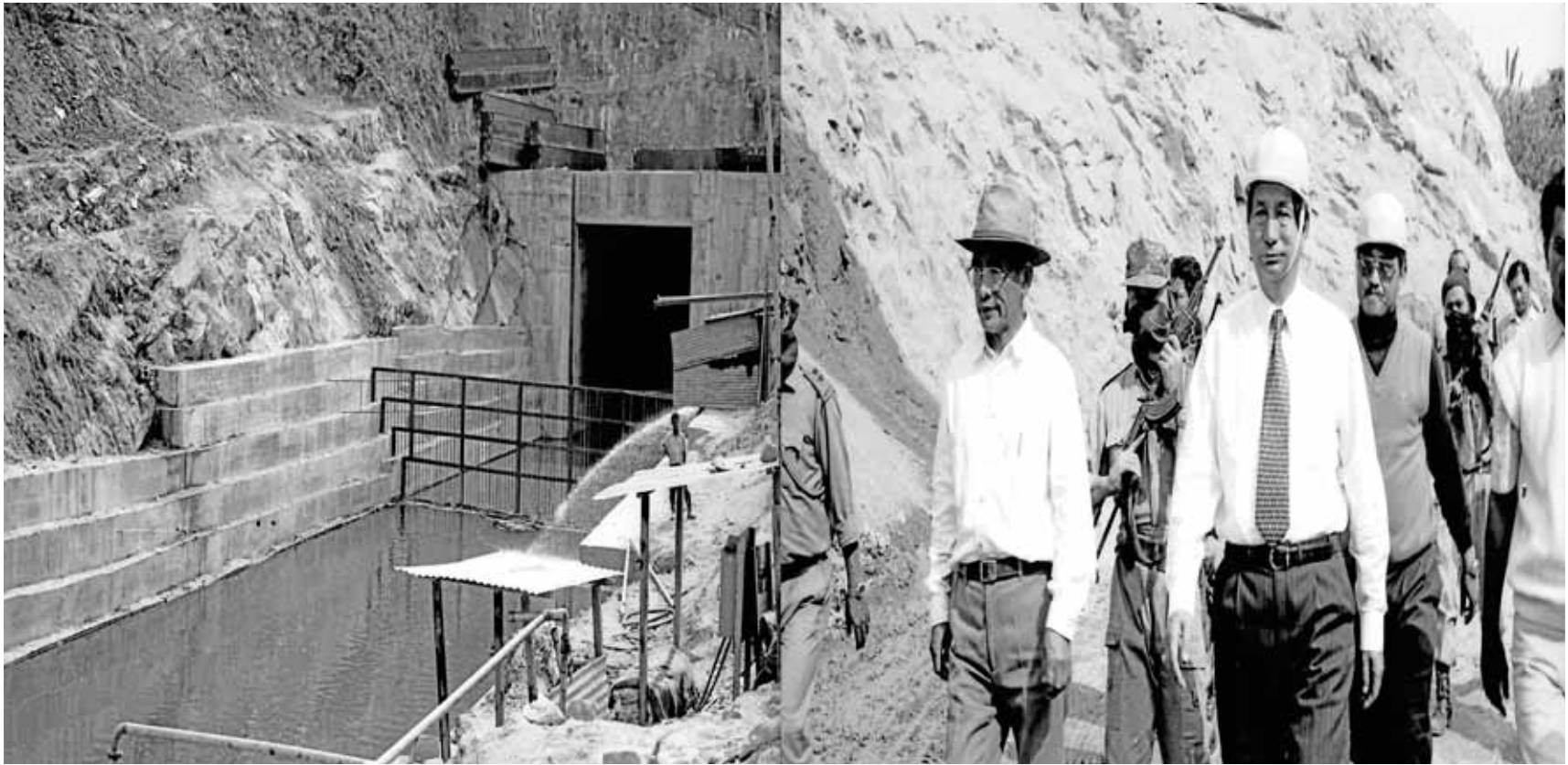
In agriculture, winged beans were introduced and the focus was on encouraging the setting up of sugar industry, fisheries, sericulture extension and management, besides power development. Kiwi made inroads, cashew nuts, sweet potato, rubber and maize began to be grown as agriculture became more diversified. Farm mechanisation was introduced and, at the same time, the environmental impact of water resources was carried out.

MAKING OF A CULTURAL HUB

In 1998, the Council extended financial support towards setting up of an 'Archive of Audio-Visual Recordings of Folk Musics and Dances of the North-Eastern Region' at Shillong in Meghalaya. The proposed archive was aimed at providing a repository for the



Tribal's enjoy the drumbeats at a function.



Former Chief Minister of Nagaland SC Jamir visiting the Doyang Hydro Project in Wokh District on March, 1997.

material collected through documentation and other studies related to folk music and dances of the NER's various tribes and groups. The region is inhabited by a large number of socio-cultural groups who represent a wide variety of folk and cultural traditions.

Most of these groups have their distinctive folk art traditions, including folk music and folk dances and, in some cases, also the folk theatre; these traditional forms have existed since time immemorial and are rooted deeply in the tradition and environment of each of these socio-cultural groups. However, these folk art forms had to undergo some stress in the modern times because of the emergence of mass entertainment techniques.

NEC MEANS THE NE's DEVELOPMENT

The NEC has played catalytic roles in the region's holistic development. Starting off with the 5th Plan, it has laid considerable

emphasis on the development of agriculture and allied fields together with irrigation, flood control, afforestation, soil and water management. In horticulture, the NEC supported 23 pioneering projects during the 6th and 7th Plan periods.

Through these, the NEC's efforts were targeted towards development for mass propagation of temperate fruit nurseries, establishment of regional vegetable seed farms, potato seed farms and orchard-cum, identification and cultivation of medicinal and tuber crops, the promotion of floriculture and establishing a Regional Fruit Processing Plant. Basic infrastructural facilities were also created for processing quality coffee, tea and rubber by setting up processing factories for these commercial crops at Guwahati (for coffee) and Agartala (for rubber and tea) in the 6th and 7th Plan periods, respectively. The North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation was set up by NEC during the Sixth Plan.



The officials from NERCORMP carrying out of PRA exercise in Longding district, Arunachal Pradesh.

Starting in 1999, NERCORMP has had three phases. It was during this duration that it worked extensively with villages and marginalised or neglected communities. Rather than suggesting solutions from a higher authoritarian level or simply pontificating, it aimed at involving the direct beneficiaries and helping the target villagers to themselves arrive at sustainable alternatives for the issue at hand. NERCORMP set up SHGs and Natural Resource Management Groups which worked towards the implementation of projects that have been identified by the villagers themselves as areas of their concern.

Meanwhile, extensive studies were also carried out to understand the reasons for the region being especially prone to earthquakes and the remedial measures taken. The NEC had been supporting the cost of construction of a rail-cum-road bridge over Brahmaputra river at

Jogighopa/Panchratna, for which ₹75 crore had been contributed till 1991-92 and another ₹20 crore released the following year. The bridge was completed by the mid-1990s. Since 1989-90, the NAA was also supported by the NEC to the extent of 60 per cent in sharing the cost of various facilities like navigational aids, communication aids, extension of runways, night landing facilities and passenger amenities at 13 airports in the NER.

The NEC's intervention in all these areas, among several others, brought about a transformation in the region and in the lives of the people who inhabited it. This was an era of dynamic growth of the North East and the NEC played a pivotal role in it. A number of major hydel stations were set up which are either already operational or are in various stages of completion. ■



The mesmerising traditional Ghid Dance of Nagaland.



CHAPTER SEVEN 2001-10

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

This decade witnessed several strategic events that shaped North Eastern Council's (NEC) future for many years. The setting up of Department of Development of NE Region (DoNER) in 2001 brought further changes to the NEC's composition. The Department of DoNER was entrusted with the responsibility of planning, executing and monitoring developmental schemes and projects in entire North East Region (NER). It coordinated



Happy kids on their way to school. in Arunachal Pradesh.



(Left to Right) KC Pant, then Dy. Chairman, Planning Commission of India; Yashwant Sinha, then Minister of Finance, and LK Advani, then Minister of Home Affairs, at the NEC plenary in New Delhi on July, 2000.

with specific Ministries and departments responsible for implementation of programmes or facilitation of development initiatives. The Department, however, was entrusted to retain responsibility for the project's implementation.

With the objective that NEC's resources converge with those of Central Ministries, the respective State Governments and private sector for investment in diversified projects and also for introducing innovative approaches and schemes for overall development of the entire region, NEC came under the administrative control of Department of DoNER, which was converted into a full-fledged Ministry (MDoNER) in 2004. It is the only Ministry with a territorial jurisdiction, and functions to coordinate developmental efforts in NER.



The NEC's two Societies, the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Society (NERCRMS) and the North East Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC), were established during this period. Started in 1999, NERCRMS was the Implementing Agency for NERCORMP (North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project), initially funded through IFAD and which had three phases.

During this time, NERCRMS worked directly with beneficiaries and helped the target villagers to themselves arrive at sustainable alternatives for their livelihood and development. Through NERCORMP, a number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Natural Resource Management Groups (NARMGs) were set up to work towards implementation of projects that were identified by local villagers themselves as areas of their need.



(Above and top) Inauguration of NEC Guest House on August 2000 in Delhi by then Governor of Assam and NEC Chairman, Lt. Gen (Retd.) SK Sinha, PVSM, along with then NEC Secretary PL Thanga.

Since 2000, there has been a single-minded focus on bamboo. The scale of its production was further jacked up with setting up of specialised centres as India stood at second spot in global bamboo production. In 2000, another project was started under UNIDO. This project resulted in establishment of



HWT Syiem, IAS, then Secretary NEC, addressing the inaugural function NE Inter-State Badminton Championship held in Shillong on April, 2001.

Cane and Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC) in 2004 and was later renamed the North East Cane and Bamboo Development Council (NECBDC).

With the opening up of economy, the need for bringing about a change in North East Council was being increasingly felt. With this aim in mind, the North East Council Amendment of 2002 brought about changes in the Council's functioning and its membership pattern. The Council was now mandated to function as a regional planning body for North East Region. While formulating regional plans for the Northeastern areas, the Council was expected to give priority to schemes and projects that would benefit two or more States, provided that in the case of Sikkim, the Council formulated specific projects and schemes for that State, including review of implementation of such projects and schemes.

The Secretary, NEC, accorded administrative approval to ₹2,382 lakh and sanctioned for release ₹261 lakh for the implementation of various schemes in different constituent States during November and December 2001. Among the major initiatives undertaken was the construction of a postgraduate boys' hostel on Delhi



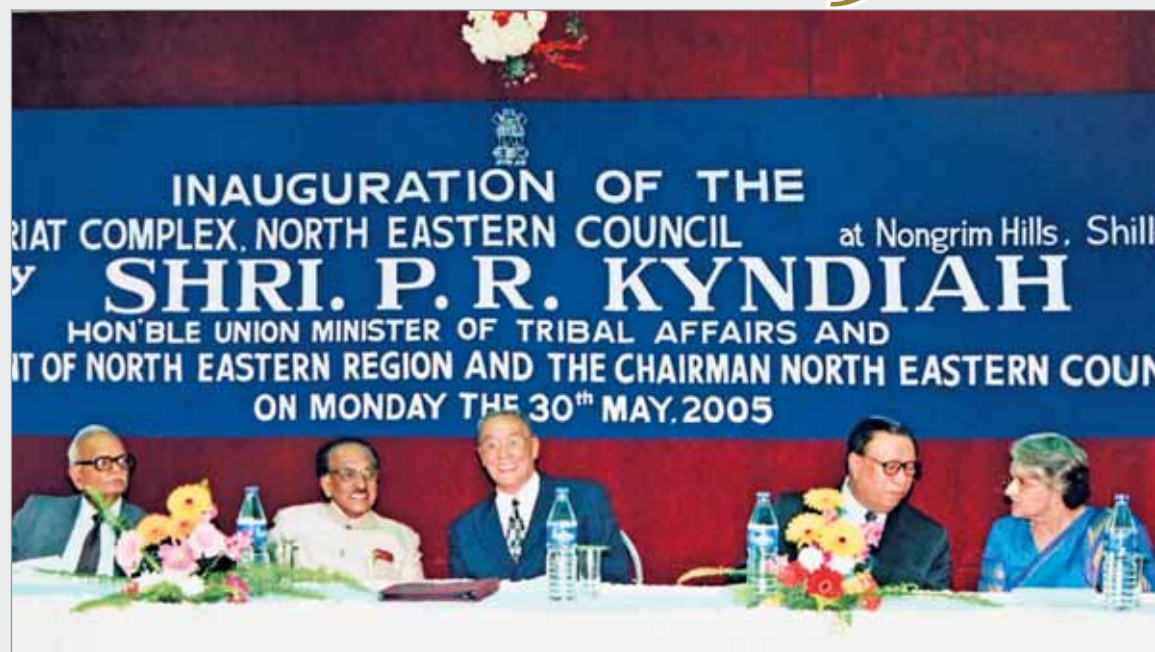
Then Secretary, NEC, PL Thanga, Dr. Harry Haris, president-Global Management Associate, California, USA and Susan Shultz, director-American Center, Eastern India, Kolkata on April 2004.

University's South Campus for the NER students at a cost of ₹26 lakh.

The Council geared up to take up ongoing schemes and to launch new schemes to be taken up in 10th Plan period with a new strategy based on instructions and guidelines issued by MDONER and the Planning Commission. The 8th steering Committee meeting was held in Shillong on January 10, 2002, to deliberate the course of action for 10th Plan.

It had to be in line with North Eastern Council's objective of holistic growth of the region. Among others, 10th Plan approach strategy focused on construction of roads to connect North East Region's member States, improvement of air services in the region by funding Indian Airlines, generation of power to benefit more than one State, adequate publicity to be given to NEC's projects and ensuring proper functioning of existing institutions instead of setting up new ones.

The Steering Committee meeting also identified major areas of priority: Instead of initiating a large number of small projects, a



(Above and below) State of art newly constructed NEC Secretariat in Shillong being inaugurated by then Minister of DoNER & Tribal Affairs and NEC Chairman PR Kyndiah along with senior officials of NEC on 30th May, 2005.

few major projects were to be initiated in such a manner that cost and time overrun were avoided; priority was to be given to the existing infrastructure so that the investment already made was properly utilized. Priority was accorded to operationalise existing airports; improving transmission and distribution of electricity; encouraging isolated mini and micro hydro power plants; tapping local resources; increasing value-addition activities in the region so that the flight of capital was arrested; initiating steps to attract outside investment in various sectors such as industry, tourism, IT; and making the whole process of the NEC projects transparent through wide publicity in the regional and local media.





A tea garden worker plucks leaves on an estate in Assam.

The 46th NEC meeting was held in Shillong on February 8, 2002. In the meeting, the Council decided that in the 10th Plan, special emphasis be given to operationalise the existing airports in the NER. Following the initiative of then Minister of DoNER, Arun Shourie, the Indian Airlines agreed to introduce services of 50-seater aircraft in the region. As per the proposed outlay, the NEC provided ₹175 crore for acquisition of four of these aircraft in the 10th Plan.

The same year, the NEC made a presentation about the status of roads, indicating the existing bottlenecks in the system and the need for reforms. The status and plans of National Highways in the NER were also discussed. The Ministry took certain major initiatives like improvement of riding quality of existing road surface, shift

**IT WAS DECIDED IN
OCTOBER 1996 THAT
THE CENTRAL MINISTRIES
AND DEPARTMENTS,
UNLESS SPECIFICALLY
EXEMPTED, WILL SET
APART 10 PER CENT
OF THEIR PLAN GROSS
BUDGETARY SUPPORT
(GBS) FOR THE NER**

'THE NER IS MY SECOND HOME... I HAVE BECOME ITS ADOPTED SON'

After the reconstitution of the North Eastern Council, then Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, addressed the NEC in 2005. He had been taking keen interest in the development of the North East. In fact, he was a Rajya Sabha member from Assam. Here are excerpts from his address:

I have great pleasure in being present at this first session of the reconstituted North Eastern Council that is now the statutory planning body for the North Eastern Region. I wish it well in its endeavours.

The North Eastern Region is my second home. Over the past two decades, as a representative of the region in the Rajya Sabha, I have become its adopted son. The unbounded love, regard and affection shown to me by its people is indeed overwhelming. I cannot repay it in this lifetime.

Thanks to its natural and locational advantages, the North Eastern Region has great potential. The NEC was established to provide an integrated, holistic, regional perspective to its development. It was meant to focus on issues having a larger regional relevance. The NEC has been reconstituted in a manner that facilitates the discharge of the heavy responsibility placed



on its shoulders. Given the composition of the NEC, there should no longer be occasion for anyone to complain about delays in processing, getting approvals or in the decision-making process.

The first requirement then, is to have a holistic road map covering the various sectors, for all to see. I am happy that the Chairman is getting an action plan prepared for formulating a Vision Document with a 15-year perspective, called the NER 2020. Development and security should go hand in hand. Given the collective wisdom of the region, the NEC is in a good position to synergise developmental goals and efforts

with security needs. The suggestion made in the revitalisation report with the consent of the Home Ministry should be carefully studied.

The North East stands today at the cusp of a new wave of development, peace and prosperity. I want to assure the people of this region that our Government will always be with them, and remain firmly committed to their welfare and progress. I wish the NEC all success in its deliberations.'

— Former Prime Minister **DR MANMOHAN SINGH**

Address to the NEC in 2005

towards mechanisation, procurement of equipment's like hot mix plants, censer paver, tipping trucks, excavators-cum-loader etc. Works costing ₹5 crore and more were encouraged, together with pre-qualification of contractors.

As per the NEC's plans and programmes, the North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) was set up in September 2000 in collaboration with the Department of Space (DoS) and

the NEC as an autonomous society under the Department of Space.

The second Governing Council Meeting of NESAC was held on February 2002, in Shillong to evolve developmental programmes and projects to be undertaken. The Centre provided developmental support to the NER by undertaking specific projects utilising space technology inputs both from remote sensing and satellite communications.



Then DoNER Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar flanked by then Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar and Governor DN Sahaya in Agartala on May 2008.

NER VISION 2020

This decade also saw the birth of the NER Vision 2020 Document, which was prepared after extensive public consultations held in all the eight States of NER and discussions in the 55th NEC Plenary held in December 2007. The Vision document was adopted in the following plenary session, which was held in Agartala on May 13, 2008.

The Vision 2020 document was an aspirational statement of the felt requirements and needs of the people of the North Eastern Region of India and was naturally dynamic. It included sectoral strategies for areas such as inclusive growth, poverty eradication, rural sector, infrastructure, human resource development, banking, industries and tourism. It also identified a six-pronged strategy to bring about inclusive development, help alleviate poverty and ensure reasonable standards of living for every family.

The six components of the strategy were: Empowering people to maximise self-governance and participatory development through grassroots planning; Expanding opportunities for a majority of the people living in villages through rural development initiatives; Developing sectors with comparative advantage so as to utilise the resources of the region productively for the benefit and welfare of the people; Human development including health and creating and building capacity of governance and development institutions both in the private and public sectors; Creating an investment climate by providing state-of-the-art infrastructure, especially connectivity both within the region and with the rest of the world; and, Generating adequate resources for public investment in infrastructure besides implementing a framework for private participation in augmenting infrastructure.



A rural household adorned with 'mithun' skulls.

Since the adoption of the Vision 2020 Document, the NEC has referred to the document while planning various developmental strategies for the NER. Sector-wise progress against Vision 2020's broad parameters is indicated below:

MAXIMISING SELF-GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

The NEC's flagship project, the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP), was established to improve the livelihood of vulnerable groups in a sustainable manner. The project adopted a bottoms-up approach in the design of development interventions and implementation is in the hands of the local communities. It promoted new technologies and institutions at the village level and encourages development of

more sustainable farming systems and establishment of non-farm enterprises.

NERCORMP operated in four States covering 10 districts, viz; Assam (KarbiAnglong and DimaHasao), Manipur (Ukhrul, Senapati, Chaurachandpur and Chandel), Meghalaya (West Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills) and Arunachal Pradesh (undivided Tirap, including Longding, and Changlang). The project covered a total of 2,640 villages in these four States, benefitting 1,18,843 households. The project also supported formation of 8326 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and 2,960 Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRMGs). Through support from NERCORMP, these Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are working together with all the community members to bring about a sustainable livelihood



Local women on walk a long in Manipur.



Tribesman in a Nyishi, Arunachal Pradesh.

**THE FORUM HAS ALREADY BEEN
CONSTITUTED AND IS CALLED
THE NORTH EASTERN STATES
TOURISM FORUM (NEST) WITH
REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL THE
NEC MEMBER STATES, THE MINISTRY
OF DONER AND THE UNION
MINISTRY OF TOURISM**



Former NEC members IK Barthakur and PP Shrivastav with then NEC secretary Falguni Rajkumar at public hearing on Vision NER 2020 on 2nd November, 2007 in Shillong.

for the village and society as a whole. The latest phase of the project was scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2021.

ACCELERATING AGRICULTURAL GROWTH FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

After Transport & Communications, Agriculture & Allied Activities is the largest sector in the NEC and it accounted for more than ₹450 crore in expenditure over the last Five-Year Plan period. Some of the areas identified in the Vision 2020 Document where the NEC planned and funded projects include the promotion of horticulture and floriculture as well as medicinal and aromatic plants and herbs, including organic farming to capture highly remunerative niche markets abroad; interventions in Animal Husbandry and Fisheries to increase farm-based production and meet the supply gap in the region; replacement of traditional cropping patterns, especially

jhum cultivation, by short-duration, high-yielding crops; promotion of bamboo and rubber plantations for better incomes; provision of better crop technology and micro-credit in the hill States through NERCORMP.

DEVELOPING SECTORS WITH COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

The Vision 2020 Document identified areas in the Manufacturing & Services Sector, including Banking Tourism and IT, for possible interventions by various agencies of the Government.

The NEC achieved significant progress in some of these areas:

- During financial year 2011-12, the NEC supported a project on 'Enhancement of Capacity of the Tea Processing Factory' at Tebaria, West Tripura, at an estimated cost of ₹498.39



Most of the NER is known for its morning mist at Arunachal Pradesh.



PS Thangjiew (IAS), then Planning Adviser year 2006-2009.

lakh and 'Expansion of Temi Tea Estate in Gangtok, Sikkim' during 2015-16.

- Establishment of industrial estates and common facility centres to address infrastructure bottlenecks have been supported by the NEC in various States and are progressing satisfactorily.

- To promote cluster-approach development of industry based

on locally available raw materials, the NEC has been actively supporting the schemes of the NE Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation, besides the NE Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation.

- The NEC has identified the much-needed skills in the hospitality and tourism industry sectors and funded capacity building of the local youth in these areas through reputed institutes like the World Class Skills Training Centre in New Delhi and the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati.

HEALTH & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Vision 2020 Document identified areas such as educational infrastructure, particularly in technical areas like engineering, information technology and bio-technology, hostels, skills training and coaching interventions. It also visualised the promotion of social interaction of the NER's people with the rest of the country.

More than one-tenth of the NEC's resources are targeted towards building up of human resources in the region. Educational and



sports infrastructure, including hostels, forms a major component of expenditure in this area.

Some of the NEC's achievements in this area include:

- The B Barooah Cancer Institute, started with the support of the NEC, was recently handed over to the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Tata Memorial Centre for more focused and specialised interventions.
- Various infrastructure projects and equipment's for healthcare services in Government health centres, medical colleges, and district/civil hospitals.
- A number of projects have been funded for the construction of tribal hostels, teachers' quarters, college buildings, science labs and school auditoriums, which are progressing satisfactorily.
- Scholarships for students studying in technical courses are

sponsored by the NEC. These scholarships are disbursed among the States of the NER.

- A number of employment-oriented training programmes on various courses are being sponsored by the NEC for computer software and hardware, BPO, MPPPR, banana fibre extraction, beauty and hair care, rural development, CAD/CAM/CNC technology & machine operation, ayurvedic therapy, hearing disability, adventure sports, sports coaches, gems and jewellery making, coaching for competitive exams such as the UPSC, SSC and Bank POs, retail management, CAT/MAT etc.
- A number of national and regional sports tournaments held in North Eastern States have been sponsored by NEC and will continue to be supported in future for encouraging sports talent in the region.



The Siju Cave in Garo Hills, Meghalaya, a tourist attraction.

- Sports infrastructure such as indoor stadiums, galleries, sports hostels, open play fields in all the eight States of the region have been funded by the NEC.
- Under the “NEC Chairman’s Sports Award for Excellence in International & National Sports Meets by Sportsmen/ Sportswomen of the NE”, cash awards are given to medal winners at the Olympics Games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games and National Games.
- To encourage and increase inter-cultural adventure activities, the NEC also supported a programme titled ‘Youth to the Edge’, where youth from across India camped and toured the North Eastern Region of India.
- A North East cultural centre, named the Centre for North East Culture (CNEC), has been set up at the CCRT campus, Dwarka, since January 24, 2012.
- As recommended by the MP Bezbaruah Committee, a North East Convention Centre with facilities for a museum, library, exhibitions, seminars, ethnic food courts, cultural performances and limited guest accommodation was sanctioned to be

constructed in November 2020 at Sector 13, Dwarka, New Delhi, at an estimated cost of ₹116.38 crore.

CREATION OF INVESTMENT CLIMATE

The Vision 2020 Document placed major stress on strengthening infrastructure and connectivity in the NE Region. It visualised better air and water connectivity with the rest of the nation and the neighbouring countries.

More than 45 percent of the NEC’s annual expenditure is dedicated towards providing infrastructure such as roads, bridges and airports. The Council has funded various projects across all sectors of the economy of the North Eastern States. The construction of 10,500 km of roads, installation of 694 MW of power generation capacity and 9,000 km of transmission and distribution lines have been carried out with NEC’s funding. There are 13 operational and seven non-operational airports in the region. Two airports are ready for operations and one new Greenfield Airport is also under construction.



A bird's-eye view of Dawki River, Meghalaya.

GENERATING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT

The Vision 2020 Document stipulated that the investment climate in North East Region should be improved to attract public and private investment and to encourage States to generate resources from their own tax and non-tax resources.

For its part, the Ministry of DoNER monitors the spending of various Ministries of the 10 per cent of their budget in the NE Region and recommends re-allocation of funds between Ministries.

The NEC, in its role as a think tank, partners with various trade bodies in organising workshops, symposia and seminars to highlight the strengths of the NE and attract investments from various Government agencies and private bodies. ■



A girl at Asia's largest women-run market in Manipur.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi listens intently to a woman explaining the weaving process of traditional garments in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

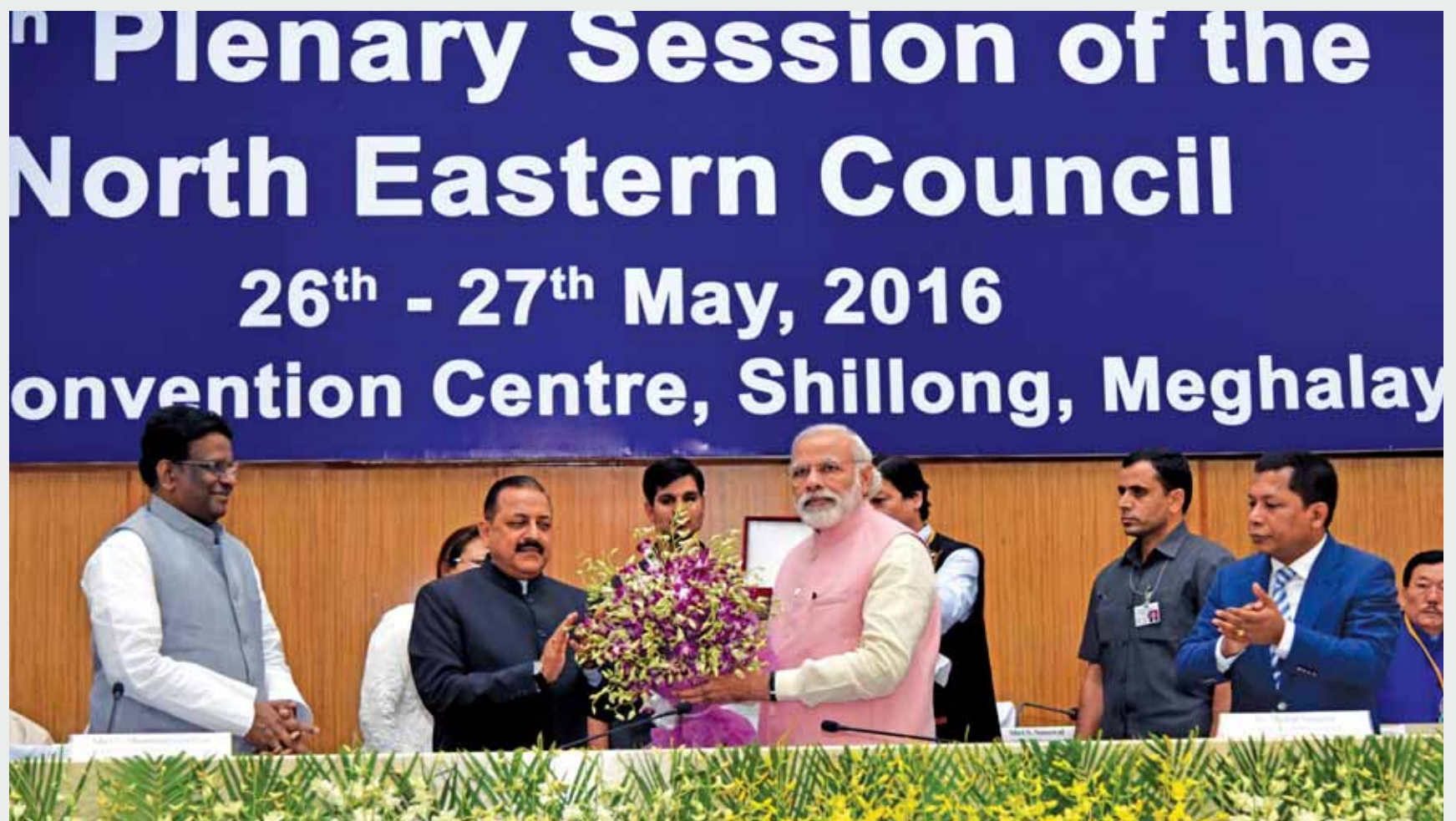


CHAPTER EIGHT 2011-22

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

The Prime Minister had outlined that ‘re-orienting and upgrading’ NEC would help it develop as a state-of-the-art resource centre with requisite knowledge and skills. In 2021, the NEC Chairman urged planners to design projects that would help protect and preserve North East Region's environment and culture. The Council has initiated action on both the fronts.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with then Minister of DoNER, Jitendra Singh and then Meghalaya Chief Minister, Dr. Mukul Sangma at the 65th plenary of the NEC in Shillong on May 2016.

“ 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 ”

In May 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the 65th North Eastern Council (NEC) Plenary in Shillong and released a special cover and stamp brought out by Department of Posts to mark the occasion. Hailing NEC's contribution in developing North Eastern Region (NER), the Prime Minister said that North Eastern Council has been instrumental in establishing a number of institutions and taking up infrastructure projects in the region.

To meet the growing aspirations of people, the Prime Minister asked North Eastern Council to introspect and assess the extent to which it has been able to achieve its objectives. He said that there perhaps was a need to “re-orient and upgrade” the Council. He suggested that there was a need to consider developing NEC as a



Performers engrossed in Tapu dance at Arunachal Pradesh.

state-of-the-art resource centre for NER with necessary resources, knowledge and skills. The resource centre may enable the States as well as implementing agencies concerned to properly plan and execute projects, promote research and innovations and to provide strategic policy vision for the region.

Subsequent to the announcement during the 65th Plenary, the NEC initiated action to implement the Prime Minister's advice by entering into strategic partnerships with premier institutes working for development of the region. The Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Centre for Policy Research and Analysis was set up through a tripartite agreement in October 2016 among the Ministry of DoNER, North Eastern Council and Indian Institute of Management, Shillong.



A special cover and a stamp brought out by the Department of Posts inaugurated by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 2016.

The Centre is working towards providing strategic policy support for development of a number of critical sectors for North East Region such as tourism, business process outsourcing (BPO),

'Need to upgrade and re-orient the Council with changing times'



Stressing the need to re-orient and upgrade the North Eastern Council (NEC) and consider developing it as a state-of-the-art resource centre for the North Eastern States with necessary resources, knowledge and skills, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** has given a clarion call for setting up a new template for the Council's future. It should focus on enabling the States and the implementing agencies to properly plan and execute projects, promote research and innovations and provide strategic policy vision for the region. Other major takeaways:

The NEC may develop 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 needs. This will enable the imbibing of good governance and best practices in the region. The NEC 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.

logistic development and 3-H Mission (Handicrafts, Handloom & Horticulture) within the region. A three-year Regional Plan for 2017-18 to 2019-20 was prepared and Sector-wise Strategic Plans were also commissioned and finalised through North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi). Improvement of research infrastructure and activities was also carried out to help all NE States in their development planning.

The NEC made optimal use of geo-spatial technology to improve planning data and enhance monitoring of the ongoing infrastructure projects. In partnership with the North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC), the NE District Resource Plan (NEDRP) was finalised in August 2018 while the North Eastern Spatial Data Repository, a project based on establishment of NER Remote Sensing and GIS Resource Network, was formally released in November

2020. The Cabinet's approval was also obtained for revision of the NEC Guidelines in order to reflect the new directions given by the Prime Minister.

To streamline the functioning of the NEC aligning with the road map given by the Prime Minister in his address to the 65th Plenary, the NEC Guidelines were revised during the 67th Plenary held in Shillong on July 9-10, 2018. Accordingly, the Vision, Goals and Objectives were revised to give emphasis to emerging areas of livelihood entrepreneurship, venture funds, startups and skill development. Focus areas such as the bamboo sector, piggyery, regional tourism, livelihood including value chain from production till processing and packaging in areas like floriculture, aromatic and medicinal plants, horticulture, poultry, fishery, handloom, handicraft and beekeeping were also identified.

The Government has been focusing on the development of the NER through its pro-active 'Act East Policy'. As part of this policy, it is focusing on reducing the isolation of the region by improving all round connectivity. Moreover, the Government has decided to continue to provide assistance in the ratio of 90:10 for core Central schemes and 80:20 for non-core schemes to the NE States. Since the North East is the gateway to South East Asia, there is a need to take advantage of this. The Government is planning to open up both road and rail routes to neighbouring countries in the region. This should give a boost to the economic development of the region. This would help in promoting international trade connectivity to the South East Asia region.

The Government has recently implemented an improved internet connectivity project for the North East Region in collaboration with Bangladesh. This will make available 10 GB of seamless alternate bandwidth for the region. The Government is also making heavy investment in power transmission projects covering all the eight NE States.

All the States of the NER are blessed with natural scenic beauty, distinct historical, cultural and ethnic heritage. This offers tremendous scope for tourism

in the region. There is also a great scope for mountaineering, trekking and adventure tourism in the region. If developed and promoted well, this can emerge as the biggest employer in the region.

The majority of youth of the NER region is English speaking. With improved connectivity and language skills, NEC may look into setting up of the BPO industry in the region. The NE is home to exotic fruits, flowers, vegetables, aromatic plants and herbs. Most of them are organic in origin. If one focuses on some development strategy on organic farming, it will help the region greatly.

There is a large rural population in the NE region. In Assam alone, 86 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. The Government has initiated the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Mission to bring in economic, social and basic development of the rural areas in a cluster model. It should be the endeavour of the region's States to make use of this mission for the development of the rural areas.

— Prime Minister NARENDRA MODI

Address to the NEC in 2016

Earlier, at the 60th plenary of the North Eastern Council, which was held in New Delhi on June 16-17, 2011, and attended by the Chief Ministers, Governors and Chief Secretaries of all the North Eastern States, various topics for the region's overall development, including power, education, science and technology, railways, air connectivity, innovation for the NER, transport and communications in the member States, agriculture and sports, among other sectors, were taken up for discussion. In a major boost for sports in the NER, awards were also presented to the winners of the 'North Eastern Council Chairman's Sports Award for Excellence'. The meeting was chaired by Union Minister of DoNER and Chairman, NEC, BK Handique. The meeting largely dwelt upon the various developmental activities already undertaken and the course of action to be embarked upon.



Paljor Stadium at Gangtok, Sikkim.



Then DoNER Minister and NEC Chairman Paban Singh Ghatowar, along with senior officials at the 61st plenary of the NEC in New Delhi on June 2012.



ISBT Guwahati, Assam.

At the 61st NEC meeting held on June 27, 2012, at the Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi, a brief presentation was made by the Director (HRD) on the 'Chairman's Award for Excellence in Sports'.

The written speech of then NEC Chairman Paban Singh Ghatowar was read out at the meeting. Placing his report before the Council, then Secretary, NEC, UK Sangma, made a brief presentation on the important achievements of the sectors since the 60th Plenary of the NEC. The NEC Secretary also flagged the issue of outstanding balances, the status of utilisation certificates and the performance of the member States, besides informing the assembly that the capacity of the States to utilise funds had shown marked improvement over the last three years.

The then Secretary also talked about the spacing of NEC's expenditure on quarterly basis and pointed out that, contrary to regular complaints of loading too much expenditure during the last one or two months, the expenditure spacing during the previous Financial Year was very even.

Pointing out that there used to be a regular complaint about the lack of monitoring of the NEC-funded projects, he said that during 2011-12, 82 such projects could be inspected and evaluated and it was for the first time in the NEC's history that the task could be accomplished. He also talked about the newly created in-house mechanism of consultancy in this regard.



Irang Bridge, Bishnupur, Manipur.

Meanwhile, addressing the inaugural session of the 64th Plenary of the NEC in New Delhi on April 9, 2015, then Union Minister of State (Independent) for MDoNER, Dr Jitendra Singh, announced a new daily direct flight from Delhi to Dimapur (Nagaland) via Kolkata and back along the same route from April 15, in addition to another daily flight from Kolkata to Silchar and back.

Admitting that air connectivity had always been an issue for the NER, Dr Singh said three hangars had been constructed and made functional by the Airports Authority of India at the Guwahati Airport with the NEC's support and hoped that the airport would soon become a regional hub for flights. The plenary meeting was attended by the Governors and Chief Ministers of the NE States, senior officers from



A beekeeper checks his honey yield on his apiary in a Nagaland village.



Then DoNER Minister Dr Jitendera Singh with then NEC Secretary Ram Muivah in New Delhi on October 2015.

the member States, Union Ministries and other Central Government Organisations.

The Minister said that the Prime Minister attached a great deal of importance to the development of the NER and accordingly had advised all his colleagues to visit the region and personally monitor the implementation of their Ministry's schemes and programmes there for understanding the issues concerning these States. As per the new arrangement, at least eight Union Ministers would visit the NER every fortnight, he added.

He also mentioned the Government's decision to set up All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Assam, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) in Nagaland and

Centre for Film Production, Animation and Gaming in Arunachal Pradesh.

Then Secretary, NEC, Ameising Luikham presented his report on the Council's activities in the preceding year, major initiatives, projects and schemes taken up and some areas of concern requiring the Members' attention. The implementation of Annual Plan 2014-15 and the sectoral allocation for the Annual Plan 2015-16 were also highlighted.

The Union Cabinet in January 2020 approved the earmarking of 30 per cent of NEC's allocation for new projects under the existing 'Schemes of the North Eastern Council' for focused development of deprived areas; deprived/neglected sections of society and emerging



A village woman cultivates turmeric plants in Lokadong, Meghalaya.

priority sectors in the North Eastern States. It would enable a more focused intervention by the NEC, especially in the emerging priority sectors as advised by the Prime Minister.

The preparation of Strategic Plans for five critical sectors in the region was commissioned through the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi). These include Regional Plan and strategy for promotion of sports to enhance career/livelihood in the NER; Regional master plan and strategy for development of sericulture in increasing Eri, Muga, Tussar and Mulberry silk production



Then DoNER Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh; MoS Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju; NEC Secretary Ameising Luikham and other dignitaries at the 64th plenary of NEC on April 2015 in New Delhi.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates the girls' hostel for Northeast students at Jnanabharathi campus, Bangalore University on March 2019.



A woman farmer in a field in Sikkim.

and marketing in the NER; Regional plan and status of science education in schools in the NER; Regional plan and strategy for upgradation of secondary and tertiary health care facilities in the region by 2030; and, Regional plan and strategy for increasing the student intake capacities for medical and para-medical courses in the NER. The Plans, which have been prepared through extensive consultations with all stakeholders and experts, have been completed and are being shared with all the North East states.

To assist the NE States and Central Ministries in planning development projects for the North Eastern Region, the NEC engaged the North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) for preparation of the North Eastern District Resources Plan (NEDRP) through effective use of geospatial technology. The project was executed in collaboration with the State Remote Sensing Applications Centre (SRSACs) of the NE Region. NEDRP was initiated with 36 select districts in the NE Region and later extended to the remaining districts (65 districts).



(Above and below) A worker tends to raw turmeric inside a solar treatment plant at Lakadong, Meghalaya.

Each of the districts comprised around 30-35 geospatial layers categorised into six major modules: Administrative or base data; Infrastructure; Land and water resources; Planning inputs; Terrain module; and Disaster management. In addition, the NEDRP dashboard is populated with governance applications on election, census, project monitoring, geo-tourism and village resources information, among other items.

The NEDRP currently serves as a decision-making platform for the governance applications in many Government departments and agencies for their planning and monitoring activities. The Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India, launched the updated version of the NEDRP Geo Portal on August 11, 2018, in Guwahati in the presence of the Chief Ministers and IT Ministers of all the North Eastern States.



NEC Secretary, K Moses Chalaj; Financial Adviser, Gaigongdin Panmei and Adviser (T&C) Navin Kumar inspecting the ongoing progress of the Bowstring bridge over Limatek River, Bishnupur-Nungba Road, Manipur.



Then NEC Chairman Rajnath Singh with then DoNER Minister Dr Jitendra Singh and other NEC officials at the 67th plenary in Shillong on July, 2018.



In addition to certain district administrations in the States of Assam, Tripura, Sikkim and Meghalaya, the NEDRP's data services have been effectively utilised by various line departments, such as for preparing forest resources management plans for Meghalaya, DPRs for Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) of the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), inputs for roads of Tripura Rural Road Development Agency, inputs for election management of the Election Department of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Manipur and Tripura, inputs for development of MoSQuIT, an integrated Surveillance System for Malaria by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Various investigation agencies, including Special Investigation Branch (SIB), line departments like agriculture, horticulture, water resources and PWD, among others, in the State of Meghalaya, research institutes like the



Union Home Minister and NEC Chairman Amit Shah presides over the 68th plenary of NEC with then Minister of DoNER Jitendra Singh and Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi in Guwahati on September 2019.

Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati. They have been utilising the NEDRP portal for their planning activities.

In October 2019, the NEC in collaboration with NESAC developed on a pilot basis a Project Monitoring Portal, with an approved cost of ₹0.96 crore, to monitor the NEC's projects, especially infrastructure projects, directly through satellite imagery. The project portal also has provisions for incorporating photographs by Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) of projects in remote and inaccessible areas. The portal was launched by the President of India in May 2022.



(Above and left) Then Minister of DoNER, Dr. Jitendra Singh along with then Secretary DoNER, Dr. Inderjit Singh; then Member NEC, Prof. BK Dutta and Secretary, NEC, K. Moses Chalai lighting the lamp to inaugurate the 'Destination North East' festival in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh on November, 2019.





Old Age Home at Boomtar, Sikkim.

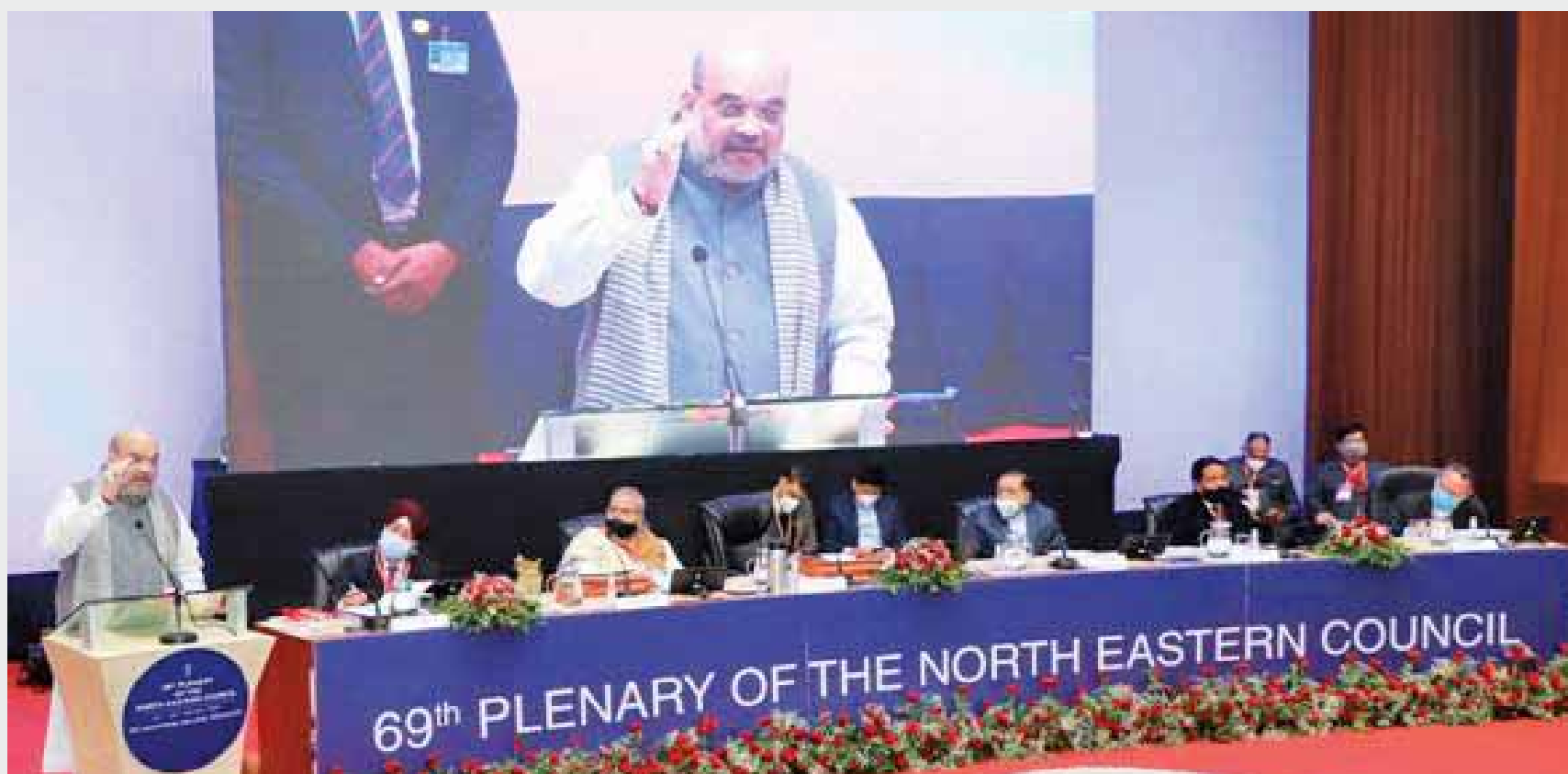
The North Eastern Spatial Data Repository (NeSDR) is one of the major programmes of North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC), taken up as per the directive of the North Eastern Council/Ministry of DoNER with the objective of establishing a geospatial network among the State Remote Sensing Applications Centres (SRSACs) of the NE Region through augmentation of existing IT infrastructure as well as creating the catalogue of existing geospatial data generated at different scales, different time frame available with SRSACs or user and the line departments.

NESAC as the central node also hosts regional database, including State data, whereas respective State nodes are responsible for State data generated by SRSACs or other line departments. The communications link between the central node and the respective State nodes is through Virtual Private Network (VPN) to enable data cataloguing,

sharing and retrieving in a decentralised mode from respective State nodes. The NeSDR facilitates users to visualise, retrieve, geo-process and publish geospatial layers of interest through online registration via a secure authentication gateway. NeSDR was commissioned in November 2020.

In order to promote research and innovations and to provide strategic policy vision to the NE States, the NEC has created support infrastructure in some critical areas:

In July 2017, the NEC sanctioned the setting up of the Centre for Brahmaputra Studies on the Gauhati University Campus, Jalukbari, at a cost of ₹28 crore to facilitate research in different aspects of the Brahmaputra River in physics, hydrology, waterways, environment, disaster/flood management and hydropower production. The construction work is currently underway.



Union Home Minister and NEC Chairman Amit Shah addresses the 69th plenary with then Minister of DoNER Jitendra Singh; Governor of Meghalaya Satya Pal Malik; Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma; Union Home Secretary, Ajay Bhalla and Secretary NEC, K. Moses Chalai in Shillong on January 2021.

In August 2018, the NEC released an initial ₹27 crore for the establishment of a Common Facility Centre (CFC) at the CSIR-NEIST, Jorhat, on the hub-and-spoke model under the scheme 'Science and Technology Intervention in the North Eastern Region' (STINER). The construction of the CSIR-NEIST STINER Hub Technology Sheds is ongoing. The Spoke Infrastructure at School of Agricultural Science & Rural Development (SASRD), Medziphema, Nagaland University, was inaugurated in February 2019. Capacity building programmes and research on banana fibre extraction, lemon grass oil distillation and drying of spices such as ginger, cardamom and King Chilly have started at SASRD.

The North Eastern Regional Entrepreneurship & Startup (NERES1.0), an Entrepreneurship & Startup Summit, was sanctioned by the NEC in October 2019 to give a fillip to startups

and offer a platform to aspiring entrepreneurs across the NER. The programme was organised and promoted by the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) in collaboration with the Federation of Industries and Commerce of North Eastern Region (FICNER). NERES 1.0 is aimed at stirring up entrepreneurial minds across the NER States and promoting startup entrepreneurs by offering them a platform to pitch their business ideas and address various challenges faced by startups.

The programme also aimed at bringing together various stakeholders associated with the startup ecosystem under one umbrella and for providing linkages to various startup entrepreneurs as well as exposing them to the current information through interaction with experts in various sectors. Scouting across the NE States, involving screening of over 1,500 candidates and 50 potential entrepreneurs, was supported.



(Above and below) Union Home Minister and NEC Chairman, Amit Shah inaugurating the Shillong ISBT on January 2021.

UNION HOME MINISTER BECOMES NEC CHAIRMAN

In July 2018, a significant order was issued by the Government of India by which the Union Home Minister became the Chairman of the NEC. The 67th Plenary of the North Eastern Council was conducted at the State Convention Centre, Pinewood Hotel, Shillong, on July 9-10, 2018. Union Home Minister and Chairman of the Council, Rajnath Singh, steered the deliberations on both days. The Vice-Chairman of the Council, Dr Jitendra Singh, the Governors and Chief Ministers of the NE States also spoke on the occasion and highlighted important areas where the NEC can focus its intervention in the future.

During the two-day session, the performance of the NEC during 2017-18 was reviewed and the Annual Plan for 2018-19 was also discussed. Apart from this, presentations on issues critical to the development of the NER such as doubling farmers' income by 2022,



'THE NEC HAS PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SPURRING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NE'



Emphasising the need for all the States in the NE Region to resolve their mutual boundary disputes, **Union Home Minister and Chairman NEC, Shri Amit Shah**, wondered that when India and Bangladesh could resolve their border issues, why can't the NE States do so despite being part of the same country? In his address to the 69th plenary of the NEC in Shillong, he urged all the States concerned to hold discussions, especially with Assam as most States have issues with it. Inter alia, he stated:

He suggested that alternative routes to the NER besides the Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's neck) should be made operational to attract private investment into the region. With this aim in mind, the Land Boundary Agreement signed between India and Bangladesh should be studied to list the connectivity routes identified and take the matter up with MEA. Connectivity of Kolkata and Chittagong ports to the NER via Bangladesh should be pursued/ expedited, he said.

Be it natural beauty or its rich cultural heritage, the NE has immense potential to become a big tourism hub of the country. The Modi Government is leaving



Kids at the multipurpose indoor hall in Siphir, Mizoram

Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, catchment area treatment through afforestation, Bamboo Mission, science and technology interventions, Poshan Abhiyan and Ayushman Bharat were made by the respective Ministries of the Government of India.

Connectivity, agriculture, health and livelihood were also discussed in great detail and the NE States were encouraged to take advantage of the many Central Government schemes available in these sectors to trigger the transformation, especially in the most backward aspirational districts of the region.

While delivering his valedictory address at the concluding session, the Chairman mentioned that

no stone unturned in promoting the NE on world map and bringing progress and prosperity to the region. Therefore, three-, five- and seven-day NE tourism circuit packages should be tailor-made with proper information brochures on important places/landmarks, etc.

NESAC has considerable repository of data on various aspects/sectors which can be used for planning and implementation purposes like degraded unutilised lands, management of forests, restoration of water resources like lakes, check dams and ponds at appropriate locations as means for flood control, irrigation and development of tourism. Saying that the space technology available with NESAC can be effectively used given the unique physiography, terrain and diversity of the NER, the NEC chairman exhorted the States to come up with a developmental Plan of Action (PoA) using space technology.

He underlined that Hindi is presently spoken widely in the NER, though States like Mizoram and Nagaland could do better. Pointing

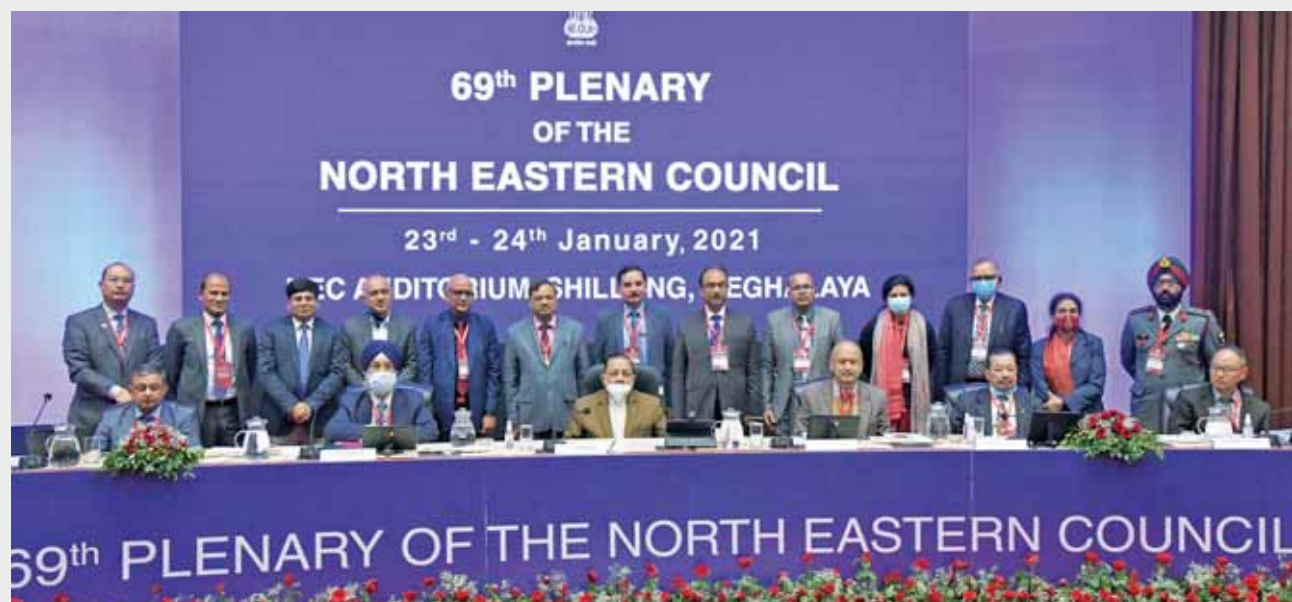
out that Hindi may be promoted for enabling better employment opportunities for the local youth outside their home State, Shah said the NEC should prepare a roadmap for the next three years for the member States to teach Hindi to engineering, medical and MBA students to equip them for better employment opportunities outside the region. Appropriate arrangements for coaching professionals in Hindi should be made, he said.

He pointed out that the Central Government had been focusing towards making the NER the new engine of growth and overall development for the entire country. The region, which was neglected for decades, has witnessed unprecedented peace and development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Union Home Minister said. From increasing livelihoods to bringing several development projects, the NEC has played a crucial role in fuelling the economic growth of the region.

**— Union Home Minister and Chairman, NEC
AMIT SHAH**

Address to the NEC in 2021

the NEC must emerge as the most credible organisation in the North East. He indicated that the Council should focus on income generation and employment creation interventions in the areas of agriculture, industry and services. Agriculture projects must target low-volume, high-value crops with export potential, the Chairman stressed. According to the Home Minister Rajnath Singh, the NE Region should also aim to export perishables to other parts of the country and the NEC should seek the assistance of the Railways for transportation of these commodities through AC wagons.



Then Minister of DoNER Dr Jitendra Singh along with NEC Member Air Marshal (Retd), AK Gogoi; then Secretary DoNER, Dr. Inderjit Singh and Secretary NEC, K Moses Chalai at the 69th plenary in Shillong on January 2021.



Switchyard at Rongli Hep, Sikkim.



District Veterinary Polyclinic Namchi, Sikkim.

The Chairman further encouraged the NE States to take advantage of the improved law and order environment and enhance the industrial climate in the region. He advised the NEC to set up Skill Development Institutes across the region to equip youth for more employment opportunities. He also expressed the hope that the NEC would come up with a time-bound roadmap for realising the Government's 'Act East Policy', thereby connecting the NE States with the neighbouring countries of the Asia Pacific Region.

The inaugural session of the NEC's 69th Plenary meeting was held in Shillong on January 23, 2021, under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister and Chairman, NEC, Amit Shah. While inaugurating the plenary, the NEC Chairman paid homage to



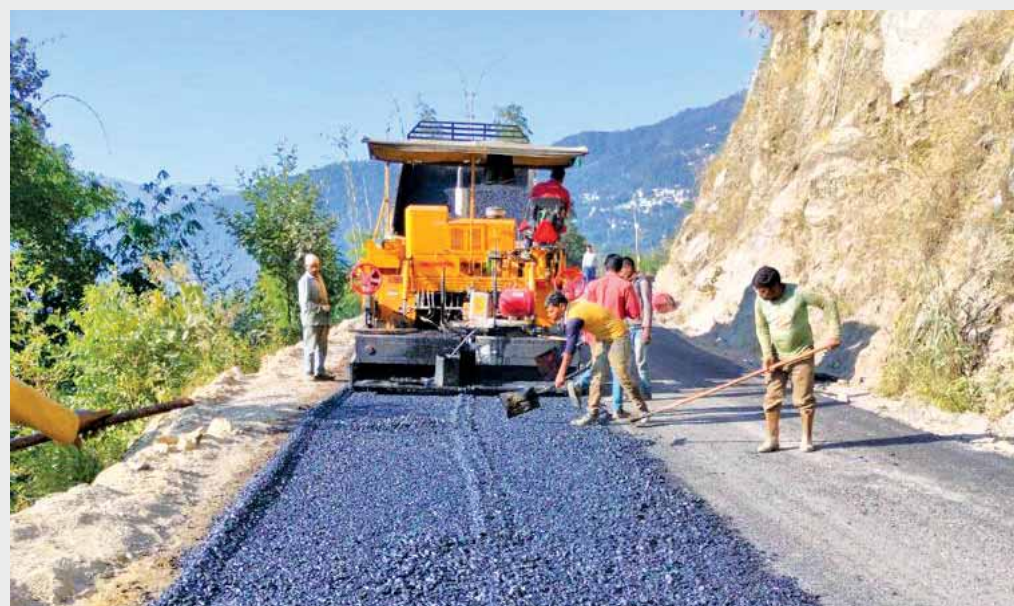
Teju Airport, Arunachal Pradesh.



Multipurpose stadium at G. Rio, Kohima, Nagaland.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary and urged the States to make efforts to spread the knowledge of his invaluable contributions to the freedom struggle.

He also expressed appreciation for the various development initiatives carried out by the NEC over the last 49 years of its existence, especially its contribution towards infrastructure creation, including building over 11,000 km of roads, installing 700 MW of power plants and building iconic institutions all across the region. Appreciating the balance between the rich natural resources available in the region and the need for it to develop further, the NEC Chairman urged planners to design development projects that do not destroy but rather help protect and preserve the environment and culture of the NER.



Road construction work at Soreng, Sikkim.

The Home Minister also observed that over the last six years, peace had returned to the NE Region as a result of out-of-the box solutions such as the Bru-Reang settlement, the Bodo Accord and even the sorting out of international boundary issues with Bangladesh. He expressed confidence that similarly, the answers to development bottlenecks in the region can also be found. In this regard, he urged the States to come together and find lasting solutions to outstanding issues and end inter-State disputes by the year 2022.

He also emphasised that the NE States must work to improve their 'Ease of Doing Business' indicators in order to attract private investments, which is the real way forward for economic prosperity to happen in the region. He assured the States that the Central Government will continue to provide all the infrastructure and administrative support needed to meet this challenge. He mentioned that the NE States have to play a very significant role in India's journey to attain the target of 5 trillion dollar economy.

The Chairman also lauded the NE States for being role models in handling and tackling the Corona crisis and urged them to carry forward the ongoing vaccination drive with the same enthusiasm. He then referred to the rich linguistic variety of the region and urged the NEC to work towards preserving the various languages and dialects. He also asked the NE States to take the lead role in the fight against the menace of drugs.

During the full-day session, the Governors and the Chief Ministers highlighted the achievements of the NEC and gave insights for shaping the development agenda of the region. They emphasised that the NEC, being a regional planning body and a resource centre, should play a major role in guiding the member States towards achieving the goal of development on a par with the rest of the country.

The creation of shared infrastructure, setting up of shared institutions and finding and pursuing common interests for



**IT WAS CONSIDERED
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COLLABORATE WITH
INSTITUTIONS OF
EXCELLENCE TO DEVELOP
THE NEC AS A STATE-OF-
THE-ART RESOURCE CENTRE
TO HELP THE STATES
CONCERNED GET INVOLVED
IN EXPORT PROMOTION,
PROMOTING INNOVATIONS
AND FUNCTIONING AS
A REPOSITORY OF BEST
PRACTICES IN THE REGION**

all the eight States should continue to be the vision and objective of the Council, they felt. The Members urged the Government to introduce the concept of 'Sister States' in order to learn from experiences of more developed States within the nation. They also stressed on the need to strengthen the NEC with enhanced resources.

In their presentations, State Chief Secretaries highlighted the progress made in various Council projects. There were deliberations on the progress of the NEC's ongoing projects, outlays by Central Ministries in the NER and plans for the period of the 15th Finance Commission cycle. They also gave valuable suggestions for increasing the scope of the Council's interventions in the NE Region and improving the fund flow to the member States.

This plenary also brought into sharp focus the need for preservation of the NE Region's endangered languages, regaining degraded forest areas, promotion of functional Hindi and increasing the usage of space technology for development planning across the region. ■

A panoramic night view of Aizawl city, Mizoram | Photo: Johny Ngurthansanga.



The Panoramic Loktak Lake in Bishnupur, Manipur.



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

Any organisation worth its salt and growing exponentially is ultimately more than the sum total of the various components that constitute its worth. The same formula applies to the North Eastern Council (NEC), which is basically the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the North Eastern Region (NER). The birth of the Council in 1972 marked the beginning of a new chapter of a concerted and planned endeavour for the rapid development of the region, comprising eight States. Over the last 50 years, the NEC has been instrumental in setting into motion a number of new socio-economic endeavours aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development of this North Eastern part of our great nation, with the result that it has ushered in an era of new hope in this region which is full of untapped potential.

AGRICULTURE HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT AND INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTH EAST INDIA FOR AGES. IT HAS BEEN THE MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME AND FOOD FOR THEM, BESIDES BEING THE PRIMARY LIVELIHOOD SOURCE FOR MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

Forming the spinal column of the NEC are several critical sectors which, coming together and working in cohesion, have resulted in a number of innovative ideas, measures and decisions that have brought about unprecedented and unimaginable development to this unspoilt, beautiful region which had been remained neglected for decades by successive regimes and powers that be. These mainly include the Agriculture and Allied sector (including crops, spices, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, sericulture, marketing and sustainable livelihood projects); Business, Industries and Tourism; Health; Human Resources Development & Education; Irrigation, Flood Control and Watershed Management; Information & Public Relations; Power; Science & Technology and Transport & Communications.

AGRICULTURE & ALLIED

A SILENT REVOLUTION GROWS IN THE FIELDS

Agriculture has been an important and integral part of life of the people of North East India for ages. It has been the main source of income and food, besides being the primary livelihood source for millions. With the addition of many allied activities like poultry, piggery and dairy farming, agriculture is being carried out in the NER with increased vigour. Now meat and poultry are also added to this. This has raised the people's income levels manifold. Agriculture has played an important role in the States' economic development and contributed substantially to the livelihood of millions of people. With the economy becoming more robust, most people are engaged



A farmer attends to her field in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh.





A view of the Agro Market Complex, Mayang in Imphal, Manipur.

in allied agricultural activities which are a major factor for the development of rural areas. With rapid industrialisation, marketing of the produce has become easier and more lucrative, so the income levels have risen considerably in rural areas. The NEC has been at the forefront of this silent farm revolution. It has enabled the farmers with knowhow and inputs like seeds, fertilisers and also made available marketing avenues to them. A case in point is the swank Agro Market Complex in Mayang, Imphal, which has been set up by the NEC in place of the ramshackle structures that used to pass off as retailers' shops. The annual plan for agriculture and allied sectors, NEC, was drawn up by incorporating inputs from the recommendation made in the Vision 2020 document, Regional Plan, Revised Guidelines and the decisions arrived at in various meetings of the Council.

Issues such as double cropping, organic farming, horticulture, floriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, sericulture, forestry developments and Sustainable Livelihoods Projects, among others, are some of the areas where the region requires impetus for improvement and self-sustenance. In view of the sector's importance and for a holistic development of the region under "agriculture allied activities" in the annual plan of NEC, the sector has been allocated a fair amount in the Budget Estimate (BE) of the Council.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Endowed with beautiful natural resources, the region is identified as one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots. It hosts species-rich tropical rainforests and supports diverse flora, fauna and several



SEVERAL SUB-ACTIVITIES IN THE SECTOR'S DOMAIN, SUCH AS DOUBLE CROPPING, ORGANIC FARMING, HORTICULTURE, FLORICULTURE, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY (ESPECIALLY PIGGERY, FISHERY, SERICULTURE), FORESTRY, BEEKEEPING, TEA/COFFEE/RUBBER CULTIVATION & PROCESSING AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS PROJECTS, REQUIRE IMPETUS FOR SELF-SUSTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

MANGSATBAM IBOYAIMA MEITEI
Adviser (Horticulture)

crop species. The forest cover in the region is used to provide global public goods, but limits the availability of arable land and enhances the cost of delivering public services to the sparse population.

Participatory development of agriculture in the region will have to adopt different approaches for its hills and plains. Tribal populations in the hills have been practicing shifting (*jhum*) cultivation for generations. Indeed, shifting cultivation, when it started, had a cycle long enough to recoup the soil fertility but with the population pressure increasing on land, the shifting cycle has got considerably reduced with enormous environmental damage. In contrast, in the plains, the strategy would be to enhance land productivity by



The Sericulture Training Institute in Tripura.

increasing crop intensity, making better use of water resources and a balanced use of organic manures and chemical fertilisers to make up for soil deficiencies.

Though agriculture, in general, is time tested for the region and several revolutionary changes have taken place in this field over the decades, it is yet to fulfil the expected needs, priority and aspirations of the local residents. The region's topography being predominantly a difficult hilly terrain, even being a zone of favourable geo-agro climatic conditions, the economy based on agriculture is made to suffocate due to low productivity. To overcome this difficulty, the policy, programmes, schemes and mandates associated with the



The spacious Kankhu Women Market Complex in Chandel district, Manipur.

agricultural development of the region should be relooked at, revisited and reviewed to put the region on sound footing on a par with that of other States in the country.

CONSTRAINTS

In the plains, small landholdings (0.63 acre per operational holding in Assam) of the region preclude mechanisation of agriculture. At higher altitudes, water run-off is rapid and, therefore, the region lacks water for agriculture in winters despite having abundant rainfall in summers. The lack of irrigation facilities and absence of water retention practices severely limit possibilities of multiple cropping, resulting in low land productivity. Of course, by planting short-duration crops (so-called HYVs) which take near four months from sowing to harvesting, instead of the traditional crops which take nearly six months, it is possible to increase crop intensity without irrigation. However, these crops require big investments in fertilisers, seeds and pesticides which the poor farmers with small landholdings may not be able to afford.

In the hills, agricultural productivity is constrained not only by the paucity of water but also by the fact that land is held not by individuals but by the community as a whole. Lack of individual ownership rights may be an important reason for the popularity of *jhum* cultivation in the hills. Further, as land is common property, cultivators have no incentive to invest in it to improve its quality. Since the hills are sparsely populated and land is relatively abundant, shifting cultivation to a new location is easy. Settled agriculture on terraces and valley land is dominated by rice cultivation. Technology is backward with limited use of HYV and fertilisers and yields are low at 1.2-1.5 MT per hectare. Limited areas of horticultural and plantation crops have been planted in recent years but the choice of crops has been production- rather than market-led, resulting in severe marketing problems for principal crops, such as oranges and pineapples.

CROP CULTIVATION

The diverse geo-climatic conditions in the North East make it an ideal location for the cultivation of a variety of agricultural crops.

THE NORTH EAST'S DIVERSE GEO-CLIMATIC CONDITIONS MAKE IT AN IDEAL LOCATION FOR CULTIVATING A VARIETY OF CROPS. **THESE PRODUCTS ARE PRODUCED MAINLY FOR LOCAL MARKETS**

These products are mainly produced for local markets, and mostly in the form of primary produce without significant value addition. The land-to-person ratio for the NER (0.68 hectare per person) is higher than the national average (0.32 hectare per person), with Arunachal Pradesh having the highest ratio (8.63 hectare per person) and Assam the lowest (0.29 hectare per person). This pattern has remained uneven across regions and crops.

The NER continues to be an importer of food grain as, despite covering 8.8 per cent of the country's total geographical area, it produces only 1.5 per cent of the total food grain. Each State has distinctive production advantages vis-à-vis other NE States and the rest of the country, yet every State produces almost all the products it needs for internal consumption. This suggests lack of sufficient trade amongs the NE States as production patterns across these (most people prefer rice and also produce it) have prevented crop specialisation. Since each State is unable to meet the consumption demand of some products internally, it has led to high import dependency in all the States.

SPICES

Though the NER is not famous for spices, the North East has shown amazing results with these. A number of farmers have cultivated spices for long without any chemicals which is the region's USP and a great marketing opportunity. Sikkim has emerged as a chemical-free farming State and holds a lot of promise for popularising the region's spices.

The NER's climatic conditions offer vast scope for promoting spice production, particularly high-value organic spices. Spices like the



The U Triot Singh Market Complex in Mairang, West Khasi Hill, Meghalaya.

Lakadong turmeric, bird-eye chilli and ginger grown in the NER have high intrinsic value and hold vast industrial and pharmaceutical potential. Areas in Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh have high potential for cardamom, organic ginger, turmeric and chillies. There is great scope for producing organic spices in these States by popularising organic farming practices among the growers. Various schemes are being implemented by the Spice Board in the NE States.

HORTICULTURE

The NER, particularly its hilly areas, has tremendous potential for development of horticulture as a major contributor to the region's economic prosperity. It has to lead the process of diversification of

agriculture. In view of the climatic and altitudinal advantage and the tradition of fruit and vegetable cultivation among the people, it should not be a difficult goal to achieve, provided a State-specific package programme with emphasis on select fruits is taken up. The programme should, among other things, provide for needed inputs, nursery for planting material, processing facilities and marketing network. The creation of marketing infrastructure has to be an important component for the perspective plan as markets provide the cardinal links essential for agro-horticulture development.

Further, the NER holds great potential for plantation crops, viz; tea, coffee, rubber and spices. It will be ideal for these States to take up projects to promote rubber, tea, coffee plantations and spice cultivation in collaboration with other States. These projects should be formulated by each State to take up more activities on production, processing and marketing of the commodities.

FISHERY

The fisheries sector occupies a unique place in the socio-economic life of the NE people; it being an income and employment-generating activity at the primary level. At the same time, in terms of water area and climate, the region has tremendous potential for growth of pisciculture. The freshwater species in the region are about 274, which constitute about 34 per cent of the country's total stock. Assam and Tripura produce the bulk of fish. The current per capita consumption of fish is around 11 kg against the desired consumption level of 31 kg as recommended by the Nutrition Advisory Committee on Human Nutrition.

SERICULTURE

Since the NER's agro-climatic conditions are most suitable for sericulture, it can be developed into a major income-earning and employment-generating sector. The North East's contribution



Creation of infrastructure at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh.



The poultry breeding farm in Ningthoukhong, Manipur.



Poultry Breeding Farm - Hatchery with 3000 layers parent stocks and 2000 Broilers parent stock at Phulbari, west Garo Hills district, Meghalaya.

towards the country's total production of raw silk is generally about 6 per cent. However, its contribution in terms of Muga and Seri production is more than 90 per cent. Over 3.8 lakh families are engaged in sericulture farming and the annual production recorded is 1,063 MT.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Animal husbandry is an important economic activity, particularly in the hill areas. Almost all the people in NER being non-vegetarian, there exists a vast market for meat and eggs. However, production falls short of demand, leading to outflow of huge money on import. Animal husbandry, therefore, should be developed as an income and employment generating activity on a sizeable scale. It is evident that the region is deficient by nearly 50 per cent in milk and over 87 per cent in eggs. The net result has been imports and the subsequent outgo of substantial funds.

MARKETING

Agricultural marketing is one of the weakest links in the agricultural economy of the region. The marketing system is unregulated and dominated by private traders and middlemen. The major part of the marketable surplus is sold individually in small quantities by farmers at periodic markets at the village level or to itinerant traders. It then passes through a hierarchy of primary and secondary assembly markets before reaching terminal markets in major cities outside the region. Factors such as seasonality of production, perishability of

produce, inadequate credit facilities, lack of market information and a host of other issues compel growers to sell their produce at low and frequently un-remunerative prices. The bargaining power of the farmers is weak and prices are dictated by the traders. Farmers also frequently borrow from traders/moneylenders, increasing the level of exploitation.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROJECTS

The NEC has been supporting community-based Sustainable Livelihood Projects, such as the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), which was launched in May 1999, covering 860 villages and outreaching 39,161 households in some of the most inaccessible remote hill districts of the North East. The success of the project resulted in NERCORMP Phase-II, which was approved during 2010-11 and then implemented in 466 villages across adjoining Phase-I Project and further implemented over the next three years in six districts of three States, viz; Manipur, Assam and Meghalaya.

NERCORMP-II covered 466 villages, formed 494 Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRM-Gs), 1216 Self Help Groups (SHGs) across 21212 households in the six project districts. Similarly, with its huge impact and widely acceptable model, the NERCORMP Phase III for extension to Arunachal Pradesh (Tirap and Changlan districts) and expansion to Manipur (Chandel and Churachandpur districts) was launched and remained in operation from 2014-15 to 2021. ■



The scenic, rolling meadows at Champhai, Mizoram offer an out-of-the world experience.

BANKING, INDUSTRY & TOURISM (BIT)

TAPPING THE REGION'S POTENTIAL

India is a much diverse country, both in terms of geography and culture. The NER stands apart from the rest of the country because it has so much potential in tourism. In fact, if one travels to the North East, it's surprising to see how beautiful this part of India is. It has great potential to become a must-visit tourist destination. The NER is among the most beautiful parts of India, surrounded by hills and majestic forests. The region isn't only geographically important but must also be on your to-visit list when you plan a vacation.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister in his plenary speech had beautifully summed up the potential of tourism in the North East and how it could become a source of sustenance for the locals. The NER is characterised by natural landscapes, friendly people and rich history. With its cultural heritage, the region has great potential as a tourist destination and source of income for the people of the North East.

Efforts have been made by the NEC to popularise the region and boost its tourism potential. It is mainly due to the great natural beauty and heritage of the region that people are attracted towards it. It offers breathtaking scenic views and picturesque hills.

"The NER States are blessed with natural scenic beauty, distinct historical cultural and ethnic heritage. All this offers tremendous scope for tourism in the region. There is also great scope for mountaineering, trekking and adventure tourism in the region. If developed and promoted well, this sector can emerge as one of the biggest employers in the region and add to its growth and income."

— Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister



The unique double root bridge in Meghalaya.

THE UNTAPPED TOURISM POTENTIAL

The NER, as its tagline says “Paradise unexplored”, is blessed with fascinating natural scenic beauty, flora, fauna, historical and cultural heritage. The eight States are not only blessed with serene natural beauty but with salubrious weather, rich biodiversity, rare wild life, historical sites and a distinct cultural and ethnic heritage. The warm and welcoming people make the experience unique for the tourist.

The North East is home to many wildlife sanctuaries like Kaziranga National Park, famous for the one-horned rhinoceros, Manas National Park, Nameri, Orang, Dibru Saikhowa in Assam,

Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh, Balpakram in Meghalaya, Keibul Namjao in Manipur, Intanki in Nagaland and Khangchendzonga in Sikkim, among others. The mighty Brahmaputra flows through the length of Assam, where tourists can enjoy memorable river cruises, and the flowing rivers of Arunachal Pradesh feed the Brahmaputra, offering incredible white water rafting experiences.

Since inception, the NEC has taken various initiatives for the overall development and promotion of tourism, such as development of tourism parks and ecotourism resorts; development of adventure tourism avenues and pilgrimage destinations; wayside amenities in



THE NEC UNDERTAKES VARIOUS PROJECTS TO ASSIST THE STATES AND VARIOUS AGENCIES IN PROMOTING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIES AND GENERATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. IT ALSO IDENTIFIES AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TAKES UP INFRA PROJECTS TO PROMOTE TOURISM IN THE NER, BESIDES PROMOTING ITS RICH TRADITIONAL & CULTURAL HERITAGE

R. LALRODINGI

Adviser (Banking, Industries and Tourism)

the North East; development of tourist destinations, including picnic spots and lakes as tourist spots; trekking routes' development; publicity for tourism promotion for attracting both domestic and international tourists; promotional activities such as organisation of 'Destination North East' programmes and others; support to the NER States for organising various festivals, capacity-building programmes and participation in International Tourism Marts.

DESTINATION NORTH EAST

'Destination North East' is a calendar event of the North Eastern Council, conceptualised with the objective of taking the region to other parts of the country and bringing them closer together in order to strengthen national integration. The theme of 'Destination North East 2019' was 'Celebrating the Brahmaputra on the banks of the Ganga'.



Water gushes down in soothing steps at Wei Sawdlong in Meghalaya.



A scene from an enchanting presentation of Raas Lila in Manipur.



ON ACCOUNT OF COVID-19, THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SECTORS WERE BADLY HIT DUE TO THE RESULTING TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, BORDER CLOSURES AND LOCKDOWNS. HOWEVER, THE NUMBER OF FOOTFALLS HAS ALREADY INCREASED MANIFOLD

The ancient city of Varanasi hosted the event and its similarities with the North East in terms of ancient culture, diverse handloom and silk products, spiritual heritage and vibrant tourist hubs brought the two regions closer together. For 'Destination North East 2020', the theme was 'The Emerging Delightful Destinations', which showcased the tourism destinations emerging stronger and more attractive when the sector opened up again.

To address the various issues pertaining to development of tourism in the NER, a proper road map is to be worked out for a planned and systematic approach to developmental needs. Accordingly, the NEC had engaged Tata Consultancy Services for preparation of the tourism master plan for the North East, and the final report was shared with all NE States. Then NEC partnered with the World Bank Group (WBG) to build an evidence-based strategy to support MSME growth and tourism development in the NER. The results of the baseline research showcased that tourism sector in the region has a major potential for creating sustainable economic opportunities for the locals, specifically through women, community-led tourism enterprises and entrepreneurship.

Various consultative meetings were organised from time to time with leading institutions like the IIM, Shillong, for addressing the gap relating to promotion of tourism in the NER. The intervention of NEC in the tourism sector has been immense and remarkable, touching every nook and corner of the region and bringing about sustainable and responsible tourism. In the recent past, on account of Covid-19, the hospitality and tourism sectors were badly hit due to



Rock climbing expedition in Sikkim.

the resulting travel restrictions, border closures and lockdowns. However, tourist footfall has increased manifold now and it has helped to a large extent in providing livelihood to smaller towns and far-flung villages.

However, infrastructure development to provide decent accommodation for tourists has remained a big challenge, including capacity-building to cover all the rich distinct cultures and traditions of the people of the North East. Community-based tourism development is being encouraged to achieve sustainable objectives.

There are a number of tourism projects in the North East that can claim the pride of place. These include:

- Integrated Tourist Circuit, Serchhip, Mizoram: The project was approved in 2020 at an estimated cost of ₹468.81 lakh and the entire amount of NEC's share was released for early completion of the project. The project was aimed at development of tourist facilities in the area by providing adequate infrastructure to cater to visiting tourists and the participants of various adventure sports like paragliding and trekking. It may be mentioned that the Pre-World Cup Paragliding Championship 2018, an international event, was held in this area and the Paragliding Accuracy World Cup 2020 was also scheduled here.
- Mega Festival-cum-Multipurpose Ground, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh: The project was approved in 2016 at an estimated cost of ₹1,257.18 lakh and the NEC's share of ₹1131.46 lakh was released. The project, proposed for revision by the State Government, is aimed at developing a mega festival-cum-multipurpose ground with parking facilities at Tawang, which is the hub of tourism in Arunachal Pradesh. Tawang is identified as one of the tourist circuits of the integrated master plan of NER. This ground is dedicated to conducting various fairs and festivals of the State.
- Trekking and base camp at Mt Saramati, Thanamir village, Nagaland: The project was approved at an estimated cost



(Above and right) Orchid Lake Resort and Covention Centre at Umiam, Ri Bhoj, Meghalaya.



THE PRE-WORLD CUP PARAGLIDING CHAMPIONSHIP 2018 WAS HELD AT THE INTEGRATED TOURIST CIRCUIT, SERCHHIP, MIZORAM, AND THE PARAGLIDING ACCURACY WORLD CUP 2020 WAS ALSO SCHEDULED AT THE SAME VENUE

Tourists can enjoy the rush of adrenalin while paragliding at Sikkim.



of ₹720 lakh and NEC's share of ₹648 lakh was released in three instalments. The project targets for setting up of various tourist amenities at the base of Mt Saramati adjoining village Thanamir. It is proposed to be the main hub of rural and adventure ecotourism camp, catering to all the requirements including accommodation for tourists.

- Rural Ecotourism Circuit in Garo Hills, Meghalaya: The project was approved in 2017 at an estimated cost of ₹1,439 lakh and the NEC's share of ₹1,295.10 lakh was released in two instalments. The project has proposed 12 locations to be developed as tourist sites, which fall along rivers that are breeding grounds for the golden and chocolate mehseers. These locations would provide traditional forms of facilities and tourist amenities and provide experience in natural surroundings with nature trails for tourist.
- Orchid Lake Resort Development, Umiam, Meghalaya: The project was approved at an estimated cost of ₹760.61 lakh in 2014 and the total amount of NEC's share of ₹684.55 lakh was released. The Orchid Lake resort is a popular budget resort belonging to the Tourism Department, Government of Meghalaya. The department has constructed a convention centre at the resort as there is a huge demand for the facility. Through implementation of the project, the locals can utilise the facility for various purposes, either commercial or social events.



The NECBDC bamboo treatment plant near Guwahati, Assam.



The bamboo auditorium, Arunachal Pradesh.

INDUSTRIALISATION

The North Eastern people are among the most industrious people in the nation. Their life is a challenge, yet they have not only managed to survive but also moulded the challenges in their favour. The reason for the slow industrial growth has been the lack of connectivity, market accessibility and the requirement of big capital. All this changed with the NEC taking it up as one of its cherished goals — to industrialise the region in post-Independence India, industrialisation strategies for the North East have been dominated with weightage in favour of heavy industries. That made the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector secondary in value until its real contribution was felt in the industrial development of the North East in particular and the Indian economy in general. In the last two decades, the region's economic growth has been satisfactory with an annual growth rate in excess of 8 per cent. A spectacular rise in the service sector has helped in the sustenance of high growth in the region. Over the decades, however, agriculture has suffered very badly due to unpredictable monsoons and faulty mechanisation offers. As early efforts of unsystematic heavy industrialisation mostly failed in the region, manufacturing became dominated by SMEs in due course of time.

Assam is better in terms of entrepreneurship development as compared to the other NE States. With an upscale market and good road/rail connectivity, Guwahati is naturally placed to lead the entrepreneurial



A model agarbatti manufacturing plant (cluster) at Karara, near Guwahati in Assam.



NEC Secretary K Moses Chalai along with senior officials at the inauguration of agarbatti project.

activities and attract large-scale investments. But it also holds true that the other States present a favourable atmosphere for SMEs as concern for environmental degradation is quite high among the local population. The local residents prefer light industries as opposed to heavy and polluting industries that create big tussles among various stakeholders concerned and harm the ecosystem.

THE NEC AS A FACILITATOR

The NEC plays a crucial role when it comes to promoting industries and livelihood in the NER. Some of the key interventions include integrated development of community sericulture garden at Solungyar village, Kurung Kumey district, Arunachal

Pradesh; establishment of a livelihood enhancement centre at Kohima, Nagaland; construction of common facility centres in the hill districts of Manipur for processing of agriculture and horticulture products; infrastructure development of existing industrial estates in Shillong and Tura by the Meghalaya Government; integrated bamboo handicrafts cluster in Tripura; integrated project for Muga development in Meghalaya; production and training centre for soft toys at Gangtok; and upgradation of export promotion industrial park, Lengte (Mizoram).

In addition, the NEC funded participation of Central and State agencies at national and global events in line with promotion of industries and products of



the NER. Also, the Council supported these agencies to organise events and training programmes to promote livelihood and employment generation. The NEC contributes to the promotion of entrepreneurial temper by supporting events like the 'NER Entrepreneurial Summit 1.0', implemented by the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati.

As the Covid-19 pandemic raged across the world, the NER was not left untouched by this historical human crisis of mass repatriation of migrant workers to their respective home States. To tackle the challenge, the NEC provided unprecedented one-time emergency financial support to all the eight NE States mainly for skill development and providing livelihood to migrant workers in their home State.

Promotion of bamboo handicrafts, bamboo shoot processing and *agarbatti* stick-making are also prime sectors getting more attention from the NEC nowadays. In this regard, it would be pertinent to highlight the first-of-its-kind model *agarbatti* manufacturing unit (technically called a 'cluster') in Karara on the outskirts of Guwahati. The self-sufficient unit, which takes care of all the intermediate steps from sourcing the raw material to the finished product, fulfils all its requirements by itself. It is also a novel experiment in the sense that it provides money and employment opportunities to the village women, who can then start working within their homes and start earning revenue by making *agarbattis*, thus effectively turning into entrepreneurs. To start with, 30 such women, which effectively means 30 families in the 1,000-house village, are the beneficiaries



(Above and left) New Market Building at Dawrpui Veng in Aizawl.

THE NEC SUPPORTS VARIOUS GOVT AGENCIES IN ORGANISING EVENTS AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES, BESIDES IN THE PROMOTION OF INDUSTRIES AND PRODUCTS OF THE NER, TO BOOST LIVELIHOOD AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

of this project, and the number keeps getting recycled every two months. One *agarbatti*-making machine is capable of providing each of the workers ₹30,000 a month.

Similarly, the NEC has supported various bamboo-related projects of States and Central agencies, like NECBDC. The handicrafts and handloom sector of NER has immense potential when it comes to uniqueness and quality. The only thing lacking is branding, standardisation and reach to the national and international market. In view of this, the NEC is currently supporting various export promotion, branding and value addition-related projects of all the eight NE State Governments and Central agencies like NEHHDC and NERAMAC's projects.

The newly constructed market building at Aizawl, Mizoram, sanctioned in 2015, cost ₹13 crore in 90:10 ratio, which means that the NEC's share was ₹11.7 crore. The project was completed in 2020. On the one hand, the newly constructed market is generating livelihood for the youth and unemployed population of Mizoram and also providing a good market facility to the locals. The iconic building adds beauty to the city. Also, due to proper drainage, the place looks tidier than it used to.

This market building will benefit mainly the people of Aizawl City and its neighbouring villages in terms of commercial facilities. The New Market is the oldest and largest market within Aizawl City and can cater to a large number of people selling and buying all kinds of food grains, vegetables, meat and other products. It is a social infrastructure project and the direct and indirect economic benefit cannot be quantified. However, it is certain that the building construction will bring benefits to farmers, sellers and consumer as a whole. ■



A farmer plucks kiwis at his orchard in Urkhul, Manipur.



EVALUATION AND MONITORING (E&M)

ASSESSING THE REAL IMPACT AND WORTH OF NEC'S PROJECTS

The Evaluation & Monitoring sector ensures transparency, accountability and timely delivery of the NEC-funded projects so that the funds meant for development programmes are invested wisely and honestly.

The NEC has a well-oiled machinery in place to ensure that the projects funded by it are executed properly by evaluating and monitoring the execution of projects and thus making sure that every penny is spent in right earnest.

For any democracy, accountability is the key to judging the performance of any project. Various policies and programmes that the Government conceives and executes do not reach the end users, the people. Indeed, Evaluation & Monitoring within the ambit of Government schemes is vital. It is important for any agency to assess the impact of its executed programmes. This doesn't only help it recalibrate future programmes but also pinpoints the responsibility of the executing department or official. The idea of having these systems in place is to ensure that public officials and programme implementers can be held accountable for the quantum of public spending and efficient utilisation of public finances.



ICU Bed Mechanical in Jivan Hospital.

It's not that the best practices require for projects to be monitored only for control; the stakeholders also demand and expect transparency our resource use and impact, to benefit future projects. An efficient evaluation and monitoring mechanism can assist in measuring the progress of projects, comparing different projects, adherence to conformance requirements, assessing the outcome and impact on citizens and in providing information for informed decision making and mid-course correction.

The NEC has, therefore, put into place an evaluation and monitoring system which would not only assess the programmes funded by it but also take an overview of the development activities being undertaken in the North Eastern Region (NER). Over the years, this simple exercise has made a huge difference in the execution of projects.

Evaluation and Monitoring is one of the most important functions of the NEC Secretariat since the Council is not only the statutory Regional Planning Body but also a funding body for schemes/projects of an inter-State nature





The school of nursing at Synod Hospital, Durtlan, Mizoram.



A ROBUST AND INDEPENDENT MONITORING AND EVALUATION WING SERVES AS THE EYES & EARS OF ANY ORGANISATION. IT HELPS ENSURE EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES, INFUSE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVE DECISION MAKING

LAYSANG A. LAMA, IES
Director (Evaluation & Monitoring)

to benefit the NER's people. At the same time, however, the NEC is not the implementing agency for projects. The responsibility of project implementation rests with other authorities like the Central Ministries/bodies/organisations, the State Governments, NGOs and other private sector organisations. As a consequence, the NEC has to ensure a strict and effective evaluation and monitoring regime so that the funds meant for development programmes are invested wisely and honestly.

The NEC's Evaluation and Monitoring sector is involved in carrying out field inspections of the ongoing projects of all NEC sectors and submit the inspection report to the sector concerned. On the basis of this report, the sectors take further necessary action to ensure smooth and timely completion of the projects, including releasing subsequent fund instalments. Further, both physical and financial achievements of these projects are regularly monitored through progress reports submitted by the State Governments and other implementing agencies concerned, and these are duly scrutinised and



Inspection team along with the beneficiaries and implementing department in West Sikkim.



Doctor examine patient at Sky Hospital and Resarch Centre in Manipur..



analysed so that the NEC Secretariat can intervene appropriately to ensure timely and successful completion of the projects.

The NEC engages Regional-Level Monitors (along the same lines as the National-Level Monitors for PMGSY under the Ministry of Rural Development) who are retired senior officers with domain expertise for evaluating projects. The Council Secretariat also engages institutes/organisations like WAPCOS, WEBCON and IIE, among others, for conducting Impact Assessment Studies of the NEC-assisted projects. The inspection reports are uploaded on the NEC website and can be accessed by interested stakeholders. These evaluations are apart from the monitoring done by the respective States through the mandatory quarterly review meetings of NEC projects as well as audits by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Evaluation & Monitoring Sector of the NEC has been helpful in providing financial assistance in the form of gap

funding to various institutions such as colleges and universities for organising seminars/symposia/workshops on the themes/topics which are related to issues of socio-economic development of the North Eastern Region on topics directly relevant to the region's development.

The NEC Secretariat also is directly involved in organising seminars/workshops/symposiums on topics related to the development and promotion of marketing and trade on agri-horticultural and industrial projects in the North Eastern Region and on topics directly relevant to public health and common concern of citizens. It also organises the NEC plenaries and sectoral summits.

These seminars/symposiums/workshops/conferences help various organisations and institutions in identifying the problems and deficiencies affecting the North Eastern Region on the one hand



Bee boxes in Tuensang District.

and the formulation of specific suggestions and recommendations on the other, for the region's socio-economic development.

Apart from this, the Evaluation & Monitoring sector helps provide financial assistance for various research activities and studies related to the NER's development such as 'Diagnostic Studies on Agriculture Produce Marketing through FPOs in North Eastern India' by the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad. It also assists in the preservation and protection of traditional knowledge documentation initiatives in the North East and helps build an information repository of products, producers and entrepreneurs of the region, through NEDFi. Recently, it has got a study done on the Ekalavya Model Residential School of North East India and also on the handloom research and development programme in Assam.

There are exciting times ahead as the Evaluation & Monitoring sector is working in collaboration with DPIIT and Invest India.

It is working to help improve the 'Ease of Doing Business' parameters in the NER. The output monitoring of all the sectors is an ongoing process indicating that benefits would keep accruing to the population in numbers and help shore up incomes in the case of agri-horti sectors.

Another milestone in the Evaluation & Monitoring sector's journey shall be the setting up of an Art Resource Centre that will basically make the NEC as the Centre for all interventions. The North Eastern Resource Centre (NERCEN) was officially set up at the NEC Secretariat on December 1, 2021. The Centre will be headed by ex-officio Chief Executive Officer ie, the Economic Adviser (E&M), NEC, and a Manager ie, the Director (E&M), NEC. A Steering Committee consisting of the Secretary as Chairman, Planning Adviser, Financial Adviser and the sector heads as the Members has been set up as the apex executive body of NERCEN with the Director (E&M)-cum-Manager NERCEN as Member Secretary. ■





The Sky Hospital and Research Centre
in Manipur.

HEALTH

HEALTHIER NER IS A BETTER REGION!

The NER has been the focus of the Central Government's attention over several years. The region is home to many tribes who live in the most inaccessible areas. It has been identified as a priority area for development by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government.

The NEC works with the State Governments concerned to improve public health facilities. It is doing yeoman's service to the NE people by providing them affordable, accessible and world-class health facilities. It is not only saving lives but also improving the quality of life. The North East has a diverse and scattered population. The region has a lot of natural resources but the region suffers from lack of health facilities. The reason for this has been that many tribal communities live in remote areas. However, there is a significant increase in the number of patients visiting hospitals and clinics due to better health facilities available in the region now.

The NEC is entrusted with the holistic development of the North East but one of its main objectives is to promote a quality healthcare system in the NER through partnership with other Government bodies, NGOs and private sector organisations. The Council has improved healthcare in remote areas by providing medical treatment facilities at district hospitals and dispensaries to all citizens irrespective of caste or creed. It also provides free medicines to poor people who don't have access to any financial aid for hospitalisation fees or medicines.

The NEC has been active in providing various equipment for examining various diseases like tuberculosis and malaria, which can be prevented by early treatment before turning fatal. The Council has established several hospitals and clinics across Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. These include tertiary



Nursing School, Lampheelphet, Imphal, Manipur.

healthcare hospitals such as Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Dibrugarh Medical College and Hospital (DMCCH), Silchar Medical College, which provide services like surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology and offer Nursing and Paramedical Institution.

In the last 10 years, the NER has witnessed a great leap in the field of healthcare. The region has been able to achieve much success in improving the quality of life by making people aware about their rights, especially in matters related to health.

DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING OUT

After ensuring security of life and limb, the most important basic human needs for citizens of any civilised society are food and nutrition, water and sanitation, housing, healthcare facilities

and education. The NER, because of its geographical location, difficult terrain, high rainfall, vast hilly region, forested areas and varied ethnic groups, is not a very homogenous territory for easily providing normal healthcare services round the clock to all the 47 million inhabitants of this part of our nation.

Moreover, due to inadequate communication facilities throughout the region, healthcare services have not yet become available to everyone as can normally be expected. The Government of India, in its Annual Report (2015-16), identified the following problems in the health sector in the NER: Shortage of trained manpower; providing access to sparsely populated, remote and far-flung areas; improvement of governance in the health sector; need for improved quality of health services rendered; making effective and full utilisation of the existing facilities; effective and timely utilisation



Dr B Barooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati, Assam.



of financial resources available; morbidity and mortality due to malaria; high level of tobacco consumption and the associated risk of cancer; and, high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Nagaland, Manipur and their increasing footprint in Mizoram and Meghalaya.

Though in the last few decades, large-scale development in healthcare services and medical education has taken place, a lot still needs to be done for ensuring good healthcare services to all the NE people. Both the Central and the respective State Governments are doing their best in providing health professionals and state-of-the-art equipment and training, among other requirements, to improve the standard of healthcare services.

The respective States design suitable schemes and send these to the NEC for funding requirements in case the funds received from the Government of India and the States' own fund are not considered sufficient.

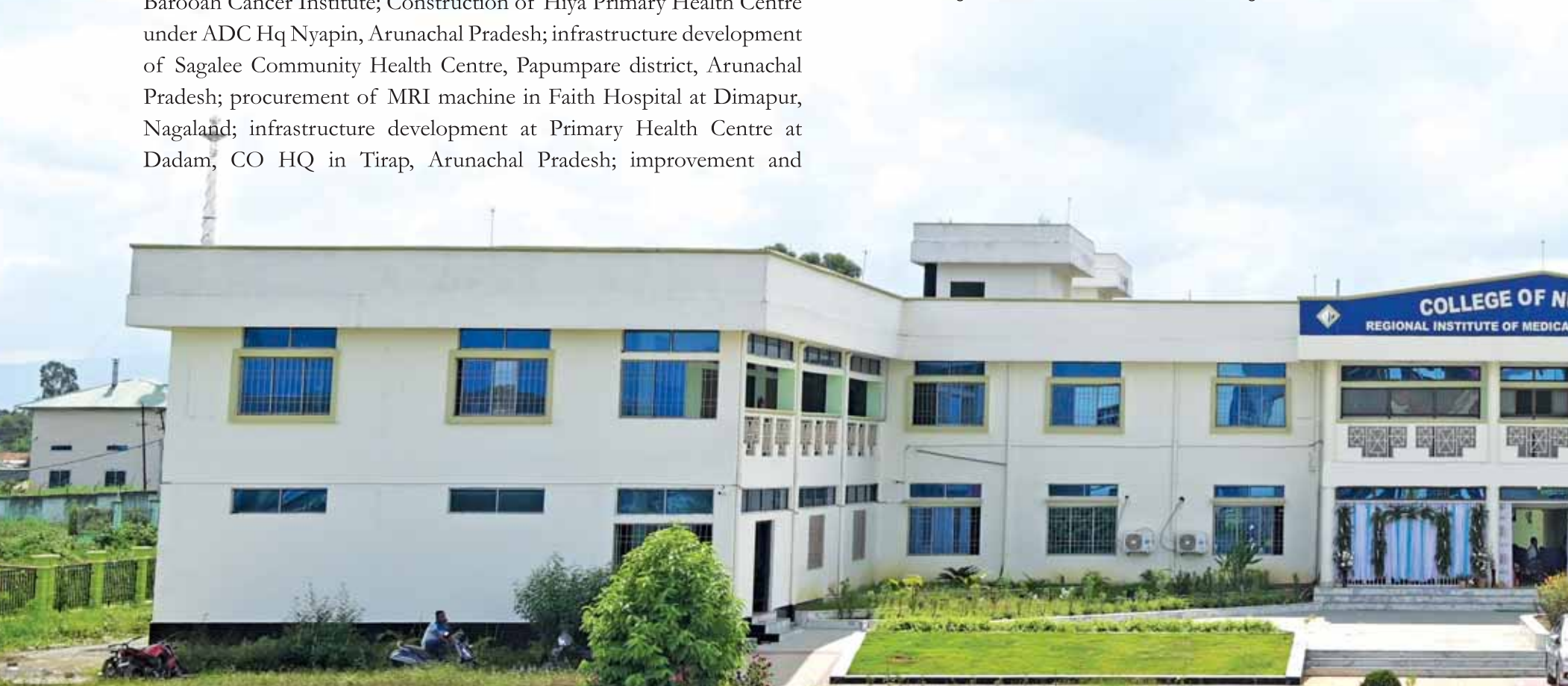
MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

To provide world-class medical care to the NE people, the NEC has been instrumental in opening several state-of-the-art institutes across every nook and corner of the region. They range from eyecare hospitals to cancer hospitals which were hitherto not available to the people, who had to go to Delhi and Kolkata or other parts of the country to get even an MRI test done. Not anymore; today the health map of the North East has changed completely; it is dotted with several hospitals and research facilities which are on a par with the best institutions in the nation.

Against these odds, the major achievements made in the medical and healthcare sector in the region during the last few years include extension of Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya, Guwahati, for procurement of equipment of Vitrectomy and OCT establishment of the Community Ophthalmology Department at SSN, Guwahati; support to District Hospital, Churachandpur, Manipur; support for development and implementation of Hospital Management Information System (HMIS), Phase-I at Civil Hospital, Aizawl, Mizoram; funds released to Dr B Barooah Cancer Institute; Construction of Hiya Primary Health Centre under ADC Hq Nyapin, Arunachal Pradesh; infrastructure development of Sagalee Community Health Centre, Papumpare district, Arunachal Pradesh; procurement of MRI machine in Faith Hospital at Dimapur, Nagaland; infrastructure development at Primary Health Centre at Dadam, CO HQ in Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh; improvement and



The Regional Institute of Paramedical and Nursing (RIPAN) in Aizawl.





TO PROVIDE WORLD-CLASS MEDICAL CARE TO THE NE PEOPLE, THE COUNCIL HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN OPENING UP SEVERAL **STATE-OF-THE-ART INSTITUTES ACROSS EVERY NOOK AND CORNER OF THE REGION**

upgradation of SAN-KER, Shillong, Meghalaya; bio-medical waste management incinerator system for District Hospital, Lawngtlai, Champhai, Mizoram; and, purchase of CT Scan machine at Civil Hospital, Lunglei, Mizoram, Paramedical Institute, Dimapur etc.

The Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, along with the attached RIMS Hospital, was transferred from the Society which managed the Medical College to the Ministry of Home Affairs in August 1976. Later, it was transferred from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the NEC by the Government of India. When the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (MDoNER) was formed and the NEC was attached to it, RIMS automatically came under the aegis of MDoNER. The institute was again transferred from MDoNER to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in April 2007 on the basis of the Sidhu Committee recommendation and following the signing of an MoU among the NEC, MDoNER and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

The Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), Imphal in Manipur.





(Above and Centre) The School of Nursing, Syond Hospital in Durtlan, Mizoram.



Many institutes have come up in recent years and helped people who want to train themselves in health services. The NEC has upgraded several hospitals and existing facilities (the School of Nursing of the Synod Hospital was established in 1928 by the Wealth Mission). The main objective of the project — construction of the main building of School of Nursing — is upgradation of the existing building and also to fulfil the norms and guidelines of the Indian Nursing Council, installing a library, including virtual access within the building and upgrading the School of Nursing to the College of Nursing at the level of BSc (Nursing). Regional

Institute of Paramedical and Nursing (RIPAN), Aizawl, was under the NEC's control; it has now been transferred to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. The Sky Hospital & Research Centre, Imphal, has been established to set up a full-fledged heart hospital which will benefit not only the people of Manipur but also of the neighbouring States. Although the hospital has few machines to treat various heart diseases, Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS) Imphal, is a joint venture between the Government of India through the NEC and other NE States since 1972. This regional health institute administered by the