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THE NEWS ROUND-UP**GOVERNMENT WILLING TO TALK TO ANY MILITANT
OUTFIT: HOME MINISTER**

Government of India is ready to talk to any militant outfit of the North East Region which is willing to eschew violence.

This was stated by the Union Home Minister, Shri Shivraj Patil while talking to the media in Shillong on March 24, 2006. Shri Patil also stressed on maintaining peace in the region which is essential for all round development of the North East Region. Shri Patil was in Shillong to participate as Chief Guest at the function to mark the 171st Raising Anniversary of Assam Rifles. Earlier, Shri Patil addressed a Special Sainik Sanmelan at the Assam Rifles Hqrs at Happy Valley on the occasion.

In his speech, Shri Patil praised the bravery and dedication of the Force which is one of the oldest in the country which has given outstanding service to the nation, especially in the N.E. Region by combating insurgency in the most difficult terrain. The Force has received recognition and honoured with numerous gallantry and distinguished awards for these services, he said.

The Home Minister also mentioned that the government has submitted a Bill in Parliament to make the Assam Rifles, a paramilitary outfit into an armed force, which is likely to be passed soon. He said that the government is also taking several welfare measures for the benefit of the AR jawans.

On the occasion, the Home Minister laid a wreath at the AR War Memorial, awarded medals to jawans for displaying bravery in their duties and also addressed a meeting of AR Commanders at the DG, AR Hqrs.

The function was attended by Lt. Gen. Bhopinder Singh, DG, Assam Rifles, besides a number of Director-Generals of Central Para Military Forces and a host of other dignitaries.

**KYNDIAH REVIEWS PROGRESS OF FORMULATION
OF VISION NER-2020**

The Minister of DoNER and Chairman NEC, Shri P.R. Kyndiah, reviewed progress of formulation of Vision NER: 2020 in a meeting in New Delhi on April 10, 2006. The meeting was attended by two members of NEC, Dr. (Mrs.) I.K. Barthakur and Shri P.P. Shrivastava, Secretary of Ministry of DoNER, Smt. Gauri Chatterjee and the Secretary of NEC, Shri H.V. Lalringa and other concerned officers of Planning Commission, DoNER and North Eastern Region. On completion of the 1st phase of involving the people in formulation of the Vision NER: 2020, a working paper broadly indicating the contours of development planning for the North East was discussed in the meeting.

It was decided that on the basis of the working paper, drafted on the basis of the views and suggestions received from a cross section of people of the NER, a detailed document indicating the goals and strategy, action plan both in short terms and long term prospective should be prepared through professional expertise supported by relevant data and in consultation with all stake holders including the State Governments of the region, concerned Central Ministries and Planning Commission. The final draft Vision Document will be discussed in the first half of June 2006 in a meeting to be taken by the Chairman of NEC.

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TOURISM SCHEMES FOR ASSAM DURING 2005-06

The Union Ministry of Tourism sanctioned the following tourism schemes for the state of Assam during the year 2005-2006.

Sl. No	Project Name	Rs. in lakhs)	
		Amt. sanctioned	Amt. released
1.	Development of Manas - Guwahati - Kaziranga Circuit	781.00	624.80
2.	Development of Dhubri-Goalpara-Guwahati-Silchar Kaziranga Circuit	432.28	345.82
3.	Eco-Tourism development at Kokrajhar	460.00	368.00
4.	Construction of Yatri Niwas at Kakopathar	30.00	5.76
5.	Rural tourism project at Asharikandi, Dhubri Distt.	48.97	39.17
6.	Development of North East Circuit	280.00	224.00
7.	Development of Adventure tourism in Kaziranga	44.95	35.90
8.	Information Technology project	47.80	43.00

SHOW CAUSE NOTICES TO 31 CHANNELS FOR SURROGATE ADS 7 MUSIC CHANNELS WARNED FOR OBJECTIONABLE REMIX SONGS

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has issued Show Cause Notices to 31 satellite TV channels for telecasting surrogate advertisements on 13 categories of liquor and tobacco brand extension in violation of rule 7(2) (viii) of Advertising Code. The Code prescribed under Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and rules framed thereunder says, 'no advertisement shall be permitted which promotes directly or indirectly production, sale or consumption of cigarette, tobacco production, wine, alcohol, liquor or other intoxicant'.

The Ministry has also issued a warning to 7 music TV channels namely; ETC, Channel V, B4U Music, Balle Balle Music, MTV Music, iTV Music and MH1 for telecasting objectionable remix Hindi filmy songs in violation of Programme code prescribed under Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. The Ministry has directed these music TV channels not to telecast these songs henceforth and to run a scroll on their TV channels round the clock for a period of 3 days that they have violated Programme Code and they will be more careful in future.

AMENDMENT TO SENIOR CITIZENS SAVINGS SCHEME, 2004

As a measure for further facilitation of Senior Citizens under the Senior Citizens Savings Scheme 2004, the depositors can now transfer their accounts from one deposit office (Post Office/Bank) to another, without application of the condition

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of change of residence. A small transfer fee of Rs.5 per lakh on deposits of one lakh and above will be payable for the first transfer. If subsequent transfers are availed of, a transfer fee of Rs.10 per lakh on deposits of one lakh and above would be payable. Earlier such transfers of Accounts were allowed only in case of change of residence of the depositor. The present amendment is intended to provide greater flexibility to the senior citizens in choosing a more conveniently located deposit office as also one that offers good service.

PRESIDENT GIVES AWAY NIRMAL GRAM PURASKAR TO PRIS ON 23RD MARCH

Second Nirmal Gram Puraskar distribution function was held on 23rd March, 2006 in New Delhi. Nirmal Gram Puraskar is a national award instituted by Government of India to recognize the efforts made by Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), individuals and organizations in promoting rural sanitation coverage. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the President of India gave away the awards to the selected PRI functionaries.

In order to encourage involvement of community, PRIs, NGOs, etc. in sanitation promotion, Government of India had launched Nirmal Gram Puraskar, an incentive scheme for PRIs, individuals and organizations on 2nd October, 2003. As per this scheme, awards are to be given to those PRIs, which attain full sanitation coverage and become open defecation free.

Total 770 (761 Gram Panchayats and 9 Block Panchayats) PRIs have been given the award. The PRIs are from 14 States viz Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal and West Bengal. Total Rs.2,060 lakh have been given as cash award to these PRIs. It also includes a memento and a certificate. The number of PRIs getting the award this year has significantly increased from last year. Against 40 PRIs, which received NGP last year, 770 have been selected for NGP in the current year.

Nirmal Gram Puraskar has been given for the second time to recognize the significant contribution made by PRIs in promoting rural sanitation and it is expected that it would give a tremendous boost to sanitation promotion in India. Government of India is committed to give all out support to the States and PRIs in this endeavour.

RAILWAY RECRUITMENT IN NORTH EASTERN REGION

The Government is giving top priority for development of North Eastern Region. Direct recruitment of Group C posts on Indian Railways is made by Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) within their respective jurisdiction. Candidates from any part of the country are free to apply in response to advertisements issued by any of the RRBs. Since Railways are an All India organization serving as an effective instrument of national integration, no discrimination or favour is done against or for any candidate on the basis of his place of residence. Selections are basically done on the basis of merit position of the candidates in the respective examinations. This

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information was given by Shri Naranbhai J. Rathwa, Union Minister of State for Railways in Rajya Sabha on March 17, 2006.

RAIL LINK WITH MYANMAR

Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES Ltd) was commissioned by the Ministry of External Affairs to carry out a feasibility study for India-Myanmar Rail Link. The study has suggested the following alignments:

- Construction of new rail link between Jiribam-Imphal-Moreh at a cost of Rs.2941.08 crore in Myanmar.
- Construction of a new rail link between Tamu (Moreh)-Kalay-Segyi at a cost of Rs.1339.02 crore and rehabilitation of existing line from Segyi-Chaungu Myohaung at a cost of Rs.283.959 crore.
- No decision has been taken with regard to setting up of rail link with Burma. However, a new line from Jiribam-Imphal Road (Tupul) has been taken up to provide connectivity to Imphal and the same is targeted for completion by March 2010.

Regarding the security situation between North East and Myanmar, the situation in the border areas is under constant review. This information was given by Union Minister of State for Railways Shri Naranbhai J. Rathwa, in Parliament last month.

INDIAN OIL CORPORATION (AOD) TO INTRODUCE AUTO LPG IN ASSAM

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (Assam Oil Division) has put up an ambitious programme to launch Auto LPG in Assam.

The project expected to be commissioned in the current fiscal proposes to put up Auto LPG storage and dispensing facilities at three IOC (AOD) retail outlets in Guwahati and one each at Jorhat and Tinsukia on the National Highway 37.

Auto LPG being eco friendly and less expensive (approximate saving of 45% than petrol is fast emerging as preferential fuel among motorists across the country.

The introduction of Auto LPG in Guwahati would reduce the pollution level apart from providing option of alternative fuel to motorists at a cost effective price. The exhaust emission of auto gas driven vehicles has 75 % less of CO₂, 85% less of hydrocarbons 40% less of Nitrous Oxide and it would reduce ozone depletion by 87%. As compared to Diesel, the exhaust emission of auto gas driven vehicles have 90% less particulate contamination, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and 50% less of Nitrous Oxide ..

Upon installing an Auto LPG kit (at approx cost of Rs.25000/- for MPFI engine & Rs.16000 for carburetor engine) the motorist would have the option of running the vehicle on Auto LPG /Motor Spirit.

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INDIA – TOWARDS HEALTH FOR ALL

- Nurul Islam Laskar

Health is a prime concern of man from time immemorial. 'Health is Wealth' is an age-old adage. However brilliant a person may be, but without good health he or she cannot perform the best. Now the question arises, 'what is health?' In short, we can define health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity.

While too much stress is laid on food and medicine in respect of physical health, mental and emotional factors are often forgotten. Only when a balance of all these factors is struck, a person can look forward to be healthy. The basic rules of health dictate that a person should not abuse his body. He should exercise it, feed it sensibly and in moderation, and abstain from poisons like excess of tobacco, alcohol or drugs. A person should think positively and not become a hypochondriac by thinking too much about his bodily functions and diseases.

All said and done, absence or prevention of disease is an important factor of good health and medicine plays a pivotal role in prevention and eradication of disease. Medicine has come a long way from the time when disease was considered as punishment from the gods and treated accordingly to a time when we know that germs are responsible for it and the treatment has to be scientific.

It was Chadwick who propounded the concept of social health which is a pillar of the modern society. A great many other measures have now been introduced to promote positive health – not mere avoiding bad health, but trying to bring about the highest possible state of good health. A balanced diet is essential for good health and it consists of correct amounts of the basic food substances. There is no unanimity of views on meal timings and gap between meals. Many experts feel that the concept of having meals at fixed intervals is nothing but a social convention and in modern life obviously a matter of convenience. Sleep, which has no substitute, is also a facilitator of good health. But different people need vastly different amounts of sleep.

Revolutionary changes are perceived in the prevention of AIDS and Hepatitis B virus by adoption of various health practices as these two dreaded diseases threaten mankind today. Another major advance in the field of medicine is in prenatal diagnosis. Diagnosis, and, to a great extent, treatment can be done

for many diseases in the mother's womb itself before the child is born, a concept hitherto unthinkable.

Transplantation of organs, fibre optic endoscopes and genetic engineering are playing a decisive role today in preventing diseases and prolonging life. Infant mortality and people per doctor are the two yardsticks which are used to measure the health of the nations of the world. Infant mortality records death rate per 1,000 live births while people per doctor refers to physicians who meet World Health Organisation (WHO) standards.

The infant mortality and people per doctor figures for India are 75 and 2,165. The same for other SAARC countries are Bangladesh 90 and 12,500; Bhutan 125 and 4,255; Maldives 55 and 5,330; Nepal 84 and 12,612; Pakistan 88 and 2,000; and Sri Lanka 14 and 5,888.

The National Common Minimum Programme of the Government of India is committed to raise public spending on health to at 2-3% of GDP over the next five years with focus on primary health care. In line with this objective, the Plan allocation for 2004-05 was enhanced by Planning Commission to Rs. 2,208 crore from the initial allocation of Rs. 1,800 crore. The outlay has been further augmented to Rs. 2,908 crore for the Annual Plan 2005-06. The major share of the increased allocation is on disease control programmes such as vector borne diseases, TB and AIDS.

Considering the ever increasing responsibilities and larger roles of the personnel engaged in healthcare activities, Government has exempted the health sector from the operation of downsizing exercise in respect of the technical categories of posts to be filled up by direct recruitment.

North East India receives special attention of the Centre in healthcare programmes. One of Central Government's ambitious healthcare projects, the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) is being set up at Shillong at a cost of Rs. 422.60 crore as a Superspeciality Hospital on the pattern of AIIMS. This Institute shall have a 500 bedded referral hospital with 35 teaching departments at post-graduate level in various specialities and super-specialities with a nursing college having an intake of 50 students per year. This has been declared as a National Institute by the Honourable Prime Minister and included in the Primer Minister's Package for Socio-economic development of North Eastern Region.

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60 YEARS OF KASTURBA GANDHI NATIONAL MEMORIAL TRUST

- Ditimoni Gogoi

The Sarania hill located in Dakshin Sarania of Guwahati city away from the hullabaloo of the city life by virtue of its location amidst the enchanting beauty of the ISKCON temple and the spectacular greenery of Gandhi Mandap gives a feeling of calm and tranquility to the visitor visiting Sarania Ashram at Ashram Road of Guwahati. Sarania Ashram is indeed a name which needs no introduction-it is the name of the Assam Branch of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust.

The Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust established in 1946, before Indian Independence, is gloriously celebrating its 60th year of existence. The Trust was registered on April 7, 1945 and on November 22, 2004 entered in its 60th year. The 60-year celebration comes to an end on April 7, 2006. Established on Gandhian idealism the Trust, for the last 60 years, has been fighting



The Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust, Guwahati

for the cause of peace, nurturing mothers and children, spreading education, restoring modesty of woman-folk and paying efforts to develop the rural economy by producing khadi clothes and spreading small-scale industries.

Ms Kusum Bora Mukasi, Trustee of the Assam Branch says that mainly three aspects viz. restoration of peace and harmony, transparency and restoring modesty of women have been the focus of their activities as part of completion of 60 years of the Trust. She also says that restoration of peace and modesty of women is the need of the hour as Assam along with other north-eastern states are going through a critical phase in restoring peace and harmony, while torture upon women is increasing day by day which affects in restoring the social values.

“The condition of women I think is deteriorating day by day”, says Preetikona Das, former Trustee who retired in 1993. She adds, “The pages of

newspapers are packed with earth-shattering news of crimes against women. We never experienced such days when we were young. She says, "We are hopeful that we will be able to establish a society free from ills, and we have to work unitedly to restore the social values, especially mothers of our society have a lot of responsibility. Spiritual education is also the need of the hour." Damayanti Devi, representative of the Trust also expressed hope of becoming successful in their mission. She stressed on the need of restoring modesty of women and developing rural economy to provide employment to the rural folk.

Gram Swaraj is another aim the trust has been nurturing from the very beginning. It has been paying more stress on developing rural economy. They are imparting their service towards the rural areas through 20 Gram Seva Kendras spreadout in the entire north-east viz. in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya (Jayantia hills, Khasi hills, Garo hills), Indo-Bhutan border, Indo-Bangladesh border, Harchura, Doimukhia, Teok, Dikom and Doomdooma. The trust believes that the development of the rural economy will provide more employment opportunities to the youths.

During the last 60 years, more than 2500 woman have undergone training in woman welfare, pre-primary education, adult education, health and hygiene, cottage industries, cotton spinning, weaving, tailoring, bee-keeping, farming and smokeless chulha. They had also conducted training camps to make soap with assistance of Rupees two lakh from North Eastern Council (NEC) recently.

The trust has been always among the people who faced huge devastation in the natural calamities. During the devastating earthquake of 1950, the Trust carried out relief measures under the guidance of Amol Prova Das. In 1954, erosion hit the Palasbari area and endangered the life of the denizens where the Trust imparted relief measures with painstaking efforts. In the same year, the Trust served more than two thousand flood victims in Jorhat district.

Whether it is the natural calamity or the communal clash, war or famine, the Kasturba Trust is the first to reach among the strife-torn people. The Trust among other activities works hard to restore peace in the region where extremist groups are active. To keep vigil on various activities which cause instability, it trains up a group of men and women whom they call Santi Sena for restoring peace. The Santi Sena renders mental support, promotes the cause of peace, organizes meetings and garners support for the victims. They also take action during any peace-breaking incident that takes place within the dimension of five kilometers from their living area. As part of their peacekeeping activities, the Trust organized a peace march in Guwahati in 2002 after the Godhra incident to ensure peace and harmony.

Along with other activities, the Trust is also rendering various services towards the tea garden workers of the state. In 1951, late Omeo Kumar Das, ex-minister of Assam Government greatly inspired with the welfare activities of the Trust broached the idea that the Trust should broaden its activities to the tea garden areas. Accordingly, the Trust prepared a scheme and started working towards these people. With this, the Daimukhia, Dikom, Teok and Harchura

centres of the Trust started labour welfare centres and also took up schemes to build their houses. Since then the Trust is imparting service towards the labourers.

To inculcate self-reliance, the Trust imparts training in cottage industry skills. Under Gram Swaraj mantra, youths are imparted training of agriculture, pisciculture and poultry. Besides all these, training is provided on mushroom cultivation with assistance of SIRD. The Dikom Kasturba Labour Welfare Centre has also organized



A view of the Sarania Ashram

jute projects for local women and 30 women were imparted training in fabric painting in collaboration with Nehru Yuba Kendra. The Gram Seva Kendras render their service accordingly to uplift their economic status as well as to meet the need of the people of the region. For instance, the Gram Seva Kendra at Lakhimpur district implement their workforce in paddy cultivation as the region is congenial for its cultivation while the kendras at the

various hilly regions of Meghalaya are doing large-scale potato cultivation.

With financial grants from the Assam Science Society, the Trust had organized various environmental awareness camps in different parts of the state. The Trust has put in its untiring efforts to create awareness among people about the need of conserving natural resources. They also conduct plantation drives in various parts of the state from time to time. Besides organizing various health awareness camps in different parts of the state, the Trust also conducted AIDS awareness camps in collaboration with Assam AIDS Control Society. The Trust runs a pre-primary school in its campus at Sarania Hill. Also, in every Gram Seva Kendra there is one pre-primary school, and a full-fledged primary school at Lakhimpur district.

Two representatives meets and two trustee meets are held every year in the central office of the Trust at Indore in Madhya Pradesh. The representatives and trustees from the states participate in such meetings. In 1992, the executive meeting of All India Kasturba Trust was held at the Assam Branch. The Trust

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also launched a yearlong Gram Sevika training programme in 1999 with financial assistance. Among other activities the Trust had also been engaged in Bhoodan, Gramdan-Gram Swaraj movement since 1952.

Various organizations and institutions are helping the Trust financially from time to time. Every month they get financial aid from their central branch at Madhya Pradesh. But the love and care from the masses and financial grant from the organizations help the Trust a lot in taking up various other activities.

Back to the Beginning

In 1944, Kasturba Gandhi died under detention in Pune's Aga Khan palace. In Gandhiji's words, "Kasturba was a simple illiterate village girl." After her death leaders like Madan Mohan Malavya, Thakkar Bapa thought about a plan to commemorate the life of the rare individual and started a drive to collect funds and they also formed a Trust Board. Due to the high esteem in which Kasturba Gandhi was held by all, donation began to pour in. People from foreign countries also donated to the fund. Assam donated more than Rs. 1.44 lakh. On the 2nd October 1944, on the occasion of Gandhiji's 75th birthday, Sarojini Naidu handed over a cheque of Rs. 80 lakh to Gandhiji, on behalf of the Trust. As Kasturba was a simple village girl, Gandhiji wanted that the money collected in her memory should be spent for the welfare of the woman and children of India's villages. He also suggested that woman folk would themselves look after the Trust. Thus the selection procedure for representatives from all over the States started. Amalprova Das from Assam was entrusted with the works of the Trust. Gandhiji said to her: "there is no need to spend the money by creating a huge organization. I would prefer a scheme that is self-reliant. By self-reliance I mean that the trainees should be able to generate their own income. Rural work should be performed by organizing the rural people."

Following his advice Amal Prova Das with great efforts established the Kasturba Trust at Sarania in Guwahati. On the 9th of January 1946, Gandhiji lit the lamp at Sarania and said to the seven girl trainees, "For this you have to be bold, self-reliant and would have the guidance of Amal Prova...."

The prayer of the trust reflects the history, aim and objective of the Trust –

*Yadgama Kasturbaki yeh bharat ka trust mahan
Jan jan ki shradha nidhihe jalti aye jyoti saman*

.....

*Atmajyoti jap Kasturbaki param tatwa mein sama gayi
Sara desh dukhi hua tha, jan jan ki aankhei roiee
Ba ki yaad mein tab jan janne apni sab shradha sanjoiee
Sanjog karke payi payi Sarojini ne baatein banayi...*

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FEATURE**BAMBOO : A PROSPECTIVE AVENUE
FOR NER REVENUE**

- Khagendra N. Bora

India has the potential to be the largest bamboo growing country in the world. After sugarcane, bamboo is the best solar energy conservator in the nature and has a vastly lower need of water. Bamboo is a critical element in balancing the oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and it plays a very important role in conserving soil and water. Bamboo is eminently suitable for housing and general engineering because of its high strength, phenomenal flexibility and tubular anatomy. The products made by traditional artisan groups still continue to play a crucial role in the rural agro-industries of our country. But unfortunately most of India's 20 lakh bamboo artisans have to suffer because of the scarcity of raw material. Since bamboo farming is ecologically sound, it is necessary to realize the immense economic potential of this amazing material, develop its utilization and propagation and to raise plantation of related bamboo species, particularly in denuded hills and degraded areas, over logged forest areas, banks of the rivers and tanks, road sides and marginal farm land covered under agro-forestry programmes.



A view of bamboo plantation

North Eastern Region (NER) can boast of having the greatest concentration of bamboos and cane in the country that is 30% in terms of area coverage. In India, nearly 45 tonnes of bamboo are annually produced out of which 45% required for paper and pulp industry. The craft sector particularly that

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of the N.E. Region, which serves as a major means of rural women employment accounts for a yearly business of Rs. 15 billion thereby generating 250 million working days. Experts are of the opinion that with value addition in any area of bamboo utilization, the present rate of income may be doubled. A glance at the following statistics would give an overview of the country's bamboo scenario :

Place	Genera (nos.)	Species (nos.)	Area (.000 sq.km.)
World	75	1250	190
India	22	136	90
N.E.Region	15	63	30.56
Assam	-	33	7.56

India has second largest reserve of bamboo occupying 9.6 million hectares of total forest area of 63.44 million hectares. The North East Region accounts for 54 per cent of the bamboo reserves of India. The total harvest of bamboo in NER has been assumed to be 6.45 million tonnes from non-forest areas and privately owned forest lands together.

Talking about the global picture, we find that bamboos are well represented over the globe barring Europe and Antarctica with major distribution lying along the equator and sub-tropical belt. South America and East Asia account for greatest concentration with distribution of woody bamboos extending right up to the temperate zones in both hemispheres from 46⁰N latitude in Japan's island of Sakhi to 47.5⁰S latitude in South America. In comparison to Asia and South America, Africa is very poor in terms of Genera and species distribution, which is six and fourteen respectively. North America has one native species while Australia has four.

There are vast bamboo resources available in North East Region of India for commercial exploitation. Almost Rs.5000 crore worth of raw bamboo is available in this region. As per current estimate 25 per cent of raw material requirement of paper industry is currently met through bamboo.

The state of Mizoram has the highest bamboo area in the whole of North East Region covering nearly half of the total area. Each of the other NE States has sizable bamboo area, although the fact remains that judicious exploitation of this natural resource in terms of care and maintenance, sustainability of existing varieties, is almost non-existent. Even paper mapping of bamboo growing area, particularly these in unclassified forest, is not believed to have been properly made in the region. On top of this, callous destruction of wild and cultivable bamboos through out the region just to feed the paper mills and for other uses have been going on unabated with utter disregard to the husbandry aspects of this precious commodity. Therefore, the need of the hour is to restore a balance between better utilization of this resource on one side and conservation of the same on the other with an eye on ecological aspects. For this, we require to look at all issues concerning bamboo from a holistic angle since it is such a versatile

forest product that provides a long series of utilizes from fuel to food. Consequent upon excessive felling of trees for timber and other purpose, bamboo emerges as a major alternative to growers and users. More than 1/3 of world population uses bamboo, which provides employment to 20 crores all along the tropics.

Ranking next to China in respect of diversity and species distributions India presently has about 136 species belonging to 22 genera. Out of these, as many as 15 genera with 63 species are found in NE Region in an area of 30500 sq.km. The share of Region's growing stock in the country is 68%, Assam having 16.67% followed by Manipur with 14.25%, Mizoram with 13.54% and Arunachal Pradesh 12.24%.

Our region boasts of a huge bamboo surplus whose employment potential is still untapped. Mizoram has a surplus of 32 lakh tonnes. It is important to note the fact that bamboo is one of the fastest growing species having a wide range of



A craftsman preparing bamboo products

versatility and has been used for thousands of years for shelter, making implements, crafts as well as for nutrition. As many as 1500 distinct uses of bamboo had been identified with the number increasing constantly as innovations across the globe find still newer uses. Some of the uses are grouped as follows:

- i) Traditional uses – housing, fencing, leaves for fodder, agricultural implements etc.
- ii) Aesthetic uses in the form of handicrafts, decorative materials etc.
- iii) Industrial uses – making pulp for paper industry, composite boards, eco-friendly pipes for water supply etc.
- iv) Other uses like preparation of beer, vinegar, charcoal etc.

Coming finally to Assam we find that the state has an area of 7660 sq.kms. which is concentrated mainly in 6 districts. The largest

concentration is found in Karbi Anglong district, followed

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by North Cachar Hills and rest of our districts. The following table illustrates the picture (Source : Deptt. of Agriculture, Assam).

Districts	Classified forest area (000 sq. km)	Unclassified forest areas (000 sq. km)	Bamboo bearing areas (000 sq.km)
Karbi Anglong	2.33	3.65	3.89
North Cachar Hills	0.71	3.20	1.87
Barak Valley districts	2.40	-	0.83
Kamrup	0.83	-	0.49
Goalpara	0.38	-	0.28
Nagaon	0.84	-	0.20

From the foregoing table, we can find that in N E Region, man has co-existed with bamboos and bamboo-based occupation from time immemorial. Considering the abundance of this forest resource, experts surmise that, if fully utilized, without however being exploited, bamboos can sustain a major chunk of North East rural population for many more years to come. However, there is a wide gap between presence of bamboo reserves and pace and quality of their sustainable utilization. Economic exploitation will be possible only with the development of proper and appropriate technology, backed by scientific knowledge and technical skill of people and other forest dwellers over the resource. A commission has been recommended setting up of processing units within tribal areas with States' Forest Deptt. acting as facilitator for creation of such facilities. The core idea is to enable farmers and practitioners of farm forestry from producing pulp upto providing raw material to artisans.

It is quite encouraging that to preserve the high quality species of bamboo in India, the National Mission of Bamboo Application (NMBA) recently undertook an ambitious scheme. A 10 hectare land inside the vast hilly campus of Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden in Guwahati has been selected as a part of this scheme. This scheme with a budget of Rs.28,60,000 will be completed in 3 years with the cooperation of Energy Research Institute of India. Out of this 10 hectare field, 7 hectares are earmarked for bamboo cultivation and the other 3 hectares are for two bamboo nurseries and for other essential facilities for bamboo cultivation.

Lastly, the concerned government departments along with the voluntary organisations (VO) working in rural areas should create an awareness among the people living around the vast bamboo bearing forest areas of this region to increase the bamboo production so that it, which is regarded as the poor man's timber may generate their income and employment opportunities in future.

BACKGROUND

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU NATIONAL URBAN RENEWAL MISSION (JNNURM)

The Prime Minister of India launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) on 3rd December, 2005 to give focused attention to integrated development of urban infrastructure and services in select 63 cities with emphasis on provision of basic services to the urban poor including housing, water supply, sanitation, slum improvement, community toilets/baths etc. A provision of Rs.50,000 crore will be made available as reform linked Central assistance over the Mission period of seven years beginning from 2005-06.

Objectives of JNNURM are:

1. To provide focused attention to integrated development of infrastructural services in the cities.
2. To secure effective linkages between asset-creation and asset-management so that the infrastructural services created in the cities are not only maintained efficiently but also become self-sustaining over time.
3. To ensure adequate investment of funds to fulfil deficiencies in the urban sector
4. To have planned development of identified cities including peri-urban areas, out growths and urban corridors.
5. To scale up delivery of civic amenities and provision of utilities with emphasis on universal access to urban poor.
6. To take up urban renewal programme, i.e., re-development of inner (old) city area to reduce congestion.

The Mission comprises two Sub-Missions, viz., Sub-Mission-I for Urban Infrastructure and Governance and Sub-Mission-II for Basic Services to the Urban Poor. For cities/towns not covered under the Mission, the Ministry of Urban Development has launched a scheme known as Urban Infrastructure Development for Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT) while the Ministry of Urban Employment & Poverty Alleviation has formulated a scheme known as Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme (IHSDP).

The following on-going schemes of the ministries of Urban Development and Urban Employment & Poverty Alleviation have been subsumed in JNNURM:-

- i) Infrastructure Development in Mega cities.
- ii) Integrated Development of Small & Medium Towns (IDSMT).
- iii) Accelerated Urban Water Supply Programme (AUWSP).
- iv) Urban Reform Incentive Fund (URIF).

Central assistance is provided in the form of 100% grant to be funded as Additional Central Assistance (ACA). To avail of the assistance, Cities have to prepare City Development Plans (CDPs) and project specific Detailed Project Reports (DPRs). Also, State Governments and Urban Local Bodies/Parastatals

have to sign Tripartite Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Central Government. The MoA should indicate commitments and milestones to be achieved in the implementation of reforms at the State & ULB/Parastatal levels.

5% of the Central grant or actual requirement, whichever is less, is provided for preparation of City Development Plans, Detailed Project Reports, Training, Capacity Building and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities.

Financing Pattern:-

Depending upon population, geographical location of the cities and category to which a city belongs, fund is provided as indicated below:-

- (i) 35% / 50% / 80% / 90% of the cost of projects would be funded by Govt. of India through 100% Additional Central Assistance and
- (ii) 65% / 50% / 20% / 10% would be funded by State/ULBs/Financial Institutions.

Funds would be released in four instalments. First instalment shall be released on signing of MoA and approval of City Development Plans (CDPs)/Detailed Project reports (DPRs). Balance will be released in subsequent instalments depending upon achievement of reform/milestones and progress of projects.

After the launch of the Mission, the Ministry of Urban Development has taken several steps to ensure expeditious implementation of the Mission.

Regional workshops were organized to sensitize the State Governments and Urban Local Bodies and also to provide a platform for interaction and exchange of thoughts. The first workshop was held at Lucknow. Six other regional workshop were held at Guwahati, Jaipur, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai. These workshops have been of great help in clarifying issues related to implementation of the Mission.

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission requires the cities to prepare a City Development Plan (CDP). Since the CDP was a new concept, the Ministry of Urban Development took steps to facilitate its preparation through a suggestive list of consultants and the same has been circulated to the States and ULBs for taking necessary action at their end. Detailed guidelines, framework and processes as well as methodology have been widely disseminated and have also been made available on the internet. Hindi translation of the above document has also been made available. The National Steering Group, Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee and Mission Directorate under JNNURM have been set up. Efforts are on to finalise agencies for 2006-07 for appraisal of CDPs, Detailed Project Report and Memorandum of Agreement. At the State level, States have been requested to set up State Level Steering Committee, to identify State level Nodal Agencies for prioritization and appraisal of projects, release of funds and monitoring implementation of reforms and to submit CDPs, DPRs and MoA for consideration and sanction of funds.

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INDO-BANGLA TIES: ACTION FOR FAST ECONOMIC GROWTH

- Purnendu Bijoy

The North Eastern Region (NER) of India is surrounded by four neighbouring countries viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, with whom the seven sisters shares 98 percent of the border. The total length of land border between NER and neighbouring countries is 5249 km., of this, the length of border between NER-Bangladesh is 1956 km, NER-Bhutan is 650 km, NER-China is 1000 km and NER-Myanmar is 1643 km. Therefore for the people of NER, border trade and trading with the bordering areas are two very natural and easier economic proposition. On the other hand apart from three neighbouring countries viz China, Myanmar and Bhutan, Bangladesh is closer to NER in terms of geo-cultural relations. The region has age-old, socio-economic ties with Bangladesh from time immemorial. The land border between Bangladesh and NER is more accessible and cost effective than the border with other neighbouring countries. Keeping these facts in mind India and Bangladesh have signed an agreement to boost trade and economic ties between the two countries. This agreement was signed on 21st March, 2006 while Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was on a three day visit to India with high level delegates both from government departments and business organisations. According to the revised trade agreement signed by India and Bangladesh on expiry of the Trade Agreement of 1981, both countries have agreed to use their waterways, roadways and railways for passage of goods between places in one country through the territory of the other. The revised trade agreement also agreed to recognise that expansion of trade is important for development of the two countries and also took into account the asymmetries that existed between them. The agreement also called for co-operation between the two governments to prevent infringement and circumvention of rules and regulations of either country in matters related to foreign exchange and foreign trade. After signing the revised trade agreement both the sides hope to overcome the difficulties in the field of border trade between India and Bangladesh which will definitely be more beneficial for NER-Bangladesh trade.

The trade between NER and Bangladesh can be divided into two categories. One is formal or official and another is informal or unofficial. According to the data prepared jointly by Tripura Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, during 2001-2002 formal trade between two countries was 194.9 crore (5.9 crore from Bangladesh to NER and from NER to Bangladesh 189 crore). The formal exported goods by NER to Bangladesh are mainly coal, non-basmati rice, lime stones, ginger etc. while imported goods are mainly dried fish, hilsa fish, fresh fish (Table 1). On the other hand the volume of informal or unofficial trade between NER and Bangladesh is much higher than formal or official trade. The principal commodities exported (smuggled) to Bangladesh through NER include spices, textiles and readymade garments, sugar, drugs etc. while imported goods are mainly electronic items, jute and plastic products etc. (Table 2). However, the informal trade or smuggling indicate that there is hidden demand for these items. Since the regions unofficial trade volume is 4-6 times higher than official trade, this indicates the minimum potential to which the legal export can be raised. For example, demand for fish (fresh and dry) in NER is estimated at 90,000 tonnes. Even if Bangladesh would supply 50% of this, trade would increase between 50-100 million US dollars which is 5 to 10 times more than the current volume of total trade. Likewise, demand for horticulture

products like ginger, garlic, oranges, citrus fruits etc. is there in Bangladesh. If NER grows more and more horticulture products and exports it to Bangladesh it will definitely increase the current volume of total exports from this region.

But what then are the obstacles ? The obstacles are mainly low or absence of proper infrastructure and lack of co-ordination as well as co-operation. Though India played a decisive role in the emergence of independent Bangladesh but the friendship between two countries did not last long, and infrastructure facilities in terms of border trade is very low. Another obstacle is lack of co-ordination and co-operation. To overcome these obstacles with the help of both the governments, the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote Bangladesh's trade and investment opportunities and encourage Indian companies to choose Bangladesh as their preferred investment destination. The two business bodies decided to set up a joint task force to work out time-bound and target bound activities to spread awareness of bilateral trade opportunities. These Government as well as business body level agreements will definitely boost the border trade between two neighbouring countries. As a result it will increase the volume of border trade of NER and give a boost to the economy of the region. (PIB feature)

TABLE – 1

FORMAL TRADE:

To Bangladesh (Export)		To NER (Import)	
Coal	69%	Dried Fish	49%
Non Basmati Rice	15%	Hilsa Fish	26%
Lime Stone	5%	Fresh Fish	16%
Ginger	2%	Ginger, Chillies etc.	4%
Miscellaneous	9%	Miscellaneous	5%

TABLE – 2

INFORMAL TRADE:

To Bangladesh (Export)		To NER (Import)	
Spices	23%	Electronic Items	20%
Textiles and RMG	13%	Jute	15%
Sugar	12%	Plastic Products	10%
Drugs and Pharma	10%	Palm Oil	7%
Processed Food	9%	Spices	4%
Cereals	8%	Textiles and RMG	4%
Fish	6%	Fish	4%
Fruits	3%	Other Mfg. Items	1%
Paper and Paper Product	3%	Beverages	0.4%
Transport Equipment	3%	Cosmetic Toiletries	0.4%
Wood and Wood Products	2%	Transport equipment	0.2%
Misc. Item	8%	Misc. Item	34%
Total	100%	Total	100%

TOURISM- PROSPERITY AHEAD

Pankaj Pandey

Tourism is a major social phenomenon of modern society with economic consequences. Its importance as an instrument for economic development and employment generation has now been realised world over. For the last four decades there has been sweeping revolution in the tourism sector across the world. The number of tourist worldwide has been growing and it is expected to swell to 1.5 billion and receipts from it are estimated to cross 200 billion US dollars.

Despite several constraints facing the tourism sector like insurgency and proper infrastructure in the North East Region, notwithstanding high potential its share is abysmally low. India's share in world tourist arrival was 44% in 2004. Out of this North East region's share is 1.2 percent with more concentration on Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The North East Region is bestowed with diverse tourist attractions and each state has its own distinctive feature. Nature has given its bountiful to this region. The attractions are located and scattered all over the region and are largely located in remote



A view of Barak Valley Express to Haflong, Assam

areas within highly fragile environments. These attractions and people of the region constitute tourism resources at large. In the North East Region, focus should be on creating infrastructure in rural areas which have potential for tourism. The objective is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage in rural locations and in villages which have core competency in terms of craft, handloom, and textile etc.

Tourism in present day does not confine itself to hotels, restaurants and sea beaches. Its broad arena touches upon Rural area (Rural Tourism), Health Sector (Health Tourism) and Environment (Eco- Tourism). This is the case of North East Region endowed with exceptional scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage and unique art and craft. There are about 305 communities and out of these 106 are tribes. Not only are their habitats captivating nestled among verdant land, but each community has also got its distinct customs, rich cultural heritage and so many fascinating folklores to tell. So, North East caters to all the requirements and aspects of modern day tourism.

The new concept of Eco tourism can easily be implemented in North East area for which all foreign tourists are looking for. There are so many aromatic plants being grown in this region. Health Tourism can be promoted in the nearby areas with selective location. It will create market for these plants also. Tourism will have multiplier effects in

the region. It will provide job opportunities, rural development, mutual co- existence through cultural exchange, and transformation to a open society from a closed one. In the backdrop of insurgency the big question arises that although there was huge potential in the tourism sector what should have been done first to attract tourists to this region. Tourism is an industry these days and trillions of money are being circulated in this sector. This sector augments so many ancillary industries and services with a potential to create thousands of jobs. The aim is to enhance the employment potential within the tourism sector as well as to foster economic integration through developing linkages with other sectors. Tourism serves gradually as an important bridge of cultural exchange, friendship and further exchanges and exerts more and more extensive influence on the human life and social progress among various countries. Tourism industry can be expected to bring millions of rupees to the region, once proper initiative is taken, proper infrastructure are built and access to the region for tourists is thrown open. It will defuse the tension among the various ethnic groups and their dependency on Government financing.

International survey ranks India fifth amongst the tourist hot spots of the world. India has overtaken biggies like USA, France, Singapore and South Africa to be treated as one of the five most favoured tourism destinations in the world in 2005. World Travel and Tourism Council rates India as the fastest growing tourism economy in the world. Although Government of India has been successful in attracting tourists to India through the Incredible India Campaign, there is a need to give more thrust to the Northeast region.

Tourism will also assuage the secessionist sentiments among the people of this region to a large extent. Insurgency is not a mere problem of law and order, it is embedded in socio- economic aspects also. Tourism will provide cultural exchange within the country and outside the country, and enthuse acceptability of the other cultures. All the insurgent groups operating in the North East Region have as one of the main demands protection of their culture and language. They have fear that if so many people will come to this region their culture and civilization will be diluted. But if tourism will come to this region that will be showcase for their culture and religion as well as in the country and outside country with boosting handicraft and other small Industries. So, tourism will help region back to normalcy.

Tourism is a tool for rural development with participation from private sector and other agencies. Government will work as a facilitator, job opportunities will be mostly created out side the government and less dependency would be on Government funds which in many instances are not utilized to its fullest potential. People will become more aware and finally things would fall in place.

The new approach is therefore to position tourism as a major engine of growth; harness the direct and multiplier effects of tourism for employment generation, economic development and providing impetus to rural tourism, which will act as a spring board for growth expansion of international as well as national tourism. There is thus an urgent need to position North East as an international brand like Kerala's 'Gods own country'.

To take advantage of burgeoning global travel and trade and the vast untapped potential of India as a destination, for this one needs efficient and satisfactory sales services. Good state governance, tourist friendly administration and basic infrastructure are crucial to retain any region as a popular destination. Once it is achieved some of the problems from this region will evaporate. Political as well as administrative will is required for achieving this objective.

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BIHU FESTIVAL OF ASSAM

- Prafulla Pran Mahanta

The primarily agricultural society of Assam blessed by nature expresses its devotion by celebrating festivals for various seasons. Most popular are the three Bihu festivals. They are Kati Bihu (Lighting of Lamps), Magh Bihu (Sacred fire) and Rongali Bihu. The Rongali Bihu is a Spring festival of dance and music. There is community feasting and social visits during the festival day. It is the spring time festival of Assam and every individual is rejuvenated and he is caught with a spirit of *joie de vivre*. The festival occasion initiates on the last day of "Chaitra" month (Mid of April) of the Vikrama Calendar. Community cattle bath is the first ritual observed in the Bohag Bihu (Rongali) on the first day at the break



of day. Before being taken to the bath, as a ritual a paste, made of wild turmeric, black gram and mustard oil is applied on the body of the cattle. During the bath, slices of brinjal, gourd and fruit of Thekera (*garcinia pedunculata*) are thrown towards the cattle intending their sound health and longevity. The animal sheds are cleaned and in the evening insects etc. are driven away by creating smoke, a strip of pseudostem of 'Tora' (*Alpinea allughas*) are wrapped around each cattle, the old ropes used for tethering these cattle are replaced by new ones and cakes etc. are offered to them. This day is observed as "Goru Bihu" and the next day as "Manuh Bihu". Presentation of the gamocha to the elders, friends, kith and kins and even to the deity is a must in this festival. Exchange of visit to neighbours, friends, relatives is a common practice. During these visits people are fed on choicest dishes of *chira* and *doi*, *pitha*, *larus* and other delicacies etc. Earlier,

dancing and singing with musical instruments under a banyan tree or in shades of bamboo by the youth (male and female separately) was a common practise; but now-a – days abandoning the shades of the banyan tree or Bamboo tree, people organise the Bihu dances under a pandal or bihutoli. The songs in Bihu dances are for the most part youthful vibrations and are woven round themes of love and young nature in bloom. These songs are spontaneous in creation and in point of appeal and aesthetic beauty.



Singing and dancing constitute essential features of the celebration of the famous Bohag Bihu festival of Assam. Accompanied by lusty playing of the Bihu drum, the bamboo clapper, hand-clapping and the buffalo horn pipe or the *pepa*, Bihu dance is characterized by brisk steppings, slinging of hands and vigorous hip movements- symbolizing mirth and yearning for union. Young girls are dressed in colourful Muga Mekhela Chadar and Kopou flowers adorn their hair. Another dance performed on the occasion of Bihu is associated with Husori singing in which groups of young men visits households, receiving contributions and give blessings

to the family members. It is a slow dance with restrained music and steppings, the performers moving in a circle. Tribal groups liked the Misings, the Deoris and the Marans etc. perform the Bihu dance in their own distinctive styles. In the Kamrup region groups of boys perform a rather crude form of dance while visiting houses for alms on the occasion of the Mohaho festival.

Each of the ethnic groups has its own stock of dances during the spring time. The Bodos have dance associated with the marriage ceremony and the spring time Boishagu festival. One of the most graceful and captivating dances of the Bodos is the famous Bagarumba dance which Bodo maidens perform to relax themselves. It is full of vivacity: the maidens hop and swing, bend and unbend, and at times give the impression of fluttering butterflies. These are gay dances full of movement.

The Rabhas perform various dances on the occasion of the Baikhu festival. The Misings also have some group dances which are performed in a gay abandonment. They perform the Bihu dance in their own distinctive style, singing



Mising Oi-nitoms (Love songs) and also Assamese Bihu songs.

Husori is one of the ritual of the Bohag Bihu where both old and young (only male) in a group visit the doors and sing and dance in the front yard. It is started from the night of "Goru Bihu". The house owner honours the group offering betel-nuts and leaves, new cloth

(Bihuwan) and small amount of cash and in return the group offers best wishes for the new year. In the Husori, ballad type songs are sung with drums and cymbal and dance in a circle.

After completion of the Husori, Bihu dances are also performed generally by the young singing Bihu songs and plying drums, horns etc.



Today, Rongali Bihu has been modernised and elements of modern music and mass culture have crept into the traditional Bihu. However,

despite modernisation Bihu is the festival which symbolises newness-newness in nature and the youthfulness of the heart. The festival celebration nowadays continues upto May with great pomp and gaiety in villages and towns alike.

HANDLOOM SCHEMES

The Ministry of Textile, Government of India introduced the following schemes for the welfare of handloom weavers during 2005-2006:

1. Health Insurance Scheme
2. Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana
3. Integrated Handloom Cluster Development Scheme.

The Health Insurance Scheme

In pursuance of the Budget Announcement of 2005-06 made by the Finance Minister, a Health Insurance Scheme was introduced by the Government of India on November 3, 2005 in place of Health Package Scheme for handloom weavers. The scheme aims at financially enabling weaver's community to access the best of healthcare facilities in the country. The scheme is to cover not only the weaver but his wife and two children at a total premium of Rs.1000, Rs. 800 will be contributed by the Government of India and Rs. 200 by the weaver. The annual coverage/benefits will be Rs. 15,000 per family, out of which OPD cover will be Rs. 7,500. The scheme is being implemented through ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company.

During 2005-06, Rs. 27.06 crore has been provided under RE for the Health Insurance Scheme, of which Rs. 21.53 crore has been sanctioned to the ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company Ltd. (upto 28.02.2006) for coverage of 2,38,731 weavers.

The Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana

Government of India has been implementing the Bunkar Bima Yojana for handloom weavers since 2003-04. During 2005-06, the Government of India has introduced a modified Bunkar Bima Yojana called "Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana (MGBBY)" in pursuance of the Budget announcement made for 2005-06 by the Finance Minister.

MGBBY was launched on October 2, 2005 with the objective of providing enhanced insurance coverage to the handloom weavers in case of natural as well as accidental death. The scheme is implemented through the Life Insurance Corporation of India. The annual premium under the scheme is Rs. 330 per weaver, out of which Government of India's share is Rs. 150, weaver's share is Rs. 80 and the LIC's share is Rs.100. Under this scheme, the sum assured is Rs. 50,000/- for natural death and Rs. 80,000/- for accidental death. During 2005-06, a sum of Rs. 3.15 crore has been sanctioned to the LIC (upto 28.02.2006) for coverage of 210000 weavers under Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana.

Integrated Handloom Cluster Development Scheme

Government has introduced the cluster development approach for the production and marketing of handloom products under which 20 clusters have been identified in the first phase with a provision of Rs. 40.00 crore. The scheme titled "Integrated Handloom Cluster Development Scheme" has been introduced as a new Central Sector Scheme from 2005-06.

The 20 Handloom Clusters identified for development in the first phase are Chirala and Madhavaram (Andhra Pradesh), Bijoinar (Assam), Surendranagar (Gujarat), Kullu (Himachal Pradeesh), Gadag (Karnataka), Tribandrum (Kerala), Chanderi/Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), Imphal (Manipur), Sonapur and Bargarh (Orissa), Triruvannamalai, Trichy and Kurinjipadi (Tamil Nadu), Varanasi, Barabanki and Mubarkpur (Uttar Pradesh), Burdwan, Nadia (West Bengal) and Bhagalpur (Bihar).

The Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad has been appointed as National Resource Agency for development of clusters. It has also been appointed as Implementing Agency for the first cluster in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.
