
Developing Contemporary Assam: Some Issues and Concerns

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Abstract

History reveals that some of the regions of the world have been ahead in the race of development while some others have been lagging behind. Disparity in any form whether inter- regional or intra- regional, may be partly due to resource endowments and partly due to policy framework and execution For example, the United States of America, Japan, U.K., Australia, Canada and the countries of the European Union are highly developed nations but most of the countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia are very backward. If we consider India in particular, we see that several states and regions of India have developed rapidly since the advent of planning while many others are still backward. The northern and the western regions of the country are fairly developed, the eastern region, especially the north-eastern region, remains the most backward. Besides inter regional differences, there is also intra-regional disparity among the states of India. Assam as one of the north-eastern State along with Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and Jharkhand is one of the top 5 poorest States in terms of NSDP per capita. This paper focuses to draw attention of the scientists, planners, policy makers and administrators on the development challenges and issues of Assam and initiates the steps required for channelizing the same to desired lines for socio-economic development of the State.

Introduction

Assam as one of the State of India was a prosperous land with its per capita income of 4% which was above the national average at the time of independence. But today Assam is one of the poorest States of the country with its per capita income less than 60% of the national average. A hoard of issues like natural calamities, industrial backwardness, insurgency, terrorism, mass poverty, ethnic tensions and clashes, terrorism, unemployment, serious financial crisis, geographical isolation and so on and so forth have resulted in such a situation. Further, a series of wars with neighbouring countries namely Indo - China in 1962, Indo - Pak war in 1965 and formation of Bangladesh in 1971 resulted in huge migration of refugees hindering prospective investors to invest in Assam. Not to forget, hemmed in by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan, it has intricate problems of regional, national and international dimensions. Maltreatment of consecutive governments has retarded serious and sensitive issues unresolved for decades. This ill treatment has promoted many of the genuine grievances of the Assamese people and helped the continuing conflicts and misconceptions to thrive. As a consequence, people of this region have increasingly grown perturbed and became mentally alienated from the rest of the country. This paper initiates to highlight the major issues which have been retarding the economic development of the State and also point out some policy implications for its development.

ISSUES

➤ ***Illegal Migration:***

The subject of 'illegal migration' from Bangladesh has been one of the most significant and emotive topics in the political milieu of Assam for almost half a century now. It has been an recognized fact that large-scale illegal migration from Bangladesh has posed a threat to the security of India and the identity of the indigenous people of Assam is also at threat. To a great extent, this has been possible due to encouragement by some political parties of Assam, having vested political interest of vote banks to win elections. The issue of undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh has been an age-old, wretched and highly poignant subject for the ethnic Assamese population. High influx of people from Bangladesh through the porous border and their subsequent enrolment in the State's electoral rolls is believed to be done clandestinely by political parties looking for easy vote banks. This has harmed the indigenous identity of Assamese people. Census figures showing an abnormal spurt in the State's non-Assamese population in the period from 1971 till now has further heightened their concern. It has put tremendous pressure on land, creating socio-political and environmental problems that have indirect adverse effects on the economy. The immigrants hardly contribute to the government revenue while the government spends a substantial amount to maintain this significantly large fraction of the population. National politicians have also shied away from dealing with illegal migration, partly because the issue is toxic and partly because local politicians like to register newcomers as voters.

Now, though the focus has been on the Bangladeshi Muslims, there have been immigrants from the Hindi heartland as well, mostly Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They come as cheap labour and take up jobs that the local people do not do easily. Even where the locals are ready to work, the employers prefer immigrants because they work for lower wages. The local people, therefore, perceive them as competitors. Thus we see that Assam has its root in the abnormal growth of population which is again not a natural growth but due to continuous influx of migrants that is putting tremendous pressure on land: man ratio. Competition for natural resources, economic opportunities and even cultural identity is the reason behind recurring economic, social and ethnic conflicts in the State.

➤ ***Agrarian Economy:***

While most other states in India are gradually moving away from their traditional agriculture-based economy toward industry or service oriented economy, Assam continues to be predominantly agrarian. As per the Population Census, 2001, 53 % of the rural labour force still depends on agriculture and allied activities. Further, the devastating flood and erosion of river Brahmaputra and its tributaries are destroying the agriculture every year. Brahmaputra board is not being able to deal this crucial aspect. As a result agricultural growth remains disheartening. The basic problems of Assam's agro-sector relate to faulty crop management, non-restoration of degraded land, absence of alternative to jhum cultivation, absence of organic farming and improved water management, undesirable crop composition, lack of integrated plant nutrition supply and pest management system and inadequate research work on agro and allied sectors to name a few.

➤ **Slow Industrialization:**

The economy of Assam compared to most other states in India, is considered a less developed State due to its weak industrial base which depicts a gloomy picture of the economic condition of the State. The industrial scenario in Assam is dominated by two major industries, viz, tea and oil and natural gas which account for the maximum value addition. But despite of these, the industrial sector of Assam is not growing at a rapid pace. The manufacturing sector contributed to only about 7% to GSDP during 2010-2011. The growth of the sector registered at 3.8 % (at constant prices) during the same year (Economic Survey, Assam 2011-12). According to the survey in Assam conducted by Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, (IIE), 2003 – 2004, out of total small scale industries of North East India, 63.7% are in Assam which is only 1.29% of all India total of small scale industries. In India about 47.22 % of the units were located in UP, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, MP and Tamil Nadu. Even though the small scale sector has huge potentialities in Assam, but the performance is far from satisfactory.

After independence, although India's industrial policy was predominantly aimed towards developing large scale industries near raw material supply centres along with an effective national infrastructure network to transfer the resources to other industrial areas, the industrial scenario of the State of Assam was mostly restricted inside the growth of employment oriented small scale sector, which encompasses of manufacturing and processing industries. The total SSI/MSME units in Assam (figured 34327) used to employ 178054 persons till the year 2010-11. The State of Assam discourages setting up of chemical or polluting industries. Many chemical units manufacturing pesticides were asked to suspend operations on pollution grounds and later they were asked to move to another location which is another bottleneck to development.

➤ **Flood Problem:**

The recurrence of flood and erosion continues to be the burning problem of Assam. Every year in Assam the floods leave a trail of destruction, washing away villages, submerging paddy fields, drowning livestock, besides causing loss of human life and property in billions. Brahmaputra has become the river of sorrow for Assam. The mighty Brahmaputra, though a life giving river has become more synonymous with devastation than with prosperity it is also known as the Burha Luit.

Flood causes billions in damages every year in Assam. A trail of destruction like washing away villages, submerging paddy fields, drowning livestock, besides causing loss of human life and property of many people, are a few common problems in Assam which leave by flood every year. According to the National Flood Commission, the area vulnerable to floods in Assam at 31.60 lakh hectares against 335.16 lakh hectares for whole India. Assam thus accounts for 9.4 per cent of total flood prone area of the country. The irony is that when the other states of India suffer due to floods, it is treated as a national calamity. But Assam in spite of reeling under flood every year hardly gets an eye or ear of the nationals of the country.

➤ **Unemployment:**

Assam being the largest state in North Eastern region, alone has 2.2 million unemployed youth. A key constraint to the growth has been poor infrastructure and limited connectivity (roads, telecommunications and power supply), both within the region as well as with the rest of the country as per ASSOCHAM. With no follow up in the form of investment plans, no new jobs are created leading to further disillusionment of the youth. Further, literacy level and educational attainment are vital indicators of development in a society, a region or a nation. According to the NFHS-3 (National Family Health Survey 2005-2006) and the 2011 census of India, the literacy rate of Assam is 76.5% which is far behind other states.

According to the National Sample Survey's 66th Round, Assam has the third highest unemployment rate in the country: urban unemployment of 52 percent, rural unemployment of 39 percent. The numbers for urban unemployment seem dismal already; the lower rate of rural unemployment is no cause for cheer either. Rural employment is largely in agriculture, a sector that is plagued by large scale underemployment and disguised unemployment. It's likely that the true unemployment rate for rural Assam is even higher.

➤ **Violence, Insurgency and Ethnic Uprising:**

Insurgency has broken the backbone of our economy, as no investor from outside, finds it secured to invest in such troubled premises. Assam, an ethnic and cultural mosaic, carrying in its embrace Ahoms, Bodos, Koch Rajbanshis, Santhals, Mishings, Dimasas, Kukis, Hmars, Zemis (Nagas), Karbis and innumerable other smaller tribes with a significant presence of Bengalis, Biharis, Oriyas, Nepalis, is truly a mini India. And yet the tragedy is that Assam is burning, bleeding and reeling under the impact of an unprecedented scale of violence. Violation of human rights whether abductions, ransom, extortion by the ultras and other miscreants or the alleged atrocities unleashed by the state machinery continue unabated, making life difficult for the peace-loving Assamese. Unprecedented levels of violence and emergence of several insurgent groups and militant outfits now disturb a once tranquil land of hills, valleys and rivers with an abundance of natural resources. This includes the ULFA mainly in the Brahmaputra Valley, NDFB and BLT in Bodo dominated areas, MULTA in areas inhabited by immigrant Muslims and BLTF in Bengali speaking areas, Birsa Commando Force and All Santhal Cobra Force in the Santhal dominated areas within a short span of time. It has influenced the educational, social and economic aspiration of countless Assamese citizens. They have committed scores of incidents of mindless violence like murders, bomb explosions, kidnapping for ransom etc. which have had a serious bearing on the law and order situation of the State. Despite efforts made by successive State Governments to hammer out an amicable solution of this insurgency, it continues, causing frequent law and order problems.

Not to forget, Assam had the highest conflict induced Internally Displaced Persons in the world during the year 2014, according to a report prepared by Asian Centre for Human Rights. The Asian Centre for Human Rights claims that there are over 3,00,000 internally displaced persons in Assam, which is the highest in the world during 2014.

Further, the Centre has declared the entire Assam as a "disturbed" area under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act -- the AFSPA -- for three more months with effect from May 3, 2017 citing various violent activities by insurgent groups ULFA, NDFB and others. As India takes advantage of globalized economy and develops growth centres around Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai, etc, Assam in the foreseeable future is unlikely to attract any national or foreign investors due to such fear of violence, insurgency and ethnic uprising.

➤ **Poverty:**

Though the government never shies away from touting about its various poverty alleviation and social welfare programmes, over one crore people in Assam or over one-third of the State's citizens, continue to remain below the poverty line (BPL). As per the latest data on 'Poverty Estimates for 2011-12', based on the Tendulkar Methodology, 101.27 lakh or 1.01 crore of Assam's population are categorized as BPL. Further, 33.89 per cent of people in rural areas (92.06 lakh people) of the State are BPL; while in the urban areas of Assam 20.49 per cent of the total population (or 9.21 lakh people) fall in the BPL segment.

➤ **Low State Income:**

One of the many aspects of growing economic inequality in India in the period of economic reforms has been spatial, expressed, for example, in regional and State-level differences in per capita income. Although Assam's GSDP increased by 12.7% in 2011-2012, that of other Special Category States like Uttarakhand and Sikkim fared much better with 24.7% and 19.24% respectively. According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (August 2015), Assam along with Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and Jharkhand is one of the top 5 poorest state in terms of NSDP per capita. Assam has net state domestic product per capita below Rs. 50,000. Goa has highest NSDP per capita among 33 Indian states and union territories. NSDP per capita of Goa is estimated at 224,138 Indian rupees in 2013-14 at current prices. Ranking of Delhi is two with per capita income around of 212,219 INR. Sikkim is at third, Chandigarh is at fourth and Puducherry is fifth richest economy of India.

➤ **Unhealthy Fiscal Health:**

Rising revenue expenditures and declining capital expenditures has been quite common for Assam for some time now. Owing to relatively high inflation and rising wages of government employees, revenue expenditure has been on the rise while capital expenditure has been on decline. Large budget surrenders, undrawn balances every year by key infrastructure and social welfare departments shows that the State is unable to apply such funds even when human development indices are among the lowest in India. This also points to the ineffective systematic monitoring and evaluation both by the State and Central Government. Further, though the State government has taken a series of financial reform measures which has helped the state government for uninterrupted flow of funds for developmental activities. But still there is a huge gap between investment and return of the government. Similarly there is a huge gap between interest receipt from loans and advances of the state government and average interest on government's borrowings.

Way ahead:

A State like Assam desperately needs some facelift to improve its image in the India. As Such certain **new Initiatives are required to be taken**. To eliminate the current disparity between the state and the nation's average level of living would require Assam to adopt a growth strategy to raise its per capita income to the national average in the years to come. This would require a host of measures like a pick-up in state income growth, steady pick-up in investment, fiscal consolidation, etc. Let us discuss a few of them.

➤ **Increase State Income**

The Economic Survey, 2014-15, has placed Assam among states with higher growth rate — both in net state domestic product (NSDP) and growth of per capita NSDP at current prices (2004-05 series) in 2013-14 — over the previous year. This is the first time that the state's NSDP and per capita NSDP growths rates have been above the national growth rate for two consecutive years. While the growth rate in NSDP is 15.9%, the growth rate of per capita NSDP is 14.5%. The national growth rate is 9.6% in per capita NSDP and 11.1% in NSDP.

The survey by its preliminary assessment anticipates that Assam will one of the biggest gainers from transfer of central funds in absolute terms under a new formula devised in the 14th Finance Commission (FFC) recommendations along with Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.

Though this seems to be a positive sign for Assam, what is required in this hour is sustained growth. Lack of physical infrastructure and adequate credit should be factored in for formulating future growth paths. The need for tapping new initiatives that the central government plans to implement with a spirit of competition between the states of the country is a must if there has to be sustained growth in our state. Public investment in education, transportation, and fire protection - services that businesses rely on heavily - can create jobs in the short run and improve economic growth and job quality in the long run. The Global Business Summit would be held in the State in November 2017 where the government hopes to gain big ticket investments at par with other developed states in the country which is a welcoming move in this direction. **Restoring infrastructure will help in reversing** the serious decline in state investment in transportation, public buildings, water treatment, and other forms of vital infrastructure leading to creating jobs and promoting economic upturn.

Assam can target its economic development resources where most future jobs will come from. That means producing more home-grown entrepreneurs and helping start-ups and young, fast-growing firms already located in the state to survive and to grow. In order to **pursue focused tax increases**, policymakers can raise taxes on high-income households and profitable corporations by changing the state income tax and reinstating taxes on inherited wealth. The States can also avoid the unnecessary social, economic, and financial costs of detaining unauthorized immigrants.

➤ ***Promote Agriculture and Rural Sector:***

To improve the rural economy, the emphasis should be on promoting the small scale industries (SSI) sector and ameliorate the condition of small and marginal farmers. Small and marginal farmers, should be provided with modern agricultural implements, bio-fertilizers, tractors, improved seeds and effective irrigation facilities to produce improved varieties of food. Appropriate policies can be formulated regarding importation and exportation of agro-based and agricultural products, livestock and their products, etc in order to assure a safe balance of domestic supply and demand. Captivating and huge advertisement, in media and newspapers announcing benefits to farmers will not materialise if the real beneficiary does not get the support in hand. The whole agriculture sector of Assam right from producing tea, rice, citrus fruits, rapeseed, potatoes, banana, papaya etc can be made export quality, if the small and marginal farmers are given adequate support by the Government Agencies. Assam can also eye for exports and carving out a share for itself in the world market. Export of tea, silk, agricultural produce, bamboo products, silk, jute, etc, can make Assam flourishing in the international market. However, State Government along with the relevant stakeholders have to discuss and solve the problems of the rural agrarian people, provide them modern technology, streamline the pricing system, abolish the illegal Syndicates and Goonda Taxes and make a congenial atmosphere for trade and business to take place smoothly.

Agriculture in Assam requires reorientation in line with Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. The farm sector in the two states focus on increasing the growth of high value commodities like fruits and vegetables.

Further, rural development can be instigated by increasing the budget allocation for rural development. It can be ensured that all programmes executed in the areas of agriculture; livestock, cooperatives and rural development are designed so that they achieve a balanced division of roles and responsibilities among men, women, youth; equitable access to and control of resources; and equitable access to the benefits of development. Also formation of groups can be promoted especially among those who otherwise would have difficulty gaining access to productive resources (e.g., women, youth and the physically disabled).

➤ ***Speeden the Pace of Industrialization:***

The manufacturing sector of the State continues to suffer abysmally low level of productivity. In spite of huge potentiality of the sector for the creation of gainful employment, the sector was not able to generate enough employment opportunities for the growing labour force of the state. The Government of Assam has several schemes for the expansion of the sector the State. In its Industrial Policy – 2008, the Government has declared several incentives and subsidies and brought some simplification in its procedures in respect of registration. At the same time, various agencies and NGOs are also actively involved in the promotion of the sector in the State. Despite of such initiatives the State completely failed to attract sizeable investments, mainly due to the existence of several structural bottlenecks in the form of lack of sufficient infrastructures like power, industrial estates, transportation, communication, quality manpower, financial institutions, etc.

As per National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) figures, 56% workforce in Assam in 2011-12 were in agriculture and only 6.5% in industry and the remaining 37.5% in services. Hence, the transition that's happening in terms of industrialization in Assam is very slow. As such efforts need to be made for technology up gradation, entrepreneurship development, skill formation, exploitation of the rich untapped resources of the State, etc. Hence, the State Government along with the Central Government should make intense efforts for removing these infrastructure inadequacies in order to make the State a preferred destination for investment. The State Government should hold events and invite investors from outside. If investors are alarmed about the law and order situation of the State, then they should be given security cover so that there is no hesitation from their end.

Further linkages between industry and agriculture should be strengthened. Given that the economy is agricultural based, industrial development should envisage expansion of processing industries and improving technology at the production level in agriculture and industry.

➤ **Look East Policy:**

The 'look east' policy is poised to benefit Assam and other north-eastern states by facilitating free movements of goods and people between this part of India and the Southeast Asian countries. While the people in Assam will benefit from being able to consume cheap imported goods from China and countries in Southeast Asia, there is not much, out of what Assam produces to export to those countries. The export of tea and handicraft items to this region may increase and find a market. However, if Assam and other north-eastern states are used just as a trade corridor, without integrating them into the production of traded goods, the gain would be inconsequential for the overall economic development of the region. There may be unintended consequences such as smuggling of illegal drugs and arms, human trafficking, and a surge of violent crimes. What is needed is a plan beyond the diplomacy of the 'Look East Policy,' a plan that can provide visibility and branding to the potential of region. Specifically, it needs a robust regional economic plan which, coupled with new international relationships, can provide a lucrative alternative to the limited trade opportunities that exist today for the NE through the expensive "Chicken's Neck" route to India (slim strip of Bengal that runs between Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan).

In order to improve the water connectivity of the mighty Brahmaputra, India's only male river and one of the most powerful rivers of the world, a five a five-day-long 'Namami Brahmaputra' festival, touted as the biggest river festival in the country, was being held from March 31 across 21 districts of Assam through which the mighty river flows. This move was taken specifically to highlight the potential of the river as an economic lifeline and how it can be used to reach markets in South Asian countries through the cheapest means of transportation, promote economy, trade and commerce, culture, skill, industry and tourism.

➤ **Tackling Migration Issue:**

Awareness should be promoted about illegal migration into Assam being not only a threat to the identity of the Assamese people but what is more, being a grave threat to our national security. India has to take some stringent measures to curb migration issue from Bangladesh. Fencing, construction of border roads and proper management of border will make a difference. India has to make diplomatic effort to get Bangladesh to cooperate as illegal migration cannot be solved in an effective manner. The action of security forces should clearly convey to the illegal migrants that they would face greater danger if they try to cross the border. The Unique Identification Number (UID) scheme, i.e., compilation of data is likely to reduce the comfort level of fresh illegal migrants. Bangladeshis who are already in could be allowed to work but should not be allowed to vote and this will diminish their ability to influence government decisions by being a political force. Further, Bangladeshis who are already in could be allowed to work but should not be allowed to vote and this will diminish their ability to influence government decisions by being a political force. Those identified as illegal migrants should be allowed to stay in the country as Stateless citizens with no voting right or the right to acquire immovable property. Furthermore, the U.S. should encourage the Government of Bangladesh to implement strong measures to curtail the flow of illegal immigrants, militants, and drugs from its side of the Indo-Bangladesh border in order to prevent further destabilization of the region.

➤ **Enhance Employment Avenues**

With few educational and employment opportunities, young people have been steadily pouring out of the state for years, and the economic stagnation, the neglect of infrastructure – from roads to schools and medical care – have added to the ethnic tensions that have shattered the state into a fragmented mosaic. The state has a good pool of highly qualified, technically skilled young people who unfortunately have to leave the state in search of jobs every year. Based on the availability of this stock of human resources alone, Assam can hope to make profitable investment in service industries, particularly those in information services (like Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO), advertising, publishing, media companies). There are several advantages to information service industries. In general, these industries require low investment in physical capital and infrastructure. They are less vulnerable to the climatic conditions and to political and social disruptions.

➤ **Promote Education:**

All levels of education are important stepping-stones to development. Education stops terrorist groups from gaining strength and trains doctors and scientists to research and cure diseases. It is one of the primary movers that help impoverished nations to help themselves. Assam can definitely emulate such moves. Assam's literacy rate according to Census 2011 is 72.19 % which is far lesser in comparison to some other states in India.

To boost education in the State, in the budget for the year 2017-18, the finance minister announced a host of new projects to boost education and skill development in state with a

special focus towards women and OBC communities. He also proposed to allocate special grant amounting to Rs 667 crore for infrastructure development of colleges and universities to be spent over a period of three to four years. However, allocating funds and grants is not just sufficient. Proper implementation is what is required at this juncture. A host of measures can be taken towards promoting sustainable high levels of employment and averting the wastage of human resources by encouraging inter sectoral collaboration between education and training institutions with those organisations who are recipients of their graduates, in curriculum design and procurement of equipment and other resources. The curriculum for basic education must be designed to foster creative and inquisitive minds, must be relevant to the demands of national development and be sufficiently flexible to cater for the diverse needs of the local community. Assam has already taken a leap this year by introducing Gujarat's model of "Gunotsav" for ensuring quality in elementary education and improvement in children's learning outcomes thereby bringing qualitative changes in education.

➤ ***Reform the Systems of Food and Aid Distribution***

Various strategies can be resorted to, to promote production of crops and livestock for domestic and international markets by both small and large scale farmers. Diversification of agricultural production can be encouraged whilst intensifying production of high valued crops and stock. Progress of government food security programmes must be monitored regularly, evaluate their impacts, and revise programmes according to agricultural production. Measures can also be taken to participate in the development of a food security risk mapping, identify vulnerable areas and promote appropriate packages for the different areas.

Strategies can be developed to promote food management, processing and storage techniques and facilitate optimal distribution of food within households, communities and regions. Instead of pouring money into resources, shipping and energy costs, Assam can invest in local businesses so that the people can more effectively improve their own circumstances without having to resort to the whims of potentially corrupt and incompetent leaders.

➤ ***Encouraging Tourism:***

Assam is a fast emerging as a major tourist destination in India with its splendid tourist attractions and breath taking tourist destinations. However the State failed to take the advantage of regional, national and international linkages so far. The slow pace of progress of tourism in this state is the result of lack of experience in planning, developing and managing the sector. It needs good packaging and a marketing strategy to attract a large number of tourists from home and abroad. Unlike many other tourist destinations in India with significant historical monuments, Assam will have to rely on nature – the rivers, the hills, and the wildlife – to bring in tourists. Rang Ghar, Kareng Ghar will not be too alluring to most tourists after a visit to Taj Mahal or to Ambar Fort or to the caves of Ajanta and Ellora. Before embarking on any high sounding glamorous events, it should be the prerogative of our Government to provide the basic amenities first. There is still time to take up a basic,

pragmatic scheme of things to facilitate tourism to take Assam to new horizons of growth and development. Kaziranga, Pobitora, Manash sanctuaries need a facelift and new concepts of tourism.

An Amazing Assam tourism campaign should be promoted at a higher decibel apart from the good work done by Incredible India campaign for Assam. This should be done in a collaborative way between private companies and state government. Possibilities must be explored of smallholder farming, agro-tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism. Religious tourism can also be promoted within the State as some of the shrines like Kamakhya have the potential to attract 10 times more people than it is currently pooling in. International flights must also be resumed to Guwahati's International Airport.

The appointment of celebrity Priyanka Chopra as the tourism brand is a great move in branding the State and presenting the incredible part of Assam's diversity and unity to the outside world in the right perspective. With a global personality like Priyanka on board, Assam Tourism will now be able to tap the global market to promote tourism not only within the country but also in the US, England, Japan, Germany, etc.

➤ ***Fiscal Reorientation:***

A well designed fiscal strategy helps to move an economy on to a higher growth trajectory minimising inflation and intergenerational transfers of the burden of public debt. In the recent years, Assam has shown some signs fiscal development. In 2014-15, revenue from taxation stood at Rs. 9441.82 crore, this increased to Rs. 10, 726 crores in 2015-16 and Rs. 12180 crore in 2016 -17. Revenue collection from non-tax sources was Rs. 2412.98 crore in 2014-15 and Rs. 2188.09 crore in 2015-16. In the expenditure front, Rs. 53561 crore was released in 2016-17 in comparison to Rs. 39804 in 2015-16. This reflects a healthy fiscal health. However, in order to sustain this fiscal health, certain measures can be resorted to.

In the revenue front, measures can be taken to identify measures for broadening the public revenue base, improve revenue collection capacity, review the mechanism for suggesting changes to tax policy, monitoring tax evasion, etc. In the expenditure front, tight measures can be instituted for the control of government expenditure and compile a public debt strategy. These initiatives can strengthen public finance framework by enhancing the State's capability in planning cash and debt management and revenue forecasting systems. This can definitely be a healthy step towards fiscal reorientation.

Conclusion

Assam both as a Multi ethnic Multi Lingual State as well as an economy which is at the threshold of taking off, pragmatic and concerned political leadership is a must for survival. Opening of waterways with Bangladesh and potential of tourism, agro based industries may accelerate the economy rapidly. Assam has adopted numerous investor-friendly policies to attract investments and accelerate industrial development. Key areas of focus include the IT, tourism and power sector along with several other initiatives such as the North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIPP) 2007 and the Industrial and Investment Policy 2014. The National Register of Citizens

(NRC) updation process has started and is underway in Assam and if seriously carried out to its logical conclusion, will provide the framework of correctly identifying our bonafide citizens and protecting their life, rights and property.

Development in Assam should be attempted only if there a long term commitment to it. The region has become tarnished because of the regular cycle of violence and increasing use of violence in making any point. But there are many activities in which our people have excelled. What is needed is imagination to tap the hidden potential of individuals and institutions of the region so that their genius can flower. There is a need to start a national political leadership for effective economic development, implementation of long-delayed projects, action to stem human rights abuses by security forces, and development of trade pacts and routes with neighbouring countries. An immediate step can be taken up of progressive taxation schemes to redistribute wealth and ensure equity. The promise of better tomorrow rests not merely in expressways, flyovers and dams but also on the well being of the masses which calls for a non- exploitative society in which every individual can multiply his well being. Development of regions in India and national economy as a whole has to be viewed as parts of a single process. The progress of the national economy will be reflected in the rate of growth realised by different regions and, in turn, greater development of resources in the regions must contribute towards accelerating the rate of progress for the country as a whole. By overcoming the impediments retarding growth in Assam, Assam can definitely contribute its best to the national economy.

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