

Year End Review- 2017: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)

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Following are the major highlights of the activities of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) during the year 2017:

Ø In a landmark decision, the President of India in November promulgated the Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 to exempt bamboo grown in non-forest areas from the definition "Tree", thereby dispensing with the requirement of obtaining a permit for felling of bamboo for economic use. The decision following the approval by the Union Cabinet in a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been hailed as historic because the bamboo was legally defined as a "Tree" under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 which proved to be a major impediment for bamboo cultivation by non-farmers on non-forest land.

Ø In October, the Government constituted a high-level committee for proper management of the water resources in the North Eastern Region (NER) under the Chairmanship of Vice-Chairman, Niti Aayog. This is a sequel to the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's visit to Guwahati in August this year to review the flood situation and relief work in the North Eastern States. The Committee would facilitate optimising benefits of appropriate water management in the form of hydro-electric power, agriculture, bio-diversity conservation, reduced flood damage erosion, inland water transport, forestry, fishery and eco-tourism. Ministry of DoNER serves as the coordinating point. The Committee will submit its report, including Plan of Action, by June, 2018. The same month, the Ministry of DoNER sanctioned Rs 200 crore for flood affected reconstruction works in the four North Eastern States of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. This year witnessed unprecedented floods and the rainfall was more than 100% higher than that in the preceding months during the same period of time. Earlier during his visit to Northeast in August to review the flood situation in the four States, the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had announced a flood relief package of Rs 2,000 crore.

Ø Ministry of DoNER started an extensive exercise to reorient and rejuvenate the North Eastern Council (NEC) in a new format so that it could perform the effective role of an important resource-cum-research centre for the entire region and could be developed as the hub of innovation for the upliftment of entire Northeast. The MoS Dr Jitendra Singh said that a proposal in this regard has already been circulated and is presently under the active consideration of the Government of India. NEC was set up way back in early 1970s with the intention to give special focus to the development of this region.

Ø On 3rd December, MoS Dr Jitendra Singh announced Rs. 90 crore for "Northeast Hill Area Development" beginning from Tamenglong district on a pilot basis, in the first phase, for a period of two years. Inaugurating a two-week "Northeast handicraft-cum-handloom Exhibition-cum-Sale Bonanza" in New Delhi, he said the Ministry of DoNER got engaged in a detailed discussion with the Department of Expenditure and it was realised that for pursuing the additional objective of public welfare, an additional vertical sub-scheme may be created under the existing schemes for the Hill Area Development in the North Eastern States.

Ø MoS Dr Jitendra Singh announced the launch of "Hill Area Development Programme" (HADP) for Northeast in Imphal (Manipur) on June 05, 2017. The announcement was made during a meet of Investors and Entrepreneurs, organised by NEDFi (North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd), with joint participation of the Ministry of DoNER and the Government of Manipur. The scheme will benefit the hilly areas of Manipur, Tripura and Assam.

Ø On 16th November, a two-day "12th North-East Business Summit" was inaugurated by MoS Dr Jitendra Singh in New Delhi. The summit aimed to explore the scope for business opportunities in the North-Eastern region of India. Focus areas were Infrastructure and Connectivity with Public Private Partnership, Skill Development, Financial Inclusion, Services Sector Development- Particularly in Tourism, Hospitality & Food Processing.

Ø Northeast is all set to get India's first-ever "Air Dispensary" based in a helicopter and the Union Ministry of Development of Northeast (DONER) has already contributed Rs. 25 crore as part of the initial funding for this initiative. MoS Dr Jitendra Singh said that the DoNER Ministry had been exploring the idea of introducing a helicopter based Dispensary/OPD service in far flung and remote areas, where no doctor or medical facility was available. The proposal put forward by the Ministry of DoNER, he said, has been accepted and is in the final stages of process in the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Ø An announcement was made on August 16, 2017 that a North Eastern Cultural and Information Centre will be set up in Delhi. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had allotted a land measuring 5341.75 sqm. (1.32 acre) at Sector-13, Dwarka, New Delhi, at a cost of approx Rs. 6 crore, to North Eastern Council (NEC) for the purpose of construction of North Eastern Cultural and Information Centre. This Centre will act as a cultural and convention/information hub of the North Eastern Region in Delhi.

Ø The foundation stone of Barak Hostel in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus in New Delhi was laid on July 24, 2017. Dr. Jitendra Singh emphasised on the occasion that JNU has more than 8,000 students, out of which there are more students from Northeast than any other State outside NE region. He said that last year, the Foundation Stone of a Hostel exclusively for Northeast girl students was also laid in Bangalore University.

Ø Conference titled “North East India: Organic Production Hub; Opportunities Unexplored” was organized during the prestigious World Food India 2017, on 4th November in New Delhi. NE region has about 50 species of bamboo, about 14 varieties of banana and 17 varieties of citrus fruits. The NE region also has huge production of fruits such as pineapple and oranges. There are 3 Mega Food Parks in North East, in the states of Assam, Tripura and Mizoram. The state of Sikkim has been declared the first Organic State of India.

Ø The first meeting of the Japan-India Coordination Forum (JICF) for DoNER was held in New Delhi on August 03, 2017. Secretary, DoNER, Shri Naveen Verma led the Indian side while the Japanese delegation was led by the Japanese Ambassador to India, Mr. Kenji Hiramatsu. Priority areas of cooperation identified by Indian side including Connectivity and Road Network Development, especially inter-State roads & major district roads; Disaster Management; Food Processing; Organic Farming and Tourism.

Ø An event “Pioneering Business Idea Challenge” was co-hosted by the Ministry of DoNER (MDoNER) and North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) at Tezpur University, as part of the University's Sampark-2017, which is an industry-academia interaction aimed at providing a platform for the students/budding entrepreneurs of the North Eastern Region on July 19, 2017. During the event, Business Plan Contests were conducted. Out of 60 plans received, 15 plans were shortlisted and based on the presentations made, 3 business plans were awarded.

Ø An e-Office of North Eastern Council (NEC) which has its headquarters at Shillong in Meghalaya, was launched through video conferencing in New Delhi on May 03, 2017. The formal launching was ceremonised by submission of a file from the NEC, Shillong to the DoNER Minister's Office, New Delhi, which was then duly approved for the holding of the next plenary meeting of the NEC.

Ø The 11th North East Business Summit (NEBS) was organized in New Delhi on March 09-10, 2017. The two-day event served as an initiative to facilitate investment, highlight strengths of the NER and business opportunities which North-East has to offer. Union Minister for Railways in a video message delivered on the occasion, said an e-commerce portal will soon be launched to sell NER handicrafts and handloom worldwide on the IRCTC website. He said the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council has assured providing land for expansion of the rail link to Darjeeling, which will be further extended to Sikkim.

Ø The two-day “North East Calling” festival was inaugurated in New Delhi on September 9, 2017. On the occasion, The ‘North East Venture Fund’ was also launched, which is a joint initiative of Ministry of DoNER and North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. The objective of the fund is to promote entrepreneurship and Start up in the North Eastern Region. It is the first dedicated Venture Fund for the region with a corpus of Rs 100 crores. The Minister also launched North East Tourism Development Council with objective to promote sustainable tourism in North East India.

Ø The three-day (from March 06-08, 2017) 'Destination North East-2017' festival was organized at Chandigarh. It was organized by Ministry of DoNER with a focus on the use of appropriate technology for the development of North East Region.

Ø Detailed discussion with Members of Parliament from Northeast on the various facets of GST was carried out by the MoS Dr Jitendra Singh. At a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee for Ministry of DoNER in New Delhi on June 08, 2017, the members expressed their views about the tax provisions relating to North Eastern handicrafts & handloom products, broom-sticks and bamboo products.

Ø MoS Dr Jitendra Singh and Assam Chief Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal inaugurated the Digidhan Mela organized in Guwahati on 11th January. On the occasion, Shri Sarbananda Sonowal launched “Toka Paisa” e-wallet for initiative towards cashless economy. The Mela was organized by the Government of Assam in collaboration with IT Department and NITI Aayog.

