

4th Jayant Bhuyan Memorial Lecture

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Mrs Romola Bhuyan

Mr Hazarika

Mr President and Secretary, Byatikram Masdo

Mr Subimal Bhattacharjee

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Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly, truly privileged to have been asked to deliver the 4th Jayant Bhuyan Memorial Lecture today in Guwahati. I accepted immediately. I was so happy. Thank you very much Mr President. Mr Subimal Bhattacharjee for thinking of me. And, that, too, to celebrate JB's birthday. 65 today.

My father's family had deep roots in Assam. We had a home in Laban, Shillong. My summer holidays were spent there. For me, this is an additional dimension.

And over the last 2 years, I am a member of the Board of Governors of IIM Shillong, bringing me to the North East regularly. Another special connection. So, very happy to be here.

I spent my entire life as an employee with 1 institution-CII. 1963 to 2009. 46 years. And, I asked Jayant to join us in 1975 which he did. And, we were colleagues together for 33 years till his tragic premature passing. He and Romola became good friends and we occasionally managed to spend time together away from work and office. This was rare for us because one kept some distance from colleagues and staff. The Bhuyans were an exception. We were able to relax together, thanks largely to the Quality of Jayant. His humor. His values. His integrity. His

Dependability. Just such a fine human being. A soft person. A gentle man. Many happy memories.

I congratulate Byatikram Masdo for organising this Annual Lecture in memory of a great and good son of the NE, of Assam.

When Subimal spoke of this to me, I was moved and impressed.

The theme given to me for today's remarks is "Development of the NE"

And, I shall focus on this now. But, limit myself. Not do a comprehensive review. But, in keeping with CII tradition, what I have to say is a collective effort with inputs from several people, who shared their ideas with me, I want to acknowledge them.

When I speak of the NE, it is of the 7 sister states plus Sikkim. 8 in all. 40 million people. 7 National Parks. 4500 Kms of international borders. Literacy rate of 70%. Female literacy rate of 62%. Above the National average.

This NE Region of ours is extremely rich in resources. Rain forests. Flora and fauna. 850 species of birds. Much wildlife. And, as WWFI has said, the Eastern Himalayas is a Priority for conservation.

Plus Petroleum and Natural Gas. Rivers – the Brahmaputra and its Tributaries. Hilly terrain. Altitude ranging from sea level to 23,000 feet. Huge diversity.

Plus, Rice, 35 varieties of crop plants. Citrus fruits. Maize. Medicinal plants. 51 types of forests. 8000 flowering plant species. Just an incredible rich Region in so many ways.

And, yet, this Region has not progressed as well as it should and could. An issue of deep concern. Very little industry. Limited opportunities for employment. Hence, local people keep moving out of the Region for employment. I can talk of what Govt should do. But, will not.

So, my first point is this: "Build People, Build NE". the key to the future is not just infrastructure or funds or plans. It is people. and, as the world changes rapidly, the development of People is crucial. Technology is making the world even more People-centric.

If we take just a few sectors and areas, as examples. Fashion, Retail, Beauty and Wellness, Healthcare, Tourism, Hospitality, Handicraft, IT and Teacher Training. There are many more.

All these are in the Service Sector.

All these are in demand in the North East.

All these are areas of great opportunity.

All these can be managed by people in the NE.

All these have huge employment and self-employment potential. Huge opportunities for building people and economic activity.

The Skills Revolution can transform the NE because the areas I have listed are relevant all over the NE. We do not need huge investment. And, the NSDC is there to support financially. They can also set the standard.

Another aspect.

There is a new revolution happening.

The availability of microfinance.

Small amounts of money for business development.

To respond to new opportunities in the NE.

To fuel a new surge of entrepreneurship in the small business area.

To create a new generation of professional NE entrepreneurs. So, Skills plus microfinance can transform NE society.

My second point is “Decentralise and Develop”. Gone are the days of big, mega projects requiring a lot of land and damaging the environment. This is a time to build small infrastructure projects, be it renewable energy or mini-hydel , or others, in multiple locations to meet local demand.

This will help build local power. Local institutions. Local schools/colleges. Local healthcare facilities. The NE is ideal for this approach: Decentralise and Develop land will not be an issue. Think small. Think local. Distribute rather than centralize.

My third point concerns National Agencies and Institutions.

Several of these already existing and some to be set up new, must have their HQ in the NE. Not Delhi. Not Mumbai.

I recall how Chandrababu Naidu, then CM of AP, fought for Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority to be HQ in Hyderabad.

In the same spirit, 8 states of the North East can have HQs of 8 National Institutions which will serve as catalysts for development. And, each of these will be in areas of strength of the NE, perhaps, in forests or the Services Sector or Agriculture.

To start with Ministry Development of North East Region (DONER) should be relocated to the NE from Delhi. It is mandated to develop the NE. it needs to be HQ here in the NE.

My fourth point is “Build Sports, Build NE”.

This maybe strange to say but success in sports builds pride and self-confidence. Builds fitness. Mary Kom. Bhaichung Bhutia are 2 renowned names. Respected names. Brand Ambassadors.

If underprivileged children have the opportunity to play, to be coached, their hunger will drive them to Medals and Honours. Don't underprivileged children have the right to play and thereby be diverted from drugs, crime, violence etc? We need 10 Mary Koms and 100 B Bhutias.

Football and Boxing are 2 examples. Football is a low cost team game. Boxing is an individual sport. There could be others.

But, the message must go out that NE can excel in sports and, therefore, a big push must be made. Children from the poorest section of society must have access to coaches and sports itself will provide numerous career opportunities.

My fifth point, to take each of the areas of strength and potential an set up Skills Development Centres in each of the 8 states. Duplication to be minimized. Coordination to be driven so that each centre is focused, operates in a niche area and builds people of quality. CII has done this in MP. Entirely funded by Industry. Why not in the NE????

My sixth point is that the People of the NE will build the NE. No one else. Others can add, can supplement. Not replace. Not substitute.

And, this will happen by building People. by focusing on HR development. This is the key to growth, to development, to prosperity-of the NE. So, a lot of attention, priority, focus must be on building the HR of the NE. People make the difference, either way.

Let me turn now to conservation. And, bring into focus the WWFI which is present in Guwahati and throughout the NE.

Conservation is Development.

Conservation is Growth.

Conservation is Essential.

Here are some examples of the work of WWFI:

1. Managing human-elephant conflict.
2. Implementing the Indian Rhino vision.
3. Surveys in the B'Putra island to develop wildlife corridors.
4. Community engagement and alternative livelihood promotion.
5. Assessment of the impact of the B'Putra on wildlife in the floodplains.
6. Promoting the area of community conserved areas.
7. Work on survival of Red Pandas.
8. Snow Leopard surveys.
9. Assessing climate vulnerability.
10. Enhancing protection of Tigers.
11. Education in Schools/Colleges.

The Living Himalaya initiative between India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Why do I mention these examples? Because, we need to hear specifics. General statements don't impress or impact us. The Hornbill Fest of Nagaland is global. There is also a thriving initiative on the Amur Falcon.

This NE Region is in desperate need of a variety of Conservation activities. WWFI is doing work. So are others.

But, much, much more needs to be done. For example, WWFI can do more if resources were available, we need to generate these by collecting small amounts and donating for specific projects and programmes, we have to train many more people in conservation.

One message for me is very important. In CII, we did the work, we generated the resources.

We did not keep looking to Govts for aid.

Govts are doing what they do best, eg, building Infra, building bridges, and much else.

But, Institutions and individuals can contribute greatly because every little bit adds up.

In my Book 'Crossing Frontiers' which is on display, I have recalled that CII did not have member cos in the NE but we set up offices in the Region – there are 5 now in the 8 States – and initiated activities because of our commitment to the NE and its development . CII does multiple work including studies, surveys, exhibitions, marketing promotion, etc.

Nandinee Kalita, who is here, has been located in Guwahati for years , driving this agenda.

There is only one further step for CII. Today, the coordination of NE work is from the National HQ in Delhi. Many years ago it was Calcutta. Similar to DONER which is located in Delhi. CII will have to consider establishing its NE HQ in the NE, relocating from Delhi. This is critical. CII will have to integrate even more deeply with the NE. because it is an Institution committed to the NE.

There is much else one can say about the NE. Its Infra, governance, music and culture, crafts; the English language; Tea Industry; its too few medium colleges. And, so on. Each and all are important. But, I want to conclude on a very fundamental issue which takes me back to my friend and colleague, Jayant Bhuyan, whose life we celebrate today.

And, this relates to Integration. This is a challenge for the people of the NE vis-à-vis the rest of India.

There are differences in culture, customs and practices. In beliefs.

All this gets highlighted when people from the NE move out to other parts of India as is happening now. They are finding it difficult to fit in. To adjust. To adapt. And, this is, of course, a 2-way street. People in the rest of India are finding the same challenges.

But, there was a young man, Jayant Bhuyan, who came out of Assam, took a job in an Industry Association in Cal in 1975 as junior executive, ready to experiment and experience this challenge. A different Calcutta from now. A Cal beset with gheraos and industrial strife.

He rose steadily to become Deputy Director General of CII. At the very top. For a few years, by mutual agreement, he went to head Assocham as its Secretary General. He headed CII in Bombay, Calcutta, London. He headed its international Division.

This man crossed the bridge of physical and psychological barriers as he went out of the NE. And, he excelled.

And, apart from working with Industry and Govts at all levels, he went and married a Bengali girl from Cal, Romola, taking integration to the ultimate.

He was a true Indian.

He did not believe in Isolation.

He was not alienated.

He was Jayant Bhuyan.

- Who preserved his culture and heritage.
- Who grasped the new economic opportunity.
- Who emerged out of the NE into the unknown jungle of India.

- And, who succeeded extremely well. Lets salute this great human being. JB.

Thank you.