

Business Opportunities with special reference to Northeast India and Realigning strategies towards the Look East Policy

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Abstract: The present paper looks at the business and investment opportunities on two strata – at one level, we would analyse the business opportunities arising out of the policy support given by Government of India to the Northeastern region and later stretch the business opportunities and possibilities beyond the realm of Government support. Innovative services industry, creative and technology based business opportunities have been forged by entrepreneurs with unbound energy and right application of knowledge, technology and services.

Keywords: Business Opportunity, Northeast, Look East policy

Business and Investment Opportunities in the Northeast India

Under this section, we would look at business opportunities and investment which are identified by states and central Government and the various investment and subsidy support are discussed threadbare. Despite our socio-economic problems, Northeast India is considered as a high growth region now. There are various investment opportunities in the Northeastern states. As per the ‘North Eastern Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIPP) – 2007’ by Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the whole of Northeastern region has been declared as Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The benefits that were applicable to SEZs only are now applicable to all the industrial units located anywhere

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in the Northeastern region. Under the NEIPP – 2007 policy document, the Governments offer subsidies such as, on cost of infrastructure, on transport, on training, on power, etc. The Central Government has declared that new units in the Northeastern region will be eligible for exemption from income tax for a period of five years from the date of commercial production. In addition to it, the Central Government offers Central Transport Subsidy at 90% of transport cost of raw material brought from outside the Northeastern region as well as the finished goods sent from the Northeastern region to other parts of the country. In addition, subsidy is also available at 90% of transport cost on movement of raw materials and at 50% of transport cost on movement of finished goods from one state to another within the Northeastern region. This region is believed to be rich in various minerals such as natural gas, oil, coal, etc. The exploration of these minerals has not taken a boost because of the lack of infrastructure. With an improvement in the infrastructure facilities, exploration of ores and minerals is also expected to take place at a mammoth scale.

The forests cover majority of the geographical area in all the Northeastern states. The forests are a huge source of the medicinal plants. With the demand of ayurvedic medicines growing around the world, the demand of medicinal plants is set to grow. The medicinal plants like Ginseng and Taxuz Bacata, which have tremendous commercial potential for export, are available in abundance in the region. The commercial scale farming and processing/distillation of medicinal and aromatic plants like citronella, lemon grass, geranium, aloevera, etc. have been successful in the region. Scientific harnessing of this potential sector can yield good results. The agro-climatic condition is very conducive for the development of sericulture in Northeastern states. The cultivation of all four species viz. eri, mulberry, muga and oak tasar are successful in the region. The state governments have identified eri development as a thrust area. The sericulture firms provide technical and other supports like training of farmers, distribution of improved varieties of saplings and supply of disease free “lying”. The entire Northeast has a high concentration of bamboo, the “wonder” plant. The bamboo at present is used mainly for handicrafts, paper making and other traditional uses. The potentials

of bamboo for various other end uses are limitless. The value added applications such as foods, medicinal products, as a wood substitute, as a building and construction material, ply board, flooring, furniture are endless. The renewed interest due to plant usefulness and beauty, especially as a cheap, strong and fast growing renewable material with untapped industrial potential has brought bamboo to the fore ground among the resources available in the Northeastern states of India.

Of the myriads of opportunities identified, three sectors tourism, food processing and horticulture and infrastructure are selected as niche areas and they have the potential of bringing about a paradigm shift and economic turnaround of the entire region. The said sectors could evolve as drivers of economic investment in the region. The investment opportunities available in each sector is given in detail as under.

1. Tourism Sector

As far as investment potential in the tourism sector is concerned, taking into account the existing infrastructure that can attract domestic and international tourists, Meghalaya, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh offer most of the opportunities leveraging the “untouched” natural and scenic beauty. In Assam, though there is some fear about militancy or insurgency, but that is confined to “upper Assam” area of the state. The states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram also has a lot to offer in terms of natural beauty. These states are ideal destination for eco-tourism etc. Taking all the factors like security, mindset of state Governments towards investments into account, we suggest Assam and Meghalaya as the two states where we found significant possibilities towards the investment in the tourism sector. For instance, building hotels on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model are eyed across Northeastern states by Thai investors.

2. Food Processing and Horticulture Sector

The region offers scope for cultivation of a wide variety of agricultural crops because of its diversities in topography, altitude and climatic conditions. These products are sold mainly in the local markets, and mostly in the form of primary produce without significant value-addition.

In spite of covering 7.7% of the country's total geographical area, North-eastern region produces only 1.5 % of the country's total food grain production. Agriculture provides livelihood support to 70 % of the population of Northeastern region. The undulating topography and varied agro-climatic conditions offer vast potential for the development of horticulture for growing varieties of tropical, sub-tropical and temperate fruits, vegetable including off season vegetables, spices, aromatic and medicinal plants flowers and mushroom. The fruits being perennial in nature help in checking soil erosion and provide high density green cover to the soil. These trees can also be planted in retrieve soil which provide potential alternative for control of shifting cultivation. Across the seven states, after meeting with various secretaries of the states and understanding the existing infrastructure, it can be summed up that there lies immense potential to invest in food processing and horticulture sector across various growth sectors for various fruits and flowers. The various states identified for various fruits and flowers are shown in the table below:-

Sl. No.	State	Crop / Horticulture produce	Area	Additional Remarks / Comments
1	Manipur	ASEAN Fruits and Orange processing (juices)	Mhao (35 Kms from the capital)	An Organization – 'Exotic Fruit Juices Private Limited' is coming up with the investment of INR (Indian Rupees) 7,00 million
2	Mizoram	Orange and other fruits	Near	State Government owned Organization – MIFCO, opportunities for possible collaboration
3	Assam	Jute produce (Handicraft and Handlooms)	Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagaon, Dhubri, Barpeta and Darrang	Ramee fiber has some excellent characteristics namely, long fine ultimate cells, low lignin content, high degree of luster, a high degree of crystalloid and orientation, and high tenacity.
4	Assam	Cut flowers	Guwahati	Availability of cold chain funded by APEDA, packaging unit and big cold storage is coming up in Guwahati that can be lease to various entrepreneurs. If these flowers are to be sold to Europe, then 10% of FOB rebate is given to perishable exports.

5	Tripura	Pineapple juice / titbits / slices / jam etc	Area around state capital	Queen variety pineapple available. Cold storage at Agartala with a capacity of 10 MT.
6	Assam	Ginger other organic crops	North Cachar Hills & Karbi Anglong	
7	Meghalaya	Mushroom		A large number of wild growing varieties with local names. Growing areas for mushroom can be found throughout the year in the state by alternating between different regions.

According to the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Import Development (APEDA) officials based in Guwahati, investment potential coupled with various government initiatives to promote export of horticulture and processed foods like juices, jams and jellies, etc. differentiate Northeastern states like Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur from the other states. Under the mini-mission IV scheme of Ministry of Food Processing Industries assistance has been provided to various food processing units.

APEDA Guwahati has scheme for support in packaging and also scheme for inland transport assistance which can be used for perishable products like banana, pineapple, orange, cut flowers, guava, bamboo shoots that allows 90% of the assistance for transportation from any airport in Northeast to Kolkata and 50% subsidy for transport from Northeast to Mumbai or Delhi. If it is to be sent through train from ICD to any port in India, then an assistance of Rs. 2 per Kg is provided. Synergies can be looked into possible “win-win” collaboration between Thai investors and local entrepreneurs They (Thai Investors and Government) have plant and machinery for preparing “cold mixes” and we have huge opportunities and funds (with central and state governments).

3. Investment Opportunities in the ‘Infrastructure’ Sector

The whole region is endowed with various perennial rivers and water

bodies such as waterfalls; hence underlining the huge hydro electricity production potential in the state. Generating hydro electricity will satiate the demand of electricity as well as keep the pristine environment clean and green. This will be cost effective as well as preserve the natural beauty of the region. Though coal is available in some parts in abundance, it is mostly low quality coal and due to the lack of transportation facilities and hilly terrain, electricity generation is costly. Across the Northeastern region, investment opportunity exist in the power generation and road infrastructure areas, as far as infrastructure sector is concerned.

The power generation opportunities especially in the hydro power were found in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram where several water bodies are present and passage of water through various elevations make the states ideal place for various mega and medium sized hydro power plant. Many companies have shown interest in oil exploration and setting up oil extraction refineries in the state of Assam. There has also been special thrust in building up the road infrastructure. Sufficient funds has also been allocated in building the road infrastructure in the Northeastern states. The Northeastern states have 2,473 Kms of National Highways, 5,711 Kms of State Highways, 15,154 Kms of major District roads. The states has funds (from various agencies like Asian Development Bank, etc.) to upgrade the worn out state roads. Major oil companies have show interest in the oil exploration and setting up oil extraction refineries. Some of them are Premier Oil (UK based oil), Canroe and Reliance Industries. The Assam Government has also signed MoU with Oil India for oil exploration. Assam Power and Hydrocarbon Company have also been established recently in Assam which is an indication of the potential Assam exhibits.

Incentives towards investments (to grasp the extent of support given under NEIIP 2007)

The Central Government has shown renewed interest to develop the infrastructure and improve investment in the Northeastern part of India. The change in outlook could stem from the much touted Look East policy. The Central Government has provided various incentives towards investment in the Northeastern region of India. The various schemes

for attracting the investments are as under:-

- Central Transport Subsidy at 90% of transport cost of raw materials brought from outside the Northeastern region as well as the finished goods sent from the Northeastern region to other parts of the country. The transport cost between Siliguri (the entry point to the Northeast) and the factory site only is considered for subsidy calculations. In addition, subsidy is also available at 90% of transport cost on movement of raw materials and at 50% of transport cost on movement of finished goods from one state to another within the Northeastern region.

- Income tax exemption for 5 years for the new industrial units set up in the Northeastern region.

- Growth Centres & IIDCs to be converted into total tax free zones for next 10 years. All industrial activity in these zones would be free from income tax, excise, for a period of 10 years from the commencement of production. Similar benefits would also be extended to new industrial units or their substantial expansion in other Growth Centres or IIDCs of industrial estates/parks/export promotion zones set up by the states. Similar benefits will also be provided to units located outside the specified locations, if they belong to the specified industries listed in Annexure A of the Government of India circular.

- Capital Investment Subsidy (CIS) at 15% of investment in plant and machinery, subject to a maximum ceiling of Rs 30 lakhs would be given. Eligibility conditions will be same as in case of tax benefits.

- Transport Subsidy Scheme will be extended beyond March 31, 2007 on same terms and conditions, as are applicable now.

- Interest Subsidy of 3% on working capital loans would be provided for a period of 10 years. Eligibility conditions will be same as in case of tax benefit.

- A comprehensive insurance scheme for industrial units to be designed, in consultation with GIC and 100% premium to be borne by Government of India for 10 years.

Business Opportunities and ties with Thailand: the Look East effect

There is an improved Thai-Indian business relations in the last two decades. The other ASEAN countries besides, Vietnam and Myanmar,

are yet to have a strategy or policy to respond to India's initiative. Thailand and India are close to concluding a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) covering trade in goods by 2010. The Free Trade Agreement between Thailand and India is expected to improve trade relations between the two countries further. The FTA covering trade in goods would lead to long term mutual benefits in trade and investment and the partnership would be expanded further to cover technology know-how and expertise. The total trade of 82 items under Early Harvest Scheme (EHS) of the FTA increased by over 140 percent to about \$358.63 million in 2005-06 from \$149 million in 2003-04. India's trade with Thailand could touch USD 7 billion by 2010-11 propelled by a doubling in transaction under Free Trade Agreement (FTA). India's primary imports from Thailand are machinery, electronic appliances, textiles, plastic material, transport equipment, vegetable oil and latex, while Thailand's main imports from India are jewellery, gemstones, steel, pharmaceuticals and ferrous metal ores. The growing partnership between India and Thailand is the outcome of the synergy between India's "Look East" policy and Thailand's "Look West" policy. These policies complement one another in making vibrant and dynamic trade partnership.

With significant potential for growth of business between the two countries, the Royal Thai Embassy is perhaps the only country in ASEAN region who could be interested in understanding the investment potential across Northeastern region of India across various sectors especially in the tourism, food processing and infrastructure. Business opportunities coexist with investment opportunities, collaborations between Thai industries and Northeast entrepreneurs could give impetus to the lacklustre Look East policy at its present state.

Business Opportunities driven by Tech-know-logy, Knowledge, innovation and creativity

The business opportunities which have higher dependency on Government and also on infrastructure have not pick up the expected. The entrepreneurs are forced to innovate and look at things in a different perspective, the internet powered or similar innovative ideas have higher chance of a breakthrough in the Northeastern region. Another success

story as big as google is easier to envisioned than to see a robust food processing units under the circumstances and break in business linkages in Northeast India.

Internet economy wired world provides business opportunities to the new breed of entrepreneurs with or without money. The entry barrier is low. Factors other than knowledge, technology and ideas are easily overcome. The opportunities provided by internet economy are listed below.

1. There are plenty of exciting business opportunities in internet ventures, outsourcing technology, e-commerce opportunities, software development opportunities, business trends and other business ideas. A few case studies in Bangalore, India are given below: Online Customer Support From India-

- . E-Commerce Export Opportunities In India
- . Export Animations, Multimedia, Graphics or other content Products
- . Export Data Services
- . Start a Software Company
- . E-Commerce Business Opportunities Within India

2. Mobile based Business Opportunities: mGovernance, mlearning, mobile Gaming, mobile for location intelligence and survey.

3. Advisory and consulting Services – Architecture firms, Financial services and consultancy

4. Education services.

The common trait of success across business that thrives in the region is the ability of the services to connect and satisfy a local need gap. Doing the unexpected and thinking out of the box – beyond the myopic lenses of seeing opportunities in the Northeastern region as agro-based and tourism only could pave a way for the new breed of entrepreneurs to succeed in the changing enabling wired world.

Look East Policy policy and Moreh Community

Communities inhabiting Point of Interest/Focus such as Moreh, Tamu

and Champhai needs to re-align their strategies towards Look East to reap the envisioned benefits. In a scenario where Look East policy materialise, the community needs to be ready for the great upheaval and changes in their lives and habitation and also possess the requisite trading, human capital and skill sets required to reap the the benefits thereon. India's Look East policy envisages the Northeast region not as the periphery of India, but as the centre of a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region. Such economic integration of Northeast India with its transnational neighbours is expected to open up new opportunities for the region. The first outcome of India's conscious efforts is the Indo-Myanmar Trade Agreement signed on January 31, 1994 for the establishment of trade based on equality and mutual benefit. The agreement specified that trade should be conducted through the designated custom posts, viz, (i) Moreh in India (Manipur) and Tamu in Burma, (ii) Champhai in India (Mizoram) and Rih in Burma and (iii) other places that may be notified by mutual agreement between the two countries (Haokip 2011: 194-195). The border trade at Moreh and Tamu was formally opened on April 12, 1995. India is bringing an opportunity to the doorstep for communities inhabiting Moreh. Especially for the Kukis who are both on the Indian and Burmese side of the border, trading and openings for permanent business establishments in Moreh and other Indian metros will become a norm and a shift of occupation from traditional shifting cultivation to trading is expected. To exploit the opportunities, realignment of the community human capital towards Trading and commercial activities should be initiated as early as possible. Not doing so could risk the community from exploitation by others from outside the region who may not look beyond the potential earnings.

India 2020 and Look East Policy – Implications for Business

The top Business opportunities available in India for the 2010-11 list includes the following sectors such as Social ventures, Food Processing, Education and Training, Organic farming, Floriculture, Tourism, Corporate demands (formal attires & corporate gifting), Ayurveda and traditional medicine, Healthcare sector, Software, Biotechnology, Toys,

Engineering goods, Textiles, Media, Packaging, Automobiles. I have picked up a few opportunities which we at TECHKNOWLOGIZ rank very high on potential and applicability in the Northeast.

RANK 1: Social ventures

Many entrepreneurs are taking up social entrepreneurship. Helping the less privileged get into employment and make a viable business is quite a challenge. There are many who have succeeded in setting up social ventures. With a growing young population in rural areas who have the drive and enthusiasm to work, entrepreneurs can focus on this segment. For instance, Somm Mission is our foray into Social Entrepreneurship.

Rank 2: Education and Training

There is a good demand for education and online tutorial services. With good facilities at competitive rates, India can attract more students from abroad. Unique teaching methods, educational portals and tools can be used effectively to make the sector useful and interesting.

Rank 3: Food Processing

India's mainstay is agriculture. Entrepreneurs can explore many options in the food grain cultivation and marketing segments. Inefficient management, lack of infrastructure, proper storage facilities leads to huge losses of food grains and fresh produce in India.

Entrepreneurs can add value with proper management and marketing initiatives. The processed food market opens a great potential for entrepreneurs be it fast food, packaged food or organic food. Fresh fruits and vegetables too have a good demand abroad. A good network of food processing units can help potential exporters build a good business.

Rank 4: Floriculture

India's floriculture segment is small and unorganised. There is a lot to

be done in this lucrative sector. The global trade in floriculture products is worth \$9.4 billion. With a 8 per cent growth, it is expected to grow to \$16 billion by 2010. India's share in world trade is just 0.18 per cent.

This is a huge market to be tapped considering the rising demand for fresh flowers. More awareness and better farming and infrastructure can boost exports.

Rank 5: Organic farming

Organic farming has been in India since a long time. The importance of organic farming will grow at a fast pace, especially with many foreigners preferring only organic products. Entrepreneurs can focus on business opportunities in this sector. There are many small-time farmers who have adopted organic farming but the demand is still unmet, offering many opportunities for those who can promote organic farming on a large scale.

Rank 6: Tourism

Tourism is a booming industry in India. With the number of domestic and international tourists rising every year. India with its diverse culture and rich heritage has a lot to offer to foreign tourists. Beaches, hill stations, heritage sites, wildlife and rural life, India has everything tourists are looking for. But this sector is yet to be organised into a well managed highly profitable business. India lacks trained professionals in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Any business in this sector will thrive in the long run as the demand continues to grow every year. Foreign tourist arrivals during January-March were 15.63 lakh with a growth rate of 12.8 percent, compared to 13.86 lakh during the first three months in 2010.

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Rank 7: Software

India's software and services exports are likely to rise with export revenue growth projected at 13 to 15 percent to hit about \$57 billion by March 2011. With one of the largest pool of software engineers, Indian entrepreneurs can set higher targets in hardware and software development. The information technology enabled services have contributed substantially to the economy. With more companies outsourcing contracts to India, business to business solutions and services would be required. Entrepreneurs can cash in on the rise in demand for these services with innovative and cost effective solutions.

Rank 8: Corporate demands

There will be a good demand for formal attire with more companies opening their offices in India. People who can meet this demand in a cost effective way can make a good business. With corporate gifting getting very popular, this is also a unique business to explore.

Rank 9: Media

Digitisation, regionalisation, competition, innovation, process, marketing and distribution will drive the growth of India's media and entertainment sector, according to FICCI. The media industry has huge opportunities to offer young entrepreneurs. With the huge growth of this segment, any business in this field will help entrepreneurs reap huge benefits. Television, advertising, print and digital media have seen a boom in business.

9. Healthcare sector

India's healthcare sector is dismal. The private sector can play a vital role in developing this sector. With medical tourism also gaining momentum, the sector can attract foreigners who are looking for cost

effective treatment in countries like India.

Rank 10: Biotechnology

After the software sector, biotechnology opens a huge potential. Entrepreneurs can look at a plethora of options with the application of biotechnology in agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, poultry, dairy and production of fruits and vegetables.

Finding Business opportunities in a technology-enabled-world

Today, doing business or finding business opportunities in a technology-enabled-world is becoming ever simpler and accessible than it used to be a decade back. All you need is an internet connection, go to google.com to find Business Opportunities in North East India or Go to www.business.gov.in and you can find investment and business opportunities in various states of India. Northeast India is a growing market and is emerging as a great place to do business.

Finding business opportunities in India is much easier than it may seem. What a person needs is to carefully follow the instructions below:

- 1: Decide which type of business opportunity you desire. You can do anything from importing, exporting and trading to investing and franchising. The business opportunities in India are endless. Pick something that interests you.

- 2: Go to Infobanc.com. At Infobanc.com, you can find Indian exporters and directories of Indian manufacturers. You can also find Indian buyers, suppliers, agents and even trade leads. Infobanc.com has been in business since 1997, and they have a long history of helping connect buyers and sellers. On the left hand column, you can find a directory that can help you locate the exact industry that you are interested in.

- 3: Surf over to Tradeindia.com. Tradeindia.com is a powerful directory of Indian business opportunities. The site contains over 1,200 product categories and subcategories. With over six million registered users, Tradeindia.com is a massive resource to help you find whatever it

is that you are interested in. You can also contact them via phone at (011) 91 11 26152172 from various states of India.

4: Look for other business opportunities within India, go to Ibf.com. Ibf.com is the international business forum. By clicking on their business directory and then the country directory, you can find a list of Indian business opportunities.

In the real world and especially in the Northeast, doing business or finding business opportunities is a different ball game altogether. There is never a doubt in the region's economic potential, but a clear identification of the regions critical driving forces at present needs to be done to arrive at the much touted positive future scenario for North East 2020. The realisation of the NER vision rest on the actions shaped by the positive outcomes of the plans and projects laid out in the visionary policy- the Look East policy.

To make the most of the available opportunities, an in-depth understanding of the current drivers of economy and polity which will eventually shape Northeast future is a must. The current driving forces in 2011¹ listed below will shape the future of the region and also its business environment.

Positives

1. Strategic location and the Look East policy
2. Natural Resources
3. Cultural heritage
4. Youthful population
5. Education index
6. Diaspora
7. Agriculture
8. Historical ethnic commonalities
9. India's rise
10. Self image construction
11. Strong local communities
12. Governance

Negative

1. Transportation and communication
2. Perceived feelings of neglect by New Delhi
3. Cultural difference
4. Ethnic violence
5. Pressure on land
6. Ethnic security dilemmas
7. Militarisation of state's presence
8. Negative political culture
9. Insurgent extortion networks
10. Economic backwardness
11. Image of a frontier (too peripheral)
12. Quality of education
13. Porous international border

Four Alternative Futures for the Northeast- (based on this drivers)

1. Destination Northeast (A future based on tourism development)
2. Island Northeast (A future based on fear of domination by 'outsiders' and ethnic violence)
3. Multi-cultural Northeast (A future based on the success of democracy)
4. Global Northeast (A future based on the success of India's Look East policy)

The future is in our hands whether we create future no. 2 and fail or finally take charge and create future no. 4 which appears most feasible with Government of India's Look East policy. Northeastern region has to ensure that our positive drivers shape our future by 2020.

Business Opportunities at state level

The various state governments has identified a number of business opportunities since the First North East Business Summit 2002; however, there seems to be no takers as no investors either from mainland India or abroad. Many questions arise - is it lack of interest in the region or have we failed to

showcase the region's potential or is the opportunities identified based on traditional mindset or policy too lopsided towards the often repeated agriculture and agro-based industries. If these opportunities do really have the teeth to compete with other opportunities, in the last 10 years it would have shown considerably growth. Unfortunately, growth in these identified sectors is also too slow to create a ripple effect to bring about a agro-horti revolution. Is it that we didn't do it right? Or we didn't try at all. It could be a combination of a couple of factors or maybe all. Our honest efforts have not been able to overcome the negative drivers. It is time for root cause analysis.

Northeast needs to do a soul searching to make Look East policy a reality. In the interest of the revisiting and getting a clearer picture to the delegates on the Business & Investment avenues in each state, a case study on Business & Investment Opportunities in Manipur is included here.

Investment Opportunities in Manipur

Manipur, though located in a far flung Northeastern corner of the country with a largely hilly terrain, has many advantages and opportunities for investment. There are several sectors which have ample potential for attracting investors.

Agro and Food Processing

The agro-climatic condition in the State makes it suitable for growing almost all kinds of agricultural and horticultural crops and setting up of food processing industries. The State produces sizeable quantity of paddy, wheat, maize, pulses, oilseeds (like mustard, groundnut, soyabeans, sunflower, etc), fruits (like pineapple, lime/lemon, banana, orange, etc), and vegetables (like, cauliflower, cabbage, tomato, pea, etc.).

As a result the food processing sector plays a significant role in diversification and commercialisation of agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, poultry, animal husbandry and forest. In view of the importance of the industry, State Government has established a Food Processing Training Centre and Food Processing Training Hall at Imphal. A food Park is also being set up at Imphal.

Handloom

Handloom industry is the largest cottage industry in the State, flourishing since time immemorial. It is providing maximum employment in the State, particularly to the women. The main handloom products of Manipur are sarees, bed sheets, curtains, fashion garments, scarves and pillow covers, etc. Most of the weavers who are famous for their skill and intricate designing are from Wangkhei, Bamon Kampu, Kongba, Khongman, Utlou etc., in respect of fine silk items. Fabrics and Shawls of Manipur are in great demand in the national and international market.

Major handloom production activities are undertaken by three Government organisations:-

- Manipur Development Society (MDS)
- Manipur Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation (MHHDC)
- Manipur State Handloom Weavers Co-operative Society (MSHWCS)

Handicraft

Handicraft industry in the State has a unique place among the various crafts of the country and consists of products made of cane and bamboo as well as the pottery culture. Pottery culture is very old in Manipur and flourishes in Andro, Sekmai, Chairen, Thongjao, Nungbi and parts of Senapati District. Since cane and bamboo are abundantly available, basketry has been a popular occupation of the people of Manipur. Besides, fishing equipments are also made of cane and bamboo. All such products are in great demand from both domestic as well as international buyers.

Tourism

Manipur, due to its wealth of flora and fauna is described as a “flower on lofty heights”, “Jewel of India” and “Switzerland of the East”. Its breathtaking scenic beauty makes it a tourist’s paradise. Its enchanting landscape includes rare species of flora and fauna; virgin forests; cascading rivers; hilly green landscape; and meandering streams. Added

to this are the various tourist attractions which offer excellent opportunity for developing different types of tourism in the State. Shree Govindajee temple, Khwairamband Bazar (Ima Keithel), War cemeteries, Shaheed Minar, Nupi Lan (Women's War) Memorial Complex, Khonghampat Orchidarium, INA Memorial (Moirang), Loktak Lake, Keibul Lamjao National Park, Bishnu Temple at Bishnupur, Sendra, Moreh, Siroy Village, Siroy Hills, Dzuko Valley, State Museum, Kaina Tourist Home, Khongjom War Memorial Complex, etc., constitute some of the important tourist centres in Manipur.

Information Technology

Recognising the vast potential of IT industry in the State, the Government of Manipur accords high priority to the electronics and Information Technology sector as a major thrust area of development. Also, the State has a vibrant manpower potential and qualitative work force, ideally suited for such industries.

The Manipur Industrial Development Corporation Ltd. has been established to fill up the gaps for development of electronics and information technology based industries in the State. The IT areas where opportunities for investment exist are:-

- Setting up of IT Parks, IT Enabled Service Centres & Information Kiosks;
- Development of a backbone network "Manipur State Wide Area Network" (MANNET) for voice, data and video transmission and dissemination;
- Issue of multi-function Electronic SMART cards to citizens;
- IT literacy programme in schools and colleges;
- To create infrastructure throughout the State for promotion of distance learning through IT; etc.

Notes

1. Dutta's

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