

MEGHA START-UP EXPO – A TRIUMPH OF INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

October 05th, 2023: MEGHA START-UP EXPO 2023, a dynamic three-day event, unfolded its grandeur at NEHU, Tura Campus, from October 03 to 05, 2023 aimed to celebrate entrepreneurship, foster networking, and showcase innovation. This grand event was jointly organized by BIRAC's BioNEST Bio-incubator (B3I) Facility, NEHU, Meghalaya; PRIME Startup Hub, Meghalaya, and BRTC, KIIT - TBI, Odisha with an active support from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Bio-Resources Development Centre (BRDC), Shillong and North East Centre for Technology Application & Reach (NECTAR).

Pre-Expo Buzz: The organisers worked hand in hand with numerous promotional partners including state government agencies like Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation Limited (MIDCL) to create the right buzz for the event. The pre-expo days witnessed extensive promotional and outreach activities including distribution of the Expo's leaflet, public announcements, hoisting of banners in and around Tura and flooding the virtual space through effective and innovative social media campaigns.

Inauguration Highlights: The wait finally ended on October 03rd, 2023 with the launch Megha Start-up Expo 2023 from NEHU, Tura Campus by the Hon'ble Education Minister, Government of Meghalaya SHRI RAKKAM A SANGMA in the presence of PROF. P. S SHUKLA, Vice Chancellor, NEHU, Meghalaya; DR P. K. S. SARMA, GM & Head, Technical Department, BIRAC, Government of India, New Delhi; DR MRUTYUNJAY SUAR, DG, R&D, KIIT University & CEO, KIIT-TBI, Odisha; PROF. SUJATA GURUDEV, Campus Director, NEHU Tura Campus; SHRI KITT MILLER SANGMA, DDM, West Garo Hills, NABARD; SHRI ADITYA SEN, Program Head, PRIME Start-up Hub, Meghalaya and DR B.K. MISHRA, Head & Associate Professor, RDAP Department, NEHU, Tura Campus.

Speaking on the occasion SHRI RAKKAM A SANGMA, the Education Minister of the State lauded the farsighted vision of the organisers and sponsors for introducing such a program in Garo Hills and underscored the benefits, prospects for the students and the support available from Government and other Enablers for the budding and established entrepreneurs. He identified the future entrepreneurs as the torch bearers of the state wide inclusive and sustainable development.

Shri Sangma said, “Meghalaya with all its resources have the potential to become the NEXT Development Destination of the NER, but we need a visionary who can lead us to fulfil our destiny”. He further applauded the youth as the most precious asset of the State, have the vision and ideas to redefine the horizon for Meghalaya. All the dignitaries illuminated the inauguration of the EXPO with their valuable insights, discussed the opportunities for the young educated youth and entrepreneurs of the State and took the initiative to visit the EXPO stalls and interact with the entrepreneurs in person.

Exhibition Pavilions: The EXPO hosted 91 stalls with more than 200 exhibitors, mostly women, presenting a wide array of entrepreneurial participation. The stalls include 30 SHGs under NABARD, and 45 stalls are taken up by start-ups, agripreneurs, FPOs, established businesses, artisans and Industry leaders. The stalls were organized in four different pavilions starting with STAY UP AND EXPLORE Pavilion set up for the enablers and facilitators across the Eastern and North-Eastern Region to create awareness about the various funding assistance, mentoring and incubation opportunities for the entrepreneurs. The second PAVILION is AGRIPRENEURSHIP, where SHGs, agripreneurs and Start-Up companies from various Districts of Meghalaya and other states displayed their products and services regarding Agri ventures. The third Pavilion in the category of the NEW FOOT FALLING, embraces innovative exhibitors across the sectors. Many exhibitors in these pavilions offered live product demonstrations, allowing attendees to experience their offerings firsthand. These demonstrations were an effective means of attracting visitors, generating interest and promoting products. Many stalls provided opportunities for one-on-one interactions with their representatives, fostering valuable networking and business connections. Exhibitors had the chance to connect with potential clients, partners, and investors, leading to new business collaborations. The FOOD AND BEVERAGE PAVILLION showcased a wide variety of offerings including vast range of cuisines from local delicacies to unique flavours, to fermented & non-alcoholic beverages. Furthermore, 16 stalls were also set up specifically for the Women Entrepreneurs under the Tribal Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (TRIFED), the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India for showcasing and promoting the traditional arts and crafts, techniques, skills and cultural heritage of the State of Meghalaya. The TRIFED team also conducted an exclusive discussion session on the challenges faced by the artisans, and the status of the arts & craft market. Overall, the stalls at the Expo delivered a wonderful experience for attendees.

Panel Discussions, Ideathon & Pitchathon: In the other verticals holding the PANEL DISCUSSION with esteem panellists across the sectors, discussed the path from Academia to

Entrepreneurship; the Role of Enablers in smoothening the entrepreneurs' journey; The much-needed MARKETING, BRANDING, NETWORKING and TECHNOLOGY Adoption necessities for NER startups and finally the practicalities of the Entrepreneurial World from the horse's mouth i.e., the entrepreneurs of North-Eastern India. All the sessions were thought-provoking, discussing people-centric solutions aptly complemented by the audience queries.

On the other hand, the Student's IDEATHON & Entrepreneurs' PITCHATHON gathered ample attention across the states resulting in 42 applications from Assam, Tripura, Bihar, and Kerala with a major share from our own Meghalaya. After evaluation, 11 under the students' categories and 5 under the entrepreneurs' category were invited for the final pitch. The ideas presented cover the sectors including fashion, waste management, arts & crafts, traditional instruments, food and nutrition, e-platform, Road Safety Management and Biotechnology. A team of 05 designated jury members interacted with the participants in a lively manner to find out the possibilities of the business propositions.

Cultural Extravaganza: The Expo wasn't just about business; it showcased the rich cultural heritage of the Northeast. The event witnessed the cultural talents of the NEHU Students and Scholars presenting a mesmerizing evening full of traditional songs, dances and cultural depictions of the mini-India, resided at North-Eastern Hill University.

Closing Ceremony: The curtain of the expo rolled down on October 05th 2023 with a valedictory session which was graced by the presence of PROF J.U. AHMED Campus Director In-charge, NEHU, Tura Campus as the Chief Guest of the session; SHRI NILESH TRIVEDI, Assistant Director, MSME-DFO, Tura Branch and Guest of Honor of the program; SHRI ADITYA SEN, Program Head, PRIME Start-Up Hub, Meghalaya; SHRI KITT MILLER SANGMA, DDM, West Garo Hills, NABARD; PROF. DEEPAK BHAGAT, Department of ABFT, NEHU Tura Campus; DR B. K. MISHRA, Head & Associate Professor, RDAP Department and PI, BioNEST Facility, DR SUMAN KUMAR NANDY, CEO, BioNEST Facility along with all the dignitaries, faculties, Staff, Scholars, Students, Entrepreneurs, and participants. The program started with short addresses and feedback from the dignitaries. This was followed by felicitation of the winners from different pavilions and competitions, emphasizing their role in the region's entrepreneurial landscape. From each pavilion, one exhibitor is awarded as the best exhibitor on the basis of their sales and crowd attraction. From PAVILION AGRIPRENEURSHIP, PRIME PSREF Entrepreneurs bagged the Best Exhibitor, MR SALJAGRING N ARENGH, the painter secured the Best Exhibitor from PAVILION NEW FOOT FALLING and MR KEENAN K MARAK, founder of 7 United Rice Beer won the best exhibitor from the PAVILION FOOD & BEVERAGE. A consolation prize was also

awarded to the Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh. From the student's Ideathon category MISS SUSYIANA SYNGKLI of Department of RDAP, NEHU, Tura Campus secured the first position; followed by MR ASHISH GARG of Dev Bhoomi Institute of Engineering, Bihar in the second position, MR. GUTTENBERG SANGMA of Department of Management, NEHU, Tura Campus in the third position and MS AVRIL SYNTANG secured the consolation prize. From the Entrepreneurs' Pitchathon category, MR SWATTIK CHAKRABORTY, Founder of SS Bamboowala Pvt. Ltd. took the first position, MS BARSHA SAIKIA, Founder of Ayushka Food Products Pvt. Ltd in the second position and MR. SANI SUCHIANG and YOOMAINKY Y SUIAM, aspiring entrepreneurs in the third place. These winners were not only be awarded but will also be facilitated in establishing their business through the organisers i.e., BioNEST Facility, NEHU, Meghalaya; and PRIME Startup Hub Meghalaya. The MEGHA START-UP EXPO was all summed by a short report from DR SK NANDY and a visual summary of the three-day event. The program comes to its closure with a vote of Thanks from PROF. DEEPAK BHAGAT, Department of ABMFT, NEHU, Tura campus expressing gratitude to the participants, sponsors, and organizers. The event concluded with the rendition of the National Anthem of India, symbolizing unity and a shared sense of purpose.



Fig. Snapshots from MEGHA START-UP EXPO 2023 at NEHU Tura campus