



## INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewer: Rohan Mukherjee

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MUKHERJEE: It is the 26<sup>st</sup> of July, I am Rohan Mukherjee. I am with Dr. Jayanta Madhab, former Advisor to the Chief Minister of Assam. Dr. Madhab, could I ask you to start off by providing a short introduction of yourself and your role in the government of Assam in the recent past?

MADHAB: *I am an economist by training, with a Ph.D. from London School of Economics. Essentially I worked abroad with the Asian Development Bank and then later on I worked here in various other organizations in India promoting banks and financial institutions and whatnot. Later on, from 2003 onwards until early 2009, I was with the government of Assam as one of the chief minister's advisors. It is an honorary post and that is the link with the government as far as I am concerned.*

MUKHERJEE: Could you talk a little bit about your role and responsibilities as the advisor to the Chief Minister?

MADHAB: *Essentially there are two parts to it. In the first term that was between 2003 and 2006, I was the Advisor to the Chief Minister. Whatever advice he sought or I thought was required from my side, particularly on economic and financial areas, that's what I used to give him. In the second term that was say from 2006 to early 2009, that was a specific assignment as far as the advisorship was concerned. That was for particularly generation of employment in the State of Assam. We devised in my earlier term, we produced a scheme called a Mission to Generate Employment in the State of Assam, which was approved by the Planning Commission. It's a fairly large big scheme and it is being implemented now. I was giving advice on how to implement that one in the second term of my office.*

MUKHERJEE: So as an advisor to the government, you would have seen at close quarters how the government functions and what its priorities must have been. Could I ask you to think back to the initial days when you began your position as an advisor? What were the major challenges and issues facing the government when it started this project of reform?

MADHAB: *You see, although I hadn't worked as an advisor prior to 2003, I was associated with Assam say from 1994 onwards after I came back from abroad. So I had seen the government during earlier terms also—that is Mr. Prafulla Mahanta's time, that's the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) time. I was invited to do a number of reports. One was on industry, one was on finance, etcetera. I had seen what the government was and what reforms were required even prior to that one. But by the time I assumed the responsibility as an advisor there were already a lot of talks that had taken place about government reforms. Particularly, the Asian Development Bank and World Bank got into it and they also started having a dialog with the government of Assam on the various reform possibilities.*

*You were asking me about the priorities. Number one priority is the government's own reforms—the reforms in the system—and I think that that is the most important thing. We have been following the old, somewhat archaic, British government-based systems and, in fact, during the AGP time the system was really—I mean because of the systems, the government was really in a flux, particularly on the finances.*

*There was a time when the Reserve Bank would be open only five to six days in a month for the government to withdraw its money. Such were the times. Since Tarun Gogoi has come, I think he saw to it. I think he has a good grasp about the system, particularly because, unlike all other Chief Ministers prior to him, he has*

*worked in central government. He was a Minister: Minister of State in the Union government in Delhi. So therefore he understood what were the problems there. He had a fairly good grasp of the systems. So soon after that he initiated a few things. By the time he took over, the Central Government had also come under different reform procedures both at their own insistence and also the insistences of the lending institutions.*

*One of them was the FRBM, Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Bill, which I was asked to draft for the government of Assam. I once said that that was a very critical piece of legislation that we got and this is the only legislation where I don't think any government in India has that particular clause that if you violate any one of those critical rules you may be subjected to legal procedures. But we diligently, I think, followed that. As a result of that, the first improvement in the reform procedure was to improve financial conditions. Now, as a result of all those and also reforms in taxation and other procedures, the government of Assam's financial condition has improved considerably. There is really no ban as far as the Reserve Bank is concerned that "only for that many days we can open for you."*

*You were also asking about the other reform, which is critically needed. As I was about to tell you, is that the systems, which we are working on—essentially the same old systems, in my opinion, are not suited for a development-oriented system. Development requires a little bit more open and a more, shall we say, speedy decision-making system. You can say no, but say no quickly, whatever the program or projects may be.*

MUKHERJEE: In the financial realm, you spoke of the FRBM Act. Where there any other reforms that came about?

MADHAB: *Sure. I mean first of all, we had also given, during my time or just before my time, but I was associated on that one, about the government's financial system—it was a big report. I understand you will be meeting Harendra [Nath] Das today or tomorrow. He will also talk about it because he was the chairman of that when I was a member. We had actually given the government of Assam a very voluminous report on the entire financial system, essentially on the tax part of it. Some reforms were implemented; many of them were not for whatever compulsions the government of Assam had.*

MUKHERJEE: Was there anything in common between the reforms that were implemented of the ones you recommended? Was it that they were easier to implement or that they were—?

MADHAB: *The most difficult was the fiscal responsibility and budget management one because it gives you a particular, specific target that you cannot cross. Now even the government of India hasn't followed this because of the recession and the compulsion that one has to really have some deficit financing. Because of that maybe some relaxations may occur this year. But other than that it was basically followed, more or less. But I would say one of the problems in this kind of democracy is that the party, particularly the Chief Minister who is really the helm of the Party—although there may be someone else as the chairman of the Congress Party—but it is his tenure that will speak about the Congress Party's performance.*

*So therefore, he sees to it that a lot of money goes towards popular schemes. I think here Mr. Gogoi has devised probably hundreds of schemes in different areas. These are needed, but one has to see whether we have different priorities than this. You name it; we have a scheme for it. He does it, but then later on sometimes because of the financial concern, it tapers off. That's another problem.*

MUKHERJEE: What do you think is the purpose of all these schemes that he has launched?

MADHAB: *Schemes are two-fold actually. These are, as I say, these are needed. For example, for specific ones are for the women, specific ones for children, one for the tribals—I mean all kinds, hundreds of other schemes you can have. These are outside the scope of the government of India's schemes; these are more specifically targeted schemes. For example, all the class ten students who have come in first divisions will all get computers. All the class nine girl students will get cycles. Poor women will get sewing machines. There are all kinds of schemes. I mean you name it we have a scheme for that one.*

*So one is of course, these are needed—he is looking at specific target groups. The second thing is, of course, the popularity. I mean let's admit that. If he can serve all kinds of different people at least some point in time, they will remember that "I got a sewing machine," "I got a cycle," "I got a radio," and various other things. Obviously it is a popular thing and he will get a vote.*

MUKHERJEE: Do these popular schemes also extend not just to children, ladies or tribals but also to different ethnic groups and different religious communities?

MADHAB: *It does, I mean even minorities. He has a scheme for minorities, he has a scheme for the tribals. During his time also I think another six, what do we call it—you see Assam has a peculiar governance system. I think this is the only such kind of governance system probably in India. Assam is unlike any other state, you have the Assembly—we do not have a second chamber although there is a movement to have a second chamber. So there is the Assembly and the Ministers and the Governor. But we have two districts here: the Karbi Anglong autonomous districts and then the North Cachar Hills autonomous districts, which are governed under the constitution. It is a separate governance system.*

*Then of course we have similarly given to Bodo—it's not really autonomous system, just as in the case of Karbi Anglong, it is slightly different but it is again—Bodoland Territorial Development Council. So that's another. Then besides that, we have six other autonomous councils, like Mishing development council, Thengal Kachari, the Tiwa, all kinds. So the governance system is somewhat different than of any other state in India.*

MUKHERJEE: Do you think that the creation of these councils was necessary to some extent because of the assertion of various ethnic identities in Assam, so that the government could more easily push forward its reforms as it is doing them without being bogged down by various demands?

MADHAB: *You see this was essentially, as far as I can remember, Gopinath Bordoloi who was then what we called the premier at that time, the Chief Minister, who really pushed for this. That the tribals have a different sort of governance all together and therefore they're not quite well equipped to—let us keep their government*

*system as it is, but then tribals were not only in Assam. Tribals were in Bihar, tribals were in Madhya Pradesh, all over other places tribals are there. But then it was chosen as these two autonomous districts. Of course, at that time Arunachal wasn't there, it was Northeast Frontier Tract—Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were districts of Assam. Manipur of course at that time was a princely state, but later on it joined the government of India and so did Tripura. So these states had again peculiar situations, and they were governed under a separate rule. The governor of Assam was responsible.*

*So we had a number of systems within the state of Assam. That was one peculiarity we had and it has created, in my opinion, a lot of problems. That was with a good intent. The idea was that they could develop in their own ingenuity, in their own time, so let us not interfere in their affairs. That was a good intent, but I think that has created a hell of a lot of problems for us.*

*There is lot of demand for that autonomous council like similar states, a state within state, because there is a lot of autonomy as far as the money goes. It goes from the government of India, then comes to Assam and Assam directly sends it [to the districts]. But if you see the development, it is absolutely shameful. There has hardly been any development in the last fifty years, even though they have the autonomy to do that. They might say look, my hundred crore is not good enough. That may be true, but that hundred crore is not even being spent properly.*

*So in order to get its vested interest or shall we say elite families in both—in North Cachar Hills, it is four families in North Cachar Hills and a few families in the Karbi Anglong—they are the ones, for the last fifty years. They have been the main people who are elected there and they are the ones who were governing them. They are the ones who are really siphoning all this money instead of really spending for the population.*

MUKHERJEE: But why do you think Mr. Tarun Gogoi set up six more in his time when so many Chief Ministers before him did not do that? Why do you think that he thought that that was the right time?

MADHAB: *This is of course with a difference. The Tiwa—for example the Thengal Kachari, there were demands for this and to satisfy the popular demand. I mean that Vote Bank politics is there. One cannot really say it is not there. But with a difference that the devolution of power is not that much. I mean here, control is with the Assam Government much more; but in case of the two autonomous districts, the Assam government's control is hardly there. But even then, I would say these are wrong moves—we should be one India. One India and there is one law for everybody. If there are poor, underprivileged, uneducated or unhealthy people, then we need to help them. There is no question of whether he is a Muslim or a tribal or a scheduled tribe—that is why we need to help him, not on basis of being a Thengal Kachari, or if he is a Bodo—he needs to be helped, because there are rich people in the Bodos, there are rich people in the Thengal Kachari, there are rich people among the Muslims.*

*So I think the criteria should be, in my opinion, the underprivileged, unhealthy, the uneducated, and those other few criteria.*

MUKHERJEE: Do you think that, as you mentioned, the development money that goes into these autonomous councils rarely ever reaches the intended targets?

- MADHAB:** *I wouldn't say rarely. I would say largely do not reach that. I mean the development record in both these districts are very poor.*
- MUKHERJEE:** Do you think that, apart from electoral gains, there was any motive of the government to build support for the reform efforts that they had by setting up more autonomous councils or was it purely for votes? Was it a sense of getting support for their agenda by doing this?
- MADHAB:** *No, you see there's a movement there. There will be more movement because now this Komatapur—Komatapur means Koch Rajbongshi—they are actually part of Assam and part of West Bengal up to Jalpaiguri, because that was the old Koch Kingdom. They're demanding that. So there's no end to it because they think that they can cater to their people well, but it is a few people who really run all these things. This is where it is and that is not really a solution. India cannot be divided piece by piece. The idea that is why do—they have to ask for it. They think that they cannot get jobs and they think they are poor. I mean it is a reality. These are things—they are not properly educated and they have no skills. These are the fault of the government itself, that we haven't been able to give them those things.*
- If they think that they are equally competent with any other Assamese or any Bengalese, then these things wouldn't arise.*
- MUKHERJEE:** So in terms of the actual reform package that the Tarun Gogoi government tried to introduce, was there widespread support for the moves that they wanted to take, or did they have to actually build support for the reforms in particular.
- MADHAB:** *Mostly there was no opposition as such because some of the reforms were internal, that is internal to the government. So it has, in fact, there was support for that. If it was internal for the government and if it really helps—. But, then again, as I say, the big problem is that the systems within the government have not really changed. I mean reforms are basically only a little on the finance side.*
- MUKHERJEE:** But even in changing the systems of government one does need to reorient the bureaucracy and the civil service to a great extent, to change the attitudes or the incentives that face different individuals in the government. Did the government have that kind of a problem?
- MADHAB:** *That is the main problem. As I said, there are two parts of the reform. Say it's a one-year scheme—if it takes about nine months to start a one-year scheme, something is wrong—archaic systems that we are following from the olden days, which were control-oriented. We need some development-oriented with a certain amount of control—not losing the control but at the same time the emphasis will be development, because after all, we have a hell of a lot of money now we've got to spend. The criticisms that we'll see mostly from the auditor-general are that we haven't been able to spend money.*
- MUKHERJEE:** In building support for the government, you mentioned the Chief Minister started a lot of schemes. Now in a society as diverse as Assam, was it considered important to represent different parts of the community in these schemes? Different groups, as you mentioned there is a scheme for everyone but—.
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**MADHAB:** *Once you start that, if you do it for a tribal you've got to do for somebody else also—scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and then minorities. You have to do that because you cannot just leave them.*

**MUKHERJEE:** But there are some people who argue that in trying to represent too many sections of society you compromise your ability to actually carry out reforms because it slows things down.

**MADHAB:** *This actually is not reform, per se. Don't confuse with that one. It was aid, helping them to come up to a level. It was money given, for example, for schooling and etcetera. So it was not really reform, per se. Reform is normally related to a system. But here, systems—we didn't tinker with the systems apart from a few, I mean.*

**MUKHERJEE:** It seems that the government had sort of built up a good amount of public support through these popular schemes.

**MADHAB:** Sure.

**MUKHERJEE:** What do you think in the future could cause this level of support to diminish? What do you think are the challenges for the government in maintaining this level of support?

**MADHAB:** *Well first of all, of course, you see government finances have improved considerably. Partly it is the VAT (value added tax) regime. The VAT regime has brought in a lot of money. Also, money from the central government has also increased quite substantially. I mean, there is a proper devolution of finance as recommended by the finance commission and apart from that also, money has come from quite a number of other sources like ADB and the World Bank. So, that gives leverage to the Chief Minister to work on all these different programs. He must be congratulated for doing that. And I must also say, the Chief Minister is generally approachable. Obviously all Chief Ministers have problems of time—I mean, within his budgeted time—if he can find some time to be approachable. He is also outward looking. He is not inward looking and he worked as a central minister down there. That gave him great confidence and also he knows how the central government works so he can also get money from there.*

**MUKHERJEE:** In terms of the public support, do you think that in the future too many schemes might be a problem in maintaining this level of public support?

**MADHAB:** *I mean, he will, himself, find it difficult. I'm not critical about having too many schemes. What I'm saying is that I think, as I said, my idea of tackling things are four or five different criteria. Say it is poor—you don't have to really help the rich. The second one is the uneducated—bring them to a level. Third, underprivileged—whether they are discriminated, that's another one. Then the unhealthy—if he is not a healthy person, bring him to a level. So these should be the ones rather than tackling all these different—if I were the Chief Minister, let me put it that way.*

*Fortunately, I am not the Chief Minister and I'm not, shall I say, responsible to the public and I'm not asking for votes. So he has a different concern all together. His concerns will be somewhat different.*

MUKHERJEE: In thinking about your role as an advisor to the Chief Minister again, it has been observed in other parts of the world that often reform efforts get caught in certain kinds of traps, and they can't get out of them. I would just like to lay out a few scenarios for you and ask you if these situations applied to Assam, and if there were any efforts at all to tackle these situation.

The first one that we often encounter is patronage, that many leaders face pressures to provide jobs to certain sections of society or more vocal sections, or some factions of their party. This may compromise the pace of reform, yet they are necessary to move along because without doing so, you can't move along. So was this something that the government faced?

MADHAB: *I mean this was so much earlier but I think the Tarun Gogoi government, particularly Tarun Gogoi, saw to it like that because there were a lot of court cases already from previous regimes and things like that. Even in Tarun Gogoi also there are some cases. Just recently with the ACS, Assam Civil Services, the selections have been withheld because the court—there problems there. But in any case what I wanted to say is that I think Gogoi has realized that this is a problem area. I would say that. I wouldn't say he eradicated that, be that it is much less, but he cannot control all. There are other autonomous, district level—there are ministers who are not equally sensitive about this, so therefore it happens.*

MUKHERJEE: What specific steps do you think he has taken to make this happen?

MADHAB: *Because he does not approve—he doesn't do it himself, as far as I know it, I could be wrong also. So he also urges the other people not to do it, but some ministers do it. You can't help it.*

MUKHERJEE: This may not be so applicable in the financial area, but certainly in needing law and order, on improving the law and order situation—often there are vested interests in the system, say militant groups or criminal groups, who are opposed to the improvement of governance or the improvement of law and order. Has the government faced such resistance in trying to improve law and order or even in other areas, in trying to deliver services in the countryside? Often you hear when an infrastructure project is being built, the militants target that because it means the reach of the state is diminished in that area.

MADHAB: *Let me put it this way, the development is stalled in quite a number of places. In Assam as whole, for the last thirty years there has hardly been any big investment from outside. In fact, until Tarun Gogoi days, I would say probably 2004, 2003, 2002, hardly any investments were here. There is ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) movement. There is not only ULFA, but there is all other subsidiary movements, all over. The bandhs were frequent, and even now the power system has not improved—an acute shortage of power. We haven't been able to improve, so therefore there are hardly any industries. No major industries have come. No outsiders have come, basically. It is the Marwaris who left during the hay days of the insurgencies—left to Calcutta, left to Delhi. They still have a relationship here. They are the ones who are coming and setting up some smaller industries here. So therefore that is there, that problem still exists here. ULFA has a different agenda, so has Karbi Anglong and others. Also they do not like government to succeed because if government succeeds and people are happy, obviously, they have hardly any constituency.*

MUKHERJEE: Has the government been able to tackle this problem at all?

MADHAB: *With ULFA, a little bit—I mean, by its own because ULFA is not the same as it used to be in the '70s, '80s, or '90s. ULFA itself have moved themselves out of Assam and control is not there. A part of ULFA wants to negotiate with the government. Similarly Bodos have come out of it and the Karbi Anglong is still better. The North Cachar is still a problem, but there are also feelers for it. But then, there are all kinds of groups there. There is not one group now; there are hundreds of other groups there. They create—I mean, if somebody plants a bomb, be it a small organization, it succeeds because people are afraid to go out. Once the bombs are frequent, then what development can you expect?*

MUKHERJEE: But has the diminished role of the ULFA or the accord with the Bodos or other movements—the major movements sort of diminishing—has that been the result of state action or has that been a result of the autonomous decisions made by these organizations to come out of militancy and enter a more mainstream role?

MADHAB: *ULFA, of course we haven't. I mean there are no negotiations with ULFA. It was only a group of people—people's representatives it was called, some consultative group, PCC (People's Consultative Group). They thought they were representing the ULFA and they were discussing with the government of India three times. Nothing much came out of it because the government of India also thought that they were not really the mouthpiece of ULFA. Here, I would say in the '90s, I think people would not dare to go out after nine o'clock in the streets. But here up to one, two three o'clock in the night you can go—the restaurants are open up to one o'clock or so. So life is normal, as in New York. So therefore that part has gone, I think. Although occasional bombing is there, occasional strike is there—that's a part of life now and that, we have to reduce.*

MUKHERJEE: So when you say the government's efforts, do you mean in terms of security measures or do you mean in terms of opening up the space for talks with the—?

MADHAB: *Both, and settlement. Bodo is partly settled. Of course in Bodo there is one group, which wasn't settled—NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland)—so that creates occasional problems. ULFA, of course, is still there but a large group, 27 battalion or whatever it is in the upper Assam, they have more or less come to a cease fire and they are watching. Of course they're a little bit discontented because things are not moving. At the same time, other small groups are there and new groups are also growing.*

MUKHERJEE: All right. Now you mentioned this a little bit earlier about democratic societies and even in the case of the Public Service Commission in Assam, and the court cases etcetera that you mentioned—now, in a diverse setting where there are many different social groups, when there are competitive processes like elections or like competitive entrance exams to the civil service, there is a sense that those who win these competitions somehow can aggregate all the benefits to the exclusion of other groups, if you see what I mean. There is a sort of winner-take-all sense to competitive processes in polarized settings. Has the government tried to manage this kind of situation in Assam? Has it faced problems? I mean the court cases are clearly one symptom of that.

MADHAB: *The court cases are there, yes. I mean, under this newly constituted Assam Public Service Commission—the previous one had more trouble than this one.*

*Simple corruption. Also the government, the ministers—every minister wants to push their people, because after all they have to satisfy their constituency.*

*I would say it has reduced that kind of a thing compared to about seven or eight years ago. But then we still have problems because number one, corruption is there. Of course corruption is everywhere, even in England. In the US it is more or less the same. So corruption is everywhere. Maybe we have more, I don't know. Indonesia used to be very corrupt, and so was the Philippines. I lived in Philippines. Here because of the election system—that you have to spend so much—how do you recover that money? Corruption is there.*

MUKHERJEE: Again, we touched a little bit on the Chief Minister's own background in the central government and his experience in governance over there. What do you think it is about his personal management style that helps him succeed in the reforms that he has been successful, where others were not able to succeed before him?

MADHAB: *I think, first of all, he is a lawyer. Of course many others are all equally—have good degrees. I think Assam probably has the pride that all our Chief Ministers were fairly well educated. And besides that, he was a lawyer and then he went to the central government and had some experience in central government, and nobody can say that he is personally corrupt. I don't think any paper has ever written anything about him. Besides, actually, he has no, what you call constituency. That is, like others, wife, children—but his children are out and well placed, and his wife is a very low-key person. So therefore one cannot really say that the Chief Minister is corrupt.*

*So that gives him a good image and authority. He is, of course—amongst his peers he is a little bit, one step ahead because of his central government experience and he was also with Rajiv Gandhi at one time. He started all of these different schemes and different initiatives—the commissions, missions and etcetera. People welcomed that, because people wanted a change. Whether he has been able to implement it all, that is another question.*

MUKHERJEE: And do you think it is important as a reformer for him to have and to articulate a vision for Assam, for where he wants to take Assam, and has he done this? Has he articulated to you as an advisor or to the public his vision for where he wants Assam to go?

MADHAB: *Well, yes and no. Of course, we have a northeast vision document, which is one that Mani Shankar Aiyar has prepared, where I also worked. Then of course Mani Shankar Aiyar asked everybody, every state of the north, to prepare a vision document of its own that is consistent with the main vision document for the north, which we prepared. And these are, in my opinion, only for public purposes. But he has his own kind of a vision. Whether he has been able to, shall we say, publicize or communicate to the people is another matter. But he has his own kind of priorities and he does things according to the priorities. But if you say whether he has written all these down for the next five years, I would say no.*

MUKHERJEE: You were obviously one of his advisors on various issues. Where else do you think he turned for information or advice on the various options open to his government when he was considering a policy? Was there a think tank or—?

**MADHAB:** *No, he is a man who invites opinion—meetings were held, committees and commissions were formed, and recommendations made.*

**MUKHERJEE:** And was there a sort of key team of reformers within the government that were at the helm?

**MADHAB:** *No. Essentially he is a reformer. You see, there were two or three key establishments. One is finance. At the same time within finance, there are a lot of reforms needed as far as the systems are concerned. That reform has not taken place. There is also the other one his home, very big. Some reform has taken place. But good bureaucrats are there, he listens to them. Also he listens to other people. He doesn't have one particular person or something like that.*

**MUKHERJEE:** Could you talk a little bit about your experience, in your second role that you mentioned from 2007 to early 2009 in the Employment Generation Commission? Could you tell us a little bit about how you came into that and what your mandate was?

**MADHAB:** *You see, I was doing quite a number of things in the earlier role. The tea industry was in crisis and there were a lot of people involved in the tea, particularly laborers, and Assam supplied the tea. So we prepared a fairly large report. That was done and also I think Gogoi has implemented some of them. Then, of course, the fiscal reform—fiscal responsibility bill. The bill is an important piece of legislation, which we have produced there, and a number of other things.*

*But, in the meantime—and also the preparation of the development plan. But we realized that the most important thing was finding jobs, finding something to do with this vast number of people. Now, let me tell you, as far as our human resources are concerned, I would say it is a failure on our part. I'm not blaming one particular Chief Minister or one regime, but over time—. You see about 50% of our children leave at the primary school. Only 50% go to the upper schools, upper regimes, and 75% drop at the high school level.*

*After the class twelve, only about 15% go to the college level. At the college level about 75% of them study for a Bachelor of Arts, 12% study science, 6% for commerce and 0.5% for any technical skills. So with these kinds of human resources a nation cannot be built, industry cannot be developed, development really cannot take place. This is the big problem we had. Because of these problems, they're unemployable. Therefore, various insurgent groups were able to recruit these people at a very marginal price and are fighting with the government systems. So why not find some avenues for these people?*

*After all, you cannot ask them to go back and study but you have to find some avenues for these people. So essentially, the focus of our employment generation mission is threefold. First, since about 87% of our people of Assam live in rural areas and about 76% depend on agriculture for their livelihood, why not focus your strategy on development of agriculture? So far, our agriculture has been growing at a dismal pace, 2%, 2.5% or sometimes 1% or something like that. Therefore, a priority was to develop agriculture so that they can retain this bulk of the people there for the time being.*

*Second one is give them skills, any skills, whatever skills they can absorb. After all, it will have to depend on the absorptive capacity. It can be a plumber, it can be an electrician, it can be mechanic, it can be instrument operator, it can be*

*mobile repair, it can be cycle repairing, it can be computer repair or any skills. Give them skills, skills, skills. If skills are there, people will not die of hunger. This is true. So therefore, give them skills.*

*The third one is to create an environment where the other industries will be able to come here. These are the three, focus on that one. The systems have to be improved. Unless you improve the systems—.*

MUKHERJEE: Do you think that the lack of systemic change is likely to have an impact on the sustainability of the reforms that the government is engaged in right now?

MADHAB: *I think so.*

MUKHERJEE: All right.

MADHAB: *Thank you.*