

NRI pitches for Assam's image makeover

Naresh Mitra | TNN

Wahid Saleh has a terse suggestion for the Assam government, if it is serious about roping in the expertise of Assamese people living abroad.

The first Assamese NRI to bag the Pravasi Bharatiya Community Service Award in New Delhi recently, Saleh believes that Dispur should create an extensive database of the "Assamese Diaspora" and

an exclusive cell for non-resident Assamese within the government if it is serious about availing the expertise and experience of those living abroad for the development of the state.

"To attract NRI investment in Assam, says in the tourism sector, the government should project the state as 'incredible Assam' and 'credible Assam' for investors," says Saleh, currently a resident of the Netherlands and member of the board of directors of the Eu-

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rope-India Chamber of Commerce.

"Assam has a huge image problem, and that has to be done away with. Investors will not invest if the government takes any ad hoc decision," he adds.

Originally from Jorhat, Saleh left Assam in 1963 and landed in Munich in one of the coldest days of that century

for higher training on jet engines.

"The temperature was hovering around minus 30 degrees Celsius, and it was quite a struggle in Hamburg. In 1968, I moved to Rotterdam in the Netherlands where worked as a computer programmer. When I was studying in Kerala, I made a Dutch pen friend named Hannia. She later became my wife," Saleh says in fluent Assamese even after more than 40 years in Europe. Saleh, who is also decorat-

ed with the Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau by Dutch Queen Beatrix, was in Guwahati on a holiday, but he was disappointed with the unplanned urban growth and deteriorating law and order in Assam. "I also have a suggestion for the Assamese diaspora. They should begin interacting with institutions and various NGOs here to make their expertise and experience available to their home state."

Unlike non-resident Gujarati or Punjabi businessmen,

Saleh says the majority of the Assamese living abroad were employees of different firms and belonged to the fixed-income group. "So, it would be foolhardy to expect heavy investment from non-resident Assamese."

"The Assamese diaspora can get involved in development activities in healthcare, education and rural sector," says Saleh, who has adopted a fishery project at the Titabor-based Praginalaya, a school run by a former militant.