COVID-19 testing laboratory inaugurated in the CSIR-North East Institute of Science & Technology (CSIR-NEIST) campus, Jorhat

The COVID-19 testing laboratory in the CSIR-NEIST campus has been inaugurated today by Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma the honourable minister of Health & Family Welfare, Finance, Education (Higher, Secondary & Elementary), Transformation & Development, PWD, Govt. of Assam. The director of CSIR-NEIST Dr G. Narahari Sastry described this momentous event as an important milestone in the annals of CSIR-NEIST history. The inauguration ceremony has been attended by a galaxy of eminent personalities viz. Shi Atul Bora, honourable minister of Agriculture, Horticulture & Food Processing, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Govt. of Assam; Shri Pijush Hazarika, Urban Development including T & CP (Independent), Health & Family welfare (Assist Cabinet Minister on MoS) of Govt. of Assam; Shri Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Honourable MP, Rajya Sabha; Shri Topon Kumar Gogoi, Honourable MP, Jorhat constituency; Shri Santanu Pujari, State BJP Executive; Shri Bhavendra Nath Bharali, MLA Dergaon constituency, Ms Roshni Aparanji Korati, IAS and Deputy Commissioner, Jorhat District and Dr Sanjay Bhargawa, AOC 5 Airforce Hospital, Jorhat.

Addressing a gathering of media persons Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed his delight to learn that apart from the ICMR and the medical institutions, CSIR-NEIST is the first R&D institute in Assam to have come out in support to the government in its battle to combat the abominable COVID-19 pandemic. He said a milestone has been achieved by this institute on this historic day. He congratulated scientists and staff of the institute for providing a yeoman service by establishing this testing laboratory as an added facility in this time of crisis when the need of the hour is to have more testing facilities which is pressing and burgeoning given the number of COVID-19 testing in the state is likely to cross one lakh mark. Dr Sarma also took stock of the kind of scientific programs, research, technologies and products which are being focused by the institute. He enquired about the technologies being patented and commercialized by CSIR-NEIST. To which Dr Sastry said that the institute has developed several technologies and many of these have been commercially translated among which herbal anti-arthritis ointment, anti-fungal ointment, new varieties of aromatic plants are noteworthy.

Dr Sastry ascribed the establishment of the COVID-19 testing laboratory here as demand of the hour, as it is the most effective and globally successful approach to test, trace, isolate the virus before it gets disperse to community transmission level. He opined that
Assam is at the threshold point of crossing over to stage 3 which is the community level transmission stage. He further added that the only way to mitigate and contain the situation is to carry forward with extensive testing, and the ray of hope is the will of lakhs of people to fight the pandemic, but the challenge is, the capacity to do so lies in the hands of a few people. Thus, the task of paramount importance ahead for the scientific community is to carry as many tests as possible to keep a tab on the virus and to develop effective drugs and vaccines for a sure shot cure. Dr Sastry mentioned that a team of 10 scientists of the institute are actively involved in isolation of RNA from the virus besides 40 other staff members are acting as a support system. The institute’s Biotechnology Division is playing a pivotal role in carrying out RT PCR based COVID-19 testing. Besides the Govt. of Assam and the district administration of Jorhat is actively cooperating and facilitating the efforts laid down by the institute. A microbiologist from the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Assam has been engaged with the institute’s COVID-19 testing laboratory to certify the testing. The samples for the testing are expected to be obtained in coordination with state government and the district administration of Jorhat. It may be mentioned that the institute has contractually engaged a project scientist II and a research student especially for this testing purpose. This testing facility is a feat achieved by the institute, as this herculean task was possible only because of the dedicate efforts of staff and the administration of the institute at war footing for the last one month.

Prepared By: Bijit Kumar Choudhury (PhD),
Senior Scientist, GSTD, CSIR-NEIST
Photo: Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurating the COVID-19 testing laboratory at CSIR-NEIST in the presence of director of the institute Dr G. Narahari Sastry

Photo: Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing the media persons in presence of director CSIR-NEIST Dr G. Narahari Sastry