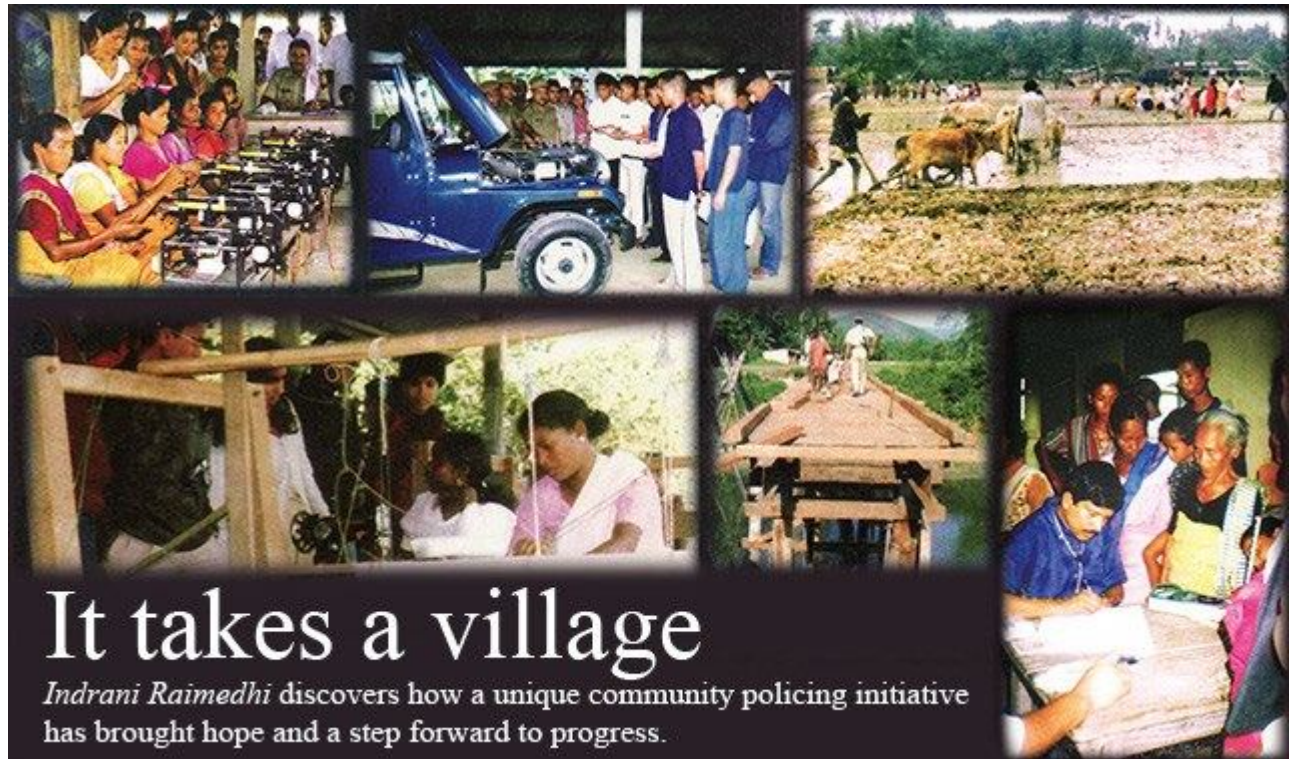


THIRD EYE EDITION

It takes a village



It takes a village

Indrani Raimedhi discovers how a unique community policing initiative has brought hope and a step forward to progress.

It was a moonless night in a remote village in Assam, set amidst a rolling expanse of rice fields and clumps of bamboo. As the hours slipped towards midnight, the men and women went on with their everyday tasks, as if unaware of what was to happen, what they planned to carry out under cover of darkness by a tacit, whispered plan.

Lakhi Bodo (not her real name) never had a chance. The widowed sixty-five-year-old, asleep in her straw pallet in her ramshackle hut, woke up gasping as a hand clamped over her mouth. Within minutes she was being dragged by her hair to the front courtyard. Her terrified eyes caught a glimpse of a ring of faces lit up by a flaming torch. She screamed in agony as they hit her with bamboo sticks, kicked her till she lay still in the dust, her frail form curled up like of foetus.

Relief flooded through her killers. They were safe. Their children would not catch the deadly fever. The bugs would not destroy their plants. This act of violence was for the common good. And what was for the common good could not be a sin.

Such killings were happening in other villages all over Assam's deceptively idyllic countryside. The spine chilling murders of five innocent villages in the name of witches in the year 2000 in Thagarguri village stirred the conscience of the law-enforcing agencies and

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demonstrated their helplessness in preventing such happenings. Remote location, inhospitable terrain and the presence of terrorists hampered the police from reaching the scene of crime, rounding up the accused and undertaking a thorough investigation.