

Padman boost to work force

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati: Akshay Kumar-starrer film *Padman* seems to have inspired women to increase production at a sanitary napkin production unit at a tea garden in Upper Assam.

A team of five young women at Khobong sanitary napkin production unit in Apeejay tea garden in Dibrugarh is looking to raise the production from 300-450 napkins to 650-700 pieces a day. The objective is to make the unit a financially viable manufacturing facility, capable of generating Rs 3,000-Rs 3,500 pieces per month per worker.

"On International Women's Day, the production unit had set up a stall at the celebrations and sold 310 pieces in a few hours. So there is potential. The garden has provided a space of over 250 square feet that is suitably clean and hygienic with electricity, drinking water and toilet facilities for the five young women who work in the unit. The location and the room pro-



The women at work at the Khobong production unit

vided is dedicated for the purpose of production of sanitary napkins and to keep the machines in safe custody," Debashish Barua, manager, Khobong tea estate, said.

"A healthy women work force matters most as it directly impacts production and productivity. Personal hygiene affects women in many ways, including fertility. Adolescent girls remain absent from their school classes because of discomfort and unhygienic practices by them during their menstrual cycle. The partnership between Indian Tea Association (ITA) and Zorg van de

Zaak Foundation, an NGO from Netherlands, is most valuable as it promotes personal hygiene and makes it available at the doorstep," Shikha Mukerjee, advisor CSR, Apeejay Tea, said.

The napkins have been priced at below the market rate for similar products.

The distribution of the products amongst tea gardens is done through the adolescent groups and members of the production team. The company helps the team in their sales effort and is also looking at the possibility of replicating this pilot project in other estates of Apeejay Tea.

A partnership between ITA and the Foundation has been conceived to help better hygienic practices among tea communities.

Recent survey findings conducted at the Assam branch of ITA estates in Upper Assam show that the awareness to use napkins among adolescent girls has been good compared to the middle-aged female population residing in tea estates of Assam.