

Asom Barta

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A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Cultural performance during the Republic Day celebrations in Guwahati.



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Dr. Himanata Biswa Sarma has said that Assam of the present is a transformed State from the years gone by. Highlighting the financial stability of the State in his Republic Day speech, Dr. Sarma said that for the first time in 2022, the State Government was able to provide salaries to employees from its own revenue.

"Like the previous financial year, our total expenditure in the next financial year will also be over Rs one lakh crore," said Dr. Sarma in his capacity as the chief guest in the 74th Republic Day celebrations of the country at the Veterinary College Playground, Khanapara in Guwahati.

The Chief Minister said that the State has made rapid strides on multiple fronts. Once considered a restive region, Assam today is often referred to as one of the most peaceful geographical and political entities.

Focussing on youth, he announced a sum of ₹3,000 crore in the next State budget for their self-employment while reiterating that it will fulfil its target of providing one lakh Government jobs to youths in the State. He added that henceforth, March 31 will be marked as 'Students Day' in Assam in memory of Upendranath Brahma, popularly called 'Bodofa'.

Dr. Sarma informed the gathering of a State sports policy in this year's Independence Day. "We will hold a sports festival in 2023 covering every revenue village. The sports festivals will cover nearly 25,000 revenue villages. This Krira Mahotsav will culminate in the State's capital.



This will be the biggest Sports festival organised in the State," he said.

He urged the insurgent ULFA (I) to return to the mainstream which, he said, will facilitate transformation of Assam into an 'island of peace'.

He also touched upon the success on the rhino poaching front and the crackdown on encroachers across the State, especially of the 'Satras' (Vaishnavite Monasteries centres of learning) and forest areas.

Dr. Sarma asserted that his Government has been making special efforts to place the State prominently on the global map by highlighting its rich culture and heritage. To present the State's rich culture before the world, a massive event is being planned on April 14, marking the Assamese New Year. "Anywhere between 10,000-15,000 'dhulias' (drum players) and 'nachonis' (dancers) will assemble for a Bihu

"We will hold a sports festival in 2023 covering every revenue village. The sports festivals will cover nearly 25,000 revenue villages. This Krira Mahotsav will culminate in the State's capital. This will be the biggest Sports festival organised in the State"

performance, aiming to enter the *Guinness Book of World Records*," he said adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the event.

His speech also covered the recent nomination of Charaideo Moidams as a World Heritage Site and the rapid transformation of 'Batadrava Than' into a world-class religious-tourism site and redevelopment of areas around the historic Rang Ghar in Sivasagar. Dr Sarma announced an allocation of ₹ 300 crores for building a corridor at Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati on the lines of Kashi -Vishwanath corridor in Varanasi.

He spoke of the forthcoming "Health Services Utsav" aimed at taking healthcare delivery to the last mile. "In line with Gunotsav, Government officials will visit and evaluate qualitative parameters of government hospitals under the policy," said Dr Sarma.



Musings of a Chief Minister



The year has begun for the people of Assam on a remarkable note. For the first time in 45 years, there was zero poaching of the State's rhinos. A feat which honourable Prime Minister has noted and hailed. The credit for this goes to the forest staff and the Assam Police who brave all kinds of danger to guard the cherished unicorn. No wonder, this feat has been hailed around the world. For me this reflects how the Government can achieve a lot by delegating individuals and departments with their respective responsibilities and not meddling in their affairs while monitoring their activities for necessary support.

This is precisely what various awardees of Assam's highest civilian awards also represent. Their silent and unbridled dedication to the cause of humanity has shown through, with or without the Government. Each one of these awardees represent the epitome of dedication to humanity. It would be unfair on my part to choose one over the other. The selection has been free of bias and best. I expressed my personal gratitude to them for their service to the State and its people.

Our Government has been unrelenting in elevating Assam's infrastructure to world class standards. Continuing with our December month's commitment in building major infrastructure across the State, this month we announced a series of projects for Guwahati, the capital city as well as the Gateway to South East Asia. These projects will go a long way in easing life for its people and those coming here from all parts of the world, including industries and investors. The partial commissioning of the water supply project is another step in that direction.

The fact that we have come of age in terms of the perception can be gauged from the fact that we are hosting five important meetings related to G20 in the coming months starting as early as this week. One could not have imagined important financial and cultural leaders from the most powerful countries and zones of the world to assemble in Assam; however, things have changed not only in the State but also in the country, especially with the kind of leadership provided to the nation by our honourable Prime Minister. India's Presidency of the G20 could not have come to us at a better time than this as the country has embarked well on its course to lead the world in more areas than one. I have personally supervised preparations towards these events as we get ready to put our best foot forward. These events will open new doors of opportunities by showcasing Assam's rich cultural heritage, nature & potentials. We are waiting with bated breath to welcome guests, including youths, to this beautiful land of ours whose diversity, both ethnic and cultural, is surely to attract these delegates from around the world.

Amid all this, our Government has not forgotten the welfare of the masses. Different schemes that we had announced last year are well and truly on course to meet their target dates while we embark on newer vistas, especially for our youths, which I had announced in my Republic Day speech.

Towards the end of the month, we took a landmark decision to curb the menace of child marriage in the State, a fact which, it seems, has slipped out of the psyche of the society. The National Family Health Survey (V) has painted a grim picture of Assam. I have no doubt in my mind that we are way better than what statistics reflect, yet the figures are there for all of us to see. To bring things back on track, my Cabinet took a decision to launch a major drive against this social issue. Rural pockets of the State have thrown figures and incidences which are hard to believe. Any conscious individual cannot sit tight after receiving such a dismal picture. Let me assure you that we will strictly enforce existing laws on child marriage through actions at the ground using resources we have to ensure that when the next NFHS comes, we can hold our head high.

We are indeed holding our heads high on the basis of the fact that our historical Moidams in Charaideo, the former seat of the Ahom kingdom, have been nominated by the Government of India to Unesco for recognition in the 's World Heritage Site (Cultural) tag. This year, Assam's entry, selected from 52 entries, is the only one from India, which will compete with hundreds of entries from around the world in various sections for their recognition. I must tell you that behind the scenes efforts by our cultural experts would not have resulted in anything had not the Prime Minister personally spared time to drive home its importance. We have been working on it since 2014. Although there are processes that our entry needs to comply with during the next few months, as a first step the nomination has allowed the world to take note of these historical and culturally rich heritage of the State.

India's Presidency of the G20 could not have come to us at a better time than this as the country has embarked well on its course to lead the world in more areas than one. I have personally supervised preparations towards these events as we get ready to put our best foot forward.

Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Ganga Vilas to change NE waterways scene



MV Ganga Vilas at its colourful best as it sets sails on the Ganges in Varanasi.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the world's longest river cruise-MV Ganga Vilas via video conferencing on January 13 besides inaugurating and laying the foundation stones for several inland waterways projects worth more than ₹ 1,000 crores during the event. This includes a ship repair centre at Pandu with an investment of ₹208 crore, besides a dedicated road connecting the Pandu Terminal to NH 27 which will enable 24-hour connectivity. It will be built at an estimated cost of ₹ 180 crores.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the cruise from Kashi to Dibrugarh will bring to the fore, places of tourism in North India on the world tourism map.

Addressing 32 tourists from Switzerland who are taking the cruise, Modi said, "Today, India has everything and a lot beyond your imagination."

Throwing light on the experience of the river cruise, he informed the tourists that it has something special for everyone. He added that those seeking spirituality will enjoy destinations like Kashi, Bodh Gaya, Vikramshila, Patna Sahib and Majuli, while tourists looking out for a multinational cruise experience will get the opportunity to experience Dhaka in Bangladesh, and those wanting to witness the natural diversity of India will cross through Sundarbans and the forests of Assam.

Observing that the cruise will pass through 25 different river streams, he said that the cruise has significant importance for those who want to understand the river systems of India.

"One can witness the extraordinary amalgamation of the heritage of India and its

modernity on this cruise," Modi said while shedding light on the new era of cruise tourism where employment opportunities will be created for the youth of the country. "Not just foreign tourists but Indians who travelled to different nations for such an experience can head towards North India now," the Prime Minister said. He said that similar experiences are being readied in other inland waterways of the country to boost cruise tourism while keeping in mind the budget as well as the luxury experience.

He said that this initiative will assist in making Eastern India a growth engine for a developed India.

Emphasising the need for training of the staff and skilled workforce, the Prime Minister informed that a Skill Development Centre has been set up at Guwahati. Addressing the inauguration and foundation stones laying ceremony, he expressed his gratitude towards the Prime Minister for the numerous initiatives undertaken at transforming the region into an engine of growth and development in the country.

He said that the cruise will be a game-changer in unleashing the potential of the tourism sector in eastern India and go a long way in realising the Prime Minister's motto of "transformation of the North East through transportation".

Dr. Sarma hoped that the Maritime Skill Development Centre would ensure that youths from the region would be able to make use of the employment and self-employment opportunities the maritime sector would be providing in the days to come.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said that the Act East Policy of the Prime Minister

"One can witness the extraordinary amalgamation of the heritage of India and its modernity on this cruise"

Prime Minister Narendra Modi



was becoming a reality bringing growth & prosperity to the country.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that Mr Modi's vision to enable an affordable, sustainable, and smooth mode of transport is finally taking shape. He said that the revival of inland waterways in the country is proving to be a boon to landlocked regions like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the North East.

Partha Pegu, Director Inland Water Transport, Assam told *Asom Barta* that

On February 18, the MV Ganga will arrive in Assam and three days later, on February 21, it will reach the Pandu Port.

Meanwhile, Biswajit Pegu, Deputy Commissioner of Dibrugarh district informed this reporter that the vessel will arrive in Dibrugarh on February 28. "It will halt for the night at Bogibeel. On March 1, the tourists will fly back from Dibrugarh," Pegu said.

G20 is here, Guwahati decked up



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Guwahati is getting decked up as a bride to welcome G20 delegates for two key meetings in the month of February, the first one being one on sustainable finance under the Finance Track, one of the three work streams under the G20 mandate.

Since India is hosting the Youth20 (Y20) summit for the first time on the side-line of the G20 summit, the first meeting of the Y20 Group shall be held in Guwahati from February 6 to 8. This is the first of the various meetings to be held on the five Y20 themes across India in a run-up to the final Youth-20 Summit in August 2023. Altogether, 18 events under Y20 has been planned in India, the final event of which will be held in Varanasi where deliberations and negotiations on all five themes will take place besides finalisation of the Y20 communique.

More than 250 delegates from across the world are expected to participate in the three-day event in Assam. It will focus on five themes of Future of Work; Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction; Peace Building and Reconciliation; Youth in Democracy and Health, Wellbeing and Sports, and many subthemes under the broad umbrella of the themes. A white paper will also be launched during the programme in Guwahati. There will be panel discussions on the broad themes in which speakers from across the North East and the country have been invited. Couple of publications of scholarly articles and research papers are also being planned as part of the Y20.

Anmol Sovit, Chair of Y20, told *Asom Barta* over phone that with a very youthful population, India is poised to usher in a new era on the global stage. "Hence, the Y20 has become a very important platform for India to give leadership to the world," he said.

The events will take place at two major venues: IIT Guwahati and Hotel Radisson Blue. Sources told *Asom Barta* that Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has directed officials to leave no stone unturned to make the event a memorable one. A senior Assam Government officer reviewed preparation in a meeting in IIT-G which was also attended by IIT Director and other government department representatives. Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Thakur is expected to be present



A prominent landmark in the Last Gate area in Guwahati branded with the G20 logo.

during one of the days of the event, sources informed this newsletter.

Youth20 is one of the eight official engagement groups under the G20 umbrella. The G20 rotating presidency bears the responsibility of hosting the youth summit, which usually takes place some weeks prior to the traditional forum to know what the youths are thinking and incorporate their suggestions in their own policy proposals.

It is an attempt to create a connecting point between G20 governments and their local youth. The Y20 India Summit in 2023 would exemplify India's youth-centric efforts and provide an opportunity to showcase its values and policy measures to the youth across the globe.

To create a participative and inclusive deliberation process in the run up to the Y20 meeting, over 50 universities and colleges across Assam will be organising seminars, workshops, debates, and panel discussions in

“The Y20 has become a very important platform for India to give leadership to the world”

Anmol Sovit, Chair, Y20

their campuses leading on to the first meeting of the Y20 Group in IIT-G. Over 12,000 college-university students are expected to participate in these events. Each higher education institution has been entrusted to organise awareness drive at 10 nearby schools to sensitise the schools about G-20 groupings and functioning.

In total, 400 students, including prize winners of competitions from various participating Universities/Colleges will participate in the central event at IIT-G on February 7 and will be accordingly mentored for understanding innovations and industry-academia linkages. They will also get an opportunity to interact with the international youth delegates to exchange ideas for a shared future.

Police unrelenting on drugs cartel



Police officials in Tinsukia (left) and Karbi Anglong with seized narcotics and peddlers.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The day was June 21, 2021. An Assam Home Guard Borsing Bey and his team received an Intelligence report that a large consignment of the banned methamphetamine was being smuggled in a public bus in Karbi Anglong. He used his experience and intelligence to unravel the drugs hidden in the bus which more experienced policemen could not locate. It is now rumoured that he was offered a lucrative deal to keep quiet. The policeman in Bey did not defy the call of conscience and reported the matter to his seniors. Not only drugs worth ₹ 12 crore were seized but even those responsible were arrested. Bey was promoted as a constable by the police. However, what not many realised was that this was the beginning of a massive crackdown on drugs by the Assam Police which probably Bey ignited.

As on date, The Assam Police in the last 18 months have managed to seize drugs worth ₹ 1,066.29 crore and arrest 7,659 peddlers in their mission to rid the State of drugs. The situation has come to such a state that not one day passes by without the news of a drugs haul reported by the State media, highlighting how galvanised the police has become in its quest to make Assam drugs free.

Talking to *Asom Barta*, DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta said that a sustained campaign against drugs was always on. “What has changed after



a new Government under Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma has come to power is that the campaign has been intensified. The Assam Police has become ruthless in its quest to make the State drugs-free,” Mahanta said, adding that the police has educated itself on the stringent laws governing peddling of drugs, while also taking advantage of technology.

A case in point is the app Drugs Free Assam which encourages the people to post information on drugs on the app. Besides, the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) app of the Home Ministry is facilitating greater coordination between the State and various law enforcement agencies of the Centre in its fight against narcotics.

“The matter came up during the Regional Conference on Drug Trafficking and National Security held in Guwahati. Union Home Minister Amit Shah while addressing Chief Ministers, Chief Secretaries and DGPs of the North Eastern States harped on the need for greater coordination among agencies while referring to the habit of drug consumption as one which can destroy generations,” The Assam DGP told *Asom Barta*.

Sanjib Kumar Saikia, Superintendent of Police, Karbi Anglong said police in his district is always on the alert since Karbi Anglong is the nodal centre of drugs trafficking in the region, especially consignment coming from Myanmar via Nagaland to other parts of Assam via the hill district.

“Last year, our police force confiscated 2833 kg of ganja, 20.36 kg of heroine, and 63,463 methamphetamine tablets, among others. We

Case Registered	4,608
Person Arrested	7,659
Heroin (in KG)	162.70
Ganja (in KG)	59,539.54
Opium (in KG)	257.02
Cough Syrup (Bottles)	3,48,274
Tablets / Capsule	73,41,190
Morphine (in KG)	7.70
Poppy Straw (in KG)	3,316.75
Crystal Methamphetamine (in KG)	17.70
Cocaine(in KG)	0.30
Cannabis Plant (in KG)	213.93
Tramadol(in KG)	0.56
Raw Opium Bud (KG)	10

Estimated market value (street price)
₹ 1,066.29 Crore

organise several awareness programme to nip the habit in the bud,” Saikia said.

Writer Jayant Madhav Bora, who has also penned a novel centring on drugs, was full of praise for the police initiative against drugs. “It destroys not only one single body but a household and a society,” he said, while exhorting writers, singers and poets to use the power of their art to raise awareness against drugs.

Bimal Laskar of Nagaon, while appreciating the relentless drive of the police against narcotics in his district, advocated a continuous campaign to rid the society of this menace. “We had two successful years against drugs when the district police swamped the peddlers. However, I want this drive to continue,” he told this reporter.

In Guwahati city, drugs worth ₹ 407 crore were confiscated in the calendar year 2022, including heroin, and cocaine.

“We maintain a close contact with our neighbouring States. Besides, the Assam Police works on forward and backward linkage to identify peddlers and consumers so that the problem is tackled at the grassroots,” the DGP said.

Data on recovery under NDPS Cases w.e.f. 10-05-2021 to 11-12-2022



₹ 3,37,00185.00 (Cash in Rupees)



28,865.00 (Foreign Currency)



68,150.00 (Fake Indian Currency)



31 Bigha, 3 Katha, 12 Lessa Cultivation destroyed (Cannabis)



648 Bigha Cultivation destroyed (Opium)



625 (Total Vehicle Seized)

A new feather in Guwahati's green drive



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma purchasing a ceremonial ticket for a ride in a CNG bus(left). He also inaugurated a CNG Depot on the day.



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

In its quest to make Guwahati a smart city, the Guwahati Smart City Limited has taken a big stride by introducing 100 CNG-based city buses on the city roads courtesy the Guwahati Smart City Project. And people are already feeling the change.

Take the case of 36-year-old Md Pinku Ali. A city bus driver who has been covering the roads of Guwahati for eight years, Pinku has started feeling lighter about the bus that he is now driving because it is CNG-laden and because it pollutes less, a fact to which Pinku is not oblivious of.

"I had been noticing all along that my erstwhile diesel bus would emit a lot of smoke. I knew that it was not good for the environment, but I was helpless. Now, driving this bus from Khanapara to Adabari, I feel that it pollutes less, and it is comfortable," he told this correspondent who undertook a journey in the bus to get a feel of things. "It consumes more fuel than diesel, but I think it is good for everybody," he said.

Bandana Sharma, a passenger in the same bus was appreciative of the steps taken by the Transport Department and the GSCL. "This is my first ride on a CNG-driven bus. It is comfortable, and I am enjoying it. It is air conditioned. I do not mind paying more if need be," she said.

The CNG-buses were flagged off by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on the New Year Day in the presence of Transport Minister Parimal Suklabaidya; Housing Affairs and Urban Development Minister Ashok Singhal and Commerce and Industry Minister Bimal Bora, besides senior officials. On the same day, a CNG Depot, set up by Purva Bharti Gas in a petrol pump of oil retail giant Indian Oil Corporation near ISBT, was inaugurated by Dr. Sarma. Coincidentally, the Assam Chief Minister became the fleet's first ticketed passenger as well.

Later tweeting from his account, Dr. Sarma

Why CNG is Eco-Friendly

Green Fuel

Commonly referred to as the green fuel because of its lead and sulphur free character, CNG reduces harmful emissions. Being non-corrosive, it enhances the longevity of spark plugs. Due to the absence of any lead or benzene content in CNG, the lead fouling of spark plugs, and lead or benzene pollution are eliminated.

Safe Fuel

The properties of CNG make it a safe fuel. It is stored in high gauge seamless cylinders which are certified with a negligible chance of leakage. It is lighter than air, so in case of leak it just rises up and disperses into the atmosphere and mixes in the air easily and evenly.

The carbon emissions are also lower in case of CNG fuel which will help in reducing the carbon emissions of the public transport sector.



termed the occasion as the beginning of a green era in Guwahati. "With introduction of clean & green energy in public transport, we're moving closer to our goal of Net Zero Carbon Emission by 2070," read the tweet.

Procured at a cost of ₹ 29 crore, these buses are aimed at reducing emission in the city whose air quality has deteriorated over time. "These luxurious and comfortable city service buses will also play a crucial role in shaping the habit of the people of Guwahati to opt for public transport services and stop the use of personal private vehicles for travel within the city limits. This, in turn, reduces carbon emissions and traffic congestion in the City," said Rahul Das, Managing Director, Assam State Transport Corporation, which is managing the fleet of CNG buses, while talking to this correspondent over phone.

A decision to introduce CNG buses on the city roads was taken in a Cabinet meeting in August 2022.

"This is my first ride on a CNG-driven bus. It is comfortable, and I am enjoying it. It is air conditioned. I do not mind paying more if need be"

Bandana Sharma



Charaideo Moidams in quest of history



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

January 23 was probably the most important day in the professional life of Deepi Rekha Kouli, the Director of Archaeology, Assam. It was on this day she got to know that something on which she, her department and others were working on for nine years has taken a giant stride forward. It was the news that the Union Government has decided to nominate the Moidam of Charaideo for Unesco Heritage Status List recognition.

“Our efforts for Unesco’s World Heritage Site tag to Charaideo Moidam began in 2014. In 2017-18 and 2018-19, we received necessary guidance from Unesco’s Paris office on how to prepare dossiers for a cultural-cum-historical site. In 2019, we got good financial support from the State Government. We had entrusted Dr. K C Nauriyal, former director of ASI to study the cultural aspects of Charaideo Moidam and Prof J N Phukon, a leading historian of the State, to help us in providing the historical basis and glory of the Moidams,” Kouli told *Asom Barta*.

She said that apart from Dr. Nauriyal and Prof Phukon, Janhwi Sharma, former Additional Director General (Conservation and Scientific Preservation) of ASI also extended help in preparing the final dossier of Charaideo Moidam.

This was the dossier, according to Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi selected out of the 52 others that came for his consideration for the coveted tag.

The Prime Minister’s Office, Union Ministry of Cultural Affairs and DG, ASI informed me of this momentous news and about the submission of the nomination in Paris, said Dr. Sarma while talking to the media.

“If selected, the 90 royal burials at Charaideo will be the only cultural heritage site in the North East to get the coveted status. Assam’s nomination of the 52 sites in India reflects the Prime Minister’s love and respect for the rich cultural heritage of Assam and the North East,” said Dr Sarma.

Dr. Kouli disclosed some anecdotes to this reporter after her return from New Delhi where she was one among many working on this initiative. “Dr Nauriyal was so serious in preparing the note on cultural

richness of the Charaideo Moidam within stipulated time that he even stayed at our office guest house in Guwahati. Both Dr Nauriyal and Dr Phukon’s had a huge contribution in preparing the final dossier,” she said.

Kouli claimed that the Directorate of Archaeology is the first government agency in the country to prepare a dossier on its own for a Cultural – Historical site for Unesco World Heritage Site nomination.

“In the State Budget of 2019-20, we sanctioned ₹ 25 crore for the development of the Moidams. We had engaged a very professional team to prepare the dossier. Besides, five officers of the Directorate of Archaeology, 10 researchers and many others were actively engaged in preparing the dossier,” Dr. Sarma informed the media.

“It took nine years for the dossier to reach the nomination status from the tentative list and this was possible only due to the initiative of the Prime Minister,” Sarma said adding that he and his Cabinet colleague Keshab Mahanta met the Union Cultural Affairs Minister recently to apprise him about the State Government’s move.

The Assam Chief Minister in his interaction with the media said that during the 400th birth anniversary celebrations of Ahom General Lachit Borphukan in New Delhi in November last year, an exhibition was held at Vigyan Bhawan which included a model of ‘Moidam’ that highlighted the unique burial architecture and tradition of the Tai Ahoms.

“The Prime Minister had viewed the exhibition. This nomination has been possible due to his interest in this heritage of ours. It is a matter of great honour for Assam that the country has decided to forward the World Heritage Site nomination dossier to Unesco for evaluation,” the Chief Minister said.

“In the month of September, a team of Unesco officials and experts will visit these Moidams at Charaideo to assess them,” added Dr. Sarma.

At present, there is no site from the region in the country’s 32 World Heritage Sites (Cultural). However, Kaziranga National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary are World Heritage sites under the natural category, of which there are seven in India.

“The Prime Minister had viewed the exhibition. This nomination has been possible due to his interest in this heritage of ours. It is a matter of great honour for Assam that the country has decided to forward the World Heritage Site nomination dossier to Unesco for evaluation”

**Chief Minister
Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma**

State ups the ante against 'child marriage'



Maternal Mortality

- One forth (25%) of the Maternal deaths are of age less than equal to 20 years.
- 31.8% Women of Assam age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (NFHS-5) compared to 23.3% in India
- 11.7% Women of Assam age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (NFHS-5) compared to 6.8% of India

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Barpeta police on January 26 while acting on a tip off carried out an operation in Kurbaha village under Sarbhog Police Station and picked up four persons in connection with a child marriage case.

"We arrested four persons, including a Kaji, for the marriage of an underage girl. The groom, his father and uncle were the other three persons arrested for the crime," said Amitav Sinha, Superintendent of Police, Barpeta.

The arrest bears significance coming as it does on the backdrop of a Cabinet decision of the Assam Government which has decided to take a multi-pronged strategy to crackdown on child marriage based on its decision in a Cabinet meeting of January 23.

The Assam Cabinet had then decided to launch a State-wide drive against the menace of child marriage. The decision was taken in a Cabinet meeting following thorough the discussion of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS- 5)

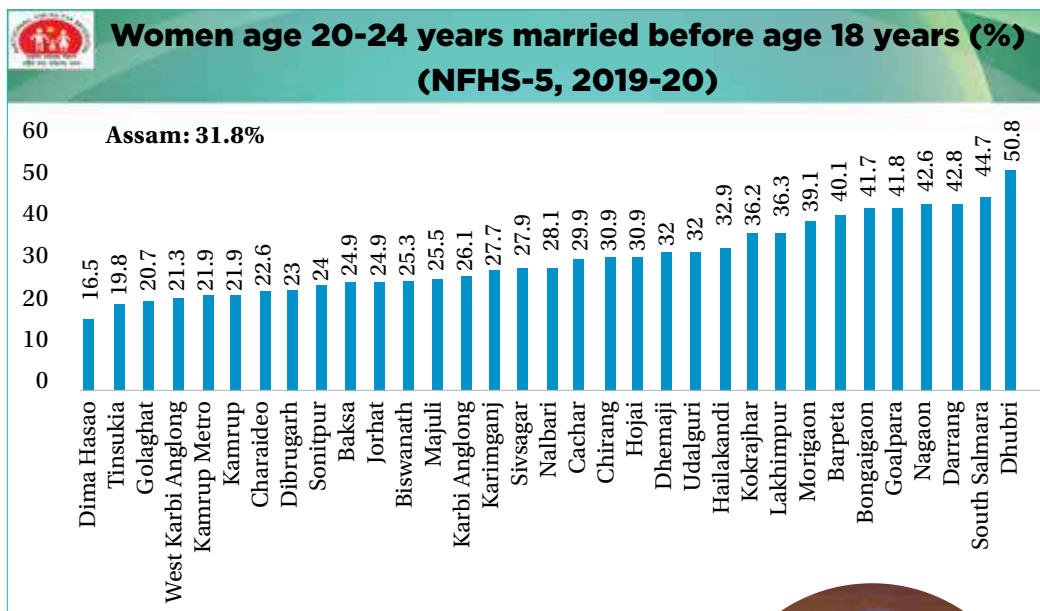
Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Government has directed the police to launch a massive crackdown against child marriage in the next fortnight.

Data from the National Family Health Survey -5 (For the year 2019-20), reflect that 31.8% of women in Assam in the age group of 20-24 years have married before the age of 18 years compared to 23.3% in India.

Moreover, 11.7% of women in Assam in the age group of 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (NFHS-5) compared to 6.8% of women in India.

The Chief Minister explained how the Centre's survey, conducted between 2019 and 2020, revealed an 'alarming' 11.7% of underage mothers or pregnant girls in the State, a figure 'much higher' than the national average of 6.8%. Dr. Sarma said that the figures reflected 'rampant' child marriage, a root cause of high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates in Assam.

"The worrying trend is that in Dhubri; around 50.8% of the marriages have taken place in the prohibited age category. Besides 44.7% of child marriages have been registered



"State wide police action will be initiated against people involved in Child Marriage menace. FIR will be lodged under POCSO Act in situations where the girl's age is under 14 years and under The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 in cases where the girl's age is between 14 years and 18 years"



in South Salmara; 42.8% and 42.6% in Darrang and Nagaon respectively; 41.8% and 41.7% in Goalpara and Bongaigaon respectively; 40.1% in Barpeta; 39.1% in Morigaon and lowest in Dima Hasao district with 16.5%," revealed Dr. Sarma.

According to the survey, western Assam's Dhubri district registered 22.4% of women/ girls that gave birth at the prohibited age. Likewise, in South Salmara, 22% of women became mothers at an early age; 16.1% in Darrang; 15.7% in Kamrup; 15.6% in Hojai; 15.4% in Bongaigaon; 15% in Nagaon and 14.2% in Barpeta district.

"State wide police action will be initiated against people involved in Child Marriage menace. FIR will be lodged under POCSO Act in situations where the girl's age is under 14 years and under The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 in cases where the girl's age is between 14 years and 18 years," said Dr Sarma.

The POCSO Act of 2012 defines a child as anyone under the age of 18, and it criminalises

sex between an underage child and an adult. The Act defines 'sexual crime' as when the husband engages in sexual activity with his wife who is under the age of 14. According to POCSO, a violation of the POCSO Act imposes a life sentence for the male partner. Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, action can be taken against those who marry girls between 14 and 18 years of age.

He said that based on the Cabinet decision, the Gaon Panchayat Secretary will now also be designated as the child marriage prohibition officer (CMPO), tasked with the responsibility of lodging an FIR if she comes across any such case in area of her jurisdiction.

The State Cabinet's move to curb the menace of child marriage was apparently inspired by similar rule in Karnataka. "The Karnataka Government is doing this. So, we are taking a bit of inspiration from Karnataka," said Dr. Sarma while adding that it will be a priority of the State Government to eradicate the menace within five years.

A guidebook initiative



Deputy Commissioner Biswajit Pegu with officials during the launch of the guidebook.



AB BUREAU, DIBRUGARH

District Level Internal Examination Committee of Dibrugarh District has published a Student Guidebook to assist prospective examinees to crack the examinations in the best possible way. This has been done keeping in view a recent directive by the Board of Secondary Education, Assam that 50% questions on subjects like Mathematics, Science, Social Science and English set to be in objective forms in the forthcoming examination. The guidebook is focusing on these above mentioned subjects.

The committee that worked behind-the-scene consisted of its president and the then Dibrugarh School Inspector Dipika Choudhury, vice president and Seba's regional secretary and also

the District Programme Officer of Samagra Shiksha, Dibrugarh Dipankar Dutta, Secretary of the committee Udo Shankar Gogoi, who is also the Assistant Head Master of Tengakhat Girls' High School, assistant secretary and Chabua Tea Garden Model School, Principal (in-charge), Anjan Konwar, assistant secretary and Chachaji High School Head Master Sew Kumar Sahu.

The objective of the initiative is to improve the overall HSLC results and at the same time contribute to a better understanding of the subject and its content among the students. Talking to *Asom Barta*, Dutta said, "This student guidebook is a result of a meeting we had with the executive committee. Based on this, we had discussion with students, and teachers. They supported this idea. In the same way, we spoke to teachers of various institutions in the district and based on their support, we came out with this guidebook."

Gogoi told this correspondent over phone, "This is being published in two languages: English and Assamese. The guidebook will be distributed free of cost to students of the district. We have reports that students are appreciating the initiative. We printed it despite limited time because we had support from all quarters."

Tengakhat Girls' High School student Namrata Gogoi, who is an HSLC aspirant this academic session, said, "This guidebook has helped me a lot. The answers here are in brief. I am reading it regularly these days. It has helped me understand the topic easily."

Gunotsav begins in Assam

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Over 15.08 lakh students from 16,900-odd schools were tested on a range of metrics in the first phase of Gunotsav, the annual academic exercise conducted by Department of School Education, Government of Assam in 11 selected districts of the State. Meant to test the mettle of students in the academic and non-academic fields as well as evaluate the school infrastructure and its management, the exercise began on January 18 and concluded successfully on the 21st of the last month.

Schools in the districts of Nagaon, Barpeta, Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Sivasagar, South Salmara Mancachar and Udalguri participated in the first phase of the programme. The exercise is meant for students from Class 1 to Class IX.

The second phase of Gunotsav shall be held from February 1 to 4, while the third and final phase shall be conducted from February 15 to 18. It is being conducted in Government/Provincialised schools, Tea garden management Schools, Adarsha Vidyalaya, Tea Garden Model Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Avasiya Vidyalaya numbering 44,525 across the State. Altogether over 42.76 lakh



Education Minister Dr. Ranaj Pegu in a school during Gunotsav.

students will be evaluated as part of the exercise which will see the participation of over 18,000 evaluators.

In the second phase, over 15,500 schools with more than 15.07 lakh students in the districts of Baksa, Charaideo, Chirang, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Golaghat, Hojai (now part of Nagaon district), Hailakandi, Jorhat, Kamrup (Metropolitan), Sonitpur, Tinsukia, and West Karbi Anglong will be evaluated.

The rest will be part of the evaluation

exercise in the concluding phase.

Sivasagar district School Inspector Kamaljoyti Gogoi told *Asom Barta* that Gunotsav in his district was a success. "This time grading of schools will be done on three parameters, of which scholastic will carry a weight of 90% marks, while 5% each shall be for co-scholastic and other areas and community participation and contribution," he said adding that Sivasagar was the best district in Gunotsav last year.

Govt honours State's civil heroes

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Shila Goala, an ASHA worker was buried neck deep in work during Covid when she was faced with a peculiar problem. She came across a teenage victim of a sexual offence and her intellectually-disabled mother. Shila had questions which her conscience alone could answer. She listened to her heart and brought the teenager and her mother home. She took care of them to the best of her ability. The ASHA was never shy of seeking help from her neighbours, relatives, and her health colleagues. After a few months, the teenager gave birth to a baby. Shila was now in a different world.

Bringing all her experience into play, she nurtured the mother and her new-born son back to health, while facing the challenge of the girl's mother at the same time. This unsung act did not go unnoticed.

The Assam Government realising her dedication to humanity chose her as an Asom Gaurav. A reticent Shila who works around the Joboka Tea Estate, says, "I have been an ASHA worker since 2006. I have met different people on different occasions. The experience, too, has been variegated. However, the time during Covid was an exceptional challenge and even in that this episode was a very rare one for all of us. I took care of her pregnancy. She was merely 13. The challenges during her postpartum stage were different. But within the ambit of medical regulations, we managed. Thanks to my relatives, neighbours and health colleagues, the mother and her son are doing fine. I am every grateful to all of them."

When Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on January 4 announced that Assam Government has decided to confer the highest state civilian award 'Assam Baibhav' on Mumbai-based medical practitioner Dr Tapan Saikia for his contribution towards cancer treatment, he also had heroes like Shila in his mind.

The Chief Minister announced the names of 21 recipients of 'Assam Saurav and Assam Gaurav' for the year 2022 besides Assam



"I have been an ASHA worker since 2006. I have met different people on different occasions. The experience, too, has been variegated. However, the time during Covid was an exceptional challenge and even in that this episode was a very rare one for all of us. I took care of her pregnancy. She was merely 13..."

Shila Gowala (Assam Gaurav)



Baibhav. These awards constitute the State Civilian Award announced each year by the Assam Government.

Five personalities have been selected for the Assam Sourav award this year- Krishna Roy (Art & Culture- Mobile Theatre), Gilbertson Sangma (Sports - Football), Nayanmoni

Saikia (Sports- Lawnball), Dr. Binoy Kumar Saikia (Science) and Dr. Sashidhar Phukan (Healthcare and Public Service).

Founder of the famed Abahan Theatre, Roy expressed his happiness at being chosen for the Asom Saurav award. "What this award has done is to increase my responsibility towards society. I am grateful to the people of Bajali and the mobile theatre community. I will continue to work with the same dedication in the days to come," Rai told *Asom Barta* over phone.

A total of 15 personalities have been selected for the Assam Gourav award this year- Dhritimala Deka, Debajit Barman, Rustom Basumatary, Manje La, Binanda Hatibaruah, Atul Chandra Baruah, Kalyani Rajbonshi, Shila Gowala, Dr. Jogesh Deuri, Dr. Pankaj Lal Gogoi, Sarbeswar Basumatary, Manthang Hmar, Dr. Dhruvajyoti Sharma, Dayal Goswami and Dr. Syed Ifthikar Ahmed.

The Assam Vaibhav Award carries a cash prize of ₹ 5 lakh and the recipient can avail medical treatment throughout his life at Government expense. The obverse of the award is an image of the Jaapi along with the words "Assam Baibhav", inscribed in Assamese script, on a Hollong tree (*Dipterocarpus retusus*) leaf. The Assam Saurav carries a cash prize of ₹ 4 lakh while the prize money is ₹ 3 lakh for the Assam Gaurav.

About Assam's Civilian Awards:

All the above awardees will also be offered the following facilities:

- Free Medical Treatment in Government hospitals and stay in paying cabins, wherever available.
- They will be provided free accommodation in State Government Circuit Houses, Guest Houses and Assam Bhawans.
- They will be regular invitees for all the official functions as distinguished guests.
- The Government of Assam will provide up to ₹ 2 lakh for medical expenses towards their treatment of critical diseases.
- Over and above the provision for award money and certain facilities to recipients, free travel will also be permitted to awardees in ASTC buses, provided they give a 24-hour prior information of the proposed journey.



Slew of projects set to transform city



Assam Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and others during the stone laying ceremony of new Raj Bhawan.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

As part of the Government of Assam's "Bikashor Baabe Edin" initiative, which roughly translates into "A Day for Development", Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on January 5 attended the foundation laying and bhumi puja ceremonies of seven major infrastructure development projects under the Public Works (Building & National Highway) Department at various locations across Kamrup (Metro) district.

The seven projects, being undertaken at an estimated cost of approximately ₹ 1,777 cr, are: A new Raj Bhawan at Kharghuli, to be built at a cost of ₹ 41.32 cr; an auditorium with a seating capacity of 800 to be built at a cost of ₹ 44.26 cr; a police reserve at Pan Bazar at a cost of ₹ 544.44 cr; the integrated Deputy Commissioner's Office at Rupnagar at a cost of ₹ 58.86 crore, another auditorium with a seating capacity of 5,000 at Khanapara to be built at a cost of ₹ 185 cr, the Police Commissionerate building at Khanapara which is set to cost Rs. 95 cr and the integrated Directorate Complex at Betkuchi to be built at a cost of ₹ 808 cr.

The construction of the Raj Bhawan shall be completed within the stipulated time-frame of 18 months while the other projects will take anywhere between 24 to 30 months.

Chief Minister Dr. Sarma termed the day as a historic one for the residents' of Guwahati for these projects have the ability to go a step further in ensuring that the largest city in the North East becomes the gateway to South East Asia in more ways than one.

He said the seven projects for which the foundation stones were laid today would act as catalysts in helping the Government realise

"I must appreciate the move of the Assam Government for taking this step to make Guwahati – the Gateway of South East Asia in a real sense. The Chief Minister has been working on a vision to make Guwahati a beautiful city on all fronts"

JN Khataniar, Senior Technical Adviser, GMDA

its ambitions to transform Guwahati as a nerve-centre of all important activities in the field of economy, industries, cultural affairs, and tourism in the region.

JN Khataniar, Senior Technical Adviser of GMDA and a consultant engineer was among those who lauded the Government's latest infrastructure push.

"I must appreciate the move of the Assam Government for taking this step to make Guwahati – the Gateway of South East Asia in a real sense. The Chief Minister

has been working on a vision to make Guwahati a beautiful city on all fronts," said Khataniar.

"These projects will reduce hassles faced by the people of Guwahati. It will ease office life on one hand while ensuring that the city will have permanent structures, whose needs have been felt for a long time. There is a need for a new 'Governor House' as the old one (presently used by the Governor of the State) is almost outdated. Guwahati needs a modern international auditorium. The proposed international auditorium at Khanapara will enable the Government to convene international meets in the city," commented the engineer.

The Chief Minister said that the new Raj Bhawan, once completed, would easily stand out as one of the most magnificent Governor's residences in the entire country. He said that his Government will ensure that the project is completed within the time-frame of 18 months.

Ajay Kumar Dutta, vice president of Save Guwahati Build Guwahati hailed the initiative. "This could be a silver lining in the city's proud history. These seven projects will solve many problems in the Government's functioning while adding beauty to the city," he told this correspondent.

A redeveloped Guwahati Police Reserve complex at Panbazar and a new office building for the Police Commissioner would prove to be of help to the police department in efficiently and effectively carrying out their official obligations and duties in the city. Stating that a city such as Guwahati with an ever-increasing population figure poses several challenges in maintenance of law and order, traffic management, new-age technical crimes, etc., the Chief Minister exuded confidence that the redeveloped police reserve and the police Commissionerate office would serve their intended purposes and help create a favourable image for the city.

Taking part at the "bhumi puja" at the site of the Integrated Deputy Commissioner's Office and the Integrated Directorate Complex at Rupnagar and Betkuchi respectively, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma said apart from promoting good governance and efficient time-management, the spaces that would free up urban spaces in key areas which could then be utilised for welfare of the public in the form of public parks, gardens, etc.



Model of the Integrated Directorate Complex at Betkuchi, Guwahati.

A MARKET THAT EMPOWERS



Credit: www.manipur tourism.gov.in

Imas in the Keithel (market) in Imphal.

Asom Barta, Guwahati & Leivon Jimmy, Imphal

Attired in her traditional *phanek* and *innaphi*, she takes her earmarked place in the Ima Market. The loan that she has taken from the committee, which she, too, is part of, has enabled her to go for some extra purchases like bananas from the hills; vegetables, and products made of cane. She is confident that she will be able to sell the stuff she has purchased, from her establishment in Ima Keithel, the market now known globally for its unique characteristics. This is not the story of just one Ima but several hundreds of them. It is a representation of women, and their empowerment, and their confidence which stems from over five hundred years of rich history.

History says that the tradition of *lallup-kaba* began when Manipuri kings would draft all able-bodied Meitei males into the army to fight for the Kingdom or to the farms in distant places to supply produce to the army fighting

with an enemy. The onus of managing the household then fell on the women folk. They started tilling the land and sewing clothes and began selling their wares. Many say that this was the genesis of what is now known as Ima Keithel.

In Meitei, Ima means Mother and Keithel means Bazaar or marketplace. Operated entirely by women, this is Asia's biggest market. It is, at times, also called *nupi keithel*, which means market run by women.

When the British had established their sway over Manipur, they brought in certain legislation which never found favours with these women. They organised themselves against the colonial masters and raised a banner of revolt called Nupi Lan, or the women movement. Post-Independence, this bazaar gained commercial, social, and political prominence. In the year 2010, it was shifted to Khawairamband Bazar built by the Imphal Municipal Corporation.

One of the unwritten codes of the Ima

Market is that only a married woman is allowed to operate here. Even in that, it is the matriarch of the house who is given the preference. This has been handed down from one generation to the other. There are more than 5000 matriarchs operating in the bazar. They have organised themselves into a union of sorts which manage the market through a well-defined set of rules and regulations. This union also lends money to its representatives.

One such beneficiary is Konthoujam Manitombi from Sagolband Sayang, Imphal West district. She is into selling bori (local made Soyabean chunks) at Keithel. The outlet was started by her mother-in-law. "After her demise 10 years ago, I inherited this shop. It has provided us sustenance since. I have heard about keithel since my childhood.. Vending here has allowed me to divert my mind from family issues as well," she said..

Loitonngbam Ongbi Pishak Macha from Kwakeithel has been selling local fresh fish in this market since 2002 inheriting it from her grandmother. "I love vending here, mingling with others, sharing joy, happiness, and other emotions of life," she says. She also recounts the toughest period of her life here as a vendor during the Covid when sales had hit rock bottom.

In the earthquake of January 4, 2016, which shook Imphal, the market took a massive pounding. It had to be rebuilt after that. Such is its fame that it is not only a commercial hub for the locals, but also a tourist attraction for those coming from all over the world. Buoyed by the success of this concept, the Government of Manipur has inaugurated seven such bazaars in Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Jiribam, Kangpokpi, Tamenglong, Senapati, and Chandel. On March 16, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Bazar in Churachandpur.

Attempts had also been made in Assam to establish markets on similar lines, but they could never take the shape of the Ima Keithel. Here lies the reason why the bazaar is unique.



Credit: MygovManipur

Confluence of Trust and Tradition



AB BUREAU, JAGIROAD

Scene 1: It is 7pm. Bhumila Kharai of Bormarjongbor in West Karbi Anglong district is inspecting one last time her produce: ginger, chillies, and turmeric meant for the Jonbeel Mela. She is planning an early dinner and sleep. The next morning she will be leaving for Jagiroad with some of her acquaintances to the Gobha Kingdom

Scene 2: Bandana Patar from Baropujia in Nagaon is all excited to unveil her collection of clothes in the Jonbeel Mela. Her stall, like others, will be a temporary one. She has dry fish, poha and dry sweets in a packet which she has carried from her village. The mela had been part of folklore for her, having heard about it many times from her father. It has become a reality today. Right in front of her temporary stall is a Tiwa woman. Bandana forwards her packet to the Tiwa woman and in turn gets a packet consisting of ginger, turmeric, and chillies. As she turns back, the Tiwa woman adds a couple of arum root for Bandana, free of cost.

These were two of the many such moments of this year's mela near Jagiroad from January 19 to 21. It got underway with the traditional ceremony at the Charibhai Deohal Shivathan by the Gobha king. Besides other rituals, an important element on the first day was the interaction of the King with his subjects who are referred as mama (male) and mami (female)

This mela is a confluence of people, culture, and tradition of the people from the hills and the plains, and their produce which are exchanged and not traded. This custom has been in existence for scores of years. People from the highland descend to an open land near the beel for a few days by constructing a temporary shade.

The second day, beginning at 5am, one can see people bartering their goods and produce. These goods are made or cultivated by them. Those from the highland bring to barter produce like potato, turmeric, ginger, arum root. Besides these, potato, white gourd and water bottle gourd are the ones that are exchanged by the likes of this Tiwa woman for stuff like dry fish, sira, pitha, jaggery, milk-based dry sweet, etc. Tibisuri Pomai is one of those who participated in this exchange. "I came at 5am with turmeric, ginger, chillies and arun roots, and exchanged them for dry sweets, dry fish, and peetha," Pomai from Ulukunchi told this reporter.



"The mela has helped us to strengthen our cordial ties with people from the plain. What has helped in the process is the barter trade"

Dipsingh Deoraja, Gobha King



Bhumila said, "I have been coming here for 10 years now. Earlier, I used to walk down to this place. This year, I took a transport ride. Each year, I meet new people. I enjoy this."

The temporary market place has incentivised many small retailers who come with ethnic clothes, goods made of wood, and bamboo, utensils, ornaments, sports equipment, etc., besides traditional food items.

Kanika Kachari is one such retailer. "I have been coming here for the last 13 years. Sales are always encouraging. Besides, I like meeting those from the highland," the trader from Goalpara told this newsletter.

This activity is followed by community fishing in the arum beel nearby. Folk songs, music, and dances are then followed by the traditional revenue collection from the subjects on the last day. In the afternoon, the Gobha King organises his court and issues royal allowance. A traditional attraction on the day is the cock fight.

The Gobha King Dipsingh Deoraja, who assumed the throne in 1995, told *Asom Barta*, "The mela has helped us to strengthen our cordial ties with people from the plain. What has helped in the process is the barter trade. I would appeal to the Government to solve our land disputes so that the tradition can continue for centuries to come."

"We are trying to preserve tradition. This mela which is historical has also been able to draw international attention. We received a lot of support from the district administration this time as well," said Jursingh Bordoloi, the secretary of Gobharoja Deuroja Jonbeel Mela Unnayan Samiti.

Premised on trust and tradition, built over centuries, the mela is not only a confluence of people, produce and ethnicity but also represents civilisational values.



The Assam tableau at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi.



A contingent of the Veeranganas of Assam Police salute during their march past on the occasion of the Republic Day celebration.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma distributing food to children of safai karmacharis at Sankardev Kalakshetra.



Tiwa cultural performers in their traditional attire during the Jonbeel Mela.



The refurbished Ranachandi Temple and Park in Maibang in Dima Hasao district.



Photo credit: Beautiful Haflong Facebook page

Pushing for a healthy society



The MLA during a visit in his constituency.(left). The seven candidates selected for APSC coaching.



constituency after they cleared the mock examination,” the MLA told *Asom Barta*. He told this newsletter that he has been carrying in his heart a dream to bring renaissance in the field of education in his area.

Newar told this reporter that she was being coached in a private civil service coaching centre in Guwahati thanks to the initiative of the Tamulpur MLA. “I am currently preparing for my APSC. All expenses related to my coaching and hostel are being provided by MLA Sir. He is large-hearted. His initiative will surely help us in serving the people in the times to come,” Newar said. She expressed satisfaction regarding her preparation and said that she was confident of clearing the APSC in his next attempt. “When I sat for my first attempt in 2018, I was hardly prepared. But now, it is different. Back then, I had no access to quality newspapers in my area. Here in Guwahati, I can easily get the best magazines and newspapers,” Newar said over phone.

“I am also thinking of providing coaching on agriculture and horticulture in my constituency,” the MLA told this reporter while adding that under the leadership of Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and the Bodoland Territorial Region chief Pramod Boro, the region is seeing multiple projects being undertaken for better transportation, roads, health, sports facilities, modes of communication, besides initiatives in skill development.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI AND TAMULPUR

Megh Maya Newar sat for his Assam Public Service Examinations in 2018 for the first time. She could not clear it then. She immediately realised that to pass civil services examinations, one is required to be focused and need the right sort of guidance. Another person who realised this reality was the MLA of 58 Tamulpur LAC Jolen Daimary. Thereafter, to have more Newars from his area crack the APSC and other competitive examinations, he decided to undertake an initiative to conduct a special examination. Those who clear these mock examinations were offered 100 per cent ‘scholarship’ for off-line and online coaching.

“A healthy society can be created through the civil services. Hence, I am now offering 100% scholarship to seven selected students of my

Department Snapshots

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Here is a brief round-up of the activities of various departments:

Cultural Affairs Department

Cultural Affairs Department Minister Bimal Bora presided over a meeting on Assam State Film Policy 2019 at the Administrative Staff College in Guwahati on January 23. Eminent filmmakers, artistes, and technical experts took part in the interaction, which was also attended by Assam State Film (Finance & Development) Corporation Chairman Simanta Sekhar, and Secretary, Cultural Affairs Department, Laya Madduri. Stakeholders appealed to the Government to give traction to the policy, besides course correction required in the light of the present day scenario.

Directorate of Information & Public Relations

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma interacted with media representatives and senior citizens of the State on January 1 at the Koinadhora State Guest House. He spoke on the various initiatives undertaken by his Government in the year 2022 and outlined the policy direction envisioned by his Government for the year 2023.



EDITORIAL

Firmly on Track

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma after unfurling the tricolour also unfurled the direction that his Government proposed to take in the coming months. Addressing the gathering during the 74th Republic Day celebrations, Dr. Sarma unveiled a series of measures that will focus on youth, education, health and social security while reiterating that the State's growth trajectory is firmly in place, a sharp reversal from years gone by when the State was often referred to as one of the most difficult places to do business. The fact that the State Government has managed to pay its employees salaries from the revenue generated by it is a reflection that Assam is one of those States which is enjoying its rightful place under the sun in a new economic order in the country.

Also, official statistics point out that Assam's GST growth is among the highest in the country, despite the two difficult years of Covid-19 means that the right financial architecture is already in place. Another important piece of information in his speech was that Government spending in the State has touched the important 1 lakh crore mark. It needs no reiteration that in States like Assam, which are late bloomers, the Government is still the major driver of business and opportunity generation. What the Government in Dispur now needs to do is to act more as a facilitator for private businesses to come and invest in the huge potential that the State offers in terms of its strategic location and manpower richness and bring the investment ecosystem in place through its policy direction.

The success of his Government in bringing restive insurgents from various ethnic groups to the mainstream is one among these steps. His next big challenge and the most important one will be to get the ULFA (I) group to join the mainstream and be a partner in the growth trajectory of the State.

The Moidams of Charaideo

by Dr. Deepi Rekha Kouli, Dr. K.C. Nauriyal and Ms Simran Sambhi

World Heritage Sites are cultural and/or natural sites landmarks considered to be of 'Outstanding Universal Value', which are inscribed on the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee of Unesco after thorough scrutiny and evaluation. These places or buildings are considered to have special importance for everyone beyond the boundary limits of the country in the territorial jurisdiction of which the given site is located.

The World Heritage Convention, adopted by Unesco, that came into force in 1975 sets out the duties of Member States, called State Parties, in identifying potential heritage sites—(i) cultural, (ii) natural and (iii) mixed, within their sovereign territories and their role in protecting and preserving them. By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage.

Governments of countries (States Parties) that have ratified the Convention identify and nominate suitable heritage sites to the World Heritage Committee for inscription on the list maintained by Unesco. The nominated heritage sites are required to justify the Outstanding Universal Value based on one or more specified criteria, which are six in number in case of cultural heritage sites, and four in case of natural heritage sites. According to the latest Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 1972 of Unesco (July 2021), one State Party (one country) can only send one nomination per year.

A nominated property is then independently evaluated by two Advisory Bodies mandated by the World Heritage Convention: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which respectively provide the World Heritage Committee with evaluations of the cultural heritage and natural heritage site respectively.

For India, Archaeological Survey of India is the nodal agency to forward all nomination dossiers to Unesco for evaluation.

History:

Moidams (or Maidams) represent the late mediaeval (13th–19th century CE) mound-burial tradition of the Tai Ahoms in Assam, a tradition that continued for 600 years until the end of the Ahom rule which had begun in 1228. Out of 386 Moidams explored so far throughout the State, 90 royal burials at Charaideo are the best preserved, representative, and most complete examples of this tradition, and hence lay claim to World Heritage status.

In brief, the Charaideo Moidams enshrine the mortal remains of Ahom royalty—previously, those of the deceased with their paraphernalia were buried, but after the 18th century, the Ahom rulers adopted the Hindu method of cremation, later entombing the cremated bones and ashes in a Moidam at Charaideo.

The Ahoms venerate Moidams believing that one part of the deceased's spirit has eternally resided in the Moidam that ensures the State's well-being. Symbolising unique cultural ethos, this heritage site represents the technical genius of the creators who transformed and alleviated a natural landscape into the "Ahom Heaven" as also "Ancestral Spirit Forest". The Charaideo heritage site is one of aspirants and contenders under the cultural heritage category in the current year cycle—it adds a new burial typology to the list of World Heritage Sites.

The physical transformation of the scenic natural landscape into a dramatic sacred geography was achieved by clustering burial mounds of varied sizes, that were sited ceremonially. Moidams are mounds created by providing an earth-cover (or 'Ga-Moidam') over a hollow vault ('Tak') constructed with bricks and stone or earth. The hollow cavity within the 'Tak' contained a 'Garvha' or the burial pit where embalmed bodies or cremated remains (ashes) of Kings and Royals were laid to rest.

The Buffer Zone measuring 754.511 hectare comprises representative component parts associated with funerary rituals, other Moidams and archaeological remains of the first Ahom Capital city and settlements continuing traditional management demonstrating the 'Ahom-way of life'.

Within the Buffer Zone lies archaeological remains of associated with the funerary traditions like ritual ponds (Sha -Dhuwa Pukhuri and Petu- Dhuwa Pukhuri), ceremonial pathways (Dhodhur Ali and Sha- Niya Ali), other Moidams, fragments of the first capital at Charaideo and twin hills with remains of Deo- shal and Lang kuri Doul (Gota Dole) on the low hill, south of Deo - shal – the sacred core of Tai Ahoms. These remains are set amidst a rural landscape where the customary way of life and traditions characteristic to Tai-Ahom culture continues till date.

Out of a total of 1,154 World Heritage Sites (called properties) across the globe in 167 signatory countries, there are 40 in India, including Kaziranga National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary. There is currently no World Heritage Site in the category of cultural heritage in North East India. The current nomination dossier on the Royal Ahom Moidams at Charaideo in Assam is an attempt to fill this gap.

In doing so, the State honours the spirit and aspirations of the people of Assam, which owes Ahom kings their exceptional contribution in lay foundations of modern Assam society. The Ahom kings will always be remembered in the history of Assam for integrating divided peoples and regions of the Brahmaputra valley, unifying them in one single thread of modern vibrant Assamese commonality, diversity, and identity.

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