

Asom Barta

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A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Central agencies are working relentlessly to make life better for the flood-affected.



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A consignment of the fruit to London will add flavour to the British summer.



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An assessment of how State Government schemes are impacting constituencies.

Assam Govt eyes ₹92,000 cr investment



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma interacting with captains of industries. Also present is Industry Minister Bimal Borah along with Power and Mines & Minerals Minister Nandita Gorlosa.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Assam growth story has started to find a few takers. Conglomerates in the private and public sectors are working on ways and means to invest nearly ₹ 92,000 crores in the State in the coming years, some of which are already in the pipeline. This was the message that emerged from a two-day interactive programme of the Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma with captains of industry and their representatives in Guwahati.

Bottlenecks that generally thwart investments like land acquisition, conversion of agricultural land to industrial land, availability of uninterrupted power, reimbursement of SGST, connectivity, and issues of infrastructure around industrial land were discussed and addressed by Dr Sarma during the meeting.

This 'free and frank' discussion, as the Chief Minister himself put it, was an informal way of the State Government to check the pulse of the existing industrial ecosystem, appreciate perspectives and facilitate investment and capital expansion in Assam.

Also present in the interactions were Industry Minister Bimal Bora, and Power and Mines and Mineral Minister Nandita Garlosa, besides officials of the State Government.

Giving thumbs up to the idea, Abhijit Barooah, a pioneer industrialist of the region and chairman of North East Council of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), praised the effort of the Chief Minister. "It is heartening

to see that he has interacted with investors and industrialists for two days and assured us that bottlenecks affecting industries will be removed. We expect that this momentum will get steam in the coming months. This, in turn, will bring investments to the State", he told *Asom Barta*.

He, however, said that it was important for the State Government to urge the Centre to unveil a North East industrial investment policy in a new avatar since the current policy has run its full course.

The Chief Minister said that with State power companies turning the corners now, Assam is ready to cater to power requirements of industrial units by entering into power purchase agreements with more number of producers and focusing on State's generation capacity, including renewable power. "₹ 10,000 crore has been invested in Assam to improve distribution of power," he told corporate honchos in the meeting.

Bajrang Lohia, the Director of Lohia Group, who was present in the informal meeting, appreciated the State Government. "The Government is doing good work for promoting industries in the State. The Chief Minister has taken initiatives to bring investments to Assam", he told *Asom Barta*.

Dr Sarma spoke of a comprehensive industrial policy being prepared by the Industries Department. "We are committed

STOP PRESS

The Petroleum Ministry has okayed an investment of ₹740 crore to increase the capacity of Digboi Refinery, Asia's oldest Refinery from 0.65 to 1.0 MMTPA. This has been Assam's long-standing request to the Central Government.

to creating an environment conducive to businesses so that the aim of transforming Assam into one of the most developed States in the country can be achieved at the shortest possible time," he told the who's who of investors in Assam.

Meanwhile, an MoU between the Directorate of Geology & Mining, Assam and SBI Capital Markets Ltd aimed at using the expertise of the public sector capital market player in the auctioning process of the State's limestone and iron-ore blocks was also inked during the two-day programme.

Apart from employment generation, it is expected by experts that the MoU will lead to growth of limestone, iron, steel, and cement industries in the State.

The State Government is eying a total of ₹ 43,850 crore and ₹ 1,850 crore respectively in 50-years from limestone and iron-ore block auctioning process.



Musings of a Chief Minister



My Government and the people of Assam will stand by those hit by floods, come what may. The Central Government has reassured us of all help to rebuild lives and livelihood of a significant percentage of our population. I am indebted to individuals and institutions who have come voluntarily to contribute whatever they can towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

When nature proposes, we cannot dispose. This is the recurring lesson for humanity which I am reading once again as I see nature's fury all around me from Silchar to Siphajhar, Kampur to Pathsala. Even Guwahati was not spared by torrential rains in the month of June. Whereas the State Government had put all its machinery into service, ably assisted by the Centre's 'ever-ready to assist' approach, we could not prevent colossal damage to life and property. I have already instructed respective deputy commissioners to assess the damage and start distributing assistance to the victims at the earliest. But I know for sure that these are losses beyond the material aspects. Losing one's dear ones; one's home and hearth built with so much care; pet animals and farmland is a very subjective experience. My Government and the people of Assam will stand by those hit by floods, come what may. The Central Government has reassured us of all help to rebuild lives and livelihood of a significant percentage of our population. I am indebted to individuals and institutions who have come voluntarily to contribute whatever they can towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Among the donors were people from all walks of life, MLAs, industrialists, businessmen, self-employed and organisations, all bound by their love for humanity. This year, the rains arrived much earlier, and have been unrelenting. Despite preemptive measures, we just could not put up enough resistance to this wave of flood.

Around the same time when flood waters were ravaging Assam, I interacted with the deputy commissioners of all districts for two days. Spread over 27 hours, these interactive sessions enabled us to review the progress of the various Central and State schemes and their last-mile delivery. I was impressed to know the hard work the district administrations are putting in for people's welfare. If at all one needed a proof of it, it came about during the flood relief measures undertaken by them. I know for sure that many of these DCs, depending upon the ground realities in their respective districts, are working almost 24x7 to assist relief and rescue measures. Yet, there are people who are dissatisfied with the fact that relief or the benefit of some schemes have not reached them. I understand the ground reality. Whereas I have asked the DCs to go all out to ensure that these schemes reach the beneficiaries, I also urge the people to have patience. I want to reassure them that no one will be left out.

Just prior to the time when floods hit Assam, we had a minor expansion of my Cabinet with young and talented representatives Mr Jayanata Mallabaruah and Ms Nandita Garlosa being inducted to take additional responsibilities. Cabinet expansion or for that matter portfolio allocation is not a matter of power and privilege but always about shouldering greater responsibilities of the people. In addition to being accountable to one's own constituency, these ministers then become accountable to the people of the State. Rejig in portfolio is seen as a power equation by many, but I can tell you that in my Cabinet it is about responsibility. We were operating for a year with limited ministers, so it was natural for us to expand. Now, my Cabinet is a mixture of experience and youth although I must recall Benjamin Franklin, the famous American statesman, who said that "experience was not always about years and youth was not always without it". I am sure that the entire Cabinet would continue to work towards the progress of the State and the welfare of the people without an eye on positions and privilege. In due course, we will go for another round of expansion to reduce additional responsibilities of some while asking others to take on the role.

In the third week of June, I had a chance to interact with corporate honchos of public and the private sectors as part of an idea to exchange views and explore opportunities. I was very happy to note that they share a common vision of a progressive and developed Assam. Whereas I and a few of my Cabinet colleagues spoke about our commitment to help them, they were all buoyant about the State's potential. Although the investment figures that we came to know of are staggering, for me as a Chief Minister what was important was that there was optimism and hope regarding the growth story of our State.

Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Agencies aid worst-hit Cachar, Kamrup



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at ground zero reviewing Silchar’s flood situation.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Assam flood, while being a saga of untold miseries, has also brought in its fold multiple Central Government agencies giving their all, especially in Cachar district, which bore the brunt of nature’s fury this year. Whereas the NDRF is a perennial source of support and assistance to the State, in this year’s flood even the CRPF, BSF, Indian Air Force, Army, Assam Rifles and the Indian Railways are playing a proactive role in providing succour to many of the nearly 80 lakh people affected by flood in 34 districts of the State.

Whereas the intensity of unseasonal flood and torrential rains have caught people by surprise, these agencies have relentlessly supported the State Government in all possible ways.

The NDRF has deployed 26 teams in the State, including an all women team in Silchar, something not seen in previous rescue missions. Since May, when flood first hit Assam, the NDRF has evacuated over 21,000 people.

“My family members were rescued by NDRF men. We were taken to Kamalpur by the NDRF personnel in a boat,” said Tarubala Das of Bhenipara Chuburi of Athhara Gaon. Tarubala and others, rescued by NDRF, have since been shifted to a flood relief camp set up by the Kamrup district administration.

The Indian Air Force has flown 74 missions to rescue the flood-hit in Assam and neighbouring Meghalaya. It has deployed C-130J Super Hercules, AN-32 transport aircraft, Mi 17V5 helicopters, Advanced Light Helicopters, Dhruv and Mi-17 helicopters to provide relief and supplies to the people in the flood-hit areas, while coordinating with the civil administration. The IAF has partnered with the Assam Rifles’ Srikona Battalion in Cachar district to assist relief and rescue missions in


— ASSAM FLOOD —
Report till 28th June, 2022
Districts affected:
Flood 34
Landslide: 11
Revenue Circle affected: 148
Village affected: 9195
Population affected: 79,57,900
Human lives lost: 139
No of missing: 35
House damaged: Fully 16,767
Partially 1,17,256
Animal deaths/ washed away: 14,930
Total crop area affected: 2,32,982.95 hectares

southern Assam, especially Cachar district. More than 100 personnel of the NDRF were airlifted to Silchar from Bhubaneswar on June 21. Around 1.8 lakh litres of diesel and petrol were air dropped to Silchar to cater to the requirements of southern Assam.


Just as the State Government swung into action, the Centre, too, was moved. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted to assure all help to Assam while Home Minister Amit Shah spoke twice to the Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on relief and rescue strategy.

The intensity of the flood and rains can be gauged from the damage that they have brought in their wake for the people of the State, including the likes of Dipali Das. (See Box)

The night of Friday, June 16, became a



Persons evacuated: 96,674
Inmates in the relief camps: 5,18,510



No of relief camps: 3478 (Relief camp)
4818 (Relief Distribution Centre)

nightmare for Dipali (55) of Gar Bhiton Gaon under Rangia subdivision in Kamrup district. “Everything in my household was swept away by flood waters,” she told Asom Barta while recalling the horror of the episode.

Like her, hundreds of her fellow villagers are taking shelter at Fatima Convent English Medium School near NH 31 in Rangia town. “We were brought here by the administration,” she says. “I am getting my meals twice a day besides medicine.”

“My house was swamped by flood waters on that fateful day,” says Jiten Kalita of Atsara village in Puthimari in Kamrup district. “We managed to save ourselves from drowning by a whisker,” said Kalita from his makeshift shelter adjacent to NH-31.

Thousands of people from Baihata to Udiyana (a stretch of around 25 kilometres) are in makeshift camps on both sides of NH 31 as relief camps, set up by the district administration, are full to capacity..

The Darrang district administration sought the Army’s help to rescue marooned people. “Apart from three NDRF and two SDRF teams, we requested the Army to evacuate marooned people. There is no shortage of flood relief, said Ms Jinti Deka, an ADC of the district.

The Railways volunteered to run train services with relief materials, especially in lower Assam as well as southern Assam where road communication had been hit badly.

Asha: Saga of hope and grit

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Simonabasti Primary Health Centre, Koliabor, Nagaon. It is 11am. The youngest member of the Oja household of Uluoni village, Devangshi, is wailing. She 'knows' that she will be injected with her required dose of vaccine anytime now. Mamoni Bora quietly picks Devangshi up and comforts her and then presses her on her blue border saree, a dress that is well-known across the village. For it is the dress of the Asha *baideu*, as Mamoni and many like her across Assam are known as. She is a universal figure in the village having served as an ASHA *baideu* for nearly 15 years. Devangshi's wailing has come to a halt; an ANM injects her with the vaccine, the kid wails again, and then quietens. It is 11.05am.

Mamoni is one among the 10 lakh-plus ASHA, an ubiquitous feature of primary health, in rural India. These unsung heroes have changed the way basic healthcare is administered in the country. It is to recognize their yeoman contribution, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, that the World Health Organisation accorded the community with the decorated WHO Director-General's Global Health Leaders Award on May 22.

They are the interface between the community and the public health system deployed in each village under the National Health Mission programme since 2005. They are responsible for programmes like universal immunisation, referral and escort services for Reproductive & Child Health (RCH) and other healthcare initiatives, as well as construction of household toilets. No wonder, statistics from the National Family Health Survey reflect that post-2005, institutional birth rate has increased multiple times across India, which experts credit to these ASHAs. (See graph)

Dolly Bora Deka of Kuwaritol Primary Health Centre, in Koliabor subdivision recalls the challenges that she faced as a dedicated ASHA. "I was extremely busy during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. Besides the household chores, I had a one-year-old baby to care for. I also had to report possible symptoms among the villagers while encouraging them to go for Covid tests. In one instance, an expectant mother cursed

me no end when I insisted that she should get herself tested," she tells *Asom Barta*. "The woman, during her third trimester pregnancy test, along with her husband reported positive. I felt fear surge up my spine since I had accompanied them to the health centre that day. I was worried about my baby." Dolly says that there are challenges in the profession but adds that satisfaction is more than frustration at the end of the day.

The total number of Asha in Assam is 32,545, out of which 31,334 are posted in rural areas while the rest plays the role of catalysts in urban areas of the State. Besides, there are 2,661 ASHA supervisors to guide these grass-roots health warriors.

There are 80 ASHAs under Simonabasti

Health Centre catering to a population of 93,000. They take care of workers from tea estates like Kellydon, Nonoi and Salna, among others. "Undoubtedly, they face many hurdles while discharging their duties. However, their patience and unwavering dedication see them through these tough times," says Saifur Rahman, Block Programme Manager of Simonabasti Block under NHM.

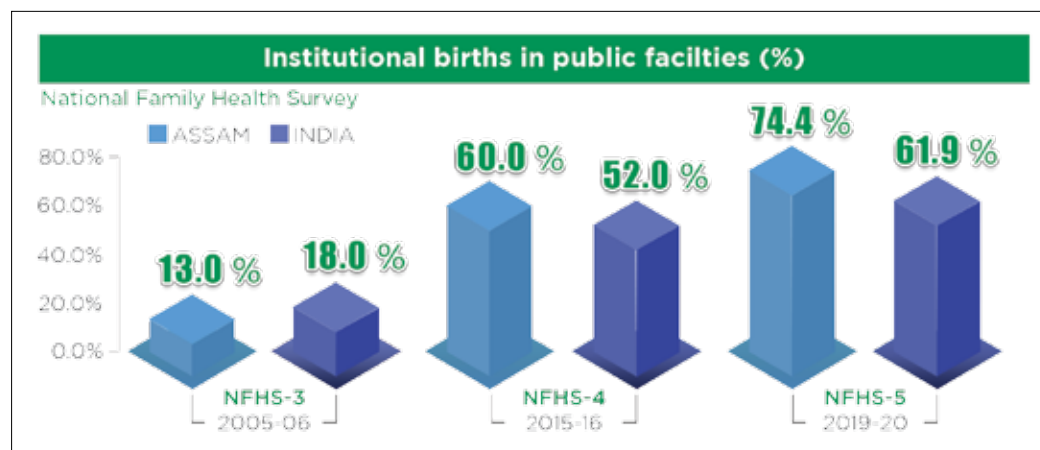
An extreme form of such a challenge was faced by Barmita Momin of Phulaguri Garo Gaon village in Sonitpur. A village where superstition is widely prevalent, Barmita was once tied to a tree and released only when she 'compensated' the villagers with a penalty. Yet, she achieved 100% coverage in the Har Ghar Dastak campaign launched during Covid-19. She had her satisfaction when the Government of Assam bestowed upon her the honour of 'Asom Gaurav'.

"What gives us satisfaction despite our hectic household routine and on ground duty is the fact that people take us seriously when we suggest something," says Mili Saikia, an ASHA of Kuwaritol. "Be it the expectant mother or a lactating one, or someone needing a vaccine during times like these, we are consulted," she adds.

Land surface, hilly terrains or watery roads, on foot or on board a makeshift raft, ASHA baideus are conspicuous by their presence partaking all that a village family goes through. She is never out of action.



Toramai Rabidas in saree (top left), Mamoni Bora offering medicine to a child while Dolly Bora Deka (left) injecting Covid vaccine to a senior citizen.



Divyangs script HSLC success



Dipesh with his proud parents.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The atmosphere is surcharged with joy in the Bhanwari Devi Saraogi Government Higher Secondary School for Hearing Impaired, Guwahati; Srimanta Sankar Mission Blind High School, Nagaon; Guwahati Blind High School, and the Jorhat Blind Institute. These schools, thanks to their students and dedicated teachers, have bucked the trend and achieved cent percent results in the HSLC Examinations despite a less than impressive performance by schools across the State.

The stars for these schools are Dipesh, Salma, Laxman, and Junmoni and many more like them. The world has changed, albeit for some time, for these students as well. They have passed the first major hurdle in their life at a time when the ‘privileged’ majority have fallen by the wayside in lakhs.

These students despite physical, mental and societal challenges confronting them, day in and day out, have never succumbed.

Data from Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) reflect their pass percentage at nearly 78%. These students, too, had their

share of Covid-induced lockdowns, online classes and its resultant issues but facilitated by the intervention of their teachers, parents and technology, they have made this Herculean task look easy.

“The Government of Assam, Sarba Siksha Abhijan and the Social Welfare Department besides our teachers, students and their parents have all combined to achieve this feat,” says Hermaba Kumar Das, a teacher with the BDS School. “We had to record their lectures, and send them in sign language while their notes were sent to them on WhatsApp.” He says that with the number of students enrolling in their school going up, the school will need infrastructure support to continue doing better.

Dipesh Chandra Roy, another student of this school established in 1949, secured letter marks in two subjects, and passed with Star Marks. He has been a boarder in the school hostel since his pre-primary days. His mother Anita was all praises for his teachers and the Government. “If the Government continues to support these students, I am sure many more like Dipesh will emerge across all

Schools with 100% Results

- Bhanwari Devi Saraogi Government Higher Secondary School for Hearing Impaired
- Srimanta Sankar Mission Blind School, Nagaon
- Guwahati Blind High School
- Jorhat Blind Institute School
- Jana Mangal Adarsha Blind School, Moran
- Assam Blind Child School, Bihpuria

Schools Under SEBA: 7016

Special School: 6 (4 Government; 2 Private)

574 Divyangs appeared in HSLC Examinations

447 divyangs passed HSLC

disciplines,”she says.

Dipesh’s result is nearly matched by Salma, his classmate. She scored letter mark in one subject and passed in First Division. Hailing from Kolgachia of Barpeta district, Salma is a good artist as well. Her father is a driver, while mother Sajeda Khatun is a homemaker. She attributed her daughter’s achievement to the dedication of her teachers.

Afrin Ahmed, his classmate, has scored the highest mark in the State in Weaving and Textile Design paper.

Guwahati Blind High School Principal Nirupama Bhattacharya, while analysing her school results, reflected on the challenges faced during Covid. “Since they depend on Braille for their education, we had to record their lessons, and disseminate them in their WhatsApp group in the form of audio recordings. It would not have been possible but for the relentless dedication of my colleagues, and the support of the guardians,” she says. “The results of our previous batches, too, acted as an inspiration for these students.”

Laxman Kumar Mishra has done the school proud with letter marks in four subjects besides scoring 80% overall. He will pursue Science in his higher secondary. “I know the challenges that a visually impaired like me will face while pursuing Science. But if institutional support and assistance from people around keep forthcoming, I can,” he tells *Asom Barta*, with confidence writ large in his voice.

Jonmoni Duarah is an outlier, though. She had no one to give her company in her class. She was the only student to appear in her matriculation from the Jorhat Blind School. Yet, that did not impact her performance. She scored letter marks in two subjects and passed with Star Mark to cap off a very impressive result for these special students in the State for whom grit and determination always find a new meaning.



Laxman Prasad Mishra



Junmoni Duwara

Worth its weight in gold



Gita Devi with her husband Diganta Kalita.



Scheme unveiled on January 1, 2021



Beneficiaries are entitled to Rs 40,000
28,108 application received till June 13, 2022



11,119 beneficiaries of the Scheme till June 13, 2022



Darrang district with 1184 has the highest number of beneficiaries



Application can be made at:
revenueassam.nic.in

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

A marriage in India sans gold ornament is 'incomplete' for most brides and even their parents. Such is the importance of the metal in the country since time immemorial. The Assam Government, too, had realised this emotional bonding of a bride with gold ornaments and accordingly announced the Arundhati Swarna Yojana in its 2019-2020 Budget under the then Finance Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Dr Sarma had then driven home the auspiciousness quotient of the metal to assist and uplift the economic standard of many of the economically challenged Assamese households. He announced an assistance of ₹ 30,000 for the bride to buy gold in the open market upon registration of her marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954. Later, the amount was increased to ₹ 40,000.

This has linked the likes of Rehena Parbin, Rubina Zaman, Bobita Bora, Forbhina Choudhury and Nitu Sarkar to a common thread. They are all beneficiaries of this scheme of the Government of Assam, besides

We could not have thought of buying gold had this scheme not been there. It is not only an ornament for me but also a sense of security:
Gita Devi

Dharitri Kalita of Guwahati.

"I am thankful to the Government of Assam for conceiving such a scheme. For poor people like us, a tola of gold means a lot," Dharitri told *Asom Barta*.

Gita Devi of Sinabari village in Goalpara is another beneficiary. Her father is a farmer. "We could not have thought of buying gold had this scheme not been there. It is not only an ornament for me but also a sense of security," she told *Asom Barta*. She had applied under the Scheme after registering

her marriage and received the amount after nearly three months.

Like Dharitri and Gita, thousands of women in Assam have benefited from this scheme. As on June 13, 2022, the Revenue and Disaster Management Department, the nodal department, has sanctioned ₹ 44.47 crore to 11,119 brides since the launch of the Scheme. The highest number of beneficiaries is from Darrang district with 1,184, while the lowest is from West Karbi Anglong at 35.

The total application received by the Department is 28,108 as on June 13, 2022.

Kakoli Bezbarua of Kharjara Village is a prospective beneficiary. Having registered her marriage with Anil Barman, she applied for her share of benefit in the month of May. Her father is a hand-cart puller. "I came to know of the Scheme at the office of the Registrar of Marriage," she told *Asom Barta* indicating that the State Government has tried its best to reach out to prospective beneficiaries to secure their future, to some extent. "The day I received my marriage registration certificate, we applied for it."

KNOCK, KNOCK; CAMPAIGN BOOSTS VACCINE DRIVE



ANMs finishing their paperwork after administering vaccines to two women in Dibrugarh.



An ASHA assisting an ANM to vaccinate a man with special needs.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

It is 12.30pm, Monday, June 18. Gayatri Dutta (75), a resident of Natun Sarania Gandhi Basti in Guwahati is waiting for a knock on her door. It will confirm the presence of health workers from the nearby Urban Public Health Centre under East Guwahati State Dispensary as part of the Har Ghar Dastak 2.0 campaign undertaken by the National Health Mission (NHM) across

Assam, alarmed by the falling vaccination rate in the State, especially of the booster dose, and the eligibility of children above 12 for their first dose.

Gayatri's anxiety is put to rest when a three-member team consisting of two ANMs (Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery) and an ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) worker arrives at her residence.

This is her second dose while her family members had their booster dose much earlier. As part of the programme, the Duttas contacted the dispensary and scheduled her appointment. "I feel secure today. I think I will not contract Covid now," says Dutta to *Asom Barta*.

Parbin Sultana, the ANM who had administered Covid-19 dose to Gayatri, says that there is still hesitation among many but with every passing day it is on the wane.

"I have administered about eight thousand Covid doses since the vaccination drive started," she says.

Nilima Devi, the ASHA who accompanied the two ANMs to Gayatri's house, says that in the first phase she brought people to the vaccine centres by reasoning for it but now people come on their own. "Since I have data of the people in my area, I know who is above 60 and who are the ones left behind," she says.

Block Programme Manager of East Guwahati Public Health Centre under NHM, Ruprekha Khatanar, says that under this vaccination campaign, the PHC organized camps in educational institutions, launch special drive for the elderly to administer these doses door-to-door.

"Till June 20, we have completed 92 sessions in areas under our jurisdiction. We clocked a very good response," says Khatanar.

The total doses administered across the State at the end of the drive was nearly 11.56 lakh, out of which 1.90 lakh were booster doses.

She adds that the PHC has also received requests to administer the vaccine for the elderly from the 104 (Assam Government's health helpline) phone service.

Uttara Baishya (64), a resident of Nizarapar area in Chandmari, contacted the East Guwahati State Dispensary for her precautionary dose. She, too, received her dose at the New Guwahati Treasury Office near her residence.

"I am doubly protected now. I thank the State Government for initiating this health campaign," she says.

According to data provided by a Universal Immunisation Programme official, the total doses administered across the State at the end of the drive was nearly 11.56 lakh, out of which nearly 1.90 lakh were booster doses. "In the first few days of the drive, the average dose administered was very impressive but because of incessant rains and flood, the drive had to be slowed down," says a senior official, adding that the numbers are still satisfactory.

"The Har Ghar Dastak 2.0 campaign commenced on June 1 across the country but in Assam the first few days were used to put logistics and other requirements in place and it began in the State on June 6," a Health Department official says.

(Images courtesy NHM)



A nurse injecting Covid vaccine to an elderly citizen.

Yoga for Humanity

मनः प्रशमनोपायो योग इत्यभिधीयते ।
(The recourse to pacify the mind is called yoga.)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Mysuru Palace.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the now familiar sight of an Assamese gamosa around his shoulder, led the celebration of the 8th International Day of Yoga on June 21 with the theme “Yoga for Humanity” from Mysuru Palace in Karnataka. He said that yoga was no longer a part of life but is already becoming a way of life. While addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister said, “Yoga is not for an individual but for humanity at large.” He also said that yoga will bring peace to the universe.

The day was celebrated across the world by tens of millions of people.

The Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma was among the participants in a yoga session in Dibrugarh’s Chowkidinghee Ground while his Cabinet colleagues and senior bureaucrats were present in various towns to celebrate the day despite torrential rains and flood in many parts of the State. “Yoga generates spiritual energy in us and balances our mental state,” the Chief Minister said.

Sonia Naznin, an Assamese wellness coach based in Dubai,



Sonia Naznin

told *Asom Barta* that through yoga humanity can generate the resources to lead not only a healthy physical life but also develop an enriched mental and spiritual state. “Yoga goes beyond caste, class, sex and religion. Anyone who is three years of age and above can be a yoga practitioner,” she said, adding that “the sooner we incorporate yoga in our lives, the more we can develop the self”.

The Assam Tourism Development Corporation organised a yoga day celebration in Guwahati where people from all walks of life participated. Filmmaker and actress Aimee Baruah told *Asom Barta* that yoga needs to be an integral part of life and not just a day of celebration.

Bulki Kalita, a yoga teacher based in Guwahati, said that yoga in daily life is a system of practice consisting of eight levels of development in the areas of physical, mental, social and spiritual health. “When the body is physically healthy, the mind is clear, focused and stress is under control. That’s why practising yoga regularly can help an individual to lead a healthy and peaceful life,” he said.

Sweet & pulpy? It must be Tezpur Litchi



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

If you spot Tezpur litchi in a London supermarket, give the credit to farmers of Sonitpur district and the Department of Agriculture, among others. Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on June 12 flagged off a consignment of indigenous Geographical Identification (GI) tagged Tezpur Litchis for export to London at the Tezpur Convention Centre. The consignment was exported by Agnigarh Producer Company Ltd, a farmers’ producer organisation with 106 members, through Kiega Exims.

Those who made the exports possible include Sonitpur District Agricultural Department, NABARD supported by APEDA, Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART), Biswanath College of Agriculture under Assam Agricultural University and Tezpur University, besides the district administration.

“The export of litchi will uplift the economic condition of small and marginal farmers in the district,” the Chief Minister later stated in a tweet.

Tezpur Litchi of Assam received the geographical indication (GI) tag in 2013 through NERAMAC. Pankaj Saikia, Assistant Director of the Agriculture Department, told *Asom Barta* that Tezpur Litchi is known for its excellent quality, pleasant flavour, juicy pulp and for its attractive colour.

“It is a broad term which covers five varieties of litchi grown in and around Tezpur town in Sonitpur district of the State. The export consignment consisted of litchi grown in Na-Paam and Paruwa area near the Tezpur Central University,” he said. “The focus was to bring maximum benefit to the farmers by leveraging the GI Tag accorded to Tezpur Litchi”.

Pranjal Sarma, SDO (Horticulture) of Sonitpur district, said that a buyer-seller meeting with farmers and prospective litchi exporters in the presence of stakeholders was held on May 19, 2022 under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner, Sonitpur. It was this meeting which facilitated the export of 650 kg Tezpur Litchi (Bombaiya and Shahi varieties) to London.

“We have identified three areas in Sonitpur for Tezpur Litchi cultivation: Ghoramari, Bhalukpung and Rakshasmari. We are planning to add 200 bighas of land for cultivating this fruit. At present, there are nearly 250 Tezpur Litchi farmers in the district,” Sarma told *Asom Barta*.

The State Government has given due importance to ensure all-round development of all constituencies. To know the outcome at the grassroots, we have started this segment called “MLAs Speak” focusing on two constituencies at a time.

This month we are focusing on Bijni and Sarupathar Assembly constituencies.

- Q1** How is the Government’s attitude in the development of your constituency?
- Q2** How is the progress in terms of road and infrastructure development, utilisation of grants to namghars and other religious institutions in your constituency?
- Q3** What is your assessment of floods this year?

ANSWERS

Ajay Kumar Rai, MLA, 33 Bijni Assembly Constituency



Ans 1: It is very forward-looking and positive.

Ans 2: In my constituency, under the Assam Darshan fund as well as MLAD Fund, we have built rest rooms in religious institutions, theatre halls and community halls besides toilets. Under the Rural Infrastructure Fund, we have built 10 km of roads while under MGNREGA, we have constructed anganwadi centres among others. Even a stadium is being constructed at Ulubari in my constituency.

Ans 3: Unprecedented flood this time round has created havoc in Assam. Over 20-25 villages in my constituency were under flood during its peak. Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika had visited some villages here. I must compliment the Government of Assam for its handling of flood, relief and rescue measures.

Biswajit Phukan, MLA, 94 Sarupathar Assembly Constituency



Ans 1: It is very impressive. Under Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, infrastructure, industries, power, and sports have got their due attention. The Government has acted tough on drugs and smuggling. The people of Assam are happy.

Ans 2: In my constituency, some of the work that has been done should have been done 75 years earlier. We are focusing on rural roads. Nearly 120 bighas of land has been allotted to establish the Sati Sadhini University. Work will begin soon on the Lovlina Borgohain Sports Project in Barpathar. Construction work of the 100-bed Sarupathar Civil Hospital in Dhansiri Subdivision is on. In Naojan, the first weekly market for women traders is being constructed.

Ans 3: This year the State has seen unprecedented rainfall. However, our Chief Minister is personally supervising everything. It is a lesson for people’s representatives like us.

AMBUBACHI MELA
attracts eight lakh pilgrims

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The annual Ambubachi Mela concluded in Guwahati on June 26 with nearly eight lakh people visiting the Kamakhya Temple, a famous Shakti shrine. This despite the mela being a low-key affair because of floods in the State. It was held for the first time since 2019 owing to COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 and 2021.

As a part of the rituals, the temple doors were symbolically closed for four days with the 'Pravritti' on June 22.

“Ambubachi” means “spoken with water” which signifies that the rains expected during this month make the earth fertile and ready for procreation. Daily worship is suspended during this period.

Elaborate arrangements were made for the devotees visiting the temple atop the Nilachal Hills in the city. However, no personal vehicles or public transport were allowed there, Kamrup (Metro) Additional Deputy Commissioner Bipul Das informed *Asom Barta*.

Three tented accommodations, with a total capacity to house around 30,000 devotees, were set up with toilet facilities below the hills in Pandu Port Camp, Maligaon and Old Jail Campus at Fancy Bazar. Some NGOs and individuals also set up camps for pilgrims at Bharalumukh and Nursery areas of the city.

The Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) was entrusted with the cleanliness drive before and during the Mela. “Cleanliness was one of the themes for this year’s Ambubachi Mela. Nearly 750 Safai Mitras were deputed to realise the objective. Apart from the temple premises, safai mitras were



deputed in camps set up for pilgrims,” Devasish Sarma, Commissioner, GMC told *Asom Barta*. He said that two static compactors were pressed into service for waste disposal in the vicinity of Kamakhya Temple.

Das added that since vehicular movement had been restricted to the temple for four days of the festival, the administration had arranged ferry car services for all frontline workers for visiting the temple premises. This reporter, too, was a beneficiary of such a service.

“Facilities in the camp set up by the administration are better this time. Food served by NGOs is vegetarian. There is police’s vigilance in the camp beside medical facilities”, said Mrinal Kanti Guha, a pilgrim from Habra Gaighata Village in 24 North Pargana district of West Bengal when *Asom Barta* interacted with him on June 23. Guha said he had been a regular visitor to the Mela since 2012.

Nandan Kumar and seven others from Begusarai in Bihar arrived in Guwahati on June 21, a day before the beginning of the festival. “This is my first visit to the Shakti Peeth. I am amazed to see a gathering like this at the temple premises. We are satisfied with the food and lodging arrangements,” Nandan Kumar told *Asom Barta*.

Dipankar Barman, an ACS officer, deputed at the old jail campus, told *Asom Barta* that most of the pilgrims there were from the States of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Bindeswari Das, a sadhu from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, who had been a regular visitor to the Mela since 2007, was also happy with the facilities.

Expanded Council of Ministers

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Departments

Home, Personnel, Public Works, any other
Department not allotted to any other Minister



Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass

Departments

Panchayat & Rural Development, Food
& Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs,
General Administration, Law & Justice.



Shri Atul Bora

Departments

Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal
Husbandry & Veterinary, Border
Area Development, Implementation
of Assam Accord



Shri Keshab Mahanta

Departments

Health & Family Welfare, Medical
Education & Research, Science
& Technology, Information
Technology



Shri Urkhao Gwra Brahma

Departments

Handloom & Textile, Soil
Conservation, Welfare of Bodoland



Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary

Departments

Environment & Forests, Act East Policy
Affairs, Welfare of Minorities



Shri Parimal Suklabaidya

Departments

Transport, Fisheries, Excise

Shri Jogen Mohan

Departments

Revenue & Disaster Management,
Hills Area Development



Dr Ranaj Pegu

Departments

Education (Higher, Secondary &
Elementary), Welfare of Plain Tribe &
Backward Classes, Indigenous & Tribal
Faith and Culture (Directorate of Library
and Museum).



Shri Ashok Singhal

Departments

Housing and Urban Affairs,
Irrigation



Shri Bimal Borah

Departments

Industries & Commerce and Public
Enterprises, Cultural Affairs



Shri Sanjoy Kishan

Departments

Welfare of Tea Tribes, Labour Welfare



Smt Ajanta Neog

Departments

Finance, Women & Child Development

Shri Pijush Hazarika

Departments

Water Resources, Information & Public
Relations, Parliamentary Affairs, Social
Justice & Empowerment



Shri Jayanta Mallabaruah

Departments

Public Health Engineering, Skill,
Employment & Entrepreneurship,
Tourism



Smt Nandita Gorlosa

Departments

Power, Cooperation, Mines &
Minerals, Indigenous & Tribal
Faith and Culture



Want to boost rural economy: CM



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has said that his Government is focused on developing the State's rural economy, giving land rights to indigenous people, working for the well-being of tea garden workers and ensuring that schemes reach the beneficiaries.

Addressing the State BJP executive meeting in Diphu in Karbi Anglong, Dr. Sarma said that through paddy procurement, more than ₹ 800 crore has been infused into the State's economy in the last one year. He said that the Government is targeting infusion of ₹ 5,000 crore into the rural economy through procurement of 24 lakh metric tonnes of paddy.

He said that the State Government will bring 27 lakh farmers under the ambit of Pradhan Mantri Krishak Sanman Nidhi from the present figure of 14 lakh. Under this scheme, a farmer gets ₹ 6,000 in three equal instalments as assistance in his bank account.

The Chief Minister reiterated his

Government's commitment to enhance the monthly transfer under Orunodoi scheme to ₹ 1250 from the present ₹ 1,000 to nearly 27 lakh women through the direct benefit transfer mode.

He said that very soon five lakh more women will benefit from the loan waiver scheme of his Government. "The target is to waive off the debt of 27 lakh women," he informed his party colleagues.

The Chief Minister said that one of the top priorities of the Assam Government is to empower the long-neglected tea garden workers. "Hitherto, a garden owner is the sole beneficiary of compensation for land acquisition from tea gardens. We have decided to provide a part of the compensation to the workers of the affected gardens," Sarma said.

He spoke of making Assam self-reliant in power production. "We aim to enhance power production from 500 MW at present to 2,000 MW in the next four years. We will primarily emphasise on green energy," said Sarma.

- State Government will bring 27 lakh farmers under the ambit of Pradhan Mantri Krishak Sanman Nidhi
- Govt is targeting infusion of ₹ 5,000 crore into the rural economy through procurement of 24 lakh metric tonnes of paddy in four years.
- Orunodoi scheme to benefit 27 lakh women through an enhanced transfer of ₹1250 per month.
- Govt aims to benefit 27 lakh women under its microfinance loan waiver scheme
- State Government will appoint 26,000 'Jal Mitras' with a monthly remuneration of ₹ 6,500.

The Chief Minister stated that eligible students from Class IX to XII will get their caste certificates in their schools under Mission Bhumi Putra.

The State Government will appoint 26,000 'Jal Mitras' with a monthly remuneration of ₹ 6,500 to check water connection in villages.

Dr Sarma said that the Government has solved land-related problems of seven lakh families under Mission Basundhara-I. "In Mission Basundhara II, we will ensure land rights for indigenous people of the State," he added.

Connect with the masses: CM to DCs



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma with Ministers, DCs of various districts & officials at the Deputy Commissioners' Conference in Tezpur.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma has urged deputy commissioners of the 35 districts in Assam to focus on last mile delivery to achieve targets under various Central and State Government schemes to ensure the development and uplift of the people.

Addressing the third DC conference in Tezpur, Dr Sarma urged them to work towards effective implementation of flagship schemes of the State as well as the Central governments and issues related to them. He singled out Jal Jeevan Mission, Aadhaar Seeding of Ration Cards & PM Kisan Samman Nidhi beneficiaries, Verification of Orunodoi households, PMAY(G), Atal Amrit Abhiyan, Paddy Procurement, among others, for special attention during his two-day interaction with these officials on June 12 and 13 wherein he also addressed issues flagged by the DCs.

He focused on periodic reviews of various schemes to improve the quality and credibility of delivery of services. He asked these administrators to tour extensively for a first-hand understanding of the ground realities. He impressed upon these administrators to constitute what he called "Team District",

consisting of the Deputy Commissioner, ADCs, SDOs and Assistant Commissioners and to ensure its stability for smooth execution of flagship schemes and institutional memory.

In view of the extensive damage because of unseasonal rain and flood, he ordered them to take immediate measures for restoration of flood damage infrastructure.

Dr Sarma directed DCs to speed up land acquisition for the Asom Mala projects and to create a district land bank under three heads: compensatory afforestation, industry and government projects. The Chief Minister appreciated the officials for the success of Mission Basundhara and asked them to review cases which were rejected under the Mission.

He exhorted them to open a minimum of five paddy procurement centres in their districts to expedite procurement and asked them to facilitate the procurement of 7 lakh metric tonnes of paddy by September 30 as targeted by the State. The Chief Minister told the DCs to explore export potential of organic produce from their respective districts and to encourage farmers to go for multiple cropping, especially of millet based on the United Nations declaring the year 2023 as the year of millets.

He urged the administrators to meet targets

TO DO LIST

- Focus on last mile delivery
- Concept of "Team District" mooted
- Speed up land acquisition for Asom Mala projects
- Implement E-office by Oct 2

related to installation of functional household tap connections, while directing them to ensure quality inspection of health institutions, schools and anganwadi centres.

Specifying two areas where most district administrations were found wanting, Dr Sarma wanted them to focus on the functioning of the right to public services (RTPS) and the grievance redressal Kritagata portal.

The Chief Minister sought an efficient and transparent digitization of delivery of services to make sure that the common man need not undertake any travel to the district headquarters to get her work done. He informed these officers that beginning October 2, the concept of physical files will cease to exist in the State and ordered them to implement the concept of E-office in their districts at the earliest. He directed them to ensure completion of Aadhaar seeding to 12 lakh deserving farmers, individuals and facilitate mandatory e-KYC for optimum results under government schemes. "You are to ensure that e-POS seeding is completed in totality," he said.

He exhorted them to keep a hawk eye on incidences of child marriage in the district which he said have wider health and societal ramifications like an increase in maternal mortality rate.

Laying down the agenda for the next conference in Tinsukia, the Chief Minister listed health, education and social welfare as priority areas.



A worthy enterprise



Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma receiving the WSIS Award 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. This is the only project from India to win this title for the year 2022.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Meghalaya Enterprise Architecture (MeghEA) is an initiative of Government of Meghalaya supported by National e-Governance Division. Through this project, the Government of Meghalaya aims to transform Government service delivery mechanism through an industry standard framework – Enterprise Architecture.

The project intends to transform service delivery from being department-centric hitherto to citizen-centric hereafter thereby eliminating silos and facilitating world class experience in service delivery. For example, citizens would get outcomes such as direct benefit transfers, agriculture supports, etc., by providing simple information instead of “long cumbersome processes”, as the rationale of the project puts it. The project is based on India Enterprise Architecture (IndEA), the nation's first State-wide implementation.

The State Planning Department is the nodal implementation department, while several departments and directorates have collaborated towards the finalisation of the architecture and plan

“Generally, citizens are asked to provide IDs, certificates, licences, NOCs multiple times by multiple departments. This leads to delay, higher transaction cost and dissatisfaction among the masses. This happens as each department’s functions in its own way, without much collaboration and integration of information. MeghEA looks to resolve this core issue, by looking at processes from citizen’s points of view instead of service delivery department’s point of view,” says an official connected to the project in his email to *Asom Barta*. “While

departments function within the existing structure, the information of departments are integrated through digital systems,” adds the official.

The project has several components such as Government to citizen or business services, Government to employee services and Government to Government services. The E-Proposal system, part of the Government-to-Government component, enables faster processing and tracking of schemes. The system completely transforms the ecosystem of administrative approvals and sanctions of citizen’s schemes. With the help of technology, the project integrates multiple departments, directorates and other Government agencies.

It has been piloted by the Finance Department of the Government of Meghalaya. The system named eProposal System is built on Low Code/ No Code Platform. This enables the department to add more services, modify processes and implement digital services in a short time frame.

The official claims that the project has made a difference in improving efficiency in governance of proposals by reducing their average sanction time from nearly 50 days to just 5 days.

“The eProposal system now leads to faster approval of schemes, which earlier used to take days and thus benefits to end citizens are delivered at the right time,” he says, adding “schemes are now tracked and information about proposals is available for efficient decision making. “ In one word, citizens benefit through transformation of these internal processes using digital technology.

The State Government Department is planning to expand the scope of the project by bringing all non-financial files into this system to achieve efficiency and attain the goal of a paperless governance.

The nodal department is planning to start implementing citizen services starting with Agriculture, Community & Rural Development, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary and Social Welfare departments. “This will change the way citizens avail government services from different departments. The plan also includes consent-based proactive services to be delivered to citizens of the State,” he informs *Asom Barta*.

The project was nominated for WSIS Award 2022 in the category “The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development”. It emerged as “Champion Project” in the category. Remarkably, this is the only project from India to win this title for the year 2022.

- Completely digital workflow including minister’s approvals, generation of orders, drafting of minutes of meetings, etc
- System generated digital sanctions/orders in pre-defined format.
- Seamless information flows through the State Information Exchange Platform.
- Real-time tracking of proposal files.

Riding piggyback to success

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The year 1992. A quiet boy had done his parents and those around proud. His name had figured among the handful of aspirants who had passed the Joint Admission Test. But No. Manoj Kumar Basumatary had other ideas. He wanted to be in Delhi. To be more precise: St Stephens College. From there, UPSC. He realised part of it, though. He graduated from St Stephens in Mathematics, and enrolled himself in the Campus Law Centre. However, by 1997, he was on the hunt for a job to take care of his family and fulfil a responsibility. He cleared the probationary officer examinations of three banks, and joined the Union Bank of India and after 10 months switched over to the State Bank of India.

But he had his calling elsewhere. In 2013, he resigned. The scent of his native Dekhidol Village in Ghoramari of Sonitpur district was too powerful for him to ignore. It brought him back to Assam. As they say, he has never looked back since.

He decided to plunge himself to prop up the rural economy of Assam through agriculture. By now, he had seen enough of the world to know how to do so. He met his brother's friend, Khanindra Kalita, who suggested that he rear pigs to impart meaning to his second essay in life. A diligent Manoj begun researching the sector. In 2014, with 25 sows and two pigs, he started his piggery along with Khanindra. In the same year, he accompanied his banker's wife to Belgium where he delved into the European model of piggery. The next year, he went to The Netherlands to inspect a farm. "It changed my perspective towards piggery," he told *Asom Barta*.

Manoj and Khanindra consolidated their acquaintance to partnership of sorts by



Manoj Kumar Basumatary

registering Symbiotic Foods Pvt Ltd in 2016. Their company is now a name to reckon with. They kicked off their business by selling piglets and later branched out into selling breeding stock, live fattener, feed, etc. Besides, the duo also facilitated vaccines and other necessities for pig rearers in nearby areas.

The Covid-induced lockdown enabled Symbiotics to launch a meat brand called

“The definition of success is subjective. In my case, I draw satisfaction by seeing young faces gainfully employed, although there are areas where I want to achieve more.”

“Slice of Gahori”. Their company's turnover in fiscal 2021-22 was ₹ 3 crore. The company is currently valued at ₹ 15 crore, he claimed. “We are now working on artificial insemination. Besides, we are keen to export our product,” he told *Asom Barta*.

“The definition of success is subjective. In my case, I draw satisfaction by seeing young faces gainfully employed, although there are areas where I want to achieve more,” he said.

His firm has directly or indirectly given sustenance to over hundred individuals in and around the area. Junmoni Barua, an employee of his retail outlet in Dekargaon, said, “Sir has given many like me an opportunity to be self-reliant and make our lives meaningful.”

Pari Barman Saikia, an entrepreneur of Dhalaiabill in Sonitpur, reached out to Manoj in 2020 for training to start her piggery farm. She is among 1,500 or more individuals who had since 2017 benefited from the training programme which Symbiotic Foods organises for the youths of the North Eastern region. “This was an altogether new area for me. However, he imparted to us, in a scientific way, the intricacies of good rearing and piggery. Even his medical team helped us understand vulnerability of piggery farms. They are ever ready to help us whenever needed,” she said.

David Basumatary of Dhekiajuli and Raja Dutta of Sivasagar are among two success stories which Manoj can be proud of besides the achievement of Pari.

Manoj has also been able to utilise his banking connections to ink an MoU with the State Bank of India. The MoU has helped 50 farmers of the district to avail loans, required training, technology and know-how to start on their own besides a buy-back guarantee clause with his company.

Traditional or backyard piggery never allowed the growth of a formal sector in the State, but Manoj seems determined to change this ecosystem. His confidence stems from the success that he has accumulated hitherto. The Government of Assam has also recognised his efforts. No wonder, he is Asom Gaurav for the people of the State.



Manoj with a batch of his trainees



Assam Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi along with Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and his expanded Cabinet after the swearing-in ceremony of ministers designate Jayanta Mallabaruah and Nandita Garlosa at the Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma paying tributes to Bishnu Rabha on Rabha Divas in Dibrugarh.

Assam Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi greeting the new Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Justice Rashmin Manharbhai Chhaya after his swearing-in ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Guwahati.



An NDRF personnal offering aid to a flood victim in Silchar (Photo: NDRF)



Restoration work of Sontila to SS Road in progress in Dima Hasao district. The road was damaged in a landslide in the month of May.

Development in Assam

When it comes to matters of development, we often have two things in mind: Our immediate family and the larger family, the society. For a society to develop, works done by the Government has to be complimented by efforts of the society. Just like a cricket team, where the captain is as good as his team, the country or the government is as good as its people, i.e. those who are aware and conscious of what is happening around them.

The work done by the Government in Assam since 2016, especially the last one year, for betterment of women, children, elderly, youths and the weaker sections of the society has been noteworthy.

It seems that the Union and the State governments are working in sync with a vision of improving the living conditions of people in both rural and urban areas. This is visible in their endeavours. Road connectivity, housing, sanitation are areas where development is visible. Another major change has been a zero tolerance towards corruption and the massive fight against drugs.

We have begun well and have a long way to go to be among the most developed States in India. However, we the people of Assam have what it takes and a visionary leader like Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma to guide us towards a golden era of development and progress.

I also appeal to the people of our State to contribute their part in this endeavour.

RJ Aaliya
Guwahati

Farmers’ welfare measures

In view of the constraint faced by farmers in India with regard to their income and livelihood, it is very important for governments of the day to continue with welfare schemes. Of late, many States in the country have waived off farmers’ loan to keep them afloat. Yes, there are ramifications of such waivers. It is very difficult to ensure that welfare measures reach the farmers every time such schemes are announced.

Therefore, it is important that we get away from such an arrangement and ensure that farmers get the right support in terms of production, distribution, price and availability of required loans for expansion.

These reforms are important to develop the capacity of Indian farmers to be on his own.

When the NDA Government came to power in 2014, an assessment of the failed policies of the previous government was made. Some schemes were discarded, others were reinvented besides new policies meant for farmers’ welfare were introduced. In 2018, the Government declared that by 2022, farmers’ income will be doubled and accordingly took reform measures and some far-reaching schemes. It is now incumbent on the State and the Central governments to create awareness among the farmers to take advantage of such ideas and schemes so that the target is achieved as early as possible.

Sanjay Rabidas
Jorhat

Funding Research

It is high time to admit the fact that one of the hindrances to India’s development— be it socio-political, economic, cultural or scientific— is the lack of comprehensive high quality research, or more so, the lack of governmental support for it. Providing resources for research is one of the best ways to utilise our immense human resources with creative potential.

Research needs to be looked at as both an approach to education and as a career option. This will not only motivate individuals to think innovatively which will result in efficacious solutions to contemporary problems pertaining to the environment, fighting poverty, et al., but also provide intellectual gratification and be a tool for critical assessment in cultural, historical, political and economic spheres. The kind of approach to education that has prevailed in this country has been found wanting with regards to job creation and useful labour at par with 21st century global society. A research-based approach will result in a productive and compatible work force, equipped with practical knowledge. This will be a ‘profitable investment’ for both the government and the society. For e.g., advancements in Indian economic and sociological research will help in forming and implementing comprehensive and efficient policies while literary and musical research will contribute in protecting our heritage and keeping it alive.


Taking all the aforesaid into account, there is, therefore, an urgent need to look into the matter and find solutions to problems that impede the research sector in India. The Government can start by reviewing all the grants that have not met with the recipient researchers and bring an end to the infinite delays. The system should be revived in a way that facilitates the receipt of grants within a specific time frame. There is a need to be able to identify good projects with potential for the benefit of the country and global society as a whole and provide them with the necessary support.

Another useful step could be the creation of a new “research grant” policy with an application/appeal system which will provide financial and other backing to projects with potential, after a thorough scrutiny by competent individuals. This will be very much in line with NEP 2020 which is looking towards changing the traditional canvas of the Indian education system.

The Government needs to take it upon itself to encourage youngsters with out-of-the-box ideas and to think new and big.

Arani S Hazarika
Guwahati

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EDITORIAL

Time for a Lasting Solution

Nature pummelled Assam again. The destruction caused by incessant rainfall leading to landslides and flood has come back to haunt us one more time. To begin with, the districts of Bajali, Darrang and Kamrup presented a grim picture but then nothing was grimmer than Cachar, especially the Silchar town scene. This flood in the State has brought development activities to a halt impacting the socio-economic life of people. Despite genuine attempts by successive State governments and the Centre, nature is still having the last say on this matter.

The post-landslide scene in Dima Hasao is a grim foreboding of the fury of nature. The unprecedented flooding of Silchar town and Guwahati artificial flood scenario have caused havoc to the dwellers. Whether it is man-made or natural, the debate can continue but what is clear is that the existing approach to flood control and its management, not to mention, a round-the-year erosion that subsumes the State's landmass by the kilometres, is not the answer.

When this Government had assumed charge last year, a proactive Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika was in full throttle. He was inspecting dykes, embankments, putting in place flood control measures, and calling for greater inter-departmental cooperation. But there is so much that a Government can do, faced with such an onslaught. Although the full impact of this latest round of flood is yet to unravel, what has come though official statistics is humongous.

Loss of lives and property in flood is a given, yet the mark of a government lies in how it has managed to minimise the damage going by previous experiences. What perennial floods in Assam and their recurrences, in phases, do is to prevent the State from realising its development potential. A coordinated Central and State relief and rehabilitation measures can only assuage short-term pain, but there is no alternative to a permanent flood control measure.

While the governments in the State and Centre are focused on short- and medium-term strategies for mitigation of flood and erosion, it is important to put in place a long-term strategy, with scientific planning and management, for a lasting solution to benefit the people and the State.

For an Impact-based Education

by Rachna Nath



After seven years as a student in Cotton College (now Cotton University), I never imagined myself to be teaching within the education system in the US. My regards to all my educators thus far and to all who have taught me throughout my journey as an individual. When I look back at those yonder years, memories of my high school teacher calling me out for daydreaming to my college professor, Dr. Sabitry Bordoloi, asking me to do research on *Fejervaria limnocharis* (A species of frog endemic to Assam), everything was a life changing moment. I learnt from people who cared. I am a lifelong learner and learn from every moment of my life, as a mother, educator, researcher and as a forward thinker.

The Covid pandemic has paved paths for policies and focus for 2022 and beyond. Memorization of content is no longer a viable way, if ever it was, to prepare students for life skills that they need to be successful. Skills important to supplement their learning like critical thinking, problem solving, communication, comprehension, etc., are integral part of education. The Global Education Policy emphasizes the need for competencies or "breadth of skills" beyond literacy and numeracy within the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UN SDG4) to be met by 2030[1]. This is now being reflected albeit slowly in national education policies across the world. As the co-author of the corporate handbook for SGD4 to be released in 2030, I am intricately involved in communicating these skillsets like the one mentioned in the "Skills of a Changing World" [2], a project at the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution.

As an experienced educator both in the Indian and the US system, I feel that the emphasis should be more on these life skills of the students through professional development of the teachers and identifying the critical areas of each of the education systems. As myriad of problems plague our schools, to be proactive and look for changes that can be brought at the grassroots is very important. Problems relating to education systems like mass illiteracy, wastage of resources, neglect of local languages, expensive higher education, socio-economic conditions of the parents, etc., can be tackled with a proper vision. Everything boils down to the educator and their passion. I personally spend over 30-plus hours in a week interacting with my students outside of my work hours, showing them I care; showing them that they can communicate with me anytime and also creating a safe environment for them to be in. This is very important for a student to feel that, irrespective of the problems outside the school environment, they are learning life skills that will help them succeed in the future.

Given that each child is unique, our schools need to find ways to create that space where the child is not just given an academic curriculum but also an opportunity to find her passion early in life. The child's expectations should be given priority with proper mentoring and teachers with proper training should be empowered to identify the uniqueness of the child. Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) should be part of their lives and not just in books. Let's teach them that mixing colours for art classes is in fact science. In a cricket match, the spin of the ball and the contact of the ball with the bat is science. The *Masor Tenga* and our reaction to it in our daily cuisine is nothing but a combination of chemical signals in the tongue along with, of course, the fact that we all are *kharkhuwas* not just because we love it but because of the weather conditions we live in and that is Science. Let's see things in a different light and not approach our curriculum as compulsive studies for a grade but make it an adventure through creative teaching practices and innovativeness of the educators. Invest in them, and not just technology or technology startups!!!. These startups will happen if the students are given opportunities to think beyond their curriculum. Let me assure you that they will prosper beyond our wildest dreams and become entrepreneurial and solve real world problems in an innovative way.

LETS INVEST IN OUR TEACHERS !!

1. United Nations. (2016). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. Retrieved from <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202016.pdf>

2. <https://www.brookings.edu/series/skills-for-a-changing-world/>

(The author is a 2022 TIME Celebrated Innovative Teacher who is engaged with STEAM Education through her Dream Research Innovative Problem/Project Based Learning (DRIPBL) platforms. She teaches at Arizona College Prep-High School in the USA.)

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