

# Asom Barta

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2 | JUNE 2022

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## SE Asia inches closer to NE P3

New Delhi is literally pushing the boundary while implementing the Act East Policy.



## A first-of-its-kind initiative in TEs P7

The Government by inaugurating 96 high schools in tea gardens have redefined education.



## Government says OK Tata P11

Technical education in Assam will change forever thanks to a Govt-Tata Technologies Ltd tie-up.

## Jobs sans graft is Govt's new mantra



*Subhadra Das's prayers were answered when her three children Arpana, Jayanta (left) & Bhaskar made it to the Assam Police.*

### AB BUREAU, PATHSALA & GUWAHATI

**D**aisingri is a non-descript village in Bajali district although Chandraprabha Saikiani, the noted freedom fighter and Padma Shri awardee, and Dr Rajaniprabha Saikiani, Assam's first female doctor, had put it on the pride map of Assam with their achievements.

This village is in news again after decades thanks to six of its determined youths like Arpana Das and her brothers, Jayanta and Bhaskar, as well as Nayan. They have been appointed as Sub Inspector of Police after clearing the recruitment examination, an exercise that drew appreciation for its transparency and fairness.

The siblings had a very challenging upbringing but now see a better future. "I and my brothers had to borrow money to even go for the interview. We are all thankful to the Government for a very transparent recruitment process," says Arpana. "I studied hard and put in a lot of effort to be physically fit for the tests," she says.

Earlier, her brother Jayanta failed the test but started doing the hard yards since then and tasted success. "I am thankful to the Government for conducting a fair and transparent examination," he tells *Asom Barta*.

Coincidentally, they are all alumni of the Dr Rajaniprabha Primary School thereby living

up to the grit that the famed doctor had shown in her life.

The Das siblings, Nayan and Pranati Gogoi, a Dhemaji native are among the 22,598 recruits appointed by the BJP-led Assam Government of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Of this, Education Department with 11,063 appointments and Home with 8,867 are the biggest recruiters, followed by Health (2,419). These appointment letters were distributed on May 14 in arguably one of the biggest appointment exercises ever taken in Assam's history.

Pranati's father Dimbeswar could not hold back his tears while talking to *Asom Barta* after her daughter became the first from the family to secure a Government job. He hailed the Government for eliminating corruption from the recruitment process and giving credence to merit.

Similarly, Rupjyoti Mili couldn't contain her excitement on receiving her appointment letter as a GNM under the Health Department. "I cannot wait. I want to work," an excited Rupjyoti says.

The Chief Minister, in his speech, while distributing these appointment letters said that transparency and fairness characterised the entire recruitment process and urged those appointed to serve the State with all their might. He said that his Government has zero



### Summary of Recruitment

Departments	Recruits
Education	11,063
Home	8,867
Health	2,419
Public Health Engineering	330
Water Resources	105
Social Welfare	69
Agriculture	55
Environment & Forest	23
Labour Welfare	17
PWD (Roads)	8
Mines & Minerals	2

tolerance for corruption and is on a mission to transform Assam into a top-performing State.

He said that in the coming months more than 34,000 recruitments would be made as part of their poll promise of creating one lakh Government posts.



# Musings of a Chief Minister



What a feeling it is to realise that a promise that one had made is well on its course to be fulfilled. The childlike emotions are difficult to describe but can certainly be felt over and over again. The promise of generating one lakh jobs that we had made in our election manifesto, over a year back, is well on its course to be achieved. We took a giant stride towards that on May 14 when my Government handed over nearly 23,000 appointment letters to our youths. We delivered transparency to them with a hope that they will reciprocate with sincerity in discharging their duties towards the people of the State. But, we are not stopping at that. In the coming months, we will be ready with over 34,000 more appointments. I reiterate my promise: These appointments will be characterised by honesty and transparency, come what may.

Besides this, our idea is also to create institutions which will harness our youth's unlimited potential and train them to be self motivated. That was the thinking which went into our signing a comprehensive memorandum of agreement with Tata Technologies Limited to upgrade our ITIs and polytechnics with significant investment in material and manpower. This will set in motion a process which will change the face of technical and vocational education in Assam. Not only do we hope to generate employment for our youths skilled in these ITIs and polytechnics but we also want to ensure that they find meaning in their work. It is the same hope that we are nurturing from Gunotsav, our unique initiative to assess the standard of education in our schools meaningfully through a broad based system of evaluation.

I know that Gunotsav is a work in progress but I have no doubt we have sown seeds which have the potential to blossom into fruit-bearing trees. When I take stock of the entire exercise after June 4, I am sure that by then we would have been able to touch the lives of over 42 lakh students spread across 46,000-plus schools in Assam. An exercise we began in 2017 has gained traction, thanks to the dedication of all strata of the government machinery, schools, students and the civil society. This year, we have faced challenges from nature to conduct it as smoothly as we would have liked but that will not take away anything from what has been achieved at the ground. Let us not forget that the last two years pegged us back in our effort by a long way. The effort this year must be looked into with this prism.

Yes, the findings may not be all rosy, but this is precisely why we wanted to have Gunotsav: To identify loopholes and take corrective measures. The mark of a good government is to spot deficiencies and work towards addressing them. Any good government is always a work in progress, just like a student, who continues to learn from mistakes and build on that to add new knowledge to her repertoire.

My Government has been trying to undo historical wrongdoings meted out to the tea garden community. The latest measure towards this end is the opening of 96 model schools to give children from the community a shot at quality education so that they can think for themselves a better future.

Come summer, Assam's struggle with nature comes to the fore. In the month of May, too, floods wreaked havoc in many places and unprecedented rainfall triggered landslides leading to loss of lives and property beyond imagination. The scenario in Dima Hasao, especially, seeks our immediate attention. My Government is committed to help the people of the district. Respective district administrations are still working 24X7 to alleviate the pain and misery of the people. My Cabinet colleagues are using all means to reach out, irrespective of the ground realities. Even the Central Government has been very sympathetic by assuring us that there will no scarcity of funds. The Union Home Minister had called me up personally to assure all help. Like-minded individuals and business houses

are wholeheartedly donating to the cause. How can anyone be at ease when our fellow human beings are struggling to lift themselves up?

A development that has saddened me to no end is the burning down of a police station in Batadraba, a place whose roots are in history. Collective rage is not a healthy sign in a democracy. I am at pains to warn anti-socials that my Government will not take it lying down. I have no qualms about reiterating that we will not tolerate any nonsense, whatsoever, that has the potential to disrupt peace in our society.

**Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam



# SE Asia inches closer to NE



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressing the gathering.



Assam Chief Minister with External Affairs Minister Dr. Subramanyam Jaishankar at NADI.

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Central Government's increasing attention towards the North East consolidated with two more initiatives, this time by the Ministry of External Affairs. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar was in Guwahati on May 28 to inaugurate an international river conference to articulate the collective vision of cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Southeast Asian region.

He termed Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal as India's most trusted global partners along with Japan and members of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

Jaishankar said the importance of North East India in the overall scheme of things of the Central Government has made it obvious that India should work with its most trusted global partners.

The Union Minister reiterated that the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project, which will provide an alternative route between India's landlocked North East and Southeast Asia, has been one of the hardest projects, both because of topography and law and order issues, but India was determined to "spare no effort to get it".

Referring to the various initiatives India has taken in South Asian countries, Jaishankar

said, "We are also looking at the feasibility of creating a cross border rail line between Bhutan and India, running through Assam."

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman while addressing the valedictory session of the conclave reiterated that development of infrastructure and connectivity in the region have been Centre's focus areas since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office.

Sitharaman said that the Prime Minister has emphasised a "Neighbourhood First" policy as well as the "Act East" policy. "This focus has shown positive results", said Sitharaman. The Union Finance Minister said that the conclave has kept five 'Cs' of connectivity, commerce, culture, capacity building and conservation – as its focus area. "These five pillars essentially capture the areas which are critical for the development of the region," said Sitharaman.

Highlighting the improvement of National Waterways of NW-1 (Ganga), NW-2 (Brahmaputra) and NW-16 (Barak River), Sitharaman said these three national waterways will play a vital role in faster development of the region.

Sitharaman said improvement of relationship with Bangladesh in recent years shall pave the way for faster development of the North East region.

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his address, said that better cooperation and connectivity, with judicious use of natural resources, were the key to the overall prosperity of the region.

"North East is India's gateway to South East Asia. Our Government is working to make Assam an industrial hub not only for the region but to cater to the requirements of ASEAN countries. There is a need to leverage the advantage of Assam's unique location," he said.

Speaking at the special plenary session, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal advocated for an ecologically responsible economic growth in the South-east Asian region.

The third edition of the conclave, 'NADI' (Natural Allies in Development and Interdependence), was organised by Shillong-based thinktank Asian Confluence in

collaboration with the Union External Affairs Ministry, Act East Policy Affairs Department of the State Government, North Eastern Council, among other partners.

The conference was aimed at building confidence in the key role of the North East in taking forward India's strategic initiative for energy and water security in the neighbourhood and the Bay of Bengal region leading towards a vibrant and secure Indo-Pacific.

A day prior to the event saw the participation of eight ASEAN envoys in a connectivity conclave called "Act East through North East" which was inaugurated by the Assam Chief Minister.

In his keynote address, Dr. Sarma thanked the Centre for massive infrastructure investment in North East India.

"Our Government is working hard to make Assam a gateway of the India-ASEAN relationship. For development to pick up pace, peace and a conducive investment climate are needed. Peace has been restored and we have created a conducive climate for investors to invest in the State. In fact, Assam is currently among the top three ranked States in the country to attract external aid," said Dr. Sarma.

Sanjeev Sanyal, member of the Prime Ministers' Economic Advisory Council, in his address, said that for its unique geographical position and ethnic diversity-cum-cultural affinity of the northeastern region with many ASEAN countries, the region is poised to be the economic hub of India-ASEAN relation.

High Commissioner of Singapore to India, Simon Wong, in his address, spoke of Singapore's interest to invest in three sectors of tea, petrochemical and food processing in Assam. He also outlined his country's interest in investing in a multi-modal logistics park in Guwahati.

The Government of India, as part of the "Act East policy", has been working with ASEAN members to improve connectivity, boost the quantum of trade & commerce, and enhance economic cooperation. Participants in the conclave deliberated on emerging opportunities for enhancing connectivity, trade, and investments relations with ASEAN, with a focus on Assam and the North East.



Assam Chief Minister greeting an envoy.



# 'Har Ghar Jal' on mission mode



Nasatra Water Supply Scheme, Morigaon under Jal Jeevan Mission.



Guneswari Deka, a beneficiary under Jal Jeevan Mission.

**AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI**

A safe water supply is the backbone of a healthy economy yet was woefully under prioritised in the country until Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in his address to the Nation on its 73rd Independence Day in 2019, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, that India will take forward the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in the days to come.

JJM is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in rural India by 2024. Launched with the aim of 'Har Ghar Jal', the Mission has made a major impact in the lives of the people.



Kuladhar Keleng, a beneficiary under Jal Jeevan Mission.

Being implemented in partnership with State governments, JJM ensures 'no one is left out' and that the poorest and marginalised as well as the previously unreached are all provided assured tap water supply.

Bamunigaon, a picturesque village, nestled in the greens of surrounding hills near Madan Kamdev temple in Kamrup rural district has all the reasons to rejoice now. The village, inhabited mostly by the Bodos, was once marked by water scarcity, but no longer. All 110 households have access to potable water at home, thanks to the Bamunigaon water supply scheme under JJM.

Piped water is distributed to every household here, planned and implemented by the PHE Department.

"Every day, we need to lift 70,000 litres of groundwater to the treatment plant. After completing prescribed norms of water treatment, we release potable water to every household in our village", said Bolin Chandra Boro, the man in-charge of operations of the Bamunigaon water supply scheme.

"Previously, we used to collect water from different natural sources. It had a bearing on our daily lives. Now, we get clean water regularly," says Dunu Boro, a native of the village.

The story is similar in Manipur village of Morigaon district. "Until the third week of March, we had water scarcity. Whatever little water was available had lots of iron content. But with the installation of tap water connection in my house, I get potable water now," says Kuladhar Keleng (65), a villager in this flood-prone area.

The PHE was entrusted to develop the water supply scheme at Basnaghat in the district. It was later transferred to the Mission.



**Jal Jeevan Mission is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in rural India by 2024. Launched with the aim of 'Har Ghar Jal', the Mission has made a major impact in the lives of the people.**

Dayagiya village in Morigaon is about 75-odd km from Guwahati. This is one of the five villages where potable water under JJM has been provided to households under the Jagi Bhakatgaon Water Supply Scheme.

Munu Barua (35), wife of a farmer in the village, says that tap water connection to her house was made available in February. "We get water supply twice a day now. Earlier, we had difficulties in accessing clean drinking water," Munu says.

Villagers in the greater Na-Satra area in the same district had to live for long with scarcity of water besides its contamination. JJM seems to have ameliorated their crisis. Most of them now have access to piped water with regular frequency, thanks to the Na Satra Pani Water Supply Scheme.

Arup Kumar Medhi (43), a resident of Monoha Nasatra village, is one among the beneficiaries. He cannot stop thanking the State and the Central governments for implementing JJM in his village.



# PMAY expands its net in Assam



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma with Union Minister Giriraj Singh and State P&RD Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass distributing sanction letters of PMAY-G houses in Jorhat on May 19, 2022.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in our Constitution encourages the State to secure, among others, a decent standard of living for all. An essential part of this Policy is providing adequate shelter.

Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Grameen (PMAY-G), launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, with the avowed objective of providing affordable housing to the rural and urban poor by 2024, got a major boost in Assam on May 19 when five lakh houses were allotted to beneficiaries under the scheme in a public meeting in Jorhat.

The meeting was graced by Union Minister

of Rural Development Giriraj Singh, who in the presence of the Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Cabinet colleague and Panchayat & Rural Development Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass, ceremonially sanctioned ₹ 7,739.50 crore for 5 lakh PMAY-G houses in Assam. Besides the first of three equal instalments of ₹ 1.3 lakh, each beneficiary will also be getting ₹ 21,755 as payment for 95 man-days under MGNREGA.

With this, the number of beneficiaries under the PMAY (G) in the State has gone up to 19 lakh. One of them being Renu Bala Kalita of Khudra Polaha village of Agdola Gaon near Baihata Chariali in Kamrup district.

Renu Bala’s husband was allotted a pucca house, which was to be built over his kutcha house, under the Scheme. Her joy was short-lived when he passed away without finishing the task. However, she became the beneficiary of the Scheme and is now the proud owner of a 25 square metre house where she resides with one of her daughters.

“I am delighted. With this, my dream of having a pucca roof over my head is fulfilled. It would have been impossible for us to have such a house but for the Government,” she said.

Like her, poor families of neighbouring villages have also benefited under the scheme once they have been identified based on parameters drawn from the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC). The SECC parameters are verified by gram sabhas.

Purnima Devi Barman of

### PMAY- G coverage in Assam

- **Beneficiaries Registered: 15,27,751**
- **Houses Geo-tagged: 14,02,881**
- **Houses Sanctioned: 12,51,051**
- **Houses Completed: 5,36,836**
- **Funds Utilized: ₹ 8,661.59 crore**

(As on May 19, 2022)

Agdola Gaon is another beneficiary of the visionary scheme. Her ailing husband is a struggling watchmaker by profession. She now resides in a pucca house.

The scheme has also created jobs for labourers in rural India. So much so that during the Covid-19 pandemic, PMAY-G became a significant source of livelihood for migrant workers, providing a dignified life to millions living in the hinterland of India.

In a reiteration of the Prime Minister’s vision of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas’, the Assam Chief Minister pointed out in his speech that out of the 12,000 beneficiaries from Jorhat district, four thousand are from the tea garden community. He also urged the tea garden management to provide No Objection Certificate (NOC) for construction of the houses. Dr. Sarma said that the scheme would strengthen Assam’s rural economy.

Mr Ranjeet Kumar Dass while talking to *Asom Barta* credited the Chief Minister for continuously monitoring the scheme. “We are hopeful that by 2024, we will be able to achieve 100 per cent target under the scheme”, he said.







## Uplifting education standard in Assam

**AB BUREAU, MORIGAON, SIVASAGAR KARIMGANJ**

**I**t is 6am on May 24. Charuprabha Chaliha, an Assistant Lecturer of Mayong Anchalik College is getting ready to be on time at Hathibhangi Middle English School. After a four-km ride on a motorcycle driven by her brother, she reaches Tetelia Ghat of Pakoria River. The bridge on the river is half constructed. She boards a boat along with her brother and the motorcycle. After alighting from it, they drive through a rickety road for three more km. She then negotiates a narrow bamboo bridge to reach her destination. The time is 8.15am.

Some distance away from Charuprabha's residence in Mayong is Sampurna Biswas, a resident of a make-shift camp in Hathibhangi. She gets up at 3.45am, unusually early even by her standards. After revision of her lessons, she is getting ready to reach her ME School well ahead of the appointed time of 7am.

It was a coincidence that these two individuals met during the day since Charuprabha was the external evaluator of the school while Sampurna was there to defend the standard of education of her institution as part of the Gunotsav exercise of the Education Department.

Nearly 46,000 Government/Provincialised/Tea Garden Management Schools of elementary level up to Class IX through their 42 lakh students across Assam will be evaluated in Gunotsav in three phases. The first two phases have already been completed while the third one is due in the first week of the next month.

Talking to *Asom Barta*, Charuprabha says, "I am happy with the enthusiasm among the students, guardians and the management. Despite inclement weather, the attendance is 100% in this school. I am pleased with their overall performance."

"This ME School is not an isolated example. Schools under Hathibhangi Cluster will do well in the exercise despite floods all around. There is a general enthusiasm which you can see. Moreover, it is a fact that the standard in

## Gunotsav has made teachers and students responsible for increasing the standard of education in the State.

these schools is improving," says Gambhir Deka, Hathibhangi Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator and Liaison Officer, Gunotsav.

Mrinal Sarma, Assistant Professor of Mathematics in Narengi Anchalik College, is the evaluator of No. 1 Murkata Lower Primary School in the same area. He, too, is happy at the way Gunotsav has made teachers and students responsible for increasing the standard of education in the State.

Far away from Morigaon in Karimganj district is Biroja Sundori Girls' High School. This 76-year-old school has 350 students from Class VI to X. Despite torrential rains, the attendance in the school was 100% when evaluator KSPV Pavan Kumar, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, started the evaluation exercise. At the end of the day, the officer was all praises for the school, its management, and the

Government. "The enthusiasm among the students and the teachers was amazing," he told *Asom Barta*. "Gunotsav helps in capturing the actual state of the learning atmosphere. At an individual level, it provides officers like us an opportunity to revisit our school memories. Kudos to the Chief Minister for initiating such an exercise," he said.

The enthusiasm in Sivasagar's Alimur Jnanoday High School under Khelua Education Block was no less. Manik Chetia, the headmaster, attributed the infrastructure and academic development in the school to Gunotsav. "This year, we have improved facilities in the room meant for menstrual hygiene. We are imparting life skills as well as disaster management skills to our students," he says.

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma kicked off this annual exercise on May 11 at Ghorabandha Junior Basic School in Sipajhar of Darrang district. In the first phase, 15,313 schools in 10 districts were evaluated while 13,799 schools were evaluated in nine districts in the second phase despite challenging weather conditions across the State.

*Sampurna Biswas, a student of Hathibhangi Middle English School, collecting Gunotsav question paper from external evaluator Charuprabha Chaliha.*



*State Education Minister Dr. Ranoj Pegu inspecting a school during Gunotsav (T). Glimpses of Gunotsav from No. 271 Longai Road Buniyadi Balika Vidyalaya, Karimganj (M); Hathibhangi Middle English School, Morigaon.*





## A first-of-its-kind initiative in TEs post-1947

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Ushering in a new era of academic excellence in tea garden areas in Assam, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma dedicated 96 newly built model high schools in tea garden areas of the State at a function held in Sonitpur district on May 25.

Dr. Sarma inaugurated Tezpur-Ghogora and Rupajuli Tea Garden Model Schools, Sonajuli Tea Garden Model High School, Nahoroni Model High School, Phulbari and Thakurbari Model High Schools as part of the exercise. The inauguration spree continued till May 30 with ministers, MPs and MLAs doing the honours.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that this is the first-of-its-kind effort by any Government in the State. He said that education will now be used as a tool to bring about overall development of the people of the tea garden areas.

"For the first time since Independence, schools have been set up in the tea gardens for children of the garden workers. This will herald an era of quality education for their children," Dr. Sarma said.

The Chief Minister, while addressing a gathering, said that 14,594 students have been enrolled in these 96 model schools. Eight teachers have been appointed in each of these schools.

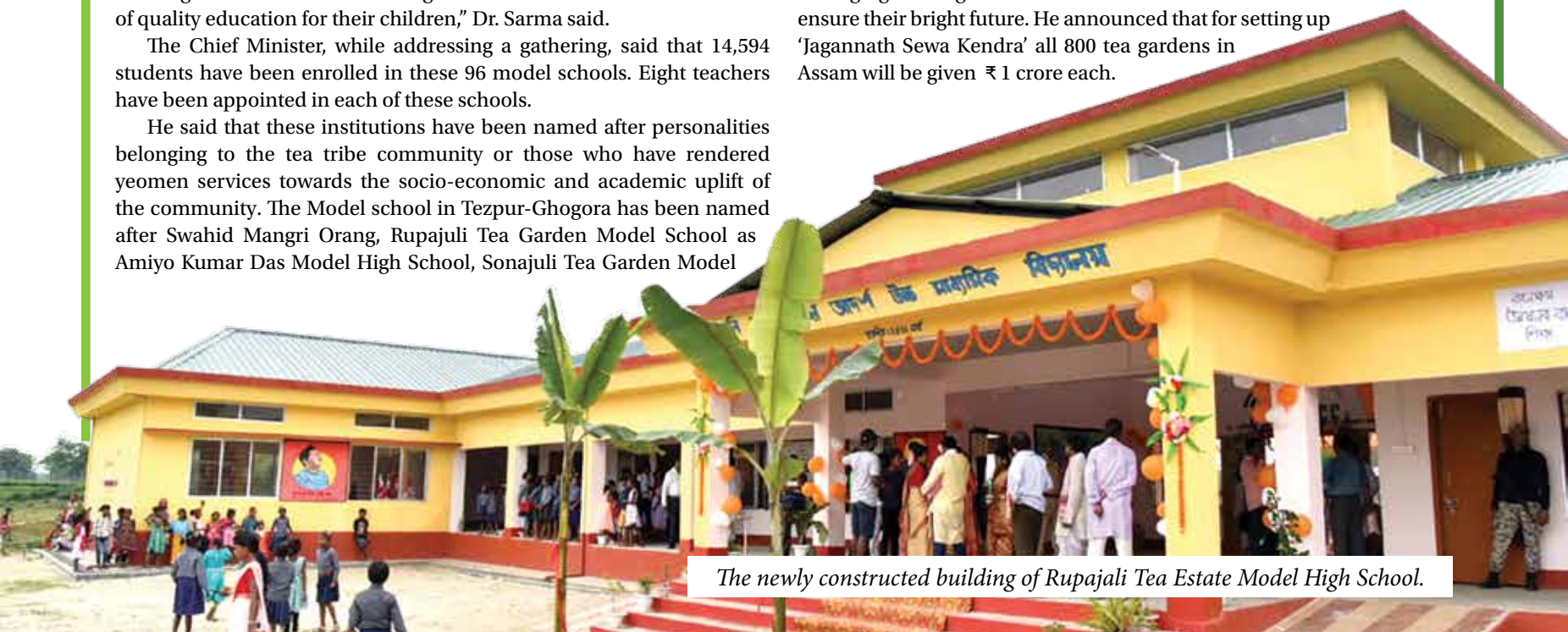
He said that these institutions have been named after personalities belonging to the tea tribe community or those who have rendered yeomen services towards the socio-economic and academic uplift of the community. The Model school in Tezpur-Ghogora has been named after Swahid Mangri Orang, Rupajuli Tea Garden Model School as Amiyo Kumar Das Model High School, Sonajuli Tea Garden Model

High School as Swahid Hemlal Kalandi Model High School. The State Government in the forthcoming academic session will upgrade these model high schools to higher secondary schools, in phases, with free education for children from tea garden areas.

"It's an attempt to rectify old mistakes. If previous Governments had set up high schools in tea garden areas, the State would have benefited," he said adding that subjects like Mathematics and Science shall be taught in English medium so that students can excel in their academics and be ready for the future.

For the management of these schools, ₹ 1 lakh each has been earmarked out of which ₹ 25,000 have been released to them. Students in these schools will be entitled to free textbooks, free mid-day meals and free uniforms.

Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also called upon guardians of the students belonging to tea garden areas to send their wards to schools to ensure their bright future. He announced that for setting up 'Jagannath Sewa Kendra' all 800 tea gardens in Assam will be given ₹ 1 crore each.



The newly constructed building of Rupajuli Tea Estate Model High School.

## Making Assam AatmaNirbhar in Healthcare Innovation

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Heralding a new dawn for Assam in interdisciplinary medical research, the Government of Assam signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati to establish a first-of-its-kind integrated multi-speciality 350-bed hospital: Assam Advanced Healthcare Innovation Institute (AAHI). The agreement was inked in presence of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

As part of the MoU, Government of Assam has committed ₹ 546 crore for the project while IIT-G will contribute the required land & expertise.

"The collaboration between the Government of Assam & IIT Guwahati is a first-of-its-kind between a State Government and an academic institute. While our medical colleges primarily focus on clinical aspects, the new institute will focus on technology & research to facilitate innovation in the medical field," Dr. Sarma said.

Once completed, AAHI will usher in interdisciplinary medical research & innovations. This will enhance India's medical tech industry in the coming years. The partnership will also facilitate the setting up of a research institute and a postgraduate medical college to offer advanced medical degrees like DNB, MD, PhD, MS, MD-PhD, etc.

Further, the partnership will mark the amalgamation of various disciplines like Engineering, Medical Sciences and Industry 4.0



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma with Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan at the MoU signing ceremony between Government of Assam & IIT Guwahati on May 20, 2022.

Technologies to foster research collaborations with leading global universities in areas like stem cell therapy, diagnostics, therapeutics, molecular biology, regenerative medicine, etc.

Later, the Chief Minister along with the Union Education Minister also inaugurated the Technology Incubation Centre of Guwahati Biotech Park, Amingaon along with the three day Assam Biotech Conclave-2022.



# Floods: Govt working 24X7 in aid & rescue



*Minister Pijush Hazarika inspecting flood affected areas of Raha.*

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

From time immemorial, rivers like Barak, Brahmaputra, Jhanji and Subansiri, etc., have nourished Assam. Time and again, these rivers have also shown their other side damaging property through floods while eroding vast stretches of land. The perennial flood problem is so common in the State that it even compelled the 'Bard of the Brahmaputra' Dr. Bhupen Hazarika to compose an evergreen classic to highlight the severity of the problem. This long standing problem persists due to natural and geographical factors.

This year, Assam has been experiencing heavy rainfall since Bohag Bihu, the Assamese New Year starting in mid-April. This led to flooding in 32 districts of the State which affected 3,246 villages and resulted in 39 deaths. The impact was especially severe in districts in the Barak Valley region in southern Assam, Dima Hasao, Nagaon & Hojai. According to an official statistics, 8,39,691 people of the State have been affected by floods.

However, continued efforts of the Central and State governments has come as a ray of hope to those affected while minimising loss of life. Rescue and relief operations are still being carried out across the affected districts in more ways than one.



*SDRF personnel carrying out rescue and relief operations in Hamren of West Karbi Anglong district.*

The Central Government has allocated ₹ 1,000 crore for flood relief, out of which ₹ 150 crore has already been released to various flood-affected districts, while an additional ₹ 324 crore under State Disaster Response Fund has been made available to the State in advance based on a recommendation by the 15th Finance Commission.

Meanwhile, Assam State Disaster Management Authority is using drones and satellite data to determine the extent of damage caused by floods in these districts.

"There is no shortage of funds for relief and rehabilitation of flood-affected people. Our Government is working round-the-clock to provide relief to the affected." Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Special flights have been deployed to Barak Valley to ensure adequate supply of food and essential commodities in the affected areas. NDRF and SDRF forces are working on war footing as well for any eventuality.

Recently, the State Cabinet also gave rescue and rebuilding operation a much needed fillip by approving a tie-up with an aviation company to operate special flights for a subsidised fare of ₹ 3,000 per ticket from Guwahati to Silchar and vice versa. Besides, to mitigate the sufferings of affected families and for beginning restoration work in flood & landslide-ravaged Dima Hasao, the Assam Government decided in its latest Cabinet meeting to provide an immediate package of ₹ 50 crore. Under this, ₹ 30 crore will be provided for immediate reconstruction of critical roads.

Of the total package, ₹ 23 crore will be provided from SDRF & ₹ 27 crore from SOPD. The Government has also decided to give ₹ 2 lakh each to 590 families to reconstruct their damaged houses. Altogether ₹ 11.80 crore will be allocated for the purpose.

## SOP for Mission Amrit Sarovar

The Assam Cabinet in its last meeting held on May 29 approved a standard operating procedure for Mission Amrit Sarovar which seeks to introduce a source of water for small and marginal farmers and income generating assets by integrating pisciculture and commercial plantations.

In total, 3,007 sarovars will be constructed at a cost of ₹ 11,208 crore. The work on them is targeted to be completed by August 15, 2023. In each of the districts in Assam, at least 75 such sarovars need to be constructed with a minimum size of one hectare. However, in the case of Kamrup Metro, South Salmara and Dima Hasao, the minimum size will be one acre



These sarovars shall be maintained by cluster level federation of women SHGs and the revenue earned shall be shared with Panchayats or local bodies in Sixth Schedule areas in 3:1 proportion.

## Minority status to six communities

### AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis in Assam will henceforth be officially certified as minorities in the State, according to a Cabinet decision of the Government of Assam.

"This decision is likely to aid these groups in availing government benefits", said Minister and Government spokesperson Keshab Mahanta after the May 29 State Cabinet meeting.



# PADDY FARMERS ON CLOUD NINE

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI, MORIGAON, MANGALDAI, BEZERA

Paddy cultivators in Assam never had it so good until this time. On January 8, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma nudged six procurement agencies, including Food Corporation of India (FCI), to procure at least 10 lakh metric tonnes of paddy at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹ 1,940 per quintal from farmers. This has brought a new ray of hope for many.

All this while, middlemen were ruling the roost in procuring paddy from these farmers thereby depriving them of a fair price. The State Government’s move was aimed at erasing hegemony of middlemen and giving farmers a ‘major financial relief’ while making agriculture much more profitable. The impact is there at the ground.

About 70 km east of Assam’s capital city of Guwahati is Jagi Bhakatgaon in Morigaon district, proclaimed by many as the rice bowl of Assam. The paddy procurement centre (PPC) here is buzzing with farmers and their chatters. An excited Dharanidhar Das, secretary of Morigaon DRMC (District Regulated Market Committee) under Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board (ASAMB), says, “In our PPCs even women farmers register their names. We never had it so good.”

“It is my first time ever in a PPC. Along with me, five women farmers sold their produce at this PPC. This time the Government set an MSP of ₹ 1,940 per quintal. Previously, I sold my produce in the open market at a much lower price. This time, I got ₹ 75,000 more, says Premoda Deuri of Bondhai Gaon of the district.

Romini Hazarika, a farmer of Borbheti village sold 90 quintals of paddy at the same PPC. He, too, had his maiden experience of a PPC as a seller.

“I came to know about the MSP from a Gaon Panchayat member. The gaon panchayat held meetings in villages under Jagi Bhakatgaon area in January. We are happy and satisfied,” says Hazarika.

Binanda Rajbongshi of Niz Madartola village under Kamalpur Development Block in Kamrup district sold paddy to the FCI at MSP which is nearly 20% higher than the price he previously used to get in the open market. Sushil Das, a cultivator of Sutargaon village in Muktapur of Kamrup district, sold 50 quintals of his paddy at Rangia FCI sub centre in February.

Under the direction of the Chief Minister, a massive awareness drive about paddy procurement at MSP was carried out in January by respective district administrations in rural areas across the State. This

## NEW HEIGHTS IN PADDY PROCUREMENT

- **3 lakh MT** Paddy procured from farmers of Assam.
  - **35,402** farmers benefitted.
  - **MSP: ₹ 1,940** per quintal of paddy.
- **Total MSP** provided to farmers: **₹ 582 crore.**
- **184 paddy procurement centres** in Assam.



brought in more farmers to PPCs across Assam.

In Darrang district, too, enthusiasm among paddy farmers is visible. “Thus far, I have sold 138 quintals of paddy at the Mangaldai PPC of Assam Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd (AFCSCL). I got ₹ 770 per quintal more than what I got in the open market last year”, says Nayan Kalita of Kalgiri village, 25 kilometres west of the Darrang district headquarter of Mangaldai.

“We are expecting more farmers at our PPC. Once these happy farmers report better prices, more of them will come,” says Bipul Saikia, manager of the Mangaldai PPC.

The success of procurement at MSP is changing the attitude of farmers who had given up on paddy cultivation. One of them being Hiranya Kakati of Gelaidingi village, two kilometres west of Mangaldai town.

“My family has been engaged with paddy cultivation since ages. I had thought of moving away from it after suffering losses because of middlemen. Now, I have changed my decision. I would rather increase the cultivated area. This year I sold 75 quintals of Ranjit variety of paddy at MSP at the Mangaldai PPC”, he says.

## Ferry for all



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

In a major boost to river tourism in Assam, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma flagged off two state-of-the-art catamaran vessels on May 13, 2022. Each vessel has a capacity of 100 passengers and will house amenities for divyangs, senior citizens, women and children. Both vessels also have a capacity to carry 50 motorcycles.

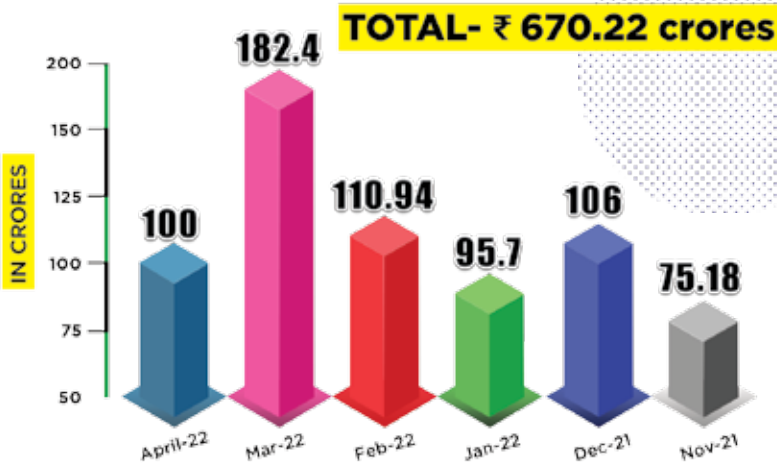
The Chief Minister also laid the foundation stone for construction of Guwahati Ferry Terminal, with shopping centres, restaurants and parking lots in it. The terminal will be constructed at a cost of ₹ 289 crore. The construction is expected to be completed in 24 months.

Addressing the occasion, Dr. Sarma hailed the initiative as a “first-of-its-kind in a river system in India”. Transport Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary and Guwahati Lok Sabha MP Queen Oja, among others, were present in the meeting.

## VAHAN

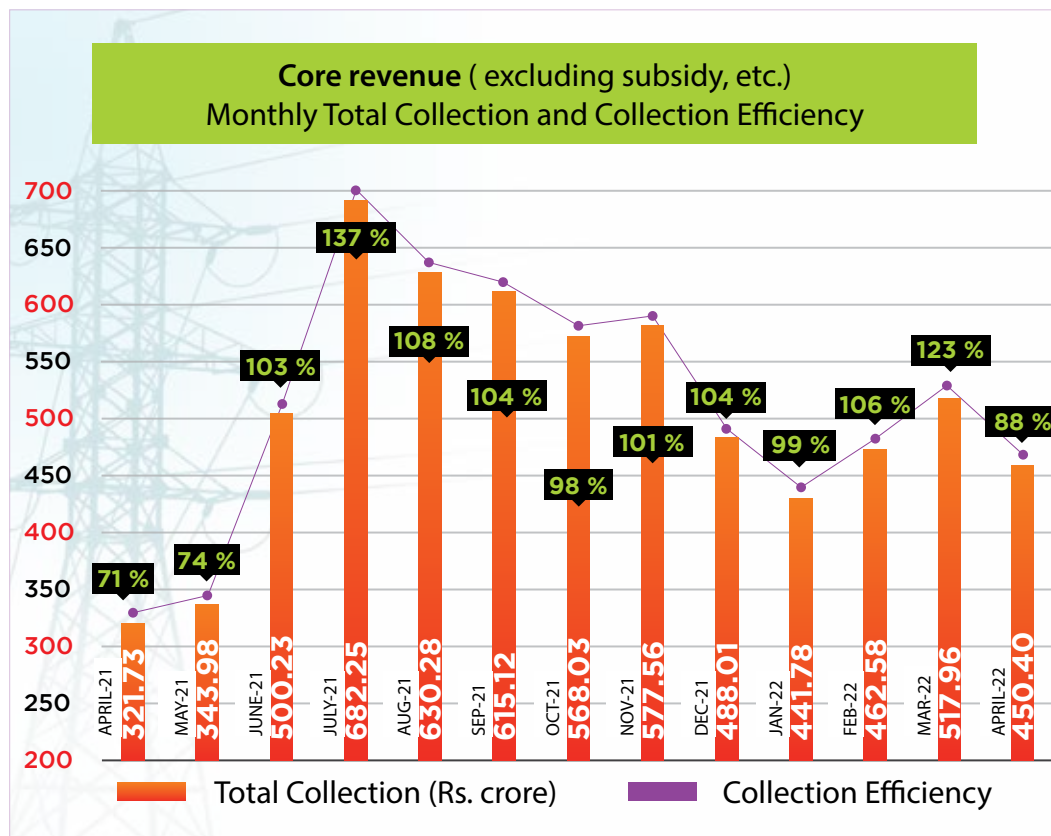
### REVENUE COLLECTED

Revenue collection includes Motor Vehicle tax, Motor Vehicle fees, Compounded fines, Arrear tax, Pollution fines, Permit fees, etc.





# Resurrecting APDCL



Since June 2021, APDCL has consistently achieved almost 100% collection efficiency, except in April 2022, which was attributed by officials to inclement weather conditions.

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

One of the most visible departments of the present Government in Assam is Power. With a proactive Chief Minister and a new minister at the helm, the Department has started clicking on the right switches.

Historically, transmission and distribution losses have been the biggest drag on discoms in India so much so that the Central Government continues to bail them out year after year. The same is the case with Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL). Since its incorporation in 2009, it has consistently been in the red. With a section of big power consumers not paying its bills and resorting to malpractices like power theft, the picture looked bleak for the company. Until now.

The APDCL has since taken measures to rev up revenues, recover old dues, and cajole and coax consumers to pay their outstanding while coming down hard on power theft. The direction from the top is as clear as it gets: Make APDCL a profitable entity.

Towards that, the APDCL is in the process of creating a database of its nearly 66 lakh consumers and implementing an improved billing system to cut down losses. It is also installing smart meters across the State, a target which it sets to achieve by 2025. So far, work on approximately 10 lakh smart metres is being completed. It is streamlining bill & revenue collection practices, while taking necessary steps to recover unpaid dues from Government offices & departments. Taking a tough stand towards Government officials, the

**However, with the usage of renewable energy sources gaining momentum in recent years, the Department, too, is seen moving away from its overwhelming dependence on thermal & hydro and joining the solar bandwagon. The inauguration of the 70MW Amguri Solar Park being an example.**

Chief Minister has directed Power officials to recover unpaid bills of Government servants directly from their salaries through the Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDOs).

As a result of all these measures, APDCL has hit the ground running. An aggressive campaign against power theft by arresting those complicit in the malpractices and resorting to disconnection drives against defaulters, being one step. This, and timely collection of bills have resulted in increased collection in its coffers. So much so that in July 2021, it collected a revenue of ₹ 750 crore, the highest ever in its history.

The company has also launched schemes like 'Special One-Time Settlement Scheme, 2022' to settle assessment/supplementary bills from defaulters, and 'Surcharge Waiver Scheme' (extended till June 15, 2022). The

scheme allowed consumers to settle their electricity bills and arrears at one go while availing 100% surcharge waiver. Nearly 3.80 lakh participants availed off the scheme till March 2022 which yielded the APDCL an amount of ₹ 361 crore.

The turnaround measures of APDCL is likely to get a fillip after the Union Cabinet approved an assistance of ₹ 6,286 crore for Assam to implement power reforms recently. Of the total assistance, ₹ 3,677 crore is for installation of smart metres and ₹ 2,609 crore to mitigate loss reduction.

Yet, there are areas where APDCL needs to tread cautiously. There are many like Renu Dutta, who are aggrieved. "All this talk of APDCL turning profitable is commendable, but it must not come at the cost of service. We frequently experience unannounced power cuts of short durations. There are times when the duration is much longer. During Bihu, we didn't have power for a whole day," she says.

She wants the Department to generate more electricity. Statistics suggest that in Assam, the peak demand is in the region of 2,100 MW while the State generates on its own anywhere between 200-300 MW although its generation capacity stands at 441 MW. The shortfall is covered by buying power from other producers, both private and government entities, which certainly comes at a price, more so, during times like this when the country, especially North India, is going through a heat wave.

However, with the usage of renewable energy sources gaining momentum in recent years, the Department, too, is seen moving away from its overwhelming dependence on thermal & hydro and joining the solar and renewable bandwagon. The inauguration of the 70MW Amguri Solar Park being an example. Private groups like Azure Power Ltd and Jakson Powers are contributing a bulk of the renewable power production in the State which is 393 MW, out of which the APDCL produces 212 MW of solar power.

Rakesh Kumar, MD, APDCL told *Asom Barta* in an email interview that a renewable policy is under preparation with a tentative target of around 1200 MW from various sources. Meanwhile, in the budget statement of FY2022-23, the Government has announced "Mukhya Mantri Souro Shakti Prokolpo" under which it seeks to install 1000 MW solar power plants across the State in a phased manner. "A portion of it will be installed with storage capacity considering the peak load requirement," Kumar responded to a query.

The Department is also inviting prospective landowners/farmers/cooperatives/panchayats/FPOs to lease their barren/uncultivated land for setting up grid connected ground-mounted solar photovoltaic power plants through Component-A of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Urja Surakshan evam Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM).



# Government says OK Tata



*B Kalyan Chakravarthy, IAS (Government of Assam) & Warren Harris (CEO, Tata Technologies) signing the agreement.*

## AB BUREAU, ROWTA, GUWAHATI

**D**edsung Bora, Promeswar Panika and Anupam Koch are among the many names that have acted as catalysts leading to a landmark memorandum of agreement (MoA) between the Government of Assam and Tata Technologies Limited.

They are among the many success stories of ITI, Rowta established and managed by a Tata company called Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited (erstwhile Tata Tea) since 1997. The MoA envisages thousands like these individuals to come out of the refurbished Industrial Training Institutes and polytechnics in the State to join hundreds of companies operating in India and abroad under the Tata brand like APPL, and others. At present there are 43 ITIs and 34 polytechnics in Assam.

Whereas Dedsung Boro from Sengimon in Udalguri district under Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam is working in Kuwait after his diploma as a Mechanic Motor Vehicle from this Institute, Panika is the head clerk of Hathikuli Tea Estate of APPL in Golaghat district. Anupam is with Assam Gas Company Limited in Digboi.

With the completion of infrastructure in these institutions and their upgrade to centres of excellence, with funding of over ₹ 2,390 crores from the Government of Assam and the Tata company based on the MoA, the likes

of Dedsung and Promeswar will no longer be clamouring for government jobs in Assam.

The MoA was inked on May 11 by B Kalyan Chakravarthy, Principal Secretary, Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Department, on behalf of the Government of Assam, and Warren Harris, CEO of Tata Technologies Limited. Among those present during the signing ceremony were Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Skill Development Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, Education Minister Dr. Ranaj Pegu besides S Ramadorai, Chairman of Tata Technologies Limited, et al.

The MoA will facilitate government-industry interface to encourage students to become innovators and make these institutes vibrant with cutting edge technology to train human resources for industry 4.0.

Dr. Sarma appreciated the Tatas for their role in Assam. He said that through this initiative over 20,000 youths will be gainfully employed each year, primarily in the Tata group. "Today we've taken a huge step towards enhancing the employability of our youths & making them ready for Industry 4.0," the Assam Chief Minister tweeted minutes after the ceremony.

In his remarks, Mr Ramadorai hailed Dr. Sarma as a "man in hurry" for development in the State and reiterated the Tata group's

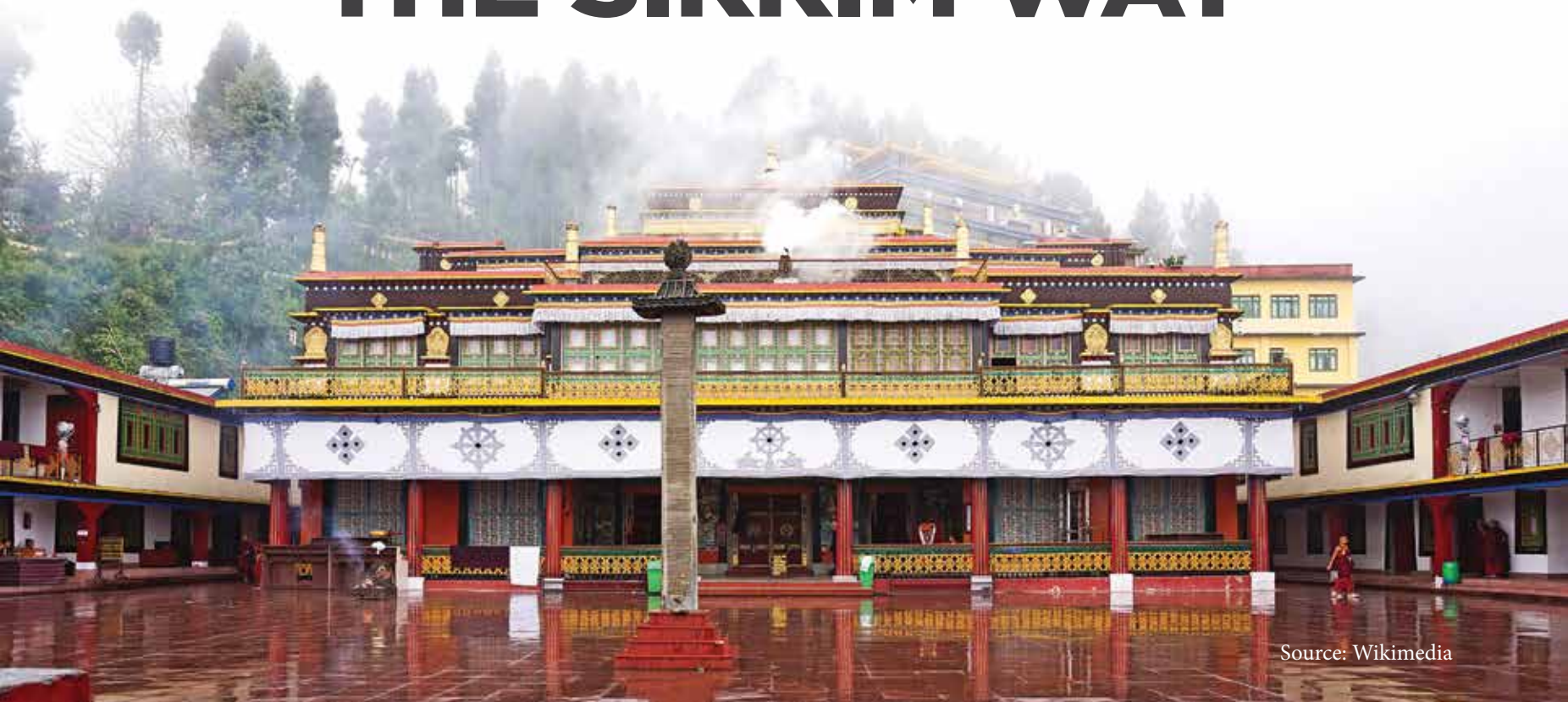
**The MoA will facilitate government-industry interface to encourage students to become innovators and make these institutes vibrant with cutting edge technology to train human resources for industry 4.0.**

commitment to Assam. He said that with evolving technology, skilled manpower was in short supply.

Talking to *Asom Barta*, the Principal Secretary said that the initiative began when the Chief Minister directed him to explore what the Tatas can do for technical education in Assam keeping in mind the unique skill sets of its people while exploring what the corporate group has done in other States like Karnataka and Bihar. "We had a presentation by the Tatas in Guwahati. Once the Chief Minister was convinced that it would be a game changer, we were on it. We managed to bring the Tatas on board in around five months," he said.



# PROTECTING OUR HERITAGE THE SIKKIM WAY



Source: Wikimedia

*The Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs controls the external affairs of monasteries, mandirs and other religious institutions in Sikkim.*

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Established by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev during the 16th century, our venerated satras (monasteries) were the nerve centres of the neo-Vaishnavite movement and are a part of our shared heritage. Over the years, these satras have suffered immensely in the hands of a suspected immigrant population through encroachment and land grabbing. Until now.

Ever since Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma took charge, the Government of Assam have launched a coordinated campaign to remove encroachers from the satra lands. Not only that, the Government has given financial assistance of ₹ 2.5 lakh to namghars while forming a three-member committee to monitor instances of satra land encroachment. While all this is being done, the neighbouring State of Sikkim has a policy prescription which Assam, too, can draw from.

Sikkim has a department to look into and control the affairs of various religious institutions: Ecclesiastical Affairs Department. One of

the most respected departments of the State, it controls the external affairs of monasteries, mandirs and other religious institutions in the State. The Department does not interfere in the internal affairs/ functioning of the religious institutions and organisations, particularly matters relating to religious protocols and ritual traditions. It also looks after Sikkim's religious centres at Darjeeling, Bodhgaya and Sarnath, while preserving sacred hot springs, caves, holy lakes and places of pilgrimage in the State. Currently, the Department is headed by Minister Mr Sonam Lama.

Late last year, the Department decided to revive the revered 233-year-old tradition of Khamsel after a gap of nine years. Khamsel is a triennial exhibition of ancient Buddhist and Tibetan relics dating back to 7th century AD. Held from November 23 to 26, the event saw participation of more than 6,000 devotees across Sikkim and Bhutan.



# UP aims to be a \$1tn economy

## MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS



₹ 6,15,518.97 crore budget for 2022-23 FY,  
₹ 39,181.10 crore for new schemes.



₹ 75.50 crore for women empowerment scheme.  
₹ 20 crore for the safety, empowerment & skill development of women under the Mission Shakti.



₹ 650 crore proposed for the farmers' accident scheme. A maximum of ₹ 5 lakh to be provided in case of accidental death/disability.



₹ 1,500 crore proposed for Swami Vivekananda Youth Empowerment Scheme.



₹ 95 crore proposed for establishment of the International Cricket Stadium at Varanasi.

The UP Government has envisioned a \$ 1 trillion GSDP after presenting a ₹ 6.15 lakh crore maiden budget of the new government for 2022-23. It is aiming to create four lakh jobs in five years while planning a capital expenditure of 1.5 lakh crore with major focus on infrastructure.

For children orphaned because of Covid-19, a UP CM Bal Seva Yojana has been planned with ₹ 2,500 per month to each one of them to support their education and protection. The Government has earmarked ₹ 1,500 crore in the Budget for purchasing two crore smartphones/ tablets over the next five years.

An outlay of ₹ 650 crore is there in the Budget for farmer accident insurance. It is targeting 10,000 start-ups in the State.





# A quest within became game changer



Source: Forbes

Rajlakshmi Borthakur showcasing Xaant, a mental wellness product.

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

On December 8, 2017, while delivering her inaugural address at the 8th Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) 2017 in Hyderabad, Ivanka Trump, the then adviser to the former US President Donald Trump, specifically mentioned three women entrepreneurs in the audience who represented “the vision, the ambition, the grit of every entrepreneur” of the summit. One among the three was Assam’s Rajlakshmi Borthakur, founder & CEO of TerraBlue XT, a healthcare startup.

Before founding TerraBlue XT, Rajlakshmi (or Raji as she is fondly called) had over 14 years of experience with corporate giants ranging from Infosys to EY with the world at her feet. However, the birth of her second child turned her world upside down, albeit temporarily. And thus began a search within which made her what she is today.

Her younger son Tejas has had epilepsy since birth and often required emergency medical care to bring his seizures under control. Hence, Raji with the hope of a better tomorrow for her son dreamt of making a device that could give her some indication of her son’s impending seizure giving her family enough lead time for precautionary measures.

While she was trying to make sense of her son’s problem, it dawned on her that she was better off than many others. While her family had the resources, there were others at risk and those, including parents and even patients, who did not even understand the intricacies of the disorder. These were people that needed more care than her son and there was not much available, either in terms of support or awareness, to make life easier for them. This was the vision that gave birth to TerraBlue XT. The startup has developed smart



A prototype photo of TJay that enables us to detect epileptic seizures.

gloves known as TJay and Xaant (pronounced Shant) which are designed for early detection and management of epilepsy.

The TJay gloves have sensors that extract information from the palm of our hand. This information is transmitted continuously to Poketee, a personal data gateway and intelligent system that comes with TJay. It makes it easier for doctors to arrive at a more accurate and faster diagnosis with the help of real-time data collected over long periods of time.

Post TJay, Raji came up with Xaant, the world’s first wearable medical diagnostic device for the automatic identification of mental health status. With Xaant’s real time data, we can recognize what makes us anxious and angry, enabling us to manage our mental stress better.

She has been felicitated by Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi, while being a recipient of numerous awards: Forbes Women Trailblazer, 2019; Women Transforming India, 2017 by United Nations, Niti Aayog & MyGov India; Innovative Entrepreneur by the Government of Assam to name a few.







Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma exchange pleasantries with Azim Premji, founder chairman, Wipro.



Assam State Biodiversity Board showcasing 48 rice varieties indigenous to the State in an exhibition organised by National Biodiversity Authority in Chennai.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma shares a meal with the students of Sonajuli TE Model School.



Assam Chief Minister at Jyoti Bharati Museum (Poki), ancestral home of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, at Tezpur.



Police and other officials inspecting Phensedyl bottles after recovery of a consignment of over 30,000 bottles in one of the biggest seizures of cough syrup.



Guardian Minister of Cachar district Ashok Singhal before boarding a cargo aircraft of Indian Air Force with relief materials for flood-affected people.



Garukhuti-Kanyaka model



Unemployment can never be an issue in countries which give importance to agriculture. The combination of the usage of advanced technology along with traditional agricultural practices can herald agriculture-led economic revolution in any country. It can happen in Assam, too. As a riverine State, Assam's soil is fertile and water sources are plenty. All that is needed is planning.

In the last five years, initiatives started in Assam's agriculture sector like Kanyaka and Garukhuti are drawing attention. By encouraging the cultivation of exotic fruits like Thai melon, apple melon, dragon fruit, strawberry, litchi, banana, pineapple, etc., these projects have become catalysts in making hundreds of youth self-reliant.

The high quality local products of Garukhuti and Kanyaka projects have received good responses not only in Assam but across India. Those days when Assam had to depend on other States for meat, eggs, milk and sweets during popular festivals like Puja, Bihu, etc., will be history soon.

Agreed, it may not be possible to cultivate thousands of bighas of land simultaneously across the State. Hence, implementation of small scale projects of 50 to 100 bighas on the lines of Kanyaka and Garukhuti projects will provide adequate opportunities for the youths to become *atma nirbhar* while contributing to the State's economy. It is then that we will be able to realise the dream of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma to make Assam among the top five States of the country.

Gopal Jalan

108, MG Road, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati

Importance of technology in farming

It is heartening to see that there is an increasing awareness about farming of various fruits, both exotic and common, among the farmers and the common people. Also laudable is the fact that financial institutions like the World Bank are aiding these initiatives with projects like Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART) besides, of course, farmer welfare schemes.

Even the Department of Agriculture of the Government of Assam has become very proactive. Programmes like 'A Day Out with Farmers' held recently in Bokakhat with support from the Government and Brahmaputra Valley Farmer Producers' Company Pvt Ltd, a local business unit, are frequently being organised in other parts of the State.

It goes without saying that farmers are the unsung heroes who produce food for the people. The prosperity of a nation depends upon the wellbeing of the farming community. Also, what must not be forgotten is the importance of women in agriculture for the overall socio-economic development of a society.

However, those who are now seriously taking to farming as a career option must use technologies to reduce dependence on nature and minimise damage from unpredictable events to become self-reliant.

Abhisekh Singha

Golaghat



Positive step

Is it too much to chase one's dream? I think each one of us has a dream and we end up going the distance to realise it. Although there will only be some who will achieve them, others will continue chasing them. That makes life worth living. It is a very nostalgic feeling to come across young faces with dreams in their eyes and smile on their faces. Just a couple of days ago, I received a phone call from a young girl. She was excited. "I have got through the TET," she told me. Prior to that, another acquaintance met me and said that he has started a regime of sprinting in the morning after filling up the form for police recruitment. I could see a dream in his eyes. He continued, "These days it is not about money. One needs to work hard to get a job," he sounded very confident to me.

I think the initiative by the present Government in Assam has brought hope and smiles on the faces of thousands of youths like the ones above. "How times have changed?" I thought to myself. In the times gone by, the very idea of a Government job, irrespective of your qualification, involved big money changing hands. Things have started getting better now. The hopes and aspirations of these young men and women are set to be fulfilled. We must appreciate the Government for what it has done and pray that it continues like this in the future as well.

Babita Borah

Guwahati

Write to us with your opinion and suggestions at [bartaasom@gmail.com](mailto:bartaasom@gmail.com)

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## EDITORIAL

## Employment Booster Dose

What a pleasure it is to receive a letter of appointment, more so after you have waited for it with bated breath. The mass scale distribution of appointment letters, numbering nearly 23,000, on May 14, must be seen as a red-letter day in the history of Assam. Seldom have we seen an event like these in the past, not to speak of in recent times.

With this action, the new dispensation at Dispur led by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has let it be known to the people, not necessarily his detractors alone, that he stands by the promise made by his party before the election that at least one lakh Government jobs would be created in the State. He may have missed the deadline when he had intended it to, for reasons beyond his control, but that should not take away anything from his Government's intent. The Government has also promised that in the coming months more than 30,000-odd appointments will be made in various departments, thereby taking the overall figure closer to the promised target. What is especially heartening is that the entire process was done in a transparent manner sans controversy.

But one must not be resting on this achievement alone. It must be kept in mind that mere employment in government sectors or departments would do the State no good. The State Government in the times to come must facilitate a greater role for the private sector to generate the bulk of employment in the State. If this does not happen, the Government move would end up as a drag on the exchequer. A vibrant private sector means a growing economy and an increasing taxation purse for any government. This allows it the fiscal leverage of reinvesting in key social sectors, including infrastructure, thereby enlarging the scope for a growth in human capital base.

We have examples in the form of States, mostly in southern India, where Government job creation has been far superseded by a vibrant IT and manufacturing sector so much so that it is becoming difficult for these State governments to attract the best talent despite their best intention. This is a situation that most governments would be happier to be in.

## Creating an ecosystem of development

by Partha Neog



Guwahati, among one of the fastest growing Tier 2 cities in the country, is also a Gateway to South East Asia. The entrepreneurship ecosystem, long stymied by infrastructure hurdle here, is now getting uncaged thanks to measures undertaken by successive governments, as well as the Centre. What should also not be lost on us is the effort put in by entrepreneurs who are competing with more illustrious peers of theirs spread across major metros of India with a much better IT infrastructure, not to mention an existing architecture that allows innovations and innovators to grow.

Under circumstances like this, when I look back at the success of my company, I feel empowered. The Guwahati-based startup Vantage Circle is today a global employee engagement platform designed to transform how people work, connect, and feel. We have reached 1.8 million users with the help of the team, clients, and valuable users. It has acquired some prestigious names in its list of clients like Infosys, Wipro, Airtel, Bosch, Tata Communication, and many more across the globe.

When myself and my partner Anjan Pathak— the CEO and CTO of Vantage Circle— laid the foundation of Vantage Circle way back in 2011, it was the realisation of a dream for us. We were two high school classmates who had a nascent idea of founding our own business, not exactly knowing how to start and where to start. One thing was sure then that it was not going to be from Guwahati, a city bereft of IT infrastructure and not too skilled manpower to boot. It was not that we were undermining our city or State but we were being pragmatic. Any entrepreneur would be looking for aids that would help her/him to have an edge over his competitors. For example, raw materials, market, power and transport in case of a manufacturing business. Similarly, in case of IT, it had to be power, connectivity, bandwidth and skilled manpower. Our efforts culminated in the launch of Vantage Circle. But as fate would have it, within a few years we felt Guwahati will be a better base for long term growth.

But it did come with its own challenges. Initially, it was difficult to get the right talent, particularly in Engineering. But with the efforts that we put in, Vantage Circle attracted some very good developers. The team grew from an initial strength of 10 people to about 150 today. We have also been able to attract people who are not directly connected to Assam, a reverse 'brain drain' if you may call it, on the sheer merit of the company. Over the years, Vantage Circle has become an outlier because despite being from a small city in North East India with limited resources, talent pool, and funding, its innovation has propelled it into being recognised as one of the leading employee engagement platforms in the market.

There were other challenges too which I had referred to earlier like internet connectivity, office space, etc. Vantage Circle experienced a complete shutdown of its internet connectivity during the CAA protest which rendered us *hors de combat* despite tight deadlines and client requirements. However, we did survive. And we thrived. Today, there is a healthy ecosystem of technology-based companies in Guwahati. This has helped in germinating ideas and shared learnings.

There is a lot of talent in the the region now coming from quality educational institutes. If we can change peoples' mindset that things are changing in Assam, we can stop brain drain, which , in turn, can lead to the growth of the city and the region.

The State Government needs to create a buzz around technology startups here. It can also incentivise companies to set up bases with additional investments in transport infrastructure. No one wants to move out of her home unless forced to. I strongly feel there is a bright future ahead for Assam and Guwahati, on its part, can become the Bangalore of the East.

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