

# Asom Barta

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 5 | SEPTEMBER 2022

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

TO SUBSCRIBE WHATSAPP  "Assam" @ 8287912158



## Assam presses accelerator on renewables P3

An MoU with PSU navratna NLCIL will help APDCL generate 1,000 MW of solar power.



## Atal Amrit: A healthy scheme P5

Access to top class hospitals and doctors now made easy by the Assam Govt through its flagship health scheme.



## Crackdown on jihadi intensifies P6

The Assam Police is cracking down hard on jihadi activities in the State and have even put in an SoP for new Imams

## Sovereignty is non-negotiable: CM



### AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has said that the sovereignty of the country is non-negotiable and wholehearted participation of the people in the development journey of the State is a must.

His speech during the 76th Independence Day celebration at the playground of College of Veterinary Science at Khanapara in Guwahati was marked with an appeal to insurgents to join the mainstream. Stating that the sovereignty of the country is non-negotiable, he pointed out at the overwhelming response that the people of Assam gave to the Tricolour in sync with the Har Ghar Tiranga Abhiyan.

"The enthusiastic celebrations and display of love for the Tricolour by the people from August 13 to this day is a lesson for those who dream of an 'independent' Assam," he said.

The Chief Minister's remarks were seconded by many, including a young businessman Jiyarul Haque of Guwahati. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to the nation on Har Ghar Tiranga has proved the unconditional love that 135 crore Indians have for the country. This will surely strengthen India's prestige in the world. The tricolour flying in households across the country is a reflection of the pride and independence of the people of India," Haque told *Asom Barta*.

Paying homage to freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country, the Chief Minister said the State Government will facilitate the visit of 1,000 youths to Cellular

Jail in Andaman and Nicobar Islands this year as part of an educational tour.

He reiterated the success of the State Government in implementing welfare schemes and elaborated his vision to achieve targets set by his Government.

Dr. Sarma urged people to participate with their full might in the development journey of Assam while emphasising his belief that the State has the potential to become one of India's most progressive States. "Assam is moving ahead despite facing many hurdles. Peace is prevailing in the State. Assam's GDP has reached a new high," said Dr. Sarma while listing out reasons for his optimism.

In his address, Sarma announced that his

Government will withdraw one lakh minor cases, including those for social media posts, to reduce the burden on the lower judiciary.

The Chief Minister informed the gathering that ₹ 10,000 crore has been earmarked to improve infrastructure in all Government-run High and Higher Secondary schools in the State. He said the State Government will roll out English as medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics in all the over 4,000 High and Higher Secondary schools based on a Cabinet decision taken by his Government.

Stating that Assam was well on course to ensure Universal Health Insurance, the Chief Minister stated that his Government would extend Ayushman Bharat benefits to 58 lakh BPL families. "All ration card holders will get the Ayushman Bharat card. Around 85% of people in rural areas and 75% in urban areas will be covered under the scheme," he said.

The Chief Minister also informed the gathering that the Government was planning to bring a law on the conservation of wetland to mitigate the problem of floods. "The proposed law will help utilisation of water bodies and check encroachments and construction activities in wetlands," he said.

Referring to his promise during the last Assembly election campaign of creating one lakh jobs, the Chief Minister pointed out that his Government has provided jobs to around 30,000 people thus far while the process to recruit more than 40,000 individuals in the next few months has already begun.

### Har Ghar Tiranga made possible by:

- Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission led the charge.
- Total flags sewn and sold under ASLRM: 39.79 lakh
- Highest production: Ushapur GP, Gabharu Block, Sonitpur (4,700 flags)
- Highset sale: Nagaon District (2,64,131) flags
- Noble Textile, Assam produced: 2.90 lakhs flags
- Assam Khadi and Village Industries Board: 23,000 flag sold





# Musings of a Chief Minister



**Ever since I assumed the responsibility of the Chief Minister of the State, my constant endeavour has been to uplift the education standard in the State. The Cabinet decision to introduce English as a medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics in over 4,000 High and Higher Secondary schools in the State is geared towards that. The people of Assam know that English is not only an important language but also a practical instrument to get employment opportunities while communicating with the rest of the world.**

August is a very eventful month in India for the obvious reason. Not only we celebrate our hard-fought won Independence from the British Raj but we also pledge to preserve this Independence in its true spirit, and commit ourselves to the service of our country. This August took it a step further. It was the 75th year of our Independence, and based on a clarion call by the Prime Minister, more than 20 crore tricolours flew in their pristine glory, fluttering but unflustered, a representation of this country at present. Assam, too, contributed its bit by hoisting 80 lakh flags in the nook and cranny of the State. This act will singularly reinforce patriotism and love for the country. Period.

In order to reinforce this spirit, the Assam Government has decided to facilitate the visit of at least 1,000 youth to the Cellular Jail in Andaman and Nicobar Island. This will allow them to have a feel of the sacrifices made by our freedom fighters in securing the freedom of this land. This will also reinforce in them the spirit of nationhood and importance of struggle in their personal lives.

It is this love for the country coupled with a crackdown on elements working against the interest of the country that India will feel safe and secure. The Assam Police has done a good job in busting jihadi cells operating in the State. These incidents call for vigilance of the citizens and continuous efficiency of the police. Any slip up on any front can be catastrophic for us. My Government is determined to uproot any vestige of terrorism in the State. I am personally keen to bring permanent peace to this land of ours. Having made several appeals to those seeking secession from India to join the mainstream, I must state as clearly as it requires that the sovereignty of the country is non-negotiable. I am a great believer in the power of dialogue to solve conflicting views. It is this view that is driving me to seek solutions to the border rows between Assam and its neighbours. I know that this will take time. Patience heals and so does time. If not today, the solution will be there tomorrow.

Ever since I assumed the responsibility of the Chief Minister of the State, my constant endeavour has been to uplift the education standard in the State. The Cabinet decision to introduce English as a medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics in over 4,000 High and Higher Secondary schools in the State is geared towards that. The people of Assam know that English is not only an important language but also a practical instrument to get employment opportunities while communicating with the rest of the world. Under no circumstances I will allow any language to eclipse my mother tongue. Yet, I am being pragmatic because I have realised that English language can provide a cutting edge to our students to realise their potential. Yes, many of our students and individuals have done well by completing their matriculation in Assamese medium and then going on to make it big in their respective careers. Allow me to state that expecting everyone to be on the same plank would be a mistake. For example, the IT sector which is emerging as the biggest employer globally is mostly run on instructions coded in the English language, whatever the reasons. Isn't it an advantage if our boys and girls are one up on others on this? No where does the policy neglect the Assamese language. In a globalised world, passion must make way for reasoning. I want to assure everyone in Assam that my entire Cabinet is rooting for the growth of the Assamese language, but we cannot overlook the aspiration of our next generation and hold them hostage to our beliefs.

Our Government, ever since it assumed office, had pledged that it will create one lakh jobs in the Government sector alone. Having made quite a substantial progress on this in the last few months, we opened the door for nearly 30,000 Grade III & IV posts wherein more than 14 lakh individuals appeared to secure their prospects and serve the State in any capacity. These examinations were conducted with the utmost transparency and strictest discipline. I want to assure you all that we will bear no laxity in any form in selecting the right aspirants.

We are fully committed to bring this same fairness to our Orunodoi beneficiaries. Those who have been able to migrate to a higher economic status by dint of their hard work will no longer be able to partake of the benefits under the Scheme. They can opt-out voluntarily from the list of beneficiaries. At the same time, new beneficiaries will be added in the list based on an exhaustive household survey which has already begun across the State. It is incumbent on any Government to revisit welfare schemes to ensure that those who deserve are rightfully included.

**Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam





# Assam

## presses accelerator on renewables

### AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

To make a significant contribution to India's commitment to green energy under Sustainable Development Goal 7 and to fortify Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment at COP26 in Glasgow, Assam, too, has decided to rev up its aggregate solar capacity with a series of aggressive steps in that direction.

The first step towards this end was the signing of the historic deal between Assam Power Distribution Company Limited, the production arm of the State Power Department and the Public Sector Undertakings NLC India Limited recently to generate 1,000 MW of renewable power in Assam. The MoU was signed by the Managing Director of APDCL Rakesh Kumar and Director (Planning and Projects) of NLCIL K. Mohan Reddy in the presence of Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Minister for Coal, Mines, and others, Pralhad Joshi at a function held in Janata Bhawan on August 9.

Dr. Sarma termed it a historic day for the State in the field of power generation. He said that since power requirement in Assam is increasing by the day, it was incumbent on the State to respond accordingly with an eye on the issue of climate change, as envisioned by the Prime Minister.

He informed the gathering that Assam will witness investment of an additional ₹ 4,000 crore in yet another project besides the one in question to produce an additional 1,000 MW power.

"This is a Central Government initiative. We have got an in-principle approval of an

Asian Development Bank loan for this. This will be implemented fully by APDCL. So, Assam will see a total of around ₹ 10,000 crore investment to produce 2,000 MW of renewable energy in the coming years," Sarma said.

Union Minister Joshi said that apart from empowering the people with the required energy, the initiative will develop Assam by creating employment opportunities, technical knowhow and overall uplift of the State.

Consequent to a series of deliberation, a joint venture company (JVC) with equity participation in the ratio of 51: 49 between NLCIL and APDCL was inked wherein ₹5,000 crore will be invested in Assam to boost power generation with a resultant growth in economic activities and employment generation.

Rakesh Kumar, MD, APDCL, while talking to *Asom Barta*, said that the JVC is a symbiotic deal. Whereas Assam will profit by way of monetization of unused land, enhanced generation profile of the State and technical uplift, the Navratna CPSU will benefit by way of business expansion to meet its renewable energy target and hassle-free land availability. This, in turn, will ensure economies of scale to ensure the commercial viability of this project.

"Around 2,000 personnel will be engaged during the construction stage and around 1,000 personnel during the operational stage," Kumar said while listing the employment generation ability of the project.

The JVC states that APDCL shall facilitate

the allotment of land, preferably closer to sub-stations of CTU/ STU / APDCL. The JVC shall initially take up solar power projects with an aggregate capacity of around 1,000 MW upon availability of required land from APDCL.

Kumar said that more than 16,000 bighas of land has already been allotted in the name of APDCL which includes 10,000 bighas at Karbi Anglong, 5,000 bighas at Dima Hasao and 1,000 bighas at Bilasipara in Dhubri district. Apart from this, a process of transfer of user rights on 12,261 hectares of the water bodies under the Fishery Department of the State Government is also underway.

Besides this, the APDCL has received an approval from the Ministry of Finance for installation of 1,000 MW solar power plants under its 'Mukhya Mantri Saura Shakti Prokolpo' as reported by *Asom Barta* in its earlier issue.

On August 19, the State Cabinet had approved signing of an MoU between APDCL and SJVN Green Energy Limited (SGEL), a wholly owned subsidiary of SJVNL for development of 1,000 MW Renewable Energy Power Projects by creating yet another JVC.

The APDCL top brass is of the view that the successful commissioning of these projects will not only increase the power generation capacity of the State but also lead to a massive reduction in carbon emission.

State Power Minister Nandita Gorlosa along with several other State ministers, and senior bureaucrats were present on the occasion.



# NEDFi fillip for NE entrepreneurs



Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma with NEDFi CMD PVSLN Murthy(left) during the 27<sup>th</sup> foundation day of NEDFi.

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**A**nanto Boro, a resident of Makeli in Chayygaon Revenue Circle in Kamrup district of Assam, had no idea of business until circumstances compelled him to navigate this uncharted territory. He was the first in his family to step into business: a grocery shop in his village. He says it was made possible by the financial institution called the North Eastern Development Financial institution (NEDFi)

"A business correspondent of NEDFi was in touch with me right from Day One of the opening of my shop. I came to know about its micro lending facility and agreed to take a loan amounting to over ₹ 1 lakh. After submitting the required documents, he did the follow-up for me. An amount of ₹ 1.10 lakh was credited to my account after some days," Boro told *Asom Barta* over phone.

"To repay the amount with interest, I will have to deposit ₹ 3,900 per month for the next three years," he added.

Boro said that he has invested the amount to increase the variety of goods in his shop, which, in turn, was giving him a decent return.

Ila Moral of Sulakuchi in Kamrup started a fast-food outlet near Sankar Mandir in her locality three years ago. Sulakuchi known as the Manchester of Assam has witnessed a spurt in commercial activities in the recent past. "To develop our business, we were looking for cash infusion. It was then that a business correspondent of NEDFi came to us," she told *Asom Barta*. "After due process, NEDFi sanctioned us ₹ 1.20 lakh," Moral added.

The Morals are not only paying instalment on time but also taking care of the school fees of their two daughters studying in a private

**The NEDFi Micro Lending Scheme was launched to help micro entrepreneurs in setting up and expanding their income generation activities at a concessional interest rate, with a loan size of up to ₹ 2 lakh**



English medium school, besides, of course, their household expenses.

Boro and the Morals are among the hundreds of beneficiaries of NEDFi's micro lending scheme being successfully implemented across the North East of the country. "Our micro credit schemes were launched to assist the grassroots small borrowers in unserved & underserved areas of the region. More than 90% beneficiaries in our micro credit schemes are women. This has enabled them to improve their economic status," says PVSLN Murthy, the Chairman and Managing Director of the financial institution.

As if to reinforce his belief in the success of NEDFi, Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma announced a contribution of ₹100 crores by the State Government towards a new "Micro Lending Scheme" launched

by the institution while celebrating its 27<sup>th</sup> foundation day recently.

The Chief Minister handed over a cheque of ₹ 7.89 crore on behalf of NEDFi for 669 borrowers under this scheme.

The NEDFi Micro Lending Scheme was launched to help micro entrepreneurs in setting up and expanding their income generation activities at a concessional interest rate, with a loan size of up to ₹ 2 lakh. The interest rate is fixed at 15% per annum, which, it claims, is the lowest in the domain with a target group of existing and potential micro entrepreneurs and microfinance borrowers.

Addressing the occasion, the Chief Minister congratulated the financial institution for assisting micro, small, medium and large enterprises for setting up industrial, infrastructure projects in the region since its inception.

Dr. Sarma stated that the current dispensations at the Centre and the State are keen to empower the people of the region, especially the youths, through the entrepreneurial route. This, the Chief Minister stated, would give financial independence and employment opportunities to the youths of the region.

"It is our dream to bring down the credit cost for the needy and first generation entrepreneurs through our intervention. We are preparing our best towards this goal. Various new IT initiatives have been rolled out. New products & services introduced to cater to the customised needs of the entrepreneurs. We are reaching out to difficult & far-flung areas for affordable credit directly. This Scheme will help us to fulfil our dream," Murthy told *Asom Barta*.



# Atal Amrit: A healthy scheme



Attendants of patients queuing up at the Atal Amrit counter in GMCH.

**AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI**

**S**ujan Das (43) of Gossaigaon is in a queue behind some 20 other attendants in the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital. It is almost 10am. He is seeking clarity regarding minor expenses incurred for the treatment of his 75-year-old mother's kidney under the Atal Amrit Abhiyan (AAA), a cashless treatment scheme. Sujan is a petty trader in his hometown. He earns just enough to take care of his family. "Had it not been for AAA, I could not have afforded her treatment," he tells *Asom Barta* while waiting for his turn.

As on August 15, more than 3,18,683 beneficiaries like Sujan availed cashless treatment in empanelled hospitals across Assam and some parts of India. Out of these, 1,75,276 are males and 1,43,407 are females.

It is to prevent the likes of Sujan Das and other households from descending into economic hardship because of unbudgeted spending on healthcare that this scheme has been launched by the Government of Assam. It offers them access to quality treatment in 91 Government and private hospitals. Out of these, 68 hospitals are within Assam (9 Government and 59 private hospitals) while 23 hospitals are located outside the State.

The Society has reimbursed ₹ 413.91 crore to these empanelled hospitals towards the treatment of beneficiaries since the inception of the Scheme on December 25, 2016. The Scheme migrated to a cashless model from April 18, 2018.

"It has allowed hospitals, especially Government ones, to have financial mobility. Given their resources they can even earn under the Scheme. At the same time, the poor need not pay at all if they are covered under it," says Siddhartha Singh, Mission Director, AAA,



**The Society has reimbursed ₹ 413.91 crore to these empanelled hospitals towards the treatment of beneficiaries since the inception of the Scheme on December 25, 2016. The Scheme migrated to a cashless model from April 18, 2018.**

and Commissioner, Health, Government of Assam. "Even private hospitals are getting patients who otherwise would not have come to them," he adds.

Managing Director of Nemcare Hospital Dr Hitesh Baruah told *Asom Barta* that on an average 60-70 patients each month avail advantage of this scheme in their burn and cardiology units. "We appreciate this unique initiative of the Government for the welfare of the poorer section of society. We will continue to accord the best of services to them. However, I also appeal to the Mission to clear our long pending bills," he said.

Nayan Bhuyan of Moukhati in Nagaon district was able to navigate the tricky waters of the cost incurred for angioplasty treatment of his mother in Narayana Superspeciality Hospital in Guwahati, thanks to the fact that he had enrolled under it. "The total cost of treatment was a little less than ₹ 2 lakh. Accordingly, I was able to get everything done almost free of cost in one day. There were some minor expenses which are not covered under this, but they were too small for me to bother," he says.

It is open for all BPL and APL families in

the State with an annual income of less than ₹ 5 lakh. It provides inpatient treatment facility at the empanelled hospitals (Private and Public) up to a maximum limit of ₹ 2.00 lakh per individual member per annum within and outside the State of Assam covering 438 procedures for treatment of cardiovascular, cancer, kidney, neo-natal, neurological and burns.

The Scheme was expanded on October 25, 2019 and Vistarita Atal Amrit Abhiyan (VAAA) was implemented to cover areas such as ICU packages, trauma, critical care paediatrics, paediatric surgery, Japanese encephalitis & acute encephalitis syndrome, and supplementary packages.

It now covers 732 procedures for the 12 listed specialties.

Enrolment under AAA is free for BPL people. For individuals having annual family income of ₹ 5 lakh or less, the beneficiaries are required to pay ₹ 100 per person per year. Renewal is done after every year which again is free in case of BPL households and chargeable at ₹ 100 per person in case of APLs. Enrolment of eligible beneficiaries is done in the enrolment kiosks located in the districts.



# Crackdown on jihadis intensifies



## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**A**ssam Police has intensified its crackdown on jihadi elements and their associates in a bid to quell the growing threat of Islamic terrorist organisations, operating mostly from Bangladesh. A series of arrests in the districts of Goalpara, Morigaon, Barpeta and Bongaigaon in the last few weeks have reinforced the threat potential of these organisations. In a latest, two persons linked to foreign groups were nabbed on August 29. The number of person arrested has now gone up to 37.

The Assam Police has also handed over a couple of cases to the National Investigation Agency(NIA) for a detailed investigation after busting sleeper cells in these districts. Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma had personally addressed the media on the gravity of the situation.

“Since March, Assam Police, aided by inputs from Central agencies, have been carrying out operations in lower Assam districts of Barpeta and Bongaigaon. These operations have revealed that six Bangladeshi nationals entered the State to ‘indoctrinate youths,’ and one of them — Mohammed Suman — was arrested from Barpeta in the same month, while five are at large” Dr Sarma told the media.

Subsequently, police busted six modules of Bangladesh-based Islamic terrorist

organisation, Ansarullah Bangla Team(ABT) in the State. It has also accessed vital information and decoded the activities and plans of outfits like Al Qaeda Indian Sub-Continent(AQIS) and ABT.

The Chief Minister said Suman had been living in the “guise of an Arabic teacher in a Madrasa, and also worked as an Imam”. One Mufti Mustafa, was arrested from Moirabari in Morigaon district on July 28. He ran a Madrasa, where children were indoctrinated in ‘jihadi’ ideology. His madrasa in Moirabari was demolished on August 4 because it was constructed ‘without permission,’ the Chief Minister had told the media in his briefing.

“I urge all to stay alert and help the administration in overcoming the challenges posed by these jihadis. Peace-loving Muslim groups have already joined hands with us for the cause. The current situation calls for a higher level of vigilance to defeat these evil forces,” Dr. Sarma said

Meanwhile, Goalpara Superintendent of Police VV Rakesh Reddy told *Asom Barta* that

the police in Goalpara district have arrested two Imams for links to the AQIS and ABT.

“We have found evidence of logistic support given to other jihadis by the two arrested imams. They were also recruiting people for new jihadi sleeper cells in Goalpara and were getting logistical support from AQIS and ABT,” said Reddy.

The SP added that members of ABT were found using highly-sophisticated technology to communicate, rarely using their phones for calls and there was complete compartmentalisation of different modules with members using several aliases.

“Both of them have ties with Jihadi cells earlier busted in Barpeta and Morigaon districts. During interrogation we came to know that both had literature with an Al Qaida connection,” he added.

In order to pre-empt the threat perception, the Assam Chief Minister informed the media that a new SOP was being put in place for new Imams coming to the State (See Box).

## SOP ON OUTSIDE STATE IMAMS

- Portal for Imams and preachers to be out in place.
- Those coming from outside States need to register.
- People requested to inform police on any Imam or preacher seen in their mosque or madrasa.

## Timeline:

- **In March**, Barpeta police arrests Md Suman, a Bangladeshi national. Suman entered India in 2018. He was working as an Imam in a Bhatalipara Masjid in Howly area in the district.
- **April 16**: Barpeta Police arrests six Jihadis.
- **April 24**: Bongaigaon police arrests four jihadis from a village under Jogighopa police station.
- **July 27**: Barpeta police busts a jihadi module, recovers jihadi literature, Bangladesh SIM, sophisticated apps.
- **July 28**: Morigaon police busts a jihadi module, arrests one Mufti Mustafa from Moirabari area in the district. He is a Ph.D on Islamic Law from a University in Bhopal
- **August 20**: Goalpara police arrested two Imams for their links with ABT.

# Grants provide succour to flood-hit



Cabinet Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary along with Chaygaon MLA Rekibuddin Ahmed handing over a cheque to a flood-hit beneficiary at DC office, Kamrup.

**AB BUREAU, RANGIA**

**B**abul Kalita is a 68-year-old daily wage earner. A resident of Korora Gar Bhiton village, he would have ideally liked to be spared by a testing flood this season. It has become an annual rite for him. Having borne the flood with vigour all his life, he is now tired of fighting it. For he knows, age is no longer on his side anymore.

“On that wee hour of June 18, gushing flood water gave me no chance. It just came and turned my life upside down. I lost everything. We took shelter at the Balagaon LP School flood relief camp. Post-floods, I have been staying at my relative’s place. But, how long?” a distraught Kalita questions the heaven. He is now a little relieved, though. “The Government has transferred over ₹ 95,100 on August 20 to my account to help me rebuild,” he tells *Asom Barta*. “At least, the Government is sensitive. I am already thinking of the next flood,” he says, adding that this annual problem is taking a toll on him, mentally.

Kalita and few others of the village have been engaged by a brick kiln owner as a labour at ₹ 300 per day to work in a kiln in Balagaon. “Life is tough for us. Any financial aid to us by the Government makes life bearable,” he adds ruefully.

Romila Das (58), like Kalita, is from Balagaon. She, too, lost everything to surging waters in the June flood. She is thankful to the district administration after getting to know that a rehabilitation grant of ₹ 95,100 has been credited to her through the direct benefit transfer. She, too, wants the Government to solve the problem of flooding.

The case of Rukmini Koiborta (70) is even sanguine. She was forced to stay with her daughter in Balagaon after losing her home to floods. Having been a despondent soul for three months or so, she is getting back her mojo after realising that money has been credited to

her account. “I am alone and not enough is left in this body of mine. This is a big help to me. I checked my account and withdrew ₹ 10,000 on August 23. Today, I have engaged two men to start rebuilding my house,” she says.

These transfers are part of the Rehabilitation Grant Fund through direct benefit transfer (DBT), a scheme launched by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on August 20 for families whose houses have been damaged during the flood.

Apurba Goswami, Lat Mondol of Rangia Circle Office, seconds the difficulties faced by the likes of Rukmini and Romila.

“We had a tough time during the June flood. Shifting people from their houses to relief camps was one of toughest jobs for the administration. This year’s flood in Rangia subdivision areas was the biggest flood in the last one decade,” says Goswami.

“The list of beneficiaries prepared by us has been checked twice. I can claim that there is no mistake in this,” he says.

A total of 2,04,348 houses were damaged in 31 districts, according to official data for which the Government of Assam has sanctioned ₹ 119.11 crore. Beneficiaries in hilly areas will get ₹ 1,01,900 and those in plain areas will get ₹ 95,100 for houses fully damaged. Similarly, those whose houses have been partially damaged will get ₹ 5,200 (for pucca) and ₹ 3,200 (for Kutcha). Those whose huts have been partially damaged will get ₹ 2,100 according to norms of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). Cachar (81,536), followed by Karimganj (28,364) and Nagaon (15,200) district households have been the hardest hit in the flood.

While launching the initiative, Dr Sarma said that 309 families, whose houses have been washed away by flood and are being forced to live on highways and embankments, will get an additional ₹ 1 lakh each from the Chief

- Total affected population : 88.47 lakh
- 4,097 Relief Camps and 5,871 Relief Distribution Centres were set up during floods
- Clothing & utensil grant released: 76.76 Crore (₹ 3,800 per family in relief camp)
- Special grant from Chief Minister’s Relief Fund to 309 families.
- Fully damaged houses : 5,185
- Partially damaged houses : 34,924 pucca houses and 1,53,326 kutcha houses
- Rehabilitation Grant: ₹ 1,01,900 for houses fully damaged in hilly areas and ₹ 95,100 for plain areas
- Number of students who have received special book grant : 1,01,539

Minister’s Relief Fund to rebuild their houses.

Dr. Sarma said that his Cabinet colleagues who visited the district have randomly verified about 20% of the houses damaged.

Altogether 5,185 houses have been severely or fully damaged while as many as 34,924 pucca houses and 1,53,326 kutcha houses were partially damaged, according to State Government data. The Government had earlier released ₹ 76.76 crore to 2.02 lakh affected families as clothing and utensil grant, while ₹ 1,000 was given to each of 1,01,539 students as special book grant.

Dr. Sarma said the Government will focus on rebuilding infrastructure from September. “An assessment exercise is underway for the damaged infrastructure. The final report will be sent to the Centre shortly,” he says.



## Questions

1. How do you see the attitude of the Assam Government in the overall development of your constituency?
2. Please inform us of the development work being undertaken in

**Kaushik Roy, MLA,  
13 Lakhipur Assembly Constituency**



**Ans 1:** The Chief Minister is not merely looking at constituencies which have elected BJP MLAs or MLAs from its allies. In fact, he has been thinking of the development of each of the 126 constituencies in the State. His target is to make Assam one among the five most developed States of the country.

**Ans 2:** We have received grants for a Navodaya Vidyalaya and for the completion of a half-constructed bridge in the name of Kargil martyr Nandachand. Under the Chief Minister Pokipoth Scheme, funds have been received to construct a 25-km road in Lakhipur constituency. Work is already in progress for an indoor stadium at Shivpur in my constituency. A sum of ₹ 25 crore has also been received to start work on the Lakhipur Subdivision Office. Money has been earmarked in the Budget for a Circuit House in Lakhipur. The foundation stone of a Government Law College has already been laid. Even after 75 years of our Independence, there were just three higher secondary schools in the subdivision, in the last one year, we have taken that number to six. Ten model anganwadi centres have been opened while work is in progress on six more.

**Ans 3:** The unprecedented flood this year caused major damage in my constituency. The Government at Dispur was quick to provide relief to the people. The Chief Minister has kept his promise of providing relief funds at the earliest. In my constituency, 121 individuals have received funds for houses washed away by flood while 3,049 individuals have received funds for minor damage.

specific areas like roads, infrastructure, Assam Darshan, education and sports in your constituency.

3. What is your impression of the relief measures undertaken by the Government of Assam during this year's floods?

**RamKrishna Ghosh, MLA,  
91 Hojai Assembly Constituency**



**Ans 1:** Our Government led by Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has continued to direct his energies in giving a facelift to all assembly constituencies of the State. The Government is beginning each day of its to-do list with newer ideas. With a positive mindset, we are ready to go all-out to help the Chief Minister to achieve everything that he has set out to do.

**Ans 2:** Tourism is one area where the Chief Minister has asked us to focus on. He has promised to act decisively on this in the next six months. Under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), a road between Lanka and Jogijan has been built. Under the urban development fund, many roads have been built. A sum of ₹ 50 crore has been allotted to rev up infrastructure of the Rabindra Nath Tagore University. Deshbandhu Vidyapeeth has been declared as an MLA model school. Under Asom Darshan, 25 namghars have been allotted ₹ 2.5 lakh each. Under the Social Welfare Department, ₹ 25 lakh has been issued for each of the 11 model anganwadi centres. An old stadium is being rebuilt with all modern facilities and improved infrastructure.

**Ans 3:** Hojai faced the wrath of two floods this year within a span of a month. This was something unprecedented. The measures taken under the guidance of the Chief Minister were appreciated by all. In the meantime, relief funds have already been credited to the account of those who suffered because of the floods.

## Department Snapshots



**AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI**

**H**ere is a brief round-up of the activities of various departments:

### Panchayat & Rural Development

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on August 21 distributed 6,670 scooters to Bank Sakhis, Bima Sakhis, Jeevika Sakhis, etc., under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission's Sakhi Express Scheme for FY 2021-22 at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra Auditorium. He expressed his hope that sakhis would use these scooters in spreading the message of financial empowerment among women.

Also present on the occasion were P&RD Minister Ranjit Kumar Dass, Guwahati MP Queen Oja, and Dispur MLA Atul Bora, et al.

### Finance

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma launched Orunodoi Month during which the list of beneficiaries will be rectified. Beneficiaries will start receiving Orunodoi benefits at an enhanced rate of ₹ 1,250 from October 10. The flagship scheme has benefited 20 lakh women in whose accounts ₹ 1,000 is credited every month.



### Education

The fourth phase of Gunotsav-2022 ended successfully on August 6. It began on August 3 in five districts of Assam namely, Cachar, Dima Hasao, Hailakandi, Hojai and South Salmara Mankachar, including some left out schools of Barpeta, Kamrup, Lakhimpur and Morigaon districts. A total of 5,20,175 students from Classes I to IX of 6,044 schools participated in the evaluation process.



# Of students and scholarships



**AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI**

**P**ranab Kurmi has nurtured a dream since his childhood. Born amid the beautiful and pristine landscape of Mijikijan Tea Estate in Biswanath district (erstwhile Sonitpur district), he had dreamt of higher education to ameliorate his economic condition and make a career for himself. After years of hard work, he took a giant leap towards his ambition by securing Star Marks in the 2021 High School Leaving Certificate examinations and made his father Bijoy Kurmi proud of his achievement.

It is to encourage the likes of him that the Government of Assam through its Tea Tribes Welfare Department has instituted scholarship schemes to performers dream big in the world of academics.

The Department has launched schemes to allow these students access to secondary and higher education through the pre-matric and post-matric scholarships, Simon Sing Horo Special Scholarship Scheme, and the Financial Assistance for ANM/GNM/Technical Courses. In fact, the Government has a specific portal called SIRISH through which the deserving can apply for their due benefit.

Last year, Pranab became a deserving recipient of two such scholarships. He received

₹ 5,000 under the post-matric scholarship category while also qualifying under the Simon Sing Horo special scholarship scheme for securing Star Marks. “I paid for my admission fee in Higher Secondary with the money that I received under the schemes and bought required textbooks. I am thankful to the Government for thinking of students like us,” he tells *Asom Barta*.

This financial year, the Tea Tribes Welfare Department has earmarked ₹ 29.50 crore while ₹ 21.43 crore were disbursed to 25,585 students in the financial year 2021-2022.

Mrinmoy Sahu, an intern with a Government hospital, graduated from the Swahid Jadav Nath Homoeopathic Medical College. He is a beneficiary of an annual scholarship of ₹ 35,000 meant for higher education. “This money was a great relief for me. Many students unfortunately are not aware of such a scheme. I would request the relevant department to publicise it,” he says.

This is merely one of the attempts of the Government of Assam to add momentum in the uplift of the status of tea tribes, scheduled caste and other backward classes. Scholarships and stipends under various heads have also been instituted for students belonging to different strata of society.

Similarly, under the Directorate of Tribal

**Scholarships under Directorate of Tea Tribes Welfare:**

- **Pre-Matric: ₹ 3,000 per annum**
- **Post-Matric**
  - **Higher Secondary : ₹ 5,000**
  - **TDC: ₹ 7,000**
- **Simon Sing Horo Special Post-Matric Scholarship**
  - **One time incentive of ₹ 10,000 for meritorious HSLC- and HS-passed students**
- **ANM/GNM/Technical Courses ₹ 4,000-₹ 20,000**
- **Higher studies: ₹ 25,000 to ₹ 35,000 per year**

Affairs(Plain), meritorious students of Scheduled Tribes(ST) and Other Backward Classes(OBC) have a ray of hope through its scholarship scheme meant for them. Those who secure over 80% in the HSLC examinations or over 75% under the Higher Secondary examinations qualify for financial assistance. It does not end there. Consistency is encouraged and rewarded. Those who score over 70% in their graduation and 65% in their postgraduation course are financially rewarded by the Directorate.

In the last academic session, 1,830 students qualified under the Scheme. The Directorate has budgeted ₹ 4.50 crore under this head for the academic year 2022-2023.

The Social Justice and Empowerment Department has also launched a special scheme meant for meritorious Schedule Castes students under the pre-matric and post-matric categories. They can apply through the National Scholarship Portal for aid under this category. The Assam Government through the Schedule Caste Welfare Department has earmarked ₹ 16 lakh for students securing above 80% in the matriculation examination in the 2021-2022 academic session.



Pranab Kurmi (left) and Mrinmoy Sahu.



# Pension portal makes life easier



Robin Bora, a beneficiary of the Kritagyata portal.

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**M**anabendra Bhatta of Guwahati and Kalpana Saikia of Nagaon are two former employees of the Government of Assam. Both retired as senior assistants from their respective departments. Manabendra retired on December 31, 2008 from the Department of Culture while Kalpana retired from Karaiyani HS School on June 30, 2022.

Manabendra had to wait for five years to get his pension. "I had to run from pillar to post. From this to that office. I once felt that there was no respect for my service to the Government. 'Did I work with dedication to see this day,' I once questioned myself," he says talking to *Asom Barta* on the phone. "I finally got my first pension in the month of January in 2014. I dread to think of those years when I had no pension."

This episode in the days to come will no longer be part of the post-retired life of any Government employee, if Archana Verma, Principal Secretary, Pension and Public Grievances Department, is to be believed. "We have launched a series of reforms to address or preempt grievances on these lines by launching a portal where pension applications

can be filed and tracked. The Kritagyata portal was launched on October 1, 2020 and has now received a traction with the inauguration of 27 pension seva kendras in various districts of Assam," she says.

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma after inaugurating one such kendra in the office of the Inspector of Schools, Kamrup (Metropolitan) took to the social media to express his sentiments thus: "If we do justice to the pensioners now, we have all the reasons to believe that we will get justice when we retire. These seva kendras will ease hardships faced by pensioners for their commitment to the people of the State."

"The portal was initially used to process the payment of retired teachers. In June 2021, the present Chief Minister asked us to widen its ambit. Accordingly, those working with elementary and higher education, police personnel and employees of the General Administration Department are now being served through this portal. By this year, we are hopeful that all Government employees will be able to avail benefit of this portal," says Manabendra Goswami, Technical Director of National Informatics Centre, the agency responsible for executing this operation. "At

present, we are focusing on training those who will man the pension sewa kendras and also to incorporate more departments under this portal. We are developing a mobile app to make it even simpler for prospective pensioners."

Employees like Kalpana Saikia, Robin Borah and Bhagyaban Doley have benefitted from the portal. So far, 5,654 employees from 55 departments have received their pension payment orders (PPOs) through the portal. "Life has and will become easier for the retired employees in our district. This has given them a lot of satisfaction. They now need to come to the office just once for a signature. A dedicated team will then take care of all formalities," says Kavita Deka, an official of the Education Department, and School Inspector (In-charge), Dhemaji.

Inspector of School, Nagaon, Mridul Kumar Nath says, "Pension Seva Kendras will make it simpler in processing pensions. So far, 295 employees have applied in Kritagyata Portal in our district, out of which 235 have already received their PPOs. There are 17 such individuals who have received their PPOs even before their retirement." One among them is Kalpana.

Generally, district authorities or the head of the departments or competent authorities as the case may be are authorised to start the processing of pension proposals within a year of the retirement.

The reforms in the Department have taken Kalpana by surprise. "I thought I would have to wait for a long time to receive my pension. But even before my retirement, my PPO was there for me to see and feel. I just went to the office to deposit relevant papers and sign. It was surreal," she says.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Bhagyaban Doley, a former assistant teacher of Releha Sapor Primary School in Dhemaji. "I went to the office twice. One day to know which documents to deposit and then to deposit them. I have been receiving my pension since the month of July after retiring on March 31. That it is so easy was beyond my imagination," he says.

# Cabinet boost to health services

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**T**he State Cabinet decision to increase the retirement age of doctors working in government medical colleges from the present 65 to 70 to augment the availability of experienced doctors for educational and medical services in Assam has been appreciated by many.

Dr. Jayanta Kumar Goswami, the head of the Department of Paediatric Surgery, Gauhati Medical College, has termed the decision as far-sighted and historic in view of the ground realities in Assam.

"We have one doctor for every 10,000 persons in the country. The Assam Government decision to set up new colleges and steps like increasing the retirement ages of doctors in Government hospitals is far-sighted and positive. It is the experience of these doctors that will guide the next generation," Dr Goswami told *Asom Barta*.

He said that generally a number of professors teach in private institutions post-retirement. "It would be better if the same experience is utilised in government-run institutions," he added.

In yet another significant decision taken by the Cabinet, ₹ 136.8 crore shall be sanctioned for implementation of free drugs and consumables including the tea gardens' scheme. The Government has said that this will ensure uninterrupted availability of essential drugs, surgicals, sutured, disinfectants, chemicals and consumables in government-health facilities.

Responding to the Cabinet decision, Dr. Jayanta Kumar Das, a doctor in a tea garden hospital in Nonoi in Nagaon, said that this will indeed go a long way in bridging whatever shortfall that arises in tea estate hospitals despite a very robust supply mechanism under the National Health Mission scheme.



**In yet another significant decision taken by the Cabinet, ₹ 136.8 crore shall be sanctioned for implementation of free drugs and consumables including the tea gardens' scheme.**



# Govt to employees: Hard work pays



*Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma along with his Cabinet colleague Ranjeet Kumar Dass and others at Lok Kalyan Diwas celebration.*

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**M**anish Das, Kaku Goswami and Mrinal Saikia are three names that the people of Assam can be proud of. They have defied the perception among the masses that Government employees generally do not work with zeal and enthusiasm for the amelioration of the plebeians.

The trio is among the 10-winners at the State-level of the Lok Seva Award, instituted by the Government of Assam to acknowledge, recognise, and reward the good performance of non-gazetted employees. Besides them, there are 89 others at the district level who have been bestowed the Award.

The award carries a citation, ₹ 25,000 and an extension of one year of their total service. Hence, an awardee of Lok Seva Award will be superannuated at the age 61 years.

The parameters of selecting the awardees were work ethics, punctuality, integrity, and any other yardstick which was decided by the committees constituted to select and evaluate the nominations received.

Saikia, a senior administrative assistant in the Finance Department, thanked the Government for recognising him. "I joined as a junior administrative assistant in 2013 and was promoted to senior administrative assistant in

2019. I am overjoyed today. It is a recognition of my sincere works over the years. This will enthuse employees to bring efficiency in their day-to-day functioning in the office," he told *Asom Barta* on the sidelines of the event.

Goswami, a senior administrative assistant in the Department of Housing & Urban Affairs (T&CP) echoed Saikia. "I joined as a junior administrative assistant in 2010. Right from Day One, I have been performing my duties sincerely. I think this recognition comes to me for my sincere works over the years," he said.

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his speech, said that the celebration on July 5 marked the culmination of Mission Sadbhavana Phase I in Assam. He informed the gathering at the Dispur Playground that under the Mission, the Government could dispose of all petitions received in relation to 2.75 lakh files out of the 3.24 lakh files opened hitherto in the Assam Secretariat. These 2.75 lakh files will now be classified. Some files will still exist in physical form, some will be sent to the archives while a majority will be shredded. He launched the process of shredding of files in Janata Bhawan on the day.

Das testified to this approach of the Government. "I have been with the Personnel

Department since the beginning of my service in the Assam Secretariat. I have noticed, especially in the last one year, that the Government has been emphasising to make the administration efficient. Sadhbhavna will go a long way in achieving this," he said, unable to contain the joy of being a recipient of the Lok Seva Award.

The Chief Minister reiterated that beginning October 2, Assam Secretariat will become a digital or e-office to ensure that people from any part of the State or even outside can petition to the Government for their issues without physically making it to the Janata Bhawan.

Earlier, he paid tributes to Bharat Ratna Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi on his 72nd death anniversary and said that the day shall be celebrated as Lok Kalyan Diwas as a mark of respect to the first Chief Minister of Assam and his unparalleled service to the State and its people.

Minister, General Administration Department, Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Chief Secretary Jishnu Baruah, Additional Chief Secretary, Transformation and Development Department, Paban Borthakur, were among those present in the meeting.

# CM, World Bank discuss EAPs



*Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Martin Raiser, World Bank's South Asia Regional VP (centre) & Auguste Tano Kouame, World Bank India Country Director at Janata Bhawan.*

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**C**hief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma chaired a meeting with a World Bank delegation led by its South Asia Regional Vice President Martin Raiser and India Country-Director Auguste

Tano Kouame held at the Janata Bhawan.

Both the sides discussed the ongoing external aided projects (EAPs) and the proposed EAPs financed by the World Bank. The two sides agreed upon fast-tracking the completion of the remaining portions of the ongoing projects and expediting the approval procedure for launching those in the pipeline.

During the interaction, the Chief Minister praised the World Bank for its wholehearted support in realising the growth potential of Assam. He expressed confidence that the relationship between Assam and the World Bank would grow stronger in the days to come, as the two sides embark upon newer projects and schemes in the State.

Dr. Sarma, in presence of the World Bank delegation, also inaugurated the "State Public Procurement Portal", a one-stop solution to public procurements of various magnitudes and varieties.

He said that the portal is aimed at ensuring transparency in public procurement by the Government of Assam. It is worth noting that this portal is the second of its kind to be launched by a State Government.

Cabinet minister Jayanta Mallabaruah, senior bureaucrats Paban Borthakur and Ravi Shankar Prasad were also present at the meeting.



# A lab of rich culture



*A few exhibits on display at the Riwatch Museum.*



- Ethnographic Museum of Northeast India
- Independent Research cottages to accommodate about 20 scholars at a time
- Model Medicinal Plants garden of 80 varieties of herbs
- Documentation Centre, with state-of-the-art Audio Visual documentation facilities, which is under construction.
- Conference Hall, facilitation for Home-stay with indigenous communities, etc.

Further, Riwatch has been recognised by United Nations University - Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) as a Regional Center of Education in Sustainable Development. It also has study abroad programmes with University of South Florida, every alternative year since 2014. Moreover, it is an affiliate unit of International Center for Cultural Studies, United States.

What makes Riwatch special in the world is its unique approach in bringing ethnic knowledge into academic forefront. This has provided open access for all scholars to interact with ethnic communities in their living environment. To be more precise, Riwatch's approach has made access easy to the "living laboratory of rich culture".

## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Situated in Namsai in the Lower Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh, the Research Institute of World's Ancient Traditions Cultures and Heritage (Riwatch) Museum is one of the best museums of Northeast India. This newly built facility is an institute-cum-museum and is a non-profit, non-governmental, community-based research organisation that demonstrates how cultural empowerment of ethnic communities is crucial for sustainable development.

Its mission is to empower ethnic communities to prosper sustainably by strengthening their value system. An initiative which began with the aim to preserve the age-old traditions of tribes of the region today showcases fascinating exhibits related to the lifestyle of the local tribal communities, including the Idu Mishmis.

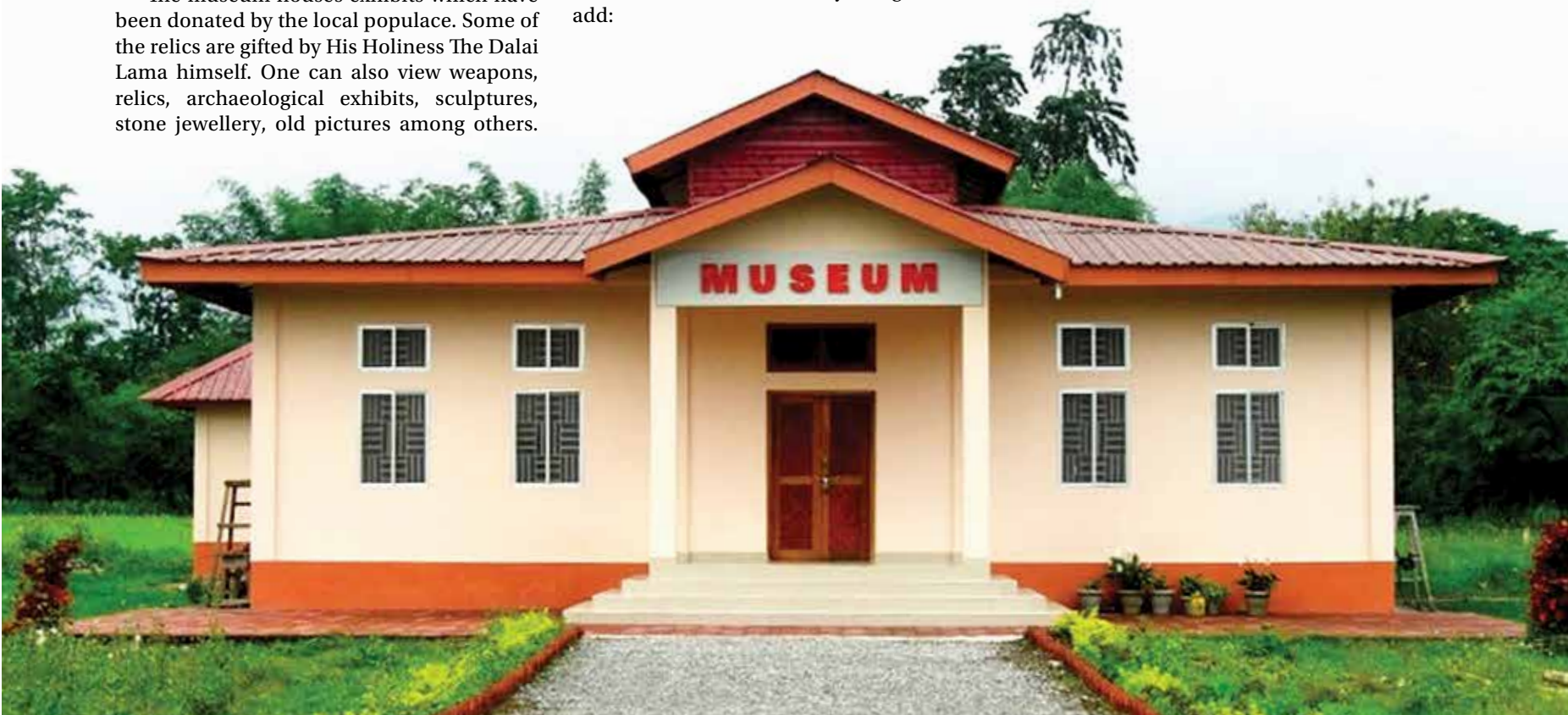
The museum houses exhibits which have been donated by the local populace. Some of the relics are gifted by His Holiness The Dalai Lama himself. One can also view weapons, relics, archaeological exhibits, sculptures, stone jewellery, old pictures among others.

Of special note are the 200-year-old earthen cooking pot and an 80-year-old stone utensil. Also on display is a small family heirloom and tribal attire.

With Assam coming up with more museums to highlight the culture and practices of various indigenous communities, the recent visit of the State Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma to this museum bears significance.

"Delighted to get a glimpse of the rich cultural heritage of various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh during my visit to Riwatch Museum at Khinjili. What's unique about Riwatch Museum is that articles on display here have been contributed by the respective communities free of cost," he tweeted.

Riwatch was born as a project of the International Center for Cultural Studies (ICCS USA) and was founded in November, 2009. Since then, the facility has gone on to add:





# In a League of His Own



Former captain of Indian volleyball team Abhijeet Bhattacharya sharing the joy of the sport with the next generation.



## AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

**D**r. Dibyajyoti Bhagawati, a State Government volleyball coach assigned to Sonitpur district, had envisioned the presence of at least one Assamese in the Indian national team. He worked on an ingenious way to scout for talents. He would visit shops selling shoes to look for those who required shoe sizes of 10 and above. This hunt led him to a young Abhijeet Bhattacharya who would not only fulfil his coach's dream by representing India between 1996 to 2006 but will also go on to captain the national team from 2003 to 2005.

During his early days, the coach convinced the Bhattacharya family to let Abhijeet switch from badminton to volleyball. The rest as they say is history. Hitherto, he remains the only player from Assam to have played for the Indian national team. A record he wants to do everything to change.

Post-retirement, Abhijeet has gone about his goal like a professional. He wants to give back to the game that had given him everything. He wants children from Assam to experience the joy and thrill of the sport.

"The sport is a low investment one, easy to learn and play and can be very entertaining for audiences to watch live. This makes it ideal for rural settings," he says.

His current vision of Volleyball Mission 100 to hunt for Abhijits from 100 villages in the State is a product of happenstance. During the Covid-19 induced lockdown, he conducted online coaching classes for aspiring players across Assam. During a visit

**"Assam has hidden talents. What they need is a sporting environment. BVL aims to be the catalyst to drive this change to empower sportspersons from rural areas..."**

to a village near his hometown, he came across children playing volleyball sans proper equipment. There and then he taught them to make volleyballs with hand towels. This experience left a deep impression on him. He then made it a mission to get them volleyballs and to collect resources for training many others.

When queries began seeping in from all quarters, he organised an online underhand volleyball league to sustain their interest. These simple steps gave rise to the idea of Brahmaputra Volleyball League (BVL), an initiative that has led to a spurt in interest in the sport across Assam. The first edition of BVL had 400 players from 49 teams (33 Men, 16 Women). To overcome fund crunch, he reached out to his peers and friends by asking them to own a team for as low as ₹ 12,000.

Now, BVF has teams adopted by former India volleyball captain Vaishali Phadtare (Dagiapara), former badminton player and Arjuna awardee Aparna Papat (Pub-Nalbari VCC during 1st season, Dhulimar Women's Volleyball team from Dhemaji), former KKR director Joy Bhattacharya

(Bapuji Club VCC), US-based NGO Fass International (Hazarikapara), NRI Debojit Bora (Chaturanga VCC) to name a few.

The League saw better participation during its second season: 2,200 players across 209 teams. It is expecting 300 teams in the third edition. For the record, 116 villages have registered already for the October event.

Speaking to *Asom Barta*, the spiker expressed satisfaction at the initial success of his initiative.

"Assam has hidden talents. What these talents need is a sporting environment. BVL aims to be the catalyst to drive this change to empower sportspersons from rural areas. Beginning Season 2, we started live streaming these matches through our Facebook page. This I believe is providing them the much-needed exposure," he says.

Beyond playing volleyball for the first time, these children are getting the opportunity to participate in an organised competition. This means donning a team jersey with their names on it, travelling outside their villages, and experiencing new things. "All these small things," he says, "spark passion, motivation and joy among the children."

Furthermore, villages where the BVL is played, host the children and others with joy. People donate vegetables, cook and serve meals for the players, and create a micro-system of support to encourage them.

His sheer grit and determination have helped him to instil hope and build an ecosystem of support while enabling these talents to be in a league of their own.





Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma along with Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court, RM Chhaya (in a mask), Justice N Kotiswar Singh & Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass during the inauguration of a judicial court building in Barpeta. The Assam Government has proposed to spend ₹ 300 cr to augment judicial infrastructure in the State.



Chief Minister of Assam greeting his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma during a meeting to resolve the boundary dispute between the two States.



The newly inaugurated Amrit Udyan in Guwahati hosts statues of eight freedom fighters from the eight North Eastern States.



Chief Minister honouring Commonwealth gold medallist Nayan Moni Saikia in Janata Bhawan. The State Cabinet has decided to appoint her as a Deputy Superintendent of Police under provisions of the Integrated Sports Policy of Assam.



Assam Chief Minister along with his Cabinet colleague Ashok Singhal in the house of a 13-year-old girl who died under mysterious circumstances at Praja Pathar village in Dhekiajuli.



Assam Chief Minister during the inaugural ceremony of the 131<sup>st</sup> edition of Durand Cup Football Tournament at Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, Sarusajai. This is for the first time ever in the history of the tournament that the championship is being played in more than one venue.



# State goes gaga over Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

One of the features of India's Independence struggle was the massive participation of the masses. Beginning August 15, 2021 when the country stepped into its 75th year of Independence from the yolk of the British, the Government of India termed the year-long celebration as Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav with a series of activities in India and abroad. *Asom Barta* spoke to a cross section of people in the society on their views on this historic achievement of the country and its people.

**Q1: We have completed 75 years of our Independence. Please share with us your feelings of this year-long celebration leading to this historic day.**

**Q2: How do you envision the onward march of our country?**

## Answers



1. We are fortunate to be part of a free country. I bow down to all those who fought and died for our country to ensure the freedom of successive generations. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav has achieved its desired objective of uniting 130-crore Indians under one umbrella. It is very important to have nationalistic feeling and I think the next generation will continue to preserve this tradition.
2. In the last 75 years, we have faced challenges on the social, economic and political fronts. We have come a long way today by overcoming many such challenges. We need to be aware of our individual responsibility towards our country. Let us remember that with freedom comes responsibility.

**Dr. Dimpy Pathak Das, Assistant Professor**  
**Assam down town University, Guwahati**



1. I am proud to be celebrating Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. Despite 75 years of our Independence, we are yet to know of many martyrs of the freedom struggle. Through various programmes, street plays, we are getting to know many of these freedom fighters. My personal observation is that in this celebration, we have overplayed the Tricolour. I have seen our flag being neglected in many places. We need to be cautious about such incidents in future.
2. As an ordinary Indian, I would like to see the nation progressing on all spheres. Schemes alone will not help, their implementation at the grassroots is the way forward. A prime example being agriculture. For all those schemes envisaged, their implementation is not even a fraction. Same with health and education.

**Ripankar Saikia**  
**College student, Gohpur**



1. The completion of 75 years of our freedom is a moment of pride for us. The youth of the country has always been at the forefront of all the struggles, including the freedom movement. We are a nation of young people. At least 66% of our population is less than 35. We have a lot of hope from these young assets of our nation.
2. In the coming days, I expect the youth of the country to spearhead our forward march. They can contribute towards building a self-reliant rural economy. Agriculture, animal husbandry, self help groups are areas where the Government of the day can encourage the participation of these youths.

**Nipon Boruah**  
**Accountant, Nagaon**



1. The celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav has been a defining point in my life. As an Indian, I feel privileged to be part of this journey. The masses have even greater responsibility in building the nation following the sacrifices of all those who laid down their lives for the country.
2. Our biggest challenge is to ensure social, economic and political justice for the masses. We need to rid society of all differences to strengthen the realise the true meaning of freedom. Our people have proved themselves in the last 75 years. The need of the hour is to advance on this achievement.

**Sangita Sarma,**  
**Advocate, North Lakhimpur**



1. Celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav is a joyous moment for all Indians. Our GDP growth, our higher education, especially the IITs; our polio campaign, our diplomatic achievements, our pharma sector are some of the areas where we have left a mark on the global map in the last 75 years.
2. Yes, in the coming years, we have a lot on our plate to be counted among the powerful countries of the world. We need improvement in our per capita income, our education and health sectors, research, FDI, employment generation and population control policies.

**Snigdha Das(Dhubri)**  
**Pursuing M.Tech, Tezpur University**



1. I was thrilled and overwhelmed to see the tricolour flying high from August 13 to 15. We followed what the Prime Minister of the country Narendra Modi had appealed to us for. It was the culmination of unity in diversity that our country has always shown to the world.
2. It is believed that our country is the fountainhead of all knowledge. The New Education Policy which the Government of India has initiated keeping in sync with this reality will, I believe, take us forward in all spheres.

**Madhusudan Upadhyay**  
**Retired Head Master, Tamulpur**

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



## EDITORIAL

## Solar is the Key

The month of August saw a flurry of activities in the socio-political and economic landscape of Assam. The most remarkable among these was the signing of a memorandum of understanding which led to the formation of a joint venture company (JVC) between Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), and the public sector power giant NLCIL (formerly Neyveli Lignite Corporation India Limited) to produce 1,000 megawatt of solar power across locations in Assam.

The fact that the JVC is a 49:51 venture with NLCIL as the major partner signals a decisive shift in the way the Government of Assam enterprise is now being seen by the outside world. It has already been emphasised across media outlets that the APDCL has, since the last year or so, been getting its act together. Today, not only does the discom is among the ones with the lowest debt burden vis-à-vis other discoms in the country, its earning is also inching up. The feather on the cap is that the APDCL has shown the confidence of handling itself as an almost equal partner in a JVC with a much-fancied power utility company in NLCIL. In one sense, it is also a vote of confidence in the ability of the State Government to handle debts, a fact which the Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma alluded to in his speech during the MoU signing ceremony.

Coming to the project, it goes without saying that the future of the world will lie in its ability to harness renewable energy. Not only do we owe it to the present generation, but to our progeny as well. This is also part of India's commitment to the world to go carbon free by 2070.

The notable aspect of this deal is that the erstwhile economically underdeveloped districts of Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Dhubri will produce the lion share of solar power. It will lead to direct job creation in thousands while boosting the local economy. In the words of the Chief Minister, this is merely a beginning and more such projects are being envisaged by Dispur.

However, what should also be kept in mind is that even solar power production can lead to carbon footprints in the form of solar panels which are hazardous thereby demanding careful handling: A fact that should not be lost sight of.



## Go all out on Act East

by Gurjit Singh

The enunciation of the Act East Policy by Prime Minister Modi at the ASEAN India summit in 2014 was a significant one. The objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern region with other countries in our neighbourhood.

AEP provides an interface between all States of North East India and the ASEAN region. Various plans at bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of the North East with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.). Some of the major projects include Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats, etc.

Besides showing greater intent to undertake cooperation with ASEAN countries, it showed clarity that the cooperation would spread over all the three pillars. So far, the economic pillar had dominated and the socio-cultural pillar had been a traditional area of cooperation. Now, the political security pillar was given equal importance.

Another significant aspect of the Act East Policy was the emphasis given to the North Eastern States. They are the closest in proximity to Myanmar and Thailand. These are two ASEAN countries with whom India has land accessibility. Significantly, the two major projects under India's Act East Policy, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project and the the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, both are connectivity projects for North East India to Myanmar and Thailand. These are covered under the rubric of not only the India-ASEAN engagement but also under the East Asia Summit and BIMSTEC.

Upgrading connectivity between North East India and the ASEAN countries is intended to increase economic engagement and mutual development. Funds from the Ministry of External Affairs have gone into developing the trilateral highway and the Kaladan multimodal project, but those funds cannot be spent in India. India has to create its own resources or, as is now becoming evident, Japan is being invited through the India North East Forum to contribute to the development of North East.

India and Japan established the Act East Forum (AEF) in 2017 for the development of the North Eastern region of India (NER) and to promote connectivity within this region and between this region and Southeast Asia. AEF reflects the synergy between India's AEP and Japan's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The scope of activities under the initiative will be covered under the umbrella of AEF and will build on the inherent strengths of NER. This document will be updated periodically by including or modifying the projects through mutual consultation and consent. Agriculture, development of agro-industries, especially through SMEs, promotion of tourism and cultural exchanges, promoting Skill India, cooperation in development of urban areas, providing healthcare, promoting sustainable use of forest resources, development of new and renewable energy, disaster resilience, connectivity are among the areas to be possibly covered under that AEF but these segments can be acted upon by individual States as well.

The connectivity assets being built with ASEAN countries are meant to augment the development and prosperity of the North Eastern States. Practically, what can be done?

First, there is the need for matching infrastructure in India. Once the trilateral highway comes up, Indian States would have the requirement of good roads so they may reach Moreh, from where they can access Myanmar and then Thailand. Secondly, there must be a vision, which goes beyond border trade. At present, border trade is the main trade and new avenues need investment. Some efforts with Japan have been made to look at the bamboo industry and the related industrial clusters. There has to be a thought-out process for every State to have a complementary industrial investment which will lead to productivity which can use the new infrastructure for better market access.

Thirdly, this should be thought out as a value chain concept for the region instead of every State making the same thing. There could be a differentiation of priorities using local materials and capacities available. Fourth, the building up of infrastructure within the North Eastern States would also open up market opportunities among themselves.

The advantages of infrastructure, connectivity and trade facilitation must be grasped by the North Eastern States in a fulsome manner.

*(The author is former Ambassador to Germany, Indonesia, Ethiopia, ASEAN and the African Union and Chair, CII Task Force on Trilateral Cooperation in Africa)*

## Editorial Advisory Board (Honorary)

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

Bishnu Kamal Borah, ACS, DIPR, Assam

## MEMBERS:

Wasbir Hussain  
Anuradha Sarma Pujari  
Gurmail Singh  
Bijay Sankar Bora

## MEMBER CONVENOR:

Sikha Saikia, Sr. Information Officer