

Asom Barta

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Crackdown on drugs

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Home Minister Amit Shah told NE CMs that the Centre will not relent in the fight against drugs.



President's visit

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The President's Assam visit was marked by launching of a number of projects.



Art is divine

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An artist from Nagaon has taken his and Assam's art to the who's and who of the world.

Grand celebration to mark Lachit's 400th birth anniv



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing the media on the Government's road map towards the 400th birth anniversary celebration of Lachit Barphukan.

SABIR NISHAT, GUWAHATI

Come November 24 and all roads will lead to Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi for the concluding function of the year-long 400th birth anniversary of 17th century Ahom General Lachit Barphukan. The day is observed as Lachit Divas in Assam.

The Government of Assam is pulling out all the stops to organise the event in the national capital in a big way.

The two-day event on November 23 and 24 at Vigyan Bhawan will showcase the exploits of one of the great warriors of Eastern India who defeated the formidable Mughals in the great Battle of Saraighat.

The Government aims to bring to national limelight the great warrior, who is hitherto lesser known in other parts of the country. To make the event a resounding success, a series of programmes have been lined up to project the great Ahom General in proper perspective.

The Government of Assam is holding discussions with Assamese organisations and media persons of Assam based in Delhi on showcasing the heroic deeds, valour, and patriotism of Lachit to the rest of the country and to give the great warrior a pride of place in the annals of history.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the two-day event.

"The Chief Minister is taking special interest in glorifying the illustrious life of Bir Lachit



Barphukan on the national stage and give the great warrior the rightful place in the annals of history," said Assam Minister for Information and Public Relations, etc., Pijush Hazarika, adding that the Government's aim is to glorify the heroic deeds of the Ahom General globally.

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma is leaving no stone unturned to make more Indians aware about the great Ahom General, who became a legend in his lifetime. The Chief Minister, through a letter, has requested his counterparts in other States to include a chapter on the warrior in their textbooks for school and college students.

The Government of Assam is fully geared up for branding the event in a big way in Delhi-NCR through publicity blitzkrieg. Pyrotechnics will be put up together with exhibition and two seminar sessions throwing light on the life and times of Lachit Barphukan. A book on Lachit Barphukan will be released and a documentary

will also be screened. The rich cultural mosaic of Assam will also be showcased. Eminent personalities from Assam will be invited to the event together with 200 college and university students with backgrounds in History.

As part of the celebrations, a Mobile App and a Web Portal lachitbarphukan.assam.gov.in have been launched by the Chief Minister wherein people can get wealth of information on the legendary warrior and can upload write-ups which will enable them to get certificate of appreciation from the Government. Essay competitions will be held in schools and colleges across the State and the best essays will be awarded at the district and then at the State-level. A preformatted physical booklet will be given in which the participants can pen down on the warrior and upload on the portal. Assam Police will conduct a march past in which National Cadet Corps will participate. "The purpose behind this massive exercise is to turn the epoch-making event of Lachit Barphukan's 400th birth anniversary into a mass movement. That will be a fitting and lasting tribute to the great hero," quipped the Chief Minister.

On February 25 this year, the then President Ram Nath Kovind kickstarted the 400th birth anniversary celebrations of the 17th century Ahom General at the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati and laid the foundation for a war memorial and a 150-foot bronze statue of Lachit Barphukan. Kovind also launched the beautification and repair work of Barphukan's burial ground in the Jorhat region.



Musings of a Chief Minister



The month of October began on a very auspicious note with the blessings of Maa Durga on people across the country. This year it was special since there were no Covid-related restrictions that had marred the previous two years. Assam was fortunate to have a productive visit of India's Home Minister Amit Shah who made the Centre's priority towards the State and the region very clear. He was straight to the point on all counts: Making Assam floodfree in five years; use of mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction in early schooling, thwarting the use of 'dirty money' and 'organised mafia' to damage the country's economy and national security, etc. On the latter, he told the chief ministers of all the States of the region that drug trafficking is a borderless crime and spoke of better coordination between all drug and law enforcement and Intelligence agencies in the bordering districts of the North Eastern States to tackle the menace. Here was a Home Minister who had no ifs and buts, he was an exemplar of decisiveness, something which I am sure we all can learn from.

He deliberated on issues related to inclusive growth and development in the region during his meeting with the North Eastern CMs and Governors. This means that he had progress of the region uppermost on his mind, a goal which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been relentlessly pursuing since he became the Prime Minister of India.

In pursuance of the same objective, my address in New Delhi at the round table of USISP Forum focused on our inherent strengths - geographical, natural resources, flora & fauna - coupled with enabling policy push guided by the vision of the Prime Minister that I had outlined above. This has, today, made Assam a powerhouse of opportunities. The Three Ts: tea, trade & tourism, offer enormous possibilities for businesses and coupled with how we've been working relentlessly on creating a robust environment for investments through a bouquet of policies, I am sure Assam is a destination investors would like to miss at their own peril. My speech was backed by the confidence that I generated after we had signed a spate of MoUs with leading corporate houses both Indian and global across several sectors. These MoUs will result not only in the growth and development of Assam but also transforming the region into a 'New Engine of Growth' as our Prime Minister refers to the North East of India.

If at all one needed a testimony to my claims, I am glad to share with you all that on October 5, with 132 aircraft movements & 17,591 passengers at LGBI Airport Guwahati, the numbers crossed pre-Covid statistics. It is a signal that we are back to normal and ready to steer Assam's economy to a new high with an admixture of manufacturing and services besides the key sector of agriculture.

Just prior to the Festival of Lights, we announced the results of the Assam State Level Recruitment Commission for Class IV posts. The entire process of conducting the examinations to the declaration of result was very effectively carried out sans any hiccup. I must compliment the team, who had worked day in and day out to get the kind of process in place that I am referring to. It is a renewal of our commitment to ensure a corruption-free and transparent employment generation opportunity in the State.

Our Government also took a humane decision of enhancing the daily wage of Home Guards, whose effectiveness go unreported most times, by two-and-a-half-times to ₹ 767 per day. I am sure this will not only give them a dignity that they deserve but also pave the way for improved education and health for them and their children. I must admit that we have not done them a favour, rather we feel it was what we owed them for a long time.

I distinctly remember that it was a home guard who had, by his exemplary courage and honesty, refused to be lured by any sort of temptations in Karbi Anglong and helped in the arrest of drug peddlers. That was the day that I had renewed my own resolve to crack down on any drug-related activity conducted in Assam no matter what. I and my Government have faced relentless criticism on this, but thanks to the support of the Assam Police and other stakeholders, we have made life miserable for those dealing in drugs. Statistics alone will not be a benchmark of this success but when I observe the resolve on the face of an Assam Police personnel, I rest assured and conclude that the campaign against drug trafficking is in good hands.

Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

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Crackdown on drugs to continue: HM



Union Home Minister Amit Shah destroying drugs by pressing a button.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said that drug trafficking is a borderless crime and called for better coordination among all drug law enforcement and Intelligence agencies and bordering districts of the North Eastern States to tackle it. He said this while chairing a meeting with chief ministers, chief secretaries and director generals of police of these States on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' in Guwahati on October 8 during his three day visit to the State. He reiterated this during his meetings with home ministers of various states in a chintan shivir in Surajkund in Haryana in the last week of October.

The meeting in Guwahati discussed the drug abuse scenario in the region and ways to mitigate it. It was also attended by the Union Home Secretary, Director General of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and other senior officials.

Shah said that the spread of drug smuggling is very fatal to any society. "The

damage caused by any terrorist incident is limited, but the spread of drugs in the society destroys the generations. Just like a termite it makes the youth power of our society and the country hollow," said the Union Home Minister. He said that in the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, the Ministry of Home Affairs has strongly resolved to fulfil the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Drug-free India'.

"The Government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has adopted the policy of zero tolerance to thwart every attempt by the 'Dirty Money' of drug trafficking and 'organised mafia' to damage the country's economy and national security," said Shah.

He said that the Ministry of Home Affairs under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to curb the menace of narcotics.

About 40,000 kg of narcotic drugs were destroyed across the region during his visit. Shah witnessed the destruction of the drugs

"The damage caused by any terrorist incident is limited, but the spread of drugs in the society destroys the generations. Just like a termite it makes the youth power of our society and the country hollow"

virtually from the conclave venue. The Narcotics Control Bureau in Guwahati burnt 11,000 kg of confiscated drugs while the Assam Police destroyed around 8,000 kg of contraband.

He emphasised the use of modern technology in curbing drug trafficking and establishing coordination among all the agencies.

Shah said that the success of the strategy to destroy the supply network of narcotics in the country is very much visible in this short span of time. He said that the seizure of narcotics after 2014 has proved it. During 2006-2013, 1.52 lakh kg of drugs were seized which doubled to 3.30 lakh kg between 2014-2022.

He said that the main objective of this regional conference is to put the seriousness of the Centre on this subject in front of the North Eastern States.

"We have to bring a synergy by bringing the States together in this fight, bringing all the agencies related to narcotics on one platform and giving a message at the national level that now the country has made up its mind to go to the root of this problem and solve it," added Shah.





HM chants mantra on NE devp

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's three-day visit to Assam was marked by a series of decisive actions and vision plans for the North East of India, in general, and Assam in particular.

Whereas he made an affirmative declaration to end the problem of flood in five years, he asked chief ministers of all the North East States to make full use and benefit of NESAC data for flood control, irrigation, tourism, afforestation and agriculture. On this, he event suggested that all States of the region should appoint a nodal officer for NESAC in their states so that maximum and better use of this platform can be made.

The Union Home Minister added that a flood-free region is very important for the Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Emphasising the measures to prevent floods, Shah added that the purpose of hydro power plants is not only to generate energy, but they can also be used in flood prevention.

The Union Home and Cooperation Minister said this while presiding over the 70th plenary meeting of the North Eastern Council in Guwahati. Union Minister For Culture, Tourism And Development of North

“The Indian economy is currently ranked fifth in the world and financial discipline by the North Eastern States is necessary to contribute to making it second in the world”

Eastern Region, G. Kishan Reddy and Minister of State for Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and Ministry of Cooperation, B L Verma, the governors and chief ministers of all the North Eastern States were present in the meeting.

In his address, Amit Shah said that there were three major hurdles in the path of development of the North East for decades – violence and unrest by extremist groups, lack of rail, road and air connectivity and absence of thrust on development of the region by previous Governments.

“The development of this region was never a priority for the previous Governments. But under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Centre has made many efforts in the last eight years to bring peace



Home Minister Amit Shah being felicitated at a meeting of NESAC Society.

here, to increase connectivity and to give priority to the development of this region,” said Shah.

Shah said that the whole of India considers the languages, cultures, cuisine and costumes of the North East of the country as its heritage and the Central Government is making every effort to preserve and promote the natural identity of this region.

Shah said that the Government believes that all-round development of the country is possible only by taking all the languages of the country together and accordingly a provision has been made in the new National Education Policy that primary education should be imparted in the mother tongue.

“The Indian economy is currently ranked fifth in the world and financial discipline by the North Eastern States is necessary to contribute to making it second in the world,” added Shah.

Highlighting the importance of natural farming and digital farming, Shah said that natural farming and digital farming are a matter of priority for the Government of India and the process of forming a multi-state cooperative society by merging Amul and five other cooperatives for certification of natural products is also started. He said that after certification of these products, this cooperative society will also ensure their export, so that the profit will go directly to the bank accounts of the farmers.



Home Minister Amit Shah during a cultural programme.

Prez hails Assam, NE progress



President Droupadi Murmu inaugurating a supercomputing facility and laboratory for the design and development of high power microwave components at IIT Guwahati.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

President Droupadi Murmu launched a slew of projects during her whirlwind visit to Assam, her first visit to the State after becoming India's President.

She started off her tour in the State by inaugurating a supercomputer facility and laboratory for the design and development of high-power microwave components at IIT Guwahati besides a medical college and hospital at Dhubri and laid the foundation stone of a National Institute of Virology on Day One.

In her speech, the President stated that research and innovation at educational institutions, particularly those engaged in higher education, is critical. She pointed out that India has a long historical tradition of research and knowledge creation and this needs to be further strengthened to make India lead research and innovation in the 21st century.

The President said that the North Eastern region of India is making rapid strides towards development and the region is making extraordinary efforts to provide high quality healthcare and education systems to the people.

She noted that the Government of Assam is setting an example by providing support

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to IIT Guwahati to set up an advanced multispecialty hospital. She said that it will serve as an example for other esteemed institutes in the country to undertake similar initiatives.

Murmu said that various projects of Central and State governments and the consequent progress of the region will set a foundation for making India a technologically advanced nation and an inclusive society.

Later in the day, the President, in a reception hosted in her honour, said that the Government of India has given special priority to the development of the Eastern and North Eastern regions of the country. "It has adopted the Act East Policy which has linked South East Asia with the North Eastern region, including Assam. With this change, the development of Assam is getting an international dimension," she said.

The President said that there is immense potential for the tourism industry in Assam. "Assam attracts tourists because of its enchanting destinations like 'Manas' and 'Kaziranga'." The Central and State governments are preparing a better ecosystem for the development of tourism," added President Murmu.

On the second day of her visit, she laid foundation stones for various projects of the

Government of Assam as well as the Union ministries of road transport & highway, petroleum & natural gas, and railways

These include inauguration of Railhead Depot of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. at Moinarbond, Silchar and two highway projects; laying of foundation stones for - 100 model Secondary Schools in the tea garden areas of Assam; 3,000 model Anganwadi centres; two highway projects; and modern Cargo-cum-Coaching Terminal at Agyathuri, Guwahati. The President flagged off a train from Guwahati to Lumding Pass up to Shokhuvi (Nagaland) and Mandipathar (Meghalaya).

The President said that the North Eastern region is rich in natural resources. She noted that Assam contributes 13% of India's total crude oil production and 15% of its total natural gas production comes from the North Eastern region. She expressed confidence that the state-of-the-art depot at Moinarbond will help in meeting the petroleum products requirements of the Barak Valley as well as that of Tripura, Manipur, and Mizoram.

The President said that the Central Government is giving special attention on road and railway connectivity in all the North Eastern States including Assam. She expressed confidence that various projects related to road and railways of which foundation stones laid/inaugurated will increase tourism opportunities apart from enhancing trade and transportation in the region.

The President said that the safety and all-round development of women and children is the sign of a civilised society. She lauded the Assam Government for opening 3,000 Model Anganwadi Centres. She expressed her happiness after laying the foundation stones for 100 Model Secondary Schools meant to provide better education for the children of tea garden workers.





NMBA campaign on the march

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

It was sometime in 1980. On an undisclosed hilltop in Shillong, Simanta Das had first tasted a banned substance. In about a month’s time, he was fully into substance abuse. After 15 years, he enrolled himself in a rehabilitation centre run by Dr Chiranjib Kakoty in Guwahati and managed to get the camel off his back. But his cup of woes was not going to end so soon. He started drinking alcohol. By this time, he had sold off his house in Ulubari, in the heart of Guwahati city, and a godown as well and started living on the platform in Guwahati Railway Station.

Often, he used to harbour suicidal tendencies, but the fear of death and the jest for life brought him back into the fold of Dr Kakoti in the year 2000. “In this tumultuous phase, I would often reflect on the hell that I was in. I used to entertain the thought of jumping before a moving train. Somehow, I could not,” said Simanta.

It is to prevent the Simantas of the world from descending into terra incognita that the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched Nasa Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA), a sensitisation campaign across the country to wean the youth away from the lure of drugs. “This campaign is the need of the hour. Drugs had physically, mentally, and financially made me weak and vulnerable,” he

told *Asom Barta*. “If you do not put a lid on it at the very start, especially when you are young, you are staring down the barrel,” he added. He is now spearheading a campaign against alcohol, drugs and substance abuse through his organisation ‘Sobriety Foundation’ in the city

The NMBA kicked off across the country on August 15, 2020 in 272 districts identified as most affected ones based on a national survey conducted by the Ministry as well as supply side inputs from the Narcotics Control Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs, in 32 States and Union Territories. Out of the 272 districts, nine are from Assam namely Cachar, Dhubri, Hailakandi, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metropolitan), Karimganj, Nagaon and Udalguri.

It has been a slow starter in Assam, but there are districts in the State which are showing the will to fight. “This programme must be introduced to the youth and be incorporated in curriculum at the school level to have a lasting impact,” Das opined.

According to data, there are 20.4 lakh substance users in Assam. Of them, 8.05 lakh are using opioids, 6.3 lakh use ganja while 3.4 lakh are frequent users of inhalant and 2.4 lakh use sedatives. What is worrisome is that over 3.3 lakh of these addicts are children. A Ministry official told this reporter that what

has come as a surprise is the increasing number of women who are into drugs.

Kamrup (M) ADC Kalpana Deka rationalising the initiative said that more than the rehabilitation campaign, it is the sensitisation that is of importance. “We are working on major areas under the campaign. One is to bring back a substance abuser to the mainstream, the other, which I think is more important, is to create awareness among the youth on the ramification of substance abuse,” she told this reporter, and added that top psychiatrists, artistes, social activists and media professionals have been roped in the process.

Manindra Adhikari, District Social Welfare Officer, Goalpara informed this newsletter that schools and colleges are being used to create awareness about the NMBA campaign. “We organised a rath yatra on June 27 and 28 to create awareness on the subject, especially in sensitive areas,” he said.

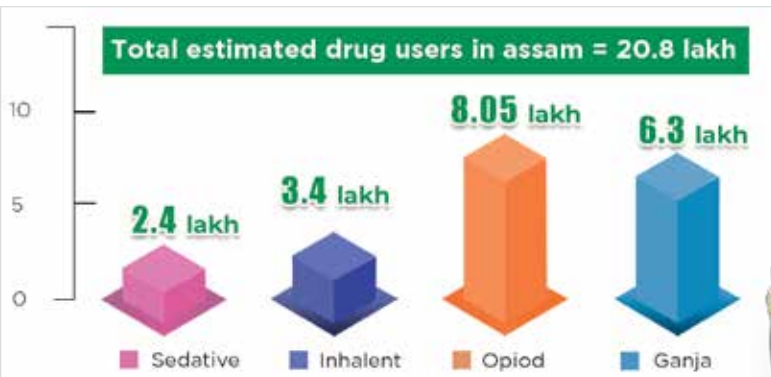
In the Kamrup Metropolitan district, Uttaran Welfare Foundation, an NGO, has been engaged to offer training to NGOs, volunteers, and even government employees.

The State Government has time and again let its seriousness known to the people. Recently, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Pijush Hazarika expressed his displeasure at the state of a rehabilitation centre in Guwahati. He even convened a meeting of stakeholders running such centres and directed them to put their house in order.

The persistent drive against drug peddlers have resulted in seizure of ₹ 655.40 crore of banned substances in the last one year or so, while leading to the arrest of 4,750 individuals in 13 months beginning August 1, 2021 and ending on August 31, 2022.

Experts believe that sensitisation efforts coupled with a drive against drug peddlers and users can only make the effort achieve the desired objectives. “One is lame without the other,” an official said, on condition of anonymity.

- Child Substance Users In Assam - 3.3 Lakh approx
- Female Substance Users In Assam - 50,000 approx



Ready, Startup, Go



Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma during his visit to The Nest recently.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Ranjit Baruah, David Gogoi, Mousum Talukdar and Rupam Choudhury are a new breed of entrepreneurs who think and even act differently. They travel the road less travelled and defy odds. And today they are the cynosure of all eyes. They are among a handful who are rewriting the Assam Start-Up story, a tale of hope and opportunities in the State.

No wonder, Assam has been recognized as a Leader (Category A) in the States' Startup Ranking 2021 in developing a strong startup ecosystem in the State by Government of India.

A lot of the credit also goes to Assam Startup: The Nest, an initiative by the State Government to create a start-up ecosystem in the State. The vision of this initiative is to create a culture of entrepreneurship in Assam by promoting and empowering the youth to become job creators and pursue their entrepreneurial dream thereby transforming Assam into a leading Start-up hub in the country.

The Nest is an end-to-end ecosystem and facilities like conference rooms, video conferencing facilities, 50 MBPS dedicated high speed internet connectivity, plug, and play workspaces, design, and testing labs. Apart from these facilities, Startups receive various services such as business assistance, financial counselling, accounting assistance, legal and regulatory guidance, and access to mentors and investors.

It is here that the mettle of the likes of Baruah was harnessed. His start-up is centred around tea. It began with the realisation that small tea growers of Assam were unable to fetch the right value for their quality products due to inadequate knowledge of market demand and lack of market connections. "I am grateful to Assam Startup. I have learnt ethics and the fundamentals important to start my business venture. Interaction with mentors here would surely help us in taking challenges," said Baruah.

IIM Calcutta Innovation Park as operating partner anchors all entrepreneurship-related efforts with Nest acting as the hub and other existing incubators across the State as its

spokes. Most of the facilities available in Nest are free of cost.

Pranjal Konwar, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Assam Startup, said that theirs is a much-needed initiative to catalyse the economic growth of the State.

"Here we explain to trainees the importance of entrepreneurship and the challenges involved in setting up an enterprise. The very first idea we have been trying to impart to everyone here is that they should be a job provider and not a job seeker," said Konwar.

Assam Startup has prepared a multi-stage intervention blueprint. The four different stages of this blueprint are i) Inspire (Ideation), ii) Ignite (Idea to prototype), iii) Incubate (Commercialisation) and iv) Invest (Scale-up).

"I collect teas from small tea growers. I have been trying to add value to our teas. Most of my teas are organic. We have produced Bhoot Jolokia tea, Blue Tea (Aparajita tea), Insulin tea and many more. We have learned the importance of value addition of products during our incubation period at the Assam Startup," said Ranjit Baruah.

He added that good branding of products is very important. "I had learnt all these basics of how to grow your business in my tenure at the Assam Startup," said Baruah.

Konwar said that for helping the Startups with financial aid, Government of Assam has introduced My Assam Startup ID (MASI). "Startups found eligible for MASI can apply for grants up to ₹ 50 lakhs for scaling up their business. So far, 292 applications have been evaluated out of the 368 applications received and 125 startups have been granted assistance," said Konwar. Zerund Manufacturing Private Limited, being one such beneficiary.

It has mastered a non-polluting process to manufacture bricks made from plastic waste, organic chemicals, and fly ash. These are weatherproof, light weight and cost 15- 20 % lower than the regular bricks.

The trio of David, Mousum and Rupam graduated from Assam Engineering College and joined Assam Startup in its very first year. "We are grateful to Assam Startup for

Capacity building trainings in The Nest

- Basic financial tools, valuation/how to present financials for funding
- Legal compliance & accounting
- Branding & Marketing and Digital Marketing
- Training on Central and State Government facilities and support
- Pitching – presentation to the investor
- Communication

imparting us all the basics on how to start a new entrepreneurial venture. Lectures by faculties from IIM, Kolkata helped us a lot," said Gogoi, one of the founders of Zerund.

All these success stories have prompted the Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma to comment that India's start-up ecosystem is creating waves in the world. The nation's start-ups are constantly improving and growing, adapting to new situations with changing times.

"This has been a steep progression from its previous recognition of being an Emerging Startup Ecosystem. The State has been acknowledged as a Mentorship Champion for building a large mentorship network for Startups. It is indeed an encouraging achievement for the youths of Assam to take up entrepreneurship on a much larger scale," said the Chief Minister.

Nest has, so far, carried out 74 outreach events, reaching out to over 15,000 students, young innovators, and aspiring Startups across every district of Assam. Initiating the Hub and Spoke model, it has, so far, signed 43 collaboration memoranda with top universities and colleges.

Cancer care goes a notch up in Barpeta



Patients and their attendants at the reception of Barpeta Cancer Centre.

AB BUREAU, BARPETA

Bhanita Pathak (45), a resident of Pat Bausi area near Barpeta town is a breast cancer patient. She was diagnosed with breast cancer almost ten months ago. Her first chemotherapy was in Chennai but once the Barpeta Cancer Centre (BCC) was inaugurated, on January 29 this year, she took her second dose right in her hometown, avoiding all costly paraphernalia that came with the disease.

“My cancer was detected about ten months ago. When my doctor told me of this fact, I rushed to Chennai with two family members for my treatment. I took my first dose of chemotherapy there. Today, I am here to take my second dose,” Pathak tells *Asom Barta*.

She is all praises for the hospital and the government. “There is no difference in doctors’ treatment here or there in Chennai. It is cost effective and time saving. Moreover, cancer patients need rest. I am happy that we have a good cancer hospital in our district,” she says.

Chaiful Islam (54), a resident of Chatla area in lower Assam’s Bongaigaon district is a Laryngeal cancer patient. “My initial cancer treatment started a year ago at the B Barooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati. Today, I am here at this Centre to take my radiotherapy dose. Doctors’ advice to me was that since this hospital is near my hometown, I should take my radiotherapy treatment at the BCC. I am an Atal Amrit Abhiyan card holder. My entire cost here is free,” says Chaiful.

The Centre has come as a blessing for people of the district and nearby

“My initial cancer treatment started a year ago at the B Barooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati. Today, I am here at Barpeta Cancer Centre to take my radiotherapy dose. Doctors’ advice to me was that since this hospital is near my hometown, I should take my radiotherapy treatment at the BCC. I am an Atal Amrit Abhiyan card holder. My entire cost here is free”



-Chaiful Islam

districts. Statistics suggest that a good number of patients accompanied by their caretakers have flocked to this newly constructed cancer hospital for treatment. This 135-bed BCC has state-of-the-art infrastructure.

Of late, there has been a spurt in the number of cancer cases across the State, including districts in lower Assam.

A unit of Assam Cancer Care Foundation, a joint venture between the Government of Assam and the Tata Trusts, BCC became operational on January 29 this year, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the centre along with six other cancer care centres of ACCF in the State, through the virtual mode.

“Each day, we have a lot of patients. The reason being Barpeta and its surrounding districts have seen a spurt of cancer cases, of late. We will procure advanced medical equipment like a PET Scan facility in the Centre in the months to come. The treatment would go a level up then,” says Dr Satya Narayan Sharma, the Medical Superintendent of BCC.

Dr Sarma says that since the day of its opening to October 15 this year, 6,804 OPD (Outpatient Department) consultations have been completed. “The Radiotherapy wing of the Centre is the most sought after. The laboratory in the Centre has carried out 11,200 tests hitherto.”

Dr Sharma said that the location of the Centre has helped in reducing financial and emotional burden on the local population, who otherwise would have travelled to Guwahati or outside the State for treatment.

“We have cases of reverse flow of patients. Cancer patients who were earlier treated out of the State are now coming back to us. This is good in many ways for patients. We are providing better cancer care facilities than many known hospitals in the country,” says the confident superintendent.

Dr Sharma said that detecting cancer early is half the battle won when it comes to cancer care and treatment. “Early detection of cancer is possible when people are aware about the disease and consult doctors. We have set up a kiosk on this alone. The idea is to create awareness among the people about the disease. Awareness is the first step towards prevention of any disease,” Sharma sums up.



MoUs galore as State seeks to expedite growth



(Left) MoU being exchanged between HSSC and ASDM; L&T signing an MoU with Labour Welfare Department and SEED.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Brahmaputra River has always been a lifeline of Assam. It is turning out to be a saviour once again, this time for its youth because of the six MoUs and an MoA signed on October 17 by various departments of the Government of Assam (GoA) with leading companies operating in India. Most of these were conceived during a journey in the river when the Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma called up a senior IAS officer, who was on his way back from Majuli, to work on ways to get the youth of Assam employed in the private sector with meaningful jobs and growth opportunity. These MoUs and the MoA will bolster employment opportunities for the youths of the State and provide them with the skill sets to be on their own in this competitive world.

Among the companies that the GoA has inked MoUs with are Google India, Microsoft, Indian Hotels Company Limited, Tata STRIVE, L&T, Healthcare Sector Skill Council, while the MoA was signed between Info Edge India Ltd (more popularly known as Naukri.com) the Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department (SEED). (Please see box for details)

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma told the gathering that these understandings and agreements will contribute immensely to the overall development of the State. He said that leading Indian and global corporations becoming part of Assam's growth trajectory is a positive indicator for the State. MoUs with Google and Microsoft while bringing in employment opportunities is a big stride towards digital

- Google and Assam Skill Development Mission MoU to support and accelerate the Government of Assam's mission to promote digital growth and development in the State.
- Microsoft Corporation India Pvt Ltd. (MCIPL) in collaboration with ASDM will launch the Microsoft Diversity Skilling Program (MDSP) and Cybersiksha Program to enhance technical skills and knowledge.
- The Department of Labour Welfare & SEED will engage L&T, which through its Construction Skills Training Institute (CSTI) will be offering knowledge and support for construction of Skill Training Institute for the construction sector.
- The MoA between Info Edge (India) Ltd. with SEED will enable the Directorate of Employment & Craftsmen Training (DECT) to share its database with naukri.com to provide an online platform to the candidates.
- The objective of the MoU between Healthcare Sector Skill Council (HSSC) with ASDM is to mobilise the unemployed youth of Assam for skill training.
- Through the MoU between IHCL, Tata Strive and ATDC, a skill centre will be set up in an under-construction building of Omiya Kumar Das Institute, Sonapur in collaboration with the Government of India.

education. He specifically mentioned that the MoU with IHCL will result in a skill centre being set up at the upcoming infrastructure of the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development in Sonapur near Guwahati. "This will result in raising capable human resources in the tourism and hospitality sector," the Chief Minister said.

Sanjay Gupta, the Google country head, and its vice president appreciated the efforts of the Assam Chief Minister in taking steps to step up the use of digital technology and

development. "We are proud to inform you that just last month we have been able to incorporate Assamese language in Google Translator app," he informed the audience in his speech.

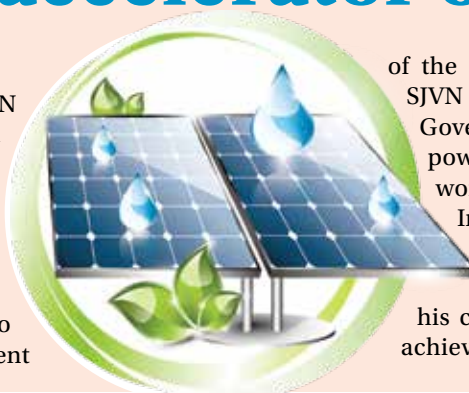
Also present in the meeting was State Power Minister Nandita Garlosa, SEED Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, Labour and Tea Tribe Minister Sanjay Kishan, Additional Chief Secretary Maninder Singh; Principal Secretary, SEED and Labour Welfare Department B Kalyan Chakravarthy, et al.

Assam presses accelerator on solar energy

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The APDCL and public sector company SJVN Green Energy Limited on October 17 inked an MoU to produce 1,000 MW solar energy through floating solar panels in wetlands in the State. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his address, termed the MoU as another step in making Assam self-reliant in power generation.

He said that ₹ 6,000 crore shall be invested to achieve the target. APDCL will invest 49% per cent



of the capital while the balance shall be invested by SJVN Green Energy Limited. He said that the State Government was also contemplating to invest in power projects outside Assam, while stating that that works on projects with financial assistance from Oil India Limited and the Asian Development Bank to produce 1,500 MW will begin soon in the State.

SJVN Green CMD NL Sharma said that his company will accord full assistance to Assam to achieve the objective set out by the State Government.

Govt eyes ₹ 6 trillion GSDP by 2025

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Assam Government is targeting a GSDP figure of \$75 billion or nearly 6.15 trillion in Indian rupee by 2025. This growth would be led by a thrust on connectivity, infrastructure, and policy support. This was stated by Principal Secretary, Finance, Government of Assam Samir Sinha at the two-day conclave organised by the Pratidin Media Network in New Delhi recently.

He said that Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has outlined a vision to take Assam among the top five States in India.

He spoke of the reform measures undertaken in Assam and those in store to make this vision successful. Sinha highlighted the impressive 12.58% Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) clocked by the State between 2016-2021.

Drawing the attention of the gathering, Sinha, who is also the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, said that Assam has leapfrogged to the Achievers category along with advanced coastal States by achieving over 90% score in the Leads22 rankings.

He emphasised the importance of private sector investment to fuel the economy. Justifying the limitation of public spending-led growth, he said that unless consumption, income and remittances show marked improvement, sustaining a government-fuelled spending growth of an economy like Assam becomes difficult. He compared Assam's scenario to that of other States like Jharkhand, Punjab, Gujarat, Kerala, and



Principal Secretary Samir Sinha delivering his lecture at the conclave.

Maharashtra to draw this conclusion.

Sinha outlined the importance of rapid urbanisation in the State to attract investment by highlighting how China became a darling of investors across the world through its singular focus on urbanisation.

The senior bureaucrat highlighted why Assam is an ideal choice for investors to come. He said that the State is at the centre of 1.88 billion consumers in ASEAN and BBIN markets. He said that Assam has 1.3 billion MT of proven oil resources, four refineries with capacity of 7.1 MM TPA and 156 billion cubic metre of natural gas reserves.

Sinha spoke about the seven operational

airports, Assam which would soon act as hub of air traffic emanating from and to SE Asia and the extensive network of roads and highways as well as the inland waterways.

Citing the case of the industrial growth centre in Matia in Dhubri, the Principal Secretary highlighted that it was the only industrial park in India with access to four countries within 750 km range where India's total exports is \$17 billion.

Earlier, inaugurating the conclave, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke about the importance of the development of North East India as the country advances in its quest to become self-reliant or atma nirbhar.

CM charms investors



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma being honoured by an official of USISP

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma spelt out his vision of his Government, especially his Dispur's relentless efforts and initiative in creating what he called "a robust environment for investments through a bouquet of policies" in a meeting of the US India Strategic

Partnership (USISP) Forum in New Delhi recently.

Dr Sarma told the gathering that Assam's inherent strengths - geographical, natural resources, flora & fauna - coupled with enabling policy push guided by the vision of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made the State a powerhouse of opportunities.

"From tea to trade & tourism, we offer enormous possibilities for businesses," he told the high-profile gathering.

Earlier, Mukesh Aghi, president and CEO of the Forum, in his address, said that the high profile delegation in India was there to assess and discuss India's economic outlook ahead of the Budget in 2023, and a look at how States like Uttar Pradesh and Assam are drawing new investments, on the eve of India's assumption of the G20 presidency,

The USISP is an independent not-for-profit institution dedicated to strengthening the US-India partnership in Washington DC and New Delhi.



MLA hopes to turn Nazirating fortune around



MLA Suren Phukan, 123No. Digboi Constituency



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Nazirating-Tamuli under Digboi constituency is a place pregnant with tourism potential. The constituency MLA Suren Phukan, since his childhood, had a fascination for the place. Once he became its MLA, he took it upon himself to convert a place known for picnickers to a place with tourism potential. In 1901 when the Britishers had established Asia’s first oil refinery. To ensure potable water, they set up a water supply project in Nazirating, some 14 km away from Digboi.

The local MLA has been working to strengthen the rural economy of the area since 2019 with the help of enterprising local youths. His is a constituency dominated by the Morans, a tribal community in upper Assam. Since then, he has taken several steps to bring the area to the notice of the outside world. Papu Gogoi, a young man, says, “Last year, the MLA cooperated with us to clean the river by digging it. He has undertaken several measures to beautify Nazirating in the last couple of years. We have set-up a few cottages and homestays besides a Rang Mancha. The MLA has taken steps to improve road connectivity.”

Just a kilometre away from Nazirating is a village full of forest. Set up in 1965, this village called Tamuli Nagar is being identified by the locals with tourism potential. At the initiative of the MLA, a three-day Nazirating-Tamuli Nagar Festival beginning January 1 each year is now being organised by the locals since 2021.

“The festival was launched to boost the rural economy in my constituency. Around 100 self-help groups on an average participate in the festival to sell their produce. Besides, Moran Bihu, Tai Bihu, Jhumur, Singpho Nepali dances are performed by dedicated artistes. Last year, we had five lakh people on the last day of the festival,” he informs *Asom Barta*. “We are looking at some value-added initiatives in and around this area, especially related to wildlife because the area has a lot of wildlife species.”

He informs this reporter that he has made partial use of MLA fund in taking this initiative while some of the fundings have come from his personal initiative and other from well-wishers.

Department Snapshots

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

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

Home Department

The State Government on October 19 through the Home Department has increased the daily allowance of Home Guards in the State from ₹ 300 to ₹ 767 thereby benefiting nearly 24,000 home guards in the State. This decision has effectively made the monthly earning of a Home Guard as ₹ 23,010, a steep hike from the previous ₹ 9,000.

Department of Welfare of Tea Tribes

The Assam Chief Minister on October 17 attended ‘Humdar Moner Katha’ in Janata Bhawan in Guwahati where seven sub committees of the tea tribe community presented their recommendations on seven key focus areas for overall development of the community. During the meeting, he told the tea tribe representatives that his Government will formulate short term, mid term & long term plans for implementing these suggestions.

Finance Department

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma met MLAs, DCs and representatives of district-level monitoring committee of all districts of the State through video conference on October 20 to review Orunodoi beneficiaries’ list. The Chief Minister directed the committees to prepare a fresh list within 10 days based on a survey done by college students and exclude or include names by citing proper reasons.



Morigaon Police ploughs agri reform



Home guards working on a farm in Morigaon.

AB BUREAU, MORIGAON

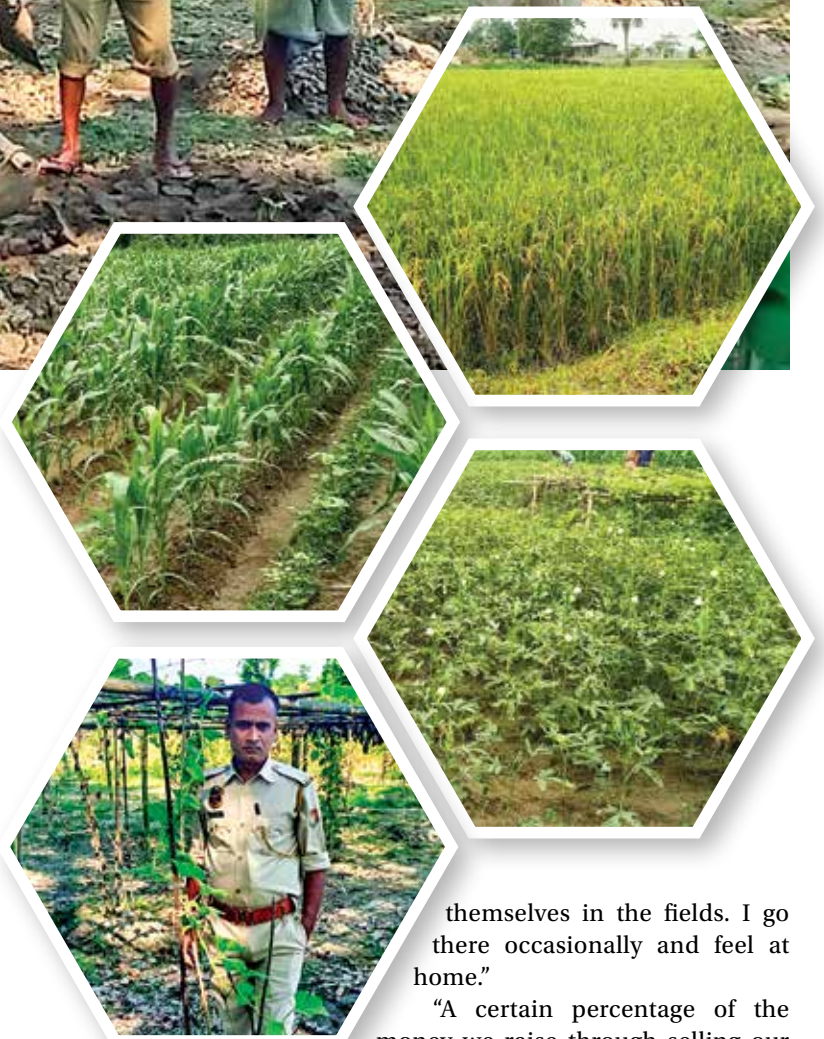
On a fine but misty December day, home guards Nazir Hussain and Abdul Salam presented themselves to Boribazar Police Patrol Assistant Sub Inspector Munindra Chandra Das for their posting. They would be posted in the camp for the next few months. Here they would, during their free time, voluntarily work on cultivation of Boro Rice Variety on the 15 bigha plus land allotted to Morigaon Police.

On the other hand, home guards like Baharul, Abhijit, Dulal, Dilip, et al, in Oujari Police Reserve are passionately looking after the 21 bighas of land near their reserve where they cultivate mustard, corn, bottle gourd, ladyfinger, and ridge gourd whenever they are free from their primary responsibility. While some water these plants, others are busy weeding out the wastages.

Cut back to a February afternoon, police personnel in Lahorighat Police Station were treated to a diet of vegetables grown in the farm around the Oujari Police Reserve in their lunch. This was based on the hard work of some of their colleagues, who had toiled the two fields.

This initiative had an interesting beginning. The then Morigaon Superintendent of Police, Aparna Natarajan, was inspecting the land allotted for Boribazar PP on a day in the month of September or October of 2021. She saw around 15 bighas of land lying idle. She was told by the local police official that the land was fertile. Besides, she came to know that there was idle land in Oujari as well. "This is a collective effort of Morigaon Police," she told *Asom Barta* of the success of her initiative. "There was a consensus in the police that by the time construction begins on the land allotted, the police should utilise the two plots for agriculture whenever they were off duty. We started with mustard, and then moved on to vegetables while in the land in Boribazar, we started paddy cultivation. This may not be a project on a huge scale, but the very idea is a success story for Assam Police," she told this reporter.

The overall produce figure presents a success story to boot: Nearly nine quintals of mustard, over five quintals of corn, over four-and-half quintals of paddy. Bharat Chandra Das, an assistant sub-inspector of Morigaon Police, who has volunteered to oversee the initiative told this newsletter that they have managed to raise ₹ 1.25 lakh by selling mustard, corn, and paddy in the open market. "The sales proceeds have been deposited in the Police Fund Unit. We generally distribute vegetables in the police barracks, cantonment and among officials in the district administration," he said. "Our jawans are happy involving



themselves in the fields. I go there occasionally and feel at home."

"A certain percentage of the money we raise through selling our produce has been invested in buying pump sets, and other tools. We have also released seven quintals of fishlings in the pond at our Boribazar plot which had low land," Aparna informed this reporter. Das informed this newsletter that the fishlings in the pond now weigh about a kilogramme while also talking of the Sali Dhan cultivation in Oujari, besides other vegetables.

"We have been supported by the District Agriculture Department here. They have given us inputs from time to time, including making vermicompost. Besides, neighbours around our land in Oujari gave us cow dung, ploughs, spades, etc., in the initial stage. In return, we gave them some of our produce, especially vegetables," said Constable Akhtar Hussain, hinting at the trade off mechanism which is historic to this district courtesy the Jonbeel Mela.

Dibyajyoti Hazarika, Assistant Inspector of Agriculture, Morigaon told *Asom Barta* that he was excited to see the police coming forward with ideas on agriculture. "Once in a while I come and interact with them. If they need my advice, I offer that as well. This initiative can be replicated by many other departments who have a land bank across Assam," he said.

Incidentally, the police are not claiming that their agricultural produce is 100% organic, but those working on the field vouch that it is, almost.

Painting a movement



AB BUREAU, NAGAON

He was then merely five. One of the best-known artists from Assam Pranab Barua had opened his Roop Rang School of Drawing and Painting in the heart of Nagaon. Kshama Das, the mother of the toddler, enrolled her son in the school to learn a thing or two about painting or drawing. The prodigious child who had started feeling paints, brushes and the papers under the tutelage of a top artist later became a *Guinness Book of World Record* holder for sketching a portrait by using the largest paintbrush. The boy was Sujit Das.

"I am the son of a middle-class household. My father Kamakhya Chandra Das started Biswanath Mistanna Bhandar, said to be the second sweetmeat shop in Nagaon. I was told by my father that even Lokopriyo Gopinath Bordoloi was a customer. When the business shut down, we opened a cycle stand near Krishna Cinema Hall, next to our house. I had my first earning from there: ₹ 1. I bought colours and painting brushes from my first earning," he reminisced.

He is an eminent name among those who are into manuscript and folk-art painting in Assam. "In 1995, my mentor Pranab Barua showed us paintings from *Chitra Bhagvat* and asked to draw any two paintings from there. That was my inspiration. Watercolour was not mainstream then and nor was it in extensive use for manuscript paintings. However, with time, I started studying more about the medium through various books and became familiar with it," Das told *Asom Barta*.

In his college days, he used to even draw on hoods of rickshaws to generate pocket money. "Alongside my involvement with working on book covers, comics and newspapers, I roamed about the nook and cranny of villages to understand the rural life of Assam which had inspired these folk-art and manuscript paintings. In the meantime, I also came in touch with mask artist Devakanta Hazarika and learnt from him the usage of colours and materials in mask making and understanding



manuscripts. In no time, I realised Sattriya culture had seeped into my being," Sujit told this reporter.

He also received a fellowship from the Centre for Culture Resources and Training of the Ministry of Culture to research manuscript and hand-written works like *Kalikapuran*, *Haribanshapuran*, *Chitra Bhagavat*, and various artwork included in the *Bhagavat*.

His varied experience has helped him exhibit his works in various States of India and around the world and conduct workshops on Xattriya art forms. Starting with Dubai, he has since exhibited his works in Russia, Cambodia, Egypt, Indonesia, Singapore, China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and other European nations. "My most memorable experience was in Russia. The Russians are generally inclined

towards Indian art and cultural forms. They have always warmly received this form of art," he said.

Champak Borobora, an artist, has all praises for Sujit. "I have known him since his childhood. His exceptional concentration is noteworthy. At a very young age, he has taken Assam's manuscript painting to an international level," he told *Asom Barta*. "He has undertaken a great initiative to preserve a tradition by opening an art school to promote what he practices."

From His Holiness The Dalai Lama to Duke of Cambridge Prince William and Kate Middleton are among those who have appreciated his art form. "I am sure Xattriya, Tai, Rajagharia (Royal) and folk-art forms will find their standing around the world," he said.

When he started getting exposure after his visit to other countries, Das felt the need to preserve the heritage of such a rich cultural tradition. It was then that he conceived the idea of an art village which he established in his residence. This is the biggest privately held art gallery and museum in the State. "Some 15-years-back when I had dreamt of an arts village, I had no money. A project like this sans Government patronage was inconceivable. However, I exhausted all my savings, took a loan from a bank and on March 14, 2021 amid the second covid outbreak, we managed to open the arts village for the public," the artist said.

The Art Village has invaluable manuscript paintings, sculpture, puppets and masks from different countries, an Ahom era boat, remnants of the British era and those from World War II, besides a floor dedicated to practice and discussion of Xattriya culture. The walls of the art village are decorated with folk paintings like Khusmora Manuscript Paintings, art forms of tea tribes, etc. The theme of the art village is life of rural Assam.

A massive believer in the capacity of the new generation, Sujit Das is a milestone for talents to look up to.





Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a meeting of the home ministers of various States during the chintan shivir in Surajkund in Haryana. Union Home Minister Amit Shah was also present during the programme.



Tourists enjoying Kaziranga National Park after it opened in early October for visitors.



Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and other dignitaries in Guwahati during the appointment letter distribution ceremony under Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Mela.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika inspecting the erosion caused by the River Brahmaputra in Maijan in Dibrugarh



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma inspecting the construction activities of the Brahmaputra riverfront project in Guwahati.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Minister of Law & Justice Kiren Rijiju, judges of the Supreme Court, and chief justices of high courts at a seminar in Kaziranga.

Solving Boundary Rows

The latest efforts by the Government of Assam to solve boundary rows with neighbouring States like Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are laudable. These efforts should have come a lot earlier. Any dispute at the inter-State boundary makes life difficult for its inhabitants. There is no disputing the fact that if these negotiations attain its formal objectives, these residents at the borders will chart a different trajectory for themselves.

Even at the international level, the border dispute between India and Pakistan is still lingering in various ways although there is no doubt as to the territories owned by respective countries.

Even China is brazenly violating the McMahon line limits to occupy Indian territories. Russia, a powerful country, is eying Ukrainian territory. Palestine and Israel are already locked in a never-ending dispute at their respective borders. What is on display are vested quarters which are instigating actors who are coming forward to solve these border rows once and for all.

The moot point is that food, war ships, armaments, and oil or to put it bluntly it is commerce or profits that is playing a part in ensuring that these disputes linger and are not solved.

Gopal Jalan, Guwahati

Increase in Bus Fares

The Transport Department has finally given its green signal to private city bus operators in Guwahati to increase bus fares. However, what is surprising is that these bus operators have been charging from passenger fares which the Government has now officially acceded to.

It means that the operators were a step ahead of the Department and the latter was a mute spectator. Will we now see another bus fare hike, or will the existing rate be maintained by the bus operators? The Department must ensure that the private bus operators do not increase fare again.

During Covid-19, under the garb of 50% passenger at double the fare policy, bus operators had passed on this additional burden on the hapless passengers. The same has continued despite all restrictions being lifted, a long time back, by the Government. The passengers are still being loaded with the same fare in the absence of a directive to this effect.

The buses also needed to be regulated by the Government with a direction to paste the new fare chart in full view of the passenger. Also, the bus stoppage must have a time limit. It must be made mandatory on the bus owners to issue a specific ticket to a passenger going to a particular stoppage than merely a general ticket of ₹10 or ₹15.

Pinku Deka, Dipila



Of Bamboo Tales

Bamboo plantation, a near universal, in households across rural Assam has the potential to turn the tide for Assam's economy and its people. We have witnessed the ill effects of pollution in Delhi. There was a news report recently that highlighted the construction of a 13,000 sq ft room by spending ₹4 crore of tax money for inhaling oxygen in Gurgaon in Haryana courtesy the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation.

Surprisingly, not many people know that bamboo sends out 35% extra oxygen into the atmosphere.

Therefore, the benefit of bamboo must be advertised to a wider audience. If not already, it can become an object of attraction for tourists.

There are folktales which talk of ghosts amidst bamboo. It can now be turned on its head by making tourists spend a night in rooms made of bamboo.

Diganta Kakati, Guwahati

Write to us with your opinion and suggestions at
bartaasom@gmail.com

TOFI launched in Assam



TOFI officials with Minister for Environment and Forest Chandra Mohan Patowary

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Department of Environment and Forests and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) on October 18 announced the launch of the "Trees Outside Forests in India (TOFI)" program in Assam. It will bring together farmers, companies, and private institutions to rapidly expand tree coverage outside of traditional forests in the State.

TOFI will enhance carbon sequestration, support local communities, and strengthen the climate resilience of agriculture, thereby supporting global climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

Assam Government has placed a high priority on expanding tree cover outside forest areas, as demonstrated in its State Action Plan on Climate Change besides the constitution of the Assam Agroforestry Development Board.

Through agroforestry, or integrating trees into farming systems, TOFI will improve the resilience of farming systems, while increasing the income of farmers in Assam, in partnership with Department of



Environment and Forest and the Assam Agroforestry Development Board.

TOFI will leverage India's private sector to promote and scale tree-based enterprises and the sale of carbon credits, helping to create jobs, boost incomes, and help families in Assam overcome the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Announcing the launch, Minister for Environment and Forest, Chandra Mohan Patowary said, "Agroforestry is intimately associated with Assamese civilization, and we are very delighted to launch the TOFI programme in Assam. The programme will help the people of Assam

to take up the traditional practice of agroforestry in a modern scientific manner to integrate productivity and profitability with environmental stewardship."

Highlighting the importance of the programme, USAID's Deputy Mission Director in India, Karen Klimowski said, "As the climate crisis intensifies, it is ever more important that we protect India's forests and the communities who depend on them. The United States is proud to support the Trees Outside Forests in India program, which builds upon decades of US-India cooperation on forestry and climate-smart agriculture. India's progress on these issues can provide models for the world."

The Trees Outside Forests in India program was launched in September 2022 by Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Secretary Leena Nandan and US Chargé d'Affaires Patricia Lacina. The program will allocate up to \$25 million in seven States: Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.

EDITORIAL

High-powered initiatives

The recent visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah which was followed by a visit of the President of India Droupadi Murmu to Assam and Tripura, followed by the visit of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Nagaland and Meghalaya has once again underscored the importance of the region that the Centre is according to the North East of India. Gone are the days when the seven sister States of North East would wait for a high profile visit in the hope of a financial package than anything else. Now, the North East is fast integrating into the overall scheme of things for the Central Government.

Important leaders are not only coming here but doing so very frequently as if it is their routine job. Whereas the Home Minister met chief ministers and top ranked officials of all the States to seek greater coordination in its fight against drugs and evil money, the President's visit was marked by a series of development schemes. The fact that this is among the first few visits that she has undertaken after assuming the highest post in the country has sent out a very clear signal to everyone that the region is as important to New Delhi if not more. It would be wrong to assume that this approach is to compensate the region for what was not accorded to it by the previous governments at the Centre. Rather it would be apt to credit the vision of the Central Government that it is investing in the region as a new growth centre, something which the Prime Minister loves to call *ashtha lakhshmi*.

Of special import are the initiatives that the Home Ministry is taking in facilitating dialogues to solve the lingering border disputes between various States, especially Assam. Not only will it act as a confidence building measure, but it will also clear ways for greater coordination among States for various development projects. This, in turn, will pave the way for investors to come to the region and explore its potential.



Assam is on the Move

by Jayanto Narayan Choudhury

Road Map 2026 aims to achieve key development objectives, setting clear goals for every Government department. The Chintan Shivir held in September was the starting point. The political leadership and top officials sat together to identify areas that needed inter-department coordination, recognized constraints, and estimated required resources. This was definitely a 'whole-of-government' approach that augurs well to achieve desired outcomes.

The dynamic Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has rightly stressed the need for a systematic follow-up since this is where most plans falter in implementation.

At the granular level, what does the ordinary citizen want? A better Quality of Life? Neighbouring Bhutan focuses not on GDP (Gross Domestic Product), but GNH (Gross National Happiness), an index now accepted by the World Bank. This has four major factors: sustainable socio-economic development; conservation of a vibrant culture; environmental protection; and good governance. Similarly, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN also focus on citizen-centric outcomes such as Health, Education, Livelihood opportunities, protection of Biodiversity, and ensuring Access to Justice.

The 20th century was obsessed with economic growth, regardless of the collateral damage caused to the environment, the increase in inequalities or breakdown of communities. In the 21st century, there is a realisation that such growth models are not sustainable, and do not necessarily improve Quality of Life.

In Assam, the British drive to cultivate tea for their economic benefit, destroyed verdant rain-forests, particularly in Upper Assam. Today, there is an increasing population of ex-tea tribes, a number that can be expected to increase with mechanisation of the production process. At the same time, there are competitive pressures with tea cultivation expanding to countries without the historical constraints and costs faced in Assam. This impacts on the ability of this sector to maintain value of output and provide employment. Likewise, extraction of minerals like oil and coal have aggravated degradation of the natural environment, though these provided resources invaluable for an industrialising India. With the present emphasis on renewable energy sources, and dwindling known reserves, the potential for expansion of the non-renewable energy sector in Assam is limited. None of these can yet be called "sunset sectors". Yet, it is time to look for alternatives that provide more sustainable economic growth and livelihood opportunities.

Assam and NER has a wealth of biodiversity, and a rich multi-cultural heritage. This has enormous potential given the present-day demand for 'experiential' and 'nature' tourism. Heavy investment by the State is not required. It simply has to facilitate building up of transport connectivity, and micro-capacity by communities and individuals. Similarly, handloom products are no longer on the fringes, but can serve high-end markets, with guidance on contemporary designs and supply chains. There is great emphasis on building up the ICT sector today, with many States investing in the infrastructure needed for seamless global connectivity. Assam cannot lag behind. At the same time, traditional skills are still needed. A special effort to upgrade ITIs to build up such skills can create livelihood opportunities for the State's growing cohort of school-leaving youth. MSMEs are not as glamorous as big-ticket investors but provide a decent livelihood to a larger number of families, especially in the services sector. 'Ease-of-doing-business' reforms need to benefit this sector as well as large investors. Access to finance and the process of obtaining local governmental clearances will need to be streamlined.

Assam is fortunate to have well-regarded institutes of higher education, whether IIT or RECs, or in other technical fields and also universities, Central and State. These can be supported to become hubs of innovation and applied research that provide solutions not just to Assam but beyond.

After decades of social unrest and militant movements, Assam has entered a period of peace. The role of the State's police, supported by the Centre's resources in achieving this, was recognized by the prestigious award of President's Colours earlier this year. Accomplishing this needed build-up of armed policing skills, and as a consequence less focus on civil policing. Now a paradigm shift is needed. A police and criminal justice system that is citizen-oriented and engages proactively with the community. And with modern capabilities to prevent, detect and prosecute crime and to effectively manage the hugely expanded volume of traffic. A beginning has been made, by modules that provide 'soft-skills' and other training needed for this.

Guwahati is the gateway to the entire NER. It is rightfully on the list of 'smart' cities. Civic services, including traffic management, here need to be upgraded to levels needed for a world-class metropolis. Assam can also take the lead in experimenting with urban governance structures that enables greater public participation. A 'whole-of-government' integrated effort in achieving Roadmap 2026 is certainly good; an 'all-of-society' engagement with the process is even better!

"The speed of the leader is the speed of the team". Assam has an exceptionally vibrant leader who though relatively youthful has decades of experience in Government. He also has established an excellent rapport with the Centre, vital in a federal polity. If successful, his legacy will be a transformed Assam.

(The author is a former DG, National Security Guard and DGP, Assam Police)

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