

Asom Barta

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 9 | JANUARY 2023

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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State set to host G20 sessions

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Assam will host five meetings of the G20: Four in Guwahati and one in Dibrugarh.



Water, Water and plenty of it

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The partial commissioning of the water project in Guwahati will cater to 13,000 households.



Gamocha's GI tag to boost rural economy

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Assamese gamocha henceforth will have a class of its own thanks to the GI tag.

Foundation laid for ₹ 15k cr dist projects



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and some of his Cabinet colleagues at the launch of the Fortnight for Development ceremonies

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

To add impetus to Assam's infrastructural development, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma launched an initiative on December 5 which concluded its first phase on December 24 wherein foundation stones of various development projects and schemes worth ₹ 15,000 crore were laid in several districts of the State. (Please see Box)

The decision for "Bikakhor Babe Eta Pokhek" (Roughly translated as Development Fortnight) was taken during the State Cabinet meeting held at Silchar on November 30 under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister.

The programme kicked off in Bongaigaon district on December 5. On the first day of the initiative, Dr. Sarma inaugurated a model hospital, laid foundation stones of a new medical college, an integrated deputy commissioner's office, a convention centre and plans to upgrade Bongaigaon polytechnic college worth over ₹ 693.29 crore. These investments reflected in all his major announcements in the districts covered in the first phase.

Addressing a gathering in Bongaigaon town, the Chief Minister said that development works in the State are going based on his Government's commitment to the people of the State.

"This is a new Assam where people don't want agitations and protests, but they seek development, better avenues for themselves and their children. If we continue at this pace

for another 5-10 years, Assam will see a lot of positive changes," Sarma said.

A spate of inauguration and foundation stones of projects worth ₹ 678.43 crore in Nalbari district which included repair and construction of several roads, beautification of Nalbari town, horticulture and agriculture College, a planetarium, setting up of a sports complex, among others, were highlights of the second day.

Development Fortnight

Referring to the period when one had to resort to strikes and demonstrations to get a genuine demand fulfilled, Dr. Sarma, in Nalbari, said that genuine aspirations were being taken care of by the current regime on its own based on its understanding of people's pulses.

Tamulpur, Morigaon, Golaghat, Biswanath, Majuli, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh were the other districts covered by the fortnight in the first phase.

Ganesh Rabha, a schoolteacher, was ecstatic. "The medical college and hospital in Tamulpur will be a big relief for us. If the projects are implemented, it will change the face of Tamulpur district," he told *Asom Barta*.

Golaghat district emerged as the district to get the biggest investment purse from the State Government with 14 projects worth ₹ 1,500 crore lined up.

A FORTNIGHT FOR DEVELOPMENT



- Bongaigaon ₹ 693.29 Cr (5th Dec)
- Nalbari ₹ 678.43 Cr (6th Dec)
- Tamulpur ₹ 961.765 Cr (7th Dec)
- Morigaon ₹ 910.13 Cr (8th Dec)
- Golaghat ₹ 1575.39 Cr (9th Dec)
- Biswanath ₹ 825.7508 Cr (10th Dec)
- Majuli ₹ 894.55 Cr (11th Dec)
- Jorhat ₹ 853.1548 Cr (15th Dec)
- Lakhimpur ₹ 1031.68 Cr (16th Dec)
- Dhemaji ₹ 1220.20 Cr (23rd Dec)
- Dibrugarh ₹ 973.38 Cr (24th Dec)

One of the key features of the investment fortnight was the assurance from the Chief Minister to complete the Lachit Maidam Memorial and Cultural Project in two years. He said that once completed, the site will be transformed into one of the most sought-after tourist destinations of the State.

The 'development fortnight' ended on December 24 at Tingkhong in Dibrugarh district with an announcement of a slew of projects in the district worth ₹ 973.38 crores.

2023 **Asom Barta** wishes its readers a Happy New Year 



Musings of a Chief Minister



As the calendar year draws to a close, I look back with satisfaction at the relentless efforts put in by all wings of our Government to improve lives for the people of the State and to put Assam firmly on its way to becoming among the best five performing States of the country. I had in the recent past spoken about the importance of infrastructure in sustaining the growth trajectory.

In accordance with that, our Government has decided to infuse massive funding into the sector by launching an initiative called 'A Fortnight for Development' wherein we are keen to infuse a lot of capital to develop basic infrastructure in all the districts of Assam. It started on December 5 and as of now, we have committed ₹ 15,000 crore in nine districts of the State. I will not go into details of the project but having worked with the people for over three decades now, I know that these investments will make lives better for my fellow citizens in the State.

I can look back with satisfaction at the way we delivered to our people what we had promised. Schemes such as Orunodoi, and Mission Basundhara have been our crowning glories. We have taken a major stride in waiving off microfinance loans of our women while ensuring that our youths are not deprived of jobs because of the greed of some. We have put in a mechanism to ensure clean and transparent recruitment process. I have no doubt whatsoever that we are on course to achieve what we had set out to.

A very significant development in the last month was the partial commissioning of the JICA-assisted Guwahati Water Supply Project which is expected to meet the drinking water requirement in some localities before it covers the entire city. This project was almost a jinxed one until our Government decided that enough is enough and the people of Guwahati deserve access to potable water 24x7. Finally, after nearly 11 years, water started flowing into nearly 13,000 households to everybody's satisfaction. Now that the first hurdle has been navigated, we are sure that by March 2024, we will be able to complete the entire project without any further delay.

We also decided to crackdown on drugs and its peddling this year with full force of the law. We have invested in our youths and we do not want them to be wasted by the habit of drugs. I am thankful to the Assam Police for cracking down hard on drug peddlers. Statistics, of course, point out their success in a big way, but if drugs are getting into the State, we cannot rest on our achievement. My Government's goal is to make Assam drugs free, and I solicit the support of the people of Assam to act as a barrier against consumption and smuggling of drugs in their respective places. Not all battles are won based on force, persuasion and sensitization go a long way in many cases to do what force cannot.

This year we paid our long and overdue respect to Assam's legendary general Lachit Borphukan. It is indeed a travesty of history that a personality of such a stature could not be given his due for over 350 years. Although what we have done does not restore the injustice that has been meted out to the General but as a Government we think we did whatever we could. I can assure you that this is just the beginning, and we will continue to put our resources, financial and physical, to secure him a place he deserves. He is not only India's outstanding military general but will also find a place among the pantheons who fought for their motherland, without an iota of self-interest. His unwavering love for his motherland is an example for generations to follow, especially during such crucial times when our nationalism is being questioned.

I am happy to share with you the importance Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Government has accorded to Assam as well as the North East. Beginning early February, our State will be hosting five meetings of the most prestigious economic forums in the entire world, the G20. This will accord us a window of opportunity to showcase to the world, our people and our diversity, our heritage, and our assets. This will be one occasion where we cannot afford to go wrong. I urge the people of the State to accord a warm welcome to these delegates from all over the world so that they carry back to their respective countries wonderful memories of the State.

Finally, as we come to the end of the year, I will reiterate my commitment and that of our Government to be unswerving in our commitment to the people and their progress. I know for sure that development has no meaning unless it is people-oriented. I wish the people of Assam and readers of *Asom Barta* a Happy 2023.

Jai Aai Asom, Jai Hind.

Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

I can look back with satisfaction at the way we delivered to our people what we had promised. Schemes like Orunodoi, and Mission Basundhara have been our crowning glories. We have taken a major stride in waiving off microfinance loans of our women while ensuring that our youths are not deprived of jobs because of the greed of some.

State set to host G20 sessions



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma felicitating G20 Chief Coordinator Harshvardhan Shringla in Guwahati(left).
G20 delegates during a meeting in Bangalore

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

They came, they saw, and they decided that Assam will be host to at least five meetings of G20, one of the most “premier forums for international economic cooperation” in the world, in 2023 during India’s presidency of it. The G20 plays an important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues.

Officials of the G20 Seceretairat who came to Assam on August 3 this year was headed by Harshvardhan Shringla, India’s ex-Foreign Secretary, and now the chief coordinator of the Secretariat responsible for organising and coordinating G20 meetings across the country during India’s presidency.

Mr Shringla and his team met Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma who assured them of all support for a smooth hosting of these meetings, including one on sustainable finance under the Finance Track, one of the three workstreams under the G20 mandate. The other workstreams are the Sherpa Track and the Engagement Groups (EGs). EG, comprising non-government participants from each G20 member, provide recommendations to the G20 leaders and contribute towards the policy-making process.

The first of the meetings to be held in Guwahati will be on February 2 and 3, 2023.

Talking to *Asom Barta*, Seyedain Abbasi, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, and the State chief coordinator of the State G20 Secretariat said that these meetings will offer Assam an opportunity to showcase the State and its potential to the G20 nations. “Assam being the Gateway to the North East will get an immense opportunity to attract investment and technology from the most economically advanced countries of the world. We are sure that the outcome will be positive and impactful,” he said.

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The State G20 Secretariat consists of officers from various departments of the State Government. It is coordinating with the Central G20 secretariat for the overall conduct of the G20 events.

Whereas Guwahati will host four meetings, the other meeting will be hosted in Dibrugarh. “The team headed by Mr Shringla also visited Dibrugarh and were satisfied with the infrastructure that we have, and decided on this venue,” informed Adil Khan, nodal officer, and member secretary of the State G20 Secretariat. Dibrugarh will also act as the venue for reception and accommodation of delegates for the event to be held in Arunachal Pradesh in March 2023.

“The five meetings being hosted by the State are in accord with the Prime Minister’s vision of importance to the North East. All the States of the region are hosting one or the other meetings according to the schedule received by us,” Khan, who is also the Secretary of the Transport Department of the Government of Assam, told this reporter.

“We will be able to tell the world that we have world class facilities to boast of besides an extremely rich cultural heritage,” he said while stating that this was by far the biggest and most prestigious international event ever to be hosted by the State. He added that besides representatives of the G20 countries, the State will also host top officials of international organisations like World Trade Organisation and the International Labour Organisation besides Unicef.

Meanwhile, the State Government has chalked out a detailed plan to showcase the tourism and cultural heritage of Assam to its foreign guests. Among some of the activities that will be undertaken during the visit of representatives of the G20 countries include visit to historical locations like Kamakhya and Umananda temples. Publications on tourism and a coffee table book on Assam will also be launched during these events. “We want to make all out efforts to brand the State to the international community to cash on the benefits of hosting these very important meetings in the State,” Khan said, adding that the State Chief Secretary is monitoring the progress regularly.

Meanwhile, representatives from various departments of the State were sent on a recce of sorts to the G20 meetings held in Mumbai and Bangalore for an exposure trip. Besides, the services of a former diplomat shall be solicited to train selected officers of Assam to impart them knowledge on communication/ interaction with foreign delegates. The officers attached for protocol duty will be sensitised on their delegates’ countries ethnicity, cultural ethos, habits, mannerisms, etc.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS					
Level	NodalMinistry/ Agency	Meeting	Month	Date	City
WG	Ministry of Finance	1 st Sustainable Finance Working Group Meeting	Feb	02 nd -03 rd Feb	Guwahati
EG	Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports	Youth 20 Inception Meeting	Feb	06 nd -08 th Feb	Guwahati
EG	CAG	SAI 20 Inception Meeting	Mar	13 th -15 th March	Guwahati
EG	Deptt of Science and Technology	RIIG Side Event	Mar	24 th -25 th March	Dibrugarh
WG	Ministry of Labour & Employment	2 nd Employment Working Group Meeting	Apr	03 rd -05 th April	Guwahati

PM Fasal Yojana: A saviour

AB BUREAU, CHHAYGAON/MORIGAON/PATHSHALA

Aynol Haque (46) is a farmer at Cholpara village, some 5 km north of Chhaygaon town in Kamrup district of the State. Cholpara village falls under the greater Goroimari area, an agri-horti belt in the district.

In the month of October 2020, like several other farmers in his native village, Haque, too, started sowing Rabi cropping in his six bigha of land. "My Rabi crops cultivation included cauliflower, cabbage, and local varieties of brinjal. It was all good in the beginning. But heavy showers on one night devastated our crops, and my hopes. It was staring down the barrel," says Haque.

Thankfully, he was enrolled into the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) for his Rabi crops. "Since my Rabi farming was insured under PMFBY, I applied for a claim of the damage incurred. After proper verification, I was compensated with ₹ 4100. The money was credited directly to my bank account," he says recalling those anxious days he spent.

PMFBY is a Centrally-sponsored crop insurance scheme introduced in Kharif 2016. Since its inception, it has been playing an important role in protecting the economic interests of the hardworking farmers by reducing the risk associated with weather uncertainties.

PMFBY has also been implemented in Assam since 2016. However, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) has taken steps to improve its implementation.

Makibur Rahman, State Nodal Officer for PMFBY says that the scheme envisages covering maximum number of farmers in the ambit of crop insurance by providing comprehensive risk coverage from pre-sowing to post-harvest losses.

"The improvement of awareness and a better understanding of its features among the farming community have potential to enhance the uptake of PMFBY," says Rahman.

Gubin Medhi (59) is from Boribandha village under Lahorighat revenue circle in Morigaon, some 12 km north of the district headquarter. More than 95% of people in the village are farmers.

Medhi's agricultural activities are confined to Sali and Boro paddy. The area is prone to floods during the monsoon season. "When we heard about this Yojana during an awareness camp from the agricultural officials in the year 2019, we knew that it was for us. In 2020, I was enrolled into PMFBY for one hectare of Sali paddy crops. Lo and Behold! That year there was a total loss of Sali paddy in our district due to a massive flood. I claimed compensation under PMFBY. I got what I had applied for," he says, adding that for one hectare of Sali crop damage, he got ₹ 2400. "That was my first experience with PMFBY. It is a good scheme for farmers as we are vulnerable to nature's vagaries, more and more farmers should join this scheme," says Medhi.

Farmer share of premium up to one hectare of insured area was fully subsidised by Assam Government last year. In the current year, farmers growing notified crops on up to one hectare of land would be able to get crop insurance for ₹ 100 only.

"In Assam, the notified crops under PMFBY are black gram, Sali paddy and Jute crop for Kharif season and Summer paddy, potato, sugarcane and rape & mustard crops for Rabi season," says Rahman.

The scheme is implemented at Gaon Panchayat (GP) level as a unit of insurance for all the districts of Assam except districts in BTR, KAAC and NCHAC areas. Five insurance companies (ICs) were empanelled for Rabi-2021-22 onwards for the next three years.

Abani Das (35) is an Adhi farmer from Saldah village some seven km from Pathsala of Bajali district, with meagre land holding. Perennial floods caused by overflow of the surging waters of both Kaldiya and Pahumara river in every monsoon season throw a spanner in the works of farmers of this village.

"In 2020, I was enrolled into PMFBY for Sali paddy cultivation in seven bighas of my land. My entire crop was damaged because of a major flood that year. Imagine what would be my state had I not been insured under PMFBY? Insurance officials and representatives from the agricultural department assessed my damage and deposited ₹ 14,850 in my bank account," says a grateful Das.



PMFBY is a Centrally-sponsored crop insurance scheme introduced in Kharif 2016. Since its inception, it has been playing an important role in protecting the economic interests of the hardworking farmers by reducing the risk associated with weather uncertainties.



Water, Water and plenty of it



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Ashok Singhal, Minister, Department of Housing and Urban Affairs along with Deputy Chief of Mission of Embassy of Japan to India Kunihiko Kawazu, chief representative of JICA India Office Mitsunori Saito during the launch programme.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

If you are a resident of Pub Sarania or Zoo Road Tiniali like Bharat Chakraborty and Nabajit Sharma respectively, one can be sure that you are on Cloud Nine. A commodity that you had been missing so badly in your household is now in plenty, and that, too, 24X7. Like them, you must be thanking your lucky stars that finally the daily anxiety is over once and for all.

This is what the Guwahati Water Supply Project has done to nearly 13,000 residents of these areas besides nearby ones with the partial commissioning of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-assisted project that began piping water at full speed to these households on December 21, of these areas.

"Potable water problems had jeopardised the day-to-day affairs of people of my locality for over a decade. When the JICA aided water supply project's work started in 2010-11, we were expecting an end to the water woes of our area by 2014-2015. However, the wait got longer. There came a time when we started thinking that it will not be done. However, beginning December 22, this hope has turned into a reality. We are getting water 24X7. I am thankful to the Government, Sarma, a retired engineer, told *Asom Barta*.

Chakraborty, a resident of Bye Lane No. 6 (West), Pub Sarania, had his anxiety almost over in November with the trial run of the project. "I got my new water supply connection from Guwahati Jal Board a month prior to the partial commissioning of the JICA water supply scheme. During the trial run, the speed was normal but since the evening of December 21, we are witnessing a very impressive speed of the water supply. It is available throughout now," Chakraborty told this reporter. He said that the installation of a water metre against every connection is a good idea to curb wastage.

The ceremony of partial commissioning of water was attended by Assam Chief Minister

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on the premises of the water treatment plant at Kharghuli in Guwahati.

He termed the project a milestone in fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the residents of Guwahati. The Chief Minister exuded confidence that the partial commissioning of the project would be able to mitigate water scarcity woes of a significant number of households.

The Chief Minister stated that the aim was to provide water supply to more than one lakh households adding that all necessary steps were being taken to ensure completion of the entire project by March 2024. He said that the partial commissioning would provide the residents of East Guwahati with a well-maintained water supply system, one of their long-standing demands.

One such resident is Prabindra Nath Bhuyan. "A safe water supply is the backbone of a healthy society. It was woefully under prioritised by the previous Governments in Assam. I am sure that the project will be completed at the earliest, said Bhuyan, a resident of Kripa Sindhu Path near the Gauhati Commerce College.

The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to JICA for its flexibility and patience.

Minister of Department of Housing and Urban Affairs Ashok Singhal said that the project would be completed as per schedule, following the Chief Minister's mantra of reform, perform and transform.

Deputy Chief of Mission of Embassy of Japan to India Kunihiko Kawazu, Chief Representative of JICA India Office Mitsunori Saito were also present in the programme.

"All these while we were compelled to procure drinking water in tanks from private players. This will end now. I want to say "Thank You" to the Government of Assam," Debotpal Goswami, whose house is near the Chandmari Railway track in Pub Sarania, told this reporter.

"I got my new water supply connection from Guwahati Jal Board a month prior to the partial commissioning of the JICA water supply scheme. During the trial run, the speed was normal but since the evening of December 21, we are witnessing a very impressive speed of the water supply. It is available throughout now"

Bharat Chakraborty

- The project, launched in the year 2009 is aimed to provide potable water to the residents of Guwahati. It is scheduled to be ready for full-commissioning by March 2024. It has the capacity to cater to 1.25 lakh households in parts of the city with 24-hours water supply.
- Now, water is being supplied to residents of Bamunimaidam to Chandmari police station on Maniram Dewan Road, Rajgarh Road and Pub Sarania. AIDC premises from Zoo Tinali, Amiya Nagar, Amiya Nagar Hilltop bypass, Rudranagar, Piyoli Phukan Nagar, the area near Holychild School, Chandmari, Milanpur, Sarkari Chhapasal Road, Red Cross Road and Bhaskar Nagar Bypass.
- GMDA Water Supply Projects has taken up four major projects, with funding from Government of India (JNNURM) for the South West region, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the North and South Central regions and Asian Development Bank for the SouthEast region. The Guwahati Jal Board will be responsible for operation and maintenance of these facilities upon their completion.

A shot in the arm for tourism



File photo of tourists in Kaziranga National Park (Photo: Krishna Kinkar Nath)

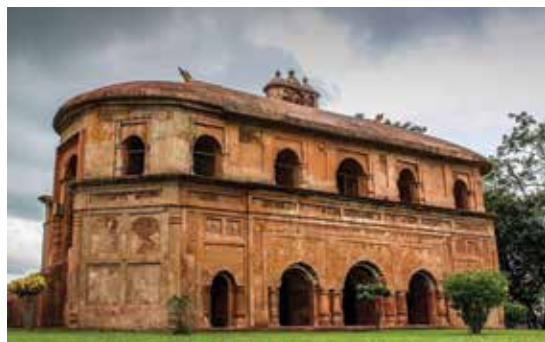
AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI, KAZIRANGA

Krishna Kingkor Nath is the proprietor of the Kaziranga-based Seven Sisters Tours and Travels. Having navigated the worst of times during two years of Covid, life and business are normalising for him this year. He could not have asked for any other news than the one the Assam Cabinet has decided to give him and many like him across the State: Industry status to tourism. “This news has come as a manna from heaven. We have waited for it for a long time. This decision will inspire us and those who are willing to do something on their own in tourism,” he said welcoming the announcement, adding that he, too, will invest in newer areas to take advantage of the policy decision.

On December 19, a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma accorded industry status to the tourism sector. This will now clear the way for many already invested in the sector and others mulling to enter it to avail benefits earmarked for industry in Assam.

The move has garnered appreciation from all quarters. “From Terrorism to Tourism, Assam has navigated an arduous journey. This is historical,” said Arijit Purkayastha, chief executive officer of Koyli Tours and Travel, a leading travel agency of the region. He adds that tourism in the State has gone through many travail to position itself where it is today. He pointed out that archaeological tourism was the next big thing in the State.

Although policy details are yet to be made public, however it has emerged that the Government is focusing on heritage hotels, motel, budget hotel, guest houses, bungalow, camping sites, restaurant/cafe/teria, amusement parks, ropeways, museums, tour operators’ services, adventure tourism and water sports in its policy prescription for the sector. The initiative will open the doors for more investment in the sector while facilitating entrepreneurs to take advantage of all the benefits that are available to the manufacturing sector.



“Our primary objective is to increase private investment in the tourism sector. The Tourism and Industry Departments will work on the modality to give it a definite direction”

Kumar Padmapani Bora, MD, ATDC

Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting on December 19, Minister of Tourism, Government of Assam Jayanta Malla Barua spoke of the possibilities that the State offers to domestic and international tourists. He said that the policy will allow the sector to emerge as the biggest contributor to the gross state domestic product, while garnering private investment. He expressed hope that tourism infrastructure will also improve courtesy private public partnership.

“River tourism will get a big boost in Assam. I urge all those associated with the sector to come forward to take advantage of the policy,” Assam Tourism Development Corporation chairman Rituparna Barua said while talking to *Asom Barta*.

“Our primary objective is to increase private investment in the tourism sector. The Tourism and Industry Departments will work on the modality to give it a definite direction,” Kumar Padmapani Bora, MD, ATDC and Secretary, Tourism, Government of Assam told this reporter. He said that increasing the number of tourists from outside the State will be a shot in the arm for the sector, and hence the policy will focus on infrastructure and services which will lead to more tourists’ footfalls in Assam. “This will lead to word-of-mouth publicity boosting the State’s reputation.”

Orunodoi 2.0 launched



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma launching Orunodoi 2.0 from the conference hall of Assam Bhawan, New Delhi

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma launched Orunodoi 2.0 in New Delhi through virtual mode on December 14 from the conference hall of Assam House.

"Our Government has been extending economic and nutritional security to lakhs of financially vulnerable families across the State and amongst them, the foremost has been Orunodoi scheme described as the foremost bead among the Ashtadash Mukutar Unnoyonee Maala in the Assam Budget 2020-2021," said Dr Sarma, adding that the greater version of Orunodoi is being launched to ensure the benefits reach the financially

vulnerable and underprivileged families of Assam.

Altogether 10.54 lakh fresh beneficiaries have been added under the greater version of Orunodoi 2.0. With the new inclusion, the total number of beneficiaries in the State will be around 27 lakh.

The total financial outlay for Orunodoi is ₹ 4,142 crore per year, making it one of the largest direct beneficiary transfer (DBT) schemes in the country.

Under Orunodoi, beneficiaries of Indira Miri Universal Widow Pension Scheme will also be enrolled. They will get ₹ 1,200 per month.

Later, the Chief Minister interacted with

the members of the district-level monitoring committees and asked them to ensure smooth and hassle-free implementation of the scheme.

The conduct of DLMC meetings for finalisation of beneficiaries will take place from January 1 to 15, 2023 while distribution of application forms among selected beneficiaries on January 20, 2023. The collection and uploading of application forms in the portal will be completed on February 28, 2023.

Earlier, Principal Secretary, Finance, Samir Sinha delivered the welcome address while Commissioner and Secretary, Finance, Jayant Narlikar, gave a presentation on Orunodoi 2.0 Principal Resident Commissioner, New Delhi, Rajeew Chandra Joshi was also present on the occasion.

A revision of the list of Orunodoi beneficiaries by excluding those who no longer need the financial grant and including others irrespective of political ideologies have been undertaken recently. "An Orunodoi month was conducted from August 20 this year during which a door-to-door survey of the beneficiaries was carried out to entail a process of verification which led to purification and enhancement of the database," an official of the Finance Department said.

Orunodoi, the poverty alleviation scheme, launched on December 1, 2020, entails a monthly grant of ₹ 1,250 to each beneficiary. It is one of 18 flagship schemes of the Government of Assam in operation. The Orunodoi benefit is usually transferred to the bank account of each beneficiary by the 10th of every month.

Aapda Mitra workshop

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in collaboration with the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) organized a workshop on "Mid-Term Review & Documentation of Best Practices of Aapda Mitra Scheme" in Guwahati recently.

The workshop was meant to provide an opportunity to the participating project States/UTs to share their experiences, challenges in implementation of the scheme and identify the gaps and do mid-course correction for proper implementation of the Scheme.

In the inaugural ceremony a theme song for Aapda Mitra was launched followed by three sessions categorised as North Eastern/Hilly States/UTs, Plain States/UTs and coastal States/UTs wherein the participating States under each category presented their best practices, challenges and success stories.

The workshop culminated with discussion on the insurance policy for Aapda Mitras across the country followed by a panel discussion on community level initiatives of different SDMA and the best practices adapted by the States.

Altogether 30 States and UTs across India participated in the workshop including Assam, West Bengal, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Puducherry, Karnataka, Chandigarh, Kerala, Punjab, Goa, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Ladakh, Delhi, Haryana, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu and Bihar.

Talking to *Asom Barta*, project officer, ASDMA, Kishore Dutta said that 2,367 Aapda Mitras have been trained thus far under the project which was launched in 2017 to give volunteers an opportunity to offer their services at the time of natural disasters.

"The pilot project was then launched in Kamrup (Metropolitan) and Jorhat districts wherein 400 volunteers had participated. We will train



Jogen Mohan, Minister of Revenue & Disaster Management, Government of Assam, inaugurating the workshop

3,900 volunteers across 16 districts of Assam by March 2024. Six training centres under the project have been set-up in Assam to train these volunteers."

Dutta told this correspondent adding that volunteers had offered exemplary services in the floods this year by assisting NDRF and SDRF jawans.

The inaugural ceremony of the workshop was graced by Jogen Mohan, Minister of Revenue & Disaster Management, Government of Assam, Rajendra Singh, Member, NDMA; Biswaranjan Samal, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Assam; Kunal Satyarthi, Joint Secretary, NDMA, besides others.

Over 1,100 militants surrender in Barak Valley



An ultra surrendering his arm during the ceremony at the CMHS Field in Katlichara, Hailakandi (left). Information & Public Relations Minister Pijush Hazarika inspecting the arms surrendered by militants.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

In yet another breakthrough for the State Government's continuous drive against insurgency, 1179 insurgents belonging to two different outfits in Barak Valley laid down arms on December 12 and joined the mainstream.

The militants, belonging to Bru Revolutionary Army of Union (BRAU) and United Democratic Liberation Front of Barak (UDLF-B), laid down their arms before Assam Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary and State IPR and Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika at a ceremony held at Katlicherra in Hailakandi district.

In his address, the Assembly Speaker said that some BRU youths had to take up weapons because they were deprived of basic rights for generations post India's Independence.

"Our government extended its arms and both militant outfits, active in Barak Valley, have responded. Now, it is our responsibility to fulfil promises made to them," Daimari said.

He said that the Government has included the Brus in Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council which will make them decide the kind of development their people deserve.

"They will enjoy all Government facilities

and additional development projects will be issued for them," Daimari added.

In the ceremony, State IPR and Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika said that the surrender of two militant outfits active in Barak Valley districts would usher a new era of peace and development in southern Assam.

He added that in the last one-and-a-half-year, during the tenure of the present Government under Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, most militant groups in the State are returning to the mainstream.

Additional Director General of Police (Special Branch) Hiren Chandra Nath said that insurgents belonging to the United Democratic Liberation Front of Barak Valley (UDLF-BV) and Bru Revolutionary Army of Union (BRAU) laid down 350 firearms, including 18 AK series rifles, M16 rifles, and over 400 cartridges.

He said that among the 1,179 cadres, 545 cadres are from Bru Revolutionary Army of Union (BRAU) and 634 are from United Democratic Liberation Front of Barak (UDLF-B).

Dhanyaram Reang, who formed the United Democratic Liberation Army (UDLA) in 2004, said that they had to take up weapons to protect their community.

- The two outfits were active mostly in areas along the Assam-Mizoram border.
- Both the militant organisations had been in talk with the Assam Police and the State Government since 2017
- Altogether 634 members of BRAU, led by Rajesh Charki, and 545 UDLF-BV militants, headed by Dhanyaram Reang, surrendered during the day.
- Bru militants were an armed outfit of the Reang tribe.
- The BRAU submitted a charter of demands addressed to the Assam Chief Minister seeking land for the community under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and Scheduled Tribe (Plain) status in the State.

BRAU leader Rajesh Charki said that they are happy to come overground and reiterated the demand for an autonomous economic council for the Bru community.

Assam-Arunachal meet on boundary

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

A high-level meeting of regional committees of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to solve the boundary dispute between the two neighbouring States was held in Janata Bhawan on December 22. The meeting re-emphasised the importance of the Government of Assam under the Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma had laid on the issue.

Leading the Assam side was senior Cabinet Minister Atul Bora while Arunachal Pradesh was represented by its Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein.

"The meeting was the third one between the regional committees of the two States regarding three districts and contentious issues were resolved through mutual agreement," said the Assam Minister. The Arunachal Deputy Chief Minister said that the meeting was "result-oriented". He termed the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh relationship carrying on a legacy which needs to be respected and not tarnished despite the border row.

Sadiya MLA Bolin Chetia, Karikho Kri, MLA, Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh, Lekang MLA Jummumn Ete Deori, Namsai MLA Chau Zignu Namchoom and senior government officials of both the sides were also present in the meeting.



Assam Agriculture Minister Atul Bora and Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein in Janata Bhawan.

Gamocha's GI tag to boost rural economy



A weaver working on a Gamocha.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

The Assamese traditional scarf, "Gamocha", the identity of Assam, has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Geographical Indications (GIs) Registry. The feat was achieved on December 13, 2022, five years after the claim was made by the State Directorate of Handloom and Textiles. With this Gamocha became the 10th product or goods from Assam to get the prestigious and unique tag.

The Handloom and Textile Department in its application for claiming GI tag on Assamese Gamocha mentioned it as a traditional textile product of the people. It also stated that

it is "identifiable as a rectangular piece of handloom weaved white cloth, having red coloured stripes along its borders. It may also contain different types of motifs inspired from nature with variable sizes. This makes it unique," and hence sought its qualification as a Geographical Indication of the State of Assam.

"It is the symbol of feeling and belongingness, welcoming people, respecting elders, love and care to loved ones. Gamocha with a big flower motif is the evidence and example of the skills of Assamese weavers," read the GI application.

No wonder, it has a big market in the State. Birendra Kumar Das, secretary, Assam Cooperative Silk House Ltd told *Asom Barta*, "Out of our four retail outlets in Guwahati, Kalpataru in Pan Bazar area sells over 25 thousands hand woven Gamocha in a year. In a year, we need almost two lakh Gamochas for our outlets. We are happy that finally our Gamocha has a GI tag. It was a long standing demand from weavers, producers of handloom products and State's handloom fraternity as a whole."

"In the last 20 years, there were floods of machine made (power looms) Gamochas in the State's market. These were mostly produced outside of the State and priced much cheaper than the hand woven Gamochas. The GI tag status will curb this activity to a large extent," said Das.

The GI tag for Gamocha has been registered in favour of the Directorate of Handloom and Textile of Assam Government under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. The certificate has been awarded dated October 16, 2017 based on the application by the Directorate.

While the Directorate of Handloom and Textile was the applicant for the GI tag, the research and documentation was done by researchers from Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) and Assam Agricultural University (AAU).

Paragmoni Mahanta, Director, Handloom and Textile, Government of Assam highlighted some of the challenges post the recognition.

"Now our challenge is to streamline all issues concerning production, promotion, and marketing of Gamocha produced in handlooms. We need to create awareness among weavers about Gamocha GI," said Mahanta talking to this reporter.

His colleague Girin Sarkar, an Additional Director, said that this will be a game changer for the weavers.

Joideep Baruah, Head, Science and Technology Division, ASTEC said that the process started in 2017 when an application for a GI tag was filed by the Institute of Handloom Development of Golaghat district in Assam. "There were anomalies in that application. The GI Registry Office asked the Directorate of Handloom and Textile about its view on Assamese Gamocha. It was then ASTEC came into the picture for research and other aspects on Gamocha. The final hearing took place in August 2022," said Baruah.

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma termed it as a day of pride for the State. The Chief Minister extended his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for always giving a place of prestige to this integral symbol of Assamese glory.

Union Textile Minister Piyush Goyal in a tweet said: "Assam's Gamocha is famous in the World. Geographical Indication tag will boost the confidence of the weavers".

Dr. Nihar Ranjan Kalita, a Researcher on State's handloom products and a faculty, Department of Economics, SBM College, Sualkuchi said that the tag will have a high socio-economic impact in rural areas of the State. "Our handloom weavers mostly reside in villages. It will obviously give an impetus to the State's rural economy. A household in Assam needs three to four Gamochas apart from Gamocha's demand on festive occasions. You can easily imagine how big the market is," said Kalita.

What GI Tag means for the Gamosa:

- i) It gets legal protection as a product of Assam.
- ii) Traditional, handloom weavers need to register with the GI Registry in Chennai through the Directorate of Handloom and Textile of the State to become authorized users of the Gamosa GI logo.
- iii) Registered weavers can expect premium prices for the Gamosa with the GI logo.
- iv) Machine-made Gamosa can be easily detected to protect consumers from deception.
- v) Eight varieties of Gamosa included in the GI application. These are Uka, Phulam, Tiyoni or Pani Gamosa, Telosh, Dora Boron, Anakata, Gosain Gamosa and Bihuwan.

Powering savings by going Green

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Shyam Sundar Kalita (61), a former employee of Guwahati Refinery under Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and a resident of Jyotinagar area in Guwahati, had long been thinking of ways and means to cut down on his electricity bills. Not because he could not afford it but he was keen to go green, and save power. And at the same time, he was not too keen to invest much in installing solar plates on his rooftop. The day he heard that the Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd was offering subsidy to encourage households to install these panels on their rooftop to generate renewable and green power, he made up his mind. "I knew I had to go for these Rooftop Solar Plates. In March last year, I availed of the Government subsidy and installed these panels to generate four KW of solar power. My total investment after subsidy was ₹ 1.18 lakh," he told *Asom Barta*.

"It is cheaper than conventional electricity. My electricity bill is much lower compared to the pre-solar power days. I save ₹ 1500 to ₹ 1800 each month," said Kalita, adding, "this is a one-time investment. The life expectancy of the panel is almost 25 years. Maintenance expense is nominal as well. Every month, APDCL engineers visit my residence to inspect the functioning of these panels," he said.

To top it all, he is also contributing to powering other homes because whatever extra power he generates through his rooftop panels goes back to APDCL through the grid. His example is encouraging his neighbours as well.

Dr Pulin Barua is in his late 80s. A resident of the Sundarpur area in Guwahati, he is a retired Army Colonel from the Armed Forces Medical Services. He, too, has benefited from the APDCL scheme on solar panels by installing 12 panels to generate 4KW. "It was my son, also an Army officer, Col Tushar Kanti Baruah, who was instrumental in installing the solar panels," he said.

Talking to this reporter over phone from his posting site out of the State, Col. Tushar said that during his posting in Rajasthan a few years ago, he witnessed how people in that State generated power from sun rays.

"Power thus generated is cost effective. It is a pure form of green energy. We need new sources to generate power. Although in Assam the sun ray is not as powerful and intrinsic as in other States of western India, yet it is good enough to generate power," he said. "I have installed solar panels at a Naamghar in my grandparents' name in our ancestral village at Lakuwa in Sivasagar district as well," the Colonel added.

The retired Colonel informed this correspondent that his family has been able to save between ₹ 1,500 to 1,800 per month on electricity bills by providing additional solar power to the APDCL's grid.



Dr Pulin Barua



Baishali Talukdar, an engineer with APDCL said that till November 2022 the company has put in place mechanisms to generate around 249.89 MW of solar projects across the State, including large scale MW generation grid connected solar power plants (179 MW), grid connected rooftop solar power plants (30.80 MW) and off grid solar system (40.09MW).

The Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Power Plants have been installed in residential, institutional, social, industrial sectors throughout the State under Rooftop Subsidy Programme of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), as well as under the State Budgetary Scheme of the Assam Government. The industrial sector has installed rooftop solar through private developers.

"The project will help to meet a certain portion of the increasing power demand of the State through green energy and optimise power procurement by APDCL," she said.

Binoy Nath, an engineer of the APDCL's New and Renewable Energy wing, added that the entire process is hassle free because there is a single window clearances and applications are approved in no time.

In solar systems installed on rooftops, electricity generated could be fed into the grid at regulated feed-in tariffs or may be used for self-consumption with a net-metering approach, he informed this newsletter.

It is because of the ease with which subsidy is being released by the APDCL and plates are being monitored that Santanu Chakraborty, a residence of Silpukhuri in Guwahati, had no problem in installing solar plates to generate three KW of solar power and thereby helping him trim ₹ 1200-1500 of his power bills each month.

"Not only we are saving money but the way in which engineers of APDCL are monitoring it, we feel that these panel will stay in service for long," said Chakraborty.

"It is cheaper than conventional electricity. My electricity bill is much lower compared to the pre-solar power days. I save ₹ 1500 to ₹ 1800 each month"



All rise for Suranjanas



*Suranjana performing at the 4th APBn at Kahilipara during its launching ceremony(top).
The Band participating in a parade on Lachit Diwas.*

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Mamu Bora of Nagaon was a constable with the Virangana wing of the Assam Police. She was hooked to music and dance from a very tender age although she could never hone her skills. Yet, she would perform Bihu and Sattriya dances and modern songs whenever opportunities came her way.

During her training, she used to be lured by the police band. It never occurred to her that she could be part of a band someday because barring a couple of central armed police forces (CAPFs), very few State police forces had an all women band. However, fortune turned a full circle for her when the Assam Police decided to form an all women band in 2021 after deliberations between the then Special DGP (T&AP) L R Bishnoi (now Meghalaya DGP), and DGP, Assam Police, Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta. The responsibility to form one such unit was handed over to a retired Subedar Major of the Indian Army and the band master of the 10th AP Bn Ajit Gogoi.

“We had been planning an all women band for quite some time. We have an all-male Brass Band and even a Pipe Band in our battalions. The battalions undertake various cultural programmes on different occasions. We were witness to the talents of our women in the battalions in music and dance. To channelise their energy, we decided that an all women band would get them on par with the men.

“The day I got an instruction on the formation of an All-Women band, I wrote to all the battalions seeking interested candidates. I received feedback from 34 personnel. Our DGP named it Suranjana. It is a brass band. We started practising from December 2021,” said Gogoi. “The day I came to know that Assam Police is going to form a band for women, I decided that I will be a ‘Suranjana’ in it,” Mamu told this correspondent, adding that she plays the clarinet in the group.



“Normally, it is an 18-month course that one must undergo to be part of any such band anywhere. However, we have such dedicated members that in three months’ time, they have made themselves stage ready”

themselves stage ready,” he informed this newsletter. Suranjana has so far performed in Assam Police Day, Lachit Diwas in New Delhi; at the Home Guards Training Centre in Panikhaiti, and at the Assam Police Officers’ Mess in Guwahati.

“They have performed like professionals in many important government programmes. I am happy at the way they have progressed,” the DGP said while adding that the Band is getting better by the day in performing Hindi songs as well. “Being part of the band means constant practice and upgrading and cannot be a one-time affair.”

He said in the future, the Assam Police is planning for a dedicated band for each of the battalion, a news that would be music for the ears of Suranjanas like Kakolo Krishna Bora, Sonali Roy, Debashree Roy, Chandana Gogoi, and other colleagues of theirs.

Deboshree Roy of Kokrajhar is a member of the band. She was earlier posted as a constable with the 24 AP(Indian Reserve) Bn in Charaimari in Baksa. “When I got to know about the formation of this Band, I decided that I need to add a new dimension to my life having learnt about the duties of a police constable. My hobby is singing but I have never played any instrument. It is an altogether new experience playing the saxophone in the Band,” she said.

Constable Sonia Khatun was also inclined towards music since childhood. In Suranjana, she has attached herself to the side drum. “I am proud to be a band member. This is unprecedented. When people appreciate us after our performance, I leap into a different world,” she exclaimed.

Second BandMaster of 10 APBn Prasanna Rajbongshi narrated that for all the members associated with Suranjana, it was a first-time experience. “Normally, it is an 18-month course that one must undergo to be part of any such band anywhere. However, we have such dedicated members that in three months’ time, they have made

Adding a mile to higher education



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma presenting a scooty to a meritorious student during the programme.

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

As and when Martina Kashyap drives her scooter across her village Korora, what she will leave behind for others to look at is her merit. She is a proud beneficiary of a two wheeler under the Banikanta Kakati Merit Award instituted by the Government of Assam's under the Pragma Bharti scheme. She scored 91.8% in her Higher Secondary Examination for the academic session 2021- 2022 thereby making her alma mater Korora Higher Secondary School proud of her achievement. She is now preparing for a seat in a medical college with the objective to serve humanity.

She is a determined student who is not afraid to speak her mind. "I thank the Government of Assam for instituting this idea. It will certainly motivate students like me. However, I would suggest that the Government should have given us an option of cash award or two wheelers. This would have helped many poor students to give something back to their families," she tells *Asom Barta*.

She was one among the 35,800 students who will benefit from this scheme inaugurated by the Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on November 30 with a ceremonial distribution of two wheelers to these meritorious students who cleared the higher secondary examinations conducted by the

Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC) with percentage above a certain threshold. The ceremony was held at the Veterinary College Playground in Guwahati which was full to capacity.

Out of the beneficiaries, 6,052 are boys and 29,748 are girls. To be eligible for the award, male candidates had to score a minimum of 75% while the percentage for female candidates has been fixed at 60%.

Also among the beneficiaries from Kamrup (Metropolitan) district is Basudev Mondal, a student of KC Das Commerce College in the city. He scored 90.2% in Higher Secondary examinations and is already riding his way to the college. "My college is quite far from my residence. Hitherto, I had to ride multiple modes of transport to reach my college. This scooter has come as a manna from heaven for me. I now drive to my college. In the process, I save time and money," he tells this reporter, while cautioning others that with the two wheeler comes the additional responsibility of driving safely.

Parag Sarma who scored 92% in his Higher Secondary is now pursuing his Bachelor in Arts from Cotton University was all praises for this initiative of the Government. He, too, echoes the same sentiment as Basudev on the time and money saved.

The central event of the Scheme's launching witnessed the distribution of scooters to eligible students of Kamrup (Metro) and Kamrup districts, while those from other districts are receiving their due as Scooters for those who belong to the rest of the districts have been covered within December.

Speaking at the event, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said that November 30, 2022 was a historic milestone in the lives of those students who made it into the merit list under the scheme.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for youth-led developments and growth, the Chief Minister appealed to these students of Assam to walk together with their counterparts in other States so that they, too, can reap the benefits of the opportunities a new and resurgent India is offering.

Adding that digitization would be the mantra for development for the next few decades, the Chief Minister asked them to focus on innovation, as the world of innovation offers tremendous opportunities for all to thrive and grow. "Innovation would ensure one becomes an employment-provider, rather than remaining an employment-seeker," the Chief Minister remarked.

Meritorious students should always aim to touch the sky, the Chief Minister said, adding it would be a waste of their talent if they were to limit their aspirations to Grade-3 and Grade-4 jobs in the days to come.

Dr. Sarma also spoke about an upcoming scheme through which female students pursuing postgraduate programmes in educational institutions of the State would be provided an annual stipend of ₹10,000 each. He appealed to them to apply for it through a portal to be launched soon by the Department of Education.

The event was also attended by Education Minister Dr. Ranoj Pegu, Ministers of Assam Cabinet Chandramohan Patowary and Atul Bora, among others.



Adriya Das, a student of Nowgong College(Autonomous) with her scooter



- 35,800 Meritorious Candidates of Higher Secondary Examination Eligible
- 6,052 Male Candidates Scoring Above 75%; 29,748 Female Candidates Scoring above 60% Being Awarded Scooters

'Education alone can uplift a society'



Kamalpur MLA Diganta Kalita at the household of Sanke Das for a night stay

AB BUREAU, KAMALPUR

The MLA of the 56 No. Kamalpur Legislative Assembly constituency believes it is among the people that one can find the true meaning of politics. That is precisely why Diganta Kalita, the MLA has decided to spend 26 nights in the household of one of the members of the 26 Gaon Panchayats under his constituency.

"It was October 1, 2021. Kamalpur MLA Diganta Kalita came to my place and shared his wish to stay in my place. He arrived in the evening hours, interacted with my neighbours and those in the village, and promised his support to solve their problems. I could not believe that a man of such stature decided to spend a night in the house of a very ordinary person," Jyotish Deka, a resident of Muktapur Gaon Panchayat told *Asom Barta*.

In the same way, resident of Raipat under the Sonapur Gaon Panchayat of the constituency Sanke Das recollected his experience



of the night of December 18 in 2021 when the MLA spent the night at his place. "The next day he got up at 5.30am, and went to see the road conditions of Raipat, Kalakuchi, Sonapur and Dhonuka villages. He came back and had his bath in my house. After his breakfast, he interacted with the women in the village. He then promised to construct two rooms in the house of Haricharan Das of Kalakuchi besides promising him financial support."

Talking to *Asom Barta*, the MLA stated that by doing so, he can understand their problems and expectations, and work towards solutions. "Our Government has been far-sighted ever since it assumed office. Infrastructure in transport, education, health, and sports have improved leaps and bounds. A National Forensic Science College will be constructed in Kamalpur constituency. We are trying our best to get an inspection bungalow in Kamalpur while development work of the Karara Mini Stadium and a mini stadium in Puthimari HS School Field under MGNREGA is in full swing."

The MLA said that if education can be uplifted anywhere, there will be overall development of that society. "We have been focusing on the growth of educational infrastructure," he told this reporter. An initiative of his called Dapoon Poripurika is geared towards education. Under this, question papers of the HSLC Examinations from 2015 to 2022 have been printed alongside answers written by meritorious students to help students know how answers should be attempted on specific questions. It is being distributed free of cost among students.

Department Snapshots



AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

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

Parliamentary Affairs

Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma laid the foundation stone for a multi-utility complex to be built at a cost of ₹ 14 crore on the residential premises of Assam Legislative Assembly.

It will have a mini hospital with ambulance service, departmental store, canteen, gym, etc, for convenience of residents and their guests. Also present on the occasion was Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Biswajit Daimary, Deputy Speaker Dr. Numal Momin, Cabinet Minister Pijush Hazarika, among others.

Agriculture Department

The 7th International Agri-Horticultural Show concluded at the College of Veterinary Science Playground in Khanapara, Guwahati on December 19. It was inaugurated by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma. Also present in the ceremony was Atul Bora, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary. More than 2 lakh people visited the fair. It was informally extended by a day to allow more people to visit the Fair. Representatives from Vietnam, Kenya and Ghana also visited the Fair. The theme of the fair this year was "Youth for Renaissance" in the Agri-Horticultural Sector.

Bodoland Territorial Region

The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL)-led Bodo Territorial Region (BTC) completed



two years of its Government of the Region on December 20. A rally was organised to mark the occasion where BTR CEM Pramod Boro along with several others took part. Later, the CEM paid floral tributes at the cemetery of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma in front of the BTC Assembly building at Thulungapuri in Kokrajhar. Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma while congratulating the Council took to Twitter to applaud the development of the BTR.

"In the last two years, BTR has moved forward on a new path of development and peace has been ensured. The Government of Assam will continue to provide all kinds of assistance to the people of BTR for the comprehensive development and growth of BTR."



The Assam Cabinet led by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma meeting at the Gandhi Mandap in Guwahati.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma flagging off a truck carrying 2,000 solar lights donated by the Art of Living Foundation under its "Light a Home Project" for Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong districts.



Images from the 8th Edition of the Falcon Festival at the Golf Field in Umrangso. Dima Hasao CEM Debolal Gorlosa had flagged off the first-ever Motocross challenge.



Agriculture Minister Atul Bora at a nursery outlet during the 7th Assam International Agri and Horticulture Show.



A panoramic view of the BTR Assembly Hall in Kokrajhar on the occasion of the second anniversary of the BTR Council.



Assam Divas marking the birth anniversary of the first Ahom King Siu-ka-pha being celebrated in Bokota, Sivasagar.

It takes two to tango

AB BUREAU, GUWAHATI

Pranab Jyoti Talukdar from Patsala in Bajali district, and Devraj Singha from Borguri in Tinsukia town were gainfully employed in the corporate world away from their native towns when a chance meeting turned them into partners. What was common among them was a thought to carve out something of their own. Both confided to their family members the desire to venture into uncharted territory of business. Like in most cases, their respective families were not too enthused about the idea of veering away from the sinecure of a corporate job to a world of uncertainties called entrepreneurship. Yet, the dominant idea in their hearts was so strong that they both realised its time has come.

During the Advantage Assam summit of 2018, when the textile major TT Garments was exhorted by the Government of Assam to invest in the State, the company made it clear that they were looking forward to getting on board local entrepreneurs to produce for them under a franchisee model. It so happened that both Pranab and Devraj were in the same hall where this development was transpiring. And the rest as they say is history.

Both decided to speak to each other respecting the sentiments each one was carrying deep within and decided that why not collaborate now rather than at some point in the future. That is how Novel Textile, their venture came into existence.

"To start with, we were producing for TT Garments their requirements for North East India, Bihar and West Bengal as their franchisee. Later, we started producing T-shirts in our name to cater to the market demand," says Pranab. "We then expanded to school uniforms and then invested in a printing set-up. This is the first such



set-up where full body sublimation, screen printing, and TShirt printing facilities are available."

However, they too went through tough times like most businesses during Covi-19. "We were set aback by Covid-19. But we sensed an opportunity to produce masks. For one full month, we devoted our entire energy into producing masks. There was a demand for PPE kits as well. We could not cater to the demand because we had no licence as was mandatory. So, we could not take advantage of the opportunity. By June, after completing necessary formalities, and armed with certification from South India Textile and Research Association (SITRA),

as well as a couple of other organisations, we started making PPE kits. We produced nearly 80,000 PPE kits during the two waves of Covid-19," says Devraj.

It is also a company that is taking care of its stakeholders, its workers being one of them. "I have been working here since 2020. I am enjoying my work. I am contributing financially to my household," says Rekha Bodo.

"It is important for budding entrepreneurs to remember that a business is an organic entity and needs time to grow. From the time we invested to a point where we started getting back some form of return took us time, and patience. Besides, there are new ideas as well which form an important ingredient in making one's business grow," says Pranab adding that

in future he wants to offer franchisee to entrepreneurs within and outside the State.

Both entrepreneurs feel that textile and school uniform business in Assam is still at an infancy. It has potential to even solve issues of unemployment in the State, provided people come out of the mindset of getting a job and instead focus on creating jobs.



EDITORIAL

Fresh Take-off

New Year is a good time for reflection and a fresh departure. Although it is more an academic exercise in one sense, yet because it marks the end of a calendar year, people all over the world are used to ditching the old and ringing in the new, including their determination to set the house in order.

In the same vein, the Assam Government would ideally love to reflect on the hits that it scored and some of the misses which formed the overall mixture of its governance record in the year gone by. But what is also ironic is that the record of a Government of a State is measured, mostly, in its fifth year when it is about to complete its term. Unlike the case of an individual or a corporate house, there are no year-to-year targets which it sets and evaluates itself. Yet, it must be admitted that the present dispensation in Dispur all through the year was focused on fulfilling its promises on multiple fronts: health, infrastructure, employment generation, agriculture, power, and industry to name some key sectors. Besides, there were people-centric announcements in the form of Orunodoi scheme, and Mission Basundhara which aims to settle once and for all issues around land rights. It must be credited to the Government that despite fiscal challenges, it continued to navigate the development trajectory.

Today, the State can proudly boast of many infrastructure projects on which work is in progress and some of which it has already achieved. One primary example being the number of medical colleges and hospitals, including the cancer care units, that have come up in the public sector in the State. Another notable area is power generation, especially renewable power. With basic infrastructure improving leaps and bounds in the State, it is just a matter of time that corporate groups start fulfilling their promises on Assam. Some of them are already here while others are on their way.



Combating Climate Change

by Rizwan Uz Zaman

Today Climate Change is an international emergency affecting lives, livelihoods, the economy, and our sustenance. Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC's) AR6 report. Further, global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) occur in the coming decades (IPCC AR6 WG I, 2021).

Assam has the highest overall vulnerability index in the country (CEEW, 2021) while India is ranked 7th in the list of the countries most affected by extreme weather events (Germanwatch, 2021). Over the years, the State has been reeling under the compounding and cascading effects of frequent and extreme hydro-meteorological hazards. According to the revised Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (ASAPCC) version 2.0 (2021-2030), by 2011-2040, the annual average maximum temperature ranges across Assam are likely to rise by 0.85°C and 1°C; annual average minimum temperature may increase up to 0.85°C and 0.95°C; annual average rainfall in Assam is projected to increase by 3.04mm.

Recent climate vulnerability assessment for the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) using a common framework developed under the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem ranked Assam as the highest vulnerable State with a VI of 0.72 among the IHR States. The report also states that Assam has 15 of India's 50 most vulnerable districts. Climate change is of great relevance to Assam given its strategic location in the North East and varying geophysical conditions, as well as its significant developmental needs with a large part of its population residing in rural areas, many of which are exposed to recurrent droughts, floods, heat waves, hailstorms, affecting livelihoods and health of the population at large.

ASAPCC 2.0 is a concerted effort by the Assam Government to adapt to and mitigate the adverse impacts of human-induced climate change. The Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) has prepared the revised document in consultations with all the line departments and other important stakeholders. ACCMS is a special-purpose vehicle of the Government of Assam to implement the ASAPCC and to coordinate with all other stakeholders to take climate actions.

The revised document has considered the latest advancements in climate science and global and local climate developments. The revised ASAPCC 2.0 for 2021-2030 envisages the Prime Minister of India's concept of Panchamrit commitments, Sustainable Development Goals; Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and India's other international commitments such as the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, etc.

The overall objective of the revised ASAPCC will enable Assam to enhance adaptation to climate-induced risks that the State is susceptible to, mitigate the drivers of climate change at the State level in line with India's NDCs, and institutionalise the revised ASAPCC while building awareness and capacities to implement the same.

The focus areas of the ASAPCC 2.0 include nine thematic sectors – (i). Agriculture and Allied Sectors; (ii). Water Resource Management focusing on Integrated Water Resource Management; (iii). Environment, Forests, Biodiversity Sector including Tourism; (iv). Energy Sector (Renewable Energy and Enhanced Energy Efficiency); (v). Human Habitat Sector (Urban and Rural); (vi). Transport Sector; (vii). Human Health Sector; (viii). Disaster Management Sector; (ix). Strategic Knowledge Management Sector.

The revised ASAPCC provides a comprehensive strategy to protect Assam among those States that are highly vulnerable to extreme climate events. The State Government is committed to taking affirmative actions at the grassroots level to encourage adaptation and mitigation innovations with an emphasis on all sectors, including education; the document is dedicated to contributing towards global and local climate change issues. Sectoral vulnerability profiling is also part of the study, and it helped identify and prioritise the actions in various sectors.

Notwithstanding the robustness of ASAPCC 2.0, there exist a few systematic challenges also for the State to a mainstream climate action plan, which can be addressed by:

1. The stakeholders should collaborate to develop a climate change (Climate parameters) database that will meet the gap of data for research and help to develop adaptation projects. This data can highlight needs and reveal who and where the most vulnerable people are. Also, there should be a platform or mechanism for sharing hydro-meteorological information with neighbouring States. This will further help the stakeholders for further preparedness and readiness in their sectors.
2. Lack of technical and institutional capacity across different sectors to report/record climate data. All the actions must be integrated into various sectoral plans and strategies and implemented using a coordinated effort across governmental departments.
3. Availability of climate change funds for the region.
4. Need for further developing inclusive risk management strategies for women, children, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and the elderly, among other population groups who are at higher risk recognizing the factors and circumstances contributing to higher vulnerability.

(The author is a Technical Consultant, Assam Climate Change Management Society.)

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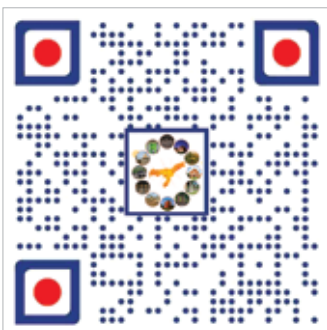
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