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GUWAHATI'S OWN ENGLISH WEEKLY

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Rise in insurgency, NRC re-verification & CAA execution key challenges for CM Himanta

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Other than managing COVID-19 situation in the state, the new chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma faces some critical challenges such as reining in insurgent activities which are raising their ugly head again in Assam, re-verification of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and implementation of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 as soon as it gets the nod from the Centre.

Within days of taking over the charge, two people were killed by a grenade blast in oil town Digboi in Upper Assam. The proscribed ULFA (Independent) has denied its involvement in the incident and has alleged that "some miscreants" are trying to create disturbance in upper Assam to put the government in a troubling situation when the state is reeling under COVID-19 crisis.

For Chief Minister Sarma the task is cut out, the insurgent activities which were at their lowest ebb in the state in the last ten years are again starting to make headlines. The recent kidnapping of two Quippo employees and their subsequent

release, abduction of three ONGC employees of which one is still captive with ULFA (I), are cases in point that will surely not make the job easier for the newly appointed chief minister.

Notably, after taking the oath, Sarma in his first media interaction called out the insurgent outfit ULFA Chief Paresh Barua to shun the path of violence and join the mainstream. Sarma categorically stated that both the government and the outfit have to make moves towards the negotiating table to make peace a long-lasting affair in the state.

Besides this, Sarma also faces some tougher challenges - that of the issue of re-verification of NRC and the implementation of the CAA. Detailing out his plans on the NRC, Sarma said that the state government will file a petition on the Supreme Court demanding re-verification of 20 percent of names in the final list of NRC.

NRC Coordinator Hitesh Dev Sarma has filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking a complete, comprehensive, and time-bound re-verification of the NRC. So now if the court agrees to the demand, how the entire re-verification exercise will be carried out will defiantly occupy the center stage of politics in Assam and India and will also

test the nerves of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader as a chief minister.

NRC is a sensitive issue and depending on how the court responds it will likely trigger responses from those who got their names in the final list and the 19 lakhs people who were left out from the final roll.

Sarma is a master strategist, and his political acumen has so far been hardly matched by his rivals in Assam. But the issue of NRC will be a litmus test for him as the chief minister of Assam. He will also be tested when it comes to implementation of the CAA. The central government has sought time from Parliament for framing the rules for the CAA. It is learned that both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha through the committees on subordinate legislations are likely to grant an adjournment of the Union Home Ministry's request.

The CAA formed part of the BJP's election manifesto in the recently concluded Assembly elections in Assam.

If Sarma succeeds in maneuvering these challenges, especially that of insurgency and NRC, issues which he has flagged out immediately after taking oath as the chief minister of Assam, he could start on a high note in the hot seat.

Mantra of perform or perish to be top priority for Sarma government

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Himanta Biswa Sarma was sworn in on Monday as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam. A 13-member Cabinet also took oath of office along with him. The new team under Sarma is a diverse make up of people from all across the state and from different social and political backgrounds.

Of the 13 members, there are six new faces – Assam Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Ranjeet Kumar Dass who is now a minister in the cabinet. The other new faces are Ajanta Neog, a former Assam minister and a former five-time Congress MLA from Golaghat, Bimal Borah, MLA from the Tingkhong constituency, Dr Ranuj Pegu, MLA from Dhemaji and former chief executive member of Missing Autonomous Council, Ashok Singhal, MLA from Dhekiajuli who is also a former Assam BJP spokesman, secretary and treasurer of the party and the well-known writer and winner of Sahitya Akademi Award from Bodoland Urkhao Gwra Brahma of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). Brahma won the election from the Chapaguri seat.

Senior BJP leader Chandra Mohan Patowary and Ason Gana Parishad (AGP) President Atul Bora continue to remain as ministers. They were cabinet minister in the earlier Sarbananda Sonowal led government. Former ministers of state Jogen Mohan, Pijush

Hazarika and Sanjay Kishan have been elevated to cabinet rank ministers.

While many of the cabinet ministers are experienced and have held ministerial responsibilities before, given Chief Minister Sarma's enigmatic persona and also the tendency to micromanage, talks of whether the ministers in the cabinet will perform to the expectations which has been set by the chief minister are already doing the rounds in the political corridor.

A BJP state level executive member talking to *G Plus* said on condition of anonymity, "It would be very challenging for Keshav Mahanta to handle health as Himanta Biswa Sarma as a health minister has set a benchmark during Covid crisis last year, and this year the 2nd wave is more serious and crucial." Mahanta is the AGP's working president and a former Water Resources Minister in the Sonowal cabinet.

The allocation of the Guwahati Development Department to Ashok Singhal has also raised some brows and concerns amongst BJP insiders. As Singhal is not from Guwahati, doubts are being expressed on how he would perform as head a key



Group photo of the newly sworn in cabinet ministers of Assam during oath taking ceremony | G Plus Photo

department which looks after interest of the city. However, some other members of the party are confident that he will perform well as he is from real estate background and understand the planning part any city better.

According to the BJP state executive member, "Singhal will be a better performer than Siddhartha Bhattacharya." Bhattacharya did not get any ministry in newly formed state cabinet headed by Sarma. It needs to be mentioned that it was Bhattacharya as the state BJP president in 2015 who was largely instrumental in getting Himanta into the BJP.

The handing of the important finance portfolio to Neog has not come as a surprise given her experience as a minister

during Congress rule. She was minister in PWD and Social Welfare departments and her performance is considered decent.

Even though Sarma has not kept health or finance with him, the possibility of him taking back these ministries if the ministers incharge do not perform as per the expectations which has set by him cannot be ruled out. "Everyone in his cabinet will have to perform to keep their ministries intact," said the BJP state executive member.

It has also been in the social media that any minister after carrying out their departmental work make a mention of the fact that they were instructed by the chief minister to do so. Forest Minister Shuklabaidya after announcing in social media that

he would visit Nagaon where 18 elephants were killed by lightning, said that instructions came from the chief minister.

Similarly, Chandra Mohan Patowary after checking the COVID-19 preparedness in Udalguri informed about the meeting tagging the chief minister on his social media post.

Chief Minister's Sarma's social media team is very prompt but now even the other cabinet ministers are seen following their present chief minister in communicating through the social media.

Well time will tell who all performs but it should not be a one man show or else no one will get opportunity to work and show their capability as people's representatives.

COVID-19 spike and lockdown woes: Who is responsible?

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In a recent risk assessment of the COVID-19 situation in India the World Health Organization (WHO) said that there were many possible contributing factors including "several religious and political mass meeting events that increased social mixing," had led to the "resurgence and acceleration" of COVID-19 transmission in the country. Talking about Assam, just few days before Bihu, the present chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had claimed that there was no Coronavirus in Assam and wearing mask was not important then. Well, it might have been true but the situation now is

different and as Assam is under partial lockdown now, who is responsible for such a scenario and what are the reasons that is making people to suffer like they are.

Scientists have claimed that election may not be the only reason for such a scenario in Assam and that people who came from outside brought the mutant strains into the population. But the fact remains that people are suffering and there had to be a super spreader event for the kind of spike we are seeing.

Talking to *G Plus* a resident of Jyotikuchi, Kedar Nath expressed his angst and said, "The authorities are responsible for further escalating the crisis as till 1 pm all spreading of the virus is done." He explained that businesses are open from 10 am to 1 pm and everyone

visits the market creating more chaos. Though post 2 pm the virus is contained, but the spread already takes place between 10 am to 1 pm.

It is difficult to say if such observations have any scientific basis as these are not backed by data. But we also cannot dismiss the fact there is rush at regular shops and also in those which provide cheaper goods continues during no lockdown timing (5 am to 1 pm). Even if we don't have answers and science to back people's concerns but common sense would have it that a crowded place can only add to the problem.

On the other hand even if we are to agree that the government decision of partial lockdown is correct, yet we must also look at the pros and cons of such decisions.

For instance, people are irked at the authorities for not regulating rise in prices during such times. The price of mustard oil has suddenly shot up Rs 170 per litre (Ramdev brand) and the cheapest which used to sell for Rs 90 (Gokul) sells for Rs 140 per litre. Similarly, after the authorities closed the daily and haat bazaars for 15 days, potato prices have gone up from Rs 10 per kilo to Rs 20 per kilo.

There are also instances of the people purchasing goods from back doors during curfew hours, inspite of the strict warnings to the businesses and the public. Who is responsible for that, the public or the enforcing agencies?

We need to accept that the politicians do not decide what we do in our everyday lives. Several

of our countrymen who went holidaying in Shillong early this year or gleefully held parties and large gatherings were not instructed by the politicians to do so. Even now people don't take the disease seriously. The strategy by authorities are also questionable as when two weeks complete lockdown is decreasing cases in Mumbai and Delhi, why is Guwahati stuck to partial lockdown increasing chaos for all during curfew hours and increasing risks during non curfew hours? Looks like everyone is equally responsible.

Therefore, it is but legitimate to ask the question which everyone is asking, that is: who is responsible for the chaos now? Public or authorities?

Lightning strike kills 18 jumbos, fingers point towards habitat protection & safety

Nibir Deka
@nibirdeka

In a tragic incident as many as 18 elephants died at Bamuni Hills on the peripheries of Barhampur, in Nagaon on Thursday. The pachyderms are said have been from the same herd that resided in the jungle.

Though the cause of death of the elephants have been attributed to lightning based on initial investigation, nothing can be said unless a thorough inquiry is made into the incident. In fact the government too is not leaving anything to chance and has ordered a complete investigation headed by AFS, Deputy Conservator of Forest (Publicity) K.K. Deori.

As soon as the news broke out, former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal tweeted calling it "a tragedy and a big loss." His successor and present Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma responded by sending Environment and forest minister Parimal Suklabadiya to the site of the incident to assess the ground situation.

Accompanied by top officers of the environment and forest department and a team of veterinarians and wildlife specialists the minister reached the site of the incident on Friday morning. After assessing the situation Suklabadiya said that the elephants appeared to have died probably due to lightning as there was no visible signs of struggle before they died. However, he also said that the exact reason for their tragic death will come out into the open following the submission of the post mortem report as well as the inquiry report.

Meanwhile, a search operation was initiated by the Nagaon forest authorities to recovering the bodies of the elephants.

The framework of the government inquiry

The investigation report has to be submitted within seven days from the date of issue of the order by the Office of the Principal Chief Conservator Of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden.

The inquiry led by Deputy Conservator of Forest, Deori under the provision of Section 50(8) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 is vested with powers

under Section 50 (8)(a)(b)(c)(d) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to investigate into the death of the elephants. The investigating officer will be assisted by qualified veterinarians.

According to the official order the investigating officer is allowed to undertake a detailed investigation of the local site including water and salt lick quality and may engage experts and agencies for the purpose, and carry out detailed fact-finding from fringe communities and first informants.

Terms and conditions for the inquiry

Some of the terms and conditions of the investigation which is to be carried out under the relevant provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, required the veterinary team to carry out a detailed post mortem of the elephants including collection and examination of samples for all relevant investigations in order to establish the actual cause of death of the elephants. The veterinary team also has to submit a preliminary report within three days and the final report within 15 days from the date of issue of the order.

Differing views and opinions

Environmentalists and social activists closely following wildlife and environment conservation activities are sceptical of the reason that has been shown as the reason for the death of elephants. Dilip Nath, a social activist from Tezpur refuted the claims of the lightning strike saying, "I can't fathom how so many elephants can die from lightning. I don't think the magnitude of the deaths have ever occurred in any other part of the world."

Deaths by lightning have earlier surfaced in India, such as the deaths of five elephants in Baksa in 2006. The sheer numbers of the death have even bamboozled the experts.

However, nothing can be concluded without the proper report. "See we have to first get the report to address the concerns raised, which includes poisoning or any other issue," an official from the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) told *G Plus*.

Locals from the area seem not



Carcasses of elephants killed at Bamuni Hills in Nagaon | G Plus Photo

too sure even as they pointed to a tree, which has been sliced into half and burned down.

The ground report from the site on Friday revealed that the most possible cause of death is due to lightning. The images of trees have clear impacts of a lightening strike. The designated team will submit official report in the next two days. At this stage concerns of poisoning have to be established as ground evidence suggest that lightning must have been the probable cause.

"Till this morning I also thought possible poisoning, but after getting images from the ground, I feel lightening seems the possible cause as of now. However team of investigators are investigating all other aspects and their technical and scientific report will reflect what actually caused such a large scale death of elephants," said Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Environmentalist and President of Aranyak an NGO working on wildlife conservation in Assam.

Ground current or the "step potential" which is associated with current discharge and conductivity is also not being ruled out. The near-instantaneous rate of discharge causes a potential (difference) over distance, which may amount to several thousand volts per linear foot. According to National Weather Services this phenomenon (also responsible for reports of mass reindeer deaths due to lightning storms) leads to more injuries and deaths than the

above three [clarification needed] combined.

Beyond the bigger issues: the existence of elephants

While the real reasons will come soon after the investigation is completed, the cause of the deaths has raised the issues of loss of elephant habitat.

This reporter had earlier filed an RTI to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest & Head of Forest Force which shows that over the last four years, 57 elephants in Assam have died from electrocution, 22 have died from train accidents and 5 from poaching. These man-inflicted deaths are an account of the human-animal conflicts in the state. A particular factor in the data is that 95 deaths have been attributed to unknown reasons.

"The loss of habitat is a reality. The recent deaths might not be linked to it, but the areas where elephants have traditionally have wiped out by brazen deforestation. The latest to join this is the Karbi Anglong forest," said an official from the Wildlife Trust of India.

In Guwahati, the problems have taken another dimension with the increasing population and concretisation in the city. There are instances of elephants going rogue in the city. There are two major hotspots in Guwahati in Panbari and Deepor Beel.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Guwahati Wildlife Division Jayanta Deka had earlier told *G Plus* that, "People have encroached upon the elephant habitat which has hindered the elephant corridor." The traditional corridors have been in the Sonapur-Jorabat route which has also been disrupted. This makes them enter the city as they are unable to utilise the original corridors. As per the forest officials, the people evicted from the area come back again.

Future course of action

The ensuing situation highlights that in the coming years, the elephant-human conflict occurrences will only increase in the state. As such, it is important to take protective measures regarding the situation. The crux of the problem related to increasing conflict between human and wildlife has caused the decline of habitats.

According to Talukdar of Aranyak, "For the long term solution to reduce such increasing incidences of Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC), the need is to focus on restoration of the degraded habitat." He says that along with the long term approach, short term approach should be to disburse the compensation or ex-gratia to human victims of HWC so that animosity could be reduced through quick disbursement of compensation or ex-gratia.

Scooters for girl students remain unused in Maligaon school

Nibir Deka
@nibirdeka

The scooters to be distributed under the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC) Scooty Scheme under the Pragyan Bharati remain unused.

Over 200 scooters have been lying idle for the past two months at the Maligaon High School in Guwahati. The scooters have been exposed to rains and had been covered in weed, which was only cleared recently. The covering which was placed earlier was also nowhere to be found when *G Plus* visited the school premises.

"We don't know when these vehicles will be taken from here. Maybe after the distribution is done completely," a staff member from the school told *G Plus*.

Similar cases of scooters lying unused have been reported in other government institutions without any use across Assam.

Few residents have claimed the scooter to be used for the healthcare staff if the government doesn't intend to utilize them for the students.

The former Education minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma had announced on August 18 that in the first batch, 22,000 girl students who had secured 1st division in higher secondary examination 2020-21 will be given scooters in December.

Later, an announcement was made that girl students of the 2018-19 batch and 2019-20 batch will also get scooters.

This was done in order to facilitate girls from going to colleges without any hassle. The approximate cost of each scooter was Rs 50-55 thousand. This means that approximately Rs 1 crore worth of scooters are parked at the Maligaon school campus.

Although the distribution for the 2020 batch has been completed and many meritorious girls have received the scooters for free,

the distribution for the batches of 2018-19 and 2019-20 have not yet been completed. *G Plus* spoke to an official from the Directorate of Higher Education, who claimed that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) hindered the distribution of the scooters.

"We have successfully distributed the 2020 batch but for the previous batches, only 50% have been completed," added the official.

The MCC was enforced in Assam since the poll dates were announced first on February 26 and had remained till the completion of the election process on May 2.

The MCC comes into force immediately on the



Unused scooters at Maligaon High School in Guwahati | G Plus Photo

announcement of the election schedule by the commission for the need of ensuring free and fair elections. Its main purpose is to ensure that ruling parties, at the Centre and in the States, do not misuse their position of advantage to gain an unfair edge.

It is designed to avert practices that are deemed corrupt under the MCC. For example, politicians should not make hate speeches, putting one community against another, or make promises about new projects that may sway a voter.

Inoculation of children and young adults to begin amid vaccination shortage

Angita Mahanta
@guwahatipius

Over 25.5 lakh people in the state of Assam have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and over 7.2 lakh people have received the second dose till May 14, 2021, bringing the state one step closer to the end of the pandemic.

However, a large segment of the population, teenagers under the age of 18, pre-teens, and children are yet to be vaccinated. Children and younger adolescents, under the age of 18, are still not eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in India. Having said that, the trial run for the indigenous 'covaxin' vaccine manufactured by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Institute of Virology (NIV), has been approved. Bharat Biotech has received approval from India's drugs regulator to conduct clinical trials on children for the COVID-19 vaccine making it the first coronavirus vaccine to be tested on kids and teenagers

in India. The approval has been granted for testing the vaccine on children between the age group of 2 and 18 years of age. The trials have been planned to be conducted among over 500 participants at multiple locations. The hospitals include the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi, and AIIMS Patna, among others.

The aim of conducting these trials will be to evaluate the vaccine in children for safety, reactions, and immunity. All the parameters like is it safe, is it high risks, is there any long-term side effect, among other new and perplexing realities have added to the parent's stress. "It is good to know that the trials for coronavirus vaccination on kids are starting, but when can I expect my kid to get vaccinated? Will it be available in abundance for all kids under 18?" asked a parent of a 6-year-old, Dorimi Borah.

Earlier, *G Plus* asked the question about children below the age of 18 getting vaccinated to Prakritish Bora, Paediatrician, Excelcare Hospitals. He said, "When we have a larger surplus of vaccines available, I am sure

the young adults will be eligible for vaccination. UK and US are probably the only countries that have started vaccinating certain age groups below 18. So gradually, the safety of the vaccination will be established like it is established in adults now. I am sure that other countries will also join in and once we know that vaccinating children is safe, India should go ahead and vaccinate the children as well."

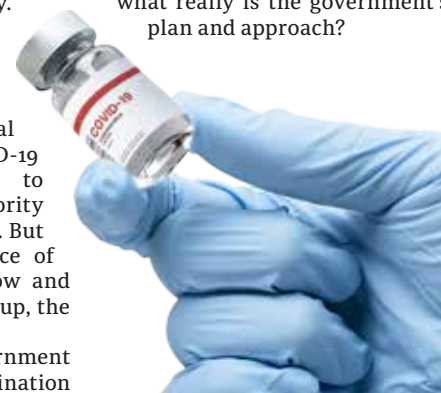
Dr Bora also informed that as the children mingle with adults, they have the ability to act as potential carriers, so vaccinating them becomes all the more crucial. "It is important to vaccinate children first because if they get infected, it gets harder to isolate them and they will potentially put their parents as well as grandparents at high risks. To reduce this type of scenario, vaccination in children becomes important. Secondly, since there is no cure, after the parents are vaccinated, no parent would want their child to be at risk, vaccinating them would be unavoidable," he added.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has given

permission to start phase 2 and phase 3 trials for vaccines on children. India is suffering from both - a shortage of vaccines and a record surge in new infections. Therefore, the Centre is taking several key decisions to enhance the vaccination program amid the call for a crisis. Only recently, the government said it received 150,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine and that "millions of doses" more will be made available in the country in five months between August and December, enough to vaccinate the entire population. India has also asked Johnson & Johnson and Moderna to sell their vaccines to the country. US pharmaceutical company Pfizer is in fresh talks with the Indian government over an "expedited approval pathway" for its COVID-19 vaccine. India aims to vaccinate 250 million "priority people" by the end of July. But experts say that the pace of vaccination has been slow and unless the drive is scaled up, the target could be missed.

Meanwhile, the government of India started the vaccination

drive for the 18-44 age group on May 1. After a four-day delay, the drive began in Assam on May 5 however city residents have been struggling since, and on many occasions, they have been turned down because the centres didn't have enough doses left. As a result, the state government was compelled to open the booking of slots on the CoWIN portal after 4 PM every day depending on the availability of doses in vaccination centers. So this begs the question, due to lack of clarity from the Centre, if there is to be another vaccination drive approved for children and young adults below the age of 18 years, what really is the government's plan and approach?



COVID 19 crisis creates oxygen black market in Assam

Angita Mahanta
@guwahatiplus

The unparallel crisis for oxygen that the country has witnessed only recently, whether to remedy a COVID-19 patient or a terminally ill patient or otherwise - as if begging for a little air to keep alive for a little longer, is going to become such an expensive affair, who would have thought. The arrangement of an oxygen cylinder at these times of distress has become the most important commodity and a major concern, especially for the members of a patient's family. Medical oxygen is a life-saving source and for that very reason, a flourishing black market is deceiving the hapless people across the state of Assam.

Loved ones are desperately trying to score whatever little supply of oxygen, the government is so preciously guarding, is left in an effort to buy some more time in this pandemic-stricken nation.

"I bought two oxygen cylinders for Rs 25,000 from Jainex Company. Ideally, the rate is Rs 7200 and these people are selling it at double the price, they are charging as much as Rs 13,000 per oxygen cylinder. Moreover, the distributors were not ready to issue any sort of bill against the purchase. It was only after I had a talk with the owner, that they provided me with a hand-written slip," a resident of Athgaon told *G Plus*.

Some private distributors are making money out of this crisis. They are charging more than the tariff decided by the government and taking advantage of people in these desperate times.

"My mother is terminally ill, and oxygen cylinders have become an essential part of our household. Earlier, the oxygen cylinders were available within the 7-8 thousand bracket but ever since the second wave of the COVID-19 got worse, the prices have just doubled, as if overnight. And, at our last purchase, we paid double the usual price. We have no other choice, we desperately need it and moreover, the distributors informed us that they were quickly running out of stock. Given such unprecedented situations, we have no other options but to pay heavy prices to the money-making marketers," Mahamaya Ghosh, a resident of Lal Ganesh shared her woes with *G Plus*.

With a record-breaking spike in the daily death toll and the

government's constant claims about having enough oxygen supply, the real problem is getting it to people in need. As the saying goes, desperate times call for desperate measures, many are paying hefty amounts of money to buy oxygen cylinders on the black market.

"I urged the distributors to take the standard tariff price and also offered to pay the extra cargo charge that is required to carry the shipment, but they refused. I had a talk with two different distributors based out of Guwahati. They are selling cylinders with only gas, without the medical accessories, within the range of Rs 13000-15000 per cylinder. The accessories that come along with it would itself cost around Rs 3000 extra. They are adamant that they cannot lower the price as the demand for medical oxygen has risen. One of them even told me that in the Panbazar area, one cylinder is being bought for not less than Rs 20000, so they certainly cannot compromise. This is after I told them it is a medical emergency and people cannot afford to pay double or triple the actual price," informed another resident of Guwahati.

Meanwhile, a supplier and manufacturer of oxygen cylinders from Rajasthan confirmed that the oxygen cylinders are coming into the state of Assam via flights in couriers because of which an extra cargo charge is expected. "At least 50 oxygen cylinders are arriving in couriers on SpiceJet flights to meet the increased daily demand. The rate of the liquid gas as well as that of the cylinder hasn't changed. However, a cargo charge will be asked, which should be expected," the supplier informed.

"There is indeed an increase in the demand for oxygen all over India, it has become very difficult for us. We still charge only Rs 110 for the liquid gas, not a penny more. We have helped people in times of need, we made sure oxygen reaches them even at odd hours. We don't know why they are charging more in Assam, there is still availability here. In states like Maharashtra, the demand is much higher and there is a crisis as well. They shouldn't be charging more than the standard price, only the additional cargo charges should be demanded because of the increased logistics and transport," the manufacturer added.

Meanwhile, the Guwahati city police have not received any complaints regarding the black

marketing of oxygen cylinders.

"Till now we have not received any such complaint regarding the issue, and should there be any such complaints in the future, we will investigate and take lawful action against it," said Numal Mahatta, Additional Deputy

Commissioner of Police, West Gauhati.

In the same vein, commissioner of police Munna Prasad Gupta told *G Plus*, "While the police don't control the price of medical equipment, we have not received any complaints in this matter so far."

As coronavirus cases continue to surge in the state, health care facilities are also in a constant struggle to ensure the supply of oxygen meets the demand. And while hospitals and patients are running from pillar to post, the state government maintains that there is no need for panic and only in the worst situation, Assam may need oxygen supply in bulk. Recently, the newly appointed Health Minister, Keshab Mahanta announced that all the civil hospitals in Assam will have their own oxygen plants in the next one month time. The minister made the statement



Oxygen cylinder at MMCH | File Photo

during a visit to the Nalbari Swahid Mukunda Kakati Civil Hospital where he visited to take stock of the COVID situation. Despite the availability, there is no denying that there is already

a striving black market where the average price for oxygen has skyrocketed. And desperate buyers are turning to these ruthless sellers amidst a record-breaking COVID-19 surge.



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Himanta Biswa Sarma: First Assam CM from present day Guwahati post-independent India

Nibir Deka
@nibirdeka

Senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma has become the first Chief Minister (CM) of Assam in Independent India, to be raised in present-day Guwahati.

Although technically Sarma was born on February 1, 1969, in Jorhat to parents Kailash Nath Sarma and Mrinalini Devi, the family later shifted to Guwahati and he was raised in Gandhi Basti, Ulubari.

The residents near the Kali Mandir area of Gandhi Basti still recall the vibrant Sarma. "He was ten years ahead of his age group and was very focused. Although he was my junior, I could see the proactiveness in him and he always stood out," recalls Prasanta Sarma, a native of Gandhibasti, Guwahati.

Sarma started his political journey from Guwahati served as the General Secretary (GS) of Cotton College Student's Union from 1991 to 1992. Later, he completed his Post Graduation in political science from Cotton College, Guwahati in 1992.

"We were in the same Lower Primary school and later did student politics together. I was from Cotton Collegiate and he was from Kamrup Academy. I remember jamming with him with musical instruments," said Bhupen Medhi, a childhood friend of Sarma. Medhi further stated, "Whatever he (Himanta Biswa

Sarma) wanted to do, he would do try his best to get it done."

Sarma will be the first Chief Minister from the Guwahati unit of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the second BJP Chief Minister of all time in Assam after Sarbananda Sonowal. "The Guwahati BJP unit has also stated that Himanta Biswa Sarma is the first from Guwahati BJP to become the CM," Mrigen Sarania, BJP Guwahati City District President.

The earlier Chief Ministers

Before India's Independence, the equivalent to the Chief Ministerial position was called the Premier. In that case, the Premier Sir Muhammad Saadullah was also born at Lakhtokia, Guwahati on May 21, 1885. He originally belonged to Kacharihat, a village near the town of Golaghat. As such, Sarma is the only CM after Independent India to be raised in Guwahati.

Meanwhile, Himanta Biswa Sarma is not the first Guwahati legislator to become the CM. Gopinath Bordoloi had won from the then South Gauhati constituency. After the Independence of India, Mahendra Mohan Choudhury had won from the East Gauhati constituency in 1967, who later served as the chief minister from November 11, 1970, to January 30, 1972. However, the Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi was born at Raha in Nagaon district on June 6. On the other hand, Mahendra Mohan Choudhury - under whose name



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during oath taking ceremony | G Plus Photo

the famous MMCH hospital is situated at Panbazar - was born at Nawgaon (near Barpeta) in the undivided Kamrup district. Bishnu Ram Medhi, who served as CM from August 9, 1950, to December 27, 1957, was born in the then undivided Kamrup district at Hajo.

The Guwahati connection

Guwahati was part of the same undivided Kamrup district. In 1983, Barpeta district was split from Kamrup, and Nalbari district was then similarly split off on August 14, 1985. On February 3, 2003, the Kamrup Metropolitan district was formed to cover the

urban core of the district out of once Unidivided Kamrup district.

Thus, both Bordoloi and Choudhury were very much Guwahatians as their political and education journey is based in the city, but by the virtue of upbringing they belonged to various places across Assam. Bordoloi was even part of the famous Sonaram High School, Guwahati in 1917 and was elected as the Chairman of Guwahati Municipal Board in 1934.

In comparison to that, Himanta Biswa Sarma will be the first CM in post-Independence India to be raised in the current Kamrup (M) area, which constitutes four constituencies of Gauhati East, Gauhati West, Dispur

and Jalukbari. Himanta Biswa Sarma has been the legislator of Jalukbari since 2001, winning it for 5 consecutive terms.

The lower Assam angle

Sarma will also be the first CM from lower Assam since Sarat Chandra Sinha (January 31, 1972- March 12, 1978). Earlier, Bhumidhar Barman from Belsor, Nalbari served as the CM from April 22, 1996, to May 14, 1996, and he didn't complete a full term. Similarly, Anowara Taimur (who was the GS of Barpeta District Mahila Samity) also didn't complete the full term in office and was the Assam CM from December 6, 1980, to June 30, 1981.

Look Back -

Students of Cotton College who went on to serve Assam as Chief Minister

Himanta Biswa Sarma has joined a list of eminent alumni of Cotton College, Guwahati to have become the Chief Minister of Assam.

Sarma joined Cotton College in 1985 to pursue Higher Secondary (Arts). Then he did Three-Year Degree Course (TDC) with Political Science as Major in 1987 and in 1991, he took Admission for Masters Degree in Political Science in Cotton College under Gauhati University.

At the same time, he was Assistant General Secretary (AGS) in 1987-88. From 1988-92, he became record three-time consecutive General Secretary (GS) of Cotton College Student's Union (CCSU).

G Plus spoke to the then Debate Secretary of the CCSU and Associate

Professor of Pandu College Navajyoti Borah who reflected upon the memories of Cotton College.

"We used to travel in a two-wheeler across Guwahati with the sole agenda to develop Cotton College," said Borah.

The former Cottonian revealed that the state of infrastructure in then Cotton College hostels was in a dilapidated condition. Cottonians, especially the leaders, wanted to bring in TV, telephone, and other facilities. This was led by Sarma under the CCSU.

The current day CCSU has stated that Sarma's victory is reflective of the leadership qualities the college breeds in the minds of Cottonians. "Cotton politics is like the net practice for leadership

and development in Assam. The quality of education also boosts an intellectual breadth in the students," said Rahul Bordoloi, incumbent GS of Cotton College since 2019.

Here is the list of Cotton College alumni who later went on to become the CM of Assam

- ✦ Sir Muhammad Saadullah, Premier (equivalent to then CM) was educated in Cotton College and later became a lecturer at the college.
- ✦ Gopinath Bordoloi, Premier and first

CM had passed IA in the year 1909 from Cotton College

- ✦ Mahendra Mohan Chowdhury, the CM from November 11, 1970 to January 30, 1972, was also educated at Cotton College
- ✦ Sarat Chandra Singha was the CM from January 31, 1972 to March 12, 1978) received his bachelor's degree from Cotton College.
- ✦ Hiteswar Saikia, two times CM of Assam was also from Cotton college
- ✦ Dr Bhumidhar Barman was from Cotton College as well.

Despite official orders Guwahati clinics & hospitals run unregulated rates of COVID tests

Trishna Das
@trishnadass56

As the COVID-19 cases mount in Guwahati, people are rushing to government and private health facilities for COVID-19 testing. Every day, thousands of people are being tested for COVID. However, the rates of COVID tests at some leading for-profit private hospitals in Guwahati and other clinics have become a matter of concern for the people at such vulnerable times.

Residents in Guwahati have complained that the rates of COVID tests in private hospitals and clinics are too high. The price for a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) at most places was found to be Rs. 500 while the rate of RT-PCR tests was well above Rs. 1000. *G Plus* later verified the claim and found that the private health care facilities have indeed marked higher rates for these simple COVID tests.

Meanwhile, at government hospitals, both the COVID antigen test and RT-PCR tests are being conducted for free. However, due to huge demand, hospitals are sometimes unable to provide testing services due to the unavailability of testing kits. Moreover, people choose to go to private hospitals and clinics due to the heavy rush at government hospitals like Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital (MMCH), Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH).

"At first, I went to a government hospital for an Antigen test. But due to the unavailability of test kits, I had to go to a private health

centre. There I had to pay Rs. 600 for an RT-PCR test," said 27-year-old Debajit Baruah, a resident of Zoo Road. Baruah said the health care centre charged him with Rs 500 for conducting the RT-PCR test. They also asked him to pay an extra amount of Rs. 100, citing some other reason, while the government rate for RT-PCR tests is only Rs. 500 at private clinics.

G Plus tried to get in touch with representatives of Ultracare Diagnostic Centre over the phone. However, there was no response from them.

It seems that after the government released the strict rate list for private hospitals and clinics, some have stopped providing the COVID tests services. *G Plus* spoke to a representative of Hayat Hospital who said, "We don't conduct tests for COVID anymore. Earlier, we used to conduct tests for outsiders. But now, we conduct tests only for those who get admitted in our hospital."

Earlier, the Health and Family Welfare Department had announced that the government of Assam has decided to fix the rates for COVID-19 tests. All the private clinics and laboratories in the state were ordered to follow the guidelines issued by the (Indian Council of Medical Research) ICMR. However, many private health clinics and hospitals seem to have violated the order of the Assam government.

A person from Jayanagar, who was unaware of the rate set by the government for the COVID antigen test said, "I went for the rapid antigen test, and the clinic

asked me to pay around 500, which I have realized was double the amount I was supposed to pay."

Meanwhile, those violating the order are to face action as per the provisions of the law. The health department officials and district administration have been ordered by the government to closely monitor COVID tests at private health facilities and enforce rates strictly.

But, it has been found that many such private clinics are still running COVID tests at unregulated rates.



File photo of a lady getting tested for COVID-19

Rates set by Government

- ★ RT-PCR test samples, which are collected at labs or hospitals, including all charges test cost, PPE charges has been set at Rs. 500.
- ★ RT-PCR test samples, which are collected from home, including all charges such as test cost VTM, PPE, etc have been set at Rs. 700
- ★ Private health facilities have been directed to charge only Rs. 250, for a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT).

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চলুক | for every

Say Yes

to Covid appropriate behaviour at all time

- Wear a mask
- Wash hands frequently
- Use hand sanitizer
- Maintain social distancing
- Get vaccinated

Consult doctors through eSanjeevani OPD app

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Guwahati COVID Support

A repository of all COVID-19 related data

Indrakshi Dutta
@IndrakshiDutta1

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has gripped India. As per the data from the health ministry, India continues to see a new high in COVID positive cases with over three lakh reported daily. Our government machineries are trying their hardest to support us through these difficult times. Our responsibilities as good citizens remind us that it is our duty to strictly maintain COVID protocol and abide by the rules of social distancing, but that is not all we can do.

The need of the hour is to stand together and help out those who are in need of any aid. Across the country, residents have joined hands, outpoured their support in the form of WhatsApp groups, crowdsourced lists, calls for oxygen answered by total strangers, and prayers sent to anyone listening.

Taking inspiration from these enormous acts of everyday courage, kindness, and sincerity, *G Plus* along with some good Samaritans of the city have come up with Guwahati COVID Support (<https://covid.guwahatipius.com/>) - a complete repository of COVID-19 support, whose objective is to help people gain access to vital resources by sharing information. The information provided has been verified to the best of our abilities, however, we would request our kind readers to use their discretion and verify the leads on their own before taking any action.

The Guwahati COVID Support will provide you with information related to COVID-19 in Guwahati. You can volunteer for Relief Work, Plasma donation, and

much more. Your participation will make sure that Guwahati residents get through the second wave as safely as possible.

These are the resources that you can access from the Guwahati COVID Support:

Request for Beds

To know of any availability of a hospital bed in Guwahati, please fill in a form with details such as the patient and attendee's name, contact details, and the urgency of their requirement. It is to acknowledge that the hospitals taking COVID Patients have received your request and may get in touch with you to meet your requirement based on their availability. In case the patient is extremely critical, we recommend you contact the hospital directly.

Pharmacy/Chemist

We understand that it becomes extremely difficult to step out with the risk of increasing infection everyday, hence we have tried to compile a list of Pharmacies and Chemists in Guwahati who provide lab services, home testing, and many other facilities. The contact details have been verified to the best of our knowledge, however, we recommend using your discretion.

Diagnostic Centres

We have collated a list of resources for diagnostic centres in Guwahati offering home collection of COVID tests. If you suspect that you might be COVID positive or if members of your family are COVID-19 positive, we

recommend you opt for home testing and collection to prevent further spread of infection. Stay home and safe, choose home testing.

Doctors for Home Consultancy

We have collated a list of Doctors in Guwahati who are currently offering services of home consultancy. In this case, the doctor visits the patient at home to review the health status, recommend diagnostics, formulate a treatment plan and refer them to a specialist, if required. Patients suffering from chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, elderly and bed-bound patients who find it difficult to travel to the hospital could opt for these services.

Get a COVID Test

We recommend getting a COVID test if your healthcare provider believes you have signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, difficulty, breathing, etc.), you live in or have recently traveled to an area where the transmission of COVID-19 is high or have been in close contact with an individual suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. The results of your COVID-19 test, along with other information, can help your healthcare provider make informed

decisions about your care. Being tested for COVID-19 may help limit the spread of COVID-19 to your family and others in your community. On Guwahati COVID Support, we have listed the places in Guwahati where you can get tested.

Oxygen Cylinders

A small proportion of COVID-19 patients need oxygen support when shortness of breath progresses to a more acute condition. Most patients have a respiratory tract infection, and in the most severe cases, their symptoms can include shortness of breath. In a small proportion of such cases, this can progress to a more severe and systemic disease characterized by Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). Our list of oxygen cylinder suppliers in Guwahati could come in handy if you require an oxygen supply.

Request for Plasma

Treating patients suffering from coronavirus infection with transfusion of blood plasma from those who have already recovered from the disease have been found to be safe and beneficial, multiple studies have suggested. Hence, there has been a growing requirement for plasma to treat patients in severe conditions. In such critical times, if you have just recovered from COVID-19 and want to donate your plasma or are someone looking for a plasma donor please refer to the 'Request for Plasma' section on Guwahati COVID Support.

Get Vaccinated

Wearing masks and staying 6 feet apart from others help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Vaccination for COVID-19 is voluntary in India. However, it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of the COVID-19 vaccine for protecting oneself against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease to close contacts including family members, friends, relatives, and co-workers. Refer to the list of Government and Private vaccination centers in Guwahati on Guwahati COVID Support. Additionally, please note that all vaccination is currently being facilitated using the CoWIN app.

Burial and Cremation

The Health Ministry has issued a list of guidelines and protocols that need to be followed while handling COVID-19 victims' bodies. Basic hygiene and COVID protocols are mandatory while handling the dead body. For further information on the burial and cremation of COVID-19 patients, which places in Guwahati are offering these services, please visit Guwahati COVID Support.

Latest COVID News

On Guwahati COVID Support, we bring to you COVID-19 research, reviews, commentary, news, and analysis from across the world. The information we share is fact-checked to the best of our abilities.



The second wave of COVID-19 has hit us harder than ever. It has created chaos, and in this hour of need, we have to be more than organized. We need to be prepared.

| We are proud to launch,

GUWAHATI COVID SUPPORT

A website and a resource portal for Guwahati, by Guwahati. Our One-Click Navigation will help you with hospital beds, medicines, diagnostic centres, oxygen availability, vaccination, plasma donations and requests, counselling or any related queries. Every information listed is verified by us as much as possible

Visit <https://covid.guwahatiplus.com/> for more

Government must rethink vaccine strategy

Of all the options that are available the best possible way to contain the COVID-19 virus is to ensure that a large section of the population gets vaccinated. This is what scientists and medical experts have been saying since day one. The government too is aware of the need to vaccinate people all across the country and has been trying to address the growing need for vaccines. However, realization is one thing and to act and act fast is another thing. The courts have been asking questions and constantly prodding the government to answer for the shortcomings. Most of the responses from the government has been defensive to say the least. The center has in an affidavit to the Supreme Court urged against any judicial interference on its vaccine policy. Its affidavit said, "Any overzealous, though well-meaning judicial intervention may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences, in absence of any expert advice or administrative experience, leaving the doctors, scientists, experts and executive very little room to find innovative solutions on the go."

The affidavit also said "It is submitted that in view of the unprecedented and peculiar circumstances under which vaccination drive is devised as an executive policy, the wisdom of the executive should be trusted."

Be it about the oxygen shortages or the vaccine policies of the center the courts were responding based on how the situation has been unfolding on the ground. The truth about vaccination is that people still are not getting their vaccines. Here in Assam, most of the 18-40 years age group people are yet to successfully get a vaccination slot. Others in the above 45 age category are also not sure if they can get their first and second doses on time. There is an acute shortage of vaccination which the government needs to acknowledge and find a solution and not find excuses or try to spend time doing image branding to show that it has been dealing with the pandemic to counter narratives in the media or how the courts have been responding to the chaotic situation all over the country. What the government needs to do is assess the ground situation regularly and do everything possible to ramp up vaccine production and also import vaccines from outside. It must also utilise its own vaccine manufacturing institutes which it has not done so far and which led to the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court saying that such facilities must be revived and put into effective use as this will help the government to inoculate all people instead of spending time in bargaining with private players at this challenging time.

[@guwahatiplus](#)

"Caged", once again

It is the feeling of a caged animal that's being felt once again by those residing in containment zones across Guwahati.

Several streets have been made containment zones owing to the spiking COVID-19 cases, cordoned off with barricades and police personnel on duty.

The residents of these zones are allowed access to only essential services within their area and movement is severely restricted.

Of course, we know it's for our own good that these tin sheets are placed otherwise people would come out without any reason, but sometimes we feel like caged animals.

Inside the house, it's the season of "work from home" teamed with "work for home" with house helps not being allowed to enter the containment zones.

Outside, the streets wear a deserted look. Locked shops and closed mosques/ temples show how work and worship have been affected by the pandemic.

Many residents are well-off, but a huge chunk comprises daily wagers and families pursuing small businesses. They are once again left with no source of income.

At a time when businesses had just started to limp back to action and the overall situation had started to get back to normal, containment zones are most certainly a step back at getting the economy back on its foot.

Even outside containment zones, a 2 PM – 5 AM curfew is in place, along with the odd-even rule for vehicles, closure of offices and other restrictions.

Amid all these steps by the administration, managing a large population with blatant containment zone violations remains a challenge due to the COVID-19 vaccination drive ongoing and people getting slots at far-off vaccination centres, and inter-state / intra-state movement being allowed.

There continues to be a sense of resistance from the people towards the guidelines set by the government.

Meanwhile, with active cases rising to as high as 42,000 and the death toll inching towards the 2,000-mark, it is now but a choice between safety and suffocation. The former being of utmost importance.

Nehal Jain

[@NehalJain96](#)

An animal corridor at peril, alleged muscle power behind

A wildlife corridor is a narrow strip of land with native vegetation that connects two or larger areas of forest habitats or fragments and for the maintenance of ecological processes. The movement of animals is a natural process. A permeable landscape is mandatory to ensure the same, the ability of certain species to mate, maintain biodiversity, and most importantly not to disturb the ecological cycle.

The Kanchanjuri corridor located in Kaziranga National Park (KNP) is of utmost vitality because it along with other similar corridors is used as a form of a bridge by animals to move to safer or higher places to avoid the fury of nature. As per the Supreme Court Judgment dated WP-C No. 202/1995 passed in 2019, it was laid down that no new construction was allowed on private lands which formed a part of the nine identified corridors of KNP. However, around this time last year, a serious allegation of illegal construction of a huge building on the Kanchanjuri Animal Corridor of Kaziranga National Park hogged the limelight which was in stark contravention of the orders of the aforementioned court orders.

Right to Information (RTI) and environmental activist Rohit Choudhury had championed the cause, and done whatever is necessary to bring the issue to the fore and had sent notice of the authorities such as the Central Empowered Committee (CEC). On May 7 2021 he had filed an FIR before Jakhlabandha P.S and has provided the authorities with evidence in photographic form as well of illegal activities going on in Kanchanjuri such as clearing of forest land, apparently digging up tea plantation for a water reservoir. Even the director of the adjoining Tiger Reserve Mr. P. Sivakumar had said that he had filed representations before the Golaghat district Authorities of illegal construction activities in sister corridors such as Haldibari and Panbari Corridor for construction of a religious building.

The continuing of such activities violates the court's order which means it amounts to contempt of court. As reported in regional dailies, the aforementioned tea garden in Kanchanjuri Corridor seems to be owned by a powerful politician and that smacks of influence of muscle power because of which even after an SC order, the intervention of local administration on these activities, media attention, etc. these illegal construction activities are going on in either

full swing or staggered form but no one has been able to put a stay at it in totality.

Even last year during this time this issue was creating a lot of buzz around, Mr. Amarnatha Shetty, the then Honourable Secretary of the panel had asked the Chief Wildlife Warden M.K Yadava to furnish a report related to the illegal construction of the permanent structure which is not only a threat to the movement of animals in the corridor but a poses a potential risk of overall ecological imbalance. The activities came to a halt for some time but after a lapse, the



activities continued. Moreover, the corridor is affected by illegal immigrants encroaching as seen in Amguri Debera Chang Gaon, and nefarious activities being carried out by clearing jungles and fences.

Why is it important to protect such Corridors? Animals get disturbed during the onslaught of their movement cycle which can further lead to such unavoidable situations the painful experience as observed in Numaligarh Refinery, where four elephants had died while trying to cross an illegal wall construction in the no-development zone which is located at proximity to the Kaziranga National Park. Ultimately, the court had not only ordered banning illegal construction activities but had also made laid down mandates keeping in mind the ecological viability of the area and similarly setting a proximate distance for the Numaligarh Refinery, defining the ambit of the no-development zone, any giving paramount importance to elephant movements and their migration activities understanding about the preservation of gene pool. It was witnessed in Tadoba Tiger reserve that mining projects led to cutting off a critical corridor in the area. The (Mysore-Nilgiri Corridor) covers almost three states and even historically Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve linked with the forest has suffered huge losses due to the expansion of farming and human settlements.

The corridors are of utmost vitality as can be gauged from

OPINION

PRAKREETISH SARMA



the fact that such corridors have been globally recognized which can be inferred from initiatives such as "Tiger Forever Projects" connecting Himalayan nations such as Bhutan, Nepal, etc or the initiative taken by Russia and China in the form of bi-national China-Russia genetic tiger corridor catering to the Siberian Tigers population. India is also not far behind with initiatives such as the critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) which identified five large corridors.

A report made by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has indicated that the existing legal provisions such as the Environment Protection Act 1986, Wildlife Protection Act, and the Biodiversity Act, etc are all effective but mostly remain dormant when it comes to dealing with such issues, under the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act and Forest Rights Act the recognized forest communities are empowered to protect, regenerate and also powers are vested with the Gram Sabha to manage the forests and especially the community forest resources (CFR) can be used by the local communities to protect the corridors.

The foreseeable lurking threat is that with the onset of monsoon, the entire belt is likely to submerge and the visuals of animals such as Rhinos who drown as a result is not new, the incessant rains pave the way for natural disasters such as floods, erosion, etc which is a common scenario in Assam. To add to the list of other miseries, other related adverse effects include, imbalance in the food chain which could further lead to vegetation loss, loss of large predators could lead to exaggerating smaller animals such as mice, raccoons which could further lead to serious problems such as crop damage as these smaller animals who are not eaten up by larger animals due to disturbance in the movement cycle can lead to such unavoidable situations.

(The author is currently practicing as an Advocate in Gauhati High Court. The views expressed in the article are his own.)

In humble response to 'hypocrisy', penning a reply to Mahua Moitra



Kangkana Goswami

The honorable Member of Parliament (MP) of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), Smt. Mahua Moitra who penned down her take on the Bengal elections in her write-up titled "I Know What It Takes To Defeat Narendra Modi" in the New York Times Opinion page dated May 5, 2021, probably, is being rewarded with claps and pats by the party supremo for hurling a harpoon on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), slamming them with a series of charges in the run for the Bengal berth. But little did she realize that the harpoon happened to be a double-edged one, with the hands of the TMC equally stained with blemishes of election bloopers.

To begin with, the honorable MP charges the Prime Minister (PM) of being an authoritarian juggernaut. Just a bird's eye of what Bengal has in store for storytellers. From booking a 25-year-old young star over a 'meme' to banning political satires in theatres across Bengal, the chief minister's (CM) aggressive and disgraceful retaliations reeks of political intolerance and vendetta in West Bengal. From blocking central schemes in the state to blocking BJP campaign choppers from landing in Bengal, Mamata ji exuded political narrowness to the extent of compromising even with common welfare and also electoral democracy.

The coercive ways used by her musclemen to dismiss political opposition, the TMC guerillas guarding the ground sniffing the slightest of dissent, and the monetary bonhomie to unemployed youths in villages, funding their clubs along with assisting them with police protection, speaks volumes of the didi's dadagiri.

On the point of an allegation of the prime minister catcalling Mamata Banerjee as 'Didi-o-Didi' as pointed out by the honorable MP, what makes her so rest assured of the fact that the chief minister has not transgressed every limit of political disgrace when she publicly uttered in a rally in 2019, that she wants to slap the PM when he visits West Bengal. With what conscience, ethical audacity, and political poise will Mohua Moitra ji defend and justify such a distasteful demonstration of such obnoxious and scornful invectives against a public representative of the highest order, the Prime Minister of a nation, only because he is a political bete noire?

All said and done, let's talk about the violence and political hooliganism in Bengal, of a party who speaks off, so vehemently, about the prime minister being an authoritarian. From charges of extortion against political goons patronized by the TMC to pre-poll incitement of violence, to now, the ruthless show of



political feud and vendetta against BJP workers in Bengal. The gruesome stories of post-poll violence in Bengal can be gauged from the fact that the TMC is leaving no stones unturned to infuse horror in the minds of anyone and everyone. The post-poll, muscle-flexing on the part of TMC saw everything from killing, molesting women, gang rapes, to torching properties of BJP supporters. The use of noose and knuckle by the TMC, battering and butchering life and limb is not just sadistic merriment of their

victory, but also a spectacle of vengeance, making statements of what happens in Bengal if the didi is dissented to.

Last but not the least, the TMC should, while boasting about their victory in the recent election also introspect about how could a guest party in Bengal with only 3 seats in the past elections make impressive inroads into the bastions of the TMC will a humongous surge of 77 seats to their credit this time. Inflicting more wounds to the political arrogance of the TMC is the Nandigram seat which the

chief minister took for granted but dramatically lost to the BJP. How Bengal has a chief minister who lost in her constituency. Has to be a humbling experience for the chief minister. All said and done, "heights of hypocrisy" Moitra ji! Don't throw stones at your neighbors if your windows are glass.

(The author is an Advocate at the Gauhati High Court, she was also the former Senior Assistant Editor, NorthEast Live. She is reachable at kgoswami1987@gmail.com. All opinions expressed are her own.)

Myriad threads of existence

Poetry is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be 'interior and personal' which the reader recognizes as his own. As I picked up this volume of poetry these are exact emotions that echoed in my mind and heart. The 'poet in question' if I may be permitted to use this word is one who perhaps never made a conscious decision to be a poet. Infact, Manjula Goswami is one who perhaps jotted down her thoughts, sentiments, triumphs,

struggles, tears, and smiles in her diary; believing it to be too private to be shared, except with those close to her heart. 'Kabitar Pachali' by Manjula Goswami is a very slim volume of poems; yet they echo as true emotions, for the one who pens it, as for those who read it.

You feel these are your emotions too. 'Matri R Anurudh' the poet claims is very close to her heart; it reveals the inner workings of a mother's heart as she offers her daughter's hand in marriage. Another poem



'Anami Mur Sai Bondhu Jon' is another poem that deals with the toll that this mechanized society has taken on society and human relations. Again in 'Maya' the poet, Manjula Goswami turns inward becoming philosophical where she tries to find her 'true place' on this world stage. The last poem in this volume deals with the deadly Coronavirus. It is a tribute to all our brave Corona warriors who are making it their call to put duty before themselves. This poet or rather 'budding' poet, seems to have a penchant for

rhyming words and she uses her words with care.

Perhaps it is this love for rhythm and desire to break the monotony of daily existence; that makes her put forward her creativity in the public eye despite the pandemic. This volume makes one recollect Thomas Hardy's favorite words 'Poetry is emotion put into measure'.

The author is an Advocate and with over 20 years of teaching experience. She is an ardent writer and social worker as well. The views expressed in the article are her own.

Meenakshi Gautam

Vaastu factors affecting relationships



HEMANTA KUMAR SARMAH
Engineer, Businessman, Advanced Pranik
Healer and Su Jok Acupressure specialist.

It is very difficult to maintain relationships for a long time without disharmony or conflict. The material life led by us takes its toll in the long run, sometimes much quicker than expected. We have too much expectation from our near and dear ones and when they do not deliver as we would have liked them to, our relations suffer as a result. Fresh relations like love or marriage take a back seat after a few years. Relations between parents and children are strained. We become complacent in our surroundings. By making changes in the house or by moving household stuff, we can bring in new energy to ignite stale relationships. Vastu arrangement can help in enhancing harmony in the family as well as curing the disturbed relationship.

The factors affecting relationships are described below:

- ✧ If the location of bedrooms is wrong. Southwest, west, and south are the best directions.
- ✧ If the southwest corner is cut or if there is a defect at southwest.
- ✧ If the northeast corner is cut or if there is a defect at the northeast corner
- ✧ If the sleeping direction is wrong. Sleep with the head to the south.
- ✧ If the color of the bedroom is not correct. This has been discussed earlier.
- ✧ There are wrong pictures or

statues in the room.

- ✧ There is a water body at the southeast or northwest.
- ✧ If the house is located on a T-junction or very near a U-turn.
- ✧ If the house is located very near a public place like a bus stand or railway station.

Some Feng Shui Tips On Love

The basis of all our relations rests on love. People long for love all their life; some get it but some lose it. There are innumerable love stories written or filmed and monuments are constructed like The Tajmahal. There are instances of kingdoms being invaded or destroyed just for love.

Here are some Feng Shui tips which can activate romance luck



and enhance relationships:

- ✧ If you are single or looking to improve your relationship, sleep with your head in your best favorable direction.
- ✧ Do not sleep facing the door as the shar chi (killing breath) will be very strong and will cause problems in your relationship.

✧ The southwest is responsible for relationships. Strengthen the southwest section of your home. The southwest section governs romance and marital happiness. The element of the southwest is Earth. This should be activated with a pleasant decoration of small rocks or anything made from terracotta or clay. A picture of a mountain without any water can be hanged. Crystals are also very useful and so are mandarin ducks.

- ✧ The edges of columns, beams, and furniture in the bedroom poison send arrows. These poison arrows bring harmful energies which affects one affecting relationship as well. These edges should be rounded or covered.
- ✧ Those who are single and wish to have a partner can hang a painting of peonies, the Chinese flower of love in the house or bedroom.
- ✧ The Yin(female) and Yang(male) energy of the house should be balanced. Males should display feminine stuff like photographs etc.; females vice versa i.e. masculine items or photos.

Managing anger to nurture relationships

Just like any other emotion, anger is also a type of human emotion. If not controlled, anger may destroy relationships over time. It is essential, therefore, to manage anger issues for people who are highly volatile in testing situations. Anger may have an indirect cause such as stress, family problems, or financial issues. It should be noted that anger is not a disorder but just a symptom of an underlying illness. As most of the people in our society are not aware of what is happening internally, it becomes difficult to control sensitive situations which may turn violent. Random scenes when the husband becomes abusive to his wife and family are very common in our society.

For children who have had a troubled childhood because of the abusive behavior of their father, it leaves trauma. Also, for the wife, she becomes helpless and embarrassed by her husband's

abusive behavior. Domestic violence is a major problem in Indian households. In a report by National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 32% of women surveyed in Assam have faced some kind of violence in their homes. Alcoholism is considered to be a major cause of anger issues and it may lead to physical abuse subsequently. Women across the globe have faced bashing from their husbands and it affects the whole family. Anger, stress, abuse, and addictions are interrelated in one way or the other, so it becomes essential to control them. Here, I will suggest a few methods of how anger can be managed by the individual who has a problem controlling this emotion.

i) Try to find what triggers you

When you are finally expressing your anger, most often the wrath is faced by your closed ones. Therefore, it is important to find out the actual cause. It may be



due to frustration of over-working, mismanagement of finances or addiction to alcohol. Try to find the cause, when you are calm and not vulnerable to anger. When you can access yourself unbiased, you are on the way to salvation.

ii) Positive self-talk

When you are on the edge of bursting out, try to say these lines within yourself, "Relax", "I am okay, I have time, I don't have to speak now", "I will speak only when I am calm". I know, this is very hard to tell yourself when you are triggered, but once you start speaking these affirmations to yourself, you are replacing angry

thoughts with sensible thoughts. This will provide you the time to relax and think twice before you spit venom.

iii) Walk-away

Before you are about to explode with anger, take a step back. Keep moving away from a zone where your close people might get affected. Walk for a few minutes and take deep breaths.

iv) Channelize energy to different work

Once you are alone with your anger, this energy should be channelized to a different entity, so that your mind is relaxed. One way to channelize that energy is to do any workout that releases quick sweat like 20-30 push-ups. Sweating will release positive hormones, which can help to calm the mind. Some people might have a habit to break things, but they can be costly items. So, it is better to channelize energy in a productive way like running, walking, push-ups etc.

v) Avoid addiction to alcohol



Abhijnan Pritam Sarma

When a person is addicted to alcohol, that person is unable to use reason and is controlled by alcohol. When alcohol controls you, it may in turn affect your relationships within family, friends and office. Alcoholism is an underlying cause of domestic violence against women. Therefore, any individual addicted to alcohol must realize that it has bad effects on family and relationships.

(The author has completed his master's degree in Linguistics from Delhi University. He can be reached at abhijnan.sarma1@gmail.com. The views expressed in the article are his own.)

Where do the pedestrians walk?

People have often heard about illegal activities like land encroachment, forest encroachment, hills encroachment etc that have always created predicaments for society at large. But in our busy day-to-day lives, it is the encroachment of the walking space of the people residing in a city that has over the years turned into a headache for most of the denizens. The problem of encroachment of walking space is an unsolved issue in most of the urban areas of the major cities of India, and at times it feels even the government has become helpless in its desire to curb the menace of the encroachment of the walking spaces of the pedestrians. This issue also has troubled most of the people of the city of Guwahati.

In our periphery of discussion regarding the encroachment of walking space for the pedestrians, it is pertinent for us to understand the core reasons behind the creation of congested areas of walking for the people. For the same, we have to analyze different rules, regulations, laws, by-laws, etc to understand: whether is it the failure to create a stringent ACT that is creating this dilemma or the ineffectiveness of the authorities to ensure proper enforcement of the laws, if there are any?

If one hovers around the city of Guwahati and tries to find out the core reasons behind the lack of proper space for the pedestrians to walk, one can find many reasons that are creating this hindrance. The main roads or highways have been always used by the people for vehicular movement and with the increase in population and number of motor vehicles, the government has always been enthusiastic to increase the width of the tracks to avoid traffic congestion. Therefore for the dwellers of the city, the footpaths have been preferably bestowed to them for locomotion. But in recent times, it is the coming up of illegal shops and establishments, small vendors and hawkers on the footpaths, irregular and



illegal parking on the footpaths as well as manholes that have encroached most of the walking space of the pedestrians, and the magnitude of this problem has simply kept on escalating with each passing day.

While discussing this very important issue, we have to bring into focus a concept known as 'walkability'. Walkability is nothing but it is simply the measure of how friendly an area is for walking. To throw light to the statistics, the Ministry of Urban Development, India (MoUD) once considered thirty cities of variable population, which included Guwahati as well to know about the walkability score. The study revealed that Guwahati had a walkability score of 0.39, while the average being 0.54, and the list was topped by Chandigarh with a score of 0.92. Further, if we take into account any part of the Guwahati city, there is hardly any location where one can walk a distance of 50-100 meters on the footpath without stepping on the roads. These statistics draw a deplorable scenario for the pedestrians of Guwahati as many had to even face fatal

accidents because of the lack of walking space.

The major issue that is eating up the spaces of walking on the footpaths of Guwahati is the establishment of illegal stalls by hawkers and vendors. The footpaths of Guwahati are often occupied by licensed shops and stalls that already absorb the majority of the space of the footpath. And along with that the construction of illegal shops by vendors and hawkers simply means that people have to either wait for the other person to pass or sometimes even walk by colliding with one another. Many a time, we have also seen concerned authorities carrying out eviction drives but after the passing of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, the government is finding it difficult to accommodate all the registered vendors in the allocated alternative spaces.

Further in the famous Sodan Singh case- 1989 (4) SCC 155 on Hawkers, the Supreme Court had observed that “...If the circumstances are appropriate and a small trader can do some business for personal gain on the

pavement to the advantage of the general public and without any discomfort or annoyance to others, there can be no objection. Hawkers cannot be permitted to squat on every road. Factors like the width of the road, security, etc, have to be considered.” Therefore with all the rules and regulations in place, the authorities are currently finding it difficult to find out a long-term solution regarding creating the right balance between allowing licensed vendors to operate and also finding adequate spaces for the denizens to walk on the footpath.

To worsen the situation of limited walking space of the pedestrians, the reckless activities done by a few selfish dwellers of Guwahati, have also reduced the walking space for the pedestrians to a large extent. A few of the citizens are seen either parking their vehicles on the footpaths or even driving their vehicles on them, thus completely blocking the little space left on the footpaths for the pedestrians to work. But under the Road Regulation Act, 1989, certain obligations are imposed on the driver of a vehicle



Bishaldeep Kakati

concerning the pedestrians. Rule 11 prohibits driving on the footpath or the cycle lane and Rule 15 says no driver shall park a motor vehicle near a traffic light, on a pedestrian crossing, or a footpath. Therefore the authorities and the police department have to be strict in this regard and impose suitable fines and punishment against people breaking the rules.

Therefore to reduce the plight of the pedestrians, at least three things must be done at the earliest. Firstly, the authorities must come out with a long-term solution to create the balance between construction and operation of shops and stalls and walking space for the pedestrians on the footpaths. Secondly, the authorities must conduct strict surveillance and impose fines and punishment on those who either drive vehicles on the footpaths or park the same on the footpaths. Thirdly, the people should show some civic sense, shouldn't be selfish, and come out to help the government by following the basic rules and regulations. And in the longer run, if appropriate walking spaces for the pedestrians on footpaths can be ensured, then it would not only reduce fatal accidents but also allow all the sections of the society, be it the young or the old to stroll properly on the footpaths without any difficulty.

(The author is a lawyer, writer, and a socio-political commentator. The views expressed in the article are his own.)







Weather report for the week

Guwahati

SATURDAY

Sunny

30°-19° C

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
					
Sunny	Sunny	Sunny	Mostly Sunny	Sunny	Sunny
32°18° C	32°18° C	33°19° C	33°20° C	32°20° C	32°20° C

Saving the student

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) data shows the percentage of people infected from COVID-19 between ages 0-10 years and 10-20 years to be 3.32% and 8.32% respectively. Based on uniform averages, the number of children (aged 5-16) infected in the state comes to 21,644 (6.98% of 3,10,098 as of 13th May 2021). Though the mortality rate has been low in this age cohort, only the future can say if the strain has left any long-term impact on our bodies. More than the direct impact of the virus, in terms of morbidity or mortality, this age cohort has been more impacted in the areas of education, nutrition, social security, and mental health. I want to focus on the former in terms of Assam.

There are about 90 lakh children in the state of Assam between ages 5 to 16. With 86% of the state's population being rural, the impact on rural education demands the most attention. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020 rural report (based on data from Sep 2020) for Assam shows that the percentage of students enrolled in schools has gone up from 95.8% in 2018 to 97.8% in 2020 whereas the country's average has fallen by 0.8%. Assam deploys a lot of migrant workers to other states. One possible explanation of this aberration could be the returning migrants settling with their families back in their villages and enrolling their children in school. It also highlights the presence of strong rural educational infrastructure. Second, the entire country's rural educational scenario saw a 3% shift in enrolments from private schools to government schools across all grades. The prime factor responsible for this should be the inability of some parents to pay for private education and the closure of private schools in the pandemic. However, even this data is opposite in the case of Assam. Private schools' share in the pie has grown by 3-4%, taking share from the government schools. This counter-logic can be explained with two possibilities—one, the Assam Government asked private schools to waive off at least 25% of their fees as their costs of electricity, maintenance, day-boarding, etc had reduced and two, there could be a weak personal connection between the government school authorities and the households (compared to the private schools). This is bolstered by ASER 2020 Assam data that shows that 44% of government schools engaged in 'no' activity of any kind with students from the lockdown till September 2020 compared to private schools' figure standing at 29%. With no engagement of any kind, parents may not have

enrolled their children for the next academic year in the case of government schools.

Third, with smartphones being the biggest asset for education in these months; the number of rural households owning them has grown from 36% to a whopping 61%! However, this tremendous rise has not been proportionally supported by the adequate provision of

video-recorded lessons (only 13% schools) or online classes (mere 6% schools) by both government and private schools. Also, about 84% of the households in the country having a smartphone have only a single smartphone for all its members. The 2011 census shows an average household size of '4.87' in Assam. Even with a single device, the accessibility among the children in such household sizes is questionable (even without accounting for the access to electricity and internet). Fourth, with a large percentage of parents and community members not skilled enough to tutor their children, especially in the later classes, coupled with the chores and stress of battling with the direct effects of the pandemic; the quality of learning a child gets from any educational effort comes to question. Already, the middle-school children in Assam are at least 10% points behind the national average when it comes to both the ability of reading and doing basic division. This fact becomes even more grave when we see government school students, who are 2x in headcount, performing 2x more than private school students on these metrics. These trends show that we have done great in terms of getting students into the schooling system, which is a victory on its merit but has lagged in helping them get the learnings out of it. Several NGOs were seen raising money to create online infrastructure but the impact of all NGOs combined can come nowhere close to the capacity and reach of the government.

On assessing the state government's intervention in this sphere, we see several steps taken over the months. In terms of learning avenues, the government urged school teachers to provide study



material (either subsidized or free) and questions for practice to their students. It tried re-opening schools in a staggered manner with school sanitization and limited student capacity in check. The Biswa Vidya Assam Channel (A Government of Assam initiative) on YouTube provides extensive learning resources for school students free of cost across grades and subjects. A mobile app with the same name is also being developed. The Diksha App (A Government of India Initiative) has been downloaded by 3.5 lakh students and 1.18 lakh courses completed. Under the Gyan Brikshya program, classes on mathematics, science, and English were being broadcasted from 8:30 AM to 7:30 PM by two TV channel broadcasters in the state—ACC and GTPL and also on Jio TV. Biswa Vidya, an AIR learning program in Guwahati and Dibrugarh for elementary classes in English, Assamese, and Social Sciences was being broadcasted. For 9th and 10th graders, Doordarshan was telecasting Science and Math classes several times over the week. In terms of examinations, the state's education boards were asked to either reduce their syllabus or give maximum options in the question papers. The academic year in the state has also been changed to April-March, like the ROI, from the Jan-Dec anomaly. To promote higher education among girls, 22,000 HS girls who scored the first division were announced to be awarded a two-wheeler. Students who cleared the Class 10 examination were announced to be awarded a computer or a sum of 20,000. The results for Class 10th and 12th were digitized and the online process to get admissions using these digital mark sheets was initiated for enrolment in the next academic year. In June,

the state government announced free admission for the current academic year to all students from HS to the PG level with no prospectus or form charges. For hostel residents, a transfer of 1000 per student for mess charges and 1000 for buying textbooks will also be provided. In addition to this, all colleges have been directed to increase their intake capacity by 25% for this year and reserve these seats for students who pass the HS exam this year. The government also announced an amount ranging from 2 to 5 thousand (based on geography) for students studying outside the state who wanted to return home due to the pandemic. The state government has also created a career guidance portal for students in classes 9 to 12 for helping them explore colleges, exams, vocational courses, and scholarships, etc. A team of 40 people was constituted for the implementation of the New Education Policy 2020 in the state.

On asking ourselves what more could have been done, let's look at some examples from other states. The Kerala government has an educational channel called Kite Victors, which exclusively telecasts educational content for classes 1-12. With 45% TV household penetration in rural Assam and a higher percentage in urban areas, such a channel could have greatly increased access to education in Assam. Moreover TV, unlike smartphones, comes with the advantage of shared learning. The Kerala government created neighborhood study centers to allow for this provision. These centers were also used to sell television to households at subsidized rates. Assam could have also rolled out subsidized/zero-EMI-based smartphones and TV purchase



Tarang Bansal

schemes through its network of Aanganwadis and schools. Kerala also became the first state to provide free high-speed internet to economically backward sections of society. With so much content available on YouTube and other government platforms and the smartphone penetration at 61% in rural Assam (much higher in urban), access to high-speed internet could have again improved access to Education in Assam. The Haryana government launched the Ghar se Padhao Abhiyan (Study from Home Initiative) to connect the 50,000 teachers from 8,686 primary, 2,423 middle, and 1,154 high govt schools with 52 lakh students through hundreds of WhatsApp groups. Teachers would be responsible for the children in their groups for normal classes, notes from classes, subject and topic wise completion of course for each student. WhatsApp groups were formed by lots of schools in Assam also but such initiatives were school-driven and only encouraged by the government, unlike Haryana where the government became the prime facilitator of this service.

The teachers, parents, the government, and all other stakeholders seemed to have wanted the best for our students. Having said this, the impact of COVID-19 on education can be ascertained by tracking the learning parameters (reading-arithmetic stats) and the dropout rate for the 2021 academic year. The above analysis doesn't include the impact on education due to inaccessibility to nutrition, loss of social security from the demise of caretakers or their loss of livelihoods, physical and mental toll on children due to the disease, and the shock that a complete shift from classroom-based teacher-led teaching to online pedagogy brings. The impact on children with disabilities is also one to follow as we needed special books and screens, software, and scribes to provide equality of opportunity to this cohort. The practice of going to school, in itself, protects a child from being pushed in marriage, labor, or crime but that is another story to follow.

(The author is an alumnus of Don Bosco School, Pan Bazar. He is currently working for an FMCG company and is enthusiastic about the education field.)

#ntw

News This Week

A quick round up of the news that mattered during the past week



1 Why are we hiding actual COVID-19 deaths, IMA asks Centre

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has accused the Centre of not carrying out transparency in reporting and making a registry of COVID-19 deaths in the country. "Hundreds of deaths happening in big hospitals are shown as non-COVID deaths and crematoriums are showing house full boards. RT-PCR negative, but CT positive cases aren't counted. Why are we trying to hide actual deaths?" the IMA said in a letter. IMA on Saturday, May 8, said that the Union Health Ministry was showing "extreme lethargy" and taking "inappropriate actions" in dealing with the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.



6 List of states that have imposed restrictions, curfew, and lockdowns

The Union government left it to the States/Union Territories to impose restrictions in order to curb the rising COVID-19 cases amid the second wave. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that states should consider lockdowns as a 'last resort' to plateau the rising cases. Here's a list of states with total lockdown: Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, Punjab, Nagaland, Haryana, Puducherry, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Other states like Assam, West Bengal, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu, and Kashmir have imposed either a partial lockdown and/or night curfews.



2 21 dead in Rajasthan village after 150 attend burial

21 people died in the Sikar district of Rajasthan allegedly after a COVID-19 infected corpse was buried without following standard protocols. "A COVID-19 infected body was brought to Kheerva village on April 21 and about 150 people attended the last rites and the burial was done without following Coronavirus protocol," said an official. The body was taken out of the plastic bag and several people touched it during burial, the official added. However, officials said only four deaths have occurred due to the COVID-19 virus between April 15 and May 5.



7 Indian woman killed amidst Palestine-Israeli conflict

An Indian woman, Soumya Santosh from Kerala has been killed in a Hamas rocket attack at Ashkelon in Israel on Tuesday, May 11. Soumya Santosh, who hailed from Keerithodu of Idukki and worked as a caregiver in Israel, was killed in rocket launches on Israel by Palestine amid the ongoing conflicts between the two countries. Santosh, 31-year-old is survived by her husband and a nine-year-old son. Israel's ambassador to India Ron Malka took to Twitter to condole the Indian woman's demise.



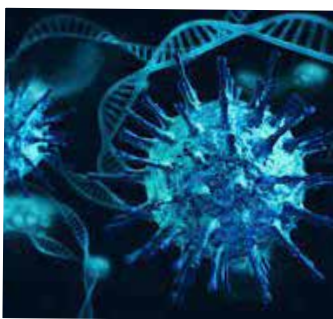
3 After Twitter, Instagram takes down Kangana Ranaut's post

Days after actress Kangana Ranaut's Twitter handle was permanently suspended by the social media giant, Instagram has now deleted one of Ranaut's posts where she talked about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On Saturday, May 8, Kangana informed on Instagram that she tested positive for COVID-19. The actress had developed symptoms in the past few days and got herself tested because she wanted to travel to her hometown in Himachal Pradesh.



8 Nearly 100 bodies found floating in river Ganga

At least 96 unidentified bodies – many of them decomposed and bloated – have been found floating in River Ganga over the past couple of days. It has triggered fears among local residents in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh that bodies of Covid victims were being dumped in the river. The floating of dead bodies in the Ganga has evoked shock and anger. Authorities of both Bihar and UP are yet to confirm if the unidentified decomposed and bloated bodies of 96 people were of COVID cases.



4 Not 'Indian variant', virus needs to be called by scientific name

The Government of India recently raised objections over the B.1.617 strain of COVID-19 being called by some - including media outlets - as the 'Indian variant' of coronavirus. Therefore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday, May 12, clarified that it does not identify viruses or their variants with names of countries where they are found. "WHO does not identify viruses or variants with names of countries they are first reported from. We refer to them by their scientific names and request all to do the same for consistency," WHO (South-east Asia) posted on Twitter.



9 Group of auto drivers start 'jugaad ambulance' in Pune

A group of auto drivers in Pune on Thursday, May 13 started 'Jugaad Ambulance' which is an initiative to help facilitate COVID-19 patients in the city. The leader of the initiative, Keshav Kshirsagar said that they have installed oxygen support in three of their autos to help people who are facing difficulties in finding beds in hospitals. "People who are suffering from COVID-19 were finding it difficult to get a bed in the hospitals, so we have installed oxygen support in three autos to help them," he added.



5 11 COVID-19 patients die in Tirupati hospital after oxygen disruption

Eleven COVID-19 patients died due to a shortage in oxygen supply at a government hospital in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh on Monday evening (May 10). The deaths have been reported at a time when the entire country is fighting the second wave of COVID-19 and shortage of medical oxygen has emerged as a key challenge. There are about 135 ICU beds and 400-plus oxygen beds at the hospital where some 1,100 COVID-19 patients have been admitted at present. Even as families of patients alleged that the oxygen supply was disrupted for about 25-45 minutes, officials claimed that the supply was affected for just a few minutes during which time the tragedy took place. The delay in the arrival of the oxygen tanker from Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu had further triggered the crisis, the official said.



10 COVID-19 positive woman raped by male nurse, dies within hours

A male nurse has allegedly raped a COVID-19 patient at a hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal, police said on Thursday, May 13, 2021. The woman, who was undergoing treatment for COVID-19, disclosed the incident to a doctor at the hospital. However, soon after, the 43-year-old woman's condition worsened. She was out on a ventilator and she died within 24 hours of the incident.

Guwahati

GYAN

Did you know?

Barasha Das

Lakhtokia

Eid Mubarak! As Guwahati along with the rest of the country celebrates a subdued Eid-ul-Fitr, here's a small piece of history of one of the oldest and renowned Muslim neighbourhood of the city – Lakhtokia.

From the Panbazar railway overbridge to the Sikh Mandir Charioli of Fancy Bazaar, the area is known as Lakhtokia. During the Ahom rule, this locality was known as 'Parsiporia Gaon.'

The residents of this area and the senior citizens of Guwahati have different theories as to why this locality came to be known as Lakhtokia. The most common is that a very wealthy family used to reside in the area whom the neighborhood used to refer to as 'Lakhtokia Ghar.' From this the locality eventually got its name.

However, as per the history written by Akdas Ali Mir in his

series "Aitihasic Patabhumit Asomir Aitijyamandita Islamdharmi Sakal", after years of fighting, the Ahom kingdom signed a treaty with the Mughals to end the battle. In return the Ahom king had to pay Rs. 1 lakh as indemnity to the Mughals annually.

Every year the Mughal officials used to establish a temporary camp in the Lakhtokia area where the formalities of payment used to take place. History records that the locality might have got its name from that Rs. 1 lakh payment.

Lakhtokia area is home to a section of the Muslim community with the title 'Mir.' History records that the origin of these people with 'Mir' title can be traced back to Iran. They came to the Indian subcontinent as warriors with the Mughals.

They were brought to Assam by Mir Jumla II, the governor

of Bengal under Emperor Aurangzeb. When Mir Jumla invaded the Ahom Kingdom in 1662 he brought along the ancestor of noted engineer of Lakhtokia, Mir Azgar Ali, who contributed significantly to the construction of the Guwahati-Shillong Road. The Mirs were brought as doctors of the Mughal army. Many in the army fell in love with Assam and stayed back. Since the Mughals didn't bring along any women, those who stayed back married the indigenous Assamese people. Eventually they formed the indigenous Muslim community of the state.

Some of the prominent personalities of Lakhtokia are Syed Muhammad Saadulla, Col. Zalnur Ali Ahmed, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed – the fifth president of India, Syed Mohammad Mohibullah, former principal of Cotton College.



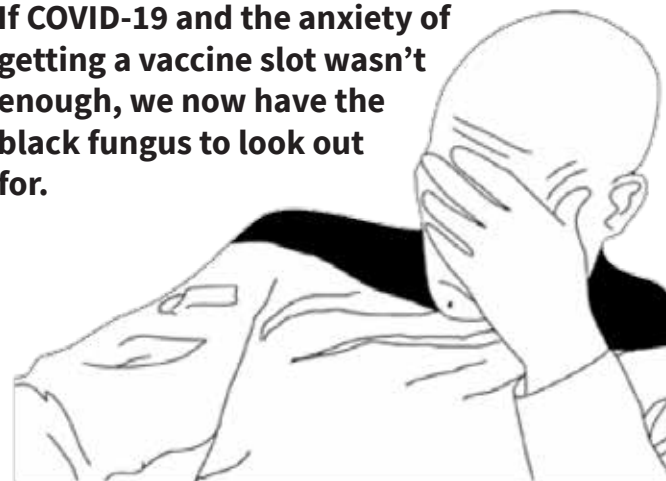
Prayers defying pandemic | Photo: Surajit Sharma

PIC OF THE WEEK

KAMUR OF THE WEEK

Wake up in the morning everyday, open the CoWin website and just see the vaccine slots disappear in seconds. The need of the hour seems to be practicing fastest fingers first to get a jab!

If COVID-19 and the anxiety of getting a vaccine slot wasn't enough, we now have the black fungus to look out for.



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