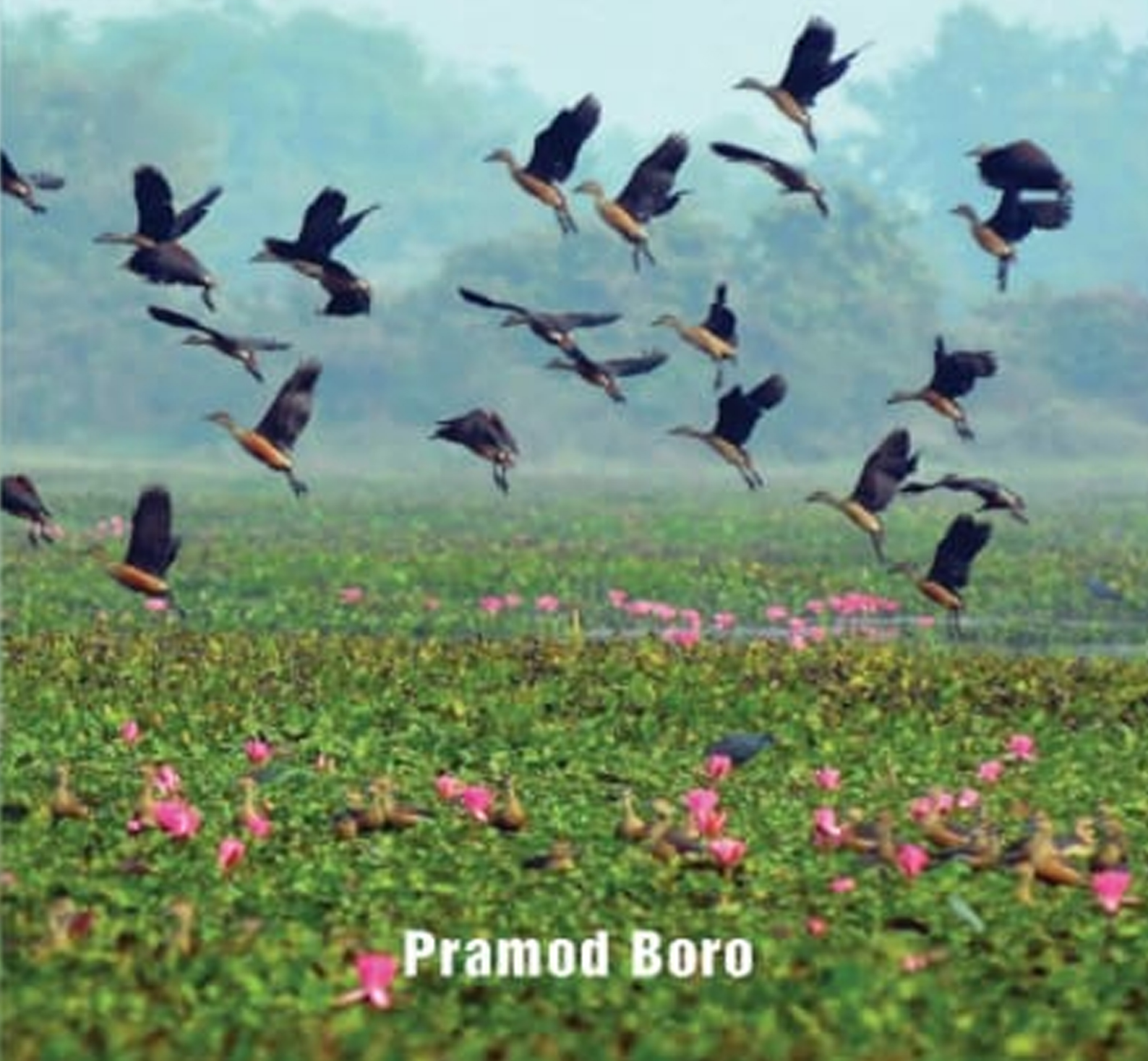


# Lookin' Within

*My Reflections. . .*



**Pramod Boro**

Published by  
**Pramod Boro**

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# LOOKIN' WITHIN

*My Reflections...*

PRAMOD BORO





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# Acknowledgments

The completion of this volume, *Lookin' Within: My Reflections*, represents the culmination of a reflective journey shaped by a confluence of personal experiences and collective aspirations. The importance of introspection and public discourse have been central to my reflective journey in life. It is an outcome that would not have been possible without the consistent support, intellectual stimulation, and moral encouragement of numerous individuals, civil society organizations and institutions to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

Words are not enough to convey my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to my spouse, Smt. Parul Boro, whose unflinching support, empathetic counsel, and steadfast belief in me has seen me through the thick and thin of things, also the completion of this work. During my long years as a student's union activist, struggling for the political rights and social reformation, absent from home days and sometimes months on end, she became my eyes, ears and heart in the toughest of times, while having to take decisions on most crucial matters that affect not only our personal lives, but also the trajectory of our collective movement. Losing my parents was not easy, at that time she became my pillar of strength—taking care of my family, and more significantly, me, being a revolutionary. Her companionship, through my many ups and downs and struggles, have never failed me once ever. To my children—Drishtant and Lehrin—your presence has served as a



grounding force for me. You, like all other children, are a continual reminder of the intergenerational stakes underpinning love, care, empathy, challenges, failures, success, resilience and peace for me. I owe gratitude to all my extended family members— they have filled my life with vitality and warmth, reminding me that no public achievement is complete without the blessings of family ties. It is in your presence that I find continuity, rootedness, and resilience.

I salute in gratitude the supreme sacrifice of all our Martyrs who continually inspire me and our generations! They started what has now snowballed into a reality: peace, harmony and justice! Though my parents are no more here to see me complete this work, their love, courage and compassion continue to light a fire deep within me— and my brother Late Marjit Basumatary, who had fielded for me and shielded me *unconditionally* during my sojourn as an activist and thereafter, too— I pay my deepest of respects, and pray to the Almighty that your souls find eternal rest and peace.

I am profoundly indebted to the people of the Bodoland Territorial Region who have continued to shower on me their blessings! Their struggles, lived experiences and aspirations constitute the soul of this work. From shared labour in agricultural fields to tea gardens, farms, health and educational institutions, cultural gatherings and political meetings, I have gleaned a multitude of perspectives that have enriched the thematic scope and depth of this volume. Your courage and resilience amidst socio-political turmoil and transitions are the bedrock of Bodoland's evolving narrative.

My UPPL family has translated ideals into action programmes for peaceful, harmonious co-existence and overall progress of our region. UG Brahma has been leading the movement from the front with support from Rwn Gwra Narzary. Raju Narzary has been a brother, Pratibha Brahma, my aabo, while Madhab Chandra Chetry a friend. Everyone in the party: mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, they have shown that a collective spirit for social change and transformation and work wonders— it is surely a winning cause.

In acknowledging institutional support, I must recognize the Bodoland Territorial Council and my colleagues for their cooperation in enabling the articulation of policy reflections contained herein. Special mention is due to all the Executive Members and Members of the Council Legislative Assembly, officers and staff for their thoughtful engagement on regional policy matters and for consistently providing critical insights throughout my tenure as the Chief Executive Member. Their intellectual rigor and commitment to policy and administrative excellence significantly informed several of the chapters compiled in this volume.

My gratitude extends to the custodians of Bodoland's historical and philosophical legacy, notably the leaders of the educational institutions, civil society organizations, namely, the All Bodo Students Union, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, all member-organizations of the CCBTRO, as well as the family and friends and followers of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. The narratives and activism they shared with me have been instrumental to me in developing a nuanced understanding of the cultural and ideological foundations upon which Bodoland has been built. These contributions greatly enriched not only a large part of this volume, but also a greater part of me as a person. Their scholarship and mentorship helped refine the theoretical underpinnings of chapters related to peacebuilding, harmonious co-existence, social development, and community visioning. Their influence has been both formative and enduring.

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I am deeply indebted to Dr. Niketu Iralu for the gracious foreword that opens this volume. Your words captured the spirit of "looking within" better than I ever could, and set a tone of thoughtful

reflection that I hope resonates with every reader. Your mentorship has been a gift; your belief in this project gave me the courage to transform speeches and articles into a cohesive narrative. Patricia Mukhim— my kong— a repository of courage, knowledge and compassion— I cannot thank you enough. I owe my peace and non-violence journey to *the true Gandhian* Natwar Thakkar Ji, Dr. Sunil Kaul, Dr. Samudra Gupta Kashyap, and Suresh Khatri Ji. You were there when I set forward my fledgling steps. Thank you. Ranjan Baruah, Chandi Basumatary, Adv. Sabda Ram Rabha, and my close associates whose names I mention not here, but writ'large in my heart, I thank you sincerely.

Social institutions such as the Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha, Initiatives of Change (IofC), and DISOM- the Leadership School among others played a critical role by seeding in me the power and the capacity to delve deep within me for answers. I remain indebted for their candour, academic rigor, spiritual depth and insightful questions that have launched me on a quest to look and see always deeper within.

To my friends beyond Bodoland—across Assam, Northeast and whole of India—thank you for blessing me and offering new perspectives. The conversations we had helped me see my region as part of a larger tapestry. Your stories of cooperation, shared challenges, and common hopes enriched my understanding of Northeast India's place in a changing world. This book is my humble ode to political possibility. It reflects the tensions, aspirations, and pathways that define public service in a multi-ethnic, post-conflict society. It affirms that leadership is not the privilege of the few but a responsibility shared by the many. The reflections herein are not prescriptions but provocations—to think, to dialogue, and to govern ethically. I thank every individual who believes that politics, when rooted in justice, humility, and vision, can indeed be a transformative force.



The editorial and production support provided by the members of the Chief Executive Member's Office, particularly, Dr. Victor Narzary, Shri Puspadhar Das and Dr. Geetarth Darshan Barua, all deserve special commendation. Their professionalism and meticulous attention to language, form, and structure helped sustain the nuance and emotional cadence of each reflection, making this work inclusive and linguistically resonant. I further extend my thanks to artists and photographers whose contributions elevated the visual and symbolic dimensions of the text. Maneswar Brahma and Bekheo Basumatary, in particular, succeeded in capturing the emotional and cultural contours of my reflective journey in Bodoland, thereby complementing the narrative with evocative imagery.

Finally, I express my gratitude to all individuals—named and unnamed—whose encouragement, spoken and unspoken words, and quiet acts of kindness supported my endeavours all throughout. This book, though authored by one, is representative of many minds and voices that have collectively shaped the Bodoland vision. To the prospective reader, may this volume serve not merely as a compendium of reflections, but as an invitation to engage, to question, and to contribute to the building of a peaceful, resilient and equitable society.

*With profound respect and appreciation,*

**Pramod Boro**



# Foreword

*by*

## Niketu Iralu.

The Bodo people have turned their most difficult struggle for their aspirations into the wider inclusive struggle by all the other communities for whom also Bodoland has become their homeland today. They have learned faster than their neighbours to be realistic and resilient in responding correctly and wisely to the inescapable complicated impacts coming from the changing world. The imaginative leadership that anticipates the emerging challenges thus being given, is watched closely by an increasing number of thinkers in the region deeply concerned for their respective situations.

At the helm of this bold venture is Shri Pramod Boro, the Hon. CEM of the Government of the Bodoland Territorial Region. He and his committed team lead an unyielding struggle for human goodness, compassion, peace and proper growth for all who live in Bodoland. Pramod Boro's warm-hearted care constantly reaches out to every person, never leaving out the vulnerable and the marginalized who live in his homeland. His leadership is the kind of inspiration our region urgently needs.

This inclusive idea now being boldly pioneered in what is now the BTR Government is indisputably the way the whole North-East will be able to grow together properly in mutual goodwill and cooperation, if they will choose to do so. The alternative to this challenging idea will be our North-East region bringing ourselves



down inevitably in unmanageable "killing fields". This must never happen.

As a Naga well wisher of the Bodoland Teritorial Region, I was privileged to be welcomed for visits to Bodoland during the past decades to work with and learn from fellow searchers for the same ideas. I express my sincere appreciation for the undeserved honour given to me to write the Foreword for this important and timely book. Thank you.

"Lookin' Within : My Reflections" by Shri Pramod Boro, is an instantly intriguing and question-provoking book. It is a must-read for everyone who cares about the future and well-being of our North-East region.

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# Looking Within

*Locationing myself in an evolving world*

## **I. On Education: Hurdles and Dreams**

I grew up to be an average student, myself, given the circumstances around me. Growing up in my ancestral village at Souraguri afforded me opportunities only as much. Growing up there meant being shaped by scarcity and enormous hardships. In the late 1990s, even as a teenager, I found myself standing at a point of multiple cross worlds: my days spanned engaging with quite a few contrasting realities of my life. I was someone navigating schooling, while also toiling away with the resilience of a farmer tilling muddy soil, ploughing with hope even when the rains forgot to fall. As the rooster crowed by dawn, I was already knee-deep in the fields, shouldering my family's agricultural toil like the generations before me. By late morning, I switched roles, donning the garb of a student, hungrily seeking answers in the dog-eared books that came down to me passing through cohorts of previous students— some who had become successful and a few others who had already gone on in life as school drop-outs. And when the sun shone higher up and farther Westward, I transformed once again—this time into an activist with the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), a foot soldier in a larger, burning quest for upliftment of marginalized voices, for our dignity and human rights.

I was not unique in this; I was one among many, navigating a maze where each turn demanded a sacrifice. On joining the Rangia

College, I was appointed the Speaker of Kamrup District ABSU. Later I went on to become the President of the entire Kamrup District ABSU, shouldering greater weights of responsibilities with every passing day.

In the midst of poverty and traditional social systems, schooling was tough. Going to college was even tougher. By the time I was in the High School, the education system had already failed an astounding number of my peers. The all-important rite of clearing the matric exams seemed to be a Herculean task given the prevalent biases, prejudices and aura of insurmountability created around it. The teacher failed to see the merit in students. The students were left in the lurch without the means to comprehend the skills and the know-how for clearing it with ease as was the case in other affluent parts of Assam. To top it all, we were with our baggage: familial responsibilities, attending to-do agenda of the ABSU in a movement or a mission mode pace, lack of adequate books, study materials and the like.

Years earlier, the movement launched by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) since its foundation in 1952 had finally led to the Chief Minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha declaring, at Kokrajhar on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1963, the Bodo language as Medium of Instruction for the primary level. It was meant to be a celebration of our linguistic dignity. Today, we proudly observe the 18<sup>th</sup> May as Bodo Medium Implementation Day each year. And yet, year after year, the very tools needed to honour this promise—correct textbooks, timely curriculum, sufficient materials—have eluded us like mirages in the desert. Till date. It is rather painful that our text books have never arrived on time, they have never been error-free, and when they arrived, they have always come in inadequate numbers.

Back to 1990s, when I held the important portfolio as the President of the Kamrup district ABSU, we had the task of promoting better educational achievements among our students. It was during this

period that I found myself doing random visits on my bicycle to different schools to take stock of the situation. On one occasion, villagers welcomed me and my fellow-volunteers warmly and pointed to a school that had earned notoriety. Its matric pass percentage had been zero for three consecutive years. While that might shock a person new to our region, for us, it was a *déjà vu*. The villagers were filled with despair, their children were biting the dust year after year. It hit their dignity hard. It was an alarming situation there, even though, it was a regular phenomenon in the entire Bodoland region.

On arrival at the school, we met the Head Teacher for a discussion. “Oh, these students are good for nothing,” was his first remark. “Our school does not receive good students. Hence, they fail year after year,” he defended, while other teachers who were present nodded in what seemed like a ‘total agreement’. That he was, in unison with other fellow-teachers, filled to the brim with pessimism was evident from our first interaction. None the less, we requested permission to interact with the students of Class Xth and IXth students. On entering the classrooms and interacting with them, I was happy and at the same time rather distraught. Every child in the class wanted to pass. They were however condemned to fail by their very own teachers. They had bright hopes of building careers for themselves. I could empathise that they also shouldered multiple responsibilities at home and in the society, like I had to in my earlier years. I, and my fellow ABSU volunteers were at our wits’ end. At that time, fortunately for us, the famous Bollywood movie “Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge” starring Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol was a soaring success, smashing one record after another. We took a cue from the movie. The protagonists Raj and Simran went for a kind of “summer school” across Europe. Though, it was filled with all the masala one could expect of a Bollywood, it led to self-discovery for them. That was what we were looking for and immediately intended to do: engage with the children, of our school

in discussion, for a journey of self-discovery to redeem their self-esteem, confidence and the capacity to overcome their obstacles for clearing the matric exams.

When we approached the school head teacher, he acquiesced to our plan rather unwillingly, and with the look of I-know-this-adventurism-very-well-and-it-will-definitely-fail. Although romping across the European cities was a far-cry for us, we settled for a fortnight of summer school programme in the school itself. We summoned our best ABSU volunteers—students who were academically strong, but more importantly, emotionally grounded. Sessions were held in mathematics, science, and English—the most feared subjects. But equally important were the personality development segments. We talked about confidence, time management, teamwork, self-worth. We told them stories of real people from similar backgrounds who had carved out success.

The results were stupendous by the standards. Seven cleared with second-division marks in the ensuing matric exams. None failed. We could have never wished for a better outcome! More importantly it taught us that it is possible. Teachers were surprised—some quietly took credit—but deep inside, they knew something had changed. It taught them an important lesson: never doubt the capacity of ones' own students.

I realised that such interventions were the need of the hour across the Bodo Medium schools. The teachers' morale and the self-belief that their students were good enough to compete needed to be boosted. The students could shine when they were taken into confidence and provided with a little support. The communities could pursue their aspirations when their children did well in the schools. They needed to feel the comfort that their dreams were safe in classrooms, not strangled by them.

This experience didn't just transform those students—it strengthened me immensely. I saw firsthand what belief, even borrowed, could achieve. It taught me that students are not empty pots waiting to

be filled—they are lamps waiting to be lit. The flame may flicker, but with just a bit of shelter and warmth, it can blaze strong. We needed a systemic healing.

Today, many things have changed, but many problems wear new masks. Our children now wrestle with distractions and dangers—drugs, mobile addiction, domestic violence, trafficking. We are in a different era, but the war for education remains. It cannot be won by teachers alone. Or parents alone. Or students alone. Everyone—teachers, parents, students, and leaders—must become torchbearers, working together for their success and wellbeing. Together, we must guide our youth toward the light. Only then will they rise—not just to pass exams, but to rewrite stories long believed unwritable.

## **II. When the System Looked Away: A Brother's Prayer, A Sister's Survival**

My father grew up amid the thick forests and warm earth of Moranjan village, nestled near Rangia—a place where quietness ruled, and life was paced by the planting seasons. But that peace was eventually disrupted by the rumbling steel of the expanding railways. The iron horses roared louder each year, their sirens echoing through the fields, carrying with them not just cargo but change—unwelcome and unnerving.

For my father, the ceaseless clatter of the trains and the looming smokestacks were like cracks in the mirror of a life once tranquil. The rhythms of sowing and reaping no longer matched the speed of progress. So, he and others from our tribe folded their small holdings and resettled in Souraguri, near the Tamulpur junction—where fields were still generous and time still kind.

My mother came from Katalpara, a nearby village. Together, they raised us in Souraguri: five elder sisters and me, the youngest and the only son. The lone bamboo among the reeds. My childhood, though threaded with affection, was also steeped in shadows—

those cast by disease, death, and a haunting brew of superstition.

In those days, the health care system was like a boat with holes—leaky, misdirected, and half-submerged. The poor, the illiterate, and the tribal people—our people—approached hospitals as if stepping onto foreign soil. There was fear in our eyes, and often, cold indifference in theirs. When the sick feared both the cure and the healer, how could trust bloom?

Maternal and child deaths were heartbreakingly common—so frequent that grief sometimes arrived even before hope did. It was commonplace when a mother didn't return home any more from childbirth. An infant's wails going silent—it was grief that recurred with astonishing regularity. The heart-wrenching explanations offered were often draped in mystery and folklore. Someone somewhere whispered, "It's black magic," and the community nodded solemnly.

These were not isolated beliefs. Superstition roamed freely. Whole families were branded witches—*dainas* and *dainis*—based on nothing more than an illness that spread or a streak of bad luck. And those so accused were not just shunned; some were beaten, ostracized, or quietly killed. The hands of medicine, even if they existed, were too short to reach these injustices.

It dawned unto me painfully that doctors and medical workers—usually stationed from towns or cities—seemed reluctant to dirty their hands with our reality. Emergencies were often met with folded arms and furrowed brows. Their silence was sometimes mistaken for caution; at other times, it seemed a mask for prejudice. Whether it was due to standard protocols, fear of conflict zones, or simply the old disease of apathy, it amounted to the same thing: a health system that stood still while precious lives were lost.

*I remember one incident clearly. How can I ever forget it?* It was 1993 or perhaps 1994. I was still a student at Tamulpur Higher Secondary School, balancing my education, ABSU responsibilities, and the



demands of our household. I had barely caught my breath from classes when word came that my sister, Padma—affectionately, my *aabo*—was critically unwell during her fifth pregnancy.

She had been admitted to Nagrijuli Hospital. Her body had swollen ominously, and the attending doctor, casting a brief glance over her, told us the baby was no longer alive. He washed his hands of her case with words colder than steel: he could do nothing more.

Still clinging to threads of hope, we rushed her to Tamulpur Civil Hospital, thinking—praying—that maybe, just maybe, she would receive better care. But there, the response chilled us to the bone. The doctor scarcely examined her, announced that the fetus was lifeless, and said bluntly that there was nothing to be done for the mother either. It was a verdict, not a consultation. A sentence handed down without deliberation.

At that moment, time slowed but our desperation quickened. We were spiraling into panic. And then we remembered—one of our relatives worked in the National Anti-Malaria Programme. Not a doctor, but a man with some knowledge of the system, of medicines, of emergency interventions. I sprinted to his home and dragged him back to the hospital, hope pounding in my chest.

Seeing my sister's condition, he paused, scanned her face, her swollen limbs, and then offered a different prognosis. Even if the baby was lost, he believed the mother could be saved. She could be induced to deliver the stillborn—her life need not end with the child's.

We turned back to the hospital staff. The doctor stood firm in his refusal. No. Nothing could be done. We pleaded. We reasoned. Finally, he relented—but only with a chilling caveat. He would take no responsibility. He asked us to sign an undertaking, washing his hands off the matter entirely. Then, reluctantly, he allowed our relative—the malaria prevention staffer—to proceed.

What followed were the six most harrowing hours of my life. I sat helpless, surrounded by sterile walls and unfeeling glances, counting heartbeats that did not come. Eventually, my sister delivered the stillborn. A baby we never met. A life that never opened its eyes. But my sister lived.

That day, the sky didn't burst into colour, but inside us, a world had been saved. And it had nothing to do with the doctor. A malaria worker—not even from the maternity department—had become our saviour. The one meant to help us had turned his back. The one not meant to, reached forward.

Even today, that memory creeps over me like a chill—how close I came to lighting a funeral pyre for my sister. Though my *aabo* is no more with us today, she lived many more years, after the ordeal. How could a doctor, sworn to save lives, chose instead to spectate? Yes, I understand the limitations—protocols, fear, systems under strain. But I also understand what it means to care. To do something. That doctor had training, tools, and authority. He chose distance. Our malaria staffer had only heart. And that was enough.

In hindsight, many might judge our decision as risky, even reckless. But when the official doors are bolted shut, sometimes you must climb in through the window. That is not courage; it is necessity. Especially in Bodoland, where for decades, modern healthcare has been a flickering flame—a promise barely kept.

Our case was an exception. Many families were not so lucky. Some saw their daughters fade in childbirth; others watched children succumb to fevers, infections, or accidents that should not have been fatal. The tragedy was not always in the absence of healthcare—it was in its refusal. Many died, I feel, not necessarily due to lack of services, but particularly because they were refused by those in positions who could have done so otherwise.

My sister survived. That moment lit a fire in me that still burns. It was a reminder that systems must serve, not stand by. That for

every protocol, there must also be empathy. We deserved better. All human beings do.

### **III. A Son's Trial by Fire: When Faith Fought the Final Word**

Among, many such encounters with the health systems, another experience stood out for me. More so, because it was concerning the life and death of my very own mother. What does one do when the person who gave you your life begins to slip away—and there seem to be no helping hands around? When institutions say “no,” should we still fight back with a whisper of hope? Can our prayers, persistence, and the kindness of strangers outweigh the cold detachment of a broken system?

It was one of those crisp winter mornings when the world looked deceptively still and clean—as though nothing could go wrong. But I had spent the night tossing and turning, haunted by an inexplicable unease, on my bed at the rented room in Rangia. I couldn't put my finger on it, but a dark cloud loomed just outside the periphery of understanding. Call it instinct, or a mother's silence echoing across miles, but something within me whispered that all was not well at home.

The next morning, still gripped by that dread, I borrowed some money from a friend and a motor bike from another—racing across the familiar roads to my home at Tamulpur. The wind lashed at my face, but the storm within raged harder. As I neared home, my heart sank. I saw my sister placing my mother into the backseat of an auto-rickshaw. She was unconscious. Limp. Breath shallow. Her dokhona hung loosely over her frame, barely clinging on to life.

I leapt off the bike, my feet moving before my mind could catch up. There was no time for pleasantries or panic. We rushed her to a private hospital in Rangia. Earlier, the government doctor at Tamulpur Civil Hospital had already refused to treat her—another chapter in the now-familiar book of rejection. There, a senior and

reputed doctor, known for his experience and expertise, examined her. His words fell as cold as the ice: "Take her home. She won't survive."

But how could I accept that? To me, my mother still breathed—and breath is life. As the youngest and only son, bound by both love and the invisible strings of obligation, I knew the mantle of responsibility had fallen squarely on my shoulders. There was no room for collapse. If the world had turned its back, I would carry her forward.

We hired an ambulance and began the journey to Guwahati, her frail body nestled inside like a candle on its last flicker. As we moved through choked roads, the siren cried out in desperation. But the city remained unmoved—cars blocked our path, truck drivers turned deaf ears, and traffic snarled like an angry god. At that moment, I felt the acute helplessness of being part of a system where sirens meant little and speed gave way to indifference. My prayers and tears of desperation flowed silently like a river under moonlight: "Let her awaken, O Lord. Let her see that her son is here. Don't let her go without knowing she is loved." I silently thanked the governments that later made way for new orders—where ambulances would be given their due right of passage.

After what felt like an eternity, we arrived at MMC Hospital in Pan Bazaar. But fate had another challenge waiting: no oxygen, no bed, no room in the Emergency. In that chaotic room of human suffering, there was no place for one more. I could not afford to lose heart. Faith has no space for hesitation. I prayed with every cell in my body, willing the universe to listen, and shifted her to the International Hospital at Guwahati. It was rather frustrating that on reaching, I realized I had only ₹2000 in my pockets. But the hospital needed me to deposit an advance of ₹5000 for emergency admission. The crisis now turned financial in matter of seconds. Standing outside the hospital room, holding my mother's arms,

I realized I was not just battling death—I was bargaining with a system where survival comes with a heavy price.

I called on everyone I knew—friends, colleagues, allies in the student movement. None were in a position to help. In a last-ditch attempt, I reached out to an elected MLA—the man we had poured our strength into bringing to power. His curt response remains etched in my memory: “I don’t have five thousand rupees.” That was the response. A man who had once begged me for our help, support and strength now turned his face away when it mattered most. That moment wasn’t just heartbreaking—it was a revelation. Politics, I learned, does not always walk hand in hand with gratitude.

Leaving my sister by my mother’s side, I returned to Tamulpur. Knocking on doors, borrowing what I could, even contemplating selling bits of our ancestral property if need be. The very land that held our stories was on the table—because healing had a cost. The next day, having mobilized some money scraped together from hope and shame, I rushed back to Guwahati.

At midnight, a young ICU doctor called me in. His voice was grave. “There’s only a 20–25% chance she’ll make it,” he said. “We’ll need your permission to try everything.”

What could I say? When 25% is all you have, it becomes your 100%.

For the next few days, I lived in limbo—hovering between corridors and prayers. On the evening of the second day, a stranger walked up to me. A man from Rangia, vaguely familiar, his face lined with sincerity. “I know you,” he said gently, “and I want to help.” He asked to see my mother. I took him to the ICU, though the staff didn’t let us inside. As we stood by the door, he began telling me stories—fables, parables, old moral tales that somehow, amid the beeping machines and rustling uniforms, gave me a strange comfort.

And then, just like that, he offered ₹20,000 for my mother's treatment.

I was taken aback. I insisted I couldn't take it. I barely knew him. I hadn't asked. But he persisted, assuring me that it was given freely, and I wasn't to return it. Eventually, I accepted half the amount, promising to repay the rest. That man, a contractor, told me with quiet pride that he worked without bribery or corruption—and perhaps this was his way of keeping humanity afloat in an often-inhuman world.

For 45 long days, my sister and I lived in a cycle of exhaustion and hope—visiting our village for more money, returning to the hospital with folded clothes and hopeful prayers. The weight of finances, responsibilities, and fear were like a mountain pressing on my chest, but we climbed it step by slow step.

And then, finally, on the forty-sixth day, my mother was finally released from the hospital. She was greatly weakened by the prolonged illness and hospitalization, but what mattered to me the most was, she was alive. She had defied every verdict, every statistic, every cold-handed diagnosis. She went on to live another 15–16 years, her second innings a testimony to stubborn love and sheer will.

The moral of this story isn't just personal. It is one I now carry forward every time I see someone in distress. Every time I meet a patient unsure of whether they should visit a doctor, I implore them: Please go. Don't wait. Don't give up. My message to the medical fraternity is just as clear—never say “No” too quickly. You may be the last hope standing between someone and a goodbye. That single refusal may become someone's last memory of a hope extinguished too soon.

If someone had convinced me to take my mother home that fateful day, I would have never heard her voice again. That crisis shaped my philosophy. It taught me what it means to fight—not just for life,

but for the dignity of seeking help and not being denied it. When someone is sick, even the softest voice matters. Sometimes, all one needs is not a miracle—but for someone to simply say, “Let’s try it.”

#### **IV. Conflict and the Pursuit of Peace in Bodoland**

Conflict is as old as human civilization and as persistent. In Bodoland, nestled in the northwestern corner of Assam, conflict has not been a stranger. It has visited in many forms—ethnic, political, cultural—and left behind trails of displacement, distrust, and despair. Yet, from these ashes, the region has also nurtured seeds of peace, resilience, and reconciliation.

In my own life, I have witnessed conflict not as an abstract concept but as a lived reality. And from these experiences, I have come to understand that conflict in unorganized or unplanned societies is not an anomaly—it is a symptom. I can see that in Bodoland and Assam, three recurring causes have stood out: first, it is the peoples’ insecurity over their lands, identity, and culture. For many indigenous communities, land is not just property—it is memory, ancestry, and identity. The fear of losing this to outsiders, whether real or perceived, has often sparked unrest. It is held that the loss of land is accompanied by the loss of culture and identity. Hence the insecurity. Second, it is the tendency of domination by one group over another. When one community attempts to assert superiority—be it political, economic, or cultural—it breeds resentment. This feeling of being unheard or unseen festers until it erupts. In Assam, many issues of smaller groups and communities were looked upon with disdain, and thereby, left neglected. This led to several movements and conflicts. Third, there could be seen a lack of dialogue and communication efforts during the run up and in the middle of conflicts. Silence, in times of tension, is definitely not golden. It is dangerous. It could lead to the loss of precious lives, villages wiped out overnight, or gruesome acts of crimes that scar the social and psychological wellbeing for generations to come. The

absence of platforms for honest, empathetic dialogue has allowed misunderstandings to calcify into hatred.

These root causes are not unique to Bodoland, though. They echo across conflict zones worldwide. But what makes Bodoland's story distinct is the way these tensions have been repeatedly mismanaged—treated as law and order problems rather than human and societal ones.

*The 2012 Kokrajhar Conflict: A Wound Still Healing*

The inter-community violence that erupted in Kokrajhar in July 2012 was one of the darkest chapters in Assam's recent history. Sparked by a series of retaliatory attacks between two different communities, the violence spiraled out of control within days. Over 100 people lost their lives, and more than 400,000 were displaced from nearly 400 villages.

What was most heartbreaking was not just the scale of the violence, but the silence that surrounded it. Institutions that were meant to protect and mediate became mute spectators. Law enforcement agencies, lacking both training on conflict resolution and peace building, and bereft of empathy, responded with force rather than foresight. Relief camps overflowed, but compassion was in short supply.

The conflict was not inevitable. It was preventable—but partisan political agendas sought to dismantle the fragile harmony that had existed among the communities. And when the fire spread, no one dared to douse it. Some of us, those who spoke for peace were held with suspicion by both sides. I saw that in a conflict, truth becomes fragmented, and those who try to hold it together are often torn apart. In such a climate, neutrality became a dangerous position.

One of the most painful realizations during the 2012 conflict was the nonchalance of the state machinery. The administrative setup, from top to bottom, appeared paralyzed—either unwilling or unable to act in preventing the conflict, or in containing it when started.



Whether due to lack of political will, bureaucratic inertia, or fear of backlash, the result was the same: poor and helpless people were left to fend for themselves. This is not an isolated phenomenon, though. Across the world, from Rwanda to Sri Lanka, we have seen how state inaction—or worse, biased action—can deepen divides. In Bodoland, I could see that the absence of institutional empathy turned a manageable situation into a humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the media, intellectuals, and religious institutions—who could have played a role in calming tensions—often chose sides which, unfortunately, did not help anyone.

*Healing is possible: What the World Can Learn from Bodoland*

Despite the devastation, the Bodo Peace Accord 2020, signed between the Government of India, the Assam government, and Bodo organizations led by the NDFB, ABSU and the UBPO marked a significant milestone. It signaled a shift—from armed struggle to democratic dialogue. Yet, peace is not achieved by signing papers. It is built in our minds. In homes, classrooms, community halls, and everyday lived spaces. True peace is not the absence of conflict—it is the presence of justice, dignity, and dialogue.

After we formed the BTR Government in 2020, one of the first initiatives was the Bodoland Happiness Mission. This grassroots program focuses on emotional healing, trauma counseling, and community dialogue. Survivors of the 2012 riots, like Abdul, Raju, Somaina (names changed), who once harbored thoughts of revenge, have now become peace volunteers. Through storytelling, mindfulness sessions, and active listening, the Mission has helped thousands find their voice again. Women, in particular, have emerged as powerful agents of peace in Bodoland region. Trained in conflict resolution and emotional intelligence, they now lead sessions in villages, helping others process grief and rebuild trust through workshops, training programmes and healing sessions.

On reflection, I realize that Bodoland's journey from insurgency to institution-building offers several universal lessons. We learnt

that inter-community dialogue is the first step to peace. It entails creating safe and non-threatening spaces for conversation, especially among youth. As real change, transformation and healing come from and within the affected communities, only localized peace-building can sustain peace and harmony. Our formal institutions: health, education and financial should hand out empathy and inclusion aplenty. In a polarized world, those who speak for peace often find themselves standing alone. They need allies. Taking cue from the repetition of cycles of conflicts since centuries, we should adopt/take pre-emptive measures and initiatives. We cannot but teach to our children and students about the disastrous effects and impact of conflict. Reconciliation, healing and harmonious co-existence among the communities are not rocket sciences. I have faith, as history has shown, time and again, that these are achieved by love, respect and care. We should teach our children and students to love, care, be generous and compassionate. Every university must have the department of conflict resolution and peace. This should not be optional—it is foundational.

In Bodoland, we have seen the worst of what societal divisions can do. But we have also glimpsed the best of what unity can achieve. The road ahead is long, but the direction is clear. Taking this road—let us walk together—for a Bodoland that is better in the present as well as the future!

## 2

# Journeying Beyond a Crossroad

*My thoughts on Peaceful, Safe and Resilient Bodoland*

Today, my memory takes me to the time when we had the good fortune to welcome our most beloved Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji at Kokrajhar, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, less than a month after we had signed the Bodo Peace Accord. We were a massive gathering of nearly a million people from every nook and corner of the BTR that were greatly blessed to listen, feel reassured and once again re-ignite our self-belief in the possibility of establishing a peaceful, safe and resilient Bodoland. The prophetic words of our Hon'ble Prime Minister rang a truth deep in our hearts. “आज एक नई शुरुआत, एक नया सवेरा और एक नई प्रेरणा को स्वागत करने का समय है। बोडोलैंड के विकास के लिए शांति हमारा मंत्र है [*Today is a time to behold a new beginning, a new dawn and a new inspiration. Our mantra for the development of Bodoland is peace*],” he said, reassuring the people of BTR.

Sure enough, the people of Bodoland were at a crossroad during that point in time. In general, crossroads present us with new opportunities, hopes and aspirations. When at crossroads, persons, communities and nations also face the greater challenge of making the right decision, going in the right direction and overcoming the fear of freedom that are on offer. I feel happy and grateful that the people of BTR made the right decision,

took the correct path and did overcome all doubts and fears when we were at a crossroad in the year 2020. The people of BTR gave their blessings and mandated the formation of our coalition Government comprising United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP). This collective step of the people of Bodoland gave us the opportunity to redeem the many golden years we had lost due to prolonged conflict, violence, ignorance and the habit of shying away from problems. Our education, our economy, our society, our lands and human resources had been severely damaged. So, a change in course was of essence: we needed to change our mindsets, work ethos and shift gears. Two years down the lane, we have come a long way beyond the crossroad.

As a matter of fact, our Government was formed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 when the entire country, including Assam and BTR, were undergoing a full-blown Covid 19 pandemic. At that time, we inherited a legacy of failed governance of the preceding 17 years of misrule by Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF). An environment of fear and uncertainty pervaded the sinews and tendons of our society. An overall negligence of basic human development indices in health, nutrition, and child safety was alarmingly high. We had also inherited a dysfunctional administrative system, massive liabilities (of Rs. 2900 Crores) and a policy vacuum.

The stability of the BTR Government was tested at every step. There were deliberate attempts to sabotage the process of peace-building, growth and development in Bodoland. In the midst of this hostile backdrop created by elements that thrive in violence, environment of fear and anarchy, our BTR Government embarked on a courageous journey of creating a 'New Bodoland Territorial Region' [New BTR]. A New BTR that is peaceful, green and smart. A New BTR that empowers people to participate and express themselves by offering people-centric governance at all

levels. A New BTR that provides the environ for all communities, intellectuals, industries, tourists and entrepreneurs to flourish. A New BTR that is inclusive: where health and education of people is improved, where children are not malnourished, where sports, music and literature flourish, where youthful aspirations are supported, where women have the avenues of employment and where all people prosper together. This vision has continually received the blessings of our beloved **Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji, Home Minister of India Shri Amit Shah Ji and Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji.**

In the last couple of years, we have worked relentlessly for peaceful coexistence, sustainable development and good governance. The programme for development of institutions as per the Bodo Peace Accord 2020 has been fast-tracked through the establishment of the Department of Implementation of Bodo Accord. This department has been expeditiously pursuing the conceptualization, drafting and instituting of various projects for socio-culture, linguistic and educational development of all communities residing in the Bodoland Territorial Region.

By launching flagship programmes like the Giyan Swrang Bithangki (Knowledge is Light Mission) our Government has sought to reverse the poor performance indicators in the field of education through Bodoland School Adoption Programme, Capacity Building of Teachers and Officials through Exchange Programmes and Trainings, Stipends for poor students, and Super 50 Missions (one each for grooming 50 students to clear JEE and Indian Civil Services Examination) among others. In the agro-based sectors, important missions have been launched to augment the livelihood, incomes and employment of youth and women through the Sericulture Mission, Handloom and Textile Mission, Mushroom Mission, Milk Mission, Goat Mission, Bodoland Pig Mission, Feed Mission, Bamboo Mission, Poultry Mission, Farm Mechanization Mission, and Paddy Procurement Mission among others.

Fin Rwdwmkhang Bithanki [*Bloom Again Mission*] has also been initiated to enable meaningful social, economic and psychological reintegration of the erstwhile cadres of the disbanded National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), survivors of violence during the Bodoland Movement, and conflict-induced Internally Displaced Persons. In order to promote psychological wellbeing and healing in a post-conflict scenario, a Bodoland Community Counselling Programme, and a Bodoland Happiness Mission have been launched. The Rog Nirmal Bodoland Mission is set to address health concerns through telemedicine, mobile medical response teams and welfare grants to the poor. Again, high-value-low-volume ecotourism projects, establishment of non-polluting industries and business centres, agroforestry, marketing of sericulture produces are some of the initiatives that aim at revenue generation for the Council.

For a person to succeed in the contemporary times, one needs a comprehensive skill set. The development of skills can contribute to structural transformation and economic growth by enhancing employability and workforce productivity. This area helps societies to be more progressive. In this regard, our Government launched the Bodoland Skill Employment & Entrepreneurship Development (SEED) Mission on 14th December 2021. Its vision of creating a *Skilled BTR* will ensure happiness amongst people of our region.

Partnerships with the UNDP, UNICEF, Azim Premji University, Transforming Rural India Foundation (TRIF), North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), Center for Effective Governance of Indian States (CEGIS), Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF) and other civil society organizations have been established in a bid to keep up with the march towards realization of SDGs 2030.

Peace and harmonious co-existence of all tribes and communities in the Bodoland Territorial Region was an important thinking that went behind the crystallization of the Bodo Peace Accord 2020.

On this count, our Government has been communicating messages of peace, love, solidarity and resilience through poetry, drama, music, dance and sports. Most significant of these events being the 100-Language Poetry Festival (2021), Jothumma 2.0- a Youth Conclave (2022) and the Inter Sixth Schedule Premier League (ISPL) 2022. These well-attended events successfully provided the platform for celebration of creative expressions of the diverse languages, art, culture and sports in Bodoland, Assam and India. By way of hosting and showcasing personalities and stalwarts from every part of the country in these events, Kokrajhar (the capital city of Bodoland Territorial Region) has truly redeemed its imagery as a City of Peace from that of a narrowly held stereotypical imagery as a place capable of only violence.

Our Government holds that land is an important denominator for survival, dignity and self-respect of persons and households in our society. Without land, people especially from rural and tribal communities are not able to build social, cultural and economic capital. On being landless, there is a constant impoverishment of the household, often leading to destruction of forests and fauna through encroachments. In this vein, to contextualize Mission Basundhara and in order to achieve our collective vision, the BTR Government will be launching Mission Bwiswmuthi on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2023. As a precursor to the launch of the Mission Bwiswmuthi, the Land Certificate Issue Fairs are being organized in all our Circle Offices. This is a sure step towards providing land certificates to all eligible persons/households— taking us one step closer towards addressing the issues faced by all landless, poor and marginalized households in the BTR.

Thus, our BTR Government is immersed in transforming contemporary governance paradigm in the region by combining best practices, new knowledge and praxis for bringing all-round change and development. The manifest commitment of the BTR Government to ensure “Peaceful, Green and Smart Bodoland”

is expressed through its various policy and programmatic initiatives in promoting peaceful co-existence, good governance and expediting overall growth and development against earlier neglect, apathy and underdevelopment. The various participatory programmes initiated by the BTR Government has ensured a departure from the then banal norms of conflict, violence and non-performance. It has brought a turnaround by strengthening culture of “a shared vision, a cohesive team and an engaging work culture”.

However, we have only begun our journey and have not reached our destination yet. Our Government is committed to work still harder in the days to come to achieve our collective goal. A New BTR can be realized only when it is BTR 24/7. Now is the time to focus on rebuilding our lives, revitalizing our communities and rejuvenating our institutions. While there is peace in our region, we have to build an ecosystem where all people can dream and work for the fulfilment of those dreams. The people of BTR have already taken a courageous step towards this end. Our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters made the right choice and took the correct turn at the crossroad. We are now poised to reach greater heights of development and prosperity along with the rest of Assam and India!



# 3

## Visionary Leaders Translate a Promise into Reality

In my brief journey, first as a student activist from Northeast India working for peace, education and other socio-political rights, and presently as an incumbent Chief of a Sixth Schedule Council of India, I have seen that the transformation in *approach and the thinking* of the government has become more pronounced under the present leadership. For instance, only a clear vision and strong political will could have led to concrete steps for the future of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in particular and for the nation as a whole. Revoking Article 370 and 35A ushered in the dawn of an era of peace, prosperity, stability and hope for the region of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh. Article 370 which now stands abrogated will always remain a dark chapter in our country's history.

The people of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh witnessed conflicts, violence and bloodshed as a result of a faultline that existed for more than seven decades after India's Independence. Even though the region is blessed with breathtaking landscape and rich cultural heritage, and in true essence is the "Crown of Bharat" it could not enjoy the fruits of peace, harmony and co-existence. The impact of cross-border terrorism became the biggest obstacle in the path of complete integration of the state with the rest of India. The peace-loving people of the heavenly valley of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh were in a dark period due to Article 370. Leaders came and leaders went: the foundational issue yet remained unresolved for

decades, till at last, the confluence of vision, will and commitment of the present government ended the matter resolutely.

Another milestone achieved by the present government is the positive change and transformation in Northeast India. It has dealt the multi-dimensional issues of North East India with openness and trust, as against earlier policy of imposition of draconian laws and ordinances. No Prime Minister had ever frequented the region like Modi, while no Home Minister had ever been closer home there. For decades, the states in north-east India suffered negligence and deprivations in all aspects of social, political and economic development which resulted in widespread political turmoil and instability, and conflicts and violence. The existing view of Northeast India as the Astha-Laxmi of India is particularly a positive deviation in this regard. Northeast India is not only law and order, or security matter, it is alive and thriving, requiring greater understanding, trust and mutual exchange with the rest of India. This farsighted vision of the Prime Minister brings Northeast right in the currents of development across the nation, and is the sure path towards a Vikshit Bharat which is inclusive of Northeast India. This has led to a significant improvement in the security situation in the North-Eastern states and, as such, the pace of the development has increased. Since April 2022, the number of “disturbed areas” under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Nagaland, Assam and Manipur, has drastically reduced. The recent conflict(s) that erupted in Manipur is much undesired. It came at a time when the Northeast as a whole was moving towards peace and harmony after decades of conflicts and violence. The condition for healing of both the survivors as well as perpetrators of violence needs to be sustained.

A number of peace settlements and accords have crystallised in Northeast India in the last four years due to Prime Minister Modi’s vision of a peaceful and prosperous North-East, and the astute leadership of the Union Home Minister Amit Shah. This

has augured peace and harmonious co-existence in previously disturbed areas of Northeast India. The efforts to build trust and all-round development has won over most of the insurgent groups to repose faith in the Constitution of the country and the policies of the government. Thousands have laid down their arms and became partners in the peace and development journey of the North East. Hence, this dream of a peaceful, prosperous and developed North East has been a sure winner— decades-old problems are being resolved amicably in a steady manner. For instance, the historic signing of Bodo Peace Accord on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 2020 addressed the five-decade old Bodoland Movement of Assam.

Giving equal space of development to all people including the people from the ten **Sixth Schedule Areas through the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019** is a welcome proposition. This Bill seeks to provide greater autonomy for social, cultural and economic development of marginalised tribal and indigenous communities within the constitutional framework of India. It aims to augment legislative, administrative and financial powers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule Councils of India by making necessary constitutional amendments. The streamlining and calibration of various institutions, processes and mechanisms through this Bill will ensure strengthening of democratic institutions in far-flung and often-overlooked tribal areas in peripheral India. Further, it will ensure greater appreciation of the rich diversity of languages, faiths, creeds and cultures by providing autonomy in several transferred subjects. Even though the 125<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill is not going to fulfil all aspirations of the tribal-indigenous communities, it serves as yet another milestone on the offer for ensuring development and smooth functioning of administration in the Sixth-Schedule Regions. While it will foster and provide the impetus to positive changes in Northeast India, this Bill is key to connecting the region with the hearts of rest of India!



# 4

## Peace and Love

*The sure remedies in a fragmented world*

I appreciate the observation of the International Day of Peace today. Peace is simply a very powerful word. In the past Centuries, we witnessed the power of guns, canons, nuclear bombs, muscle, money and politics. We also witnessed that when all these powers failed to resolve the issues of humankind, non-violence and dialogue were able to restore peace and normalcy. In this way, peace is very precious in the history of humankind. However, as someone said, "... [we] human beings are naturally selfish," we forget and fail to comprehend the values that we cannot buy with money. For, instance, it did not occur to humankind in different epochs of time across the centuries and millennia, that peace is a power which could have solved many of our problems. Instead, violence and hatred feature prominently in our histories. Unfortunately, we are seeing the repeat of this failure in the contemporary times too.

It took two catastrophic events- the First World War and the Second World War, and several other episodes of violence-filled global altercations, for the United Nations (UN) to be formed, and later on for the UN to promote the value of/for peace by declaring the International Day of Peace. The aforementioned violence-filled global events had already destroyed human lives and degenerated the human values to such an unprecedented extent, never imagined in our earlier times. By declaring the International Day of Peace in 1981, and by unanimously voting to designate the 21<sup>st</sup> Day of September to observe the day as a period of non-violence

and cease-fire, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) once again sought to reposition peace as fundamental to human survival and wellbeing. The UNGA's adoption of the *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace* recognized, also, that peace "not only is the absence of conflict, but also ... a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation."

Now, we the peace-loving people realize that had everyone understood the importance of peace, and had it been the tradition of human societ(ies) to celebrate peace like the way people celebrated New Year's Day or Christmas, there would not be crises such as the ones we have had, in any place on our Earth, in the past centuries or present times. In this context, the observation of the International Day of Peace reminds us today, more than ever, about the need for respecting life, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons, groups, communities and nations. There is a need to engage in holistic promotion of non-violence and harmonious co-existence through education, dialogue and cooperation. We can avoid further damage to universal human values of peace, love, generosity and compassion by peaceful settlement of world conflicts as advocated by India under the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is the sure way to promote "justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations" as declared by the United Nations General Assembly.

When there are wars, violence, riots, killings and mass displacements, we feel the need for change of behaviour and transformation of degenerated human morality in our societies. In the recent times too, there has been continuous and widespread activity of killings and counter-killings of lives. Oh! What a misfortune it is that peace itself is so easily displaced by violence

in our society. This, in spite of the fact that, in the contemporary human society, we have modern world-class institutions where subjects of humanities, and science and technologies are taught! Today, when we reflect on peace, we fail to draw a line of distinction or see any marked difference between the so-called ‘educated’ and the ‘non-educated’, and so also among the ‘schooled’ and the ‘non-schooled’— the minds of people, irrespective of their background, by and large conform to the idea of violence as a solution. This mole in our thinking has been a total failure, a total disaster, and completely against humanity. This has led to one human catastrophe after another till date. Particularly, the poorest people, women and children have been worst hit by the spread of unreasonable violence and brutality in our societies. As on date, millions have become victims of violence and are reduced to the status of refugees in relief camps. This, in spite of our claim that we are at the pinnacle of human civilizational achievement: status of being an economic, technological and nuclear superpower. It is crystal clear that if we do not have a foundational value of/for peace in our collective vision for creating a human-friendly and ecologically sustainable earth, we will always engage in ‘othering’ processes, and perceive ‘the other’ as a threat.

Our celebrated philosopher of peace— the Non-Violence Guru of the World— Mahatma Gandhi had said, “There is enough for everybody’s need.” And here we are. We fight. The insecure/fighting mind comes from our greed he had said— the greed for power, wealth and the audacity to exhibit one as more superior to the other. In such a scenario, could there be a cure? Could we hope for a permanent peace in our world of today and tomorrow, for ourselves and our future generations? What are the ways in which we could prevent future violence and establish peace? These are some difficult questions of our times. Daunting but not impossible, I must say. For instance, the celebration of International Day of Peace by the people of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) is a clear signal that they are fed-up with decades of conflict and

violence. Better late than never, they have chosen well to talk and walk the path of peace: bridge the gaps between and among communities, hold hands and walk together as one, irrespective of their linguistic, cultural and historical differences. One may draw from this experience and say that it is possible not only for the people of BTR to shed the differences and work on each other's strengths, but also for all the societies of our world to realize that there is no alternative to peace and love, and that peace is a sure possibility.

In contrast to how armed movements—both small and big breed on violence, peace thrives on love, kindness and generosity. For peace to exist, it is essential to treat all people with love and kindness, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, creed and religion. In order to replace violence with peace, it is essential to teach ourselves and our future generations on *peace and love*, the two most potent values of human beings. Some of our educational institutions have done well to start *happiness curricula* in their academic programmes. It is my belief that happiness exists when there is love and peace—within the self as well as in the society. Catch them young, they say. Therefore, the need to move a step further towards introducing *peace and love* as regular curricula in our schools. Inculcating the sense of awareness that the unfathomable power of love and peace are but every human being's innate capacity among our children could be the best starting point. Cultivating a culture of peace in our fragmented world is fraught with challenges, but I see it as a definite possibility: a sure remedy. And the right time to begin is now—within our minds, homes, communities and nations. Fostering, promoting, educating one and all on peace and love is the sure path to human survival, wellbeing and prosperity.



# 5

## Celebration of Peace on Bodoland Thanksgiving Day

Ever since the signing of the Bodo Peace Accord on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, there has been no looking back for the people of Bodoland Territorial Region. Like the rare “*Aha*” moment in one’s life, this Peace Accord came by as a true ‘*moment of lift*’ for the people of our region. Like the shriveled-up plants after a prolonged drought, our parents, children and youth relished the drops and torrents that came pouring in. Our parched and dry spirits were reinvigorated, hopes were rekindled and lives were defragmented for the first time in decades. All of a sudden, people saw a rainbow of possibilities for establishing peace and stability in our region. It came as a true blessing: a moment of time in our collective histories that beckoned the end of the old ways of violence and terror, and the dawning of a new epoch of peace, sustainable development and happiness. Social and psychological healing can take place only when a condition for peace is created and sustained. The Bodo Peace Accord 2020 has already created and sustained one.

Strengthened by the goodwill of well-wishers and guided by our collective vision- *Peaceful, Smart and Green Bodoland* we were able to initiate a number of flagships aimed at sustaining peace, psycho-social healing, economic growth and social development in the last three years. We have been able to set the necessary momentum for delivering good governance in our region and march along with the rest of Assam and India.

How true it is that in defining moments of history, such as the one we experienced in 2020, paths of individuals and communities are crossed, thereby providing the scope and arena for collective envisioning of a common destiny! While one may say that peace does not mean mere absence of conflict, it is also true that peace can prevail only when fear is absent from the minds of people. The people of the Bodoland Territorial Region have indeed chosen well: choosing peace in place of conflict and violence. Sink or swim, the people have hit the road running. In this way, within a couple of years, we have had rich dividends come our way: our children, young men and women have begun to walk their dreams, rebuild lives and revitalize communities.

The Bodoland Territorial Region has always been full of potentials, hopes and bright futures. Unfortunately, the creative potentials and talents were horribly stifled and suffocated for generations as a result of the internecine conflicts that ruled the roost for generations. Bright dreams and visions came to a sorrowful waste as thousands of lives perished to bullets and mortar. Others spent the most productive phases of their lives in uncertainty and seemingly endless gloom. There was a dark cloud hovering permanently over our physical and mental spaces. One cannot but shiver and shudder to think about the bygone years when our pristine and undulating lands were stained by the blood of so many innocent lives. The horrors of those piercing wails and screams continue to haunt us to this very day.

Every passing day had brought rueful news of arrests, kidnappings, rapes, death(s) and property damage through gunfire, bomb blasts or other forms of violence. We have had to weep continuously. On occasions when brothers and sisters from our communities fell, and also on occasions when our *Jarwans* fell. How could we be immune to grief in sorrowful times. There was no rest and respite from pain for any one of us during conflict years. In Bodoland alone, we lost over 5000 persons. Many of our women continue to

live as widows and we have so many children who were orphaned during the conflict.

However, on the eve of the successful completion of three years of the UPPL-BJP-GSP led BTR Council Government, our hearts are now filled with gratitude and our minds with reinvigorated hopes and dreams! Our BTR Government has tried to honour everyone's faith in us by committing ourselves to everything that will retain Bodoland Territorial Region as a climate-resilient region. We have initiated missions to address long-pending issues that were kept in abeyance earlier. Our collective vision *Peaceful, Smart and Green Bodoland* seeks to sustain peace, healing, transformation and development. Our objectives are promotion of peaceful co-existence through innovative programming for social, cultural and economic development- down to the last mile. We have been joined by a number of collaborators for social and economic transformation: corporates, philanthropic agencies, CSOs, CBOs, etc. Our missions focus prominently on agriculture, animal husbandry and livelihoods. Our education officials have worked hard with the candidates of the Bodofa Super-50 missions and in turn our young people have responded with their hard work and phenomenal success. A similar enthusiasm is seen in the arena of sports, culture and literature. Erstwhile known for prevalence of violence and fear, Kokrajhar, now retitled as the *City of Peace*, has hosted several national and international events already. Thus, it behoves that we repay our benefactors with gratitude.

Though, our journey has just begun and we have much distance to traverse, this occasion calls for celebration! Thus, thousands thronged to participate in the *Thanksgiving & Celebrating Peace Programme* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, at SAI Stadium Kokrajhar- the City of Peace. They gleefully and heartily wove their cell phone lights- gesturing gratitude to Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi, Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji, HCM of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji and all our well-wishers and benefactors.

This opportune event provided us the unique platform to redeem our faith, hope and vitality. I can already see that this event will inspire all of us, particularly our youth and children, to hold unto peace even more dearly, thereby, building a happy, healthy and wealthy BTR.

## 6

# Celebrating the Universality of the Legacy of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma

*(Originally published in The Assam Tribune on  
the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025)*

*“Nothing could deter Bodofa! He was courageous, brave and right in his thinking, and thus had no fear of any oppressor. He circumvented all forms of oppression and atrocities by rending the slogan: Live and Let Live!”*

Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1956 in the Boragari Village of Dotma Block in the present day Kokrajhar district. His mother was Lepshri Brahma while father was Monglaram Brahma. He was preceded by two brothers and sisters each, and thus was the fifth and the youngest child of the family. Like the other families in his village, Bodofa’s family depended on agriculture for a living. They could barely make ends meet. Thus, he faced several hardships in his life since very early. The challenges that life brought, however, could not stifle the zeal, fervour and vitality of the young Bodofa. He graduated with a prestigious merit scholarship here or passed the examination with flying colours there— he had an undying zeal to excel, and nothing could stop his pursuit of knowledge.

The meagre income of his family could not support the educational requirements of Bodofa. As such, he had to attend school without

adequate books all throughout. When he lost his father in 1973, he was further pushed to the wall. He had to make up his studies in an itinerant book shop by the name of Sri Guru Library in Dotma. Bodofa often visited the shop and spent time, there, reading the books that he could not otherwise afford. These hardships accompanied him while he went for pursuing his higher studies in the prestigious Cotton College (present day Cotton University) too. He could hardly afford even the highly subsidized hostel fees of the Third Mess. Notwithstanding these difficulties, he completed his Pre University Studies with Letter Marks in Physics and thereafter completed his B. Sc. (Honours in Physics) in 1981.

Bodofa took up the job of an Inspector of Income Tax under the Ministry of Finance in 1984. However, such was his thirst for knowledge that he completed his BA from Kokrajhar College in 1985, and later on his M. Sc. from Gauhati University in 1986. Thereafter he started pursuing studies in Law under Gauhati University, which he could not complete as there was a greater calling that he responded to.

Bodofa was also a prolific writer. He wrote extensively in Bodo, Assamese, Bangla and English. Most prominent writings of Bodofa are to be found in the magazine by the name of “Orkhi” which he edited in the 1980s. This magazine served as a powerful mouthpiece for the social transformation of the Bodos and other marginalized communities. His thoughts on social, economic and political future of the Bodos were widely circulated through the different editions of this magazine. Yet again, to reach out to a wider readership base, Bodofa started a weekly “The Bodoland Times” on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March of 1987.

He was a born leader! Small in built and physique though, Bodofa proved to be head and shoulders above his peers right from his young days. His charisma and energy had no parallels. He travelled throughout the length and breadth of the Bodo inhabited regions of Assam and united them. At the young age of 22, he became

the President of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in Goalpara District in 1978-79. In 1983-84, he was made the Vice President of the ABSU. The ultimate calling came when he became the President of the ABSU during its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference held on the 29-31 May, 1986. He emerged as a mass leader among the Bodos voicing for their Constitutional Rights and entitlements as citizens of India.

Bodofa was born at a time when the Bodos and other tribal communities of Assam were facing the dangers of land alienation, linguistic marginalization and overall deprivation from the benefits of India's development. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s were definitive years for the Bodos, characterized by socio-political marginalization, economic struggles, and the beginning of socio-political and cultural assertion. Historically, they had become marginalized since the onset of the colonial period, which continued in the post-independence era. Their lack of adequate political participation and representation, and issues such as land alienation and lack of access to modern education and government employment exacerbated their economic backwardness and social discrimination, leaving them vulnerable, exploited, and neglected. Efforts to conserve and protect their language and cultural identity faced severe obstacles.

It was in response to this call of the times that the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was formed in 1952, followed by the formation of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in 1967. These organizations were largely non-political, though, and worked for the socio-economic, literary and cultural upliftment, and preservation of the identity of Bodos and other communities. Thus, this period marked the early stages of socio-political mobilization, laying the groundwork for later movements, as the state not only failed to address but rather suppressed their demands using repressive forces, igniting the demands for autonomy and self-determination.

In 1986, when Bodofa became the President of the ABSU by sacrificing his life of comfort and luxury as a government officer, he meant serious business! He was on a Mission and vowed to end all forms of oppression, violence and discrimination faced by the Bodos and other marginalized communities. Being a lover of all peoples and their well-being, he could not tolerate the social exclusion and cultural violence faced by them at the hands of the Assamese chauvinism. He outrightly advocated for their constitutional rights, dignity and justice, and total liberation from the web of domination by creating a separate state of Bodoland. Hence his slogan: Divide Assam 50:50!

Within the five eventful years that Bodofa led the Bodoland Movement, his revolutionary philosophy, zeal and action programmes awakened the consciousness of the Bodos and other marginalized communities. There has been no stopping ever since. Even though the movement led by him was democratic and peaceful, there were numerous occasions when excessive repression was meted out on the innocent and poor Bodos by the forces. Nothing could deter Bodofa! He was courageous, brave and right in his thinking, and thus had no fear of any oppressor. He circumvented all forms of oppression and atrocities by rending the slogan: Live and Let Live! He called for peaceful dialogue and negotiation, rather than repression, in resolving the issues and concerns of the vulnerable groups and communities. He was a true patriot and a great Indian Nationalist- and thus adopted the stance of *Nationalist Socialism* while leading the Bodoland Movement. He kept the rights and dignity of the Bodos and other marginalized communities in the front without ever compromising on the integrity and security of Indian Nation.

Bodofa was a lover of science. He adopted a scientific approach to problem-solving in the fields of linguistic development, social transformation and achievement of political rights. He believed that in order to strengthen democracy, it was essential to create



a society where the scientific-temperament reigned supreme among the citizens. This, he believed, would eventually lead to the establishment of a *scientific democracy*: a democracy that guarantees egalitarian society. Thus, he had called for establishment of adequate numbers of educational institutions that promoted science and technology.

Bodofa left this world too soon on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1990, at the young age of 34. Though he died very early, his legacy continues to inspire students, activists and leaders who advocate for social and political change through peaceful, nonviolent and scientific means. His philosophy and actions for social justice has been well-appreciated today. In recent times, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji has paid tributes to Bodofa and acknowledged his phenomenal contributions on several occasions. Hon'ble Home Minister of India Shri Amit Shah Ji has already named a street of Delhi after Bodofa in order to celebrate his great contributions. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has declared his day of birth, that is, the 31<sup>st</sup> of March every year, as the Students' Day of Assam. The Upendra Nath Brahma Trust has established "The Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award" in order to honour the outstanding work and contribution of individuals towards upliftment of humankind, especially, those in margins of the society!

Today, the legacy of Bodofa has profoundly impacted many generations of our society. *Bodofa's revolutionary ideals illuminate a path that steer away from hatred and destruction, and point towards freedom, justice and victory— Sangharsh to Nirman— a roadmap where everybody becomes the winner!* It is only because of Bodofa that a roadmap for peace was made possible in Bodoland region. Thus, as we commemorate Bodofa as a champion of the marginalized and oppressed, one who advocated for the rights of the poor, vulnerable, and discriminated, we also celebrate his life and teachings that emphasized the importance of peace, understanding, and conflict

resolution through negotiation, dialogue and reciprocity. Herein lies the universality of his legacy. Bodofa may be long gone from this world, yet he remains in our midst– a constant inspiration to have *no fear* in the pursuit of our constitutional rights, human dignity and social justice!

# Land Justice as the Foundation of Civilization

*A New Era for Bodoland Region*

In every chapter of human history, land has served not merely as territory but as the foundation within which societies, cultures, ideas and ideals are forged. Land is the ground on which civilizations have risen, emplaced cultures, and redefined identities over time, space, and social landscapes. The Bodoland Region, rich in diverse cultures and traditions, finds itself at a historic crossroads where a long-overdue reformation in land administration is now paving the way for renewed dignity, empowerment, and sustainable development through a series of reforms.

Even after India celebrated its independence in 1947, a critical sector that should have underpinned rapid national progress—land reform—continued to struggle with deep-rooted challenges in the Bodoland Region. Governed by the stringent provisions of Chapter X of the Assam Land and Regulation Act of 1886, vast tracts of land within and around Bodoland languished under neglect and non-implementation. In the 47 designated tribal belts and blocks within the present Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), along with an additional 19 lying outside its ambit, land disputes festered. Over decades, significant segments of land fell prey to encroachment and alienation, often through mechanisms of usury and fraud, leaving many of the indigenous and tribal communities disenfranchised and exposed to exploitation.

The decades-old mismanagement of land records, disputes, and settlements has not only disrupted economic growth but has also deeply affected the social fabric of the region. Land, being an essential need of human dignity, the people were robbed of its promise as a secure anchor for families and communities as their livelihoods, heritage, and identity.

Recognizing the intrinsic link between land and human dignity, the present BTR Government has embarked on a comprehensive reform agenda that is as visionary as it is practical. Today, every bonafide citizen of Bodoland Territorial Region—irrespective of caste, community, or historical disadvantage—is being extended the promise of secure land rights, under both the amended provisions of Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, and the spirit of inclusion as envisioned in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2003.

Over the past four and a half years alone, the BTR government has reached a significant milestone by providing land rights to more than 26,775 families within revenue villages. Further, 32,798 Individual Land Title Distribution and 1161 Community Land Title Distribution have been completed till date under Forest Rights Act 2006. In parallel, various land-related services delivered through both offline and online platforms have benefitted approximately 3,23,178 individuals. This hybrid approach—merging traditional mechanisms with modern technology—is creating a resilient ecosystem for land governance, geared to overcome the inertia of centuries-old practices and catapult the region into a future of transparency and fairness.

### **Mission Bwiswmuthi: The Engine of Transformation**

At the heart of these transformative changes is the flagship initiative, “Mission Bwiswmuthi 1.0.” The outstanding results of Mission Bwiswmuthi 1.0 will now be followed by the launch of Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0. In the first phase, the mission

streamlined administrative procedures, secured land rights for citizens, and enhanced trust in government services across the region. The project offered fourteen pivotal land-related services to the local population through online mode. These services included processing mutations by inheritance and deed, facilitating land partitioning, and reclassifying properties up to one bigha. Additionally, the initiative enabled conversions of land categories, and allowed for correcting area and name inaccuracies. The project updated mobile numbers and provided certified copies of essential documents, including the Jamabandi and Chitha. It also issued Land Holding Certificates and updated the Records of Rights (RoR/Jamabandi) after direct settlements.

Under Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0, six more additional settlement services are being introduced to allow eligible holders to secure their rights. It will offer settlement on government lands for individual small tea growers and for groups such as NGOs and cooperative societies. It will also provide services for individual settlers and institutions on various government lands, benefitting small tea growers and rubber farmers among others. Additionally, eligible occupiers will benefit from the settlement of transferred lands, while online certified copy maps would be made available to verify property boundaries.

For instance, it is a known fact that agriculture remains the key component of Bodoland's economy, with small tea gardens and rubber plantations dotting the landscape. Approximately 8,000 small tea gardens, covering an area of 2239.04 hectares, now stand to gain directly from the initiatives under Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0. These gardens, a vital source of livelihood, collectively produce nearly 9,95,92,875 kilograms of green tea leaves annually—an economic force that not only contributes to local growth but also boosts the region's integration with national and global markets. For tea garden farmers, as well as the rubber growers scattered across the region, securing proper land titles will further cement

their economic resilience and foster a sense of ownership and self-determination. With the advent of Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0, the land settlement challenges that have long impeded progress in these sectors are being addressed head-on. This integrated approach will enable small entrepreneurs to access formal credit, invest in improved cultivation practices, and participate equitably in the broader economic dialogue of a modernizing India.

This Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0 is designed to streamline the process of land settlement by reducing administrative delays and enhancing service transparency. As a result, families who have long waited for the promise of a secure livelihood on their ancestral lands are now poised to receive timely benefits. The mission is not merely about issuing documents; it symbolizes the BTR Government's commitment to rectifying historical inequities and restoring dignity to every corner of the region.

Yet another significant step in the last two years has been that surveys have been successfully conducted in 36 previously unmapped non-cadastral villages across BTR, particularly those nestled along the border with Bhutan. For 77 years—since India's independence—these communities had been deprived of formal land recognition. Leveraging modern drone technology, the Department of Land Revenue & Disaster Management has meticulously surveyed these areas, initiating the process of land records preparation and subsequent patta distribution.

Central to Bodoland's renewed vigor in land administration is the modernization of the institutional framework governing land records. A state-of-the-art central record room, complete with an advanced record tracking and management system, is now operational. Complementing this is a well-equipped Geographic Information System (GIS) laboratory, which plays a pivotal role in accurately mapping the region's territory and ensuring that land records are updated in real time.

This digital transformation—integrating land services onto online platforms—has not only streamlined administrative processes but has also instilled greater public confidence in the system. Continuous capacity-building programs for officials ensure that the latest technology is effectively harnessed to provide reliable and prompt services. As disputes over land ownership diminish, the resultant clarity and transparency are fostering an environment of trust and collective progress. The modern digital backbone of land services is a testament to the region's commitment to redefining governance for a sustainable future.

Through projects like Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0, our BTR Government have attempted to reduce historical inequities while promoting a cohesive local, regional as well as national identity. This alignment with broader national aspirations is further reinforced by the strategic integration of digital tools, making the land reform process more efficient and accessible to every eligible family. In doing so, Bodoland is not only correcting decades of oversight but is also setting a benchmark for other regions governed by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

These sweeping reforms in the Bodoland Region resonate deeply with the integrated vision of growth as articulated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji. His universal call to "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayaas" is the approach that our BTR Government has tried to embody with sincerity and commitment. This inclusive development model will surely lead us to achieve the vision for a Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

Land is not to be seen only as a commodity; it is the bedrock upon which the dignity of a community is built. In so doing, BTR Government has helped secure land rights for every eligible family, effectively reducing long-standing disputes, restricting unauthorized encroachments, and minimizing instances of land fraud. This in turn has had far-reaching socioeconomic implications.

Thus, communities have been assured of their fundamental right to the land they have historically depended upon. This is already ensuring a ripple effect across education, health, and economic productivity in our region.

Restored land rights have enhanced confidence, mutual trust and a deep sense of healing, thus, paving the way for peace, harmonious co-existence and sustainable local development. In BTR, families who previously grappled with insecure tenure are now empowered to invest in their properties, cultivate crops with renewed confidence, and contribute robustly to local economic initiatives. The trust engendered by a transparent land governance system has uplifted entire communities, paving the way for a future where they are able to dream, see visions and co-exist where development is both inclusive and self-sustaining.

Bodoland's advances in land reform underscore a commitment to crafting not only a secure present but also a resilient future. The comprehensive reforms have positioned the Bodoland Territorial Council as a pioneer among the various Sixth Schedule Councils across India. The drive towards technological integration, when combined with an earnest effort to redress historical injustices, exemplifies a modern model of governance. This model is characterized by transparency in service delivery, an agile administrative framework, and an unflinching commitment to citizen empowerment. As Bodoland envisages to become a model of "Peaceful, Smart and Green" development, the established institutions are continuously evolving to meet the dynamic needs of the population. These initiatives are not isolated projects but are interconnected facets of a larger vision—a vision that aims to secure land rights as a pathway to a dignified and prosperous future.

The evolution of land reforms in the Bodoland Region is more than an administrative exercise; it is a reaffirmation of human dignity and the timeless belief that every individual deserves a secure stake in the future. By reimagining age-old practices through modern



technology and inclusive policies, Bodoland is not only resolving historical inequities but is also laying down a robust foundation for a resilient socio-economic landscape. The journey has just begun, and to forge a future of enduring dignity, prosperity, and unity, BTR Government will leave no stone unturned in the coming days.



## 132<sup>nd</sup> Durand Cup in Bodoland— an Uplifting Confluence of Peace and Sports

Ever since the signing of the Bodo Peace Accord on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, there has been no looking back for the people of Bodoland Territorial Region. Like the rare “*Aha*” moment in one’s life, this Peace Accord came by as a true ‘*moment of lift*’ for the people of our region. Like the shriveled-up plants after a prolonged drought, our parents, children and youth relished the drops and torrents that came pouring in. Our parched and dry spirits were reinvigorated, hopes were rekindled and lives were defragmented for the first time in decades. All of a sudden, people saw a rainbow of possibilities for establishing peace and stability in our region. It came as a true blessing: a moment of time in our collective histories that beckoned the end of the old ways of violence and terror, and the dawning of a new epoch of peace, sustainable development and happiness. Social and psychological healing can take place only when a condition for peace is created and sustained. The Bodo Peace Accord 2020 has already created and sustained one.

How true it is that in defining moments of history, such as the one we experienced in 2020, paths of individuals and communities are crossed, thereby providing the scope and arena for collective envisioning of a common destiny. While one may say that peace does not mean mere absence of conflict, it is also true that peace

can prevail only when fear is absent from the minds of people. The people of the Bodoland Territorial Region have indeed chosen well: choosing peace in place of conflict and violence. Sink or swim, the people have hit the road running. In this way, within a couple of years, we have had rich dividends come our way: our children, young men and women have begun to walk their dreams, rebuild lives and revitalize communities.

The Bodoland Territorial Region has always been full of potentials, hopes and bright futures. Unfortunately, the creative potentials and talents were horribly stifled and suffocated for generations as a result of the internecine conflicts that ruled the roost for generations. Bright dreams and visions came to a sorrowful waste as thousands of lives perished to bullets and mortar. Others spent the most productive phases of their lives in uncertainty and seemingly endless gloom. There was a dark cloud hovering permanently over our physical and mental spaces. One cannot but shiver and shudder to think about the bygone years when our pristine and undulating lands were stained by the blood of so many innocent lives. The horrors of those piercing wails and screams continue to haunt us to this very day.

Every passing day had brought rueful news of arrests, kidnappings, rapes, death(s) and property damage through gunfire, bomb blasts or other forms of violence. We have had to weep continuously. On occasions when brothers and sisters from our communities fell, and also on occasions when our *Jawans* fell. How could we be immune to grief in sorrowful times. There was no rest and respite from pain for any one of us during conflict years. In Bodoland alone, we lost over 5000 persons. Many of our women continue to live as widows and we have so many children who were orphaned during the conflict.

However, the 132<sup>nd</sup> Durand Cup Football Tournament being held from 5-24 August 2023 at Kokrajhar- the City of Peace once again lifts our spirits and reinvigorates our march towards peace and

stability. This opportune event provides us the unique platform to redeem peoples' faith, hope and vitality. As culture and sports are unifying elements, it is only right that sports have shaped up in a great way in BTR. The Indian Army has played a big role here. In bringing football to our region, they have endorsed our efforts in peace building. It is a blessing that our Army Jawans are not only protecting our borders with their lives, but also playing very constructive role in social development of the youth across the country by providing them training, career counselling, sporting opportunities, Bharat Darshan and the like.

Presently, what more could we have hoped and prayed for than the august footfall of Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Ji, Hon'ble *Karmayogi* Chief Minister of Assam Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji, AIFF President Shri Kalyan Chaubey Ji, dignitaries from Government of India and Government of Assam, and the valiant stalwarts from the Indian Army in our humble city of Kokrajhar. Seven top teams from India and another from Nepal have been locking horns for reaching the covetous quarterfinal slot here. The display of skills in the thrilling line-up of matches have been uplifting sights to behold. This event has taken us many steps forward in realizing the great vision of our Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji "*to make fitness an integral part of our daily lives*" through the flagship KHELO INDIA! It is a beckoning to one and all to join his clarion call to "*reform, perform and transform!*"

Football is a glorious game of sports; it is loved and has been played for ages in India and abroad. Recently, the theme: "*Football is in our blood, Unity is our Goal*" had reverberated across BTR and Northeast India during the high-voltage Inter Sixth Schedule Premier League (ISPL 2022) matches played out in all the four districts of BTR. Today, I can already see that the 132<sup>nd</sup> Durand Cup matches have inspired all of us, particularly our youth and children, to love football and other sports even more dearly, thereby, building a happy, healthy and wealthy BTR.

More recently, the **CEM Cup 2025** has emerged as a transformative force in the Bodoland Territorial Region, once again, symbolizing a profound shift from decades of conflict to a vibrant culture of peace and unity. With participation from over 3,700 *teams and nearly 70,000 players*, including a significant number of young women, the tournament has galvanized communities across Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, and Tamulpur. More than a sporting event, it has become a **celebration of collective aspiration**, offering youth a platform to showcase talent, build camaraderie, and reclaim public spaces once marked by mistrust. The tournament's inclusive structure—from village-level matches to council finals—has fostered grassroots engagement and civic pride, while spotlighting Bodoland's emergence as a national hub for football excellence. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji noted in the 123<sup>rd</sup> episode of *Maan Ki Baat*, while addressing the nation that, the CEM Cup is “not just a tournament; it has become a celebration of unity and hope.”

## Community Visioning in BTR for a Viksit Bharat @ 2047

Originally published in The Eastern Chornicle, In a move to reclaim the greatness of Indian civilization as a developed and prosperous nation among all nations of the world, Prime Minister Modi Ji has already sounded the conch and given the clarion call- *Vikshit Bharat @ 2047!* This visionary call posits the widest participation of all institutions, organizations and personnel to redeem the greatness of Bharat. This call is an inspiration for one and all in the country to relentlessly pursue the dream of achieving a *Sashakt Bharat*. It calls every one of us- every citizen, family, community, civil society organization and corporate house of Bharat to work in synchrony to achieve a glorious end!

Under the leadership of our Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi Ji, the Bodo Peace Accord 2020 had provided an opportune platform for the establishment of sustainable peace, harmony and integrity in the Bodoland region. It brought to an end the dark days of violence, killings and pervasive hatred among and between communities of the region. Further, the continued guidance of Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji, and the hard work of Chief Minister of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji, have gifted the Bodoland region with the time and the opportunity to rebuild, heal, and take the first steps for lasting peace, harmony and development!

What a privilege it is for every one of us in the Bodoland region, even from the remote Indo-Bhutan border areas, to partake in this magnificent and unprecedented journey towards the Vikshit Bharat @ 2047!

Earlier, the challenges faced by the people of BTR had demanded a proactive and empathetic approach from policymakers. Acknowledging the peoples' grievances and aspirations was essential for fostering trust and building sustainable peace. In this scheme of things, key steps included delivery of participatory governance, equitable development, conflict resolution mechanisms, education and awareness, among others. Thus, the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Government initiated a participatory visioning exercise among 26 different communities residing in BTR, involving over 70 different organizations, agencies and institutions, each spearheading and voicing their respective community's aspirations. By engaging with them in ways that honour relationality, respect and dignity of all individuals and communities, this Community Vision for BTR project crystallized a collective vision that transects towards acknowledging, documenting and resolving the long-standing issues and unmet aspirations of all the communities. As part of the flagship Bodoland Happiness Mission, this initiative reflected the Council Government's steadfast commitment to fostering sustainable peace, promoting healing, and addressing the enduring scars of over four decades of conflict and violence.

Why community? Taking the 'community' approach was necessitated by the fact that India, with its rich cultural and social diversity, is a nation that thrives on the strength and unity of its communities. Encouraging and empowering communities is not only vital for preserving this diversity but also essential for fostering progress and harmony within the country. Communities form the foundation of India's identity. From traditional practices to modern collaborations, communities embody the shared histories, values, and aspirations of their members. Their collective spirit contributes



to the vibrancy and dynamism of Indian society, making them indispensable to the nation's progress.

It is also true that from the Stone Age to modern times, human beings have largely organized themselves into communities. Community as a frame of reference made space for intensive interactions, the establishment of blood-based and kinship-based relationships, the demarcation of boundaries that provided the inside-outside markers, and the growth and development of cultures, languages, mores, religions, and worldviews. The community sustained individual and group well-being; it afforded cooperation, collaboration, and protection among its members. The group survival principle was the integral rule. Thus, community best promoted and sustained distinctive languages, cultures, customs, and traditions. In contrast, the modern societies generally promoted individual liberty, freedom, and dignity. These, being framed within the purview of human rights laws have largely shaped modern nation-state governance systems. Primacy is accorded to the individual right and well-being from the modern society point of view. On the other hand, individual aspirations and ambitions often make way for the community's greater interest from the community point of view.

While the community is a zealous protector and promoter of all it considers 'its own,' it can radically be the opposite for those considered outside its set boundaries. Thus, history is replete with instances of community divides, conflicts, wars and killings. Can communities co-exist? Can there be a shared culture of peace and security? Can harmony be established? These are the fundamental questions that need to be revisited in today's times. There is a need to revisit the common good that 'community' has to offer. For instance, it is evident that the community emboldens one to survive with dignity by resisting social discriminations. Community has served as the only true custodian of cultures, languages, worldviews, and epistemes. Community provides the necessary arrangements

for forming institutions, agencies, and organizations to ensure that these are preserved, sustained, and promoted. Communities are not just cultural entities; they are engines of social and economic development. Empowering them through education, resources, and opportunities enhances their ability to contribute to national progress. A strong community fosters social cohesion, reduces inequalities, and creates an environment where every citizen can achieve their full potential.

In this way, Community Vision for BTR is a humble yet novel initiative of our Council Government. It has been conceived in the spirit of transformation and healing—a sincere effort to understand and address the hopes, grievances, and priorities of the people. While capturing the aspirations of the communities, the vision is an attempt to align the government's efforts with their felt needs and unmet aspirations, thereby, ensuring that every voice is heard and represented in the journey towards peace and development. As such, it seeks to provide a guiding framework to the government and various other agencies for addressing the unique needs and collective goals of the Bodoland region, thus, ensuring our steady climb towards Viksit Bharat @ 2047!"

# The Winning Recipe: Our Vision for Peace, Happiness and Development in BTR

(मैं शांति के साथ हूँ, क्या आप भी हैं?)

India has produced the greatest of peace ambassadors in the history of humankind. Early on, Lord Gautama Buddha had renounced royalty to become the messenger of peace and social harmony for the entire world. Emperor Ashoka followed in Lord Buddha's footsteps and became a torchbearer of non-violence and peace after witnessing the miseries and afflictions that wars caused. In recent times, Mahatma Gandhi and his universal principles of ahimsa and satyagraha had won for us the freedom from the British in 1947. In post-independence India, BR Ambedkar sought to establish peace and social harmony by undoing structurally embedded age-old practices of social discrimination and injustice through constitutional measures. Moreover, the aspirations for peace and happiness are seen to have found expressions in myriad of movements initiated by local leaders all throughout India for bringing political and social change throughout our history. All our great leaders of peace ignited the idea of peace and spread it in our society across different times. It is seen that peace did not come easy. Peace had to be ideated, planted, nurtured and promoted to find place in our society.

In our immediate context and times, Bodoland region was characterized by conflict and violence at the turn of the Twenty-First Century. Our days were dark and nights endless. We needed to steer our communities away from the gloomy Bodo- Non-Bodo politics of hatred and divide. There was a need to take ourselves out of the recurrent fratricidal killings among ourselves. In those days, the very fabric of social harmony was spiraling down into an unfathomable abyss. There was all round social distrust and mistrust. Yet again, we needed to end the gun-culture and violence which had reduced us to poverty and indignity. There was no meeting the eye for resolution of disputes. Bullets, grenades, bombs, rapes, torture, killings and burning of houses had become the media of communication. Students, journalists, politicians, community leaders, business persons and teachers were kidnapped, tortured and murdered. Even children and women were not spared. Alas, what curse had befallen us! Violence had become the norm—we lived in a society where there was a complete inversion of morality.

In this milieu, as young cadres of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), I and my fellow-workers took a conscious decision to adopt peace and non-violence as the means as well as the end for resolving the social, political and economic crises that had set in. We needed to reverse the process of alienation of our youth and reorient them towards the mainstream of positive change and development in the world around us. I recall that it was rather challenging for us to voice out this powerful alternative, back then, as an achievable possibility for the people of Bodoland region. We had demanded, way back in 2009, that our region be freed from all illegal arms and weapons. We were determined to put an end to intra-community fratricidal killings as well as the cyclical inter-community conflicts that were triggered regularly then. We wanted to establish permanent peace, security and development in the region and thereby reclaim the dignity, rights and respect for one and all. Peace needed to be given a chance in our world! We needed to plant peace, nurture peace and spread peace!

In the meantime, our call for peace and end to all forms of violence kept growing louder. In spite of challenges, hostilities, threats and violent reprisals, our vision for peace, happiness and development in Bodoland region could not be extinguished. Rather, this idea took deep roots and spread like a wildfire engulfing ideologies of hatred, violence and corruption in our society. Our lone voice became a chorus- a slogan that everybody accepted, appreciated and professed! Thus, from the unending darkness of hatred and violence to a dawning light of peace, happiness and progress—that was what fundamentally changed and transformed in the social, political and economic landscape of BTR with the onset of our pledge for peace. While ideologies of violence and disharmony were infectious in the past, our vision for peace and progress has become even more contagious now.

The signing of the Bodo Peace Accord 2020 was a watershed moment that crystallized the promises of peace in our region. As a result of this agreement, people of our region could once again visualize a rainbow of possibilities for establishing peace and stability in our region. It came as a true blessing: a moment of time in our collective histories that beckoned the end of the old ways of violence and terror, and the dawning of a new epoch of peace, sustainable development and happiness.

Currently, United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has become the torchbearer for voicing out and sustaining peace in the Bodoland Territorial Region. Since its formation in 2015, it committed itself to this vision for establishing peace and happiness in Bodoland region. We can clearly see that what was our mini-step towards peace in 2009, has now snowballed into a massive peoples' movement for establishment and sustenance of peace, progress and good governance in BTR. As a result of UPPL's commitment to implement the Bodo Peace Accord 2020 and deliver peace, good governance and overall development in the region, we are seeing that men and women from all ranks, communities and walks of life

are rushing to join the UPPL by the thousands. Most significantly, by providing an all-inclusive platform, a team of visionary leaders and a clean work-culture, the UPPL movement has weaned the people of BTR away from the normalization of communal as well as fratricidal killings and violence which had eaten into the heart of our society.

There are a few standout characteristics of the UPPL that have propelled it to where it stands today. First of all, as a party, we resolved to achieve peace, good governance and development in the Bodoland region by taking a courageous deviation from the prevalent communal and violent political overtones that were ruling the roost in the whole of North Eastern Region of India. Sailing against the currents of the time signified an unprecedented positioning by our party. Thus, we had to work and pursue our goal relentlessly in spite of threats and violence that were perpetrated to derail our march. Few years down the line, we see that the people of our region put tremendous faith in us. With the peoples' wholehearted support and participation, we have not only successfully warded off the sinister conspiracies and recurrence of catastrophic events in our region, but also gained better traction and momentum in our march towards our goal.

On the development plank, too, BTR is no longer in the dregs of neglect and despair thanks to the proactive role of UPPL. Once peace and security were established, our society's economic growth and socio-cultural development became the principal agenda of the UPPL-BJP led BTR Government. We have initiated missions and flagship programmes to address long-pending issues that were kept in abeyance earlier. The BTR Government's vision *Peaceful, Smart and Green Bodoland* has provided the framework to sustain and promote peaceful co-existence and development through innovative programming for social, cultural and economic growth-addressing all issues down to the last mile. By investing prominently on agriculture, animal husbandry and livelihoods, we sought to

reverse poverty in our rural areas by enhancing the incomes of our farmers, SHGs and entrepreneurs. Our Bodofa Super-50 missions aiming to produce outstanding graduates in Engineering and Medicine, as well as, successful candidates in UPSC and APSC examinations have already achieved phenomenal success. A similar enthusiasm is seen in the arena of sports, culture, drama, theatre, art and literature.

Erstwhile known for prevalence of violence and fear, Kokrajhar, now retitled as the City of Peace, has successfully hosted several national and international events already. Youth empowerment, women development and protection of rights of children and differently abled persons are our roadmaps for creating an inclusive society in BTR. Providing land to the landless and home for the homeless, and creating healthy, wealthy and happy BTR are our core principles and *modus operandi*. Realizing the merit of this collective vision, we have been joined by a number of collaborators for social and economic transformation: corporates, philanthropic agencies, CSOs, and CBOs. We are no longer lonely in our journey as was the case earlier.

What a blessing it has been to have received an over-abundance of love and confidence of all the peoples of Bodoland Territorial Region! The peoples' faith and trust in UPPL's commitment to bring change and transformation gave us resounding victories in the BTR Elections of 2020, the Assam Assembly Elections of 2021 and the MP (Rajya Sabha) nomination in 2022. We are now part of the Ruling Party in our BTR Council Government, Assam Government and also represented in the Indian Parliament. These signify the continued confidence that the people of our region have in UPPL! Presently, with the support of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji, and Karmayogi Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji, our UPPL is a proud member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)!

While extending full support to the alliance candidates of the BJP and AGP in the rest of the constituencies of Assam, UPPL has fielded Shri Joyanta Basumatary as the worthy candidate from No. 1 Kokrajhar Lok Sabha (ST) Constituency in the ongoing 18th Lok Sabha Elections of India. Our goal in this election is to further strengthen and expedite the realization of the peoples' collective vision, mission, objectives and strategy to sustain peace and security, foster all-round development and ensure good governance for fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of all the ethnic, linguistic and religious communities of BTR. We have no more room for Boro-Oboro politics of anger, hatred and divide in our midst thanks to the endorsement of our vision by none other than our beloved Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi Ji!

During my recent public engagement programmes and visits to all nook and cranny of BTR, I could see that UPPL is truly blessed with an overwhelming support and love. This tremendous support received towards the candidature of Joyanta Basumatary, once again, assures us of a resounding victory— which in essence will be a great victory of the people of entire BTR! All of us at UPPL are confident that the voters of BTR will continue to favour us by casting their votes on our symbol of Tractor in this key election to be held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024. With their precious votes, we are assured of forming a pro-marginalized people's government with an absolute majority— *Phir Ek Bar Modi Sarkar!*



## ‘Tis Time for Kokrajhar- City of Peace

*The Assam Legislative Assembly Session in Kokrajhar*

Today, we, the people of Bodoland Territorial Region welcome in unison, the Hon’ble Governor of Assam Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya Ji, Hon’ble CM of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji, the Hon’ble Cabinet Ministers of Assam, Hon’ble MLAs who represent the voices of every nook and corner of Assam, and all the esteemed Officers of the Government of Assam to Kokrajhar- the City of Peace for the historic Budget Session of the Assam Legislative Assembly. Nestled in the gateway to the northeastern region of India, Kokrajhar, the capital of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), is a city that harmoniously blends physical beauty, natural bounty, and geographical significance. Known for its tranquil agricultural fields, rich flora and fauna, the famous Raimona National Park, the Sacred Baukhungri Hills, and the serene rippling of the rivers Sonkosh, Gaurang and Champa, Kokrajhar is a natural embodiment of peace. The city, though small in terms of population, remains a place where nature meets culture and carries a weighty historical significance for the Bodos and other communities residing in the Bodoland Territorial Region and Assam.

Kokrajhar’s history like that of the rest of Bodoland Territorial Region is unfortunately marked by dark times of conflict and violence, with the region often being a hotbed for insurgent

activities, ethnic violence, and clashes between various communities. The period between the early 1990s and the early 2000s was particularly tragic, with the Bodo movement witnessing violent uprisings and counterinsurgency measures. These led to the loss of countless innocent lives, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. There was hovering gloom of mistrust, distrust and hatred towards one another. The heart-wrenching stories of killings, rapes, and kidnappings are etched in the collective memory of the people of BTR and continue to haunt us even today. Revolutions often give birth to counter-revolutions, and our region witnessed such cycles of violence that were fueled by a combination of politics, identity, and a battle for resources. This cycle of bloodshed and hostility, at times, made our region feel like a place of never-ending despair. In those years, Kokrajhar and the whole of BTR became a place where people lived in constant fear. A sense of hopelessness prevailed as the optimism for peace seemed distant and unattainable.

The holding of the Budget Session for the Financial Year 2025-26 by the Assam Legislative Assembly at Kokrajhar, today, the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2026 marks the dawn of a new chapter in Bodoland Territorial Region. This trumpets the remarkable transformation that Bodoland region has undergone in the last four years ever since the UPPL-BJP coalition formed the BTR Council Government. This marks the complete transition- a total shift- from the turbulent past to a bright future. It is indeed a historic moment, marking the first time since India's independence, that the state's legislative assembly session is being convened at the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly.

This decision to hold the Budget Session in Kokrajhar is a clear message from the Chief Minister of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji: the Government of Assam is committed to ensuring good governance and development in all corners of the state. It is already an established fact that our

present Chief Minister and his dynamic cabinet of ministers have worked tirelessly to implement policies that reach the last mile of society, regardless of geographic or social barriers. On the other hand, this historic event also signals that the present Assam government has gone beyond the previous attempts to assimilate or exclude communities. The new focus is on empathy, understanding, and integration for creating a prosperous Assam. This approach has transformed the state's governance paradigm. The current government's inclusive model is one where regions like Upper Assam, the Barak Valley, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, and Bodoland region are no longer seen as peripheral but are integrated into the heart of Assam's development agenda. This shift in governance coupled with equitable distribution of resources has ensured that there is no more center-periphery dichotomy in Assam as was the case in earlier decades.

This assembly session in Kokrajhar is a proud moment for the people of BTR, symbolizing the region's resurgence and recognition. It is a testimony to the vision, hard work and resolve of the BTR government in sustaining peace, harmony, and integrity in the region. A few years ago, such an event seemed inconceivable. The mental and physical distance between the Bodoland region and the rest of Assam, fostered by political negligence, had created an atmosphere of despondency. The Bodoland region was relegated to a place of despair, where development seemed a far-off dream.

Now, with the vision for a Vikshit Bharat envisaged by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi Ji, the support and guidance of the Home Minister of India Amit Shah Ji and the hard work of the CM of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma ji, the Bodoland region is on the path to progress. The holding of this budget assembly session in Kokrajhar affirms the achievements of the BTR government and marks a significant step forward for the region. The vision for the future of the BTR, which

includes sustaining peace and harmony come what may, better infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic growth, is now closer to being realized. The people of Bodoland region will no longer be alone in their journey!

To host the Hon'ble Governor, Chief Minister, Cabinet Ministers, and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from across Assam, one and on the same day, is a moment of great honor for the people of BTR. For this event in itself, is a blessing of the entire state of Assam for the people of BTR. There is no longer an ounce of doubt that the future looks bright for Kokrajhar- the City of Peace. The efforts of the government, the resilience of our people, and the spirit of unity among the communities have already ensured that our region continues to stride forward as a model of peace and prosperity. The path forward may still have challenges, but with the leadership of CM Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and his team of dedicated cabinet ministers, we are already on the threshold of the best days for Bodoland Territorial Region!

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## Advantage Assam 2.0

*Laying the Foundations for a Glorious Assam*

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### **Introduction**

The above immortal verses vividly depicting the greatness of Assam were penned by none other than our very own Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. True to this testament by our celebrated bard, Assam is a land with an ancient and glorious legacy, and it has long been a cradle of civilizations. Today, the people of Assam, numbering over three crores, inherit a rich cultural, geographical, and natural heritage. We are blessed with abundant natural resources,

endowed with undulating forests and fertile agricultural lands. We are nourished by the mighty rivers Brahmaputra and Barak, and a subtropical climate comprising six seasons—গ্রীষ্মকাল (Summer), বর্ষাকাল (Rainy Season), শরৎকাল (Autumn), হেমন্তকাল (Late Autumn), শীতকাল (Winter), and বসন্তকাল (Spring). Maa Kamakhya has indeed blessed our lands to support diverse ecosystems and species and has rendered it an excellent ground for cultivation of a variety of crops, including rice, tea, jute, and sugarcane, alongside fruits like oranges and bananas, making it an ideal location for agriculture and horticulture. On the other hand, these natural riches have provided for the emplacement of a rainbow of diverse communities, cultures, traditions, languages, art and crafts: some ancient and a few others newly found. That our people are very friendly, welcoming, hospitable and caring of one another has been well documented by travelers and historians ever since the ancient times.

Despite its bounteous natural wealth, Assam was confronted with numerous challenges in the last few decades preceding the Covid-19 phase. In the aftermath of the Assam Agitation (1979-85), the region had experienced a long period of violence, civil unrest, and ethnic strife, leaving the state in a turmoil. Alongside this, several movements that voiced the socio-political and economic concerns and aspirations of different tribal-indigenous communities experiencing long-felt neglect had led to political instability and social unrest. There was a downward spiral in law-and-order situation that created a trust deficit between the government and its people. Consequently, Assam had lagged behind in many development indicators.

***India's Ashtalakshmi: Reigniting the Greatness of Assam and North East India***

However, just like the overpowering flow of the majestic Brahmaputra, the tide began to turn in favour of Assam with the advent of the Prime Minister of Bharat Shri Narendra Modi-led NDA Government at Delhi in 2014. For instance, it was

Modi Ji who listened to the grievances of the people of Northeast India region for the first time with empathy and an unambiguous intent to resolve our problems. His foresight and astute faith in the people of Northeast India once again rekindled hope, faith and trust among all groups and communities. This augured an era of peace in the entire region, particularly in Assam. The historic number of peace accords signed under the guidance of Home Minister Amit Shah ji has signaled a new dawn in the socio-political landscape of our region— as thousands of cadres of different insurgent organizations laid down their arms in the interest of peace in the last decade. Our brothers and sisters who had formerly taken up arms have shunned the path of violence and rejoined the mainstream society. These peace accords have paved the way for a peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive Assam and North East India. What a privilege it is for the whole of Assam and Northeastern states that we now have the privilege of marching ahead in unison with the rest of India towards a Vikshit Bharat @2047 as envisaged by Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi Ji!

Without doubt, Modi Ji's vision for Northeast India has played a significant role in Assam's transformation. Under the "Act East Policy," Assam has already emerged as a critical player in India's geopolitical and economic future. The frequent visits of the Prime Minister, which were a rarity in the past, have become a catalyst for increased investment in Assam and emphasized the central government's commitment to the state's development. Through the recently concluded *Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav*, Modi Ji envisaged connecting the Northeast with the '*Trinity of Emotion, Economy and Ecology*,' which points to better times for our region. With this enhanced focus, Assam is India's key connecting link for political, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic ties with countries of South East Asia: Assam and the Northeast Indian states have become crucial for the aspirations of the 1.25 billion people of India. As

South East Asia is projected to drive the future economic growth, India's Ashtalakshmi is sure to derive the shared benefits.

The return of total peace has favorably placed Assam as the *growth engine* of India's Ashtalakshmi. Over the past few years, Assam's GSDP at current prices increased from ₹3,09,336.32 crore in 2018-19 to ₹4,93,166.60 crore in 2022-23, already reflecting a substantial growth. These figures indicate a consistent upward trend with significant growth in both nominal and real terms.

### ***Assam on a path to glory: Advantage Assam 2.0***

Assam is the vital gateway to Northeast India by road, rail and air. It holds immense potential for further economic development. The peaceful environment fostered by the Assam Government provides a solid foundation for growth in sectors such as tourism, education, industries and infrastructure. The region is home to seven National Parks and seventeen Wildlife Sanctuaries, numerous wetlands and freshwater rivers—which offer enormous potential for development of eco-tourism. The state also has a long stretch of Indo-Bhutan border that characterized by transborder cooperation projects as well as social, cultural and economic exchanges. Further, the presence of the Holy Maa Kamakhya Temple in Assam has made the state a growing pilgrimage hub of India.

Yet again, the subsequent taking of office by the incumbent Chief Minister of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji paved the way for a new chapter in Assam's history! His arrival as the Chief Minister of Assam has brought a paradigm shift in the state's governance *modus operandi*. His approach has been marked by efficiency, pragmatism, and a result-oriented vision, focusing on transforming Assam into one of the country's top performers within a short timeframe. Under his leadership, Assam Government has emphasized working towards efficiency and productivity enhancement across farm and non-farm sectors. Notably, Assam witnessed significant improvement in revenue



generation, including both tax and non-tax revenue streams, since 2021.

During this short period of time, Assam has also experienced the establishment of several key institutions, including medical colleges, the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), and Assam Skill University, among others, which have significantly strengthened Assam's educational and employment infrastructure. Additionally, during this short period, the Assam Government scaled up strategic development projects across multiple sectors. Notable among these are the establishment of the USD 3.3 Billion Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) project by the TATAs in Jajiroad, the development of India's First International Multimodal Logistics Port at Jogighopa, and the quick expansion of the Guwahati Airport. These initiatives have not only contributed to Assam's economic growth but also have strengthened its position as a critical economic hub in the region.

The people of Assam eagerly anticipate significant benefits from the auspicious Advantage Assam 2.0. This event will undoubtedly create opportunities and provide a platform for crystallizing partnerships and collaborations aimed at developing a robust and dynamic economy in Assam. Additionally, it will help position Assam as a prime investment destination across India and the world.

Assam Government has laid the foundation for a prosperous future by way of holding the Advantage Assam 2.0. Our doors have been opened for investors and business leaders to explore the numerous opportunities, particularly in sectors such as education, infrastructure, energy, digital economy, IT, defense, aerospace, automobile manufacturing, sports, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, agriculture, tourism, and financial services. Once caught in the shackles of conflict and stagnation, we have now embarked on a new journey of transformation. The state's governance model has evolved, and development is becoming visible across all sectors. Its

strategic location, natural wealth, and government initiatives offer an array of opportunities that will contribute to both the region's prosperity and India's national progress. With a strong leadership at its helm, clear vision and a speedy inflow of investments, I say with much confidence, today, that Assam is firmly on a path of glory!

## Sangharsh to Nirman

### *The Bodoland Model of Peace*

In the heart of Bodoland region, where verdant fields stretch to meet the horizon and rivers sing songs of ancient times, a new chapter of hope, harmony, and unity has unfolded ever since the historic Bodo Peace Accord 2020. This is a land, like other parts of Assam and North East India, that has endured the storms of struggle and conflict. Thanks to the visionary intervention of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, the guidance and support of Hon'ble Home Minister of India Shri Amit Shah Ji, and the hard work of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji, it is emerging resilient, today, and poised for a brighter future.

Our brothers and sisters who were earlier cadres of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) had returned to the mainstream by laying down their arms in the interest of peace through the Bodo Peace Accord 2020. The Civil Society Organizations led by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) had played a monumental role in spearheading the Movement for Peace and finally succeeding in making Bodoland an illegal-arms-free region. This is the essence of Bodoland Model of Peace, a shining testament to the vision and sincere connection at all levels of the government(s) on the one hand, and the unyielding spirit of its people and their collective resolve, on the other hand.

Yesterday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2025, I was pleased to attend the Rehabilitation Package distribution Ceremony held at Kokrajhar

for 678 former cadres of the NDFB. This has taken the number of our former cadres who have received the rehabilitation package to a total of 4881. The concerned departments of the Government of India as well as the Government of Assam have worked tirelessly to make the process rigorous yet smooth. Ex-gratia payments to the families of 632 martyrs was completed earlier, ensuring that those affected by past conflicts receive the support they need. This has been possible as it was our sincere effort to make rehabilitating former cadres of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) a priority.

However, it is important to note here that the BTR Government's work has extended beyond rehabilitation, focusing on the meaningful social, economic, and psychological re-integration of the former cadres. The lingering hurt and grief needed healing and reconciliation. In this regard, a plethora of flagship programmes like the Bodoland Happiness Mission and the Community Visions of BTR have gradually crystallised a future filled with possibilities and peace. Through The Fin Rwdwmkhang Mission, another flagship initiative of our government, the former cadres of the NDFB have initiated sustainable livelihoods through cooperative movement. Nineteen multipurpose cooperative societies have been registered and have started gainful activities in agriculture, veterinary, and agro-tourism among others.

The implementation of various projects enlisted in the Bodo Peace Accord is a source of immense pride. The construction of several projects that are funded by the Government of Assam and Government of India has already started. These projects range from polytechnic and vocational training institutes to paramedical and nursing science institutes, cultural complexes, animal feed plants, organic manure production centers, traditional food parks, educational institutions, and emporiums for tribal women. The provincialization of 259 services for teaching and non-teaching staff in ten venture colleges has been accomplished, while 60 villages

have been added to BTR. In the coming days, we are hopeful that the Bodo Peace Accord will be implemented in toto for the benefit of all the citizens of BTR.

The Bodoland Happiness Mission, a symbol of unity and shared aspirations, underscores the BTR Government's commitment to a harmonious future. Envisioning permanent peace and harmonious coexistence, it works collectively towards realizing the Community Visions of each of the 26 proud communities residing in Bodoland Territorial Region. Thus, ensuring that as peace return, a new era of '*Nirman*' unfolds!

In this vein, to our brothers and sisters who still tread the path of armed revolution elsewhere in the country, consider the words of our Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi Ji: Peace is the strongest and most powerful form of resistance. Let us all join hands and embrace this path, for it is only through peace that we can build a Viksit Bharat @2047 as envisioned by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji. In this context, the unwavering commitment of the Government and the steadfast resolve of its people, Bodoland is now forging a path to a brighter, more harmonious future, one where the echoes of conflict are replaced by a symphony of peace, harmony and prosperity- a complete transformation: *Sangharsh* to *Nirman*!



## Cooperation Movement Leading the Way to a Viksit Bharat @2047

In the heart of a nation richly endowed with tradition and diversity, a renaissance is quietly unfolding—a movement borne from the very essence of unity and cooperation. Under the visionary leadership of Hon’ble Union Minister of Cooperation Shri Amit Shah Ji, the cooperative movement has ascended to unprecedented heights, embracing the remotest corners of our country with an unyielding spirit. As one reflects upon this transformative journey, there cannot but be a feeling of pride and hope: for it is a story of upliftment, resilience, and collective strength.

The Cooperative Movement, with its resounding motto “*Sabakarita se Samriddhi*” has become a beacon of hope, illuminating the path toward Viksit Bharat @ 2047—a vision of a developed India envisaged by our esteemed Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji. In the fields and bustling villages of this *new* Bharat, the spirit of cooperation already breathes new life into the poorest of artisans, farmers, women, and youth. With unwavering dedication, Shri Amit Shah Ji has launched multi-sectoral expansion programmes for cooperative societies, catering to their need for modernization in areas encompassing the use of technology, education, training, consultancy, research, and development. The ideals of “*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayaas*” resonate deeply within this movement. As we march towards the dream of an

*Aatmanirbhar Bharat*, the cooperative spirit binds us together, forging a future where no one is left behind. In this way, he has truly knitted a tapestry of support and empowerment that touches every life it encounters. It is in this collective endeavor that Bharat surely finds its true strength.

In this context, the Cooperative Movement has woven its magic even in the previously remote and untouched Indo-Bhutan areas comprising the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The historic Bodo Peace Accord of 2020 ensued the dawn of a new era in the Bodoland region. Thanks to the return of hard-won peace, our youth, women, former revolutionary community members, and families of victims have come together, united in their pursuit of economic prosperity, peace, and solidarity. The peace accord has been the wind beneath our wings, guiding the cooperation movement in the right direction. Within the last five years, the Bodo Peace Accord 2020 has eliminated the all-pervasive violence, killings, hatred and conflicts in our midst that had prevailed for more than four decades- it stands as a unique model of peacebuilding and progress in North East India, today.

As one traverses through the landscapes of Bodoland, we are now greeted by the vibrant hum of gradual healing, rejuvenation and progress, as against earlier gunshots, bomb blasts and grief-stricken wails of children and women. Silk production, honey harvesting, handlooms and textiles, agriculture, and livestock-based activities thrive and flourish in every corner, nurtured by the firm spirit of cooperation. Under the guidance of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the BTR Government has fostered the vision of cooperation movement and social awareness in the most remote and unserved areas. Here, our youth and women are not merely participants but becoming the torch-bearers of social and economic transformation, producing organic dairy and engaging in fish, pig, goat, and poultry farming. The Mission Fin Rwdwmkhang, a flagship mission aimed at



providing effective rehabilitation and sustainable livelihoods to ex-NDFB cadres and victim families, stands as a testament to our commitment.

Within the Bodoland Territorial Region, 1535 registered cooperative societies stand tall, their roots firmly embedded in the soil of cooperation. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, Udalguri—all districts echo the same story of resilience and unity. The lands that are bubbling with cultivation under our cooperative societies, spanning approximately 549,120 acres, demonstrate the hard work and dedication of 432,300 shareholders, with 75% belonging to ST & SC communities, and a remarkable 65% being women. This land, once a symbol of strife, now thrives under the nurturing embrace of cooperation. Also, the pages of our cooperative success are adorned with the stories of 19 cooperative societies registered under the Mission Fin Rwdwmkhang. Rice-mill cooperative societies, poultry cooperative societies, dairy cooperative societies, agro-tourism cooperative societies, multipurpose cooperative societies—all stand as pillars of strength, offering sustainable livelihoods and a sense of belonging to those who once faced adversity and had taken up arms. Each cooperative society under the Mission Fin Rwdwmkhang has provided avenues for not merely rehabilitation, but intense social, economic and psychological reintegration for our brothers and sisters who were former cadres of the NDFB.

Yet again, the Bodoland Territorial Region offers boundless possibilities in the present-day cooperative movement of India. Our agro-based industries, areca nut processing units, eco hatcheries, and fish feed production units have been streamlined to bear rich dividends. Given close to 40% of our lands being under forest cover, the forest-based industries, handloom and handicrafts, honey processing and packaging units, horticulture nurseries, tea processing units, tourism, and hospitality ventures—all hold the promise of a brighter, prosperous future. Cold storage

facilities, layer farms, milk producer cooperatives, bulk milk coolers, micro and small-scale industries, meat processing units, organic farming, piggery farming, and processing units—each sector has imbibed the cooperative spirit and stands ready for the next-level engagement.

As I pen down these thoughts, my heart brims with gratitude and pride. The Cooperative Movement, as envisaged by our Prime Minister Modi Ji and under the guidance of Hon'ble Amit Shah Ji, has become a beacon of hope for millions not only in affluent parts of India, but also in the previously forsaken areas like ours. This movement has transcended boundaries, uniting us in Bharat's shared pursuit of prosperity, peace, and unity. Today, we march towards a future where the dreams of many converge into a symphony of hope, and where every hand is extended in goodwill and support. As we look towards this new horizon, we do so with a newfound aspiration and faith, for the cooperation movement has become the architect of a new destiny: a future that shines brightly for the present as well as the generations that are to come.

## Advancing Indo Bhutan Economic Partnership

Bharat, one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, has gifted humanity with innumerable marvels over the millennia. From the wisdom of Mahavira Jaina, Gautama Buddha, Ashoka, Guru Nanak, and Mahatma Gandhi to the scientific breakthroughs of Baudhayan, Aryabhatta, and Susruta, India's contributions have been vast and varied. The oldest religions, including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, were born in this land. India has produced saints, sages, emperors, scientists, thinkers, philosophers, and leaders throughout its history. Walking through the historical lanes of Bharat, one cannot help but marvel at the achievements of our great nation.

On the other hand, Bhutan, India's immediate neighbor, friend, and ally, known to the world as Drukyl or "The Land of the Thunder Dragon," has transcended the social, political, and economic challenges of the contemporary world. Bhutan has demonstrated that it is possible to care for the earth, thrive in the bounty of nature, and be happy in today's age of consumerism. It has shown that universal values of peace, generosity, and compassion can still be practiced in an era of wars, battles, and cut-throat diplomacy. The peaceful transition of Bhutan from a monarchy to a democracy without civil unrest is a testament to the wisdom of its leadership. Today, Bhutan remains the only carbon-negative country in the world, highlighting its commitment to sustainability, an area where the entire world can learn and collaborate.

Assam, sharing a 267 km international boundary with Bhutan, has fostered a rich exchange of goods, people, and traditions since ancient times. The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) along this border has seen vibrant trade and cultural exchange since time immemorial. Goods like rice, areca nuts, dry fish, and meat from India are traded for oranges and Sichuan spice from Bhutan. Unlike many tensed-up international borders, the Indo-Bhutan border is marked by openness and goodwill, nurturing mutual respect and fraternity. Beyond economic ties, social practices like the kurma system highlight deep-rooted cultural connections. Annual trade and cultural fairs further strengthen the human-to-human relationship.

However, the encampment of revolutionary groups from Assam in Bhutan since the 1980s had threatened our regional harmony. Thanks to the wise leadership of former Bhutanese King His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck and Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, peace was restored in the last one decade. Recent efforts by India's Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji and Assam's Chief Minister Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma Ji have further solidified and sustained peace and harmony in our region. The Bhutan India Friendship Association (BIFA) has also played a pivotal role in maintaining bilateral ties, exemplifying a unique model of peace and friendship. This partnership, deeply spiritual rather than transactional, indeed, sets a global precedent.

Assam is the natural gateway to India's Act East Policy, and Bodoland is a critical hub for economic growth due to its border proximity. The Advantage Assam 2.0 initiative aiming to leverage global economic opportunities will strengthen regional partnerships and foster prosperity. For instance, to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship in the region, plans are underway to establish a Startup Park in BTR by our Council Government. This park will provide a platform for innovative and sustainable businesses in agritech, tourism, IT services, and renewable energy. As the entire

Bodoland Territorial Region is the Duar region along the Indo-Bhutan border (approximately 267 km in length and 50 km in breadth), it is readily accessible by both Bhutan and India. Setting up of the cross-border collaborations and partnerships in this region will enable Bhutanese and Indian entrepreneurs can work together to develop sustainable and scalable businesses. The park will offer mentorship, seed funding, networking opportunities, and infrastructure support to promising startups. Government incentives, along with private sector involvement, will ensure the initiative thrives, attracting investors and creating jobs. A cross-border startup exchange program will allow knowledge sharing, bringing young minds together to build solutions for the future.

Bhutan has long been a leader in hydropower generation. Their perspective on sustainable development and rich experiences must be leveraged for sustainable energy development in BTR and Assam. Investing in small hydropower projects along rivers can ensure energy self-sufficiency and facilitate power trade, benefiting both India and Bhutan. Beyond hydropower, exploring solar and biomass energy projects can capitalize on Assam's green energy initiatives. An Indo-Bhutan Renewable Energy Mission can oversee the development of renewable energy infrastructure, paving the way for a greener, more sustainable future.

As industrialization progresses and electric vehicle demand rises, Bodoland region itself will require nearly 1500 MW of additional power. Major industrial activities in Assam will benefit from power generated from these projects, ensuring the smooth operation of industrial parks. Run-of-the-river projects can also be pursued for power generation, with bilateral arrangements to control water flow, maintain year-round uniformity, and minimize soil erosion in the unstable Himalayan region. Most residents of Bodoland region rely on rivers flowing from the Bhutan hills, and natural phenomena in these upper stretches always pose a catastrophe threat. However, over the years, active participation from both

sides of the border has mitigated these risks. Future renewable energy projects must adopt non-polluting sources to protect the environment and ensure safety and protection for downstream communities.

Bhutan's rich resources in wood, bamboo, and minerals present significant potential for collaboration in agriculture and allied activities. Joint initiatives in organic farming, rice-vegetable exchanges, and horticulture can boost economic growth for both regions. Large-scale grain production in Assam's plains can benefit Bhutan, while Bhutan's expertise in organic farming can benefit Indian farmers, promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Bhutan's climate is suitable for year-round cultivation of vegetables and various horticultural crops. Collaborative efforts can ensure year-round availability of agricultural produce in both nations. Including Chirang district's Dadgiri and Hatisar vicinities in the Gelephu Mindfulness City initiative and establishing a wellness center can promote sustainable living and well-being. Besides this, the border areas of Baksa district of India that correspond to Nganglam and Panbang in Bhutan, the Darrangajuli and Tamulpur that correspond to Sandrup Jhonkar, and Bhairabkunda that correspond to Daifam are already well advanced in terms of people-to-people cooperation and local business partnerships.

Tourism can drive economic growth through a transnational ecotourism circuit connecting Bhutan's pristine landscapes with Manas National Park and other ecotourism destinations in BTR. Adventure tourism, wildlife safaris, river rafting, trekking, and heritage tourism can attract global tourists. An Annual Indo-Bhutan Tourism & Cultural Festival can celebrate rich traditions in dance, music, crafts, and cuisine, serving as a business networking platform for tourism entrepreneurs, travel agencies, and hospitality providers. Investments in homestay facilities, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and water rafting on both sides of the border will strengthen tourism ties.

Bodoland has developed a strong higher education system with universities, a Central Institute of Technology, and Industrial Training Institutes providing higher and vocational education. Collaboration in human resources development and skilling the new generation can enhance future capabilities. The Indo-Bhutan partnership also presents opportunities for joint initiatives in start-ups, renewable energy, and industrial development. Strengthening border trade mechanisms can ensure smoother exchanges of goods, benefiting local economies. Bhutan's training in organic farming and sustainable practices can enhance employment opportunities for Indian youth. International student programs in Bodoland's Industrial Training Institutes can position the region as a center for vocational excellence.

Further, establishing a Bhutan-India tourist circuit can attract international visitors, leveraging Bhutan's sustainability reputation. A tourism facilitation center in Bodoland can cater to Indian tourists, promoting cross-border tourism. Economic cooperation extends to trade facilitation, skill development, and industrial growth. **Cultural and spiritual connections between India and Bhutan offer avenues for deeper engagement. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness model provides insights into holistic well-being, an aspect India can integrate into its development policies. Bhutan's approach to peace and happiness can serve as a learning model for the world.** Bhutan's diplomatic approach to peacebuilding can offer valuable lessons, promoting dialogue and resolution of conflict. The Act East Policy will benefit from incorporating Bhutan's principles of peace and sustainability, fostering regional stability and cooperation, also along the other international borders.

Thus, by prioritizing human-to-human partnerships over mere economic transactions, the Indo-Bhutan relationship serves as a model for global diplomatic engagement. Leveraging mutual strengths in agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, environmental

sustainability, and skill development, both nations can achieve shared prosperity. The leadership of both countries has demonstrated a commitment to peace and development, and their continued cooperation is a beacon of regional harmony and economic growth. As India and Bhutan move forward, fostering inclusive and sustainable development will be the key to ensuring long-term prosperity for the people of both nations. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient economic corridor that connects our people, our businesses, and our dreams. The Advantage Assam 2.0 has offered us this opportunity on a platter. Let us all join hands and translate this into a reality!



## The tide has turned

*Assam is now voyaging in Amrit Kaal*

It was on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 that the formation of the present BJP-AGP-UPPL Government of Assam, under the leadership of Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma took place. It is embedded in our collective memories that Assam, along with the rest of India and the world, had the arduous task of reversing the deleterious effects of the COVID-19 then. I remember very well that the new Government wasted no time: the new Chief Minister announced that the first Cabinet Meeting of the newly-formed government would chalk out the strategy and measures for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its multi-dimensional ill-effects head on. The new government surely meant business. The tide had turned!

It is for all to see that today's Assam is steadily voyaging in Amrit Kaal—the auspicious time for all to hope, build and prosper—towards a bright future. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unparalleled vision and Home Minister Amit Shah's definitive decisions and actions have given the people of Assam much to hope for. Towards this end, the vision, strategy and activities of the Government have been now well-calibrated to reach Assam to the top five developed states in India as promised by the hon'ble Chief Minister. Peace building, social and economic development have received greater focus more than ever before. In fact, Assam has seen the doubling of efforts for realizing the promises of last mile service delivery, good governance and economic growth ever

since the new government took over. Thus, the brief two-year time period has seen Assam steering steadily towards the promises of Amrit Kaal India!

With Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at the helm of affairs, our Government has carried out corrective measures as well as placed Assam in its rightful place in various regional, national and international forums. For instance, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, in the midst of a Cabinet session at Kokrajhar, the entire Cabinet of Assam led by hon'ble Chief Minister paid a visit to the house of Bodofa UN Brahma. This was an unprecedented gesture of goodwill and humanistic zeal in the context of Bodoland Movement. This visit followed by the Chief Ministerial Declaration that the 31st of March, would henceforth be observed as the Chaatra Divas (Students' Day) in the official calendar of Assam was a *moment of healing*. This was an unparalleled expression and validation of our collective veneration towards Bodofa and his universal ideals of unity, peace, love and justice. This step has bridged the gap, suspicion and mistrust that existed in our state for many years!

The 400<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Lachit Barphukan observed in New Delhi rightfully brought his sacrifice, love for motherland and bravery in the face of adversity within the national purview. It has reversed the years of historical neglect and has duly placed the hero on a national pedestal. It has greatly enhanced the pride and esteem of the people of Assam.

Again, the largest Bihu dance performance with 11,298 participants entered the Guinness Book of World Records on 14 April 2023. This most-cherished dance performance during our harvest festival is truly captivating. It is a matter of pride for the people of Assam that under the leadership of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, this glorious dance form has found its rightful place in the world!

Closer home, the people of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), along with those of other Councils have also witnessed

unprecedented epoch of peace, good governance, and all-round development in the last two-good-and-favorable-years of Assam Government. It has helped the people of BTR to further consolidate the collective vision of building a “Peaceful, Smart and Green Bodoland”.

There was a need to eradicate the gun culture forever in the Bodoland region, and plant a new sapling of peace which would bear rich fruits for all the people of Bodoland and the whole of Assam. Decades of conflict and violence in our region have taught us a lesson that without peace nothing productive was possible. The Government of India and Assam have taken steps to reverse the ill-effects of our yesteryears by signing the Bodo Peace Accord 2020. In the last two years of the Assam Government, we were given the opportunity to focus on rebuilding our lives, revitalizing our communities and rejuvenating our institutions. We have been provided with a conducive environment to focus on delivery of quality education, employment and sustainable incomes, social security, skill education, child and youth development, and good governance for all-round progress of the society. While there is peace, we have been creating an ecosystem where people could dream and work for the fulfilment of those dreams.

The two years of Assam Government has brought governance to the very doorsteps of people of all regions of the state. It has ensured access and inclusion at all times. It has bridged social, spatial, temporal and psychological distances that existed among peoples and communities in Assam. For instance, two Assam Cabinet Meetings were held in BTR- one at Kokrajhar and the other at Dimakuchi, Udalguri, within the span of a year. This is unprecedented in the annals of the BTR Council. The cabinet meetings of the government also being held across all the districts have ensured the physical presence of the cabinet in remote areas of the state. The fruitful decisions thereof for the welfare of the people of Assam have surely moved our state ahead towards sustainable peace, equitable development and all-round progress.

People of Assam's first-steps in Amrit Kaal have been to establish peace and ensure development in every sector. It can be seen that the government has taken a firm stand to root out all social, economic and political evils besetting the state. There have been drives and mobilizations against illegal drugs, illicit arms, and all forms of crime and criminals. The government has also been dealing firmly with deep-seated social evils like the child marriage, child-trafficking and witch-hunting. Welfare measures for the poor and the disadvantaged sections of the society, and infrastructural development have been carried out most expeditiously.

In summary, our BJP-AGP- UPPL Government led by a *Karmayogi* Chief Minister has worked tirelessly and wholeheartedly for the development of each and every community in Assam. Our Government has remained steadfast in its focus to improve every aspect of peoples' lives for ensuring respect and dignity of all. Thus, the 2-years Completion Celebration of our BJP-AGP- UPPL Government presents a timely opportunity to consolidate and strengthen the good work that has begun and, even more importantly, to look ahead at the exciting prospect of fully realizing our collective vision in the years to follow.

# Let the Manipur Violence be the last one

*We Love Manipur*

*Sound of Gunshots is not a rhythm of the flute, it is a signal of gloomy days ahead....*

One step back by Meiteis and another step back by Kukis may change the entire uncertainty in the conflict-ridden state of Manipur and people can live without fear and return to their normal life and once again move ahead with the development agenda in the state. Peace in Manipur is dependent on the hands and legs of the Meiteis and Kukis. If they move their legs towards each other in a spirit of brotherhood and move their hands away from the trigger of the guns, Peace will become an inevitable reality. And the State and Union leaders can get rid of sleepless nights just to listen about a day when there would not be a single gunshot fired and not a single death in Manipur.

This one step back will save the innocent lives and property of the state and individuals and help focus more on development and the resolution of important Regional issues. Students can go back to schools, farmers can go to their fields, and daily wagers and small vendors can start their daily earnings.

Killings and counter-killings, burning, determining who is in the right and who is in the wrong, land rights, political rights, and cultural rights dominate public discourse in the aftermath of any

conflict. However, before a conflict or in normal times, no one examines all these factors, except for a small number of conflict resolution scholars. When a situation arises, politicians seek political advantage, social organizations experiment, and businesspeople take advantage of abrupt price increases, economic blockades, etc. After a certain point, everyone must abandon the plans they had at the time of the conflict, alter their mindset, and resolve to live together once more. In times of conflict, if one pledges that he or she will never live together again, we later realize that the world is our home, which is referred to as *Vasudeva Kutumbakam*, and that we must reconcile as human beings with the highest value of humanity which is the immunity against inhuman acts.

There are instances in which nature itself repairs human society and fosters an environment conducive to reconciliation. India fought against British imperialism, but within the second generation of the freedom movement, an individual of Indian descent became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Racism existed in the world, but Martin Luther King Jr.'s hopes and desires were realized in the United States. Many countries that fought in the previous century have become allies in this century building strong economic and cultural ties with each other. Humans are social organisms and cannot survive without society.

So, anger, antagonism, violence, killing, and hatred are short-term companions in human instinct; arising in a particular situation and persists for a brief period, like a flood, and then it recedes; it never persists for an extended period, and the basic instinct of mankind to love and understand the suffering of others heals it at a particular time. As constituent elements of humanity, we must adhere to the natural order and not the vested interests of individuals or groups at this time.

Currently, life is difficult not only in Manipur or in some communities but also in the region and nation, as this conflict poses a threat to peaceful coexistence and national sovereignty.

If we examine the entirety of human history, we have failed to avoid violence and strife. In every century, there have been wars or conflicts in some part of the globe, people endure a great deal in the hope of the return of peace and normalcy and successive generations read about it in the history books.

After taking a deep breath and struggling for the rest of their lives, the history of bloodbaths, the snatching away of humanity, and immeasurable suffering are forgotten.

**It is not in government policy to ensure that the next generation is never again victimised by these senseless conflicts in which we lose our loved ones. As soon as normalcy is restored, social organisations and many stakeholders forget, and so do the people who read about these incidents. In the political and policy-making ecosystem, there are competent leaders and civil servants who are well versed in history and deliver engaging lectures and pass the most difficult civil service examinations. In addition, they do not sense the need to focus on such issues once they are on the job. Some other political leaders or bureaucrats who are content with their routine duties do not entertain any long-term discussion on conflict resolution even after insistence from some of their peers. If the Constitution contained a clause on conflict resolution, officers and leaders may have been required to take these incidents seriously as part of their duties. During many periods of conflict, the discussions in the Indian Parliament on such conflicts have been overshadowed by the tug-of-war between the ruling and opposition parties and other partisan considerations. In normal circumstances, however, it may be an item on the Parliamentary Business agenda to develop a policy to address the recurrence of these types of incidents in various parts of the country at different times.**

We have learned from recent events in Manipur that there may be conflict between communities that have lived together for centuries. Therefore, we cannot foresee where and when conflict

and violence will occur between communities. Like, the Flood Control Department officials believe that there will be no floods in the upcoming year, so they do not manage the embankments and river dykes in a timely manner. However, when the floods come and destroy the houses and silt the thousands of acres of farming land, turning the rich into the poor overnight, we believe that the floods would not have caused any damage if the embankment had been timely and properly constructed. This is precisely what occurs during times of community violence and conflict. It is because we lack both long-term flood mitigation and conflict resolution policies.

Our great Guru of Nonviolence MK Gandhi said the immediate result of violence is destruction. But still, we do that, **why? Why? Why?** if it is for our survival why do we kill others, if we fight for right why we ceased other right, if it is for our security why do we make others insecure by killing and burning them?

In any conflict situation, one side engages in violence while the other side discusses security measures; one side murders innocents while the other discusses peace. But everyone knows that when there is violence and murder, neither security nor tranquilly can exist. The same individuals who provoke violence also complain about insecurity. If those who provoke violence were to strive for peace, there would be no loss of life. In my opinion, the situation can be resolved by the Meiteis taking one step back and the Kukis taking another stride back. And this is feasible since Meiteis love Meiteis and Kukis love Kukis. And both communities cherish humankind. If both communities declare the cessation of violence and control their own people to save each other, which we cannot do during violence using sophisticated weapons, we do not require paramilitary, army, or spending crores of rupees on security arrangements that could be used for other development and welfare programmes.



The enemy of human society is all violence, which is not only the failure of the government but also of all institutions, organisations, and intellectuals. People who belong to a community physically, mentally, psychologically, philosophically, and emotionally constitute a government. During conflict and war, no one can be neutral on the ground, despite the fact that the Constitution mandates neutrality in the performance of governmental duties, which must be manifest in practise.

Attributing blame to one another will not resolve the issue of conflict and violence. To permanently overcome the problems, we will require profound comprehension, action, and will. There are numerous colleges and universities, religious and social institutions that always teach the importance of integrity and social well-being. There are numerous government departments that always address these issues. Numerous people have conducted research on conflict resolution, and there are Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working around the clock on these issues. Nonetheless, it is occurring, and when it does, everyone selects a safe place for him and his arguments in order to protect him and the society to which he belongs. Even religious leaders who advocate for peace and humanity and bless the people for their overall well-being allegedly take sides in most cases.

In Manipur, we have observed a robust civil society and very active human rights activists who have worked tirelessly for justice and to ensure that their laws safeguard their people. To safeguard human rights in the state, they have fought numerous cases at various national and international levels. Despite this, the status of human rights in the state is gravely threatened, and the state's hard-won calm has been suffocated by its own citizens during the ongoing conflict.

In the states of the North Eastern Region, Manipur holds a unique position in sports, art and culture, craftsmanship, and entrepreneurship. All the positive news emanating from Manipur

has inspired and made us feel proud as citizens of diverse states. We also felt satisfied when all types of conflict between state and non-state forces ceased for several years. However, recent acts of violence stunned us all and once again disrupted the normalcy, peace, and happiness of a state that has been lauded in recent years for its many positive developments. Suddenly, however, a large number of precious lives, including one's beloved siblings, sisters, sons, and parents, were lost before their eyes. Our hearts were shattered by the uprooting of the beautiful families in which our mothers and sisters raised us. The home, which is the safest place on earth for a man, providing us with affection, courage, morals, and motivation to live, has been reduced to ashes. Nobody has time to consider the mother, sibling, and children because we have not learned a lesson that compels us to consider such circumstances. We are accustomed to considering only the offensive and defensive. If one group considers safety, the other considers conflict. This raises the question of where this violence will end. Do we truly cherish our children? If we truly care for our offspring, are hatred, violence, and conflict gifts for their future?

In light of all these incidents that have persisted for centuries, I believe there should be a long-term strategy to transform our generation from being threatened by violence and insecurity to always feeling safe, tranquil, and optimistic by making them joyful and peace-loving. Only if our next generation pledges not to engage in any form of violence, conflict, or hostility towards one another for the sake of their lives and peaceful coexistence can we hope for a better future and appropriate development. This will not occur naturally. We have no trees in the North East or anywhere else in the world that produce fruit that will immediately bring us Peace and Happiness.

Experiencing a great deal of conflict in our time, I feel that we should have a curriculum that teaches our children about peace and happiness from an early age, so that they can learn and recall

the effects of peace and conflict throughout their lives. Simple logic is comparable to when a doctor completes his training and begins treating patients, when an engineer completes his training and begins designing infrastructure, and when a lad completes his military training and is prepared for battle. Similarly, a boy or girl who receives spiritual training becomes a spiritual leader during their lifetime. If our children are taught the meaning of peace and happiness, they will consider twice before engaging in any form of violence or negative behaviour towards humanity. If human society teaches these two values from the outset of informal and formal education, I believe we would eventually have a peaceful society.

Even if not in the entirety of India, let us have a curriculum in every school that teaches Peace and Happiness so that we do not have to confront inhuman acts of humanity in the future. I pay homage to the precious lives lost in this conflict in Manipur, and I pray that Peace will soon prevail. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." I am optimistic because I have always believed that.



## Remembering Bodofa Upendranath Brahma

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31<sup>st</sup> March 2023)*

On the 67th birth anniversary of the Father of the Bodos Upendranath Brahma, I extended my honour and gratitude to hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma for declaring this day (March 31) as Chatra Divas (Students' Day) to be observed and celebrated across the State. This significant recognition is a far-reaching initiative to reunite alienated minds with love and compassion while furthering the process of reintegration in the direction of a peaceful nation.

It was beyond imagination just one generation ago, that the sense of hatred, neglect, anger, fear of suppression, oppression, and discrimination would get alleviated and change the course of history. Against the backdrop of the bifurcation of thoughts with a sense of deprivation, discrimination and the fear of losing their identity in their own land that alienated three generations of Bodo people, the path of reconciliation and reconstruction is clear after a prolonged period of over four decades.

On the 67th birth anniversary of Father of the Bodos Upendranath Brahma, let us remember his most valuable quote, "Live and let live." This quote is directly connected with natural law. In Nature, there is an ecosystem among all creatures living

on Earth. In the animal kingdom, despite all fights and struggles between themselves, they survive without the intervention of outsiders. Among flora also, when some small plants and trees grow under a big tree, they coexist facing challenges in having a healthy atmosphere. But we humans make and break for our self-interest. Many civilisations in the world were made by one generation and destroyed by others, but hope continued to persist as we made our foray into the 21st century. In adapting to the laws of Nature, we can make perfect decisions. The best way to make a perfect decision for the future is to look back at least 30 to 40 years where we did right and wrong.

As we celebrate Chatta Divas today, we recollect how the Father of the Bodos responded to the uncertainty in protecting the Bodo language, culture, identity and allround development for the Bodo people in their motherland. His positivity to find out solutions, however, did not get the proper response from the political leadership including the Centre and the State government at that time. This made him challenge the scenario in the interests of the people who needed the response. The two words ‘challenge’ and ‘response’ are priceless. The great historian Arnold J Toynbee said that history is written in terms of these two words — challenge and response. The failure to understand the implication of these two words has led to a huge price being paid by successive generations for centuries, as is evident from the history of different regions across the globe.

All of us know the history of the three-year movement of Bodofa Upendranath Brahma from March 2, 1987 till the time he left for his heavenly abode on May 1, 1990. Some vested interests created the perception that Upendranath Brahma had started the Bodo self-determination movement as he was not accommodated politically by the then ruling regime. This is a factually wrong story created to negate the impact of the movement which gained pace within a short time.

The revered Bodofa had said, “The language which we speak is our language. It is very sweet for us and we are very much proud of it but it doesn’t threaten any other languages, nor does it turn any one down. Just like other languages, it wants to live.” The intention of the Bodo Movement was not to create trouble nor to threaten any community co-existing with the Bodo community. When a challenge came in place of response, the challenge was responded to with a challenge. And that continued till 2020 — leading to the loss of thousands of lives, damage to property, disintegration among fellow citizens and total trust deficit with the political leadership and the government of the day.

Bodofa ignited, organised and sensitised the Bodo community and also the tribal communities of Assam to be sensitive to their rights and duties as citizens of the world’s largest democracy. He contributed a lot to the understanding of the need for socio-economic and educational development, and the protection and preservation of identity and culture among the people. Today, we are proud that most of the aspirations mentioned by Bodofa — aspirations of the tribal people of Assam — are in the process of being achieved and fulfilled

Today, when initiatives like the recently concluded Bodoland Inter- national Knowledge Festival bring Bodoland to the focus of the world in the most positive ways, the stand of Bodofa stands vindicated.

In accordance with the goals laid out by Bodofa Upendranath Brahma, the All Bodo Students’ Union and other stakeholders of the Bodo society have shown a great deal of commitment to their work and have joined forces to undertake the mission of comprehensively improving the Bodo society. In the current scenario, the nation is led by outstanding people such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, both of whom are exceptional in their comprehension of the goals of the community and their ability to address and accommodate those

desires with decisive actions. If we have a leader who knows the situation better than anybody else, we ought to stand with him and make sure that our path is both smooth and meaningful. As Bodofa remains the Messiah of the Bodos, the people of the Bodo society have a greater responsibility than any other people to honour Bodofa Upendranath Brahma by adhering to his vision and making it a reality. Today in this moment of joy and pride for the Bodo community, we once again express our heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Minister of Assam for his clear idea and inclusiveness in his political ideology by declaring Students' Day. It is a sign of a new dawn in the country. Through this positive approach of our leader we can build our State, region and country.



## Thoughts on peaceful, resilient Bodoland

*(Originally published in The Assam Tribune on  
20<sup>th</sup> December 2022)*

Today, my memory takes me to the time when we had the good fortune of welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kokrajhar in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on February 7, 2020, less than a month after we had signed the Bodo Peace Accord. We were a massive gathering of nearly a million people from every nook and corner of the BTR. The people were reassured of the possibility of establishing a peaceful, safe and resilient Bodoland.

Our BTR Government was formed on December 20, 2020 at a time when the entire country, including Assam and the BTR, was in the grip of a full-blown Covid-19 pandemic. We inherited a legacy of failed governance from the previous 17 years of misrule by the Bodoland People's Front (BPF). A climate of anxiety and uncertainty had infected our society's sinews and tendons. The overwhelming negligence of essential human development indices such as health, nutrition, and child safety was disturbing. We also inherited a dysfunctional administrative system, massive liabilities to the tune of Rs 2,900 crore and total policy paralysis and vacuum.

The BTR Government's stability was put to the test at every turn. In the middle of this difficult situation produced by elements that feed on violence, fear, and chaos, our BTR Government proceeded on the brave adventure of establishing a 'New Bodoland Territorial Region' (New BTR). A new BTR that promotes participation and expression by providing a people-centric Government at all levels. One that fosters the growth of all communities, intellectuals, industries, tourists, and entrepreneurs. A New BTR that is inclusive, where people's health and education are better; where children do not starve; where sports, music, and literature thrive; where the youth's goals are supported; where women have employment opportunities, and where all people succeed together.

The formation of the Department of Bodo Accord Implementation accelerated the timetable for institutional development outlined in the Bodo Peace Accord 2020. The department has been working quickly to conceptualise and implement numerous programmes for the sociocultural, linguistic, and educational development of all groups in the BTR.

Our Government has sought to reverse the poor performance indicators in the field of education through the Bodoland School Adoption Programme, capacity building of teachers and officials through exchange programmes and trainings, stipend for poor students, and Super 50 missions (one each for grooming 50 students to clear JEE and civil services examinations), among other initiatives. Important missions have been launched in agro-based sectors to improve the livelihood, income, and employment of youth and women, including the Sericulture Mission, Handloom and Textile Mission, Mushroom Mission, Milk Mission, Goat Mission, Bodoland Pig Mission, Feed Mission, Bamboo Mission, Poultry Mission, Farm Mechanisation Mission, and Paddy Procurement Mission.

Fin-Rwdwmkhang Bithanki (Bloom Again Mission) has been launched to facilitate meaningful social, economic, and

psychological reintegration of former cadres of the defunct National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), survivors of violence during the Bodoland Movement, and conflict-induced internally displaced persons. A Bodoland Community Counselling Programme and a Bodoland Happiness Mission have been developed to promote psychological well-being and healing in a post-conflict context. High-value-low-volume ecotourism projects, construction of non-polluting enterprises and business centres, agroforestry, and commercialisation of sericulture products are just a few of the activities aimed at generating revenue for the Council.

On December 14, 2021, our Government launched the Bodoland Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Development (SEED) Mission. Its objective of developing a skilled BTR will bring delight to the people of our region.

Partnerships have been formed with the UNDP, UNICEF, Azim Premji University, Transforming Rural India Foundation (TRIF), the North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), the Centre for Effective Governance of Indian States (CEGIS), the Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF), and other civil society organisations in order to keep up with the march towards the realisation of the SDGs 2030.

Our Government believes that land is a critical factor in the survival, dignity, and self-esteem of individuals and households in our society. People, particularly those from rural and indigenous communities, are unable to establish social, cultural, and economic capital in the absence of land. Being landless means that the household is constantly impoverished, which often leads to the degradation of forests and fauna through encroachment. In this vein, in order to contextualise Mission Basundhara and fulfil our joint vision, the BTR Government will launch Mission Bwiswmuthi on January 27, 2023. Land Certificate Issue Fairs (land melas) are being held in all of our Circle Offices as a prelude

to Mission Bwiswmuthi. This is a sure step towards giving land certificates to all eligible individuals and households, bringing us one step closer to addressing the difficulties confronting all landless, impoverished, and marginalised households in the BTR.

Thus, our BTR Government is immersed in reshaping the region's contemporary governance paradigm by integrating best practices, new knowledge, and praxis to bring about overall transformation and growth. The BTR Government's commitment to ensuring "Peaceful, Green, and Smart Bodoland" is expressed through its various policy and programmatic initiatives promoting peaceful coexistence, good governance, and accelerating overall development and growth. The BTR Government's varied participation programmes ensured a departure from the then-common norms of conflict, violence, and non-performance. It has created a turnaround by improving the culture of "a common goal, a cohesive team and an engaging work culture".

However, we have only just begun our journey and have not yet arrived at our destination. Our Government is determined to work even harder in the coming days to achieve our united goal. Only when it is BTR 24x7 can a new BTR be realised. Now is the time to reconstruct our lives, revitalise our communities, and revitalise our institutions. While our region is at peace, we must create an environment in which everyone can dream and work to make those goals a reality. The residents of BTR have already taken a brave step in this direction. Our fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters took the correct decision and turned at the crossroads. We are now set to join the rest of Assam and India in reaching new heights of development and growth!

## UPPL: Working for a conflict-free Bodoland

*(Originally published in The Assam Tribune on  
12<sup>th</sup> November 2022)*

The emergence of the United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) as a political party to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people of Bodoland happened at a critical time in the socio-political timeline of the region.

The BTC Accord 2003, which gave autonomy to Bodoland under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, raised expectations of the Bodo people for the socio-economic transformation of the region bringing normalcy, communal harmony and all-round development. However, just after a few years during 2008–2010, the region witnessed violence, killings and unrest created by a mindless section of people causing a huge loss to the socio-cultural fabric of Bodoland. The people were left feeling insecure in the prevalent atmosphere of lawlessness and disorder which created doubts about the common belief that the Constitution of India and the laws of the land were strong enough to protect each and every citizen of the country. This period was characterised by a growing gun culture aggravated by the gross negligence of the political leadership and the bureaucracy towards the sensitivities of the people. Development remained just a word with the ruling dispensation under the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) making

a hasty U-turn on the promises of development and community aspirations. The authoritarianism of the BPF leadership resulted in the complete alienation of the people from every aspect of governance. This paved the way for misgovernance and rampant corruption which would go on for one and a half decades, also leading to a period of serious communal conflict. This was an alarming situation and the simple and easy-going tribal populace and their sympathisers were shaken by the communal conflict backed by a section of the intelligentsia with vested interests trying to draw an imaginary 'Lakshman Rekha' between the Bodos and non-Bodos.

It became the need of the hour to delve deep into the sensitivities of the people in this difficult and complex situation. It was within this paradigm of realisation and sensitivity that the UPPL was formed in the year 2015 by uniting the two different entities BPPF and UPDF, with the objective of working unitedly within a liberal set of values covering the interests and aspirations of all sections of society in Bodoland.

Since its very inception, the UPPL had always advocated a peaceful and conflict-free Bodoland. The agenda was to reunite the communities, different linguistic groups, the damaged psyche and hearts of the people of Bodoland. The UPPL started connecting all sections of people with mutual love and respect, moving for reconciliation among the various tribes while also assessing the development indices and re-strategising community and regional development.

The UPPL-led alliance with the BJP and GSP, after assuming charge of BTC in December 2020, started addressing the development issues with a comprehensive audit of the various development programmes, schemes and expenditures undertaken by the previous regime which was in power for seventeen years. Within a month, our government came up with a white paper which revealed an alarming picture. We inherited liabilities of

Rs 2,900 crore with most major infrastructure works remaining incomplete, the condition of educational institutions at its worst, malfunctioning of the Secretariat marked by many irregularities, among a host of other issues.

Governance was divorced from the realities on the ground marked by huge gaps and absence of any meaningful developmental data with any department.

However, we shouldered this burden and started moving strategically towards revamping the entire system. In our one and a half years in office, we have been able to build a framework for holistic development in BTR with the motto of a safe, smart and green Bodoland integrating our governance with the national developmental process and agenda. We are moving from 'zero work culture' towards 'work culture', from 'zero policy' to 'policy making' as part of an effective governance mechanism. Our primary focus is to ensure peaceful coexistence of all, taking care of each other, education, health care, livelihoods, effective governance and time-bound implementation of the BTR Accord 2020. The secondary focus is to fill the gap in all development sectors to make the BTC districts at par with the developed ones in the State and the country.

We are strengthening the livelihoods and social security mechanism to address multiple issues like reversing the negative impacts of long-term conflict and integrating programmes on psychological healing and well-being into the education curriculum. In collaboration with the UNDP, we have made a BTR Vision 2030 Report outlining the short, medium and long-term development goals of BTR by mapping them to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs) agenda of the United Nations.

Peace and stability are gradually resulting in the success of many endeavours of our government already with the huge turnout and success of programmes like the ISPL Football League 2022, Kokrajhar Literary Festival, mission mode programmes, and many

aspirational programmes like the BTR Super 50 for civil services and IIT/NIT entrances, etc. The school adoption programme is an innovative mechanism introduced to attract people from different walks of life to adopt schools in the region.

It is a matter of pride that this year sixty students from BTR have qualified in the entrance for MBBS and BDS, fourteen candidates from BTR have cleared the Assam Civil Services (ACS) examinations and also many candidates have qualified in the police recruitment/drive for third and fourth grade posts of the Government of Assam. We have also facilitated recruitment from BTR for positions related to ground staff of Air India.

My vision is not to confine the UPPL to winning and losing elections but to go for a constructive social revolution through which the people of BTR can live peacefully in safety and security and make progress in the future. We acknowledge the love and affection of the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister and the Chief Minister of Assam towards BTR and their constant support and guidance in taking the region forward. It is due to their vision for sustainable peace and unstinted development that a small regional party like UPPL has been empowered to bring transformational change in BTR by its inclusion within the NDA umbrella. On the 7th foundation day of UPPL, we pledge to work with sincerity, a sense of purpose, direction and dedication in the days ahead.



## Two Years of Assam Govt: My Thoughts

*(Originally published in The Assam Tribune on  
11<sup>th</sup> May 2023)*

The completion of two years of the Government of Assam under the leadership of Himanta Biswa Sarma is an occasion to reflect on the changing contours of the socio-economic, cultural and overall scenario of the State. As Indians, we take pride in the rich civilisational history and ethos of our country. Similarly, with the dawn of a new leadership in Assam since May 2021, we have a reason to take pride in the dynamism and vibrancy of a Chief Minister who is steering Assam ahead in the third decade of the 21st century at the regional, national and global levels. In being richly mindful of our State's heritage including Maa Kamakhya, Kaziranga, Manas, and the diversity of our people, we are proud of the leadership of a Chief Minister who has been able to elevate the developmental dimension to an altogether different level giving all the courage to dream for a better future, ensuring the security of life and property, identity and culture, and raising the dignity of every citizen of the State.

The State government's comprehensive approach in addressing long-pending issues is not only praiseworthy but a matter of great joy for the common people of the State. Some initiatives have been taken which transcend the boundaries of common political thought.

Being a citizen, my understanding of political leadership is that we need to analyse every initiative and decision carefully at various times to finally make a correct policy for the next generation. This has been a principal characteristic underlining the decisions taken by the State government under the leadership of Chief Minister Sarma. After his completion of two years, it is felt that he should have been in this position long back and his competency to handle national issues has also captured the imagination of the nation. A state or a nation progresses only on the vision and mission of a leader. In many Indian states, we can count some names who have transformed their states into developed ones in terms of economic and other parameters. And at the global level, we have witnessed visionary leadership changing the course of many countries. “Nation first” was the slogan of many leaders in the world but that slogan has been translated into reality by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who envisions a trillion-dollar economy for India. We see this change in every nook and corner and it is being felt by each sensitive citizen of the country to the last mile. As a citizen I believe that when a leader understands a nation not only within the visible scenarios of its geography, population and resources but also in the essence and core values, only then he or she can make a vision, mission and master plan for the overall development of the country. These leaders work not only for posterity but also to create a history where all sections of people can be benefited from their ideas, knowledge and guidance.

A comprehensive leader can understand every problem and issue faced by the citizens of that state or country. It is the leader who takes the risk to face any consequences for the betterment of his citizens. If we talk about the political leadership of Assam, there were lots of dedicated and committed leaders who led the State at different times. But among them, the present leadership stands out as full of energy, vibrancy and dynamism. A few years back we had felt the need for a leadership to bridge the gap within a short period of time. And today we are seeing visible efforts in this direction.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Assam for 2023-24 (at current prices) is projected to be Rs 5.67 lakh crore, amounting to a growth of 15 per cent over 2022-23. The infrastructure gap is going to be filled within the next couple of years.

The present government's focus on alleviating many societal problems is manifest in the sustained campaigns against drugs, drinking, gambling, corruption, black magic and other social evils. This has brought about a sense of stability in the society. Age-old land issues have been resolved after digitisation of land documents and huge corruption in government appointments has been curbed. The big nagging issue of encroachment has been resolved. A new dawn has started for the poorest section of society after the effective and speedy implementation of the two most humanitarian schemes of microfinance loan waiver to various categories of borrowers and the Arunodoi scheme envisaging benefits to 24 lakh poor households. The establishment of new medical and nursing colleges in every district has given an unprecedented boost to the health care delivery system in the State. Many other citizen-centric schemes have encompassed every section of society. The establishment of model schools in Adivasi and tea garden areas is another innovative initiative that has been able to bridge the gap in education in these areas. The new paddy procurement policy, new model colleges and one lakh appointments drive are noteworthy initiatives being personally monitored by the Chief Minister.

In the early morning of September 6, 2022, Chief Minister Sarma along with all his Cabinet colleagues visited the memorial and residence of Bodofa Upendranath Brahma at Dotma, Kokrajhar. After paying solemn tributes to the father of the Bodos and talking to the family of Bodofa, he announced that March 31, the date of birth of Bodofa would henceforth be celebrated as Chatra Divas by the State government. With this singular announcement — giving long due recognition to an icon of Bodo nationalism — he broke all barriers that had been erected in the chequered timeline of Bodo history of long-felt alienation from the mainstream. The

announcement found resonance amongst the people of BTR as it found across the two valleys of the Barak and Brahmaputra, bringing a silver lining to the dream of a stronger united Assam. For his humanity, and courage to set history right, Chief Minister Sarma displayed an innate humanism that makes him the embodiment of leadership which is not only inspirational but one with the capacity to bring emancipation, redemption and hope to the future of Assam. I wish the Chief Minister, all his Cabinet colleagues, leaders of the AGP-BJP-UPPL alliance and officers of the Government of Assam all the best on this occasion.

## Promises and reality

*(Originally published in The Assam Tribune on  
11<sup>th</sup> August 2024)*

*The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019 will provide greater autonomy to tribals and indigenous communities.*

In my brief journey, first as a student activist from Northeast India working for peace, education and other socio-political rights, and presently as an incumbent Chief of a Sixth Schedule Council of India, I have seen that the transformation in approach and the thinking of the government has become more pronounced under the present leadership. For instance, only a clear vision and strong political will could have led to concrete steps for the future of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in particular and for the nation as a whole. Revoking Article 370 and 35A ushered in the dawn of an era of peace, prosperity, stability and hope for the region of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh. Article 370 which now stands abrogated will always remain a dark chapter in our country's history.

The people of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh witnessed conflicts, violence and bloodshed as a result of a faultline that existed for more than seven decades after India's Independence. Even though the region is blessed with breathtaking landscape and rich cultural heritage, and in true essence is the "Crown of Bharat" it could not enjoy the fruits of peace, harmony and co-existence. The impact

of cross-border terrorism became the biggest obstacle in the path of complete integration of the state with the rest of India. The peace-loving people of the heavenly valley of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh were in a dark period due to Article 370. Leaders came and leaders went: the foundational issue yet remained unresolved for decades, till at last, the confluence of vision, will and commitment of the present government ended the matter resolutely.

Another milestone achieved by the present government is the positive change and transformation in Northeast India. It has dealt with the multi-dimensional issues of North East India with openness and trust, as against earlier policy of imposition of draconian laws and ordinances. No Prime Minister had ever frequented the region like Modi, while no Home Minister had ever been closer home there. For decades, the States in north-east India suffered negligence and deprivations in all aspects of social, political and economic development which resulted in widespread political turmoil and instability, and conflicts and violence. Since April 2022, the number of “disturbed areas” under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Nagaland, Assam and Manipur, has drastically reduced. The recent conflict(s) that erupted in Manipur is much undesired. It came at a time when the Northeast as a whole was moving towards peace and harmony after decades of conflicts and violence.

A number of peace settlements and accords have crystallised in Northeast India in the last four years due to Prime Minister Modi’s vision of a peaceful and prosperous North-East, and the astute leadership of the Union Home Minister Amit Shah. This has augured peace and harmonious co-existence in previously disturbed areas of Northeast India.

Giving equal space of development to all people including the people from the ten Sixth Schedule Areas through the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019 is a welcome proposition. This Bill seeks to provide greater autonomy for social,

cultural and economic development of marginalised tribal and indigenous communities within the constitutional framework of India. It aims to augment legislative, administrative and financial powers of the 6th Schedule Councils of India by making necessary constitutional amendments. The streamlining and calibration of various institutions, processes and mechanisms through this Bill will ensure strengthening of democratic institutions in far-flung and often-overlooked tribal areas in peripheral India. Further, it will ensure greater appreciation of the rich diversity of languages, faiths, creeds and cultures by providing autonomy in several transferred subjects. Even though the 125th Amendment Bill is not going to fulfil all aspirations of the tribal-indigenous communities, it serves as yet another milestone on the offer for ensuring development and smooth functioning of administration in the Sixth-Schedule Regions. While it will foster and provide the impetus to positive changes in Northeast India, this Bill is key to connecting the region with the hearts of rest of India!







A moment captured with my colleagues during the Mass Gathering held at Udangshrine Alari Prensingh Brahma Playground, Kajalgaon (Chirang), demanding the Separate State of Bodoland, organized jointly by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), NDFB (P) and Peoples Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) on the 23rd September 2018.



Addressing a public rally during the Bodoland Movement



A moment of action: a public call by the All Bodo Students Union to  
"Awake, Arise, Listen and Solve our Problems".



The Movement used  
creative cultural  
expressions to voice  
out the concerns of the  
people of Bodoland.



The peaceful event received  
wide media attention  
and coverage.





With my colleagues, organizing an "Open Meeting: Social Awareness on Quality Education, Development and Violence Free Society" on the 3rd of December 2009 at Kokrajhar. The event was jointly organized by multiple students' unions, namely, ABSU, ARSU, TMPK, ADSU, AASKSU, GSU, TYCP and KSA. I addressed the rally calling for peace, end to prevalence of illegal arms, ensuring of quality education and overall development of the people of Bodoland by ending the apathy and neglect. A public procession was also carried out with slogans resounding through the heart of Kokrajhar town.





With Dr. Sunil Kaul and colleagues signing a pledge to ensure  
 “Quality Education, Development and Violence Free Society”



We also symbolically released balloons on the occasion calling for peace, end to illegal arms,  
 and resolution of all issues in our society.





As part of the social reformation movement alongside the demand for a Separate State of Bodoland, we carried out a long-cycle-rally through the length and breadth of Bodoland Region awakening consciousness among our communities to aspire, adopt and beget Quality Education, and a violence-free society. In photo: moments captured during the rally.



Several stopover awareness campaigns and rallies were held along the route of the long-cycle-rally. I highlighted the ideals of Bodofa and the need for our generations to take up pens and books by ending all illegal arms and social evils in our society. In photos: public awareness meetings at the Dwimalu Ground and another venue.





With Dr. P. Chidambaram, the then Home Minister of India. ABSU submitted a memorandum calling for immediate end to violence and killings in Bodoland region, and to resolve the issues of the people of Bodoland region by creation of the separate state of Bodoland.



Various glimpses of the sessions of Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union during my Presidentship.







Former Speaker of Lok Sabha PA Sangma lighting the ceremonial lamp of the National Convention for “New States for New India” organized by National Federation for New States (NFNS) & ABSU, on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013, at the Speaker Hall, Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, New Delhi. The convention proposed the creation of new states of Bodoland, Gorkhaland, Bundelkhand, Vidarbha, Tipra Land, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao Hill State, Harit Pradesh, and Poorbanchal, among others.





With former President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam attending the 43rd Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union, held at Maidangsri Nwgr, Banargaon. His visit to Kokrajhar was a lifetime "moment of lift" for the students of strife-torn western Assam. His Excellency the President was at his best! Using wit and humour he asked students to take the responsibility of making India a developed nation by 2020. He underscored the importance of acquiring knowledge saying, "We should concentrate on learning and acquire great ethical value, not only education. If we miss this chance the purpose of life is lost. So, my dear friends, learn and acquire knowledge."







Glimpses of the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union held from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013 at Goibari Nwgr, Tamulpur. During this conference, ABSU resolved to continue work in accordance with the 2007-2015 action plan — Mission Quality Education — and carry on with the movement till all problems pertaining to Bodo-medium were addressed. It also resolved to pressurise the government to provincialise all Bodo-medium venture institutions and also to implement the Right to Education Act all over the state. Another significant resolution of the union was to the eradication of the evil practice of witch-hunting in the society. We also called upon the state government to propagate the universal ideals of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma by including his life and philosophy in the curriculum of Bodo-medium schools in the state.





A moment captured welcoming the delegation from the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan during the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union.

Smt. Sulekha Basumatary, the vocal queen of the Bodos being felicitated along with a citation during the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union held from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013 at Goibari Nwgr, Tamulpur.



Veteran journalist and author B G Verghese being conferred with the 10<sup>th</sup> UN Brahma Memorial Soldier of Humanity Award on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

The event was also attended by Dr. Samujjal Bhattacharya, the former President of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and several other dignitaries.





Calling for peace and non-violence.

A moment of lamp-lighting ceremony captured during the Annual Conference of the ABSU.



Leading a delegation of the All Bodo Students Union to meet the former Hon'ble Governor of Assam Shri JB Patnaik.

With fellow-activists of the ABSU, carrying out a 12 hours hunger strike on demand of Bodoland 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2013 at Rash Mela Field, Kokrajhar.



Our pledge to non-violence and peace: an end to illegal arms in Bodoland. In photo: Symbolic setting on fire dummy guns to campaign against gun-culture in Bodoland.



With ABSU observing the 25<sup>th</sup> Bodoland Martyrs' Day on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Addressing the Rail Roko public rally during the Bodoland Movement



Addressing the gathering during the Open Discussion in connection with Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Bodo Medium Education on the theme:

"Education in Mother Tongue: Problems and Perspective," held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2013

Leading a delegation of the All Bodo Students Union to meet the Hon'ble Raksha Mantri of India, Former Home Minister of India, Shri Rajnath Singh Ji to apprise him about various issues and demands of the people of Bodoland





At the New Delhi Press Club, holding a Press Conference on Bodoland Issues on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2014

Leading a delegation of the ABSU to meet Hon'ble Union Minister of India Shri Kiren Rijiju Ji at New Delhi.



A moment captured with Hon'ble Union Minister for Home and Cooperation Shri Amit Shah Ji and President of BJP Shri JP Nadda Ji at New Delhi





Attending the All Party Meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at New Delhi on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2023.



A moment of assurance from the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji on the sidelines of the All Party Meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at New Delhi on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2023.

Holding a meeting with the Former Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande, PVSM AVSM VSM ADC, at New Delhi, as a mark of gratitude for hosting the Durand Cup at Kokrajhar- the City of Peace.





Glimpses of various events of the Durand Cups held at Kokrajhar- the City of Peace



A moment of pride and happiness to felicitate Her Excellency the President of India Smt. Draupadi Murmu Ji during her visit to Assam.



His Excellency the former President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind Ji blessed Bodoland with his auspicious presence and words of wisdom during the 61st Annual Conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha at Tamulpur on May 4th 2022.



Meeting the Hon'ble Governor of Assam Shri Laxhman Prasad Acharya Ji to apprise him of various emergent matters of the Bodoland Territorial Region



Meeting the Former Hon'ble Governor of Assam Shri Gulab Chand Kataria Ji



Leading a delegation to meet the Former Hon'ble Governor of Assam Prof. Jagdish Mukhi Ji along with Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) Shri Rwn Gwra Narzary

Welcoming Dr. Ranoj Pegu, Hon'ble Education Minister of Assam to the Bodoland International Knowledge Festival. The historic event was attended by scholars from over 30 countries, and over 50,000 participants from all the districts of BTR.



Poetry for Peace & Love: A Hundred Language Poetry Meet at Kokrajhar- the City of Peace. In photos: Lighting the lamps for love and peace during the event.





Moments captured during the signing of the Bodo Peace Accord on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020. The historic peace accord was signed in the presence of Hon'ble Home Minister of India Shri Amit Shah Ji ushering an era of peace, harmonious co-existence and overall progress of the Bodoland Territorial Region



Ensuring dignity and peace through land reforms in Bodoland Territorial Region. In photo: Hon'ble Governor of Assam Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya Ji distributing land allotment certificates to landless beneficiary during the BTR Government's launch ceremony of Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0 at Kharuajan, Baksa on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2025.



With the dynamic Chief Minister of Assam Karmayogi Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma.



Inaugurating the first match of the VCDC-level competition of the Bodoland CEM Cup 2025 at Borigaon VCDC in No. 37 Dhwnsri (ST) BTR Constituency. This grand tournament is more than just a celebration of sports – it's a movement for peace, unity, and youth empowerment in BTR. By nurturing grassroots talent and fostering community spirit, the Bodoland CEM Cup will unite BTR through the beautiful game of football.





With the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi Ji at the Bodoland Mohotsov 2024, New Delhi. The Bodoland Mohotsov jointly organized by the BTR Government, ABSU, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and Dularai Boro Harimu Afat signalled unity, oneness and harmonious co-existence in the Bodoland Territorial Region.





On a visit to take stock of river-bank erosion in Chirang District with local MLA Shri Nirmal Kumar Brahma and local villagers.



During a photo session with the Executive Members of the Government of the Government of Bodoland Territorial Region, at Kokrajhar- the City of Peace:  
We are together... for your future... to make it better!



*"Another world is possible: a world full of love, care and honour... but for that we must read the book of humanity which is not available in the market, it is to be found only in our hearts."*

**— Pramod Boro**



**Lookin' Within**  
*My Reflections...*  
**Pramod Boro**

# Lookin' Within

*My Reflections...*



**Pramod Boro**



*"Another world is possible: a world full of love, care and honour... but for that we must read the book of humanity which is not available in the market, it is to be found only in our hearts."*

**— Pramod Boro**

