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ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world

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Assam Society of America (ASA) wishes everyone a Very Happy Bohag Bihu. May the New Year bring your great success, prosperity and happiness to you and yours. Please become a member of ASA and contribute to the many excellent projects in which ASA is involved. In particular, your hearty participation and generous contribution are sought for three projects: Digitizing Assamese hand-written manuscripts, Adopt-A-Child and High School Scholarships. Please contact me if you want to be a member or simply make a contribution, small or large.

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From:

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To My Young Friends In Assam

I am writing to you as an unknown person living in the United States. When I was 12 years old I went to live with my grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi, in Sewagram Ashram. I used to be very angry because while growing up in South Africa I was beaten up by a gang of white boys and then a few months later by a gang of African boys. I wanted to be strong and be able to fight back.

Gandhiji said to me that anger is like electric power. It can be useful if used intelligently but very deadly if abused. So, just as we channel electric energy intelligently and use it for the good of humanity we must channel the energy of anger intelligently for the good of humanity. If we abuse electricity we destroy ourselves. The same thing happens if we abuse anger. In the beginning it might seem that by abusing anger we can frighten people into submission but ultimately it destroys us because it generate a cycle of violence.

I learned this lesson and for many years I trained myself not to act in a moment of anger. Every time I felt angry I wrote it all down in the book but I wrote it with the intention of finding a solution to whatever it was that caused the problem. The solution must always be one that both parties will be happy with. Anger is responsible for more than 80 per cent of violence in human society. So, if we learn to manage our anger intelligently and use the energy for the good of humanity we would be able to reduce the level of violence very substantially.

I hope all of you will make an attempt to manage your anger intelligently and help create a society where peace and harmony will prevail. With good wishes—

Arun Gandhi (This letter was sent to Vavani Sarma of Pennsylvania)

Bihu in Thailand

The Assamese residents in Thailand regularly celebrate Bihu there. I was in Thailand from 1996 to 2000 and enjoyed the celebration every year mainly hosted in the campus of Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). There were 10 to 15 people at some point of time, but we never had problem of gathering as many other Indians, Thai and Chinese friends joined us in the feast and dance. Though we did not have 'dhulia' and 'dhol' at that period, but we made full use of music systems for our continuous bihu dance. As many people did not know what bihu is, we took that opportunity to explain to them who drops by seeing the dance party. It may be mentioned that AIT's almost 70% students and faculties are from 40 different countries.

The main festival of Thailand is New Year festival known as 'Songkran' and celebrated exactly at the same time as Bohag Bihu. It starts on April 13 every year and lasts for 3 days. Songkran in Thai word means "move" or "change place" as it is the day when the sun changes its position in the zodiac. It is also known as the "Water Festival" as people throw water believing that water will wash away bad luck.

There are some similarities between Bohag Bihu and Songkran besides being the 'New Year' celebration and much romantic enthusiasm among younger generation. During Songkran, people also apply a kind of talc powder that gives cooling effect to the body, as April is hot summer in Thailand. That reminded me of our applying 'Maah'-'Halodhi' to prevent 'Boxonto'.

(The writer Ganesh Bora is from Manhattan, Kansas and studied and worked in Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand from 1996 to 2000)

Ganesh Bora, Manhattan, Kansas

Poems of Niribili

Niribili Sarmah has published her first book! Niribili is popularly known as Niky among her friends. She is just nine years old. She lives with her parents in Secane, Pennsylvania, USA. Niky has written many stories and published few of them in her school publishing center. The "Thanks Giving Stories" is her first story collection book. It has total 9 very interesting stories in 49 color pages. The ISBN number is 1-59196-536-5.



Niky likes to read storybooks and want to write and publish her own books. The idea to publish this book came on Thanksgiving Day 2003 night.

In free time she watch TV and playing with her friends. Sometimes, she helps her parents while cooking food. She is in Grade-III in Amosland Elementary School. 549 Amosland Road, Morton, PA-19070. She says "Children age 6-8 will love to read this book"

Her Teacher's Says

The "Thanks Giving Stories" is a fine collection of stories by a talented young author just turning nine years old. Niky is industrious, creative and intelligent and her stories in this collection are very imaginative and entertaining. I highly recommend this collection of stories for they make excellent reading for all ages.

Virginia McDevitt

Third Grade Teacher

Amosland Elementary School

Shipping and other information

The Price of the book =US\$3.95/CAN\$5.0

Shipping within United States = US\$2.00

Shipping International =US\$3.00

For each sale of the book, 0.95 cents will be spend for ASA's Scholarship Project in Assam.

For more shipping information, please call +1-484-478-0799 or Fax +1-801-516-7005 or email at Vavani@rcn.com.

Jukti Kalita, Kendall Park, New Jersy

Rainforests of North East and around the World

The Tropical Rainforests of the world are ancient, complex ecosystem, teeming with diverse life forms. Here there are soaring trees, their trunks are often buttressed; a lofty canopy of branches and leaves, with deep shade below; climbing lianes and palms; plants growing on other plants; a rather bare floor with lumpy roots writhing across it, a dusting of fallen leaves, and scattered ferns and seedlings. Butterflies dance in rare shafts of sunlight from the above, birds make exotic noises, and insects sizzle and click.

The term 'rainforest' was first coined in 1898 by a German botanist named Schimper, to describe forests that grow constantly wet condition. They can occur wherever the annual rainfall more tat 2500mm (100inches) and evenly spread throughout the year and temperature is constantly high. Rainforests are found to occur in a belt around the equator between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

Worldwide Distribution of Tropical Rainforests:

Rainforests covers about 8.5 million square kilometer, which is 6% of the earth's land surface. These tropical rainforests are extending from Central America and Amazon Basin through Central, East Africa and South East Asia to Queens land of Australia along the equator between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

Central America:

The seven Central American countries south of Mexico- Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama- contain a unique concentration of flora, fauna and people. The rainforests of this region are among the richest habitat on earth in terms of number of species they contain. The rainforests of southern Mexico represent the northern most extent of this habitat.

The Caribbean:

The island s of Caribbean stretching in an area from Florida to Venezuela, are the emergent tops of ancient volcanoes, some which are still active. Before the sixteen century many of the island were almost totally covered in forests,, but now due to the limited land availability and high human density most of the forests has disappeared.

The Amazon Basin:

The Amazon Basin contains by far the largest area of tropical forests in the world, covering six million square kilometers in nine countries- 60% in Brazil, and rest in French Guiana, Surinam, Guyana, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Biologically, it is probably the richest and most diverse region in the world, containing about 20% of all higher plant species, perhaps the same proportion of birds and around ten percent of the world's mammals. Each type of tree may support more than 400 insect species. Much of the Amazon Basin still remains unknown.

Central, East Africa and Madagascar:

A belt of tropical rainforests spans the center of Africa, running from Cameroon and Gabon on the Atlantic coast to the Kenya and Tanzania on the Indian Ocean. Within this belt, the climate and hence the type of forests, is very varied. Unending vistas of dark, impenetrable jungle are associated with the Central African countries, while East African countries are largely covered with bushland, the rainforests restricted to the fertile mountain regions.

Being separated from its mainland many million years ago and due to the very wide Mozambique Channel, no life could raft across from the mainland. As a result, Madagascar's flora and fauna is unique to the island. Botanically, it is one of the richest areas in the world.

South and South East Asia:

South and South East Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines contain rich diversity of rainforests. In India, Western Ghats, Assam and northeast India and Andaman and Nicobar Island are famous for the tropical rainforests.

Rainforests of Northeast India:

The Northeast region of India is criss-crossed by Himalayan ranges flanking the Brahmaputra and Sumatra Valleys. It is the meeting point of the Indian peninsula with the main Asian land serving as a faunal and floral gateway resulting in complex assemblage of species diversity. The region lies between 89° to 98° E longitudes and 22° to 30° N latitude. Altitude varies from 30 m to 4500 m above mean sea level. The region shares international boundaries with four countries -- Myanmar in the east and southeast, China in the north, Bhutan in the northwest, and Bangladesh in the west and southwest. Brahmaputra and Barak are two main river and valley systems in the region. Owing to geographical position, it offers a complex variety of habitats and ecosystems. Therefore, it is one of the mega-biodiversity centers in the region and also one of the ten distinct bio-geographic zones of the country. The region comprises of seven states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Sixty four per cent of total geographical area of the region is covered with various types of forests especially rain, tropical wet evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, sub-tropical broad leaved hill and montane temperate forests. Though the region embodies 7-8% of total geographical area of the country, it contributes 26% of total forest cover of the nation.

Rain forests once covered large areas of the northeast region of India, but as human population has increased, thousands of square kilometers of forests have been cleared and replaced with scrub jungles. Today, about 43,000 square kilometers of rain forests still remain. Shifting cultivation (jhum) is common throughout that region. It was a sustainable form of land use when the local population was much smaller, but as the population pressure increased the situation has deteriorated. Lack of land forced many farmers to shorten the fallow period and in consequence a severe soil erosion can now be found over large areas. Wood is an important source of fuel for 75% of India's people and its collection is another serious drain on forest resources.

The surviving forests are confined to the Assam valley, foothills of the eastern Himalayas (Arunachal Pradesh) and lower parts of Naga Hills in places where the annual rainfall exceeds 2300mm. Botanically these forests are the richest in the Indian subcontinent. They also support a great variety of mammal and bird species.

Characteristics of Rainforests in Northeast:

Tropical wet evergreen forests are typical rain forests in Northeast India with an annual rainfall above 2500mm. They are composed of very tall trees, usually above 45m high, forming a very dense canopy and are many-storeyed and impenetrable with luxuriant ground vegetation. These forests appear to be climatic complex, being composed of very large number of species that are generally not gregarious. Dominant tree in the upper storey may have few deciduous species, but on account of extremely dense nature of the canopy the evergreen nature of the forests is most prominent. Climbers and wood lianes may be present, and often conspicuous. Bamboos are present. Palms, canes and other climbers are present, forming tangle masses in the undergrowth. Grasses are absent in the forests. Canebrakes usually replace high forests along streams. The trees have smooth barks and plank buttress. They have usually thick and glossy leaves, showing a characteristic pink or white color, when young. Epiphytes of all types of all types are abundant.

The most important trees found in the rainforests of Northeast are *Dipterocarpus* (Hollong), *Mesua* (Nahor), *Michelia* (Titasepa), *Dillenia* (Outenga), *Shorea assamica* (Mekai) and so on.

Diversity Of Tropical Rainforests:

Tropical rainforests hold greatest diversity of life of environment on earth. The Amazon, which drains the world's largest tropical rainforest, is thought to have 3000 species of fish, including the fruit eating fish and electric eel. The tropical forest country of Panama has 1500 species of butterfly, compared with 763 in the USA and is mere 68 in UK. Five times as many kinds of tree grow on the island of Madagascar as in the whole temperate North America. In one ten-hectare (25 acres) plot in central Amazon, researchers have identified over 300 species of trees. A recent study in Malaysia recorded 835 species of tree in 50 hectares. It has been estimated that a typical patch of rain forest of just six kilometers square contain as many as 1500 species of flowering plants, 750 species of trees, 400 hundred species of birds, 150 species of butterfly, 100 species of reptiles and 60 species amphibians. The number of insects is so great that they can only guess at, but one hectare may contain as many as 42,000 species, Tropical forests, therefore, represent the most complex system known in the universe.

Rainforests: Treasure House Of Food, Fodder, Fuel And Medicines:

Rainforests are treasure house of large number of important life saving drugs. The list is endless but here are the few examples. The dainty, pink-flowered Rosy Periwinkle of Madagascar had been used forest people for generations: in 1960 its properties were finally investigated. Drug that cure leukaemia was derived from Rosy Periwinkle. Quinine, the first effective and widely used treatment for malaria, was derived from the bark of South American Cinchona tree. The contraceptive pill is derived from a Mexican yam. Curare, with which the Amazonian Indian poison-tip their arrows, is the basis of muscle relaxant now used extensively in western surgery; while cardiac glycoside of Africa Strophanthus vine seeds, also used in the making arrow poison, are stimulant which are now used in the treatment of heart diseases.

The list goes on, but the important point is these plants, particularly rainforests plants, are sources of an immense range chemicals. Their uninvestigated potential could yield a still greater range of medicines, not to mention other useful substances – foods, perfumes, insecticides, dyes, waxes, fuels, oils and hundred more.

The writer, Mr. Rajib Kalita is a Scientist in Rain Forest Research Institute, Jorhat

The Best Graduate Schools in America

Each year, U.S. News ranks graduate programs in the areas of business, education, engineering, law, medicine, sciences, humanities and arts. These rankings are based on two types of data: expert opinion about program quality and statistical indicators that measure the quality of a school's faculty, research, and students. For the rankings in all areas, indicator and opinion data come from surveys of more than 1,000 programs and nearly 9,100 academics and other professionals conducted in fall 2003. I am presenting with the rankings of the top five schools in the different categories with a brief write-up.

Business:

Business school education has come a long way. Back in the fifties, the M.B.A. programs would provide people with minimal applied skills. Today's B-schools are extremely diverse with specialties ranging from E-commerce to environmental management as well as a wealth of learning opportunities. In the job scenario, most schools would have a regional focus, especially for fresh business grads. With placement openings in management, consulting, marketing, financing etc. the good news is that some of the companies are really teeming in to the campuses. Here is a list of top five business schools.

- Harvard University.
- Stanford University.
- University of Pennsylvania (Wharton).
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan).
- Northwestern University (Kellogg).

Education:

Getting in to a good ed school is not an easy task. With high quality of teacher training program, there are enormous number of applicants competing for a top master's program. Besides solid grades and rich experience is strongly encouraged. Ph.D. candidates should have significant experience and a strong interest in a specific line of research. Ed.D. applicants should have at least two to three years of successful teaching in their resumes. Here is a list of top five education schools.

Harvard University.
Stanford University.
University of California-Los Angeles.
Teachers College, Columbia.
Vanderbilt University.

Engineering:

A majority of the applications that the Graduate College receives belong to this category. With jobs both in academics as well as industries there are many who wish to pursue a career in this field. Often the admission committee finds it difficult to choose from thousands of applicants who compete for different engineering schools across the country. Generally, the strength of an individual program is more important than the quality of the school as a whole. Grades, GRE scores and letters of recommendation have been the Big Three in engineering admissions, but in recent years the last one has become increasingly important. Undergraduate research experience is another important criterion to get in to a graduate school. An outstanding letter of recommendation from a supervisor or any other faculty member tells us the student has been brilliant in his/her academic curriculum as well in his/her research capabilities. Here is a list of top five engineering schools.

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
2. Stanford University.
3. University of California-Berkeley.
4. University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign.
5. Georgia Institute of Technology.

Law:

There are just the two important things that matters in getting admission in law schools - the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and the undergraduate grade-point average (GPA). For example, Yale has the best law school in the country and three quarters of the students had over 3.8 in their undergraduate GPA. For students who don't have high LSAT scores, there is still hope. Most law schools are now considering other factors in admissions, including work experience and professional interests. There are some specialty programs in some schools which are on the look out for demonstrated passion in those areas. Obviously, one of the best ways to show interest is work experience. A student attending a particular law school will help him/her determine which job he/she would be offered. For example to go to a top corporate law firm (that gathers six figures a year) then attending a law school with a premium reputation is the key. Here is a list of top five law schools.

1. Yale University.

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2. Harvard University.
 3. Stanford University.
 4. Columbia University.
 5. New York University.

Medicine:

Studies indicate that the demand for physicians and the demand for specialists are very strong in US and further doctors are still very satisfied professionally. However, there is a tough competition to get in to the nation's top medical school. So, if the students are serious about med schools, they should be prepared to show good grades (3.5 or above) and board scores (27 and up) with a solid evidence that they understand what medicine is all about. Another important consideration is the amount of money that they are going to invest in learning medicine. The average debt loads for medical school for the year 2003 was \$109,457. Students are also told to prepare to answer questions about their financial support during their admission interview. Here is a list of top five medical schools by research.

1. Harvard University.
2. Washington University.
3. John Hopkins University.
4. Duke University.
5. University of Pennsylvania.

Sciences:

The first step for a student applying for grad schools is to pick department that is strong in their area of interest, and the admitting professors select them based on their academic records and test scores. To choose a school would require the student to make a preliminary resource in various aspects like high graduation rate, research funding, quality of research, short time to degree, job opportunity etc. Most college will accept a large number of students and then weed out after few years citing lack of funding or if the student is not making a significantly good progress towards degree. A Ph.D. degree is desirable to get in to academics but professional master's degree (two year) program aim to make graduates ready for a job in research and industry. Studies show that almost 30 percent of science Ph.D. goes on jobs outside academia. Undergraduate research and recommendation letters are few of the important issues for getting in good graduate schools. Here is a list of top six science schools.

1. Stanford University
2. Harvard University.
3. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
4. University of California-Berkeley.
5. California Institute of Technology.
6. John Hopkins University.

Social Science & Humanities:

There are two rules for picking a program in the humanities or social sciences. One, choose a department with strong faculty presence in the area of interest. Two, to become a professor get in to the best school possible. The statement of purpose should

prove the students' gasps of the field and understanding of the department. Due to high dropout rates some graduate schools have reduced in their class size. The good news is that for the students who do make it in are much more likely to receive academic and financial support they need to succeed. Graduate students get more experiences in teaching and many universities have instituted Preparing Future Faculty programs which teach students how to be faculty members. Research and career advice can be best taken from Ph.D. supervisors. Here is a list of schools that tops the different departments in humanities.

1. Economics: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
2. English: Harvard University, Stanford University, UC Berkeley.
3. History: Princeton University, Yale University.
4. Political Science: Harvard University.
5. Psychology: Stanford University.
6. Sociology: UC Berkeley, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Source: US News and World Report, 2005 Edition. For more articles, methodology, criteria of ranking visit <http://www.usnews.com/>

Compiled by: Satyam K Bhuyan, Ames, Iowa. The writer is a graduate student in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Iowa State University.

Srijuta Baby Bezbaruah: A Tribute

Baby Bezbaruah - this lively name belongs to a colorful and a gracious woman, who was my mother. I am the 2nd of her six children. She left my father and all of us, totally heartbroken, for her heavenly abode at a very young age, on March 1st, 2004. Quite often, I see people in their 70's and 80's with colorful attires driving all around the place in Houston - and seeing them I was (and still am, though my mother is gone) always relieved and thankful to God for allowing Science/Technology be so progressive as to let people live longer these days. But alas! that did not hold true for my Ma. She was only 72 when she left us, going to be 73 in July of this year.



I always remember my mother as being a very active woman. She could never sit idle - she had to do something or the other. She retired as the Assistant Head Mistress of Kali Ram Barooah Girls' High School in 1989. She was a people's person - so now that she had retired from her 30+ year teaching career, she had to get involved into some organization, and she chose the 'Xeuji Mahila Xonggho' of Kumarpara. She was very active and extremely popular there just for being herself - a simple but a colorful person at the same time. She participated and got awards in the state-wide literary competitions.

Ma attended two area 'Naam-Ghar's and kept a close relationship with her school staff even after she retired from there 15 years ago. Everybody loved and respected my mother for her simplicity and her down-to-earth nature. She had zero 'bhem' and never

kept a grudge against anybody. She was a college graduate from the 50's, but was surrounded by a number of friends who did not have any (formal) education. She tried to help them (and many others, including the maid-servants in our home) to read and write.

She always had a kind word for everyone, be it the 'paper-walla', the 'gakhir-walla', or the 'fol/torkari-walla'. It was really poignant to see all these folks come to the 'shraddha' ceremony to pay their 'homage' to my mother - their 'Ma-ji'.

My mother brought us up with strict rules. We had to study in the morning and in the evening for at least a couple of hours. We could not go out and play except in the evening and had to come back before dark, wash up, have some 'ruti-gakhir' and then sit down to study. She would make sure that we studied and remembered the poems by heart from both Assamese and English literature (text) books, the multiplication tables, etc., etc. I, as a child, still did manage not to do all the things that she wanted us to, but only some - I must admit.

Ma did everything in a timely manner who could do multiple tasks at one time - like, when we were very young, she would cut vegetables, get us (at least 3 of us) to the kitchen table to do our homework, watch for the boiling daal/rice on two different smokey 'souka's with 'kesa-khori' - all at the same time, and still would make time to listen to the 'Ancholik Batori' broadcasted by Guwahati Radio Center daily, and the weekly drama on Tuesday nights.

My mother grew up with her grandparents who put her through college. She graduated with Honors in Philosophy. She started her MA degree at Gauhati University but got married and could not finish her MA. But that did not stop her education, she went ahead and enrolled for a BT program, and got her BT. And all this at a time when she was burdened with 5 young children. Looking back at these accomplishments, she was really an amazing woman.

I have a feeling that my mother's grandmother quite aptly fulfilled my mother's need for a mother's love and care. But I think she always missed a father's love and attention even though her grandfather was also there to provide for the family. But she was also extremely lucky to have our wonderful father, as a husband. We have a feeling that she found everything that she missed in the earlier part of her life, in my father - a father's and a husband's love and care, a friend, and a devoted and life-long companion.

Though very active and mature, my mother loved personal attention and small gestures pleased her immensely. She loved it when we touched her feet, even if it was to put cream on the cracks of her feet that she had sometimes, or to apply nail polish on her toenails, or whatever. She loved to be pampered - and my only regret in life will be that, I did not pamper her enough. I didn't realize that she would leave us so soon. In many ways, she was like an innocent child and could be pleased easily with simple things.

When I last visited my Ma in December, she was walking around, went up to the 3rd floor to dry her clothes without anybody's knowledge, took me to her friends' homes to visit. She was very sick - bed ridden, in the summer of 2002, but she came alright and started doing things and walking on her own. So we didn't suspect even for a moment that she would be snatched away from us so soon.

My mother was a person of principle. She would give up the very item that she most wanted, if it was at the cost of her principles.

She came to Houston twice (in 1996 and 1999) and lived with me and my brother for six months - each time. Though she missed her active social life back home, she was also very happy to be with us in Houston. She noticed and appreciated every little thing. She tried to take notes on whatever she saw and wherever she went and then wrote articles on the elementary/secondary school system after visiting our son's school, her travel experiences etc. She wrote articles and gave lectures on Shri Sankardev when the people in Houston celebrated 500th birthday of Sankardev.

She taught me to make the almost perfect 'Narikolor laru' while she was in Houston. We made over 450 'laru's (from fresh coconuts) together for the yearly get-together of all the Assamese people in 1999. We spent many late nights watching movies - in fact I spent the most intimate time of my life with my mother when she was in Houston.

I know I will meet my mother some day again and then I hope and pray I will once again have the opportunity to lavishly pamper her with everything that I somehow missed doing all these years. The part of me that died with her will come alive then. Till then, may your soul rest in peace, Ma!

Alpana Sarangapani, Houston, Texas

Michael Fincke to be an International Space Station Resident

Michael Fincke, who is married to Renita Saikia, of Houston is the Flight Engineer and Space Station Science Officer of Expedition 9, is scheduled to take off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan on April 18 at approximately 11:19 p.m. EDT, aboard a Soyuz vehicle for the two-day trip leading to a six-month tour of duty aboard the International Space Station. Russian Gennady Padalka is the Expedition 9 Commander. NASA astronaut European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Andre Kuipers of the Netherlands will join them.



Michael Fincke, who is married to Renita, daughter of Rupesh and .Saikia of .Alabama, is going to carry an Assamese gamosa with him into space. He is a source of great pride to all Assamse in North America and in fact a great source of pride for all Assamese everywhere.

Michael Fincke was born on March 14, 1967 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mr. Fincke enjoys hiking, flying, travel, Geology, Astronomy, learning new languages, and reading. He is conversant in Japanese and Russian. .

Michael Fincke graduated the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1989 with a bachelor of science in Aeronautics and Astronautics as well as a bachelor of science in Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences. He then received a Master of Science in Aeronautics and Astronautics from Stanford University in 1990 and second master of science in Physical Sciences (Planetary Geology) from the University of Houston, Clear Lake in 2001.

Lt Col Fincke has over 800 flight hours in more than 30 different aircraft types.

Selected by NASA in April 1996, Mr. Fincke started working at the Johnson Space Center in August 1996. He was assigned technical duties in the Astronaut Office Station Operations Branch serving as an International Space Station Spacecraft Communicator (ISS CAPCOM), a member of the Crew Test Support Team in Russia and as the ISS crew procedures team lead. In July 1999, Mr. Fincke was assigned as backup crew member for the International Space Station Expedition 4 crew. Additionally he served as a backup for the ISS Expedition 6 crew and is qualified to fly as a left-seat Flight Engineer (co-pilot) on the Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

(Jugal Kalita with help from NASA's astronaut biography at <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/fincke.html>)

Articles for ASA magazine

Like in the previous years, ASA is planning to bring out a colorful magazine in July 2004. We want to take this opportunity and request you for articles in both Assamese and English. We will appreciate getting them by mid-May. Please send your contributions to Rabin Deka (rabindeka@yahoo.com) or Jukti Kalita (jukti_kalita@ml.com)

Jugal Kalita publishes “On Perl: Perl for Students and Professionals”

Jugal Kalita, published his first book in January 2004. It is a product of more than 6 years of work. The book has 660 pages and is dense in content. It is available both in paperback and in electronic format. Go to www.amazon.com and search for “Jugal Kalita” if you want to peruse the table of contents of the book.

Dr. Rod Moten of Colgate Univeristy, NY writes:



Four words describe "On Perl: Perl for Students and Professionals" by Jugal Kalita: comprehensive, thorough, clear and concise. Kalita thoroughly explains many of the intricate constructs in Perl in a clear and concise manner. As a result, I think "On Perl" would be an exceptional book for students with as little as one semester of programming in another language such as C++ or Java. More advanced programmers can benefit from the comprehensive presentations of advanced concepts such as interprocess communication with sockets, higher-order functions, modules and security. For each advanced programming concept, Kalita gives clear and concise overviews that give a reader insight

into the background for which the advanced programming concept originates. Therefore, readers with little or no knowledge of the advanced programming concept could gain the knowledge to create Perl programs that uses these concepts.

Kalita's writing style reflects his experience of teaching students Perl in the classroom at the college level. "On Perl" reflects the insight of a person who has extensive knowledge of Perl and computer science, experience using Perl, and experience that his knowledge to others. I believe Kalita successfully conveys his knowledge and experience clearly and concisely in "On Perl".

In my opinion, "On Perl" is the best book on Perl I have read. Other books on Perl only present the features of the language. "On Perl" presents these features and teaches you how to write Perl programs that employ these features. The books that do try to teach you how to write Perl programs do so with large examples that distract the reader from the topic they are intended to illustrate. Kalita skillfully uses the right level of detail in relevant examples to adequately illustrate Perl's capabilities.

Babul Gogoi, Guwahat)

ULFA, militancy, and a subjective monologue - I

(The study of the idea called militancy)

I am not here to glorify or decry the ULFA and its like and nor am I here to rant about the problems of 'Why?' and 'Why not?' Three reasons. First, too much water has already flown under the bridge and what can possibly be said for either side has probably been already said. Second and most important though is the fact that I, or for that matter anyone, cannot be a detached or objective judge of such a case simply because our own prejudices reflect on how we decide and hence every time we make a statement about militancy, it is mostly descriptive of our own values rather than being objectively prescriptive. Third when I stand up to make a judgement on someone's views or actions, I presuppose that my views or ideas are 'superior' to his whom I am judging and more often than not, such a view is highly delusional.

Instead it would be instructive to examine the very idea of militancy as it relates to Assam from several different viewpoints. In the past few years the term 'militancy' has become obscured with overuse. Whenever the problem of differentiating between

freedom-fighters and terrorists is encountered, then most reactions basically boil down to a "Freedom-fighters are on 'my' side and terrorists are on the other side" kind of stand. Now there is hardly a liberation movement which hasn't used terrorism. The terms 'militancy' and 'terrorism', due to careless use, has frightening connotations.

A little digression: the concept of the 'individual state'

What is the ideal size of a state? What are the mutual obligations between a state and its constituents?

These are serious questions which force to look back at history and gaze into the future. The whole idea of a federal state is built on a utilitarian idea of sharing. Every state (or almost every state) lacks some things while has surplus of some other things (things here meant to include both material things and intellectual assets). So when such states come together for mutual good, a federation is born. In a federation it is imperative that there will be some very rich states and some very poor states; and the ideal utilitarian federation should attempt at increasing the average prosperity not individual prosperity. Hence the ideal state would be the union of all the states on earth (not very unlike the state, which according to revelations, the Anti-Christ is supposed to rule).

But we don't live in a utopian world; instead in our society, like it or not, the fittest survive and the instinct to take advantage of one's superiority is engrained in man's very blood. In that sense, the state is not very much different than an individual. A state which is a part of a federation, if it more prosperous than the rest will try to take advantage of its prosperity just like a fitter individual will like to take advantage of his fitness. Yes, it sounds perverted but it is often true.

That brings us to the idea of the 'individual state'; the idea that every individual is 'capable' of functioning as a sovereign state. In fact he is not only capable, but if he is fit he will go by his instincts and actively try to function outside the rules set by society for common good; a society which forces him to pull a weakling out of a pit.

Such is human nature. And we have to look at the concept of a state without simplifying this principal idea.

Modernity and Post-modernity: varying world-views.

According to Frederic Jameson, modernism and postmodernism are cultural formations which accompany particular stages of capitalism. Jameson outlines three primary phases of capitalism which dictate particular cultural practices (including art, literature, customs and social views). The first is market capitalism, which occurred in the eighteenth through the late nineteenth centuries in Western Europe, England, and the United States and all their spheres of influence. This first phase is associated with particular technological developments, namely, the steam-driven motor, and with a particular kind of aesthetics, namely, realism. The second phase occurred from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century; this phase, monopoly capitalism, is associated with electric and internal combustion motors, and with modernism. The third, the phase we're in now, is multinational or consumer capitalism associated with nuclear and electronic technologies, and correlated with postmodernism. The comparisons between the last two phases are especially interesting. The basic ideas of modernism are almost similar to those of humanism. According to modernism, reason is the ultimate

judge of what is true, and therefore of what is right, and what is good (what is legal and what is ethical). Freedom consists of obedience to the laws that conform to the knowledge discovered by reason. In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful); there can be no conflict between what is true and what is right (etc.). Modernity deals with the need to create order: the need to rationalize chaos. It works on the principle that the more 'rational' a society is, the more ordered will it be and hence more smoothly will it function. More accurately speaking, modern societies actively try to create binary oppositions between 'order' and 'disorder' just so that they can enforce the superiority of 'order'. Anything that can be construed as disorder is led to elimination. But the point that to assert the superiority of order continually one has to continually create 'disorder' is something that is forgotten or rather overlooked. The idea of the 'individual state' is an offshoot of the same and hence is always considered 'the other'. Going back to the problem of militancy; when examined closely, the government's justification of eliminating militancy is based on certain premises two of which relate to the concept of the 'individual state'. Let us, as an exercise of intellectual muscle-flexing, examine those premises: first, that 'a federal government is a more NATURAL to humanity than the idea of individual-states and hence superior' (I say more natural because IF governments acceded that anarchy (for a lack of a better term) is a more natural human state, then they would not have tried to ELIMINATE anarchistic elements, rather they would have tried to maintain an equilibrium between government and anarchistic forces and discovered ways not to DOMINATE but to come to an UNDERSTANDING with it.) Now, to think of it, what was the social order before a political system was decided on? It was a dog-eats-dog kind of anarchy. The state is a man-made institution to further common good and since it is man made, it is not natural. This idea that the individual-state is the natural state of humanity, puts into question the very righteousness of the state to eliminate the individual-state completely'.

The Government cannot be defined independently.

Postmodern Anarchy: A 'modern' society's standard reaction to militancy

Calling someone a 'militant' is defeating him before the war, a psychological exclusion of not only something we are not supposed to like but something we are not 'supposed' to like. Michael Foucault shows that with the spread of modernism, power began operating in a highly insidious way on what he calls a 'micro-political level' through the technology of power called 'discipline'.

We all live in a highly disciplinary society. The primary effect of government policing is not the repression of radical groups but instead, the construction of self-evaluated and self-policed subjects.

Francois Lyotard equates the effort to create stability through order with the idea of "totality," or a totalized system. Totality, and stability, and order, Lyotard argues, are maintained in modern societies through the means of "grand narratives" or "master narratives," which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. In other words, a metanarrative is an untold story that unifies and totalizes the world, and justifies a culture's power structures. Metanarratives are not usually told outright, but are reinforced by other more specific narratives told within the culture. Postmodernism on the other hand disassociates itself with the very idea of grand narratives and instead prefers situational, provisional, contingent and temporary "mini-narratives". This results in the virtual deconstruction of the very values that make 'grand-narratives' grand. One of the

consequences of postmodernism seems to be the rise of religious fundamentalism, as a form of resistance to the questioning of the "grand narratives" of religious truth. This is perhaps most obvious in Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East which ban postmodernist ideas because they deconstruct such grand narratives. Herein lies the difference between the two: while fundamentalists fight against postmodern influences, millitantas like ULFA fight 'for' them.

Syamanta Saikia, Wichita, Kansas

Pritam Das's Company Wins Business Plan Contest

The University of Akron's Fitzgerald Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies has awarded a first place prize of \$3,000 in its annual business plan competition to Polymeric Drug Delivery Systems LLC, an Akron company formed last year. The trio who formed the company are Deenu Kanjickal, Pritam Das and Dave Young.

Polymeric's signature product, the PolyRing, is a time-controlled drug delivery device that seeks to reduce or eliminate the need for further surgeries caused by intimal hyperplasia, a form of blood vessel blockage.

"Intimal hyperplasia has been identified as a primary cause in the failure of vascular prosthetic devices. For example, approximately 150,000 peripheral arterial bypass graft procedures are surgically implanted each year in the U.S. for dialysis access," Mr. Kanjickal said.

"The bypass grafts fail within a year in 60% to 80% of the patients. The device developed by PDDS would prolong the life of these grafts," Mr. Kanjickal said.

Mr. Kanjickal said he and his team were very pleased to get the award after many months of hard work. "I feel great," he said. The award would not have been possible without a \$55,335 grant provided by the Summa Foundation, he said. The research also was supported by University of Akron faculty member Stephanie Lopina, who runs the Biomaterials Lab in the Chemical Engineering Department, and Steven P. Schmidt, of the Falor Division of Surgical Research at Summa Health System.

Mr. Kanjickal said he expects animal studies in about six months and said that FDA approval will have to be sought in order to market the device.

The competition's director, Todd Finkle, is an associate professor of management at the University of Akron and a fellow of the Fitzgerald Institute. He said the business plan competition is part of an effort to change the business culture of the region.

"We are in the middle of transforming the economy of Northeast Ohio into a more entrepreneurial mindset."



Pritam Das (Bubu) is finishing his MS in Polymer Engineering in University of Akron, Ohio come August. After graduation in Chemical Engg from Surat, India he worked briefly in Mumbai, India in IT area before

coming to Ohio for studies less than two years ago. Pritam is a nephew of Dr. Umesh Tahbildar of New Jersey.

The picture shows from left to right, President of University of Akron, Pritam Das, a Venture Capitalist from Cleveland, Deenu Kanjichal, President and Chief executive of Federal Reserve of the MidWest Zone, Dave Young, an another Venture Capitalist from Cincinnati.

Umesh Tahbildar, West Windsor, New Jersey

ASA Newsletter is a monthly email newsletter, posted during the first week of every month. We invite contributors from all over the world. Your valuable feedback, comments & suggestions; and of course news from your part of the world for inclusion in the coming editions are highly appreciated. Mantu Baishya of Omaha, NE, on behalf of Assam Society of America, is the publisher of this issue of the ASA newsletter. Assam Foundation of North America (AFNA) also sponsors the newsletter. The editors are Satyam Bhuyan (Ames, Iowa), Ganesh Bora Manhattan, Kansas), Babul Gogoi (Guwahati, Assam), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado), Shymanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas), Santonu Goswami (El Paso, Texas) and Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania). We are seeking a few additional members to sit on the Editorial Board. The responsibilities include writing occasionally, editing submissions, collecting contributions and disseminating the newsletter to a wider audience. If interested, please contact email: asanewsletter@assam.org or asanewsletter@yahoo.com.

This newsletter can also be read online at <http://www.assam.org/newsletter>. If you want a printed copy of this newsletter, please contact us at the email address given above.

