



ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world

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A Message from the President, Assam Society of America

Dear Member,

A (belated) Happy New Year to you and your family! Hope you and your family had a wonderful holiday season! As you may be aware, several exciting things happened in the last part of 2004 – for instance, we implemented two projects (Project Hope, Phase I and Flood Relief Project), and also were very pleased to get invited to the July05 get-together (Assam 2005) in Orlando, FL.

We had a successful Quarterly meeting this Sun (9th) at Jayanta and Nilakshi Thakuria's home in Monmouth Jct., NJ. The meeting agenda is given elsewhere in the newsletter.



Once again, I thank you for being a member of this organization in the last year and I urge you to renew your

membership for 2005 (a form was sent along with the Newsletter that you recently received). Additionally, please get yourself involved with many things we do for the people of Assam as well as those who live here. Let me know if I could provide any help in finding an appropriate venue for your contribution – both money and time wise.

Finally, I urge all of you to plan to attend the Assam 2005 get-together in Orlando, FL (arrive July 1st, depart July 4th or whenever you feel like!). Sunil(da) Nath will soon let you know about the hotel and other arrangements. Please note that his email has changed from the AOL account to the following: Sunil.B.Nath@att.net.

Best wishes and hope to see many of you this Sun!
Regards,

Sanjib Bhuyan
New Brunswick, New Jersey

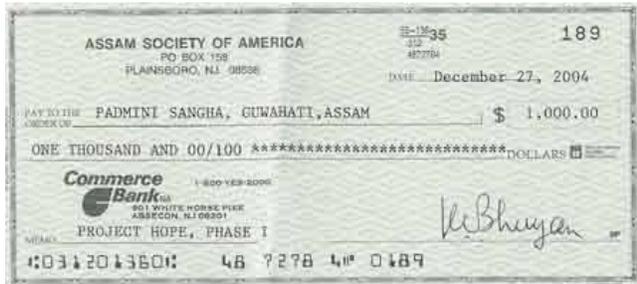
January 9, 2005 Quarterly ASA Meeting

The agenda for January 9, 2005 meeting at the Home of Jayanta and Nilakshi Thakuria is given below. Minutes will be posted in a future issue of the ASA Newsletter.

1. Approval of October 10, 2004 minute
2. Tsunami tragedy - a moment of silence,

3. donations
3. President's Report
 - a. Incorporation of ASA
 - b. Invitation to Assam 2005 - Planning, etc.
 - c. Newsletter - wide distribution of December newsletter, a new name? new editors?

- d. Constitution amendments - Mantu Baishya and Kedar Bhuyan
- e. Membership drive - charge taken by Utpal Brahma
- f. Projects
 - i. Flood relief: Institute of Integrated Research Management, Tezpur got \$1,140 (Rs 51,000)
 - ii. Project Hope, Phase I: Padmini Sangha,



- iii. Kahilipara got \$1,000 (Rs 45,000)
- iii. Asom Sahitya Sabha fund by Purandar Sarma
- iv. Kuruabahi Xatra, Golaghat got Rs 5,000
- g. Status of other project Fund raising strategies
- h. Bihu - Magh Bihu (Probina Tahbildar and Nilakshi Thakuria), Bohat Bihu (Prakash Deka)
- i. Updated list of calendar of events
- j. Next ASA Meeting: April 9th or 10th (Prakash and Anuradha Deka hosting)
- k. Next Report from ASA Foundation due (for

- April meeting): March 15, 2005
- l. Upcoming sponsors of newsletter: Utpal and Malabika Brahma (January), Jukti and Suravi Kalita (February)
- m. Report from VP - Utpal Brahma (Membership drive efforts, USP, member participation in organizational activities, etc.)
- 4. Report from Treasurer: Kedar Bhuyan (updating October balance sheet)
- 5. Report from ASA Foundation: Mukul Chowdhary
- 6. Report from Project Coordinators: Jugal Kalita, Vavani Sarma, etc
- 7. Report from Magazine editor: Jukti Kalita
- 8. Publisher/Editor's Report: Jugal Kalita
- 9. Old Business
- 10. New Business

Photographing Assamese Manuscripts

Assam Society of America started a project to photograph Assamese handwritten manuscripts in 2003. We reported on the photographing of "Paarijaat Haran", an Assamese drama from the 16th Century written by Mahapurux Xankardeva in the magazine called "Asomi" in 2003. The manuscript we photographed using a digital camera so that it can

be preserved in the form of a digital CD was highly illustrated and was prepared by Xaxadhar Aata in 1836. The manuscript was damaged in a fire in the late 19th century. Since then, during 2004, we photographed more than a dozen such manuscripts, several of which are highly illustrated. The photographing has been done using a 5 mega pixel camera donated by Samar Gogoi of Omaha, Nebraska. We have been

helped enormously in this effort by Babul Gogoi of Guwahati and Delhi (lately), Dr. Naren Kalita of Nagaon (an expert on illustrated Assamese manuscripts), Prabodh Nath (an electrical engineer from Nagaon) and many others.

During 2004, we photographed a book called "Haribanxa", a manuscript possibly from the late 17th Century. The book has been



persevered by Kadami Bora of Roha-Sokiyal Gaon in the Chaparmukh area of Nagaon. Kadami Bora is a recipient of President of India Award for Teachers in 1998. This manuscript has about 300 illustrated pages. You see a page of this manuscript in this article. The actual picture is very clear and looks a lot better than the one you see here. Another book we photographed is called "Tantraxaar" from the 18th Century. This book along with another 50 or so manuscripts are being preserved by Nabin Borthakur, a teacher of Kaliabor Higher Secondary School and the maintainer of the Barbhokoti Than.

We have also developed an excellent relation with the Xatraadhikaar and others at the Kuruabahi Xatra in Golaghat District. Babul Gogoi has gone and stayed there overnight taking photographs of manuscripts. I spent a full day on the 12th of January, 2005, taking pictures of more 250 pages of the "Bhaktiratanaakar" manuscript at the Kuruabahi Xatra. Babul Gogoi has photographed almost a dozen books from this Xatra. The Xatra has about 60 books, but they are not illustrated.

In summary, we have in the past year or so, taken more than 2500

photographs and are in the process of editing the pictures and making them into CDs for purposes of preservation. Our goal is to provide copies to the original sites, but also to well-known libraries in the US and around the world. If you would like to facilitate this project, especially with expenses, please contact Jugal Kalita (jkalita@uccs.edu) or Sanjib Bhuyan, ASA President at (bhuyan@AESOP.Rutgers.edu).

Jugal Kalita, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Common Currency in South Asia?

The demography of South Asia is considered as very similar. The root and the origin of the peoples are similar. Although people speak different languages and eat different kinds of food, the overall socio-cultural background is the same. In the last few years many scholars have suggested that a common currency in this region will have a tremendous benefit to the development and economic stability.

Those in favor of a common currency in South Asia usually see four main reasons to support.

1. A common currency is a characteristic of strong regional economic integration.
2. Currency unification will eliminate exchange risk and ease inter-country trade and investment policies.
3. Reduction of transaction costs arising from currency conversions. and
4. Currency union in the belief that it will promote political unity amongst the constituent nations.

However, collective decision-making is slow affair in this region. There are infighting and arms race among them and spending lots of money that benefiting other developed countries who sales arms to them. There are many small tribes fighting for separate states or other forms of political structure. The historical legacy is another factor that makes collective efforts difficult. But the recent Tsunami has brought all the countries to think collectively to achieve their strategic goals and the need

has arisen for collective projects. Each country wants state-of-the-art high technology Tsunami forecast technology not only for itself, but also for the entire region. Although the Indian Ex-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had taken some initiatives in December 2003 in this regards, progress has been very slow.

Now, if we look at the similarity of the different currencies being used in

this region, we will have much clear picture to support the idea of a common currency.

India being the regional power and most responsible country in this region, India should take necessary

As of Jan-25-2005, USD 1 is equivalent to:

India	(Rupee)	43.70195
Pakistan (Rupee)		59.31253
Sri Lanka	(Rupee)	98.32020
Nepal	(Rupee)	75.13000
Bhutan	(Ngultrum/Rupee)	43.70195
Bangladesh	(Taka)	59.60000
Maldives	(Rufiyaa)	11.84245

steps and promote the idea of free commercial interaction that could benefit each and every nation in general and their people in particular. Hope to see this kind of collective and strategic move and more in the coming years.

Contributed by Vavani Sarmah, Wharton Business School, UPENN, Philadelphia.

Magh Bihu celebration in Dubai

Magh Bihu was celebrated in United Arab Emirates by the Axom Xomaj (Assam Society), Dubai on 14th January, 2005 at the Al Mumzar Beach Park.

The celebrations witnessed the participation of about 100 people from the Emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ajman. The program was also enjoyed by a few guests who were in UAE visiting – they were Bina Sarma of Guwahati, Santi Saikia and his wife Anjana Saikia also from Guwahati and Anjana Barua from Mumbai.

The delicious combination of Doi, Chira and Gur served along with Til Pitha, Narikolor laru and Ghila pitha, and other snacks for the breakfast took quite a few by sweet surprise.

Koni Juj (Egg fight) organized for the first time (courtesy Ratul Barkataky) attracted the attention of all present and witnessed the participation from both children and grown-ups where Rohika Kataty won the first prize.



Games organized for the children such as sack race, three-legged race and 'gooseberry and spoon' race had seen keen contest amongst all the children present. The children who could win prizes were Samiron, Suffraz, Harshita, Arnav, Shartaz, Sucheta, Rusha, Sivanto and Sanjana.

The lunch consisted of Fish curries prepared of Rau and Kawoi along with 'bengena pitika' and Assamese lemon were instant hits, which was followed by the introduction of newcomers to UAE.

Dr. (Mrs.) Santi Medhi expressed satisfaction at the ever growing size of the Assamese Community in the UAE and sought co-operation of every one to prepare for the Rongali Bihu celebrations in April. She also informed the gathering that the proposed 'Dubai Initiative for Assam' (D.I.A.) will soon be registered as a NGO in Assam; it may be added here that D.I.A. aims

at carrying out social activities for the rural poor in Assam with financial assistance mainly from UAE.

Utpal Kataky made a formal announcement of the planned launch of an e-newsletter soon. The celebrations concluded with two rounds of 'Tambola, conducted by Ratul Barkataky and Pankaj Das.

The program was a success largely due to the co-operation of all those who were present and specially due to the team efforts put up by Ratul Barkataky, Faruk Ahmed, Sumon Bordoloi, Pradip Das, Pankaj Das, Jayanta Paul, Abul Hussain, Utpal Kataky, Safiqul Rahman, Rashid Ahmed, Tonmoy Barooa, Sanjeeb Rose, Sujit Dutta, Farhad Choudhury, Muthanna, Khokan Paul, Parul Hazarika, Padmakshi Borah, Seema Rose, Bipasha Barkataky etc. The celebrations were made memorable thru' the photographic skills of Rashid Ahmed and Sanjeeb Rose.

Contributed by D K Borah, Axom Xomaj (UAE), Dubai.

Magh Bihu Celebrations in Bangalore

Magh Bihu was celebrated at the St Aloysius Junior College playground, Bangalore on 16th of Jan 2005.

The celebration was jointly organized by the Assam Bangalore Coordination Forum and Assam Society of Bangalore. The events main attraction were invited singers from Assam: Manash Robin and Krishnamoni Nath. They did full justice to the Assamese mass of

Bangalore by making them jive to their performances.

The day started with Meji Prajjalan, followed by breakfast (pitha, doi, chira etc). Games like like Tekeli Bhanga, Koni Juj, Rosi tana, Musical Chair



were organized and everybody participated. It was followed by lunch.

The cultural event took off after the lunch with the Bonti Prajwalon by Dr. Gogoi, one of the senior Assamese citizens of Bangalore. The cultural event started with Chorus followed by Borgeet, Bihu Nitya, Husori, Fashion Show of Assamese

Ethnic Wear. Jeng Bihu was another major attraction of the Cultural Evening.

The performance by Krishnamoni and Manash can't be put in words. It was simply overwhelming and it made the audience dance to their melodious Bihu tunes.

With this Magh Bihu Celebration - ENAJORI (Wall Magazine) was also launched. People showed lots of enthusiasm by sending their poems, articles etc., even though some of them were out of station.

The day long celebration came to an end with a Rock Show.

Himangshu Agarwala, Bangalore

Magh Bihu celebrations by Assam Association, Delhi

Assam Association, Delhi celebrated the Annual Sports Day and Magh Bihu on the 16th January, 2005 at the Central Secretariat Sports Ground at Chanakyapuri. Magh For the past many years Central Secretariat Sports Ground has become the regular venue for this event.

The festivity kicks off on the eve of the succeeding Saturday of the actual Magh Bihu day, this year on the 15th January. By 1 PM the water tanker arrives, tent house items are dropped. In charge of the kitchen for 1000 odd guests has to work passionately to shop for groceries, rou fish, mutton and sundry other items. By 2 PM cleaners start the job and the chefs arrive and get on with their activities, which would continue overnight.

The uruka was celebrated on 15th January night among a select group of sponsors and workers with the fire place (xaru meji), khichri, and mutton curry. They plan for the next day's schedule. There are arrangements to be made for fund collection, sports, entertainment, decoration, stalls etc. This year's participants numbered about 1000.

Whole night chefs and assistants prepare the food. If the weather god plays truant, turnout of people would be downsized and food would be surplus. That's a risk organizers bear every year. It's quite unpredictable, this year about 300 more people turned up over the estimates. However none went empty stomach.

On 16th January, the event began in the morning with the hoisting of the Association's flag by the President Bikash Chandra Bora in the presence of Kamal Taori, Secretary, NEC and P.P. Srivastava, veteran bureaucrat and social worker. Jatiya Sangeet - O' Mur Aponar Desh - was sung and members remembered the tsunami victims. The lighting of the meji, that heralds the onset of the spring in northern plains followed. Mah-Prasad and light breakfast was served concurrently. Dr Taori inaugurated "Samayik", the



periodical bulletin of the Association Association also published a fresh edition of the Directory of Members, which was inaugurated by Mr. Bijay Krishna Handique, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Defence.

There were programs for all. Painting competition and races for kids. Walking competition for senior citizens, musical chair for ladies, football for young men etc. After the gourmet feast the members tried their luck in tambola. The day ended in the late evening after an eventful day.

Contributed by Babul Gogoi, New Delhi

Bhogali Bihu Celebrated at Imphal

The Assamese community in Imphal celebrated Bhogali Bihu with a day-long

program on 15th January 2005 under the aegis of Asom Samaj, Manipur.

The function, held at the countryside in Sangaiprou in the outskirts of

Imphal town. On the Uruka day, Bhela Ghar and Meji was put up at the paddy field in Sangaiprou Mamang Leikai. Acknowledging the enthusiasm of the Assamese people, the residents of Sangaiprou Mamang Leikai also chipped-in manually in erecting the structure of Bhela Ghar and Meji. All the Assamese people along with a few enthusiastic residents of the locality spent the Uruka night in the bhela ghar. The grant feast - Bhoj - for the night consisted of traditional Assamese delicacies such as Mangshor Jhol, Machor Tenga, Behua, Mati Dail laced with Outenga, Kath Alu Poora and Kharicha along with famed Manipur dish "Ironba". The night after the sumptuous dinner was spent by singing, dancing & merry making.

The very next dawn, people after taking bath and attiring themselves in traditional clothes & Gamocha paid obeisance to the Sun God. Then the flag of Asom Samaj : Manipur

was hosted by Shri Rajen Gogoi, General Secretary along with Shri Upen Basumatary, President. The Bhela Ghar along with Meji was set on fire denoting that the festival has begun. Meji Prajwalon was done at the hands of Basumatary, President of Asom Samaj : Manipur. The Assamese people then paid their obeisance to *Agni* by bowing in front of the burning Meji. A few Bihu songs were instantly rendered on the occasion by Bihu Bolia Raiz. Thereafter Boot-Magu, offerings made to the traditional deity, were distributed, which made the members nostalgic about their Naamghar back at home in Assam. To mark the occasion games like Koni-Juj were held as a part of the celebration, which was enjoyed greatly by all the people present especially the children. In the meantime all the ladies, who turned up in traditional attire of Mekhala Chador, did a quick jig by going around the burning Meji.

This was followed by serving of traditional breakfast with mouth watering Assamese delicacies like Doi, Chira, Mithoi, Til Pitha, Tilor Laru, Narikolor Laru.

After the breakfast, *Xolagor Xarai* was offered by Shri Dilip Das, Jt. Secretary and Dilip Singh, Cultural Secretary, Asom Samaj : Manipur. The Publicity Secretary of the Samaj, Shri Biswajit Deb, extended his heartfelt gratitude on behalf of the Asom Samaj : Manipur to the local residents of Sangaiprou Mamang Leikai for their overwhelming response and co-operation in making the Bhogali Bihu Celebration a grand success. He also took time to praise media persons both from print & electronic media, for the keen interest shown by them in covering the celebration.

Contributed by Biswajit Dev, Publicity Secretary, ASOM SAMAJ : MANIPUR

Tryst with destiny

“ARE YOU JOKING”, asked Gandhiji surprised. “No. I am serious”, replied the Inspector General of Prisons. I received the orders just today. You can continue to stay here for some time for convalescence, if you like. But the guards will be removed at 8 tomorrow.

It was the fifth day of May, 1944, one month before the landing of Allied forces on Normandy beach for their assault against Hitler, which was the end of Germany's defeat almost to the day eleven months later. Col., Bhandari, the Inspector General of Prisons, Bombay had turned up suddenly in the evening, a rather unusual time for such a visit, at the Aga Khan Palace detention camp at Poona, where Gandhiji was being kept incommunicado, and told him that he and his party were to be unconditionally released at 8 O'

clock the next morning. Gandhiji had by this time recovered from his first shock, “what happens to my railway fare?”. He asked half in jest, half in earnest with a smile. Under prison regulations, a prisoner is entitled to the fare back to the place of arrest.

“You will have it whenever you leave Poona”. “All right. Then I will stay at Poona for two or three days”. “Now, please do not come back here again”, the Inspector General added. “See my hair has turned grey with worry”.

Thus ended the spell of twenty one month of prison life, Gandhiji gave the British government the ultimatum on the night of August 8, 1942, to declare India Independent and quit [Quoted from Mahatma Gandhi, Volume I, The Last Phase by Pyarilal Published in 1956].

I am tempted to throw some light on Gandhiji's last release from British prison. Gandhiji is the architect of India's freedom movement, culminating in India's independence on August 15, 1947. It was Sarojini Naidu who hailed Gandhiji as a great soldier of liberty, great seer of human destiny, martyr of world's sorrows and prophet of world's hope. Within a few years after Gandhiji's release from jail, some terrible events took place in India one after another, viz, the great Calcutta killings in the garb of direct action, communal rioting of Noakhali, followed by Bihar.

In the early part of 1945, Gandhiji took an all India tour to assess the then prevailing political situation for himself. His visit to Guwahati was a meteor-burst. As soon as it was announced that Gandhi would address a public prayer meeting at the Jubilee Garden in Panbazar,

Guwahati, great sensation and enthusiasm engulfed the whole of Assam. At that time, I was a small boy of class five studying in the Mangaldai Govt HE School. Mangaldai in those days was a small town with a thin population. Even then the whole atmosphere was surcharged with Gandhiji's visit. Being very much emotional I made up my mind to visit Guwahati to see Gandhiji personally and accordingly stayed in the residence of late Kaliram Barman, a prominent Congress leader who was related to my senior friend. Barman's residence was a stone's throw away from the historic Jubilee Garden.

To my astonishment, I found Kaliram Barman's house a virtual mela where scores of people coming from his native village and the surrounding area were living and taking their meals together, facing inevitable inconveniences with a smile. Suddenly, Guwahati became a place of pilgrimage due to Gandhiji's epoch making visit. So far as I remember, I, along with my senior friend Trailokya Patowari (Sonkan) went to the Jubilee Garden endlessly. So, as far as I remember, Gandhiji and his entourage took their seats on raised platform. Ramdhun was chanted and Gandhiji exhorted the assembly of hearers to join in the chanting. As soon as the Ramdhun was over, someone announced over the microphone that Gandhiji would now sit in prayer and nobody should venture to take

photographs. The gentleman who made such an announcement was none but the first chief minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi, as I learnt later on.

Gandhiji's prayer address was delivered in simple Hindustani. The few words that I still recall to my mind were nari abala nahi. Pointing to the moment of army personal, Gandhiji remarked – "If an army man appears here and gives me few blows, I would refrain from retaliation." Thus, on the eve of independence, a stroke of fortune helped me to see Gandhiji with my own eyes, although I only faintly remember it.

Independence came on August 15, 1947. It was a day of deliverance from the foreign yoke. I was still in my boyhood and as such I could not make any head and tail of it. On the previous night I was in a deep slumber in my bed. Waking up from my sleep having heard a hue and cry, I came to the nearby road and saw a small procession and someone holding a petromax light ahead of the procession followed by a band party. It was 12 midnight and I was beside myself with joy. Spellbound, I followed the procession a little further. At our residence, I heard from my elder brother, Sri Govinda Ram Deka, that from this midnight India attains independence.

On August 15, the national flag was ceremoniously hoisted in front of the

SDO's court building. At that time the civil SDO was late Rati Kanta Sharma, a brilliant product of Calcutta University who obtained a first class in MA in Sanskrit. It was a large gathering and the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. Late Babulal Ale, Deputy Superintendent of Police, headed the march past with a ceremonial open sword. The national song, Vande Mataram was sung. It was indeed a great day for us all.

In the afternoon, a public meeting was held in front of the Mangaldai HE School in the open field. The then district Congress president and freedom fighter late Ratneswar Sarmah presided. It was a mammoth gathering. Late Bipin Chandra Medhi, freedom fighter and MLA, late Kumud Chandra Bora, veteran Congress leader and freedom fighter, Congress leader and senior advocate late Taperswar Sarmah, firebrand orator and renowned freedom fighter Phani Ram Das and Muslim league leader late Badaruddin Ahmed, addressed the meeting and explained the significance of independence and all that it implied. What impressed me immensely was the enthusiasm of the people, irrespective of age and gender. August 15, 1947 still lingers my mind vividly.

Contributed by Ramani Kanta Deka, Guwahati. The author is a prolific writer who is regularly writing in the local dailies and journals of Assam.

The ASA Newsletter is published monthly. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ, on behalf of Assam Society of America, has published this issue of ASA newsletter. The editors are Satyam Bhuyan (Ames, Iowa), Ganesh Bora (Manhattan, Kansas), Babul Gogoi (New Delhi, India), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Editor-In-Chief), Symanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas), Santonu Goswami (El Paso, Texas), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania), Ujjal Pathak (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), Rini Kakati (London, UK) and Ram Sarangapani (Houston, Texas). The ASA Executive Committee is composed of Sanjib Bhuyan, President (Kendall Park, New Jersey), Utpal Brahma, Vice President (Burlington, New Jersey), Ganesh Bora, General Secretary (Manhattan, Kansas), Probal Tabhildar (Kendall Park, New Jersey), Mantu Baishya (Omaha, Nebraska), Kedar Bhuyan (Mays Landing, New Jersey), Sangeeta Duorah (California) & Umesh Sharma (Law student at Harvard).

We invite contributors from all over the world. We appreciate your valuable feedback, comments & suggestions, and of course, news from your part of the world for inclusion in the coming editions. Please send your written contributions to asanewsletter@yahoo.com. If you prefer, you can send your contributions directly to any of the editors listed above as well. Any contribution must be 750 words or shorter in length. Please include a scanned image of the author. We also request you to submit other pertinent photographs if possible.

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