

*Wishing our readers and well-wishers
a Happy Rongali Bihu*



Old ladies of Deori community have been performing **Deori Bihu** at Sibsagar, in Upper Assam during the on-going Rongali Bihu celebrations in Assam. *Photo © by Ubphotos.com, Guwahati*

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Wikiassam and Assamese on-line Dictionary Launched

I am sure a lot of you have heard about the various Wiki projects available on the Web. Wikis are online openly editable databases, some of which have become very large. One of the most famous Wiki sites is <http://www.wikipedia.org> which hosts an open encyclopedia called Wikipedia in many languages of the world. Wikis are examples of collaborative authoring. Research in collaborative computer-based authoring has been going on for the past 20 years and many software vendors provide such software tools at high costs. The Wiki model provides a free and increasingly popular alternative for collaborative writing.

The word *wiki* is a short form of the Hawaiian phrase *wiki wiki* which means *quick* or *fast*. The first Wiki was installed on the Web by Warn Cunningham in 1995 as a repository for the so-called design patterns used in computer programming. From its humble beginning in 1995, it has become a widespread movement. Wikipedia has encyclopedia type articles in 229 languages as of April 24, 2006. Assamese is one of the languages on the Wikipedia site although there are only 6 articles as of this date. The English version of Wikipedia has more than a million articles contributed by individuals from around the world; its articles have been shown by academic research to be as authoritative as the venerable Encyclopedia Britannica. Wikis are not only all-encompassing encyclopedias, but many are on specific topics. Examples of Wikis on narrowly focused topics are: Fluwiki that is a repository of knowledge about the Flu virus, Wordpress that is a repository of knowledge for Wordpress authors, a Wiki for teaching freshmen English in college, and an Wiki for users of the Emacs editor. So, the Wiki model has found widespread usage in diverse domains.

The Wikiassam project was started by Saurav Pathak and Jugal Kalita in the

summer of 2004. It was first hosted at a Website at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The site was moved to <http://www.wikiassam.org> in 2005. Wikiassam is also called Raizkoox which means a substantial repository of knowledge, to be created about Assam in a collaborative manner by authors from around the world. We invite would-be contributors to become members of the Web site; once one becomes a member, one can write on any topic of interest and edit any article that is there at this time. One can write a sentence about a topic or a whole essay. One can start writing on a topic and can come back the next week or the next month or the next year and edit it. One can edit articles written by others at will. We request that whatever you write be factual and unbiased. Guidelines for writing are posted on the site. We have a few hundred articles as of now, and we would like the repository to grow substantially. We consider it a long-term project and hope that in the next 5 or 10 years, this will be a very large repository of knowledge about all aspects of Assam. If you would like to write about any topic related to Assam, you should open an account on the site

and start writing. Example topics: the schools or colleges you went to; the place you grew up in whether it is a town or a village or a city; a person of renown you know or knew or adore from the past or the present; flora and fauna of Assam; riv-

ers, lakes, hills and mountains in Assam, etc. There is no end of topics you can write on.

Recently, Saurav Pathak has started a project that hopes to build a substantial online dictionary of Assamese. The project is hosted at <http://www.wikiassam.org/dict>. The goal is to build a dictionary of Assamese in a collaborative fashion. Assamese characters can be entered in Unicode using a simple clickable table. You may have to download a Unicode Assamese font to be able to read and write properly. Once again, anyone interested in creating a substantial Assamese online dictionary is invited to create an account and start entering information. Also, anyone who wants help design and write the code to build a scalable dictionary is invited to contact Saurav Pathak (sauravpathak@yahoo.com) or Jugal Kalita (jugalkalita@yahoo.com). This can easily be someone's Masters or Ph.D. thesis topic as well.

By Jugal Kalita, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Miracle of Kindness

Hi, how are you doing? I'm fine. You want to know why I am in the woods, right? I'll tell you. My parents really chewed me out all the time. They gave me only one thing that I liked, and that was an audio device. But I had to be aware of Greeks bearing gifts.



My dad works in a real estate agency. Every day he'd come home with lots of money, probably about \$700. My parents' plan was to become millionaires, live in complete luxury, live in a mansion, and abandon me and keep me in an orphanage. They were counting their eggs before they hatched! They said, "We should have a girl, not Andy!"

One night I packed my stuff and ran away. With aid from my flashlight, my decision was to run to a forest near town. Seven weeks ago, I was hiking when I heard a sound. I turned around and saw a squirrel. The squirrel said to me, "Hi! Who are you?" I said, "Hello! I am Andy Blubbers. What do you want?" The squirrel replied, "I want your friendship and for you to realize your po-

tential."

"All right," I said in enthusiasm. "But what do I do?" The squirrel instructed, "When there are some bullies and we see them, you will speak encouraging words to make them stop bullying other people." I said, "Yes, but you haven't told me your name. Cat, got your tongue?" "Boyyard is the name," came the reply.

I must pause here to tell you one thing. Almost everything here is all in the past. I resume now.

For one week Boyyard and I went to town to get supplies for our life in the forest. We were also building a log cabin out of the trees we chopped down. We bought furniture by using the money I made from mowing lawns for people in the neighboring town. It was a great week for us.

One day we were in town buying a chair for me to sit on when a group of boys were bullying

some people. Surprisingly, amongst them were my parents! I walked up to the mean bullies and told them, "I don't think you should bully people because you just hurt their feelings. Treat those people over there the way you want them to treat you." The bullies did not heed my advice and retorted, "Mind your own business." I made them understand that they would not gain anything by harassing others. Surprisingly my words drove sense into them and they walked away.

People who were witnessing the scene clapped. My parents felt very proud but they were ashamed too. Even though they were not nice to me earlier, I never stopped loving and protecting them. They walked up to me and said, "Andy, we are so sorry that we were mean to you and only wanted a girl, not you. Will you come back to us?" I said, "Yeah, sure! But can I keep Boyyard, my squirrel friend?" The answer was "Yes." Mom and Dad decided to quit their millionaire dream and instead live with Boyyard and me helping others and bringing them joy. We sometimes come to the log cabin I built in the woods to enjoy the beautiful sights. And that's how I'm here today.

(Ayan is a fourth grade student in Findley Oaks Elementary, Atlanta, Georgia. He loves reading books, listening to Indian music and playing the piano.)

An Appeal

Hello Everybody,

To celebrate the auspicious memory of Dr. Madhab Chandra Bora, a well-renowned professor of Engineering, Computer Sci-

ence and Business of Assam, who passed away in an accident almost two years ago, I am in the process of planning for a First World Conference at Tezpur University in mid December 2007 (tentative). Already, I have had discussions with many people here and there; the responses have been overwhelming.



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At this moment, I have an impression that

each one of us to make it happen. We need to identify a Keynote speaker and prepare a Call for Papers from participants and presenters. Here are my thoughts on the themes the conference should focus on:

Theme 1: There is a demand for knowledge on the environment to meet both educational and professional needs. Areas in which more training is greatly needed are

science and technology generally; technology assessment; environmental impact assessment; environmental management and sustainable development; environmental chemistry; environmental engineering; physical planning and the development of geographic information systems; and information and communications technology.

Theme 2: Widening access and Partnership with local communities in higher education for sustainable development among under-represented groups and meeting the challenges of multi-cultural societies and globalization

If anyone is interested to present papers or participate, please feel free to send me an email with your abstract. Soon, we will host the conference web site with more and updated information.

Thanks

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Performing Art

There is Nothing Like Musical

On March 19, 10 and 1, 2006, at the Frank Guaracini Jr. Fine and Performing Arts Center, Vineland New Jersey, a Perry Award nominated Best Director Joe Marrella recreated Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "South Pacific". Under his direction, the crew and cast worked tirelessly for almost six months to achieve success and they exceeded expectations. Tickets, at \$12.00 each, were sold out well in advance for the weekend shows and it was about 90% sold out for the mid-week.

The South Pacific featured 15 year old Assamese adolescents Rupak (Rick) and Neepak (Nick) Bhuyan in acting, dancing and singing roles. Rick and Nick have been singing from their early childhood. South Pacific was their debut acting and dancing performance along with singing. The South Pacific music was easy to sing and there was a predominance of male roles. It was a crowd pleaser. Rick and Nick won the hearts and minds of the audience. The audience was humming the tunes with Rick and Nick: "There is nothing like a damn".

Performances of the South Pacific were highly acclaimed in all the local print media.

The group 'Americar Rick & Nick' have so far produced 3 non-commercial audio CDs, recreating golden oldies with memorable voices. Within the next month or so, they will release their fourth audio CD full of Bihu Geets, Hussori and other Bihu related songs.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Here are few pictures from the South Pacific that will tell story far better than any words.



Music Director - Ms Newnam in action

By Jugal kalita, Colorado Springs

\$100 machine on Assam kids' laptops - any good?

<http://ia.rediff.com/money/2006/apr/07laptop.htm?q=bp&file=.htm>: This news link has an interview with an MIT professor designing a \$100 laptop for school kids across the world – especially, in poor countries like India. Earlier he had to close down one of his projects in India when it failed to produce satisfactory results.



Here are some suggestions for Assam's education in the context of this story:

Where is the money?

The MIT professor is committed to helping connect school kids in remote, poor areas to the modern world -by using his skills in media technology. So far so good. If he can find some Bill Gates or Warren Buffet to fund his dreams and provide about only \$100 billion (for about 1 billion school kids) to hand out a laptop to each school kid, all would be fine.

But he wants the cash strapped governments of these poor countries to fund his dreams - to take out money from programs engaged in fighting hunger, AIDS, teacher training and textbook supplies — to buy into his dream of providing a \$100 laptop to each kid.

At a global level, the United Nations and its member nations have decided to provide Universal Primary Education by 2015 - and many countries including India are unlikely to meet that goal - due to shortage of funds. Rich countries are still falling short on their commitments, including the US -so how does the professor aim to get extra funds. Maybe, he wants countries to close down the schools in remote areas and buy these glittering machines for the media-friendly and media-accessible schools in big cities. He, being in media business, knows its market value -for getting more funding for his research projects (currently totaling \$28 million as per the above article - a huge amount even by MIT standards).

Now I mentioned my reservations about his project in an earlier post on Assamnet: <http://assamnet.org/pipermail/>

assam.assamnet.org/2005-October/001271.html

Video Games/PSPs versus Laptop - in US schools' poor kids

After writing that post, I have had the opportunity of teaching primary school kids in the Washington DC area - those who need extra help and hail from mainly (illegal ?) immigrant Latino families . Most have video games and hand-held Playstation PSPs, which they play sometimes even in class (I have to keep checking on them and asking them not to). They cost about \$20-40 each.

So, if these \$100 laptops were made available to the poor students from rich countries like US - they would certainly find them beneficial and affordable.

Of course, even these kids would need some training about how to go about gathering relevant information over the Internet (while avoiding the garbage floating around on it) and in optimal utilization of the machine. Students do not have enough access to computers even in the US, it seems . At least the elementary school students (aged 8-9 years) I teach have limited access to PCs in their school (it is one of the better endowed schools in the capital or a supposedly natural paradise in a rich county), although from their remarks I make out that many of them have had access to improper material over the net of adult nature.

Nutritious Mid-day meal versus Laptop versus Teacher supervision/ training

However, the MIT professor wants the poor in poor countries to buy them - or their governments to do that for them. When the governments do not have money even to afford decent mid-day meals for school kids which can also help improve enrollments and remove malnutrition (it is just porridge for Indian ones - while the US ones have a rich menu which has at least four dishes daily along with milk -and changes everyday and across seasons)!

Thus, those in rich countries can perhaps benefit from this \$100 laptop, but poor kids in Indian rural areas cannot -without sacrificing their immediate needs of mid-day meals, uniforms and textbooks - and most importantly - effective teaching and teacher supervision. Teacher supervision is lacking in most of India - in remote rural areas up to 80% teachers are absent -as a result. Supervisors lack resources (travel and communication costs) to monitor staff.

Lack of test marketing

Although the professor does say that they got busy with this mission after using computers in Africa in the 1980s, he does not aim to conduct any test marketing or trials. He expects to sell one million laptops in the very first year!! - to poor countries.

What if they turn out to be less useful than mid-day meals, teacher training and supervision, free textbook distribution or scholarships for poor children?

Suggestions:

- 1.The professor and his research team and collaborators should conduct trials - just like you do drug testing trials before releasing a new drug (medicine) for humans or animals on the market. Of course, the trial should be free from bias or experimental error. The school kids who participate should not be subjected to increased media attention or giving anything else extra - than which is available to children in schools of comparable nature with comparable demographics.
2. They should also engage the services of traditional educators to use equal amounts of money (to that they spent upon computers for the above schools)- to fund other experimental projects using them for improving menu of mid-day meals, or teacher supervision and training, provide free textbooks etc.
3. Then, only they should decide which of these strategies was the most effective.
4. Assam should at least do this trial for its own schools -since education is a state subject in India - and not fritter away limited resources on untested fads.

Any comments?

By Umesh Sharmah , College Park, MD

El Nino and La Nina

The Devastating Twins and Their Impact

Every year, extreme climatic problems occur around the globe, with droughts in some places and floods in others. Variations in climate and weather can significantly impact our daily lives in subtle ways. We are irrevocably linked to our ecosystem in events resulting from extremely cold winters, crop failure from draught, or emergency conditions such as flooding, heat waves, or forest fires. Some of these widely dispersed climatic extremes might have a common origin in the occasional warming of sea surface water in the central and eastern Equatorial Pacific Ocean. Currents of Change, explains in simple terms what El Niño is, its far-reaching impacts on all of us and how those impacts might be forecast.

El Niño refers to the anomalous increase in sea surface temperatures from the coasts of Peru and Ecuador to the Equatorial Central Pacific. This is nothing but an abnormal state of the ocean-atmosphere system in the Tropical Pacific with important consequences for weather around the globe. Global climate anomalies tending to be opposite to those of El Niño is referred to as La Niña and is characterised by usually cold ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific, as compared to El Niño, which is characterised by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific.

El Niño was originally recognised by fisherman of the coast of South America as the appearance of unusually warm



water in the Pacific Ocean, occurring in the beginning of the year. El Niño means The Little Boy or Christ child in Spanish. This name was used for the tendency of the phenomenon to arrive around Christmas. La Niña means The Little Girl. La Niña is sometimes called as El Viejo, anti-El Niño, or simply “a cold event” or “a cold episode”. El Niño is often called a “warm event”. There has been a confusing range of uses for the terms El Niño, La Niña and El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) by both, the scientific community and the general public.

Each El Niño contains seeds of its own destruction, that is for every Niño there is a Niña. The subsurface ocean waves explain more than the origin and propagation of El Niños. They also explain how El Niños end. The wave first hit the South American coast, some reflect back and when the reflected wave reaches Asia, they rebound again. The cool temperature dilutes the warmer liquid at the surface, causing a temperature drop in the eastern Pacific, and the decrease is

nothing but La Niña.

El Niño has direct implications on the USA Economy as well as that of Asian countries. Weather and climate sensitive industries are directly impacted by weather (such as agriculture, construction, energy distribution, and outdoor recreation) accounting for nearly 10 percent of GDP. El Niño impacts important business variables like sales, revenues, and employment in a wide range of climate-sensitive industries and sectors. Overall, total U.S. economic impacts of the 1997-1998 El Niño were estimated to be on the order of \$25 billion. In the same period Asian countries experienced tremendous food shortage. These economic impacts lead to both gains and losses among regions

and within industries. For example, department store sales were up by five to 15 percent during the abnormally warm winter in the Midwest, but sales of snow equipment like snowmobiles were down by nearly 35 percent. Skiing was up in the West but down in the Midwest. In the highly weather sensitive energy sector, households and businesses saved \$2-7 billion in heating costs, while energy production and distribution businesses suffered from reduced sales. In fact, on balance, the effect of the 1997-98 El Niño in the U.S. could well have been an economic benefit, with gains and losses across regions and industries. While economic impacts tend to cancel each other out at the national level, El Niño does cause real economic losses such as storm damage or crop losses, which are not offset by gains elsewhere. These are losses that can be prevented or reduced by a better forecast or mitigation.

Reference: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Magazine.

By Dr. Ganesh Bora, Florida

Use of Information Technology by Oil Refining Companies in North-East

Information Systems with its plethora of technologies plays a vital role in a company's day-to-day activities and oil refineries are no exception. Oil companies have traditionally remained in the forefront while adoption new technology. The North Eastern refineries have also thrived to be in the technology forefront by adopting latest developments in the Information Technology and Communications. Considerable investments have been made in the IT communication infrastructure by all the refineries.



The Northeast refineries in Digboi, Guwahati and Bongaigaon started their IT forays by developing and implementing stand alone applications in the areas of Finance, Materials, sales etc. While these applications could take care of the short term IT requirements, they could not cater to the information requirement in the changed competitive environments. With the dismantling of APM (Administrative Pricing Mechanism) the efficiency of the Oil companies became very important for the survival. Coupled with the re-alignment of market players in the Oil Sector, the need came for an integrated approach towards IT. All the three refineries today have an integrated IT system through the use of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning).

ERP is a structured approach to optimizing a company's internal value chain.

ERP helps the company manage its important functions like production, sales & distribution, inventory & material management, plant maintenance, finance and human resource management. ERP consists of a multi-module application, which allows data to flow from one module to the other. It therefore not only integrates the business processes, but also offers intelligent information by correlating data from various modules.

Information Technologies and its applications are strategic to a business whereas telecomm and network infrastructure are strategic to Information Technology. Therefore, for any IT implementation, it is very essential that it has a proper telecomm and network infrastructure in place. This in fact was the major bottleneck in implementing IT solutions in the northeast refineries. But now with a variety of network products available in the market and BSNL also offering a variety of telecomm services, this is no longer a constraint.

Technology utilization in a North-East Oil refinery:

Numaligarh Refinery is the newest of the four of the NE refineries. Since its inception, NRL has adopted the latest technologies in the areas of process plants, DCS, TAS and Information Technology. Its process plants are based on technology from USA, Denmark and France.

NRL has always remained forefront while absorbing latest technologies. NRL was the first Oil Company in India to implement full suite of ERP application. NRL adopted ERP solution in the year 1998. The communication network consists of state of the art LAN (Local Area Network), WAN (Wide Area Network) consisting of leased lines, V-SATs, Vo-IP (Voice Over IP), LAN and WAN. VPN (Virtual Private Network) is used as a secure access media for the information systems through Internet.

Recently NRL has implemented the full suite of SAP R/3 in 5 months. The end-to-end implementation duration of 5 months is a record time for such a large-scale implementation of SAP base modules and the industry solution IS-OIL.

Numaligarh Refinery has been able to achieve major benefits through the use of Information and Communication Technology.

- Software developed in the area of OPC (OLE for process control) has made process monitoring very easy. The important process parameters are monitored for greater plant availability. The in-house developed software makes available the plant aberrations to the user's desktops through mails.

- The OPC software has also helped NRL in the areas of pollution control. NRL is the first Oil refinery in India to display on-line the environment related parameters like NOX, SOX. These parameters can be properly monitored as any violation of the norms is brought to the notice of the relevant personnel through automatic mail.

- At the Marketing Terminal, state of the art Terminal Automation System (TAS) has been installed to affect the dispatches both through road and rail. The TAS solution was imported from M/s Alstom, France and adopted in the year 2000. The TAS is seamlessly integrated with the ERP System to enable operation and business processes work in tandem. Terminal automation system is administered by "LOAD RACK COMPUTER" (LRC) system based on Unix platform with Oracle as back-end. The Terminal Automation System and its interface with SAP R/3 has made it possible to adopt Engine on Load concept in railway dispatches. Because

of adoption of this concept the end-to-end loading time of railway rakes is very low. This has helped in the better utilization of the precious railway resource.

- With the adoption of new SAP R/3, the tight monitoring of fuel and losses has been made possible. Fuel and losses is a parameter, which has got a major bearing the profitability of Oil Company.

- Integrated IT approach has helped us in innovative treasury management and thereby reducing our interest burden.

- With the implementation of the SAP R/3 we expect to achieve major benefits in the areas of inventory optimization, plant availability, better internal and external customer satisfaction. Apart from usage in marketing endeavors, the implementation is expected to bring in major benefits to the organization in the various areas of operations besides ensuring optimum utilization of resources.

- There are many other areas of IT like ARS (Attendance Recording System), Laboratory Information System that have brought in major benefits to the organization. The ARS system, which is directly linked to SAP R/3, has brought in proper utilization of manpower.

Resource allocation for areas of IT has never been a constraint for NRL as the Return on Investment is very high for Information Technology projects.

Conclusion:

The North East Refineries including NRL have adopted major initiatives for using IT and Communication for enhancing productivity and profitability. There are many other areas in IT, which are yet to be explored by the North East refineries. As all the four refineries are in common software platform i.e. SAP R/3, development of a common pool of knowledge base will help in the areas of resource optimization. As all the oil refineries spend considerably in the areas of ICT (Information and Communication technology), there is ample of scope for local entrepreneurs making use of these opportunities. The adoptions of modern technologies in these areas will not only help the refineries but will also contribute towards development of NE region.

Source: Various articles & press releases.

By Roshmi Choudhury, Numaligarh, Assam

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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 (Lake Alfred, Florida), Prasenjit Chetia (Atlanta, Georgia), Babul Gogoi (New Delhi, India), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Co-Editor-In-Chief), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania), Rini Kakati (London, UK), Umesh Sharma (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Alpana Sarangapani (Co-Editor-In-Chief, Houston, Texas), , Nandini Bora Das (Centennial, Colorado) and Ram Sarangapani (Houston, Texas). The ASA Executive Committee is composed of Sanjib Bhuyan, President (Franklin Park, New Jersey), Utpal Brahma, Vice President (Burlington, New Jersey), Ganesh Bora, General Secretary (Lake Alfred, Florida), Probal Tabbildar (Kendall Park, New Jersey), Mantu Baishya (Omaha, Nebraska), Kedar Bhuyan (Mays Landing, New Jersey), and Sangeeta Duorah (California).

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