

Assam: Where Flood is an Annual Visitor



(Source- <https://www.newsgram.com/due-to-heavy-rainfall-in-barak-river-basin-central-water-commission-warns-assam-districts-of-impending-floods/>)

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Lead Essay

Assam: Where Flood is an Annual Visitor

Floods in Assam are such a recurring phenomena that it seems that the unfortunate number of deaths, villages and people affected by virtually don't merit much attention of both the Government, the media and of a significant portion of people living in rest of India. Surprisingly even the Prime Minister who visited Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar and Tamil Nadu during floods has not yet found the time to visit Assam, which has been struggling with the devastation caused by the ongoing floodsⁱ. With more than 25 lakh people affected and 79 dead due to floods in different parts of the state, as per the initial estimates of the State Government, they would need Rs.2939 crore to meet the costs of the damage caused. However, the fact that Assam has not got the same attention as the other flood affected states, means that the state government will have to wait for a ministerial report to come out before the Centre will release funds for flood rehabilitation, while Gujarat, which has also been facing devastating floods has already been allocated a sum of Rs. 500 crore from Prime Minister Modi on 25th July 2017.

'Plan' Neglect

While the state government awaits Central help post the inter-ministerial team's report, it is a matter of grave concern that the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on State Finances, 2016 shows that there has been a decrease in overall revenue expenditure due to the decrease in Rehabilitation Grants (Flood) and Gratuitous Relief (flood) and repairs and restoration of damaged Roads and Bridges due to floodsⁱⁱ. What is worse for the state is that not only has there been a reduction in expenditure on these core activities in the past, unlike the Twelfth Five Year Plan, the Modi Government's Think Tank, Niti Aayog's report "Three Years Action Agenda 2017-18 to 2019-20", is completely silent on strategies to solve the perennial problem of flooding in Assam and other North-eastern states. The Twelfth Five Year Plan, had clearly focused on the importance of the creation of the Northeast Water Resource Authority for flood moderation, therefore, considering the fact that every year, many people die and many others lose their property, it is extremely unfortunate that this problem is totally ignored by the Government in its strategy paper for the coming three years.

Similarly, while the BJP's Assam Vision Document 2016-2025ⁱⁱⁱ focused on the various problems due to floods in Assam, including protecting the livelihoods of inhabitants in flood affected areas, introducing a state-sponsored insurance and rehabilitation scheme for flood and erosion victims and updating and upgrading the state disaster management system etc., the present situation of the state, and the government's response to the fallout of the flood underlines the fact that many of the promises mentioned by them have remained unfulfilled.

Lack of Comprehensive Vision

According to the Water Resources Department, Government of Assam, there are no long-term measures that have been implemented so far to mitigate the flood and erosion problems in the state^{iv}. In the last 50 years, Assam has already lost 7% land to soil erosion in the state's 17 riverine districts^v. The largest river island of Majuli on the Brahmaputra is now reduced to 50% of its size^{vi}. Every year, on an average eight to ten people die in the city of Guwahati due to landslides and flash floods during the rainy season^{vii}. Despite having recurrent incidents of loss of life and property, protocols

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governing the management of floods in the state are surprisingly tardy. Against this backdrop it is important to highlight the flood management measures that have been taken in the state so far.

Earth Embankments as a solution

The best temporary flood management measures that have been used in the past are earth embankments. However, these embankments become counterproductive, when the Brahmaputra breaks its banks and the embankments come down like a house of cards. Over a period of time several crores have been spent on making embankments in the state.^{viii} In the first week of July, this year too, continuous rain and dam-induced flash floods brought extreme devastation in North Lakhimpur area of the state. Sudden rise in water level induced by the Ranganadi dam in Arunachal Pradesh caused devastation in different parts of the North Lakhimpur area^{ix}.

Recently, the Chief Minister of the state proposed a 5000 km road-cum-embankment as a solution to the problem of frequent flooding. It is also being pitched as a program to help rural people in terms of connectivity, economy, and tourism and also facilitate implementation of PMGSY to connect every village in the state^x. However, considering the past experiences of breached embankments, to what extent the new proposal will work as a solution to the age old problem of flood in the state is a question mark.

Role of Big dams in North-East

The significant cause of concern for the region is the big dams planned in the Northeast. During the BJP's election campaign in 2014, the prime minister had categorically assured that he would honour the region's sentiment against large dams. Surprisingly, soon after the elections, the central government gave its nod to the Dibang valley mega dam in Arunachal Pradesh^{xi} which once built, will sweep away approximately 4,500 hectares of forest area and displace indigenous people, particularly the Idu Mishmis Community.^{xii} According to Dr. Umesh C Tahbildar (2004)^{xiii}, a US-based senior engineer, no dam design is possible within Assam and considering the statistical probability of flooding due to dams, the government should certainly not take the risk of building large dams. He also mentioned that considering the long narrow sloping topography of the Assam valley, the area might be caught in a deluge in the event of a dam being breached. Given these concerns based on data given by experts, it is unfortunate that resistance to building dams on grounds of unacceptable risks is being seen as a move to hinder progress.

Proposal to Dredge Brahmaputra

Apart from the fact that Brahmaputra has collected much silt and there has been no large scale dredging in the river, it is also a dumping ground for all kinds of filth in the surrounding area. The present Government has proposed to dredge Brahmaputra at an estimated investment of Rs. 40,000 crore.^{xiv} But according to Dr. Tahbildar, the concept of dredging Brahmaputra does not seem practical^{xv}. According to him "no sooner the dredging is done to dig a channel of 35-metre width, as postulated, than the silt-laden flood water of the Brahmaputra will fill the dredged channel to force dredging again. It is going to be a daunting task, both financially and practically. Justification and more clarity from the authorities are needed before the project is launched."

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Increasing Population in Guwahati and Lack of Town Planning

Nonetheless, Guwahati, the gateway to North-East India has been suffering from flash floods and water logging. In many places of the city, even after an hour's rain, roads get waterlogged. Considering this problem as man-made, some eviction and demolition drive have been taken by the Government in the city since 2014. But in the absence of a long-term strategy, these demolition drives have been aggravating the problem in the city. Guwahati, as the capital city of Assam and the only metropolitan city in the entire North-Eastern region of India, there has been a rapid expansion in the city during the last few decades. The urban population growth rate of Guwahati city has also been higher than that of the urban population growth rate of India. The shifting of the capital from Shillong to Dispur in 1973, and its status of being the only developed city in the region, has drawn a large number of people searching for better livelihood. But there is no systematic long-term strategy to mitigate the demographic changes that have taken place over a period of time, which is a big gap in the city that needs pro-active thinking on the part of the town planners with genuine political will to address the issues that lead to frequent flooding.

The Way Forward

Governments have continued to take lots of *ex post facto measures* to address the fallout from this annual menace which destroys life in different parts of the state. This lack of diligence and preemptive planning on the part of policy makers, has meant that the problem continues and the extent of devastation and suffering increases every year. The present Government's effort to enhance connectivity of the North-East with rest of the country and the world, as a vision for the coming years is praiseworthy. But before connectivity the Government should prioritize the most fundamental problem of floods which has been troubling the state for years. Moreover, the expensive 'Namami Brahmaputra' initiative to celebrate the Brahmaputra seems to be wasteful if it is not going to solve the problem of flooding. The flood prone area of Assam is four times of that of the country as a whole (10.2%) in percentage term. According to the Water Resources Department, Government of Assam, the flood prone area of the state is 31.05 Lakh hectares, which is about 39.58% of the total land area of Assam. As Dr. Tahbildar mentioned "Assam can prosper even without big dams. Its hydro potential in a limited way can still be exploited without undue risk by building mini-hydro plants. It can build thermal plants, solar plants, wind power plants etc. Why not be a little more creative than go for something that may turn tragic? Assam is not held back in progress for lack of big dams. It is held back by a multitude of other problems." The state government needs to ensure it takes these issues into consideration as it plans to minimize the devastation caused by floods in this region.

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Headlines

India's jobless growth: Employment exchanges struggle to place job-seekers

(The Wire, July 26, 2017)

The unemployment figures released by the Ministry of Labour and Employment have revealed that the national average of placements by employment exchanges was a mere 0.57%. Labour Minister Dattatreya claimed that the national unemployment rate stands at 1% and more than 4 crore people are registered with employment exchanges. The Government plans to initiate career counselling centres across the country.

Read more: <https://thewire.in/161866/india-unemployment-jobs/>

Date Accessed: 28.07.2017

Economy

Seeing red: why is tomato on fire?

(The Indian Express, July 28, 2017)

A perfect storm of price rise in the markets has left both the producers and consumers puzzled, worried and angry. Though the consumers began to experience its impact towards the end of June, the farmers saw red for the past seven months or so. Largely because of a combination of the after effects of demonetization adding to the late kharif crop that has led to the low tomato prices through the winter.

According to the technical manager (vegetables) at Monsanto India, "tomato plantings in the current kharif season have so far been 35-40 per cent lower relative to last year. While high prices could still induce plantings, the fact is the nursery sowing time is over in many areas. If the autumn/ late kharif tomato crop, too, turns out lower, we may not see any significant cooling of prices in the immediate period".

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/seeing-red-why-is-tomato-on-fire-4770448/>

Date Accessed: 28.07.2017

Governance & Development

DEVELOPMENT

Niti Aayog CEO for govt exit from infra projects, schools and jails

(India Today, July 26, 2017)

As per the statement shared by Amitabh Kant, CEO Niti Aayog, the government needs to look into new areas of PPP Model taking into account its failure in handling big projects and realizing the potential of the Private Players in becoming the real game changers in the Indian Economy by transferring some major projects from the government to the private sector. At the same time, he also talks the insensitive behaviour presented by the private investors in the past which might lead to suffering of the Indian economy.

Read More:

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/niti-aayog-ceo-for-govt-exit-from-infra-projs-schools-jails/1/1011227.html>

Date Accessed: 27.07.2017

GOVERNMENT

War veterans to join BJP's nationalism drive, to be launched on Quit India Movement's 75th anniversary

(India Today, July 27, 2017)

The youth wing of the BJP party has reached out to war veterans to instil a sense of nationalism amongst the youth. War veterans will hand over national flags to the BJP presidents in all the states and Union Territories to spread the message of nationalism and raise awareness about India's past and the sacrifices made by the armed forces.

Read more: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bjp-nationalism-drive-veterans-quit-india-movement/1/1011972.html>

Date Accessed: 27. 07.2017

EDUCATION

Remove Riots, English and Urdu Words, and Praise of Mughals from Textbooks: Dinanath Batra

(The Wire, July 24, 2017)

The RSS-affiliated Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas has submitted to the National Council for Education and Research Training (NCERT) recommendations to remove, among other things, a poem by Pash; a couplet by Ghalib; the thoughts of Tagore; the mention of the BJP as a 'Hindu' party; and a line saying "nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat in 2002." Atul Kothari, secretary of the Nyas, has termed these sections as "baseless" and "biased" and questions how one can "inspire" children "by teaching them about riots."

Read more: <https://thewire.in/160977/dinanath-batra-textbooks-ncert/>

Date Accessed: 28.7.2017

HEALTH

Poor spend a fortune on even basic healthcare

(Times of India, July 25, 2017)

A recent study conducted by AIIMS highlights how the increased amount of spending in basic healthcare is a major issue of concern keeping in mind the financial and the social status of the middle and lower class people who are unable to enjoy the basic services and treatment provided by public and private hospitals as they are proving to be unaffordable for them.

Read More:

<http://epaperbeta.timesofindia.com/Article.aspx?eid=31808&articlexml=Poor-spend-a-fortune-on-even-basic-healthcare-25072017008011>

Date Accessed: 26.07.2017

Governance & Development

TRANSPORT

Eight national waterways will be unveiled soon

(The Hindu, July 27, 2017)

32 national waterways have been considered technically feasible and 7 waterways have already been approved in an attempt to expand and modernise major ports and keep them abreast with the growing trade requirements. The government has stated that these measures have increased the aggregate cargo handling capacity from 696.53 million tonnes per annum to 1065.83 million tonnes per annum between 2012-2017.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/gadkari-reveals-national-waterways-plan/article19370101.ece>

Date Accessed: 27.07.2017

LAW AND JUSTICE

Finally compensation for women in Odisha's village of widows

(The Hindu, July 24, 2017)

The labour court of Keonjhar district has awarded 46 lakhs as compensation to widows of employees of a pyrophyllite grinding unit in Madarangajodi who died of occupational lung disease caused by constant exposure to silica. The case was referred to the labour court by the NHRC but was expedited by a social activist working in the region.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/finally-compensation-for-women-in-odishas-village-of-widows/article19339339.ece>

Date Accessed: 27.07.2017

There is a fundamental right to privacy but it is a wholly qualified right: Centre to SC

(Indian Express, July 27, 2017)

In the matter of violation of right to privacy in the Aadhar case in the Supreme Court, the centre stated that right to privacy is not an absolute or homogenous right but a qualified and multi faceted one that is subject to reasonable restrictions by the government. The petitioners however have argued that privacy is embedded in all process of human life and liberty. Four non BJP states have moved the court to seek permission to intervene in the hearing. This issue is one of the matters that was brought up challenging the Aadhar scheme.

Read more: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/there-is-a-fundamental-right-to-privacy-centre-to-sc-aadhaar/>

Date Accessed: 27.07.2017

Juveniles lock up warden, escape from reform home.

(Times of India, July 27, 2017)

On Monday, seven juveniles escaped from their reform home in Alipur after beating up the warden and locking him up. The police was called only after six hours after failing to locate the escapees. This is the second case coming ahead within a week's time after three girls jumped from the boundary walls of the shelter home. It appears that the boys had been planning the escape for the past one week. Last year, several cases were reported by Asian Centre for Human Rights subject to sexual assault and cruel behaviour against kids below under 18 years in government run juvenile justice homes.

Read more:

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/juveniles-lock-up-warden-escape-from-reform-home/articleshow/59781042.cms>

Date Accessed: 27.07.2017

Society

DISABLED

‘Ensure Jobs for Disabled Teachers’

(The Hindu, July 26, 2017)

The Tamil Nadu Association for the Rights of All Types of Differently Abled and Caregivers, a rights organisation, has written to K. Palaniswami, claiming that 350 teachers with disabilities have been jobless for the last four years. As the organisation has argued, this is the case even when the teachers have cleared the Teachers Eligibility Test along with the special test for the disabled.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/ensure-jobs-for-disabled-teachers/article19362389.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.7.2017

SOCIAL CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

London: Indian Muslim girl raped, murdered by 'kin' over Arab boyfriend

(DNA, July 26, 2017)

A dead body of a teenage Indian Muslim girl was found in London who, along with a friend were first raped and murdered by two of her Arab Muslim boyfriend's family members. Although the friend managed to escape, and report the incident to the police. The reason behind the act is stated to be the disapproval from boy's family against their alleged relationship since the girl was of an Indian origin that has led to this act.

Read More:

<http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-london-indian-muslim-girl-raped-murderd-by-for-being-in-a-relationship-with-Arab-boy-2514576>

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India and World

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India's Friendly Ties with Israel could Interfere with Present Conflict in Jerusalem: Envoy

(Kallol Bhattacharjee, *The Hindu*, July 26, 2017)

The Palestinian ambassador to India, Adnan Abu Al Hija, raised concerns over the growing bonhomie between India and Israel, expecting from the former a “positive” role towards the Palestinian cause. The statement comes amidst the mounting tensions in East Jerusalem’s Old City after the al-Aqsa Mosque compound was closed by Israel, a step last taken in 1969.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-friendly-ties-with-israel-could-interfere-with-present-conflict-in-jerusalem-envoy/article19363548.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.7.2017

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

India and US, Spot the Difference

(Zoya Hasan & Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Indian Express*, July 24, 2017)

Putting the phenomena of Trump and Modi in a comparative perspective, the article draws attention to the common features both leaders exemplify: indulgence with corporate elites, dislike of intellectualism, abhorrence of criticism, etc. Regardless of practicing different brands of populism, the “narcissist” and the “ideologue” continue to encroach upon the democratic fabrics of their respective countries.

Read more: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/donald-trump-narendra-modi-demonetisation-education-radical-islam-employment-beef-lynching-cow-slaughter-love-jihad-india-us-spot-the-difference-4763976/>

Date Accessed: 28.7.2017

The Communicator: Editorial

(*The Indian Express*, July 26, 2017)

Professor Yash Pal contributed to the Indian citizenry not only the innovations of science, but also the popularisation thereof – through a touch of personal engagement, as opposed to mere bureaucratic promotion. His death marks the end of an era, one which will be remembered for his focus on reforms in higher education as much as his contributions to the field of cosmic-rays.

Read more: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/the-communicator-professor-yash-pal-cosmic-rays-4767042/>

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People should get used to seeing female bikers on the road

(*Times of India*, July 24, 2017)

IP College student and Gurugram resident, Riya Yadav becomes the youngest female to ride Khardung La

Read More:

<http://epaperbeta.timesofindia.com//Article.aspx?eid=31808&articlexml=People-should-get-used-to-seeing-female-bikers-24072017106009&Mode=1>

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