

## Assam

State (pop., 2008 est.: 29,929,000), northeastern India.




Name : Shri Janaki Ballav Patnaik  
Date of Birth : January 3, 1927  
Governor of Assam

### Chief Minister of Assam



Name : Shri. Tarun Gogoi  
Father's Name : Late Dr. Kamaleswar Gogoi  
Date of Birth : 01/04/1936

### The Cabinet Ministers of Assam (in alphabetical order):

<b>AJANTA NEOG</b>	
Department: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT Party: INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS	

<b>AKON BORA</b>	

Department: SOCIAL WELFARE, JAIL  
Party: INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS



**BHARAT CHANDRA NARAH**

Department: CULTURAL AFFAIRS, CO-OPERATION,  
PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS DEPTT, SPORTS & YOUTH WELFARE  
Party: INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS



**BHUMIDHAR BARMAN**

Department: REVENUE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT,  
IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSAM ACCORD, ADMINISTRATIVE  
REFORMS & TRAINING  
Party: INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS



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**GAUTAM BORA**

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### **NURZAMAL SARKAR**

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**Establishment:** 15th of August 1947 **Legislature (seats):** Unicameral (126) **Capital:** Dispur **Largest city:** Guwahati **Districts:** 27 **Blocks :** 219 (2001 census) **Panchayats :** 2489 (2001 census) **Villages :** 26312 (2001 census) **Official language(s):** Assamese, Bodo, Karbi

**Geographical Data**

**Density:** 340/km<sup>2</sup> **Area:** 78,438 km<sup>2</sup> **State Boundaries:**

**East** : Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur

**West** : West Bengal and Meghalaya

**North** : Arunachal Pradesh

**South** : Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura

**International Boundary:**

**North** : Bhutan

**West** : Bangladesh

**Geographic Coordinates:**

**Latitude** : 24° to 28° North

**Longitude** : 90° to 96° East

**Time zone:** IST **Forest Cover:** 35.48 %

### Statistical Data

#### Population

**(2001):**

26,655,528

**Literacy rate:**

64.28% (2001

census) **Sex**

**Ratio:** 1000 :

965 **National**

**parks:** 5

Manas

Dibru

Saikhowa

Nameri

Orang

#### Wildlife

**Sanctuaries:** Pobitora

18

Sonai Rupai

Bura-Chapori

Laokhowa

Pobha or Milroy

Chakrashila

Bornadi

Garampani

Gibbon

Nambor

East Karbi Anglong

Karbi Anglong

Pani Dihing

Deeoporbeel

Bordoibum Beelmukh

Bherjan-Borajan-Padumoni

Morat Longri

Amchang

**Refineries:**

- 4            Digboi  
              Noonmati  
              Dhaligaon near Bongaigaon  
              Numaligarh

With an area of 30,285 sq mi (78,438 sq km), Assam borders the countries of Bhutan and Bangladesh and the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and West Bengal; its capital is Dispur. A strong independent kingdom was founded there in the 13th century by invaders from Myanmar (Burma) and China; it reached its zenith in the early 18th century. The British took control in the early 19th century. In the division of India (1947), Assam lost some territory to Pakistan. Beginning in the 1960s, four new states—Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh—were created from land within Assam. The Brahmaputra River valley is its dominant physical feature. The population consists of peoples of Indo-Iranian and Asian descent; the most widely spoken language is Assamese.

It is located in the northeastern part of the country and is bounded to the north by the kingdom of Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh, to the east by the states of Nagaland and Manipur, to the south by the states of Mizoram and Tripura, and to the west by Bangladesh and the states of Meghalaya and West Bengal. The name Assam is derived from the word *asama*, meaning “peerless” in the now extinct Ahom language. The neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya were once part of Assam. The capital, formerly Shillong (now the capital of Meghalaya), was shifted to Dispur, a suburb of Guwahati, in 1972. Area 30,285 square miles (78,438 square km). Pop. (2008 est.) 29,929,000.

### Land

A land of plains and river valleys, Assam has three principal physical regions—the Brahmaputra River valley in the north, the Barak River (upper Surma River) valley in the south, and the hilly region between Meghalaya (to the west) and Nagaland and Manipur (to the east) in the south-central part of the state. Of these regions, the Brahmaputra River valley is the largest. According to Hindu mythology, the Brahmaputra rises as the son of the god Brahma from a sacred pool known as the Brahmakund, in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh. The river enters Assam near Sadiya in the extreme northeast and runs westward through the length of Assam for nearly 450 miles (725 km) before turning south to enter the plains of Bangladesh. Studded with low, isolated hills and ridges that rise abruptly from the plain, the valley is rarely more than 50 miles (80 km) wide and is surrounded on all sides, except on the west, by mountains. Numerous streams and rivulets that flow from the neighbouring hills empty into the Brahmaputra. Although only a small portion of the Barak River valley lies within Assam’s borders, it nevertheless forms an extensive lowland area that is important for agriculture in the state’s southern region. Geologically, the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys lie on ancient alluvial sediments, which themselves cover a variety of deposits from the Neogene and Paleogene periods (i.e., some 2.6 to 65 million years old). Among these deposits are hard sandstone, soft and loose sand, conglomerates, coal seams, shales, sandy clays, and limestone.

The south-central hills between Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur include the North Cachar Hills and form part of the Meghalaya Plateau, which may have been an extension of Gondwana (an ancient

landmass in the Southern Hemisphere that once grouped together South America, Africa, Australia, and part of the Indian subcontinent). Isolated from the main plateau by the embayments of the Kepili River, this upland displays a rugged topography. It generally has a northerly slope, with average elevations ranging from about 1,500 feet (450 metres) to about 3,300 feet (1,000 metres).

Roughly between the Brahmaputra valley and the south-central hill region are the northern ranges, which extend northeastward from Dabaka (east of Dispur) to Bokakhat in east-central Assam. The Rengma Hills to the south of the ridge average about 3,000 feet (900 metres). Their most prominent peak is Chenghehishon (4,460 feet [1,360 metres]).

Earthquakes are common in Assam. Among the most severe are those recorded in 1897, with the Shillong Plateau as the epicentre; in 1930, with Dhuburi as the epicentre; and in 1950, with Zayu (Rima) in Tibet at the Arunachal Pradesh border as the epicentre. The 1950 earthquake is considered one of the most disastrous in South Asia's history. It created heavy landslides that blocked the courses of many hill streams. The floods that followed the bursting of these earthquake-generated dams caused more loss of life and property than the earthquake itself.

### **Climate**

Average temperatures in Assam range from highs in the upper 90s F (about 36 °C) in August to lows in the mid-40s F (about 7 °C) in January. The cool season generally lasts from October to February and is marked by fogs and brief showers. The state escapes the normal Indian hot, dry season. Although some rain occurs from March through May, the heaviest precipitation comes with the southwest monsoon, which arrives in June, stays through September, and often causes widespread and destructive flooding. Annual rainfall in Assam is not only the highest in the country but also ranks among the highest in the world; its annual average varies from about 70 inches (1,800 mm) in the west to more than 120 inches (3,000 mm) in the east.

### **Population composition**

The people of the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys are mainly of Indo-Iranian ancestry. By the time of their arrival in the region, however, the local Aryan peoples had become intermixed with Asiatic peoples. The Ahom people, who arrived in the region from mainland Southeast Asia during the 13th century, ultimately stem from Yunnan province of southern China. A significant minority of the population consists of rural indigenous peoples who fall outside the Indian caste system; as such, they are officially designated as Scheduled Tribes. The Boro constitute the largest of these groups. Most of the Scheduled Tribes live in the south-central hill region and are of Asiatic descent.

Assamese, an Indo-Aryan language, is the official and principal language of the state, and an unbroken record of Assamese literary history is traceable from the 14th century. Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken by most of the Scheduled Tribes, although the Khasi people speak an Austroasiatic tongue; some groups have adopted Assamese as their first language. The people in the Barak valley in southern Assam mostly speak Bengali (also called Bangla), which, like Assamese, is an Indo-Aryan language.

About two-thirds of the Assamese are Hindus, the majority of whom follow Vaishnavism, which venerates the deity Vishnu. Roughly one-fourth of the population practices Islam, most Muslims being settlers from Bangladesh or converts from the lower strata of Hindu society. Although many of the

Scheduled Tribes have converted to Christianity, some continue to practice traditional local religions; the Mikir and Kachari peoples are mostly Hindus.

### **Settlement patterns and demographic trends**

The great majority of Assam's people live in rural areas. The distribution of population is uneven, however, reflecting the hilly terrain, the number of rivers, the forests, the small amount of cultivable land, and the lack of industrialization. The agricultural zone of the Barak River valley supports relatively dense settlement.

Since the late 20th century, population growth has been unusually rapid, mostly due to immigration into Assam of tea garden labourers, herders from Nepal, Muslims from West Bengal, and refugees from Bangladesh. Increasing population in the state's urban areas reflects not only the growth of industries and the expansion of commercial activity but also the tendency of many of the immigrants—particularly those from Bangladesh—to live near towns. In the early 21st century Guwahati had the most significant urban population.

### **Agriculture, forestry, and fishing**

Agriculture is of basic importance to Assam, engaging about half of the total working population and generating roughly one-third of the state's gross product. Rice accounts for more than two-thirds of the sown area. Tea and jute, widely cultivated in the Brahmaputra valley, are important foreign-exchange earners. Assam grows a large portion of the country's tea. Other crops include oilseeds, pulses (legumes, such as peas, beans, or lentils), corn (maize), sugarcane, rape (an oil-yielding plant, the leaves of which are used for fodder), mustard, potatoes, and fruits. Through improved cultivation methods, some farms yield more than one crop per year.

Livestock and dairy farming have shown moderate growth since the late 20th century, largely promoted by the government. Nevertheless, these activities remain but small contributors to the state's economy. Sericulture (raising of silk worms), on the other hand, is well established; Assam is a major producer of silk.

In the forestry sector, sal and other tropical hardwoods are highly valued. Depletion of forest resources and increased erosion, however, have led the government to impose logging bans and enact other legislation to reestablish the country's woodlands. Aside from timber, important forest products include bamboo, firewood, and lac (the source of shellac).

Aquaculture has been a major focus of agricultural development since the mid-1990s, and yields have increased. Overall yield, however, has continued to fall short of domestic demand.

### **Resources and power**

Minerals exploited commercially in the state include petroleum, coal, natural gas, and limestone. Since the late 19th century, extensive oil reserves have been discovered in northeastern Assam; the refinery at Digboi, built in 1901, was the first in South Asia. Later, refineries were established in Guwahati and Nunmati. Coal—used locally by the railways, tea estates, and steamships—also is found in northeastern

and south-central Assam. Liquefied natural gas is produced in the northeast, and limestone is quarried in the Mikir Hills.

Assam's energy is provided by thermal and hydroelectric plants. Less than half of the state's energy is generated locally, however. A significant portion of Assam's power is purchased from the national government, private sources, and, to a much lesser extent, other state governments.

### **Manufacturing**

Development of the manufacturing sector has been inhibited by the state's isolation from the rest of India, by an underdeveloped transport system, by a small local market, and by the lack of sufficient capital. Small-scale industrial enterprises produce (or process) fertilizer, jute, paper, silk and textiles, sugar, chemicals, electronics, and cement. Sawmills and plywood and match factories make use of timber resources.

### **Transportation**

Historically, geography has inhibited the growth of efficient transport systems, and underdeveloped transport and communication systems have in turn hindered economic development in Assam. The Brahmaputra, for example, long has been a major barrier to integrating the transportation networks lying north and south of the river. The situation improved, however, with the opening of several rail and road bridges since the late 20th century.

With Assam's abundance of waterways, inland water transport is important. The Brahmaputra and Barak (Surma) rivers are the state's primary water channels. Numerous passenger ferries operate between various points on the Brahmaputra, and freight service is offered between Guwahati and Kolkata, West Bengal.

There is considerable air traffic between Assam and Kolkata. Among the towns with air service are Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, and Silchar. The Guwahati airport offers international service.

### **Constitutional framework**

Like most other Indian states, Assam has a governmental structure that is defined by the national constitution of 1950. The governor, who is the head of state, is appointed by the president of India and is assisted by a popularly elected unicameral legislature and a Council of Ministers. The state of Assam comprises about two dozen districts, each of which is administered by a deputy commissioner. Districts are subdivided at several levels, with the village as the smallest administrative unit.

The high court at Guwahati has jurisdiction not only over the state of Assam but also over the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh through outlying benches. The chief justice and all other high court justices are appointed by India's president. Permanent judges serve until they are a maximum of 62 years old. Short-term judges are appointed to help with periodic backlogs. Lower courts include district courts, sessions courts, and magistrate's courts.

## Education and welfare

Education, which is free up to the secondary level, is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 12. Government universities are located in the state's larger cities, including Guwahati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, and Silchar. Assam also has specialized colleges in the arts, sciences, commerce, law, and medicine. Welfare-extension projects, operating through dozens of centres, provide recreational and cultural facilities for women and children.

## Cultural life

The cultural life of Assam is interwoven with the activities of a number of cultural institutions and religious centres, such as the *satra* (seat of a religious head known as the *satradhikar*) and *namghar* (prayer hall). *Satras* in Assam have been looking after the religious and social well-being of the Hindu population since the 15th century. The Assamese people observe all the pan-Indian religious festivals, but their most important celebrations are the three Bihu festivals. Originally agricultural festivals, these are observed with great enthusiasm irrespective of caste, creed, and religious affinity.

The Bohag Bihu, celebrated in the spring (usually mid-April), marks the commencement of the new year (first day of the Bohag or Baishakh month). Also known as Rangoli Bihu (from *rang*, meaning merrymaking and fun), it is accompanied by much dancing and singing. The Magh Bihu, celebrated in mid-January (in the month of Magh), is a harvest festival. Known also as Bhogali Bihu (from *bhog*, meaning enjoyment and feasting), it is a time of community feasts and bonfires. The third Bihu festival, the Kati Bihu (in mid-October or November), is also called the Kangali Bihu (from *kangali*, meaning poor), because by this time of year the house of an ordinary family is without food grains, as the stock is usually consumed before the next harvest.

Weaving is another important aspect of the cultural life of the people of Assam, particularly of the women. Nearly every Assamese household, irrespective of caste, creed, and social status, has at least one loom, and most women are expected to be skilled in producing fine silk and cotton cloths.

## History

In the earliest recorded times, Assam was part of Kamarupa, a state that had its capital at Pragjyotishapura (now Guwahati). Ancient Kamarupa included roughly the Brahmaputra River valley, Bhutan, the Rangpur region (now in Bangladesh), and Koch Bihar, in West Bengal. King Narakasura and his son Bhagadatta were famous rulers of Kamarupa in the *Mahabharata* period (roughly 400 bce to 200 ce). A Chinese traveler, Xuanzang, left a vivid account of the country and its people about 640 ce. Although information about the following centuries is meagre, clay seals and inscriptions on copper plates and stone that date from the 7th to the mid-12th century indicate that the inhabitants of the region attained considerable power and a fair degree of social, economic, and technological development. The copper plates further provide clues as to the locations of important ancient settlements and the routes connecting them.

Assam was ruled by various dynasties—the Pala, Koch, Kachari, and Chutiya—and there was constant warfare among the princes until the coming of the Ahom people in the 13th century. The Ahom crossed the Patkai Range from Myanmar (Burma) and conquered the local chieftains of the upper Assam plain. In the 15th century the Ahom, who gave their name to the region, were the dominant power in upper

Assam. Two centuries later they defeated the Koch, Kachari, and other local rulers to gain control of lower Assam up to Goalpara. Ahom power and prosperity reached a zenith during the rule of King Rudra Singh (reigned 1696–1714), before the kingdom was occupied by warriors from Myanmar in the late 18th century.

Conflict among the princes gradually weakened the central administration until 1786, when the ruling prince, Gaurinath Singh, sought aid from Calcutta (Kolkata), which by that time had become the capital of British India. A British army officer, sent by the British governor-general in India, restored peace and subsequently was recalled, in spite of the protests of the Ahom king. Internal strife then caused one crisis after another until, in 1817, forces from Myanmar entered Assam in response to the appeal of a rebellious governor and ravaged the area.

The British, whose interests were threatened by these developments, ultimately drove out the invaders, and, after the Treaty of Yandabo was concluded with Myanmar in 1826, Assam became a part of British India. A British agent, representing the governor-general, was appointed to administer Assam, and in 1838 the area was incorporated into British-administered Bengal. By 1842 the whole of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam had come under British rule. A separate province of Assam (administered by a chief commissioner) was created in 1874 with its capital at Shillong. In 1905 Bengal was partitioned, and Assam was amalgamated with eastern Bengal; this created such resentment, however, that in 1912 Bengal was reunited, and Assam was once more made a separate province. During World War II, Assam was a major supply route for Allied forces operating in Burma. Several battles fought in the area in 1944 (e.g., at Bishenpur in Manipur and Kohima in Nagaland) were decisive in halting the Japanese advance into India.

With the partition and independence of India in 1947, the district of Sylhet (excluding the Karimganj subdivision) was ceded to Pakistan (the eastern portion of which later became Bangladesh). Assam became a constituent state of India in 1950. In 1961 and 1962 Chinese armed forces, disputing the McMahon Line as the boundary between India and Tibet, occupied part of the North East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh but then part of Assam). In December 1962, however, they voluntarily withdrew to Tibet.

Since the early 1960s Assam has lost much territory to new states emerging from within its borders. In 1963 the Naga Hills district became the 16th state of India under the name of Nagaland. Part of Tuensang, a former territory of the North East Frontier Agency, was also added to Nagaland. In 1970, in response to the demands of the tribal peoples of the Meghalaya Plateau, the districts embracing the Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, and Garo Hills were formed into an autonomous state within Assam; in 1972 it became a separate state under the name of Meghalaya. Also in 1972 Arunachal Pradesh (the North East Frontier Agency) and Mizoram (from the Mizo Hills in the south) were separated from Assam as union territories; both became states in 1986.

Despite the separation of these ethnic-based states, communal tensions and violence have remained a problem in Assam. In the early 1980s, resentment among the Assamese against “foreigners,” mostly immigrants from Bangladesh, led to widespread violence and considerable loss of life. Subsequently, disaffected Boro tribesmen (in Assam and Meghalaya) agitated for an autonomous state. The militant United Liberation Front of Assam waged a vigorous guerrilla campaign for the outright secession of Assam from India throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century.

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