

# Urban Chronicles

## A Monthly Newsletter

By Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of Assam

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Government of Assam

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Aerial view of Adabari Park in Guwahati City

## FOREWORD

*From the  
Hon'ble Minister's  
Desk*



Dear Readers,

I am delighted to introduce the inaugural edition of the Department of Housing & Urban Affairs (DoHUA) newsletter. This publication is a reflection of our commitment to keeping you informed about the exciting projects, forward-thinking initiatives, and key developments shaping the urban landscape around us.

As cities evolve, our department continues to focus on creating spaces that are sustainable, inclusive, and forward-looking. This newsletter will not only provide updates on our progress but also offer insights into the challenges and gaps in urban planning, smart city initiatives and infrastructure development.

Through this platform, we aim to engage more deeply with our stakeholders and the community, highlighting both the work being done and the people behind it. I encourage you to explore the content and share your thoughts with us as we work together to build better, more vibrant cities.

Thank you for your continued interest and support in the endeavours that DoHUA has undertaken.

*Ashok Singhal*

**Ashok Singhal**

Minister, Department of Housing & Urban Affairs, Irrigation

## DoHUA: Pioneering Urban Governance

**U**rban areas are the vibrant hearts of our society, where cultures converge, economies thrive, and innovation flourishes. As the custodians of these dynamic environments, the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of our towns and cities. This booklet aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the department's functions, initiatives, and impact on urban development.

In the pages that follow, readers will discover how the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs is dedicated to fostering sustainable growth, enhancing

the quality of life for residents, and creating inclusive, resilient communities. The department emphasizes strategic urban planning, affordable housing, and environmental conservation to effectively address the complexities and prospects of urban expansion.

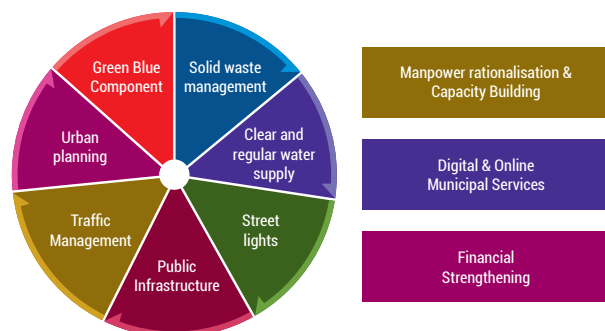
This newsletter acts as an informative resource and an invitation to engage with the pertinent work of urban development. It aims to inspire and enhance our understanding of the crucial role that urban policy making and governance play in shaping the cities of tomorrow while enhancing the life of the present urban condition.

### Initiative of the Month

#### 10 CITIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

**T**he Indian Government recognizes 'Cities as Engines of Growth', acknowledging urbanization as being central to development. India is shifting from rural to urban dominance, with 31% of India's population living in urban areas according to the 2011 Census. Assam reflects this trend, with 104 Municipalities and Guwahati as its largest urban centre.

The "10 Cities Development Programme: Doh Shaher – Ek Rupayan" led by DoHUA, received the cabinet nod on 10th February 2024. It aims to unify and streamline urban development across ten select cities, namely, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Nagaon, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, North Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Tinsukia, Jorhat, and Tezpur by focusing on sustainable, inclusive growth through coordinated planning and investment in infrastructure development across various aspects of urban development. It focuses on strengthening Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) through ten key components as shown below:



DoHUA has partnered with Janaagraha, a leading organization in the Urban Space for the program through a Memorandum of Understanding.

At the outset, brainstorming sessions with working groups within the Department on components like water, waste management and infrastructure were held. At the city level, following steps have taken place:

- Janaagraha team with DoHUA representatives have visited each city for stakeholder engagement.
- Thereafter, draft dossiers of the inputs obtained were shared with relevant stakeholders, including municipal councils, to identify gaps and propose a sustainable project plan suited to each city's context.
- Next, the gap analysis for all the cities was done.
- The next phase on participatory action planning began with the first city council meeting on 12th November at Sivasagar.



First City Council Meeting held at Sivasagar



## DoHUA's Lighthouse Projects

### North Lakhimpur's Urban Forest Initiative: A Sustainable Transformation

Under DoHUA's '10 Cities Development Programme', the North Lakhimpur Urban Forest represents an ambitious endeavor to convert a 40-year-old landfill into an ecological asset. Designed in partnership with Jana Urban Space, this 5.5-acre project aims to rejuvenate the landscape, foster biodiversity, and redefine the local identity of the region. Strategically situated 250 meters from NT Road and near key transport nodes, the Urban Forest will be cultivated using the Miyawaki method, featuring indigenous trees, recreational spaces and public amenities. The trees will be planted in high, medium, and low-density zones, blending ecology with public use. Walking and cycling trails will incorporate lighting and signage, while recycled materials will be used for park installations, emphasizing the "waste to

wonder" ethos. The initiative exemplifies how urban forests can elevate living standards while tackling environmental concerns, serving as a blueprint for sustainable urban renewal.



Conceptual visualisation of Proposed Urban Forest using the Miyawaki method in North Lakhimpur

### Transforming Sivasagar Tank: A Vision for Heritage Development

DoHUA in collaboration with Jana Urban Space, has unveiled a revitalization plan for the historic 18th-century Sivasagar Tank, which is a 60ft deep tank built by the Ahoms, spanning 120 acres in the city's heart. As part of the '10 Cities Development Programme', this lighthouse project focuses on urban infrastructure development while preserving heritage, promoting sustainability and enhancing aesthetic appeal. Key interventions include:

#### Road and Footpath Redevelopment:

- Redesigning a 3.9 km stretch around the tank and adjoining roads.



Existing stretch behind Shiva Dol

- Upgraded infrastructure for safer, visually cohesive pedestrian and vehicular zones.
- Utility Modernization and Lighting

#### Heritage and Beautification:

- Landscaping with historical elements, seating, wayfinding signage, and aesthetic repairs.
- Redesign of facades inspired by Ahom architecture.
- This initiative aspires to balance Sivasagar's historical charm with modern urban needs, reinforcing its cultural and civic significance.



Proposed intervention behind Shiva Dol

## Buzz from the ULBs

### Eco-Friendly Traditions: Nalbari Municipal Board and GREEN GLOBE led Sustainable Idol Immersion

The Nalbari Municipal Board this year, in collaboration with GREEN GLOBE an NGO, has taken an impactful step towards making the annual Durga Puja idol immersion ceremony environmentally sustainable.

Recognizing the potential harm caused by non-biodegradable materials entering the river, GREEN GLOBE's team engaged with attendees to raise awareness about the environmental impact of these practices. Volunteers educated the public on the dangers of disposing of harmful materials in water bodies, underscoring the importance of sustainable rituals.

Beyond awareness, the NGO personnel took proactive measures to carefully segregate materials to prevent any non-biodegradable waste from

polluting the river. This hands-on approach ensured that no harmful substances entered the water, making this year's immersion ceremony both meaningful and environmentally sustainable.



*Segregation of non-biodegradable waste by Green Globe NGO before idol immersion*

### CTU Transformation in Digboi and Chapakhowa ULB: Towards Cleaner Public Spaces

Cleanliness Target Units (CTUs) are projects under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) that aim to transform dirty spots in cities into public facilities. The transformation of Cleanliness Target Units (CTUs) in Digboi and Chapakhowa showcase innovative efforts to clean public spaces, previously used for garbage dumping.

In Digboi, regular awareness campaigns were held around the town involving NCC cadets from local colleges, however waste disposal issues continued around the main bus stand. Persistent efforts led to the transformation of the CTU into a selfie point at the public bus stand, using a cost-effective waste-to-art approach.



*Transformation of a CTU at Digboi Town under the 'Swachta Hi Sewa' Mission*



*Transformation of a CTU in Chapakhowa town under the 'Swachta Hi Sewa' Mission*

In Chapakhowa, several initiatives have been introduced, including public seating to encourage community engagement, a waste-to-art display that promotes recycling, and decorative elements featuring traditional Assamese Dhol symbols. A wall painting depicting a unique stork from the Sadiya region emphasizes its ecological importance, while efforts are underway to establish a local book stand to promote community reading and creative use of the space which was previously a dumpsite.



## Voices from the First Mile

### Inclusive Urban Living: A tale of woman empowerment from the grassroots

**K**hao Gali at North Lakhimpur: The North Lakhimpur Municipal Board inaugurated the "Lakhimpur Khadya Khetra: Khao Gali" which is a designated street food vending area under the North Lakhimpur Municipal Board as part of the closing ceremony for 'Swachhata Hi Sewa' campaign.

**Ranjita Morang (38) (Tea Stall Vendor at Khao Gali, N.Lakhimpur):**

"The tea stall has become a beacon of hope for my family during challenging financial times. Finally, I can contribute to our household, supporting my husband and providing for my two young children. Previously, we struggled financially, relying solely on my husband's income from driving a passenger vehicle, which was often unstable. With a revolving fund of ₹25,000 from my Self-Help Group (SHG), I opened this tea stall on Khao Gali street, where I sell tea, pitha, laru, and other snacks. The response has been encouraging, and I am grateful for the support from municipal officials, including Executive officer Sir. They have guided me and other vendors through the entire process, even when we lacked the vision or expertise to set up a stall.

Their assistance has been invaluable, particularly in teaching us the importance of maintaining a clean and hygienic environment. This journey has not only empowered me financially but has also instilled a sense of pride and purpose in my work."



Ranjita Morang outside her stall at the newly inaugurated 'KHAO GALI' in North Lakhimpur town



## Voices from the First Mile

### From Struggles to Stability: PMAY & NULM building a Life of Hope

**B**ipul Rai, (48), a resident of Abhayapuri, endured years of hardship, struggling to provide for his family. Living in a fragile makeshift home, the monsoons of Assam were a constant source of fear. Despite his dreams for a better life, Bipul's financial struggles kept him from building a safe and sturdy home. Yet, hope came through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), turning his dream into reality. *"For someone like me, with limited means, a pucca house was unimaginable. Now, my family finally has a strong roof over their heads. It's our most cherished dream," Bipul shares, his eyes brimming with tears.*

Bipul's challenges didn't stop there. With no stable income, he found it difficult to sustain his family. But with the support of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), he received loans that allowed him to open a small pan shop. *"The loans helped me set up a regular source of income. With additional funds, I was able to expand, and now I can earn enough to support my family,"* he says gratefully. Bipul extends heartfelt gratitude to the Abhayapuri municipality for extending the hand of support when he needed it most, transforming his life and giving his family a future filled with hope.



Bipul Rai proudly standing outside his house built from funds received under the PMAY-U scheme



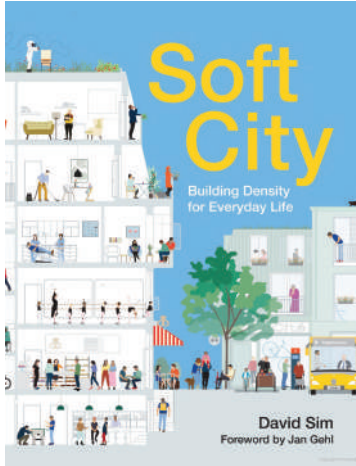
Bipul Rai outside his pan shop built with the support from NULM loans

Bipul's story exemplifies the profound impact that well-crafted policies can have on the lives of everyday individuals. His journey underscores how government initiatives like PMAY (U) and NULM can transform not just the physical conditions of people's lives, but their entire sense of security and dignity. For someone like Bipul, who once struggled to make ends meet, these policies offered more than just a stable home or a source of income—they provided hope, stability and a renewed sense of self-worth.

His experience is a powerful reminder of how policy, when effectively implemented, can uplift vulnerable communities and foster long-term change, creating opportunities for individuals to rise above their circumstances and lead better lives.

## Urban Lexicon: Emerging Terminologies shaping Urban Life

**Soft Cities:** A term coined by David Sim in his book of the same title, illustrates how higher urban densities can coexist with an enhanced quality of life. Sim describes the “soft city” as one focused on ease, comfort and care in daily life, advocating for people-centered architecture and urban planning that fosters connections among individuals and their environment. Rather than relying on advanced technologies to address urban challenges, it underlines the importance of simple, small-scale, low-tech and cost-effective solutions that prioritize human needs.



A soft city focuses on creating spaces which emphasize on neighborliness, tempered microclimate and enhanced mobility. “Soft city” is particularly relevant to the urbanization trajectory

of Assam, where rapid growth presents both challenges and opportunities. By focusing on simple, small-scale, low-tech solutions, Assam can address urban issues such as infrastructure strain, pollution, and social connectivity without over-relying on expensive technologies. An example of a “soft city” initiative in Assam is the implementation of community-based waste management programs like home composting in local neighborhoods.

This grassroots approach not only addresses waste management challenges but also promotes social connectivity among residents, fostering a sense of community. By emphasizing simple, low-tech solutions like community composting, Assam can effectively tackle urban issues while preserving its cultural identity and enhancing the quality of life for its citizens.

Note: By scanning the QR code, readers can listen to an episode on ‘Urbanistica Podcast’, where David Sim discusses the idea of a Soft City in the context of the Covid-19 lockdown.



## Envisioning Urban: India and Beyond!

### Transforming the Urban Landscape

As part of its goal to become a \$5-trillion economy, India has received Cabinet approval to establish 12 new industrial smart cities along the Golden Quadrilateral. These cities will be located in Khurpia (Uttarakhand), Rajpura-Patiala(Punjab), Dighi (Maharashtra), Palakkad (Kerala), Agra and Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Gaya (Bihar), Zaheerabad (Telangana), Orvakal and Koppaerthy (Andhra Pradesh), and Jodhpur-Pali (Rajasthan), spanning 10 states and 6 major industrial corridors. Supported by an investment of ₹28,602 crore, this initiative aims to alleviate congestion in metropolitan areas, enhance manufacturing capabilities and create employment opportunities, representing a significant shift in India's industrial and urban development.

(Source: Financial Express: Oct 6, 2024)

### Urban October 2024: Youth, architects of our urban future

Each October, UN-Habitat and its partners host a month-long series of activities focused on urban sustainability, allowing people worldwide to engage in vital discussions about the future of cities and towns. Urban October begins with World Habitat Day on the first Monday of the month and culminates with World Cities Day on October 31. This year's theme emphasizes the role of youth in shaping sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban environments. Young people, as the next generation of leaders and innovators, are essential to driving positive change in their communities.





# Revolving EDITOR'S DESK Feature of the Month

**GAURAB DUTTA**

Executive Officer, Narayanpur M.B



## Transforming Narayanpur

### *A story of commitment to community and cleanliness*

**T**he writer is from the Assam Urban Administrative Services and is posted as Executive Officer (EO) at Narayanpur Municipal Board (NMB). A mechanical engineer by training, he has six years of experience in Data Science and Business Analytics at Amazon and Novartis. He switched to the government sector, driven by an unwavering zeal for public service. He has brought about significant improvements in Narayanpur town's cleanliness and service delivery system.

#### **Narayanpur's Journey to Excellence:**

Nestled in North Lakhimpur, Narayanpur is renowned for its rich Vaishnavite heritage and vibrant community life. Since its establishment as a Municipal Board in 2018-19, the Narayanpur Municipal Board (NMB) has launched numerous initiatives to elevate residents' quality of life and boost local revenues.

#### **Key Initiatives and Achievements**

- 'Swachh Housaggar - Safai Se Kamai Tak': This program incentivizes public toilet maintenance, rewarding teams with upto monthly INR 1,500 based on cleanliness inspections. This has significantly improved public washroom standards.
- Streetlight Enhancement: By cataloging each streetlight pole, NMB increased streetlight functionality from 34% to 68%, enhancing security



*A view of the Narayanpur town*

in town.

- Mur Ghor Swachh Ghor: Brainchild initiative of Chairman Narayanpur M.B, Shri Harish Chandak, it promotes household cleanliness and tax compliance through graded badges, achieving 65% compliance in pilot wards within a month.
- Narayanpur Swachhta Mahaparba: Engaging nearly half the population of town, this cleanliness campaign collected 9 tonnes of waste, raising sanitation standards and fostering community ownership.

#### **Impact on Revenue and Governance**

These efforts have transformed initial resistance to increased taxes into enhanced compliance, with property tax collections for FY 2024-25 exceeding INR 25 lakhs—surpassing the previous year and the target of 21.5 lakhs needed for 15th Finance Commission grants.

#### **Path to Sustainable Growth:**

NMB's integrated approach to service delivery and revenue generation, combined with continuous innovation and community involvement, is steering Narayanpur towards self-sufficiency. This collaborative governance model not only enhances municipal services but also cultivates civic pride and responsibility, laying a robust foundation for the town's future growth and prosperity.

The writer thanks DoHUA for its continuous support and guidance in undertaking these innovative measures in urban governance. As an early career officer, he is proud of this opportunity to be a part of the paradigm shift in urban development unfolding in Assam.

*\*This column is a part of our Revolving Editor's Desk featuring monthly articles which highlight diverse experiences from officers of DoHUA.\**

For sharing your thoughts on the Urban Space in Assam, please mail us at: [dohuaurbanchronicles@gmail.com](mailto:dohuaurbanchronicles@gmail.com)

Conceptualised & Published by Assam Urban Infrastructure Development & Finance Corporation Limited