

Awardees, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to thank CNN IBN for selecting me for the Young Indian Leaders award. This is not only a recognition of the work of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), a movement of marginalised peasants in Assam, but also a recognition for North-East India. For many, the northeast as a whole is a land inhabited by naked tribals, who have climbed the ladder of civilization only after their political affiliation with the Indian mainland, **which definitely is not the case.** Unfortunately, we still remain the troubled periphery of India.

At Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, we have been fighting for land, forest and livelihood rights of

marginalised peasants. We have been fighting for good governance and against corruption through extensive use of the Right to Information act. One of our most challenging ongoing battles is to safeguard the social and ecological security of the Brahmaputra river valley from an onslaught of over 100 large dams planned in the region. We want development which is socially and ecologically sensitive, which respects the intricate relationships of our farmers with their land, of our fisherfolk with their rivers, of our wildlife and biodiversity with the Brahmaputra. Scientific community has already expressed their concern on the ongoing mega dam projects in NE India. In June 2010, a scientific committee jointly established by the Assam

Government and National hydro-Power Corporation presented their report on their study of the downstream impacts of the 2000 MW Lower Subansiri. This committee has recommended that: (I quote)“...*The selected site for the mega dam of the present dimension was not appropriate in such a geologically and seismologically sensitive location...Therefore, it is recommended not to construct the mega dam in the present site...*” (unquote). We cannot allow destructive development which will undermine the very foundation of our society - the Brahmaputra and Barak river valleys. Water and energy are important social services, but they cannot be treated as mere commodities to be mindlessly ‘mined’ in one region and mindlessly consumed in another. We will

continue our battle to protect our cultural and natural inheritance, our lifeline, the Brahmaputra.

Similarly, our organisation has also mobilised thousands of people for better implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006. We have ensured that the people of Assam get full benefit under this Act. Our campaign for RTI is extremely crucial. We have used RTI for better governance and have successfully turned RTI as a weapon of people's movement. I would like all of you to come and see the impact of RTI in Assam, particularly in Public Distribution System and NREGA. In recent months, we have succeeded in exposing the malpractices of one of the most powerful ministers in the state cabinet of Assam, Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma,

who has been perceived as the shadow Chief Minister in the state.

All these have helped us towards enlisting the support of lakhs of people of Assam, cutting across all classes of people, to endorse our stand on the above mentioned issues.

We firmly believe that this award will help us immensely in taking the movement fought by us in Assam to the national level. Also, we sincerely hope that this will give the Indian state an opportunity to be positively responsive to the genuine issues of Northeast and to rectify its faulty approach and position.

Thanking you all,

Akhil Gogoi

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General Secretary, KMSS, Assam

Email: secretarykmss@gmail.com

www.kmssassam.org