North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati



Annual Report of the Silver Jubilee Year, April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025

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About the Annual Report 2024-25

With joy and gratitude to all those who have accompanied North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC) for a quarter of a century, we the Director and staff of NESRC present to you the silver jubilee report of NESRC. Founded on 1st March 2000, NESRC completed 25 years of service to the people of Northeast India on 1st March 2025. We, therefore, begin this 25th Annual Report with gratitude to all those who have stood by us during these years. The report begins with the silver jubilee events of NESRC. Then follows the mandate of NESRC in the form of its vision and mission statements. The activities that follow indicate how as in the past, during its silver jubilee year too NESRC has made an effort to live up to the spirit of these statements and mandate to combine serious intellectual inputs with involvement in the field and encourage others, especially the youth, to do research on issues of relevance to the Northeast. This effort was made through research, the library, documentation, networking with civil society groups active among the marginalised and others involved in processes aimed at policy changes in favour of the marginalised. Its publications and the professional and newspaper articles of its staff too, try the same path,

Introducing the Silver Jubilee Year of NESRC

The silver jubilee was launched on the 24th anniversary on 1st March 2024, in the presence of the staff of all the Jagriti institutions, the present and some former staff members and friends of NESRC. Other events followed after it till its culmination on March 1, 2025.

1. The first such event was the evaluation of NESRC by a team of Dr. Denzil Lobo of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru, Prof. Sanjay Barbora GB member and Dr Anjum Ara Begum of Royal Global University. They studied the documents, interviewed present and staff & associates during July 2024, & presented the report to the Governing Board on August 2





- 2. All the staff members came together for a retreat at Mawshohroh, Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya on October 27-29, 2024, to reflect on the report and on the past and future of NESRC.
- 3. The report was presented once again on January 11, 2025 at the Jubilee Gathering of present & former staff, partners & friends for their feedback. The purpose of this Gathering was to "Read the Past to Write the Future" of NESRC together and give it a new direction.





- 4. A book *Research*, *Reflection and Community Engagement: NESRC's Journey over 25 Years*. edited by Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Barbora, who started NESRC on March 1, 2000, brought together 10 papers by present & past staff members. Its introduction is a reflection on the socio-political situation of the Northeast at the turn of the millennium and the response of NESRC during the last 25 years. The book was released by Prof. Saswati Choudhury.
- 5. Three seminars were held during the year as part of the silver jubilee celebrations. The first of them, a *Regional Seminar on the Social and Environmental impacts of Oil Palm Plantations in North East India*, September 6-7, 2024, brought together oil palm farmers, environmentalists and social activists to reflect on the impacts and future of commercial plantations.
- 6. The second national seminar on *The Role of History in Conflicts and Peace: Focus on the Northeast* was held on November 16-17, 2024.

- 7. The final national seminar was held on *Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations*, on the jubilee day, February 28-March 1, 2025.
- 8. The celebrations culminated with a public lecture by the eminent journalist Mr. P. Sainath on March 1, 2025 evening, to a 150 strong audience on *The Media and the Marginalised: Engagement, Research and Policy changes in Favour of the Marginalised.*"



We would like to add that only the seminars were partially funded from projects. The cost of all other silver jubilee events was met from contributions in cash or kind from partners, friends and former staff members of NESRC. We are grateful to all of them for their support.

The Mission Statement of NESRC

The mission of North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC) is to encourage the youth of Northeast India for the service of the tribal, indigenous, Adivasi and other marginalised communities of the Northeast, particularly women among them.

- * NESRC will attempt to live up to this mission by itself doing research and networking with civil society groups, researchers and decision-makers for advocacy for change of policies in favour of the marginalised communities.
- * A tool of accomplishing it is to combine good quality professional research with concerted action to accompany these communities in their search for peace and reconciliation based on justice and equality.
- * Conflict and peace studies, tribal, gender, ecology and livelihood issues will get priority in the research and field action of NESRC.
- * In these efforts NESRC will inspire the youth of the Region to undertake research and action in favour of these and other communities on the margins of society.
- * These activities are undertaken in order to move towards a just society in Northeast India, based on peace and justice, equality and reconciliation.

Dedication

While presenting the work of NESRC during 2024-25, we its Director and Staff assure our past staff members, partners, friends and associates that NESRC remains committed to making a contribution to the building of an inclusive society

in NEI in which every community and social segment is counted, included, and provided with a voice in shaping their own destiny. This spirit is maintained by our staff members some of whom left **NESRC** after completing their contract and others joined and continued to live by its mandate. Two studies were completed during the year, and six publications were brought out. NESRC organised two national seminars and a regional seminar and joined others in organising more of them. Its library continues to serve young scholars of the region.



Staff of NESRC, 2024-25

Seated: Dr Walter Fernandes, Director; **First Row** (L to R) Dr. P. Lalpeklhui (Senior Research Associate – SRA); Ms Ashpriya Rohman, Accounts cum Adm.; Ms Rita Xess, Librarian; Ms Raysha Alvir, RA; Ms Mary Nomita Devi, Documentation; **Second Row** (L to R): Mr Timothy Khongsai RA; Ms Dejna Daulagupu RA; Mr Mrinmoy Kalita, Documentation; Dr Vizokhole Ltu, SRA; Mr Nirab Bora, Publications; Mr Noihrit Gogoi, RA

Research

Research is the mainstay of NESRC. During 2024-25 we completed two studies on indigenous women & ecological conservation and on the impacts of commercial oil palm plans in four states. Two more studies are ongoing.

Completed Studies

Nipasa Dutta and Dejna Daulagupu. Women and Indigenous Practices of Ecological Conservation in Northeast India.

The study focused on exploring the relationship of women from the Dimasa, Karbi and Khasi communities with their ecology. By placing women at the centre of these dynamics, the study aimed to unfold the relationships that they form with various ecological entities, and to understand the knowledge systems in place among the indigenous communities and the manner in which they transmit ecological knowledge to the next generation as intrinsic to their livelihood. Within this overarching theme the study emphasised the concept of conservation and examined how the communities practise it while also considering the involvement of other stakeholders like the government, industrialists, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Dr P. Lalpekhlui and Timothy Khongsai. Socio-Economic Impacts of Commercial Plantations in Northeast India: Focus on Oil Palm Plantations

The Government of India's push for domestic palm oil production through the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) has positioned Northeast India (NEI) as a critical region for oil palm expansion. But its expansion in NEI has emerged as a complex intersection of development aspirations, environmental concerns, and socio-cultural transformation. The debate transcends agricultural choices, and encompasses fundamental questions about development pathways, indigenous rights, and ecological preservation. Within this context, (NESRC studied the socio-economic and environmental impacts of oil palm plantations in the region. The study covered Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland. Mizoram was the main study area since oil palms have been planted in the state for two decades. The study showed that the commercialisation of agriculture through oil palm cultivation has dramatically altered the agrarian landscape, has given rise to complex economic and social inequalities, and to internal land alienation and class formation in the otherwise egalitarian tribal communities. It also posits that commercial plantations like oil palm, will exacerbate patriarchal systems in legal, family, and public spheres, ultimately undermining women's status. Oil palm cultivation is likely to have adverse effects on food production and biodiversity in the northeastern region.





Ongoing Studies

Dr. Vizokhole Ltu, Dejna Daulagupu and Raysha Alvir. *Tribal Land in Northeast India, Constitutional Provisions & Laws: Implications and Solutions* seeks to understand land relations – control, management, and usage – amongst the tribals in four Northeastern states (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Meghalaya). More specifically, the study attempts to look at the existing constitutional provisions, the implications of the existing Statutory laws and customary laws with regard to land and natural resources, and recommend suitable solutions based on the empirical study. The study also seeks to explore the complex and dynamic social relations leading to land acquisition/alienation – through state infrastructural projects, interface between statutory laws and customary practices, and internal land transaction – as a result of forces such as capital and market. The project is in the final stages, with an expected completion date by end of April, 2025.





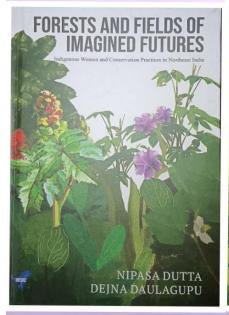
Noihrit Gogoi with staff members of the partner organisations of the peace project. Empowering Communities and Institutions for Peace Building in Northeast India

This project combines training and research to support peace activists in developing their analytical skills and in facilitating peace processes among communities in conflict. Over the years, it became evident that many peace activists had internalised the stereotypes held by their communities towards others. To be truly effective, it is essential that they confront and overcome these biases. The project aims to support peace activists from five partner organisations in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura to recognise and address such internalised prejudices. The activists were mentored in research as part of this effort to engage with literature related to Northeast India and peace and conflict studies, conduct fieldwork, write research papers, and present their findings at national seminars organised by NESRC.

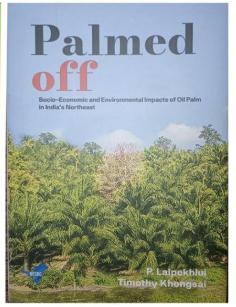
PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

The studies completed during the year took the form of the following publications of NESRC. Besides, some staff members wrote professional and newspaper articles, some of them in our own publications and others in books and journals of other publishers.

- 1. Nipasa Dutta & Dejna Daulagupu. 2024. Forests and Fields of Imagined Futures: Indigenous Women and Conservation Practices in Northeast India. pp.xx+204 ISBN 978-81-960850-8-7
- 2. Kallol Deka & Rajdeep Singha. 2024. Child Labour in the Tea Plantations of Assam. pp. viii+59. ISBN 9678-81-960850-6-3.
- 3. P. Lalpekhlui & Timothy Khongsai 2025 Palmed Off: Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts of Oil Palm in India's Northeast, pp. xviii+ 198 ISBN: 978-81-960850-4-9

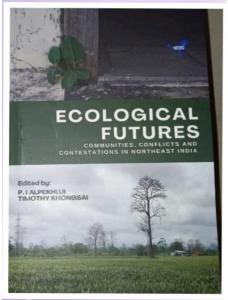


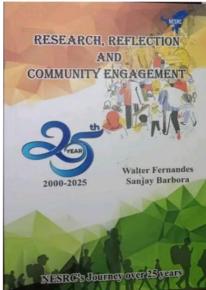


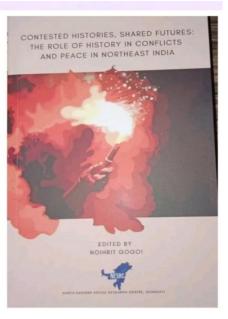


4. Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (eds). 2025. Research, Reflection and Community Engagement: NESRC's Journey over 25 Years. pp. xii+220. ISBN 978-81-960850-5-6

- 5. Noihrit Gogoi (ed). 2025. Contested Histories, Shared Futures: The Role of History in Conflicts and Peace in Northeast India. pp vi + 256. ISBN 978-81-943578-9-6
- 6. P. Lalpekhlui & Timothy Khongsai (eds) 2025. *Ecological Futures: Communities, Conflicts and Contestations in Northeast India.* pp. x + 148. ISBN 978-81-960850-7-0







PROFESSIONAL

The fruits of research often find outlets in journals and edited books, as professional articles. The following articles of the staff members were published during 2024-25

- Noihrit Gogoi. 2025. "Conservation and Changing Land Relations in Assam: The Case of the Misings in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park," In Walter Fernandes & Sanjay Barbora (eds), Research, Reflection and Community Engagement: NESRC's Journey over 25 Years. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre. pp. 127–147.
- **Timothy Khongsai.** 2025. "Social Structures and Land Relations in Northeast India after Oil Palm." In P. Lalpeklhui & Timothy Khongsai (eds) Ecological Futures: Communities, Conflicts and Contestations in Northeast India. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, pp. 79–94.
- **Dr. Vizokole Ltu.** 2024. "Nagaland State Transport, 1960s-90s" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 59, Issue 50, December 14-20, pp. 29-34.

NEWSPAPER

Newspaper articles are one more way of sharing the findings of our research. The staff members of NESRC wrote a few such articles during the year

Raysha Alvir

"Researching Northeast India for 25 Years: Here's What We Have Learnt," *East Mojo*, 24th February 2025.

"25 Years of Transformative Research in NE India: NESRC," *Arunachal Times*, 27th February 2025.

Dejna Daulagupu. "Celebrating 25 Years of Research and Advocacy: North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati," *The Tribal Voice*, 24th February, 2025

Noihrit Gogoi. Aamar *Nogor Adhikar (Our Rights to the City). Dainik Asom* 17th November, 2024.

Noihrit Gogoi & Dr Dolly Kikon. "Waiting for Justice: The Baghjan Oil Blow Out." The India Forum 6th November 2024. https://www.theindiaforum.in/environment/waiting-justice-baghjan-oil-blow-out

Timothy Khongsai. "25 Years of NESRC: Intersection of Research, Advocacy and Activism," *The Shillong Times*, 3rd March, 2025.

Dr P. Lalpekhlui & Timothy Khongsai. "Oil palm zirchianna: A hlawk reng em? Sawrkar hian hmarchhak state hi enchhin nan min hmang em?" *Vanglaini*, 4th November, 2024. Https://www.vanglaini.org/article/133896?Date=2024-11-04

Dr Vizokhole Ltu

"Flawed Implementation or Flawed Legislation: the Nagaland Land Act Conundrum," *The Eastern Mirror*, 19th December 2024

"The Nagaland Land Act Conundrum," The Nagaland Post, 14th January 2025.

"Doing Social Research in Northeast," The Morung Express, 19th February 2025

"How Much Right of Way is Right?" The Morung Express, 23rd February 2025.

Book Fair and Discussion

NESRC participated successfully in the *Assam Book Fair* on the grounds of the Veterinary College, Khanapara, Guwahati, from December 27, 2024 to January 7, 2025. On January 4, NESRC organised a session for young researchers at the fairgrounds on *Doing Research in Northeast India*. Most of its more than 60 participants were young researchers. After

presenting the overall research scenario of NESRC two recent publications were presented and the approach to their research was analysed. Good discussion followed.





SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

Seminars are important steps in sharing our research and building alliances with civil society, researchers and policy makers for policy changes in favour of the marginalised. During 2024-25 NESRC organised three national or regional seminars, some local seminars or meetings and co-sponsored some others with partner organisations. Our researchers also presented papers at or participated in seminars organised by others.

Organised by North Eastern Social Research Centre during 2024-25

Regional Seminar, The Social and Environmental Impact of Commercial Plantations on the People of Northeast India, September 6-7, 2024.

This seminar was organised with support from the University of California, Santa Cruz, to discuss the socio-economic and environmental impacts of commercial oil palm plantations in Northeast India. This region, part of the Eastern Himalayas and a recognised mega-biodiversity zone along with western Myanmar, is ecologically rich with diverse flora and fauna. Today, the National Mission on Edible Oils (NMEO), of 2021 aims to reduce India's reliance on imported edible oils by expanding domestic oil palm cultivation, especially in Northeast India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The project has sparked debate at both theoretical and practical levels. Oil palm plantations raise concerns regarding environmental impacts such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss. The shift towards commercial agriculture affects traditional land management, agriculture, and biodiversity in the region, where land ownership and property rights vary by tribe. Tribal women typically do not own land but hold some decision-making power in community-managed lands. Experience with other commercial plantations like tea, coffee, and rubber indicates that benefits often accrue to powerful individual men, reinforcing class division and patriarchy, while women's influence diminishes. Thus, the key questions addressed include whether oil palm cultivation improves small farmers' condition or benefits mainly large landowners, effects on women's roles and decision-making, if it leads to land alienation and social stratification. These concerns are vital as community identity and livelihoods are closely linked to land.





National Seminar on the Role of History in Conflicts and Peace: Focus on the Northeast, November 15-16, 2024

The seminar brought together scholars, community leaders, practitioners to reflect critically on how historical narratives shape both conflict and peacebuilding in the Northeast. Its aim was to examine how history is constructed, mobilised, and contested in conflicts, and to explore possibilities of using inclusive historical narratives as tools for peace. The participants of the seminar highlighted that dominant historical accounts often marginalise subaltern voices, and that communities across the region have actively rewritten history to legitimise their claims over land, identity, and autonomy. Case studies from Manipur, Assam, and Nagaland illustrated how selective historical memory can exacerbate tensions, but also how inclusive, plural understanding of history can foster reconciliation and dialogue. The seminar underlined the importance of addressing historical grievances in present-day peace efforts and called for a deeper engagement with local histories as a step towards long-term, sustainable peace.

National Seminar: Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations: Focus on the Northeast, February 28-March 1, 2025.

The two-day seminar that marked the culmination of the silver jubilee celebrations of NESRC brought together a body of researchers, policy makers, experts, and social activists working with the tribal communities in the Northeast and in the rest of India, with the objective of studying the ambiguity around statutory laws. The participants looked at constitutional and legal provisions like the 5th and 6th Schedules, Article 371A, land acts specific to states, and other statutory laws, and asked whether land issues emanated from the shortcomings of the law or the implementation gaps. It is important because the Scheduled Tribes keep facing displacement, marginalisation, and exploitation through land alienation, acquisition for development projects, and other causes. Much of the discrepancy between the law and the reality is caused by conflicting laws, defective implementation, liberalisation and commercialisation even by the tribes themselves. Important was also the focus on customary practices that reconstitute and are reconstituted by the logic of the market through official schemes. The growing commodification of land threatens the identity, culture, and livelihood, particularly of marginalised communities, and can spark conflicts and human rights concerns. Constant ethnic transformation in which different ethnic groups contest and negotiate the everydayness of lived experiences and histories tied to land, produces multiple complexities. Recognition of such contested and shifting alliances is central to an understanding of identity

politics, particularly in the Northeast. Overall, the seminar examined the multifaceted changes in land relations, and their social, political, economic, and cultural implications, by study indepth the shifting land relations to better understand the intricate intersection between the socio-economic factors, political policies, and cultural identities, which in turn shape contemporary relations within and between tribes and with the non-tribal societies.





Seminars in Collaboration with Other Organisations

- 1. August 20-21, 2024 NESRC joined OKDISCD at a 2-day dialogue on Child Labour in the Tea Gardens of Assam, with representatives of tea garden workers, management & the state.
- 2. March 7-8 co-sponsored with NEISSR, Choumukedima, Nagaland, a two-day international seminar on the Role of Civil Society in Peace Processes.
- 3. The reflection begun at the September 2024 seminar on Oil Palm Plantation continued at the local level with a seminar for the Nagaland farmers & civil society groups on January 17, 2025, for some Assam oil farmers at Dudhnoi on February 23 & for some farmers and civil society groups in Mizoram on March 13. The participants of these sessions coordinated by Timothy Khongsai reflected on the soci0-economic & environmental implications of oil palm.

Participation and Presentations at Seminars

Apart from organising seminars, the staff members of NESRC attended seminars, presented some papers at seminars or gave lectures or were resource persons

Raysha Alvir,

'Resurgence of Idu Mishmi Language in Arunachal Pradesh,' *International Conference on Language, Ecology, and Culture.* Guwahati: North Eastern Institute of Language and Culture, September 30-October 1, 2024.

"Sacred Geographies of the Idu Mishmi: Indigenous Perspectives of Land and State-led Development in Arunachal Pradesh," Online Presentation, *Rights, Gender & Identity*:

Rethinking Development in Northeast India, Rotaract Club of South Guwahati and the Rotary Club of Global New Generation, Thames Valley District, London, UK, January 25, 2025

Dejna Daulagupu, "Mines, Dams & Falcons in Umrangso: Land Alienation in a Sixth-Schedule District of Assam," *National Seminar Tribal Land Alienation & Changing Land Relations: Focus on the Northeast*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 28-March 1, 2025.

Dr Walter Fernandes

"Tribal Development in Northeast India: Issues, Challenges & Opportunities" Online Lecture, *Indian Sociological Society RC-15 Social Transformation & Development*, April 30, 2024.

"Advocacy for a New Land Acquisition Act in India," *International Webinar on Advocacy*, organised by SJES, Rome, January 21, 2025.

"Environment and Sustainable Development in Northeast India," Keynote Address, *Seminar on Environment, Development and Sustainability.* Tulungia: Department of Sociology, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Adarsh Vidyalaya, January 28, 2025.

"Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and Rights over Nature," Seminar on Tribal Ecological Knowledge in South Asia: Lessons for Rights of Nature Discourses. Shillong: National Law University Meghalaya, January 31-February 1, 2025.

"Displacement in Northeast India," Seminar on Forced Displacement in India with Reference to India's Northeast. Guwahati: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group. February 24, 2025.

"Peace with Justice: Role of Social Scientists and Peace Activists," Keynote Address: *International Conference of Social Scientists and Peace Activists*. Chujmoukedima: North East Institute of Social Sciences & Research. March 7-8, 2025.

Noihrit Gogoi "Eroding Belonging: Land, Conservation, and the Making of Displacement in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park." *National Seminar Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations in India: Focus on the Northeast*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 28-March 1, 2025.

Timothy Khongsai.

'Displacement by the Manipur Conflict," *Seminar, Forced Displacement in India with Reference to India's Northeast.* Guwahati: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group. Feb 24, 2025.

"Land in Transition: Examining the Multiple Dimensions of Alienation in Northeast India's Oil Palm Expansion," *National Seminar Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations in India: Focus on the Northeast*. Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 28-March 1, 2025.

Dr P. Lalpekhlui. "Us versus Them: The Politics of Belonging in Indo-Myanmar Borderland," *International Seminar Crossways of Knowledge.* Surabaya, Indonesia: International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS), July 28-August 1, 2024.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu "The Way Forward: Tribal Land Issues in the Northeast" at the National Seminar on *Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations: Focus on the* Northeast, Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 28-March 1, 2025.

Participation in Seminars

Raysha Alvir and Noihrit Gogoi. Community Consultation: Infrastructure, Energy, Extraction, Forest, and Water. Guwahati: Civil Society of Assam. Dec. 9-10, 2024.

Dejna Daulaupu. Sixth Schedule: Unresolved Issues and Challenges- The Way Forward. Diphu: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). 2-13 November, 2024

Dr Walter Fernandes, participated in the *Conference of Directors of Jesuit-run Research Centres.* New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, March 13-14, 2025.

Dr Vizokhole Ltu

Chaired the Technical Session on "History and Conflicts in Northeast India," at the *National Seminar on the Role of History in Conflicts and Peace: Focus on the Northeast*, Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, November 16-17, 2024.

Chaired the technical session on "Legal Provisions and Tribal Land" at the *National Seminar Tribal Land Alienation and Changing Land Relations: Focus on the Northeast*, Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, February 28-March 1, 2025.

Participated in the 30th Anniversary Foundation Day of North East Network, 21 March 2025

The NESRC Library

The volume count of the library has surpassed 11,000 with 337 new books purchased between April 2024 and March 2025. Because of its growing collection of books and journals on specialised topics in social sciences, particularly on Northeast India, it has become a valuable resource for students, scholars, and researchers. In addition to works on the epidemic and its effects on society, this year saw the addition of other titles, including food practices, indigenous food culture, and oil palm, data analysis, media studies, internet studies, and women and ecology. The library subscribes to around 30 periodicals and publications. Some important ones among them are bound and preserved for future use. In addition, the documentation team is scanning and cataloguing five newspapers of the last 25 years. Over 13,000 newspaper items were scanned, catalogued, and uploaded in the course of the year, and we anticipate increasing this number during the next year to 40,000.





In addition to our own staff, the library gets visitors from various colleges, universities and other institutions such as Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati and Mumbai, NEF Law College, Gauhati University, Assam Don Bosco University, Assam University, Silchar, JNU, IIT (Guwahati, Mumbai, and Delhi), Delhi University, Jamia Milia Islamia, Royal Global University, Tezpur University, Cotton University, and IGNOU, as well as some scholars from foreign universities like Stanford, Stockholm, California and Yale. Visitors have free access to the resources of the library in its well-equipped reading room. In addition, NESRC provides facilities such as photocopy and print-out at nominal charges. To facilitate access to the library and enable users to explore its resources we are in the process of uploading the catalogue on the NESRC website. Some of the documentation too may be uploaded soon.

Guwahati 31st July, 2025 Dr Walter Fernandes Director