

Track sensation Hima Das back from Turkey for HS exam

Dhing, 15km from Nagaon, is now known for Hima and her world record



Hima Das in Guwahati on Tuesday.

PTI

[Sarat Sarma](#) | Nagaon | Published 12.02.19, 06:55 PM

Dhing College on Tuesday received its famous student Hima Das on Tuesday, who, after a year-long gap, appeared for her higher secondary final examination this year.

She greeted her invigilator and **history teacher Biman Hazarika** with a simple “Good morning, sir”, which reduced him to tears.

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“Today we have got back the same Hima in this hall that we found in the classrooms years ago. The talkative, slim girl with a smile on her face,” Hazarika said.

Hazarika, an assistant professor in the college, was the invigilator during the first day of the examination on Tuesday. Altogether 269 students appeared for the exam from Dhing College this year.

“We have made a special arrangement in an extra room for Hima and will continue doing so till the end of her examination. Geography on March 9 is her fourth subject and that will be her last paper,” **Dhing college principal Sarat Dutta said.**

Hima, who after the Asian Games had been practising in Turkey, reached the quiet town on Monday. She spent the night at home and rushed to the examination hall on Tuesday morning. She was in her school uniform.

Dhing, 15km from Nagaon, is now known for Hima and her world record.

Two of Hima’s classmates — Deepsikha and Nilanjana — who are also appearing for their exam this year, came to the school on a cycle. “There was a time when she (Hima) used to come to school with us on a cycle. As many as 15 girls from our Kandhulimari gaon used to come in a group. Our routine of cycling to school continues,” Nilanjana said.

“Hima is always just a phone call away but the situation has forced us to miss a talkative cyclist in the group,” Deepsikha said.

Hima, accompanied by her security guards, arrived in an Innova for the exam.

“My aim is to complete my college studies at any cost and for that I rushed to Dhing. After completing my examination I will return to Turkey,” Hima said.

“I must finish my graduation and I will do that from Dhing College,” she said.

Hima, 18, completed her schooling from her **local high school and got admitted to higher secondary first year (Arts) in Dhing College in 2016.** She left her college without appearing for the final examination last year because of her busy schedule.

Hima Das campaigns for change in Assam's indigenous heartland

[Rahul Karmakar](#)

DHING (ASSAM)JULY 14, 2018 23:35 IST

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Hima's mother (foreground), father (behind, to her left), uncle (behind, to her right) and other family members and friends.

Golden athlete wants to end illegal migration in her native village in Dhing

The [historic feat of an 18-year-old sprinter](#) has fuelled hopes for the future of athletics in India. But it means much more in her birthplace, Dhing, that has been running from an “ominous” present after losing the race to save its golden past. On Friday night, Hima Das became the first Indian athlete to win a gold medal at a global meet: the IAAF World U-20 Athletics Championship 2018 at Tampere.

[The Hindu Editorial on Hima Das' gold medal](#)

For Dhing, constricted by a land-eating Brahmaputra and an influx of migrants, it was the dawn of a new day. Hima has been at the forefront of a movement against illegal influx. The town and five of the last Assamese villages on its eastern edge had basked in a different sun — one with the cultural and literary glow — 55 years ago when Ratnakanta Barkakati became the 30th president of the 101-year-old Assam Sahitya Sabha, a moulder of opinions. One of those five villages is Kandhulimari, where

Hima was born on the banks of the Leteri (dirty) channel of the Brahmaputra.

“Dhing has produced the likes of dramatist Basanta Kumar Saikia, actor Debananda Goswami and writer Anamika Bora. Yesteryear’s table tennis star Monalisa Baruah Mehta has her roots here. But Hima’s performance has given the place a new lease of life almost six decades after Barkakati lit up the place culturally,” **Biman Hazarika, an archaeologist, told *The Hindu*** .

Also read: [All you need to know about Hima Das](#)

Dhing, which sits off Assam’s axis of development along a national highway 30 km south, is at the centre of the State map. The place was the epicentre of a British-era movement considered the precursor to the BJP’s 2016 Assembly poll campaign — save *jaati-maati-bheti* (race, land, and homestead). Cultural activist Mahendranath M. Dekaphukan launched Khangrakkhini Andolan, a movement to save Assamese identity, when the British began settling Muslims from present-day Bangladesh along the banks of the Brahmaputra in 1936.

Centurion Rajanikanta Bora of Auni-Ati village, adjoining Kandhulimari, said there were only seven houses of migrants during Quit India in 1942. “Today, we are surrounded by migrants, both Muslims and Bengali Hindus, who tend not to interact with us,” he says.

Many Assamese families sold off their fields and homes because of migrant pressure and became urban migrants themselves.

“It breaks my heart whenever I visit Dhing, our ancestral town. It is a living example of how in one generation, one has to live as a minority in one’s own place. Dhing now has over 90% Muslims of East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh origin,” says Upamanyu Hazarika of Prabrajan Virodhi Mancha, or anti-infiltration forum.

Writing on the wall

The last Assamese who won the Dhing Assembly constituency were Motiram Bora and Beliram Das (jointly) in 1951. The locals saw the signs when the pro-minority All India United Democratic Front won the seat in

2006 and retained it in the next two elections. In between, Dhing had become a byword for conflict. During the language riots of the early 1960s, houses of many Bengali Hindus were burnt. And in the 1970s, the United Liberation Front of Asom's Luitporiya (the Brahmaputra riverbank) wing was formed here to 'liberate Assam from occupiers'. Most of the cadre were from the indigenous villages around Hima's.

"Our first mission was against the migrant people of Radha-Ati, who were into armed robbery. Things changed after gunfights in 1983," says Dipak Bora, coordinator of the Luitporiya wing.

Radha-Ati, just over a kilometre from Kandhulimari, used to be called Assam's Chambal.

Ashafuddin, resident of the nearby Muslim village Khoirabari, trashes the influx theory. "It is wrong to call us Bangladeshis. We seem to be expanding because the Brahmaputra has taken away much of our land, forcing us to huddle in smaller spaces," he says.

The Brahmaputra that used to be miles away is now flowing 3 km north of Hima's village.

According to Tajmul Hassan, a sports secretary of AASU, Hima, as lifetime sports secretary of AASU's Dhing unit, has locally been at the forefront of a renewed movement against illegal influx. She has also been vocal against Delhi's bid to push the "non-secular" Citizenship (Amendment) Bill of 2016 that seeks to grant quick citizenship to non-Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, he said.

Social change

But some 190 families of Kandhulimari and adjoining villages know her more as an activist against social ills. In 2016, she led a group of women in dismantling an illegal liquor outlet at Auni-Ati. The outlet's operator retaliated, filing a case against her father Ranjit Das, 52, and two others.

"The last hearing was on June 27. But I don't mind appearing in court [at the district headquarters, Nagaon, 26 km away] for a daughter who has put me on top of the world," says Mr. Das, a farmer who co-owns 45 'bighas' [a land measure] of paddy field with three brothers.

“I had often protested her father letting her do whatever she wanted. I was protective, especially when she raced against a Sumo during her school days and won,” says Jonali Das, Hima’s mother.

It so happened that the driver of a passenger vehicle ignored her, while giving the other children of her school, 2 km away, a lift. She was so angry that she challenged the driver and beat the vehicle to her home. “I scolded and beat her, but her father took it lightly. I now know why,” Ms. Das says.

Hima’s uncle Sonaram Das, a retired employee of the Public Health Department, and aunt Puspalata Das, a retired teacher, also doted on her. They noted her flair for sports and entrusted her with Samsul Haque, an instructor at the local Navodaya Vidyalaya. Mr. Haque weaned her off football when she turned nine.

“We used to chase her away whenever she would grab the ball and play. But she was so fast that we could never catch her. We were very patriarchal, admonishing her for doing what girls are not supposed to; but in hindsight, we might have encouraged her to run,” says Ratul Bora, a local youth.

She practised running at the local field, a grazing ground, 50 metres from the house of their 17-member joint family. She practised before dawn when villagers would let their cattle loose, and after dusk when they would take them back home.

“She is a raw talent with energy and positive attitude that is contagious. She does not care about who her opponents are. She is just focussed on outrunning others,” says Nipon Das, her Guwahati-based coach for the last two years.

Bhogeswar Baruah, Assam’s first athlete to win an international gold medal (the 800-metre race in the 1966 Bangkok Asian Games), had once lamented that he might not live to see “another Bhogeswar”. “I was wrong. We have someone better,” he says.