

# Damage threat to Ahom relics

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Guwahati, July 19: The Archaeological Survey of India has warned that encroachment around the Ahom-era water tanks and nearby ditches that protected the monuments will lead to their collapse.

Milan Kumar Chauley, superintending archaeologist of the Guwahati circle of ASI, told The Telegraph the Ahoms built tanks and nearby ditches as a protective shield for their monuments against earthquake. "The water tanks and the ditches play a crucial role in making the monuments earthquake-resistant. If water is drained away from them or the water level is disturbed owing to human activities, it will lead to collapse of the monuments," he warned.

Many Ahom monuments mostly in Upper Assam districts, including the famous Siva Doul (believed to be tallest in the country), Devi Doul and Joy Doul, are built on the



Siva Doul in  
Sivasagar. File picture

banks of water tanks. Chauley said of the over 150 important tanks dug in the Ahom-era, most had been encroached upon except a few prominent ones.

Chauley said going through history books and documents he found the base platform of the monuments rest on stone boulders. Beneath the boulders lies a thick layer of clay. The water from the tanks and ditches on both side of the temple fill the gap between the boulders.

When an earthquake occurs, the intensity of its waves is diluted by the clay layers, boulders and water below and by the water in the tanks and ditches from sides. Without the water, the monuments will face the direct impact of a quake, he said.

"As far as I know, this is a unique concept developed by the Ahoms in their architecture although they learnt the use of bricks from the Koch kingdom," he said.

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"You will be surprised to see how these monuments withstood the massive earthquakes that took place in 1897 (8.3 on Richter scale) and 1950 (8.6). The Ahom kings always kept the water level of the ponds at a certain level so they could constantly fill up the gaps between the boulders," said Chauley.

Sources said people have encroached upon many Ahom-era tanks.

There has not been any concerted effort from the state government to remove the encroachment and restore the tanks to their earlier condition.

The tanks, which have been restored, have been handed over to self-help groups or individuals for fish farming, they said.

Chauley said the Centre has slashed funds for the ASI this year, which would adversely impact protection and preservation of valuable monuments, including those in the Northeast.

Chauley said the Guwahati centre of the ASI, which looks after the entire Northeast, has received a little over Rs 40 lakh.

"But even to erect walls around Charaideo in Sivasagar district in Upper Assam, which is on Unesco's tentative list of World Heritage Site, we need around Rs 2 crore," he said.