



Riverside Adventist Academy

Photo courtesy of Rajiv Paul R. Marak.

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# Riverside Adventist Academy

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## RAJIV PAUL R. MARAK

Rajiv Paul R. Marak has been the principal of Riverside Adventist Academy since 2014.

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Riverside Adventist Academy is the only school managed by the Northeast India Union Section. It is located on 23 acres of land beside the Didram river at Chichotcheng village, P.O. Bajengdoba, North Garo Hills district of Meghalaya, India.

## Establishment

After Berun R. Sangma, president of Garo Section, attended a campmeeting in Oregon he desired to start a similar kind of campsite for the rapidly growing membership of Garo Section. He shared his vision with his co-officers B. K. Momin and M. B. Kullu and some lay members. Grewinda R. Marak, president of the A'chik Adventist Convention, a lay association of Adventists, played an integral part in acquiring the land for the campsite in 2004. Garo Section was the major investor. The A'chik Adventist Convention and several lay members contributed too.

In 2006 the Colson and Thorn families desired to donate funds for the construction of a school that would provide disadvantaged Adventist children with quality Adventist Education. They contacted D. Ron Watts, president of the Southern Asia Division. The matter was urgent. They wished for the school to be completed before 2008. As the acquisition of land could take time, Ron Watts scouted around for any available plot of land in the possession of the Church in the Division. M. M. Rimsu, associate secretary of Southern Asia Division, recommended the property intended for the church campsite in Garo Hills. Doug Clark, president of Maranatha India, was sent to inspect the site, which he found to be promising. The foundation stone for the school was laid on April 29, 1907 in the presence of more than 500 members from churches in the area.<sup>1</sup>

Construction started in May 2007 by Maranatha Volunteers International. The donors could follow the progress of the construction via the Internet. The school was inaugurated on October 21, 2007 in the presence of more than 2000 people.<sup>2</sup> The Union voted to name the school Riverside Adventist Academy<sup>3</sup> and appointed M. M. Rimsu as the first principal.<sup>4</sup> On November 27, 2007, Garo Section handed over the management of the property and the school to Northeast India Union Section.<sup>5</sup>

The school campus consists of a school building, an auditorium, a dispensary, a cafeteria, an excellent reverse osmosis filtration plant for drinking water, a bakery, and residential buildings for teachers and auxiliary staff. There are four hostels: Colson Boys Home for the older boys, which can house approximately 150 boys; Nicolie Thorn Girls Home for the older girls, which can house approximately 150 girls; Sinai Boys Home for the younger boys, which can house approximately 50 boys; and Bethsaida Girls Home which can accommodate approximately 50 girls.

In the first year of operation the school had 855 students, of which 300 were sponsored by Adventist Child India, a church entity at the Southern Asia Division established by Dorothy Watts. As the only union school in Northeast India Union Section, it is a cultural melting pot for diverse communities and tribes. All school faculty and staff are Adventists, and nearly half of the students are from Adventist homes.

## Affiliations

Initially classes were offered from nursery to class VIII. On September 20, 2010, the Government of Meghalaya granted permission for classes VIII to X (SSLC),<sup>6</sup> and Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) granted affiliation on January 23, 2013.<sup>7</sup> The first group of students to take the Secondary School Leaving Certificate

examination was in 2011. After a gap of one year, the school introduced class XI in 2012, followed by class XII in the year 2013. The school was given order of Opening Permission by the Government of Meghalaya on September 20, 2012,<sup>8</sup> and full accreditation on October 29, 2012.<sup>9</sup> The first group of students to take the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) examination was in 2014.

The Adventist Accrediting Association of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist inspected the school in 2011 and awarded accreditation in the same year. The school serves as an examination centre for the secondary school exams in the Southern Asia Division: the Division High School Certificate (DHSC), for the tenth standard; and Division College Entrance Certificate (DCEC), for the twelfth standard.

In 2015, Riverside Adventist Academy was designated as Bajengdoba-II Examination Centre by the Meghalaya Board of School Education to host state exams for four schools: Kosichora Secondary School, Berubari Secondary School, United Kongkhal Secondary School and Riverside Adventist Academy. It has been serving in that capacity since then.

Riverside Adventist Academy is the largest Adventist Child India (ACI) supported school in the Southern Asia Division. ACI provides scholarships for Adventist children with financial difficulties.

Walla Walla University (WWU), Washington, U.S.A., having close ties with the initial donors of the school, had a keen interest in assist Riverside Adventist Academy. WWU sent teams of students along with staff sponsors to support and aid the school both financially and logistically. The WWU nursing team visited the school from 2008 to 2014. During their annual visits they administered vaccinations to all the students. In 2017, WWU sent its engineering team under the banner "Engineers Without Borders." The engineering team got involved in property maintenance, instruction, and development.

## The Flood

On September 22, 2014 the school family woke up to unexpected flooding that in a short time submerged parts of the campus up to 10 feet. Not only the school property but hundreds of lives were threatened. Rituraj Phukan, a school staff, lost his life while helping others. The homes of twenty families were destroyed. However, the school reopened within a month after the flood to successfully end the academic year by conducting the final exam. During the period when the school was closed massive cleaning and repair work was carried out. Several Adventist churches helped the teachers, staff and students in cleaning up the campus. The displaced staff were accommodated in the guest house and in rented apartments. In 2016, an acre of land was purchased one kilometer away from the school, and new staff housing was constructed there.

## Administrators

Principals: Malaki M. Rimsu (2008-2012); Gaigampou Palmei (April to May 2012); Prodeep S. Sangma (April to December 2012); Pyra Kullu (2013); Rajiv Paul R. Marak (2014- ).

Headmasters: Kapzauva Hauzel (2008-2010); Sanathoi Panmei (2011); Gaingampou Palmei (2012- ).

Treasurer: Panbun Phawa (2008- ).

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## SOURCES

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2. Barthon Momin, "A Boarding School in Garo Hills," *New Southern Asia Tidings*, February 2008, 10.
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9. Memo No. MBOSE/HSSLC/ AFFIL/25/12/2031359-2031365, Tura, October 29, 2012.

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