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For one who dared take a road less taken - Assamese NRI to receive award for upholding Indian culture in the Netherlands

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



Saleh with his granddaughter

Guwahati, Jan. 3: Armed with two *annas* and a degree in aircraft maintenance, a Jorhat youth landed in Germany in search of a job in the sixties.

A couple of years and a blossoming relationship with a Dutch penfriend later, he moved to the Netherlands and made it his home. And almost simultaneously, began his campaign for Indo-Dutch ties.

After decades of ceaseless work to uphold Indian culture in Holland and five years after receiving that country's highest civilian honour — Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau — Wahid Saleh will finally be honoured in his motherland.

This Saturday, the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin, a US-headquartered organisation that works with the Indian government, will honour Saleh during a Pravasi Bharatiya Divas programme in New Delhi. Saleh will be among four NRIs who will be honoured for their efforts at strengthening the country's ties with the global community.

Charan Gill from Canada, George Abraham from Singapore and Nevin P. Megchiani from Bahrain are the other three recipients of the award.

A retired IT professional and active social worker, 67-year-old Saleh still has close ties with his family members in Jorhat.

A close friend of Saleh said the awardee will travel to Assam after the ceremony at Delhi and is likely to attend some public functions here.

In fact, the NRI is an idol for Jorhat youths who dream to make it big abroad.

With a resume that includes names like BMW and Lufthansa (during his stint in Germany) and later with Rotterdam in the Netherlands, it's not hard to see why.

He also featured in The Telegraph's Bihu magazine in 2005 as one among the few Assamese NRIs who have made it big through sheer grit and determination.

Asked about insurgency, Saleh said, "It is the foot soldiers who are paying the price and of course the innocent public of Assam — the main victims of the reckless barbaric act of violence."

The father of two — Tasnim and Qauthar — now spends most of his time working with the Netherlands-India Friendship Association, which he formed as a bridge between the two countries.

On the honour, Saleh merely quoted the last three lines of Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — /I took the one less travelled by, /And that has made all the difference."

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