

Peace talks with Naga ultras remain a non-starter: Jamir

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 30 APRIL

THE ONGOING talks between NSCN(IM) and the Union government (which have been going on for the last two years) are yet to make any real headway. "They are still a non-starter," said Nagaland chief minister and chairman of North East Congress Co-ordination Committee S.C. Jamir.

The chief minister, who has been on the hit list of militants in the state and escaped bids on his life many times, said while addressing the media: "If the problem of insurgency has to be solved, the Union government must involve all sections of Naga society — both the underground and the overground, which includes NGOs church leaders and elected representatives."

He said the Union government must learn from its past mistakes as they did not do proper ground-work while formulating rules for a cease-fire with NSCN(IM). That's the reason why it has not worked so far. They must learn from the 1964 cease-fire.



STALE-MEET: Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir at a press meet in Guwahati on Sunday

Caroline Singh

"What kind of cease-fire arrangement is this where militants are carrying guns and involving themselves in crimes like extortion, killings and kidnappings but the state government has to take action according to the law?" asked Jamir.

When asked if the Union government had neglected the state

government while negotiating with NSCN(IM) he said that was not the case. It was only last month that Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee had invited him and the state governor for consultations. "We want to work like a bridge between the militants and the Union government to help bring peace to the state."

The Economic Times

ARRAY 0600

MAY 2000

82 militants surrender in Assam

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, May 2: Altogether 75 activists of different underground outfits today laid down arms in the mainstream. The surrender ceremony was organised at the Circuit House by the district administration.

Of them, 54 belonged to the Ulfa, 12 to the Rabha National Security Force, eight to the Multa and one to the Koch Rajbongshi Protection Force. The surrenderedees also included four women activists of the Ulfa.

Prominent among those who surrendered included self-styled Sergeant Major Dharma Kanta

Das alias Biman Deka and the "controller" of the Ulfa's cultural wing Jaidev Nath alias Udayaditya Medhi. Both these militants were active members of the Pancharatna Anchalik Committee of the Ulfa.

Another hardcore militant of the Rabha National Security Force also came overground.

The four women cadre are Swapna Hatu alias Namita Boro, Punya Rabha alias Kiranmoyee Devi, Manju Rabha alias Jonali and Sarojini Rabha alias Kanaklata. Two US-made carbines, a heavy Thomson carbine, eight hand-made revolvers, three shot guns, a pistol and some ingredients for making bombs were de-

posited by the militants.

Apart from Goalpara deputy commissioner Khagendra Nath Buragohain and superintendent of police Deepak Kumar Rabha, senior functionaries of the Rabha Hajong Autonomous Council and leading citizens were present at the ceremony.

In another ceremony, seven militants, led by a former body-guard of Ulfa commander-in-chief Pareswari Baruah, Dhem Deuri alias Rajani Duwarah laid down arms before the Tinsukia administration this evening. The rebels, six Ulfa and one belonging to the National Democratic Front of Boroland, Nayan Kumar Bodo, handed over a 9 mm sten gun, a .3

revolver and 14 rounds of AK-47 bullets, reports our Jorhat correspondent.

Muivah case

The inquiry report on the Grindler Muivah case was submitted in the Gauhati High Court today by Mizoram advocate-general P. Pathak.

The inquiry was conducted by the Mizoram government following a High Court order on the basis of a petition filed by Grindler Muivah who sought that the case registered by the Mizoram government be quashed.

Grindler Muivah was taken into custody in Calcutta after one Ranju Rangan "confessed" that he

was planning to hijack an Indian Airlines aircraft from Lengpui airport in "furtherance of a conspiracy hatched by Grindler".

Justice A.K. Patnaik of the Gauhati High Court had ordered constitution of a committee comprising of the Mizoram home secretary, the law secretary and the director-general of police to probe the issue and submit the report by May 2.

The petitioner is a nephew of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) leader Thuingaleng Muivah. Accused Ranju Rangan had stated to the police that he was tortured by the intelligence officials and compelled to implicate the petitioner.

THE ASSAM TIMES

3 MAY 2000

Court notice on Migrants' Act

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, May 2: The Supreme Court has issued notices to the Union and Assam governments on a petition seeking to strike down the controversial Illegal Migrants' (Determination by Tribunal) Act as unconstitutional.

A three-judge bench of Chief Justice A.S. Anand and Justices R.C. Lahoti and S.N. Vairava directed filing of affidavits by the Union and the state governments within six weeks starting May 1.

The public interest litigation filed by former president of the All-Assam Students Union Sarbananda Sonowal contended that the law, although applicable in all parts of the country, has so far been made to apply only in Assam which itself violate Article 14 of the Constitution that ensures "equality before and equal application of law".

Former attorney-general Ashok H. Desai arguing on the PIL told the apex court the Foreigners Act, 1946 should be applied in Assam as it would go a long way in detecting and deporting illegal migrants now settled as legal citizens of the state. The petition sought the rules framed under the IMDT also to be struck down as illegal, ultra vires of the Constitution, unconstitutional and null and void.

Sonowal said sections 1(3), 4, 5,

8(2), 8(3), 8A(2) and 14 of the IMDT should be struck down as they have been "hindering" the process of detection and deportation of illegal foreigners living in the state. The former AASU president, who was also chairman of the North East Students Organisation, said the onus of proof on the complainant to establish that a person was a foreigner could not be imagined to be part of any provision in any law.

Under the IMDT, the prosecution should prove beyond doubt that the person in question is a foreigner and that he is illegally living in the state. Under the Foreigners Act, the onus of proof is on the accused.

The entire Assam agitation hinged on the "foreigners issue" and even after decades, the issue is yet to be settled as the governments have given only lip service to the problem, Sonowal said.

In fact, the Centre had made it clear several times, including through an affidavit in the Supreme Court that the proposal to repeal the IMDT Act was "under active consideration" and gave a categorical impression that the Act had been repealed, although it was not the truth, Sonowal added. The matter will come up for hearing in July after the summer vacation of the apex court.

THE TELEGRAPH

MAY 2000

Tripura rebels kill three in post-poll violence

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, May 4: In the first major eruption of post-poll violence, militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura last night gunned down three members of a tribal family owing allegiance to the CPM.

In a separate incident, three government employees were abducted yesterday. Police also recovered the decomposed body of a tribal youth suspected to have been killed in Monday's ethnic violence in Jirania police station area. Sources said at 10 pm a group of 10 heavily armed NLFT militants descended on the house of local CPM leader Hiron Debbarma. He was sleeping inside the thatched house along with his family members. The militants set the house on fire and as soon as the terrified inmates rushed out, they shot dead Hiron Debbarma, 45, his wife Chandramoti Debbarma, 42, and son Somendra Debbarma, 16 and left. The incident oc-

curred in remote Radhanagar village under Sidhai police station in Sadar (north) subdivision.

Officers and policemen of Sidhai police station rushed to the spot but no one has been arrested.

In a separate incident yesterday, NLFT militants abducted three employees of a private electrical company from Longtarai temple area under Ambasa police station of Dhalai district. Police sources said supervisor R.P. Bhat-tacharya, feeder mechanic Nandalal Pandit and labourer Rupen Basak had been working on high tension 132-KV transmission lines near Longtarai temple area. At 3 pm, a group of NLFT militants arrived and abducted all the three persons at gunpoint.

Shortly after receiving information, policemen of Ambasa police station led by Dhalai superintendent of police T.B. Roy reached the spot and launched combing operations. The police recovered the body of an unidentified tribal youth from Hawrah river under

Jirania police station area last evening. The body could not be identified. Sources said two tribals were killed and three others went missing following ethnic violence in Mohanpur market area under Jirania police station.

Interpol help sought: The state government has asked the Union home ministry to seek Interpol's help in arresting 20 Tripura militants holed up in Bangladesh.

The Union home ministry has been requested to issue a "red corner notice" with Interpol's help to facilitate extradition of the militants from Bangladesh. Thirteen of the 20 militants belong to the NLFT while the rest are Tiger Force activists.

Disclosing this, director-general of police K. T. D. Singh said the state government had information that the militants were camping in Bangladesh and all of them were wanted in a number of cases, including murder. The rebels were also involved in arms smuggling, the DGP added.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 5 MAY 2000

'ULFA cadres are surrendering in the droves'

EXPRESS FOCUS INTERVIEW

In a couple of weeks, Assam's Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta will clock four years and two terms in office. Once the most charismatic of chief ministers, Mahanta is an embattled man today. The ULFA and other militant groups show no signs of halting their bloody battle and the state is fighting hard to balance its finances. But mass support to the rebel groups is on the wane, Mahanta tells

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP, and Assam is poised for a turnaround.

■ The ULFA has completed 21 years of its existence. Do you see an end to insurgency in the near future?

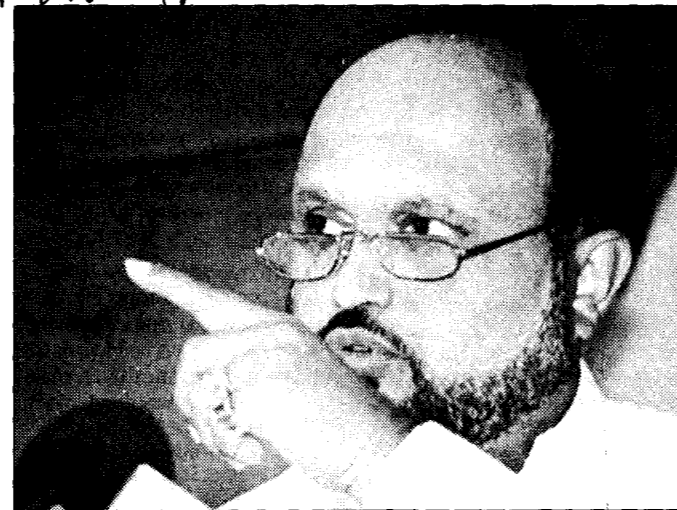
We have been repeatedly asking ULFA to come forward for talks. The ULFA chairperson, Arabinda Rajkhowa, has shown his willingness, but some leaders from the armed wing, especially commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, have been opposing any truck with the government. Moreover, ULFA is now totally in the

grip of Pakistan's Inter-services Intelligence (ISI), which is why they asked the people of Assam to support the Mujahideen during the Kargil conflict.

■ Why is there an increasing trend of surrenders?

There is tremendous resentment brewing among the ULFA cadres, especially after people rejected its call to support the Mujahideen. Most of the boys now want to quit. Every day, district magistrates, police and army officers receive calls from boys willing to surrender. In the last week of April itself, 532 of them came overground. A large number of the 1,000-odd boys living in the Bhutan camps too want to quit. The lower level cadres have realised that ULFA has become the personal enterprise of Paresh Barua and a few others.

■ Some months back, you had said that ULFA may fall in line after the NSCN (IM) agreed to a ceasefire and the NSCN (K) expressed its willingness for talks.



But nothing has moved since.

The ULFA has links with both the NSCN factions. If the Centre invites the factions for talks, the ULFA will come around as well.

■ Both you and Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir have been demanding that both the NSCN factions be invited for talks. Why has the Centre not proceeded?

The Centre has appointed the wrong person (former union

home secretary K Padmanabhaiah) for the job. I don't think he will be able to find any solution. A person who will not seek political mileage out of the discussions should be appointed. Everybody has seen that talks with NSCN (IM) have not progressed since Padmanabhaiah took over from Swaraj Kaushal.

■ Why do rebel camps inside Bhutan still exist despite the In-

dian government's efforts?

Though India has been pressing Bhutan to evict the rebels from its land, Bhutan does not seem responsive. Instead, it appears to be siding ULFA, although it has declared that it is readying its army to take on the ULFA. At this rate, it would take Bhutan 15-20 years before it could perform that task.

However, other countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar seem to be responding to our call. Myanmar had only recently cracked down on ULFA and NSCN camps inside its territory. The Bangladeshi government has taken some steps but the opposition is totally pro-ULFA.

■ Do militants still collect money through extortion?

Extortion is on the wane. The security forces and the police are doing a good job. But most importantly, the common man has begun resisting extortion. In Nalbari, one Umesh Rabha built up a massive resistance movement, even sacrificing his life in the bargain.

■ Is the ISI still active in Assam

even after the arrest of two of its top functionaries last year?

My government has confirmed information that two Islamic groups, Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) and Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) have sent boys to Pakistan to be trained by the ISI.

■ And what about infiltration from Bangladesh? Jamiat chief Maulana Asad Madani has claimed that there is no influx.

Madani is wrong. He met me during his recent visit to Guwahati, where I handed him facts and figures about infiltration. Bangladeshis have become a problem even in Calcutta, Delhi and Mumbai.

■ Madani also complained that you want the IMDT Act to be scrapped in order to harass religious minorities.

The IMDT Act is a hurdle in identifying infiltrators. Our government has recommended its scrapping and the Centre too agrees with us. The Supreme Court has also taken up the matter. It is only the Congress that

Extortion is on the wane. The security forces and the police are doing a good job. But most importantly, the common man has begun resisting extortion.

wants it in place. The Congress brand of politics has always sought to create confusion over minorities and infiltrators. You will be surprised to know that while the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee wants the act to stay, the Northeast Congress Co-ordination Committee wants it scrapped. I have stated in a meeting organised by the Jamiat that IMDT or no IMDT, our government has not harassed any genuine Indian Muslim.

■ You recently accused a section of the press of inciting the militants.

This is a fact. Some newspapers have been glorifying the acts of militants. This is not just unfair; it amounts to aiding and abetting anti-national elements. The press

should be more responsible and highlight the common man's increasing opposition to militancy.

■ The state's finances are in a dire straits. You have not been able to pay employees on time.

The annual salary bill is have shot up from Rs 2,181 crore in 1996-97 to Rs 4,264 crore in 1999-2000. But payments have been delayed only by a few days every month. Every state is facing similar problems. We are asking the Centre to bail us out.

■ Is that why you have begun abolishing government posts?

The government is over-staffed. We are not throwing out employees, only abolishing posts which have been lying vacant for years.

■ What about unemployment and the rural economy?

Educated youth must seek self-employment. The government does not have any more jobs to offer.

Agricultural schemes like the installation of one lakh shallow tube wells and one lakh power tillers have generated tremendous response. The agricultural output has gone up, and boys are increasingly returning to villages to take up cultivation. Even surrendered militants are taking to agriculture.

1-12

FOREIGN MATTER

The Supreme Court has recently attempted to end a protracted controversy in Assam politics. A three-judge bench of the apex court has recently issued notices to the Union and Assam governments asking for the repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act. This is in response to a public interest litigation filed by the former president of the All Assam Students' Union, Mr Sarbananda Sonowal, against the unconstitutional enforcement of the act only in Assam, even when it is applicable everywhere in the country. The Supreme Court has now given six weeks, from May 1, to the Union and state governments for filing affidavits repealing the IM(DT) Act. It has also been recommended to the court that the act should be substituted by the Foreigners Act of 1946 in Assam.

The central issue here is the facilitation of the processes of identifying and deporting "foreigners" or illegal aliens in the state — a concern that has been central to its politics since the beginnings of the "Assam movement" in 1979. The IM(DT) Act puts the onus of proving a person's foreignness on the prosecution, whereas the recommended Foreigners Act puts this onus on the accused. Assam is therefore eager to weed out illegal migrants with a law that opposes the Anglo-Saxon principle of jurisprudence by which a person is innocent unless proven guilty. Constitutionally, Indian citizenship laws are under the Central government's jurisdiction. The IM(DT) Act was passed by Parliament in 1983, when Assam was largely unrepresented in the house as a result of an election boycott. This made it extremely difficult, unwieldy and expensive, if not technically impossible, to prove that someone was an illegal alien in Assam, reinforced by the ambivalence of pan-Indian political parties on the issue. Since then, the IM(DT) Act has been a source of frustration for supporters of the Assam agitation and, more recently, for those who link the rise of insurgency in the state with the influx of aliens from across the Bangladesh border. Although the number of illegal migrants actually deported under the act has been ridiculously low compared to the estimated number of infiltrators settled in the state, the act has often been deployed in votebank politics by both the Asom Gana Parishad and the Congress in relation to the indigenous Muslim population. Migration across the borders will continue to be an inevitable and uncontrollable human reality in Assam, largely dictated by local economic conditions. Although the Supreme Court's pressure might put an end to a long political dispute in the state, there is no guarantee that this legal measure will make the problem of identifying "foreigners", who share the language and physiognomy of the legal citizens, any less insurmountable in the absence of more fundamental economic solutions.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 MAY 2000

Rebels abduct six in Tripura

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, May 6: Six persons, including three minors, were abducted and two militant collaborators arrested in separate incidents in the state during the past 24 hours.

In retaliation, irate non-tribals attacked a nearby tribal settlement and gutted 30 houses.

Three farmers, Anil Pal (60), Gopal Pal (45) and Gouranga Pal (12), of Amar colony under Kalyanpur police station were kidnapped by All-Tripura Tiger force militants yesterday when they were tending their cows on a hilly tract.

Infuriated by the abduction, residents of the colony invaded the nearby Kobra Para tribal village and set ablaze at least 30 houses.

Tripura State Rifles (TSR) jawans were later deployed to restore normalcy.

In a separate incident, a group of suspected NLFT militants barged into the house of Rakhal

Mazumder in remote East Charakbai village in South Tripura last night and abducted Mazumder's children Ranjit (7) and Saraswati (9), both primary school students. The militants then broke into another non-tribal house and kidnapped at gunpoint Subal Nama (8).

Police, however, made a breakthrough by arresting two leading militant collaborators Jitendra Reang (26) and Jatindra Reang (27) from remote S.K. Para village in Dhalai district last night.

Traders released

Militants have released two traders abducted from Cachar district on April 25, reports our Silchar correspondent.

Madan Gopal Saha and Sudip Sarkar were held as hostages in the National Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) and the People's United Liberation Front hideouts in Tamenglong district of Manipur.

It was not known whether any ransom was paid for their release.

THE

7 MAY 2000

DELHI CAN WAIT

Naga situation is complicated enough

THE Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim does not recognise any other group. Its silence over the Centre's reported decision to sign a ceasefire accord with the Khaplang group indicates displeasure. That the truce is yet to be formalised also suggests that Delhi is cautious. The proposal for talks with Khaplang came from Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir, who has often been accused by NSCN-IM leaders of helping the rival group. Coming at a time when NSCN general secretary Th Muivah is in a Thai jail, any move by Delhi would be a minor coup. The group is unable to find a replacement for Muivah to resume talks. Delhi has shown remarkable patience for three years and its waiting till Muivah's release next January will make little difference. This will also ease the group's discomfiture. The ceasefire, which expires on 31 July, can be extended. Delhi obviously is on difficult ground but it might have to take a firm stand soon on whether it would like to hold separate talks or talk to all warring groups together. The Naga National Council cannot be ignored. Its two factions are headed by Phizo's daughter and M Kent, respectively. The sore point is that no one group enjoys the popular support of all Nagas. The priority is to end the fratricidal killings indulged in by both NSCN factions.

Jamir's recent remark that the Nagas of Nagaland should decide the fate of the state adds to the problem. This is obviously directed at Muivah suggesting that, being a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur, he has no *locus standi* in the matter. If this is the case, then Khaplang, a Hemi Naga from Myanmar, should also be excluded. Only chairman Isak Chishi Swu, a Sema from Nagaland, then, is the true representative of the Nagas. All concerned must avoid precipitating the situation. One needs to remember that after Phizo left the country in the late fifties the mantle fell on Muivah, who has identified himself with Naga nationalism from the outset.

THE STATESMAN

5 6 MAY 2000

5 6 MAY 2000

Fresh initiative to resolve N-E border dispute

FROM ANIRBAN ROY

Shillong, May 8: Meghalaya chief minister E.K. Mawlong and his Assam counterpart Prafulla Kumar Mahanta will make a joint visit to the "disputed" border areas of the two states on Thursday to resolve the 27-year-old imbroglio.

Earlier, both the chief ministers were scheduled to visit the disputed areas of Block I and II of Karbi Anglong district on April 28. But the visit was shelved after the Northeast chief ministers' conference was postponed.

"Both the chief ministers will visit Khanduli and its nearby areas and try to resolve the issue," Meghalaya chief secretary J.P. Singh told The Telegraph this morning. "If the weather permits, both chief ministers may also visit some disputed areas in Ri Bhoi district."

The two chief ministers, after their first meeting in Guwahati on March 15, had agreed to resolve the border imbroglio through "mutual co-operation" and had decided to jointly visit the disputed areas to bring an end to the debate at the earliest.

Singh said the records available with the state revenue department and Blocks I and II have "always" been under Jaintia Hills

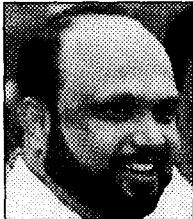
district of Meghalaya and were "temporarily" transferred to Assam.

Singh met his Assam counterpart P.K. Bora on April 19 at Khanduli to discuss the boundary issue. While both the chief ministers are trying to resolve the dispute, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council has expressed "great concern" over the arbitrary move of the Assam police to dismantle two toll gates near Guwahati on April 19.

In addition to dismantling the two KHADC gates at Maikhuli and Barapethar, it has also alleged that Assam policemen had destroyed another checkgate of the Syiem of Myllem. The district council complained that both the checkgates were in Meghalaya and the Assam police had overstepped their jurisdiction by dismantling the gates.

Mawlong had also taken up the checkgate issue during his meeting with Mahanta in Guwahati on April 22 and both the chief ministers had decided to resolve the crisis "amicably."

Tight security arrangements are being made at Khanduli for the proposed visit of the chief ministers. Sources in the state secretariat said all arrangements have also been made for the landing of helicopters.



Mahanta (top)
Mawlong: Joint
endeavour

THE ASSAM

9 MAY 2000

Jaswant rules out joining NPT

HD-1 By C. Raja Mohan 7-10-81

NEW DELHI, MAY 9. The Government today ruled out the possibility of giving up the nuclear weapons programme and joining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In a suo motu statement in both the Houses of Parliament, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, declared that the "the NPT community needs to understand that India cannot join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state".

India's strong assertion comes amidst the on-going NPT Review Conference at the United Nations in New York. The five NPT nuclear weapon states have insisted at the Conference that they will not accept India as a nuclear weapon state under the treaty.

Responding to that statement, Mr. Singh was in effect telling the international community that it was legal fiction to pretend that India was not a nuclear weapons state under the NPT rules. India, he said, was in better compliance with the obligations of nuclear weapon states under the NPT.

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"Though not a party to the NPT, India's policies have been consistent with the key provisions of NPT that apply to nuclear weapon states." The principal obligation of the nuclear weapon states under the NPT is to avoid assisting other countries from making nuclear weapons.

In claiming that India's record on this front as "impeccable", Mr. Singh was indirectly criticising China and the West for assisting the clandestine nuclear weapon programme of Pakistan. The nuclear weapon states party to the NPT, Mr. Singh said, "have either been active collaborators of or silent spectators to continuing proliferation". On the special obligation of nuclear weapon states under article VI of the NPT to work for effective nuclear disarmament, Mr. Singh said "India today is the only nuclear weapon state that remains committed to commencing negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention in order to bring about a nuclear-weapon-free-world".

At the same time Mr. Singh sought to correct the international

al misperception that India's position on nuclear matters amounted to "all or nothing". He pointed to New Delhi's nuclear restraint and its readiness to abide by a range of interim steps that would pave the way for total abolition of nuclear weapons. He referred to India's commitment to the principle of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, and its proposals to reduce nuclear danger worldwide by "de-alerting" nuclear arsenals.

Recognising the fact that the NPT today had near-universal membership, the Minister did not indulge in the usual tirade against the treaty. His criticism was measured and factual. He was also reaching out to the non-nuclear states party to the NPT by pointing out that India was in empathy with their demands at the Review Conference. Unlike the other nuclear weapon states, Mr. Singh pointed out India was ready to support nuclear weapon-free zones in other regions, and was willing to give unconditional assurances that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons.

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2001

TERROR WINS

Elections, intrinsic to democracy, could sometimes arbitrate against its fundamental principles. In Tripura, the run up to the recent Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council elections has been consistently violent. The endless rehearsal of massacres, abductions, torture, arson and extortion has persisted through the polls and is now going through its abated post-poll phase. The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura has emerged triumphant, dramatically ousting the Left Front which has been in power since 1978, winning every council election so far by a comfortable majority. This catastrophic electoral displacement marks the reinstatement of a particularly alarming form of indigenized politics in Tripura. The entire course of the elections has been determined by the concerted violent coercive tactics of the National Liberation Front of Tripura, a banned organization of tribal militants widely believed to be backing the IPFT.

The history of ethnic discord between indigenous tribals and immigrant nontribals in Tripura finds its focus in the status of the Autonomous District Council itself, a product of vested political interests right from its inception. Created by the Left Front in 1982 along a convoluted legislative route in order to secure tribal interests, its formation in Tripura endorsed an already existing ethnic schism caused by the reservation of three fourths of the state's territory for only a quarter of its population. This was further heightened by the 1993 peace accord between the Left Front and the All Tripura Tribal Front, by which the number of seats in the council reserved for nontribals was reduced from seven to three. Since the formation of the autonomous council, the percentage of nontribals in the state has fallen from 31 to 23. The initiatives of the Left Front are therefore tied up with the origins of the move towards tribal autonomy in Tripura. From 1982 to 1995, when the council elections were last held, the Left Front has consistently retained its majority in the council. Therefore, its recent ouster indicates a complete change in these perceived allegiances. The rejection of the Left Front establishes a total severing of its identification with the tribal interest, as perceived by the militant tribal hegemony controlling the polls. The Left Front is now quite definitively identified with the interests of the nontribal minority. More specifically, like elsewhere in the Northeast, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is now associated with the Bengali interest in the indigenous consciousness and is therefore perceived as inimical to tribal autonomy. This is, of course, compounded with the Left Front's persistent failure to negotiate, bilaterally with the Centre, any sort of understanding with a single extremist tribal outfit in the state. The instatement of a party backed by such a triumphantly violent outfit in a state, whose economy and civil society are in a shambles, raises profoundly disturbing questions regarding the quality of the autonomy it may have achieved in the process.

THE TELEGRAPH

11 MAY 2000

Boomerang in Tripura

IT WOULD be too simplistic to attribute the humiliating defeat of the Left Front in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections to the new emerging polarisation in West Bengal politics. Its defeat at the hands of the newly formed Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) is the result of a combination of factors which include the events in West Bengal. The ruling Left Front, which held sway over tribal voters since the inception of the Council in 1982, has suffered its worst defeat. A party which bagged all but one seat in the last District Council poll in 1995, could save only 10 seats. The ruling party can ignore the warning signals at its own peril.

Several factors account for the Left Front's rout. First, the ruling party failed to improve the law and order situation. While Nagaland and Manipur witnessed a marked improvement in the law and order situation following a dialogue with Naga militants and Assam enjoyed relative peace, Tripura experienced just the opposite. The past two years witnessed a series of violent attacks against non-tribals, mostly Bengali migrants. Second, the Left Front tried every trick in its bag to retain its support base among the tribals, including the demand to introduce inner line permits in the ADC areas. However, the ruling party failed to improve the plight of the tribals. Finally, the decision of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity, the Trinamool Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal to stay out of elections forced a straight fight between the Left Front and the IPFT. This proved costly for the Left Front.

Both the CPI(M) and the Congress have sought to exploit the divide between tribals and non-tribals for narrow political gains. The extremist outfits in the state have been cultivated by all major parties. If the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) had the blessings of the CPI(M), which targeted primarily TUJS workers, the TUJS has now used the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) to outmanoeuvre the Left Front. The NLFT extremists openly backed the IPFT candidates. The patronage given to the extremist groups and the rigging culture which it brought to Tripura have boomeranged on the Left Front. The erosion in the Left Front's support base has hardly helped the Congress which drew a blank. If the Left Front has been paid in its own coin, it has only itself to blame.

MAY 2000

North-east CMs' meet at Shillong

'Prepare for talks with militants'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 10. — Reiterating its commitment to restoring normalcy in the region, the Centre has reportedly asked the chief ministers of the seven north-eastern states to create a congenial atmosphere before initiating talks with the underground outfits.

The Centre has reportedly asked the chief ministers to establish contacts with the leaders of insurgent organisations and prepare for holding early talks.

The chief ministers will meet in Shillong on Friday to evolve a common strategy for the region's socio-economic development. The Tripura chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, left for Shillong today.

Highly placed home ministry sources said the Union home minister and other senior officials, including the home secretary, Mr Kamal Pande, have asked the chief ministers to evolve a common strategy for combating insurgency and holding talks with the militants within the parameters drawn by the Centre.

Sources said the chief ministers are expected to meet the Prime Minister and Mr LK Advani early next month.

Last week, some Tripura leaders who met Mr Advani, demanded the "strict implementation" of socio-economic

programmes initiated by the Centre some time ago.

"The Centre is trying to persuade the insurgents to stop their activities. But only the Bodo Liberation Tigers have suspended operations against the Army, paramilitary forces and the police," sources said, adding that "no other organisation has come forward for talks within the Centrally stipulated parameters."

Ministry sources said of the 31 main extremist and terrorist organisations, eight operate in the North-east. They are: United Liberation Front of Assam, National Democratic Front of Bodoland, National Liberation Front of Tripura, All Tripura Tiger Force, National Socialist Council of Nagalim, Manipur People's Liberation Front, United National Liberation Front and People's Liberation Army.

Tripura's ruling Left Front has in a statement expressed its anxieties over the mounting incidents of post poll violence in the state.

NLFT insurgents in particular, the statement said, were trying to harm the supporters and activists of the ruling front.

Extremists have killed at least four party members and activists in the hill areas. Many have also been injured and the houses of CPI-M supporters torched, the front alleged.

THE STATESMAN

11 MAY 2000

Bandh evokes mixed response in North-east

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, May 11. — The Bharat bandh, called by the National Forum of Mass Organisations, today evoked a mixed response in the North-east.

The strike against "anti-people measures" of the BJP-led government paralysed life in Tripura, Assam and Manipur, but evoked no response in Nagaland and Sikkim.

In Tripura the bandh was peaceful but total. Shops, markets and commercial establishments remained closed in Agartala and its outskirts. Vehicles went off the roads all over the state.

Attendance in state and central government offices, corporations, banks and financial institutions was almost nil. The Tripura university, colleges and other educational institutions wore a deserted look in the state.

Private and state transport did not ply. Indian Airlines flights between Calcutta and Agartala were earlier cancelled.

A forum of employees, workers, teachers and bank and corporation employees launched a campaign throughout the state over the past 10 days to make

ORISSA STRIKE

BHUBANESWAR, May 11. — Life was paralysed in many parts of Orissa following the Bharat bandh today. Road and rail transport was affected. As many as 1619 trade union activists and left party members were arrested and later released. The bandh was peaceful. Most educational institutions and business establishments remained closed. — SNS

the bandh a success.

Assam: Guwahati wore a deserted look as most vehicles went off the roads and attendance in the government and public sector organisations was thin, adds UNI. Shops and business establishments remained closed and air and rail services were suspended. All the financial institutions, including the banks, were also closed.

The ruling four-party alliance — AGP, CPI, CPI-M and UPPA — had extended support to the strike. A number of trade unions in the state had expressed their solidarity with the bandh.

Nagaland: In Nagaland, the nation-wide strike evoked no response. All offices of the cen-

tral and state government functioned as usual and educational institutions were open throughout the state. There was no disruption in vehicular movement.

In Dimapur flights did not operate but the trains were running normally. All branches of the SBI were open, but branches of other banks remained closed because of a strike called by some bank unions.

The Nagaland branch of the All India Telecom Employees' Union participated in the strike.

Sikkim: Sikkim remained largely unaffected by the nation-wide general strike. All state government institutions, schools and business establishments were open and movement of vehicles was normal, adds PTI. Almost all central government offices functioned as usual.

Manipur: Life was, however, disrupted in Manipur. Reports from district headquarters said shops, markets, business establishments and educational institutions remained closed.

Attendance in both state and central government offices was thin while nationalised banks in the state failed to transact any business.

THE STATESMAN

12 MAY 2000

Ethnic tension in Mizoram

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Silchar, May 11: Mizoram is bracing for a possible ethnic flare-up between Mizos and minority Reang or Bru tribals as a fallout of the 25-day long hostage crisis.

Three Mizos, a teacher and two public health engineering department officials, were abducted by insurgents of the Bru National Liberation Front on April 15. Though Lalnunfela, the teacher, was freed from a BNLFF hideout in southwest Bangladesh last week, the other two are still in rebel custody.

The abduction was probably in retaliation to the kidnapping of six Neepeco engineers from the hydel power plant site at Bilkhawtlir in Mizoram on March 31. The Naga militants and the Hmar People's Conference, holding the six men captive somewhere in Manipur, have demanded Rs 1 crore ransom for their release. The authorities at Neepeco, headquartered at Shillong, are yet to respond. A new Mizo outfit, the Mizo Protection Force, has added fuel to fire by setting May 12 as a "firm" deadline for the release of the six Neepeco employees. Otherwise, it has threatened to slap

"quit notices" to Reangs living in northwestern Mizoram.

Mizoram chief secretary H.V. Lalhinga today said the government is aware of brewing ethnic tension. He said the government has already drawn up plans to prevent any flare-up.

He told **The Telegraph** over phone from Aizawl this morning that personnel of the Mizoram Armed Police, Assam Rifles and BSF have been deployed in the vulnerable areas in northwestern Mizoram and along its border with Bangladesh. The chief secretary said the border areas in Mamit district, a Reang stronghold, has been divided into three "security zones", led by senior magistrates.

The chief secretary said the three church leaders, sent to negotiate the release of the two Mizo hostages, are likely to meet the BNLFF militants at Zomuang Thlang, a Mizo border village near Tuipuibari either today or early tomorrow. He, however, ruled out payment of Rs 50 lakh ransom demanded by the rebels.

The pastors include a Reang clergyman, A.K. Dawi, a Synod co-ordinator Lalramthara and Lalsawma.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAY 2000

Closing ranks for a dreamland

THE hundreds of tree stumps rising a few feet above the ground bear testimony to evergreen forests having been plundered all around Kokrajhar, Assam's Bodo heartland. Tigers may have once roamed these forests, but with their habitat gone, the cats have long since retreated far and beyond.

For the past six years or more, the forests around Kokrajhar have been home to a different variety of tigers: the Bodo Liberation Tigers or BLT guerrillas who are fighting for a separate Bodoland state. Unlike its more radical rival, the National Democratic Front of Boroland, which is engaged in an armed struggle for an independent Bodo homeland outside India, the BLT has all along been seeking a solution within the Indian constitutional framework. That, of course, did not prevent the outfit from blowing up the Brahmaputra Mail in the winter of 1996 that killed 33 passengers.

Nevertheless, when the BLT entered into a ceasefire agreement with the government of India in March, not many were surprised. After all, the group believed in the Constitution. Today, almost every available wall along the highway, starting from the oil township of Bongaigaon to Kokrajhar and beyond till the border with West Bengal is plastered with slogans welcoming the BLT-government ceasefire.

On 30 April, as I arrived in Kokrajhar, a 15-member BLT delegation led by its chairman Hagrama Basumatary left for New Delhi to meet senior officials in the home affairs ministry for their first formal peace talks. The rebel leaders could not meet home minister LK Advani and the talks, too, apparently did not make much progress. It is natural. After all, rebel groups entering into negotiations with the Indian government are known to put up tough conditions at the beginning.

On this occasion, the BLT apparently insisted that the group be allowed to continue collecting Bodoland tax as it has been doing for quite some time now. Another thorny issue that came up was the actual strength of its cadres who need to be rehabilitated. Security agencies in Assam, including the Army, puts the strength of hardcore BLT cadres at 600 and its total number at around 2,500. The BLT claims a strength of 5,000 and has sought identity cards for each of its cadres so that they are not subjected to harassment by security forces. The group is angry and says that three of its cadres were killed by security forces after the truce while they were engaged in wall-writing. It will take time before things become easy.

On the whole, however, the mood among the common Bodos is for peace. It is for the government too to capitalise on the situation and take matters to their logical end. The talks with the



under the initiative of the Absu-BPAC combine.

The idea is to get the Bodo political parties under one platform with the backing of the Absu and BPAC, two of the most influential non-political Bodo organisations. The assembly polls in Assam are due early next year and this time round the Bodos hope to put up single candidates in each of the constituencies where they have some influence. The objective is to secure the victory of at least 15 Bodo candidates who would then back the party which will be in a position to form the new government in the state.

Of course, there will be a bargaining point. The Bodo legislators would want the state assembly to pass a resolution recommending the creation of a separate Bodo state. After all, the state legislatures in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh had passed resolutions favouring the creation of Vananchal, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh states respectively. This looks like the gameplan of the Bodo groups at the moment.

If anything, there's an ominous quiet in the Bodo areas these days. The BLT and the NDFB, otherwise bitter rivals, have not indulged in any fratricidal killings since the end of last year when they were said to have reached an understanding not to attack each other.

However, moves to hold the long pending elections to the BAC promises to shatter this uneasy calm. The protagonists of the Bodo agitation, the Absu-BPAC combine (which were signatories to the 1993 Bodo Accord), have already rejected the accord. They maintain that they will have nothing to do with the BAC. Moreover, they have refused to recognise the BAC constituencies formed after the recent delimitation exercise as the original dispute over the very boundary of the council remains unsettled.

The mood on the ground is reflected in the assessment report sent to the state government by the administration in seven districts which comes under the BAC. The authorities in most of these seven districts have pointed out that holding polls to the BAC would lead to largescale violence and would once again provide militants the opportunity to take the upper hand. The report also says the polls, if held, would certainly be boycotted by the mainstream Bodo parties and groups.

There is just no scope for the state government to rush things on the Bodo front. This is not to say that the Assam government has any clue on how to proceed or that it has an action plan ready for execution to set things right in the troubled land of the Bodos.

(The writer is editor of the Northeast Daily, Guwahati.)

There are signs of peace in Assam's Bodo country but the road to a final settlement of the statehood stir still appears thorny, writes WASBIR HUSSAIN

BLT should be transparent. If the talks are to fail somehow, the situation on the ground will deteriorate further, firebrand Lok Sabha MP from Kokrajhar, Sansuma Khungur Bwiswamuthiary, tells me.

Now, all the prominent overground Bodo groups like the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee, besides the BLT, are engaged in fighting for the same goal, a separate Bodo state to be carved out of Assam. Does this mean that the secessionist National Democratic Front of Boroland is slowly getting isolated?

The answer may be no at the moment, but it is a fact that the NDFB is under pressure in view of the developments on the peace front. Bishiram Narzary, president of the All Bodo Employees' Federation, would like to put it differently. The percentage of people wanting to stay within India and find a solution to the Bodo problem within the constitutional framework is more. If this is to increase further, it is likely that the NDFB will be isolated, he says.

Already, a section of NDFB members are said to be willing to enter into exploratory dialogue with government agencies. Lieutenant-General DB Shekatkar, general officer commanding

the Army's Tezpur-based IV Corps, who heads the unified counter-insurgency headquarters in Assam, told me that the Army was soon going to hold talks with the NDFB. He said NDFB representatives had met him personally in recent weeks to finalise things like security for those group leaders who would be coming over for the talks.

On the overground front, too, things are moving fast. The Assam government last fortnight dissolved the interim Bodoland Autonomous Council, formed as per provision of the Bodo Accord signed in 1993. Dissolution of the near-defunct BAC was fine, but the state government made the blunder of appointing an advisory board with a cabinet minister as its chairman and all the Bodo legislators as its members.

This was a unilateral move and the result has been that all the Bodo legislators, save one, have resigned from the board.

As the Assam government initiated moves (including dissolution of the interim BAC) to hold the first-ever elections to the 40-member BAC, Bodo groups were busy trying to shed their individual identities and close ranks. Things have progressed quite a bit

Joint N-E secretariat proposed

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shillong, May 12: Meghalaya chief minister E.K. Mawlong has suggested constitution of a "permanent forum", including a secretariat of chief ministers of the Northeast, to ensure implementation of the Centre's development packages for the Northeast.

Addressing a meeting of chief ministers of the Northeast here today, Mawlong said a joint forum would also strengthen regional unity. "Once such a secretariat is constituted, we will be able to jointly take up various issues with the Centre," he said.

The Meghalaya chief minister also made a case for reconstitution of the North Eastern Council, saying that further delay in doing so would affect several projects undertaken by the organisation.

Referring to the law and order situation in the Northeast, Mawlong said the insurgency-ravaged states should evolve a joint strategy to keep militant outfits in check. "The success of our efforts to combat militancy depends on the level of coordination between us," he said. Mawlong also stressed the importance of sharing intelligence information.

The chief minister said there were several other areas where the northeastern states could collaborate. He said the ban on the timber trade was an issue the governments of the Northeast could jointly take up with the Supreme Court.

"The recently-revised criteria for supply of subsidised rice and wheat, establishment of a regional institute of management and upgradation of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research at Umiam are other issues we can jointly raise," Mawlong said.

Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar said two of the major issues in the Northeast were lack of employment opportunities for youth and inadequate infrastructure.

"Unless the basic needs of the region are fulfilled, the sinister designs of divisive forces will continue to succeed. This is why today's meeting assumes importance. We have to jointly pressure the Centre into regarding our problems as national issues," he said.

Echoing Sarkar's views, Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir said the Centre should realise that militancy and the region's economic backwardness were inter-linked.

Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Mukut Mithi said today's conference was a step in the right direction. "This is the first time that we, the chief ministers of the Northeast, have come together to discuss our common problems. I am sure the Centre will be forced to listen if we speak in one voice," he said.

Ransom deadline

The Bru National Liberation Front has extended the deadline for payment of ransom for the two government employees it is keeping as hostage, reports UNI.

Official sources said the deadline was extended from May 13 to May 15 following a breakthrough in the negotiations between the militants and the Church leaders at Zumuanthlang last night. The militants agreed to call in their senior leaders from Bangladesh on the request of the Church leaders negotiating on behalf of the Mizoram government. A senior home department official claimed that the Border Security Force has been requested not to arrest any BNLF leader entering from the Bangladesh side for negotiations.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 MAY 2000

Ethnic balance under threat

NSCN abetting infiltration into Nagaland: CM

FROM ANIRBAN ROY

Shillong, May 14: Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir has alleged that the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) has been "abetting" infiltration in Nagaland for better contacts in Bangladesh.

Jamir, who was here to attend the northeastern chief ministers' meet, told **The Telegraph** that infiltration has now become an additional problem for the troubled state.

"The infiltration problem can now be termed as a demographic invasion and will disturb the delicate ethnic balance of the state," the chief minister said. Despite the violence and killings, Nagaland has witnessed a steady infiltration over the past few years.

The Naga rebels have been using Bangladesh as a safe haven since the beginning. But over the past decade, Naga leaders have been using the Kathmandu International airport to fly out of the region. Jamir agreed that many "infiltrators" from Bangladesh were trying to settle down in the state by marrying local girls. "This will change the demographic pattern of the state," he said.

"A similar thing has happened in Assam. The Ulfa, which was floated to safeguard the rights and culture of the indigenous people of the state, is now operating from

Bangladesh. This is the paradox of insurgency in the Northeast," the chief minister said.

According to Jamir, the NSCN has been "helping" other fraternal organisations like the Jiyanniewtrep National Liberation Council, the A'chik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) and the National Democratic Front of Boroland "only to make their movement easier in the region."

"If they are close to the Meghalaya outfit, they can easily use the state as a corridor for entry into

Bangladesh," the chief minister said, adding that the Naga insurgents "have been traditionally using Dawki as an 'entry point' to Bangladesh."

Jamir demanded that the Centre should treat the problem as a political issue and resolve it politically. "Even at the chief ministers' conference, I

said the Centre was treating the insurgency problem in the Northeast as a law and order problem," he said.

"The central leadership should understand the problem," the chief minister said, adding that there was a need for a political approach to resolve the imbroglio.

Wage hike: Arunachal Pradesh government has proposed to increase the minimum daily wage for labourers from the existing Rs 35.60 to Rs 58 per day — up by around 70 per cent, reports PTI.



Jamir: Grappling with fresh crisis

THE TELEGRAPH

15 MAY 2000

TRIPURA VERDICT

For the Left Front, a stark message

RESULTS of the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council elections indicate a major erosion in Marxist influence in traditional strongholds. The Left Front managed just 10 of 28 elective seats in the 30-member ADC compared to 27 in 1995. Non-performance is the reason. Despite the Marxists' strength in rural bases and an overwhelming majority in the ADC, tribals have always suffered at the hands of security forces, insurgents and Bengali chauvinism and have been driven from the marketplace. Not only have the Marxists been unable to check growing insurgency they have no answer to why rebels are more active in Khowai district, a red bastion. The Congress central command fielded candidates at the last moment; as in 1995, it drew a blank, since it has no influence in the hills. It is doubtful if the Opposition alliance — the BJP, Trinamul, Tripura Upajati Juba Samity and JD(U) — would have done better. The anti-Communist tribal organisation, the TUJS, once an influential electoral partner of the Congress, is also losing support in the hills.

It would be an understatement to say that this poor show is the result of pre-poll violence unleashed by the National Liberation Front of Tripura which backed the newly-formed Indigenous People's Front of Tripura. The rebels threatened other parties but did not hinder campaigning by Left Front constituents. The IPFT, comprising the Tripura Hills People's Party, Tripura Tribal National Conference, Tripura Tribal Students Federation and the Tripura Upajati Karmachari Samity, has won an overwhelming majority. But it is not clear whether it will be able to persuade the NLFT to give up violence. Devoid of ideology and leadership, the IPFT is unlikely to bring about any qualitative changes. On the contrary, the chances of heightened animosity with non-tribals is possible if the party wants to evict immigrant settlers. The implications of the poll outcome should not be lost on the government.

THE STATESMAN

1 MAY 2000

NSCN keen on resuming talks

Naga outfit seeks public co-operation

1675
9-10

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, May 15: The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) has, in an open letter, urged the people to help expedite resumption of peace talks for a lasting solution to the decades-old Naga political problem.

"We believe that the people also have a stake in the peace process and should ask their government to be more transparent," the underground organisation said. The talks were stalled following the imprisonment of NSCN(I-M) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah in Thailand in January this year.

The appeal comes on the heels of similar efforts initiated by the Naga Peoples' Movement of Human Rights. The human rights body, in its last conference, resolved that it was pertinent to explain to the people about the "traditional rights" of the Nagas.

Charging the Centre with "insincerity" towards resolving the issue through peace talks, the NSCN(I-M) said, "We do not know why Indian officials have shown scant respect for the ceasefire and the peace process, but we would like the people to know about the real hurdles in the way of an honourable and peaceful solution to the Indo-Naga political conflict".

Reiterating its commitment towards a peaceful solution, the NSCN(I-M) said, "We believe that the solution lies in a political process and not in armed confrontation," the open letter said.

The ceasefire between the Centre and the NSCN(I-M), which came into effect in 1997, expires in July. However, the Centre has not been sincere in its efforts to stand by its commitment for a peaceful solution to the conflict, the outfit alleged, adding that home ministry officials, intelligence bureau and security forces have shown scant regard for the current peace process.

Stating that there was "total insincerity" on part of the officials involved in the negotiation, the NSCN(I-M) said even the Prime Minister's emissary had no "real

power" to negotiate because intelligence agencies and Assam Rifles "constantly undermined" the authority of the emissary.

It also alleged that in the middle of the peace process, the intelligence agencies got the Thai authorities to arrest Muivah by "spreading false information," which seriously jeopardised "our faith" in the sincerity of New Delhi's commitment towards a just solution.

The NSCN(I-M) also identified Nagaland chief minister S. C. Jamir as "one of the greatest obstacles" in the peace process, saying he along with the Governor and the Assam Rifles closed down the monitoring cell office at Dimapur without the consent of Ceasefire Monitoring Group set up by the Centre.

"Most Indians do not know much about the peace process and Grinder Muivah. He is not a member of our organisation but he represents the Centre's interests," the NSCN(I-M) said.

BJP flays Jamir

With the BJP consolidating base in Christian-dominated Nagaland, its national secretary in-charge of five northeastern border states, P.B. Acharya has mounted a tirade against Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir saying the biggest-ever lottery scam in the state was masterminded by the chief minister, adds our Imphal correspondent.

The Supreme Court recently passed an order on the Nagaland lottery scam saying the full amount siphoned by the "agents" should be recovered and deposited in the state exchequer.

In a memorandum to Nagaland Governor O.P. Sharma, Acharya and other state level BJP leaders alleged that the S.C. Jamir government was not making any attempt to recover the amount from M/S Associates, the Nagaland state lottery agents.

BJP's entry has widened the ambit of politics in Nagaland. Earlier, the Congress and the Naga National Council were the key players in Nagaland politics.

THE TELEGRAPH

MAY 2000

4 killed in Tripura militant attacks

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, May 15: National Liberation Front of Tripura militants killed four persons and abducted three in Tripura over the past 24 hours.

Police sources said a group of militants waylaid a tribal youth at Muhuripur under Baikhola police station in South Tripura last night and hacked him to death. The slain youth has been identified as Makhan Tripura of Shibpur village. He is believed to have been killed for refusing to work for the NLFT.

Militants from the same outfit also killed three members of a

non-tribal family at Itbhatta under Bishalgarh police station in West Tripura district last night.

The bodies of Satish Chandra Datta, his wife Basanti Datta and daughter Protima Datta were recovered by the police today. Itbhatta has been witnessing an Exodus of non-tribals due to a series of raids by militants. Satish Chandra Datta's family is one of the few to have stayed back.

Sources said NLFT militants may have killed three members of the Datta family to scare the others into fleeing the village.

The incident has sparked tension in the area. Non-tribals resorted to a road blockade today

and manhandled three tribal government employees in retaliation for the killings.

Deputy collector (revenue) Anandahari Jamatya, sub-inspector Anil Debbarma of the mobile task force and Tripura Road Transport Corporation employee Ratan Debbarma were beaten up by a mob after being dragged out from a bus. The road blockade was withdrawn at 1.15 pm after the police intervened.

In another incident, NLFT militants today opened fire on a group of people at Ampu colony under Amarpur subdivision of South Tripura. One Sunil Biswas was injured in the incident. He is

undergoing treatment at Amarpur Hospital. The rebels also abducted three persons in the state over the past 24 hours.

Police sources said an unemployed non-tribal youth, identified as Dibyendu Datta, was abducted from Moshauli village under Fatikroy police station in North Tripura.

Another group of militants raided Tularampara village under Peharthal police station and took one Yularam Reang and his son Jayram Reang hostage.

The father-son duo was abducted following a dispute over collection of "taxes" by the militants, sources said. NLFT rebels

also took away a jeep after beating up its driver and his assistant on the Ambasa-Gandacherra road in Dhakai district yesterday. The vehicle is yet to be traced.

CRPF jawan killed

A Central Reserve Police Force jawan was killed when suspected valley militants attacked a footpatrol team near Kumbi Bazar in Manipur's Bishenpur district this afternoon.

They also snatched an AK 47 rifle from the slain soldier. He has been identified as constable N. Brajakishore Singh, a resident of Manipur, reports our correspondent from Imbhal.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAY 2000

¹⁰ ✓
No ransom paid, says govt

Bru militants release two Mizo hostages

Gr 4 17/5 ✓

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Silchar, May 16: The Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) today released two Mizo officials after keeping them in captivity for over a month.

Mizoram home minister Tawnluia said the two captives — junior engineer Lalchhanhima and section officer Jolly Lalawmliana, both employees of the state public health engineering department — were received at the New Kawnpui village along the Mizoram-Tripura border by the state police this morning.

Detailed programmes for the official reception of the released duo would be chalked out by the five-member committee of ministers on security and related matters, he said.

He expressed gratitude to the three church leaders — Rev. Lalsawma, Rev. A.K. Dawi and Lalramthanga — who managed to persuade the Bru outfit.

The three-member team of Church leaders held two rounds of talks with the BNLF. While the first round failed to make headway, the second round proved successful.

The final round of talks was held at Zomung Tblang, 180 km northwest of Aizawl on the Indo-Bangladesh border yesterday.

Sources in Aizawl said the rebel leaders agreed to set the captives free despite being told by the Church elders that no ransom would be paid by the government. The BNLF had demanded Rs 50 lakh as ransom.

However, it could not be ascertained whether any accord on bilateral matters between the

state government and the BNLF has been signed.

It is also not clear if any groundwork had been laid between the religious leaders and the Bru rebels paving the way for an eventual settlement of demands. The Brus (also known as Reangs in Mizoram) have been demanding repatriation of over 37,000 Reang refugees to Mizoram from camps in north Tripura. The Reangs fled Mizoram following ethnic cleansing by the Mizos in October 1997.

Other demands of the BNLF include, carving out of an autonomous district council to ensure the welfare of the Brus.

The BNLF, a militant outfit set up five years ago, is an ally of the Tripura rebels and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah).

THE TELEGRAPH

17 MAY 2000

Bru militants free two Mizo hostages after a month

Aizawl, May 16

BRU NATIONAL Liberation Front (BNLF) on Tuesday released two Mizos after keeping them in captivity for over one month, Mizoram Home Minister Tawnluia said here.

The two captives — junior engineer Lalchhanhima and section officer Jolly Lalawmliana, both working in the State public health engineering department — were received at the Mizoram-Tripura border village of New Kawnpui by the State police on Tuesday morning, Tawnluia said at a press conference.

A five-member committee of ministers on security and related matters will chalk out a reception for the duo.

Tawnluia thanked the three church leaders — Rev Lalsawma, Rev A K Dawi and Elder Lalramthanga — who successfully held talks with the Reang and Bru outfits. "I also express my sincere thanks to the BNLF militants for

releasing the two Mizos unconditionally," he said.

Rev Lalsawma, who accompanied the Home Minister in the press meet, said they did not give ransom money to the outfit for the release of the two Mizo captives.

"We told the top leaders of the BNLF, including chief commander Solomon Prafulla and commander of the tornado operation Blong Buraha, that the Government would never pay the ransom," he said. Though he did not specify the place where they met the BNLF chief commander, he indicated that it was somewhere in Bangladesh, where the outfit has several hideouts.

The Government negotiators also met Bru National Union (BNU) leaders from Reang and Bru refugee camps in Tripura, including its president A Sawibung, vice-president Laldawnglian and general secretary Bruno Msha.

The State Government had sent a proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs to outlaw the BNLF,

Tawnluia said.

He denied that the State Government neglected the six NEEPCO employees who were abducted by Manipur's Hmar People's Convention-Democrats (HPC-D) on March 31 from the project site of the 60 MW Tuirial Hydel Project. "The HPC-D has demanded Rs 1 crore ransom from the NEEPCO. The Government is doing everything it can and the corporation is directly negotiating with the outfit," he said.

BNLF abducted Lalchhanhima and Jolly Lalawmliana from a Government bus near the Mizoram-Bangladesh border hamlet of Saithah on April 15. Rev Lalsawma said the BNLF leadership were concerned over the issue of Reang and Bru refugees in Tripura and expressed the desire for an early settlement to the problem. When asked if they had any political demand, the BNLF leaders said they had already submitted memorandums to the Mizoram Government. **PTI**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 MAY 2000

Assam bandh call for Karbi autonomy

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, May 16

17-7
17/5

THE CENTRE'S decision to table Bills for the creation of Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh States tomorrow has set off a chain of reactions in Assam. While Bodos have vowed to fight for a separate Bodoland, parties battling for autonomy in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam have called a bandh in the State on Thursday to protest against the Centre's discriminatory policy.

Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) general secretary Holiram Terang told reporters here on Tuesday that the Centre should not be partial to the Hindi heartland while granting autonomy.

The ASDC, along with Karbi Students' Association and CPI(ML) have been agitating for autonomy to Karbi Anglong for over 14 years now. The North Cachar Hills case has been spear-

9-N 5/2000

headed by the Dimasa Students' Union for almost a similar period.

"The exclusion of the autonomous State from the agenda of creating new States reflects the attitude of the Centre towards the region," said Terang, who is also the leader of the ASDC Legislature Party. "This is despite the fact that granting autonomy to Karbi Anglong falls within the provisions of Article 244(a) of the Constitution and would not entail any constitutional amendment."

Article 244(a) advocates formation of an autonomous State comprising certain tribal areas in Assam and creation of local legislature or council of ministers or both thereof.

The ASDC leader further said various groups advocating statehood for Bodoland have echoed the sentiments of the Karbi people. However, the participation of Bodo organisations like All Bodo Students Union and Peoples' Democratic Front in the May 18 bandh has not been confirmed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAY 2000

Rebels kill 3, abduct 5 in Tripura

FROM SEKHAR DATTA

Agartala, May 18: Reprisals by militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura against tribals and non-tribals who voted against their political front, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, in the recent autonomous district council polls continued unabated.

Last night, a group of armed NLFT militants shot dead three members of a non-tribal family and injured an infant. Apart from this, five persons including two tribals were abducted during the past 24 hours.

Giving details, police sources said at 9.30 pm last night a group of NLFT rebels came to Haripur village near Gandacherra subdivisional town and stormed the house of one Sajal Sarkar, 45. Sarkar was not home at that time. The militants shot dead his wife Maranbala Sarkar, 40, his younger brother Ratan Sarkar, 25, and a tenant, Shyamacharan Sarkar, 19. They also inflicted bullet injuries on Sarkar's five-month-old son Liton Sarkar, who is now struggling for life in Gandacherra hospital.

Hearing the sound of gunfire, policemen from Gandacherra police station, which is only 500 metres from the village, reached the spot and fired over 700 rounds but failed to arrest any of the militants.

Shortly after receiving information of the attack, Dhalai superintendent of police T.B. Roy rushed to the spot with a large contingent of policemen from Am-

basa and launched combing operations.

With last night's killing, altogether 144 persons have been killed by militants so far this year. Of these, 78 persons have been killed after the notification for the ADC polls was issued on March 31. Sources attributed last night's killing to the NLFT's attempt to avenge CPM candidate Lalit Tripura's victory from the Raima valley constituency in the ADC polls.

In separate incidents, five persons were abducted during the past 24 hours. Police sources said Nanigopal Saha, 46, a trader, was abducted at gunpoint at 6.30 pm yesterday from his residence near Killa market under Udaipur subdivision of south Tripura.

Two tribals, Aghore Debbarma, 27, and Khirod Debbarma, 35, residents of Garia Dafadarpara village under Kalyanpur police station who are known to be CPM supporters, were abducted by NLFT militants from near the ADC sub-zonal office in North Maharanipur under Teliamura police station. They are still untraced. Sources said the two tribals were abducted for working in favour of the CPM in the ADC elections.

In a separate incident yesterday, two brothers, Praneswar Das, 21, and Laxman Das, 23, were abducted from the Sonaram area under Sidhai police station by All-Tripura Tiger Force militants. The non-tribal youth, originally residents of Ishanpur village, had gone to Sonaram to buy jackfruit. They are still untraced.

THE TRIBUNE

19 MAY 2000

3 non-tribal villagers shot dead by NLFT rebels

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, May 18. — Three non-tribal villagers were shot dead by armed insurgents of the outlawed NLFT in the Gandachhara region of south Tripura last night.

Militants have kidnapped at least 11 persons in the last 24 hours.

An armed NLFT gang fired at the houses of non-tribal villagers at Haripur in Gandachhara subdivision shortly after nine p.m. yesterday killing Mr Ratan Sarkar (25), Mr Shyamacharan Sarkar (24) and Mrs Mayarani Sarkar (40) on the spot.

Mrs Sarkar's five month old baby was also seriously injured in the firing and was rushed immediately to the subdivisional hospital.

A combing operation was launched by security men in the area shortly after the killing to trek down the militants.

However, no one has been arrested so far.

In a separate incident, Mr Nanigopal Saha, a trader was kidnapped from the Killa area in Udaypur subdivision early today.

Earlier, six day labourers from Bihar were abducted from Sonamura in west Tripura district yesterday when armed militants waylaid a loaded truck in which they were travelling at Bisramgonj.

A villager was similarly kidnapped from Natunbazar area in the Amarpur subdivision yesterday.

Meanwhile, the jawans of the Tripura State Rifles repulsed an attack on a security camp at Sarbang in the Amarpur subdivision by armed insurgents of the NLFT.

The camp at Sarbang came under heavy firing by insurgents shortly after nine p.m. yesterday.

Rebels fired from nearby bushes and the TSR men retaliated immediately.

The encounter lasted for about half an hour.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAY 2000

NLFT militants kill three more

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, May 18

SUSPECTED NATIONAL
Liberation Front of Tripura rebels shot dead three more people in the remote Ganddachara area of Dhalai district on Wednesday, but their attempt to overrun a Tripura State Rifles (TSR) camp in South District was foiled. No casualties were reported in the second incident.

A five-year-old child received bullet wounds in the NLFT strike at Haripur village, half-a -km from Ganddachara police station. Around 10 pm, some armed rebels stormed the house and asked Sajal Sarkar to come out.

Having failed to find him, the ultras began firing indiscriminately. Manabati Sarkar was hit. She died instantly, while her five-month-old son, Litan, sustained bullet wounds. His condition was stated to be critical.

The rebels then dragged Ratan, Sajal's younger brother to the courtyard and shot him dead.

Shymacharan, Sajal's uncle, who was returning home, too was sprayed with bullets.

Officers and security men of Ganddachara police station arrived at the scene only after the rebels fled.

Having reached the village, the policemen began firing aimlessly.

Personnel from a nearby CRPF camp too failed to come to the village during the raid.

Elsewhere in the State, Tripura State Rifles men deployed at the Sarbang camp at Amarpur resisted an attempt by the suspected NLFT rebels to overrun it.

Heavily armed rebels swooped down on the camp from two sides. The jawans retaliated.

The encounter lasted for about half-an-hour, before the jawans pushed the rebels back. Later, reinforcements came in from nearby camps.

Police said the rebels, led by self-styled NLFT commander Dharmacharan Reang had planned to take away arms from the camp.

Elsewhere, five more non-tribals have been kidnapped.

The NLFT, apparently bolstered by the recent drubbing received by the Left Front in the Tripura Areas Autonomous District Council polls, has stepped up its campaign of violence in the State.

The council polls were won by the Tripura Indigenous People's Front said to be close to the ultras. The Left Front accused the militants of rigging the polls.

Since the TTAADC polls there has been a spate of violence and abductions in the State with the security forces apparently unable to contain the situation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAY 2000

Track II efforts on to push Naga peace talks

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, MAY. 19. Track II negotiations are on to further push the Nagaland peace talks. Well-placed Government sources said the Centre gave the green signal to "Track II" negotiations about two months ago. Well established Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Nagaland and NGOs who are "knowledgeable" in Naga affairs have been asked to help in the negotiations.

Apparently tired of persuading the NSCN (I-M) to nominate their representative for the peace talks, the Centre has tried to open the "parallel course" recognising the overwhelming desire of the Naga people and organisations for restoration of peace in the strife-torn North-Eastern State.

Though the "Track II" course has not yet yielded any concrete results, senior Government officials believe that a channel of communication on yet another front has been opened and hope that the initiative would restore confidence and trust in the Centre's sincerity in taking the negotiation route.

The Naga peace talks have come to a standstill for the time being as Mr. T. Muivah, the NSCN (Issac-Muivah) outfit's powerful general secretary, is serving a jail term in Bangkok. He was arrested on January 19 on charges of travelling on a forged South Korean passport and later convicted by a Thai court which handed him down one-year prison sentence.

The Centre's chief negotiator with the NSCN(I-M), Mr. K. Padmanbhaiah, was scheduled to hold talks with the outfit in Amsterdam in February, but the dialogue had to be put off due to detention of the NSCN(I-M) General Secretary. The organisation has accused the Centre of not making efforts to get Mr. Muivah released but the Government maintains that it would take a neutral stand in the matter.

Also on the cards is a crucial meeting with the NSCN (I-M). Sources said the meeting would open a channel of communication with the NSCN (I-M) which has not nominated any office-bearer at the peace talks in the absence of Mr. Muivah.

The Cease Fire Monitoring Group (CFMG) which has not met for the past seven months is also scheduled to hold a meeting, probably later this month. It will also be the first meeting of the CFMG since the arrest of Mr. Muivah in Bangkok.

With the NSCN (Khaplang) faction also joining the ceasefire, the Army is stated to be thrashing out the modalities of ceasefire with the outfit. Sources said that discussions were being held with the Khaplang faction of the NSCN on finalising the ground rules of the ceasefire. Care is being taken to tighten the screws on the modalities to ensure that none of the ground rules were left open to rather "wide" interpretations.

The ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) was announced in July 1997 and has been periodically extended. It is slated to expire on July 31 but the sources said another extension would be logical as the Government wanted to continue with the arrangement. Ultimately, the sources said the effort would be to make the arrangement as broadbased as possible and bring the NSCN (I-M) and Khaplang faction on the same platform.

Rift with PMO denied

PTI reports:

The Union Home Ministry today denied a press report on rift between it and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Naga peace talks with insurgent groups.

A report in a local daily had alleged that the Home Ministry had a rift with the PMO and the former had blamed the Nagaland Government for sabotaging the peace talks with insurgent groups in the State.

THE HINDU

20 MAY 2000

NLFT guns down 7 non-tribals

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, May 19. — NLFT insurgents shot dead seven non-tribal villagers and torched a number of houses in South and West Tripura last night.

NLFT men stormed the houses of two CPI-M activists in Chandramohonpara, in South Tripura's Amarpur sub-division, shortly before 9.30 p.m.

They killed Mrs Archana Das (50), her daughter Subhadra (18) and son Swadesh (8) along with Mr Satish Das (45), his wife Mrs Shantibala Das (39) and their son Dipankar (12). Five people — Ms Anita Das (21), Shankar Das (15), Mr Charan Das (22), Puspa Das (11), and Mr Sukhendu Das (35) were injured.

They were later rushed to the government hospital in Udaypur, South Tripura's district headquarters, in a critical condition.

Rebels also fired at the houses of CPI-M supporters Mr Jagat Ballav Das and Mr Pran Ballav Das. There was no casualty as members of both families had fled earli-

er.

Insurgents set fire to six huts before retreating. Security reinforcements have been rushed to Amarpur from Udaypur.

The SP, south district, is now camping in the area.

At Kamalnagar, in West Tripura's Khowai sub-division, NLFT men fired at an orchard last evening killing Sita Bhowmik, 40, a non-tribal housewife working there. Others working in the orchard managed to flee.

The rebels kidnapped Mr Mahendra Devnath from the village before escaping.

Insurgents have killed at least 60 people, kidnapped about 100 and torched many houses in the state in the past one month, especially after the Tripura hill council polls.

Bandh observed

A 24-hour bandh was observed yesterday in the Gandachhara region of South Tripura, in protest against the killings of three non-tribal villagers, including a

woman, by NLFT insurgents on Wednesday.

The call was given earlier by the local traders organisation.

Villager lynched

Hari Sinha, a farmer, was beaten to death by some criminals following a land dispute at Radhakishorepur, Damchhara, North Tripura, yesterday.

No arrests have yet been made.

Hunt on for Bamapur killers: A massive hunt has been launched in Bamapur village and its adjoining areas in South Tripura for the NLFT insurgents who killed eight non-tribals and injured four last night, adds PTI.

Top district police officials are camping in the area in the Amarpur sub-division, to supervise a joint search operation of the area, officers said.

The BSF is keeping vigil along the Indo-Bangla border to prevent ultras from sneaking into their base camps in Bangladesh.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 19 1980

Intermediaries to help Govt, NSCN dialogue

Anil Anand
New Delhi, May 19

THE GOVERNMENT seems to have broken the logjam in its talks with a dominant Naga insurgent group -- NSCN-IM -- with a reported agreement between the two sides to initiate dialogue through "intermediaries" early next month.

The earlier engagement between the Government and NSCN leader T Muivah had broken down after the latter's arrest in Thailand in January this year. This time, the Vajpayee regime, while holding negotiations with NSCN representatives, intends pursuing the Track-II approach of opening additional channels of communication with Naga insurgent groups.

In this connection, services of some Nagaland-oriented groups and individuals have already been requisitioned by the Government. Sources indicated that the Track-II platform might witness the participation of NGOs such as Naga Ho Ho and Naga Mothers' Association besides various Naga students' bodies.

Home Ministry officials appear to have achieved a breakthrough of

sorts by being able to re-establish contact with the NSCN-IM, which, at one stage, had refused to continue peace talks in the absence of Mr Muivah. They had then argued that none other than the imprisoned leader was authorised to hold talks with the Government.

Official sources defined the "intermediary level" by stating that the NSCN-IM was likely to be represented by some functionaries of its 'Kiloners' (Naga Government in exile). But it is reliably learnt that Mr Muivah has finally nominated a senior figure of the outfit for resuming the stalled dialogue.

Meanwhile, the Centre has refuted reports about a difference of approach between the Prime Minister's Office and the Home Ministry towards these peace bids. The approach in this connection was evolved through consensus and the Government is fully committed to continuing talks with the NSCN (IM).

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAY 2000

Six tribals killed, Tripura area under curfew

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, May 20

INDEFINITE CURFEW was imposed in the Kalyanpur area of West Tripura district, where seven persons, six of them tribals, were killed on Saturday.

Five tribals, including a woman and a three-year-old child were killed when suspected United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF) rebels attacked a vehicle with bombs and sharp weapons at Kiranmalakar Basti in Kalyanpur this morning. Two bodies with multiple wounds were found in the area.

State director-general of police K T Singh described the situation as tense, but under control. "Senior police officers are monitoring the situation and additional forces have been deployed. Indefinite curfew has been clamped indefinitely," he said.

The situation in Kalyanpur, considered as a flashpoint, took a turn for the worse on Saturday when the jeep was attacked around 9.15 am. Sources said the vehicle (registration number TR-01-2149) was going to Teliamura town from North Maharanipur. The UBLF rebels lobbed powerful bombs on the vehicle forcing it to a halt.

They then attacked the tribal passengers with sharp weapons. Five tribals were killed on the spot and eight, including two non-tribals wounded. The dead have been identified as Harendra Debbarma (45), Sumolya Debbarma (40), Sukumar Debbarma (53), Shmala Debbarma (23) and a three-year-old child, Taifung Jamatia.

Seven of the wounded have been moved to G B Hospital here. Three of them are stated to be in a critical condition.

The news of the attack spread like wildfire in Kalyanpur area and tribals in different localities came out of their houses to vent their anger.

A mob lynched one Lal Mohan Sarkar (35) at North Maharanipur. Angry tribal mobs raided Chomuhani Bazar and Kamal Nagar areas, ransacked and looted houses as well as shops owned by non-tribals.

At Kamal Nagar, a mob ransacked houses of one Kalipada Sarkar and some of his neighbours and destroyed their belongings.

Non-tribals in the area retaliated and roughed up tribals after dragging them out of vehicles. In the Bagan Bazar area, hundreds of Bengali women organised a road block to press their demand for security, fearing that the area

might come under attack from tribal rebels anytime. Security men fired several rounds in the air to bring the rampaging crowd under control. The protesters threw stones at them, wounding head constable Lal Debnath.

When the tribals received news that the body of a tribal had been recovered at Lembuchara, violence flared up again.

Police and security forces were busy the whole day controlling the mobs of tribal and non-tribals. When the situation was taking an ugly turn, the district administration clamed curfew and issued prohibitory orders.

"Tomorrow, we will consider whether to relax the curfew. That will depend entirely on situation," DGP Singh said. The Assam Rifles, CRPF, TSR and State Armed Police have been deployed to prevent fresh riots.

Kalyanpur was tensed since Friday, following a bloody attack at Godaibari by the suspected UBLF rebels. One tribal woman was killed and five seriously wounded in that raid.

A 24-hour bandh was in force in Amarpur sub-division of South District. The bandh was called by major political parties to protest against the killings of six non-tribals in the area on Thursday night.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 MAY 2000

Tripura toll rises to 40 as NLFT massacres 19

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, May 21

SUSPECTED NATIONAL Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) militants last evening massacred 19 non-tribals at a makeshift camp in Kalyanpur, West Tripura. And, elsewhere in the district, ethnic clashes continued unabated, taking the toll in the violence to 40.

Today, members of the same outfit struck again at Kalyanpur and Chakmaghat in the Teliamura area and shot dead four non-tribals.

Armed with shoot-at-sight orders, personnel of the Assam Rifles and other Central forces staged flag marches in violence-torn areas. Senior police and civil officials are camping at Kalyanpur. However, the additional deployments have so far failed to contain the violence.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar met the Prime Minister in New Delhi today and demanded

that the Army and more Central forces be deployed in the troubled areas.

Yesterday's massacre took place around 5 pm at a school building at Baghber in West Ghilatali, less than a kilometre from Kalyanpur police station. But police confirmed the incident only after midnight. The killings took place in front of CRPF personnel, but they did not do a thing, police claimed.

Late reports reaching here said 20 heavily armed NLFT rebels, backed by about 30 tribal youths, attacked the camp from three sides. They first lobbed grenades and then sprayed the inmates with bullets. The non-tribals had taken shelter there after their houses were gutted by angry mobs.

The rebels then pursued those who had escaped with sharp weapons. All 19, including 10

women, died on the spot.

Sources in Kalyanpur said only seven bodies had been shifted at night. The remaining bodies lay scattered in the school premises and the adjoining areas.

This morning, police started shifting the bodies. At 12.30, the State's officiating Chief Minister, Anil Sarkar, said bodies were still being recovered from the area.

The Baghber massacre created tension at Kalyanpur and the adjoining Kalyanpur police station area. The curfew, clamped yesterday, was today extended to Teliamura, State Director-General of police K T D Singh said.

In an extension of the Baghber incident, suspected NLFT rebels shot dead three non-tribals at Ratiya-Durgapur area around 11 am today. The rebels set fire to several houses. Tripura State

Rifles (TSR) personnel rushed to the area and challenged the rebels. A massive exchange of fire followed. Unconfirmed reports said the rebels killed five people in the attack.

Three bullet-riddled bodies of non-tribals were recovered from Mungiabari in Kalyanpur this afternoon. Around 5 pm, the NLFT struck at Chakmaghat and shot dead one tribal. Three others were seriously wounded in the attack.

The killings started after United Bengali Liberation Force militants attacked a passenger vehicle, killing five tribals and wounding eight at Kiranmalakar Basti of Kalyanpur yesterday. One injured later died in hospital.

In an immediate retaliation, angry tribals lynched three non-tribals at North Maharanipur. Bodies of two Bengalis were recovered later. One tribal was killed at Lembuchara.

Related report on Page 7

CM Rushes to Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 MAY 2000

Treat insurgency as national problem, N-E CMs tell Centre

Guwahati, May 22

CHIEF MINISTERS of North-eastern States have urged the Centre to deal with insurgency as a national problem.

They decided to jointly move the Centre on insurgency, in a resolution passed last Friday at a meeting of the North-eastern States' Chief Ministers at Shillong. At the meeting, the Chief Ministers resolved to meet the Prime Minister to discuss insurgency.

Insurgency is no longer the problem of only the North-eastern States because insurgents demand secession from the country, which should be viewed as a threat to the integrity of the nation, Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir said at the meeting.

Meghalaya Chief Minister E K Mawlong said the Chief Ministers were unanimous that insurgency in the region was dangerous enough to be treated as a national problem.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar said the international border along the North-eastern States was porous and most insurgent

groups were taking shelter in neighboring countries. This can be tackled only at the diplomatic level by New Delhi, he said.

The Chief Ministers urged militants in the region to shun violence and agree to negotiate with the Government. They appealed everybody concerned to solve the problem.

"The States would be better equipped to deal with militants if insurgency is recognised as a national problem," Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Mahanta, who has survived an attempt on his life, regretted that police force in the North-eastern States was ill-equipped to check insurgency.

The Chief Minister alleged that the Bhutan Government was sheltering militants. "Delhi has to deal with by taking up the issue with the Bhutanese Government which is only possible if the insurgency is regarded as a national problem," Mahanta said.

Earlier, Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir had made a plea to the Centre to evolve a national policy on insurgency during a meeting of the Congress block presidents,

which was attended by party president Sonia Gandhi. "Temporary measures will only alienate the people of the North east," Jamir had said.

At the block presidents' meeting, Jamir regretted that a "small group" of misguided youth had been killing hundreds of people. "If insurgency is regarded as a national problem, clear cut policies could be formulated to solve it permanently," Jamir, the chairman of the North east Congress committee, had said.

He had urged party president Gandhi to take up the matter urgently. The Nagaland Chief Minister insisted that a national response was the only cure.

Jamir said solving the problem was of paramount importance for the Centre as it would decide the future of North-eastern States, which are situated along the country's international border with several countries.

Later at a press conference, the Naga leader lauded the Centre's offer of ceasefire to the NSCN but regretted the ultras had violated the norms and indulged in killings and extortions. **PTI**

ASSAM

23 MAY 2000

ARMY NOT NEEDED TO MAINTAIN PEACE, FEELS CENTRE

Ethnic violence in Tripura forces Centre to send CRPF

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 22 MAY

EVEN AS the Centre on Monday reiterated that the existing level of para-military deployment in Tripura was adequate it is rushing ten additional companies of CRPF and Assam Rifles for counter-insurgency operations in the state.

Ethnic violence in Tripura, by the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) has claimed 44 more lives, over the last three days.

The decision to despatch 4 companies of Assam Rifles with immediate effect and six companies of the CRPF over the next four weeks was taken at a meeting between Union home secretary Kamal Pande and the Tripura chief secretary V Thulidas here today. The meeting coincided with chief minister Manik Sarkar's briefing of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee about the law and order situation in the

north-eastern state. The former is reported to have sought deployment of the Army to combat the stepped up violence.

Although the Centre is unlikely to concede to the chief minister's demand, it feels the augmentation of para-military presence will help bring the situation under control. As it is, the existing level of deployment for counter-insurgency operations is considerable — 15 battalions of CRPF and four Assam Rifles battalions. Besides, nine battalions of BSF are guarding the international border in Tripura.

The discussions between the Union home secretary and the state chief secretary today are believed to have stressed on more effective implementation of the action plan drawn up during Centre-state meetings in November and December 1999 to tackle the ethnic violence in the state. The main features of the multi-pronged action plan

were:

- Setting up of special operation group in every battalion of para-military forces and state armed police
- Use of NSA against militants of the banned NLFT and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
- Specific measures to obtain intelligence
- Setting up of development-security zones.

Tripura has been the main cause of concern for the Centre owing to the steady rise of insurgency-related violence over the last few years compared to the declining trends in other north-eastern states like Assam and Nagaland. According to statistics compiled by the Union home ministry, insurgency-related incidents in Tripura grew from 568 in 1998 to 614 in 1999 to 286 till May 3, 2000, while the extremists killed declined from 26 in 1998 to 22 in 1999 to only 6 till May this year.

The Economic Times

2 MAY 2000

5/10/95
20/5/95
20/5/95

KARBI CALAMITY

Dispur's alienation the main cause

IF Dispur had treated the Karbis with dignity they would probably not have revived their demand for an autonomous state under Article 244(A). The 1992 understanding to upgrade the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Districts was a climbdown on the part of the Autonomous State Demand Committee. But the hill leaders were suspicious of Dispur's sincerity. Soon differences surfaced. Within four months, the Saikia government superseded the KAADC alleging financial "irregularities" – the apparent motive being to dislodge the KAADC ruled by the ASDC. Gauhati High Court, however, restored the KAADC. It took more than two and a half years to reach a settlement. Prafulla Mahanta, who did not visit Karbi Anglong during his first tenure, went to Diphu in 1997 and transferred powers to create confidence. The expectation was that Dispur would expedite the process. It failed. The ambiguity of granting greater autonomy while retaining authority to interfere is dishonest and should be removed by amending the Sixth Schedule.

The Karbis' anger that their demand for an autonomous state was not conceded while Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand are on the way is understandable. But to be eligible for separate status they must meet certain criteria. The combined population of the non-Karbis in the districts is more than that of the Karbis and Dimasas. Their interests cannot be ignored. The demand for separate status seems inspired more by chauvinism than a desire for development. The formation of autonomous district councils and the Bodo Autonomous Council should meet local aspirations. The Karbis and Bodos must see the opportunities brought about by liberalisation and globalisation and not shut themselves up.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAY 2000

Tripura ethnic riot toll 43, bandh today

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, May 22: The death toll in the past three days of ethnic violence in the Kalyanpur police station area in Khowai sub-division has risen to 43 with the recovery of two more bodies from the worst-affected Bagber village. They are yet to be identified.

Another person, identified as Rabi Roy, died of his injuries in Teliamura hospital after being shot during a rebel attack on Chakmaghat market under Teliamura police station last evening. Sources from Amarpur subdi-

vision said the body of Tripura State Rifles jawan Rabibal Das, who had been kidnapped from his residence in the Malbasa area of Amarpur on Friday, was recovered from a jungle near Malbasa.

The Congress, Trinamul and the ruling Left Front have called 12-hour state bandh tomorrow to protest the ethnic violence in Khowai over the past three days. The Congress has extended its bandh call by another 12 hours.

PCC president Birajit Sinha and leader of the Opposition Jawhar Saha told newsmen that they have written to Prime Minis-

ter Atal Behari Vajpayee and home minister I.K. Advani demanding imposition of President's rule in the state.

Six hurt in blast

Six passengers were injured as a crude countrymade bomb hurled by suspected militants exploded on a jeep in which they were travelling in Dharmanagar sub-division this morning.

United Bengali Liberation Front rebels are suspected to be involved in the incident. On receiving information about the blast, a police force rushed to the

site and shifted the injured passengers to hospital. The incident has triggered ethnic tension in the area.

Police sources said tension was already simmering in Amarpur subdivision of South Tripura following an organised attack by tribals on the Bengali-dominated Shankar colony area near Amarpur town.

The sources said at 8 am today, a large group of armed tribals attacked Shankar colony and opened fire. After putting up a brief resistance, several Bengali families took shelter in Amarpur

town. A large number of terror-stricken Bengali families from militancy-affected areas of Barnapur, Malbasa, Moilak and Birganj, also arrived in Amarpur town this morning demanding security and gheraoed the SDO. Another group also clashed with TSR jawans. There were no casualties.

Already, more than 12,000 refugees have taken shelter in six camps under the Khowai and Kalyanpur police station areas. The indefinite curfew in Kalyanpur and Teliamura police station areas is continuing for the third day today.

23 MAY 2000

24/5/82

Tripura's woes

The killing of 34 people over the weekend in Tripura represents the latest, horrifying turn in Tripura's long running ethnic feud. A newly formed guerrilla outfit — the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) — has wreaked mayhem for some time now on the state's Bengali settlers though the latest bout of bloodletting has involved violence on both sides. The roots of the ethnic feud go back to Partition when the state's demographic pattern was altered due to a large-scale influx of Bengalis. This reduced Tripura's original inhabitants — somewhat patronisingly referred to as tribals — to a minority. Subsequent population influxes from Bangladesh has tended to worsen the demographic imbalance. The result is a sharp rise in such incidents in Tripura. This is in marked contrast to the situation in the rest of the North-East, where according to home ministry figures, there has been some improvement during the last year. As in many of the other northeastern states, ethnic strife combined with economic backwardness has culminated in insurgency. Unfortunately, the northeastern states remain among the poorest in the country. Indeed reform has seen disparities widen rather than narrow.

Amidst the violence the only sign of hope is that the NLFT, or organisations allied to it, seem inclined to participate in the democratic process. In the recent elections to Tripura's districts the ruling Left Front was defeated by an organisation which is supposedly a front organisation of the NLFT. The key to improving ethnic relations in Tripura and the North-East lies in sound economic policies combined with sound public investments. Growing prosperity and opportunities in the market economy will wean away disillusioned youth from the path of violence. The economy needs to be internationalised and equipped with world class public goods which link up the area with the most important centre of commerce in eastern India: Calcutta. This way, remoteness will disappear, people will be integrated and the region will become part of the globalising world economy. This must change if we are to win the war against insurgency.

Tripura Govt's 'inefficiency' may force Centre to intervene

Anil Anand
New Delhi, May 24

THE CURRENT Tripura situation might force a Central intervention to bring insurgency-related violence under control, official sources indicated here today as the Centre directed the State Government to explore possibilities of beginning peace talks with insurgents.

Although Home Minister L K Advani has ruled out the possibility of imposing President's rule in the insurgency-hit State, it appears the Centre is keeping all options open in the interest of peace in this sensitive area. The general perception in the North Block is that the State Government has adequate forces at its command which have

not been put to effective use.

Centre's perception is the situation has worsened due to "indecision" of the Government which is "too bureaucratic" in its approach and lacks "strategic vision" to combat insurgency. The inefficiency of the CPM-led Government in meeting the challenge posed by insurgents has paralysed the administrative set up, particularly in the worst-affected tribal areas.

Making case for Central intervention in view of worsening situation in the State, State Government sources here felt the Centre should act "tough" on the administration to tide over the crisis. While rejecting the State Government's demand for more Central forces, sources felt the already available 25 battalions

were not being effectively used.

Analysing the utilisation of the security forces by the Government, a senior Home Ministry official pointed out that the 25 battalions had only 23 encounters with the insurgents during last year, thereby meaning that every battalion came face to face with the militants only once in 12 months. It was a serious reflection on the administrative capabilities of the Tripura Government, sources felt.

A pointer to the poor management of the available security forces by the State authorities is the fact that all vantage points like ridges and hilltops have not been used by them to set up pickets. An amazing situation has developed as militants could be seen occupying these high points.

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION

25 MAY 2000

TRIPURA KILLINGS

5/5/21 Time for an agonising reappraisal 9/5/21

NOTHING short of joint Centre-state action can stop the bloodbath in Tripura. In less than three weeks following the Tribal Autonomous District Council elections, 111 people have been killed. The 28 additional CRPF companies and two helicopters deployed during the elections have been withdrawn. Delhi has not kept its promise of sending back two army units pulled out during the Kargil conflict. The political scenario in the tribal area has changed. Earlier, there were political forces like the CPI-M and anti-Marxist moderate groups like the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity and Tripura National Volunteers. Now the Indigenous People's Front of People, helped by the militant National Liberation Front of Tripura, is in charge of the ADC. This could mean that ISI agents who have been helping tribal insurgents from Bangladesh might be tempted to operate closer to home. A proxy war is on and there is justification for using the army.

Originally tribal-based, the CPI-M has neither been able to assess the changing values of the younger tribal generation nor can it project a leader of Dasarath Deb's stature. The large-scale influx from across the border has deprived tribals of forests and lands, their main sources of livelihood. This is the root cause of the trouble. Even if the process cannot be reversed, the least the government can do is to stop the continuing inflow. Opposition parties are also to be blamed for playing a negative role. They refuse to understand the problem, putting the blame on the Left Front and demanding central takeover. Strangely, there has been no immediate reaction either from the Congress or other Opposition parties to last weekend's massacre of 40 people. They have failed as an Opposition. Tribal insurgency is not one party's problem. To tackle it successfully all parties face the challenge unitedly.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2000

Treat insurgency as a national problem: N-E CMs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, May 25. — The chief ministers of the north-eastern states want the Centre to consider the region's insurgency as a part of the national problem and find its solution as a matter of national priority.

The north-east chief ministers had earlier in their meeting in Shillong on 12 May decided on floating a forum of region's chief ministers to discuss the issues of mutual interests and place demands before the Centre unitedly. The Sikkim chief minister has been included in the forum.

In pursuance of a decision earlier approved by the Shillong meeting, the chief ministers met at the Arunachal Bhavan in New Delhi on 21 May. It was decided that the region's chief ministers would place a memorandum jointly before the Prime Minister regarding the problems of the region's states in the third week of June.

The chief ministers will approach Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to allow them time so that they can submit the memorandum before him in New Delhi and discuss the problems of the states.

The following chief ministers — Mr Manik Sarkar of Tripura, Mr EK Mowlang of Meghalaya, Mr SC Jamir of Nagaland, Mr W Nipamacha Singh of Manipur, Mr

Zoramthanga of Mizoram, Mr Mukut Mithi of Arunachal Pradesh — and three ministers from Assam were present during talks in New Delhi. The Assam chief minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta could not attend the meeting.

The meeting approved the decision unanimously to put pressure on the Centre to take more effective measures to deal with the escalating insurgency in the region immediately. The chief ministers also decided on approaching the Prime Minister to announce an economic package for development of the region's most backward states.

The chief ministers felt schemes were to be implemented in the region's states mainly to improve people's living conditions and provide them basic minimum amenities along with creating job potential for the educated unemployed.

In the joint memorandum to be placed before the Prime Minister, the NE chief ministers will pressure the Centre for considering the region's foreign agency-backed insurgency as part of the national problem and finding its solution on a national priority.

The NE chief ministers' forum has also decided to observe 8 June as "anti terrorism day" in the region to mobilise people's opinion against rebel violence and morally pressure armed groups of undergrounds to join

the process of negotiation.

Public meetings, processions and demonstrations will be organised in all the NE states on 8 June to denounce insurgency and rebel depredations. The Tripura government has announced a programme to observe "anti terrorism day" in a big way.

Meanwhile, Tripura Governor Professor Siddheswar Prasad has rejected the Congress leaders' demand for summoning a "special session" of the Tripura assembly to discuss about the "state's explosive situation".

The Governor told a Congress leaders' delegation here that he could not summon the assembly unless he was requested by the chief minister to do so. He advised the state Congress leaders to discuss the matter with Mr Manik Sarkar.

The state Congress leaders have in a memorandum placed before the Governor demanded imposition of President's rule in the state immediately in view of the state's deteriorating situation.

The state Congress wanted the Centre to bring the whole state under Disturbed Area Regulation and induct the Army in the hills to combat insurgency.

The TPCC chief, Mr Birjit Sinha, and the leader of the Congress group in the assembly, Mr Jahar Saha, were in the delegation which met the Governor here yesterday.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAY 2000

Ethnic strife fears in Mizoram

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, May 25

THE MIZO Zirlai Pawl (MZO) or Mizo Students Union has clamped a curfew on the hill State's non-tribals during its two-day protest rally beginning on Friday.

The rally, against the rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl by an 18-year-old mason in Aizawl last Thursday, raises fears of ethnic tensions akin to those being seen in Tripura.

The MZO order was issued four days ago after Afzal Hussain, a mason from Karimganj, Assam, confessed to raping and murdering the minor daughter of his friend Abdul Khaliq. Khaliq, married to a Mizo woman in Aizawl, was not the girl's biological father.

The body of the girl was packed into a gunny bag and left in a drain outside Khaliq's house. The MZO took its time to react to the crime and eventually decided to hold the 48-hour protest rally, although the incident "primarily

involved non-tribals".

Its argument was that the Mizo society did not tolerate such crimes and that even non-tribals should obey the moral code of the Mizo people.

Though the State Government found nothing wrong with the protest rally, it considered the MZO order to "all non-tribals in the State" unconstitutional. The tribal outfit said it would not be able to guarantee the safety of the non-tribals during the rally.

Given Mizoram's 20-year-old history of ethnic riots, the undertone of animosity in the MZO order had an immediate effect. Many non-tribals began leaving Aizawl and other smaller towns in Mizoram to the relative safety of Silchar and the adjoining plains of Assam.

Though Home Minister Iawnluia was aware of the repercussions the curfew on non-tribals could have, he felt the matter was not something his ministry should interfere with.

Acting chief secretary Lily

Tochhawng and Aizawl deputy commissioner C Ropianga held talks with MZO leaders, but the situation did not appear to be thawing.

Ropianga said that security had been tightened in view of the rally. "We have told the MZO that firm steps would be taken against them if things went wrong. We have requested them to defer the rally."

Senior officials said that the Government could go for preventive arrests if the MZO was firm on holding the rally.

Mizoram, it may be recalled, had witnessed a prolonged phase of ethnic tension in 1994 following the murder of a Mizo truck driver in Assam's Barak Valley. (Mizoram is accessible through Barak valley).

The murder led to hounding out of non-tribals in Mizoram and an economic blockade in Assam. Over 5,000 victims of that flare-up are yet to receive compensation promised by the then Prime Minister, P V Narasimha Rao.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAY 2000

Our land, our refugees

By Wasbir Hussain

TALKING ABOUT refugees in South Asia, the following crises instantly come to mind: Tamils from Sri Lanka and Tibetans from China in India and Nepal, the Rohingyas (Muslims) from Myanmar in Bangladesh, the Lhotsampas (Nepali-speaking people) from southern Bhutan in Nepal and Afghans in Pakistan. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, there are today an estimated 12 million refugees and about 20 million to 25 million internally displaced persons in the world (UNHCR: 1997 Statistical Review). South Asia alone constitutes nearly 12 per cent of the total global refugee population (U.S. Committee for Refugees. World Refugee Survey, 1998). In fact, South Asia has the fourth largest refugee population in the world.

Zeroing in on Assam, the term refugee is usually applied to the post-partition stream of people from the then East Pakistan who had fled to India fearing persecution. It is, therefore, not surprising that almost all those who arrived in Assam till the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 were non-Muslims. According to estimates, 600,000 Bengali Hindus, 100,000 Christian tribes people and an unspecified number of Buddhist Chakmas arrived in Assam during the period. The Indian political leaders of the time thought it was their moral responsibility to let the refugees, regarded as victims of partition, stay on in the country. Local authorities were told that laws such as the Expulsion of Undesirable Immigrants Act need not be applied to those who had fled East Pakistan.

Thirty years down the line, people in Assam talk about illegal migration from Bangladesh, about how the continued cross-border influx poses the danger of the indigenous people being overwhelmed by aliens. When one talks about refugees in Assam today, one refers to the thousands of internally-displaced people, in a contiguous stretch in the western part of the State, who are victims of a bloody ethnic conflict. Those who had arrived from across the border till 1971 have since assimilated with the locals and have been accepted as Indian citizens and peo-

ple hardly talk about them anymore in the context of refugees.

I shall go into the reasons later, but violent ethnic riots between the majority Bodos and the Santhals (both tribal groups) in Assam's Bodo heartland of Kokrajhar and its adjoining districts in the summer of 1996 had displaced more than 300,000 people belonging to both communities. About 250 people were killed in the riots that began on May 15 and continued sporadically till the end of 1996. While thousands returned to their homes, an estimated 200,000 are still living sub-hu-

The dimension of the refugee crisis in Assam is no less than some of those in sub-Saharan Africa. What is sadder is that even the rest of India is unconcerned, not to speak of international agencies.

man lives in thatched or polythene roofed huts in what pass for relief camps run by the State Government. There are 64 such so-called relief camps in Kokrajhar district (the adjoining districts of Bongaigaon and Dhubri have some more) housing an estimated 1.10 lakh Santhals, 70,000 Bodos and others. There is nothing called sanitation and hygiene and the inmates do not get two square meals a day. Both Santhal and Bodo refugee leaders says that since February, the Government has been providing them rations for just five days a month — three kg of rice per adult and about 50 grams of salt (600 and 400 grams of rice for each adult and child respectively a day). The district magistrate of Kokrajhar candidly admitted this. Lack of funds is cited by the State authorities for the poor relief. They say more than Rs. 100 crore has so far been spent on the upkeep of the refugees.

Now, how are the refugees surviving? Every morning, Lakhiram Mormu (50) and Domaram Kahar (27), both inmates of the Jyapur relief camp, near Kokrajhar, and scores of others, go out to the jungles in the vicinity to look for wild tubers and roots. Others such as Phagu Lakr set out with axes and some other iron implements to dig out the stumps of trees, felled illegally in the past, and sell them to buyers along the highway. After all, every

rupee is important. Eating a meal of mashed wild potatoes (which need to be soaked in water overnight), Birsu Kujur (60) recalled how his wife was stung by a snake one morning while she was hunting for wild tubers. Scores of these refugees have already started migrating to neighbouring Bhutan (no travel documents are required for Indians to travel to Bhutan) to work for daily wages. Life has been indeed difficult for these people.

The dimension of the refugee crisis in Assam is no less than some of those in sub-Saharan Africa. What is sadder here

forces were/are not at play in engineering the Bodo-Santhal feud. That is another story, but the divide today between the two communities is more than complete. These refugees may have survived a violent past and are going through a miserable present, but the question is what does the future hold for them. Hundreds of children are just whiling away their time for lack of educational facilities. Disease and hunger have taken their toll on their health. What is the Government doing for their rehabilitation? This is the million-dollar question because a vast majority of the refugees had their homes in recognised forest villages or in encroachments inside reserve forests. There is a Supreme Court ban on encroachments or settlements in reserve forest areas and even without such a ban these refugees cannot now be resettled or rehabilitated in such restricted areas. Nevertheless, district officials at last submitted a rehabilitation plan to the Assam Government in mid-May.

But the most basic of requirements for any rehabilitation programme to succeed is funds. And this is what the Assam Government, which owes the Centre a staggering Rs. 7,000 crore as debt repayment, does not have. Existing rules calls for provision of Rs. 10,000 per family as rehabilitation grant. So far, not a penny has been paid to any of the displaced families (who have since returned to their villages) by way of rehabilitation grant. The Assam Government's financial bankruptcy is another story. But, the main problem is where to settle the refugees who had been encroachers in reserve forest areas. The Government has no answer even four years after the ethnic riots had uprooted these people from their settlements.

Assam's Bodo heartland continues to be an ethnic cauldron with the Bodo statehood uprising still on in full swing. Unless the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos are properly addressed by the Government, it may not be long before the area witnesses another bout of violence. This may mean another stream of refugees.

(The writer is Editor, The Northeast Daily, Guwahati.)

Insensitivity to Northeast issues

Anger in Manipur

NEARLY a month ago, an 84-year-old man and the editor of a Manipuri newspaper were arrested in Imphal by the Manipur police for allegedly making seditious remarks. The old man was Thounaojam Iboyaima, chief adviser to the All-Manipur Clubs' Organisation, a non-government group that had rallied the Meiteis, the predominant community of the Imphal Valley, in major public rallies against any carving up of Manipur. The journalist was N. Biren of the *Nahaolgi Thoudang*.

Accounts from Imphal say that the report of the meeting was published by all newspapers but this particular one was singled out for special treatment. The two were arrested for making these supposed statements at Cheriaoching, outside Imphal, on April 9. The event took place five days before the anniversary of the People Liberation Army, one of the older militant groups of the state.

However, the judge who heard the case threw it out of court a few days ago, declaring that newspaper reports could not be construed as primary evidence under Indian law.

Yet, there has been barely a whisper in the metropolitan media about the case and these two men. If it had happened in a major city of the Hindi heartland, then the press would have been charging all over the place, breathing righteous indignation and fire and brimstone at the government. Nothing of the sort happened here — to the shame of the "national" press. No wonder that journalists of the Northeast also feel alienated from the rest of the country, not just other segments of society which face the pressure of the security forces or the deviousness and corruption of the state.

The local press boycotted the government's activities in Manipur during this period; a bandh was called and the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, a New York-based organisation that speaks up for journalists under in-

timidation, called for the release of both men.

As the *North-East Vigil*, a magazine which reports on issues related to the Northeast, remarked: "The news, not unexpectedly, has not ruffled too many feathers in the mainstream Indian media. Who cares for some lousy journalist of a lousy newspaper of a lousy state in the back of beyond? The same people who write tomes to condemn insurgency, militancy, terrorism... cannot even spare a word to denounce the (Manipur Chief Minister) Nipamacha Singhs of the Northeast."

It is also worth reflecting here on the issue that stirred Manipur up for all of last month. The question of integration is critical to the Meitei con-

pendence from India, has also wanted to incorporate parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh into a Greater Nagaland.

This plan has drawn the fiercest opposition from the Meiteis of Manipur for this former kingdom's traditional territorial boundaries are sought to be changed, with the hills of the state going to this vision of a larger Naga territory. Time after time, Manipuri leaders, from all political hues, have warned

against any deal with the NSCN (I-M) that barter away parts of their state's land. Feelings still continue to run high in Manipur about the way the Government of India ceded land to Burma (now Myanmar) from Manipur, without consulting the State Government.



SANJOY HAZARIKA

"Who cares for some lousy journalist of a lousy newspaper of a lousy state in the back of beyond" asks a local paper, about an incident ignored by the mainstream media

cept of Manipur and their civilisational existence. The Meiteis are an ancient community of the Northeast and Vaishnavites by faith. Every morning, a soothing sight awaits visitors to Imphal and other towns in the valley as hundreds of Meiteis, freshly bathed, go to temples with sandal paste on their foreheads and a little drop of it on the bridge of the nose.

The hills, by comparison, are populated largely by Nagas and, in some parts, by members of the Kuki tribe as well as Paites. The latter are distant kin of the Mizos further south but have clan connections across the border in Myanmar. For many years, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now rechristened Nagalim by this militant group), which has sought inde-

pendence from India, has also wanted to incorporate parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh into a Greater Nagaland. This plan has drawn the fiercest opposition from the Meiteis of Manipur for this former kingdom's traditional territorial boundaries are sought to be changed, with the hills of the state going to this vision of a larger Naga territory. Time after time, Manipuri leaders, from all political hues, have warned against any deal with the NSCN (I-M) that barter away parts of their state's land. Feelings still continue to run high in Manipur about the way the Government of India ceded land to Burma (now Myanmar) from Manipur, without consulting the State Government.

One ran into this mental roadblock in a discussion last year with Rh. Raising, then the "Home Minister" of the "Government of the Peoples Republic of Nagaland." Raising declared that the Naga demands for more territory were based on history and tradition. To which one responded by saying that there had to be

a common approach to some of these problems, instead of viewing them through one particular periscope. Raising kept insisting on Naga rights; it was then pointed out that it was only after the British came at the end of the 19th century that a semblance of Naga unity evolved — until then they comprised fiercely independent tribes.

The "Republic" of the GPRN exists outside of Nagaland, in a network of offices in South-East Asia and through the good offices of NGOs in Europe. Of course, it continues to hold sway over the minds and hearts of many Nagas, both in Nagaland and Manipur and has a physical presence in the Naga hills as well with bases and offices (without the GRPN logo). Their writ runs extensively. Thus, while the Government of India does not levy taxes on the hill states of the Northeast, civil servants in Nagaland and Manipur pay "taxes" from their salary to this group almost as a tradition as well as to other insurgent groups.

To the Meiteis, the demand of the NSCN (I-M) for more territory is their worst nightmare and they are prepared to resist. Indeed, the insurgent groups in the plains of Manipur too are opposed to any breakup of the state.

The leaders of the Nagas, especially the charismatic General Secretary of the NSCN (I-M), Thieungelang Muivah, now in a Thai prison on charges of entering Thailand illegally, would do well to consider these feelings, instead of sticking to a hardline stand. Surely, in the Northeast of their dreams — and ours — Nagas, Meiteis, Kukis and Assamese and all other communities will need to live together, instead of being constantly at one another's throats. The latter is a tiresome, violent and embittering process, of which everyone has had enough.

The writer is senior fellow, Centre for Policy Research

INDIAN EXPRESS

26 MAY 2000

Aapsu demands 'total removal' of refugees

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

ITANAGAR, May 27. — The All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union has reiterated its stand for "total removal" of refugees and "foreigners" from the state.

Aapsu leaders have submitted a memorandum to the chief minister Mr Mukut Mithi yesterday, expressing "concern" over Chakma and Hajong refugees' move to get Indian citizenship under "Centre's supervision".

The Aapsu has opposed Delhi High Court's ruling to include Chakma and Hajong refugees of Arunachal Pradesh in the voters' list.

The memorandum also demanded immediate cancellation of Schedule Tribe certificates issued to Tibetan refugees by deputy commissioners of West Kameng and Tawang districts, strict checking at the gates on inner line permits, and use of indigenous names and cent per cent reservation in government jobs for indigenous people.

Inclusion of all bona fide tribals of the state in the list of Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes, restoration of development activities and immediate deployment of reserve battalion at border areas are other some of the other demands.

The Aapsu further demanded immediate constitution of boundary commission for a permanent solution to the Assam-Arunachal boundary problem, withdrawal of land settlement rights given to Assam Riflemen and ex-servicemen and cancellation of trading licences and land settlement given to non-Arunachal Schedule Tribes before 1965.

On education front, the students' union demanded an inquiry into the appointment of vice-chancellor of the Arunachal University, making the university a central university, introduction of law faculty and science streams in Itanagar college, introduction of sociology, psychology and anthropology at the degree level and appointment of regular principals in all colleges of the state.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAY 2000

Centre's gameplan to tackle N-E ultras

Agartala, May 28

THE CENTRE has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to curb militancy in the North-East, a Union Home Ministry document said.

It said militancy in the North-East had acquired an ominous form as a result of networking between various militant groups and availability of trans-border 'sanctuaries'. Feelings of alienation and exploitation, lack of employment opportunities and 'non-performance' of the State Government have also contributed to the participation of neo-literate youth in militant activities, it pointed out.

The multi-pronged strategy includes willingness to meet and discuss legitimate grievances, resolve to counter senseless violence with a firm hand, understandings with neighbouring countries and infrastructural development, employment opportunities, good governance and decentralisation.

The document said the Central Government has declared as many as 12 militant groups in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura as unlawful associations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. The more seriously militancy-affected states and areas have been declared 'disturbed areas' under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 and units of the Army and Central Paramilitary forces have been deployed to assist the civilian authorities in maintaining peace.

The Union Government has so far sanctioned 13 India Reserve Battalions to the North-Eastern

States. A scheme of reimbursement of security-related expenditure has been formulated and about Rs 377 crore has been released during 1997-98, 1998-99 and approved for 1999-2000.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has taken up a 100 per cent Centrally-funded special scheme for modernisation of police forces in the North-East with emphasis on supply of arms and ammunition, vehicles, communication equipment and other essentials.

The Government has also formulated a scheme to take care of the rehabilitation of misguided youths who have strayed into militancy.

The key to the solution of the problem of militancy in the North-East lies in the development of the region, the Home Ministry document said, adding that the North-Eastern Council (NEC) has been conceived and established as an advisory as well as funding agency to secure an accelerated and balanced development of the region.

Since its inception, NEC has been laying emphasis on development of infrastructure in the region.

Meanwhile, a Home Ministry official said that the Centre was unhappy over the existing use of Central Paramilitary forces in Tripura for anti-insurgency operations. The Ministry would extend the Disturbed Areas Act, which provides the Army and Paramilitary forces special powers to the entire State to flush out militants if the Tripura Government wanted, the official said. (UNI)

Electronic

2 MAY 2000

ULFA shifts 3 main camps to Arunachal

Utpal Parashar
Guwahati, May 29

FRESH MOVES by Bhutan and Myanmar against militant outfits based in their areas have forced the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to look for new camp sites in Arunachal Pradesh.

Official sources state that following recent counter-offensives launched by the Myanmar Army, the ULFA has recently shifted three main camps along with nearly 100 cadres to the bor-

der areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Bhutan government's recent threats to use force to evict militant outfits based in their soil have also pressurised the ULFA to look for new places to set up camps for training their cadres, sources stated.

The first ULFA camps in Myanmar were set up 15 years ago with the help of Kachin Independent Army (KIA), a local militant group which was also instrumental in providing training and arms to ULFA and many other

militant outfits of the region.

"With the surrender of many senior leaders in the past few months, the KIA suffered huge setbacks and reached an agreement with the Myanmar government recently. Following this agreement, the Myanmar Army launched counter-offensive against the militant outfits from India based there. This is the main reason why ULFA is shifting camps to Arunachal," said an official.

The move to shift camps to Arunachal Pradesh is also the

result of strict vigil by the Royal Bhutan Army in the past few weeks. Last month, the Bhutan Government assured India that it would not allow the Indian militant outfits to operate from its soil.

The assurance came after reports of King Jigme Singhye Wangchuck, having breakfast with the ULFA cadres in camps located in Bhutan appeared in many newspapers. The Bhutan government denied the reports and stated that its government would never support any

outfit operating from Bhutan.

30 MAY 2000

Surrendered rebels await Ulfa end

99 FROM PULLOCK DUTTA 1-9

Over 500 militants give up arms, brand outfit a terrorist group, Paresh Baruah a dictator

Sivsagar, April 4: It was the spring of 1979 when six youth from Upper Assam met at the historic Rang Ghar here to float the United Liberation Front of Asom.

Today, just three days short of completing 21 years, the banned outfit's dream of a "swadhin Asom (independent Assam)" lay all but shattered as 436 of its activists surrendered at the same venue and launched a virulent attack against its leadership.

Led by self-styled 'lieutenant' Amrit Phukon, a training instructor at an Ulfa camp in Myanmar, altogether 532 militants laid down arms in the presence of Governor Lt. Gen. (retd) S.K. Sinha and chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

While 432 of these rebels were from the Ulfa, 77 belonged to the Karbi National Volunteers and 19 to the National Democratic Front of Boroland. They deposited four AK-47 rifles, an AK-56 rifle, three carbines, six 9 mm pistols, 21 revolvers, two machine guns, 17 12-bore rifles and five 303 rifles.

The function, christened a "rehabilitation ceremony", was the 14th of its kind in the state since the unified command struc-

ture came into being. Given the number of militants who surrendered, it was also the most successful.

"The Ulfa is no longer a revolutionary organisation. It has become a terrorist outfit," said Phukon, who joined the militant movement in 1992. "We hope the government will not give us the short shrift," he added.

Phukon, who had been training Ulfa activists in Myanmar for the past four years, said the outfit's leadership was least bothered about the development of Assam. "The killing of social activist Sanjoy Ghose, who was working for the uplift of the people of Majuli, is a case in point," he said.

Disillusioned with the militant movement, Phukon pledged to work for the development of the state and be "a good law-abiding citizen".

Lakhi Saikia, another Ulfa activist, said there was a feud between the leadership of the political and armed wings of the outfit.

"It was becoming increasingly difficult for activists like us to survive. We had no idea whom to support," he said.

Saikia, who led the Agnigarh unit of the Ulfa, said commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah had turned into a dictator. "There is no democracy in the outfit anymore," he said. The just-surrendered militant said he wanted to see the Ulfa "finished" and would do "anything" to ensure that. "I have not surrendered because I fear being arrested or killed by the security forces. It is just that I am completely disillusioned with the Ulfa," he said.

"We have shown the way and more are on the way," added Sewali Neog, the lone woman to surrender. Welcoming the "misguided" youth back to the mainstream, Gen. Sinha said their surrender was a step towards restoration of normalcy. "Let this event be a new chapter in the history of Assam, which has witnessed bloodshed for the last three decades," he said.

Though the Assam government is yet to work out a package for the rebels who surrendered today, the Governor said no effort would be spared to rehabilitate them. "They will not be offered government jobs, but provided the help necessary to become self-reliant," he said.

The chief minister echoed Sinha's views, saying the mass surrender was one of the most positive developments in recent times. "Assam has not gained anything from violence. We need change and these kind of ceremonies will help us achieve that," he said.

Criticising the Ulfa leadership, Mahanta said, "If the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers can come forward for talks, why can't the Ulfa? The outfit's leadership is obviously not interested in the development of Assam."

Lt. Gen D.B. Shekatkar, general-officer-commanding of the 4 Corps, urged the Ulfa leadership to come to the negotiation table before "time runs out" and the state disintegrates. "We will provide whatever help is necessary for their (Ulfa leaders') rehabilitation," he said.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 5 APR 2 00

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E-14

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

IT MAY BE dismissed as a major publicity stunt for the Assam Government, but it was also the largest-ever surrender by militants belonging to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). With a few cadres from the KNV and the NDFB also joining in, 532 militants surrendered before the Governor, Lt. Gen. (ret'd.), S. K. Sinha. Even as the ULFA prepares for its 21st anniversary celebrations, this large scale surrender is sure to deflate the militant outfit which has been holding Assam to ransom for over two decades. There may not be big names in the list of cadres who surrendered on Tuesday, but the numbers may send out a clear message to others holed out in the jungles. An active Governor and a Chief Minister, Mr. P. K. Mahanta, who was himself part of a student revolutionary movement that took up arms, may provide the best setting for the troubled State of Assam to resolve this separatist menace once and for all. Lt. Gen. Sinha has apparently spent some time with the Army working on this event. The special offer during the new year and dawn of the millennium for militants to visit their families must have also induced some of the less motivated youth to lay down arms and seek reintegration with civil society.

It is important that both the Assam Government and the Centre must follow up on this surrender. Instead of adding numbers to the S(urrendered)ULFA, they must seriously implement an attractive rehabilitation package for these misguided youth. Though the Army and the police are bound to pick on them to update the intelligence inputs and strengthen counter insurgency measures, it may not be right to deploy the surrendered cadres in these operations. Unless they are fully rehabilitated and reintegrated with their families and society, it cannot spark a full-fledged desertion from these militant groups. So their rehabilitation must get top priority. Just as the Centre is trying to engage the

NSCN outfits in Nagaland, the signal must go out to the ULFA and all other groups active in the Northeast that it is high time they gave serious thought to dialogue and a negotiated solution to all outstanding problems. The Assam Governor may be ideally suited to make the preliminary moves and send out serious feelers to all of them to see if they are interested in a constructive dialogue. With one or two senior functionaries of the ULFA in what is called "effective custody", further developments may be on the anvil.

Be it in Assam or its neighbouring States, the main problem seems to be the lack of development in the region. Successive Governments at the Centre and in the States have announced huge packages for the sister-States in the Northeast. They need to go further. While inviting the militants and insurgents for talks, the States and the Northeast Council must simultaneously work on a set of priorities in development. Improving transport and communications, generating employment and providing a market for the produce are some urgent steps the administration in these States must take to send out a strong signal. There is bound to be resistance from the dictatorial leadership of these groups, when they realise that the cadres are deserting them. But care must be taken to provide security to the returning youth and demonstrate that they can be rehabilitated effectively. The cadres have reasons to flee and reject the authoritarian leadership of commanders like Paresh Barua. But they must be shown a viable and attractive alternative in civil society. Mr. Mahanta may not be an inspiring model as a political leader, but he and his colleagues who joined the political mainstream have certainly come a long way. Unfortunately, they have forgotten what they fought for and failed to live up to the expectations of the people. That is the tragedy.

THE HINDU

- 6 APR 2000

532 ULFA militants lay down arms

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
SIVASAGAR, APRIL 5

THE authorities in Assam on Wednesday launched an assault on the outlawed ULFA by organising a massive surrender ceremony on the premises of the historic Rang-ghar, a 16th century sports pavilion, where the organisation was formally born exactly 21 years ago.

Speaking on behalf of the 531 boys and a woman who laid down arms and took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution of India, self-styled lieutenant Amrit Phukan said ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Barua had become a dictator and made ULFA his personal fief-

dom. "ULFA now runs according to the whims and fancies of Paresh Barua, who is leading a luxurious life along with his family abroad, while we are made to fight here, risking our lives," said Phukan, who quit after remaining an armed wing member for eight years.

Phukan, who hails from Amguri, near this historic town which used to be the Ahom capital for more than 200 years before Assam was annexed to British India, also said that there was total moral degradation in ULFA, which prompted him and others to quit. "There is also simmering discontent among the hundreds of cadre who are holed up in camps in Bhutan, and it is only a matter of time when the bubble

will burst," the 34-year-old youth, who spoke for 15 minutes on behalf of his comrades, added.

He also stated that a handful of self-styled "saviours of Assam" had amassed huge sums and were living in safety while the common people and the lower-level cadre were suffering. Explaining the reasons behind his decision to quit, Phukan said that while a large number of ULFA cadre had increasingly realised that ULFA had become a hindrance for Assam's development, the people proved how strong the ULFA's mass base was when the Kargil war broke out.

Addressing the function CM Prafulla Kumar Mahanta said that it was time the ULFA leaders began to read the writing on the wall.

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 APR 2000

High command prevails upon TPCC

Tripura Cong to participate in hill council polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 6. — The Tripura Congress unit today announced that it would participate in Tripura hill council polls.

The TPCC, which yesterday demanded that polls be deferred, apparently changed its decision under pressure from the high command.

The TPCC chief, Mr Birjit Sinha, and the leader of the Congress in the Assembly, Mr Jahar Saha, had demanded that polls be postponed "in view of the deteriorating situation arising out of escalating insurgency in the state."

Leaders of the Congress, Tripura's main Opposition party, had also announced to launch a state-wide agitation to bring pressure on poll authorities and the state government to defer the electoral process "in the interest of people."

TPCC leaders, in a memorandum to the commission for council elections, had said: "A free and fair polling is not at all possible in hill areas in view of the present situation. Moreover, thousands of families of Bengalis and tribals, which have been forced by insurgents to quit their areas, must be given proper rehabilitation first."

Mr Sinha did not say what prompted the party to decide in

PROHIBITORY ORDERS

AGARTALA, April 6. — Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC has been imposed on West Tripura district yesterday in view of polls to the Tripura tribal areas autonomous district council, slated for 30 April 30 and 3 May 3. The orders will remain in force till the end of poll process. No fire arms, crackers and weapons will be allowed to be carried during the period.— PTI

favour of participating in polls. Though the TPCC rank and file was opposed to participation, the Congress high command wanted the state Congress leadership not to boycott council elections.

The high command's argument was: "The election is an important democratic process. A national party like the Congress can hardly afford to ignore the fray what ever may be the situation."

The TPCC chief, Mr Sinha, released the first panel of 17 candidates. "The CPI-M's calculated move for keeping the Congress in the race to give credence to the electoral process is now successful," a former TPCC chief said.

The TPCC's changed decision brought relief for the ruling

Left Front. The four-party Opposition alliance — comprising the BJP, Trinamul Congress, Janata Dal (United) and the TUJS — had announced to boycott elections. The Nationalist Congress Party will also boycott polls.

Mr Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhaw's TNV has announced to abstain from the contest. The TNV and the NLFT are supporting the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, a forum of hill regional organisations. The participation of the Congress in the polls will give some credibility to the electoral process.

A spokesman of the BJP state committee said the Left Front's "conspicuous silence over the exodus of minority non-tribal voters from the hill autonomous region under rebel pressure was the most unfortunate."

He said: "The CPI-M has gone back on its assurance earlier given to minorities living in the hill autonomous region. The Left Front is now indulging in tribalism to woo hill people's support."

The BJP leader said the CPI-M had announced in the early '80s: "Our democracy is committed to safeguard interests of tribal minorities in the state." On this commitment the tribal areas autonomous district council was set up under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

THE STATESMAN

7 APR 2000

'Manipur Nagas not backing unity moves'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOHIMA, April 6. — Though the Nagaland Assembly passed resolutions three times to bring all contiguous areas inhabited by Nagas under a single administrative unit, the Nagas of Manipur did not respond positively, the Nagaland Speaker, Mr Zhovehu Lohe, has said.

Even former chief ministers of Manipur, Mr Yangmangso Saiza and Mr Rishang Keishing, replied in the negative.

Mr Lohe told reporters here yesterday that the Centre had made it clear that the territorial integrity of no North-eastern state would be affected for achieving Naga unity.

Ever since the political move-

ment of Nagas started, Nagaland has been centre of political activities. The Nagas of Nagaland suffered the most compared to those of Manipur, the Speaker said.

The Manipur Nagas received a lot of facilities from the Nagaland government. The Speaker regretted that the Nagas of Manipur had failed to acknowledge the facilities. On the other hand, they continued to pester the Nagas of Nagaland.

Mr Lohe denied the charge of the Naga Hoho general secretary that the present crisis within the Hoho was the handiwork of some overground organisations of Nagaland.

The Naga Hoho should not act as a front organisation of one underground faction. "The

Hoho should not show any sign of inclination towards a particular underground faction — how strong it might be."

Mr Lohe said the Hoho should be impartial so that Naga people could freely express their opinion on the issue of Naga unity. "To me that is vital for the survival of the Hoho", he said.

Consultations between the Nagaland government and the Centre, between the Naga Hoho and the Centre as well as between Naga groups and the Union government are necessary for solving the Naga political issue "once and for all", he pointed out.

The Speaker said that the Hoho should appreciate Centre's attempt to involve the Nagaland government in the

peace process. To achieve a solution to the Naga political problem, the Centre should take into consideration the views of all sections — underground or overground.

The Speaker said the Congress would have appreciated had the Centre talked to other parties like NPC and NDM.

"Here what is important is magnanimity. Unless we have magnanimity, how can we bring a lasting solution", he asked.

However, the final solution depends on the moves of the underground groups and the government of India.

Mr Lohe hoped that underground groups would gain the "mandate of the people" once they are united.

THE STATESMAN

7 APR 2000

Anti-Ulfa wave sweeps rallies

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Jorhat, April 7: Craving for peace after over two decades of violence, thousands of people today gave vent to their feelings at rallies coinciding with the Ulfa's 21st foundation day.

"Assam has not gained anything over the past two decades. It has only witnessed bloodshed," said an elderly person at one such rally at the Boarding Field in Sivsagar town.

"Violence only begets violence. If Assam wants development, peace will have to be restored," said another speaker. Three days back, an Ulfa trainer who led the surrender of 532 militants at the historic Rang Ghar had spoken of militancy in the same vein.

"Bereft of any ideology, the Ulfa is heading nowhere. There is no democracy in the set-up. There is no doubt that it has turned into a terrorist outfit," said Amrit Phukon, who used to train recruits at the Ulfa's White Basti camp in Myanmar not long ago.

Observers feel the Ulfa "wrote

its own epitaph" by killing development worker Sanjoy Ghose.

"Ghose's death made the islanders realise that it was not the Ulfa, but people like Ghose whom they could bank on. The anti-Ulfa spark ignited in the island spread in the rest of the state like wildfire," a senior official said.

Several years have elapsed since Ghose was abducted and killed, but the people do not appear to have forgotten him. "If the Ulfa is truly committed to the development of Assam, why did it kill Ghose? Why did it target someone who came all the way from Delhi to serve the people of Majuli?" questioned a former government official at the rally here.

Though there is a groundswell of public opinion against the Ulfa, many believe that the proscribed outfit can still redeem its image by abjuring violence. A majority of the speakers at the peace rallies in Sivsagar and the Court Field here urged the outfit's leadership to come to the negotiating table. Peace rallies were held in all parts of the state, including Guwahati and Silchar, today.

THE ASSAM POST

- 8 APR 2000

Pak's Dhaka mission has links with ULFA: Mahanta

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, April 7

CHOOSING TO strike on the day the State dreads the most, April 7, the raising day of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has divulged evidence of the Pakistan-ULFA connection. He has also blamed the ISI for promoting fundamentalism and militancy among local Muslim youth by misleading them in the name of "jihad".

Mahanta's official outburst, close on the heels of Union Minister L K Advani and senior BJP leader Narendra Modi's north-east trip to highlight the danger to the region from Bangladeshis, has irked the minority leaders in Assam. They view it as the Chief Minister's rebuff to their move to form a common political platform of pan-Islamic parties in the State.

In a strong statement issued here, Mahanta said that his Government was in possession of enough proof that the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka was in touch with the ULFA leadership. It also provided the ULFA with passports in the names of Muslims to facilitate their frequent travel to and from Karachi, from where they would be covertly taken to guerilla training centres.

Revealing confessional statements of top militants like ULFA vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi, the Chief Minister said that the Assam police was in possession of copies of ULFA commander-in-chief Pareshm Barua's Bangladeshi pass-

Editor's arrest flayed

THE LATE night arrest of *Asomiya Pratidin* editor Haidad Hussain on Thursday by the city police has attracted criticism for the AGP-led Government. Hussain was apparently arrested for "maintaining the ULFA raising day celebrations in the outfit's Bhutan headquarters earlier". According to reports, police personnel followed him on Friday night from his Chandramari office to his residence. They surrounded his house as soon as he stepped in and conducted a raid thereafter. At the time of filing of this report, Hussain was in detention at the Panbazar police station.

HTC, Guwahati

ports obtained fraudulently with the help of Pak Embassy officials in Dhaka. One of these was in the name of Kamaruddin Zaman Khan.

Mahanta also stated that the past couple of years saw the mushrooming of 11 Pak-funded militant organisations in Assam.

These were the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam, Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, Islamic Liberation Army of Assam, United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam, United Reformation Protest of Assam, People's United Liberation Front, Muslim Volunteer Force, Adam Sena, Islamic Sevak Sangh, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Jehad.

The gravity of Islamic fundamentalism was realised when four Harkat, including two from Pakistan (Md Fasih Ullah Hussaini from Hyderabad, Sindh and Md Javed Wakhar from Karachi) were arrested in July last year, the Chief Minister added.

Meanwhile, peace rallies were organised today by various political parties and social organisations across the State condemning violence and terrorism. Timed with the ULFA raising day today, these rallies were targeted against the banned outfit.

The day also marked the 63rd foundation day of the Assam Legislative Assembly. A function, attended by Lok Sabha speaker G M C Balayogi, was held to felicitate former ministers and legislators, some posthumously. They included Sir Muhammad Saadullah, former premier of Assam and Babu Basant Kumar Das, the first Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly.

THE HINDUSTAN

APR 2000

Centre jeopardising peace: NSCN leader's brother

BY DALIP SINGH

New Delhi, April 8: There are doubts if peace could return to Nagaland soon with the Union government failing to start talks with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) after the arrest of its general secretary T.H. Muivah in Thailand.

G. Grinder, cousin of T.H. Muivah and a "bridge" between the government and the NSCN (IM), spoke to *The Asian Age* on Naga peace talks and what he alleged was his false implication in a hijacking case.

Mr Grinder blamed the government for jeopardising the peace talks. "This is the last stage of the peace process, if nothing is done now, then only God knows how much time it will take to come back to this stage once again," he said.

"It took 30 years for the Nagas to come to a negotiating table and talk to the government. But, there are certain people who are ready to sabotage this process," Mr Grinder said, adding: "The peace is in the interests of both — the Nagas and the Central government."

A Noida-based businessman, Mr

Grinder, however, repeatedly stated during the interview that he was not a member of the NSCN (IM) and he entered into this peace process when the government invited him to be "a messenger" between the two parties in 1996.

Questioning the government's seriousness to solve the issue, Mr Grinder said since the attack on Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir on November 29, 1999, for which he said that NSCN (IM) is being held responsible, the government has shown no inclination to talk to them on peace.

Despite the IM faction's denial of its involvement in the attack, Mr Jamir has been taking this as an opportunity to provoke them to break the ceasefire, he charged.

On December 29, 1999, one of the members of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) monitoring cell, Chiphanthing Lotha, was arrested from his home, he said, pointing to one of what he claims are many violations of the ceasefire rules by the state government.

Mr Muivah claimed he was falsely implicated in a case in which he was charged with planning the hijacking of an aircraft

from Mizoram's Lengpui airport in order to secure the release of T.H. Muivah, at present in a Thai jail.

He said he was sent to Bangkok in early February by the government to talk to the jailed general secretary in Bangkok. To his surprise, he said, he was arrested from Calcutta airport on way back to India on March 4 in a hijacking case.

Mr Grinder, who has been released on bail, spoke to Mr K. Padmanabhahai, the PM's emissary in the peace talks, about it but to no avail. He said the government till now has not bothered to talk to him for feedback after he returned from Bangkok. He however, refused to divulge the details of his Bangkok mission. "This is a tool of the government to tarnish the image of the NSCN (IM) and mine," he stated.

Contrary, Mr T.H. Muivah suspects the involvement of the Indian government in his arrest in Thailand," his nephew said when asked if India is talking to Bangkok officials to obtain his release.

He has filed a writ petition in the Guwahati high court against the government for falsely implicating him in a hijacking case. Asked whether the government has acquired Mr T.H. Muivah of having links

with Pakistan's ISI, he said, "The link between the Naga underground and Pakistan goes back to the 1950s and there is no love lost. But it has nothing to do with the ISI and has been, in fact, most concerned by the increase ISI activity in Nagaland." "If NSCN (IM) was involved with ISI, why didn't it work for them during the Kargil war," he argued.

A fresh peace process was started when Mr Rajesh Pilot met the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) leaders as Prime Minister Deve Gowda's emissary at Bangkok and both the sides agreed to the three points as a basis of the peace process.

It was agreed that the talks will be unconditional, which meant it was decided to avoid any mention of the demand for a sovereign state from the Naga side and there was no mention of a solution within the Indian Constitution from the government side.

The talks were to be held outside India. The talks are to be held at the highest level, which meant at the Prime Minister's level, with the PM being represented by his emissary and the Nagas being represented by the general secretary of the

NSCN, who the NSCN regards as the "Prime Minister of the government of the People's Republic of Nagaland."

The reason for the lack of progress, according to the Nagas, is primarily the refusal of the government to officially extend the ceasefire to all Naga-inhabited areas, specially to districts like Ukhrul, Chandel, Senapati and Tamenglong in Manipur. The earlier agreement between the two in 1964 had covered Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur. However, later the Union home ministry admitted that there was an "informal ceasefire" in Manipur, but they refused to state it formally, it said.

The NSCN is very critical of the Nagaland chief minister's role in the process, and they have charged him with undermining the ceasefire by resorting to all sorts of politics, said the document listing the problems in implementing the peace process. The other reason is that, according to them, the Union government has refused to sign the agreement or the ground rules for the ceasefire which was formalised way back on December 1997. The ceasefire ground rule making committee was set up under Mr K. Padmanabhahai.

NSCN(K) announces ceasefire ahead of talks with govt

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 9 APRIL

THE CENTRE crossed another milestone in its efforts to bring peace to the Northeast through dialogue with militant groups, with the rebel Naga outfit NSCN (Khaplang) on Sunday announcing its decision to enter into a ceasefire with the Union government, ahead of opening political-level parleys.

"NSCN has called a formal ceasefire with the government in Naga-inhabited areas to fulfil the demand of the Nagas for peace and thereafter a permanent political settlement," an NSCN(K) release issued by its information and publicity wing-in-charge Kughalo Mulationu in Kohima said.

The NSCN faction, headed by S.S. Khaplang, by declaring a ceasefire with the Centre, which apparently means suspension of operations against the army, central paramilitary forces and even the state police, has joined the likes of its regional rival — the NSCN (Isaac-Muivah) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) — both of which are observing a

ceasefire with the Union government in Nagaland and Assam respectively.

The Khaplang faction's willingness to enter into a truce with the Centre was first made public by the Nagaland chief minister, Mr S.C. Jamir, following his visits to New Delhi last month to discuss the possibility of broadbasing the Naga peace talks with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and senior Union government officials.

The NSCN(K) on Sunday hinted that a high-level meeting of the outfit will be held soon to work out the modalities of the ceasefire. The ground rules for the formal ceasefire will then be laid down at a meeting between the rebel leadership and a government emissary, the venue and date for which has to be intimated by the PMO, a NSCN(K) representative reportedly told the news agencies.

While the NSCN(I-M) was the first to initiate peace talks with the Union government its leadership had inked a ceasefire agreement with the Centre way back in August 1997. The BLT formalised its pact for "suspension of opera-

tions" against the security forces in Assam only last month.

Although the NSCN(I-M) has held several rounds of discussions with the Centre's emissary, former Union home secretary K. Padmanabhaiah, in foreign destinations, the peace dialogue is yet to make much headway. The talks are currently on hold following the recent arrest of its leader T. Muivah in Thailand on charges of carrying a fake passport.

Both the NSCN(K) and the NSCN(I-M) have been waging a parallel bush war in Nagaland for an independent tribal homeland outside the Indian federation. More than 25,000 people have lost their lives during the 52-year-old insurgency.

Rivalry exists even between the two NSCN factions over the question of territorial supremacy. While their respective ceasefires with the Centre will lead to suspension of operations vis-a-vis the security forces, the internecine warfare between the NSCN(I-M) and NSCN(K) may continue to interfere with the restoration of normalcy in Nagaland.

The Economic Times

1 0 APR 2000

NSCN Khaplang faction agrees on ceasefire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KOHIMA, April 9. — The NSCN (Khaplang faction) today decided to have a formal cease-fire with the central government.

An NSCN-K release received here said "The NSCN has decided to have formal cease-fire with the government of India in Naga-inhabited areas to fulfil the demand of the Nagas for peace and thereafter a permanent political settlement."

The release issued by the NSCN-K information and publicity wing in-charge, Kughalo Mulatonu, said: "The future of the Nagas will be decided very shortly with unanimous consensus of the Nagas", insisting that the "future of the Nagas cannot and will not be decided by others but the Nagas alone."

The NSCN-K had already

expressed its desire to hold political talks with the Centre but asserted that New Delhi should revoke the ban on the outfit and other laws which it termed as "black laws" such as Armed Forces (Special Power) Act from Naga-inhabited areas.

The Nagaland government has also been insisting that the Centre should extend the cease-fire to all underground groups and include all factions under the purview of the ongoing peace process.

The Centre and NSCN (Issak-Muivah faction) had signed the cease-fire agreement in August 1997 which expires on next July.

Meanwhile, NSCN-K sources said a high-level meeting of the outfit would be held very soon to finalise the modalities for the formal cease-fire.

The outfit has also decided to invite prominent Naga citizens

to another meeting to express their views and opinions on the imminent cease-fire and political talks, they said.

As a local arrangement, in the greater interest of the current peace talk process between the NSCN (Issak-Muivah faction) and the Centre, security forces had extended unilateral cease-fire to the NSCN-K too which expires on 15 April.

Although NSCN-K had not officially reciprocated to the cease-fire offer, there was no report of any clash between security forces and the underground outfit in Nagaland in the last two years.

However, such clashes were on between the two factions of the NSCN even after repeated appeals made by the government and various non-government organisations to stop such activities in the interest of peace in the state.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2000

Assam, Tripura joint operation to nab ultras

Agartala, April 9

ASSAM AND Tripura police will conduct joint operations along the border of the two States to flush out militants and exchange intelligence information.

A meeting of senior Tripura and Assam police officers, besides top officials of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), was held at Karimganj in Assam early this week to finalise the modalities of the joint operations. This is the first of its kind in the North-east, said North Tripura's Superintendent of Police Nepal Das here today.

CRPF personnel will participate in the joint operations, which will be led by senior police officials of the two States, Das said.

Information and intelligence reports about the movement and activities of the underground militants will be shared by the police of the two States.

The Tripura delegation was led by DIG (northern range) K Nagraj and DIG (Cachar range) headed the Assam police.

The proposed joint operations will also keep a watch on other border crimes, Das said.

An official report said National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militants were training the ultras of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF).

NLFT, ATTF, NSCN (IM) and ULFA militants have jointly conducted a series of attacks in Tripura and in the Barak valley of Assam, the report said. Several shelter camps have also been set up by the outfits in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Tripura Government has stepped up the ongoing counter insurgency operations in the State in view of the ensuing elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), slated on April 30 and May 4, election commissioner for district council Sudhir Sharma said here today. Additional paramilitary forces will be deployed in the trouble-torn areas, he added.

Security forces arrested a top NLFT militant from Amarpur in South Tripura yesterday.

(UNI)

Eye On Border Crime

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 APR 2000

THE TREK BACK

5/18 10/10 'Swadhin Asom' a lost cause 9/16/98

THE surrender of 532 activists of the United Liberation Front of Asom, National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Karbi National Volunteers is welcome but neither side stands to gain if former rebels are not rehabilitated in time. This must be the government's main objective if it wants to break the backbone of the militant organisations. But they should not be treated as a privileged class. More than 800 trained Ulfa cadres, who came overground after the outfit's unilateral declaration of ceasefire in December 1991, enjoyed outrageous indulgence under the late Hiteshwar Saikia, their mode of functioning demoralising law-enforcing agencies. They were promised Rs 2,000 per month for a year and given vocational training according to their qualifications and aptitude. This should help them make worthwhile attempts to start a new life. But the number of weapons deposited was disappointing; this must be pursued.

Dispur's attitude towards the Ulfa has changed after the murder some weeks ago of a ruling AGP minister. Prafulla Mahanta who, in July 1998, avoided being seen at the first surrender ceremony organised by the army, no longer seems to think that instead of piecemeal arrangements they should be encouraged to come to the negotiating table. It must be painful for the Ulfa leadership to see the organisation fighting for "swadhin Asom" being fractured (more than a dozen times), but they asked for it. The surrender is a tribute to the unified command's patience and realisation that the armed struggle rooted in socio-economic grievances must be tackled accordingly. Dispur must consolidate the advantage. This is the Ulfa's last chance, if they do not respond they will end up like the self-exiled Naga supremo Angami Zapu Phizo.

THE STATESMAN

TU APR 2000

~~NSCN(K)~~ ✓ ✓ ✓

210 ALL OF A PEACE 10

The hopes of a ceasefire and subsequent talks with militant outfits in Nagaland had started building up since the visit of the chief minister, Mr S.C. Jamir, to New Delhi last month. Now that the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) has decided to accept the Centre's offer of a ceasefire, these hopes show signs of maturing. Not that the way to even a low level equilibrium in the state is likely to be smooth. But the willingness of the NSCN(K) is promising, if only because the Centre's exchanges so far had been chiefly with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). As is usual in the strife riddled states of the North-east, any particular event can spin off into any direction. While the NSCN(K)'s initiative looks good, the NSCN(I-M)'s response to it remains far from predictable. Mr Jamir has reportedly asked the Centre to involve all the major militant outfits in the talks, that is, the NSCN(K), NSCN(I-M) and the Naga National Council. Discrete or exclusive discussions with one or the other are likely to exacerbate tensions among the different groups and demolish the peace process before it gets off the ground.

While this is by far the most farsighted and sensible thing to do, a plan to bring all underground outfits into the scope of the peace process may not be easy to implement. Inter-group rivalry has been a major threat to peace during the last three years. Killings have continued throughout the period that ceasefire has been operative from the side of the security forces, extending till July for the NSCN(I-M) and April 15 for the NSCN(K). The latter's decision must be seen in this perspective as a willingness to scale down factional hostility before the unilateral ceasefire expires. The incarceration of Mr T. Muivah has also provided it with an opportunity to improve its image *vis a vis* the NSCN(I-M). The Naga Hoho, the apex tribal group, has already warned against the possibility of the NSCN(I-M) withdrawing from the peace process if the Nagaland government, perceived as closer to the Khaplang faction, is seen to be active in it. There is no doubt that somebody must take the initiative, and the NSCN(K) has done so. How far this will take the state towards normalcy will depend as much on the NSCN(K) as on the Centre, the state government, and the other disaffected outfits.

THE ...

11 APR 2000

Nipamacha stands by autonomy demand

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, April 10. — Mr W Nipamacha Singh has justified his demand for autonomy to Manipur.

Speaking at a gathering of United Front ministers organised by Manipur State Congress Party workers here, the chief minister said: "We are not asking for a independent state. All we want is a greater degree of autonomy for Manipur inside India."

The autonomy demand is inconsonance with the common manifesto of the United Front. "We are not alone in this demand. Several other states are also rooting more powers," he said.

Stating that there was no move by the Centre to declare a financial emergency in the state, Mr Nipamacha Singh said the country is going through a financial crisis and that the fiscal position of many other states is worse than that of Manipur. "The Centre understands this."

On arms-snatching incidents, he said that the Union home minister had asked him to take action against the top brass instead of "small fries."

Mr L K Advani had demanded accountability at the top level.

Mr Nipamacha Singh said he had asked the Union home minister whether he should step down as he was holding the home portfolio.

Mr Advani, however, said: "You (Mr Nipamacha Singh) are democratically elected. Why should you step down?"

The chief minister used the reception party to consolidate his leadership.

The Union minister of state, Mr Th. Chaoba, had criticised the chief minister for his statement on autonomy.

Mr Nipamacha Sigh said: "I will resign if required. If I am not able to perform my duties, I will step down."

Similar statements in the past had helped him consolidate his position in the ministry.

He told the gathering that the BJP has no future in the state. "The BJP cannot come to power in the state. They are building castles in the air."

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Chandramani Singh, deputy chief minister, said: "Even if Mr Advani was made the chief minister of Manipur, he would not be able to solve the insurgency problem in Manipur." The state police is ill-equipped, he said. "How can the police, with .303, fight against militants with AK 47s?" he asked.

THE STATESMAN

1 APR 2000

Fragile peace, hard

51-7 24 bargains

THE guns may not boom that loudly in the Naga insurgency theatre of late, but there's a blistering war of words between the different Naga rebel factions, between the rebels and the government and between the rebels and the organisations considered peace brokers. To say the least, the Naga peace process has entered an extremely delicate stage.

On the one hand, there has been a halt in the ongoing exercise of dialogue between the government of India and the NSCN (Isak-Muivah group) ever since the outfit's general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah was arrested on 19 January by the authorities in Thailand and jailed on charges of flying into the country on a forged South Korean passport. On the other hand, the NSCN-IM's most bitter rival, the NSCN (Khaplang), has called a ceasefire with New Delhi as a concrete step towards joining the process of negotiations with the government of India.

The first signs of trouble in the ongoing NSCN(I-M) government peace process was the rebel group's reluctance to nominate anybody else in place of Muivah to continue the dialogue until his release from prison. New Delhi's argument that it was holding negotiations with the NSCN (I-M) as an organisation and not with an individual leader failed to cut the ice with the rebel top brass. They have decided to stick to their stand of not nominating anyone else

to lead the talks on behalf of their organisation until Muivah's release from jail. The second problem was over whether the Indian government should intervene to secure Muivah's release in the interest of the peace process.

Here the difficulty was from more than one quarter: first, New Delhi would not like to interfere in the judicial process of another country, but it could have still tried to launch a diplomatic exercise to bail out the detained Naga rebel leader. But, things were not so easy. Any such move could have been thought of if a request would have come from the NSCN(I-M). But, according to published reports, Muivah is dead against making any such request to the Indian government. The NSCN(I-M)'s stand is understandable because, like the other Naga rebel factions, it doesn't regard Nagaland or the Nagas as Indians. In fact, riding on this stand, outfits like the NSCN(I-M) have been waging a bush war to, as it says, regain the lost freedom of the Nagas.

Muivah, therefore, doesn't consider himself an Indian citizen and this poses a technical problem for the peace intermediaries, maybe even to

The mood in Nagaland is for peace and New Delhi needs to tread carefully so as not to lose an opportunity which may not come again for years. Again, transparency in the dealings will determine the success of the peace efforts, writes WASBIR HUSSAIN

New Delhi's official interlocutors. Of course, from the government of India's point of view, it would have been a good political and strategic move to try and bail out Muivah so as to gain the trust of the rebel group. But here, one must not lose sight of media reports that it could

rival NSCN(K) faction to neutralise it).

One is not trying to even remotely suggest that the Centre should not involve the state government concerned in the peace process. But, if keeping out a state government ultimately leads to a solution of a thorny 50-year-old prob-

It is indeed heartening to hear from none other than home minister LK Advani that the NSCN(K) too could soon be invited to join the negotiations. This can now happen sooner than expected with the NSCN(K) announcing its decision to sign a ceasefire agreement soon. In doing so, however, New Delhi must ensure that the ongoing efforts with the NSCN(I-M) aren't jeopardised. If the latest efforts to bring the NSCN(K) and the Naga National Council (for long led by Angami Zapu Phizo who was the father of Naga militancy) into the fold of negotiations is, even remotely, an attempt to sideline the NSCN(I-M), the scene in Nagaland is bound to turn even murkier.

A situation is gradually unfolding in the Naga theatre where the NSCN(I-M) and the NSCN(K) have launched moves to prove who is the more legitimately representative of the Nagas.

The rebel groups have perhaps thought it necessary to try and demonstrate this so that New Delhi could decide which of the two outfits should be given more weightage as the peace talks go on. It was not surprising, therefore, to find the NSCN(K) warning the chief minister recently (despite suggestions from rivals that it is soft towards the Jamir government) to keep away from the Nagas struggle as well as the peace process.

The NSCN(K) has described Mr Jamir as New Delhi's puppet and has accused him of pressuring the Centre to declare the NSCN(I-M) an outlawed organisation.

The Khaplang faction is not known to have used such harsh language to attack Mr Jamir before and this changed stance is seen by Naga insurgency observers as the outcome of the compulsions of the time.

With the battle for supremacy on in full swing even before the talks with one group, that is the NSCN(I-M) making any headway, New Delhi is in for some hard times to settle things in Nagaland. The Centre can least afford to feel happy or relieved at this stage over hard bargainer Muivah's detention in Thailand. After all, even US Congressmen like Benjamin A Gilman (chairman of the US Congress Committee on International Relations) have written to Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai pleading for Muivah's release for the sake of peace in the troubled Naga areas.

The mood in Nagaland is for peace and New Delhi needs to tread carefully so as not to lose an opportunity which may not come around again for years. Here, transparency in the dealings will determine the success of the peace efforts.

(The writer is editor of The Northeast Daily, Guwahati.)



The NSCN (I-M) considers SC Jamir (right) and his Congress government enemy No. 1 and has described him as New Delhi's puppet.

have been the RAW which had tipped off the Thai authorities that Kwang Chu Soong (under which name Muivah was travelling at the time of his arrest on 19 January) was a North Korean agent, travelling on a South Korean passport with a mission to blow up the South Korean embassy in Bangkok ahead of an important United Nations meeting.

Apparently, it was this bit of information that drove the Thai authorities into a tizzy, leading to alert immigration officials arresting Muivah as he alighted from a flight from Karachi.

That is a different story, but things at home have become all the more complex with Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir now saying that following a meeting with the Prime Minister and the union home minister recently, the Centre has agreed to consult the Nagaland government too in the peace process. The move has the potential to even derail the peace talks between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M). This is because the NSCN (I-M) considers Mr Jamir and his Congress government its enemy number one (primarily owing to the NSCN(I-M)'s suspicion that Mr Jamir and company could be backing the

lem, it's worth it. After all, the Congress government of Lalthanhawla wasn't involved in the peace talks between the Mizo National Front and the Centre and he had, in fact, relinquished office to usher in MNF chieftain Laldenga, Mizoram's chief minister, as soon as the Nzo Accord was clinched in 1986.

Of course, Mr Jamir, to be fair to him, has also gone on record as having said he is ready to lay down office for the sake of peace in Nagaland. But his word can be taken seriously only if his government treads carefully in so far as commenting in public on the ongoing peace process. The chief minister who has survived multiple assassination bids apparently by the NSCN(I-M), is a bitter critic of the nature of the ceasefire between the government of India and the NSCN(I-M) currently in force in Nagaland, and has described it as a licence to the outfit's rebels to indulge in loot, murder and arson.

On the other hand, Mr Jamir is right in saying that a piecemeal solution cannot bring lasting peace in Nagaland and that other Naga rebel groups such as the NSCN(K) must also be roped into the process.

BAC polls to violate spirit of negotiations: Bodo leaders

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 11 APRIL

THE BODO Liberation Tigers leaders warned the state government that holding elections to the Bodoland Autonomous Council will go against the spirit of the ongoing negotiations and send wrong signals to the other groups closely following the talks.

Holding their first ever press conference, vice-chairman of the Bodo Liberation Tigers Kamal Mushahari and publicity secretary of the organisation Mainao Daimary, who will represent the Tigers in the negotiations, said on Tuesday that the state's present political scenario was not conducive to development.

They said with 80 per cent to 90 per cent of the total resources going towards payment of salaries there was no scope for sustained economic development and thus, they added, there was all the more need to demand a separate state of Bodoland.

The two leaders said the Tigers, though still an underground organisation, had agreed to hold talks after the constitution of a Ceasefire Monitoring Group with Union joint secretary (home) G.K. Pillai as the chairman and representatives from BLT, state government, army and other para military forces after seven months of discussions. The



Bodo Liberation Tigers leaders Kamal Mushahari and Mainao Daimary at a press conference in Guwahati on Tuesday

Caroline Singh

talks were held following an initiative by Union home minister L.K. Advani.

Mainao Daimary, blaming a section of the media, said some people have been giving wrong information that the state had no role in the peace process but, he added, that as soon as the contact was made and the process started the chief minister took initiative and nominated representatives of the state government for the tripartite talks between the BLT, the Union and state governments.

Kamal Mushahari, while asking the NDFB to take part in the talks, said: "They must realise the ground realities and come to hold talks for the wel-

fare of the people of Bodoland."

He was hopeful that with NSCN (K), NSCN (IM) and their organisation coming to hold talks, other organisations will also realise the need to hold talks with the government.

Later, when asked what were the factors responsible for their taking extreme steps like taking up arms and asking for a separate state of Bodoland, Kamal Mushahari said for the last over 50 years there has been negative economic development in the Bodo areas and no attempt has been made to even give basic amenities like education and health care.

The Economic Times

12 APR 2000

Naga peace process enters crucial stage

137A By Vinay Kumar HD-17
NEW DELHI, APRIL 12. The 30-month-old peace process in Nagaland appears to have entered a delicate stage with the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) formally announcing its decision on Sunday to agree to the ceasefire with the Centre. Though informal contacts were established between the Centre and the NSCN (Khaplang) group about a year ago, the group came around to formally agreeing to the ceasefire only now. The Nagaland Chief Minister, Mr. S. C. Jamir, who is seen as being soft towards the NSCN (Khaplang) group, had recently met the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and urged them to include the rebel group in the peace process in the State.

9-N.E. Sp...
The formal announcement by the NSCN (Khaplang) also indicates that overwhelming mood in Nagaland is for peace as several NGOs and social organisations in the State, including the influential

Naga Ho Ho, have expressed their views in favour of peace and development of the State which has witnessed insurgency over the last five decades. In Assam too, the Centre and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) announced suspension of operations on March 15. Last week, in Sibsagar district in Assam about 530 men from ULFA and other militant outfits surrendered before the authorities. The developments may help generate a conducive atmosphere for peace in the region.

The NSCN (K) also finds itself catapulted to a significant position as its bitter rival, the NSCN (Issac-Muivah) group which had agreed to the ceasefire arrangement in August 1997 and has held talks with the Centre is beset with its own problems. The NSCN(I-M) general secretary, Mr. Thuingaleng Muivah, is serving a jail term imposed by the Thai authorities after he was found travelling to Bangkok on a fake South Korean passport in January.

Mr. Muivah's arrest also resulted in putting off the scheduled round of talks in February with

the Central Government's chief negotiator, Mr. K. Padmanbhaiah. The NSCN (I-M) faces a tricky situation as the group has always claimed that it believed in collective leadership, indicating that peace talks could go on even when Mr. Muivah was behind the bars.

Over the past one month, the group has demanded that talks be held at the level of the Prime Minister and asserted that it would have none other than Mr. Muivah to represent the organisation at the talks with the Centre. Well placed sources in the Government say that the NSCN(I-M) is dominated by Thangkhul tribals and its claim of "collective leadership" has fallen flat as it did not nominate a representative other than Mr. Muivah for the talks. Unwilling to take up the issue of early release of Mr. Muivah with the Thai authorities for the sake of peace in Nagaland, sources in the Government say that it would not be proper for the Government to interfere in the judicial process of another country.

As the Union Home Ministry

and the NSCN (K) representatives sit down soon to lay down the ground rules for ceasefire, the Government would also have to devise the strategy to bring the NSCN(I-M) and the Khaplang faction together on the negotiating table. "Talks with the NSCN(I-M) will go on as usual. It will be a long drawn process before peace returns to Nagaland. We will also have to involve the Naga National Council in the peace process," sources said.

Though the NSCN(I-M) is more powerful and deadlier of the two militant groups, the Khaplang faction is reportedly numerically stronger and dominated by Konyaks, Hemis, Semas tribes. The configuration of the tribal set up in the militant group, their respective areas of domination on the ground play a crucial role in determining who is on a stronger wicket where and who represents Nagas in more legitimate way than the other. Any feeling of being sidelined by the Centre by either of the groups would also act as a deterrent in further progress of the peace process.

THE HINDU

13 APR 2000

Peace talks may help N-E return to normalcy

Anil Anand
New Delhi, April 12

ALTHOUGH THE National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-Khaplang), one of the main insurgent outfits in the North-East, announced a formal ceasefire on Sunday, the NSCN faction was understood to have expressed its desire to enter into dialogue with the Centre about a year back. According to well-placed sources in the Union Government, the NSCN (Khaplang) had accordingly declared an "informal" ceasefire in July 1999 while expressing willing-

ness to enter into a dialogue with the Centre for finding a peaceful solution to the endemic Naga problem. In reciprocation, the security forces had also "informally" suspended action against the outfit.

The sources further disclosed that it was after series of meetings held with the Khaplang faction over the months that the two sides finally agreed to formally begin peace talks. As a sequel to the Government-NSCN (K) informal parleys, Home Minister L.K. Advani had on March 15 last officially declared in Parliament the suspension of security opera-

tion against this faction of the NSCN as well.

With another underground outfit, NSCN (Issak-Muiwah), already engaged in peace-talks with the Centre, yet another step forward has been taken to restore peace

which at times were reportedly involved in fierce inter-faction rivalry. The Naga Federal Group and the NNC are the only other groups of some consequence which are still to respond to the Centre's overtures for peace.

The NSCN (K) and NSCN (I-M) were reportedly engaged in an intermine battle of supremacy in the past in a bid to increase their respective areas of operation and influence in the region. A North-East observer, while describing the NSCN (K) numerically stronger to its rival faction NSCN (I-M) which has an edge in terms of weaponry, said that only recently

the former was able to regain certain positions after dislodging the NSCN (I-M).

The NSCN (K) is understood to have a strong base in the neighbouring Myanmar from where it was receiving arms and ammunition and also training to its cadres. The NSCN (I-M) is "marginally bigger" than its rival faction as its leaders belong to the dominant Thankul tribe while Khaplang belongs to Sema tribe.

The Government sources here said that the dialogue with the NSCN (K) will in no way affect the already ongoing talks with the NSCN (I-M).

Centre-NSCN talks

and normalcy in the North-East with NSCN-K showing its readiness to talk, the sources felt.

Though nearly half a dozen Naga insurgent groups are active in the area over the years, the two NSCN factions are the dominant ones

Tripura Opp demands Centre's intervention

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 12. — The four-party Opposition alliance, led by the BJP, has demanded "Centre's intervention" in Tripura immediately in view of "escalating ethnic disturbances" in parts of state before elections to the hill council.

Leaders of alliance constituents — the BJP, Trinamul Congress, Janata Dal (United) and TUJS — earlier met here to review the state's latest situation arising out of mayhem by rebel groups.

They feared that Tripura might be heading for another blood bath like that in June 1980 in which over 2,000 innocents of Bengali and tribal communities were killed and over 25,000 houses were torched. Mr Rabindra Devbarma, TUJS general secretary and the alliance spokesman, said the state government had "miserably failed" in tackling the situation. "The govt is apparently keen on avoiding responsibility by blaming either the Centre or the Opposition for the worsening situation."

He said separate messages were already sent to the Prime Minister and the Union home minister demanding immediate Central intervention in the state to save the lives and property of the citizens. Mr Devbarma expressed his concern over the manner in which about 500 houses of tribals and non-tribals were torched by organised miscreants in a large number of villages around Jirania hill township during the past two days.

The alliance will stage a demonstration here on 17 April "to protest against the state government's failure in dealing with the situation properly". Mr Devbarma issued an appeal to the people to maintain peace and harmony.

The opposition alliance earlier announced its decision to boycott elections to the hill areas autonomous district council. Mr Jahar Saha, leader of Congress opposition group in the House said: "Holding of a free and fair election in the present situation is not at all possible." He urged the Commission for autonomous district council poll to defer the election process immediately "to save life and properties of the citizens."

He also said the state Congress might soon review its decision on participating in the poll process in view of steadily deteriorating situation.

The TPCC chief, Mr Birjit Sinha, noted his anxieties over the recent spurt in incidents of mayhem and violence, wanton abductions and torching of houses by armed rebel groups. He felt, the rise in rebel violence was hastening process of an ominous polarisation on ethnic line in the state.

CPI-M worker killed: NLFT militants raided Gandhi Karbari para in the Chhamanu area of North Tripura last night. They picked up Mr Subalya Chakma, a tribal activist of the CPI-M, from his house and later killed him.

Body recovered: The body of Gopal Das, a villager, was recovered by police from Dilbag area of Dharmanagar subdivision of North Tripura last night. He was earlier kidnapped from his house by a group of criminals on 4 April.

Encounter: NLFT men fired at a patrol of the Tripura State Rifles at Radhamohon pur in West Tripura last night. The TSR men returned the fire.

The encounter lasted for about half-an-hour.

THE STATESMAN

13 APR 2000

13 APR 2000

Old wounds and a sign of light

HPC-13
19/11

HARISH CHANDOLA on the desperate need to break the deadlock between the rebels and the Government and force a peace in Nagaland

THE NATIONAL Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) has stated that it can only be represented by NSCN general secretary Isaac Muivah in the ongoing peace talks with the Government. But Muivah is in a Bangkok prison for entering the country on a forged passport in January. He has been sentenced to an year's imprisonment for trying to escape from the country while on bail and is now awaiting a second trial.

Union Home Minister L. K. Advani's call for talks with rebels in the North-east is a positive move. Surely, the effort should be to heal bitter memories and bring in a spectrum of public opinion to the negotiating table. But it won't be easy and the Government would need to be immensely patient and tactical if it really wants a solution to this festering wound.

The last round of talks in early February had to be cancelled because Muivah was in prison. The Indian Government cannot wait for him to complete his sentence to resume talks with the NSCN. Resolving the Naga issue can wait, but what cannot is the extension of the two-and-a-half-year old ceasefire in Nagaland, which ends on July 31. An agreement has to be reached between the two parties before the ceasefire is extended. In the absence of such a move, Nagaland and Manipur will lapse into a more intense armed conflict than ever before.

The hopes of the NSCN nominating another leader to continue the talks with the personal envoy of the Prime Minister were dashed in early February, when it stated that it was not going to hand over Muivah's role to anyone else. The NSCN is convinced that Muivah has been arrested as a result of pressure on the Thai government by authorities in Delhi. Several international organisations, including Unrepresented People's Organisation in a recent meeting in Amsterdam, has asked for Muivah's release. Their contention is that he is a political prisoner and not a criminal. India had been asking Bangkok not to allow the Nagas to use Thailand for their political activities. India had sent its Minister of State for External

PLATFORM

Affairs to Thailand along with joint secretary S. J. Singh to press this point.

The NSCN believes that if New Delhi uses the same diplomatic clout with Thailand that it had used earlier, it will succeed in getting Muivah out of jail. Opinion on taking an initiative to secure Muivah's release is, however, deeply divided within the power circles in Delhi and Nagaland. The stock answer given is that Muivah has not been arrested as an Indian citizen, so the Indian Government's hands are tied. The real reason, however, lies elsewhere. The military has been accusing the NSCN of using the ceasefire period



for stockpiling weapons. It also maintains that the NSCN has violated the truce conditions. The army has used this argument since the first ceasefire was signed in 1964.

Some government leaders have found it upsetting that Muivah should be in Pakistan during the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu. They believe that he may have been plotting against India with the help of the ISI by organising the transport of weapons from Thailand to the North-east through Myanmar. They conclude that Muivah's continued collaboration with Pakistani authorities was established beyond doubt when it was revealed by a Bangkok report that the South Korean passport he was travelling on bore only the stamp of his exit from Karachi and not that of his entry.

Hence, his presence in Pakistan while he was negotiating a peace settlement with India is being taken as a mark of his insincerity.

Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir is a strong supporter of the view that Muivah should be left to rot in the Thai prison. There was a major attempt to assassinate Mr Jamir a few months ago which the Nagaland Government believes is the work of the NSCN. This was the second attempt on Mr Jamir's life. He, therefore, is determined to see that Muivah stays where he is. The NSCN, on its part, considers Mr Jamir as the biggest hurdle in the way of a settlement of the Naga issue with India. And they may be partially right.

Extending the ceasefire in Nagaland is essential. That the Nagas have been going to Pakistan to obtain arms is an old story. It began in 1955 when arrangements were made for A.Z. Phizo's escape through what was then East Pakistan. This led to a nearly 20-year long period of underground conflict during which arms were smuggled into Naga areas from East Pakistan. Significantly, Delhi succeeded in halting that traffic by signing a ceasefire and opening peace talks with the Nagas in September 1964.

Today, Delhi stands to lose if the ceasefire is not extended or breaks down. The Northeast falls in the periphery of New Delhi's policy framework. No one seems to care while the intensity of the conflict only becomes more bitter. The fact that history has shown little progress should not deter the Government to end the cycle of violence and alienation in the region. The Centre must realise that by alienating the people, they are only strengthening the hands of various underground factions.

A political solution would mean a reopening of consensual dialogue with all concerned, including Muivah, who still holds a considerable support base among the Nagas. Nagaland needs a democratic solution; looking at the conflict purely as a law and order problem is not going to lead to any tangible result, as is evidenced by more than two decades of underground rebellion in the area despite continued army presence

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 APR 2000

Militant clash sparks tension in Nagaland

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, April 13: Tension mounted in the Konyak-dominated Dizit area of Nagaland's Mon district today with the outbreak of the first ever factional clash.

Both factions of the NSCN traded fire inside the forests of Tiru bordering Assam this morning when senior NSCN (Khaplang) leaders were on the verge of resuming discussions to finalise the modalities of ceasefire.

Violence erupted as soon as officials from New Delhi and Kohima left for Tuensang from Mon.

NSCN(K) sources told **The Telegraph** that senior leaders of the outfit including its general secretary K. Zhimoni had been engaged in "threadbare discussions" for the past three days to finalise modalities of the ceasefire. A senior legislator from Mon said clashes were unheard of in the peaceful Konyak territory before.

The district police said tension has been mounting over the past week after a large group of NSCN(I-M) activists sneaked into Dizit and Tiru areas of the district, which is a NSCN (Khaplang) stronghold.

Permit relaxation

The Centre has decided to relax the controversial restricted area permit (RAP) for four districts in Nagaland in response to the state government's plea. The move is expected to boost tourist inflow.

Joint secretary (Northeast) in the Union home ministry G.K. Pillai today said the regulation

would be relaxed on an experimental basis in Kohima, Dimapur, Wokha and Mokokchung districts on the lines of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Pillai said if the provision helped to boost tourism, it would be extended to the other four districts in the state also.

Pillai is here to attend a two-day seminar organised at Mon and Tuensang to identify the development needs of the two backward districts and recommend suitable schemes.

Inaugurating the seminar here this morning, chief minister S.C. Jamir stressed the need for drawing up a "special economic package" which would address all issues with emphasis on specific projects. The package would be taken up with the Centre for approval and funding. Once the schemes were approved, a high-level committee would be constituted to monitor their implementation, he added.

Jamir attributed the socio-economic backwardness of Tuensang district to historical reasons and geographical isolation. He said the people never got the opportunity to participate in the development process till Nagaland attained statehood in 1963.

The seminar, organised jointly by the Union home ministry and the state government, cleared several development schemes in the past two days.

Pillai said special recruitment drives would be conducted to induct youth from the two districts into paramilitary forces.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 APR 2000

Bangladesh migrants continue to enter Assam

BY MANOJ ANAND

Mankachar, (India-Bangladesh border in Assam), April 13: The deployment of the BSF and the fencing on western frontier of Assam, specially to check the influx from Bangladesh has turned to be totally ineffective with unabated flow of migrants from across the border, making a mockery of the process of checking the infiltration.

This was disclosed when *The Asian Age* managed to reach the frontier posts with Bangladesh pretending as to be a contractor because reporters are not allowed to visit the border without formal permission of the BSF authority.

The border fencing that has been broken at the end of every foot-tracks across the fencing indicates the modus operandi of the smugglers and criminals who are having the field day along the International border of the state.

The migration from Bangladesh that is still going on has also started forcing the indigenous people

from Mankachar border area to migrate to other places without disposing off their properties in the border area.

Many such people who were compelled to vacate the border villages have been taking shelter at Gouripur and Dhubri area of the western Assam.

One of such victim told *The Asian Age* that they could not sell off their paternal properties as no body agrees to buy their lands and properties, systematically coercing them to leave the area.

Mr Radha Dutta Choudhury, a resident of Gouripur village said that the new settlers in and around their village are those who were compelled to vacate their villages mostly in the Mankachar sector.

People discern a planned conspiracy of the migrants to capture the properties of the indigenous people in the border areas.

The volume of migration from the border can also be estimated by the record of the Border Police that deported more than 200 foreigners through Mankachar border during

last couple of years.

The border police sources claim it is only the tip of the iceberg, actual migration is much more than that of it.

Interestingly, the Centre's proposed second line of defence has yet to take start as out of 14 proposed, only three border outposts are functional that too amidst constraint of housing and other facilities.

This correspondent who also visited all the three functional posts of the "second line of defence" discovered that there was no coordination between the BSF and the Border Police.

The BSF men did not allow Border Police to move through the border road without prior permission.

Once even the Mankachar police was denied the use of the border road to apprehend an ISI agent and the ISI man managed to cross over the international border before the police could cordon off the area with the formal permission from the BSF authorities.

THE ASIAN AGE

14 APR 2000

WELCOME TRUCE

But only trust will bring Nagaland peace

DESPITE the Centre deciding to sign a ceasefire accord with the NSCN-Khaplang faction, the prospects of an early solution to the 50-year-old Naga problem seem bleak. New Delhi's initiative, although constructive, implies belated recognition of the group's importance. SS Khaplang's willingness to talk is also significant in the sense that as chief of the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front he was against its members — Ulfa included — suing for peace individually. Coming at a time when NSCN general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah is in jail in Thailand and the outfit is unable to resume talks, Delhi's move may feed the suspicion that it was a deliberate attempt to jeopardise the peace process. One wonders why the Centre did not think of it earlier particularly when, over the past two years, both the security forces and Khaplang cadres had unilaterally suspended operations against each other. For one thing, Khaplang, who was vice chairman of the undivided NSCN, cannot be written off as he has considerable influence over the Chang, Konyak and Ao tribes in the north. Besides, all sections of the people agree that unless all three factions — the other being the parent body, the Naga National Council — sink their differences there can be little ground for optimism. Delhi has no option but to invite the NNC as well, even at the risk of offending the NSCN-IM which claims to be the sole representative of the Nagas and wants no one else involved. For them, two choices remain: to either drop a bombshell or agree to share a common platform with the rival groups.

The ceasefire does not necessarily mean a return to peace but it should at least provide a sense of security. The truce in force since August 1997 has more or less been a farce, with several cases of violation of ground rules, the most blatant being the abortive attempt on the life of chief minister SC Jamir. Having roped in both the NSCN groups it is logical to end the grim situation created by growing fratricidal killings.

15 APR 2000

NLFT kills 3 of family, steps up attacks on CPM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 14. — The NLFT hacked to death three members of a tribal family in West Tripura last night and stepped up attacks on the CPI-M in the run-up to the hill council polls.

In separate attacks across West Tripura's Bishalgarh region, the rebels severely beat up three CPI-M leaders including a woman, sending them to hospital. A journalist of the CPI-M's organ and a party activist were beaten up by NLFT supporters at Bisramganj in the same district.

Another CPI-M member, Mr Asraf Ali, was shot dead by an unidentified gang at his home in North Tripura's Dharmanagar subdivision.

The triple murder happened at Dafaderpara, Khowai. The rebels swooped on the home of Mr Pulin Devbarma (65) shortly before 9 p.m. They broke open the door, dragged Mr Devbarma near the courtyard and hacked him to death.

They then pounced on the rest

of the family with sharp weapons, killing Mr Devbarma's wife Nayanawari (50) and son Arun (21), and seriously injuring Arun's sister Sabita (18) and brother Barun (15).

Sabita and Barun are fighting for life at a nearby government hospital.

Reinforcements have been sent to the local Kalyanpur police station. The security forces are searching for the killers but no arrests had been made till this evening.

Beatings: Mr Jugal Devbarma, a tribal CPI-M leader and member of the party's Bishalgarh divisional committee, was beaten up at Herma in West Tripura.

The chairman of CPI-M's block advisory committee in Bishalgarh, Mr Manik Lal Devbarma, was picked up by guerrillas from his home at Rangmala and was mercilessly thrashed before the crowd at the local hill market.

Mrs Mandodari Devbarma, a tribal CPI-M leader of the area, too was abducted from her

home at Shikhariapara and beaten up by the rebels who threatened to kill her unless she left the CPI-M at once.

At West Tripura's Bisramganj, a group of NLFT supporters beat up Mr Manoranjan Devbarma, a reporter with the CPI-M's Bengali language mouthpiece, *Daily Desherkatha*.

At Ichai Tulagaon, Dharmaganagar, an armed gang shot Mr Asraf Ali, CPI-M activist and a member of the Agricultural Workers' Union backed by the party. No arrests have been made.

Kidnappings: Mr Mati Devbarma, a tribal villager, was kidnapped by guerrillas yesterday. He was untraced till this evening.

Mr Nepal Das, a village trader, was kidnapped by rebels from Warengbari, West Tripura, the same day.

Arson, curfew: Curfew was reimposed this afternoon in and around the Jirania hill township, West Tripura, after about 500 homes were torched in neighbouring villages during last night's curfew hours.

15 APR 2000

Tripura border to be fenced soon

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 15. — Tripura's international frontier line will soon have barbed wire fences to check trans-border movement of rebels, according to officials here.

Work on two patches along Tripura's border with Bangladesh's Sylhet region will be taken up first. Around 200 km between Simna, a hill town in West district, and Shib Bari in North Tripura, opposite Sylhet, will be fenced.

Tripura has a 839-km border line with Bangladesh.

Another 150 km from South district's Shukhnachhari up to Boalkhali, opposite Bangladesh's Chittagong hills and Noakhali areas, will also be fenced.

An initial fund of Rs 250 crore has been approved by the Centre for fencing work.

The state government had ear-

lier approached the Centre for fencing these border stretches, more often being used as conduits by insurgents to negotiate with their camps in Bangladesh.

The BSF had earlier handed over details to the Bangladesh Rifles about insurgents' camps across the border.

A map was handed over showing 29 camps in Sylhet and Chittagong hills. The Centre has requested Bangladesh to demolish camps of the NSCN, Ulfa, People's Liberation Army of Manipur, NLFT and the ATTF.

Lieutenant General A K Puri, the director-general of the Border Road Task Force, said here on 12 April last that the BRTF was given the assignment of constructing 553-km road along Tripura's frontier line with Bangladesh.

In the past several years, the BRTF has completed work on

construction of 416-km road along the border. Work on another 135-km road is expected to be finished by March next year.

Lt Gen Puri said work on renovation of state's southern highway linking Agartala with the southern most subdivisional town of Sabrum, opposite Bangladesh's Chittagong hill tracts, was also likely to be completed by March.

The North-eastern Council has provided funds for construction of a road linking Tripura's northern hill town of Kanchanpur with Aizawl. The work is expected to be finished soon.

Lt Gen Puri said the progress of border road work was being hampered by escalating insurgency in Tripura.

He approached the Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, for providing security to BRTF workers.

16 APR 2000

Suicidal fights

EXPRESS FOCUS NORTH-EAST

The Naga factions should first talk to each other and then to India, says **SANJOY HAZARIKA** as the Khaplang group expresses willingness to talk

ON Sunday, the faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by S.S. Khaplang announced that it was ready for a dialogue with the Government of India and for a ceasefire with Indian security forces in all areas dominated by the Nagas.

The announcement is not surprising: A ceasefire from the Khaplang side has been in force since last Christmas. So this is just an extension of that process. In addition, it should be noted that the Indian security forces have declared a ceasefire with all Naga factions, including the Khaplang faction, since last year.

The importance of the announcement lies not in the decision to pull back the military wing, a situation which existed anyway, but in the proposal to open a political dialogue with New Delhi. Until the announcement, the Khaplang group had maintained that it would not interfere in the discussions between the Indian Government and its rival faction, the NSCN led by Issak Chisi Swu and Thiuengelang Muivah. Those talks began in the mid-1990s with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and then were followed up by H.D. Deve Gowda before a formalised structure of negotiations began between the Government delegation led by a representative of the Prime Minister and the Naga

group led by Th. Muivah, who is the Kilo Kilsoner or Prime Minister of the 'Government of the Republic of Nagaland.'

These talks with Muivah have stuttered along for nearly three years without any tangible movement toward a settlement. Part of the problem has been the insistence of the Muivah-Swu group that the Government should talk only with their faction and not with any other group. They claim to have exclusive representation of the Nagas.

This is strongly disputed not just by the Khaplang faction but by many NGOs and others working at the field level in Nagaland and Manipur, where the Nagas live in large numbers. Indeed, over the past decades, the Naga movement appears to be split along personal and ethnic lines as well as along that of the "ideologically pure."

As with all political parties, each group claims to represent the people. But Muivah's camp is dominated by the Tangkhul tribe, of which Muivah is a leader. Isaak Swu is a Sema which has representation both in Nagaland and Manipur. But the problem is that the Tangkhuls are largely in Manipur and hardly have a physical presence in the present state of Nagaland.

It is of course another matter that the

I-M group declares (and this ideological line is also followed by the Khaplang faction) that those areas where Nagas constitute a majority should be part of a greater Nagaland which they define as Nagalim. This proposal has met with fierce opposition from the neighbouring states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur which see their existence and special status threatened by such demands and claims.

Assam is already one-third of its original size, shrunk from the once-proud state which covered virtually all of the North East. That it has lost so many of its communities and its lands to other states, all new, is a reflection of the chauvinism and bias with which the Assamese-speaking elite conducted itself for generations, alienating the tribes of the hills and plains without understanding their sensitivities and, all the time, demanding recognition of Assamese demands.

But the demands of Khaplang go beyond just talks and territorial claims. His group has sought the carving out of Naga areas in Arunachal Pradesh as a special Union Territory. All who know the situation in the hills of Nagaland and Manipur also know that there are demands to repeal the "black laws," especially the Armed Forces Special Powers Act which gives security forces sweeping powers to search, arrest and shoot without warrants.

As far as the Naga groups are concerned, one can only believe seeing their moves and counter-moves that all of their ideology and positions flows from their ethnic identities. Thus, Khaplang is a Konyak Naga although he is technically a resident of Myanmar. But his movement commands the support of the Konyaks and their sub-tribes, which comprise the largest of the Naga tribes.

There are questions about why Khaplang has chosen this moment to raise the question of a separate ceasefire with the

Government of India. There are those who would see the hand of the Congress Party government in Nagaland, under Chief Minister S.C. Jamir, in this new development. Groups in the Congress Party are said to be close to the Khaplang faction. But the fact of the matter is that Khaplang suffered several severe setbacks in the past year.

Militarily, his command has come under acute pressure from the tough Myanmar army which attacked and overran his General Headquarters near the Myanmar-India border. He lost his Number Two, Daly Mongro, in an assault by armed groups near the Naga capital town of Kohima last August, a killing put at the door of

The Khaplang group had maintained that it would not interfere in the discussions between the Indian Government and its rival faction, the NSCN led by Issak Chisi Swu and Thiuengelang Muivah.

the other faction. And for years, the Khaplang army has been under the pressure of the Swu-Muivah faction, smarting from what they regard as the dishonour and death of hundreds of cadres at the hands of the rival group in 1988. In that assault, Muivah barely escaped but many of his followers were killed. That incident has not yet been forgotten.

So in addition to the demands for a Naga homeland, there are these fratricidal

conflicts that are tearing the Naga society apart. Indeed, what is ironic is that over the past years — since the ceasefire with the groups began — the armed confrontation and clashes are not between the Indian army and the insurgents but among the different Naga groups. The most recent incident was in Nagaland last week when the Muivah group fought a pitched battle with the Khaplang fighters. Extortions of professionals, government officials and businessmen by all sides has left a very unpleasant taste in the mouths of many Nagas who want to live in peace, without harassment either from the security forces or the militants.

Until these deep bitteresses and political divisions are healed, with all sides facing up openly and squarely to their mistakes instead of always blaming the other side, there cannot be progress in any dialogue. For if the Naga-India issue is to be resolved, it must first be resolved among the Nagas so that they speak unitedly and frankly, without fear or favour. Until they come together and talk with each other and then with the Government of India, negotiations will remain stalemated even when Muivah comes out of the Thai prison where he has been held since the end of January for travelling on false passports and jumping bail.

The Government of India side must hasten slowly. This is an issue that is not less than 50 years old. There is no need to add fuel to suspicions that New Delhi seeks to divide the Nagas even further. A Shillong-type accord that leaves some groups out will not be acceptable to the Naga public. What is required is statesmanship to rise above the petty and the divisiveness that is tearing that society apart. And the Government must keep the door open for talks and more discussions for that is the only way to resolve this problem.

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 APR 2000

TOWARDS PEACE IN NAGALAND

THE PEACE PROCESS in Nagaland has gained momentum with the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) announcing a ceasefire and expressing a desire to join the dialogue with the Government of India. Only last month, the process had received a setback with the arrest of Mr. Muivah, leader of the NSCN (I-M), in Thailand, for travelling with forged documents. The Issac-Muivah group had called a ceasefire in 1997 and entered into a halting dialogue with the Centre. Though some progress was being made, it was evident that Nagaland could not hope to achieve peace through any agreement with just one insurgent group. It was obvious that the Centre had to broad-base the talks and make the process more inclusive. That is the point the Chief Minister, Mr. S. C. Jamir, also made at his recent meeting with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Delhi. After all, the NSCN split because of the inevitable clash of personalities and egos about a decade ago. The groups may not be willing to sit together across the table to talk peace with the authorities. At least for a few initial rounds, the talks will have to be held separately to identify a common minimum programme or framework. It will be essential to bring the Nagaland National Council (NNC) also to the negotiating table at an early stage.

Most of the northeastern States have suffered insurgency and violence over the past few decades. The lack of development and the regional imbalances have contributed to this sorry state of affairs. Despite several packages of development announced by the Centre and the Northeast Council, nothing much has happened on the ground. Several studies have shown that leakage in the implementation of development and welfare schemes, because of rampant corruption, has denied people the basic necessities

in life. Though a few Central public sector projects have been launched in some of these States, they are under constant security threat. Officials of these undertakings, mainly refineries, have been abducted for ransom and often killed in cold blood by some of the militant outfits. Because of repeated sabotage and bomb blasts, the Railways is unable to expand its operations in the region. Air travel, though subsidised, is still very costly. So transport and communications themselves have remained stumbling blocks. With unabated violence and threats, it has not been possible for the State Governments to take up projects which can provide some relief.

That is why a ceasefire becomes meaningful, especially if both sides are keen on getting on with a serious dialogue. If the Centre and the Nagaland Government initiate preliminary talks with the NSCN and the NNC, the Muivah faction can be persuaded to participate in the negotiations at an appropriate stage. It may take some time to secure the release of Mr. Muivah from Thailand. It must be remembered that the NSCN was born out of the NNC, which split in 1964 and the bifurcation of the NSCN came about in 1988 with the parting of ways between Mr. Muivah and Mr. S. S. Khaplang. Before getting on to the substantive issues, the Government must ascertain and make clear that the ceasefire must be total and not just a ruse to regroup. If a breakthrough is possible in Nagaland, it could well be a harbinger for the restoration of peace and planned development in the northeast. At least hereafter, the politicians in power in these States and the leaders of the various militant and insurgent groups must put the people first and make a genuine effort to bring lasting peace and prosperity.

17 APR 2000

19 massacred by rebels in N-E ethnic cleansing

FROM SUBROTO ROY IN
DIPHU AND SEKHAR DATTA
IN AGARTALA

April 20: Northeast militants carried out an ethnic cleansing drive yesterday, gunning down 19 people in three separate attacks in Assam and neighbouring Tripura. In less than a fortnight of the grisly massacre of 11 people — all non-Karbis — suspected Karbi National Volunteers once again went on a killing spree last night, mowing down 11 Nepalis in Karbi Anglong district.

In North Tripura, militants belonging to the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura gunned down eight non-tribals, including three women, in the Laxmicherra village last night.

They also torched a large number of houses.

Karbi Anglong additional superintendent of police Nitul Gogoi said 15 militants, armed with sophisticated weapons, shot dead three persons at East Umlaipher village under Gaithalangsho police station in Hamren sub-division. The victims were attacked while on their way to attend a marriage ceremony in a nearby village.

The dead have been identified as Bir Bahadur Khatwal, Dhan Bahadur Bosnet and Keshar Khatwal. The militants struck again at 3.30 pm in West Umlaipher village killing eight members of three families and torching 25 houses. "They asked all the male members to come out of their houses. The

men were then lined up and shot from point black range," Gogoi said. The dead have been identified as Prabhu Ram Dahal, Motilal Dahal and his two sons, Govinda and Ganesh, Ghanesyam Dahal, Bhim Prasad Dahal, Kasiram Dahal and Ghanesyam Dahal.

Sources said the Karbi Peoples Front which had merged with the KNV to form the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity, was behind the carnage. "The killings might be a retaliation of an incident in 1998 when the villagers of the area had handed over two KNV militants to the police after beating them up," a source said.

Army and paramilitary forces have launched a massive combing operation in the district and its neighbouring areas.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 APR 2000

Ulfa on its last legs, says Army

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SHILLONG, April 21. — There is "no point" in talking to the Ulfa top brass residing abroad to find a meaningful solution to the vexed insurgency problem in the state, the GoC-in-C of 4 Corps, Lt Gen DB Shekatkar, said today.

Talking to UNI at the Sos village at Barapani, about 20 km from here, Lt Gen Shekatkar said Ulfa, after having lost mass support, was now left with no option but to listen to the ISI.

It is only the foreign agency that had benefitted from continued violence and the vexed insurgency problem, he said.

Justifying his contention, the Lt Gen, who is also the operational head of the Unified Command, said the Army now was concentrating on roping in Ulfa's grassroot-level workers who were deserting the banned

outfit.

He hoped this would weaken the backbone of the organisation.

The Ulfa leaders who were living in luxury abroad would become toothless without the support of the grassroot workers, he said.

It was not possible, however, to set a specific time-frame for weeding out the

problem and claimed there had been an appreciable change in the law and order situation in the North-east, particularly in Assam, with more militant groups either surrendering or willing to come to the negotiation table.

BODOLAND COUNCIL

GUWAHATI, April 21. — The Assam government has dissolved the adhoc Bodoland autonomous council and constituted a 26-member advisory committee under the chairmanship of the Hills and Plain Tribal Development Minister, Ms Rekharani Das Boro. Official sources said the council had been dissolved with a view to holding free and fair election to the council. However, the date of election has not been decided yet. — UNI

The Lt Gen said the problem must come to an end soon as people had started showing their disenchantment with the militants and more importantly, many of the Ulfa cadres had realised that their prime goal of sovereignty could never be achieved.

Citing reasons for the disintegration of various outfits in the region he said, infighting among various outfits had begun because dedicated cadres who had operated from the jungles for years were getting frustrated to see their top leaders leading cushy lives

in places like Bangkok and Singapore.

Besides, sharing of money amassed by the militants had led to confrontations among the activists and would result in the elimination of the insurgency in the region, the Lt Gen said.

More and more militants were willing to come to the national mainstream following the rehabilitation package for militants announced by the government, he said.

Asked if the meagre amount of money given to the surrendered ultras was enough to attract them, he said they (ultras) might be getting little money but they would enjoy independence.

"What would you say of those militants who have earned lakhs but cannot spend the money freely and enjoy life?" he said.

22 APR 20

Tripura told to start dialogue with rebels

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 21. — The Centre has told the Tripura government to immediately start the process towards beginning peace talks with leaders of the state's outlawed rebel outfits.

Replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha, the Union Minister of State for Home, Mr ID Swami, voiced "deep concern" at the deteriorating law and order situation in the state following stepped up rebel activities.

Kidnapping of innocent civilians by armed rebel groups had become a thriving trade in the state, he said. As many as 1,377 attacks by armed insurgents had been recorded in Tripura over the past three years. And these attacks had left 597 persons, including members of the state police and armed forces, dead. At least 1,081 persons had been kidnapped by insurgents during the period, Mr Swami said.

He said, there had been 195 incidents of rebel attacks in the state during the last three months, with 65 persons, including armed forces personnel, killed in these attacks.

The minister stressed the need for utilising the forces deployed in the state to combat insurgency more effectively.

He said, the Union Home Minister, Mr LK Advani, had recently visited Tripura for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation and in a meeting with senior state officials and officials of the police and central paramilitary forces, had reviewed the situation, he said.

BODY RECOVERED

AGARTALA, April 21. — Tension prevailed in the Kanchanpur area of North Tripura district today following recovery of the body of an old man, police said.

The body of the 65-year old man was recovered from Hemsuklapara, neighbouring village Laxmipur under the Kanchanpur police station where eight non-tribals including five persons of a family were massacred on Wednesday night by militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura.

Police suspect the man had been hacked to death by a group of tribals when he went there to tend his cows yesterday. Patrolling had been intensified to defuse tension in the area, they said. — PTI

Certain measures had been approved and would be taken up immediately for tackling the situation. These measures, Mr Swami said, would include strengthening the intelligence network and ensuring effective coordination among security forces engaged in counter-insurgency operations.

He said the Tripura government had been told by the Centre to raise a reserve battalion in the state to fight the rebels and form special operational groups of CRPF and Tripura State Rifles personnel to combat armed insurgents.

During an earlier visit here the Union home minister had made it clear that it was the

state government's prerogative to bring insurgents to the table for negotiations.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, left for New Delhi yesterday to meet the Union home minister and apprise him of the latest situation in the state.

Mr Sarkar would reiterate the state's demand for deployment of additional central forces to ensure peaceful elections to the Tripura Hill Areas Autonomous District Council slated for 30 April and 3 May next.

In November last year, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Advani held a meeting with Mr Sarkar in New Delhi to identify the state's security requirements. It was decided that the Centre would send back the three Army battalions which had been pulled out of the state in the wake of the Kargil conflict.

The Prime Minister's assurance, however, is yet to materialise. Though 27 police station areas had been declared "disturbed" under the Armed Forces Special Power Act, Tripura has no Army deployment.

Only the paramilitary forces are now engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the state's hill areas. Also, the Centre has withdrawn two more BSF battalions causing serious depletion of the state's security strength.

The government had earlier approached the Centre seeking 155 companies of paramilitary forces for the ensuing elections to the Hill Areas Autonomous District Council.

THE STATESMAN

2 APR 2000

Centre to send extra forces to Tripura

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 22. — The Centre has agreed to send additional paramilitary forces by air to Tripura in view of rebels' threat to the state's hill council election process.

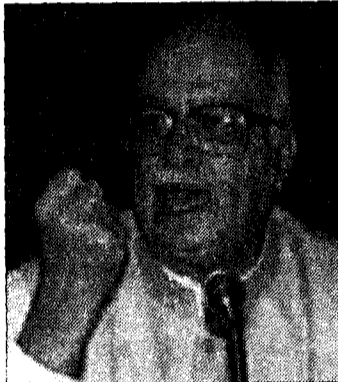
The Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, yesterday told Mr L K Advani in New Delhi that groups of armed insurgents were trying to sneak into Tripura from across the international border before elections.

The All Tripura Tiger Force has asked hill people to boycott polls and the National Liberation Front of Tripura are supporting the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura.

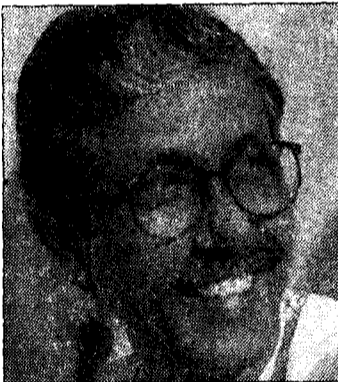
Mr Sarkar told the Union home minister that Tripura's insurgency problem might undermine the Naga peace process since state's rebels were operating in collusion with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim.

The special secretary to the Union home ministry and additional secretary were present during Advani-Sarkar talks.

The chief minister said the present security strength was not enough to combat escalating rebel violence in the state. He reiterated the three army battalions pulled out of the state in the wake of the Kargil conflict be sent back.



Mr Advani: acts at last



Mr Sarkar: drives home security point

Mr Advani has reportedly assured Mr Sarkar that he will take up the matter with the Defence Minister, Mr George Fernandes.

Mr Sarkar wanted the Centre to send a senior official of the Border Security Force who would coordinate activities of

frontier guards during elections to check sneaking of rebels groups. Mr Sarkar feared that insurgents might indulge in violence to disrupt the electoral process.

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was a constitutional body and hence it is the responsibility of the Centre and the state government to provide security to the electorate and poll personnel, Mr Sarkar said.

Mr Advani has promised that additional paramilitary forces will be airdashed to Tripura to ensure peaceful polls. He also assured that a top BSF official will be present in the state during polls.

The chief minister later told reporters that the Centre had made adequate security arrangement to check infiltration of militants into Assam, Nagaland and Manipur from Bhutan and Myanmar. But rebels are crossing over to Tripura frequently from their operational camps in Bangladesh for want of forces to guard state's 849-km frontier line.

Mr Sarkar has urged the Union home minister to take up with Dhaka the issue of demolishing camps of North-east insurgents in Bangladesh.

Tripura earlier approached the Centre for deployment of 55 additional companies of para-

military forces before elections to the hill autonomous council, scheduled for 30 April and 3 May. Twenty companies of central forces have arrived and the Centre may rush another eight companies before polls.

Encounter: A group of NLFT members fired at a Tripura State Rifles patrol at Ajendrabazar in the Jirania area of West Tripura district last night. Jawans returned the fire and the encounter lasted for about 25 minutes. No jawan was injured.

Militants also fired at houses of non-tribal villagers and burnt a road bridge in the area. No villager was injured. A total 375 non-tribal families deserted the area after rebel firing last night.

Houses burnt: NLFT extremists have burnt over 50 houses of non-tribal villagers in the Gabardi area of West district in the past few days.

Rebel collaborators yesterday torched 26 houses of non-tribal villagers in the Chhailengta area of North Tripura.

CPI-M member attacked: A CPI-M tribal leader and chairman of the block advisory committee, Mr Sukumar Devbarma, was assaulted by NLFT men at Jirania in West district last night. Militants kidnapped a tribal school-teacher, Mr Sunu Devbarma, from the area.

THE STATESMAN

23 APR 2000

Bhutan King did visit ULFA camp, confirms Assam Govt

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, April 24

HIGHLY PLACED Assam Government officials today confirmed that the King of Bhutan Jigme Singhye Wangchuk had recently visited United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) camps located in Bhutan and had breakfast with the militants there.

"We have definite proof that the King visited ULFA camps located in Bhutan on several occasions and had long discussions with the militants. He even had breakfast with the militants on at least three occasions," said the official on condition of anonymity.

The ULFA had set up several camps in Bhutan to impart training to their cadres in the past several years, but this is the first time the Bhutanese government has been accused of directly supporting and sheltering the militants.

The startling revelations are reported to have been unearthed following sustained interrogation of some ULFA militants arrested recently.

The official added that the militants have the patronage of the

ULFA issue to figure in talks

THE PRESENCE of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Bodo militants and their flourishing camps within Bhutanese territory is likely to come up for discussion during talks between the Bhutanese foreign minister Lyonpo Jigmi Y Thinley and Jaswant Singh tomorrow.

Mr Thinley, who is on an official tour of India, arrived in New Delhi this evening. An External Affairs Ministry spokesman however said there was "no link" between the forthcoming visit of the Bhutanese foreign minister and the quotes ascribed to the Assam Chief Minister. (HTC)

Bhutan government and are able

to carry out their operations without any major hitches. All this information has been forwarded to the Central Government for taking up the issue at their level, he added. "The state government has expressed serious concern over the issue and has asked the Centre to take up the issue with Bhutan so that ULFA camps located there are dismantled and the militants flushed out," said the official.

On Saturday, Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had expressed concern over the involvement of the Bhutan Government with the militant outfits of Assam, particularly ULFA. Briefing journalists after a trip to Delhi, Mr Mahanta had stated that the response of the Bhutan Government to requests of dismantling the ULFA camps had been very unsatisfactory.

"Militants are being imparted training by Pakistan's ISI in camps located in Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh, he said.

The Assam Chief Minister added that the Butan government was openly aiding and sheltering ULFA militants.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 APR 2008

Bhutan sheltering ULFA militants, alleges Mahanta

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, APRIL 23

ASSAM Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta today charged the Bhutan government with sheltering different insurgent groups, including the outlawed ULFA.

Returning from a three-day visit to New Delhi, Mahanta told newsmen that he had apprised the central leadership, including Union Home Minister L K Advani, of the present situation in the state and urged them to take up with neighbouring Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh the issue of the insurgents operating from their countries.

Mahanta also said he apprised the Centre of the ISI activities in the state, adding the Pakistani intelligence agency was aiding and abetting several militant outfits, including the ULFA, for carrying out anti-national activities.

The sinister design of the ISI posed a grave threat to the unity, integrity, peace and harmony in the Northeastern region, he averred.

The state government had been able to put up the ISI issue before the Central government

in the most convincing manner, he said.

Mahanta said the ISI was providing training, arms and ammunition to the extremist outfits here. The state government had urged the Centre to take prompt measures in this regard the interest of the nation. The state government had convinced the Central leaders about the seriousness of the menace with facts supported by an array of documentary evidence, he said and hoped the Centre would take the best possible action to foil the ISI's pernicious designs.

The Chief Minister also impressed upon the Central government about the need to rehabilitate all the members of the militant outfits in the state, who had returned to the mainstream, to enable them live a normal life.

He said the haphazard manner in which the matter of rehabilitation of the surrendered militants was taken up during the period of the previous government had resulted in several complexities, but now the Centre had responded favourably to the request.

Mahanta hoped effective steps would be taken up soon to deal with the matter smoothly.

INDIAN EXPRESS-

24 APR 2000

PM charges Cong with CTBT doublespeak

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 25. — The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today blamed the Congress for creating confusion over India signing the CTBT. Speaking on the motion of thanks to the President's address to the Budget Session of Parliament, Mr Vajpayee charged the Congress with indulging in doublespeak on the issue.

He said what the Congress had told the Mr Bill Clinton during his recent visit was at variance with its public stand and suggested that Mrs Sonia Gandhi had soft-pedaled on her party's stand on the issue when Mr Clinton met her. He also iterated India's stand of keeping away from signing the CTBT to retain a minimum nuclear deterrent.

The Congress spokesperson, Mrs Margret Alva, said her party's stand on the issue had already been spelt out and refused to elaborate despite repeated requests. All she would say was the Congress stand on the issue had been spelt out by Mr Pranab Mukherjee. Mr Mukherjee and Mr Ajit Jogi have been saying that India has a right to chart out its own nuclear policy without outside influence.

In his 45-minute speech, Mr Vajpayee ruled out talking to Pakistan until it stopped aiding and abetting cross-border terrorism. Pakistan would have to respect the LoC for resumption of dialogue, he said, alluding to Kargil and intermittent firing by Pakistani troops from across the LoC.

Mr Vajpayee referred to his bus trip to Lahore and the Pakistani incursion in Kargil in its wake. He said there could be no more goodwill mission after this.

He noted that in her intervention on the motion of thanks Mrs Sonia Gandhi had not mentioned the proposed review of the Constitution and the committee formed with this objective. Mr Vajpayee said perhaps the Congress had already said all it had to say on the issue, and its leader did not deem it fit to rake up the issue again. Mr Vajpayee, however, reminded the House that it was the Congress that had formed a review committee in 1976 under the late Swaran Singh. When Mr Vajpayee was speaking about review of the Constitution, the former Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, rose and criticised the manner in which the review committee had been formed and called it an insult to Parliament.

THE STATESMAN

26 APR 2008

Infiltration of Bangladeshis into Assam

Mahanta rejects Aasu claim

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, April 27. — The Assam chief minister and president of the



Mr Mahanta

Asom Gana Parishad, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, today contradicted the claims of the All Assam Students Union on the influx of Bangladeshis into the state.

He said the infiltration rate is now less than before.

Aasu, which spearheaded the six-year-long stir against foreigners in Assam in the early 80s, claims that the rate of influx of Bangladeshis has increased. The indigenous people look to become minorities in their homeland.

Mr Mahanta told reporters at the AGP headquarters here

this afternoon that steps were being taken to prevent illegal infiltration into the state. "Border fences are being set up," he said.

On the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, the AGP chief said his party wanted a uniform law in the country for detecting and deporting foreigners. The Act is applicable only in Assam though the legislation provides for its promulgation in other states if such a need arises.

Aasu and the BJP want the Act to be repealed because they think the Act has failed in helping detect foreigners. Minority organisations and the Congress want to retain it for protecting the minorities from harassment.

"No matter by what name the legislation goes, the government will always try and ensure that no Indian citizen is put to trouble," Mr Mahanta

said.

He also denied local newspaper reports that the AGP was trying to form a mahajot with the BJP. "There has been no such thinking," he said adding that the four-party alliance in the state will continue.

The four parties apart from the AGP are the CPI, CPI-M and the United People's Party of Assam.

Mr Mahanta also took the opportunity to list his party's achievements during its two tenures in office and claimed that the AGP was the only party which had worked in the state's interest, whether in power or out of it.

Encounter: Two National Democratic Front of Bodoland militants were killed in an encounter with the Army near Lokpala village under Borbori police station in Nalbari district in the early hours of today, official sources said, adds UNI.

THE STATESMAN

28 APR 2000

Army deployed on eve of Tripura hill council polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, April 29. — Army units have been deployed in rebel-prone areas and defence helicopters pressed into service for surveillance of militants' movements to ensure peaceful elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council tomorrow and on Wednesday.

Paramilitary forces started patrolling vulnerable areas in the hills since last night. Patrolling will continue till polling is over, according to officials here.

Security measures have been stepped up along highways and inter-district roads in view of rebel threat.

Mr VN Singh, BSF special director-general who arrived here yesterday, will supervise coordination of frontier guards' activities.

The Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, had requested Mr LK Advani to send a senior BSF official to the state on the eve of elections.

The Union home minister was told the Tripura government had information that fresh rebel groups with sophisticated weapons were attempting to cross over to the state from their camps in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, National Liberation Front of Tripura militants continue their terrorisation

BOOTH TORCHED

AGARTALA, April 29. — Militants burnt a polling booth in the Kulai area of North district's Kamalpur subdivision last night. In another incident last night, Mr Dharendra Jamatiya, a CPI-M panchayat leader, was kidnapped by rebels from Baidyabari in the Natunbazar area of South Tripura's Amarpur subdivision. He is still missing. — SNS

tactics to pressure hill people to vote for the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura. The All Tripura Tiger Force earlier told the electorate to boycott polls "to avoid grim consequences."

Polling will be held for 27 council seats as a nominee of the Left Front has been declared elected uncontested. Two members of the council will later be nominated by the Governor.

Elections to 15 seats in four districts will be held on Sunday. Polling for 12 other seats is slated for 3 May.

The first election to the hill autonomous council, functioning under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, was held in 1982. This is the fifth election to the council.

Besides several Army units, the Centre has deployed 28

additional companies of paramilitary forces to ensure a peaceful election.

A number of non-tribal voters, earlier forced by rebel groups to quit the autonomous hill region, will not be able to vote. According to state BJP leaders, about two lakh villagers were driven out by rebel groups from the autonomous hill region.

State DGP, Mr KTD Singh, told UNI that a few Army columns arrived here today from Assam to intensify counter-insurgency operation against militants.

Mr Singh said this is first time that such massive security measures had been taken before polls.

Assam Rifles' Quick Reaction teams will be ready in all 27 constituencies, while other para military and state security personnel will be reserved in police stations, sub-divisional and district headquarters.

He said static police pickets had been set up in front of all polling stations, while security forces would conduct mobile and foot patrolling in and around booths.

Mr Singh, who was holding regular meetings with senior police and para military officials to review the latest situation, said adequate security measures had been taken for voters, candidates, polling and other officials.

30 APR 2000

Muivah jumps bail, rearrested

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 31: A day after releasing him on bail, the Thailand police rearrested National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah for trying to flee the country.

Sources in the Union home ministry said Muivah was arrested for the second time at Hat Yai in southern Thailand on Saturday while trying to board a plane to Singapore. He was detained by Thai immigration officials when it transpired that he was travelling on another fake passport, allegedly under a Singaporean name. Muivah is being kept in a jail in Hat Yai and will be pro-

duced in court tomorrow.

Sources said Muivah got himself admitted to a hospital in the Thailand capital of Bangkok on Friday shortly after being released on payment of a bail bond of 200,000 bahts.

The militant leader escaped from the hospital the same day — allegedly by bribing officials — and fled to southern Thailand.

"After he was arrested for travelling on a fake South Korean passport, the Thai authorities recorded Muivah's name and the offence he committed in the computer. It was, therefore, not diffi-

cult for Thai immigration officials to find out that he was trying to flee the country on another fake passport," an official said.

There are now four charges against Muivah. Apart from being booked for travelling on a fake South Korean passport, he is in the dock for jumping bail, attempting to illegally leave Thailand and possessing a fake passport for the second time.

"It was quite silly on his part to have tried to escape. We really cannot fathom why he was so keen to leave Thailand. After all, he has strong base in Bangkok. NSCN(I-M) president Isak Chisi Swu also lives in Bangkok," an official said. The



Muivah:
Making news

two militant leaders are also believed to have houses in Manila.

Muivah's arrest for the second time has cast a shadow over the Naga peace talks, which were scheduled to be held between the NSCN(I-M) leadership and principal government interlocutor K. Padmanabhaiah "somewhere in Europe". In a statement after the militant leader's arrest earlier this month, the Centre had said that the proposed talks would be rescheduled for the first week of February.

According to a senior official here, Muivah's arrest on Saturday could delay the talks further. "The prospect of talks being held as per schedule now appears to be dim as Muivah has landed himself in a soup," he said.

Kuki-Paite riot scars fade as tribes hold fire

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Churachandpur, Feb. 2: Once the hub of Kuki-Paite clashes, Manipur's Churachandpur district is expected to witness peaceful elections this time.

Chief minister Wahengbam Nipamacha Singh brokered "peace" between the two communities on October 1, 1998.

Of the six Assembly constituencies in the district, elections to the Hmar-dominated Tipaimukh seat have been countermanded following the killing of a Janata Dal (United) candidate on Monday.

The killing is believed to be the outcome of a factional feud between Hmar militant outfits. Electioneering is underway in the rest of Churachandpur, but no one is willing to lay a wager on peaceful polls because of the abundance of militants in the district.

The majority of the candidates for the five seats to which elections will be held are based in the district headquarters town. This is because all village chiefs and tribal leaders whose support matters are also camp-

ing in Churachandpur town. Except for Churachandpur and Saikot, the other four constituencies in the district — Henglep, Thanlon, Singhat and Tipaimukh — are part of the rural belt.

Against the backdrop of the Kuki-Paite clashes of 1997, it is hard to believe that Churachandpur is preparing for Assembly elections without the spectre of ethnic violence.

Altogether 227 people were killed, 4,008 houses set ablaze and thousands of families displaced during the clashes that erupted in June 1997 and lasted nine months. Nipamacha Singh initially brokered a ceasefire between the warring communities on March 26, 1998. The final "peace accord" between the two tribes was signed on October 1 the same year. Since then, there has been no Kuki-Paite clash in the district.

Churachandpur town is dominated by the Paites, while the Kukis comprise the majority community in Saikot. However, it is the Zou, Vaiphei, Hmar, Kom, Simte, Gangte, Mizo and Meitei votes which are likely to

determine the fate of candidates in the two constituencies.

In spite of four candidates being in the fray, the Churachandpur seat is expected to witness a straight contest between two Paite leaders — former state Congress president Phungzathang Tonsing and health minister V. Hangkhanlian.

In Saikot constituency, Kuki leader and sitting Manipur People's Party legislator T.N. Haokip is up against Chungkhoshei Haokip of the Manipur State Congress Party and Albert Gen Goukhip Mate of the Nationalist Congress Party. Both Mate and Haokip were instrumental in brokering peace between the Kukis and Paites.

"There is no sign of animosity between the Kuki and Paite communities this time. Both sides appear to have forgotten the past," said a Congress activist. "It is a good sign that Paite militants have distanced themselves from the elections," he added.

One of Haokip's aides echoed this view, saying that ethnic violence in Churachandpur was a thing of the past.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 FEB 2000

BJP hits out at Congress 'misrule' in North-east

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, Feb. 3. — The BJP has blamed 50 years of Congress "misrule" for the present "corrupt atmosphere" in the North-east. The Manipur State Congress Party is only a product of the Congress legacy.

Mr BP Acharya, BJP secretary in charge of the North-east, told reporters today that the Congress pumped in funds to the region without keeping account. This gave opportunity to many to make money. "The corrupt atmosphere encouraged everyone to make money without any compunction or fear of being caught or punished", Mr Acharya said. The Manipur Assembly elections are scheduled for 12 and 22 February.

The Congress, instead of "creating an ideological base for the party", created neo-rich leaders who ran state governments with groups of "beneficiaries", much like a feudal system. Mr Acharya said the growth of media opened up Congress leaders' activities in the North-east. "People could see through false image created by the Congress." The congress had been following a divide and rule policy, he charged.

"Thanks to media, people have come to realise that the BJP is not anti-Christian as it is being made out to be. Several BJP leaders in the

North-east are staunch Christians and they do not consider the party as communal. The BJP does not believe in an appeasement policy. The BJP stands for appeasement to non and equality to all," Mr Acharya said.

He also came down heavily on the ruling Manipur State Congress Party, calling it a product of the Congress culture. "We are happy that we are not allying with it. Today we do not have to defend its non-performance. Because the MSCP is an NDA ally, we approached it for a tie-up in the state. However, MSCP leaders turned out to be insincere and untrustworthy," the BJP leader said. "The MSCP-led government is corrupt and has not been able to govern the state properly," he alleged.

Every month more than Rs 200 crore goes out of the state for students admitted in outside colleges though the state has so many good schools and colleges, he said, adding the Nipamacha government has not been able to maintain a good academic atmosphere.

Mr Acharya criticised the poll boycott call by the NSCN.

Ending of insurgency is a main agenda of the BJP. "It should be solved democratically — over negotiation table. I salute the underground boys who have exposed the failure of democracy as practised by the Congress," he said.

THE STATESMAN

4 FEB 2000

Autonomy demanded for Reangs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, Feb. 5. — The Bru National Union has demanded that minority Reangs of Mizoram be granted autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The BNU wants formation of an autonomous district council for Reang-dominated areas on the lines of the Chakma district council of Mizoram.

Mr A Sawisbunga Bru, president of the Mizoram Bru National Union, said here today that the BNU had urged tribal members of the Lok Sabha to raise problems of Reangs in the next session of Parliament.

"There have been systematic attempts by vested interests belonging to the majority ethnic group to jeopardise our identity and reduce the Reang

community to a non-entity in Mizoram," Mr Bru said.

In a memorandum submitted to tribal MPs, the BNU listed 15 demands, including autonomy for the Reangs.

A delegation of Reang leaders recently visited Delhi to place the demands before the Union government. They demanded introduction of primitive group programme for development of the Reang tribe in Mizoram and early repatriation of Reang evacuees huddled in North Tripura camps.

The Reang body demanded that a tripartite agreement be signed by the Mizoram government, Centre and leaders of evacuees before initiating the repatriation process.

The BNU has urged the Centre and the Election Commission to include names of "genuine Reang citizens",

deliberately removed from Mizoram's electoral rolls in 1993.

It demanded investigation into allegations of human rights abuses in Mizoram and adequate compensation for Reang families affected by ethnic violence.

Reang leaders wanted the Mizoram government to take measures for restoration of alienated lands to Reang owners and provide adequate security in areas inhabited by the ethnic group.

More than 35,000 Reang refugees are now languishing in six relief camps in North Tripura.

Mr Sawisbunga Bru said the term "Bru" included all 13 tribal clans identified as Reangs. Besides Reangs, other Bru clans Molshoy, Mesca, Toimoi, Apeto, Chawpreng and Chorkhi.

THE STATESMAN

- 6 FEB 2000

HD-15
9/2

ULFA ups the ante

AFTER A comparative lull, the ULFA again went on a spree of violence in Assam from the beginning of the new year as if to register its presence. There were several cases of oil pipelines being blasted in Upper Assam, while stray encounters with the police and the Army continued. Both sides suffered casualties.

A crude oil pipeline of the ONGC was blasted in Sivasagar district on the night of January 1. So powerful was the blast that about 20 feet of the pipeline was blown off and a blaze broke out. The loss amounted to about 150 tonnes of crude, costing Rs. 5 lakhs. Fortunately, there was no loss of life as the incident took place in an isolated area.

The ULFA struck again in Dibrugarh district on January 12. Around half past two in the afternoon, a patrol party of

the State armed police was ambushed. Five policemen and the helper of the vehicle were killed. The ultras took away a self-loading rifle and three .303 rifles. The same night they made an abortive attempt on the oil pipeline of Oil India Ltd. (OIL) in Golaghat district. The blast, triggered by a remote-controlled device, failed to burst the pipeline.

The militants blew up ten bogies of a goods train in Golaghat district in the early hours of January 19, disrupting the through running of trains between Upper and Lower Assam. The blast created a crater one metre deep and two metres across.

In Lower Assam, seven ULFA and Bodo ultras were killed and 77 apprehended in January by ja-

wans of the 21 Mountain Division. Eighteen pieces of weaponry and a radio transmitter were recovered from them. At Rangiya, some 30 km from Guwahati, two policemen and a home guard were killed on January 14 in an encounter with the militants. Three days later, the "deputy commandant" of the Manah Anchalik Parishad of the ULFA, Joycharan alias Prakash Burman was killed in an encounter with the Army.

The militants fired on an Army patrol vehicle on January 25 near the oil town of Duliajan in Upper Assam, seriously injuring two jawans and the driver. Two days later, an ULFA cadre was killed in an encounter when the Army was engaged in a flush-out operation in a jungle in Dibrugarh district.

The Army foiled another attempt at sabotage by detecting and defusing nine improvised explosive devices (IEDs) connected together and planted under a road in Barpeta district on January 27. The IEDs contained RDX and

The ULFA has stepped up violence in Assam but the State's police chief says this is more a sign of desperation, writes BARUN DASGUPTA.

commercial explosives reinforced with steel pellets. What is significant is that the string of blasts started immediately after the 10-day "safe passage" period expired on December 31. The Government had earlier announced that those militants who wanted to visit their families on the occasion of the *Magh Bihu* festival and who carried no

The police chief said there was no doubt that the ULFA and Bodo militants were getting more and more isolated from the people. He cited two recent instances. Mr. Benoy Biswas, a popular businessman of Tihu in Nalbari district, was attacked by suspected NDFB militants. He later died in hospital. Thousands of people held a huge public meeting to condemn the NDFB for the killing and observed a 24-hour bandh. This was a sign not only of the ultras' isolation but also of the people's resolve to resist.

He also pointed out that this year's Republic Day rallies were attended by a far larger number of people all over the State than ever before, in spite of the fact that, as in previous years, all the ultra outfits had given a call to boycott the day. In the capital, Guwahati, more



Women activists of the ULFA under arrest ... ULFA's increasing isolation?

weapons would be given safe passage between December 21 and 31 and would not be arrested. Later, the "safe passage" period was extended till January 17.

The State Director-General of Police, Mr. P. V. Sumant, says the recent acts of violence are more a sign of desperation on the part of the ULFA rather than one of its gaining strength. He told *The Hindu* that between December 21 and January 17, 258 ULFA and 47 NDFB, BLTF and KNV militants had visited their families. What is significant, most of them chose not to go back. "Feelers" were still coming to him from the ultras for coming overground.

According to him, this meant that the middle and lower level ULFA activists were losing faith in the leadership. So, the latter had to "do something" not only to show the world that the outfit was far from dead but also to boost the sagging morale of its own cadre.

people and vehicles were in the streets and, for the first time, private buses also plied on the day.

In recent months, there have been many cases of ULFA, NDFB and BLTF ultras being caught by the villagers, thrashed and handed over to the Army or the police.

In one case, a Bodo militant, Mohan Bodo, was nabbed by the Army at Solpara in Goalpara district. The people were so terrorised by him that they surrounded the Army jawans and demanded that they hand over the man to them for meting out summary justice. The jawans had a tough job pacifying the angry villagers and eventually handing him over to the police.

The last such incident took place on February 2. Rahul Barman, an ULFA activist, who came for extortion at Nalbari town was caught by the people and handed over to the Army.

These are encouraging signs but there can be no lowering of the guard.

'If it's the Northeast, no one cares'

EXPRESS FOCUS NAGALAND

From the Home Ministry's perspective, Muivah's arrest has just removed the 'hard man' from the Naga talks table, writes **SWATI CHATURVEDI**. And the NSCN sees this as yet another example of official insensitivity

OFFICIALS dealing with the Naga peace negotiations heaved a huge sigh of relief when T.H. Muivah, general secretary of the dominant Naga faction, the NSCN(I/M), was arrested and sentenced to a year in prison by the Thai government. The slightly strange official response was caused by unofficial jubilation due to the indefinite postponement of the next round of peace negotiations, scheduled to be held in Germany between the NSCN(I/M) and the Prime Minister's Principal Interlocutor, K. Padmanabhaiah.

Muivah is considered to be the "hard man" of the NSCN(I/M) by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which feels that he is not prepared to compromise an

ies. He accused the NSCN leader of ulterior motives on the ground that he had visited Karachi. "The visit of Muivah to Karachi proves, beyond any shadow of doubt, his links with Pakistan's ISI," he said. The spokesman added that this linkage would naturally hinder any pragmatic solution to the Naga problem.

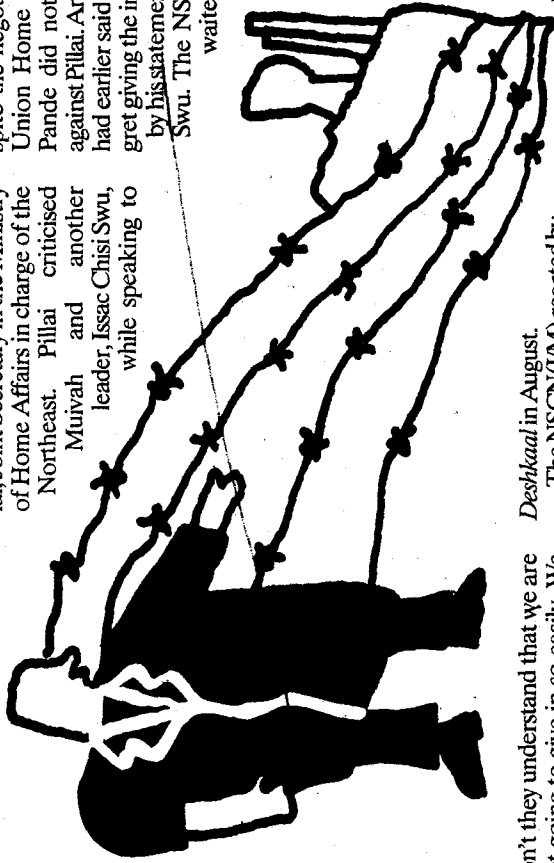
"How can an indisciplined leader, lacking moral courage and concern for civility, be relied upon to deal with the Naga issue in a fair and impartial manner? It is obvious that Muivah has always placed his narrow parochial interests over and above Naga aspirations," the spokesman said.

He said the re-arrest of Muivah on January 29, while trying to leave for Kuala Lumpur from Hatyai airport in Southern Thailand, had "exposed the Naga leader and brought to the fore his dubious personality traits, besides his total disregard for the laws of the country where he has been residing for a number of years."

This, according to NSCN members, is pre-

cisely the crux of the problem. "The officials appointed by your government are not interested in a solution. All they do is denigrate us, rubbish our demands and tell lies to the political leadership. Why

threatened to call off the talks if the government persisted in appointing bureaucrats as negotiators. The provocation for the November ultimatum of the NSCN(I/M) was an interview given by G.K. Pillai, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs in charge of the Northeast. Pillai criticised Muivah and another leader, Issac Chisi Swu, while speaking to



the Naga peace talks. Otherwise, how could an official of the level of joint secretary, who is supposed to keep his counsel, make such provocative statements?"

Even more unbelievably, despite the negotiators' complaint, Union Home Secretary Kamal Pande did not take any action against Pillai. An unrepentant Pillai had earlier said that he did not regret giving the interview and stood by his statements on Muivah and Swu. The NSCN say that they waited for two months

hoping that the government would take action against Pillai, but were "bedeviled and hurt" when he continued to hold the sensitive portfolio. "They do not want to leave us with any face. If it had been Kashmir,

Deshkai in August.

The NSCN(I/M) reacted by writing to the government saying that they no longer wanted to negotiate with bureaucrats, much to the dismay of the actual negotiating team. Says a senior member of the team: "It seems like the Home Ministry is determined to sabotage

don't they understand that we are not going to give in so easily. We have fought for nearly 40 years," says an NSCN leader close to Muivah.

The official sniping at the NSCN(I/M) had nearly jeopardised the peace talks earlier. The top NSCN(I/M) leadership had

quick changes would have happened; but if it's the Northeast, no one cares. We are always being humiliated like this," says a Naga leader based in Bangkok.

Obviously, no lessons were

learnt from the earlier episode as the same own-goal approach was adopted in branding Muivah an ISI agent. Says a senior intelligence official who is in charge of the Northeast desk: "The Hurriyat has open links with Pakistan, but the same MHA is prepared to talk to them. In any case, can every visi-

tor to Karachi be branded an ISI agent." wear suits. But the MHA has been insisting that the negotiators, who routinely wear suits, wear casual clothes and not address Swu and Muivah by their titles during meetings.

The MHA was acutely uncomfortable when former Mizoram governor Swaraj Kaushal was principal negotiator, as he took the position that small concessions did not matter as long as the big picture was kept in mind and the sovereignty issue not conceded. His approach led to the only hopeful moment in the Naga talks when, after 38 years, Muivah and Swu came to Nagaland. However, before any breakthrough could be achieved, Kaushal was removed and the MHA tried to derail the peace process. Naga leaders say that if the government continues with this carping approach, there will be no point in future talks.

'The officials appointed by your government are not interested in a solution. All they do is denigrate us, rubbish our demands and tell lies to the political leadership'

tor to Karachi be branded an ISI agent."

This insensitive and nearly inimical approach of the MHA towards the Naga talks have nearly destroyed the negotiating brief. While a fresh brief is approved every time by the Prime Minister, the constraints imposed by the Home Ministry leave little room for manoeuvring. Officials say that even tiny concessions are frowned upon by the MHA, which takes an inexplicably hardline approach. For instance, the Naga leaders are very protocol-conscious and want the negotiators to call them by their titles. They also want them to

With the battle-lines drawn on both sides, the negotiators now want the PM to revise the brief.

"We have to make some concrete concessions. Everything short of sovereignty should be on the table. Some creative thinking with limited autonomy is the only solution," says a senior official. This view is not shared by the MHA, which is still insistent that the Nagas be tired out by using the ceasefire to destroy NSCN(IM) strongholds.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 7 FEB 2000

TOO MANY COOKS

9-1-6 Hung Assembly likely in Manipur 9-1-6

THE Nationalist Congress Party is the only one to go it alone in the Manipur Assembly elections scheduled for 12 and 22 February. In its maiden attempt in the last parliamentary elections it won the Outer Manipur (reserved) Constituency seat. Having failed to join hands with the ruling Manipur State Congress Party (NDA ally) led by W Nipamacha Singh, the BJP has aligned itself with the Kuki National Assembly and the Samata Party under the Manipur Democratic Alliance. The BJP's determination to make its presence felt in the state became clear as early as April last year when during Kushabhau Thakre's first visit to Imphal he roped in former Congress chief minister R K Dorendro and several others. During his second trip not only was Thakre not able to consolidate the position, he also made an unsuccessful bid to join Nipamacha's ministry. The BJP's description of the party as a "magnet" is an obvious allusion to its ability to attract votes at the Centre. Parties do not see eye to eye on issues yet they have forged alliances. For example, while the United Democratic Front comprises the ruling MSCP and the Federal Party of Manipur, the Secular Democratic Front consists of Manipur People's Party, the Congress, CPI, Janata Dal (S), RSP and Revolutionary Socialist Party. The general impression is that no one will get a majority and the post-poll scenario will involve horsetrading in which some former Congress stalwarts seem to excel. But if the BJP and NCP combine, they can make a formidable team.

Fortunes of contenders in 10 Naga-dominated hill areas are likely to be determined by NSCN-IM activists who want the poll boycotted. They disrupted the last parliamentary elections necessitating repoll in as many as 178 booths. However, despite threats the turn-out on October 28 was 60 per cent, compared to the earlier 47.2 per cent. A fear psychosis seems to grip the voters but they must remember that this time they are sending representatives to the assembly. There is cause for concern over the deteriorating law and order situation as one candidate has already been shot. Extreme steps like issuing shoot-at-sight orders may be necessary.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 FEB 2000

Kukis uphold Sadar Hills issue

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Imphal, Feb. 7: The Sadar Hills issue is still alive for the Kukis of the Saikul, Saitu and Kangpokpi constituencies in Senapati district even as local issues dominate the Manipur Assembly elections this time.

The Sadar Hills, which comprises the three Kuki-dominated Saikul, Saitu and Kangpokpi constituencies, is considered to be the most "explosive" issue in the state as it has always been a bone of contention between the Nagas and the Kukis.

While the Kukis have been demanding upgradation of the Sadar Hills area, which has a separate Autonomous District Council, to a full-fledged revenue district, the

Nagas have opposed the demand, calling the area their "ancestral land." The issue has led to the resignation of prominent Kuki leader, Chungkhokai

Doungel and Thangminlen Kipgen from the ruling Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) and as legislators. While Doungel had represented Saikul, Thangminlen was the Kangpokpi MLA. After resigning, the two Kuki leaders joined the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) just after the announcement of poll dates.

Doungel, who has been attacked by Naga militants at least



KUKI DUO: Doungel (left) and Kipgen

five times, had once termed the Sadar Hills as a "political football." After the switching over of these Kuki leaders, the NCP has become a political force to contend with.

The party, which is sure to get a few seats, will play a crucial role in the formation of the next government and the Sadar Hills issue is bound to take centre stage.

When chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh failed to fulfil his commitment on the creation of Sadar Hills district after the issue became too "explosive", the pow-

erful Kuki lobby, which even includes "Kuki militants", had exerted pressure on Saikul, Saitu and Kangpokpi legislators to resign from the MSCP. While Doungel and Thangminlen succumbed, Saitu's sitting MLA and horticulture minister Ngamthang Haokip stuck to the MSCP and remained loyal to Nipamacha Singh.

The Nagas in general and Senapati Nagas in particular are always up in arms against the creation of Sadar Hills district. "Creation of Sadar Hills district is essential for the integrity of Manipur," said Doungel.

The issue is one of the factors in the growth of the NCP in the state. Doungel admitted that it will be an important issue in the next government formation.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 8 FEB 2000

Confusion over Naga peace talks continue

BY REZAUL H. LASKAR

New Delhi, Feb. 8: The imbroglio over the next round of the Naga peace talks continues, with no indication from the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland as to when its representatives would meet Mr K. Padmanabhaiah, for discussions.

The talks ran into rough weather after Thuingaleng Muivah, general secretary of the NSCN (I-M), was arrested by the authorities in Thailand on two separate occasions for travelling on forged passports and for jumping bail. An immigration court in southern Thailand later sentenced Muivah to one year's imprisonment after he was convicted for travelling on a forged Singapore passport. Muivah is likely to face further legal proceedings.

Government sources told *The Asian Age* that the banned militant group had not yet informed the Union government about a possible date and venue for continuing the peace talks which started after the two sides announced a ceasefire in August 1997.

The development has led to some concern within the Union home ministry as Muivah is viewed as the "principal negotiator" of the NSCN(I-M). "Although both Muivah and NSCN(I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu represented the group in all the rounds of talks,

Muivah was the one who did all the talking. The NSCN(I-M) also has indicated who will replace Muivah in its negotiating team," the sources said.

Despite the lack of progress in addressing substantive issues, the Naga peace talks have facilitated the continuation of the ceasefire in Nagaland. It has also allowed the Union government and the NSCN(I-M), one of the most powerful insurgent groups in the Northeast, to exchange views on issues which have not been addressed by successive governments at the Centre for almost three decades.

Meanwhile, there are no clear indications as to who would step in to fill the gap created by Muivah's detention by the Thai authorities. The sources said Muivah had always controlled the affairs of the NSCN(I-M) with an iron hand, and there was thus no "clear second rung of leaders."

Brigadier V. Atem, former commander of the NSCN(I-M)'s army wing, is very popular with the outfit's cadres, and he was recently given the less-important post of "finance minister" in the group's political set-up. Hungshi Thangkul, the present commander of the army wing, is also popular with the cadres. Muivah has reportedly been grooming another young leader, Shimre, as a possible successor, the sources said.

THE ASIAN AGE

• 9 FEB 2000

Assam tea estates panic after Ulfa threats

BY MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, Feb. 8: Panic has gripped the tea industry in Upper Assam's Golaghat district where separatist guerrillas of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom have served extortion notices to more than 20 tea companies in the last 10 days.

Disclosing this here on Saturday, industry sources told *The Asian Age* a few aggrieved tea companies had approached the police for protection but the response was not encouraging.

A tea planter was served a notice to pay Rs 5 lakhs through a messenger with the warning not to disclose anything to the police.

He claimed that at least 20 of the dis-

trict's 70-odd tea gardens have been served such threats and many tea executives on these gardens are thinking about fleeing the area.

Sources did not rule out the possibility of some tea companies resorting to pay the ransom to buy peace as they are under tremendous pressure from their executives, who are reluctant to resist any such threat.

A photocopy of the demand note with *The Asian Age* revealed that the notices have been signed by United Liberation Front of Asom central committee member Aroon Deka.

The letter, printed in Assamese, bears the warning: "If you approach the administration or reveal anything to others, (our) outfit will not be responsi-

ble for any serious consequences." The planter, on condition of anonymity, said, "The most surprising thing for the industrialist was that a few police officers of the district have approached the planters for negotiations on behalf of the rebels. At least in one case, the deal was finalised."

"I don't know whether the negotiation took place with genuine Ulfa rebels or fake ones, but money was paid to somebody in the presence of the said police officer of the district, who also claims to have cordial relations with Ulfa because of his active contribution in the Assam agitation," he said, but refused to disclose the name of the police officer.

He said tribal guerrillas of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland

are also active in the area bordering Nagaland but this fresh spurt of United Liberation Front of Asom extortion notices has created panic among the planters.

With an annual turnover of Rs 2,000 crores, Assam's tea industry accounts for nearly 55 per cent of India's total production of about 865 million kg of tea.

In the latter half of 1997, the Assam government had accused several tea majors of "aiding and abetting terrorism" by shelling out ransom money to militant groups.

During the past four years, at least 30 planters have been killed and more than 60 tea executives kidnapped at gunpoint by militants in Assam.

COMBAT CORRUPTION

5/6 Only way to save the North-east 107

THE North-east Girl Students' Coordination Committee has hit the nail on the head by identifying corruption and gross misuse of public funds as the reason for the region's backwardness. It accurately reflects the perceptions of educated youth. They have been the worst victims of backwardness and neglect forcing a large section of the educated unemployed to join the ranks of insurgents. Lack of transparency in financial affairs is the root of the problem; a point the Prime Minister made to regional leaders during his recent visit to Shillong. Central funds for North-east development have been so "grossly misused" (an euphemism for corruption) by politicians that insurgency has been a natural fallout. Only 17 paise of every rupee earmarked for development reach the grassroots. The region is the poorest in terms of infrastructure, although the annual per capita fund allocation for development is one of the highest. In fact the region views insurgency as a protest against rampant corruption. The nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, contractors and touts thrives. No wonder food rakes and relief convoys bound for the region vanish. Ironically insurgents themselves are not free from the scourge. Corruption is their main source of sustenance. In Manipur and Nagaland ministers have developed a vested interest in letting insurgency thrive; some retain clandestine links with insurgents.

The Centre too is responsible. Ever since Nehru the Centre's policy has been to buy peace which has only emboldened insurgents. To overcome past neglect, the Centre has provided assistance without accountability. Worse, it has sent on deputation officers who have proven records of corruption or are unwanted. It is a pity that Delhi still has not been able to change its mindset and views the North-east as a "punishment posting". The Centre is yet to punish those who use their "punishment posting" to make money. More deplorable is the Centre's policy of not reverting back to the region officers of proven merit after their stints in Delhi. The problem is lack of governance. If Delhi wants peace and development in the region, it must establish governance and accountability. //

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2000

Plan to rehabilitate militants under review

BY DALIP SINGH

Pr. 3 18/2
g-f-h 6 8/2
New Delhi, Feb. 12: The Union home ministry is taking a fresh look at its scheme to "rehabilitate" militants in some of the more trouble-prone states in the Northeastern region, largely because response to such overtures has been rather tepid.

The rehabilitation scheme for the militants, which was launched by the ministry of home affairs an year ago amid great fanfare, has been a virtual non-starter, with only a handful of those in the underground having surrendered in return of benefits promised to them, sources in the ministry said.

According to a senior official: "To make the scheme more lucrative, the ministry is thinking of enhancing the financial package

(being) offered to the surrendered militants." Presently, the government gives a monthly remuneration, apart from an initial amount immediately offered on surrender.

The remuneration incentive was one among several blandishments that the government has considered towards enticing underground militants to give up arms and rejoin the mainstream.

Except for Assam, where a few militants surrendered following the announcement of the package, the scheme has almost drawn a complete blank in other states like Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur. It is felt that the allurements have not been attractive enough for the militants, as they are used to easy access to funds

through extortion.

The "good life" available in the underground is too comfortable to be given up, an official averred. The official commented that a militant will give up arms only for two reasons — either, when he knows that he would not be eliminated or put behind bars

or when, a stable financial base is the other main motive. Officials said the "main bottleneck" has

been the militants' desire to get government jobs for themselves as one of the conditions for surrender, which, in the given circumstances, is very difficult to concede both for the states concerned and the Centre as well. "How, can we offer them jobs, against people who deserve such consideration more?"

a senior official asked, adding "We (the official machinery) can only provide inputs, like training, to enable them to earn a secure livelihood for themselves."

The rehabilitation scheme has different slabs, giving varying benefits to militants as per their "status," their use, value and the quantity and quality of arms, ammunition and critical information they are willing to share. After surrendering, the militants are supposed to undergo a camp for an year, where the government, as per the scheme, imparts training in various fields.

The Centre has experimented with a similar policy for Kashmiri militants, with varying results. Delhi has also raised a paramilitary force battalion from the ranks of surrendered terrorists.

THE NORTHEAST

NAGA PEACE TALKS

Success depends on change of attitudes

THE Thai foreign ministry's reported admission that the arrest of NSCN general secretary Muivah was "accidental" and likely to be "corrected" would suggest the Naga leader may not have to serve the full one-year prison term. The Centre has agreed to defer peace talks at the instance of the NSCN-IM whose future course will now be guided by how soon Muivah is released. Chairman Isak Swu's inability to talk alone exposes the party's pretensions, a point repeatedly ignored by their spokesmen in Nagaland. If nothing substantial emerges soon they will probably be back to where they started. Delhi must be reminded that however optimistic it might feel about the outcome it will not be binding on all Nagas. The BJP government should rectify the UF government's mistake of ignoring the NSCN(Khaplang) and the Naga National Council, apparently at the behest of Isak and Muivah who refuse to accept their existence. The two factions cannot be written off. Most, including the influential apex council of leaders, Naga Hoho, NGOs, church leaders and private organisations, think the peace dialogue is irrelevant to existing ground realities. Not only has the BJP not respected this sentiment, the former mediator Swaraj Kaushal alleged that the Prime Minister went back on his word to extend the ceasefire also to the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur.

Chief negotiator P Padmanabiah spoke of a "new strategy" without elaborating. Hopefully Delhi will take a sound decision on the demand for a "Greater Nagaland" covering Naga areas of Manipur. The idea is as preposterous as it is dangerous in the context of the NSCN-IM's statement in August 1997 denying that the leadership had asked for "unification" of these areas, and also clarifying that "for us the Meiteis and the Nagas are brothers and sisters of the same parents... therefore anyone who attempts to break this oneness is reactionary". Whatever might be the BJP's hidden agenda on resolving the Naga problem, it must ensure it does not cause a further agonising nightmare in Nagaland where, despite the ceasefire, the people continue to live in fear.

THE STATESMAN
16 FEB 2000

PM urged to secure Muivah's release

NEW DELHI, FEB. 15. Several prominent personalities have sought the intervention of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Thai Prime Minister, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, to secure the release of the NSCN(I-M) leader, Mr. Thuingaleng Muivah, from Thai prison saying such a step would have a positive impact on the peace process initiated by the Government in the North-East. *Q-N H Sw*

While acknowledging that Mr. Muivah's visit to Karachi "at this juncture has complicated matters for all", they said the NSCN(I-M) general secretary also had "an obligation to his own people and to all those who have affirmed and supported the peace process to come clean on his visit to Pakistan so that fears of the Government are put to rest".

In separate letters to both Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Leekpai, the signatories said their intervention

in getting Mr. Muivah released "would go a long way in supporting the NSCN-Government peace negotiation for a lasting and just peace". *16/2*

They said though the Royal Thai Government was "well within its rights to enforce its laws with regard to illegal use of passports, we strongly believe that if Mr. Muivah is not released immediately the prospects of continuing dialogue for lasting peace would be in jeopardy".

To Mr. Vajpayee, they wrote that "there has to be openness from both parties so that the focus of peace talks is not jeopardised".

The signatories include Mr. Surendra Mohan, Mr. Dunu Roy, Mr. Sumanta Banerjee, Mr. Gautam Navlakha, Mr. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Mr. N. D. Pancholi, Mr. Prabir Purakayastha, Mr. Praful Bidwai, Syeda Hamid and Mr. Gautam Navlakha. — PTI

THE HINDU
16 FEB 2000

Army hurls back peace-derail charge at NSCN-IM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, Feb. 19. — The Army has accused the NSCN-IM of trying to derail the peace talks. The public information cell of the Army's 3 corps headquarters today issued a statement, saying the Naga militant outfit had broken the ceasefire's ground rules by turning the "safe house" (ceasefire monitoring cell's office) into an extension of their council headquarters.

The Army statement comes shortly after the outfit charged it with sabotaging peace talks.

The handout said the NSCN-IM is using the immunity granted under the ceasefire to carry out illegal activities such as extortion, abduction, running illegal lottery and sheltering armed cadres in the "safe house".

The Army said Ch Lotha, a civil functionary of NSCN-IM, was held by the 16 AR at Bari Langrijan in Assam on 27 December last year for moving around with an unlicensed .38 revolver and six rounds of ammunition.

On "illegal detention" of NSCN-IM cadres under National Securities Act, the

statement said 17 "criminals" were arrested in connection with the ambush on the Nagaland chief minister on 29 November. Ten other cadres of the outfit were also held for unlawful activities.

On the Army's raid at the house of "Captain" Neilaku, an outfit member, on 12 February, the statement said the raid was conducted on the clues provided by two suspects in an abduction case. The house was found to be belonging to NSCN-IM's Kohima town commander. Seven rounds of ammunition of assorted caliber were recovered from the house. The Army has appealed to the outfit to follow ceasefire ground rules.

Plea to media: The state agriculture minister, Mr Nyamnei Konyak, media should focus more on the development activities than extortions and kidnapping.

In an informal chat with reporters today, he said his department is trying to increase food production with the help of modern researches. During 1989-99, 282,650 metric ton of food grain was produced in 215,659 hectares of land.

Mr Konyak hoped more oilseed would be produced this

year. Last year, the 36,850 metric ton of oilseed was produced. He said production of wheat and barley, especially in Kohima, was very encouraging last year. He would advice farmers in other districts to sow the particular type of seed.

He asked the farmers to collect seeds from the department keeping in mind the climatic and soil conditions of the region.

The department is giving 50 per cent subsidy to the farmers for buying power tillers and other pump sets.

Mr Konyak said the Centre has sanctioned 81 projects under National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPR) during the ninth five-year plan. The minister said his department will be divided into different departments that will look after soil conservation, horticulture, sericulture, fisheries, wasteland development and veterinary.

A team of agriculture officials would be sent to Chumukedima to inspect the paddy discovered by a pastor, Melhite Kenya. The minister said his department may buy the variety from the pastor.

THE STATESMAN
20 FEB 2000

Naga rebels committed to peace talks

19 2/2
Kohima, Feb. 20 (Agencies): The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) today reiterated its commitment to the peace process in Nagaland, but refused to take things lying down if the Centre continued to be belligerent.

9 N. 6 9/10
"If the peace process is to succeed, the Centre will have to show respect to the Naga people," an NSCN(I-M) release said.

The outfit has been trading charges with the government and the armed forces since the past week.

The Army said on Friday that the NSCN(I-M) had converted its ceasefire monitoring cell office near Dimapur into an "extension of its headquarters".

The office was sealed on November 30 after the attempt on Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir's life.

The NSCN(I-M) responded by saying that the Army was also guilty of violating the ceasefire. "The Centre is silent on constant acts of violation of the ceasefire by its own machinery, but quick to criticise us," the outfit said.

However, the Army's 3 Corps said in a statement here today that "contentious issues, if any, can be resolved through discussions between the two sides".

"The security forces are conscious of the fact that an atmosphere conducive to peace talks should be created.

"It is also imperative to adhere to the ground rules of the ceasefire," it said.

Bomb defused: A mysterious bomb dating back to World War II was defused here by a bomb disposal squad of the Army from Tezpur in Assam, according to the state's deputy inspector-general of police Aditya Arya.

The cylindrical shaped bomb weighed approximately 14 kg.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 FEB 2000

All-party drive against insurgency

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, Feb. 20: Chief minister Manik Sarkar announced that he would shortly constitute an all-party committee for launching a statewide campaign against militancy even as the tea industry in the state observed a day's bandh in protest against last Friday's killing of the Ganagar tea estate manager.

The committee comprising representatives of all political parties will meet in the insurgency-affected areas.

The chief minister an-

nounced this following TUJS leader Nagendra Jamatia's reminder that the Left Front government was prepared to accept any suggestion from the Opposition on a possible solution to the insurgency problem.

Sarkar said, "Even if an NGO comes up with a good proposal, we will accept it."

The Centre is worried over the deteriorating law and order condition in the state. Union home secretary Kamal Pande has written two successive letters to the state government expressing displeasure over the

Left Front government's inability to curb militancy. Pande reportedly pointed out that contrary to the state government's claim of inadequate security forces, there was enough manpower at the state government's disposal.

He had directed the state administration to ensure proper utilisation of forces. Following Pande's letter, the state government held several meetings with the heads of various security forces for intensifying counter-insurgency operations.

In a significant disclosure to

the state government yesterday, chief minister Manik Sarkar said CRPF jawans had recently expressed reluctance to perform certain duties, including road patrolling.

Tribal killed

A tribal civilian was killed and six were injured, four of them seriously, when suspected United Bengali Liberation Front militants lobbed bombs on a passenger jeep in West Tripura today. The jeep was on its way from Bishramganj to Melaghar when it was attacked at 2.30 pm.

Police sources said the jeep carrying tribal passengers was ambushed in the Bagmara area under Bishramganj police station. While one tribal youth, Rabiranjjan Debbarma, died on the spot, six more were injured.

They are yet to be identified. The four seriously injured have been admitted to G.B. hospital here.

Security forces have launched a hunt to flush out the United Bengali Liberation Front militants from the area. Tension mounted in the area following the attack.

9-11-82
H.D.13

Probe into Naga leader's suspected ISI links ✓

29/2 ✓

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. The Centre is probing the suspected ISI links of the Naga rebel leader, Mr. Thuingaleng Muivah, who was recently sentenced to one year in prison by the Thailand authorities on charges of travelling on a "fake" passport.

Mr. Muivah, NSCN (I-M) general secretary, was detained at Bangkok airport on arrival from Karachi on January 22. He and one of his aides, Mr. I. Shimre, were found travelling under false South Korean passports, reportedly procured from Myanmar. However, the two were set free on bail by a Thai court.

Mr. Muivah was again arrested a few days later on charges of travelling on a fake passport.

His ultimate destination was Amsterdam where the next round of Naga peace talks with the Indian Government's chief negotiator, Mr. K. Padmanabhaiah, was scheduled to begin on February 4. The talks have been put off for the time being but sources say the Government was

hopeful of finding some solution in the next two to three weeks.

It is Mr. Muivah's Karachi visit, reportedly from January 15 to 19 that has given rise to suspicion here. According to highly-placed sources, intelligence agencies are trying to unravel the links of Mr. Muivah and the NSCN (I-M) with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence which may be funding the outlawed Naga outfit.

Well-placed sources said Mr. Muivah had purchased the air ticket from Pak Travels, a travel agency managed from the New Peninsula hotel in Bangkok by a Pakistani national, Rafiq Khan, suspected of having links with the ISI. The ticket was meant for Amsterdam through Kuala Lumpur. Inquiries revealed that Mr. Muivah had bought his ticket from the same travel agency earlier.

Sources said the Government was also making efforts to ascertain the places visited by Mr. Muivah in Pakistan and the persons with whom he had interacted. Only last week, several prominent personalities had sought the intervention of the

Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his Thai counterpart, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, to secure Mr. Muivah's release from the Thai prison saying its would have a positive impact on the peace process in the North-East.

While acknowledging that Mr. Muivah's visit to Karachi "at this juncture" has complicated matters for all, they said the NSCN (I-M) general secretary also had "an obligation to his own people and to all those who have affirmed and supported the peace process to come clean on his visit to Pakistan so that the Government's fears are put to rest."

They said that though the Royal Thai Government was "well within its rights to enforce its laws with regard to illegal use of passports, we strongly believe that if Mr. Muivah is not released immediately the prospects of continuing dialogue for lasting peace would be in jeopardy." The signatories included Mr. Gautam Navlakha, Mr. Surendra Mohan, Mr. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Mr. N. D. Pancholi and Mr. Sumanta Banerjee.

THE HINDU
24 FEB 2000

Centre tests waters for test ban sign-up



KR Narayanan and AB Vajpayee come out of Parliament on the first day of the budget session. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Feb. 23: As part of its campaign to build a consensus on signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the government today assured the Opposition that global nuclear disarmament continues to be its goal and inking the pact will not be at the cost of national and strategic interests.

Stating this in the presidential address to the joint sitting of Parliament, the Centre also made it clear that talks with Pakistan cannot resume unless it jettisoned its policy of hatred towards India and stopped terror export to Kashmir.

"India reaffirms her commitment to global nuclear disarmament in a time-bound manner on a comprehensive and non-discriminatory basis. While addressing multilateral disarmament initiatives and treaties, the government will continue to abide by the imperative of preserving India's strategic autonomy," the President said in his statement kicking off the budget session.

By reaffirming India's commitment towards nuclear disarmament, the government wants to assure the Opposition — especially the Congress — there will be no shift in its stand on the issue. At the same time, it is also trying to

send the message that if India signs the test ban treaty, it will do so keeping the national and strategic interests in mind.

Though the government has not spelt out whether or not it will ink the pact, it has cleverly pushed the issue for debate in the budget session. In the winter session, there were indications that the government will initiate a debate on the issue. But the matter was postponed in the absence of any categorical statement from the Congress.

A final decision was further deferred with the US confirming President Bill Clinton's visit to the country in March.

Smarting under the humiliation of the Kandahar militant-for-hostage swap, the BJP-led regime is keen on reasserting its tough image and would not like to be seen as signing the treaty under US pressure. The government, therefore, will not sign the pact either immediately before or after Clinton's trip. But by introducing the subject for discussion, it has ensured that a debate is started on the issue.

Indications are that the government will clarify by the end of the session whether it intends to initial the treaty. Signing the pact will not only help improve ties

with the US, it will also pave the way for access to sophisticated and dual-use technology from the West. It will also ensure that post-Pokhran sanctions are lifted.

With the West increasingly demanding that the nuclear neighbours resume dialogue, the government sought to clarify its stand. In the presidential speech, the government argues that while it is keen on expanding relations with its neighbours not only in South Asia but also in Central Asian republics and Israel, it cannot do so with Pakistan.

"Pakistan has shown no inclination to end its policy of aiding and abetting cross-border terrorism and its hostile anti-India propaganda. Pakistan's role in acts of terror has been recently underscored by the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight," the President said.

"Irrefutable evidence has been provided by the government about the Pakistani origins of the hijackers as well as the role of Pakistani officials posted in Kathmandu," he added.

Urging Islamabad to change its policy, he said: "We sincerely hope that Pakistan will reverse this policy of hostility towards India so that normal relations can be restored."

Peace talks on right track, says NSCN

Kohima, February 24

THE PEACE process towards finding a final solution of the Naga political problem is moving on the right track, the NSCN (IM) has said.

The eight-member Steering Committee, the highest policy making body of the outfit, in a statement said that the world other than being aware of the situation in the state was also a witness to the on-going political talks being held at the Prime Ministerial level.

Seeking solution within the Indian Constitution would be the repetition of the past follies and imposition of Indian elections upon the Nagas at this juncture was a ploy to sabotage the peace process, the statement said and added it was a political bait to murder the Naga national rights.

"We want a lasting solution and genuine peace. NSCN is firmly

committed to finding a peaceful political solution and believe in the Indian commitment too," the committee said.

They said that both the parties had accepted the undisputed fact that the Indo-Naga issue was a political and not a military problem. After launching 50 years of 'bitter war' on Nagaland, New Delhi had openly admitted the hard reality that violent means was no solution to the issue.

The Steering Committee also applauded their collective leadership, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his predecessors, as they believed Indian leaders too were deeply committed to finding a political solution to the issue. "Let us thank God, who has given us a time for peace. It is now opportune time for negotiating across the table. Do not let us miss it," they said.

(UNI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
25 FEB 2000

UF stakes claim to form Govt in Manipur

Imphal, February 27

UNITED FRONT leader and Manipur Chief Minister Wahengbam Nipamacha Singh today met Governor Ved Marwah and staked claim to form government claiming support of 36 MLAs.

Announcing this at a press conference here, Deputy Chief Minister Chandramani Singh said three MLAs each broke away from Nationalist Congress Party and Manipur People's Party and decid-

ed to support the two-party United Front which had bagged 28 seats in the 60-member House.

He said Rashtriya Janata Dal member Hangkhaopao and lone independent W. Leima Devi too had decided to support the Front comprising Manipur State Congress and Federal Party of Manipur.

Chandramani said the members who had decided to support the United Front were Alaudin, Thangminlien Kipgen and O. Haokip (all NCP) and K. Tomba

Singh, Chandra Singh and Jatra Singh (all MPP).

Party sources said three NCP members, three MPP members and the lone RJD member who broke away from their parent parties would soon merge with Manipur State Congress Party, a dominant partner of the UF.

Mr Chandramani Singh said the list of 36 members had been submitted to the governor. The signed list was also circulated to the Press.

He said that Nipamacha Singh was not yet invited to form the

Government by the governor as the seventh Manipur legislative Assembly was yet to be constituted.

Its constitution was delayed because the counting of votes for Thanlon Assembly constituency had been adjourned till tomorrow due to non-arrival of three ballot boxes from the interior areas, he said.

Earlier in the day, political parties had gone into a tizzy today as they made frantic efforts to cobble together support to form the government in Manipur. (PTI)

Assam minister killed in Ulfa blast

511 28/2

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Feb. 27. — The Assam forest and PWD minister and a general secretary of the AGP, Nagen Sharma, and four others were killed when the vehicle they were traveling in was blown up in a blast set off by Ulfa militants through remote control at Bahjani, known to be a stronghold of the militant outfit, in Nalbari district around 2 p.m. today. *Q-N 5 5165*

The minister was on his way to the Dakshin Nalbari College, about eight km from Nalbari town, for its governing body meeting when the explosion occurred. The minister had earlier attended the shradddh ceremony of Achyut Kalita, a policeman who died in an ambush by NDFB militants on 17 February.

The convoy was led by the additional superintendent of police of the district. The minister was travelling in the second car. The improvised explosive device was planted under a road culvert about 200 metres from the college and it blew up underneath the minister's vehicle, damaging it beyond salvage and killing all the five occupants on the spot.

The bodies were badly mutilated. Police had to return later to the spot to fetch some limbs of the minister which they had missed when taking his body to hospital.

The militants, who are said to have been hiding in a bamboo grove along the road, opened fire and lobbed hand grenades after the explosion, partly damaging another car. Unconfirmed reports said some persons were injured in the firing.

Sharma was 46. He leaves behind his wife — a lecturer in the Jagiroad College — and a minor daughter.

Those who died along with the minister have been identified as Mintu Deka (driver), Sarat Barua (minister's personal security officer), Makhhan Barpatragohain

BANDH ON TUESDAY

(personal assistant) and Pranabesh Barua, a businessman friend of the minister.

In a statement issued this evening, the Ulfa publicity secretary, Mr Mithinga Daimary, said it had carried out the killing because leaders of the Assam agitation like Sharma had betrayed the cause of the Assamese people.

The Chief Minister, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who was in Kokrajhar, and senior police officials, including the DGP, rushed to Nalbari.

Condemning the killings, Mr Mahanta said the incident should be condemned by everybody as such heinous killings do not

achieve anything. "Such killings reflect the desperation of the militants and their cowardice."

(The AGP called for a 12-hour Assam bandh on Tuesday to protest against the killings, adds PTI. "The decision was unanimously taken by the party functionaries following the dastardly killing of Sharma", AGP publicity secretary, Mr Moidul Islam Bora, said.

Mr Bora urged the cooperation from all to observe the bandh which would be held from 5 a.m. The party has also drawn up plan to observe a seven-day mourning from tomorrow to protest against the killing. The AGP flag would be flown at half mast over party offices, he said.)

An AGP vice-president, Mr Durga Das Boro, said the murderous attack on the minister only showed that the Ulfa was a "frustrated and desperate lot".

The Ulfa had earlier carried out abortive attempts on the lives of the Chief Minister and three other AGP ministers in the last three years. Earlier alleged to be a "friend" of the Ulfa — a Union home ministry report had, in fact, named the slain minister as one of the AGP leaders close to the outfit — the AGP came under attack of the militant outfit after the Mahanta-led government intensified counter-insurgency operations in the state.

THE STATESMAN
28 FEB 2000

Special branch did not have time to 'sterilise' Nagen Sarma's route, says Assam DGP ^{T-8 29/2} Thousands throng funeral

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Feb. 28: "Why did they have to kill him? Why can't they kill those who are really evil?" wailed Nagen Sarma's niece as his body was placed on the pyre at the Nabagraha crematorium this afternoon.

Hundreds of sympathetic eyes looked on as the young girl wept inconsolably along with some other relatives. "This is what Nalbari has given you. We had asked you so many times not to go there," she said.

What they overlooked was the fact that though Nalbari district is one of the last remaining strongholds of the Ulfa, the Nalbari Assembly constituency had returned Sarma to the House three times in succession since 1985.

Sarma was put to rest with full state honours with a large number of dignitaries and common people attending the cremation. Among those present were Governor Lt. Gen. (retd.) S.K. Sinha, chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his ministerial colleagues, commander of the 51 sub-area Brig. K.P. Nanjappa, chief secretary P.K. Bora, director-general of police P.V. Sumant and dissident Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) leader Pulakesh Baruah.

Earlier this morning, Sarma's body was brought from his official residence to the state secretariat and the Assembly before being taken to the AGP headquarters, the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) headquarters and the public works department (PWD) and forest department offices for the people to pay their last respects.

A large number of AASU leaders also turned up for the funeral as Sarma was one of the two leaders who had revived the students' organisation after the Emergency had left it almost defunct. The other leader, Lalit Rajkhowa, had predeceased Sarma.

The rented house of Makhan Barpatra Gohain, Sarma's personal assistant, in the Hatigaon area of the city wore a deserted look as his family left for Mariani in Jorhat district with his body today. Gohain, who was staying at Hatigaon with his wife and three daughters, had laid the foundation of his own home only a few days ago.

8 Ulfa men killed

At least eight Ulfa militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Upper Arunachal Pradesh today. Official sources here confirmed the incident saying details were awaited, adds UNI.

Another Ulfa militant was killed in an encounter with the Army near Halem railway station in Assam's Sonitpur district yesterday. However, one of his associates managed to escape under the cover of darkness. The slain militant was identified as Samaihi



LAST JOURNEY: Distraught family members of slain Assam minister Nagen Sarma during his funeral procession in Guwahati on Monday. Picture by K. Anupam

Burman. Nearly 500 gm of explosives, two detonators, two metre cordex and some incriminating documents were recovered from the site, an official report said.

Two central committee members of Ulfa were killed and two policemen injured in an encounter last night at Aosangtang basti in Nagaland's Mokokchung district, bordering Jorhat district of Assam, reports our Jorhat correspondent.

The slain militants have been identified as Aditya Baruah alias Bhaskar Dutta and Samiran Bhuyan alias Rituraj. Both were

from Nagaon district.

The militants were arrested by the Jorhat police at Neemati, the ferry ghat which connects Majuli island with the mainland, in the early hours yesterday. They were taken to Nagaland to identify the location of an Ulfa camp.

The police team was attacked by militants while it was on its way to the camp. In the ensuing encounter, two members of the armed police were injured. The Ulfa duo accompanying the police team tried to escape but were killed in the crossfire, police sources said. The police team re-

turned after the encounter.

The injured policemen have been shifted to the CRPF hospital in Guwahati. However, sources alleged that the police team went berserk after two of their colleagues received bullet injuries and shot dead the captured Ulfa rebels. The incident comes in the wake of intelligence reports that Ulfa militants have set up camps in the jungles of Nagaland bordering the districts of Upper Assam.

Several computer discs, digital diaries and incriminating documents had earlier been recovered from the slain militants.

Police step up clamour for modernisation

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Feb. 28: Alerted by the high security risks to the lives of VVIPs, particularly ministers residing in the state capital, the city police have submitted a modernisation proposal for approval from the state government.

A police source said, "Another reason why we need to modernise our infrastructure is the rapid growth of the city, both in size and population."

The source also pointed out, "The United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) has targeted VVIPs in the city in the past." Chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had survived an assassination attempt on June 7, 1997. State municipal administration development minister Biraj Kumar Sarma was fired upon eight months later on February 11, 1998. The plan mooted by the police is better known as the geographical information package system.

The proposal, if cleared by the government, would enable the police to have easy access to every "minute detail" of the city at the click of a mouse and help in "effective control". The proposal was mooted after unabated infiltration from all corners of the city was found to have posed a serious security threat.

"The city has become a breeding ground for all kinds of suspicious elements, whether they are rebels of different militant outfits or Bangladeshi infiltrators," a senior official told **The Telegraph**. He added the lack of an effective monitoring system has set daunting tasks for the police to keep track of every incident.

Oil India Limited (OIL) has recently completed a similar survey of all existing pipelines in the state. Sources said the survey was undertaken after militants increased attacks on oil pipelines.

Sources said at least a couple of private firms have submitted prepared land cover mappings of the city to the authorities.

"These firms, including Amtron, have approached us in this context and prepared three-dimensional and aerial images of the city," a source said. These images would give vivid pictures of each and every area of the city.

"These will help the police to launch a foolproof anti-crime offensive," he said, adding the sys-

tem also facilitates "lively pictures" of every household. "But for this, marking of the houses is a must," the source said, adding that effective steps have already been taken by the authorities.

Another significant aspect in the implementation of the system is that the police will be able to keep tabs on every city tenant. The city police, who have admitted that they are facing hassles, recently initiated a survey of tenants in all rented houses.

The system, which will carry out a total study of all routes of the city, will also help the police make "alternative arrangements" when required.

"In most cases, landlords are ignorant about the antecedents of their tenants. And the latter have been found to take undue advantage of this," the source said. He also recalled instances where rebels of underground outfits have taken shelter in disguise.

Bandh today

Security has been tightened throughout the state to block any attempts by the Ulfa to foil the 12-hour Assam bandh tomorrow. The bandh has been called by the ruling Asom Gana Parishad in protest against the killing of state PWD and forest minister Nagen Sarma. Director-general of police P.V. Sumant said adequate security measures have been taken to prevent any untoward incident during the bandh. He said additional forces have been deployed in all sensitive areas and strict instructions issued to all the district headquarters.

"There should not be any laxity in security control," another senior police official said. He pointed out that there was every possibility of the militant outfit trying to create disturbance during the bandh. A red alert has also been sounded in the state.

Sources said the issue is sensitive as it involves the killing of a popular leader. "While the party workers would try and make the bandh a success, Ulfa may try and cause disturbances," a source said. The Army is also on alert, he added. State sports and youth welfare minister Moidul Islam Bora, who is also party spokesman, claimed that the bandh will be a total success. He said all the district committees of the AGP have been asked to maintain peace.



Sarma: Killing vindicates police demand

Muivah held in Bangkok

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

5f-1 2871
KOHIMA, Jan. 27. — The NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Th Muivah, and his associate, I Shimre, were arrested at Bangkok airport on 19 January for carrying "fake" South Korean passports "issued in Pakistan", the Nagaland chief minister said today.

Mr SC Jamir said he got news of the arrests from a "friend" in Delhi.

The joint secretary, Union home ministry, Mr GK Pillai, confirmed the arrests. He told PTI over the phone from Delhi that they were in Bangkok's Klong Prem Prison. A Thai court will hear their case on 1 February.

On 1 August 1997, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) and security forces in Nagaland agreed to ceasefire, now extended till July 2001.

The fact that they flew from Karachi confirms that Pakistan is a support-base for terrorists

and their organisations in north Indian states, Union home ministry officials said.

Mr Jamir wondered why Muivah had to go to Pakistan now, when the Centre was holding talks with the NSCN (I-M) to solve the Naga problem. "Top NSCN (I-M) leaders should have been here in India if they are serious at all to find a solution to the problem."

Asked whether India will try to get the two extradited, Mr Pillai said they would have to first face the trial in Bangkok. "How can we interfere in their (Thailand's) legal procedure."

Home ministry officials, meanwhile, said the Prime Minister's special emissary, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, is likely to hold talks with NSCN (I-M) leaders in Bangkok next week.

Muivah and NSCN (I-M) chairman, Isak Chishi Swu, were in Nagaland in April last year to hold talks with individuals and Naga organisations as part of the ongoing dialogue between the Centre and the underground outfit.

THE STATESMAN

28 JAN 2000

Muivah flies into Thai custody from Karachi

BY SENTINARO JAMIR AND
CHANDAN NANDY

Jan. 27: Naga insurgent leader Thuingaleng Muivah has been arrested by Thai authorities soon after flying into Bangkok from Karachi.

Muivah, general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), was arrested along with I. Shimre, said to be his chief arms procurer, last weekend. Muivah and Shimre are under judicial custody till February 1.

Muivah's arrest was first disclosed by the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in the magazine's latest issue. Published from Hong Kong, the *Review* said he had been "detained" after arriving on a flight from Karachi.

India does not have an extradition treaty with Thailand. But, in a sensitive case like this, back-channel negotiations sometimes play a more influential role than formal agreements.

However, India has not made it clear whether it is keen on bringing Muivah over. The 65-year-old insurgent leader carries a Rs 3-lakh reward on his head in Manipur, but he is also a key player in the ongoing negotiations between Naga militants and the Centre.

Delhi will be eager to ensure that Muivah's arrest does not jeopardise the talks, scheduled to resume in Bangkok next week. A ceasefire is now in force between the Isak-Muivah group and the security forces in Nagaland.

Asked whether Delhi will press for Muivah's handover, a home ministry official said: "How

can we intervene at this juncture? They will be prosecuted according to Thai laws."

The home ministry is now focusing on highlighting the Karachi connection to the troubles in the Northeast. Muivah's Karachi visit "exposes the links that he enjoys with Pakistani officialdom, especially the country's intelligence agencies", an official said.

Senior officials in the Union home ministry, who learnt of the arrest only after the magazine



Muivah

carried the report, said Muivah was arrested on January 22 for travelling on a fake Myanmar passport.

But Nagaland chief minister S. C. Jamir said "reliable sources" had told him that the two were arrested on January 19. Besides, a joint secretary in the home ministry said they were carrying fake South Korean passports.

This is not the first time that the leader of a banned insurgent outfit has been arrested on

charges of travelling on fake documents. In 1998, Bangladesh police arrested Ulfa general secretary Anup Chetia for entering the country with fake travel documents. According to Indian security agencies, Chetia, too, used to travel frequently to Pakistan on assumed names.

Both Muivah and the insurgent outfit president Isak Chisi Swu have been shuttling between Bangkok and Manila since the early nineties. Home ministry officials insisted that they had time and again asked Thailand to arrest both leaders. But the Thai government showed little interest as they had not committed any crime in that country.

Quoting Thai police sources, Reuters said Muivah has been lodged at Bangkok's Klong Prem prison pending trial, and "at this moment, he can only be charged for entering the country with fake documents".

Thailand was on high alert ever since members of an armed insurgent group laid siege to the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok, holding several persons hostage for a number of days. On Monday, there was another hostage crisis in a hospital.

The NSCN(I-M) leaders have met two Indian Prime Ministers as part of the Naga peace talks. In 1997, then Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda met the two at Davos, Switzerland.

A year later, A.B. Vajpayee discussed the peace talks with the two in Paris. Muivah and Swu had reached Nagaland in April last year to elicit the views of individuals and organisations.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 JAN 2000

Muivah arrest puts off Naga talks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 28. — Talks between the Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) have reportedly been put off after the arrest of the terrorist outfit's general secretary, Th Muivah, in Bangkok.

The talks — scheduled to be held outside India on 31 January and 1 February — were postponed reportedly at the request of the NSCN-IM. The Union home ministry was learnt to be considering a proposal for fresh dates.

The Nagaland chief minister, Mr SC Jamir, had yesterday revealed that Muivah was arrested in Bangkok on 19

January for carrying fake passports issued in Pakistan. The news was confirmed by senior officials here. *29-1-80*

The Centre and the NSCN-IM have held several rounds of talks in "neutral" territory over the past few years. The last round was held in Amsterdam in November last year, with Muivah leading the rebel outfit.

India's chief negotiator with the Nagas is the former Union home secretary, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, who took over from Mr Swaraj Kaushal last year.

Rebels deny arrest: In Manipur, however, the rebel group's "ministry of information and publicity" denied that

Muivah has been arrested in Bangkok, adds SNS from Imphal. A spokesman said Muivah was well, but refused to reveal where he is now.

The NSCN-IM's publicity secretary, Ng Hungsei, said over telephone that media reports of Muivah's arrest are false. He said he had spoken to Muivah over telephone today after the reports came out. "He (Muivah) is well."

Hungsei admitted that "there were some problems at the (Bangkok) airport, but they were sorted out".

He was "surprised how Mr GK Pillai, joint secretary at Union home ministry, could confirm the reports (of Muivah's arrest). Mr Pillai

knew about the (nature of the) problems (at the Bangkok airport)."

The reports of Muivah's arrest have taken the Manipur government by surprise. The chief minister said he was still to have the news confirmed. "If it is true, the law will take its own course," Mr Nipamacha Singh said.

He said it would be better if the Thailand government tried Muivah "instead of us bringing him back here and releasing him on one pretext or another. Fake passport cases are considered serious in Thailand.

"Nagaland police have a history of releasing arrested NSCN-IM cadres on the plea of peace talks."

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2000

Naga delegation to hold a peace march in Delhi

BY MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, Jan. 29: At a time when secretary of the banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) Thuingaleng Muivah is facing trial in a Thailand court, a 60-member delegation, comprising various Naga organisations, has embarked upon "a journey of conscience" to interact with the civil rights groups, intellectuals and the media in different parts of the country to highlight the problems facing the Naga society.

The delegation led by the convenor of Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, Mr Neingulo Krome, will take part in a peace march in New Delhi on Monday and will pay tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat on Sunday.

Before boarding the train for New Delhi, Mr Krome said that initiation of the peace talks without any pre-conditions had raised hopes among the peace-loving Nagas for a solution to the 52-year political struggle.

He, however, regretted: "We are yet to see any concrete development and progress towards a solution, the lack of which threatens the fragile peace process itself."

The snail's pace in the peace dialogue was providing an opportunity to vested interests to foment a sense of uncertainty and suspicion belying the hopes of the people, he added.

Advocating transparency in the peace talks between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M), Mr Krome said: "Nagas believe that for any viable

political solution to emerge and subsequently leading to sustainable peace, interaction has to transcend the confines of the negotiation room and civil society has to contribute responsibly towards forming public opinion through broadening of participation."

"We feel that people in India as part of the larger civil society can not remain mere spectators in the movement for peace and must share the responsibility in strengthening the peace initiative that are taking place at the political level," he said and added that the understanding of the people in India of reasons why the Naga struggle has not been subdued has been inadequate.

"This has resulted in needless damage to perceptions and relation between peoples."

"We Nagas are to blame for our failure to come to you to enable you to understand our position and compulsions."

In an emotional appeal, he said: "Believe us when we say there is much goodwill and hope left, although we have to add that time and patience is against us. We believe that something must be done together to demonstrate our sincere concerns to bring about peaceful fundamental change leading to a just political solution."

The delegation includes the representatives of the Naga Hoho, Naga Students Federation, Naga Mothers Association, Naga Baptist Church Council, and Manipur-based All Naga Students' Union and Naga Women's Union.

THE ASIAN AGE

30 JAN 2000

Sanjoy suspect in surrender talks

FROM RAJIB BORAH

Guwahati, Jan. 30: One of the main accused in the kidnapping and subsequent "killing" of social worker Sanjoy Ghose in Majuli island of Upper Assam is negotiating with the police for his surrender.

The surrender, the details of which are likely to be finalised in the next "two or three days", is expected to set at rest speculation about Ghose's "death" which has so far been shrouded in mystery because of "contradictory" statements issued by the United Liberation Front of Asom.

According to sources, Bhaskar Baruah alias Mridul Hazarika, son of the late Khageswar Baruah of Ratanpur village in Majuli, met a senior police official in the city on January 27 to negotiate terms for his surrender.

However, nothing concrete emerged out of the meeting except that the police promised him the "best possible deal".

On the same day, the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is probing the Ghose case, announced a reward of Rs 50,000 to any person providing information facilitating the arrest of Bhaskar Baruah.

Similar rewards were also announced for information on five other accused, including Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah.

Official sources denied the surrender meeting initially, but confirmed it on Sunday. The negotiations have made some progress but another two or three days would be needed to hammer out the details, they said.

"Only after that can we make it public," a source said. He added

that as of today only Baruah has approached the government to surrender.

The sources also said Baruah's surrender would resolve the Ghose mystery. Ghose, who was the general secretary of Avar-NE, an NGO working in the world's largest riverine island, was picked up by Ulfa activists on July 4, 1997. He has remained untraced ever since.

Subsequently, a press statement, "apparently issued by the Ulfa", claimed that he had been executed. However, in the face of widespread outrage, the militant outfit washed its hands of the statement.

It said Ghose was "still alive" in its custody and set four conditions for his release. One of the conditions was that Ghose's Avar-NE should quit Assam. On July 30, the NGO vacated its office

at Kamalabari in Majuli.

Though the Ulfa promised to hand over Ghose to a team of Red Cross officials, Paresh Baruah announced on August 6 that the social worker had died after falling off a cliff while trying to escape.

Despite appeals for information about the place where Ghose had reportedly died, the Ulfa remained silent.

An Ulfa activist reportedly involved in the crime, Amrit Dutta, has been arrested by the police. He is said to have confessed that Ghose had been killed the very day he was abducted. He was shot, put into a gunny bag and thrown into the Brahmaputra, he reportedly said.

On the other hand, Ghose's wife Sumita has refused to accept that he is dead. "I still believe he is alive," she had said.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 JAN 2000

Ulfa blows up ONGC pipeline

BY MANOJ ANAND

AA-1 2/11
Guwahati, Jan. 2: Suspected Ulfa rebels blew up an ONGC pipeline in Assam's Sibsagar district on Saturday, disrupting the supply of crude oil from Moran oil field. Experts said this may affect the supply of crude oil to the refineries.

The blast on the loop line at Disangpani, near Safari village, took place at about 10.30 pm on Saturday. The police recovered batteries and wires near the blast site, indicating that it was a remote-controlled explosion.

ONGC's monitoring station sources said the extent of damage may be less as the supply was not operational when the blast took place. There were no casualties. The crude oil blocked in the pipeline which gushed out following the blast immediately caught fire. Fire tenders fought the blaze for hours. "We heard the sound of the explosion here at Lakwa residential complex (which is 5 km away) of the ONGC," said an employee.

Hundreds of panic-stricken villagers gathered around the site later along with the police and officials from ONGC. The police said a five-metre stretch of the pipeline was damaged.

Additional superintendent of police Vijay Kuli told *The Asian Age* over the telephone from Sibsagar that the police has launched a massive combing operation to arrest the militants responsible for the explosion. Senior police officers of the area had also reached the spot.

THE ASIAN AGE

- 3 JAN 2000

Assam extends offer to Ulfa

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 3: Assam Chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta today announced the extension of the safe passage offer till January 17 after 257 militants opted for it between December 21 and New Year's eve.

Addressing a news conference here this afternoon, Mahanta said only peace could bring about development and hoped that more militants would avail of the offer. Mahanta said the government would lay stress on development by focusing attention on District Rural Development Agency and the agriculture and public works departments.

Emphasising on the government's success in bringing about an overall improvement in the law and order situation, Mahanta attributed the new scenario to the

Large number of militants opting for safe passage deal, says DGP

political will of the government and the success of the unified command structure. He, however, ruled out any unilateral ceasefire at present.

Mahanta said the government has chargesheeted a number of its employees and business houses for aiding militants and had launched a drive to cut off the rebels' fund source.

Inspector-general of police (special branch) N. Ramachandran, who was present on the occasion, said though the Ulfa central leadership were not "ecstatic" about the safe passage offer, a large number of rebels had contacted the Army and the police in

this connection.

Ramachandran said insurgency-related killings had declined this year. The militants had killed 214 people in 1999, 544 in 1998 and 1,337 in 1997.

The Assam police, which lost 113 personnel, bore the brunt of the militants' attacks. The Central Reserve Police Force lost 33 personnel and the Border Security Force 14. Though a large number of militants were apprehended, several managed to escape due to legal loopholes.

The Ulfa struck hardest in Nalbari, Tinsukia and Sibsagar districts while the National Democratic Front of Boroland and the

Bodo Liberation Tigers made their presence felt in Kokrajhar, Darrang and Kamrup districts. The NSCN, the Dima Haiam Daoga and the Kuki-National Volunteers killed 23 people in the North Cachar Hills and 18 in Karbi Anglong.

Ramachandran said 199 militants were killed last year in counter-insurgency operations.

"The scenario has drastically changed in the state as the militants can no more roam freely as was earlier the case," Ramachandran said.

On the rehabilitation package for surrendered militants, Ramachandran said 291 insurgents were lodged in camps run by the police while 40 were with the army. Altogether 913 militants surrendered in the past two years, of which 760 were Ulfa rebels, he added.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 4 JAN 2000

ULFA's campaign

EVERY CALCULATED act of extremist violence in the north-east is often intended as a political act. Whether it is Sunday's ONGC pipeline blast in Assam's Sibsagar district or a series of attacks on the railways last year or attempts on the lives of political leaders or police officials, they have the objective of demonstrating the extremists' fire power and their ability to hit where it hurts. Each time efforts have been made to write the obituary of the ULFA and Bodo militants, they have struck back. Despite the presence of the Army, the extremists have carried on the campaign of terror. While one can understand the difficulties of the security agencies to prevent militants from attacking soft targets like bus passengers etc, how does one explain the lax security at vital installations despite these being targeted from time to time? For several years now the ONGC employees have been subjected to intimidation and threats. On several occasions the ONGC had to suspend all its drilling activities as a result. Businessmen and entrepreneurs too have received "quit notices" almost everywhere in the region.

It is ironical that those who have exploited sentiments directed against the Centre about its "step-motherly" treatment of the region have themselves sought to paralyse the states economically through bandhs and other crippling acts. In a region where state governments have failed to supply even rice and kerosene under the PDS to the common people, the NGOs have done a commendable work. But even they have not been spared. There was a time when the ULFA militants enjoyed some support. But its campaign of mindless violence has exposed its dubious game plan. Whatever little sympathy the ULFA once had evaporated following its declaration that the Pakistani infiltrators in Kargil were "freedom fighters". Now that the ULFA militants are facing marginalisation, they are looking for dramatic "successes" to stay in the limelight. What is disquieting however is their links with forces inimical to the country. The state government's inept handling of the law and order situation has only helped the militants to survive at a time when they are steadily losing ground.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 JAN 2000

Zero tolerance & terrorism

By Wasbir Hussain

9. M. 6 87. 5

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, may or may not be firmly in the saddle yet, but his National Democratic Alliance has made one significant declaration: that its Government would be guided by the principle of zero tolerance in its fight against terrorism. In a recent interview to a national news agency, Mr. Vajpayee said: "Our immediate focus is on combating trans-border terrorism and terrorist violence in Jammu & Kashmir as also in other parts of the country, especially in the north-east. We have already declared that our Government will be guided by the principle of zero tolerance in our fight against terrorism." The Union Government's declaration that it would pursue a policy of zero tolerance while combating terrorism can have a deep impact in a geo-strategic region like the north-east, large parts of which are reeling under insurgency with the separatist rebels operating from both within and outside the country's borders.

Now, what is zero tolerance? Does it mean that the Centre would henceforth look, as much as possible, for military solutions to the insurgency problems in hot-spots such as the north-east or J&K? Has it given up hope of finding lasting solutions to problems of militancy through the process of negotiations? The answer to these two questions is certainly a big no.

India, in keeping with its democratic spirit, has held dialogue with outlawed insurgent groups such as the Mizo National Front and the Tripura National Volunteers and is now engaged in talks with the Isaac-Muiwah faction of the banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Protracted negotiations led to the MNF giving up its demand for an independent Mizoram and the Mizo Accord was clinched in 1986. The TNV, too, agreed to a solution within the Indian Constitutional framework and signed an agreement in 1988.

The Naga peace efforts currently on are in an extremely fragile state, particularly after the recent bid on the life of the Nagaland Chief Minister, Mr. S. C. Jamir. Still, the peace process has not collapsed yet.

The Government of India had held dialogue with outlawed rebel groups earlier; it is engaged in talks now and has been saying time and again that its doors are always open for negotiations. Why the need then to declare a policy of, what the Prime Minister calls, zero tolerance? After all, it does give out confusing signals to the rebel leaders as well as peace-brokers in areas such as the north-east and smacks of double-speak on the Government's part.

No one is expecting the Government of India to give in to the demands for sov-

mediation. Most importantly, everyone also knows that the Indian authorities would work for a solution strictly within the framework of the Constitution. Therefore, any rebel group entering into talks with the Government must be prepared to work out an agreement within the Constitutional framework.

This being the case, there is no point in talking of zero tolerance because one cannot even remotely think of a military solution to insurgency in the north-east, in the same way as the rebels cannot or should

There is no point in talking of zero tolerance because one cannot even remotely think of a military solution to insurgency in the north-east, in the same way as the rebels cannot hope to achieve a military victory.

eign homelands made by sundry insurgent outfits. Similarly, no one is prepared to accept even talk of such a policy as zero tolerance as a means to tackle insurgency movements.

Talking about double-speak, the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, said, while participating recently in a special discussion in the Lok Sabha on internal security, with special reference to J&K and the north-east, that the Government was in favour of ending militancy in the country through negotiations within the Constitutional framework. Mr. Advani, at the same time, spoke about the zero tolerance policy. This, he said, means that the Government while being keen on evolving negotiated settlements to insurgency problems would not look for or entertain proposals for solutions which seek to put a premium on violence.

Mr. Advani is basically talking of a carrot-and-stick policy which has been in operation in insurgency theatres such as the north-east for long. By now, New Delhi's stand is known to everyone, particularly the militant groups: that it is ready to hold unconditional talks with them anywhere in the world without any third party

Ministers and Governors of the north-eastern States in Shillong on January 21 to address the twin and most crucial issues of insurgency and development is praiseworthy. The Prime Minister is scheduled to personally preside over this meeting and this indicates that the Centre has made up its mind to move forward parallelly while dealing with the problems of insurgency and economic backwardness in the region.

A parallel approach is the only way to effectively tackle these two issues and break the vicious cycle of under-development leading to militancy and militancy leading to economic backwardness. Militancy in various forms is there to stay in the ethnically-diverse north-east and it would be futile for anyone to wait for insurgency to end before shifting the focus development.

Mr. Vajpayee's Government has started talking about things like a zero tolerance policy to stop looking at solutions or entertaining proposals for solutions which seek to put a premium on violence. One must remember here that most of the insurgency movements in the country, particularly in the north-east and in J&K, are separatist movements and are unlawful activities under the Indian Constitution, in terms of which secessionism is taboo. Such movements are bound to be violent. And if the Government decides to go ahead with its new hard line and were to adopt a bullet-for-bullet policy, insurgencies perhaps would never end in the country.

Already, such draconian laws as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, and the Disturbed Areas Act are in force in parts of the north-east, providing sweeping powers to security personnel engaged in counter-insurgency operations. In Assam, for instance, there is a unified headquarters of the Army, police and paramilitary forces for anti-insurgency operations. Anything harsher than these measures already existing will only limit the Government's options in extreme situations.

(The writer is Editor, The Northeast Daily, Guwahati.)

Tripura to introduce National Security Act

HT Correspondent
Agartala, January 5

AFTER MONTHS of hesitation, the Left Front government in Tripura has finally decided to introduce the National Security Act (NSA) to curb the growing tribal insurgency in the state. However, the step has been opposed by various opposition parties since they feel the Act would be misused against their workers and innocent people.

The decision to enforce the much-talked about Act was taken at the Cabinet meeting here last night. Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, addressing a Press conference after the meeting, announced his government had resolved to enforce the Act to contain the increasing insurgency.

In a sharp deviation from its original stand on preventive Acts, the Left government led by CPI(M) agreed on the matter amid continuing pressure from the Centre. In his last meeting with the Chief Minister, Union Home Minister L K Advani had made it clear that the situation in Tripura demanded

immediate introduction of stringent measures like the NSA.

Apparently, it was a tough task for the ruling CPI(M) to concede the Act since the party has always opposed preventive Acts, considering them "black laws". The party even took to streets when the Congress - TUJS alliance government in the state introduced the Act in 1988.

But considering the worsening insurgency situation as well as mounting pressure from the Centre, the CPI(M) had no other option than to shift its stand. The state government could not even seek more forces from the Centre.

The Chief Minister said there should not be any fear in any quarter regarding the Act. "It would be properly used".

The state government has proposed the name of Justice M L Singhal of the Agartala Bench of the Guwahati High Court as chairman of the advisory board under the Act. Two other members also from legal circle would be inducted on the board. The introduction of the Act has been flayed by the opposition.

Five top Ulfa activists nabbed

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 8 JANUARY

GUWAHATI POLICE, in a major breakthrough, arrested five top Ulfa cadres from Shillong on Friday night, including Chitra Dihingia, chairman of Ulfa central headquarters and four others.

According to police sources, one Bimal Chetri alias Bitupan Chetri was arrested 15 kilometers from here and acting on a tip off from him the police raided a paddy house in upper Lechmere Shillong and arrested Chitra Dihingia along with Deepak Bora, another member of the Ulfa central executive, Sanghamitra Bora and Julie Bora.

Police sources, who maintained silence all through for reasons best known to them, only managed to give information in bits and pieces.

They later informed that they also recovered one .32 revolver and some video and audio cassettes along with documents relating to their activities in the region.

INCLUSIVE TALKS

The Need For Naga Unity

51-8
911
THE ceasefire between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) has been renewed once again to take the fractured, tense and fear-tormented peace that exists in the unfortunate state of Nagaland into this New Year.

New Delhi has also extended the ceasefire to the other groups in the state which also have had confrontations with it or are allied to such groups as the United Liberation Front of Asom. One is referring here principally to the NSCN (Khaplang) group, which is the principal Naga political and military adversary to the group led by Isak Chisi Swu and Theungelang Muivah.

The talks are scheduled in the Netherlands at The Hague, which is the political capital of that country. Participating in them from the Indian side will be the former home secretary, Padmanabhiah, the main negotiator, and Muivah and Swu from the Naga side.

SEVERE BLOW

Padmanabhiah took over last year from Swaraj Kaushal, the former Mizoram Governor, who has conducted the talks for two years. Kaushal's main strength in the meetings with the Nagas has been his patience as a listener. His role in organising the Mizoram accord of 1986 which ended 20 years of sporadic insurgency in that state was also an asset although the Nagas consistently have made the point that the two situations are completely different.

These discussions between the NSCN (I-M) and India are important, not merely in themselves but because, with time and patience, they could show a way for negotiations with other militant groups, whether in our fractious North-east or in the north-west. Much depends on their success or failure, not least of all the prospects for a genuine peace in Nagaland.

At the moment, it appears that the talks are at a stalemate. There has been little progress except with the continuance of the ceasefire. Even this is tenuous because of attacks and counter-attacks not between the government and Naga militants but among the Nagas themselves. Over the past months, this has created an extremely piquant situation for the government.

It has been witness to major battles between the two military factions of the NSCN in different parts of the state but has not acted much beyond sounding warnings to either.

In one significant incident, Daly Mongro, one of Khaplang's top aides was shot and killed last August near the

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By SANJOY HAZARIKA

state capital of Kohima, allegedly by members of the rival group.

The more recent ambush of Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir and his motorcade was another severe blow to the peace process and drew a sharp response from security forces. A number of NSCN (I-M) cadres were picked up for interrogation after the blast for their suspected involvement. The I-M group has denied its involvement and there is much confusion in Nagaland over it because no group has taken responsibility. Some ask whether there is a breakaway faction within the I-M that is impatient with the talks but this does not have many takers.

The Nagaland of today — and in this way it is representative of several parts of the region — is an unreal world of intrigue and manipulation. It is a state where after incidents, some even point an accusing finger at the state government saying that it organised the whole thing to sabotage the peace process.

DESPITE ODDS

Yet, the fact that the ceasefire has survived the physical and psychological damage caused by these attacks is an indication of how deep the longing for peace is in Nagaland. Many Nagas, from different tribes and walks of life, have been working behind the scenes for the past years in a Track Two process that has seen them hold frank meetings with leaders of all factions in efforts to lower the level of violence. They are doing so with great courage and not inconsiderable risk to themselves.

After nearly a half century of violence and conflict, within and without Naga society, people desperately want peace. An entire generation of Nagas has grown to adulthood and middle-age without knowing a life without tension or fear. The human resources wasted, in terms of lives, energy, creativity that blossoms in non-conflict situations is unimaginable.

The ceasefire is holding despite the odds. Indeed, after the recent attack on Jamir, the home ministry seriously considered revoking the ceasefire.

Although Jamir is a regional leader and a member of the Congress, he can also be regarded as a representative of

the Indian state because, in the broadest of terms, he represents India's interests.

After much discussion and with inputs from informal advisors, the government, rightly, came to the view that it should continue the ceasefire and not abrogate it unilaterally. Such a step would also have extensively damaged the informal process which is as important if not more than the official discussions. This process is seeking to build a consensus for peace from within, a job that is far more difficult than a settlement imposed by leaders.

What has increasingly become clear is that there cannot be much progress in the political dialogue if all groups are not involved, either in direct talks together or, initially, independent of each other, leading to a final round of talks with all parties present.

The NSCN (I-M) should no longer stick to its demand that the Government of India should negotiate exclusively with it. Exclusivity does not work.

DISUNITY

The politics of inclusion, which leads to a broader sense of all involved, is a far more potent weapon of negotiation.

Surely, it cannot be the view of the Government of India that only the I-M group has the right to represent Naga concerns. It is not a simple matter that Muivah is a Tangkhul Naga from Ukhrul in Manipur state and that the Tangkhuls dominate his group's military and political leadership; there are few Tangkhuls in Nagaland and the Naga movement over the decades has been acutely divided along lines of tribal ethnic grouping. It is no different today.

Thus, the Konyaks, the largest Naga group in the whole region, are behind Khaplang. The Angamis and smaller groups like the Chakesangs owe allegiance to the old Federal Government of Nagaland of the late AZ Phizo.

Disunity will ensure the lack of success of the Naga movement. It is a situation that does not displease the Government of India.

It is time for the Naga leadership and those in the informal process to share their views and ideas with the people of India, with communicators and academics, editors and others who influence policy. As I pointed out to a former "minister" in Muivah's "Cabinet": "One of the tragedies of the Naga movement is that 50 years after you began fighting most people in India do not even know what you're fighting, for and care even less."

The Nagas need to reach out beyond the Government of India, with whom they have talked for 50 years. We need to listen to each other. There are many in India who wish the Naga people well and want them to live in peace, dignity and prosperity.



TUJS seeks more powers for tribal council

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, Jan. 8. — The Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti has urged the Prime Minister to give more powers to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council by amending the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

A four-member TUJS delegation, led by Mr Shyamacharan Tripura, chairman of the party advisory council, submitted a memorandum to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi last week. The memorandum contained the TUJS' five-point charter of demands, including floating of an autonomous tribal state within Tripura under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution.

Mr Tripura told The Statesman here recently: "We have tried to explain to Mr Vajpayee the indispensability of amending the Sixth Schedule under which the TTAADC is functioning."

The TTAADC was set up in 1982 to enable hill people to participate in the process of local governance. Now three-tier panchayats are enjoying more powers than the TTAADC, he said.

The Tripura government has recently decided to delegate more administrative, financial and supervisory powers to panchayat bodies. As a result, panchayat bodies will monitor the overall performance of a number of state departments including agriculture, primary education, minor irrigation, cooperation, rural development, vil-

lage health care and rural water and power supply. "The TTAADC now enjoys the most minimum autonomy — only in matters of running primary schools," Mr Tripura said.

Panchayats are operating only in state's plain areas. The Sixth Schedule provides for election to hill village councils that will function in the autonomous region. But elections have not been held since the formation of the TTAADC in 1982. The ruling Left Front has set up nominated village units to function as gaon panchayats in hill areas.

Insurgency: The TUJS delegation urged the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of Tripura tribal leaders of various political parties and hill regional units to arrive at a consensus on the issue of fighting insurgency.

"We tried to persuade Mr Vajpayee that if floating of an autonomous tribal state within Tripura is not possible at this stage, the Centre may at least consider the proposal to elevate the status of the present Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council so that it can enjoy more autonomy under the Constitution," Mr Tripura said.

CMS' meeting: The Prime Minister has convened a meeting of chief ministers of the Northeast in Shillong on 21 January to discuss the insurgency problem. The meeting may also assess progress of peace talks with Naga undergrounds.

Bodo students threaten to revive statehood movement

ABSU president says the Prime Minister had promised to create Bodoland but has now backed out

Rahul Karmakar
Kokrajhar (Assam), January 9

TWO YEARS after giving the BJP-led Central Government a long rope, various players of the Bodoland statehood movement are warming up for a fresh phase of intense agitation. The impetus appears to be New Delhi's "attitudinal change" towards the statehood issue.

Though militant outfits like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Bodo Liberation Tigers have been carrying out subversive activities, the democratic movement was suspended after the key player

All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the lone member of Parliament backed by it Samsuma Khungur Bwisumthiary decided to support the BJP. The decision followed the party's "commitment to the Bodoland State in 1998."

"Our patience has been stretched to the limit", ABSU president Urkho Gwra Brahma told *The Hindustan Times*. "We are firm about reviving the statehood movement, but the form is yet to be decided."

According to Brahma, the movement has received a shot in the arm with various Bodo factions deciding to join forces. The main among them is the People's

Democratic Front, a political party formed on the eve of the 1996 Assembly polls.

"But Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in Shimla followed by Home Minister L. K. Advani's speech in the Lok Sabha against creation of new states besides Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh were a blow to the aspirations of the Bodo people," said Mr Bwisumthiary.

"They committed themselves to Bodoland when they needed our support, but did a volte face once they realised they could do without us."

Mr Bwisumthiary said that the Bodoland movement was a demand for rightful sta-

tus for indigenous people and not ethnic autonomy. "There is no reason why Bodoland cannot be granted."

The Bodoland movement began in 1986, which led to the signing of the Bodo Accord

The signing of the Bodo Accord saw the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) the catalyst of the movement, being dissolved to form Bodo People's Party (BPP). It, however, split a year later into the S. K. Bwisumthiary and Prem Singh Brahma factions. The latter had surrendered during signing of the Accord.

Prior to the 1996 Assembly polls, both factions of BPP were dissolved. While

Bwisumthiary formed the Bodoland State Movement Council, Prem Singh Brahma joined the Congress. Almost at the same time, former ABSU president Garlahtha Basumatary formed the people's Democratic Front (PDF).

The PDF went on to win seven Assembly seats and joined the six-party alliance led by Asom Gana Parishad to form the government in the state, but pulled out of it last year.

With the PDF evincing interest to unite various groups to strengthen the ABSU movement and the BPAC being revived last year, the Bodo-dominated areas are in for another phase of unrest.

Saifuddin served notice

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, January 9

REBEL CPI-M leader Mr Saifuddin Chowdhury was served yesterday with a show-cause notice by the CPI-M in the wake of his strident demands for inner-party democracy in the CPI-M and greater transparency in the party functioning.

Mr Chowdhury admitted to having received the notice and said he would reply in due course. He maintained that he was fighting for a genuine cause, but refused any further elaboration on this point, regretting that he was often being quoted out of context by the

media.

He also went to the state CPI-M headquarters and met the CPI-M state secretary Mr Anil Biswas, Deputy Chief Minister Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharyya and senior CPI-M leader Mr Benoy Konar.

"We discussed party matters", was all he said in reply to questions on the issue.

The show-cause notice served on Mr Chowdhury was, however, not a surprise.

It was at the CPI-M state committee meeting last week that the party had decided to seek his explanation in regard to his recent criticism of the party stand.

TRIPURA'S AGONY

5/10/16 Redress tribal grievances

THE Left Front Government in Tripura had no option but to invoke the National Security Act to combat mounting militancy which has caused a breakdown of law and order. In the last few months not a day has passed without killings, kidnappings and other lawless acts being perpetrated by tribal militants who have been holding the state to ransom. The Tripura Government's writ does not run in many parts of the state where outlawed tribal outfits rule the roost. Even more ominously these outfits are trying to create a religious and cultural divide between Bengalis and tribals by "banning" tribals from worshipping Hindu deities and participating in Hindu festivals. Equally disturbing is the Bengali backlash that tribal violence has unleashed. An extremist Bengali outfit has begun to attack tribals making the situation explosive.

The tragic happenings in Tripura are the result of long years of neglect and misgovernance. The state hasn't known good governance although both Congress and the Left parties have had long innings in power. Political leaders have not been able to make the administration purposeful and accountable. They have promoted pliant officers who by their ineffective functioning have undermined the credibility of successive Governments. The leadership's lack of political will has let the tribal autonomous district council degenerate into a hotbed of corruption. Even after two decades of existence the council does not have proper infrastructure. An institution that is supposed to fulfil tribal aspirations is now a symbol of decadence. Nothing explains the near collapse of the administration better than the rapid spread of militancy and the ease with which militants strike and get away. Policing is poor. The ruling CPI-M has to share much of the blame. The lure of votes had once encouraged its leaders to fan hatred among tribals against Bengalis. They formed the Gano Mukti Parishad to rouse the tribals' political consciousness. But little was done to improve socio-economic and educational standards. As a result many Government jobs for tribals are lying vacant. CPI-M rulers must realise that militancy cannot be fought by invoking the NSA. For insurgency to end, tribal grievances must be redressed. Then a beginning will be made.

THE STATESMAN

10 JAN 2000

Rebel tax hits N-E supplies

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Imphal, Jan. 10: Supplies of essential commodities to Manipur have been disrupted with transporters staying off the roads following a hike in "illegal tax" rates by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) recently.

The NSCN(IM) hiked "tax rates" on all trucks plying on the Imphal-Dimapur and Imphal-Silchar national highways. The new taxes have put an extra burden on transporters who were already paying a hefty sum to the Naga outfit.

The Manipur government has already apprised the Centre on the NSCN(IM)'s activities. Official sources said the state gov-

Manipur transporters stay off roads to protest NSCN-IM extortion

ernment has urged Union home minister L. K. Advani to discuss the problem at the next peace committee meeting. Meanwhile, the state government has intensified patrolling on the Imphal-Dimapur national highway which is the main lifeline of the state. But even this has failed to prevent the Naga militants from carrying out extortion.

Sources said barring a few trucks carrying food items, the entire fleet of Manipur trucks had gone off the roads. The NSCN(IM) has been imposing il-

legal taxes on all Manipur trucks and buses plying on the Imphal-Dimapur and Imphal-Silchar national highways.

Sources said NSCN(IM) activists have detained and unloaded Manipur trucks at Dimapur for failing to pay the new taxes. As Dimapur is in Nagaland, the Manipur government is unable to take any action

PLA women cadre nabbed: Assam Rifles yesterday arrested two women cadre of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) from Napet Palli village in Im-

phal East district.

An Army press release today claimed that the two PLA women cadre were responsible for the bomb attack on an Assam Rifles convoy last Thursday.

They have been identified as Santibala Devi and Nirmala Chanu (20). The women have been handed over to the police for interrogation.

Road accidents

The rise in the number of vehicles in Manipur has alarmed the authorities as the number of road accidents has also risen. In the past six years, the state has recorded about 2,400 cases of road accidents which have claimed nearly 700 lives and left over 4,300 injured.

THREAT TO PEACE

55-8 Militancy returns to Mizoram 16/1

THE decision of the Mizoram People's Conference to snap ties with the ruling Mizo National Front is not a surprise as it has the reputation of being inconsistent. Known earlier as the Mizoram Janata Dal, it forged an alliance with the Congress before the 1993 assembly elections which lasted only six months. The former Congress chief minister, Lalthanhawla, managed to complete the term by splitting the MJD and MNF. It is symptomatic of the disease, particularly in Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram, that whenever a regional party comes to power it is sought to pull it down. Zoramthanga was under no pressure and everything seemed to be going smoothly when last month he sacked five MPC ministers accusing them of striking a deal with the Congress to contest the village council polls. The promotion of two ministers of state to Cabinet rank and induction of five new faces in the first reshuffle in 13 months is expected to keep the flock together. The chief minister enjoys the support of 22 legislators in the 40-member House. But this is not to suggest that his opponents will keep quiet till the next elections in 2003.

Peace has returned to Mizoram after the signing of 1986 Mizo Accord. Government are busy implementing development projects. But peace will receive a serious jolt if the activities of Bru (Reang) National Liberation Front, a new Hmar outfit and a Manipuri insurgent group are not checked. Zoramthanga's refusal to repatriate 40,000 Reang refugees living in Tripura camps since October 1997, on the ground that they are not permanent settlers has complicated the issue. No official explanation has been given as to what forced them to leave the state. The fact that Reangs constitute the second largest ethnic group in Tripura should serve to emphasise that if the refugees are not taken back the Mizoram-Tripura border will remain tense, a prospect neither side will relish.

THE STATESMAN

16 JAN 2000

Bodos warn Ulfa on recruitment

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

AA-3 17/1 9 12/12

Guwahati, Jan. 16: In a significant development, the banned Bodo Liberation Tiger outfit has warned the United Liberation Front of Asom to refrain from recruiting the Bodo youths in their organisation.

In a press statement faxed to local newspaper offices here on Sunday, the Bodo outfit that has declared a unilateral cease-fire against the security forces, said that the Ulfa should not try to lure and recruit the Bodo youths in their organisation.

The Bodo militant outfit has also cited the instances from Upper Assam's Sibsagar district where the Ulfa militants have threatened the Bodo youths of serious consequences for not joining their organisation.

The statement signed by the Bodo Liberation Tiger's organising secretary Zarimin Narzary said: "Two Bodo youths Harish Basumatary and Naren Daimary of Dulakakhoria village in Sibsagar district had refused to join the United Liberation Front of Asom and therefore they have been threatened of serious consequences."

Several such incidents of forcing innocent Bodo youths to join the United Liberation Front of Asom have come to light, Mr Narzary claimed.

THE ASIAN AGE

17 JAN 2000

Habits of violence and a sense of foreboding

The recent killing of Subhas Chandra Sher in Manipur by insurgents is yet another milestone in the unending route of turmoil and trauma in the Northeast, writes **Sudipta Bhattacharjee**

An uneasy calm prevails over the picturesque Loktak lake in Manipur. Punctuated by its unique floating islands and grass dwellings, it was once billed as a tourist destination. But reaching it after a four-hour long journey from the state capital, Imphal, through militant-infested, security-smothered Bishenpur district, leaves one with a curious sense of foreboding.

This apprehension has been fuelled over the years with sporadic attempts on the lives of personnel posted in the vicinity. It was here that insurgents of the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup killed Subhash Chandra Sher, chief engineer of the Loktak hydroelectric project on January 14. Ironically, the site is a stone's throw from historical Moirang, where another Subhas Chandra (Bose) had unfurled the first tricolour on the Indian mainland, and the Indian National Army flag with its springing tiger (*sher* again) emblem in 1944.

The "reason" proffered by the militants for killing Sher — that he was "punished" for refusing to pay them "tax" — is another grim milestone in the unending route of turmoil and trauma in the Northeast. It is hardly surprising that employees of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, which runs the plant at Loktak, demanded the immediate closure of the project. The area is a haven for underground outfits, and extortion and threats are rampant.

Demands for more security have gone unheeded in the past despite an attack on Sher's predecessor, R. P. Sehgal, in Bishenpur last

year. He survived the fusillade simply because he happened to be in a bullet-proof car at the time. After prolonged deliberations, on January 14, the government promised "foolproof security" to workers stationed at the Loktak plant and its downstream project, since the units, with a total output of 195 MW, is crucial to its interests.

The government's hasty reassurance obviously springs from the need to defuse the demand to close down the plant. Perhaps the chief minister, Nipamacha Singh, can explain how his ministry hopes to ensure this foolproof protection, or why such security was not guaranteed before precious lives were lost. His desperation is prompted by his uncertainty about the safe conduct of the forthcoming elections to the 60-member Manipur Assembly, slated for February 12 and 22.

Electoral promises are also to blame for much of the region's turbulence. Power-hungry politicians are quick to "pardon" ultras, promise job opportunities to the youth and peace and development in the state, just as glibly as they vow to ensure safety to those compelled to leave their home states to work here. Appeasement of militants has only whetted their appetite. After years of easy money (and money-laundering) the insurgents have lost the capacity to earn a livelihood. Thus, extortions, abductions and hi-



Imphal: terror struck

jacking are the order of the day. Any attempt to defy them ends in cold-blooded murder.

Since the politicians are crafty enough to save their own skin (it remains a mystery how they invariably survive ambushes), it is usually the government or public sector employees and businessmen who end up as soft targets. Chief engineer Sher was called out of his house and shot dead, although he lived

initiated at this delayed stage. Or, more importantly, whether the extra troops can actually prevent a recurrence of such ghastly acts.

Escalation of violence in Manipur is routine at election time. With the Centre ignoring the state government's plea for three-phase polls in March and opting for February instead, the militants are gearing up for an active month ahead.

Outfits like the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) have already issued a poll boycott call. Anyone flouting this diktat has been warned of dire consequences. To compound matters, youth bodies like the All-Tribal Student's Union (Manipur) have also announced their decision to boycott the elections, to protest "lack of development in tribal inhabited areas".

Boycotting of polls can only prove detrimental to the state's interests, and consequently, the militants' own. The hill districts, where the rebel writ runs, account for a third of the assembly's capacity. Boycott of elections in these seats would create serious hurdles in the formation of the new government.

The Naga leaders in Manipur have voiced their desire to contest the polls. It is now upto the United Naga Council, the apex Naga tribal body in Manipur, to help catalyse a reconciliation between the rebel outfits and the

prospective contestants. Already, the fire-brand People's Liberation Army has fired its first salvo by ambushing an Assam Rifles convoy last week, when army chief General V.P. Malik was in Imphal to assess the security scenario.

It is now a matter of concern that besides frontline militant groups like the PLA and the United National Liberation Front, outfits like the KYKL (Oken faction) are spreading their tentacles. A few days ago, nine KYKL insurgents, including its chief Namojam Oken and four women members were nabbed from Shillong's crowded Nongthymmai locality. Human rights workers raised a hue and cry over the KYKL "army chiefs" young son being taken into custody along with his father. Yet these righteous voices fade into silence when innocent civilians are "punished" with "death sentences" by the guerrillas.

Another sinister design has been the sustained attempt by militant outfits in these states to form an umbrella group to wreak havoc in the region. January should have been a happy time for the Northeast because several of the states acquired statehood during this month. But with Republic Day in the offing, subversive activities are rampant.

If blowing up pipelines or destroying lives by planting explosives on railway tracks can induce a sense of achievement and glory, it is time the militants and their sympathizers did some soul-searching. And time, too, for the government to stop soft-peddling the crisis and tackle the malaise head-on.

THE TELEGRAPH

19 JAN 2000

'Naga homeland issue closed'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOHIMA, Jan. 19. — A Nagaland minister has declared the issue of "greater Nagaland or integration (of boundaries of Naga areas of Manipur and Nagaland)" as "closed."

The Nagaland Congress — meeting after the failed assassination bid on the chief minister, Mr SC Jamir — has already passed a resolution to this effect, state power minister, Mr K Therie, said.

The Prime Minister and his home minister too had promised Manipur that its territorial integrity would be protected, Mr Therie said. "Now what more doubts can we have?"

Mr Therie alleged the Opposition — NDM, NPC, BJP or NCP — in the state had no clear idea of a solution to the boundary problem.

"So I think, may be they are too scared to speak their

minds although they know, or may be they do not know in the first place".

All those who spoke of "greater Nagaland and sovereignty" — NGOs and leaders of political parties — were "still in the dream land," the minister said. "I should say their approach is not realistic".

Mr Therie welcomed the Nagas from Manipur who had settled permanently in his state, but made it clear those Nagas could not, "as long as they are here as Nagas of Nagaland," speak for the Nagas of Manipur.

Since the Nagas of Nagaland and Manipur cannot merge their boundaries, "it is better we decide and agree to live separately and harmoniously as brothers and sisters."

The minister could see no reason for discord: "Why should somebody try to exploit or invade somebody else. That is not necessary."

THE STATESMAN
20 JAN 2000

'LARGER GAME PLAN TO DESTABILISE INDIA'

Pak. backs insurgents in northeast: P.M.

SHILLONG, JAN. 21. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today charged Pakistan with backing insurgents and separatists in the North-Eastern States as "part of its larger game plan" to destabilise India and said this had impeded the region's economic development.

"It is now well established that Pakistan is backing some of these groups as part of its larger gameplan to try and destabilise India," Mr. Vajpayee said. He was inaugurating a two-day Conference of Governors and Chief Ministers of seven North Eastern States here. The conference was also attended among others by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes and the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman, Mr. K. C. Pant. "One of many factors that have impeded economic development in some North-Eastern States is violence unleashed by insurgents and externally-aided separatists and criminals," he said.

Mr. Vajpayee said the Centre had been assisting insurgency-affected States with paramilitary forces and by reimbursing security-related expenditure.

"But this cannot compensate for the terrible price extracted by insurgents and extortionists at the expense of the region's development or the fear psychosis created by them among the people," the Prime Minister said.

Stating that there was a growing perception that widespread unemployment and lack of job prospects were the main factors behind insurgency and criminal activities that have retarded the economic progress of this region, he said "together, we need to pursue development policies and programmes that generate employment opportunities, though not necessarily in Government sectors."

Mr. Vajpayee also stressed the need for effective governance for economic development. "In order to be effective, the State Governments represented here have to ensure time-bound implementation of projects and transparency in their functioning. This is necessary for people to repose trust in their elected representatives," he added.

He, however, admitted that many States of the region became a part of the planning process much later. "Bearing this in mind, the outlay for the States under the Ninth Plan had been increased to Rs. 25,283.52 crores which is nearly Rs. 10,000 crores more than the previous plan outlay."

The Prime Minister expressed displeasure over the performance of North Eastern Council (NEC) saying it had not lived up to the expectations. He said the Government was determined to ensure that the council was not only revitalised but also met twice a year which would expedite the developmental process in the region. The Assam Chief Minister, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, today urged Mr. Vajpayee to provide a minimum term loan of Rs. 1000 crores to the State to help overcome its precarious financial condition. Addressing the conference, Mr. Mahanta, highlighted the acute financial imbalances arising out of Assam's narrow resource base and heavy expenditure to contain terrorism and insurgency over the past few years and demanded that the Centre grant the State debt-relief.

Sikkim's Chief Minister, Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling, today asked the Centre to complete the process for restructuring the North Eastern Council (NEC) urgently for an expeditious infrastructure development of the State. — PTI, UNI

THE HINDU
22 JAN 2000

Centre's development thrust with anti-insurgency push

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHILLONG, Jan. 21. — The Centre will lay more emphasis on development and youth, on the one hand, and continue to build pressure on militants to weed out insurgency from the North-east, on the other.

A senior Union Home Ministry official said a unanimous policy on tackling insurgency for all North-east states was not possible. "The policies have to be state-specific," the official

said. "After all, what may be right for, for instance, Manipur may not yield dividends in Tripura."

The official said the region had seen some development in the last few years, but more was required to be done. "As a matter of fact, we envisage the North-east as the leading region in the country in the next 10-15 years and are working accordingly," he said, adding that development could play a vital role in erasing the feeling of alienation among the people here.

While at it, the Centre plans to focus on the youth by creating more employment opportunities besides job-oriented education and development of sports and cultural activities. "The youth are sucked into militancy by the lure of money, nobody likes to kill," he said. He added that the Centre will provide all possible assistance to the state governments in the region towards "keeping the youth preoccupied with gainful activities. On our part, we are ready to go a far dis-

tance." At the same time, there will be no let-up in military action against militants. "In fact, in states like Tripura, security forces will, henceforth, be seeking out militants and engaging them," he said. The Prime Minister will discuss the insurgency situation in the North-east, and what the Centre proposes to do, with the Chief Ministers tomorrow. Today, Mr AB Vajpayee discussed development and finances of the states.

The official said that while tough

action is being planned against militants, the Centre will also keep its doors open for talks with whichever group is willing. The aim, however, remains to take the armed forces' help to pressure the militants on agreeing on a dialogue, he said.

The official said the ISI has gained a foothold in Assam and was trying for one in Nagaland. "We are not sitting quiet, we are taking steps to thwart ISI's moves in the country. But these steps cannot be discussed right now."

'Naga groups must be part of talks'

DIPANKAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHILLONG, Jan. 21. — The Centre may be talking to the National Socialist Council of Nagalim now but eventually other groups like Khaplang's National Socialist Council of Nagaland or late Angami Zapu Phizo's Naga National Council will be involved to find a solution to the 50-year-old insurgency problem in Nagaland. A senior Union home ministry

official told The Statesman here today that not only other rebel groups but NGOs like the Naga Ho Ho, Naga Mothers' Association and Naga students' bodies will also have to be involved. "There have been several agreements in the past but all of them failed because some group or the other was left out of the process. We cannot make the same mistake again. Any agreement we arrive at in the future must have the endorsement of the entire Naga com-

munity," he said.

But then why was the Centre not inviting the other regional groups for a dialogue? "Even with the NSCN it was they who wrote to us saying that they wanted to talk. Our position is clear: we are for talks with anyone," the official said.

He said that if talks have not begun with the NSCN (Khaplang) it was because the outfit has not yet approached the Centre with such a proposal. "The day they do, talks will

begin," he said.

The Nagaland Chief Minister, Mr S C Jamir, and NGOs have been saying that no solution to the problem could be found by holding talks with one rebel group alone. They have also been advocating unity between the various underground groups. The NSCN has, however, virtually ruled out any understanding with other groups.

The official said the next round of talks between the

Centre and the NSCN are scheduled for next week. He said the on-going ceasefire with the NSCN will continue. "Hopefully, there will be some tangible results in the next few years," he said.

On the other hand, Mr S C Jamir is likely to demand a full review of the ceasefire at the meeting of the Prime Minister with the Chief Ministers of the seven North-east states and Sikkim tomorrow. The meeting will discuss the insurgency

problem in the area.

Mr Jamir — who escaped an NSCN bid on his life recently — said the Centre should review the modalities of the ceasefire.

"We want the ceasefire to be on the basis of a written agreement," he said, adding the NSCN had violated the ceasefire by attacking him on 29 November 1999. "They have stopped targeting security forces but still kill civilians," he said.

Violence retards N-E development: PM

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SHILLONG, Jan. 21. — The Prime Minister today attributed tardy progress in North-east to violence by militants and foreign-backed separatists.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said Pakistan was backing some insurgent groups as part of its larger gameplan to destabilise India. Despite all these hazards, the Centre is seriously engaged in working out plans for the region's development, he said.

Addressing a conference of Governors and chief ministers of north-eastern states and Sikkim on regional development and security issues, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said mismanagement of funds, non-involvement of people in development process and violence

unleashed by insurgents have slowed down progress of north-eastern states. He emphasised effective governance for development. The state governments have to ensure time-bound implementation of projects and transparency in their functioning, he said.

In the inaugural session attended by the Union Home Minister, Mr LK Advani, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr KC Pant, the Prime Minister admitted that many north-eastern states became part of the planning process much later. For that reason, the outlay for the states under the Ninth Plan had been increased to Rs 25,283.52 crore which was nearly Rs 10,000 crore more than the previous Plan outlay, he said.

THE STATESMAN

22 JAN 2000

PM announces Rs.10,271-cr. package for North-East

By Our Special Correspondent

SHILLONG, JAN. 22. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, announced here today a Rs. 10,271-crore "Agenda for the Economic Development" for the North-East and Sikkim, implying that two earlier packages — of Rs. 6,100 crores and Rs. 7,000 crores — announced by two former Prime Ministers, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda and Mr. I. K. Gujral, have been given the go-by. *G-N h*

Later, answering questions at a press conference at the Raj Bhavan here, Mr. Vajpayee explained that some of the projects included in the new package would be financed out of the plan allocation, while funds for some others would be made available from outside the Tenth Plan.

However, a close scrutiny of the new package reveals that some of the schemes — like fencing and construction of roads on the Indo-Bangladesh border — are ongoing projects while some others, like Rs. 500 crores from the non-lapsable pool of the Centre for the North-East are actually transfers from one head to another.

Mr. Vajpayee also said that some projects in the new scheme were time-bound while others were not but efforts would be made to complete them "in the shortest possible time".

He said the North-East Council (NEC) would be the nodal agency for implementing the schemes. A Bill will be introduced in the next session of Parliament to vest more powers to the NEC.

However, monitoring the progress of work on different projects will be done by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as the Prime Minister himself will oversee development and anti-insurgency exercises in the North-East.

The Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, who was also present at the press meet, declined to name any militant outfit as being used



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, with the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Mukut Mithi, and the Meghalaya Chief Minister, Mr. B. B. Lyngdoh (centre), at the meeting of North-East Chief Ministers and Governors in Shillong on Friday. — PTI

by the ISI of Pakistan. "We have information that several underground outfits are getting funds and arms from Pakistan and have even gone to Pakistan, but I will not name them," he said.

The Prime Minister's public meeting at the Polo Grounds here this afternoon was rather a poor show by the ruling combine of UDP and BJP, as only about five thousand people turned up to hear Mr. Vajpayee.

PTI reports:

On security-related expenditure (SRE), the Prime Minister assured that the Centre would further expand the list of items of expenditure incurred by the police eligible for reimbursement. It would include 50 per cent cost of petrol, oil and lubricants, he said and added village guards, village defence committees and houseguards would be extended to Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

He said the scheme to modernise the police force would be extended to Sikkim and the total additional reimbursement would

be Rs. 40 crores per year.

Mr. Vajpayee said the Government would also sanction three Indian Reserve Battalions (IRBs), one each for Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur. With an estimated annual expense of Rs. 15 crores for three years, setting up of these battalions would cost Rs. 45 crores, he said.

The Prime Minister ruled out any negotiations on the question of sovereignty but said the Government would enter into a "meaningful dialogue" with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). "There is no question of any negotiation on the question of sovereignty."

Mr. Vajpayee said it has been decided to fence the remaining portion of the Indo-Bangladesh border and construct border roads with a total outlay of Rs. 1,335 crores. The work is to commence in April.

A Central University would be set up in Mizoram and a Bill in this regard has been passed by Rajya Sabha and would be taken up shortly in Lok Sabha.

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2000

Nagaland refuses to monitor ceasefire policy

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
SHILLONG, JAN 23

THE Nagaland government has charged the Centre with keeping it in dark on negotiations with the insurgents in the state and warned that the state Cabinet would no longer be associated with monitoring of cease-fire.

Terming the cease-fire as "meaningless" and a "mockery as far as people of Nagaland are concerned", Chief Minister S C Jamir said here that even now the insurgent groups have been blatantly and repeatedly violating the ground rules and indulging in killings, extortion, intimidation, robbery and other acts of terrorism.

The CM, who was here to attend the two-day conference of Governors and Chief Ministers of North-East and Sikkim that concluded yesterday, told PM Vajpayee that there had been no deterrence for such violations since the NSCN (IM). In fact, the militants unilaterally abrogated the cease-fire by their attempt to assassinate the CM Jamir on November 29, 1999, in



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee being felicitated at a public meeting in Shillong on Saturday - PTI

which two police men were killed and five injured.

In his memorandum submitted to the PM, the Chief Minister also alleged that the state government, which was a duly elected government in accordance with the Constitution of India, had been totally left out of the purview of negotiations. Jamir said that this needed to be reconsidered, adding that the political, constitutional and legal consequences of bypassing the state government were fraught with dangerous implications.

Meanwhile, the Tripura Government urged the Centre to pursue Bangladesh to root out outfits like the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) from that country. It also suggested that a joint operation be conducted by both the countries to demolish their bases.

CM Manik Sarkar, in his memorandum to the PM, said, "The situation is very complicated and vulnerable and its importance cannot be under-rated." He called for a "holistic" approach by the Centre together with the state government to tackle the problem.

INDIAN EXPRESS

24 JAN 2000

N-E parties sceptical about PM's package

Guwahati, January 23

THE RS 10,271 crore package announced by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday has been received with scepticism and apprehension.

Cutting across party lines, political parties in Assam have expressed scepticism over the actual shape of the package, although everyone welcomed it.

The main scepticism of the political parties relates to the funding pattern of the package. They also wonder whether the same is an extension of the package announced by former Prime

Minister Deve Gowda.

AGP's general secretary Pradeep Hazarika made his apprehension clear: "The Prime Minister did not elaborate about the funding of the package. We welcome the project and his concern for the development of the region".

Congress spokesman Pankaj Bora also hoped the package would not see the same fate as that of the two packages by Mr I K Gujral and Mr Deve Gowda. "No doubt we welcome and appreciate the efforts of the Prime Minister but we have apprehension about the whole package. First of all, none of the two announced pack-

ages were implemented and what is the guarantee that the same would not happen. Further it seems that there were many ongoing projects and schemes which were also included in the package", he said.

The BJP was, however, jubilant. "This is the first time the Prime Minister has voiced his and the party's concern for the region. The best thing about the package is that money has been earmarked sector-wise and not in lump sum," BJP Assam unit president Naryan Barkataki opined. Mr Barkataki was, however, confident that this package would not meet the fate of

the earlier two. "This time it is an agenda. Last time it was not an agenda. Very soon you will see the result," he said.

But the Left parties were even more sceptical. One of the senior-most members of the state Cabinet Promod Gogoi said there should be some time frame. "We welcome the package but it should be clarified what is the actual amount of additional fund available to the package because a large chunk of the package is an existing one", Mr Gogoi said while insisting that lack of any time bound programme might make any announcement redundant. (UNI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 JAN 2000

Signing the CTBT

Implications for India's Security

By PRAKASH SHAH and ARUNDHATI GHOSE

7-19
25
WHEN India voted against the CTBT resolution at the UN in 1996, it did so on three main grounds; it did not have any linkage to the elimination of nuclear weapons within a timebound framework, the treaty text permitted means of testing other than explosive testing and, therefore, was not "comprehensive" and most important, the treaty did not meet India's security interests, then or in the long run.

During the negotiation of the treaty text in Geneva, India had clearly stated that unless the treaty was amended to meet its security requirements, it would accept no restraint on the exercise of its nuclear option. The Pokhran tests of May 1998 was a logical outcome of the CTBT negotiations, once it became clear that no such amendments were even contemplated by the nuclear weapon states.

Developments in India post-Pokhran II, however, do not appear equally logical. After the tests were conducted, the government announced that it was willing to consider "being an adherent to some of the undertakings" in the CTBT.

Act of Bad Faith

The public is being told that India could 'disaggregate' her approach and sign the CTBT without ratifying it for the present. If the intention indeed is to sign but not ratify, it is an act of bad faith. The ratification of an international treaty does not require a re-examination by the cabinet, much less by Parliament. More important, once we sign an international treaty like the CTBT, we are obligated, under Art XVIII of the Vienna Convention on Treaties, not to violate the objectives or purposes of the treaty.

The question arises as to how the five nuclear tests of May 1998, of which only one was a "weapon" test, protect our national security. The nation is being told that the tests at Pokhran have given our scientists sufficient data to build a credible nuclear deterrent. Are these scientists, or the government, willing to assure publicly that one "weapon test" is sufficient to guarantee India's security forever.

This is particularly important in view of the statement of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, that "we have conducted more than 1,000 nuclear tests. We do not need more tests to protect our security. Would-be proliferators and modernisers, however, must test if they are to develop the kind of advanced, compact nuclear weapons

that are most threatening".

When we contrast this categorical statement with contrary assurances from Indian scientists, the question legitimately arises: where does the truth lie? What faith can our defence forces have in the claim that our scientists have perfected the ability to conduct non-explosive tests? It is argued that, once we sign the CTBT, India will be accepted as an equal member of the mainstream international power structure.

The reality, sadly, is that top US administration officials have repeatedly rejected this idea. Mr Strobe Talbott, our foreign minister's chief interlocutor on the American side, outlined the principles of US policy towards India when he said: "We remain committed to ... the long range goal of universal adherence to the NPT. We do not, and will not, concede, even by implication, that India and Pakistan have established themselves as nuclear weapon states under the NPT. This is a crucial and immutable guideline for our foreign policy."

A few weeks ago, US disarmament czar John Hollum, head of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, confirmed the policy that "from our perspective, India's security requirements are best served without a nuclear capability." The Clinton administration, he added, did not "acquiesce in or accept" India's nuclear capability. In this context, the government needs to examine the memoranda and agreements concluded among the five nuclear weapon powers, during the CTBT negotiations, which are not known to the Indian public.

India Vindicated

The reality is that India is not, and will not be, in the "mainstream" because the NPT-based nuclear order of the five nuclear weapon states and their western allies treat India as their principal target. Notwithstanding the apparent recent softening of US public posture, but not the policy, by Talbott, we should not forget that once India signs the CTBT, the American pressure will shift to ratification, to a moratorium on production of fissile material and eventually to the signing of the NPT as a non-nuclear state. The nuclear goalpost for India will remain a moving one, with every compromise that India makes.

An issue that has been skirted in this debate so far is that of verification. A major obligation of adher-

ence to the CTBT is to submit to the intrusive verification regime of the treaty. The CTBT verification regime provides for untrammelled use of low flying aircraft for "on-site inspections". The raw data collected by this form of intelligence-gathering would not be submitted to the CTBT organisation. It would receive only limited analysed and interpreted information.

Some of our economists and business leaders believe that sanctions will be lifted once we sign the CTBT. In any case, economic sanctions on India were not imposed after we rejected the CTBT, they were imposed after Pokhran II. If Japan has made its economic aid conditional on the signing of the CTBT, the answer is to make it clear to the world that India does not submit to economic blackmail.

We believe that India's caution on the CTBT since its rejection in 1996 has been a wise policy. It was vindicated earlier this year by the US senate's rejection of the treaty on the grounds that it does not serve American national security interests.

Narrow Prism

India needs to continue its caution on the CTBT and at the least await fulfilment of the assurance that the prime minister gave in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 1998. He, in effect, assured the nation that India will consider signing the CTBT (i) on successful conclusion of our dialogue with key interlocutors and (ii) only if other countries essential to the treaty's existence will adhere to the treaty with out conditions.

On the first point, unless the US administration moves away from its declared policy on non-proliferation, our dialogue with the US, and others, is unlikely to be successful. On the second point, it is naive to expect that the US will ratify the CTBT, if at all, without conditions, after it has been rejected by the Senate.

India's security requirements should not be seen through the narrow prism of this government's elected tenure or subordinated to make Washington happy. The political leadership has an obligation to view our security, which is now inextricably nuclear-related, in a wider and longer term context.



Pitfalls in North-East

THERE WERE several occasions in the recent history of the North-East when the political and economic clouds hovering over the region seemed to lift and the people began to believe that their long-standing problems would soon be over. The Centre's decision to hold talks with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and a succession of Prime Ministerial visits to the region were among such occasions. However, these hopes did not last long. Given the fate of the earlier two offers to the tune of Rs 6,000 crore and Rs 7,000 crore made by former Prime Ministers H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral respectively, the Rs 10,000 crore package announced by Prime Minister Vajpayee has elicited a somewhat cynical response from regional leaders. If economic packages alone could solve its myriad problems, the North-East would have been free from insurgent violence by now. Unfortunately, most of the funds allocated by the Centre went to line the pockets of unscrupulous politicians, bureaucrats and middlemen. And since the Centre has tended to rule the North-East through regional satraps, it has never really bothered about how the money is spent. Such adhocism created a sense of neglect and alienation among the people. So the bulk of the money will be made available to the region through plan allocations and the previous packages now stand scrapped.

The malaise afflicting the North-East is hardly unfamiliar and largely the result of unimaginative politics and faulty development models. The economic order in the region, dominated by the tea, oil and timber industries, is still primitive, despite the hype created by the Central allocations. The infrastructure for development is also poor as nobody wants to invest in a region of turbulence. Since education has far outstripped job opportunities, the essentially economic problem has become a political one. The Centre's lack of clarity on initiating a dialogue with a plethora of militant groups has further created doubts in the minds of the people. So any economic package would be meaningful only when efforts are made to ensure that the money is spent judiciously. The key to peace is economic development and the widening of economic opportunities. Unless the new package is geared to these ends, it could go the way of the earlier ones.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
25 JAN 2000

MAKING AMENDS

North-eastern Council gets due recognition

THE PM rightly emphasised that the Rs 10,271-crore package he announced was an "agenda for socio-economic development in the North-east". Unlike Deve Gowda's Rs 6,100-crore package in October 1996, when the seven states received no funds, the bulk adjusted to complete on-going projects, the new "agenda" raises hopes. Interest has been revived in the 28-year-old North-eastern Council to make it an implementing agency. The council has created the required infrastructure in the face of insurgency plaguing Manipur and Nagaland. Once it is given more powers it should be able to play a more effective role in its the integrated development of the region. One of the notable features of the new "agenda" includes an annual provision of Rs 500 crore from the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, a sensible decision given only a fraction of massive central assistance has percolated to the rural people.

Faster economic growth is possible if Bangladesh allows transit facilities to the region. It will be in India's interest to open the riverine route through Bangladesh to Dhubri and Karimganj in Assam as was the case before Partition. A beginning has been made with a direct Calcutta-Dhaka bus service and Ajit Panja on his return from that country last week said it might be extended up to Agartala. Legitimisation of border trade with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh should discourage smuggling. This apart, rural economies will get a boost if cross-border trade is also allowed. That landlocked Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura will play an important role in the proposed Indo-Asean trade underlines the need to complete the conversion of the 180-km Lumding-Badarpur hill metre-gauge railway section in the Barak Valley. Another problem overlooked is the tension along inter-state borders. This has to be defused if the region is to be treated as a single economic zone.