

BODO AMBIGUITY

A spirit of give-and-take helps

THE All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo People's Action Committee spearheading the movement for a separate state should stop confusing their followers by their inconsistent stand on the demand. Their slogan before aligning with the Asom Gana Parishad for the assembly elections was "No Bodoland, no rest", but now they maintain that since the ruling party is against further vivisection of the state, they will not raise the issue for as long as they remain partners. This appears to be a mere obiter dictum; Absu adviser UG Brahma later clarified that it was not a conditional commitment and that the party had not abandoned the demand for a separate state. Even more confusing was AGP minister CM Patowary's explanation that two sides would negotiate on the demand after the elections. The broad conclusion drawn is that the Bodos will have a separate entity, after all. In view of the AGP categorically ruling out a separate state for so long, this is a reversal of its earlier policy. The climate of hate against the Assamese seems to have changed overnight. In fact, the AGP-BJP alliance is reportedly agreeable to Absu's call that the two parties' come together, the objective being to defeat the Congress. Every move is dictated by expediency.

The AGP has to do some tightrope walking to create a separate state. Many villages in the region do not have a Bodo majority and outsiders far outnumber indigenous people. Their interests must be protected. Besides, the security aspect, particularly along the international border with Bhutan, has to be taken into account while conceding more villages. But if Bodo aspirations can be met in a spirit of give and take and helps restore peace and harmony, it is worthwhile. It must be remembered that the economic well-being of most North-east states depends on the uninterrupted flow of traffic along the vital north bank corridor.

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

ONE GRENADE ATTACK VICTIM DEAD

Assam seeks Army help against Ulfa

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, April 29

RECENT ATTACKS on ^{offices} by rebel outfits including Saturday night's grenade attack on the makeshift AGP campaign office, have confirmed Assam Police intelligence reports that a 50-member Ulfa group and 40-odd NDFB guerrillas have fanned out in the State to destabilise the polls. The Government accordingly sought 30 additional Army columns for 10 militant-infested districts including Kokrajhar, Nalbari, Darrang, Dibrugarh, Bongaigaon and Dhubri.

One party worker was killed and 11 others were injured in Saturday's attack. Panic has gripped the workers of the AGP and BJP following the attack barely 500 yards from the fortified residence of Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

The attack, in the heart of Dispur constituency where Mahanta is a heavyweight candidate, followed the murder of five AGP block leaders in Bongaigaon and Nalbari districts since Tuesday night. All attacks were allegedly executed by the outlawed Ulfa's lethal 'Erigma' unit.

The police, though, are not sure whether grenades of improvised explosive devices were used to blow up the AGP's Dispur campaign office. An official said

a red alert had been sounded across the State to tighten security around campaign offices of all the parties.

Mahanta, who visited the injured in a private hospital here Saturday night, labelled the attack as an attempt to terrorise the AGP and its workers. He said the attacks have made the AGP more resolute against violence. Five hours later, one of the injured in the grenade attack, Raju Chhetri, died.

Incidentally, the Ulfa was soft on AGP during the 1996 polls. One of the reasons could have been the AGP's manifesto then, which called for an autonomous State on the lines of the outlawed outfit's demand for an independent Assam.

The party earned the Ulfa's wrath for its strong counter-insurgency policies during the past three years, including the formation of the Unified Command.

Meanwhile Assam Pradesh Congress Committee dismissed insinuations that his party was behind the attacks. He claimed that Congress workers were equally vulnerable to militant attacks as was evident from sporadic demolition of Congress campaign offices and attacks on its candidates.

He alleged that the Government had not paid enough atten-

tion to the safety and security of Congress leaders and workers. **Ulfa continues killings: UIFA CONTINUED** to target AGP workers before the Assembly elections in Assam and killed a party activist in Nalbari district, sources said.

Ultras of the banned outfit attacked an AGP worker at Galpajar area of Barama in Nalbari district when he was returning home late Saturday night and shot at him point-blank, reports PTI. The man was rushed to Guwahati Medical College Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries on Sunday, sources said.

A high-level security meeting was held on Saturday at Nalbari, which is the hot-bed of Ulfa militancy. The meeting was presided over by GOC of red horns division Major General A S Jamwal and chalked out measures to prevent the militants from disturbing the elections and provide safety and security for the general people to allow them to exercise their franchise.

The Ulfa militants have targeted top politicians of the State, particularly those of the ruling AGP in view of its plans to disrupt the May 10 Assembly polls.

The militants had gunned down two AGP workers at Barama in Nalbari from point-blank range on Friday night.



A doctor attends to a victim at a Guwahati hospital on Saturday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 APR 2001

Centre, NSCN-K

declares ceasefire

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28. The prospects of peace in strife-torn Nagaland brightened today with the Government entering into a formal ceasefire agreement with the Khaplang group of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K). It already has a four-year-old ceasefire with the other NSCN faction led by Isak Swu and T. Muivah.

The agreement followed persistent demands by the public, NGOs, church leaders and the State Government involving other militant Naga groups apart from the NSCN (I-M) in the peace process. Of late, Nagaland has been witness to "peace rallies" with the latest being a 15,000-strong gathering in the border district of Tuensang.

In a statement, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, said the ceasefire would be in force for one year with effect from April 28. "The Government of India hopes this would enlarge the area of peace in Nagaland. This would also meet the long-standing demand of the people of Nagaland for entering into a ceasefire with this group."

Briefing reporters, the Additional Secretary in the Home Ministry, Dr. P. D. Shenoy, said the ground rules specified that the truce was limited to Nagaland. As in the case of the NSCN (I-M), there would be a ceasefire monitoring board (CFMB) comprising five representatives of the Central and state governments and others from the NSCN (Khaplang).

A positive step: Page 8

Aasu for Army deployment on Bangla border

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, April 28. - The skirmish on the Indo-Bangladesh border last week has given the All Assam Students' Union fresh reason to raise the foreigners issue and it today demanded Army's role in resolving the issue.

The premiere students' organisation has submitted a memorandum to the President demanding that Army be deployed on the Indo-Bangladesh border to prevent infiltration and said that if the demand were not met then it would call a statewide bandh on 2 May.

Addressing the press conference, Aasu president Mr Amiya Bhuyan said that the Army should be armed with shoot-at-sight orders. He said that the men in uniform should also be used to drive out foreigners illegally residing in Assam.

Mr Samujjal Bhattacharyya, advisor to Aasu, said that the Assam accord stipulated preventing infiltration in any manner. "It implies, therefore, that the security forces can also shoot if necessary to prevent infiltration," he said.

If the accord had been implemented properly minions Bangladesh would not have dared to do what it did, he said.

He said that the BSF had failed to deliver and needed to be replaced by the army.

"The way the Centre is neglecting the Indo-Bangladesh border suggests that there is a conspiracy to hand over Assam to Bangladesh on a platter," he said.

The Aasu has also asked all political parties to make their stand clear on the foreigners issue and other issues like education, flood and erosion, reservation of seats for the indigenous people, corruption etc.

Mr Bhuyan said no party was showing any interest in resolving the burning issues. "They are only interested in self-aggrandisement.

The Aasu leaders were especially harsh on the AGP, which was born in the crucible of the six-year long foreigners agitation led by the students' body, for the party's growing distance from the cause it had once held close to its heart and for which reason the party had first come to power in 1985.

The AGP, which had once burnt copies of the controversial IMDT Act demanding its repeal, has not even cared to mention the demand in its manifesto this time.

The party has devoted just one small paragraph on the foreigners issue.

No bed of roses

EVERYTHING in Manipur seems to be in a shambles. All development work has come to a standstill, petrol and diesel pumps have been dry since January and kerosene is scarce. Government employees haven't been paid since February, Catholic schools are closed following extortion notices by insurgents, and most non-local staff have left. There are no drinking water facilities despite the commissioning some years ago of the Singda dam which was to have met the needs of greater Imphal. Not only is the power supply from the 105-MW Loktak hydel project erratic, there are power cuts for as many as 20 hours a day.

Since June last year, no Hindi films have been screened in keeping with the ban imposed by the People's Liberation Army, which oversaw the destruction of all Hindi CDs and cassettes. So great is the fear that during a recent Hindu religious procession, hymns and incantations were rendered in Manipuri by hired local artistes.

There are no job opportunities for the thousands of fresh graduates colleges churn out every year. Corruption has rotted every strata of society. With the government being the biggest employer — it has 88,000 personnel on the roster — the current rate for securing a job is said to range between Rs 1.5-3 lakh. Should you happen to hire a cycle-rickshaw driven by a young man with his face half masked, the chances are he is a graduate who'd rather hide his face than risk recognition by family and friends. Many graduates operate auto-rickshaws, an indication of the desperation among the educated unemployed.

The government wants young people to come forward and "start industries and avail of facilities" but little is being done to stimulate growth. Getting things done means passing money under the table. Altogether 772 entrepreneurs reportedly deposited Rs 63.8 lakh with the commerce and industries department for supply of equipment

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Radhabinod Koijam might have fulfilled a long-cherished desire to become chief minister but the Manipur he oversees today is in the doldrums. And New Delhi now calls the shots, writes
JB LAMA

at subsidised rates from the Centre but, till mid-April, Rs 48.6 lakh was still lying with the department.

In the hills, the insurgents hold sway. The stretch between Mao and Karong on the vital Dimapur-Imphal highway is practically under the control of the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim and the valley-based Kanglei Yaon Kanna Lup (Oken). Since December last year, their cadres have burnt 25 oil-laden tankers because the "agreed tax" wasn't paid. Oil transporters say they had been paying their annual tax but couldn't put up with the demands of the other factions as well. In Nagaland — where the ceasefire is in force — oil tanker drivers aren't harassed.

The previous Nipamacha Singh government paid Rs 2 lakh as compensation for every tanker burnt or destroyed but chief minister Radhabinod Koijam has refused, arguing that since the government is a mere consumer the Indian Oil Corporation must pay the compensation. The stand-off with

the transporters continues following the demand to increase the rate of compensation to Rs 3 lakh. The government is hard put to build a buffer stock before the monsoon.

It is inconceivable why the Nipamacha Singh government decided to implement the Fifth Pay Commission recommendations when his government had no money to meet pensioners' and government employees' arrears. It was a populist move to get votes in the last Lok Sabha elections.

Except for Arunachal Pradesh, no North-eastern states implemented the Commission's recommendations. Nipamacha's move entailed an additional burden and Manipur needs Rs 72 crore every month to pay salaries and pensions, compared to the earlier Rs 35 crore. To make ends meet, it has to depend entirely on the Centre which released only Rs 100 crore last month — Rs 100 crore less than promised. The state already has an overdraft of Rs 400 crore which the Centre is unlikely to waive.

One way to ease the burden is for Koijam to keep the Nipamacha Singh decision in abeyance, but would state government employees agree? They are already agitated over the cut in their Travelling and Dearness Allowances.

As a matter of fact, Nipamacha Singh sold both body and soul when he committed himself to a 26-point Action Plan which, among others issues, includes containing militancy and toning up the administration. This he did to stay in power since his administration was on the verge of collapse. Now the responsibility of implementing the time-bound plan rests with Koijam. The Centre will dole out money after assessing the progress, apparently a contrived move to put Manipur under its control.

About the first thing a beleaguered Koijam did after meeting central leaders was to order the termination of the services of 2,581 employees who were appointed two years ago in violation of the memorandum of understanding reached between the state and Central government.



The wreckage of some of the oil tankers burnt by Manipur insurgents between Mao and Karong on NH 39 at regular intervals between December and March. — Yumnam Rupachandra

Gauhati High Court, however, stayed the directive and the matter has now been referred to the Attorney-General.

The parents of prospective job-seekers were said to have sold their land to get employment for their children. There is a feeling that it will be unfair to punish the employees for no fault of theirs, and that those ministers and officials responsible for appointing them, allegedly for a consideration, should not be allowed to go scot free. Most of the "bribe-takers" are part of the Koijam ministry.

Even the Manipur Human Rights Commission faces the bleak prospect of being disbanded. For four months, members haven't received their honorarium and 14 clerical workers haven't got their salaries for seven months. Perhaps the intention is to cause the commission to implode.

One wonders how Koijam will conduct an investigation into the

alleged minister/legislator-insurgent nexus. There is no denying that most of the government employees ungrudgingly contribute to the rebels' welfare.

Koijam is also extremely circumspect about restoring the screening of Hindi films in cinemas and on cable TV, part of the action plan. The decline of his political authority was evident from his inability to convince the Centre to extend the unilateral ceasefire by another month. That insurgent groups rejected this is besides the point. Perhaps the insurgents will think twice before accepting any such offer in future.

Instead of issuing appeals to Catholic school authorities to open, the government must recognise their predicament and intervene because the future of 15,000 students is involved. After all, extortion by insurgents is not a new phenomenon, but the line must be drawn when basic education is

sought to be tampered with.

The state's plea for more Central assistance may be justified but the administration should also go all out to improve tax collections — excise and income. Much can be earned from the power sector if only the loopholes are plugged. Illegal tapping and tampering of meters is rampant. Only 26 per cent of consumers are said to pay their bills regularly.

Surprisingly, Manipuris take these hardships in their stride. After all, their's is Hobson's choice — they cannot speak against the insurgents and it is pointless turning to the government for succour. As for Koijam, he might have fulfilled a long-cherished dream of becoming chief minister only to realise soon enough that it isn't a bed of roses.

(The author is a veteran journalist who retired from The Statesman and comments regularly on North-east affairs.)

✓ Khasis offer help to guard Indo-Bangla border

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SHILLONG, April 22. - Traditional *Khasi Syiem* (king), *Myntris* (ministers) and *Rongbahsnong* (headman) have demanded the Centre to allow their "durbar" to raise "peoples army" to assist the BSF personnel in protecting the Indo-Bangla border at Meghalaya sector.

Feeling humiliated after the Pyrdiwah village incident, in which the BDR backed by Bangladesh Army stormed the village on April 15 and rendered about 1200 villagers homeless, the traditional institutions, have asked the Centre to resolve the boundary dispute by October next, failing which they said the matter would be taken to the UN.

The Raid Mukertilla Durbar (province covering 100 or more villages) at a meeting held at Umsyiem village, near Pyrdiwah in East Khasi hills, yesterday felt that if the Centre allowed the durbar's own army to be raised, it would look after the safety of the people of the border village as well as the country.

The meeting was attended by Syiem (king) of Myllem, Laborious Manik Syiem besides all chiefs of the border villages, Myntris (minister) of Khyrim, spokesperson of Khasi traditional institution, Mr John F Kharshing and a large number of people.

In the meeting the king expressed concern over the lack of promptness by the Centre in restoring Pyrdiwah from the Bangladeshis and the state government's negligence towards the victims adding that such slackness on the part of

the government mainly forced the frustrated people to go underground. He clearly said "do not make me join the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (hnlc)".

In yesterday's meeting, the durbar refused to accept the external affair ministry's version that only 6.5 km of the total 4000 km Indo-Bangla border remained disputed.

They said the Centre would be held responsible for any kind of recurrence of the Pyrdiwah incident. At the same time they condemned the Centre for going soft on the neighbouring country which had brutally killed 16 BSF men in violation to the existing internal norms.

Mr Kharshing today said that the local Durbar should also be taken as a third party in any discussion held between the two countries for solving the dispute.

Mr Kharshing said the pillars meant for demarcation of areas were not correctly erected and that the border people had enough documents to prove that the pillars should have been actually posted 25 km more inside Bangladesh's border. "The people are keeping all the papers hoping that a day will come when they will get back their land": he said.

The meeting also urged the Centre to immediately strengthen the border security and issue shoot-at-sight order for averting any more confrontation.

In another resolution, the Durbar also urged the Centre not to allow any more excavation of sand and bolders along the river Umgot Rpt Umgot.

THE STATESMAN

23 APR 2005

Centre, NSCN-K decide on truce

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHAKABAMA (Nagaland), April 21. — The Centre and NSCN (K) have decided on a ceasefire, to be implemented in a couple of days, to broaden the scope of ongoing peace talks in Nagaland.

"All formalities of ceasefire ground rules were being finalised and the formal deal between two sides would be struck within two to three days," the GOC, Nagaland, Maj Gen RN Kapur said yesterday.

The GOC, who visited Chakabama in Phek district, discounted fears expressed in certain quarters that extension of ceasefire to other Naga outfits would complicate the peace talks between the Centre and NSCN (I-M).

Maj Gen Kapur also refuted

the allegation by the NSCN (I-M) that the security forces had provided security to top NSCN(K) leaders. He said they have accorded "incidental security" cover to all groups, including government officials and the general public.

He asserted that it was the duty of security forces to provide incidental security cover to all citizens, but denied having offered "personal security" to any one.

Maj Gen Kapur said the security forces even provided incidental security to NSCN (I-M) ceasefire monitoring cell, located at Dimapur, to prevent any chance incident.

The GOC said identity cards would be issued to 60 NSCN (I-M) activists to further consolidate the peace process and the outfit had been asked to furnish the list of such persons.

Maj Gen Kapur asserted neither the security forces nor the NSCN (I-M) could afford to pull out from the current ceasefire as such action would be against the wishes of Naga people, adding the government forces would honour the ceasefire ground rules at any cost. But he asserted that security forces would enforce the ground rules if they found that the agreed conditions were being violated by the other party.

His observations came in the backdrop of mounting criticism on the continuation of the ceasefire when both security forces and the NSCN (I-M) have hurled allegations of ceasefire violations at each other. Maj Gen Kapur said the question of abrogating the truce by either side was "next to impossible".

THE STATESMAN

22 APR 2001

SICKLY SILENCE

Does the North-East count?

THERE is reason to appreciate the government's restraint in dealing with the serious provocation on the north-eastern frontier, though a time may come when our men in uniform manning the borders will begin to question why so little value is attached to their lives. What must cause dismay in the lack of reaction in political circles to a potentially explosive set of facts. By no stretch of the imagination could that virtual silence be explained as calculated to avoid fueling an already tense situation. Opposition parties have seldom displayed that brand of maturity and lose no opportunity to jump around over anything that might project the government of the day in poor light. Nor can it be put down to an understanding of the domestic currents in Bangladesh. If that were accepted as an excuse of sorts there would be no grounds for condemning the assistance the militants operating in Jammu and Kashmir receive from across the western border. Hence the indifference that was displayed betrays a lot in terms of attitude.

To start with it indicates a realisation that the political gains from making an issue of it were far less than from continuing to beat other and more explosive drums. It also shows how the nation at large has come to live with violence and death and that it should be police or military personnel makes no difference. But this was not just another routine clash that has unfortunately become accepted along the frontiers, it was an attempt to alter the configuration of the frontier through the use of force at the instance of fundamentalists. No self-respecting nation can treat such provocation lightly. The worst facet of this distressing event is the casualness that has come to extend the physical and emotional "distance" that separates the North East from the country's political heartland. Had there been a similar intrusion across the Rajasthan, Punjab or Gujarat borders all hell would have been raised — and not simply because the mischief would have been Pakistani in origin. Each of those states has the numbers in Parliament that makes development there a factor in national politics. The "seven sisters" do not add up to even a Cinderella. This latest display of unconcern will only add to the feeling of neglect.

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POLL SCENE IN ASSAM

THE REALIGNMENT OF forces in Assam, taking place as it did just as the poll process was initiated, has brought about some far-reaching changes in the political scenario. The ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) that faced a concerted attack from several quarters — the Congress (I) and the BJP in particular — has now managed to have not just the BJP as its ally but even the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) whose ranks were involved in fighting the AGP cadres in the streets all these years. The ABSU, with its demand for a separate Bodoland, was seen as a serious challenger not just to the AGP but also to the civil administration. The violent means its ranks had used in the course of the agitation as well as their demand for a separate Bodoland was one of the serious challenges faced by the Prafulla Mahanta dispensation in the past few years. And yet, the AGP had no compunction in striking a poll eve alliance with the ABSU. But then, the AGP had displayed its opportunism even earlier when the party decided to negotiate an alliance with the BJP in the State. This was despite the fact that Mr. Prafulla Mahanta as Chief Minister of Assam was a key player in the United Front that came into existence in May 1996 with the single-point programme of keeping the BJP at bay.

Be that as it may, the coming together of the BJP and the AGP along with such outfits as the ABSU has led to a polarisation of forces and the polls could be a straight contest between the AGP-BJP-ABSU combine and the Congress(I). The revolt in the Assam unit of the BJP, with a section in the party floating a regional outfit, may have its effect. And in this context, the BJP may have to reconcile itself to the possibility of its prospects getting affected. And the BJP will now have to bear the brunt of an anti-incumbency sentiment against the Prafulla Mahanta

regime. After all, the BJP's Assam unit had been involved in orchestrating protests against the regime all these years. The BJP's decision to set up a front along with the AGP and the ABSU was indeed a gamble in this context. But then, there are areas of agreement between the AGP and the BJP on certain issues; the two platforms hold similar views on one important issue — involving migrants into Assam — that has dominated the political discourse in Assam over the years. The alliance that existed between the AGP and the Left parties since 1996 was indeed a synthetic one in this context. And it was only natural that the CPI and the CPI(M) walked out of the AGP's fold immediately after Mr. Mahanta's party tied up with the BJP.

Given these factors, the Assembly election in Assam is a significant event insofar as the Congress(I) is concerned. The Congress(I) can now rest assured of emerging as the rallying point for all those opposed to the sectarian political line of the AGP (the members of the minority community in particular). In addition to this, the party could look forward to benefit from the anti-incumbency sentiment. After all, the AGP's performance in the Lok Sabha elections in 1999 (it drew a blank) could not but have been an expression of this sentiment. In addition to this, the Congress(I) must have managed to recover from the state of shock its ranks were in due to the demise of Hiteshwar Saikia just on the eve of the 1996 Assembly elections when it lost power to the AGP. The elections in Assam are important for the Congress(I) in another sense too; among the States that go to polls on May 10, Assam is the only State (barring Kerala) where the party can claim to play a leading role. Given these factors, the poll scene in Assam will be interesting to watch.

THE HINDU

27 APR 2001

27 APR 2001

Mahanta again links Congress to Ulfa

HT Correspondent & PTI
Guwahati/ New Delhi, April 26

CHIEF MINISTER Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on Wednesday said the Congress had proved its links with the Ulfa by nominating the outfit's advocate for the Assembly elections.

Mahanta was referring to the candidature of Gauhati High Court advocate Nekibur Zaman from the Sarukhetri Assembly constituency on a Congress ticket.

"Zaman has been handling all court cases of the banned outfit for quite a long time and his candidature by the Congress only establishes charges that Congress has links with Ulfa," Mahanta said.

The Congress would once again use Ulfa during the elections. He said AGP supporters in Nalbari district have been served warning letters by Ulfa asking them to refrain from campaigning.

Mahanta also lashed out at Congress president Tarun Gogoi and said the man being projected by the party as the chief ministerial candidate had resorted to fraudulent practices with his own party men.

He said Gogoi was responsible for the cancellation of the nominations of two Congress candidates on Tuesday at Chaygaon and Hajo.

Mahanta said wrong signatures by the party president on the nomination papers of these two candidates denied them their chances to contest the election.

Meanwhile, the BJP also today accused the Congress of seeking the support of "anti-national" elements like the Ulfa in its quest for power in Assam, adds PTI.

"We have reports that in Assam, Congress is working in tandem with organisations of Bangladeshi infiltrators, Ulfa and ISI sympathisers to win the elections," party spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra told reporters in New Delhi.

He said BJP delegations to the State had earlier also found that Congress was seeking the support of "anti-national elements" in its political pursuits.

"This is neither proper nor will it benefit them," Malhotra said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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Politicians accused of violating code of conduct

COMPLAINTS HAVE been filed against several politicians for violating the model code of conduct for the forthcoming may 10 assembly polls in Assam, official sources said here on Thursday.

The Darrang returning officer Sanjay Lohia has filed complaints with the police station against State Revenue Minister Dr Zoi Nath Sarmah, Congress MP Madhab Rajbongshi, AGP MLA Hiren Das, AGP's Darrang district president Atulananda Goswami and BJP district president Hariram Saharia.

The returning officer in his complaint has alleged that the leaders have violated the model code of conduct by indulging in wall writing.

The leaders were urged by the district administration to wipe out all wall writings but till date it has not been done. The returning officer had a video recording done of the walls and filed a complaint with the police.

Police have forwarded the complaint to State Election Department. Trinamool Gana Parishad leader Atul Bora has lodged a complaint with the election department against Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta for using elephants, which is AGP's party symbol, during the filing of his nominations.

PTI, Guwahati



Bodies Of security personnel killed in an ambush in West Tripura on Thursday.

HINDUSTAN TIMES PHOTO

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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খাসি রাজাদের বিদ্রোহের হুমকি সীমান্তে

সৌভদ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায় • শিলং

২৩ এপ্রিল— রাজা এ বার বাগি হওয়ার হুমকি দিলেন।

প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে উত্তেজনা বিতর্কিত, পিরদিয়া গ্রামকে কেন্দ্র করে দেশের ভিতরেই নতুন সমস্যার মুখোমুখি কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। 'সিয়েম' বা রাজার নেতৃত্বাধীন খাসিদের প্রথাগত সামাজিক ব্যবস্থাকে সাংবিধানিক স্বীকৃতি যে দাবি গত পঞ্চাশ বছর ধরে ঐক্যবদ্ধ ছিল, 'পিরদিয়ার আক্রমণ তাকে উসকে দিল। খাসিয়া রাজারা এ বার সম্মিলিত ভাবে 'প্রয়োজনে চরম পথ' নেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। সেই কথা প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবাহারী বাজপেয়ীকে এই সপ্তাহে চিঠি মারফত জানানো হবে।

ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তে বিতর্কিত এলাকার সমস্যা সমাধানে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার যে প্রচেষ্টা শুরু করেছে, সেই প্রসঙ্গে সিয়েমদের সংগঠন 'ফেডারেশন অব খাসি স্টেটস' প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে লিখেছে, "ট্রান্জিশনাল রাজাদের বাদ দিয়ে কোনও পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করা হলে, তা থেকে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদ জন্ম নিতে পারে। আপনি আমাদের এইচ এন এল সি-র মতো আরেকটা উগ্রপন্থী সংগঠন বানিয়ে দেবেন না।"

মেঘালয়ের পূর্ব খাসি পাহাড় জেলার পিরদিয়া গ্রামে গত সপ্তাহে যে-সংঘর্ষ আরম্ভ

হয়, তার মূল কারণ হিসাবে ভারত-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্তের 'স্পষ্টতার অভাব'কে দায়ী করেছেন সিয়েমরা। হেমা মাইলিয়েম এলাকা বা দরবারের রাজা এল মানিক বলেছেন, "বাংলাদেশ স্বাধীন হওয়ার সময়ে সীমান্ত নির্ধারণে আমাদের সঙ্গে কোনও আলোচনাই করা হয়নি। ফলে বহু খাসি অধ্যুষিত গ্রামই বাংলাদেশের অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়ে গিয়েছে। এই নিয়ে অসন্তোষ খাসিদের মধ্যে বহুদিন ধরেই রয়েছে। এই ভুল যাতে আবার না হয়, সে জন্য বর্তমান উদ্যোগে আমাদের স্যামিল করতে হবে।"

পিরদিয়াকে সামনে রেখে খাসিরা অতএব তাঁদের দীর্ঘদিনের না-মেটা দাবির ফয়সালা চাইছেন। ১৯৪৭ সালে ২৫টি খাসি রাজ্য ও তাঁদের সিয়েমরা ভারতের সঙ্গে সংযোজিত হয় সেই পুরনো প্রসঙ্গ তুলে ফেডারেশনের মুখপাত্র জন খারশিং পিরদিয়ায় বলে বসেছিলেন, "অন্যান্য রাজ্যের মতো আমরা কিন্তু ভারতের অন্তর্ভুক্ত হইনি। সংযোজিত হয়েছিলাম। উই নেভার মার্জড বাট অ্যাকসিডেড। খাসি রাজাদের প্রতিশ্রুতি দেওয়া হয়েছিল, সিয়েম-নির্ভর সমাজব্যবস্থাকে সাংবিধানিক স্বীকৃতি দেওয়া হবে। কিন্তু সংবিধান গঠনের পঞ্চাশ বছরের পরেও তা হল না।"

জানুয়ারি মাসে বাজপেয়ীকে জানানো হয়েছিল। মার্চ মাসে রাষ্ট্রপতি কে আর নারায়ণনের কাছে চিঠি পাঠানো হয় দাবি

মেটানোর আবেদন জানিয়ে। কিন্তু পিরদিয়ার মতো 'সুযোগ' এবং একই সঙ্গে 'শঙ্কা' চলে আসার সিয়েমরা দাবি আদায় একেবারে মরিয়া। পিরদিয়াতে শনিবার জনসভা ডেকে মোট ছ'দফা সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে। তার মধ্যে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদের হুমকির পাশাপাশিই রয়েছে বাংলাদেশিদের পুনরায় আক্রমণ চেকাতে সিয়েমদের নিজস্ব ফৌজ গড়ার অনুমতি। খারশিং বলেছেন, "বি এস এফের ভূমিকায় আমরা সন্তুষ্ট নই। তাই নিজস্ব খাসি সীমান্তরক্ষী বাহিনী গড়তে দিতে হবে। বাহিনীর প্রশিক্ষণ দেবে ভারতীয় ফৌজ।" ভারতীয় সংবিধানে এ ধরনের কোনও সুযোগ নেই বলা হলে খারশিংয়ের উত্তর, "কেন সংবিধান সংশোধনের তো সুযোগ রয়েছে।"

বেঙ্গলচেলাইয়ার অধীনে জাতীয় সংবিধান পর্যালোচনা কমিটির দিকে আপাতত তাকিয়ে খাসি রাজা ও তাঁদের প্রজারা। পিরদিয়া সীমান্তের উমসোট নদী থেকে বাংলাদেশিদের পাথর ও বালি নেওয়া বন্ধ করার ব্যবস্থা, মেঘালয়ের ৪০০ কিলোমিটার সীমান্তের সমস্ত 'বিতর্কিত' জমির সমাধান প্রকৃতি দাবি নিয়ে আপাতত এই বছরের অক্টোবর পর্যন্ত দেখবেন রাজারা। বেঙ্গলচেলাইয়ার প্রাথমিক রিপোর্ট জমা পড়ার কথা ওই মাসে। তাতে যদি সিয়েমদের স্বীকৃতি না থাকে...

একবিংশ শতাব্দীর মুকুটহীন, রাজহারা রাজারা তা হলে যুদ্ধে নামবেন?

বিহারে সেতু ভেঙে

বাস জলে, মৃত ১৫

পুর্নিয়া, ২৩ এপ্রিল— বিহারের পুর্নিয়া জেলার বিয়াসির কাছে আজ ৩১ নম্বর জাতীয় সড়কে একটি যাত্রীবাহী বাস সেতুর রেলিং ভেঙে পুকুরে পড়ে যাওয়ায় ১৫ জন মারা গিয়েছেন। আহত হয়েছেন ১২ জন। ৩০ জন যাত্রী সাঁতরে বেঁচে আসার বেঁচে গিয়েছেন। — পি টি আই, ইউ এন আই

24 APR 2011

Graffiti replaces guns in hamlet

FROM BIDHAYAK DAS

Pyrdiwah, April 20: Life in Pyrdiwah village is limping back to normal. Today, residents led by the village headman, Poji Nongrum, visited the area that has been occupied by the Bangladesh Rifles and the Bangladesh army since Sunday evening.

BSF director-general Gurucharan Jagat also visited Pyrdiwah today. Jagat went to the BSF outpost in the village after Mahendraganj where he had gone to receive the bodies of the slain BSF jawans.

Trade along the Dawki-Tambil route continued to remain paralysed. Superintendent of customs Apolok Das said even though the conflict in Pyrdiwah has been resolved, permission to open trade could not be given because of security reasons.

The thousands who have been rendered homeless are reluctant to go back. However, chief minister E.K. Mawlong is hopeful that they will return soon.

DIG V.S. Ahlawat said Thursday night passed off peacefully and the jawans have taken control of the village. "Henceforth there will be no violation of the 1975 agreement," Ahlawat said.

Not a single bullet was fired and villagers for the first time after five days could go back to their village to see their broken homes. Khajal Lamin, a villager, said the sight was "disgusting". Most houses, he said, had been ransacked. They had not even spared churches and the only school in the village, he said.

A visit to Pyrdiwah explained Lamin's disgust. There was graffiti all over the church walls that read *aita Bongo desh* (this is Bangladesh) and *joi Bangla* (hail Bangladesh). Villagers demanded: "The Bangladeshis will have to compensate for this."

Nongrum said the state government would be asked to convey their sentiments to the Centre to tell the Bangladeshi government to "pay for all that they have done



Villagers flee their homes in Mancachar. Picture by Eastern Projections

to the villagers".

The only thing missing in the village was the now familiar sight of BSF jawans with light machine guns, mortars and shoulder-propelled rocket launchers on hill tops and trenches. Most jawans have abandoned their positions. Only the BSF camp has been strengthened with more men.

Two companies of the BSF are still positioned at Pyrdiwah, while three have been pulled out. Security is being tightened around neighbouring villages on the border like Lyngkhat and Umkrem.

The local *dorbar* of Pyrdiwah, which falls under Raid Mukertilla, is meeting today to take stock of the situation. The *syiem* of Hima Myllem, Laborious Manik Syiem, with other representatives of Khasi traditional *dorbars* is scheduled to attend the meeting.

Representatives of the Federation of Khasi States said a message would be sent to the Centre that henceforth three instead of two parties should settle border disputes. The villages along the border, too, have a stake and they should be involved in any dia-

logue between India and Bangladesh, federation spokesperson John Kharshing said.

He said the Khasi states bordering Bangladesh do not accept foreign minister Jaswant Singh's statement that only a small portion was disputed and the rest has been demarcated. "We do not accept the demarcated border," he said.

Another meeting of the *dorbar* of Raj Mukertilla, Hima Khyrim, will be held tomorrow at Umsyiem at 10 am. The meeting will be attended by Manik Syiem and the

syiem of Khyrim, Balajied Sing Syiem. After the meeting, the two *syiems* will visit the Pyrdiwah.

The state government is continuing to supply ration and relief material to the affected villagers. Deputy commissioner Lamba Roy said the district administration is providing two square meals and 100 grams of sugar to each family.

Roy will visit Pyrdiwah tomorrow and explore the possibility of resettling the villagers by repairing their homes. "In that case we may not have to rehabilitate them elsewhere," he said.

THE
21 APR 2001

Manipur braces for Kuki-Naga conflict

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Imphal, April 18: Wary of a fresh ethnic conflict in the hill districts of Manipur, Kuki and Naga leaders have begun jointly negotiating with the Kuki National Front (Military Council) for the release of abducted United Naga Council president K.S. Paul Leo.

Militants of the Kuki National Front (Military Council) waylaid an Imphal-bound bus near Keithelmanbi village yesterday and abducted Leo.

Tension gripped all five hill districts, particularly Senapati, after the abduction. Bus services to and from Senapati district were suspended today in apprehension

of an ethnic conflict between the Nagas and Kukis. Keithelmanbi village wore a deserted look, with almost all Kuki families fleeing the area.

Concerned over the developments, a delegation of Kuki and Naga leaders met tribal welfare minister Haokholet Kipgen at his residence here this morning.

The delegation included leaders of the United Naga Council, the Kuki Inpi, the Kuki Students' Organisation, the All-Naga Students' Association of Manipur, the Naga Women's Union of Manipur, the Kuki Women's Union of Manipur, the Kuki Movement for Human Rights and the Naga People's Movement for Human

Rights. Urging the Kuki National Front (Military Council) to release Leo without any conditions, the Kuki and Naga leaders said the last thing Manipur wanted was a fresh burst of ethnic clashes.

In return for Leo's release, the Kuki National Front (Military Council) wants the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muitvah) to stop backing its rival, the Kuki Revolutionary Army.

However, sources said overground Naga organisations could at best help the Kuki National Front (Military Council) negotiate with the NSCN(IM) on the issue.

Leo's abduction is the outcome of the attack on Kukis at Awang

Keithelmanbi village on Thursday. Seven villagers were killed in the attack, carried out by a group of NSCN(IM) and Kuki Revolutionary Army militants.

The Kuki Revolutionary Army claims that the victims were all activists of the Kuki National Front (Military Council). But the latter insists that they were "innocent villagers".

Sources said the Kuki National Front (Military Council) was particularly angry because Naga leaders had assured it that NSCN(IM) militants would not enter the Kangpokpi area nor help the Kuki Revolutionary Army.

The assurance was given

while negotiating the release of four Nagas who were abducted by the Kuki National Front (Military Council) early this month.

Additional director-general of police C. Peter Ngahanyui told **The Telegraph** that the situation in Senapati and Kangpokpi was tense but under control. He said two companies of the India Reserve Battalion had been deployed in Keithelmanbi.

Ngahanyui said senior police, Army and Assam Rifles officials met here today to discuss the issue. Leo's older brother, Benjamin Banjee, said their eighty-five-year-old mother was still in the dark about her son's abduction. Banjee is a former minister,

THE TELEGRAPH

15 APR 2001

Assam wants Survey of India help on border dispute

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 18

19/4

THE ASSAM Government wants the Survey of India to ascertain the actual boundary between Assam and Nagaland to end a decade-old dispute.

Rejecting the Attorney-General's suggestion that the tangle could be resolved by a boundary commission, the Assam Government has pleaded in the Supreme Court that the Survey of India be entrusted with the task of ascertaining the actual boundary between the two States.

The State Government says a Survey of India team and representatives of both the States should work out the physical boundary.

The report should be submitted to the Supreme Court for directions. The Supreme Court, which was hearing Assam's suit today, asked the A-G and Nagaland Governments to consider the proposal.

The Assam Government had sought the court's intervention over its forest and revenue-earning lands which it says are "occupied" by Nagaland. Considering the nature of the case, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice A S Anand had issued notice to the A-G for assisting the court.

Representing the State Government, counsel Vijay Hansaria told the court that the A-G's proposal for boundary panel to deal with the dispute was not acceptable.

He said such a commission, earlier appointed by the Centre on more than one occasion, could not solve the problem.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 APR 2001

Communal flare-ups cloud Assam polls

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, April 18

THREATS OF militant attacks on political leaders and communal flare-ups loom large over Assam as the State gears up for Assembly elections next month.

According to top police sources, militant outfits may resort to attacks on politicians before the polls.

They will also try to incite communal violence during the polls, the police believe.

The banned Ulfa has dubbed the elections as a tactical game by the Government.

Apart from its old ally, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, the outfit has recently forged ties with the United People's Democratic Solidarity and Dima Haram Dauga from the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills.

After several months of lull, the outfits will try to make their presence felt before the elections, a senior police official said.

The recent incident in Sonitpur district, where some miscreants had kept pieces of beef outside a Naamghar (Hindu prayer house), has added to the worries of the police.

Three youths belonging to a minority community who were arrested on Tuesday, have confessed to their involvement in the incident, police said.

Apprehending similar threats, the State Government has sought 100 additional companies of

paramilitary forces during the polls.

Security along the Indo-Bhutan border has also been beefed up to prevent the Ulfa and NDFB militants from crossing over to Assam from their camps in Bhutan.

The move follows Intelligence reports that the Ulfa might disrupt the poll process.

The banned outfit had carried out similar operations in previ-

ous elections.

According to the police, the outfit might target politicians from the AGP-BJP combine.

Police also apprehend trouble in the districts of lower Assam, where the NDFB might carry out such attacks. Ultras may also try to disrupt the poll process

in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts, the official stated.

Clash of Titans in Dispur

THE DISPUR constituency is headed for a clash of titans. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, seeking reelection for the third time, will contest this seat for the first time and is pitted against former AGP heavyweight Atul Borah.

After he was dropped from the Mahanta Cabinet, Borah floated the Trinamool Gana Parishad after snapping ties with the AGP in 1999.

He announced his candidature for Dispur on Wednesday hours after AGP announced Mahanta's name. Borah, seeking a third term from this constituency, was put up against former Congress Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia in this constituency in the 1996 elections.

Saikia died before the polls but Borah won the bye-election against Congress general secretary Akon Borah.

The Congress this time is likely to put up Robin Bordoloi, State's first CM Gopinath Bordoloi.

Borah told *Hindustan Times* on Wednesday that by choosing Dispur, Mahanta has made his chances of winning easier. "With Mahanta against me the voters will only be more committed to giving Mahanta a crushing defeat." He said it would be the responsibility of the entire State and not Dispur only to defeat Mahanta. Mahanta has decided not to contest from his home constituency of Nagaon where he had won in 1996.

HTC, Guwahati

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 APR 2001

19 APR 2001

Centre, Assam plan a Bodo council with statute protection

BY MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, April 9: The Centre and the state government in principal have agreed to give a new Bodoland Territorial Council to the Bodo Liberation Tigers in western Assam with constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Disclosing this to *The Asian Age* here on Monday, the media incharge of the BLT, Mr Mainao Daimary, said they were expecting a formal agreement before the elections but it was delayed because of technical reasons. He said, "Such agreement under the Sixth Schedule requires the approval of several ministries and, because of the announcement of the election schedule, it was not possible to clear this."

Expressing satisfaction over the progress of talks, the militant leader said, "Our objective is to secure an economic package, being prepared by the home ministry, for the all round development of the Bodo people. This is likely to be announced by the Centre immediately after the election is over." Mr Daimary also praised the role of the state government for the immediate Cabinet approval to reorganise the state and demarcate

AA: 2/10 the boundary of the proposed territorial council. He said, "Besides other things our main satisfaction is that the Centre has agreed to include the Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution for which we were fighting for the last so many years."

The BLT, at present under the ceasefire agreement, has decided to keep themselves away from the electoral process in the state, he said. Their cadres can exercise their franchise but have been asked to refrain from campaigning for any political groups. In reference to their other demands, Mr Daimary said the state government has agreed to grant equal status to the Bodo community in all the three existing district councils. These councils should also be strengthened and given constitutional safeguards to make them more meaningful.

Asked about the status of the non-Bodos in the proposed territorial council, he clarified: "They should not be apprehensive as all genuine Indian citizens would be granted equal rights in the council. Even the Sixth Schedule had the provision of reserving all the seats for the tribal people but we have decided that only 50 per cent of the seats of the 40-member council will be reserved for the tribal people."

THE ASIAN AGE

17 APR 2001

AGP-BJP pact in trouble as BJP splits in 2

*Trouble for AGP as MLA joins
Congress, three others to follow*

BY MANOJ ANAND

1414
Guwahati, April 13: The problems for the ruling AGP and BJP alliance in Assam seem to be far from over as Mr Pradhan Barua, ruling party MLA from Jonai constituency, joined the Congress on Thursday.

On the other hand, the BJP was divided in two groups with dissident leader Hiranya Bhattacharya forming Asom BJP and announcing that his faction would contest more than 60 seats in the state.

There are also indications that more ruling party MLAs will resign in protest against the party's decision to go in for a friendly contest with the BJP in their respective seats. The AGP sources said that three more MLAs are believed to be in touch with the Congress.

Meanwhile, senior BJP leaders Sunil Shashtri, Narendra Modi and Pyarelal Khandelwal flew in to the city obviously to pacify the growing dissension within the rank and file of the party.

The general secretary incharge of Assam BJP, Mr Sunil Shashtri, told reporters that he was here in connection with a meeting of the state election committee. Admitting that there was some resentment among the party workers on the seat-sharing arrangement, he expressed hope that it would be sorted out soon.

He also added another twist to the growing "confusion" on 10 seats on which the AGP claimed that both the AGP and the BJP will

field their candidates. He said, "We are going to contest 44 seats." Asked if the AGP will also give their candidates some of the seats allotted to the BJP, he said it would be clear after April 23, the last date for filing of nominations.

Most of these seats are held by AGP MLAs. Mr Shashtri, believed to be the main architect of this alliance, indicated that the party will try to make some adjustments in the seats already agreed upon to secure a deal that would pacify the supporters.

Meanwhile, leader of the newly-formed Asom BJP Hiranya Bhattacharya told reporters, "I could not comprehend the compulsions of the central leadership to impose this alliance on us."

"Being the founder-member of the party in Assam, I am at least aware about the areas where we have grown during these years. Among these 34 seats, the BJP will be able to win hardly a few seats," he said, regretting the decision of the central leadership.

He expressed surprise that some of the office-bearers who do not know anything about Assam were in New Delhi to formalise the alliance. "In fact the BJP surrendered before the AGP that dictated terms for the alliance," the former IPS officer-turned-politician said.

He accused senior party leaders of "selling themselves to the corrupt AGP" and betraying the workers who have been campaigning all these years against the ruling party.

THE ASIATIC AGE

14 APR 2001

NORTH-EAST THE CENTRE GETS TALKING ON THE NORTH-EAST

The progress of peace

Chief Ministers of three North-eastern states have met with the Home Minister in the past week. AJAY SURI reports on the talks

THE pursuit of peace in the turbulent North-East finally seems to be heading somewhere. For the Centre, though, the tightrope walk has only just begun, and it may be a long time before calm returns to the troubled region.

The past week has seen three Chief Ministers — of Manipur, Assam and Nagaland — dashing across the corridors of the Home Ministry, trying to fathom the Centre's mind. Fresh rounds of negotiations have started with the militants, and sources suggest that even United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) may join in later.

The Prime Minister's Office has stretched its wings and gone beyond its singular brief of talking to Naga rebels through its emissary K. Padmanabhaiah. Manipur CM RB Koizam's one-to-one session with Atal Behari Vajpayee, where he pleaded with the Centre to endorse the State's ceasefire with its 17 militant groups, has raised the bar as far as North Block is concerned.

For now, though, the immediate focus is on Assam, which goes to the polls in May. Soon after Parliament convenes on Monday, Home Minister LK Advani will announce the inclusion of Naga rebel group NSCN (Kaphlang) in the ceasefire in Nagaland. This may be followed by an endorsement of Manipur's peace efforts. These two decisions would then form the major election plank for the BJP-AGP alliance in Assam, it is learnt.

When a rattled Koizam left Advani's office last week for having dared to initiate peace with the

State's militants without taking New Delhi into consideration, he did the expected by putting his case before Vajpayee. That very day, he called a press conference in Delhi, but cancelled it abruptly and flew back to Imphal.

Sceptics in the North Block say the progress of peace depends on how the Centre sorts out the Manipur issue since it's now linked with the much bigger Naga issue. Talks with NSCN(IM), the main Naga group, have been deadlocked on account of the militants insisting that the area of ceasefire involving them should be extended to all Naga inhabited areas. This means large tracts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Koizam's argument that he's willing to accede to the Naga demand provided the Centre takes a reciprocal stand on Manipur militants has fallen on deaf ears. Even his plea that the decision to strike a ceasefire with Manipur militants has been endorsed by the entire 60-member State Assembly meant nothing to Advani.

Immediately after Advani's snub, Koizam rushed to his Samata Party colleagues George Fernandez and Digvijay Singh, saying the Manipur-Centre crisis could affect

Having brought Bodo leaders back to the table, North Block is now waiting for the bigger catch — ULFA. Though the outfit has sent feelers to the Centre, sources close to Advani feel that "Let the outfit first make up its mind whether it wants to talk with us and we will decide accordingly. So far, it has been airing its views to local papers."

The past week has also seen a marked shift in Centre-Bodo relations, with the help of Assam Chief Minister PK Mahanta himself. Advani seems to have given in to several Bodo demands, including the abolition of the existing Bodo Autonomous Council and setting up of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) with four co-terminus districts.

Advani, it is learnt, is also not averse to Bodo demands of Constitutional safeguards to BTC under the Sixth Schedule, inclusion of Bodo language under the Eighth Schedule and establishment of a central university as well as professional colleges for medicine, engineering, agriculture and information technology in the region.

Advani did attach a rider though. "I will have to discuss Bodo issues with various Central Ministries before I promise you anything," he told the Bodo representatives.

Tripura, another trouble-spot in North East, is crying to be taken up seriously. That it's run by a Left Government is just one of the reasons for Advani's apparent disinterest. Plus, none of the insurgent groups in the State has shown an interest in talking peace.



PEACE AROUND THE CORNER? Bodo leaders met in the corridors of North Block. Express photo

Samta-BJP ties. Even the former BJP president of Manipur, Bhuvon Singh who accompanied him to North Block failed to make Advani change his stand.

The prominent militant outfits in Manipur include United National Liberation Front (UNLF),

Prepak, KNL(O), KNA, KNO and KNF. For them, New Delhi's endorsement of their ceasefire with Manipur Government is vital, and without it the entire peace process could soon go up in flames.

On the Naga front, fresh ground is being broken despite the NSCN(K) in the peace process.

Advani's announcement on the Kaphlang faction should be music to Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir's ears. For well over two years now, Jamir has been pleading with the Centre to involve NSCN(K) in the peace process.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 2001

REALIGNMENT IN ASSAM

HD 12

THE EASE WITH which the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had managed a tieup with the BJP and the two parties went about announcing their decision to fight the coming elections to the State Assembly as a combine reflects so clearly that it is the idea of self-preservation rather than any serious commitment to ideological positions that guides the regional outfits. The AGP and regional parties such as the DMK and the TDP seemed to have emerged, not very long ago, as the rallying points of the third front in the national political discourse. Mr. Prafulla Mahanta's party, it may be recalled, was a key player in the United Front (U.F.) Government at the Centre between 1996 and 1998. That Mr. Mahanta had no reservations about joining the BJP-led combine now after having been a part of the U.F., whose very birth and existence was rooted in the idea to oppose the BJP at that time, is only a reflection of such opportunism that the other erstwhile constituents of the U.F. had displayed ever since the BJP-led NDA had emerged as the leading player in the Lok Sabha. The AGP, in this sense, may have taken time to change colour. But then, the AGP as a party has no representative in the Lok Sabha (the party had drawn a blank in the last election) and was of no use for the BJP-led combine all these days.

Indeed, the AGP is not the only player guilty of such opportunism in the context of the realignment in Assam. The BJP, for instance, had never appreciated Mr. Mahanta's party and even until a few weeks ago the party's State unit as well as its leaders in Delhi had been accusing the AGP of having led the State into a serious crisis. And after all these, if the BJP had no qualms about striking a deal with Mr. Mahanta and even agreed to be a junior partner in the State, one cannot but see the decision as one driven by a sense of desperation. The BJP's stated aim — that the party is keen to ensure that the anti-Congress(I) votes are not divided

11/9

— rather than any claims that it had any ideological agreement with the AGP reflects how the party is willing to be brazen about its political strategy. It is also palpable that the BJP's line in Assam was guided by the reality in such other States where Assembly elections will be held along with Assam. That the BJP as a party and the NDA as a combine cannot hope to register any significant victories in the May 10 round of Assembly polls must have guided its Assam strategy. After the exit of Ms. Mamata Banerjee from the NDA and the fact that the NDA as a platform is not a serious player in Kerala, the BJP-led combine's prospects are restricted to Tamil Nadu. And even there, the BJP is just another player in the combine. It is in this context that the Assembly polls in Assam had become important for the BJP. And there was no other option before the party than to be a junior ally to the AGP.

Be that as it may, the tieup and that too so close to the elections is bound to have its effect on the BJP. Apart from the fact that the Congress (I) in the State had been showing signs of revival (going by the party's performance in the last Lok Sabha elections) the BJP as a party cannot escape the incumbency factor this time. After all, the BJP's ranks in Assam were in the thick of campaigning against the Prafulla Mahanta regime until recently. It is rather baffling that the BJP high command, at whose initiative the alliance was forged in Assam, had glossed over these factors and that too after the experience in Karnataka, where the party lost in a big way due to its association with those in the Janata Dal in the State. Given this backdrop, the scenario in Assam in the context of the Assembly polls is yet another pointer to the extent to which opportunism and convenience have come to determine political alignments rather than high principles.

THE HINDU

APR 11 2001

AGP tries to woo Samajwadis to join Assam pact

BY MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, April 10: After surprising the political observers by forging an alliance with the BJP, the ruling Asom Gana Parishad has started an exercise to rope in the Samajwadi Party of Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav in Assam.

This was indicated by chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta here on Tuesday. He told reporters that Samajwadi Party leader and minister Abdul Muhim Mazumdar is still in his Cabinet and a discussion was on to work out an understanding with them.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party sources here hinted that Mr Mazumdar has also managed to convince the party high command to remain with the AGP in Assam.

Mr Mahanta, who was accorded a warm welcome by his party men at the Guwahati Airport, confused the BJP by saying that the seats on which the party has decided to go for a friendly contest would be identified in next few days.

According to the seat-sharing arrangement, he said, the BJP has been given 44 out of the 126 Assembly segments, while on some seats the party has decided to go for friendly contest. He, however, refused to divulge on which seats the alliance partners would have a friendly contest.

But Mulayam decides to snap ties now

BY SHAHID FARIDI

New Delhi, April 10: The Samajwadi Party has decided to snap ties with the ruling Asom Gana Parishad in Assam in view of the latter joining hands with the BJP.

Sources told *The Asian Age* that the Samajwadi Party's sole member in the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta ministry Abdul Muhim Majumdar has been asked by party president Mulayam Singh Yadav to resign from the Cabinet. Mr Majumdar would announce his resignation at Guwahati on Wednesday. The decision to snap ties with the AGP was taken at the parliamentary board meeting of the Samajwadi Party held here on Monday. The party has decided to contest the ensuing Assembly election in Assam in alliance with the Left parties. Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav has also instructed Mr Majumdar, who had earlier merged his United People's Party into the Samajwadi Party and was subsequently appointed as the president on the SP's Assam unit.

THE ASIAN AGE

11 APR 2004

AGP in poll pact with BJP, joins NDA govt at Centre

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 9 APRIL

THE AGP has decided to join the NDA government at the Centre, after week-long discussions with the BJP. The two have also reached an understanding on seat sharing, for the Assembly polls.

The AGP has kept all the seats of the sitting legislatures, thereby taking 92 seats for itself and its allies — Bodos (13) and Karbis (5) — of the total 126. The BJP has been given 44 seats. The two parties will have a "friendly contest" in 10 seats.

In a telephone conversation with ET, senior AGP leaders, who are now in Delhi, said the deal between the two parties was finally stuck when Assam agriculture minister and AGP general secretary Chandra Mohan Patowari and former Union minister Biren Prasad Baishya, on behalf of the AGP, and BJP general secretary Sunil Shastri, who is also in charge of Assam, signed the deal on Monday morning.

Of the 10 seats in which the parties will have a friendly contest, two belong to sitting Cabinet ministers Nurul Hussain — minister cooperation, from Hajo — and Ramendra Narayan Kalita — minister sericulture, from West Guwahati — while one, the Teok seat, is where deputy speaker Renukama Rajkhowa is the sitting AGP MLA.

Other seats where they will have friendly contests are Palasbari, Raha, Jonai, Naobachia, Lamding, Batadrava and Borsala.

The AGP has retained the prestigious Dispur constituency in



ALL SMILES: Home minister L.K. Advani greets Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his wife at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Guwahati and has given away the Jhalukbari seat to the BJP, where former home minister and former AGP leader Bhriku Phukan is the sitting MLA.

At a joint press conference addressed by Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, BJP national president J. Krishnamurthi and Union home minister L.K. Advani, Sunil Shastri and senior AGP leaders, it was announced that from Monday the AGP had formally become a partner of the NDA government at the Centre.

The two also accepted "in principle" that in the event of them getting a majority in the forthcoming elections, Mr Mahanta would continue to be the chief minister. However, the BJP would also be part of the government.

Centre not to call off Bodo talks

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 9 APRIL

UNION HOME minister L.K. Advani on Monday said the Centre would continue its peace negotiations with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), with whom 10 rounds of tripartite talks have already been held.

"We have had numerous rounds of talks with BLT and a lot of progress has been made. Certain aspects still remain to be clinched and after elections we will pursue them," Mr Advani told reporters here at a press conference to announce the AGP's electoral tieup with the BJP.

The Economic Times

10 APR 2001

ABSU agrees to support Assam AGP-BJP front

BY MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, April 8: The All Bodo Students' Union on Sunday said that they have finally resolved to extend their support to the AGP-BJP alliance in Assam.

Disclosing this to *The Asian Age* the ABSU adviser Urkhau Gwra Brahma also clarified that their support is neither for the AGP nor the BJP but for this alliance to which the ABSU consider as a political force that have commitment towards the indigenous people of the state.

It is significant to note here that the ABSU commands hold over a large section of Bodo community that have the domination in 15 Assembly segments while it is a deciding factor in at least 20 constituencies spreading all over the state.

Mr Brahma, who is also believed to have floated the idea of this alliance was of firm view that this alliance can retain the power in the state as tribal groups of Tiwa and Karbi have also agreed to extend their support.

"If this alliance fails to thrash out the differences on seat sharing arrangement we will have to rethink our stand of supporting them individually," Mr Brahma warned.

He said that the ABSU has decided to extend active support to the ABSU supported candidates who will go to the poll with an agenda of "granting meaningful autonomy to all the ethnic groups in the state."

He said, "The time has come

when all the indigenous people should come under an umbrella to protect their political rights as the danger of being wiped out was looming large over indigenous community of the state."

He came down heavily over the vote bank policy of the Congress party and alleged that it has failed to raise the issues of indigenous people at the national level.

He also informed that the ABSU is going to field 15 candidates in Bodo dominated areas with AGP-BJP alliance. Mr Brahma who heads political affairs committee of the Absu was here to meet AGP leader and chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta to discuss the seat sharing arrangements. He said that problem is on three seats only, which are currently held by sitting AGP MLAs.

He, however, lauded the efforts of the ruling party towards resolving the Bodo problem. He said that role of the state government headed by chief minister Mahanta and the Union government in formulating a points of understanding with the Bodo Liberation Tigers have encouraged them to appeal all the ethnic and indigenous people to support this alliance in the forthcoming state elections.

The ABSU president also made an appeal to the other indigenous organisation to support this alliance while disclosing that Tiwa Students' Organisation and Karbi group led by Holi Ram Terang have also agreed to join them if this alliance succeeds in settling down difference on the seat sharing arrangements.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 APR 2001

Mahanta loses key allies over likely AGP-BJP tie-up

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, APRIL 6

THE proposed AGP-BJP alliance in Assam has spelt doom for the four-party ruling coalition headed by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in the state, with the two Left parties, the CPI and the CPI(M) finally pulling out of it.

While the lone CPI member in the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta ministry submitted his resignation here yesterday, the CPI(M) announced its decision to quit today. The CPI has three MLAs and the CPI(M) two in the 126-member Assam Assembly.

The four-party alliance was initially a five-party affair with the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) also joining in when it was formed on the eve of the 1996 Assembly elections.

But while the ASDC quit within a year after it became a part of the CPI(M), the others continued, despite frequent wranglings.

State will benefit from alliance: CM

■ GUWAHATI: ANY alliance between the BJP and the AGP will benefit Assam immensely, state Chief Minister and AGP chief Prafulla Mahanta said on Thursday. "Our party had earlier been a partner in as many as two national alliances. On both occasions, Assam could draw a lot of benefit," he said. He dismissed state Congress chief Tarun Gogoi's charge that the AGP had latched on to BJP to retain power. He said an official announcement on the alliance would be made "within two or three days".



— ENS

While CPI leader and state flood control minister Pramod Gogoi was in the habit of criticising the functioning of the government every now and then, the CPI(M), maintained cordial ties with none of its two MLAs taking any ministerial berth.

The United People Party of Assam (UPPA), headed by former Congressman Abdul Muhib Majumdar, was a member of the alliance too, but Majumdar also had frequent rows with Mahanta and

the AGP, particularly over the latter's demand for repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act.

Majumdar, who is said to have authored this controversial legislation when Congress was in power in 1983-85, is opposed to any move to repeal the Act.

The AGP, which considers the Act a major hurdle in identifying illegal Bangladeshi migrants, has on its part been demanding it should be scrapped.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 5 APR 2001

44-8 Left plans new tie-up in Assam 894

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 7. With the Asom Gana Parishad preferring to ally with the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Left Parties are working on a new arrangement in Assam ahead of the May 10 Assembly polls, but the situation remains fluid.

The Left parties were forced to snap ties with the ruling AGP soon after it opened a formal dialogue with the BJP. Queering the pitch was the initial suggestion of the CPI State leader, Mr. Promode Gogoi, that an understanding with the Congress could be worked out in an effort to bring together all Left, democratic and secular parties to prevent the AGP/BJP from coming to power. The CPI had contested 14 of the 126 seats in Assam in 1996 in alliance with the AGP, and Mr. Gogoi was a Minister in the P. K. Mahanta Cabinet till he resigned last week.

However, perhaps piqued by the Congress-Trinamool arrangement in West Bengal, the CPI(M) made it clear that there was no place for the Congress in a Left and secular alliance in Assam. But, the situation was still not clear with meetings at the State level still going on.

As of now, the only point of agreement between the two Left parties was their opposition to the AGP and its new partner, the BJP. The CPI feels that arriving at a

possible understanding with the Congress may not be out of place. During the 1999 general elections, the Congress left the Bhatinda Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab for the CPI in a State-level adjustment which was reciprocated in an Assembly bypoll last year.

Swamy assails Fernandes' talks with Vaiko, Nedumaran

By Our Staff Reporter

MADURAI, APRIL 7. The Janata Party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, has expressed 'shock' at the reported meeting of the former Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes and the MDMK General Secretary, Mr. Vaiko, with Mr P. Nedumaran, a Tamil Nationalist movement leader, in Chennai.

In a statement issued here today, Dr. Swamy, claiming to have sourced his information from the Intelligence Bureau, alleged that the meeting pertained to rehabilitation of the LTTE within India.

Dr. Swamy insisted that the Government should firmly convey to the Norwegian peace emissaries that the LTTE supremo, Mr V. Prabhakaran, is wanted in India for having ordered the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which, he added, was a crime against the nation.

7-7-2001

8 APR 2001

Mahanta ready to don saffron garb to retain Assam

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 1 APRIL

WITH THE union of AGP and BJP for the forthcoming Assam polls almost a certainty, observers are expecting a keen battle in the state between this duo and the Congress.

BJP general secretary Sunil Shastri said the combination of saffron with AGP, the Bodos and Karbis are certain to form a government after the polls.

Mr Shastri, the party observer of Assam, told ET the electoral pact will be finalised on Tuesday in Delhi.

He said the BJP will ask for at least 50 per cent of the 126 seats, citing the fact in the last Lok Sabha elections the party stood first in 33 Assembly constituencies and a close second in 17 others.

Meanwhile senior AGP leaders like state agriculture minister and party general secretary C.M. Patowari and Rajya Sabha member Arun Sharma are in Delhi to give a shape to the alliance.

Though AGP leaders are tightlipped, it is unlikely the party will meet the BJP's demands on seats since Parliamentary polls are often not a fair indicator of the outcome to state polls.

Meanwhile, the AGP central executive committee is meeting on Sunday night to thrash out the terms of the alliance before the crucial talks with BJP on Tuesday.

Sources, however, said the Tuesday talks are just a formality as the deal has been virtually signed and sealed last week when

Assam chief minister Prafulla Mahanta had met home minister L.K. Advani for the Bodo talks. If at all the pact comes unstuck, it would be over the issue of seat sharing.

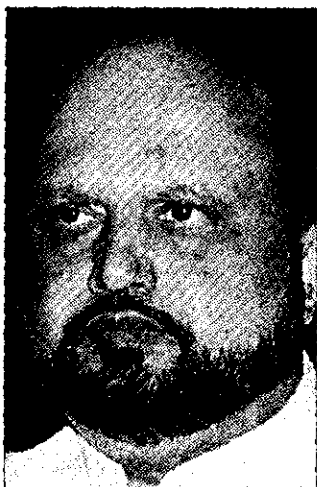
It has also been learnt the AGP has struck a three-way deal with the Bodo State Movement Committee, which is backed by the all powerful All Bodo Student Union, and the Autonomous State Demand Committee of the Karbis. State BJP leaders admit in private

that they have agreed to join hands with the AGP under pressure from tribal groups like the ABSU and the ASDC.

The CPM and CPI are peeved at the latest moves, as Mr Mahanta, hours before meeting Mr Advani, had urged CPM general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjit to jointly campaign in Assam.

The sudden twist in the state political scenario has upset the Cong (I) as the party was banking on splitting of votes between the AGP and the BJP to give them a victory as had happened in the last parliamentary polls where the Cong (I) got ten of the 14 parliamentary polls.

The Congress were banking in the AGP-BJP vote split plus its support among tea garden workers and minorities to come back to power in the state. However, the minority community is unwilling to commit themselves to Congress, given their experiences during the regime of the late Hiteshwar Saikia when hundreds of them were killed in communal clashes.



MAHANTA: BJP's pride

The Economic Times

• 2 APR 2001

AGP, BJP in tie-up talks again

Prabin Kalita
Guwahati, March 31

JUST WHEN the Election Commission was announcing the date for the Assembly election in the State on Saturday, two top members of Asom Gana Parishad and a two-member committee of the Bharatiya Janata Party were giving the final touches to their alliance in New Delhi.

And in Guwahati, AGP's Left partners in the alliance CPI and CPI (M) had already taken their decision. They would, however, wait for AGP to formally declare the new bond with BJP before announcing their own decision to snap the five-year-old alliance.

CPI (M) State secretary and legislator Hemen Das told Hindustan Times, "Once the AGP announces the alliance with BJP we will walk out. Our stand is clear." The fourth member of the alliance United People's Party of Assam (UPPA) that has since merged with Samajwadi Party, was the first to walk out of the alliance. Hours after AGP president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta spread the red carpet for L K Advani in New Delhi on Friday, Samajwadi Party's national secretary Mahavir Singh announced the end to the alliance in Guwahati.

Mahanta left New Delhi on Saturday morning but his two party colleagues Rajya Sabha MP Dr Arun Kumar Sarma and State Agriculture Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary stayed back to finish off the final round of talks



PRAFULLA KUMAR MAHANTA

with a two-member committee of BJP comprising two party secretaries Dayalal Khandelwal and Sunil Shashtry. This committee was constituted for the purpose by party president Jana Krishnamurthy. The two members, who were here on Friday as observers for the party's election committee meeting had to cancel it.

Sources said the discussions on alliance had been held with BJP's election committee. He said that "things were moving in the positive direction". The AGP would make the formal announcement of the alliance after the party's general house meeting scheduled for April 1 here. The matter has to be placed before the general body as the same had taken a decision against an alliance with BJP at its convention in February.

This sudden turn of events has taken the pre-poll political scenario by surprise as both the AGP and the BJP had ruled out any alliance between them just a couple of weeks back.

Samata to contest 45 seats

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 31

THE SAMATA Party will contest 45 seats in 12 districts of Assam. It will, however, settle for a lesser number of seats in minority dominated areas in case of an Asom Gana Parishad-BJP-All Bodo Students Union axis.

Speaking to reporters here on Saturday, former minister and Samata state unit president Afzalur Rahman said that his party has targeted minority areas with a view to eroding the vote base of the Congress.

"We favour a front of all anti-Congress parties, and we are determined to shatter the myth that the Congress is the saviour of minorities," he said.

Rahman said, Samata's priority was to stop the Congress from assuming power, "winning or losing is secondary".

He was confident of the Samata leaving its mark on the Assembly elections this time. Rahman maintained that the Tehelka episode would have no impact on the prospects of either Samata or BJP.

A politically-motivated pre-poll expose made little sense to the predominantly rural voters targeted by Samata, he asserted, adding that accused party stalwarts like George Fernandes and Jaya Jaitley would be campaigning for the party vigorously after April 16 to prove a point.

Rahman, considered a formidable Samata candidate in the Goalpara constituency, felt that the AGP-BJP-ABSU alliance move was what the State required to keep 'the vicious Congress at bay'.

The NDA and its allies may have differences on issues like the contentious IM(DT) Act, but they all concurred on common minimum programmes.

The Samata leader said that holding the much-deferred panchayat and nagar palika polls in the State figured high on the party's agenda.

"We also seek better utilisation of water resources and Assam's share from the Abul Kalam Azad Education Fund," he said.

Assam, Rahman regretted, has been missing out on Rs 105 crore a year, the fund meant for education of religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities.

States like Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh always get the lion's share of the fund owing to political preferences, he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 1 APR 2001

Manipur may not extend truce

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 30. — Going back on his stand, the Manipur chief minister today said his government was unable to further extend the unilateral ceasefire against militants which expires tomorrow.

"We may not," Mr Radhabinod Kojiam told journalists here when asked if the ceasefire would be extended. He made the statement soon after meeting the Union home minister, Mr LK Advani.

"Many militant outfits have come out openly against the ceasefire, while some others haven't responded," Mr Radhabinod Kojiam said.

Yesterday, the state government decided to extend the ceasefire by one more month from 1 April. An all-party meeting on Tuesday had urged the government to extend the truce as that would help initiate peace process in the state.

What might have caused the



Mr Radhabinod Kojiam

government's change of mind was yesterday's blast which killed three people, including two soldiers. The blast was followed by an heavy exchange of fire between militants and security forces.

About his meeting with Mr Advani, the chief minister said he had expressed his government's concern about the insurgency and also discussed measures to tone up the administration.

MPA claims responsibility:

The Manipur People's Army, armed wing of the banned United National Liberation Front, has claimed responsibility for yesterday's blast, a report from Imphal adds.

It also claimed responsibility for the 13 March rickshaw bomb attack which killed an Assam Rifles jawan and an infant at Sangakpham.

Calling offices of local dailies, the MPA said it had rejected the state government's unilateral ceasefire and that the attacks would continue till it achieved "freedom". With this, the number of insurgent groups that have rejected the ceasefire have come to four.

The other three groups are the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak, Revolutionary People's Front and Kanglei Yaol Kanna Lup and the Tuijamba Group. Meanwhile, the jawans who died in yesterday's blast have been identified as K Satbir Singh (from

ARMY VIOLATED CEASEFIRE: NSCN-IM

KOHIMA, March 30. — The NSCN-IM has said yesterday's Army raid on its information and publicity office here was a "clear violation of ceasefire ground rules".

The outfit's 'information and publicity secretary', Mr V Horam, said the Army had taken away a computer set, fax machine, tape recorder, three telephone sets, a cordless telephone, some books and printed materials and personal belongings from the office. Army sources said an AK-56 rifle, 57 rounds of ammunition, extortion notes and documents of NSCN-IM's alliance with militant groups in Assam's Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills were seized during the raid. Some NSCN-IM members had also been picked up.

Shopkeepers at Dimapur resumed business today after downing shutters yesterday in protest against the picking up of 10 businessmen for "interrogation". The businessmen had allegedly financed the underground outfits. All of them were later released, Army sources said.

The BJP youth wing's Nagaland unit and Nagaland Medical Dealers Association have condemned the businessmen's "arrests". — PTI

Rejasthan) and Challa Rangia to 15 Jat Regiment.

The dead civilian has been identified as Deepak from Su Singh (from Rajasthan) and A gunu district. He was apparently shot by the Army after the blast.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2001

Govt, Assam to ink pact with Bodo Liberation Tigers

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 MARCH

THE CENTRE and Assam government hope to sign an accord with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) with whom they have conducted at least 10 rounds of tripartite talks after the Assembly election in Assam.

"Negotiations are continuing and it is expected that the accord would be finalised in the coming months," a home ministry spokesman told reporters after a meeting of BLT leaders Kamal Muchahary and Mainao Daimary with Union home minister L.K. Advani here on Friday.

According to spokesman P.D. Shenoy, who is the additional secretary (NE) in the MHA, the Bodo Liberation Tigers had submitted a detailed proposal to the Centre regarding their demands for fresh demarcation of the Bodo Autonomous Council area, to be renamed Bodo Territorial Council and an overall welfare package for the tribal community.

The issues raised by the Bodo Liberation Tigers the proposal are:

- Abolition of the existing BAC and creation of Bodo Territorial Council with four co-terminus districts. The BTC would include villages beyond river Pasnoi, Bijni town, BRPL project in Dhaligaon, Shrirampur, Orang and Manas National Park;
- Constitutional safeguards to BATC under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution;
- Inclusion of Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule;
- Inclusion of Bodos of Karbi Anglong district in the list of STs;
- Establishment of Central University with medical, engineering, IT and agricultural colleges;
- Handing over of 40 subjects to Bodo Liberation Tigers for effective administration; and
- Liberal financial package from Centre for infrastructural development over 10 years.

According to Mr P.D. Shenoy, the above proposal, which also has the support of other Bodo groups has been forwarded to the competent authorities at the central and Assam state government-levels for an early decision.

Manipur CM unable to continue with peace moves

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 MARCH

HAVING FAILED to convince the Centre for extension of the month-long unilateral ceasefire against all militant groups in Manipur, chief minister Radhabinod Kojiam on Friday said it might not be possible to continue with the peace initiative as many of the militant outfits had acted against it.

Mr Kojiam, who met Union home minister L K Advani here on Friday, told reporters: "We may not (extend the ceasefire beyond the Holi month of March)...many outfits have come out openly against the ceasefire, while some others have not responded."

The chief minister's turn around comes after the state Cabinet had passed a decision on Thursday to extend the ceasefire for another month till April 30. An all-party meeting had earlier endorsed the extension proposal as a step towards initiating peace process in the region.

NORTH EAST DIARY

However, a major bomb blast near Imphal on Thursday — which killed three persons including two Army personnel — had loaded the odds against continuation of the ceasefire. The blast was followed by an exchange of fire between militants and security men in an adjacent area. During his discussions with Mr Kojiam on Friday, Mr Advani is said to have expressed his unhappiness at the new government's failure to tackle militancy effectively despite an assurance to that effect immediately after taking over. The Centre, it is learnt from sources, has not got very encouraging reports about the government's breaking its nexus with the militants and cracking down upon their cadres and hideouts.

At the meeting today, the Union home minister sought to remind Mr Kojiam about his earlier assurances on toning up the state administration through downsizing and launching a austerity drive to put the state's finances in order. Mr Advani is believed to have told Mr Kojiam to get his act together rather than pursue a cease fire with reluctant and unresponsive militant outfits. The better option, the Centre felt, would be to go all out against the insurgents, snapping their political nexus and destroying their hideouts.

The Economic Times

31 MAR 2001

Poor results flow in, yet U.N. very keen on the river project

CHARLES HUTZLER
BEIJING

96-9
201/3

THE United Nations is extending the life of a highly publicised but disappointing project to create a special economic zone on the historically tense Chinese, Russian and North Korean border.

Touted as a post-Cold War peace dividend, the Tumen River project was aimed at using trade to bury hostilities in a small corner of Northeast Asia and to knit the larger region together. Ten years on, the plan has by all accounts failed to meet expectations. Investment remains slack, and the borders are still difficult to cross for goods or people.

Nevertheless, the United Nations Development Program is giving the program another three years, project officials say. It will pledge support at a meeting in Hong Kong next week, as will the three border countries and the other project members, Mongolia and South Korea.

Despite the decision to go ahead, people familiar with the project say disappointments will continue because none of the partners have the money or the ideas to revitalise it. The decision, they say, shows that the project is too high-profile for the UNDP to let it die.

An internal UNDP evaluation of the project was so scathing that even member countries haven't been allowed to see the full report, project officials and advisers say. A summary provided by UNDP conceded that "development has been much less than expected" and that the project, as it stands, is "unsustainable."

"There's a difference between fantasy and reality. That's been characteristic of the Tumen project all along," says Ian Davies, a consultant who served as the project's investment adviser from 1995 to 1998.

Contributing to the dim prospects are the dire finances of Russia, North Korea and Mongolia. South Korea is reluctant to spend heavily when the others won't, say project officers and consultants. Compounding those dynamics are North Korea's ambivalence over reform, Russian corruption, and counterproductive trade policies.

While the UNDP says the area has attracted \$1.5 billion in investment, the actual figure is believed to be below \$1 billion. Most of it comes from South Korean companies investing on the Chinese side. Few investments hew to the project's initial logic: taking Russian and Mongolian raw materials, processing them with Chinese labour and shipping them through the North Korean port of Rajin.

Symbolic of the problems is the state of transport in the remote region. A new railway line between China's Hunchun and Russia's Kraskino is unused; the Russians won't provide immigration or customs services. A



decrepit rail service from the Chinese border to North Korea's Rajin can take nine hours to move 160 kilometres. The roadway to Rajin is little better, unpaved and often deep in mud.

"For foreign investors, if we can get them to Rajin, by the time they get there, they're rattled to pieces by the road," says Roger Barrett, who heads a Beijing-based association to help foreigners invest in North Korea.

Still, the UNDP says that progress is real and worthy of support. "These borders were closed for decades," says Tsogtsaikhan G., a senior program adviser on the UNDP body in Beijing that runs the project.

He argues that the project can succeed if the member countries take more responsibilities. That argument will be made to the five countries in Hong Kong next week, Mr. Tsogtsaikhan says. At the meeting, the UNDP will chip in another \$1.8 million, on top of the \$8 million already spent. The five countries each have to put in \$25,000 a year.

Even he acknowledges, however, that the amount is too little to achieve real results. Ultimately, all believe the area's fortunes rest with Japan, the region's torpid economic power. But Tokyo has told UNDP its participation is on hold until relations with North Korea are normalised. Those negotiations are progressing glacially.

(Courtesy The Wall Street Journal)

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 MAR 2001

Ulfa cadres on extortion drive

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 27

THE UNITED Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has launched a massive extortion drive in Nalbari district, the last domain of the militant outfit. The extortion drive of the militant outfit is seen as a double-edged game ahead of the election.

Sources said the militant outfit could be facing a major financial crisis. It could also be using extortion bids to create an atmosphere of terror for voters particularly supporters of AGP. The militants have not served the usual demand notes printed on the outfit's letter head but have engaged their sympathizers to place the demands. Teachers, businessman, Government officials and even farmers have received the verbal orders to pay. The district administration and police have denied receiving any

official information" about the extortion drive. Sources said the ULFA sympathizers have been mostly targeting AGP activists and supporters.

The supporters of State Agriculture Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, who is the AGP candidate for Dharmapur constituency in the district, have fled. Similar incidents have also taken place at Barkhetri constituency. The successive erosion in the militant outfit since 1994 have failed to shake the outfit's presence in the district. It continues to enjoy support from its sympathizers in the district despite the presence of security forces, including the Army in the district.

The militant outfit is likely to create trouble in the district during the election. Former Forest Minister Nagen Sarma was assassinated in Nalbari last year, while former Chief Minister Dr Bhumidhar Barman survived

three attempts on his life in the district. Sarma was representing Nalbari constituency while Dr Barman is seeking Congress ticket from his home constituency Sarukhetri in the district.

Ulfa activists arrested

DIBRUGARH POLICE nabbed five hardcore ULFA militants late Monday night. Police said the militants were arrested from their villages. A 9mm pistol, 16 rounds of Chinese made ammunition, documents, stamps of Dehing Regional Council of ULFA and some demand letters were recovered from the militants. In Udalguri police killed an NDFB militant in an encounter on Tuesday morning at Nalkhamara Kana-mukha chuba in Darrang district.

HTC, Guwahati

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2001

138 militants surrender in Assam

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, JAN. 26. As many as 138 militants surrendered with their arms before the Assam Governor, Lt.-Gen. (retd.) S.K. Sinha, at a Republic Day function here this morning.

Of them, 123 belonged to United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), nine to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), two to the Rabha National Security Force (RNSF) and four to the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA).

The people totally rejected the call given by the ULFA and several other militant outfits in the region to boycott the Republic Day celebrations. For the first time on a Republic Day, private buses plied, vehicular traffic was normal and shops were open.

The Governor, who took the salute, recounted the success achieved by the Government in curbing insurgency. He said the ULFA had massacred over 100 Hindi-speaking people last year at the behest of Pakistan's ISI so that the "land of panicky people leaving the State" could be occupied by illegal migrants.

PTI reports:

Tripura Governor's appeal

A report from Agartala said The Tripura Governor, Lt. Gen. (retd.) K.M. Seth, appealed to the insurgents to shun violence and join the mainstream to help in building a prosperous State. "The insurgents are misguided youth, who are on the wrong track which will lead them nowhere except to self-destruction" as nothing could be achieved by violence. Mr. Seth said in a Republic Day



One of the 138 ultras belonging to various militant outfits in Assam surrendering before the Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, and the Chief Minister, Mr. P.K. Mahanta, during the Republic Day celebrations in Guwahati on Friday. — PTI (Report on Page 15)

message.

He said subversive elements were trying to break the bonds of amity between tribals and non-tribals and the people should thwart their designs collectively.

Sikkim — a role model

In Gangtok, the Sikkim Governor, Chaudhury Randhir Singh, unfurled the national flag and took the salute at a colourful marchpast at the Paljor stadium.

Four platoons of the Sikkim armed police, one platoon each of the Central Industrial Security Force, the state police and homeguards took part in the march-

past. Some defence equipment was also on display.

In his message, the Governor lauded the people of Sikkim for making the hill State a 'role model' in the country for communal harmony.

Later, Mr. Singh made the first local telephone call to Siliguri.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Pawan Chamling, in a message earlier, called upon the people to join hands to evolve a 'national spirit and sense of togetherness'.

Insurgency in Arunachal

In Itanagar, the Arunachal Pradesh Governor, Mr. Arvind Dave,

unfurled the tricolour at the Indira Gandhi parade ground and took the salute at a marchpast presided by the police, the CRPF, the NCC, scouts and guides and school children. He said the State was known as an island of peace but insurgency in Tirap and Changlang districts bordering Myanmar and Nagaland alarmed the administration.

He urged the people to be more vigilant against divisive forces and not to harbour them at any cost.

'Protect peace in Mizo'

In Aizawl, the Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr. Zoramthanga, hoisted the national flag and asked the people to protect the peace in the State. He addressed the people at the R-Day function as the Governor, Mr. Ved Prakash Marwah, who is also in charge of Manipur, is in Imphal.

Militants' accomplices warned

In Kohima, the Nagaland Governor, Mr. O.P. Sharma, warned that those harbouring militants in the State would have to face serious consequences. Those serving as "support links" for militant outfits were accomplices in crimes like murder and extortion and would have to face the consequences, he said during the Republic Day function at the local ground.

Armed groups of militants and anti-social elements who had taken to violence and crime continued to jeopardise the "fragile peace" prevailing in the State, he added.

THE HINDU

27 JAN 2001

Reangs take on NLFT, free hostages

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, March 26: A group of Reang tribal leaders has prevailed upon militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura to release three abducted Bengali day labourers. The incident occurred in the thickly-wooded areas of North Tripura's Kanchanpur subdivision.

Giving details, official sources in Kanchanpur said on March 18, three Bengali labourers — Upenra Nath, Paresh Nath and Jatindra Nath — were abducted at gunpoint by a group of NLFT militants from Daincherra area under Kanchanpur subdivision.

The abduction triggered tension in the sensitive Kanchanpur subdivision as the militants shifted the hostages to a remote jungle near Manu-Chhailengta under Dhalai district.

Local Reang tribals, who were disturbed by the abduction, decided to intervene. Three senior leaders, Anil Reang, Ubachandra Reang and Naliham Reang, accompanied by more than 100 tribesmen, went to the militant hideout and prevailed upon them to release the three abducted labourers.

Language demand

Schisms within Tripura's tribal society on clannish and linguistic lines are coming to the fore with Reang tribesmen, the second largest group in the state, now demanding official recognition of their language, Kobru.

The demand for recognition of Kobru has been raised by the Reang-dominated Bru Liberation Army, a militant outfit operating in Tripura.

Sources said last week, the BLA leadership held a meeting with the Mizoram-based leaders of the Bru National Liberation Front in Assam's Karimganj district and decided to launch a struggle for "safeguarding the distinctive identity and cultural heritage of the Reang tribals."

The BLA has demanded recognition of its language, Kobru, as the third official language of the state. It threatened to launch an armed struggle unless this was done. At present, the two official languages of Tripura are Bengali and Kokborok.

Sources said the problem had originated from the NLFT's overzealous efforts to have all tribals of Tripura identified as Borok people and their language registered as Kokborok (the language of the majority Debbarma, Jamatya and Noatia communities) in the census. The "conversion drive" of the NLFT, which tried to make all tribals embrace Christianity at gunpoint, also evoked strong reactions among Reang activists of the NLFT.

The BNLF militants refused to buckle under the NLFT's pressure tactics on the ground they were not Borok but Bru people and their language was Kobru and not Kokborok. The NLFT attacked a BNLF hideout at Thangnan in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and killed 12 Reangs.

This took the schism between the NLFT and the BNLF to a point of no return as the Reang tribals flatly refused to convert from traditional Hinduism to Christianity even in the face of threats. Sources said growing tension between Reang outfits and the NLFT may soon lead to bloody clashes.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 MAR 2001

27 MAR 2001

BANNED OUTFIT LASHES OUT AT GOVERNMENT 'PROPAGANDA'

Ulfa sniffs bait in truce move

W-6 27/3

HT Correspondent
Shillong, March 26

THE BANNED Ulfa has opposed the Centre's move to declare unilateral ceasefire in Assam, saying it was a "bait to enslave the struggle and an exercise to deceive in the name of peace and so-called democracy."

A recent issue of Ulfa's mouthpiece, freedom, said the propaganda of unilateral ceasefire against the freedom fighters of Assam since the last visit of Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani to Nagaland, raises grave doubts.

The misconception had been provided to mislead the people, the Ulfa alleged. The Ulfa, that is fighting for a sovereign homeland—Sonar Asom (Golden Assam), clarified that they are

not keen on any kind of temporary respite.

"We don't need any other example to understand what an Indian ceasefire mean after viewing the Nagaland episode for the past four years," the Ulfa said. The Ulfa mouthpiece said their struggle was not merely a combination of arms and man or an isolated guerrilla campaign but in true sense, a reflection of the aspirations of the people for freedom and an outburst hatred amassed for the last fifty years against the illegal occupation.

Refusing to accept the proposal of unilateral ceasefire, the Ulfa urged the Government to return to the right track for a permanent solution to the two decade-old issue.

"If India wants a peaceful res-

olution of Indo-Assam conflict, it would cease looting our vast natural resources, forceful imposition of constitutional functions, sending illegal migrants to defame the indigenous demography," the Ulfa said.

The self styled commander in-chief of Ulfa, Paresw Baruah, on the eve of the celebration of its Army Day on March 16, hinted that some agents of their enemy had been planted in the organisation to sabotage their struggle.

Baruah stressed on the need for strict maintenance of revolutionary discipline among his fellow soldiers. He asserted that an indisciplined nation, state or any armed revolutionary is like a rudderless boat in a deep sea.

Meanwhile, sources from across the border told *Hindustan Times* that some unidentified armed miscreants gained down a Bangladeshi businessman and Paresw Baruah's close associate, Jahangir Khan, when he was travelling on Shyamoli Ring Road in Dhaka on March 22. Miscreants attacked Mohammed Salim, Baruah's another close associate on March 23.

Salim, a garment factory owner and four others were seriously injured in the bomb attack, the sources said. The Ulfa commander-in-chief had a narrow escape on March 1 in Gulshan area of the Bangladeshi capital when unidentified miscreants had sprayed several rounds of bullets on his vehicle.

Daily reveals Ulfa hit list in Assam

HT Correspondent
Silchar, March 25

THE ULFA has drawn up a hit list that has prominent politicians on it. *The Frontier Sun*, an English daily published by a prominent media group in Silchar-Sonar-Cachar has reported.

The militant outfit has also drawn up an elaborate blueprint for violence through killings and sabotage before the Assembly polls in Assam, the daily said.

It revealed that a suicide squad named 'Enigma Group' had been formed by the Ulfa under the leadership of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, a Pakistan based rebel outfit.

The Ulfa, however, reiterated its traditional stand to boycott the ensuing Assembly polls in Assam through the Internet edition of *Freedom*, the group's mouthpiece. The list made by the Ulfa at Deothang in Bhutan, includes the names of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the present C.M. Pradip Hazarika, the AGP secretary, agriculture minister Chandramohan Patowary, Union Minister of State for Water Resources, Bijoya Chakroborty and two other State ministers Joinath Sharma and Hiranya Konwar. The daily revealed that the Ulfa blueprint included extending invitations to the listed politicians to functions where the squad could eliminate them.

Tripura DGP against ceasefire with ultras

HT Correspondent
Agartala, March 25

THERE IS no need for a cease fire with the rebels as the law and order situation in the State had improved, Tripura Director General of Police B.L. Vohra said on Sunday.

Vohra gave details of the counter insurgency operations and measures taken to upgrade the State's security forces after he assumed office in July last year. Citing information listed between July last and February this year, he claimed that insurgency and the general situation has improved a lot.

Forty-four rebels were reportedly killed in 71 incidents of exchange of fire in eight months from July 2000 to February 2001. Around 130 extremists and 606 collaborators were arrested during the period. Besides 5678 preventive arrests have been made. About 104 weapons were also recovered during the period.

On the recent spurt of extremist violence that claimed at least 26 lives including 17 security men, he said every year the season witnessed escalation of violence. The recent incidents,

therefore, do not cause grave concern he said.

B.L. Vohra said kidnapping had been brought under control. Twelve security camps have been set up in interior places. Security men are armed with night vision devices and day vision powerful binoculars. Twenty new police stations would come into force and twenty existing police stations would be upgraded. Recruitment for two new Tripura State Rifles (TSR) have been completed, the DGP said.

He lauded Monoranjan Debbarma, the police officer in Ganddachara sub division who staged the surrender of 12 hardcore rebels by influencing their families, saying that the police was doing its best for the State.

Vohra suggested people should also remain alert and follow security instructions to avoid any untoward situation. Rebel killed in clash with security men. A suspected NLFT rebel has been shot dead in an exchange of fire with TSR personnel in South Tripura yesterday. The incident occurred in the forests of Kafro under Birganj police station. The rebel has been identified as Krishna Mongal Jamatia aged 25.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAR 2001

Centre, Tripura blamed for insurgency

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, March 24. - The AICC criticised the BJP-led alliance at the Centre and Tripura's Left Front government for failing to check insurgency in the state.

The party felt Tripura's situation was worse compared to other North-east states.

In a political resolution passed unanimously by the Bangalore Congress session recently, the party expressed its "deep concern" over Tripura's deteriorating situation and the manner in which the Union home ministry was conspicuous by its silence over the state's situation.

The resolution said the NDA government was evading its responsibility about Tripura's situation. It said the state's situation was deteriorating due to attacks by armed tribal groups and deteriorating law and order in the state.

The party resolution said a sitting Congress MLA, Madhusudan Saha was shot dead in Agartala on 20 February. State police have failed to nab the cul-

prits yet.

The state government has ordered a CBI enquiry into the situation, leading to the MLA's killing.

It said the AICC had given priority to sensitive problems of the North-east, and the party approved a proposal for setting up a high power Congress committee to review the situation and recommend measures for solution.

The Congress expressed its optimism over the outcome of ensuing elections in Assam.

The results of coming elections in Assam might give a positive indication towards solution of the state's long-pending problems.

"If the Congress is elected to power, the party's foremost responsibility would be to take measures for proper implementation of the Assam Accord," the party resolution said.

The AICC said proper initiative, like that in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland, should be taken up in Assam to involve various rebel outfits in ceasefire agreement, and create a conducive atmosphere for political negotiation with

the rebels.

9.N.B.S. 25-7 25/3
Reports from Tripura's interior hill areas suggest that NLFT rival factions have stepped up their infighting over supremacy.

According to an Intelligence report, Utpan Tripura, self-styled "defence minister" of "NLFT government" was killed in an encounter with his rival group in Chittagong hill forest area. Tripura was trying to escape from his camp with his family, when he was attacked by his rival NLFT group.

There were a series of gun battles between rival factions of the NLFT, both in Tripura and Chittagong hill areas, resulting in many deaths in recent weeks.

A senior state police official said NLFT's attack on security vehicles in North Tripura on 21 March was an attempt for boosting outfits' morale in view of rising intra-group clashes.

The NLFT is trying to terrorise the officials and workers with an aim of obstructing the border road construction, which will pose a problem for trans-border movement of armed rebels.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAR 2001

AGP needs BJP help, says Cong

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 24. — The Assam Pradesh Congress today said the AGP and BJP are two sides of the same coin and need each other to stay in power.

Addressing a press conference here today, the APCC chief and MP, Mr Tarun Gogoi, alleged that both the parties are neck-deep in corruption and need each other's support.

He also rubbished Mr Mahanta's charge that the Congress had sought rebel outfits' help to win the forthcoming Assembly polls.

Congress would release its poll manifesto on 27 March and its list of candidates by the first week of April, Mr Gogoi said.

He said Tehelka issue only explains

51-2 25/3
why the BJP-led corrupt NDA government at the Centre was hell bent on protecting chief minister, Mr Hrafulla Kumar Mahanta, who was earlier charged by the CBI for his involvement in the multi-crore rupee Letter-of-Credit scam.

"It is now clear why Mr Mahanta refused to condemn the corruption of the BJP regime. After all, he needs the continued protection of the Centre," Mr Gogoi said.

The Congress, if voted to power in the Assembly polls, would provide the electorate a "responsible, transparent and development-oriented government," he added.

Blaming the AGP for bringing all developmental works in the state to a standstill, Mr Gogoi said only the Congress can put an end to this feeling of insecurity prevailing among

the people of Assam.

Economic development and employment generation would be the two main programmes if Congress is elected to power, he said.

He said that the AGP, which has mastered the art of slander campaign, blamed the Congress for even its own follies — be it last years mass killing of Hindi-speaking people or governments failure to pay salaries to its employees.

Mr Gogoi alleged that the AGP had plans to rig the elections and that is why the state government had issued orders to hold the polls in three phases.

That would enable Mr Mahanta to move with his army of goons from one constituency to another, Mr Gogoi said.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAR 2001

Tripura ultras kill another five

HT-6
25/3

HT Correspondent
Agartala, March 24

IN YET another bloody strike, NLFT rebels shot dead five people including two CRPF personnel in an ambush in remote Dhalai district on Saturday morning. With this, 26 people including 16 securitymen have been killed in three militant strikes this month.

Nine people were wounded in the latest attack on a convoy of private vehicles on the Assam-Agartala National Highway at a place between Morachora and Sindhu Kumar. The rebels took away an SLR, a carbine, a hand wireless set and ammunition.

Reports reaching here said that CRPF personnel in a vehicle were escorting a convoy of private vehicles when it came under attack around 9 am. Movement of vehicles on the National Highway is allowed only at specified

times under strict security.

Two CRPF men and three passengers of a truck following the security vehicle were killed at the scene. Nine people including a security man wounded. Two of them have been shifted to G B Hospital here.

The dead CRPF men - Havildar Ratha Singh and Constable Jetha Han Borong - were from 115 Battalion of the force. The battalion is responsible for providing security and patrol duty on the National Highway.

The dead civilians have been identified as Anukul Shil, Surya Saha and Jogendra Rudra Paul.

Assam Rifles, CRPF and TSR personnel launched a joint operation to track down the rebels. The IG, CRPF, has rushed to the spot.

The Tripura Director-General of Police, B L Vohra, said the rebels step up attacks in the dry season every year. He said the

recent incidents are not so worrying, because they must be set off against the high success rate of the security forces' counter-insurgency operation.

Chief Minister Manik Sarkar held a meeting at his office with top police and civil officials following the incident. Sarkar held a similar meeting at Ambassa, the Dhalai district headquarters, last Thursday.

The NLFT's three ambushes this month, which killed 26 people including 16 paramilitary personnel, came in the South, North and Dhalai districts. They killed 13, including 11 CRPF men, at Bampur of South District on March 3; and eight people including three BSF personnel on March 21.

After the first incident at Bampur, the security top brass, fearing repeats, put their forces on maximum alert but failed to prevent the later strikes.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAR 2001

Tripura rebels out to woo Khasi outfit

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, March 23: The outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura is trying to strengthen its links with the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council of Meghalaya.

The move is believed to be aimed at ensuring the safety of NLFT activists who have to go to the Meghalaya capital for medical treatment and other purposes.

Official sources said NLFT "commanders" Rajkanta Debbarma and Upendra Debbarma visited Shillong last week and met HNLC chief Julius Donkuper. The NLFT duo reportedly sought permission to set up a well-equipped transit camp in Shillong or any other "safe area" within Meghalaya.

The HNLC, which is also keen to set up camps in the Khasi-dominated areas across the Indo-Bangladesh border, reportedly agreed to help the NLFT set up a camp in Meghalaya.

There is a sizeable population of Khasis in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Most of these Meghalaya tribals are engaged in the betel leaf business.

Officials said the NLFT was desperate to assert its supremacy after suffering largescale casualties in a series of internal clashes.

The clashes began on July 12 last year when NLFT rebels killed 12 militants of the Bru National Liberation Front of Tripura. Nayanbasi Jamatya, one of the founder members of the NLFT, subsequently revolted against the outfit's leadership, comprising Mantu Koloj, Dhanu Koloj, Kamini Debbarma and Biswamohan Debbarma.

Jamatya and his band of supporters deserted the NLFT hide-out at Thangnan in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and captured some camps in Sylhet district.

Continuing their offensive against the NLFT, the rebel leader and his supporters recently took control of the outfit's Burunji Basti camp.

The camp is close to Reang Basti and Morahcerra, where a group of BSF and Government Reserve Engineering Force (GREF) personnel were ambushed yesterday.

Sources said the NLFT leadership had directed "commander" Tapan Koloj to rein in the Jamatya faction. It is the group led by Koloj which carried out yesterday's ambush. Eleven BSF and GREF personnel were killed in the attack.

Tripura education: Despite tall claims by the ruling Left Front, the education system in Tripura lies in tatters owing to the unabated insurgency over the past eight years.

According to the Economic Review 1999-2000, tabled in the Assembly, the dropout rate among students from Class I to X is as high as 78.62 per cent. The national average for the same is about 69.42 per cent.

Official sources here said the dropout rate among tribal students living within the autonomous district council areas is more than 90 per cent because of insurgency.

In the just-concluded session of the Assembly, education minister Anil Sarkar had stated that only 20 schools within the ADC had stopped functioning. But Tripura Upajati Juba Parishad leader Rabindra Debbarma said out of 1,284 schools within the ADC, more than 50 per cent had closed down because teachers stopped attending classes for fear of militant depredations.

The education minister said posts of nearly 2,265 teachers including 306 for subject teachers were vacant. However, these could not be filled up.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 MAR 2000

NSCN (IM) puts peace onus on Govt

HT Correspondent
Dimapur, March 22

THE PRESIDENT of the NSCN (IM), Isak Chishi Swu criticised the Government of India for using the "peace process" as part of the counter-insurgency strategy to "crush the aspirations of the Nagas."

He said the Government's "non-declaration" of the mutually agreed cease-fire area coverage had become the main obstacle in their peace process. In his speech read out on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of the outfit's Republic Day by its Home Minister A Z Jami the president said the ball was in the court of the Government and not with the Nagas.

Swu questioned the logic of the Government of India declaring "unilateral ceasefire with her collaborators" saying that it would only serve to dilute the ongoing peace process. He said

Centre urged to declare ceasefire

Imphal, March 22

MANIPUR ASSEMBLY today urged the Centre to declare ceasefire and resume dialogue with all the insurgent outfits in the North Eastern region for bringing an everlasting peace in the region.

Participating in a discussion on a private member's resolution in the State Assembly, Radhabinod Kojiam said

Holding talks only with NSCN (I-M) by the Centre would not bring peace in the region. Chief minister said if there was a settlement only with NSCN (I-M), the other insurgent outfits may attempt to eliminate some NSCN (I-M) leaders and pleaded that all insurgent outfits should be involved in the peace talks.

Kojiam expressed 'positive views' that there may be everlasting peace in the region if the talks were held with all insurgent outfits after declaring ceasefire to them. The private member's resolution, moved by P Achou Singh of Manipur State Congress Party was unanimously passed by the House. Achou Singh said if there was a settlement between NSCN (I-M) and Central Government, it must not disturb the territorial integrity of Manipur.

PTI

that the decades-old Indo-Naga political issue could be solved through political means only.

Swu also apologized for the excesses committed by NSCN cadres, "we will do our utmost to

rectify all the wrongs. Please do appreciate the technical difficulties involved in our efforts," he said.

Stating that people were the backbone in the movement, Swu said the programmes and policies of the NSCN were always for the welfare of the people. It was opposed to any political move that went against the "declared principle" he said.

The NSCN president also said India's continued attempts to reduce the Indo-Naga issue into a law and order and developmental problem were futile. The policy of imposition of India's will upon the Nagas was also a mistake repeated time and again, he added.

He called the Naga movement one of the longest resistance movements in world history till date. He said the Nagas were still on the way but reaching their destination was only a matter of time.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAR 2001

SF 2
22/3

Centre urged to resume talks with N-E ultras

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

IMPHAL, March 22. - The Manipur Assembly today urged the Centre to declare ceasefire and resume dialogue with all the insurgent outfits in the North-eastern region for bringing an everlasting peace in the region.

Participating in a discussion on a private member's resolution in the House, the chief minister, state chief minister Mr Radhabinod Koijam, said holding talks only with NSCN (I-M) by the Centre would not bring peace in the region.

He said if there was a settlement only with NSCN (I-

M), the other insurgent outfits may attempt to eliminate some NSCN (I-M) leaders and pleaded that all insurgent outfits should be involved in the peace talks.

Mr Koijam expressed 'positive views' that there may be everlasting peace in the region if the talks were held with all insurgent outfits after declaring ceasefire to them.

The Manipur State Congress party member, Mr P Achou Singh, moved a private member's resolution, and said that if there was a settlement between NSCN (I-M) and Centre, it must not disturb the territorial integrity of Manipur. The resolution was passed by the House.



Mr Radhabinod Koijam

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

Bodo rebels target non-Assamese, 7 killed in Kamrup

BY MANOJ ANAND *9/19/83*

Guwahati, March 19: Suspected Bodo militants gunned down seven non-Assamese people, including three women and two children, and injured five others in Lower Assam's Kamrup district on Sunday night.

District superintendent of police L.R. Bishnoi said a group of outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland ultras, armed with sophisticated weapons, stormed Ramgaon village on the border between Kamrup and Darrang districts and opened indiscriminate fire killing three Bengalis and three Santhals on the spot.

A six-month-old infant, who sustained bullet injuries in the attack, died on the spot. The mother of the infant, who was also wounded, has been shifted to Guwahati Medical College Hospital with four others.

The incident sparked panic and terror-stricken people fled the village to take shelter in nearby forest areas, he said. Of the five injured, three are Bengalis and two Adivasis, the police said, adding that 10 empty cartridges of AK-47 rifles were recovered from the massacre site. Those killed were identified as Ter Munda, Thojen Munda, Rupali Kalindi, Pinki Sil, Raju Sil, Pula Sil and an infant. The NDFB apparently wants to evict the Ben-

9/19/83
AK-47
gali and Adivasi settlers who stayed back after a tea estate where they worked had folded up.

The killings came close on the heels of a three-day visit of the chief election commissioner M.S. Gill to the state to review the law-and-order situation before announcing the dates for Assembly elections scheduled for next month. The NDFB has been carrying out violent attacks in the area in a bid to evict the illegal encroachers since 1983, when they killed two persons and burnt down several huts in the same area.

A massive combing operation has been launched and raids conducted at Megormari, Saeladia Supa and Tamulbari to track down the killers.

Chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and senior police officers visited the spot of Monday.

Meanwhile, after a brief lull, the Ulfa struck in Lower Assam on Saturday killing three people in Nalbari district. Armed ultras kidnapped a student of Nalbari College and a teacher of a local primary school at gun point on Saturday morning from their homes at village Burinagar.

Six militants then went to the teacher's house in the evening and forcibly took away his elder brother. The rebels shot the three together in front of the school.

THE ASIAN AGE

29 MAR 2001

Assam ministers on inauguration overdrive

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 19

CHIEF MINISTER Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his Cabinet colleagues are frantically touring the State, laying foundation stones or inaugurating semi-constructed projects, before the official notification of the Assembly election.

While Mahanta laid the foundation stone of a Rs 94-crore cricket stadium at Hengerabari in the capital on Monday, other ministers were busy laying the foundation of several other schemes. Minister of State for animal husbandry Hiranya Konwar, for instance, inaugurated two unfinished small concrete bridges on the arterial Dhodhar Ali Road in Sibsagar district on Monday.

The approach to these bridges is yet to be built, but State PWD officials were instructed to clear the decks for the inauguration. One of the reasons for this haste is that the bridges fall within the Sonari constituency of veteran Congress leader Sarat Borkotoky.

This constituency is adjacent to Mahmara constituency held by Konwar, who said to be worried by the ascendancy of Congress in the Sibsagar belt. Konwar, according to AGP baiters, had taken a leaf out of Mahanta's book to flaunt a do-gooder image.

Mahanta has over the past two months inaugurated at least nine road bridges in Nagaon and Morigaon districts, some of which are yet to be completed. But none was as spectacular as the inauguration of the Rs 21.834-crore Bishnu Prasad Rava Flyover at Ganeshguri in the capital.

The construction of this four-lane flyover was undertaken in January last year. Two lanes of this flyover were completed last month and were duly "inaugurated" by Mahanta on February 18. The flyover, however, has developed depressions within a month of the inauguration, raising doubts about its strength.

This inauguration was preceded by the opening of half of one of the 11 bridges being built across the Bharalu river. And two weeks later on March 5, Mahanta inaugurated a 30-bed hospital at Bamuni in his pet constituency Barhampur. This Rs 2-crore hospital is not even half complete.

That very day Mahanta laid the foundation stone of a Rs 19.80 lakh Krishak Bhavan at Chapanala as well as a bund at Lengtajuri in his home constituency. These were followed by several others at Golaghat, Kokrajhar and Karimganj districts where the AGP's local MLAs were credited with wresting the projects for their respective constituencies.

Orissa mulls bonds for Paradip project

HT Correspondent
Bhubaneswar, March 19

ORISSA INDUSTRIES Minister K V Singhdeo told the Assembly on Monday that efforts are on to find a solution to the controversy over Paradip Oil Refinery project and the State Government is considering Indian Oil Corporation's suggestion to issue bonds.

Singhdeo stated that after one round of discussion, IOC came forward with a suggestion for issuing bonds in lieu of the sales tax to be collected by them. The bond would have a maturity of seven years bearing a low rate of interest. The bond would be encashed in the secondary market at a discount if the State Government were in urgent need of cash.

The proposal of IOC is under examination of the State Government, the Minister said. There is a deadlock over the refinery project as IOC wants sales tax waiver as promised by the State Government earlier. Initially, the project was promoted as a joint venture of Indian Oil Corporation and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. In that context, the State Government had promised to extend Sales Tax concessions under Industrial Policy Resolution, 1996.

In effect, it meant deferment of sales tax for 11 years. Subsequently, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation withdrew from the project, which is now being implemented by IOC alone.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2001

Seven massacred in Assam village

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 19

SEVEN PERSONS, including two children, were shot dead and at least five others injured when a group of suspected National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants armed with sophisticated weapons fired at a group of villagers in Rampur, Goreswar, 45 kilometres from here.

According to police, the incident took place at 8.30 a.m. on Sunday when 15 youths, dressed in Army uniform sneaked into the village and indiscriminately started firing at two houses.

The place of the incident is

near the border of Kamrup and Dairang districts.

Rampur village comprises a sizeable population of Adivasis and Bengali Hindus.

The deceased have been identified as Ter Munda, his wife Phojan Munda, Rupali Kalandi, Pinky Seal, Ratu Seal and his wife Dula Seal.

A six-month-old baby who sustained bullet injuries is battling for life. The other injured have been admitted at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital.

According to police, the militants first entered a house and started firing at the occupants. Next, they attacked Ter

Munda's house.

Senior police officials have rushed to the spot and a massive manhunt has been launched to nab the militants.

This is the second strike by militants since Saturday. Earlier, three people, including a school teacher and two farmers, had been killed by suspected UlfA militants at Nalbari district on Sunday.

Chronology of massacres of non-Assamese by suspected UlfA and NDFB militants since October 2000:

October 21, 2000: 15 persons killed by UlfA, mostly petty traders and cultivators, in Upper Assam's Tinsukia and

Dibrugarh districts.

October 27, 2000: Nine persons killed, five injured by UlfA, mostly Marwari Diwali revellers, in lower Assam's Nalbari district.

November 8, 2000: Eight killed, three injured; mostly minorities and Biharis by NDFB in a remote village of Barpeta district.

November 16, 2000: Seven killed, three injured in upper Assam's Sibsagar district by UlfA.

November 24, 2000: Eight woodcutters killed by NDFB at Launglung Reserve Forest in Kokrajhar district.

November 26, 2000: Four

killed by UlfA, mostly Biharis of the minority community in Nalbari district.

November 30, 2000: 19, mostly non-Assamese, killed by UlfA in Bongaigaon district.

December 7, 2000: 27 Hindi-speaking persons killed by suspected UlfA militants in Tinsukia district.

December 28, 2000: Eight Biharis killed by unidentified militants at Rongnagar village in Karbi Anglong district.

March 18, 2001: Six non-Assamese, including three Bengalis and three Santals, killed and five injured by NDFB at Ramgaon village in Kamrup district.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2001

'Some Assam tea companies still fund ultras'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

UWAHATI, March 18. — Efforts of the Assam Police to choke funds supply to militant outfits would have borne fruit for some tea companies. The Inspector General of Police (Operations), Mr GM Srivastava, said extortions had stopped in most cities and towns where businessmen refused to pay any longer.

However, some tea companies had frustrated the police efforts to completely starve the militant outfits of finance, Mr Srivastava said.

The chief minister, Mr Pralaya Kumar Mahanta, said the government was not aware of any forceful collection of money by any militant outfit from any tea garden or other business houses.

The statements of Mr Sri-

vaslava and Mr Mahanta imply that tea gardens which were paying money to the militant outfits were doing so voluntarily.

Mr Srivastava said very recently some tea companies in Golaghat and Tinsukia districts had paid Rs 1.35 crore to the Ulfa. These payments were made in cities like Patna and Calcutta.

Mr Srivastava refused to name the companies at this stage saying this would hamper investigations. The tea companies are still not sincere about helping the police to deal strongly with the militant outfits.

Mr Robin Barthakur, secretary of Assam Branch of Indian Tea Association said dozens of tea planters have been killed while several others have been abducted. No abducted person has ever been

rescued.

"If one of our men is kidnapped and a ransom is demanded and we are told that the man would be killed if the ransom is not paid what do we do? Do we have no responsibility towards him?" he asked.

Mr Srivastava also said there was a proposal to raise a force within the police exclusively for industry, which is to be named Assam State Industrial Security Force. He hoped that the force would soon become a reality.

Industrialists from other states should not feel apprehensive about coming to Assam to set up businesses.

The police are fully geared to ensure their security, he said. He said the security scenario in the state had improved considerably in recent times.

THE STATESMAN

18 MAR 2001

19 MAR 2001

Assam, Meghalaya move to settle border row

HT Correspondent
Shillong, March 16

MEGHALAYA GOVERNOR M M Jacob on Friday said the State Government was keen to settle inter-State boundary disputes with Assam. "The Chief Ministers of Meghalaya and Assam have agreed to resolve the border issue in an amicable manner and to strengthen the age-old friendly ties among the people of the States," he said.

Addressing the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on the inaugural day of the Budget session, the Governor said both the Chief Ministers have met a number of times to discuss on the issue. The State Level Revenue Committee has also been constituted to advise the Government on the issue. The first report is also under examination.

The Governor said counter-insurgency operations in the State had been intensified and would continue wherever required to maintain peace and tranquillity. Though the State had remained free from communal disturbances, the two militant outfits, Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and A'chik National Volunteer Council (ANVC), were continuing with their criminal activities, he said.

"Unfortunately, the new year started with nine senseless killings, including that of four

policemen," Jacob said, adding that the Government would strengthen the State police by way of modernising arms and ammunition, communication equipment and providing vehicles and manpower, to tackle militancy.

The Governor said peace was an essential component for all round development of the State. He said the State Government was repeatedly urging militants to shun violence and come forward for negotiation and peaceful resolution of their grievances.

"I am glad to mention that a large number of ANVC militants have chosen to join the mainstream," Jacob said, adding that the Government was serious about their rehabilitation. An advisory committee has been constituted to provide counselling to the surrendered cadres.

The State Government appreciates the role of Home Guards. Civil Defence personnel are being engaged in guarding vital installations, the Governor said. Raising the issue of infiltration from Bangladesh, the Governor said the 443-km-long porous international border stretch facilitates influx to Meghalaya. To tackle the problem, 47 infiltration check posts had been set up by the State Government. This is in addition to the 82 border outposts (BOPs) set up by the Border Security Force (BSF).

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAR 2001

Selective truce for N-E

FROM CHANDAN NANDY

New Delhi, March 16: The Centre will declare ceasefire selectively in the Northeast contrary to earlier indications of an omnibus announcement for the region.

A spokesman for the Union home ministry said, "The government has no proposal to declare a unilateral ceasefire with all the militant groups in the Northeast." Official sources said the Centre was ready to declare a formal truce with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang).

A draft of the ground rules to be implemented in the proposed ceasefire with the NSCN(K) has been prepared and discussions are on with leaders of the Myanmar-based insurgent outfit. The

Centre is expected to make a formal announcement by the end of this month. Top NSCN(K) leader Khitovi Sema may be summoned here to formalise the declaration.

Government sources said the Centre "has now reconsidered" its earlier proposal to broadbase the ceasefire in the whole of the Northeast for various reasons.

The Vajpayee government was forced to take into account the implications of a unilateral truce which would send confusing signals to Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh, where several insurgent groups are holed up in forest camps. Sources said in the event of an omnibus ceasefire announcement for the entire Northeast, these countries would suspend their operations against the

Indian insurgent groups. "The immediate fallout would be the suspension of operations against the NSCN (Isak-Muivah), the NSCN(K), the Ufa and the National Liberation Front of Tripura.

"It was difficult to convince the governments of these countries that cross-border terrorism not only posed a threat to their internal security but also to the entire region. It has only been a few months since these governments started co-operating with us," an official said.

The Centre's vacillation indicates that the decision-makers had done little groundwork before considering a proposal which, according to Northeast watchers, is "doomed to fail even before its blueprint is chalked out".

THE TELEGRAPH

9 8 MAR 2001

Nagas yearn for peace: Governor

HT Correspondent
Kohima, March 14

THE NAGALAND Government has expressed happiness over the Centre's peace initiative in the State and negotiation with the NSCN (K). It has urged all underground groups to extend cooperation and expedite the peace process.

Addressing the State Assembly on Tuesday, Governor Om Prakash Sharma said people of the State, after witnessing violence and unrest for decades, were yearning for peace. Peace rallies organised in the State frequently were the manifestation of people's quest for peace, he said. "It should be the constant endeavour of all to make peace a reality for the people," Sharma said.

There was a fresh wind blowing in the State with euphoria fanned by the prospectus of lasting peace, the Governor said. The Government was committed to bringing a lasting solution to the political problem of Nagaland through peaceful and democratic means, he said. The Government supported all initiatives and ideas that would help resolve the issue, he added.

"Let us not miss this opportunity to bring about a solution to the vexed problem that has affected us for the past 50 years," the Governor said.

The sharp decline in killings and arson was an indication that peace and normalcy were steadily returning to the State. During the past six months the fatality average had come down to two per month.

A month prior to the ceasefire, the average was 17, which declined to eight during the first three years of the ceasefire, Sharma said.

Though the ground rules of the ceasefire with the NSCN (IM) had been revised, it would be meaningless unless the people were sincere and committed, the Governor maintained.

6 Harkat men surrender in Guwahati

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 10

SIX MILITANTS belonging to the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen laid down arms today before the Assam Chief Minister here.

The militants — Tazrul Islam (Dhubri), Sahabul Ali (Goalpara), Saikat Ali (Goalpara), Maymul Haque (Goalpara), Safauddin Ahmed (Dhubri) and Allauddin Ahmed (Dhubri) — were trained in Pakistan. They deposited one AK-56, one AK-47 and a pistol.

The DGP Harekrishna Deka said these six people are among the 20 Harkat militants from the State trained in Pakistan. Few of them have been arrested last year but the chief of the outfit in Assam, Maulana Fakaruddin is still at large.

The surrendered militants told Hindustan Times that they were trained by ISI at Batgachi in Pakistan. After being taken to Dhaka through Dhubri, they were flown to Karachi and then to Islamabad from where they travelled by bus to the training camps.

After being administered the oath to abjure violence and respect the Indian Constitution by the DIG (CWR), the militants said they were misled Fakaruddin in the name of protecting their religion and their people.



Militants of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen surrender their arms to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta at Guwahati on Saturday.

HT PHOTO

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10. 13
7/3

Govt. to decide soon on Naga peace process

PORT BLAIR, MARCH 6. The Government will soon announce a decision to include two Naga insurgent groups in the ongoing Northeast peace process.

"A decision has almost been finalised to include NSCN (Khaplang) and Naga Federal Party.

Other Naga groups have consented to this move", Mr. Advani said.

On the security scenario in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, Mr. Advani said there have been several cases of poaching in these islands, in which foreigners are involved.

There are reports of "large-scale influx of people" in these islands which is "affecting the economy".

"Tomorrow this may affect the security of these islands as well," he said.

In view of the situation, the Centre has asked the administration and all concerned agencies as well as the Navy and the Coast Guard to remain alert and vigilant, he said.

Referring to the local

problems, Mr. Advani said he will speak to the concerned Ministries to ensure that the cost of transportation of essential items delivered through the PDS and even the cost of LPG should not be included in the prices.

"In case more subsidy is required to be given, (to keep the prices low) we'll take a decision on that matter", he said.

Mr. Advani took a positive note of the suggestions on better connectivity for the islands, including helicopter services, and even suggested establishment of a mobile hospital on a ship.

At least 15 new vessels to be employed for local transport, will arrive by June, he informed.

He said the grants for the Port Blair Municipal Commission and local self-Governments have been raised manifold in the coming plan.

Speaking on the Kashmir issue, he said Pakistan has failed to respond to India's unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir positively.

"Spreading terrorism in Kashmir has become a sort of policy for Pakistan which is a dangerous proposition.

The security forces are in a state of alert to tackle infiltration attempts by Pakistan's ISI, and we are also taking the help of our friendly neighbours in this regard," he said.

Mr. Advani tonight said that the 21st century will belong to India despite competition from China.

"China wants to be the world leader in this century and it has been claiming so for quite sometime. But the coming days will be of India's.

The 20th century was of the west. But the 21st century belongs to us."

He criticised Afghanistan's Taliban regime for destroying the statues of Buddha.

"The action of the Taliban has drawn flak from countries across the world." He said the entire world is outraged by this heinous crime. — PTI

Change of mind: Manipur CM against ceasefire extension

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 MARCH

DISPLAYING A marked change of heart on the ceasefire extension, the Manipur chief minister, Radhabinod Kojiam today firmly opposed the extension of the three-year-long ceasefire to the Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

On March 2, the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had worked out a consensus between the three chief ministers on extension of the ceasefire, after assuring them

that it did not in any way constitute a concession to the NSCN demand for a greater Nagaland, part of an apprehension in Manipur and some other parts in the region that such an extension could give legitimate right to the group to claim territorial control over the territory where ceasefire would be in force.

Mr Kojiam instead today demanded that a "more purposeful" peace process would be a comprehensive ceasefire with all the outfits in the region.

"Why not cover all the outfits? But if you want to confine your talks with National Socialist

Council of Nagaland (IM) alone at any cost it should not be extended to the Naga inhabited territories of Manipur," he said.

Two days ago, however, Mr Kojiam had sung a different tune, largely endorsing the Prime Minister's suggestion that would permit the centre to go

ahead with its plans to extend the Naga ceasefire to cover two other Naga outfits, NSCN (Khaplang) and NNC (Federal) and bring under its purview areas in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Mr Kojiam today dismissed

reports that his and Mr Mahanta's responses "were positive" in a meeting with Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani. "That is not the case...I rather opposed the extension."

Mr Kojiam recounted his conversation with the prime minister, reminding him of the

unanimous resolutions passed by the Manipur Assembly, opposing any such move. "In January at a mammoth public meeting a consensus decision was taken to oppose extension of ceasefire with NSCN (IM)."

However he advocated peace talks with all extremist outfits operating in the region by declaring ceasefire "in the pattern of Jammu and Kashmir" to bring about a "comprehensive and wholesome peace". On 27 February, the Manipur government declared a month-long ceasefire for Holi, at-tempting to reach out to 17 outfits in the state.

Stating that the peace process should not be confined to one group or be valid within fixed geographical parameter, Mr Kojiam said any move "should not affect the territorial integrity

of Manipur." Piece-meal efforts could pose some danger even to NSCN(IM) activists as a "number of insurgent groups inimical to NSCN(IM) might not approve of their action," he said.

The Manipur Cabinet will review the law and order situation consequent to the ceasefire on March 7. The state police and central paramilitary forces have been instructed not to initiate operations against the outfits, although reserving the right to retaliate if attacked.

"There are some responses... Some groups have indicated their willingness to talk," he claimed.

NO QUIET ON THE NE FRONT

The Economic Time.

The Economic Time.

6 MAR 2001

Manipur opposes ceasefire extension

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 3: The Manipur government has opposed extension of the three-year-long ceasefire between the Centre and the NSCN (IM) to all the Naga inhabited areas of the states neighbouring Nagaland.

In his meeting with the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Union home minister Lal Krishna Advani, the state chief minister Radhabinod Kojam is learnt to have conveyed that the Centre should instead announce a cease fire with all the militant groups active in the region on the pattern of the cease fire announced by it in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

He substantiated his point of view by stating that this will be the first step in bringing the militants to the negotiating table. The Manipur government has already announced a cease fire with the militant groups active in the state for the month of March. There are 17 militant groups active in the state.

Stating that the Naga outfits have been demanding a "greater Nagaland" integrating Naga dominated areas of Manipur as well, Mr Koi-

jam said the people of his state have strongly opposed the extension of cease fire with the NSCN (IM) to the areas of adjoining states and will at any cost protect the territorial integrity of Manipur.

An official from the Manipur government told *The Asian Age* that, "A large chunk of area in Manipur is Naga dominated. If it becomes a part of greater Nagaland, what will be left of Manipur?"

He disclosed that people in Manipur have been organising rallies and demonstrations on the issue. Even the state Assembly had also passed a resolution to this effect.

The state chief minister is learnt to have made it clear to the Centre that while his government will welcome Centre's initiative to restore normalcy in the region, the on-going ceasefire "should not affect the territorial integrity of Manipur." Besides Mr Kojam, the Assam chief minister also held interaction with the Prime Minister and the home minister on the issue on Friday. Earlier in September the talks between the Prime Minister and the four chief ministers from the Northeast had remained inconclusive.

THE ASIAN AGE

4 MAR 2001

Top Sulfa leader remanded in custody

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, March 4: Sulfa leader Lohit Deuri and 12 of his associates, who were arrested yesterday for vandalism and assault on businessmen here, were today remanded in judicial custody for 14 days.

The arrested persons, including three of Deuri's personal security guards, were produced before the chief judicial magistrate this evening, who sent them to jail for a fortnight.

In his statement before the magistrate, Deuri said he was not present at Fancy Bazar at the time of the incident but came to Panbazar police station on receiving information.

He alleged that besides detention, he was also beaten up by the superintendent of city police G.P. Singh. The personal security officers of the former militant provided by the state government were disarmed by the police yesterday after they abetted arson by Sulfa activists.

Seven persons were injured as the former militants and three securitymen beat up the owner and employees of a shop. One of the employees received serious head injuries after being hit by the butt of a weapon carried by a securityman. The Sulfa members were trying to collect daily "fees" for the "Care Guwahati" scheme, they were entrusted with by the Guwahati Municipal Corporation.

The term of the memorandum of understanding ended on February 28 as it was done on an experimental basis. Under the "Care Guwahati" scheme, the GMC handed over wards 29 and 30 to "Sulfa businessmen" for regular cleaning operations. The Sulfa boys were allowed to collect a daily fee of Rs 10 from bigger shops and Rs 4 from the kiosks to carry out cleaning operations. Lohit Deuri, once a top man in the outfit, was heading the Sulfa business enterprise looking after the "Care Guwahati" programme.

However, the GMC decided not to extend the term of the MoU following allegations that the Sulfa members were doing their job in a slipshod manner.

The Sulfa members also faced charges of forcible collection of a much higher fees from the petty traders.

MAR 04 2001

THE TELEGRAPH

MAR 2001

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Navigating An eagle

A political settlement with the Nagas will require the backing of the non-Nagas as well.
BARUN DAS GUPTA
on the peace moves in the Northeast.

CLOSE ON the heels of the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani's hint in Kohima last Sunday that the Naga ceasefire might be extended to other areas of the Northeast, the Army announced a "suspension of operations" against all militant groups in Manipur for 15 days from March 1, in view of the holi festival, which the Manipuris call "Yaoshang".

The next day, the Manipur Government went a step further by announcing a one-month ceasefire during which the State police and the paramilitary forces would observe a similar restraint. Obviously, the Army and the Manipur Government took the step at the instance of the Centre. In Manipur, there are about a dozen and a half militant outfits of Nagas and Kukis mainly active in the hills, and of Manipuris or Meiteis operating in the valley.

It was in August, 1997, that the Naga ceasefire between the Centre and the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) first came into force for three months. It was routinely extended every three months. However, from 1998 the period was extended to six months. Last August, it was extended by a year, implying that the Centre was satisfied that the ceasefire had worked well.

There were differences between the NSCN(I-M) and the Centre on the ceasefire on two counts. First, the former wanted it extended to all Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. But the State Governments concerned were dead against it. Second, the NSCN (I-M) maintained that the ceasefire was between the Centre (that is, the Army) and itself, but the Centre insisted it meant that the faction desist from all violent activities — whether directed against the State police, the rival Khaplang faction or common people — and stop all forms of extortion.

The Congress(I) Chief Minister of Nagaland, Mr. S. C. Jamir, has all along been opposed to the

Centre holding peace talks with one faction only. When the NSCN(I-M) made an abort on his life on November 2 1999, despite the ceasefire demanded its immediate termination. He alleged th NSCN(I-M) was honourin; ceasefire only by its flagra violation.

Intriguingly, last Tuesday NSCN(I-M) announced it "exempting" some sick a newly-established public private sector enterprises payment of "loyalty tax" Government, the so-called "Government of the Peop Republic of Nagaland" or but all other organisation continue to pay the "tax" Employees of all organis



The NSC

will also continue to c part of their salary as been doing.

On the eve of Mr. A Kobima visit, the Nag headed by Mr. Jamir, resolution pooh-pooh Isak-Muivah faction's it alone had the man Naga people to hold t the Centre.

The NPCC propose common platform "c all sections of Nagas' for holding "direct p talks" with the Cent suggested that the C the initiative for the stressed that no "sir organisation" could Naga problem. Othe such as the NSCN(I Naga National Cou

MR. BILL CLINTON, mired post-presidential blues, r have cringed at the sight ideological soulmate. Mr. Blair, backslapping Mr. George W. Bu swearing loyalties to the new White f The "charm offensive" which was th to be unique to his relationship with Clintons was in full flow as a beamin Blair flew into Washington last week first-ever meeting with a man who w his preferred choice for the White H only a few months ago. Indeed, Mr. t acknowledged that Mr. Blair had bow him over.

Downing Street has hailed the visit unqualified success, and Mr. Blair his delighted to have discovered in Mr. B "very able, very intelligent" leader wi "real sense of vision about what he w achieve and what's important". More importantly he is delighted that he is welcome in Washington and that in ti distress he can always phone a friend Bush, he has been assured, is only a telephone call away, just as it used to the days of Mr. Clinton. The message repeatedly put across by Mr. Blair anc men is that the Anglo-U.S. "special relationship" remains intact and that departure of Mr. Clinton is going to r no difference to the way the two coun have dealt with each other in the past

Those who believe that at some poi on some issues Britain would need to choose between U.S. and Europe — ar has been stated by some very importa members of Mr. Bush's team — are be told that this is a "false" and "foolish" choice conjured up by people who wa put Brita in a box. Mr. Blair declared during his visit, that "we want to have best o' both worlds"; that Britain want be bth with the U.S. and Europe at th same time. He saw no contradiction or difficulty in being an Atlantist and a European simultaneously; indeed he th Britain could be the bridge between th and Europe.

However, neither public nor political opinion is impressed, and there is a widespread view that Britain has alread cast its lot with the U.S. on important issues, the most obvious being its unqualified support to the U.S. positior Iraq. Its decision to join the recent U.S. air strikes against Baghdad caused deep unease even among Labour MPs and w seen as an attempt by Mr. Blair to ingr himself with Mr. Bush on the eve of his summit with the new U.S. president. Or Iraq, Britain is the odd man out in Euro and if there is one issue on which the F administration has clearly chosen betw U.S. and Europe it is on the question o' sanctions and military action against Baghdad. Downing Street can quibble t its own independent policy simply happened to coincide with the U.S. pos or that it is merely implementing the U Security Council resolution but few eve: Labour Party are willing to swallow this. It would take a lot more to remove the impression that Britain is indeed behavi like America's "poodle".

700 100
A MA 100

'Spouses can leaves INTUC with a red face

CALLED 'VOICE of the North-East' in faraway New Delhi, author and columnist Sanjoy Hazarika has extensively researched the regional phenomenon that has come to be known as cross-border migration. His newest book, Rites of Passage Border Crossings, Imagined Homelands, India's North-East and Bangladesh (Penguin India) probes the subject and proffers solutions. In this exclusive interview for HT, Hazarika shares his experience and insights with

UMANAND JAISWAL

What are your expectations from Rites of Passage?

I hope for a good response because I think people are fed up with lies, propaganda, half-truths and unrealistic ways of dealing with this issue (migration). The book is looking for sensible strategies, which will help pull the entire region up by its bootstraps and not one part of it. Hatred and suspicion have gone on for far too long. In the short-term and the long-term, common sense often makes the best political, social and economic strategies. I must say that I was overwhelmed with the response to *Strangers of the Mist and Bhopal, Lessons of a Tragedy*. There were the two books with T N Seshan, the former Chief Election Commissioner (Degeneration of India and Regeneration of India). So there have been four books in all. I still have to nudge myself when I see the books and read

them. *Strangers* both delight the humilit up and sa enjoyed rea

What do you expect with in pa

Rites of Passage to explore, in detail and the biggest our region. the voices ground. le migrate; wh they settle people, thei and fears. T that are nev only the ne politicians well as ex- sions about the voices of one side of unprepared sides.

Through I have travel just in As: Bangladesh lies of move at it just as i - which the b but also the and the possi of dealing w with logic an too long we l our hearts; with our hear

The book that I consi ways of dea

**HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 3**

THE TRINAMOOL Congress-dominated State INTUC has been put in a spot over the decision of the CITU-led Left trade unions to go for a united struggle against the anti-worker policies of the Union Budget proposals, if necessary by calling a countrywide industrial bandh later this month.

The decision to protest against the Union Budget proposals, which ask for immediate closure of a number of sick central public sector units, was unanimously adopted at the meeting of trade unions, held at the CITU office today.

As a first step, a workers' rally would be held at the Sahid Minar maidan on March 14, where former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and other union leaders, including the State INTUC president and Trinamool leader Subrata Mukherjee, would be asked to take part.

The INTUC was invited at today's meeting at the CITU office and had no other option but to support the resolution adopted.

But with the Trinamool being an active ally of the NDA Gov-

ernment at the Centre INTUC has reasons to be of being an active particip such Left-sponsored agit against the BJP-led Govern in the Centre.

Opinions in the State f are also divided over the is minority group, led by I hadur Singh, maintains t protect the interest of the ers, the INTUC need to go all these unions, even if means putting the Centr dock.

The majority, owing giance to Subrata Mukl feels that while the I should support the just ca the workers, it should stay from any attempts to pol these working class issues

"It is clear that the CIT taken up the workers' ca this juncture with the Ass elections in West Beni mind", said INTUC State tary Promathes Sen. Confi that they would attend the ers' rally on March 14. B they were yet to decide w they would be a party to d posed industrial bandh a the country. "We must be c that such trade union p do not take on political co Sen added.

Burdwan villages electrified

Housing

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

- 4 MAR 2001

Tripura rebels gun down 11 CRPF men

HT Correspondent
Agartala, March 3

ELEVEN CRPF men and their two civilian drivers were gunned down this morning by National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) guerrillas who lay in ambush for the convoy by a remote hill road.

Three security personnel were seriously wounded in the attack, which comes after a few months of relative calm on the state's roads.

The 4th Battalion men were travelling in a convoy of five vehicles when, from a hillock at Bampur, South Tripura, the militants began hurling grenades at them. Then they trained their guns at the last two vehicles and riddled them with bullets.

Within minutes thirteen men lay dead inside. Some of the rebels came down the hill, walked up to the vehicles and took away nine automatic rifles—four carbines, four SLRs and one LMG—and some ammunition.

The ambush was too fierce and swift, and the CRPF men were sitting ducks with virtually no chance of fighting back, the Inspector General of Police (Law & Order), K Salim Ali, said. The men killed are: Sub Inspector Ganesh Prasad Singh (38), Head Constables Sukhdev

Chaudhury (35) and Jagadish Mandal (35), and Lance-Naiks Ganga Singh (32), NK Malakar (29), Pritam Singh (28), Paban Kumar (29), Mahadev Singh (30), Subhas Chanda (30), HR Chanda (29) and Rajendra Yadav (31). The dead drivers are Kamal Das and Narayan Debnath.

The injured are fighting for life in hospital, the doctors describing their condition as critical.

The 4th Battalion men were travelling in a convoy of five vehicles when, from a hillock at Bampur, South Tripura, the militants began hurling grenades at them.

Early reports had said that the two civilian casualties were passers-by caught in crossfire. It was later confirmed that they were the drivers of the vehicles the battalion had hired.

The ambush has surprised security top brass, for the NLFT had been lying low for the past several months.

Today's was the first major strike on the security forces this year; and the first on the CRPF

in the state in two years.

The highest toll in a single ambush in Tripura is 18, all of them jawans, killed in South Tripura in 1997.

The State's Director-General of Police, BL Vohra, IGP Salim Ali and other senior police and CRPF officers rushed to the spot. A hunt is on for the killers. CRPF sources said they expect a breakthrough soon.

All police stations and security units in the state have been put on alert, for it is feared that the NLFT will launch more attacks on the forces.

PTI adds: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar condemned the ambush of the CRPF convoy in South Tripura. In a statement here, he requested the Central Government to augment the strength of Central forces, particularly the Army, for intensifying counter-insurgency operations and ably guard the border.

Referring to the ambush by suspected ATTF militants in which 13 persons, including 11 CRPF personnel, were killed the Chief Minister said it was a dastardly attack aimed at demoralising the security forces following the success in anti-insurgency operations.

He appealed to the peace-loving people of Tripura to frustrate the designs of insurgents.

Related report on Page 7

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 4 MAR 2001

North-East: peace efforts may gain momentum

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3. The Centre appears keen to give shape to its idea of extending ceasefire to the militancy-affected States of the North-East. As a first step to evolve consensus on the ways to broadbase the ongoing three-year-old ceasefire in Nagaland, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, met the Chief Ministers of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, on Friday evening.

Though the three Chief Ministers were stated to be "positive" in their response, they also expressed concern over safeguarding the interests and protecting territorial integrity of the respective States. As the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) group has observed the ceasefire in Nagaland since August 1997 and has been demanding that it should cover Naga inhabited areas in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, the Chief Ministers have been wary of the demand to create "Greater Nagaland."

However, the Chief Ministers — Mr. P.K. Mahanta of Assam, Mr. Mukut Mithi of Arunachal Pradesh and Mr. Radhabinod Kojiam of Manipur — have welcomed the Centre's initiative to usher in peace and development in the strife torn region.

The Manipur Chief Minister had declared a month-long "unilateral ceasefire" with all 17 groups operating in Manipur.

The move by the Kojiam Ministry in Manipur was rejected by the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak) who termed it as an attempt to hoodwink the people.

However, Mr. Kojiam urged the Centre to hold peace talks with all extremist outfits operating in Manipur by declaring similar ceasefire to bring about permanent peace in the insurgency-hit State.

He said that he welcomed the peace efforts but without "affecting territorial integrity of Manipur."

In all likelihood, the Centre may widen the scope of the NSCN(I-M) ceasefire to include more insurgent outfits in the ongoing arrangement. The Prime Minister may announce the "extended truce" in the North-East in the ongoing budget session of Parliament.

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, who also attended the meeting with the Prime Minister, has already indicated the Centre's willingness to broadbase the ceasefire with the NSCN(I-M) by including two other insurgent outfits in Nagaland. Sources said that modalities of the agreement were being worked out to extend it to the Naga Federal Group and the Khaplang faction of the NSCN but added that the demand of "Greater Nagaland" was not under consideration.

During his recent visit to Nagaland, Mr. Advani had asserted the Centre's readiness to talk to any militant outfit which was ready to abjure the path of violence.

Observers, however, were quick to point out the "inherent complexities" in the North-East region, dominated by the tribals and ethnic groups. Sources also pointed out that even after three years of ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (I-M) the political dialogue had not begun. Even the Home Minister had admitted that progress towards finding the political solution to the five-decade-old Naga problem had been rather slow.

Clearly, the road to restoration of peace will be dotted with bumps and dangerous turns owing to the complexities of the region and presence of a whole lot of insurgent outfits with diverse and strong tribal leanings that would have to be tackled in an astute manner and brought together on a platform.

THE HINDU

MARCH 3, 2001

NE chief ministers happy with Naga ceasefire, claims Centre

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 2 MARCH

THE CENTRE, on Friday, claimed to have evoked a positive response from the chief ministers of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh to its proposal for extension of the NSCN(I-M) ceasefire to Naga inhabited areas in the three states.

At the Prime Minister's one-to-one meetings with P.K. Mahanta, Assam chief minister, Radhabinode Kojiam of Manipur and Mukut Mithi of Arunachal, their response to the Centre's argument in favour of broad-based ceasefire was largely positive, government sources said.

This means that the Centre will not only go ahead with its plans to extend the Naga truce to cover two other insurgent outfits, the NSCN(Khaplang) and INNC(Federal), but also will bring under its purview the bordering states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

In separate discussions with Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani here, Mr Mahanta and Mr Kojiam — who until now were opposed to the inclusion of their respective states under the purview of the Naga ceasefire, fearing a spillover of the Naga insurgent groups — are said to have shed their reservations after being assured by the Centre that the expansion of geographical

TOWARDS TRUCE

cal boundaries of the truce was not a step in the direction of conceding the Naga outfit's demand for Greater Nagaland.

Arunachal chief minister Mukut Mithi has not been averse to the idea of joining the truce with the NSCN(I-M). Mr Mithi was the last to meet the PM in the consultation exercise.

Sources claimed that Fridays one-to-one meetings with the chief ministers of states border-

ing Nagaland had achieved a major breakthrough as the Centre had finally been able to convince Assam and Manipur to look beyond their narrow concerns and co-operate with the Union government in broad-based the peace process in the north-east.

A parallel is being drawn between the ceasefire with the militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir and the one in Nagaland. In fact, the Centre is believed to have called a unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir after seeing peace returning to Nagaland over the last three years of the ceasefire, even though the political talks with the NSCN(I-M) had made little headway.

Holding separate consultations with the three chief ministers was part of the Centre's strategy to prevent any clubbing of responses to its proposal to extend the geographical area of the Naga truce.

the Opposition, smelling blood, thought the sun was shining.

The upshot of all this was that the government was forced to take a conciliatory stand vis-a-vis the allies, burning the midnight oil to bring TDP and Trinamool around.

The Babri anniversary in December catches politicians and religionists in high spirits. Last year's statements by the Prime Minister resulted in Yerran Naidu and Mamata Banerjee camping outside, telling TV crews that things were really serious, while inside with Mr Vajpayee, they were busy campaigning for a better deal for the Andhra farmer.

The phenomenon is a curious feature of coalition politics and the BJP and the allies are learning the rules of the game — slowly.

CENTRAL RAILWAY
CORRIGENDUM No. 1
TO TENDER NOTICE NO. CR/S&T/DC-AC/S/04/2001 due on 28-02-2001.
With reference to the above mentioned tender notice published in Newspapers, the condition regarding submission and opening of Tender are revised as follows:
1. TENDER CLOSING DATE & TIME : 12th MARCH 2001 AT 15.05 Hrs.
2. TENDER OPENING DATE & TIME : 12th MARCH 2001 AT 15.05 Hrs.

The Economic Times

MAR 2001 MAR 2001

Ceasefires have made peace a priority in Nagaland. Kashmir could learn from this example

Lessons from the east

BY MANVENDRA SINGH

MF 8
1/3

LEARN FROM the east' is an adage as old as time — or at least the written word. The 'wise man from the east' is a part of that original maxim. Both these pearls of wisdom have, however, long since been forgotten by those who would be the principal beneficiaries of inherited knowledge.

Keeping these pieces of wisdom in mind, a very wide distance can be detected between native wisdom and those that purport to be commentators on Jammu and Kashmir. This was most acute in the days preceding a Cabinet Committee on Security meeting to discuss the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir. Now with an even longer extension of ceasefire in place, people of India will be spared from having to wade through this monthly ignorance, as also a proclivity to cover national security as though it were ornithology.

At the outset, it must be conceded that Nagaland is very different from Kashmir, if for nothing else its distance from Pakistan and the fact that only a little bit of Islamabad's money and material finds its way into the cause of Naga insurgency. (The same goes for Manipur, whose government declared on Tuesday a unilateral ceasefire to insurgent outfits in the state for a month starting today.) The Naga insurgency is the oldest in the country, the best organised, and has taken the longest to come to this stage of peace.

Going by the absence of attention to this insurgency in the national media, one would be hard-pressed to find any mention of peace in Nagaland. Some do mention that there is a ceasefire in Nagaland, but that is about it. Things, however, are happening there aplenty.

For starters, the Nagaland ceasefire is into its third year. Initially limited to the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), it was later expanded to cover NSCN (Khaplang) as well. And by all accounts, it has held out rather well, with restraint on both sides of the divide. In actual fact, it has held out so well that the people of Nagaland have taken it upon themselves to ensure that peace remains dominant.

Since the middle of January, there have been a series of peace rallies across Nagaland. Beginning in Mangkolemba, there have been rallies in Longra, Tuensang, Shamatore, Mon, Dhansiri, Chunksedima, Kukidolong, Piphima, Pfitsero, Chazouba and Meluri. The pressure for peace hasn't ended there. Some tribal councils have picked up the threads.

The traditional Naga administrative organisations, the Ho Hos, the Tribal Councils, have taken the lead in giving some structure to this yearning of the people. The tribal councils of Zunheboto, Yimchungep, Tuensang and Mangkolemba have passed resolutions that are certain to have a lasting impact on Naga



RALLYING AROUND: Members of the Naga Students Federation demonstrating for peace

insurgency. They have declared their areas to be peace zones, where no insurgent can enter carrying weapons. They have also said that there are to be no clashes between the two major groups. These clashes had resulted in a number of casualties over the years.

Significantly, the Ho Hos have also resolved against multiplicity of taxes for the people. The insurgents had been extracting taxes from the people for decades in one of the most elaborate tax collection drives in India. Nagas and non-Nagas pay taxes equally — and this includes even those Nagas who are in the security forces anywhere in India. With internecine clashes increasing on account of competition over territory and tax, resentment has built up over the years against increasing tax rates. Passing resolutions against this practice is a significant event.

Obviously, it is a significant event only in Nagaland, for there has not been even a whisper among the 'insurgency specialists' in the national media. Of course,

there are differences between the Naga and Kashmiri insurgencies, but there still are lessons to be learnt from the east.

For starters, the bottomline for all counter-insurgency operations has to be to contain violence and wean the population away from militants. The quickest route to this is an unlimited supply of money or excessive violence. The British perfected the former in Malaya of Fifties, and Pakistan the latter in Baluchistan during the Seventies. For obvious reasons, India has not undertaken either of these paths — preferring instead to chip away in a long-drawn-out battle of stamina.

In the Indian method of tackling insurgency, there comes a time to make a departure from the norm, so as to convince the people about the state's good intentions. The cessation of combat operations is the biggest and most important gesture that a state can make to a people caught between the twin fire of insurgents and security forces. Those who have not experienced counter-insurgency

operations cannot comprehend the difficulties that are placed on the daily lives of the people.

These disruptions in day-to-day life are the biggest psychological impingement as far as the people are concerned. Any relief is a meaningful indication of the vision of the state. It is from this vision that the people take heart — as they have done in Nagaland. It has taken three years of cessation of combat operations in Nagaland to create an environment wherein the people and the Ho Hos can make the kind of declarations that they have. They have taken to the streets for peace after having seen for the last three years that the state is determined to ensure freedom from strife.

The Khaplang group is certainly not like the messianic *jehadis* that Pakistan produces endlessly. But it too initially opposed the ceasefire — only to fall in line when the people who sustain the insurgency made it plain as to which way the wind was blowing.

Going by the routine reportage on Kashmir and the ceasefire there, it would seem that the wind is blowing at gale speed in an uncontrollable direction. That is far from being the case. The Kashmiri people want peace desperately. No opinion poll is required to prove that point.

One can do with a refresher of what Abdul Majid Dar, the *Salaar Aala* (chief commander) of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen said at the historic press conference in July last: "It is a fact that without the assistance of Pakistan, it was not possible to sustain the movement. But we are sons of this soil and no other person can understand the sufferings we are undergoing... The fact is that this is an indigenous movement and all the Mujahideen commanders with me are locals... We conducted grassroots surveys for two-and-a-half months before taking this decision and we have the consent of the local people." No more evidence is required to press the case.

In the third month into the ceasefire, two facts stand out amongst the myriad of statistics floating around. There have not been any operations by the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen; and the number of security personnel killed has been halved. If these two facts by themselves do not reflect a modicum of success of the ceasefire, then those who deride the peace initiative must suffer from more than just ignorance about insurgencies.

Frank Kitson, the *guru* of counter-insurgency operations, once wrote that "wars of subversion are won and lost in the mind". A section of the Indian mind is quite clearly incapable of fighting subversion, for it seems to have given up hope in a mere three months. Lessons are clearly not being learnt from the east.

NAGA TANGLE-I

Agreements Fail To Bring Lasting Result

WAY back on 19 July 1947 Naga leader AZ Phizo met Mahatma Gandhi at Bhangi colony in New Delhi in a bid to seek the latter's support for Naga independence. Gandhiji reportedly told the Naga leader as follows: "Nagas have every right to be independent. We did not want to live under the domination of the British and they are leaving us. I want you to feel that India is yours. I feel that Naga Hills are mine just as much as they are yours; but if you say 'it is not mine' then the matter must stop there. I believe in the brotherhood of man but do not believe in the force or forced unions. If you do not wish to join the Union of India nobody will force you to do that".

This looks like being Gandhiji's language but it is not found in any of the authoritative records such as *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* published by the Government of India though minutes of Gandhiji's talks and discussions with individuals and organisations are meticulously recorded in these official publications. However, the quotation is attributed by the advocates of Naga independence to Dr Aram, a South Indian social worker, who had come to Naga Hills and set up a peace centre at Chedema near Kohima.

REBELS

If indeed Gandhiji made the above observation the rebel Nagas have a point, and their leaders have discussed the issue with representatives of Government of India from time to time in the course of the last 50 years, formally as well as informally. But so far no lasting result has emerged.

It may be recalled that the interim government at the Centre formed under the Constitution of 1937 with Jawaharlal Nehru as Premier was fully aware of the simmering Naga problem and Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel appointed an experienced ICS officer, Sir Akbar Hydari, then holding the office of secretary to the Information and Broadcasting Minister, the Governor of Assam of which Naga Hills was a district, with instructions to deal with the Naga problem on a priority basis. Accordingly, Governor Hydari met a few Naga leaders and arrived at a nine-point agreement in June 1947, the preamble to the agreement stating "the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their feeling expressed is recognised".

The accord contained nine clauses on matters of judicial, executive, legislative, land, tax-

The author is the former editor of The Assam Tribune.

By SATIS C KAKATI

ation, boundaries, Arms Act, Regulations etc. A 10-year period of time was stipulated at the end of which the agreement was to be reviewed to ensure observance of the accord and at the end of the 10-year period "the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at".

government of India did not despair of the none-too-happy situation and unilaterally declared a ceasefire and set up a peace mission comprising Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narain, Assam chief minister BP Chaliha and a British pastor, Rev Maechal Scott. But the mission suffered a setback when Rev Scott was found to have instigated surreptitiously the Nagas not to yield to any settlement short of independence. The government of India having known Rev Scott's

activities expelled him from India. Obviously this was a serious setback to peace efforts in Nagaland.

Commenting on the dissolution of the peace mission, Dr JH Hutton ICS who had served Naga Hills as deputy commissioner and was an expert on Assam tribes expressed disgust and in a letter to *The Times* (London) stated: "Both sides accuse each other of some breach of faith and that seemingly not without

apparent reason or justification". In the letter, Hutton asked the secretary-general of the United Nations, U Nu, to intervene thereby presenting the Naga problem as an international issue which, in fact, the NNC president Phizo had pleaded.

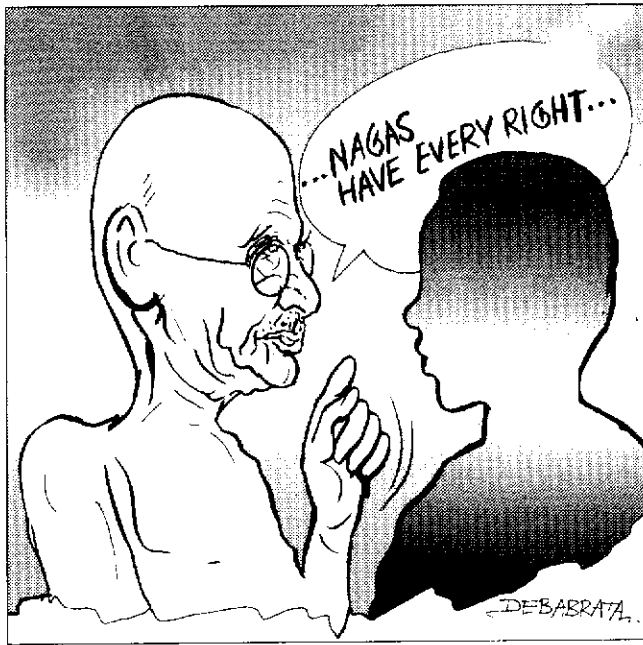
MEMORANDUM

It may be recalled that Dr Hutton while he was serving Naga Hills as deputy commissioner presented a memorandum before the Simon Commission (1928) for creation of a North-Eastern Council of small states. Later Sir Robert Reid, Governor of Assam (1937-42), advocated the acceptance of Dr Hutton's proposal for formation of a separate Province covering the tribal areas of Assam and northern Burma. It thus appears that the British Government created a wall between the hill men and plains people. Most of the hill tribes developed a feeling of un-Indianness over the years.

However, India having attained independence and the Constitution having provided autonomy for the hill men under the Sixth Schedule was seen to have met the demands of the hill tribes, but the NNC supremo Phizo was not prepared to accept anything short of independence for the Nagas.

The Mizos in south Assam too under the Mizo National Front leader Laldenga took the cue from Phizo and started the Mizo rebellion in 1966. But after 20 years of jungle life Laldenga realised the futility of an armed fight and accepted the Indian Constitution as the best means to serve the Mizo people and returned to the mainstream of India.

(To be concluded)



For unstated reasons, the 1947 agreement known as Hydari Agreement was not reviewed on the expiry of 10 years. As a result, the Naga movement under NNC chief Phizo continued. In spite of this situation another accord called the Sixteen Point Agreement was arrived at on 20 July 1960 between the Naga People Convention and the Government of India at Shillong. This accord visualised a state of the Naga Hills district to be called hereafter "a State within the Indian Union" with the inclusion of the Naga-inhabited area Tuensang of the North Eastern Frontier Agency, now Arunachal Pradesh. The new state was placed under the External Affairs Ministry with a separate Governor. Accordingly, the full-fledged state of Nagaland came into being on 1 January 1961.

PEACE CENTRE

Apparently the Naga problem was perceived to be settled once for all. But that was not so as the underground Naga leaders had insisted that the Naga issue be reviewed. The India government willy-nilly agreed to the demand and yet another agreement was signed on 11 November 1975 between the government of India and the underground leadership the Clause 3 of which read as follows: "The representatives of the underground organisation conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India." Even a peace centre was opened at Chedema where the arms and ammunition of the underground Nagas were deposited.

In spite of these agreements, the Nagas problem has not ended the rebel Nagas continuing their activities, but the

2-18-01
NOT TOO LATE 5/6
Truce with all Naga factions desirable 28/2

THE Centre and the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim have been observing a ceasefire since August 1997 with the idea of creating a congenial atmosphere for talks. Restoring peace is the ultimate aim. The Naga issue has defied solution for half a century so a final settlement will take time. But so far talks have yielded nothing substantial, the only positive outcome being the periodic extension of truce. Isak Swu and Th Muivah settled for a dialogue without any preconditions but now demand that the May 1951 plebiscite, in which an overwhelming majority of Nagas opted for independence, should form the basis for talks. Union home minister LK Advani's statement that the Centre is thinking in terms of declaring a ceasefire with two others — NSCN (Khaplang) and two factions of the Naga National Council — is a belated realisation of New Delhi's mistake in talking to one group only. Since Khaplang's men have refrained from attacking security forces for more than two years it is merely a formality. But the Centre has to be cautious that in its efforts to broaden the scope of peace talks, the NSCN-IM does not back out. The rebel leaders have repeatedly asserted that they recognise no other group and both Khaplang and the NNC must come under their banner. The crux of the matter is that none of the three represents the Naga people. The Centre cannot ignore the fact that all shades of opinion in Nagaland are for involvement of the three groups for lasting peace.

Delhi also has to take an early decision on whether or not to bring the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur under the purview of the truce as demanded by the NSCN-IM. It is a sensitive issue; acceptance means recognition of the "Greater Nagaland" concept. The best course will be to broker a separate truce in the three states. Truce or no, people in Nagaland continue to live in fear — not of being killed but of getting "love letters", a euphemism for extortion notices, from rebel outfits.

THE STATESMAN

28 FEB 2001

Defections dent NLFT

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, February 25

THE OUTLAWED National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) is not only heading for a split, but its existence too is threatened.

The outfit has been passing through a crisis as differences have cropped up among leaders on policy matters and ethnic issues. The crisis has deepened with a number of senior leaders and cadres stepping out of the group.

The NLFT — once considered one of the strongest underground outfits in the region — has conceded that it is going through problems. The banned outfit has been lying low for quite some time now. Apart from major internal differences, the offensive launched by the security forces in insurgency-torn areas has forced the group into a corner.

Though rumours about a rift in the NLFT has been doing the rounds for the past few months, the defection of dreaded guerrilla leader Nayanbasi Jamatia precipitated matters. Last week, Jamatia issued a statement citing reasons for his move. He hinted that he

would not give up underground activities — at least for the time being.

He claimed that he had opted to resign from the NLFT because of differences other leaders over key policy and operational matter.

Jamatia, alias J. Nakbar, claimed that he did not approve of the attack on a Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) camp at Kalajhari hill in the Chiitagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh killing 12 BNLF cadres. The BNLF was formed by Reang refugees who fled Mizoram to escape the atrocities of Mizos.

Jamatia, a self-style 'Major' prior to his defection, claimed four (4) RSS functionaries kidnapped from remote Dhalai district last year were killed in captivity at the behest of top NLFT leaders Mantu Koloy, Kamini Debarma and Dhanu Koloy.

Resenting the alleged attack on Bikram Bahadur Jamatia, chief of the Hoda — apex body of Jamatia tribe — the NLFT has sacrificed its secular ethos. The Hoda has been involved in an anti-insurgency campaign.

Nayanbasi fell short of saying

that serious differences had emerged in the outfit on ethnic and religious lines. This apparently was to blame for the exodus of leaders and their men.

Days after Nayanbasi parted ways with the NLFT, another top leader, Jogenra Debarma, alias D. Joshua, resigned. He was political advisor to the outfit.

While Nayanbasi is a staunch believer in traditional rituals of his tribe, Joshua is a committed Baptist.

He reportedly developed differences with other leaders over his diehard Christian stance.

The NLFT, in an apparent damage control exercise, admitted the crisis. It issued a statement signed by the outfit's publicity and information secretary, M. R. Tujang, blaming Nayanbasi and D. Joshua for the trouble. It came down heavily on Joshua for taking a staunch Christian line.

Holding him responsible for planning the attack on Hoda chief Bikram Bahadur, the statement alleged that the political adviser who had defected "was not only against other faiths but was opposed to Catholics in the State".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 FEB 2001

Nagaland ceasefire may be broadbased

By Vinay Kumar

KOHIMA, FEB. 25. The Centre is "actively considering" the proposal of the Nagaland Government to extend the ongoing three-year-old ceasefire agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-Isaac-Muivah) to two other major insurgent groups in the State.

"The State Government has been seeking a ceasefire with other insurgent groups too. We are actively considering the proposal," the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, said while addressing a joint press conference along with the Chief Minister, Mr. S.C. Jamir, here today.

This means that the Vajpayee Government could soon formally enter into a ceasefire agreement with the Khaplang faction of the NSCN and the Naga Federal Group (NFG). It could come about during the ongoing budget session of Parliament, according to indications available here. Though the NSCN(I-M) has expressed itself against the move, the Centre is most likely to rope in the NSCN(K) and the NFG into the ceasefire.

Rounding off his two-day visit with "immense satisfaction" over the climate of peace that has enthused the people of the State after a long time, Mr. Advani said: "Everyone here is talking of peace. It appears to be a season of peace in Nagaland. Adivasi organisations, NGOs, and others appear exuberant for ushering in an era of lasting peace after the insurgency of five decades." Mr. Advani quoted figures which showed that in the last six months there had been only one or two stray killings every month as against 17 killings a month prior to the ceasefire. During the three-year period preceding the ceasefire, the number of civilians and security personnel killed was 378 as against 112 since July 1997.

Cites Kashmir

He said the Centre was willing to talk to any militant group if it was ready to abjure violence and come to the negotiating table. "Peace is a dynamic force in itself. We tried to avail of it even in Jammu and Kashmir which has been in the throes of militancy for more than a decade. In Jammu and Kashmir our effort has been to build up a peace offensive within the State," Mr. Advani said drawing a parallel with the Kashmir initiative.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2001

ETHNIC TOUCH: Union home minister L.K. Advani tries on a traditional headgear of Arunachal Pradesh as chief minister Mukut Mithi looks on. (PTI)

Advani signals wider Naga truce

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Feb. 25: In an attempt to broaden the scope for peace in Nagaland, Union home minister L.K. Advani today said the Centre was considering proposals to extend the current ceasefire to other areas of the Northeast.

He said the Centre was considering the S.C. Jamir government's proposal to declare ceasefire with three other Naga outfits. The current three-and-a-half-year-old truce is between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) and the government.

Advani said a three-pronged strategy has been chalked out to expedite the peace process and weed out insurgency from the region.

Stating that the problems in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast are different, he said there could not be a uniform strategy to tackle the two situations.

"In Jammu and Kashmir, it is a state-sponsored terrorism perpetrated by our western neighbours against which we made considerable success in building world opinion," he added.

Home minister links development package to peace process

Advani said necessary assistance and co-operation were being sought from Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar to flush out northeastern militants from these countries.

Deliberating on the three-pronged approach, Advani said economic development in the region gets top priority in the Centre's scheme of things.

All Central projects — which are part of an economic package announced by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Shillong last year — are being monitored by the home ministry and the PMO, he added.

The Union minister, who was on a two-day maiden visit here, said militancy will be dealt with a firm hand, but doors will be kept open for militant groups willing to come to the negotiation table.

Advani told newsmen before leaving for New Delhi that he reviewed the law and order in the

state with Governor O.P. Sharma, the state council of ministers, government officials and representatives of several non-government organisations.

Though Advani failed to give specific information about the progress of the dialogue with the NSCN (I-M), he admitted that the process was slow. However, the Centre is in favour of speeding up the process as its priority is to restore peace in the region, he added.

He said a new battalion of Indian Reserve Battalion will be raised in the state in the next financial year. On corruption in high places in Nagaland, he said if the Supreme Court orders a CBI probe in connection with a PIL filed in the apex court, the home ministry will definitely act on it. The CBI has been reportedly conducting a probe into alleged misappropriation of funds in five government departments.

Expressing happiness over people's enthusiasm towards peace he said, "The kind of exuberance I noticed here for the past two days makes me confident that peace is really a dynamic force."

Speaking to newsmen at Patna on his way back to Delhi, Advani said peace was returning to the northeastern states, especially Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, adds our special correspondent from Patna.

The chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh has favoured extension of the term for Disturbed Area Act in two districts — Tirap and Changlang, Advani added.

Though the term of the Act was supposed to expire in March, "it will be extended for another six months," he added. The Centre, he said, would consider announcing a package of development if the peace process continued. Advani expressed concern over the spurt of ISI activities along the Indo-Nepal border and said the Centre was in touch with the countries like Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh to curb ISI activities, he added.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 FEB 2001

Three-pronged strategy to fight N-E militancy: Advani ^{HD-9}

By Vinay Kumar

KOHIMA (Nagaland), FEB. 24. Emphasising the Centre's special responsibility towards Nagaland where insurgency had gone on for over five decades, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today said the people longed for peace and looked forward to complete restoration of peace and normality in this north-eastern State.

"We want to see a climate in Nagaland where everyone can pursue his normal life and find opportunities for employment. So far as the North-East is concerned, let me assure you that New Delhi is very much concerned about the entire region and Nagaland in particular," he said here after inaugurating "Ura Bhavan", Governor's Secretariat.

Mr. Advani said the Centre was pursuing a three-pronged strategy to counter militancy in the North-East. First, the development which provides employment should be pursued vigorously. Secondly, the climate should be such where everyone felt that violence was wrong and thirdly, the political debate should focus not on ideology but on how best good and effective governance can be provided to the people.

"The choice before the people should be between parties committed to good governance and development. Speeches of political leaders do not matter, only actions count. Development programmes of a government that cares for weak and backward and its caring attitude is the touchstone," he said while

inaugurating the Spring festival on his maiden visit here.

Pointing out that the peace movement in the State was gaining momentum, the Chief Minister, Mr. S. C. Jamir, said such gains should be consolidated. "It is hoped that with the Spring festival being held at a time when the peace process is getting momentum, this happy coincidence will generate a new season of hope for the people of Nagaland," Mr. Jamir said. It was culture which appealed to the human soul as it transcended the barriers of language.

Later, Mr. Advani and Mr. Jamir addressed a well-attended public rally at Kohima local ground, a rarity in the State where the three-year-old ceasefire has held its ground.

Expressing happiness over the Centre's peace initiatives that resulted in a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (I-M), Mr. Jamir said any solution emerging out of talks with one faction of the underground groups alone might not bring lasting peace. The present peace initiative should encompass all sections of the people, whether overground or underground, so that an enduring solution could be found.

PTI adds:

Mr. Advani said the Government was successful in creating opinions all over the world against cross-border terrorism by the "enemy". The world was also convinced that restoration of peace was the need of the hour in Jammu and Kashmir.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2001

Grenade attack prompts forces to tighten security

Advani to review Naga peace

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Feb. 23: A red carpet welcome awaits Union home minister L.K. Advani, who arrives here tomorrow on a two-day maiden visit to the strife-torn state of Nagaland.

Security measures have been beefed up in and around the state capital in view of the home minister's visit.

Four more companies of the CRPF, the India Reserve Battalion and the state police have been deployed here. Frisking of vehicles, especially incoming ones, has also been intensified.

Advani is scheduled to hold a series of meetings with senior officials of the Nagaland government and Naga public leaders to take stock of the law and order situation in the state.

During his first visit after assuming office, Advani will address a public rally at the Kohima local ground and hold separate

meetings with the Governor and the chief minister.

The newly constructed Governor's secretariat at Raj Bhavan, christened Ura Academy, will be dedicated to the people of Nagaland by the home minister tomorrow at noon.

Advani will also inaugurate the three-day spring festival of arts and crafts of the Northeast, the first of its kind in the region.

He will also grace a flower show organised by the state horticulture department and inaugurate the new Administrative Training Institute complex on Sunday.

In order to ensure smooth movement of vehicles in the capital, traffic police have been deployed on all important routes.

During his meeting with the chief minister, the Governor and the Army top brass, Advani will review the latest political situation in the state in view of the revised ceasefire ground rules and

frequent peace rallies organised by non-governmental organisations in different parts of the state.

Prior to his Kohima visit, Advani will visit Roing in Arunachal Pradesh to inaugurate the Brahmaputra Darshan programme early tomorrow.

While the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) insisted that the ceasefire coverage should be extended to other Naga-inhabited areas of the region as per the revised ground rules, the Union home ministry has adopted a studied silence over the claim.

Preparations are also on to give a facelift to the state capital despite the bad weather.

Stray violence

Stray incidents of violence rocked Nagaland's commercial town Dimapur and its adjoining areas in Assam on the eve of Advani's visit to the state.

Police sources said six persons

were seriously wounded last evening when unidentified men hurled grenades on them near the Dimapur town committee building.

Dimapur police said four unidentified youth, suspected to be militants, entered a restaurant in West Yard Colony of the town and forcibly took Rs 3,000 from the cash counter.

They boarded a three-wheeler which did not have a number plate and fired in the air to scare away pedestrians.

But people in the area chased the thugs and pelted them with stones. The four fleeing youth hurled a grenade on their pursuers, injuring six seriously. All the injured were rushed to hospital, police said. A manhunt has been launched.

In separate incidents, two Assam policemen and a civilian were gunned down by suspected militants on the Assam-Nagaland border.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 FEB 2001

✓ ^{XV} Foul is fair ✓ 19/2

MANIPUR IS one state where the weird is often the ordinary. It is perhaps only in this state that a leader like Radhabinod Kojiam had to float three political fronts in as many days to become Chief Minister. First, the Samata Party members led by Mr Kojiam joined hands with the Nipamacha Singh-led United Front. The political formation which was then called the United Democratic Alliance changed only hours later to become the People's Front. Initially, Mr Kojiam staked his claim to form the Government with the support of former Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh. When the Central leaders forced both Samata and BJP leaders to swallow a bitter pill by asking them to join hands once again to keep Nipamacha Singh out, Mr Kojiam was forced to stake his claim afresh. The present dispensation consists of all members of the state Assembly except former Chief Minister Rishang Keishing who has chosen to remain neutral.

In 1995, when Mr Keishing was installed as Chief Minister, he thought he had found a magic formula to keep his flock together. He inducted as many as 28 MLAs into his ministry. It took only four months before nine legislators withdrew their support and he could save his chair thanks to a friendly Governor. Nipamacha Singh, who had masterminded a political coup against Mr Keishing, went a step further and inducted as many as 31 MLAs as ministers, 27 of them as Cabinet ministers. The absurdity to which the concept of representative Government has been reduced in Manipur has few parallels.

In 1977, most Congress members and the entire Manipur People's Party merged with the Janata Party to form a non-Congress Government. In 1980, the Congress won only 13 seats but managed to form the Government, eventually increasing its strength to 44. In 1995, Mr Keishing too lured members of the Opposition to his side and the strength of the ruling front rose to 35. The survival of Chief Ministers has come to depend as much on their political skills as on their ability to utilise the instrumentalities of the State to advance their narrow political goals. The Central grants and assistance are hardly put to productive use as much of it goes only to line the pockets of politicians and middlemen. Most political leaders cultivate links with insurgent groups to use it as a bargaining point vis-a-vis the Centre. Sharp differences between the BJP and Samata in the state may have been patched up for the time being, but in the highly fractured politics of Manipur, stability may once again elude its Government.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 FEB 2001

Consider N-E insurgency a national problem: Manik

517 STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, Feb. 17. — Mr Manik Sarkar has repeated his demand for considering the North-east's escalating rebellion as part of the national problem. The Tripura chief minister said like in Jammu and Kashmir, the fighting against insurgency in the North-east must be given a national priority.

Addressing the opening ceremony of the three-day North-east Tribal Youth Festival here today, he said the chief ministers of the North-east states had earlier floated a forum to bring pressure on the Centre to tackle the insurgency problem.

A chief ministers' delegation earlier met the Prime Minister to place a memorandum. Mr Vajpayee was urged to treat the region's militancy problem as a national problem and give it national priority.

Mr Sarkar said both in J&K and the North-east, the ISI-backed insurgents were indulg-

ing in killing, depredations and sabotages. North-east rebels were receiving funds and arms from foreign agencies. Militants were being trained in camps across international boundaries to threaten the regional integrity and destabilise the situation in the region in a meticulously-planned manner. The Centre was yet to come forward to help governments in the North-east to tackle insurgency effectively, Mr Sarkar deplored.

Mr Sarkar issued a renewed appeal to the militants to shun violence and return to the mainstream.

The senseless violence by the armed rebel groups was seriously telling upon the process of the region's socio-economic development. Many educational institutions had closed down when development work had come to a standstill in Tripura's hill areas under intensified rebel pressure, he said.

The Tripura Governor, General KM Seth (ret'd) inaugurated the festival.

THE STATESMAN

18 FEB 2001

Koijam faces a tough task

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, Feb. 17. — Mr Radhabinod Koijam faces his first ever major challenge since he was sworn in as Manipur's chief minister on 15 February — that of pleasing his 57 supporters of the effective strength of 59, with ministerial berths.



Mr R Koijam

If the development is anything to go by the task is not going to be an easy one. Already it's

major partner, the MSCP, which restructured itself yesterday, is flexing its muscles claiming a strength of 31 MLAs.

The MSCP which was torn apart in the recent struggle for power made attempts to patch itself up with the Speaker, Dr Dhananjay, and the Union minister for state for food processing, Mr Th Chaoba taking the initiative. Twenty-three members of the party yesterday held a meeting and after much soul searching decided that the MSCP MLAs should unite. The members decided to forget the past and forgive each other and resolved to pull in the eight other

MLAs including former chief minister Mr W Nipamacha Singh, and Dr L Chandramani and get back to its original strength of 31.

Speaking to the press after the meeting, Mr Th Chaoba said the number of supporters for Mr Koijam has risen to 57 from the earlier 45 which was submitted to the Governor. The Federal Party of Manipur had also decided to extend its support to the Samata-led government and even offered to be a member of the coalition.

Mr Chaoba said, "This would now make the new People's Front Government more stable." However,

a lot depends on the MSCP as it had 31 members, he added.

On whether he will ask for more share of ministerial berths now that he had increased his number, he said he would leave it to the wisdom of the new chief minister. Allocating portfolios is the chief minister's prerogative, he said.

This move has not in any way made it easier for Mr Koijam as he juggles to put a working government in place. He is said to be under pressure from the Centre to restrict the number in his ministry. It is also reported that despite the BJP state unit's assurances to the contrary,

Mr Koijam resisted swearing in the 29 Opposition MLAs.

This set of an alarm bell in the Opposition camp.

Opposition camp sources said it was an open secret what Mr Koijam was after.

He was out to consolidate his party's position in the coalition to prevent its major partner having all the say, they said.

The MSCP move is also seen as an attempt to stymie any move by Mr Koijam to increase his numbers at the expense of MSCP.

Mr Th Chaoba, however, said it would make no attempt to pull out.

THE STATESMAN

18 FEB 2001

New Manipur CM promises peace, economic development

P.P. Singh

IMPHAL 16 FEBRUARY

A long period of political one-upmanship between the Samata party leader Radha Binod Kojiam was sworn in as the chief minister of this remote and trouble-torn state of Manipur by the state governor Ved Prakash Marwah in a simple and hurriedly called swearing-in-ceremony at the Raj Bhawan Durbar Hall on Thursday.

Mr Kojiam supporting the Khamen Yarpa Phi was the lone person to have been sworn in giving rise to speculations that all is not well in the "multi-party government under the newly formed People's Front" which some called the "politicians front" with 57 out of the effective 59 members of the Assembly in it and the only INC leader and former chief minister Rishang Keishing remaining the lone ranger of the Opposition.

Mr Kojiam talking to this correspondent informed that his first priority would be to invite

ministers have not been sworn in on Friday, he said they are still to discuss the matter within their Front but when asked about the size of his Cabinet he said "this is the first all-party government in India where people are talking of National government which he was sure will also support him). As far as the size of the ministry is concerned it will neither be a jumbo ministry nor a mini one to accommodate every one and seeing the economic condition of the state they will take the mid-way." He ruled out any differences within the Front on the allocation of the portfolios but at the same time refused to comment whether he will have a deputy chief minister or not.



Manipur chief minister Radha Binod Kojiam is being sworn in by Manipur and Mizoram governor Ved Prakash Marwah at the Raj Bhawan on Thursday. — PTI

the various militant groups operating in the state "for finding a political solution to their grievances." He said the problem of insurgency cannot be solved by use of force alone and there is need for a political dialogue coupled with economic development in the state which has been neglected all these years.

Asked to comment on why other members of his council of

P. P. Singh

IMPHAL 16 FEBRUARY

FORMER CHIEF minister and Congress MLA Rishang Keishing, who will now form the Opposition in the 59-member Manipur Assembly, has said there was an urgent need for amending the elected representatives Act making it mandatory for those leaving their original party to seek a fresh mandate.

Mr Keishing felt these people have not only let down their party but also the voters to whom they had made promises on the basis of a particular party manifesto.

The veteran Congressman, who started his career in 1947 under the Socialist Party, felt the governor should have played a better role. He also said the role of the chief election commissioner, Dr M S Gill, was more important in a parliamentary democracy. Mr Keishing added the anti-defection law was of no significance if it only encouraged creation of smaller groups which subsequently form new political parties for their convenience.

Keishing wants defectors to seek fresh mandate in Manipur

Mr Keishing said the large number of political parties this time played hell with democracy as some of the MLAs, even before they took oath, defected from their parties. He said MNP had four elected MLAs and three of them left the party even before taking oath. Similar was the case with NCP and RJD.

Coming down heavily on the BJP and Samata Party, Mr Keishing said those who talk of value-based politics have forgotten it in Manipur. Otherwise, how could the present chief minister, Mr Radha Binod Kojiam, who was with the ruling front on one day, be accepted in the Opposition front the next day. Mr Keishing blamed the two parties for encouraging defections and counter-defections in the state.

Meanwhile, Union minister of state for food processing Chaoba Singh, who is also the working president of MSCP, told reporters on Friday that they are likely to take back the eight unattached MLAs including former chief minister W Nipamacha Singh thus taking their total to 31 in a House of 59 thus giving them absolute majority.

ABSU meeting to discuss stir for separate Bodo state

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, February 15

THE FATE of the Bodo statehood movement is likely to be decided at the three-day annual convention of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), being held at Barama in Nalbari district.

Prior to commencement of the convention, ABSU president U G Brahma told *The Hindustan Times*, the students' body had decided to go slow on its agitation programme in view of ongoing peace talks between the Centre and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).

The BLT, a pro-statehood militant outfit unlike the secessionist National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), had declared truce with the Government in April last year.

Brahma, however, deplored the Centre's indifference to the Bodoland cause, particularly after creation of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttaranchal.

"A time will come when the Bodo people will lose their patience," he said, hinting at revival of the statehood movement after the ABSU convention.

The crucial annual convention is also a cause for concern for the State Government owing to the threat to lives of ABSU leaders and heads of other Bodo organisations from the outlawed NDFB.

The highlights of Thursday's programme were two discussions. While one was on the 'Future of human rights amidst the arms struggle and extremism', the other was 'Challenges posed by the new economic order to downtrodden

communities like the Bodos'.

Leaders of other students' organisations like All Assam Students' Union president Prabin Boro and Tulshi Manas Rabha of the All Rabha Students' Union also attended the meeting.

The Bodoland movement began in 1967 when Bodo leaders demanded a separate Udayachal State.

Despite losing steam afterwards the movement began with renewed vigour in the late 80s.

Things have been relatively quiet following the signing of the Bodo Accord in 1995.

ABSU general secretary Nathuram Boro said the convention had attracted a sea of humanity, apart from more than a thousand delegates from the students' body.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 FEB 2001

Samata with Opposition again in Manipur

Kojiam claims majority; Speaker adjourns House sine die

HT Correspondent
Imphal, February 14

RADHABINOD KOIJAM, State Samata leader and Chief Minister-in-waiting has once again shifted his loyalty to the Opposition camp with feverish horse-trading on in Manipur's fast changing political scenario.

The newly elected leader of the new Peoples' Front Radhabinod Kojiam has submitted a list of six parties with 45 MLAs, claiming their support. In a letter to the Governor, Radhabinod Kojiam claimed to have a comfortable majority to be in a position to form a stable Government. The new front claims to have six BJP MLAs, 12 Janata Party MLAs, 23 MSCP MLAs (excluding the Chief Minister and seven other MLAs kept in unattached status), one Janata Dal (S) MLA, two Nationalist Congress Party MLAs and one MLA from the Manipur Peoples' Party.

In his letter to the Governor, Kojiam said, "I command a major-

ity and am in a position to form a stable Government. I may accordingly be invited to form the Government."

Kojiam also submitted a joint letter by the six constituents of the People's Front.

A copy of the letter issued to the press said a meeting of presidents and leaders of legislature groups "unanimously" elected Kojiam as leader of the PF.

The letter was signed by Samata Party president O Lohrii, JD (S) general secretary K H Loken, BJP president M Bhorot Singh, NCP president's Tiken Singh, MSCP working president Chaoba Singh and Manipur People's Party president O Joy Singh, adds PTI.

A meeting of the presidents and leaders of the Legislative groups of the parties was held at the BJP office and a decision to form the new common front was taken.

The front has also decided to have a common minimum programme and to draw up an action plan for the programme. A coordination committee consisting of

presidents and legislature leaders of the six parties would be formed, it was agreed.

Meanwhile, the Governor's Secretariat has issued a communiqué informing that Ved Prakash Marwah had received Radhabinod Kojiam's new claim to form a stable Government in view of the current volatile political atmosphere in Manipur.

Governor Ved Marwah had accepted Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh's resignation but asked him to continue as caretaker till necessary arrangements were made. The Assembly Session was held on Wednesday without the Chief Minister's team, including the Samata Party leaders, attending the proceedings, for just 40 minutes.

The Speaker adjourned the House sine die after receipt of the Chief Minister's resignation.

In a late night development, the four MLA-strong Federal Party of Manipur, a constituent of the then Nipamacha-led Government, joined the new Peoples' Front.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 FEB 2001

Manipur House to take up no-trust motion tomorrow

By Our Correspondent

IMPHAL, FEB. 12. A special session of the Manipur Assembly is convened for Wednesday (February 14) by the Speaker, Mr. Sapam Dhananjay, to dispose of the pending no-confidence motion against the United Front Ministry headed by Mr. W. Nipamacha.

The Assembly Secretariat has received a request from Mr. Thounaojam Chaoba, working president of the ruling MSCP and Union Minister of State for Food Processing, to treat the Chief Minister, Mr. Nipamacha, and seven Ministers as unattached members since they had been expelled from the party.

The Speaker said the seating arrangement in the House would change in view of the new scenario. Eight other MSCP members have joined the Opposition. Six of them who were Ministers submitted resignations to the Chief Minister today stating that they had lost confidence in his leadership. Two others held non-Ministerial posts which were of the Cabinet status. If the Chief Minister and seven others expelled by Mr. Chaoba are treated as unattached members, the present Ministry cannot survive. Apart from the eight members who have deserted the 30-member MSCP to join the Opposition, a good number of the remaining members are sending feelers to follow suit.

Meanwhile, the Nipamacha camp has sent a message expelling Mr. Chaoba and two others to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and the NDA convener,

Mr. George Fernandes, and requested them to drop Mr. Chaoba from the Union Ministry as he is no longer a member of the MSCP, an NDA partner.

Mr. Nipamacha maintains that his expulsion from the party by Mr. Chaoba is not valid. According to him, the post of working president held by Mr. Chaoba is not an elected one and so the latter has no right to expel the president (Nipamacha). But both claim that the decisions were arrived at in separate executive council meeting of the party. Mr. Nipamacha and the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chandramani, today said that their team continued to enjoy majority and claimed that the eight MSCP MLAs who had deserted him had not tendered their resignations.

CMs meet on power reforms in March

SURATGARH (Rajasthan), FEB. 12. The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, will convene a meeting of all the State Chief Ministers on the implementation of power reforms in New Delhi on March 3, the Union Energy Minister, Mr. Suresh Prabhu, said here today.

After laying the foundation stone of the fifth unit of 250 Mw super-thermal power station, Mr. Prabhu told a gathering that leaders of all political parties would also be invited to attend the meeting. — PTI

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THE HINDU

13 FEB 2001

Manipur CM
expelled
from party

By Our Correspondent

IMPHAL, FEB. 11. Mr. Th. Chaoba, Union Minister of State for Food Processing, in his capacity as working president of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), today expelled the Chief Minister, Mr. W. Nipamacha, the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. L. Chandramani, and five other Ministers from the party for six years for "anti-party activities". Hectic parleys are on within the opposition Manipur Democratic Front (MDF) to choose a new leader.

A meeting of the executive council of the MSCP, attended by 11 out of 17 members, also decided to support the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre. In the House with an effective strength of 59, Mr. Nipamacha's support has reduced to 27, and his Ministry has lost majority. The MDF now has 31 members. Mr. Rishang Keishing remains neutral.

But the eight-member faction of the MSCP led by the Sports Minister, Mr. M. Hemanta, — whose withdrawal of support has reduced the Ministry to a minority — lacks the minimum required one-third majority to split the party.

THE HINDU

12 FEB 2001

Six Manipur ministers resign

Chaoba faction elects M Hemanta leader; House to reconvene on Wednesday

HT Correspondent
Imphal, February 12

SIX MANIPUR ministers and the deputy chairman (planning) who are among the eight MLAs who deserted the ruling camp and crossed over to the Opposition camp on Sunday, have submitted their resignation from their respective posts to the Governor Ved Prakash Marwah, working president of the majority ruling alliance partner Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) announced on Monday evening during a press conference. The Speaker has reconvened the

House on February 14 next. Chaoba, who is also the Union Minister of State for Food Processing, announced that all eight MLAs who had joined the Opposition camp had also withdrawn support from the Nipamacha-led United Front ministry. He said a Manipur Democratic Front Government would replace the Nipamacha ministry very soon. He said he still enjoyed the support of 22 MSCP MLAs barring the CM and seven others 'expelled' MLAs.

He said though he had only eight MLAs with him in the camp, 14 were still being held 'captive' at the

Nipamacha camp. He also announced that the MSCP would join the MDF. The legislature party meeting of the Chaoba faction of the MSCP on Monday had elected Sports Minister M Hemanta as its leader. Chaoba said, Chaoba's brother Th. Bra has been elected the MSCP Legislature Party chief whip. I. Jatra is the MSCP LP convenor. One of the likely contenders for the Chief Minister's post, R K Dorendor, who attended the conference said the leadership option was still open and someone would be democratically elected after the Nipamacha Government was top-

pled. The Chief Minister on the other hand claimed that he still commanded the support of 35 MLAs and said the Speaker was on his side. He said he had appointed the working president (Chaoba), and the latter had no moral right to expel his appointer. He said that the party had urged the Vajpayee Government through a fax message on February 12 to relieve Chaoba of his post at the Centre.

With the summoning of the House on February 14, it is likely that the no-confidence motion against the Nipamacha ministry will be disposed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
13 FEB 2001

Nipamacha govt loses majority

Imphal

11 FEBRUARY

THE 11-MONTH-OLD Nipamacha Singh ministry in Manipur was reduced to minority following a split in Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), lead partner of ruling United Legislature Front (ULF), with the breakaway group withdrawing support to the alliance and expelling the chief minister and six ministers from the party.

On a day of dramatic developments, sports minister M. Hemanta Singh and seven other MLAs broke ranks from 31-member MSCP legislature party and announced withdrawal of support to Nipamacha ministry reducing its strength to 27 in the 60-member House with an effective strength of 59.

Soon afterwards, Union minister and MSCP working president Chaoba Singh, who rushed here from Delhi, presided over a meeting of the party's central committee which expelled the chief minister and six ministers from primary membership of the party for "anti-party" activities.

The others expelled were deputy chief minister L. Chandramani Singh, urban development minister P. Achou Singh, information minister M. Kunjo Singh, agriculture minister S. Rajen, tribal development minister, Samuel Jendai and irrigation and flood control minister Ksh. Biren Singh.

The MSCP is now left with 22 MLAs in the House as Speaker S. Dhanjoy Singh has already fallen out with the chief minister. In fact, the stand-off between the two leaders nearly three months ago had triggered convulsions in the ULF and con-

sequent political turmoil in Manipur.

Supporters of Hemanta Singh held talks at the residence of the Speaker.

Chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh and other "expelled" ministers were not immediately available for comments. Chaoba Singh told reporters here that the decision to expel the seven MSCP members were taken at the party's central executive committee meeting on Sunday afternoon. He claimed 11 of the 17 executive committee members attended the meeting.

The meeting also decided that MSCP would remain as a constituent of the NDA in the Centre, in sharp contrast to pro-Nipamacha faction's decision to pull out of NDA protesting remarks by some BJP leaders favouring President's Rule in Manipur.

With Nipamacha government in minority, hectic parleys got underway in the splinter MSCP group as well as the five-party Opposition combine Manipur Democratic Front (MDF) for sewing up an alternative.

Chaoba Singh, considered a front runner for chief minister-ship, said the legislators belonging to his group would soon elect their leader and consult MDF to choose a common candidate to lead the "new government."

The opinion in MDF appears to be divided on the choice of the leader of the alternative. MDF sources said Samata Party with 12 MLAs wanted its leader Radhabinod Koiyam to head a new dispensation. But BJP with six MLAs felt it should lead the MDF since it also led the NDA at the Centre, they added. —PTI

The Economic Times

12 FEB 2001

Nipamacha, Speaker refuse to break ice

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Feb. 9: Manipur Speaker Sapam Dhananjoy today said chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh was not co-operating with him for reconvening the Assembly session.

The winter session was adjourned *sine die* on December 1 last year by the Speaker after admitting a no-confidence motion against the Nipamacha Singh-led United Front of Manipur ministry. The clash between the treasury and Opposition members that day had considerably damaged the Assembly hall.

The Speaker, meanwhile, despatched a copy of Governor Ved Marwah's message to all the 60 members. The Governor sent a message to the Speaker on Wednesday directing him to immediately reconvene the winter session or face serious consequences.

Dhananjoy said the relation between the ruling and Opposition members was still tense and this was hampering his efforts to



Nipamacha: Passing the buck

reconvene the House. Despite the Speaker's assurance, his office did not indicate any probable date for reconvening the House.

After the Governor's warning to both Nipamacha Singh and Dhananjoy, political observers here predicted Raj Bhavan would take the drastic step of dissolving the House and imposing President's rule in the state. The way Mar-

wah issued the warning instead of proroguing the House clearly indicated that the Governor was annoyed. Several political leaders, who are now engaged in the current political battle, also did not rule out such a possibility. Sources said Marwah was extremely agitated over the way both the chief minister and the Speaker ignored his earlier messages.

Nipamacha Singh has welcomed the Governor's directive to the Speaker on reconvening the House. He said reconvening the House was the responsibility of the Speaker and ruling parties should not be blamed for the current impasse.

The chief minister said if the winter session is not reconvened, the House should be prorogued by the Governor so that a fresh session could be summoned.

Questioning the Speaker's refusal to reconvene the session, he criticised the Opposition parties for the standoff. Nipamacha Singh said he does not need to meet the Speaker for reconvening the session.

'Talks only if Ulfa shuns violence'

Measures likely to remove backwardness, unemployment 6/2

Utpal Parashar
Guwahati, February 5

UNION HOME Minister L K Advani said on Monday that cessation of violence by the Ulfa was the only precondition for truce in the State.

Addressing a press conference, Advani said, "The Ulfa should also initiate negotiation." Advani added that if the Ulfa were hesitant they would be dealt with an iron fist by the security forces.

The Home Minister further detailed the Government's four-point strategy to combat terrorism in the country. "Firstly, our approach is to deal with terrorism with a firm hand. Secondly, we will endeavour to eradicate economic backwardness and unemployment, which are the key problems leading to terrorist activities in the



Union Home Minister L K Advani at a press conference in Guwahati on Monday. Photo: Utpal Baruah.

State. Thirdly, to mobilise world opinion against Pakistan sponsored terrorism. Finally, look for-

ward for peace talks provided militants abandon violence," he said. Advani stressed that there would

be no similarity between the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir and the one in Assam.

Advani was questioned about the extension of ceasefire with the NSCN(I-M) beyond Nagaland, to parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. He said that the opinion of the State Governments would be taken into account before anything materialises about extension of ceasefire in the States. He added that talks with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) were progressing well in the State.

The Home Minister denied speculations on setting up of a judicial commission to probe nexus between some Assam politicians and militant outfits. The minister also appreciated the role of the Assam Government in taking stalk of the knotty situation in the State.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 FEB 2001

Advani in Assam today to study scene before polls

BY OUR CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI AND GUWAHATI

Feb. 3: The law-and-order situation in Assam will come under a serious scrutiny by the Centre ahead of the May Assembly elections when Union home minister L.K. Advani visits the state on Sunday to take stock of the situation.

During his two-day visit, Mr Advani will hold discussions on the security situation with Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and governor Lt Gen. SK Sinha (retired) at length.

He will also visit the Upper Assam districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Nagaon. Mr Advani is scheduled to address three public rallies in Tinsukia and Nagaon and at Mirza near Guwahati.

While making a statement on the Assam situation in the Parliament during the winter session, the home minister had announced that he would personally visit the state to assess the situation at the ground level. Mr Advani had made the statement following an escalation of violence in the state and killing of a large number of non-Assamese people by the militant outfits, primarily the United Liberation Front of Asom. At least 100 people were killed within a span of ten days.

The home minister was due to

visit the state in the latter half of January. However, he postponed his visit following the death of senior BJP leader Vijayaraje Scindia. After that, Mr Advani got preoccupied with the relief and rehabilitation process in the earthquake-hit state of Gujarat.

Following the quake, Mr Advani had also cancelled his two proposed trips abroad.

According to sources, besides taking stock of the law-and-order situation in the troubled state, Mr Advani is also to launch his party's campaign for the forthcoming Assembly election.

In Guwahati, the banned Ulfa and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland have jointly called 12 hours' Assam bandh on Sunday in protest against the visit of the Mr Advani.

In a joint statement signed by NDFB chairman D.R. Nabla, the banned outfits also appealed to the people to boycott all programmes of the home minister.

Meanwhile, there are possibilities of Mr Advani announcing a major policy initiative for bringing the Ulfa to the negotiation table following softening of stand by the outfit. The home minister's trip to Assam follows visits by senior Union home ministry officials to the region to streamline the security network so as to tackle the spurt in militant activities.

THE ASIAN AGE

4 FEB 2001

Assam Cong chief wants CBI probe into 'secret killings'

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, February 1

HT 2
THE ASSAM Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has demanded a CBI inquiry into the 'secret killings' going on in the State.

Addressing a press conference, APCC chief Tarun Gogoi alleged that the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government headed by Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was responsible for 'eliminating many people in the State through extra judicial killings.'

"The AGP Government has for-

gotten that the people of Assam know who have been perpetuating these killings in Assam," said Gogoi. The AGP leaders had earlier alleged that the Congress was responsible for the carnage. Gogoi said that the AGP had forgotten the vehement protest after the murder of Jyotish Sharma, a Gauhati University employee related to Ulfa leader Subhas Sharma.

He added that the Congress would oppose the Government's decision to present a full Budget in the Assembly in February. Constitutionally there was no prob-

lem with that, but as the term of the present Assembly would expire in two months, democratic ethics demanded that only a part Budget was presented, he said. Gogoi asserted that his party would win more than two-thirds of the seats in the 126-member Assembly and form the next Government. There have been rumours that the BJP and the AGP would tie up for the ensuing polls. Both the BJP and AGP have denied any such prospect. "The refutation is a result of threats issued by AGP's coalition parties," the APCC chief said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 FEB 2001

Sinha firm on dialogue within constitutional framework

Assam hardens talks stand

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Feb. 7: The budget session of the Assam Assembly began here today with Governor Lt. Gen. (retd) S.K. Sinha spelling out a harsher pre-condition for talks with militant outfits of the state.

In his inaugural address, Gen. Sinha said the government wanted a peaceful solution to the insurgency problem "at any time and any place," but the "talks should be within the framework of the Constitution".

"The integrity of our country is not negotiable," he added.

During his visit to the state last week, Union home minister L.K. Advani had said the Centre was willing to hold talks with the militants, specially the Ufa, once they stopped the killings.

The Governor said efforts would be made to "consolidate the gains of the previous years" by keeping up the pressure on the militants, but the door for dialogue would be kept open at the same time to find a lasting solution to the problem.

The Opposition Congress set the tone for the coming days of the budget session by creating a din as soon as the Governor started reading out his speech. Leader of the Opposition Silvius Condpan accused Sinha of acting as the "de facto chief minister and not as the constitutional head".

Taking a cue from their leader, other Congress members rushed to the Well of the House. They shouted slogans and waved placards to register their protest against the AGP-led government's decision to present a full-fledged budget ahead of the Assembly elections in April-May.

The Congress wants chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who also holds the finance portfo-



PLANNING AHEAD: Assam Speaker Ganesh Kutum entering the Assembly in Guwahati on Wednesday. Picture by Eastern Projections

lio, to present a vote-on-accounts.

The Congress Legislature Party had earlier submitted a memorandum to the Governor, urging him to advise the government not to go ahead with the presenting of a full-fledged budget. The ruling AGP, however, said there was no constitutional bar on presenting a full-fledged budget by an outgoing government.

One of the placards carried by a Congress member read "Good-bye AGP," indicating the party's belief that it will form the next

government in less than three months.

Claiming that the law-and-order situation had improved significantly, Gen. Sinha said the concerted and sustained operations launched by the Unified Command had resulted in improvement in the overall scene.

"The fight against the militants will be carried out by my government with greater resolve and determination and with the active support of the common masses," he added.

Significantly, Gen. Sinha was

totally silent on the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act. He only said the government was fully committed to check the illegal infiltration and to ensure that no inconvenience was caused to genuine Indian citizens in the process of detection and deportation.

Underlining the importance of planned development, the Governor said the state had been facing acute financial constraints for the past few years and its non-plan expenditure had also grown considerably.

THE TELEGRAM

- 8 FEB 2001

BARREN CHARADE

5/10 Ulfa leaders must initiate talks a/v

ULFA leaders must stop their barren charade of sending occasional hints to the media expressing a willingness to talk and instead employ purposeful feelers. They have no reason to accuse the Centre of not being interested in dialogue because they are the ones who turned tail after the preliminary meeting in December 1991 following the unilateral declaration of a ceasefire. Any initiative, therefore, must come from them. In the face of all that has happened over the past nine years the conclusion is inescapable that Ulfa leaders are insincere and unpredictable. The dropping of the precondition that talks be held in a foreign country under UN supervision is welcome, but they still harp on sovereignty, which has lost its emotional appeal in the changed realities. Even Naga rebel leaders who asserted Nagaland had never been part of India and should be accepted as an independent and sovereign state are now engaged in finding a solution. Hundreds of Ulfa men have surrendered and more are coming over, weakening the movement. If recent killings of non-Assamese was intended to provoke a backlash, it has not worked. 9-11-01

LK Advani's precondition that violence must stop before any talks should put the Ulfa leaders in a tizzy. He said nothing about whether sovereignty can be discussed about which two Home Ministry officials have made contradictory remarks. Sovereignty is not an option and pretending that it just may be as a means of luring them to the negotiating table is poor strategy and will cause complications later. Advani claims his visit to Assam this week was to take stock of law and order, in which case the only comment possible is that it comes too late. He should have come in October-November when the situation was really bad following the massacres of non-Assamese. His visit served the purpose of addressing two party rallies at Tinsukia and Nagaon, notwithstanding the bandh called by Ulfa-Bodo militants in protest, and was more of an election tour.

THE STATESMAN

9 FEB 2001

N-E militants train their guns on media

Hoihnu Hauzel
New Delhi, January 31

SENKA AO, editor of *Ao Milen*, a vernacular paper in Nagaland which publishes 5,000-6,000 copies, was abducted and handcuffed for 24 hours in 1995. His crime was his refusal to publish five press releases given by an underground outfit on the front page. On another occasion, he received a letter stating that 20 copies of his paper should be delivered at insurgency camps in Nagaland.

In October 1999, Lalrohly, editor of a daily from Manipur, was killed by rebels and in the next year, Brajamani Singh, editor of *Manipur News*, was murdered. All because they dared to disobey the diktat of militants.

Media in the Northeast functions under more precarious situations than this. At a day-long seminar on Sunday at the IIC, organised by the India International Centre and Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, more than 11 senior media persons from the Northeast attended and spoke at length on their problems.

While each state has a unique problem, militant-prone areas like Nagaland, Manipur and Assam have similar problems. "Insurgents have realised that the media can be used to communicate their thoughts to the public. So, on routine basis the print media receives news releases from these organisations. Newspapers generally oblige to steer clear of trouble," said Pradeep Phanjaban, editor of *Inphal Free Press*.

an English daily in Manipur. "However, at times, movements of insurgency groups are of vital importance as it has direct bearing on lives of people, who live in perpetual fear," he said.

Shillong, which has been peaceful so far, is also under pressure now. On one occasion, *Shillong Times*, an English daily started in 1945, could not function for 15 days because of pressure from students, who wanted a letter to be published, but were not obliged. "At one time, our Tura office was gheraoed by a students group, who would not even let us function," said Manas Choudhury, the editor.

G D Wangsu, editor of *The Dawn-Lit Post* in Arunachal Pradesh, said, "Everybody who gives a press release wants to meet the editor. People know more of their rights than responsibilities."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 FEB 2001

138 militants surrender in Assam

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, JAN. 26. As many as 138 militants surrendered with their arms before the Assam Governor, Lt.-Gen. (retd.) S.K. Sinha, at a Republic Day function here this morning.

Of them, 123 belonged to United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), nine to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), two to the Rabha National Security Force (RNSF) and four to the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA).

The people totally rejected the call given by the ULFA and several other militant outfits in the region to boycott the Republic Day celebrations. For the first time on a Republic Day, private buses plied, vehicular traffic was normal and shops were open.

The Governor, who took the salute, recounted the success achieved by the Government in curbing insurgency. He said the ULFA had massacred over 100 Hindi-speaking people last year at the behest of Pakistan's ISI so that the "land of panicky people leaving the State" could be occupied by illegal migrants.

PTI reports:

Tripura Governor's appeal

A report from Agartala said The Tripura Governor, Lt. Gen. (retd.) K.M. Seth, appealed to the insurgents to shun violence and join the mainstream to help in building a prosperous State. "The insurgents are misguided youth, who are on the wrong track which will lead them nowhere except to self-destruction" as nothing could be achieved by violence, Mr. Seth said in a Republic Day



One of the 138 ultras belonging to various militant outfits in Assam surrendering before the Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, and the Chief Minister, Mr. P.K. Mahanta, during the Republic Day celebrations in Guwahati on Friday. — PTI (Report on Page 15)

message.

He said subversive elements were trying to break the bonds of amity between tribals and non-tribals and the people should thwart their designs collectively.

Sikkim — a role model

In Gangtok, the Sikkim Governor, Chaudhury Randhir Singh, unfurled the national flag and took the salute at a colourful marchpast at the Paljor stadium.

Four platoons of the Sikkim armed police, one platoon each of the Central Industrial Security Force, the state police and homeguards took part in the march-

past. Some defence equipment was also on display.

In his message, the Governor lauded the people of Sikkim for making the hill State a 'role model' in the country for communal harmony.

Later, Mr. Singh made the first local telephone call to Siliguri.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Pawan Chamling, in a message earlier, called upon the people to join hands to evolve a 'national spirit and sense of togetherness'.

Insurgency in Arunachal

In Itanagar, the Arunachal Pradesh Governor, Mr. Arvind Dave,

unfurled the tricolour at the Indira Gandhi parade ground and took the salute at a marchpast presided by the police, the CRPF, the NCC, scouts and guides and school children. He said the State was known as an island of peace but insurgency in Tirap and Changlang districts bordering Myanmar and Nagaland alarmed the administration.

He urged the people to be more vigilant against divisive forces and not to harbour them at any cost.

'Protect peace in Mizo'

In Aizawl, the Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr. Zoramthanga, hoisted the national flag and asked the people to protect the peace in the State. He addressed the people at the R-Day function as the Governor, Mr. Ved Prakash Marwah, who is also in charge of Manipur, is in Imphal.

Militants' accomplices warned

In Kohima, the Nagaland Governor, Mr. O.P. Sharma, warned that those harbouring militants in the State would have to face serious consequences. Those serving as "support links" for militant outfits were accomplices in crimes like murder and extortion and would have to face the consequences, he said during the Republic Day function at the local ground.

Armed groups of militants and anti-social elements who had taken to violence and crime continued to jeopardise the "fragile peace" prevailing in the State, he added.

THE HINDU

27 JAN 2001

Talking to ULFA

IF THE north-eastern region has become synonymous with insurgency and remained on the margins of national politics, it is not for its small size or ethnic complexities alone. In recent years, the three successive Governments at the Centre have come up with economic packages for the region. Both H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral undertook a week-long visit of the North-east nearly covering all the states. The Vajpayee Government too has shown an eagerness to tackle the problem of militancy, with the Prime Minister maintaining that the Government was willing to consider amendments to the Constitution to solve the problem. The ongoing peace talks with the NSCN militants in Nagaland and the cease-fire in the state for the last two-and-a-half years have raised hopes that a similar peace overture towards ULFA militants may also yield the desired results. But a determination to pursue the matter is lacking.

The Centre has sent occasional feelers to ULFA receiving a favourable response. A Joint Secretary in the Union Home Ministry recently acknowledged that "we had some discussion in Kathmandu also". Initially, Paresh Barua showed an inclination to hold talks, but when he backtracked, the Centre let it be known that it was prepared for a dialogue with the moderate elements in ULFA. While the ULFA militants have suffered an erosion in their support base, the average Assamese people are becoming disillusioned with mindless violence perpetrated by them. The *bandh* culture too has caused resentment among them. The old anti-Centre card is no longer effective. But more than anything else, the ongoing talks with the Naga insurgents have prompted the ULFA leaders to take a fresh look at their strategies.

To some extent, their flip-flop about negotiations is natural. No one believes that any government worth its salt will ever be prepared to talk with ULFA on the question of 'sovereignty'. If the issue is nevertheless being raised from time to time, it is presumably only as a bargaining point. The talks with NSCN and the Bodo Liberation Tigers have undoubtedly created a momentum. If peace has prevailed in Mizoram since 1986 because of the sincerity with which both sides implemented the accord, there is no reason why the same result cannot be achieved in Assam and Nagaland. But it requires a more purposeful effort than what has been tried so far.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 JAN 2001

ULFA has nothing to do with talk offer

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, JAN 16

ULFA armed wing chief Paresh Barua has claimed that though the group had shown "enough sincerity" in wanting bringing the Assam problem to an end, New Delhi was not interested in holding talks since it had put forward the pre-condition that ULFA first give up the path of violence.

In an interview to an Assamese-language newspaper, Barua said: "We were interested in solving the issue through talks. But the Government's rejection of our offer has proved that New Delhi is not interested." ULFA had recently conveyed to the Government that it had dropped two of its original three conditions and was ready to sit down and discuss the issue of sovereignty.

This they did by directly communicating its message to the PMO last month. In the past, ULFA had maintained that the only situation in which it would hold talks was if the Government was ready to discuss the issue of sovereignty, that these talks be held in a foreign country and in the presence of a UN observer.

Recently, however, the group had changed its stand and dropped two of the preconditions and wanted to discuss only the issue of sovereignty. Barua said that any discussion should have a definite agenda, but added that the Government seemed to have no agenda at all.

"While we expressed our willingness to talk with just one condition, the Government has once again put the pre-condition of shunning violence. We have nothing to further to say now that the offer that we sent has been turned down," Barua was quoted as saying.

INDIAN EXPRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 JAN 2001

Centre ready for talks with ULFA

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GUWAHATI, JAN 17

THE Government on Wednesday said it was ready to hold peace talks and discuss demands for sovereignty with the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to end the two-decade-old insurgency in Assam.

The government was prepared to hold a formal political dialogue with the outlawed ULFA, fighting for an independent homeland, anywhere in the world, said G K Pillai, a joint secretary in the Union home ministry in charge of the North-Eastern states.

He said the government was even willing to offer a unilateral ceasefire in Assam, similar to the one in Jammu and Kashmir. "The government of India is ready to hold unconditional talks and discuss any of the ULFA's demands and at any venue of their choice in the world," Pillai told journalists.

If the rebels agree to talk, they can discuss their demand for As-

sam independence, he said, in what appeared to be a major concession by the government on the parameters of the peace talks.

The militants have said that independence must be on the agenda as a precondition for talks. The government has said previously that there must be no preconditions.

"In case the ULFA come forward for talks, we can convince them that their demand for sovereignty is not justified," Pillai said.

"If the Indian government accepts Assam's sovereignty to be on top of the agenda for talks then we are ready to review our preconditions of having the dialogue in a third country and under United Nations supervision," Rajkhowa was quoted as saying.

The ULFA chairman, Arabin-da Rajkhowa, was quoted on an Internet site on Monday as saying his group was prepared to hold peace talks if the government agrees to discuss the independence.

INDIAN EXPRESS

18 JAN 2001

Manipur imbroglio continues

By Our Correspondent

IMPHAL, JAN. 20. The Opposition parties boycotted the joint meeting convened by the Speaker Mr. S. Dhananjay, today to find ways and means of reconvening the Manipur Assembly, which has been adjourned from December 1, 2000.

The Governor, Mr. Ved Marwah, is concerned over the protracted adjournment of the House while the no-confidence motions against the United Front Ministry headed by Mr. W. Nipamacha Singh and the Speaker are still pending. On January 12, Mr. Marwah directed the Speaker to reconvene the Assembly session "without further delay." But on the same day, the Speaker adjourned the House for a period of 20 days. The spokesman of the Manipur Democratic Front (MDF), Mr. Okram Joy, told reporters on Friday that in protest against the "undemocratic and unparliamentarian verbal attack" by the Chief Minister, the Opposition members were boycotting the meeting convened by the Speaker. The Chief Minister should tender an apology, after which they will attend the meeting.

On December 15 last, the Speaker had convened a joint meeting of the leaders of the ruling and opposition parties to hammer out a date for reconvening the session. However, the Chief Minister, Mr. Nipamacha, and other Ministers had refused to attend it on the ground that they do not like to sit with some MLAs whose party affiliation is not clear. The MLAs had recently broken away from the ruling United Front and joined the MDF.

On December 18 the Cabinet recommended to the Governor to reconvene the session. However, the Governor had sent a terse note on December 20 shortly before emplaning for New Delhi suggesting to Mr. Nipamacha to meet the Speaker to find out how the session could be reconvened. But Mr. Nipamacha refused to comply with it. He maintains that he is not constitutionally bound by what the Governor had suggested. But the Governor is thus bound by the recommendation of the Cabinet. From De-

ember 21 the Council of Ministers has been lodging complaints with the President against the Governor.

On December 1 there was a fracas on the floor of the House. Three Ministers sustained bleeding injuries. The Speaker adjourned the House within 15 days. On December 8 he again adjourned it within 45 days. During the free for all fight microphones were dismantled and sound system damaged. The Finance Minister, Mr. H. Lokhon, refused to come to the office of the Speaker to discuss a financial matter. The Assembly secretariat had submitted an estimated cost of Rs. 700,000 to repair the Assembly hall. But as the Government coffer is empty (even employees are not paid their salary) this money has not been sanctioned as yet. The Speaker has been saying that if the hall is not repaired the session cannot be held. On the other hand, the Government says that the estimated cost is exorbitant since hardly Rs. 10,000 will be needed to replace four or five microphones and instal new wires for the sound system.

Mr. Nipamacha is confident that as his 34 supporters are still with him he could defeat the no confidence motion against him. In the 60-member House the MDF has just 24 MLAs. The motion against the Speaker had been rejected on technical ground. Mr. Nipamacha went to the High Court against this ruling of the Speaker. If the ruling is in favour of the United Front Ministry, Mr. Nipamacha is planning to remove the Speaker who had joined hands with the MDF.

But as the Opposition parties boycotted the meeting demanding withdrawal of the Chief Minister's "offensive and insulting" statement against some opposition members, no date for reconvening the session could be fixed. The period after the latest adjournment will expire on Feb. 1. But if the stand off continues it will not be possible to reconvene the session on February 1 or immediately after it.

The ruling United Front suspects that the Speaker and the MDF members are deliberately creating a situation for imposition of President's rule.

THE HINDU

21 JAN 2001

Untying the Assam bind

By Wasbir Hussain

10-12
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ONCE AGAIN, it is election time in Assam. The polls to the State Assembly are in fact slated for mid-May. Once again, the exercise of the people electing their representatives — 126 of them — is being held under the shadow of insurgency. Once again, the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has called a boycott of Republic Day celebrations in the State. The cycle just seem to go on and on.

Counter-insurgency operations in Assam are under a unified command of the Army, the police and the paramilitary forces. Just when the authorities turned a bit complacent and perhaps thought that the ULFA's back had been broken with the surrender of more than 2,000 of its cadres since 1997, rebels struck with a vengeance in different parts of the State. Beginning October 22 last year, armed men killed more than 100 Hindi-speaking people in cold-blooded serial attacks in towns and villages across Assam. The Government at all levels insists the killers belong to the ULFA. The outfit firmly denies its involvement. It is for the investigating authorities to come up with clinching evidence, but the killings as such were widely condemned and hundreds of people from all strata of the greater Assamese society took to the streets to demonstrate their protest.

The authorities were obviously mighty pleased over the fact that a mass upsurge against violence was taking place. And just as the cry for peace was getting louder with more and more individuals and groups taking out peace marches in Guwahati and elsewhere in the State, counter-killings started. Gunmen, who pass off in Assam as 'secret killers', started assassinating close relatives of top ULFA leaders. Among those killed was ULFA foreign secretary Shasha Choudhury's brother and deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah's brother-in-law and nephew.

Now, who are these 'secret killers' or does any 'secret killer' exist in the State? The Chief Minister, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, publicly stated that there is nothing called 'secret killer' in Assam. But, daily situation reports prepared by agencies under the State Home Department (at least some of those during the period of the killings in early January) did talk about

'secret killers' assassinating the ULFA leaders' kin.

It is widely believed that these 'secret killers' are none but surrendered militants acting at the behest of some Government functionaries, if not the Government itself. The surrendered rebels on their part insist that they are not involved in any extra-constitutional acts. What has put the authorities in Assam in a spot is their inability to arrest any of those behind the killings of the relatives of the ULFA leaders. Once

early 1990s, is of the opinion that a simple amendment of the Constitution, repealing the restrictions on the freedom of speech and association, as enumerated in Article 19, would make peaceful propagation of secession a democratic right. This, Mr. Nath feels, is a 'sensible step' which the Government of India must go for, although he is himself against the idea of an independent Assam with a 22 million population and having Bangladesh as a neighbour that has an over-spilling mass

some existing ones deleted. Inclusion of the right to secede may not also bring down insurgency in Assam. But, the Government, both in the State and the Centre, must undertake certain radical steps to tackle the problem from different directions and not just hope to crush the rebels through military might with the belief that it would force them to enter into negotiations with the authorities.

A breakthrough in Assam is not at all in sight. Before anyone has made any honest attempt at brokering peace, both the Government (the Centre as well as the State) and the ULFA have created a situation where even the possibility of the two sides meeting looks bleak. The need of the hour is informal meetings between representatives of the Government and the ULFA to try and see if the two sides could actually sit down for negotiations for a possible solution to the problem. Is New Delhi so naive as to expect the ULFA to come to the 'legal fold' by possibly coming overground and then sit for talks? Is New Delhi hoping that the ULFA would give up its demand for a sovereign Assam and then come for a dialogue? Of course, if the Indian Government at the highest level is not expecting any of the above, it must say so to avoid confusion. The ULFA is now saying that it would consider entering into talks if the ongoing negotiations between the Government of India and the Isac-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland results in a solution to the Naga problem. Would New Delhi say once and for all whether the NSCN-IM had given up its demand for independence before entering into a dialogue with the Centre. If so, it is fine and New Delhi can insist that the ULFA, too, should first give up its sovereignty demand. If the NSCN-IM has not given up its independence demand, there is no reason why the Government should not sit with the ULFA and talk on that very issue—Assam's sovereignty as propagated by the banned outfit. After all, talking on the core issue that is keeping alive the ULFA insurgency does not mean that the government of India should consider ceding Assam. Once again, what is needed are bold steps and the political will.

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

The need of the hour is informal meetings between representatives of the Government and the ULFA to try and see if the two sides can actually sit down for negotiations.

again, the people were out in the streets. The only thing is that this time they were raising slogans against the surrendered militants and the ruling Asom Gana Parishad Government. The protestors held the surrendered rebels and the Government responsible for the attacks on the ULFA leaders' kin. They were more angry because none other than the State Governor and the Chief Minister had promised adequate security cover to the family members of ULFA leaders. The authorities are losing ground and unless the killing of the relatives of militant leaders are stopped, things would boomerang and could well go beyond control, leading to a civil war-like situation.

This being the scenario, where is the key to a breakthrough in Assam or can a breakthrough be achieved at all? This, a little later. In recent weeks, however, there has been a debate in a section of the local media on whether the introduction of the right to secede in the Constitution could take the wind out of the sails of such separatist rebel groups as the ULFA which is seeking a 'sovereign, socialist Assam'. The response to this debate by prominent people, including historians, Constitution experts, student activists and former ULFA leaders, provide an interesting insight into the current thinking in the State.

The former ULFA publicity chief, Mr. Sunil Nath, who laid down arms in the

of nearly 130 million people.

Mr. Apurba Kumar Bhattacharya, general secretary of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad, one of Assam's most influential youth organisations, says the people of Assam got political freedom 53 years ago along with the rest of the country but have as yet not attained economic independence. New Delhi, he says, is still exploiting Assam's vast natural resources. He feels this is the reason why there is a demand for secession in the State and is convinced that legalising the right to secede would bring down the separatist insurgency, currently raging. Others are of the opinion that inclusion of the right to secede in the Constitution would lead to 'total anarchy' in the country. Assam's Advocate-General, Mr. Pachu Gopal Baruah, even suggested that the State should be accorded a Jammu and Kashmir type Constitutional status. But, the one common opinion even of those totally opposed to including the right to secede in the Constitution is that New Delhi is exploiting Assam and that this is behind the unrest in the State.

A few years ago, even a debate on as sensitive an issue as the right to secede was unthinkable. Now, it has come about perhaps because the Vajpayee Government has set up the Constitution Review Committee, triggering hopes of new provisions being included in the Statute or

THE HINDU

16 JAN 2007

Ulfa still open for talks, says Barua

BY MANOJ ANAND

AA-3
Guwahati, Jan. 14: The Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua on Saturday reiterated his willingness for talks while stating that "the ball is now in the Centre's court."

"We want an open and transparent talks on some serious issues related to Assam," Mr Barua told the local newspapers in an interview over telephone on Friday.

Claiming that they are watching the developments in the media, Mr Barua also rejected the idea of involving a third party or any mediator in the process.

The Ulfa chief who virtually holds the command over the outfit said, "Now it remains to be seen what the Centre decides to do."

The Ulfa, responding to the people pressure, had expressed their willingness for talks through the media recently. The outfit in its offer had agreed to review their earlier terms and condition of talks, to which the government of India was opposed, if the Centre agrees to include the question

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of sovereignty of Assam under the purview of talks. Earlier, the Ulfa was insisting for talks in the third country and presence of a United Nations representative in the negotiation process.

Meanwhile, the Union home ministry sources have contradicted the media reports which claimed that Centre has turned down the Ulfa's offer.

Sources said that the Centre was still ready to start talks with the militant leaders in Assam without any "pre-condition." Sources said that Ulfa should also try to understand the constraint and compulsion on the Union government which has to operate without proper feedbacks and merely based on media reports.

Citing the example of unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir, sources said, "It materialised after several rounds of informal parleys that can't be made public."

Meanwhile, the state government sources have expressed ignorance towards the process and rather they are trying to underplay the issue of talks directly with the Centre.

THE ASIAN AGE

15 JAN 2001

Arrest of four Bangla nationals triggers ISI scare

HT Correspondent
Balasore, January 10

ALARM BELLS have begun ringing here after four men of Bangladeshi origin were arrested on charges of stealing two solar-charged batteries from the Interim Testing Range (ITR) at Chandipur.

The district administration and defence officials are concerned that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) might have a strong espionage network among Bangladeshi expatriates settled here.

Balasore and Bhadrakh are in a sensitive zone because of the largely unguarded east-Orissa coastline and the ITR, the Proof Establishment and the Dhamra port being bang on the coast.

The population of Bangladeshi refugees has been increasing lately and the Government can do little to curb the ISI's activities if there are any.

The theft of two solar-charged batteries and plates from the inner wheeler testing range and two

remote cameras from the testing site has strengthened doubts about the presence of the espionage network.

The Dhamra-Chandbali Port offers a smooth entry point and getaway through the sea and therefore the population of Bangladeshis has been gradually increasing in Bhadrakh and Kendrapada districts that abut the port.

The number of Bangladeshis in Kendrapada district is said to be round 1.5 lakh and their population in Bhadrakh is not less than 1 lakh.

The expatriates now claim themselves to be permanent residents because they have registered Government plots in their names.

The revenue divisional commissioner had reportedly instructed the Balasore, Bhadrakh and Kendrapada district administrations to identify all foreigners in their territories but authorities are yet to take it up.

Defence authorities have set up a 'court of enquiry' to trace the two missing remote cameras.

Fire destroys Meghalaya Assembly building

Utpal Parashar
Guwahati, January 10

A FIRE razed all but one section of the Meghalaya Assembly building on Tuesday night. Many valuable documents on Assembly proceedings were destroyed.

The Meghalaya Government on Wednesday ordered a judicial inquiry into the incident. The inquiry, to be headed by a retired High Court Judge, would submit its findings soon. A task force has been constituted to bail out the Government from any crisis that may arise.

With the Budget session slated for the second week of March, several emergency meetings were held in Shillong on Wednesday to find a suitable building to house the Assembly. The Government has ruled out sabotage as the cause of the fire. The value of goods and property damaged in the fire are yet to be ascertained.

Preliminary investigations suggest the fire might have started at the Assembly canteen at around 5.30 pm, and engulfed the entire building within two hours. Barring the annex, the rest of the building, including the Speakers' chamber,

the main hall and the library was gutted in the fire. No one was injured, as the building was nearly empty.

It took more than five hours for nearly two-dozen fire tenders from Shillong and nearby areas to bring

The Government has ruled out sabotage as the cause the fire. Preliminary investigations suggest the blaze might have started at the Assembly canteen around 5.30 pm and engulfed the entire building

the fire under control. The entire building was reduced to ashes by that time.

Residents saw smoke emanating from the building at around 5.30 pm, but none suspected a fire. It was only at 8 pm, when the fire had engulfed the wooden structure that people called the fire brigade

office," a Meghalaya police official said.

Regarded as one of the most beautiful heritage buildings of the North-East, the Meghalaya Assembly was one of the oldest wooden structures in the region. The Governor of undivided Assam, Sir William Sinclair Morris, laid the foundation stone of the building on September 28, 1921.

Construction began within a year. It functioned as the Assembly building of undivided Assam till 1972 when Meghalaya was made a separate State.

Made of fine pine and teak wood, the Assembly archives housed many valuable documents, including the Assembly proceedings of undivided Assam and details of debates on important issues concerning the region.

Though it has not been officially confirmed, the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council's hand is suspected in the incident. Members of this banned Khasi outfit have been creating trouble in Shillong for the past few months. They killed five persons at an electronics shop on Friday and carried out a bank robbery on Monday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 JAN 2001

N-E SHAMBLES 51-6

Hidden hand behind Assam killings

NAGALAND is quiet under ceasefire. The nearly four-year peace dialogue is not making any headway. The Centre has given Manipur's incompetent administration yet another chance to mend itself; being an ally of the NDA has helped but financially the state is bankrupt. An uneasy lull prevails in Tripura with occasional raids by insurgents to convince the public of their presence. The massacre of five Indian businessmen early this month in the heart of Shillong is suggestive of what to expect. Arunachal Pradesh is quiet, however the presence of both factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland has made two of its districts volatile. Mizoram, which earned a peace bonus, is sliding back to the old rebellion days with Bru (Reang) insurgents making their presence felt. Ulfa seems to be in disarray. Dispur claims 2,000 have surrendered over the past few years, not all of them genuine, but the fact remains that they included some Ulfa leaders as well. Karbi Anglong district witnessed violence, so did the Bodo area. The recent murder of 100 Biharis/Marwaris in Assam seems essentially political. It was certainly not part of any pogrom. The forces behind the killings obviously had their eyes on the ensuing Assembly elections, the idea being to incite central take-over as they fear that the Asom Gana Parishad will rig the elections.

The murder of 14 Bhutanese nationals in Assam has put paid to any hope of Bhutan taking military action even with Indian help. Thimphu cannot risk the lives of its citizens who must pass through Assam to go to other parts of Bhutan. What is disturbing is the killing of Ulfa militants' kin by surrendered cadres. Sulfa and security forces, mainly the police, are working together, but the lesson of Punjab must be learnt. If such strategies are not handled carefully public opinion may go against the government. There have been protests in Nalbari and Guwahati last week. This is likely to hit anti-insurgency operations wherein public support is said to be of paramount importance. One thing is certain, Assam will witness more violence as the elections approach.

THE STATESMAN

19 June 2001

MANIPUR LOST

At times, it may appear to people in other parts of the country that the Northeast is a region which is unimaginably different from the rest of the country. With the recent killings in Assam and the collapse of government in Manipur, they may be forgiven for a sense of *déjà vu*: that things are once again spinning out of control and demanding a tough response.

Such a view maybe somewhat misplaced. Yet at one time, one was assailed by a concern that Manipur was simply slipping away and that no one in the rest of the country, especially in New Delhi, was bothered. Our myopic metropolitan media with its focus on Iftar parties and the Ayodhya mess could not care less, of course. What took the cake was the *Pioneer* writing an editorial about Manipur and titling it: "Kohima calling". Kohima is the capital of Nagaland. Imphal is the capital of Manipur.

If the press gets it wrong — and it does so with unfailing consistency — can others be blamed for getting nothing right?

And if one is to look at these issues through a Northeastern periscope, then what is one to make of a country where a strike by policemen in distant Manipur, which brings the state government to its knees and jeopardises India's security, barely comes up for discussion in Parliament and is dismissed in a few laconic sentences by the Union home minister? Manipur is a place where the state has truly collapsed. "withered away," if one was to borrow a good old leftist phrase.

There is no government worth the name in many parts of the state and the capital of Imphal is deserted by nightfall. The government is restricted to the perimeters of the city; there are no policemen manning a majority of the state's police stations, outside of Imphal.

Manipur's slide into anarchy has been sure and steady. The hills of the state, where a majority of its Nagas live, are dominated by one faction or another of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Other groups active there include the Kuki National Army. In the plains — essentially, the small and fertile Imphal valley — live the majority community, the Meiteis, who are Vaishnavite by faith. For all purposes, the Meiteis are hemmed in on all sides by the hill groups. But here too ethnic disparities are reflected in the insurgencies as well: the Meiteis have their own fighting groups which demand independence, including the **United National Liberation Front** and the **People's Liberation Army**. The dominant Naga group accuses the UNLF of trying to intimidate Nagas and apparently has its own Meitei front which has targeted supporters of the UNLF.

...ding ethnic divisions and



GUN RULE: Militants belonging to the People's Liberation Army in their training camp

bitter rivalries have brought Manipur to the brink of unmitigated disaster. The long-standing feuds between the Kukis and Tangkhul Nagas resulted in killings and counter-killings in the early Nineties, with the active participation of militants from both sides.

The Nagas say that they are under-represented in the state bureaucracy. The Meiteis say the opposite. But one thing is clear — all sections of government officers pay "tax", either willingly or otherwise, to the different factions of the underground. Those working in the hills pay their dues to the Nagas and Kukis; in the plains, the tithe goes to the Meitei groups.

be facetly argued that, through the huge funds that it sends out from Delhi to projects which are never completed, the government of India is, in fact, sustaining some of these insurgencies in the name of "development." The common man and woman rarely find a place in the scheme of things although everything is said to be done in his or her name!

People are fed up with the extortion and intimidation. But who do they turn to when the government of the state, at virtually every level appears to be in league with the "underground" or has abdicated its basic responsibilities? After all, one pays taxes to a superior authority. In the case of law abiding citizens, it is the government

and the inefficient. Funds must reach the projects to which they have been allocated. And local governance, through *panchayats* and traditional bodies, can act as watchdogs. Only then will civil society, terrorised and traumatised by both sides, find its voice and speak without fear or favour.

Transparent dialogues must take place between different ethnic groups to bridge the deep and bitter divisions which have developed among communities over these decades. This is a slow and difficult process. But it is part of the road map that leaders of different groups and organisations must chart if societies in places such as Manipur and elsewhere in the Northeast are to survive and grow and not be brutally fragmented. It is no longer a question of development but of simple survival.

Common sense points us to this path. Respected figures from the literary and creative arts, academics, non-government groups as well as the media and human rights organisations can help chart this way forward with a vision document for each state which could begin with a checklist of things to be done immediately, in the medium term and in the long term.

A wishlist of sorts exists as a vision document for Assam. A visionary document can only be developed through an interactive process where people are consulted and their voices find expression, not the jargon of politicians or the glibness of bureaucrats.

How tough this road can be is to be seen in one simple fact: the press itself has been under threat from different militant groups. In such circumstances, who then will speak out? But if states like Manipur are not to be lost, then there is no other road but this one. Other solutions will only be ad hoc, piecemeal and short term.

SANJOY HAZARIKA is associated with the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

A ROUTE MAP TO THE NORTHEAST

BY SANJOY HAZARIKA



THE LOKTAK LAKE: Terror reigns where once peace ruled

This situation has continued for years. Everyone is in the know and on the make. Ministers in Manipur and Nagaland are known for their associations with the underground groups, which support candidates in the state Assembly and Parliament elections. At times, a combination of diplomacy, good local contacts and a cool head helps those who do not want to pay (especially members of the All-India services) out of sticky situations.

Yet, it is widely believed that a slice of each major government contract (it does not matter whether it is the government of India or the state government) goes to the 'underground', of whichever hue, in different geographical areas. It could therefore

People are fed up with the intimidation. But who do they turn to when the state government appears to be in league with the 'underground'?

of India and its myriad agencies. In Manipur, Nagaland and elsewhere in the Northeast, many have bought peace and security for themselves and their families (and who can blame them if the government of the day cannot provide them protection?) by paying the underground. By acquiescing in this illegality, the state governments and New Delhi have conceded the moral high ground to the insurgents.

To correct it will need much more than a dose of President's Rule, necessary though it may be in Manipur.

What is needed is nothing less than the reinstatement of the rule of law; the judiciary must regain its independence and firm action must be taken against the corrupt

SULFA-police nexus needs to be probed: CPI

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, January 8

THE CPI, one of the ruling Assam Gana Parishad's allies, has sought a high-level inquiry into the alleged nexus between the police and surrendered ULFA activists.

It has also welcomed the gesture of ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Barua favouring a scientific dialogue with the Government.

Talking to reporters here on Monday, State unit president of CPI and Flood Control Minister Promode Gogoi said that the public outcry against bloodshed in the State prodded the Government into probing the SULFA police links.

The guilty officials should be punished accordingly, he added.

Condemning the killing of innocent people including the kin of ULFA leaders, Gogoi advocated the disarming of SULFA men, who are allegedly being patronised by the Government to run 'recognised' extortion rackets besides operating as hitmen against ULFA leaders and their

relatives. "We had asked the Centre to declare a unilateral ceasefire from January 1 this year to be adhered to by all including the ULFA and SULFA," the CPI

'We had asked the Centre to declare a unilateral ceasefire from January 1 this year to be adhered to by all including the ULFA and SULFA. We reiterate the demand if the State is to be saved from more violence'

leader said.

"We reiterate the demand if the State is to be saved from more violence." Gogoi alleged that certain sections in New Delhi were not keen on solving the crisis in Assam.

"They want to prolong the violence, and the rejection of Paresh Barua's talks offer made it obvious."

He felt that the Centre should not attach any preconditions to a dialogue with the ULFA. "Let the ULFA leaders first come to the negotiation table and the other things will follow. Being adamant would mean negation of the spirit of dialogue with an open mind," he added.

Assam Rifles jawan killed in ambush: Unidentified militants ambushed a foot patrol party of the Assam Rifles and killed a jawan in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Monday, report PTI.

Officials said the jawans were patrolling the Imphal-Ukhrul road when the militants opened fire on them between Lambui and new Hiven area. The jawans retaliated and in the encounter which went on for about half-an-hour and one jawan killed. The militants escaped to the nearby jungles. Senior police and Assam Rifles officials have rushed to the spot with additional forces.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 JAN 2001

Govt wakes up to Ulfa kin killings

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Jan. 6. — Public protests held in the last two days against the killing of relatives of Ulfa militants by suspected Sulfa men appear to have jolted the government out of its stupor.

Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta went into a huddle with his aides and emerged condemning the killings. He instructed the district administrations to prevent violent activities. Later the GOC, 4 Corps, Lt Gen Mahesh Vij, and the DGP, Mr Hare Krishna Deka, issued a similar statement.

The government turned a blind eye to the killings till the protests occurred at Nalbari on Thursday and at Guwahati yesterday. Although such killings have been going on for a long time, police couldn't even identify the culprits let alone arrest them. It gave rise to allegations that the killers were in league with the government.

The authorities have admitted for the first time, albeit obliquely, that some former rebels do possess illegal weapons. The Nalbari

district SP told people that all Sulfa men in the district would give up arms. Guwahati City SP said that Jyotish Sharma's killers would be brought to book.

The government had so far maintained that the Sulfa did not possess weapons and that the arms they were seen carrying around belonged to securitymen provided to them. In sharp contrast to the government's stand on this, some Sulfa men had exhibited their arms publicly on various occasions.

Before the last elections, the AGP promised to confiscate all illegal weapons within three months of its coming to power. This points to the fact that the party was privy to the Sulfa's possession of such weapons. Nearly five years later, police are making similar promises once again. In the interregnum, these weapons could have only increased as more than 2,000 militants had surrendered since 1998.

Sulfa appeal: The former Ulfa publicity secretary, Mr Sunil Nath, today appealed for peace in the state asking the government to declare a ceasefire.

THE STATESMAN

7 JAN 2001

FREEDOM LAST!

Impostors devalue pension scheme

AT one end of the scale is the pathetic story of neglected freedom fighters surviving on doles from the Union with only some states contributing their share to the gratitude of the nation. West Bengal is obviously not one of these, which is why some of the invitees to the Governor's tea party on the last Independence Day publicly displayed their feelings in front of Jyoti Basu, who treated them with his usual disdain. On the other hand, there is the equally unacceptable reality of thousands of bogus freedom fighters on the pay rolls — a consequence of political patronage — while many are denied pensions. Why did the question of fake applications have to rise in the first place? Who are the real culprits — the applicants or their patrons? The minister of state for home, Mr Vidyasagar Rao, now promises stringent action against those who adopt fraudulent means to secure pensions. He should not overlook equally strong action against politicians, members of Parliament, who recommend these cases? But that will require rare courage.

It is revealing that 53 years after Independence, 6.19 lakh applications were pending in the ministry of which some 4.54 lakh were rejected for lack of relevant documents. Are freedom fighters still in the process of being identified in different parts of the country? Do all those who have suffered imprisonment and worse possess papers to prove their bona fides? The minister's confession suggests sinister political hands which devalue pensions and mock the sacrifices of the past; it is also a waste of national resources. Genuine sufferers, on the other hand, could well be approaching 100 and badly in need of medical care and attention. They must be spared the sins of impostors and their patrons.

SAVING TRIPURA

Welcome IPFT proposal for all-party meet

NO amount of money can improve the condition of tribals in Tripura as long as insurgency lasts. The development process has come to a standstill. The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, in charge of the tribal area autonomous district council, has realised that the first need is to restore confidence. Its denunciation of insurgency by National Liberation Front of Tripura is significant as many thought the IPFT was the political unit of the outlawed militant outfit. Its call for an all-party meeting to end the conflict must be supported. But the question is will the NLFT agree to drop its demand for a "sovereign state of Tripura". Wooing militants with attractive economic packages has not helped. The NLFT was born in 1991 after the state government failed to fully implement the 1988 peace accord with the Tribal National Volunteers under Bijoy Hrangkhawl. The TNV's basic objective was not insurgency but to fight against illegal occupation of their land by migrants from across the border. They were branded "insurgents" only after establishing links with the Mizo National Front. All that the tribals want is protection of their democratic and economic interests.

It would pay to cultivate the IPFT. Comprising several tribal organisations, it does not have a common ideology, but it does seem sincere in its efforts to end insurgency. Hrangkhawl's presence in the party should help as he can exert influence on the NLFT rank and file, mostly former TNV rebels, to shun violence and prepare for talks. NLFT is predominantly Christian and its leadership is known to encourage conversion, not inadmissible in secular India. One cannot ignore the fact that it was the missionaries who first educated the hill people. Tribals must be given a greater say in their own affairs by amending the Sixth Schedule and thus discourage the demand for a separate autonomous state.

THE STATESMAN

4 JAN 2001

Ulfa guns down three Sulfa men

Utpal Parashar
Guwahati, January 3

SUSPECTED ULFA militants shot dead three former colleagues and injured two others in Nalbari district on Tuesday night. This is the second attack on surrendered Ulfa militants in a week.

The police said at 8.30 pm on Tuesday, suspected Ulfa militants carrying sophisticated weapons raided senior Sulfa leader Avinash Bordoloi alias Sailen Halo's arm in Bonbhag Salmari and shot at him and four other Sulfa

men. Avinash and two others, Ridip and Jabrang, died immediately while two of their associates are now battling for life at a Guwahati hospital.

Last Friday, a suspected Ulfa militant shot at former militant Monikut Kolita alias Tarzan and one of his aides outside a nursing home in Mangaldai of Darrang district.

Both victims sustained gunshot wounds and are recovering at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital.

The police said Monikut had

gone to the nursing home to visit his pregnant wife when he was attacked. He got a bullet in his arm while his friend was hurt in the left leg.

Senior police officials believe that both the incidents might be in retaliation to recent attacks on relatives of Ulfa members, including parents of Ulfa chief Paresh Baruah.

Last month, a group of unidentified youths had shot dead Dipak Choudhury, brother of Sasha Choudhury, chief of the Ulfa's external affairs wing, at his

Nalbari residence. A few days later another group targeted the family home of senior Ulfa leader Dhrishti Rajkhowa in Goalpara.

On December 23, some men lobbed two powerful hand grenades at Ulfa militant Sashi Phukan's house at Baihata in Kamrup district. No one was injured but the house was destroyed. It was the eighth assault on the house of Ulfa members and their relatives since the attack on Paresh Baruah's parents on December 5.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 JAN 2007

Ufa supremo sets 'independence' agenda for talks with Delhi

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 3: Ufa "commander-in-chief" Paresw Barua today said bloodbath in Assam would cease only if the Centre agreed to a "scientific dialogue" with the outfit.

In an exclusive interview to **The Telegraph** over phone from an undisclosed location, Barua explained what a "scientific dialogue" meant. The agenda would have to be "Assam's independence". "The talks must be logical and reasonable to us," he added. Barua claimed responsibility for

the killings of top Sulfa leader Abinash Bordoloi and two of his associates in Nalbari last night. He hinted that it was a "vendetta strike" against his former comrades. Two other Sulfa men were injured in the shootout.

The Ufa "c-in-c" said the outfit had granted "general amnesty" to all those who had left, provided they did not indulge in "illegal activities" or help security forces.

Though he did not say that Ufa was behind last night's ambush, Barua accused Bordoloi of leading the "killer squad" which shot dead Ufa "foreign secretary" Sasha Choud-

hury's brother in Nalbari last month.

Barua said the government was using the Sulfa as "secret killers" to target the families of Ufa men and for other "extra-judicial" killings. The police, on the other hand, are yet to identify those who attacked the families of the Ufa cadre.

Barua refused to accept the term "peace talks" for the dialogue with the Centre and insisted on the word "negotiation". "We have not violated peace. All our acts have been in self-defence," he said. Asked if the Ufa would agree to a protectorate status vis-a-vis India, he said: "Let the Indian government

first come out with an agenda for scientific negotiations. If this (protectorate status) is included in the agenda, we will examine it. At this moment your question is premature".

The Ufa "c-in-c", however, dismissed the parleys between the Centre and the NSCN(IM) as a "mere eye-wash doomed to fail". "The talks are a farce... played by the Indian government and the RAW to delay the Naga struggle by about three years," he said.

Barua's reservations about the Naga peace talks assume significance as the NSCN(IM) is considered the "mother of all insur-

gent outfits" in the Northeast.

Barua also dismissed police claims that the Ufa was willing to talk without chief minister Prafulla Mahanta, saying the police "were always resorting to gimmicks for personal gains." He, however, admitted that Mahanta's successor would be a "better man to talk to" as the former was a "puppet" in the Governor's hands.

He also blasted Mahanta for "cheating the Assamese nation" by riding to power on the sacrifice made by 700 "martyrs" during the Assam agitation and then turning his back on the real problems of the state.



Abinash's friend cries over his body. (UB Photos)

THE TELEGRAPH

4 JAN 2001

Rebel deadline stares at Bhutan

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 2: The Bodo Liberation Tigers have "warned" Bhutan of more attacks on its people if the kingdom did not initiate steps to drive out the Ufa and the NDFB militants from its soil "within a month".

Official sources in Thimpu quoted a Bhutanese immigration official Sonam Dorji -- who was allegedly abducted by the BLT from Assam on December 20 and released three days later -- as the basis of the "threat" issued by the pro-talk Bodo outfit.

Dorji was allegedly abducted along with his official driver Tandim Dorji when they were returning from Phuntsholing in a new Toyota Hilux. The vehicle was set ablaze by the militants.

Sources said before Dorji was released, he was asked by the militant "leader" to convey to the Bhutan government that the Bhutanese nationals were being targeted for the specific purpose of warning the kingdom not to give shelter to the Ufa and NDFB rebels.

The militant leader apparently told the Bhutanese official that if the royal government did not initiate steps to evict the Ufa and the NDFB militants from its soil within a month, more such attacks would follow.

Though the royal Bhutan embassy in Delhi admitted that it was aware of the threat, it refused to comment on the counter-measures Thimpu was contemplating. "The government is keeping tabs on the situation. That is all I can say now," Thinley Penzor, councillor at the embassy, said this

evening. The Bhutan government has repeatedly denied Assam government's claims that the banned National Democratic Front of Boroland was involved in the series of violent incidents on December 20-21, which killed 14 people and injured nearly 20. Three Bhutanese vehicles were also set ablaze by the rebels.

However, the BLT categorically stated it had nothing to do with the attacks and instead saw a conspiracy hatched jointly by the Bhutan government and the NDFB to gain "unknown diplomatic mileage" out of the incidents.

Additional director-general of police (operations) G.M. Srivastava also reiterated NDFB's hand in the attacks. "There is no basis in the Bhutan government's claims as the BLT is honouring its cease-fire agreement with the state. On the other hand, Bhutan is under tremendous pressure from the NDFB...it is obvious that Bhutan is blaming the BLT to appease the NDFB," he added.

Only a few days ago, Bhutan home secretary Dasho Pema Wangchuk expressed the kingdom's "unwillingness" to launch military operations against the Ufa and the NDFB rebels, fearing "serious retaliation against the Bhutanese people by the militants and their supporters".

Wangchuk had told **The Telegraph** in an interview that "the Ufa and Bodo militants are Assamese people. Using military force against them will entail attacking and killing Assamese nationals which would create deep resentment among the people of the state towards Bhutan."

THE TELEGRAPH

3 JAN 2001

BLT warns Bhutan of more attacks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Jan. 2. — The Bodo Liberation Tigers has warned Bhutan of more attacks on its people if it doesn't take due steps against NDFB and Ulfa rebels taking shelter there, within a month.

In its 30 December edition, the Kuensel, an English weekly newspaper published from Bhutan, quoted an immigration officer, Mr Sonam Dorji as saying that the BLT, which had earlier abducted him, made the attacks to convey to Bhutan that it must not shelter NDFB and Ulfa militants.

Thirteen Bhutaneses people were killed, 20 others injured and three vehicles burnt in separate incidents in Assam last month. The Assam government has claimed that the NDFB was behind the attacks, but Bhutan said that it had evidence of the BLT's involvement in these.

Mr Dorji told Bhutan police that militants abducted him and his driver on their way from Phuentsholing. They were released after three days, but the vehicle was burnt.

He told police that when they reached the Kushikotra forest gate on NH 31, the gatekeeper closed the gate forcing their car to stop. Soon, five

armed men surrounded their vehicle and took them away to a place called Tinalia. They were kept in a school building during the day and moved to different houses during their captivity.

He said that the kidnapers gave him a set of written questions whose answers were dictated by the group's leader. He was videotaped while being forced to make specific responses to the questions.

The abductors instructed Mr Dorji to convey their message to Bhutan government before releasing them.

Bhutan police have found out that the leader was the BLT's Bongaigaon

commander, the newspaper reported.

Contrary to this, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta maintains that the NDFB had carried out the killing of the Bhutaneses nationals. He also said that Bhutan had blamed the BLT for the attacks under the NDFB's pressure.

Recently the BLT, engaged in a dialogue with the Centre after declaring ceasefire last year, had suffered at the hands of the NDFB.

The latter had shot over a dozen members of the BLT, just before the attacks on the Bhutaneses people took place. Both NDFB and Ulfa rebels return to their camps in Bhutan after

carrying out hit-and-run attacks in Assam.

Mr Mahanta believes that the insurgency problem cannot be solved until Bhutan and other neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar stop giving refuge to rebels.

Bhutan says it has been trying to persuade militants from Assam to leave the country. The Bhutan Parliament last year gave the nod for military operation if peaceful means fail to evict them. However, not much has been achieved in this regard and, consequently, patience on part of the counter-insurgency groups seems to be waning.

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

Sorrow of the seven sisters

The seven states in the North East, despite largesse from the Centre, have remained backward when compared to the rest of India. Insurgency and ethnic violence has wrecked the economic and social fabric of this region. Sanjoy Hazarika, an expert on North East affairs, looks at the possibilities that could be explored to improve the lot of the region.

FOR decades, administrators in New Delhi have blamed the British for seemingly haphazardly drawing the border lines especially for Eastern India at the time of Partition. As a result of this cartographic exercise, India's North East has longer borders with Tibet, Myanmar and Bangladesh than it does with the rest of the country.

Its staggering diversity, just in ethnic terms, is enough to give any civil servant a lifetime of nightmares: an effort to meet the griev-

ance of one community will turn into a fresh problem for another group!

Yet, in that reality lies a greater truth: that the complex ethnic and cultural diversity of the region has greater affinity to South East Asia than it does to other parts of India. This fact may not be liked by other Indians. But it can't be wished away.

Ninety eight per cent of the borders of the North East are with other countries. A bare two per cent borders on India. It is rich in

natural resources, especially forests, rivers, coal, gas and oil. Its lowlands are extremely fertile; the hills abound in citrus and semi-tropical fruits.

At independence, undivided Assam was among the top six states of the country in terms of income. These days, it is virtually at the bottom along with the other six states of North East, Bihar and Orissa.

Why has this happened?

It is not as if New Delhi has not

**EXPRESS
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THE NORTH EAST**

lavished generosity on its eastern borders. In his book, *Economy of the North East*, Gulshan Sachdeva says the Centre dispatched funds equivalent to Rs 60,000 crore between 1990-91 to 1998-99. A part of this money came back officially as repayment on loan and interest payments, bringing the figure down

to 51,000 crore rupees. This was nearly double the assistance that Orissa, a state with a similar population size as the entire North East, received in the same period.

A person resident in the North East received (theoretically, at least) per capita central assistance several times even that of an individual living Jammu and Kashmir. In poor Bihar, people received Rs 876 per capita assistance; in Himachal Pradesh, they got Rs 5,291; a person in Arunachal Pradesh got more than Rs 36,000; and his counterpart in Mizoram a hefty Rs 32,567. The all India average is Rs. 1,080.

Despite all this largesse, bestowed almost unthinkingly by the Central Government in an effort to buy friends and influence people, a majority of people in the region remain poor. Infrastructure, whether it is roads or electricity, is in a shambles and there has been little new investment in business ventures or industrial centres.

So, where does all this money go? A substantial part returns to New Delhi by "unofficial means" and routes, enabling politicians and



Surrendered ULFA militants with weapons in Guwahati. (File pix)

A resident of the North East received per capita central assistance many times that of an individual living in J&K. Some of the money is pocketed by local politicians, bureaucrats and the militant groups

others who benefit to purchase real estate in the national capital and elsewhere in its neighbourhood. It also helps them to buy influence in political parties as well as the Government.

Some of the money is pocketed in the states by local politicians and bureaucrats; some of it even goes to militant and extortionist groups as protection money from the former group. Businessmen and industry

add their mite to this "militant" kitty. The failure has not just been in terms of macro planning.

We know the Big Picture. But we have little idea of the details which lie inside that large framework: the little stories about how individuals and communities live and whether they are better off today than they were yesterday.

A major reason for the lack of

development of the North East has been the Look West policy: of seeking funds and sustenance from New Delhi instead of turning to its natural neighbours. Indeed, because of a lopsided approach to development, the estimated volume of illegal trade between three North Eastern states (Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura) with Myanmar and Bangladesh isn't less than Rs 3,000 crores.

What goes across from the North East include drugs and pharmaceuticals, milk powder, tea, mechanical goods, cycles and stainless steel utensils. Goods coming in include precious stones, live pigs, synthetic fabrics, walking shoes, teak and electronic goods. These come by road, over mountain trails and by boat. Smuggling has existed along these routes for centuries: a smuggler knows the needs, weaknesses and market orientations of communities better than any politician or bureaucrat. The legitimisation of these trades could open up a reservoir of energy and legal funds to governments and communities. There need to be good reasons for such trades to "go legit".

Border trade, tourism, communications, cultural and academic exchanges as well and cooperative economic endeavours we discussed thread bare in analogue,

the second of its kind (the first was held at Kunming, Yunnan Province, in 1999) recently. Concerns were also voiced about the problems of cheap goods from South East Asia and China flooding Indian markets. It was pointed out that aggressive marketing of cheap man-made fabrics would devastate local economies based on traditional handicrafts and looms without providing an alternative to the workers. These are some of the problems that cooperative ventures will spawn.

How do we protect the small people whose stories make up the Big Picture? Working out answer will not be easy. We could start with a check list, for example, of what will be acceptable to governments and communities in the North East. This will, in turn, mean discussions with and listening to representatives of local communities at all levels as policies are framed. This is where the issue of local governance and accountability comes up.

Policies put into place without such consultations will only create more difficulties. Regional cooperation, if it is to work, must build on a base of consulting community leaders at the field level. This is where local governance and international relations mesh and merge.

Nipamacha in Delhi on Advani missive

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Dec. 31: Chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh today rushed to New Delhi to attend a meeting called by Union home minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday to discuss the state's affairs.

In the meantime, a two-day bandh called by women's organisations in protest against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, has paralysed life in the state.

Nipamacha Singh was summoned by Advani to discuss the prevailing situation in Manipur. He is being accompanied by deputy chief minister L. Chandramani Singh. Sources said Advani is unhappy over the prevailing law and order situation in the state.

The meeting carries a lot of significance in view of a strongly-worded letter received by the state chief secretary recently from the Union home ministry. The latter has asked the state government to take various steps to tackle the deteriorating law and order situation.

Sources said the Union home ministry has asked the state government to deploy the nine battalions of the Manipur Rifles in counter-insurgency operations. The ministry is reported to be annoyed over the way in which most of the battalions of the Manipur Rifles were engaged in acting as security escorts of VIPs and in guarding government installations. Opposition sources, however, said Advani may ask Nipamacha to drop four ministers from the United Front of Manipur ministry as they have been accused of having links with militants.

Nipamacha is also likely to discuss the grave financial situation of the state with senior Central leaders. The UFM government has been unable to pay the salaries of 82,000 state employees for the month of November. The payment of salaries for December is also uncertain. Sources said though the Centre was willing to release the state's monthly allocation to pay employees' salaries, it suspects there may be misutilisa-

tion of the funds.

The Centre is aware that the state government has issued cheques amounting to Rs 25 crore to many contractors despite strict warnings. As these cheques will also be encashed when the state's monthly allocation is released, the problem is expected to be compounded further.

Meanwhile, the 48-hour bandh called by various women's organisations in the state has completely paralysed life in Manipur. Markets were shut and the transport system affected.

The celebrations of New Year's Eve and New Year's Day have been marred by the bandh. Though Christian organisations have appealed for relaxation of the bandh, the women's organisations are going ahead with the programme. The recently-formed Women's Front Against Black Laws is spearheading the agitation. Governor Ved Marwah, in his New Year's message to the people of the state, said Manipur was facing all kinds of crises -- financial, social and political. He said the people are deprived of even the most basic services such as safe drinking water, power, health and education.

Marwah said, "Manipur today is caught in a vicious circle." He said economic development cannot take place without an end to violence, and violence will not end without economic development.

Stressing on a two-pronged strategy, Marwah said intensive efforts to speed up the pace of economic development and to end violent conflicts will have to be followed simultaneously. Wishing the people a happy New Year, the Governor called on the people to join hands and resolve to support and consolidate the forces of peace and harmony.

Militant shot dead: An Ufa militant was shot dead in an encounter with the police at number four Phuloni village under Merapani police station. Though the militant could not be identified, police said he was around 35-years-old. A large amount of arms and incriminating documents were seized from him, reports our Jorhat correspondent.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 JAN 2007

Paresh Baruah in talks gesture

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, December 31

IN WHAT is believed to be a rare New Year gesture, ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah has aired his willingness to hold "meaningful and scientific" truce talks with the "Indian Government", but without the possibility of a surrender.

What now lies between peace and a fresh phase of violence in Assam is Baruah's ego clash with Chief Minister Pratulla Kumar Mahanta and vice versa, officials say.

The ULFA military wing chief, who was almost "killed" early this month in a fabricated interethnic battle deep inside the Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh, rang up three editors of leading language dailies, a few advocates, doctors, businessmen and political leaders last week with the truce offer.

A top police officer confirmed some of these conversations and authenticated the voice of the caller as Baruah's. The police had apparently tapped some of the conversations and digitised the voices to establish the identity of the caller.

The ULFA leader had called mi-

tially to junk talk of differences in the outfit as a "disinformation campaign" by Delhi and Dispur (the capital complex here).

He subsequently discussed the possibility of "meaningful and scientific" - officials here were wondering what science has to do with negotiations - discussions, but made it clear that the ULFA was "not for surrender in the name of talks".

Baruah also laid down two conditions: one, the talks must be proposed by New Delhi, and two, Pratulla Mahanta must be removed from power.

Police officers said the perceptible softening in Baruah's stand could be the result of pressure from five relatively moderate leaders in the militant hierarchy. These leaders have been opposed to ULFA's new strategy of ethnic cleansing.

The 'Group of Five' has also been seeking a meeting of the ULFA general council by December 31 to reach an acceptable decision.

The general council has not met in six years because of frequent disruptions of communication among cadres scattered across Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Hurriyat in a fix over Centre move

HT Correspondent
Jammu, December 31

THE ALL-PARTY Hurriyat Conference (APHC) is in a dilemma over its proposed visit to Pakistan following the latest suggestion from militant outfits that all the seven executive council members of the APHC should visit that country. Two of the seven Hurriyat council members do not have travel documents.

The Hurriyat had called a meeting on January 2 to select its team for visiting Pakistan. But now it has to decide whether it should visit with the arrangement that the Centre has "forced" on it by clearing travel documents of only four of its executive council members. Former Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq already has his passport and travel documents.

"We may have to reconsider our decision (to visit Pakistan)", the Mirwaiz told *The Hindustan Times*. But another senior leader on condition of anonymity said that "a great opportunity would be lost" if the visit is delayed.

The Hurriyat had decided on December 21 that it would send a delegation to Pakistan on January 15 to talk to Pakistani and militant leaders to find out what could lead to the solution to the Kashmir issue.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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