

A GREY DAWN

Nothing captures the people's imagination in India's Northeast like the hope of a new dawn of peace. The region of many ethnic insurgencies lived constantly in that hope for much of 2002, as an end to the 50-year-old Naga militancy seemed to come closer. But for a late change of schedule, the two top leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, Mr Isak Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah, who are devout Christians, could have been in India during Christmas — for the first time in over 30 years. They will be in the Indian capital in January, carrying the hope over to the new year. As the NSCN has been known as the mother of all northeastern insurgencies, its return to peace will spread the message far beyond Nagaland. Other groups will not only lose the material and ideological support they have long received from the Naga outfit, but will also see once more the futility of their small mutinies. Peace initiatives during the year brought some hope also in Assam where the Bodo Liberation Tigers were close to signing an accord on the creation of an autonomous territorial council for the ethnic group. The agreement did not come through because of bureaucratic delays, but the talks brought cheers to a long-suffering people. The Assam government, New Delhi and the BLT have a commitment now to translate the hope into reality in the new year. The signals for peace rang louder in 2002 than the gunshots of the United Liberation Front of Asom, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland or the National Liberation Front of Tripura.

There was little cheer, though, for the region's economy that remained as starved of new industrial or commercial initiatives as ever. Even old government schemes like the hydel projects in Arunachal Pradesh lagged way behind their schedules. In Assam, a cash-strapped government struggled to pay salaries to its employees. For the first time, the Union cabinet has a separate ministry for the economic development of the region. But the minister, Mr Arun Shourie, seems to have been too busy with his other charge, disinvestment, to be able to generate either funds or hope for the area's economic growth. As economic deprivations are a major reason for the region's youth taking up guns, it is important that both New Delhi and the state governments take up the economic agenda in earnest in the new year. Sharing its border with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, the area has a locational advantage for trade that can help change its economy.

3 1 DEC 2002

The Shillong Accord of 1975

CONTINUING its series of publishing those "accords" which sought to bring about a rapprochement between the Government of India and Naga underground leaders, *The Statesman*, in the public interest, reproduces the 11 November 1975 Shillong Agreement. The Shillong Accord was signed between Naga leaders and one of the most powerful Governors that India has seen, the redoubtable Lalau Prasad Singh, a former Home Secretary of India. That accord, far from ending the conflict between India and the Nagas, prolonged it after splitting the Naga pro-independence movement down the middle. Among those who signed was the brother of AZ Phizo, who launched the Naga struggle. One of the signatories, recalled recently that there was no option for the Naga leaders but to accept the agreement because of the ferocity of the crackdown by Indian security forces that was harming ordinary people. Isak Chisi Swu and Th. Muivah, leaders of the Federal Naga Government and the Naga National Council, which spearheaded the independence struggle, denounced the agreement as a sellout to India. At the time, they were on a "friendly" visit to China, which had been supporting the movement with training and weapons. After a brief period of internal turbulence, Mr Swu and Mr Muivah managed to persuade the other major Naga underground leader, SS Khaplang, to join forces with them and

form the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim). That alliance lasted just over a decade and fell apart in 1988, leading to another bloody and bitter split that continues to divide and haunt the Naga movement. The Shillong Accord was done without a full consultation of all Naga groups, another reason that it failed. This is a factor that the present negotiators from New Delhi and the Nagas cannot afford to ignore. —
SH

organisations conveyed their decision, on their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India. It was agreed that the arms, now deposited at appointed places. Details for giving effect to this agreement will be worked out between them and the representatives of the Governments, the security forces and members of the Liaison Committee.

It was agreed that the underground representatives should have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussion for final settlement.

Dated: Shillong
November 11, 1975

I Temjamba
S Darhu
M Assa
Z Ramyo
Kevi Yallay

L.P. Singh
(On behalf of the
Government of India)

**Supplementary Agreement to the
Shillong Accord on January 5, 1976**
*Implementation of Clause II of the Shillong
Accord of November 11, 1975.*

It was decided that the collection of arms, initially at collection centres,

would commence as early as possible, and will be completed by 25 January, 1976. Initial places of collection to be decided through discussions between Commissioner, representatives and the underground organisations and the members of the Liaison Committee. Once all arms are collected, these will be handed over to Peace Council team at the respective places of collection.

Peace Council team will arrange to transport the arms from collection centres to Chedema Peace Camp and arrange guards etc. for safe custody of the arms.

Similar arrangement at agreed place/places will be made in Manipur with concurrence of the State Government.

The underground may stay at Peace Camp to be established at suitable places, and their maintenance will be arranged only by the Peace Council. Any voluntary contribution from any source will be made to the Peace Council, who will utilise the fund according to necessity.

1. Biseto Medon Keyho
2. Pukrove Nakru
3. Z. Ramyo
4. I. Tejemba

LP Singh
Governor

Dated: Shillong
January 5, 1976

Jamir throws down the gauntlet

IN an extensive conversation with H Bula Devi, a Special Representative for *The Statesman* in New Delhi, Nagaland Chief Minister SC Jamir spoke on a range of issues before his state, especially on the forthcoming visit to India of the main leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M), Isak Chisi Swu and Th. Muivah. Mr Jamir's role in Nagaland assumes significance in the light of reports that in elections to the state assembly, which are likely to be held in February 2003, he may have a real fight on his hands. In addition, Mr Jamir, one of the most enduring politicians on the Indian scene — he was Parliamentary Secretary to Jawaharlal Nehru and elected to Parliament before turning his attention to politics in his home state — has been chief minister of Nagaland for over 13 years. He is regarded as powerful, crafty and a master tactician who has survived at least four assassination attempts. Mr Jamir and the NSCN (I-M) are bitterly opposed to each other although the rival Khaplang group of the NSCN is said to be friendly to his government. But whatever the outcome of the negotiations between the I-M leaders and New Delhi, Mr Jamir is seen as continuing to be a force which cannot be ignored. — SH

The role of Naga Hohos

The Naga Hohos have been trying for last one year but so far they have not succeeded in making the Nagas reconcile among themselves. Unless we cultivate the feeling of oneness and develop the spirit of forgiveness, we can neither have peace nor unity. So to take the lead as chief minister and as president of my party I said I had forgiven those those who had attempted to kill me and that I would withdraw all the cases against them. I have done it in letter and spirit to enable them to come to India and Nagaland to have a political dialogue.

The ban on the NSCN under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and its lapsing

The lifting of the ban was the first resolution we passed in the early part of 1994 and whenever our views were sought on this we stood by it. It was my party which had first pointed out what one is subjected to under this Act even for talking or conniving... therefore it would be prudent politically to talk to a banned organisation. So, the ban should be lifted.

The BJP only inherited it (the ban on NSCN) from the United Front government... The situation continued to be disturbed in Nagaland. In a political dialogue the point about discussions on substantive issues is taken up only when the talks reach a certain stage. The Government has agreed to one of the conditions placed before it by the underground. The delay... the Government may have had their own considerations and assessment. It was a commitment by the interlocutor. I also feel that once the Government commits, it should keep its word.

On a possible visit by Mr Muivah

Open forum



SC JAMIR: 'When they (Muivah and Swu) demand something that is not achievable it is obviously unrealistic'

and Mr Swu to Nagaland

Let them come, even to Nagaland, so that people know what they will be discussing. When these people (Muivah and Swu) see the ground situation they will also realise and will react sincerely. For a meaningful dialogue they should react positively and realistically, that is on the basis of the views of the people of Nagaland.

All along they have been talking about sovereignty while the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have clearly said on the floor of the House as well as outside that sovereignty is not possible. Therefore, when they (Muivah and Swu) come to India let them spell out what they want to discuss. When they demand something that is not achievable it is obviously unrealistic. Substantive issues is a very vague term. In other words it means relevant points. We will wait and watch what kind of arrangement minus sovereignty the group spells out.

The alleged violation of the ceasefire agreement by NSCN (IM) activists and its implications

According to the ground rules of the agreement the underground activists of the NSCN (IM) will be confined to the seven designated camps they had demanded. Neither the I-M group nor the K group have shifted to their respective camps, whereas the deadline to do so was 20 November. Anybody found moving with arms or in uniform outside the designated camps is in flagrant violation of the ground rules and therefore, they have to be subjected to the law of the land... this (killing of an Assam Rifles soldier) is a violation of the ceasefire.

This would mean disturbances in

the peace process, which the people want to preserve, protect... Violation of the agreement amounts to negating the wishes of the people... there have been factional killings between the NSCN (I-M) and the NSCN (K)... the real meaning of ceasefire is cessation of all kinds of hostilities whether it is with the security forces or among themselves. It is a direct violation of the agreement. But the NSCN (I-M) said that the ceasefire was with the security forces. Although, I think, we have made them understand through the Ceasefire Monitoring Group, killing of any form will be treated as murder.

In Nagaland, the vast majority of people want peace... the trouble with these underground factions is that they want supremacy over the other faction. It is a ridiculous approach. In the name of Naga cause, if Nagas kill Nagas then what do they gain? It is quite contrary to what they are professing... in the process, they are getting exposed.

The involvement in elections

I tell them that if they are really concerned about a solution then they should do it straight; why should they talk about sovereignty, Greater Nagaland, political dialogue and at the same time take an interest, directly or indirectly, in the elections — what actually is their agenda, their cadres are moving from place to place saying, "Don't vote for Jamir"; they met many of my ministers and MLAs long before in groups and told them to withdraw support from me and not to contest on Congress tickets.

The impact on Nagaland

Their coming may even boomerang on them because all these years they have preached about sovereignty. Now people know that they are not really for sovereignty. They have not explicitly stated but their behaviour and their dialogue clearly show that they are not serious. The Naga people know it because they are very much politically alert. People will react very sharply (if they visit). And any kind of violence will only be counterproductive.

The role of Muivah

The kind of solution at which they are aiming will indicate in which way Muivah will play or Muivah will be played. Let us wait and watch first. In which way Muivah can be accommodated... whether in Nagaland or elsewhere... let's see. I am not positive about their visit. And why should I be positive? The PM and Deputy PM have already stated on the floor of the House that the territorial integrity of North East will not be disturbed. Then what kind of dialogue will it be?

On the Congress Party's prospects

My election manifesto will be economic development. Unless we have economic muscle, we can never develop. We want to be equal with the rest of the country. In a house of 60, we have got 57. It is better to get have 35 to 40 seats — it's manageable. When there are too many it is difficult to manage; it becomes too heavy.

Serial blasts rock Guwahati

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Dec. 25: The deafening sound of explosions drowned the jingle of bells and Christmas carols in Assam's capital city tonight as suspected Uifa militants fired three mortars in quick succession, killing two persons and injuring 20 more, including a senior AGP leader.

The places were the militants struck — twice on Lamb Road and once at Kalibari — are close to the imposing Peace Centre building of the Baptist Church, the Don Bosco campus and the church adjacent to Nehru Park. The attacks took place at 7 pm.

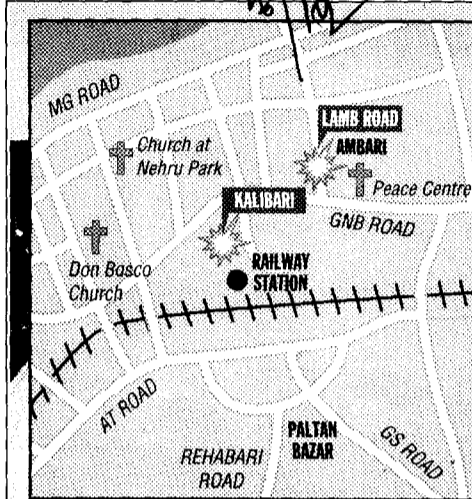
Inspector-general of police (special branch) Khagen Sharma told The Telegraph that the mortars were identical to the one used in the attack on the Dispur capital complex in October. The Uifa had claimed responsibility for that incident.

Kamrup deputy commissioner A.K. Absar Hazarika said the mortar attacks were aimed at "causing panic during the season of festivity".

The two sites where the incidents took place are densely populated: the GNB Road-Lamb Road trijunction, which has several business establishments and private residences, is usually chock-a-block with vehicles and pedestrians in the evening. Kalibari, too, has scores of huts belonging to migrant labourers.

The two casualties — a woman and a child — were at Kalibari, which is close to the Guwahati railway station. Both died shortly after being admitted to the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH). Four more persons sustained injuries in that attack.

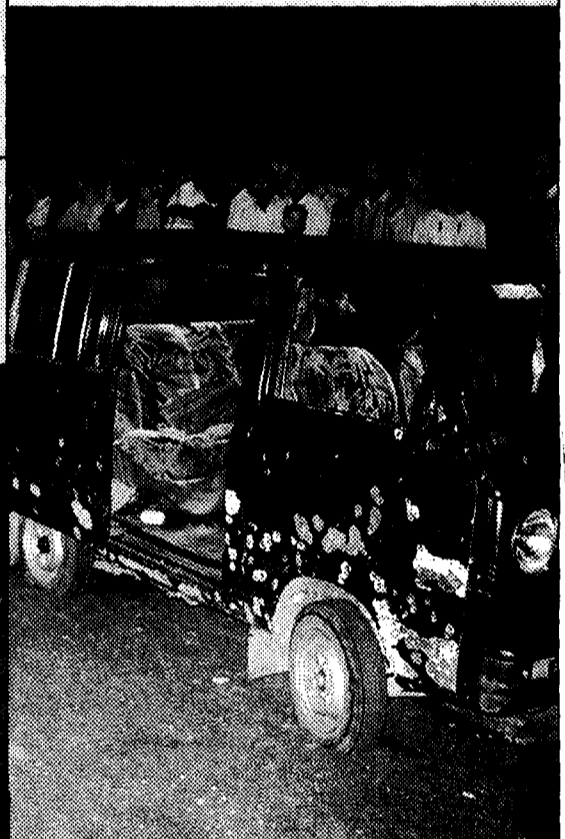
Former parliamentary



GRENADES DROWN CAROL STRAINS



Map above shows the strike spots. The Maruti van (right) which was damaged in Ambari. Tailfin (left) of the mortar that fell near Kalibari



Picture: Eastern Projections Graphic: RAJ

Prabin Sarma, a member of the AGP, was among those injured at Ambari. The condition of six of the injured is stated to be critical. The police have yet to ascertain the direction from which the mortars were fired. However, officials surmised that the impact of the incident in Ambari would have been more devastating had the rocket-propelled

grenade not hit the road. Most of the injured were on cars or two-wheelers and were hit by splinters on the lower part of their bodies. The police recovered the tailfin of a mortar at Kalibari.

A Maruti van and a Santro car took the impact of the Ambari explosion — the van's body was pockmarked by splinter hits. The splinters deflated the

tyres of both vehicles.

Prabin Sarma, who was in the Santro, recounted the incident at a private nursing home near the site of the attack. "Just as my vehicle was about to take a right turn towards Lamb Road, I heard a deafening sound. I felt a burning sensation on my left leg and saw blood seeping out. My driver, too, was injured," he said.

26 DEC 2002

9-NSB

Naga talks put off

HD 12/25/12

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24. The visit of the leaders of the Naga insurgent group NSCN (I-M), who were expected here this weekend for crucial peace talks with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has been postponed by about 10 days because of "logistical reasons", official sources said today.

The NSCN (I-M) chairman, Isak Chisi Swu, and Thuingaleng Muivah "are expected towards the end of the first week of January". Asked what were the logistical reasons, the sources said that among them were

availability of the top Indian leaders for the talks, besides Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah getting their travel documents and air tickets.

They said the two Naga leaders, who would be coming from Europe, would be given Indian travel documents.

This would be their first visit to India in the last 30 years for negotiations to resolve the decades-old Naga insurgency problem.

While the NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Mr. Muivah, who already possesses an Indian

passport, is expected to arrive from The Hague, Mr. Swu and three others have been issued passports by the Indian mission in Oslo and will arrive here from the Norwegian capital.

The meeting between the Naga delegation and Mr. Vajpayee would be attended by the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani. —PTI

THE HINDU
Wishes its readers
a **MERRY CHRISTMAS**

The Naga Accord of 1947

In the public interest and for the information of readers, The Statesman plans to publish a series of documents relating to the troubled Naga issue in the next weeks. These documents include those agreements or proposed accords which sought to settle the political problems of the Nagas and the Indian Republic. These assume significance in the light of the proposed discussions between the Union government and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) led by Isak Chisi Swu and Th Muivah in New Delhi soon. This would be the first visit by Mr Muivah to New Delhi although Mr Swu was here as part of a delegation negotiating these very issues in the 1960s, before the talks collapsed. It should be remembered that the Naga movement for independence is one of the oldest in a post-colonial world — it began as far back, officially for them, as 14 August 1947, when a young Naga walked to a telegraph office in the Naga Hills to send a telegram to the government of India and the United Nations proclaiming their decision. The forthcoming visit by the Naga leaders follows five and a half years of ceasefire between the two sides. In the first of this series of little-known documents, The North East Page publishes the first accord between Sir Akbar Hydari, governor of Assam, and the Nagas, which was rejected by New Delhi and by the chief minister of Assam, Gopinath Bardoloi, and never got beyond the first stage. — SH.

**THE NAGA-AKBAR HYDARI
PROPOSED UNDERSTANDING,
JUNE 1947**

The tribes represented at discussions on 26, 27 and 28 June 1947, at Kohima: Western Angamis, Eastern Angamis, Kukis, Kacha Nagas (Mzemi), Rengmas, Semas, Lothas, Aos, Sangtams and Changs.

That the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes is recognised.

1. Judicial — All cases whether civil or

criminal arising between Nagas in the Naga Hills will be disposed of by duly constituted Naga Courts according to Naga customary law or such law as may be introduced with the consent of the recognised Naga representative organisations: save that where a sentence of transportation or death has been passed there will be a right of appeal to the Governor.

In cases arising between Nagas and non-Nagas in (a) Kohima and Mokokchung town areas, and (b) in the neighbouring plains district the judge if not a Naga will be assisted by a Naga assessor.

2. Executive — The general principle is accepted that what the Naga Council is prepared to pay for the Naga Council should control. This principle will apply equally to the work done as well as the

Document

staff employed.

While the District Officer will be appointed at the discretion of the Governor, subdivisions of the Naga Hills should be administered by a Subdivisional Council with a full time executive president paid by Naga Council who would be responsible to the District Officer for all matters falling within the latter's responsibility, and to the Naga Council for all matters falling within their responsibility.

In regard to:

(a) Agriculture — The Naga Council will exercise all the powers now vested in the District Officer.

(b) C.W.D. — The Naga Council would take over full control.

(c) Education and Forest Department — The Naga Council is prepared to pay for all the services and staff.

3. Legislative — That no law passed by the Provincial or Central Legislature which would materially affect the terms of this agreement or the religious

practices of the Nagas shall have legal force in the Naga Hills without the consent of the Naga Council. In cases of dispute as to whether any law did so affect this agreement the matter would be referred by the Naga Council to the Governor who would then direct that the law in question should not have legal force in the Naga Hills pending the decision of the Central Government.

4. Land — That land with all its resources in the Naga Hills will be under the jurisdiction of the Naga Council.

5. Taxation — That the Naga Council will be responsible for the imposition, collection, and expenditure of land revenue and house tax and of such other taxes as may be imposed by the Naga Council.

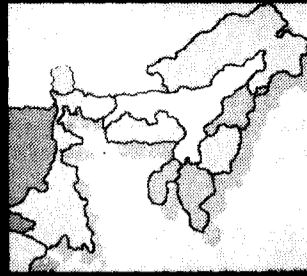
6. Boundaries — That present administrative divisions should be modified so as (1) to bring back into the Naga Hills District all the forests transferred to Sibsagar and Nowgong Districts in the past, and (2) to bring under one unified administrative unit as far as possible all Nagas. All the areas so included would be within the scope of the present proposed agreement. No area should be transferred out of the Naga Hills without the consent of the Naga Council.

7. Arms Act — The Deputy Commissioner will act on the advice of the Naga Council in accordance with the provisions of the Arms Act.

8. Regulations — The Chin Hills Regulations and the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations will remain in force.

9. Period of Agreement — The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at.

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Bhutan and Ulfa: intent & pipedream

50-2 9 or 10 or 11/12

THE tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan wants to oust the North Eastern insurgents who have built bases on its territory. This is not a new intention: it's been the focus of at least two resolutions by the Bhutan National Assembly. But deadlines have come and gone and despite the closure of four camps, hundreds of cadres of both the United Liberation Front of Asom and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland remain on Bhutanese soil. The Bhutanese appear determined in their intention to send Ulfa and the NDFB out of their country. But they seem fearful about taking tough decisions and bringing the situation to an armed confrontation, although the assembly has said the government should be prepared to do so.

In their desperation to get rid of the Assamese militants, the Bhutanese even offered them funds to leave. This did not work. And as another deadline for their voluntary departure from Bhutan looms, the Bhutanese now say that there are not more than 1,000 militants based in their country. And that the camps which were vacated last year indicated that the cadres lived in poor conditions. The question that arises is if the cadre strength is 1,000 or less, then why was the impression given for months by Thimpu that it was in the region of 2,500 or so? How did inflated figures help Bhutan? The only thing they did was perhaps bolster the fractured image of the insurgents in the eyes of the public.

In Samdruk Dzonkha, Ulfa cadres still move around openly in military uniform. Their presence is resented by the local people, although the latter have received tangible economic benefits. This then is the irony of the whole matter — Ulfa's existence in Bhutan, Bangladesh and elsewhere is helping those local economies far more than their own people in Assam. Indeed, the creation of Ulfa and the NDFB has damaged the development of the state, because of the consequent political and economic instability. Investors have not seen Assam as a safe and profitable place where they can park their money and expect a good return; the tea industry has suffered and other businesses have had to pay huge sums in protection money.

A frank question needs to be put to them: how is their presence in Bhutan or Bangladesh helping their long term aim of a so-called independent Assam? Essentially, this remains as much of a chimera, a pipedream, as it was when they first took up arms over 20 years ago. The Nagas are negotiating a settlement after 50 years. Why can't Ulfa? What do they have to lose? Why say they are watching the Naga negotiations to determine the "sincerity" of the Indian government? Why be so dependent on the Nagas and the settlement they devise? Why not have the courage to seek what is best in Assam's interests, for whom their leaders claim to speak? And how will waiting help either them or the people? The "wait and watch" approach is seen as a convenient way to wiggle out of a difficult situation and avoid negotiations, which will be tough with such a wily, calculating and tough customer as the Central government.

A local paper in Assam says that both the government and Ulfa must understand that the public wants a "peaceful, negotiated settlement" and that neither side should play with its feelings. Ulfa should not give the impression any longer that it's either too stubborn or unsure of itself to negotiate.

It's time to stop hiding in Bhutan and come for talks.

THE STATESMAN

21 DEC 2002

Dirty dancing

7-11-81
18/12
51-8
Dispur must now tackle Dimasas

As though Ulfa and Bodo militants are not enough, Dispur has to deal with the Dima Halam Daoga in the North Cachar Hills district and the United People's Democratic Solidarity in Karbi Anglong. The Dimasas have been active since 1994 with help from the NSCN which first infiltrated into the area in the aftermath of the ethnic killings in Manipur. That their activities were overlooked stems perhaps from their confining themselves to acts of extortion and robbing banks. Of late, however, they have become a serious security threat. Last week they shot dead a district ASP and his security guard and ambushed an army patrol party, killing a jawan and injuring seven others. While the DHD is a small group fighting for a "Dimaraji" state which, interestingly, includes a part of Nagaland, the UPDS demands self-rule in Karbi Anglong. The NC Hills district could become an escape route for Ulfa and Bodo militants holed up in Bhutan once Thimphu starts turning the screws on them to wind up their camps. Some portions of the Shillong-Silchar Road run through the thickly forested ghat area parallel to the Bangladesh border and afford easy access.

Although both districts enjoy autonomy, law and order are Dispur's responsibility. The Congress must fight the menace politically as it has wrested power after 12 years in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council following the July 2000 split in the Autonomous State Demand Committee headed by Jayant Rongpi and Holiram Terang of the Left Democratic Front Party. The Congress is also in a majority in the North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council, virtually eliminating the CPI(M-L)'s hold over Karbis and Dimasas. The recent happenings cry out for more attention.

Ulfa threats unfold in court

17/12 9-NB8-17

ASTAFF REPORTER



Guwahati, Dec. 16: More than five years after social activist Sanjoy Ghose was abducted and presumably murdered in Assam, the first hearing of a trial began here today with his wife Sumita giving an account of his crusade against the alleged nexus between the Ulfa and a section of officials and contractors.

Sumita reached the fast-track court of the additional ad hoc sessions judge, Kamrup, around 11 am, followed by her mother-in-law, CBI officials and advocates.

Standing in the witness box, she told the additional ad hoc sessions judge, P.K. Phukan, that her husband had incurred the Ulfa's wrath by exposing the nexus between the outfit and officials and contractors in Majuli through write-ups in a newsletter, *Deepalok*.

She testified that her husband had received threats from the Ulfa before his abduction. Ghose was the general secretary of the Northeast chapter of the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (Avard-NE). He was abducted from the river island of Majuli,

where he was implementing an anti-erosion project, on July 4, 1997.

Sumita and other members of the family alternated between hope and despair for months after he went missing. After much drama, the Ulfa announced that Ghose had died after falling into a gorge somewhere in Arunachal Pradesh while being shifted from one camp to another.

Sumita, who had sought proof of her husband's presumed death, told **The Telegraph** that she was "determined to find the truth". A special investigation team of the CBI filed chargesheets against 11 people, including Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, in 1999.

CBI lawyers will interrogate incarcerated Ulfa vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi as a prosecution witness during the course of the trial.

According to Sumita's testimony, a gun-toting militant named P. Hatimota had told her husband a few months before he was abducted that the Ulfa leadership was watching his and Avard-NE's every move.

Sumita recalled having a telephone conversation with a man

claiming to be Paresh Barua a few days after her husband was taken hostage.

She quoted him as saying that Ghose would be freed if three conditions were met: Avard-NE's withdrawal from Assam, an apology to the people of the state and suspension of operations by the security forces.

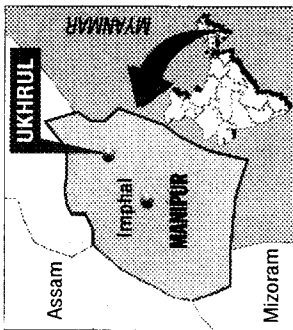
The social activist's wife told the court that she immediately agreed to the first two conditions, but did not make a commitment on the third "as it was not in my hands".

After examining and interrogating about 250 people, the CBI surmised that Ghose had probably been shot dead the very day he was abducted.

Sumita Ghose outside the court in Guwahati.
Picture by S.H. Patgiri

17 DEC 2002

Rebels take Manipur leader's son hostage



OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Dec. 11: The family of Manipur's Rajya Sabha member Rishang Keishing today confirmed reports that his youngest son had been taken hostage by suspected militants during a trip to Ukhrul three days ago.

However, no complaint about the abduction had been lodged with the police till this evening.

Victor Keishing was abducted on Monday from Sinkap village of Ukhrul district. The purpose of his visit was to inspect a suspension bridge built with money from the MP's Local Area Development Fund and take stock of the activities of the Rishang Foundation, an NGO managed by the Keishings.

The Rishang Foundation owns a food-processing unit near

Litan village in the same district. The unit closed shop before the elections in February, when a militant outfit demanded Rs 20 lakh in illegal taxes.

A member of the family said Victor had been whisked away by "unidentified people who could well be militants". He had left Imphal for Ukhrul along with a friend and his driver.

A senior police official told

The Telegraph that his department had received "unofficial reports" about the abduction. He said the Keishing family had not lodged a formal complaint probably because "they may be wanting to negotiate with the abductors directly without anyone else's interference".

The official said the militant outfit that had ambushed a police team led by Ukhrul superin-

tendent of police S. Manglemjao on December 8 could be behind Victor's abduction. Three policemen had been killed and three more seriously injured in the ambush near New Heaven, 32 km from Imphal, on the Imphal-Ukhrul road.

Chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh claimed he had only heard "rumours" about the abduction of Keishing's youngest son.

Jumping the gun

Jamir has it all back to front

9/11/02 *SR6* *12/12*
Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir suspects that the lifting of the ban on the NSCN, his ministers and employees are more vulnerable. Admittedly, the outfit is now free to operate in the open but it is still duty bound to respect the popular outcry for peace under the ceasefire in force. Jamir's fear of the Isak-Muivah faction joining the elections may, however, be unfounded. Such a move would negate its stand that Nagaland is not part of India and it owes no allegiance to the Constitution. What appears to be bugging the chief minister is the growing opposition against him. Former Lok Sabha Speaker and leader of the Nationalist Congress Party PA Sangma has said his party will contest the elections merely to help others defeat Jamir. A recent significant development has been the formation of the Naga People's Front under veteran politician and former chief minister Vizol, whose soft spot for terrorists is no secret. Although Jamir dismisses the party as having no ideology, its members include many senior politicians. In a petition to the President, they say that "it will not be possible to have free and fair election unless random corruption and manipulation of the dictator rule of Congress is checked."

Jamir is optimistic of the Congress returning to power but the pitfalls are many. In 1998, all opposition parties boycotted the assembly poll in response to a call by the NSCN-IM and the Naga Hoho, resulting in the unopposed return of as many as 43 Congress candidates in the 60-member House. This time, there is little doubt of the NSCN-IM fighting a proxy poll, thereby helping Jamir's detractors.

THE STATESMAN

1 2 DEC 2002

The Naga peace moves

By Wasbir Hussain

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12/12

THE NAGA guerrilla chiefs, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu, might still insist they are not Indians, but the two, easily among South Asia's frontline insurgent leaders, are set to fly into India anytime now to continue negotiations with New Delhi and carry the Naga peace process forward. Decks have been cleared for the top leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah faction), operating from various locations abroad, to come to India after New Delhi last fortnight lifted the 12-year-long ban on the outfit in yet another "mini-deal". Days after the Government's chief negotiator on Naga peace, K. Padmanabhaiah, briefed the NSCN (I-M) chairman, Mr. Swu, and the general secretary, Mr. Muivah, in Italy on the modalities for their visit to the country, New Delhi let the ban on the outfit lapse. Its current period expired on November 26.

The lifting of the ban was in fact among the several conditions put up by the NSCN (I-M) leaders for coming to India to continue with the peace talks in response to a personal invitation from the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. Another condition that has been met is the withdrawal of the arrest warrants against Mr. Muivah and other NSCN (I-M) leaders issued by the Nagaland Government in February 2000 after the assassination bid on the State's Chief Minister, S. C. Jamir. With the ban no longer there, the NSCN (I-M) is now a legitimate group, free to open offices anywhere in the country. It can back candidates or political parties or even contest if it likes in the coming Assembly elections in Nagaland. Of course, its cadres would still not be permitted to wander around in 'inhabited areas' with weapons.

It took more than five years for New Delhi and the NSCN (I-M) to come to a stage when they could actually talk on what the rebel leaders call 'substantive issues' since the former Prime Minister, H. D. Deve Gowda's unorthodox initiative in 1996 — when he handpicked the Opposition Congress leader, Rajesh Pilot, to make contact with the NSCN (I-M).

Ever since they entered into a ceasefire agreement that came into effect from August 1, 1997, the Government and the NSCN (I-M) have primarily been engaged in sorting out disputes that were central to the issue from the rebels' point of view, more than New Delhi's. The key dispute was over the jurisdiction of the truce, whether it should be applicable only in Nagaland or whether it should extend to all Naga-inhabited areas in other States adjoining Nagaland as demanded by the NSCN (I-M). Finally, after the anti-ceasefire uprising in neighbouring Manipur in June 2001

talks break down.

Unlike in the mid-1960s when the talks between the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and the Naga leaders broke down as the two sides held on to their respective positions — the Nagas insisting on nothing but a sovereign Naga homeland and New Delhi simply rejecting it — it is the dominant mood for peace among the Nagas now that has made the two sides push ahead to evolve a solution. The NSCN (I-M)'s decision to agree to have a ceasefire in place in 1997, and thereafter, enter into negotiations with New Delhi suggests that

agreeing to abide by the Indian Constitution. After all, no State, whether it is Assam, Manipur or Arunachal Pradesh would like its borders redrawn.

One thing is clear: New Delhi cannot afford to do things in a hurry. It must now try to ascertain whether peace will actually return to Nagaland or the Naga areas with only the deal with the NSCN (I-M) without the concurrence of rival Naga rebel factions as the NSCN (K) or the NNC. That, of course, is a long-term question. As of now, New Delhi's biggest challenge is to keep the NSCN (I-M) cadres in Nagaland under check, put an end to the internecine group clashes between the NSCN (I-M) and the NSCN (K) (between August 1, 1997, and November 26, 2002, a total of 96 NSCN (I-M) cadres and 246 NSCN (K) men were killed) and to see that the Congress Government in Nagaland headed by Mr. Jamir does not whip up unnecessary fears over the lifting of the ban on the NSCN (I-M). Mr. Jamir has already met Mr. Vajpayee and wanted him to ensure that the NSCN (I-M) does not intimidate voters during the coming Assembly elections in the State.

At the stage that the talks are in, mutual trust will hold the key to a great extent. For instance, the Mizoram Chief Minister, Zoramthanga, a former rebel leader himself, has said the NSCN (I-M) leaders were wary of New Delhi's response in the event of the talks breaking down while they are in India. Mr. Zoramthanga said that in 1978, he was part of an eight-member Mizo National Front (MNF) team that had come to New Delhi for talks with the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai. "The talks failed, and we were forcibly detained for as long as nine months in New Delhi," he said. Mr. Zoramthanga, who has emerged as another key Government negotiator on the Naga issue, however, ruled out the possibility of New Delhi repeating the same mistake this time, saying, "this is too good an opportunity to be missed". He couldn't be more correct.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi)

Only now, when the NSCN (I-M) leaders come to India, will discussions actually begin on 'substantive issues'.

that saw 18 Meitei protesters die in police firing, it was 'decided' that the truce would be confined to Nagaland.

So far, the peace talks have been held in Bangkok, Amsterdam, Paris, Italy, Davos and so on. Only now, when the NSCN (I-M) leaders come to India, will discussions actually begin on 'substantive issues'. Before examining the possible solutions that could emerge, one would like to know the current citizenship status of Mr. Muivah, Mr. Swu and some other NSCN (I-M) leaders living in self-imposed exile abroad. If the NSCN (I-M) leaders are flying into New Delhi on Indian travel documents, it would indicate a relaxation in their position. After all, the Naga rebels still stick to the "declaration of independence" by the Naga National Council (NNC) on August 14, 1947, a day before India became free from British rule. This event is cited by groups such as the NSCN (I-M) to argue that they were fighting the Indian state to "regain their lost sovereignty", and that the movement is not at all a secessionist uprising. By all accounts, New Delhi is said to have persuaded the rebel top brass to accept Indian travel documents. Of course, they could well have been promised a safe passage to return to their foreign locations should the

it had made up its mind for a compromise. Like the NSCN (I-M), the Vajpayee Government, too, appears bent on clinching the issue. This explains why the Vajpayee Government has been going all out to ensure that every possible irritant is removed from the path of the peace process.

What could the magic compromise formula for a solution be? That is the million-dollar question. The NSCN (I-M) triumvirate of Mr. Muivah, Mr. Swu and the vice-chairman, Khodao Yanthan, are all in their 60s, and are in a hurry to assume the leadership of their people and make some fruitful contribution. Could the solution lie in a dual citizenship for the Nagas? Could Nagaland's administration, as a feel-good factor, be brought under the Ministry of External Affairs as was the case at one point in the past? Could the Nagas get a new autonomy package? This is for New Delhi and the NSCN (I-M) leadership to decide and agree upon, but certain things such as the demand for integration of the Naga-inhabited areas in States such as Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh into one Nagaland are issues that cannot be decided by the two negotiating sides alone. The NSCN (I-M)'s 'greater Nagaland' dream is one that will be extremely difficult to realise even if it insists on that while

AGREEING ON PEACE

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The cause of self-determination is best served, not by violence but by democratic means. Rebel outfits that took up arms to realize dreams of self-rule are veering round to peaceful paths. The latest example is the agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In India's insurgency-infested Northeast, there is now hope of another dawn of peace. A tripartite agreement later this month could bring the curtain down on Bodo insurgency in the region. Both the Assam government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers must be commended for their sincerity of purpose that has apparently enabled them to iron out differences over the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council. The two sides and the Union home ministry seem to have agreed that they should not stall the signing of the agreement for creating the council. This proves once again that no problem is insurmountable if the fund of goodwill is not exhausted. The BLT seems to have conceded that its demand for inclusion of 93 additional villages in the council area should not jeopardize its basic aim of self-rule within Assam. In return, the Assam government has to show a spirit of accommodation over the economic package the BLT wants for the new council.

The BLT must ensure that the painstaking process of self-rule for the Bodos is not sabotaged by malcontents within the community. It is almost certain that the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland will try to scuttle the peace process with its violent movement for a "sovereign Bodoland". BLT leaders have to mobilize the community's opinion, not only in favour of the new council, but also against the NDFB's violent and irrational secessionism. If the Bodo-inhabited areas are among the poorest in Assam, one of the reasons is the NDFB's gun culture which has long stalled all development activities. The new council could be the fountainhead of a much-needed economic transformation of the areas. The BLT must also assure the non-Bodos living within the proposed council area that they will not be discriminated against, given the area's history of ethnic rivalries with tragic consequences. The leaders of the BTC have to work in tandem with the state government to ensure the safety and economic well-being of all communities living in the new administrative set-up. Assam's chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, may project the council as the first major success story of his 18-month government. But the real success will come if the council runs efficiently enough to live up to the Bodos' expectations. Both the state government and the BTC have to ensure that.

Ready for talks, with strings

SAMIR K. PURKAYASTHA

Rongbin (Somewhere in the jungles of Karbi Anglong), Dec. 8: The hardline faction of the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), the dominant militant outfit of Assam's Karbi Anglong district, has asked for modifications in the Constitution in a list of four conditions for a dialogue with the Centre.

The general secretary of the UPDS, H.E. Kathar, told a group of visiting newsmen at its "central militia commission" that his group would hold talks with the Centre only if all four conditions were met.

The UPDS, whose base extends to the adjacent North Cachar Hills, had split recently. The faction led by Herensing Bey agreed to a ceasefire with the Centre, but Kathar's outfit has stuck to its guns.

Both factions profess to be fighting for *hemprek kangthim*, or the "Karbis' right to self-rule".

Kathar said his organisation was not opposed to talks, as had the media had made it out to be. He said the UPDS would readily sit for talks if the Centre brought about a "drastic transformation of the Indian Constitution to fulfil the aspirations of the indigenous people".

The militant leader, whose outfit observed its 4th "martyrs' day" on Friday, said the agenda for the talks should focus on *hemprek kangthim* (self-rule) for the Karbi and Dimasas communities.

"We are not for secession from India. What we want is a federal state by limiting the federal powers to a handful of subjects like defence, external af-

KARBI HARDLINERS SING PEACE TUNE



UPDS rebels croon during the "martyr's day" at Rongbin in Assam's Karbi Anglong district.

Picture by UB Photos

fairs, communication, currency and some residuary powers," he said.

The UPDS hardliner said the Centre should stop looking for an answer to the Karbi and Dimasas' demand for autonomy within the ambit of the Sixth Schedule. "The Union government should instead grant maximum autonomy. We want the government to spell out its position on these vital issues prior to any negotiation, as we have seen the outcome of unconditional discussions other organisations have opted for."

Citing an instance of aspira-

tions half-fulfilled, Kathar said the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) had started a dialogue with the Centre for a separate state, only to be given a territorial council.

The UPDS leader asked the Centre call a halt to all military operations against his outfit and invite Amnesty International to investigate all "extra judicial killings by security forces and other agencies". He claimed that hundreds of innocents, including family members of UPDS leaders, had been killed since the outfit was formed in 1999.

On the spate of attacks on

non-tribals in Karbi Anglong, Kathar said his outfit was involved in none of these.

The chairman of the outfit, P. Dilli, criticised the Bey faction for "compromising a true cause" by agreeing to a truce and unconditional talks with the Centre. Dilli's statement was read out by the "finance secretary" of the outfit, B. Lekhte.

Since the split in the UPDS, the hardline faction has been referring to itself as the Karbi Anglong-N.C. Hills People's Resistance. However, the nomenclature remains an "unofficial" one.

9 DEC 2002

Decks cleared for new pact

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 5: Prodded by the Union home ministry, the Tarun Gogoi government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) today removed most of the obstacles that have delayed the creation of a new administrative set-up for Assam's troubled Bodo belt.

Official sources said after the crucial tripartite talks here that an accord was likely to be signed between the state government and the BLT by the end of this month.

R.C. Jain, special secretary (Northeast) in the Union home

Tripartite talks in Delhi remove hurdles in way of Bodo council

ministry, chaired the meeting and home commissioner B.K. Gohain represented the Assam government in the negotiations with the BLT delegation.

Another meeting on the legal and constitutional aspects of funding the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) will be held soon.

A senior official said the issue of including 93 additional villages in Bodo territory, as demanded by the BLT, would be tackled at a later date.

The Bodos had initially demanded a separate state, but most organisations representing the community have since agreed to make do with a subsidiary administrative set-up. The outlawed National Democratic Front of Boroland, however, continues to fight for a "sovereign Bodoland".

The discussions today centred on an economic package for the Bodos. As had been promised, both sides adhered to the "spirit of give and take". The

BLT, especially, modified several of its earlier demands.

The BLT delegation began the negotiations by placing its demand for a medical college, an engineering college, a Doordarshan centre and several technical institutes.

As talks got under way in the capital, Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi announced in Guwahati that the general secretary of the NDFB, Govinda Basumatary alias B. Swamkhwr, had been arrested.

The militant was apprehended at Rangiya railway station on November 26 while he was travelling from Dimapur to Calcutta on the Kamrup Express.

Incommunicado

9-N 5/8 Assam's ills call for teamwork SFB
A112

There is more than meets the eye as to what is described as the "mixed-up" killings at Hajo in Assam's Kamrup district. Reports suggest that following a "tip" that some Ulfa militants were holed up in the village an army team led by the "informer" surrounded the house of a teacher who was served an extortion notice. The villagers thought the army men were militants and in the ensuing skirmish two soldiers and six villagers were killed. The army obviously could not have ignored such vital information, but a lot more caution should have been exercised since the "informer" was of "doubtful integrity". Moreover, the police should have been taken into confidence since they are part of the Unified Command. To compound matters, the army men were in mufti. Then again, the Army Commander's claim that they had to act on an emergency basis may be justified since they are trained to surprise the enemy. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi blames the lack of communication between the army and the police for the avoidable incident but offers no plausible alternative. What all this underscores is the need for greater coordination at a time when the country is keenly watching how the Unified Command tackles militants active on either side of Bhutan and Bangladesh borders.

The growing fear of extortion is as understandable as the need to avoid a repetition of the Hajo incident. Because the villagers' action cannot be faulted and the army should have known better. It is an encouraging sign that people have begun to resist extortionists and are organising themselves. The entire north-east region is in the grip of this scourge and only public support can defeat it.

4 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

Leaders bust IT 'myth'

CMs unite in defence of Northeast

ASTAFFREPORTER

Calcutta, Dec. 2: Strong voices from the Northeast today united to tell businessmen that in their part of the country IT does not stand for Insurgency and Terrorism.

At a round-table here, held in connection with eastern and Northeastern India's biggest exhibition on information technology, top representatives of the seven states spoke of the incentives that were on offer but admitted that the region's biggest handicap was its image.

Economist-politician Jairam Ramesh set the tone for the one-and-a-half-hour session, held as a part of Infocom 2002, jointly organised by infotech industry association Nasscom and Ananda Bazar group publication *Businessworld*.

"This is the first such event in this part of the country that aims to promote IT investments in the east and the Northeast. The region has everything for a take-off," he said.

The majority of the ministers from the region conceded that they had little to claim by way of achievements in infotech but sought to dispel the myth that the Northeast was an unsafe place to invest in.

"We have nothing much to offer to the IT world right now, but there is always a first time. We would like to have industry guide us as to what should be done. We have political stability," Nagaland's minister for science and technology T. Chubha said.

There is political stability in large swathes of the Northeast. As there is no insurgency in several states, the speakers said to a national audience not familiar with conditions in the region.

Even in states where there is a problem, the ministers offered full protection.

For instance, Okram Ibobi Singh, the chief minister of Manipur, said: "We are even willing to provide commandos for the safety of the investing community." Bhubaneswar Kalita, the industry minister of Assam, attributed the sluggish growth in investments to a "negative image".

"We have made significant progress in the past 10 years. We have a call centre in Assam and discussions are on to set up two more. But we need to make people aware of our strengths to overcome the image handicap."

Ranchi bandh

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ranchi, Dec. 2: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the CPI(M-L) have jointly called a bandh on Sunday against the state government's stand on the domicile issue and demanded that it should clarify the definition of "original inhabitants".

"The government is itself triggering social tension between communities. This is a dangerous trend," leader of Opposition Stephen Marandi said. "The government has failed to chalk out supplementary steps on the directions of Jharkhand High Court. The government is not serious over such a sensitive issue which, if not sorted out, would only lead to further bad blood in the state," he added.

The high court on Wednesday had set aside the government's reservation policy of preference to tribals and long-settled outsiders in jobs.

Marandi said, "The government should at least come out with an assurance on such a sensitive matter in the Assembly."

3 DEC 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

TWO SOLDIERS AMONG 9 KILLED IN KAMRUP

Armymen in mufti attacked

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Dec. 1. — A Major, a jawan and another person were killed when villagers attacked a team of Armymen in mufti, "mistaking them for militants". The incident took place at Adhiarpara village, near Hajo, in Kamrup district around 1.30 p.m. today. The Armymen retaliated, killing six villagers.

Another jawan and eight villagers were injured and have been admitted to Guwahati Medical College Hospital. The condition of some of them is reported to be critical. The major has been identified as RAS Thabha.

The IGP (special branch), Mr Khagen Sharma, told The Statesman that a person - "not of good character" - had led a nine-member team of the Army from the Assam Regiment to the house of a teacher, Mr Tamujuddin Ahmed, in the village saying that extremists were hiding there.

About a month back, Mr Ahmed had received a demand for money ostensibly from Ulfa and was, along with other villagers, waiting for the militants to show up.

When the Armymen surrounded the house of the teacher, the villagers thought they were militants and attacked them with choppers, stones and lathis. The Major, a jawan and the civilian driver of the Army men's vehicle were killed.

At this, the Armymen opened fire killing six villagers and injuring eight others. "We suspect that the person who led the army men to the village had written to the teacher demanding money in the name of Ulfa. He may have wanted to teach a lesson to the teacher and had taken the Armymen along," Mr Sharma said. The person was absconding and the police were looking for him.

According to an army spokesman, a man of "doubtful integrity" had misled the army team. It was not clear why the army men had listened to a man of "doubtful integrity" and gone to the village without taking policemen along as is required.

However, villagers said the person was a former Ulfa militant, Mohammad Ali. According to them, Ali had asked for a hefty sum but the teacher had refused to pay. This may have annoyed the former militant.

A village teacher had received a letter, purportedly written by Ulfa militants demanding money. The Armymen in mufti were mistaken for militants and attacked

2 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

Bangla feeding North-east terror machine

Chandan Nandy

New Delhi, November 30

INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES have submitted a report to the Government detailing the activities of north-eastern insurgent groups in Bangladesh. The report had been commissioned in the context of the ongoing controversy between India and Bangladesh over Dhaka's support for anti-India activities.

New Delhi intends to use the report, called for by Deputy

Prime Minister LK Advani, for a "graduated response". If and when necessary, it will confront Dhaka with the evidence the report contains.

The report documents details of training camps for North-east insurgent outfits that function on Bangladeshi soil and get patronage and protection from both the Bangladesh Army and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

Most important camps are located in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Habiganj, Mymensingh,

Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban, Sherpur, Maulvi Bazar, Netrakona and Sunamganj districts.

The Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, say Home Ministry reports, "serves as an important link for the outfits which receive assistance from the ISI as well as from Bangladesh's Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI).

The total number of camps tracked down by Indian security agencies number around 130,

with 43 belonging to the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). Besides, there are several camps that are run jointly by some insurgent groups. The

camps belong to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), NSCN (Khaplang), United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), People's Liberation Army and United Na-

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tional Liberation Front (UNLF). Indian security agencies are aware of the existence of joint camps of at least four militant organisations. ATTF and Ulfa cadres operate from a camp in Khagrachari. Another joint ATTF-Ulfa camp functions at Satchari in Habiganj district while an NDFB-NSCN(I-M) training centre exists at Alikadam in Bandarban district.

While the Ulfa has 24 training camps, mostly in Dhaka, Sylhet, Khagrachari, Maulvi Bazar and

the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the NLFT's camps are located mostly in CHT and Khagrachari. The ATTF is active in Maulvi Bazar, Habiganj and Comilla.

The BSF's eastern theatre chief AK Mitra said over 70 battalions would be engaged to guard the Bangladesh border in view of the spiralling problem of terrorism. The BSF is also planning two new Frontier Headquarters at Malda and Silchar. Five new floating posts will also come up in the Brahmaputra.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 DEC 2002

Ban on Naga outfit lifted

27/11 710-1
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 26. The ban on the Naga secessionist group NSCN(IM) has effectively been lifted paving the way for talks in New Delhi between the Government and the Naga leaders, T. Muivah and Isak Swu. The breakthrough comes three years after talks between Mr. Muivah and the Government's special emissary, the former Home Secretary, K. Padmanabhaiah.

The NSCN(IM) has been banned since it was formed, following a split in the NSCN, in the 1980s. Its leaders Mr. Muivah and Mr. Swu have been in self-imposed exile in Thailand. Their meetings with Mr. Padmanabhaiah have been held either in Thailand or in Europe. In recent talks in Italy the Naga leaders had in principle agreed to talks in India. The Government's decision not to renew the ban on the organisation,

9-11-82
which lapsed today, fulfils a major condition for the talks.

Last week, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, had suggested that the Naga leaders arrive in Delhi in mid-December. But there is as yet no time-table for the talks. A formula for the talks and a time-table for the meetings are being worked out. These would be ready "fairly soon".

He also said that the Naga leaders were expected to meet the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and Mr. Advani while in Delhi for "an exchange of views".

Mr. Vajpayee had earlier met the Naga leaders in Paris in September 1998 and again last year while on an official visit to Japan.

Serious efforts at talks with the NSCN(IM) began in the mid 1990s.

The lifting of the ban will permit the Naga leaders unrestricted travel in India.

CIF HINDE

27 NOV 2002

Rights body denies links with Ulfa

9.11.02 11
OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Nov. 22: The Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS) has denied allegations of links with the banned Ulfa, but dared the Assam government to prove its charges that it had relations with the militant outfit.

The MASS has been in the forefront of those demanding that the government prise open the door for a dialogue with the Ulfa to end insurgency in the state.

Accusing the government of hatching a conspiracy to malign the human rights organisation, MASS chairperson Lachit Bordoloi today said "confessional statements" were being "manufactured" to frame office-bearers and activists of his organisation.

Bordoloi claimed that security agencies were "planting concocted confessional statements" to establish the allegation that the MASS was recruiting Ulfa cadre. He said no activist of his organisation was involved in any such activity, as alleged by security agencies.

The MASS chairperson also claimed that none of the persons named in alleged confessional statements of Ulfa activists was associated with his organisation.

"If the government has any evidence against anybody, then they should further investigate into the matter and arrest the person. My name has also been unnecessarily dragged into the matter," Bordoloi said.

He claimed that the "anti-talks lobby" in the state government had hatched a conspiracy against his organisation as the MASS was advocating negotiations with the Ulfa.

Bordoloi said the MASS wanted to elicit public opinion by roping in the civil society in talks with the Ulfa, should it take place.

"We have organised public meetings at several places and with the various tribal groups in this regard," he said.

The rights group also demanded immediate release of arrested Ulfa vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi to facilitate talks between the outfit and the government. The incarcerated Ulfa leader has offered to play the role of a mediator if he is authorised by the outfit.

The Ulfa leader had said that the outfit was ready to reciprocate if the Union and the state governments declare a unilateral ceasefire to create a conducive atmosphere for peace negotiations.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi, however, put the ball in the Ulfa's court by saying that his government was ready to recommend a ceasefire if the outfit came out with an assurance that it would abjure violence.

THE TELEGRAPH

23 NOV 2002

Conflicts & communities

By Lt-Gen (ret'd) VK Nayar

A trilogy of obstacles has sealed the North East off from the rest of the country. The most formidable of these has been our ignorance and lack of knowledge. This ignorance has led to distrust, ill-will and hostility. We need to break this barrier with knowledge, which will lead to understanding, goodwill and trust.

Ignorance has been responsible for misjudgment and wrong decisions on the part of Delhi and its executors on the ground. Last year's handling of the extension of New Delhi's ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) to Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, which led to agitation and bloodshed in Manipur and its eventual rollback, is not the only example. The other barrier is our continuance of the British policy of isolation of the tribals, which perpetrates distrust of the plains people. In addition, the physical difficulties caused by inaccessible terrain and lack of communications have resulted in economic and social obstacles, which have to be experienced to be believed.

The ethnic factor is omnipresent in all facets of life in the region, particularly in hill areas inhabited by the tribals. To win them, trust and credibility are essential. A key element of the problem of growth of ethnic consciousness is the perceived boundaries of the tribal communities. The Naga case is a prime example. Naga tribes maintained their identities, confined themselves to their traditional areas and the present districts in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Tripura in Arunachal Pradesh were organised on this basis. Each tribe has its own distinct culture and tradition and institutional structure, with no common language.

Nagamese, which is widely spoken, is based on Assamese and it came up by usage primarily between Assamese of the plains and tribals in the bordering areas. Even the Naga insurgent groups draw their strength from different tribes and factional fights among them are aimed at dominating more tribes and areas. The slogan of Greater Nagaland (Nagalim) does not find uniform response from Naga tribes in Nagaland and Manipur. It is both the political and insurgent agenda of the NSCN (I-M). The

real aim is to grab territory, increase areas of influence and control smuggling. It is the main cause of Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur and has led to Kukis arming themselves, thus adding to the ethnic conflict. The Meitei antagonism to the ceasefire extension is a reaction to perceived Naga expansionism.

Continuing transborder migration from Bangladesh is threatening to alter the demographic profile of the North East, particularly in Assam and Tripura. The point that Bangladesh immigrants are a source of communal and ethnic tension was well-proven by the Assam agitation. The vast official machinery and resources employed to guard the border will serve no useful purpose in the absence of political will and administrative diligence. We need to evolve an immigration policy and establish a set up similar to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service as in the USA. In the long term, only a common development

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strategy for countries of the region and the North East can resolve the problem and prevent further conflicts.

The North East has borders with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and given its topographical and ethnic configuration is prone to infiltration and exploitation by foreign powers. This is especially true of Pakistan, which has treated the region as a second front of the proxy war. When hostilities between neighbours sharpen, these lead to sponsorship of or support to insurgencies. Ethnic discord has provided the necessary conducive environment. The establishment of camps of the United Liberation Front of Asom and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland in southern Bhutan completes a circle established by insurgents in neighbouring countries.

The problem of ethnicity in a dev-

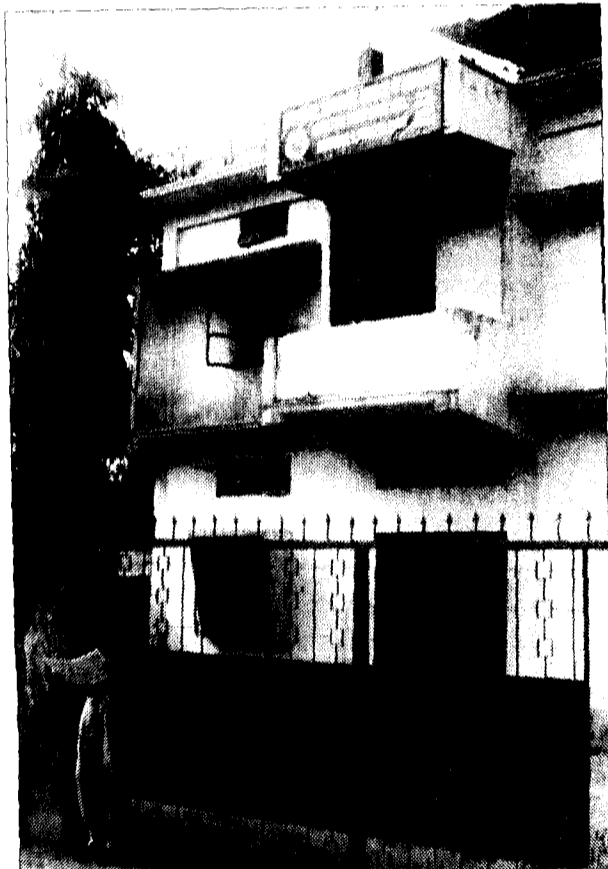
veloping society like ours is essentially one of deprivation and governance. The sense of deprivation manifests itself in different ways. Naga insurgency is rooted in their feeling of being separate, with no political, cultural and economic binding links with their neighbouring communities, which were closer to the British. The demise of British colonialism severed the link, therefore the idea of independence. The Mizos were the first to join India but the response to the famine of 1959 was, in their perception, not only tardy but deliberately mismanaged.

The Meiteis, the Vaishnavite majority group of Manipur, feel deprived when they compare themselves to tribals even in their own state, due to protection policies favouring the hill groups. They perceive themselves to be more cultured and advanced and closer to the Indian ethos. But the manner of the merger of the state, the language issue, delayed statehood, rampant corruption and increasing unemployment have generated a sense of alienation and frustration, resulting in insurgency and religious revivalism. I was able to contain it to some extent by helping Meiteis to be included in the OBC list in 1987.

Similarly, Assamese and Bodo insurgency is partly due to their sense of deprivation based on fear of submergence by the immigrants and intruders which has led to ethnic militancy. Tribal insurgency in Tripura is based on economic and social deprivation and alienation of their land as a result of influx, first from East Pakistan and then Bangladesh, which has threatened their very existence.

New Delhi's approach to conflicts has been primarily at the tactical level dealing with its law and order dimensions. Strategic issues of political responses and conflict resolution measures in the social and economic fields are given a go-by. There are social, economic and political issues which effect the lives of people and contribute to their feeling of deprivation. Attending to these can only help resolve the problem in the long run.

(The author is a former Governor of Manipur and Nagaland)



As India and the insurgent Naga leaders, Th Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim prepare to hold talks next month in Delhi, the NSCN office in Dimapur, Nagaland wears a sedate look with a cadre (left) reading news of discussions outside the building while one of its leaders, Phurting Shimrah (above) works the phone inside. Mr Shimrah is the NSCN representative at meetings of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group, which includes members of the Centre and state governments. — Sanjoy Hazarika.

Naga talks stir peace hopes

The Central government's decision to let the ban on the National Socialist of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) lapse on 26 November has generated hope across the North East that the insurgency that has ravaged the region will slowly fade.

All the major insurgent groups in the North East are closely watching the possible outcome of the ongoing negotiations between the NSCN (I-M) and the Centre.

The United Liberation Front of Asom, which is fighting for independence, recently stated that it was monitoring the outcome of these talks. "The Indo-Naga talks will have to be the acid test of Indian sincerity... We have the patience to wait till the resolution of the Naga conflict," the ULFA said in the latest issue of its mouthpiece, *Freedom*.

The ULFA has its own precondition — that the talks must focus on sovereignty, an issue that New Delhi is not prepared to discuss. The question here and with the other insurgencies is whether they will settle for something substantially short of sovereignty — which no government in Delhi can afford to give — but a huge dose of funds and wider political and economic autonomy. The NSCN (I-M), which fought a bush war for five decades against India, has observed a ceasefire with Indian forces since 1997. It has held several rounds of talks on a possible settlement with government representatives, including K Padmanabhiiah, at Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Amsterdam and Paris.

By Kuntala Chakraborty

However, if the other NSCN faction commanded by SS Khaplang is not brought into the negotiations, these discussions may boomerang because the Nagas may see a resurgence of selective killing and bloodletting. Another problem is that the Khaplang group may be able to attract those who believe that the cause of Naga sovereignty could be betrayed. There is a technical problem as well because Mr Khaplang is a Myanmarese national and cannot be involved in talks.

In addition, the Centre will have to

Analysis

involve different Naga groups, including the Naga National Council, which has been obdurate, and the Naga Hoho, the non-political platform for most Naga tribes, to hammer out a consensual agreement.

How will other armed groups react to these developments?

The ULFA, one of the Assam groups, has clarified its position. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland continues to target innocent people even as its rival group, the Bodo Liberation Tigers, prepares to sign an agreement which will create a territorial council for the Bodos within Assam. In the long run, the NSCN (I-M) talks and the BLT may weaken groups such as the NDFB.

In Manipur, those groups fighting for independence are worried about the developments concerning the Nagas. Their point of concern is supported by all political groups among the majority Meitei community — that no part of Manipur should be handed over to the larger Naga homeland sought by the NSCN (I-M). This will be the most challenging task before the negotiators, to assuage both Naga concerns and those of their neighbours. Th Muivah, the NSCN (I-M) supreme, is from the Naga-dominated hills of Manipur.

Tripura's armed groups, the All Tripura Tiger Force and the National Liberation Front of Tripura, which operate from camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, will be enfeebled by an accord involving the Nagas. The NLFT has links with the NSCN and the ATF with the ULFA. For the insurgents of Tripura, the state is not their enemy, though the NLFT talks of secession. Their targets are the settlers who have migrated from former East Pakistan after Partition and reduced the indigenous peoples to a minority. If they can be involved in power-sharing and if New Delhi gives more powers to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council to make it independent of the state government, the insurgency is likely to ease.

The question now is: How sincere is the Centre and will it have a sufficiently flexible, long-term approach?

(The author is a freelance writer based in Tripura.)

New security draft for N-E

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Shillong, Nov. 21: The essentially development-oriented North Eastern Council (NEC) has drawn up an "internal security plan" for the states of the region to counter insurgency in a more effective manner.

The director-general of Assam Rifles, who is the security adviser to the NEC, has approved the plan.

NEC secretary P.L. Thanga said the security plan was drafted after the meeting in Guwahati last week. The chief ministers and Governors of the seven northeastern states and a senior bureaucrat from Sikkim, which is the eighth member of the council, had attended the meeting. The chief ministers were unanimous in the view that law and order problems had rendered all other issues "irrelevant".

Thanga said the NEC would not be involved in direct operations, but facilitate the process. "Sharing information is crucial to the success of the new strategy. It will be implemented in the insurgency-wracked states of the region and gradually in the

relatively peaceful ones." One of the key components of the strategy is to train the police in counter-insurgency training. The NEC has decided to set aside funds for the purpose and urged the department for development of the Northeast to provide additional assistance.

The NEC secretary said development programmes could not be implemented properly if the law and order situation in the entire region remained fluid. He said the North-Eastern Police Academy could be involved in counter-insurgency operations in various states.

Meghalaya chief minister F.A. Khonglam has made a case for setting up a joint command for counter-insurgency operations in the Northeast. His Nagaland counterpart S.C. Jamir, however, has other ideas.

A day before the meeting in Guwahati, Jamir said Khonglam's insistence on a joint command was not feasible. "There is a better way of countering insurgency. Sharing of intelligence at the chief minister level, which was the norm when Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, should be revived."

9-11-02 ✓
All very well ✓
NSCN (I-M) must respect people's will ✓

Technically, the Centre has not lifted the ban on the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN, merely allowed it to lapse. No gazette notification has been issued — as in November 1990, when the Chandrasekhar government proscribed it. All NSCN factions and front organisations are also “free”. Curiously, the Centre is engaged in talks with an outfit it officially declared unlawful but so far this dialogue had been outside India. Why does Delhi not follow a consistent policy? It started negotiating with the Bodo Liberation Tigers even when it was banned. Now that the Delhi Police and the Nagaland government have withdrawn cases against NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Th Muivah for abortive attempts on the life of chief minister SC Jamir (in New Delhi in 1992 and near Kohima in 2000), the stage is set for crucial talks on home ground, a major breakthrough.

Clearly, the thinking is that the peace process will get a thrust — and one hopes transparency as well — with the venue shifting to India. Laldenga, the late Mizo supremo, was able to hammer out a solution in Delhi. But there can be little ground for optimism if the Naga people's will for reconciliation is not respected. The fratricidal killings must stop. With the next assembly elections just three months away, the atmosphere is obviously charged. The Centre must ponder opinions expressed by some leaders that holding elections while talks are at a crucial stage will only jeopardise the process. The Jamir government feels state employees and officials may become more vulnerable. This runs counter to Rajiv Gandhi's promise to the Dimapur electorate a day before he was assassinated: that his party would withdraw the ban if it came to power. Since the future of insurgency depends on how the Centre clinches the Naga issue, there must be greater flexibility and any settlement must be acceptable to all.

Reality bites: Big Brother speaks

Sanjoy Hazarika in Nagaland.

The public face of the NSCN (I-M) is its articulate spokesman, Col. Phuntling Shimrah, who is based in Dimapur. But Col. Shimrah, who studied in Imphal and Shillong, emerged as a key military commander and organised spectacular ambushes of the security forces and pushed the Khaplang faction to the defensive before the ceasefire, almost marginalising it, is anything if not blunt.

In the five years of the ceasefire, the I-M cadre strength has nearly doubled and its tax collection has soared. "I have to run a government, we have to maintain an army," Col. Shimrah said. His organisation is loathed, feared and respected in turns by Nagas and others - especially by the state government, the Centre and the security forces, a tribute to its clout.

Col. Shimrah, in his mid-40s, is the head of the NSCN (I-M)'s ceasefire monitoring liaison cell in Dimapur, which meets with the Ceasefire Monitoring Group, headed by Lt-Gen. (rtd) Ramesh Kulkarni, and representatives of the state and Central governments, to check violations of the truce. These days, the Khaplang faction is accusing the CFMG of being unable to stop attacks on it by its rival.

The I-M official acknowledges that getting used to living in one place, such as a designated camp under the ceasefire rules, informing security troops ahead of time before moving, not carrying weapons openly, is a tough call for those men in such bases. Of course, he does not indicate how many fighters live in the camps.

The Naga Hoho, an influential platform for most Naga tribes, and church leaders and non-govern-

nment groups often interact with the I-M leadership in Nagaland, seeking to persuade it to reach out to its rivals and stressing that all Nagas must be involved in the search for a settlement, including the government of Mr SC Jamir.

"We have struggled hard with the K group, the I-M, the NNC but we cannot make head

or tail because every group has its own agenda," said Rev. VH Nuh, a leader of the Council for Naga Baptist Churches, who is widely respected by all sides. The Naga Baptist Church Council, another powerful group that is working for peace, says that fear of the gun forces people to remain silent. A spokesman says that it is critical for all armed factions to talk to each other and gain a better understanding of each other's concerns.

The I-M sees things somewhat differently: "Nagas are intoxicated

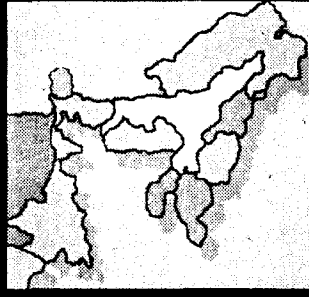
by words like unity, reconciliation, forgive and forget," said Col. Shimrah. He is not against any of these ideals. "But what is the basis for coming together?"

Thus despite progress in discussions between Mr K Padmanabhiiah, the Centre's representative and Mr Muivah, and meetings between Naga leaders and Mizoram chief minister Mr Zoramthanga, the gulf among the Nagas, ironically, remains as wide as ever.

It is this challenging task that Naga civil society, which has displayed enormous courage and inner strength during the past years, must address and resolve, whatever the state of negotiations. Much also hinges on the future political role that Mr. Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur (as is a substantial part of the I-M leadership), and Mr Swu visualise for themselves in the region.

(Continued)

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Learning from Ms J, Nagas must cooperate

The flight was bumpy, so were the roads. Garbage, especially plastic bags, cluttered either side of the streets. That, too, was familiar. Many of the neighbourhoods and roads were flooded; more of the same. The lush green countryside had been cleansed and watered by the monsoon rains. The air was cool and moist. But this was not the North East. It was Chennai over the weekend where schools were shut on a day when the weatherman had predicted a cyclone. The storm, mercifully, stayed many kilometres away, nursing its wrath out in the Bay of Bengal, otherwise one would have said that the weather gods were being too kind to Ms Jayalithaa, Tamil Nadu chief minister, after her public rebuke of her counterpart in Karnataka. The spat between the neighbouring states over the waters of the Cauvery and her complaints that her state was being deprived of its rightful share have now been washed out by a benevolent meteorological development.

The condition of the roads, which had been dug up on three separate occasions by three separate cellular companies to lay their fibre optic cables, reminded one of the state of affairs in Guwahati and other towns. The comparison ends there.

Chennai is vaster, with a greater population, unique and better preserved traditions, a tremendous social and cultural flow of events and a wonderful cuisine. It is an international hub for trade, tourists, culture and education. And drinking water remains a great problem, despite its flooded streets during the North East monsoon. Maybe chief minister Tarun Gogoi of Assam and the Centre's Ministry of Water Resources could take up the suggestion made on several occasions here to build a great pipeline carrying water from the water-rich North East, harvesting the monsoon rains and taking the excess water out of the region, to water-deficient states like Tamil Nadu.

If oil pipelines and highways spanning Asia can be conceived and built and the Prime Minister's giant road project connecting the four corners of India to each other can be implemented, then why not a water pipeline, carrying the most precious commodity to communities which need it across the country? Assam and the North East should charge for it. We will need pumping stations to inject pressure and enable the water to get to higher points. One of the first reasons that will be cited for not having this project is the cost involved. I don't know what kind of funds will be involved — but they will be huge. But they will also generate huge employment schemes, connecting states and communities to each other.

Funds can be tapped from multilateral sources such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and from bilateral agreements with countries such as the USA or France or Britain. There will be bureaucratic and political difficulties as well as engineering hurdles such as evacuating water over gradients, but these have technical solutions. One is not minimising them. But now that the Water Resources Ministry is talking of linking the rivers of India, it may be worth reminding it that the pipeline project may be cheaper, more practical and quicker to implement. Potential beneficiaries, such as "downstream states" like Orissa and Tamil Nadu, should press for such a scheme. Ms Jayalithaa, on her own, has probably more influence in Delhi than all our chief ministers in the region combined. But although she and others like her have greater clout than our little North East, we should turn our natural advantages, such as water, into economic assets and political bargaining chips. The test of leadership lies in combining them. The Cauvery water sharing problem is over 100 years old and the amount of political mileage, locally and at the national level, as well as media coverage that both sides have extracted from it should be a lesson to our leaders in the North East.

OPEN Forum today carries the viewpoints of a number of Naga leaders and organisations with regard to the current ceasefire and the negotiations with the government of India. These views are largely based on separate interviews which I had held with them during a recent visit to Nagaland. They were not conducted across a discussion table, although one wishes that, at some point, Naga civil society would force these various leaders to sit together to hammer out their differences and concerns. Why not a public debate on these questions? It is hard to visualise it right now because of the deep mistrust among the factions and the physical threats to one another. But a time must come when this will have to take place and parleying in Bangkok, Amsterdam, Kyoto, Paris and Kuala Lumpur will have to be replaced by hard bargaining in India and transparent, if challenging, consultations with Parliament and the Naga public.

Both must go together. The government and Naga leaders need to build a bridge to span the Naga valley. But the people of the valley and of India would need to be associated with building the foundations of a bridge that will stand the test of time and of pressure.

New Delhi knows, as do the leaders of the dominant faction, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim of Isak Swu and Th Muivah, that any accord must carry the people with it. Parliament will have to be convinced of the rightness of any agreement and that it will not create more problems than it will solve. And in the Naga hills of Nagaland and Manipur, the NSCN(IM) will have to get the support and mandate of a large cross-section of the Naga people, a job easier said than done. After all, the Naga movement for independence, which began more than 50 years ago, has been a minefield for accords, ceasefires and leaders. And deep divisions scar the movement today.

It is good to know from senior figures at the Centre, who are familiar with the negotiations, that the government of India is not in any hurry to rush through with an agreement. It appears to be aware of the difficulties on negotiating with one group, although that may be the most effective and powerful of the Naga militant factions.

Clearly, the territorial demands for a larger Nagaland would be extremely tough to tackle. Both the demographic and democratic profiles of the neighbouring states would have to be considered and, when the time comes, one would suggest that a committee, headed by a respected national or north-eastern figure, and representing all states and communities with a stake in the future of the region, undertake a detailed survey to find out the ground realities on where people want to live and deal with claims and counter-claims once and for all.

NOV 2002

Where do the Nagas go from here?

The following are extracts from interviews and statements made by different Naga leaders and groups during a recent visit to Nagaland, which show both the vibrancy of opinion and the divergence of views on settling the Naga problem. It must be clarified, given the sensitivity of the issues and the wide differences of opinion which exist, that these remarks were not made at any meeting or discussion where these individuals and groups were brought together. They were made either in separate interviews to me or in public statements issued to the Nagaland media. They took place in the backdrop of Naga demands for an end to the internecine killings among underground fighters and seeking better understanding (there are three major armed groups with a total strength of over 10,000). The full form of acronyms and abbreviations used in this week's Open Forum are: I-M — the Isak Swu-Th Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, the most powerful of the armed groups; K group — the rival faction of the NSCN led by SS Khaplang; NNC — Naga National Council, the original Naga political group that sought independence and is now militarily weaker but still influential among some communities; Naga Hoho — a non-government platform for representatives of most Naga tribes; NBCC — Naga Baptist Christian Council. Mr SC Jamir is the chief minister of Nagaland and the I-M uses the phrase "collective leadership" to describe Mr Swu and Mr Muivah. — SH.

of Nagaland: Both the government of India and the underground are keen for a settlement. But as long as underground elements are instigated by some political groups to create problems, it will be difficult. They are not listening to advice from the Naga Hoho or citizens. The government of India must tell them to stop fighting each other, to move to their designated camps and abide by the ground rules of the ceasefire. I told them (Muivah and Swu) that there will not be a factional agreement with the government of India and the public must endorse any agreement. They are not talking about sovereignty but about a "honourable settlement". The government has acknowledged the "unique" status of the Naga people. This is significant. I have also expressed to them that re-drawing the borders of the North East will not happen (NB: The I-M wants a

gesture of the Indian government inviting the collective leadership to come to India as state guests to expedite peace talks is a sign of sincere efforts and the result of confidence-building measures in the past few years... people coming together cutting across party lines, national workers supplementing each other, common people coming out on to the streets to voice their rights and the bold steps initiated by the Naga people-based organisations itself manifest attainment of maturity of the Naga peoples' struggle for self-determination. What the Naga people failed to achieve in the past 54 years, we have done it together during the past few years... Countrymen, from here on, consistency is the keyword till we reach an honourable and lasting solution mutually acceptable to both.

Open forum

larger homeland comprising Nagaland, parts of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, which is opposed by the latter states).

Phunting Shimrah, convenor of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) ceasefire monitoring cell: Sovereignty is my birthright, it is an inalienable right. Only one side cannot be blamed for internal differences, all sides have to be blamed. Lack of unity will delay the peace process. We should sort out the internal problems ourselves and NSCN workers will have to work harder to make people understand more. Reconciling brothers is very difficult. But can you solve the problem by saying, "We forgive"? It may even cause more complications. One has to confess to each other. South Africa took such a long time for reconciliation. Reconciliation is a continuing process. Reconciliation should be there, if it comes before a settlement that is good. But a settlement must come first.

We are prepared to go on a platform and discuss everything. But what is the basis for coming together? That is our consistent position. Public feelings have to be taken into account. But the public may say many things without looking into the future. We have to give the correct view, the correct position and convince them.

Excerpts from the NSCN (I-M) statement during President APJ Abdul Kalam's visit to Nagaland: The NSCN strongly believes that the present

Dr Tuiseem Shishak, Principal, Patkai Christian College: We recognise the I-M and what they have done for the Nagas. But they should not be exalted by that. In the eyes of God and the Naga public, all Naga political groups have done wrong and all stand condemned for the killings of innocent people. The I-M is too self-righteous. Who has not sinned? They are the strongest group and they must take the first step of reconciliation. If you do not have peace at home, then what can you talk of peace outside?

NBCC: Convinced that the renewed search and talks must result in a durable settlement and peace for Nagas, the NBCC with the Naga Hoho and all churches has taken the stand that:

- All killings of Nagas by Nagas must stop completely, not just killings between Nagas and Indian soldiers
- This would enable Nagas to begin to talk to one another on even the worst wrongs we Nagas have done to one another... so that understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation would be achieved
- This in turn would enable even the bitter rival factions to work out a consensus of the terms for negotiations for a settlement...
- The NBCC has firmly maintained that before any settlement is reached Nagas must create together healing of their wounds, division and mutual hatred against each other, resulting in forgiveness and reconciliation... The NBCC has no choice but to insist that if any process is to produce a workable solution, it must go far enough to include all Nagas.
- The NBCC holds the view that no faction, party or tribe is blameless for the present dividedness of the Nagas, which endangers our very survival.

Chief minister SC Jamir:

We have to delineate between emotions and reality. Is it not a privilege to be part of a big country like India — to play in a bigger arena rather than smaller arenas? The younger generation is not limited by the past, these concepts are too small for them. Life and realities here are different to those abroad, where the NSCN leadership lives. People here are fed up of extortion. If I ever meet Muivah, I will tell him straight away — "You are building castles in the air." And if there is another accord that does not involve or include even the smallest Naga group or tribe, it will meet the same fate as the 1975 Shillong Accord, which has been rejected. The government of India should not be in a hurry to work out something that may not work. This time it should be a permanent settlement, which should be honourable and acceptable to all. It should benefit India and the North East. Let us remember that if you make a mistake in Nagaland, it will be difficult to redeem the North East.



Hokishe Sema, former chief minister

It was only a matter of time before Manipur finally won the National football crown, defeating Kerala in the final of the Santosh Trophy. This followed good performances by its athletes at the Commonwealth Games but a somewhat disappointing show at the Asian Games at Busan.

The euphoria following Manipur's domination at the National Games at Imphal appeared to have been prematurely forgotten. But with the capture of the football title, people were delirious, for never before had any team from the North East, leave alone Manipur, won a major national title. The minnows of yesterday have displaced Bengal as the nursery of Indian football.

Kerala had started favourites, having won the trophy four times and being edged out in the finals on five other occasions. Manipur made its Santosh Trophy debut as late as in 1973 and never went past the quarter-final stage during its previous forays into the national championship. The final result — Manipur won by the odd goal in three — belied the state of the

match. It was not as closely-fought as the scoreline suggested for Manipur ruled the field.

The man with the golden foot, W Tomba Singh, was named the most valuable player. Rightly so, but he was just one among 11. All individuals played as a team, they played for their state, and no other team could match either the grit or the unflinching pace of the Manipuris.

On paper, perhaps, Manipur's chances might have been as remote as it is physically placed on the map of India. More than 80 of its football stars have migrated and play for teams elsewhere in "mainland" India. Only a handful — those like Reneddy Singh, Mani-tombi Singh, Bijen Singh and James Singh — returned to strengthen the home team. In other words, most of the big names in Indian soccer hailing from Manipur did not don the state colours anymore. But this did not matter in

the final shape of things — new stars emerged and the old order did change.

The rise has been meteoric. The All-Manipur Football Association was clubbed together only in 1976. It would be another decade and a half or so before players like Kiron Khongsai and Gunabir Singh would emerge from the landlocked state. The lure of lucre actually extricated players from Manipur — before long Mohun Bagan, East Bengal, Salgaocar, Mohammedan Sporting, Air-India, Services and others vied for Manipuri footballers. Statistics may not always reveal the truth, but in this case they are staggering: till date, Manipur has produced more than 200 internationals for India.

It was not without reason that a talent drain had started. Infrastruc-

ture was practically non-existent, and there was no money worth the name, even by Indian standards. No big coach worth his boots was around either. So what made the Manipur players rise to the occasion? The standard formula — hard work and dedication.

It is not that only the men have had it so good. Obscured in this aura that now shines around the jewel of the North East are the exploits of Manipur's eves. The women have won the national football championship as many as eight times in the last 10 years. Here, too, Bengal, is a state of the past. There are as many as nine to 10 Manipuri women who wear national colours in various age groups.

The decision of the All India Football Federation to hold the national championships in Manipur itself was recognition of the state's contribution to the annals of

Time to play ball

By Subir Ghosh

Safe in an exercise book in a village home, locked away in his Garo language, Rosendol Sangma keeps the ancestral secrets which continue to heal in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, one of the most backward districts of the country.

The Garo Hills are better known for having produced two other Sangmas, Captain Williamson and Purno, neither of whom are related to each other or to Rosendol; the former was Meghalaya's first chief minister and the other, his protégé, rose through the Congress Party's ranks to become an articulate leader on the national stage before his famous split with Sonia Gandhi.

Rosendol, who is 44, scours the hills of his neighbourhood

for the healing plants and herbs which he uses to cure a range of illnesses, including asthma and broken bones, bleeding during pregnancy, jaundice and epilepsy. He hasn't heard of the World Trade Organisation or of patents but is aware that his secrets are much in demand and of the dangers of large corporations gobbling up small traditions. But unlike many others, he is prepared to strike a deal should medical companies be prepared to pay him a handsome regular salary and provide other benefits.

He has asked for Rs 10 lakh

from his local member of Parliament, Purno Sangma, from the MP's Fund, and wants to set up a hospital based on traditional healing skills.

Despite the felling of trees and harm caused to the forests by local communities, governments and contractors, he is still able to locate the magical plants. And he's not sharing any more information about them. There hasn't been any help from either the state government or New Delhi.

There are many other traditional healers in the North East who work without government support, without clinics, often at a pittance and sometimes for payment in kind — rice, chickens, vegetables — from those who can't afford to pay cash. In 1991, Sangma says, "someone" from the Central government's department of traditional medicines had come and wanted "to buy my knowledge". He refused and hasn't heard from them since.

Sangma earns quite well — at times Rs 2,000 a day — and has a monthly income of about Rs

Garo medicine man

By Sanjoy Hazarika

Bodo Council mired in geography

Dipanker Roy in Guwahati

Nov. 14. — An early settlement of the long-festering Bodo issue now depends largely on the flexibility of the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers vis-a-vis its demand for inclusion of more area under the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council with the Assam government making it more than clear that it will not accept the demand in full.

A meeting between the BLT and the state government yesterday failed to arrive at any agreement on the geographical area of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council that is to be set up under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. At the end of the three hour-long meeting both sides agreed to wait till 30 November for a final decision on the BLT's demand for another 93 villages.

BLT leaders who attended last evening's meeting maintained that they would stick to their demand but the state government is hopeful of finding some middle ground, implying that it was not willing to accept the BLT's demand for the additional 93 villages in its entirety. Sources said the government was ready to hand over 50 villages.

Under the circumstances, if the BLT chooses to remain adamant on its stand then formation of the BTC, for which the organisation has been negotiating for over two years, may be delayed.

While an agreement on the BTC boundary hangs fire, there is no difference of views between the state government and the BLT on the nature of constitutional amendments that would be required to give a fair deal to the non-tribals living in the proposed council area.

Non-tribals, who are 60 per cent of the population, have been restive. They fear that the creation of the council would lead to curtailment of many of their rights particularly regarding land and trade. This was a major concern of the government, too. The amendments, however, are designed to ensure that status quo is maintained.

A senior bureaucrat who has been associated with Bodo affairs for a long time felt any further delay in setting up the BTC structure would only strengthen the hands of those opposed to the new arrangement, including BLT's arch rival the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and the latter's operational partner, Ulfa.

And that could make matters more complicated. The onus, it would thus seem, is now on the BLT.

FROM THE INDIA-ASIAN

Tripura, Mizoram lock horns over Reang repatriation

Statesman News Service

AGARTALA, Nov. 8. — Tripura authorities are worried over the Mizoram government's "irresponsibility" of not taking back the Reang refugees living in camps in north Tripura. "It is due to Aizwal's intransigence that the prospect of Reang repatriation has become uncertain," a Tripura official said.

Earlier, a meeting of Tripura and Mizoram officials

to discuss the issue ended inconclusively after Mizoram said it would take back only the "state's genuine residents and not aliens."

The Tripura chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, met Mr LR Aizwal on 27 August to apprise him about the situation arising out of influx of Reang tribals from Mizoram. Mr Sarkar asked the Centre to exert pressure on Aizwal to arrange for early repatriation of evacuees.

Subsequently, the special

secretary to the Union home ministry, Mr Jain, came over here to discuss the problem with the state officials. He visited the camps in north Tripura and talked to the evacuees.

After Mr Jain's report to the Centre, a tripartite meeting was arranged in Aizwal in October where the Mizoram chief secretary, Mr HV Lalringa, the district magistrate of North Tripura, Mr RK Dey Chaudhuri, were present.

9 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

Non-Bodos to petition UN

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Nov. 7: A day after the Assam government invited the Bodo Liberation Tigers for "final discussions" on the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), the Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti (SJSS) declared that it would take its agitation to the United Nations.

The executive committee of the SJSS, which is a federation of 18 non-Bodo organisations opposed to the constitution of a new administrative set-up, will meet on November 9 to finalise its strategy.

The meeting between the government and the BLT leadership will be held four days later.

"We have decided to move the United Nations because the Centre and the state government have not cared to respond to our demands for a halt to the process of creating the BTC. The state government has decided to impose the BTC on everyone and ignore the non-Bodos, who comprise the majority of the population in the proposed council's territory," SJSS deputy chief convener Brajen Mahanta told **The Telegraph** today.

The SJSS will stage a demon-

stration in front of Parliament during the winter session. This is part of the strategy to mobilise opinion against the BTC through a countrywide campaign.

Terming the state government's invitation to the BLT "a conspiracy to trigger a conflict between the Bodo and the non-Bodo communities", Mahanta said at least 1,000 of the 3,070 villages cleared for inclusion in the BTC territory did not have a sizeable Bodo population.

"It will be a travesty of justice if the government imposes an administrative set-up on us. The Bodos, who are in the minority in these villages, will rule the majority non-Bodo population," Mahanta said.

The SJSS leader reiterated that the concept of "territorial autonomy" for a particular community was not feasible for an area with a mixed population. "It will encourage other ethnic groups in the state to raise the demand to carve out territories along ethnic lines. By giving its consent to the creation of the BTC, the Congress government has paved the way for division of the state into small territories and more intense ethnic conflicts."

THE TELEGRAPH

8 NOV 2002

Unity call from Naga Hoho

9 Nov 82

51-5
6/11

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 5. — As the ban on the NSCN (I-M) is coming to an end on 26 November, hectic activity is on in the capital, Bangkok and in Nagaland.

The Mizoram chief minister, Mr Zoramthanga, who was in Bangkok last month, has brought home an assurance from the outlawed insurgent outfit leader, Th. Muivah, on his willingness to visit India. This assurance was over and above the written assurance given by Mr Muivah to the Centre's point man Mr K Padmanabhaiah. Mr Zoramthanga briefed the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani, today about his discussions with Mr Muivah in Bangkok last month.

In a first step to unite the Nagas on the political settlement of the 'core' issue, the Naga Hoho is holding a consultative meeting this month. According to the office of the Naga Hoho, headquartered in Kohima, the 'Federal Assembly' of the Naga Hoho convened a 'session' last month at Dimapur. During the deliberations, the 'House' res-

olved to initiate a consultative meeting amongst the Nagas to "arrive at a political settlement" so that no Naga feels sidelined while shaping the future. The meeting will extend over two days — 14-15 November.

Realising that the Nagas themselves are not a united lot, the Naga Hoho is trying to put the house together. Nagas who take pride in identifying themselves with the tribe they belong to, are facing inter-tribe conflict. For instance, Tangkhul Nagas feel alienated in Nagaland. The reason — they are in a majority in Manipur while only a small number stays in Nagaland. Mr Muivah himself is a Tangkhul Naga.

The Naga Hoho has said: On 18 November the "Federal Assembly" discussed the 'constitutional amendment', strengthening of Naga Hoho and the federating unit and conduct of election for Hoho office-bearers. It also deliberated on the issue that the "internal contradiction" within Nagas has to be resolved to pave way for a meaningful resolution of the protracted conflict and this could be achieved by "understanding" the real issues.

Our n-policy transparent: PM

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, OCT. 31. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee today urged the "high priests of non-proliferation" across the world to tackle the "clandestine and illegal development and transfer of nuclear and missile technologies" rather than "targeting" nations which "played by the rules".

Speaking at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre here, he said the world needed to look at India as a country where atomic energy was an "engine of growth and progress" and that it needed to be "persuaded" to look at this country "not through the prism of nuclear weapons".

Mr. Vajpayee said in "some circles abroad, atomic energy seems to raise only visions of the atom bomb or of a nuclear war". Since 1974, when India conducted nuclear tests, there was a denial of "technologies and products on unfounded suspicion" of it being a weapons programme. He underlined how this denial of technology "irritated" us. "They have re-

tarded our progress. But they did not stop us. They brought out the best in us." The country notched up success after success with its own expertise despite denial of technologies ever since the 1974 nuclear tests. Inviting foreign partners to join in developing India's nuclear energy programme — generating 20,000 mw by 2020 — he urged the world "to dispel any misconceptions about our nuclear weapons programme. We have been transparent about it". Even the 1998 nuclear testing had reasons "which are well-known. We emphasise our nuclear doctrine of minimum credible deterrence". Developed indigenously, it did not violate any of our international obligations. "It is limited in scope."

The technology-denial regimes since 1974 "proved that sanctions do not devastate a society. They spur it to greater heights of innovation and achievement. Our atoms-for-peace programmes continued to flourish and expand".

Mr. Vajpayee did not like the one-sidedness of the interna-

tional outlook. At the Rio Summit a decade ago, and recently at Johannesburg, for instance, "we are lectured on our moral obligations to clamp down on emissions" while denied international technological cooperation which can get results "without penalising our development".

Going by the past experience of denial of technologies, Mr. Vajpayee wanted Indian scientists and engineers to continue to blaze a path "of innovations and inventions which have taken our atomic energy programme to this advanced stage. He hoped that the Fast Breeder Reactor could be commercially exploited soon. "I hope you will achieve early success in the viable generation of nuclear energy from thorium for it would be a major technological breakthrough for India which has the world's largest reserves of thorium." The Prime Minister inaugurated a medical cyclotron and a nuclear desalination plant for Kalpakkam as well as a radiation process facility at Lasalgaon in Nashik — all by remote control.

THE HINDU

PM sounds alert on illegal N-transfer

Stateman News Service

MUMBAI, Oct. 31. — The Prime Minister today exhorted developed countries to take specific steps against "clandestine and illegal development and transfer of missiles and nuclear technology."

Mr Vajpayee's obvious target was the nefarious nexus between Pakistan and North Korea over the exchange of nuclear knowhow.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a programme to mark the foundation day of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (Barc) here. Mr

Vajpayee asked nuclear power nations not to harbour unfounded notions about India's nuclear weapons programme. Emphasising that India's nuclear doctrine to be "minimum nuclear deterrent", the Prime Minister said the series of tests at Pokhran conducted in 1998 were based on this doctrine. India's nuclear programme was developed indigenously and did not breach any international obligation, he added.

Mr Vajpayee invited foreigners to join the nuclear programme in India, the principal target of which, he said, was to develop the indigenous capacity to generate

20,000MW of electricity annually by the year 2020. Mr Vajpayee also said nuclear power was the most environment-friendly form of energy, and assured all such projects in the joint sector will be open to international safeguards.

India not a soft state: Advani
Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, said in Hyderabad today that India should never be considered a "soft state ... and the government has the will to take strong action".

Asserting that India would not enter into any dialogue with Pakistan till it stopped sponsoring cross-

border terror, Mr Advani said the country did not want war as a means to a solution. He was speaking at the passing-out parade of IPS officers at the National Police Academy here.

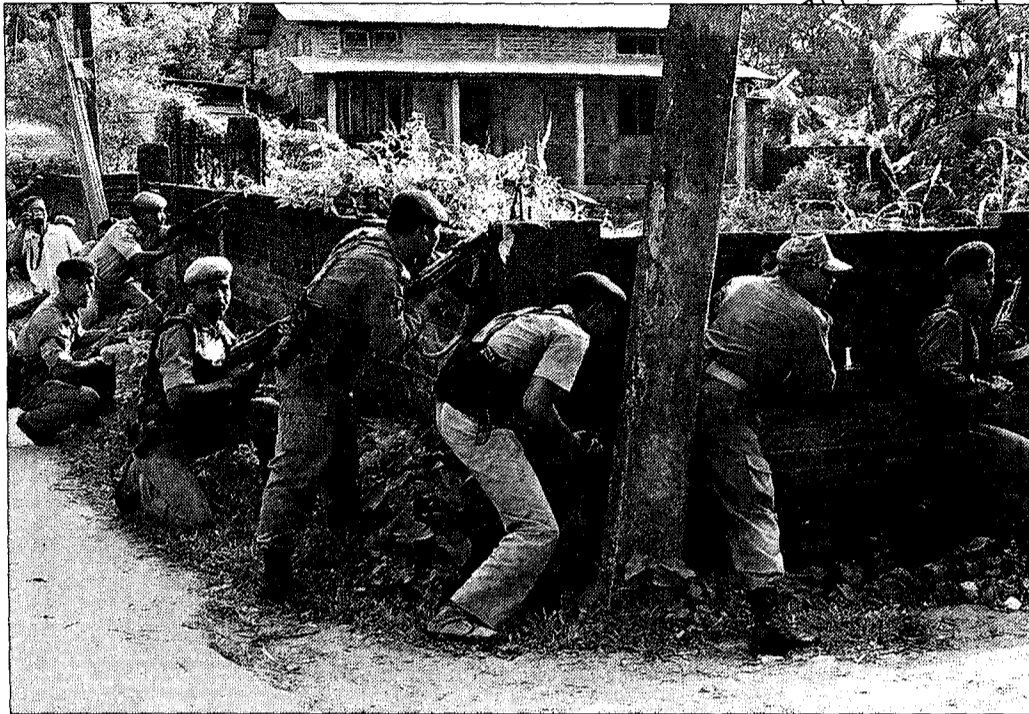
Mr Advani said the government was taking firm steps to deal with the situation on the border. He also set a new agenda for the NDA government for its remaining two years in power: "Security and development should be our motto".

Mr Advani today skipped his annual ritual on this date: that of visiting the native village of Sardar Patel in Gujarat to coincide with the "Iron Man's" birthday.

Ulfa militants killed near CM's house

HR 6 20/10

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Police take up position outside the boundary wall of the house where the militant was holed up. (Right) Body of the second Ulfa rebel gunned down by security forces.

HT Correspondent & PTI
Guwahati, October 30

IN AN apparent shift of terror theatre to the North-east, two Ulfa militants were killed today in the densely-populated Khanapara area of Guwahati after a three-hour gunbattle with security forces. A State police commando and a civilian were injured in the incident.

The encounter took place in the Khanapara area bordering Assam and Meghalaya, a few kilometres away from Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's residence in the Beltola Survey area. None in

Gogoi's residence was affected. Earlier this month, NDFB and Ulfa militants had attacked the high-security Dispur Capital Complex that houses the offices of the Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues.

This is for the first time such an incident, which created considerable panic among the people, took place in the city.

Sources said, earlier in the day the militants came to the Hatigaon Charali area for collecting ransom money from a contractor Abdur Rahman.

Rahman was held hostage by the rebel outfit for quite some

time and was released only five days ago. When the militants were sauntering in a nearby market, Rahman, who was present there, recognised one of them and alerted the people. A mob chased the terrorists.

An eyewitness said there were four men and two were armed. "They were running and firing at us and we were throwing stones at them," he said.

The mob lost track of one of the militants who was armed. Sources say the rebel armed with a .32 pistol took shelter in one of the houses in the area. When the house-owner Aftab

Uddin Ahmed refused to allow him in, the militant shot at him. Ahmed received bullet injuries on his left leg.

Ignorant of his hideout, the police, who were tipped off, initially combed the area after killing his companion, Speed Hazarika from Nagaon, who was spotted by the mob. Hazarika was a member of the Ulfa's hit squad — Enigma.

It was only after the house owner's daughter "spied on a stranger hiding in the bathroom" that the police swung into action. It took the Black Panthers — the State police's

elite commando force — over an hour to pin him down.

A Black Panther commando, Sadaq Ali, who first went inside the house, was shot at by the militant. Two .32 pistols of foreign-make, magazines and live cartridges were recovered from the slain militant, identified as Hemanta Neog from Nalbari. Police said the two militants were involved in Sunday's mortar firing at a garage in the capital.

Mediapersons at the site, who were caught in the exchange of fire, had a narrow escape. Police have cordoned off the area and beefed up security.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 OCT 2002

Ethnic cleansing

28/10 The Bodo symphony plays on 51-8

The killing of 22 non-Bodos in Kokrajhar is no surprise, though the timing is significant. It is not difficult to ascertain the precise motive of the militant National Democratic Front of Bodoland (formerly the Bodo Security Force) because ethnic cleansing is part of their strategy: they want all non-Bodos out. In January this year they massacred 30 non-Bodos and if they were quiet for the past 10 months they were possibly watching the progress of peace talks the rival Bodo Liberation Tigers are holding with the Centre and Dispur. If anything, the fresh outrage comes within days of Dispur submitting its proposals to Delhi on safeguards and protection of non-Bodos for incorporation in the Sixth Schedule — of a necessity since 60 per cent of the population in the proposed BTC are non-Bodos. It is not clear how the Centre hopes to resolve the Bodo issue by engaging only moderates like the BLT which has repeatedly spurned suggestions for inclusion of non-Bodos in the negotiations. The NDFB apparently has been marginalised because they are demanding a sovereign state, but ultimately it is their participation that can help restore peace.

Bodo militants are known to operate from Bhutan where they are holed up and during foreign minister Yashwant Sinha's visit last August, Thimphu assured him it would not allow Ulfa or the Bodos to use its soil for anti-India activities. Admittedly Bhutan has domestic compulsions not to use harsh measures to drive them out even though they reneged on their promise to leave by the end of last year, but a timeframe has to be set for their voluntary withdrawal. So far there is no clear indication they are willing. Ground realities suggest there is no alternative to joint action for restoring parity.

Bodo militants mow down 22 in Assam

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, October 27

A GANG of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants came down from the hills of Bhutan and gunned down 22 non-tribals at a village near the Indo-Bhutanese border in Kokrajhar district in the early hours today.

Hours later, the militants blew up a police vehicle, injuring six policemen, two of them critically. The policemen were on their way to the massacre site from the Runikhata border outpost. District police officers said some two dozen militants swooped on Dadgiri village between 1 and 3 am. The village is 75 km from Basugaon police station on the road to Gelengphu in Bhutan.

The terrorists forced the villagers — Bengalis, Biharis and Nepalis — out of their huts, lined them up and sprayed bullets at them. Twenty people were killed on the spot and 16 others were injured, two of whom died on the way to Kokrajhar Civil Hospital.

CARNAGE CHRONOLOGY

- Oct 21, 2000: Ulfa kills 15 in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh
- Oct 27, 2000: Nine people killed in Nalbari
- Nov 8, 2000: Eight killed in Barpeta
- Nov 16, 2000: Ulfa guns down seven in Sibsagar
- Nov 30, 2000: Nineteen massacred in Bongaigaon
- Dec 7, 2000: Twenty-seven people killed in Tinsukia district
- Dec 28, 2000: Militants kill eight Biharis in Karbi-Anglong district
- Mar 18, 2001: NDFB mows down six Bengalis and Adivasis in Kamrup district
- Jan 16, 2002: NDFB rebels kill 13 Bengalis in Bongaigaon
- Jan 27, 2002: NDFB militants massacre 17 Biharis in a lower Assam village

Seven of the dead have been identified. They are: Kajol Mondal, Bikash Chhetri, Nuruddin Ali, Noor Hussain, Gulbarg Ali, Ansari Khan and Abdul Ali. The villagers were petty traders and daily wage earners regularly crossed over to Bhutan on business or for work.

The strike, which caught a seemingly complacent administra-

tion unawares, was the biggest by the NDFB since its inception a decade and half ago. It came amid claims by security forces that the outfit was on the run following a series of setbacks during counter-insurgency operations. As if to drive home the point that they meant business, the rebels targeted a police vehicle four hours later as it headed towards Dadgiri.

Blast hits police vehicle headed for massacre site

Bodo rebels mow down 21

P. BRAHMA CHOUDHURY

Datgiri-Hatisar (Assam-Bhutan border), Oct. 27: Twenty-one non-Bodo residents of a village near the Indo-Bhutan border in Assam's Kokrajhar district were gunned down early today in a firing squad-like operation by masked militants of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB).

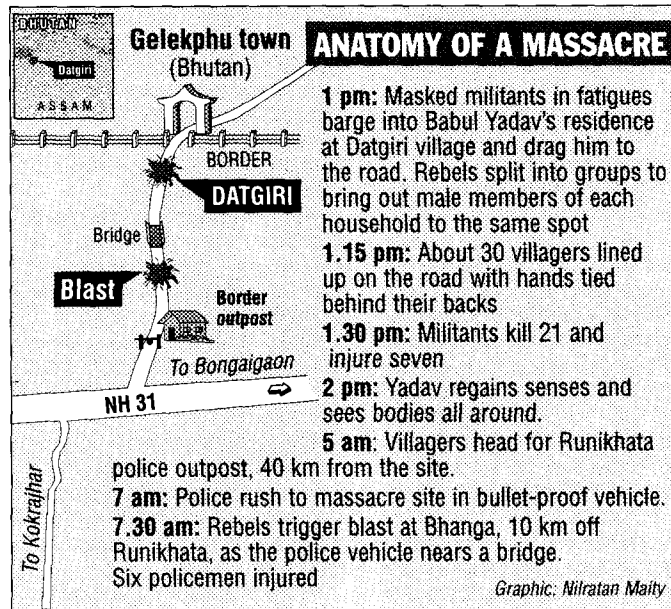
A few hours after the pre-dawn attack, six policemen were injured in a powerful explosion triggered by members of the same outfit. The bullet-proof vehicle in which the policemen were travelling was headed for the site of the massacre.

There was trouble in the state capital, too, with suspected Ulfa militants carrying out a mortar assault on the high-security Dispur complex in the evening. However, only three vehicles were damaged in the incident.

The police found mortar shells scattered near the official residence of Cabinet minister Hemoprova Saikia, who is the widow of former chief minister Hiteswar Saikia. Official sources, however, said there was no reason to believe that she was the militants' target.

It was the second abortive attack on the Dispur capital complex this month. Three persons had been injured in a grenade explosion near the Dispur police station on the eve of Puja.

Survivors of the pre-dawn at-



tack by NDFB militants said the assailants, all masked and dressed in fatigues, swooped down on the village at 1 am and ordered the male members of each household to assemble on the main road. After lining up 29 men with their hands tied behind their backs, the militants sprayed them with bullets, killing 20 on the spot. One of the nine injured succumbed to his injuries a few minutes later.

Babulal Yadav, who escaped with injuries to his legs, told **The Telegraph** that the militants had conversed in Hindi and identified themselves as army per-

sonnel. After they left, Yadav and another villager trekked for five hours to reach the Runikhata police outpost.

The injured had been rushed to Gelekphu town of Bhutan, 200 metres from the village and 75 km from Kokrajhar town, but were later shifted to Kokrajhar. Four of them were taken to the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital in the evening.

The ambush on the police vehicle took place near Bhanga, about 10 km off the Runikhata outpost. Sources said the militants triggered an improvised explosive device when the police

team neared a bridge. Such was the force of the blast that the bullet-proof vehicle was badly damaged.

The injured police personnel are undergoing treatment at a hospital near Kokrajhar.

A three-member ministerial team, comprising health minister Bhumidhar Barman, revenue minister Mithius Tudu and minister of state for home Rockybul Hussain, is scheduled to arrive here tomorrow.

Official sources in Guwahati said chief minister Tarun Gogoi reviewed the state's law and order strategy at a meeting in Dispur and later had a telephonic conversation with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani. He sought additional paramilitary forces for counter-insurgency operations, the sources added.

Terming the attack on villagers "an act of cowardice", Gogoi said in a statement that his government was committed to the task of ending militancy. He announced ex gratia of Rs 25,000 for each of the families of the victims and Rs 10,000 each for the injured.

Director-general of police Hare Krishna Deka is here to oversee combing operations.

Kokrajhar deputy commissioner A.K. Bhutani said Bhutanese officials in Gelekphu were extremely helpful when the injured were taken to the town for emergency medical treatment.

Determined Bodos send council signal to Delhi

OUR BUREAU

Oct. 25: Thousands of Bodos took to the streets today under the banner of All-Bodo Students Union (Absu) and the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) demanding the creation of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) positively by this month-end.

The demonstrators, led by Absu-BPAC workers, picketed in front of offices of the deputy commissioners in Bodo-dominated districts of lower and central Assam to convey the message to New Delhi and Dispur that their patience is fast running out.

Addressing the demonstrators at Kokrajhar — the Bodo heartland — Absu president Rabiram Narzary warned that the Bodo organisations would re-launch the statehood movement if both the Union and the state governments continued to delay the creation of the BTC.

"The government should not take today's programme lightly. Today's mass demonstration and massive gatherings throughout the state have been organised to convey the message to New Delhi and Dispur that we are ready for a long drawn statehood movement to achieve our goal," Narzary said. He also warned that the "government would be solely responsible for any untoward situation that may arise."

While the Absu-BPAC leaders reiterated their October-end deadline for the formation of the BTC, the government has sought time till November 15 to decide on the Bodo organisations' demand for the inclusion of 93 contentious villages in the proposed territory.

Non-Bodo MLAs from most of the Assembly constituencies falling under the proposed administrative territory agreed to the inclusion of only 11 of the 93 villages demanded by the Bodo Liberation Tigers and the Absu-BPAC combine. At a meeting convened by the four-member Cabinet sub-committee on BTC, the non-Bodo MLAs claimed that only these 11 villages have a Bodo population of more than 50 per cent while in the remaining ones, it is considerably less.

The Bodo groups, however, reiterated that there would be no



Bodos demonstrate against the delay in creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council in Guwahati on Friday.

Picture by Biju Boro

compromise on the inclusion of the 93 villages. Minister of state for welfare of plain tribes and backward classes, Bharat

Narah, said after the meeting, the government might convene an all-party meeting to arrive at a consensus on the issue.

THE TELEGRAPH

Talking heads

Hope and disappointment in Nagaland

The Centre has to decide whether to renew or lift the ban on the NSCN. If talks are to be held in India, this becomes necessary because Delhi cannot talk to an organisation it has officially declared unlawful. On the ground, however, it makes little difference because even with the ban in force unlawful activities — extortion and collection of illegal tax — are going on merrily. Peace talks have been painfully slow. Every time Indian emissary K Padmanabiah returns from Bangkok or Amsterdam he has nothing to add to what is already known. There has to be transparency as in 1964 when, after a ceasefire, the press was kept informed of the progress of talks at every stage. Uncertainty looms large because the obvious answer — reconciliation and unity — is missing.

The next round is unlikely before February when Nagaland goes to polls. In February 1998 all Opposition parties refrained from contesting in response to a boycott call by the NSCN-IM and Naga Hoho, giving the ruling Congress a cakewalk. This time the NSCN-IM may encourage chief minister SC Jamir's detractors. Every party's strategy is to ensure Jamir, who will complete his second term next February, is out. Even the Nationalist Congress Party is planning to contest in association with local parties to oust him. Who knows, after the elections the political climate may become congenial for the two NSCN-IM leaders to come home. For the moment, the NSCN-IM and the Centre may have to give up all pretensions of clinching the issue by 2003 end.

Bodo council Bill gets final touches

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Oct. 21: The Union law ministry is giving final touches to a Bill that would pave the way for formation of an autonomous council for the Bodos in Assam, to be known as the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Sources in the government said the Bill envisages financial and certain functional autonomy for the BTC. Central funding would be directly sanctioned to the council for "assured and guaranteed socio-economic development of the Bodo areas".

The Bill, if accepted by all parties concerned, would be introduced in the winter session of Parliament, the sources said.

The Bill is silent on Article 332 of the Constitution, which enables reservations of all seats in the Assembly and Parliament for tribals in the Bodo area.

Sources said the government had asked the Bodo representatives not to "insist" on implementation of the Constitutional provision as non-Bodos would become agitated if seats in the proposed autonomous council are reserved only for the Bodos.

According to government estimates, nearly 60 per cent of the population in the Bodo areas comprise non-Bodos, both tribals and non-tribals, and hence it would be difficult to reserve all the legislators' seats and the lone MP's seat only for Bodos.

The Koch-Rajbongshis are demanding tribal status and a case in this connection is also pending in the Supreme Court.

If the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) — which is currently holding talks with the Centre — agrees not to raise the demand for implementation of Article 332, then the Bill will sail through smoothly in Parlia-

ment, constituting the autonomous council with greater financial autonomy, the sources said.

"The Central funding will have two heads — one earmarked exclusively for the BTC and the other for Assam as a whole. The money earmarked for the BTC cannot be spent in any other part of Assam, nor can the state government divert the funds budgeted for the BTC," a source added. Likewise, the Assam state funding would also have a separate head for the BTC, the source said.

A meeting took place between the representatives of the Assam government, the BLT and the Union home ministry in New Delhi last week. It was agreed that a draft Bill would be formulated for circulation among all the parties. The sources, however, ruled out a separate state for the Bodos.

NSCN sets terms for talks

Press Trust of India

BANGKOK, Oct. 21. — The NSCN has said it was ready to "travel to India" for talks with the government provided the ban on the group was lifted.

The NSCN has given its promise and "we will honour our word, but it will depend on the Indian government to act on the issues raised by us," NSCN sources quoted leader Mr T Muivah as saying here at the end of two days of talks between NSCN (I-M) leaders and the Mizoram chief minister Mr Zoramthanga, who had come here to extend an Indian invitation to Mr Muivah. This was Mr Zoramthanga's third visit to the Thai capital to meet NSCN (I-M) leaders.

"The continuation of the talks depends entirely on India now; if things are not sorted out, the problem will remain," the sources said, adding the talks would continue, maybe in Europe, if going to India was not possible. "We will not stop talking, it will go on," they said. The NSCN demands in-

clude lifting of the ban on the group and the Special Armed Forces Act.

Earlier, Mr Zoramthanga said he was requested by both the Centre and the Naga leaders to be involved in the talks to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding. He expressed the hope that the Naga peace talks would continue without any problem and culminate in the signing of an honourable settlement.

MPLF for good relation with Nagas
Manipur People's Liberation Front, the umbrella body of three insurgent groups — RPF/PLA, PREPAK and UNLF — has vowed to strengthen the age-old ties between the Naga people and other communities in Manipur, SNS adds from Imphal.

The Front said the Naga people should not be held responsible for the "wrong actions" of the NSCN-IM. "The MPLF will not do anything that will harm the interests of the Naga people," the body said, while responding to queries put forward by some reporters. The reporters were

covering the "Black Day" function held on 15 October on the Indo-Myanmar border, south-east of Imphal.

Terming the Indian government as an enemy, the Front said it was posing a threat to the integrity of Manipur. Regarding differences with the NSCN-IM, the Front said they would be resolved once realisation dawn upon the Naga leaders. On the burning issue of territorial integrity of Manipur, the Front said it cannot be divorced from the "freedom" movement. "All strength and knowledge will be used to protect the integrity of Manipur," the Front said.

Regarding the functioning of the RPF/PLA, PREPAK and UNLF, the Front said the insurgent groups have been working independently for years and it was not possible to write off differences in ideas and concepts.

The Front also took serious note of the mushrooming of "revolutionary" organisations in the state. "For a revolution, all groups must unite. Groups which harass the masses said are anti-revolutionaries," it said.

Advani takes stock of Naga talks

9-11-88
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NEW DELHI, Oct. 18. — The Deputy Prime Minister today took stock of the progress made in the Naga peace talks. The meeting is expected to lead to a review of whether to lift the ban on the NSCN(I-M) faction, which is lapsing on 26 November, to enable its leaders to visit India for talks or renew it and at the same time give exemptions.

The Centre's interlocutor in the Naga talks, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, who had been to Bangkok recently called on Mr LK Advani and briefed him about the latest situation. The meeting which was attended by home ministry officials lasted about 45 minutes. The home ministry imposed a ban on the NSCN under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 in November 1990 and renewed it after every two years. The Centre can lift the ban even by an executive order. The decision on the ban would be referred to the Prime Minister only after Mr Advani okays it. — SNS

'Ulfa divided over talks'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 16. — Though talks between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M) for a peaceful resolution of the Naga problem continue, United Liberation Front of Assam ranks are showing signs of rift between those supporting and those opposed to such negotiations.

There have been periodic appeals by intellectuals and others from Assam in the recent past favouring a dialogue between the insurgent group and the government. Intelligence reports suggest that the "flip-flop" attitude of the ULFA leadership on the issue has created pessimism and disillusionment among its cadres.

Since the two top leaders of the ULFA, chairman Mr Arabinda Rajkhowa and commander-in-chief Mr Paresh Barua, have so far failed to "sit together" to discuss the issue, its cadres are further confused. While

Mr Rajkhowa is reportedly in Bhutan, Mr Barua is learnt to be in Dhaka.

Intelligence reports indicate that a couple of attempts by Mr Rajkhowa to visit Dhaka via Bangkok or Kathmandu were abandoned during the past six months. The ULFA leader could not have used the alternate route through Cooch Behar district of West Bengal, since the state police and Intelligence agencies are on high alert there.

If the morale of the ULFA cadres is low due to the indecision of its leaders over talks with the Centre, cadres of several other insurgent outfits of Manipur such as Kangleipak and People's Liberation Army (Pre-Pak) are also disillusioned.

Meanwhile, talks between NSCN(I-M) and the Centre have made significant progress with the insurgent outfit leaders, Mr Isak Chishi Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Mui-vah, agreeing to visit India to further the dialogue process. Assembly polls in Nagaland are scheduled early next year.

The Nagas: walk sensitively

9 N 6 48 n
There is much confusion in Nagaland these days. For one thing, there has been a flurry of activity involving self-exiled leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M) at Bangkok and a group of former chief ministers of Nagaland who have shuttled between their state, New Delhi (where they met the Prime Minister to brief him on their mission) and Thailand.

The issue here is not shuttle diplomacy; there are and have been many facilitators and interlocutors but thankfully, only two official negotiators till date from the Indian government's side. At issue is the transparency of the process that requires consultation with civil society groups in the state and the Naga people.

This was a process to which the NSCN leadership under Th Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu committed itself first during the opening round of consultations with such groups (there were 44 participants) in Bangkok in January, followed by a larger dialogue in May which involved more than 70 representatives from Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Apparently, not even the president of the Naga Hoho, forum for all Naga tribes, was informed, let alone consulted on the sudden air dashes by former Chief Ministers Vizol and Hokishe Sema (the latter is the head of the BJP in the state). And Mr Vero, head of the Hoho, a former MP and a distinguished public figure in his own right, is Mr Vizol's neighbour!

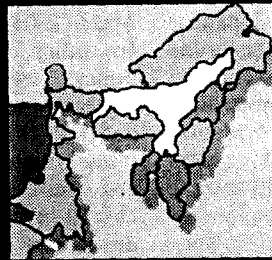
Why this unseemly haste? And note the statement that comes from them after their return to Nagaland. It makes four points, three of which are the terms laid down by Mr Muivah and Mr Swu for their return to India for talks here. The first demand by the former chief ministers is the need for a pro-peace government in Nagaland. In other words, they are speaking of the ouster of Chief Minister SC Jamir, often vilified as the villain of the piece and the man blocking a settlement.

I said in an earlier column that, without playing direct politics, the I-M leadership appears interested in isolating Mr Jamir politically. The resignation of the senior Angami leader and former Home Minister Rio from the state government and the Congress, and those of others, is aimed at this. Elections are scheduled for February.

51-2 12/10
Mr Jamir is not one to take things lying down. The Nagaland Governor and the chief secretary went to Delhi, urging the government not to bow to the demands for lifting the ban on the NSCN (I-M) and related issues. These include the repeal of the Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which gives sweeping powers to security forces in Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. Apparently, Mr Jamir now wants the elections to be advanced to prevent his opponents from gaining momentum.

The other NSCN demand – withdrawal of cases against them – has been met in Nagaland where Mr Jamir closed a case where Mr Muivah was accused of conspiring to assassinate him. But Mr Muivah is still wanted in a criminal case in

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Manipur where Chief Minister Ibobi Singh refuses to drop the charges.

The I-M cannot be seen to be going back on its commitment of consultations and transparency. It has said in recent interviews to the media that it will not talk to SS Khaplang, leader of the rival Naga faction; nor will it talk to Mr Jamir. It has held the position that the latter is supporting the former in a game against the I-M group. The political and military clout of the Muivah-Swu group is unquestionable – that is why it is holding negotiations on the Nagas' political future.

But the divisions among Naga tribes, not merely the armed factions, cannot be brushed aside. The Hoho has been trying to bring the tribes together in a mission of reconciliation. The I-M group's view is that reconciliation can follow a settlement. This flies in the face of the history of the Naga movement, where any pause, any accord by one group has only resulted in the worsening of the internecine conflict.

That is the unfortunate ground reality, where militants are still at conflict with each other, if not with the Government of India. There are, as we are aware, separate ceasefires with the I-M and the Khaplang group and now there are to be 14 designated camps (seven for each side) where their cadres will be restricted.

These sudden dashes to Bangkok and back appear to undercut the growing moral authority of the Hoho. This is unfortunate because the Hoho is above party politics. It has been viewed with suspicion by the Khaplang faction (which agreed to meet them after keeping them waiting for about six months) and as pro-I-M when it seeks to steer a neutral course!

So, one would caution against any glib talk about settlements based on the view of any one group. This is not just premature but also insensitive to the realities of Nagaland today. Can any agreement that leaves at least three political groups out succeed? One of these factions is heavily armed; one also cannot exclude Mr Jamir, for his influence within Nagaland for whatever reason cannot be denied.

And though the old Naga National Council (NNC) is a rump of its old self and is seen as a spoiler, there are many in the Angami-Chakesang area who swear undying loyalty to it. So, things are not that simple.

Whether or not there is a settlement, there must be reconciliation. It cannot be the condition for a settlement. Yet, a quick look at Naga history shows that any group that has signed an accord on its own without including other groups has neither survived politically nor physically and the accords stand discredited and unsung.

You cannot have standing armies of several thousand cadres on either side prepared to take each other on – though the I-M is a superior force. If one faction signs an agreement, will that ensure that the other side will be bound by it? India must negotiate with the I-M but also realise that the I-M is not the sole representative of all Nagas!

What is important is not unity but the need to bring the groups together on a common platform. Civil society groups such as the Hoho have a key role in this, as acknowledged during the Bangkok consultations.

Centre urged to review Naga policy

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 7. — The United Committee of Manipur, an influential pro-Meiti organisation, today urged the Centre to review its "Naga appeasement policy". Having been kept in the "dark" on the talks with the NSCN (IM), the UCM fears the Centre might reach an agreement with the I-M group before the Nagaland Assembly polls, causing further problems in Manipur.

Acting as a pressure group, the voluntary organisation is in the Capital to warn the Centre against any "wrong move", which saw the Centre withdrawing a clause of extended boundary in the cease-fire agreement with the NSCN (IM). Eighteen persons died in the violence and the Assembly was set on fire.

The UCM spokesman, Mr RK Ranendrajit, urged the Centre at a press meet here today to review its "Naga appeasement policy" insisting it was alienating people of Manipur. "We are not asking for anything more ... they have to look into our problems too", he said. While accusing the NSCN (IM) group of torturing the people of Manipur by extortion, looting and human rights violations on the highways and at the same time not sparing the state government, the UCM strongly felt that the Centre "lacked political will to improve the security" of the state.

Since no assurance was extended by the Centre on resolving the Manipuris' problems, the UCM boycotted the President's visit as a mark of protest. It is maintaining its distance from the state government in public. When the Manipur chief minister Mr Ibobi Singh called a press meet here last week, the UCM stayed away. However, when the chief minister led an all-party team to the Deputy Prime Minister, UCM was also present, sources said.

"The outcome of that meeting is good in general but has no significance. Now, we are seeking an appointment with the Prime Minister," they said. This means till the Prime Minister returns they would stay put to sort out the matter: "The credibility of the government is in question. The government turns a Nelson's eye to Manipur's problems. And now it is even using the religious card."

Drugs, guns and poses

Binalakshmi Nepram's book addresses the issues of small arms, narcotics and armed conflict in the troubled Northeast

Samrat Choudhury

THERE ARE more little wars being fought in South Asia than anywhere else on this troubled planet. The swath of land from Afghanistan through Pakistan and India to Myanmar is home to myriad hostilities. Of these, national armies facing off across 'hot' borders are only a small but visible part. The unseen and unending conflicts between ethnic and religious groups are as dangerous. They are the ones in which thousands die each year. They lead to larger wars, like Bangladesh (1971). Binalakshmi Nepram's book looks at these conflicts.

The area of focus in her book is Northeast India, a maelstrom of over 200 tribal identities that are locked in mortal combat. The usual tools and accompaniments of violence — weapons and drugs — are here in plenty. Nepram attempts a study on the linkages between small arms, narcotics and terrorism in this region. She places her study in its larger re-



**South Asia's
Fractured Frontier**
By Binalakshmi
Nepram
Mittal Publication
Price Rs 595

gional context within South Asia.

Like Kashmir, Northeast India's current problems date back to Independence. The year was 1947. The British were leaving in a hurry. When they went, the 547-odd kingdoms of the sub-continent would go back to being free. Of these, Manipur was one. "Maharaj Bodhchandra was put under house arrest at his summer palace at the Manipur Rajbari in Shillong and forcibly made to sign the merger agreement", says Nepram. "The result of that forced merger is the rise of secessionist groups fighting for independence from India".

This and similar histories are the story of genesis for militancy in much of India. While Kashmir's story is well known and the state continues to receive a great

deal of attention, it is the Northeast where the fight is more bloody. There are "wars inside wars" in the region. Thus, Nagas kill Kukis, Bodos try ethnic cleansing on Santhals, everyone kills Bengalis, and even the Tamils of Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border are attacked by their Kuki neighbours. The only thread that unites the disparate militantcies in the region is their shared enemy—India.

Nepram points out that small arms are used in all these killings. The free flow of weapons up from the Far East to Bangladesh's infamous Cox's Bazar and then into Northeast India is largely to blame for the escalation of conflicts in the region, she says. Foreign intelligence agencies play their version of the great game in these forgotten wildernesses.

Drugs follow the guns. "The narcotics industry with its annual profits of \$350 billion ranks as the world's most successful illegal enterprise, followed closely by the small arms industry", writes

4 OCT 2002

THE HINDUSTAN

Bond hope in political solution

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Bangkok, Sept. 29: Strong linkages and bonds would be forged between Nagaland and India once a political settlement is reached, according to Thuingaleng Muivah, the general secretary of the largest and most influential Naga underground group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) — NSCN (I-M).

The Government of India is currently engaged in peace negotiations with the group.

"The primary issue is to have the rights of the Nagas recognised and guaranteed, and then there is the possibility of establishing the soundest type of relationship between us. We have told the Indian negotiators that if they were to understand the Nagas, then the Nagas would not do anything that is detrimental to India's interests," the Naga leader said.

When asked about the details of guarantees that would be required to recognise Naga rights, Muivah replied that the "number one" issue was "the Nagas' political right to decide their own fate".

However, he immediately added: "This does not mean that we are not going to depend on India. No. We recognise the importance and the necessity of interdependence."

This qualification clearly is a movement forward as now it is basically a question of defining the interdependence and linkages into a framework acceptable to both the Nagas and New Delhi.

However, the Naga leader was reluctant to go into details of the framework within which such interdependence could be defined or the possible division of competencies (i.e. who would handle which areas of governance). He only said: "Many things could be mutually agreed upon. But the basic issue is that the Nagas have to have the identity of their nation."

Elaborating the point further, Muivah said: "When Indians can persuade themselves that the Nagas are not a danger to them, many things can be worked out. On our part, we recognise the truth that Indians are not our enemies. This is a big change." However, he felt that India could not expect



Thuingaleng Muivah

the Nagas to come "all the way through" without coming forward itself.

When asked how the Nagaland of his dreams would be governed, Muivah replied that the Nagas had their own structures and systems of governance. "So I think what is required for a democratic people to build a nation of their own would naturally be done from our side."

Naga society may have had its democratic structures but the Naga underground can hardly claim democratic credentials — eliminating opponents over political differences.

When Muivah was asked how could those who spent the better part of their lifetime underground feeling self-righteous suddenly become democratic overnight, he replied: "No, it is not a question of democracy as such but of disunity in principles, maybe in strategy also.... But when those people who surrendered, accepting the Indian Constitution, attacked us, naturally we had to repulse

them. In the name of democracy principles cannot be sacrificed."

The NSCN (I-M) leader rejected the notion that he could some day sit across the table with the rival NSCN (Khaplang) group (named after its leader who is a Burmese Hemi Naga) even if there was pressure to do so from the Naga civil society and elders. "It is not simply a moral principle that is involved in the issue. It is the fate of the nation. So it cannot be that easy (to sit across the table)."

Muivah denied that the Khaplang group enjoyed support in some areas of Nagaland. He claimed that the offices of the Khaplang group were being run from the camps of the Assam Rifles and that "if they have influence among the people then they should be among the people".

Was he willing to meet Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir? Muivah rejected the idea, claiming that Jamir was given to "telling lies, fabricating (events) and indulging in deception".

When he was told that in a recent interview the Nagaland chief minister had suggested that he and his party would be willing to give up office for a settlement that could lead to peace, Muivah reacted by saying: "He may say that today but tomorrow he may say something else. He is a master of changing position and saying 100 different things. You may take him at his word but the past is clearer to us."

However, he did not rule out the possibility of a broad-based dialogue with groups and organisations in Nagaland that might have opposed his organisation's ways and policies in the past.

Asked what the meeting point could be with such groups, the Naga leader said: "There is no meeting point between those who believe in Nagaland and the rights of the Nagas and those who do not. It has become a big national issue. It is no longer an issue to be decided on the democratic principle. (But) If they have realised their mistake and are willing to cooperate with us, we are ready. We will forgive them. That is the meeting point."

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

30 SEP 2002

EXCLUSIVE: Thuingaleng Muivah speaks to The Telegraph

Ray of light for Naga talks

(1) *29/9* *29/9*
BHARAT BHUSHAN

Bangkok, Sept. 28: The Naga issue, which has eluded solution for more than five decades, may finally be edging towards resolution. The largest underground Naga insurgent group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), has said it was convinced that the Government of India was determined to find a solution and respecting this, the Nagas would also reciprocate by understanding the Indian position "in the best possible way".

"There is no doubt that the Indo-Naga talks are moving on the right track. But to say that the problem could be solved within a few months would be unrealistic," Thuingaleng Muivah, the general secretary of NSCN (I-M), said. Refusing to set a deadline for the settlement, he said: "The sooner this happens, the better. But I think it would be premature to talk of a time-frame from our side."

The Naga underground and New Delhi had entered into a ceasefire agreement five years ago. The arrangement has held remarkably well despite several leadership changes at New Delhi and other hiccups, including the trouble in Manipur last year over the extension of the ceasefire to the Naga-inhabited districts

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of the state.

The latest round of peace talks in Thailand has come barely a few days after the Sri Lanka-LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) talks there mediated by Norway. LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham had given an entirely new complexion to the dialogue by openly stating that the LTTE was striving for "autonomy and self-governance" rather than "separation", which would be the last resort. He had asserted that "homeland and self-governance" for the Tamils did not mean separation but substantial autonomy or self-governance in the areas historically inhabited by the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Asked whether there were any lessons to be learnt for the Naga peace talks from the formulations being used in the Sri Lanka-LTTE talks, Muivah said: "The two issues are different in nature. They (the Sri Lankan Tamils) have their own history and we have our own. Our history is very clear — we were never a part of India. Our uniqueness is quite clear. So any arrangement reached by Sri Lanka with the LTTE may not have any impact on the course of the Indo-Naga talks."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

29 SEP 2001

THE TELEGRAPH

P. T. O.
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Muivah ready for talks give-and-take

29/9

5/6

► FROM PAGE 1

But what if the Sri Lanka-LTTE talks succeed? Would not the Sri Lankan Tamil model of devolution of powers become an example for others such as the Nagas or even the Kashmiris to learn from?

"If the LTTE thinks that their purpose is served in a particular way and they are satisfied with it, we have nothing to say. But that cannot be a model for us as our problem is very different," the Naga leader insisted.

All the same, Muivah seemed very positive about the way the peace process with New Delhi was progressing. He said: "I can assure you that any stalemate or deadlock that we may come

across will not be from our side." This is an unusually strong commitment from a man known for straight talking. It comes in the wake of what could have been a major setback to the peace process.

The NSCN (I-M) had accused the Indian side of floating a document purporting to be the outline of a settlement with them and talking to the press about the alleged changes in their negotiating posture. Both were considered grave breaches of faith by the Nagas as these moves could have jeopardised not only the peace talks but also the legitimacy of the leaders involved in the negotiations. Both sides, however, were able to tide over these controversies when

they met in Bangkok on September 21 and 23.

"Anything that could have created confusion or led to problems had been thrashed out. And this time we did largely that. A lot of issues were clarified. And we are happy to join the Indian negotiators in exploring ways to resolve the bigger issues," Muivah said.

When asked to be more specific about the progress in the negotiations, the Naga leader replied: "Sometimes this is not very easy for one to say... The Joint Communiqué that was issued on July 11 in Amsterdam is a big step forward. I would in fact say that it represented a broad-based agreement because in it the Government of India recog-

the invitation because we see it as a good gesture. But unfortunately the world is complicated and there are obstacles that need to be removed (before the visit)."

The removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Disturbed Areas Act from all the Naga areas, including those in some parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the lifting of the ban on the NSCN (I-M) would, according to Muivah, facilitate the visit. He said his understanding was that New Delhi was addressing these issues. As of now it seems that there would be another round of talks in a third country before the NSCN (I-M) leaders come to Delhi for a short visit.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

N-E states in highway tussle

OUR BUREAU

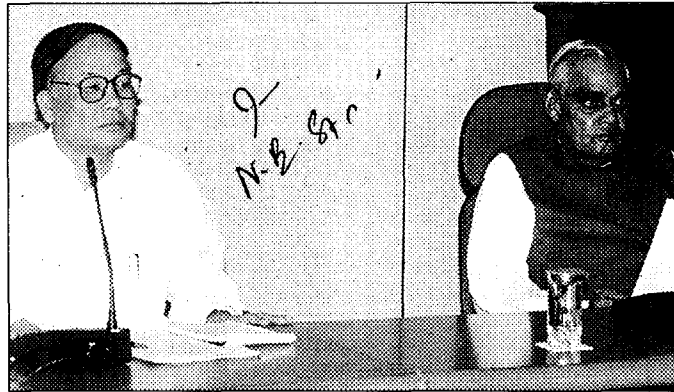
Sept. 27: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today sought a report from Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir on the high incidence of crime on the Imphal-Dimapur highway, specifically the attack on passengers of three Imphal-bound night buses near Piphema on September 5.

However, he failed to placate the United Committee, Manipur (UCM), which called a 24-hour strike from midnight in protest against the Centre's alleged refusal to make a commitment on security along the national highways 39 and 53.

Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh had met Advani in New Delhi yesterday and underscored the need to beef up security along the two highways that connect the state with the rest of the country.

Citing the incident near Piphema as an example of the lawlessness on National Highway 39, he urged the Centre to deploy additional security forces along the entire route.

Apart from robbing passengers of cash and valuables, the criminals involved in the Sep-



Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in New Delhi on Friday (PTI)

tember 5 incident had molested two girls from Manipur.

Ibobi Singh said crime on the highway would not have reached such dangerous proportions had the Centre acted on the proposal to set up a highway protection force way back in 1998.

The deputy PM promptly offered to reimburse the expenditure that would be incurred on raising such a force, but the Manipur leader said his government did not have funds to invest in the scheme.

Advani then assured the

chief minister about deployment of additional security forces in Manipur after the election process in Jammu and Kashmir ends.

The resident commissioner of Manipur House in New Delhi, P. Saratchandra, accompanied Ibobi Singh to the meeting. Union home secretary Kamal Pandey and joint secretary (Northeast) Surendra Kumar were present, too.

Based on the briefing by Ibobi Singh, the deputy PM contacted Jamir and asked him to

submit a report on the incident to the Union home ministry at the earliest.

Sources in New Delhi quoted Advani as saying that the Centre would not tolerate any more security lapses.

Addressing a news conference in the capital, Ibobi Singh said criminals had almost taken over the national highways criss-crossing Manipur, Assam and Nagaland.

"Our state has neither any waterway nor any rail link. It is wholly dependent on the two national highways. Unless the Centre makes available additional forces, we cannot contain crime on the highways. Actually, the situation is spinning out of control," he said.

The chief minister said at least Rs 3 crore was being extorted from truckers every month. "Militants even give receipts of the amount received. They do it under the noses of the police," he added.

In Manipur, the UCM remained unrelenting in its tirade against the Centre for allegedly ignoring the serious law and order problem on national highways 39 and 53.

28 SEP 2003

MLA PULLED UP FOR GENEVA SPEECH

Tripura govt slaps case on Hrangkhawl

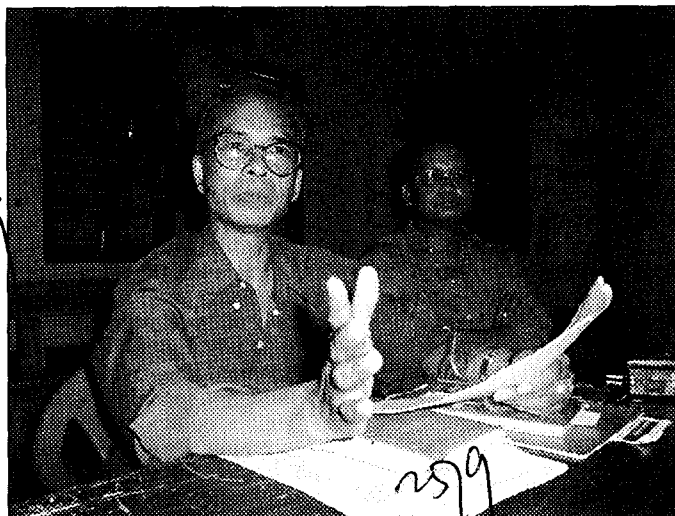
OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, Sept. 24: In a move pregnant with significant political ramifications, the Tripura government has registered a police case against Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura president Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl, two months after he delivered a controversial speech in Geneva.

Hrangkhawl — a former militant leader and now a legislator — had raised the hackles of the ruling Left Front government as well as other parties by questioning Tripura's merger with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949 and calling insurgency in the state a "struggle for self-determination". He had addressed the international convention of the Working Group of Indigenous Population in the Swiss city on July 22-26.

A sub-inspector of police last night registered a suo moto case in the West Agartala station under Section 157 of the IPC. Indicating that charges of sedition might be brought in against Hrangkhawl, the sources said provisions of 120(b), 153(a) and 153(b) of the IPC would also be invoked against the INPT president. The ruling Left Front government had warned that appropriate action would be taken against the former rebel leader for his anti-national utterances in Geneva.

The government, however, stopped short of clamping the National Security Act, which would have resulted in Hrangkhawl's immediate arrest and cause a law and order flare-up.



Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl addressing a press conference in Agartala. Picture by Biju Boro

PCC president Birajit Sinha described the case against Hrangkhawl as "politically-motivated by the Left Front". The Opposition Congress is an ally of the INPT.

Hrangkhawl, who was first arrested in the aftermath of the June 1980 riots, was released at the behest of the then Left Front chief minister Nripen Chakraborty. He had led a decade-long insurgent movement in the state until September 1988, when he surrendered after signing a peace accord. Having resumed normal political activity as a leader of the Tripura National Volunteers for many years, Hrangkhawl merged his party with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura last year, which later emerged as the INPT.

It was as president of the INPT that Hrangkhawl had visited Geneva. In his speech there, Hrangkhawl gave a "distorted" version of Tripura's history, questioning the state's very merger with the Indian Union. He also called the current phase of blood-splattered militancy as the struggle for self-determina-

tion. However, Hrangkhawl tried to gloss over the contents of his speech, first at a news conference and then a mass rally. Describing himself as a "fighter for the cause of indigenous people", he reiterated his faith in the Tricolour and the Constitution, asserting that he was never a "separatist".

Despite the turnaround, the ruling Left Front was preparing the ground for action.

Sources said: "He has been in league with the banned militants over the past years and on foreign soil, he made the seditious speech. So the case is a natural corollary."

They said the government was not keen on "making a martyr out of Hrangkhawl but to show that nobody, however high or mighty, is above the law of the land".

Highly-placed sources in state police said the step to register an innocuous case under IPC 157 had been carefully taken to linger the matter because it would not lead to Hrangkhawl's immediate arrest which would have resulted in the event of invocation of NSA.

7-year term for Ulfa leader in Dhaka jail

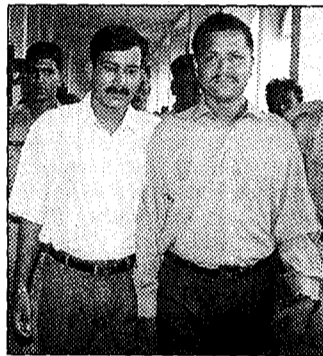
FARID HOSSAIN

Dhaka, Sept. 24: A Dhaka court today sentenced Ulfa leader Anup Chetia and two other militants to seven years in jail for illegal possession of a satellite telephone during their illegal stay in Bangladesh.

This was the last of the four charges for which Chetia and his two comrades have stood trial in Bangladesh since their arrest from a Dhaka house in December 1997.

Chetia looked unmoved when assistant metropolitan judge Abu Sayed Diljar handed down the sentence to the Ulfa leader and two other rebels, Babul Sharma and Laxmi Prosad Goswami. They were also fined 10,000 takas each.

When he was leaving the court under heavy police escort, Chetia told newsmen he would appeal in the higher court.



Chetia coming out of court on Tuesday (AFP)

During the trial Chetia had claimed he was innocent. However, he has sought political asylum in Bangladesh, a plea which Dhaka has rejected.

The three Ulfa militants were earlier found guilty on their other charges of illegal crossing into Bangladesh, unauthorised

stay in Bangladesh and illegal possession of foreign currency. They were sentenced to a total of 11 years each in these three cases.

All the sentences will run concurrently. The latest sentence is effective from the day the three were arrested.

The Assam government has often blamed Bangladesh for harbouring tribal insurgents, but Dhaka has denied the charge and has promised not to shelter separatist rebels from India.

On Tuesday, judge Syed Diljar Hossain handed Chetia and his two companions the maximum sentence of seven years and a fine of 10,000 takas (\$175) for illegally possessing a satellite telephone.

Owing to security concerns, using or owning satellite phones is not permitted in Bangladesh and can only be used by security forces.

2 5 SEP 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Unsafe passage

9-26-88
5-8
2009
Nagaland must end highway robbery

Brigandry on the 213-km Dimapur-Imphal Road (National Highway No 39) is not uncommon and the recent incident in Nagaland involving three Manipur-bound buses might have passed unnoticed but for miscreants manhandling a woman passenger. Naga organisations in Manipur were quick to discount reports of rape but the incident has left a bad taste because tribals are generally not known to indulge in such horrendous acts. Whether it was blown out of proportion, as SC Jamir alleged, the fact remains that his state, under ceasefire since August 1997, has been a happy hunting ground for militants and anti-socials bent on extortion. His administration has done little to curb the practice. Militants have slapped an annual "agreed tax" on Manipuri oil transporters collected at source in oil depots along the Assam-Nagaland border.

What this underscores is the need to make NH 39 – the only road that connects the railhead at Dimapur — safe for traffic. Manipur cannot rely on the alternative 210-km Imphal-Silchar Road (NH53) as it needs widening. Protests by Meitei women organisations against highway crimes are not without reason. Night bus services between Imphal and Guwahati are becoming popular but private operators can least afford the risks involved. Both Nagaland and Manipur must make arrangements to provide armed escorts on buses plying vulnerable stretches even during the day.

20 SEP 2001

THE STATESMAN

Meghalaya killings

51-8 9-N 5 8r
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Khonglam must display initiative

Neither the Congress nor any of the regional parties have been able to earn a name for itself as a peacemaker in Meghalaya. If they had the power, they lacked the will to render stillborn the Khasi-dominated Hinnwtrep National Liberation Council. This outfit first showed up in 1992. Its main objective is independence but it confines itself to robbing banks, harassing traders and ministers through extortion, and since January last year it has killed more than half a dozen non-tribal businessmen. A lesser known Garo outfit, the Achik Liberation Magrik Army, surrendered in 1994 but the credit for this goes to the Meghalaya police. The euphoria, however, was shortlived as those who refused to lay down arms floated the Achik National Volunteer Council to continue the struggle for a "Greater Garoland" and it has now become very potent.

The former Mawlong government frowned on force and wooed 13 ANVC activists in January 2001. Mawlong played safe by waiting for the Centre to agree to his proposal for a ban — it never came — to justify a crackdown on the HNLC. Indeed, one wonders why he did not deal firmly with the ANVC, which was outlawed. Since both Khasi and Garo outfits are active, careful handling is required. The suggestion to involve the church in the peace process deserves consideration. The Khonglam government will fail in its duty if it remains silent on the growing depredations and passes the buck to the Centre.

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THE STATESMAN

SEVEN-SISTER SYNDROME

Pointer To Joint Family Survival

By JB LAMA

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A geopolitical concept, the North-east collectively embraces Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The region is also known as the "Seven Sisters" though the expression seldom figures in conversation. The North-east nomenclature possibly caught the imagination after the North Eastern Council was formed in 1972 for the region's integrated development but of late some intellectuals and politicians, particularly in Nagaland, argue that since individual entity is hidden, that each of the states has its own peculiar problems, the use of "North-east" should be done away with.

Motive

Curiously, as if in anticipation, the Union Home Ministry in 1997 is said to have prohibited the use of North-east in its official communications. The Nagas' underlying motive appears to be governed by the fear that their state, if clubbed with the others, will one day lose its special status in the matter of Central fund allocations. It is this virus of self-interest, parochialism and sectarianism that is tearing the region apart and contributing to the slow but steady erosion of togetherness. This "to-each-his-own" attitude has also killed the NEC's concept of balanced regional development. Set up to prepare and implement projects for collective regional benefit, it has failed to forge a strong socio-economic unity. For too long, each of the constituent states vied with each other for the bigger share of local schemes, with Mizoram even threatening to pull out because of "stepmotherly" fund allotment.

But the NEC, under the Home Ministry till 1997, deserves credit because whatever meaningful regional infrastructures exists today in the spheres of communication and power are a result of its efforts in the first two decades of its existence. How-

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

ever, since the early 1990s, the Centre is treating it lackadaisically, undermining its credibility. Placing it under the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, instead of the governor as chairman by rotation, was a welcome change, but if the organisation is to function with a greater sense of purpose it must be given more financial and administrative powers.

Only a negligible percentage of the vast reserves of natural gas and hydro potential, estimated at 59,000 MW installed capacity, has been harnessed so far. About 320 million people live in the region's 250,000 sq km. While Arunachal Pradesh — the largest (83,743 sq km) — has a population of about 900,000, Tripura — the smallest (10,486 sq km) — has over 2.9 million. Unity is what the region lacks. And with even smaller tribes disintegrating into sub-tribes and clans, the concept of togetherness seems about as dead as the dodo. Memories of the ethnic killings in Manipur that claimed more than 1,500 lives since 1992 are yet to fade. In the larger interest of the region's economic resurgence, there has to be unity of purpose because progress and development cannot be in isolation.

Irritants

As a first step, irritants have to be removed. Like Assam's controversy over the boundary with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. Inter-state relations are souring even if a temporary truce has kept tensions in check. But in the context of bloody clashes over the past three decades, an early solution is paramount. Assam claims there is no dispute whatsoever, that all it

wants is the re-laying of border pillars which had been removed. If this is the case, the states must arrive at an understanding to keep their boundaries inviolate. Instead of merely asking the states to settle issues among themselves, the Centre too should show more interest by taking the initiative.

It should consider Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee's proposal last year before the Supreme Court that a boundary commission be appointed and that its



recommendations be binding on all states. The Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim has added fuel to fire by claiming its "Greater Nagaland" concept covers 120,000 sq km, whereas present Nagaland has an area of only 16,500 sq km. The political implication is obvious. The June 2001 protest against extension of the ceasefire (since withdrawn) to Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur's four hill districts should not be lost sight of. At least 15 protesters were killed and government property worth lakhs of rupees was destroyed. This is a taste of what can be expected in the next decade or so if forcible attempts are made to annex a neighbour's territory; but if there is provision in the 16-Point Agreement the Naga People's Convention signed with the Centre in 1960 leading to the formation of Nagaland, it must be by consent. The Centre has to agree to many NSCN-IM conditions before the ongoing peace talks make a breakthrough.

The rebel leaders have not revealed their political agenda, nor does one have the faintest idea of what Th Muivah's outfit has in mind after a final settlement. What is conspicuous today is the Nagas' evergrowing obsession with guns and

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unhindered extortion. If anything, the ceasefire has caused more suffering. And promises of a better life by misguided messiahs are luring youth to the gun.

Political settlement and development take time but this should in no way be allowed to amount to an economic burden. In the North-east, the prices of essential commodities are invariably 35-40 per cent higher than in the rest of the country and any agitation or disruption of rail or road traffic, even for a day, in the vital Bodo and Karbi Anglong areas has a crippling effect on the landlocked hill states' economy.

Highways

Is it too late to impose a ban on blockades of National Highways in order to highlight grievances? The Nagas in Manipur's Senapati district have been resorting to such tactics along the state's lifeline — the Dimapur-Imphal National Highway. Two years ago, people in Imphal Valley suffered silently for over a month. But there is a limit to human endurance. Of course, a ban may be justified because the entire Bodo region is a powder keg. And if the Bodos get their Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule, the tangle will persist because of the many flashpoints. The Misings' autonomous district council is already demanding Sixth Schedule status and the Tawas and Rabhas are not expected to remain docile for very long. The bottomline is that the Bodos are a minority in their own region.

What is good for them must hold good for the Koch Rajbongshis as well, more so because they outnumber the Bodos and are bound to revive their demand for a separate state. The late Hiteswar Saikia kept them in good humour by granting Scheduled Tribe status by an Ordinance, which however, lapsed before Parliament could ratify it. What the evidence presents is six of one and a half dozen of the other unless parochialism is given a quick burial and the North-east begins to exist as a family.

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Nagaland, Manipur spar over rape

Dipankar Roy in Guwahati &
Yumnam Rupachandra in Imphal

Sept. 13. — The Nagaland government and state NGOs have taken strong exception to the hue and cry raised by the Manipur government, NGOs and the media over the alleged rape of a woman on a bus near Kohima on 5 September. But the media in Manipur has refuted charges of “overreaction and exaggeration”.

Mr Jamir has written to Mr LK Advani and Manipur chief minister Mr O Ibobi Singh, saying that the reports on the rape were false.

The influential Naga Mothers' Association today dared the Meitei NGOs in Manipur and the Ibobi government to prove the allegations, failing which

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they should apologise for defaming the “ladies in question” and the character assassination of Nagas in general.

The NMA said it had carried out an independent investigation into the allegations of rape and found that no such crime had been committed. But it admitted that one woman was “indecently assaulted” by armed criminals who also looted three buses.

In his letter to Mr Ibobi Singh, Mr Jamir said the whole incident had been “blown out of proportion by the media in Manipur”. It was unfortunate that the state government had over-reacted without ascertaining the facts, he said.

The media in Manipur has refuted Mr Jamir's charges. In a press communique, the All Manipur Working Journalists' Union said reporters had re-

ported the incident based on eyewitness reports, as per reporting norms. Media reports were based on “eyewitness accounts backed by authoritative statements of representatives travel agents operating the bus agency”.

Some reporters had met the alleged victims of the assault and their denial of rape was reported in a section of the press. Hence, the charge that the Manipur media had “grossly over-reacted” was false, the AMWJU said.

The journalists union took exception to Mr Jamir's description of the incident as a “petty matter” in his letter to the Deputy Prime Minister. “It is unfortunate that an experienced and responsible person like Mr Jamir dismissed the incident as a ‘petty matter’.”

Cold comfort

'Outrage' exposes Naga ceasefire

Imphal and Kohima may derive some comfort from Tangkhul and Naga women's organisations in Manipur and the All Naga Students' Association (Manipur) denying reports of the rape in Nagaland of a tribal girl from Ukhrul district. Even the girl's family is said to have claimed she was only "manhandled" in an incident which occurred 32 km from Kohima on a night bus when armed militants took over three vehicles by force. There are contradictory versions. However, the incident cannot be brushed aside. An important consideration is that no woman is likely to say she was raped when she was not. However even manhandling short of rape is also a serious offence and warrants punishment. Note, too, that the armed miscreants in army fatigues and one cannot help suggest that prompt denials by Naga organisations in Manipur point to a deliberate attempt to save whichever militant group was involved from embarrassment. The five arrested by the Nagaland police is significant because they had allegedly refused to register the case when the passengers initially reported the matter. Of no less significance here is that the girl belongs to Ukhrul, home district of NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah.

Militants and anti-socials are engaged in a no-holds-barred victimisation of passengers and truck and oil tanker-owners. Several cases have been reported, some of them occurring at checkpoints. One wonders why the Manipur administration allows night bus services along the Dimapur-Imphal National Highway which passes through Nagaland since the stretch is as much a nightmare during the day. The latest outrage clearly underlines the failure of the ceasefire. What else would explain rag-tag outfits operating at will?

CM fears murder attempts

Jamir seeks extension of NSCN ban

OUR BUREAU

Sept. 10: The war of attrition between the S.C. Jamir government in Nagaland and the NSCN (Isak Muivah) has intensified with the administration seeking an extension of the period for which the outfit had been banned.

In a memorandum to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, the chief minister said the ban on the outfit — imposed under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act — should continue beyond November. The chief minister's request assumes significance in the light of the fact that the next round of talks between the NSCN(I-M) leadership and the Centre is proposed to be held this year.

Sources said Jamir's plea was likely to evoke extreme reactions from the outfit, which has been demanding that the ban be lifted. The NSCN(I-M) argues that it is preposterous to ban an organisation with which the Centre is engaged in peace talks. The two sides had signed a ceasefire agreement on August 31, 1997.

Jamir, who makes no bones about his disapproval of the Centre's policy of according "special treatment" to the NSCN(I-M), said in the memorandum to

Advani that clashes between the two factions of the outfit would increase if the ban were to be lifted.

The turf war between the NSCN factions in Zunheboto district has already led to an indefinite economic blockade by the Khaplang group. The blockade began on August 28.

Another reason for Jamir seeking an extension of the term of the ban on the NSCN(I-M) is growing apprehension that the outfit will target his ministerial colleagues and MLAs once it is rid of the tag of an "outlawed organisation".

The chief minister had claimed at a news conference in Dimapur on August 26 that the NSCN(I-M) was trying to intimidate Congress ministers and legislators into severing ties with him. "NSCN(I-M) cadre have been personally visiting Cabinet members and legislators and threatening them with dire consequences if they do not withdraw support from the government," he alleged.

Jamir questioned the "political agenda" of the outfit. "What is the NSCN(I-M)'s agenda? Is it sovereignty or Jamir? If it is Jamir, then let them come out and contest the elections. Why should they keep the people of Nagaland in the dark?" he asked.

Third strike in three months

Militants gun down 15 cops in Garo Hills

BIDHAYAK DAS

Shillong, Sept. 9: Militants suspected to be from the A'chik National Volunteers' Council (ANVC) today gunned down five policemen, including a deputy superintendent of police, and injured two near Chokpot in the South Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

It was the third big strike in as many months by militants active in the Garo Hills. The last such ambush was on the eve of Independence Day, when 10 people were shot dead.

Director-general of police L. Sailo and his deputy, WR Marbaniang, informed newsmen that DSP Pechon Sangma and his team were on their way to Chokpot from Baghmara at around 1 pm when they came under attack. The policemen retaliated immediately, but were seemingly outnumbered, they said.

Apart from Sangma, four constables were killed in the ambush. However, police officials here could not confirm the names of the slain constables.

With the exchange of fire continuing for at least 30 minutes, gunshots were heard at the Chokpot outpost, which is not far from the site of the ambush, Sailo said. Sangma, who was the DSP (headquarters) of South Garo Hills, was going to Chokpot for patrolling. The officer, the first of his rank to be killed by militants in Meghalaya, is survived by his wife and two sons.

Chief minister F.A. Khonglam and his deputy D.D. Lapang, who were present at the news conference, said the administration would extend all possible help to the police to flush out militants from the area.

Sailo and a few more senior police officers will visit Baghmara tomorrow to take stock of the situation. The superintendent of police of South Garo Hills is already in Chokpot to supervise the combing operation.

Marbaniang said the area was a stronghold of the outlawed ANVC and the ambush on the po-

lice team was possibly its handiwork. He said the group involved in the attack might have suffered casualties when the policemen fired back at them.

The assistant DGP said one of the constables in the police team sneaked past the militants and informed officials at the Chokpot outpost about the ambush. He said details about the ambush would be known only tomorrow. According to preliminary reports from Baghmara, the militants hurled hand grenades and opened fire from sophisticated weapons.

In Imphal, a sub-inspector of Imphal West police (narcotics cell) was killed and a constable injured by suspected drug traffickers at Singjamei Super Market in Imphal town today, adds our Imphal correspondent.

Pak envoy denial

With police and Central intelligence agencies trying hard to establish a link between arrested Assam Rifles lance naik Joe Haokip and the ISI, the Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu has denied the involvement of any of its staff in the alleged spy ring busted in Meghalaya.

Haokip was arrested on July 10 by Meghalaya police from his official quarters in Upper Shillong and booked under several charges for supplying information to the ISI.

Haokip had named Chiranjeev Shrestha — who he claimed was working in the Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu — as his direct linkman.

Haokip had said he was introduced to the ISI by a retired Assam Rifles havildar. He had also confessed to having gone to Kathmandu a couple of times with Shrestha and another friend. It is yet to be established if Shrestha and the retired havildar, now said to be residing near Bhaktapur in Nepal, are one and the same person. However, the first secretary of Pakistan embassy Kamal Ahmed dismissed the reports as "figments of his imagination".

Ominous signs in the northeast

By Wasbir Hussain

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THE VAST majority of the northeast's 38 million people may be craving for peace, but the region's separatist rebel groups are forging strategic alliances amongst themselves, broadening their area of operation, and making forays into newer theatres, indicating that they are bent on continuing with their bush war against the Indian state. Some of the recent pacts sealing the coming together of frontline insurgent outfits do not augur well for the Indian security establishment, obsessed as it is with Kashmir. And, if some of these alliances have actually been clinched at the behest of hostile forces and agencies in Pakistan on the eve of the elections in Jammu and Kashmir, New Delhi could well be forced to concentrate more on the northeastern theatre, where 'little wars', if anything, are still raging.

Insurgent politics in the northeast saw a very important development in recent weeks — the signing of a deal for joint operations by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). While the ULFA is active in Assam and has a number of well-entrenched bases in the adjoining Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, the UNLF's primary area of operation has been Manipur's Jiribam Valley and Assam's Cachar district. A UNLF statement on July 29 disclosed for the first time the agreement with the ULFA.

Significantly, that statement came less than a fortnight after the UNLF claimed responsibility for the July 16 killing of three Jat Regiment soldiers in Assam's Cachar district. Given the admission about the agreement, the ULFA could well have provided logistic support to the UNLF in carrying out that ambush.

The UNLF, formed on November 24, 1964, under the leadership of Ar-eambam Samarendra Singh to establish an independent socialist Manipur, has a rather frightening history, insofar as its one-time allies are concerned. The outfit shared a close "political relationship" with the then East Pakistani regime, and in 1969 its cadres underwent military training in that country. The group is also said to have backed the Pakista-

ni army during the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. In 1975, a team headed by N. Bisheswar Singh proceeded to Lhasa to ask for Beijing's assistance. Now headed by Rajkumar Meghen alias Sana Yaima, the UNLF is also close to the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K) and has training camps in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

It is linkages such as these and the potential for immense trans-border movement by men of these groups that has made the ULFA-UNLF pact so significant. The ULFA would like

bases and training facilities in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Denials from Dhaka notwithstanding, it is a fact that Bangladesh has been a favourite "hiding" place for ULFA leaders. The group's general secretary, Anup Chetia, was arrested by Bangladeshi security forces from a locality in Dhaka in December 1997 and has been in prison there ever since. But, in the event of a possible joint Indo-Bhutanese assault on the ULFA inside Bhutan, the group would like to have an alternative destination to head for. And, that will obviously be either

pear extraordinary, a fact the ULFA may have taken note of. In December 2001, as many as 192 UNLF cadres, including some top leaders, were "arrested" by the Myanmar army. Interestingly, all of them were set free by February 14 this year in four phases. The entire episode is still shrouded in mystery, particularly because Yangon has been almost simultaneously promising Indian leaders of support in checking cross-border insurgency. Does this mean the UNLF has some sort of an understanding with the ruling junta in Myanmar, or a section of it? Answers are difficult to find, but theories abound.

The nexus between the ULFA and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) is also worth watching. Security sources would have one believe that it was the ULFA that propped up and got the KLO formed in December 1995. The KLO's aim is to achieve a separate Kamatapur State for the Koch-Rajbongshi community comprising six districts of north Bengal and four districts in adjoining western Assam.

That is a different story, but the ULFA's alliance with the KLO gives it access to certain KLO-controlled corridors that provide the rebels from Assam a bridge linking their bases in Bhutan with hideouts in Bangladesh. The alliances between the ULFA and other rebel groups in the region may have neutralised the reverses the former has been facing in Assam in the wake of a sustained counter-insurgency offensive.

In western Assam's Nalbari district alone, supposedly an ULFA stronghold, up to 50 rebels were killed in shootouts with security forces between January and August this year. The authorities would insist the ULFA has been "marginalised". The very next moment, analysts and intelligence agencies would sound a note of caution, taking into account the new equations emerging among the rebel groups and their expanding theatres of war. New Delhi and the States in the northeast must now put in place a workable counter-insurgency strategy with the focus on coordination, not competition.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi.)

New Delhi and the States in the northeast must now put in place a workable counter-insurgency strategy with the focus on coordination, not competition.

to describe the agreement as a "fraternal bond sealed to fulfil certain tactical goals". It may not have been an exclusive bilateral pact, but both the ULFA and the UNLF were part of the loose pan-Mongoloid coalition forged in May 1990 called the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF). Formed to wage a "united struggle for the independence of Indo-Burma", the IBRF was a failure primarily because it was too much of a problem for its leaders to hold on to a group of rebel outfits which claimed to represent diverse tribes and communities.

What then was the need for the ULFA — fighting for a "sovereign, socialist Assam" since its formation in April 1979 — to now tie up with the UNLF or vice-versa? The ULFA's main fighting machine is located in Bhutan, across western Assam. Of late, the ULFA is under pressure from Bhutanese citizens and the Government to pull out from the kingdom. The latest session of the Bhutanese National Assembly or Parliament that concluded in July has reiterated its call to the ULFA to withdraw in a peaceful manner or face military action. The Royal Government has since decided to hold one last round of talks with the ULFA leadership to persuade them to leave the country.

Under the circumstances, the ULFA perhaps was eyeing the UNLF's

Bangladesh or Myanmar, or both. The pact with the UNLF was, therefore, a must for the ULFA.

At one stage, intelligence officials had traced some of the ULFA arms consignments to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, a deal brokered in 1993 by Bo Mya's Karen National Union (KNU), an anti-Yangon guerrilla group. Today, with increased surveillance making the bringing in of weaponry more difficult, the UNLF could well serve as a conduit for shipment of military hardware between Myanmar rebels and the ULFA. Between January and July this year, the UNLF has carried out at least three major attacks on security forces in Manipur and Assam, besides clamping a ban on two Manipur-based newspapers before lifting the restrictions. That means the UNLF is very much active and additional funds were only welcome. The ULFA is obviously a bigger group to which the UNLF could charge a hefty fee for services rendered. The Assam Police have claimed that the outlawed ULFA has in recent weeks stepped up its extortion drive, targeting professionals, aside from the tea industry. Whether the outfit was trying to garner funds to pay the UNLF is not immediately known.

The UNLF's equations with the military junta in Myanmar also ap-

Naga molester in police net

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Sept. 8: Nagaland police have arrested a youth and identified his accomplices who were involved in the looting of five Imphal-bound vehicles and molestation of two Tangkhul Naga girls early on September 5 at Piphema near Kohima.

Nagaland additional director-general of police (operations) J.Chankija has informed Manipur police chief S. Bimolchandra Singh that the ar-

rested youth, Bumche Limbu, is a former activist of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). He was arrested by Medziphema police in Dimapur district.

Limbu was recently released from jail after being detained under the National Security Act for the past year. The police official said the thugs had used AK-47 rifles and small arms in committing the crime.

Chankija, however, denied the rape of a Tangkhul Naga girl

inside a passenger bus. He said the youths had tried to drag the girl down from the bus, but she and the other passengers had resisted.

Changkija said the four other accomplices of the former militant were Medoneizo, Keheselie, Neikethozo and Pezangulie. He added that Nagaland police were trying to arrest them. Manipur police yesterday despatched two senior officers to Kohima to coordinate with Nagaland police.

The Manipur DGP told news-

men today that he would request Nagaland police to speed up the investigation since public protests are continuing. "Manipur police will give all help in collecting material for the investigation for their Nagaland counterpart," said Bimolchandra Singh.

All traffic on the Imphal-Mao stretch of National Highway 39 came to a grinding halt today following a bandh called by transporters and the Manipuri Students' Federation over the issue.

NSCN man among 5 arrested for rape

SNS & PTI

IMPHAL, Sept. 8. — A former NSCN-IM cadre, Bumche Limbu, and four assailants were arrested by the Nagaland Police in connection with the 5 September incident in which a Manipuri girl was allegedly raped and several others molested.

In a letter to Manipur DGP Mr Bimlochandra, the additional DIG Nagaland, Mr J Changkija, said Bumche Limbu was arrested by the Nagaland police on Friday and will be brought to Kohima soon.

Limbu was earlier arrested and detained under the National Security Act. He was released recently. The four others have been identified as Medoneizo, Keheseli, Neikethozo, and Pezangulie. A copy of the letter was issued to the press by Mr Bimlochandra here today.

According to the letter, about six or seven assailants armed with AK 47 rifles looted three Manipur-bound buses and two trucks on Thursday, but the report of rape of a Manipuri girl was "false". The assailants had tried to drag down a female passenger from a bus, but when she and other passengers resisted they fled, Mr Changkija said.

Mr Changkija said forces would be deployed at NH 39. No buses will be allowed to ply on the highway at night. Passenger buses from Guwahati would be detained at Chumukedima near Dimapur till 4 a.m.. Mr Bimlochandra said the case has been taken up by Nagaland Police. When asked how could the eyewitness account of so many passengers and drivers be wrong, the DGP said a separate investigation was on but it was too early to divulge details.

In another related development, the All Naga Students Association Manipur condemned the incident and asked all militants groups, social organisations to track down the culprits. It, however, said that no one was raped. It was only an attempt to rape, the association said.

Protests against the incident continued today in Imphal. The "Night Super" bus-owners today suspended operations on NH 39. Hundreds took part in sit-in protests by All-Manipur Students Union, the Congress and other organisations at North Aoc, Koirengei and other places in Imphal.

The All-Manipur Women Action Committee, a front of 11 women's groups, has asked the Centre to take steps to provide security along the highways.

Rape protest blocks highway

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

IMPHAL, Sept. 7. — The United Committee Manipur has imposed an indefinite embargo on entry into the territory of Nagaland with immediate effect following the rape of a Manipuri girl from Ukhurul on Sept 5 morning.

UCM president Mr S Jadumani announcing the embargo said the body will block all Manipur roads including the states lifeline the NH39 to protest against the atrocities by armed Nagaland militants

Armed Naga militants looted some Manipur-bound vehicles and molested female passengers at Piphema near Kohima on Thursday. Mr Joy Chingak Ham, UCM information secretary, said the Imphal-Jiribam Highway number 53 and Imphal-Dimapur Highway 39, which linked the state with the rest of the country, are considered

lifelines of Manipur.

The Manipur chief minister, Mr Okram Ibobi Singh, in a faxed message yesterday requested Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani to issue directives to the Nagaland government to track down the culprits and ensure proper security on the NH 39.

Mr Singh said two Manipuri girls from Ukhurul district, travelling in one of the three buses, were raped by the militants in front of other passengers. Mr D Mishra, DIG Police, had been sent to Kohima to investigate the incident, the chief minister said.

Sit-in demonstrations was organised by the All-Manipur Students Union between Imphal and the border town of Mao along the NH 39 in protest against Thursday's incident, an Amsu spokesperson said today. Effigies of the Manipur and Nagaland chief minister were burnt by them.

Manipur girl raped inside night bus

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Sept. 6: Manipur today erupted in anger over the rape of a tribal girl by armed miscreants inside a Guwahati-Imphal night bus.

Passengers of the Royal Rajdhani Luxury Coach, the bus in which the dastardly act took place yesterday, told the police that a 15-member armed gang waylaid the vehicle between Pipima and Jubza in Nagaland at around 1 am.

It was the third Imphal-bound bus that the gang had stopped at the same spot.

After collecting all the cash and valuables they could lay their hands on, the gang allowed the first two vehicles to

proceed to Manipur.

One of the robbers then drove the Royal Rajdhani Luxury Coach to a deserted spot along the National Highway 39. After the vehicle came to a halt, members of the gang raped a girl, seated in front, one by one.

The victim's co-passengers admitted to not uttering a word of protest because the rapists had threatened to shoot anyone who did so. The gang molested another female passenger before fleeing.

The joint action committee of tourist bus operators of Manipur today decided to suspend bus services on the Imphal-Dimapur highway on Sunday in protest against the incident. It threatened to go on an indefinite strike if Nagaland po-

lice fail to arrest the culprits soon.

Director-general of police Bimolchandra Singh contacted his Nagaland counterpart over phone and requested him to take all possible steps to apprehend the gang. Inspector-general of police (intelligence) T. Thang Thuam later told The Telegraph that Nagaland police had promised to spare no effort to bring the culprits to book.

Opposition leader Nimaichand Luwang said an insurgent outfit could not have been involved in the incident. "Rape and looting can by no means be the activities of a revolutionary organisation. In any case, travelling on the highway is now fraught with risks and the onus is on the Manipur and Naga-

land governments to protect passengers," he added.

Students of Manipur University said the gang involved in the rape had not only humiliated the women, but Manipuri society as a whole.

Buses to Imphal from Guwahati and Shillong will henceforth depart at 6 pm. "This is to ensure that buses enter Nagaland after dawn," a spokesman of the joint action committee said.

Detonators recovered: The army today recovered over 1,000 gelatin sticks and electronic detonators from Hazarika Chuburi village in Darrang district, reports our Guwahati correspondent. The explosives were recovered from an abandoned house.

Militants abduct five non-tribals in Tripura

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, Sept. 5: Five non-tribals were abducted by tribal militants from Natun Bazaar in Dhalai district yesterday. Besides, police have recovered two bodies from Dhalai and West Tripura districts over the past 24 hours.

Police sources said at 5 pm, a Chhailengta-bound passenger jeep from Manu was stopped by armed militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura at Natun Bazaar within three km of the Manu police station.

While most of the passengers managed to escape, three of them — Arun Datta, Narendra Pal and Anup Sarkar — were abducted.

Even as the three passengers were being asked to form a queue before being led away, a motorcycle carrying two non-tribals reached the spot. The militants also abducted the two riders, Parimal Saha and Sudhir Pal, both residents of Chhawanu area in Dhalai district.

Police personnel from Manu

reached the spot soon after being informed of the abduction. A combing operation has been launched but the abducted persons are still untraced.

In a separate incident, Ambassa police recovered the body of NLFT collaborator Nanibabu Debbarma (27) from Mahabir Dhancherra village in Dhalai district.

Sources said the police conducted a search operation acting on information provided by relatives of the collaborator. The slain collaborator, who had gone to his father-in-law's house, was missing since September 1.

In another incident, a combined force of Bishalgarh and Melaghar police exhumed the corpse of Tarun Saha (35), a contractor and truck-owner from the Melaghar police station area, this morning.

The skeletal remains were exhumed from Morgang village under Bishalgarh police station. Saha had been abducted by NLFT militants on January 7 this year.

Sources said Melaghar police

had recently arrested an NLFT rebel, Danab Kumar Malsum, from the Taiziling Bari area. He admitted to having been involved in the abduction of Tarun Saha.

He also confessed that the businessman had been killed and buried within a week of his abduction even though the militants later extorted Rs 1 lakh from his wife.

Meghalaya scam

After the controversial online lottery deal with M.S. Associates, the Meghalaya government is allegedly working on a loophole-ridden agreement with a Delhi-based company to set up a heavy fuel thermal plant at Byrnihat, reports our Shillong correspondent.

Though the Cabinet has yet to clear the relevant files, a Delhi-based company has reportedly been selected to execute the project.

There is talk of the People's Forum of Meghalaya (PFM) having selected the company without adhering to rules.

Ulfa evades police with NSCN help

OUR CORRESPONDENT

129
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Dibrugarh, Sept. 5: The outlawed Ulfa has devised a new way of eliminating "risks" to its cadre while intensifying its extortion drive in areas close to the Assam-Nagaland border in Sivasagar district.

Police sources in Sonari, a growing town near the interstate border, said the outfit recently started issuing demand notices on extortion targets through members of its ally, the NSCN (Khaplang).

The matter came to light when tea companies and businessmen informed the police that boys with Naga physical features were delivering demand notices bearing the Ulfa emblem. It transpired that Ulfa leader Debojit Konwar was controlling the extortion drive in and around Sonari, surrounded by tea gardens, from the adjacent Nagaland district of Mon.

"The Ulfa has a camp in Mon district, from where Konwar is overseeing its extortion campaign. Members of the NSCN(K) are helping the outfit in every way," a senior police official said.

Konwar is understood to have taken charge of the extortion drive after Arpan Saikia, "commander" of the Ulfa's Sivasagar unit, was arrested.

The Ulfa's alliance with the NSCN(K) is based on the condition that the Naga outfit will get a share of the booty.

"After the Khaplang group entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Centre, its members became jobless. These militants are now helping the Ulfa in its extortion drive," a source said.

By using NSCN(K) militants in its operations, the Ulfa has lessened the risk of its listed cadre being arrested by security forces.

The outfit, as usual, is targeting tea gardens, businessmen, petrol pumps and government officials.

Nagaland police, however, denied that the Ulfa was operating from Mon district. A senior police official in Tizit claimed that the outfit had set up a camp in the Abhayapur forest reserve in Assam.

Sonari, the headquarters of Charaideo subdivision of Sivasagar district, is just 14 km from the border town of Namtola.

Several batches of Ulfa militants had used the Sonari-Namtola-Mon route to reach Myanmar for arms training.

Residents of the border town blamed the administration for the spurt in extortion-linked incidents.

"We have been demanding deployment of paramilitary forces at Namtola, but it has been consistently ignored," a businessmen said.

The Assam police outpost at Namtola is said to be "ill-equipped" to take on militants of the Ulfa and the NSCN(K). A few days ago, the Naga outfit destroyed a police checkpoint when one of its members was killed in a road accident in the area.

After lying low for several months because of a string of reverses, the Ulfa has again become active in its strongholds in Upper Assam. Apart from filling its coffers, the outfit is trying to increase its cadre strength, sources said.

Bodo ball in Advani court

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Aug. 31. — Leaders of Bodoland movement hope Mr LK Advani would save the region from hurtling into yet another cycle of chaos that is inevitable if the Centre does not announce formation of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council soon.

"Officials in Delhi and Dispur have played their part and it's now up to the deputy Prime Minister to meet the Bodoland Liberation Tiger and other groups and wrap up the process of setting up the BTC," Mr Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Rajya Sabha MP and adviser to the All Bodo Students' Union said.

The Absu had earlier set a 31 August deadline for the government and warned that if nothing positive happened them it would renew its movement for a separate state for the Bodos. Speaking to The Statesman over telephone from Kokrajhar, Mr Brahma said a decision on the next course of action would be taken soon.

The Absu had put the statehood movement on hold

after the BLT declared a ceasefire and started talks with the Centre to work out an administrative arrangement under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the Bodo-inhabited areas.

Mr Brahma said the Assam government had done whatever it was assigned to do barring a decision on inclusion of an additional 93 villages in the BTC area. "The exercise now must be carried forward at the political level and the home minister has to do it," he said.

Mr Brahma said any delay would only strengthen doubts regarding the Centre's sincerity towards resolving the issue. "It was Mr Advani who had taken the initiative, but now he is delaying the process," he said.

He conceded that it would take a while for Parliament to approve the amendments to be made to the Sixth Schedule, but said the Centre could sign the MoU immediately.

The Schedule has to be amended to make it applicable to the Bodo-inhabited plains of Assam. Hitherto it was applicable to some hill areas in the North-east.

THE STATESMAN

1 SEP 2001

NSCN-K launches economic blockade to counter rivals

Naga outfits go on warpath

PRADEEPPAREEK

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Dimapur, Aug. 28: Ignoring warnings from the administration and appeals by various organisations, the Khaplang faction of the NSCN today launched an indefinite "economic blockade" in Zunheboto district of Nagaland in a bid to get even with the Isak-Muivah group, which has threatened its primacy in the area.

Sources said NSCN (K) cadre began sending back vehicles plying between Kohima and Zunheboto from Chetheba, a town along the highway, last evening. However, the district administration claimed that vehicles were plying as usual.

"In any case, there is no reason to worry as the district has buffer stocks of essential commodities for six months," deputy commissioner K.N. Ngullie told **The Telegraph** over phone. The

official said security personnel were escorting all vehicles carrying essentials to Zunheboto town.

The NSCN(K) announced the blockade in protest against the alleged violation of the ground rules of the ceasefire by its rival. The outfit had imposed a similar blockade in the district in 1999 and 2000.

The Sumi Hoho, the apex organisation of the Sumi Nagas, condemned the blockade and appealed to both factions of the NSCN to "respect and honour" the ground rules of the truce agreement with the Centre.

Leaders of the organisation had met in Zunheboto yesterday to discuss the crisis sparked by the NSCN(I-M)'s attack on an NSCN(K) camp at Suruhoto on August 24. The deputy commissioner, who attended the meeting, criticised the NSCN (I-M) for targeting its rival and the Khap-

lang group for retaliating with an economic blockade.

Ngullie read out the ground rules mentioned in the ceasefire agreement between the Centre and the NSCN (K) to drive home the point that starting an economic blockade is tantamount to calling off the truce.

The meeting said the NSCN (I-M)'s "unilateral decision" to abrogate the declaration of Zunheboto as a peace zone was "against the interests of the Naga people in general and the Sumis in particular".

The NSCN (K), however, justified the indefinite economic blockade. The outfit's "medical kilonser (minister)", Temjen Longkumer, said the leadership was "fed up with the false assurances of the Sumi Hoho over the past 10 years".

Refusing to call off the blockade, he said, "This time, we will not allow the Tangkhul-run

group to destroy the Nagas. The NSCN will not keep mum because of the terrorist threats of the Isak-Muivah group."

The Nagaland government had asked members of both factions of the NSCN to leave Zunheboto town by 6 pm today.

The deputy commissioner said the district administration would conduct a house-to-house search operation and arrest any person found with arms and ammunition.

He urged the Sumi Hoho and other organisations to cooperate with security forces in flushing out armed militant cadre from the area, which had been declared a "peace zone" three years ago.

NSCN (I-M) "home minister" A.K. Lungalang had said the attack on the Khaplang faction's camp should be regarded as a warning to those conspiring against his outfit.

23 AUG 2002

Naga forum rules out talks in Shillong

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Aug. 23: The Brussels-based Naga International Support Centre (NSIC) has ruled out Shillong as a venue for the next round of talks between the NSCN (I-M) leadership and the Centre, saying the Meghalaya capital meant nothing more to the Nagas than the "town where the infamous accord that split Naga society was signed".

The Centre's chief interlocutor in the Naga peace talks, K. Padmanabhaiah, had said here recently that Shillong could be the venue for the next round of parleys. But the human rights organisation, which has been espousing the "Naga cause" in the global arena, contradicted his statement.

24/8
"Is this the same Padmanabhaiah that represents the government of India or might it be a person that accidentally carries the same name?" it asked.

The NSIC said the former Union home secretary had more often than not contradicted himself on the peace talks and "said things which do not augur well for a lasting solution to the Naga problem".

After the last round of talks in Amsterdam in July, Padmanabhaiah had said that the Centre "recognises the unique history of the Nagas". He later made an entirely different remark on the same issue. "India has so many indigenous or unique people," he said.

The rights group said that by signing the Shillong Accord, the

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Naga National Council (NNC) had "sold out the national stand on sovereignty" and agreed "to accept the Indian Constitution". It alleged that those who did not acknowledge the accord were "taken prisoners or were executed" by the "federal army" of the NNC.

The NSIC said Shillong could be considered a venue for the signing of a pact "after an honourable settlement has been reached to strike out the black chapter of history that was written there".

NSCN (I-M) general secretary Th. Muivah had recently accused the Centre of pursuing an "over-clever policy" to hoodwink the Nagas. Padmanabhaiah, however, dismissed the accusations as "preposterous".

Naga broadsides, talking peace

Nagaland is back in the news. This time, the broadsides and battlelines are drawn clearly. Yet, the situation remains, not unstrangely, confused and murky.

Th. Muivah, supremo of the dominant National Socialist Council of Nagalim group, has attacked New Delhi for allegedly conspiring with Nagaland Chief Minister SC Jamir to distort the group's peace proposal. The NSCN (I-M) had given the Centre a list of 27 demands for negotiations last September during a meeting with the Centre's emissary, K Padmanabhiiah. Now Mr Muivah says that India is showing bad faith and that the home ministry is "stealthily" colluding with his *bete noire*, Mr Jamir, the veteran politician who heads the Congress regime in the state.

The response so far to his attack has come from Mr Padmanabhiiah, who is not the home ministry's man - he is the Prime Minister's representative to the talks. Mr Padmanabhiiah says that the Naga leader's charges are "absurd" and that if the chief minister was using any "so-called" document which had been leaked - he, of course, denied that any such leakage had taken place, although some of the issues on the negotiating table are reasonably well-known here - the NSCN should just repudiate the document. Mr Padmanabhiiah's remarks are the sharpest used by any government official about the concerns of the Naga group in these past five years of ceasefire and discussions. The negotiations are at a preliminary state and there is pressure growing on Prime Minister Vajpayee to appoint a senior politician as negotiator for the talks, should the NSCN leadership of Mr Muivah and the group's chairman, Isak Chisi Swu, come to India for brief discussions later this year.

Shillong has been full of rumours that it will be the venue of such talks. Such reporting is largely conjecture. Would the Nagas want to convene at the site of what most of them regard as the worst and most divisive agreement with the Government of India signed in Shillong in 1975? That's worth thinking about, before reporters rush to print.

Where this verbal blast and counter-blast will take the talks is unsure. They will certainly not improve the climate for conversations. But perhaps it is a good thing that Mr Muivah has aired his suspicions openly, instead of keeping them to himself. That both sides restrained themselves from speaking out is fairly well-known and the climate at the talks at times is said to be tense. This may have the effect of clearing the air. Given this spirit, even accusations such as those by the Nagas can be responded to - as the Centre has done. The public can also form its opinion on these sensitive issues. It is important for civil society in India to understand the concerns of all sides and for the media to reflect these concerns with accuracy and sensitivity.

It is not without significance that the broadside from Mr Muivah comes as the two sides gear up for their quarterly discussions on what is blandly defined as "substantive issues" on the future of the Naga movement for independence. These discussions often open with sharp attacks by the Naga side and defence by India and focus predominantly on ceasefire implementation.

The war of words is not surprising. But it comes after an unfortunate interregnum of bloodletting between the two major Naga factions, one led by Mr Muivah and the other by SS Khaplang. Until 1988, these men and their followers were brothers-in-arms. Since then, there has been a spectacular falling out with each side accusing the other of betraying the Naga cause. Mr Muivah says that hundreds of his best fighters, from his own Tangkhul tribe of Manipur state, were slain in the Khaplang attack that year. It is an incident that he has neither forgiven nor forgotten. Nor have the Tangkhuls as a group, especially as their attackers were Nagas of other tribes, particularly the Konyaks who owe allegiance to Mr Khaplang.

If that sounds complicated, then it cannot be helped. The Byzantine maze of Naga politics, of real and imagined hurts, wrongs and betrayals, is legendary and his lore has been handed down from generation to generation. Yet, things until the first week of July had promised to improve with the Angami village at Bara Basti in Kohima planning to host the first meeting of the armed factions for a dialogue. This fell apart when a local leader of the Khaplang group was taken from his home in the village by a NSCN (I-M) unit and shot nearby. Most of the others were Tangkhuls, reports indicate, and the killing sent a wave of anger, revulsion and fear through the area. The meeting was cancelled.

The question was and remains: who instructed the killing of the Khaplang man? Why did it come on the eve of the unique effort for peace? The Naga Hoho leaders are said to have admonished the local leadership of the NSCN (I-M) in Dimapur, pointing to the lack of sensitivity to tribal suspicions and how the internal efforts for reconciliation and peace had suffered a setback. They managed to arrange a low-level meeting of the two groups earlier in August. This is a small step forward and much more hard work of building bridges, breaking down the walls of hate and suspicion needs to be done. In this challenging task, the reconcilers have our support and good wishes. But they will have to do it on their own, bringing all groups on a common platform.

The tragedy of the Naga cause - as with other causes and struggles in the North East - is that so little is known of them, more than 50 years after the first shots for independence were fired. The Nagas need to come out of their region, speak to civil society groups and the public in India at large, to explain their story and their positions. This is the greater task before the Naga Hoho and other civil society groups there, and they will find many listeners.

But no negotiation or settlement with any one group will do. At a public discussion in Kolkata last week, I proposed that all the groups need to be brought together as a coalition of Naga interests since their agenda and goals were similar. This is the other task before the Naga Hoho. For that to happen, the guns among the Nagas must fall silent and the Hoho must be given elbow space to create a window for coalition cooperation by first bringing the lower and middle-ranking leaders of the rival factions together. A solution can last only if there is agreement among the groups, even if they don't unite.

24 AUG 2002

Muivah sends Centre a stinker

Says talks may derail as peace proposal 'distorted' for electoral gains in Nagaland

AJAY SURI

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

WEEKS after being invited to the country for talks aimed at ending the decades-old insurgency problem in the Naga hills, NSCN (I-M) leader Thuingaleng Muivah has accused the Centre and the Nagaland government of a "campaign of disinformation" which could well derail the negotiation process.

In a statement issued from Amsterdam on Wednesday, Muivah attacked the Union Home Ministry of "colluding" with the S.C. Jamir government in the "campaign of disinformation" which, he said,

was a complete negation of the Amsterdam Declaration he had signed on July 11 with the PM's special emissary K. Padmanabhaiah.

The Amsterdam round of talks, aimed at persuading the Naga leadership to travel to India for talks, had also focussed on a 30-point proposal which the NSCN (I-M) had turned over to the Government a year ago. In the proposal, the outfit had raised issues related to Nagaland's security, citizenship, currency and monetary policy, flag and emblems.

Although the Centre has remained silent, Muivah claimed both the Central and Nagaland governments had not only twisted the document but spread the word among

our proposal."

According to Muivah, Jamir not only had the proposed paper distributed to his Cabinet on Aug. 6 but was now working "heart and soul" to "deceive the innocent Naga public for votes for the coming puppet elections (Nagaland is due for polls next year), to undermine the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, to hijack the issue and cause more bloodshed. It is the corporate dishonest attempt of the Home Ministry and Jamir."

Muivah says the goings-on in Nagaland are intended to "dilute the importance of the Indo-Naga issue and create confusion so they are able to fish in troubled waters. It is unscrupulous. We are sorry to come to know they have gone

the reckless way. Now, how can one say the Indians are serious with the negotiation process?"

The NSCN chief's warning to the Government rings clear in his comment that "it is high time they realised the danger inherent in such an over-clever policy. It won't be wise to wait for the worst to come."

Sources said the Home Ministry, in consultation with the Law Ministry, has already gone through the NSCN's proposal. That New Delhi remained silent indicates the spot it has found itself in. Padmanabhaiah told *The Indian Express* he was not aware of the document being circulated in Nagaland by the state government. "In its absence, I am not able to comment," he said.



Nagas for electoral gains.

"To our utter astonishment, we have come to know of a proposal under the heading 'proposed basis for discussion to achieve a comprehensive solution to the Naga issue' worked out by Home Ministry stealthily in collusion with Jamir by extracting some items in distorted form from

WAY TO LASTING PEACE

Stop Fratricidal Killings In Nagaland First

By JB LAMA

57A MS

Monsoon winds seem to have swept away years of bellicosity throughout Nagaland because nowhere else in the North-east is there now such a pining for peace as in that state. Early this month, the church set out to reconcile warring underground factions, political parties and tribes throughout the state and, not insignificantly, both factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland were said to have attended the prayer meetings. But divine intervention apart, Nagaland needs all the luck it can get because the Naga Hoho-sponsored reconciliation process launched last December has so far failed to measure up to expectations and, contrarily, recent reports speak of growing tensions.

Straddling the precarious fence between peace and anarchy, the on-going cease-fire has brought about a semblance of quietude, but fratricidal killings between the two NSCN factions continue. These must stop or else the peace talks will be jeopardised and the state thrown into bloody yesterday once more. The Centre wants NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Th Muivah to return to India, an invitation to which the two are not averse, but much depends on how Delhi ensures their security and safety.

Arrest warrants

To facilitate their return, the Delhi Police and the Nagaland government have dropped cases against Muivah for allegedly attempting to kill SC Jamir in Delhi in November 1992 and near Kohima in November 1999, respectively. Lest the Centre forget, there are still "open-ended" arrest warrants against Isak and Muivah — reportedly issued by Gauhati High Court four months before the ceasefire began in August 1997 and sent to Interpol by the Union Home Ministry. The Manipur government has refused to rescind the order on Muivah's arrest but may have to reconsider it. Most important, the Centre is yet to lift the ban on the NSCN. A realistic approach is to arrange an immediate formal truce between the two feuding groups to create conditions in which they can move freely. This will not be difficult since both observe a unilateral self-imposed Christmas truce every year.

And no matter how sincere and serious the Centre and the NSCN-IM may be in

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

trying to find a solution, the Naga problem is being complicated by inter-tribal rivalry. Implicit in chief minister SC Jamir's remark two years ago — that Nagas of Nagaland should decide their own fate — is that Muivah has no legitimacy in local politics. There is little justification in this reasoning. Jamir is free to air his sentiments but they in no way represent the people's views. Moreover,

played a significant role in Naga politics was the late Z Ramyo. He was with the so-called "Federal Government of Nagaland"; the man behind the signing of the 1975 Shillong Peace Accord which both Isak and Muivah have denounced and which gave a new twist to Naga politics and helped the rapid ascendancy of the NSCN.

The Khaplang faction's recent ultima-



talk of this kind was also heard in the 1960s.

The Tangkhuls from Manipur's Ukhrul district have been dominating the underground scene. Most of the NSCN-IM cadres are from Manipur's Senapati and Ukhrul districts, contiguous to Nagaland, a good many of them have died for the Naga cause. Although Muivah is a Tangkhul, his credibility in Nagaland is beyond question.

Nationalism

He identified himself with Naga nationalism from the very beginning and became general secretary of the Naga National Council after president Angami Zapuo Phizo left Nagaland in 1960. Muivah trained in China for two years in the mid-1960s and is a leader in his own right.

Another prominent Tangkhul who

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ernment of India and its agency RAW. They want to play one group or community against another. We do not support the demand for Greater Nagaland within India."

A Hemi born in eastern Nagaland (the Naga-inhabited area of Myanmar), Khaplang floated the Eastern Naga National Council when he was in his 20s and merged it with the anti-1975 Shillong Peace Agreement group headed by Isak and Muivah, forming the NSCN. While Isak was chairman and Muivah general secretary, Khaplang was vice-president. Unlike the two leaders who were closely associated with Phizo, Khaplang did not meet the "father of Naga nationalism". In 1988 he parted company with the two over what is described as differences over initiating talks with the government of India.

Boycott call

The NSCN-(K) claims to have influence among Nagas in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap and Changlang districts, in the Ao and Konyak areas as well as among Chakhesangs, Angamis, Yumchangers, Sangtams and Kheanmungans. In Manipur also it has supporters. Khaplang also heads the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front comprising the Ulfa and the United National Liberation Front, Manipur's oldest militant outfit headed by Sanayaima. No matter what the Centre thinks, there can be no two opinions about peace hinging on Khaplang's participation in peace talks.

This boils down to the fact that being a Naga from the Sema area, Isak is the only true representative of the Nagas — however preposterous such a concept may be in the changed situation. Besides, there is also the NNC, the parent body, which declared independence on 14 August 1947 and whose voice cannot be suppressed.

The Centre has to ensure peace in Nagaland because assembly elections are due early next year. Opposition parties did not participate in the February 1998 elections following the Naga Hoho's boycott call supported by the NSCN. Should this happen again, there is every possibility of there being another mockery of democracy. It might be necessary to postpone elections if talks are to take place in Nagaland. One hopes the euphoria generated by the two Bangkok summits between NSCN leaders and NGOs in January and May will not evaporate. Peace hinges on Nagas speaking in one voice.

20 jawans killed in Tripura

Statesman News Service & PTI

AGARTALA, Aug. 20. — Twenty Tripura State Rifles personnel were killed and six injured when their truck was ambushed by militants of the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura at Hirapur in Takarjala PS area of Tripura West today.

The militants, positioned behind hillocks on both sides of the road, hurled grenades at the truck. When the truck stopped, they fired at the jawans. The jawans were going to Bislamgonj from Amrendranagar, a town in Takarjala, after their night duties. Nineteen jawans were killed instantly, while another died at GB Hospital. The injured are critical.

The militants stole 19 SLRs, a light machine-gun, wireless set and ammunition before escaping.

Takarjala is a hill town, about 35 km from here in the West Tripura district. Militant groups are active in Takarjala, brought under the disturbed area regulation for over three years. Se-

nior officials of the state police and the paramilitary forces have rushed to Takarjala. A combing operation has been launched. No arrests have been made so far. Police have taken some villagers into custody for interrogation.

The Left Front government called a 12-hour

bandh in protest against the killings. Mr Gautam Das, state CPI-M leader, and other members of the party's state secretariat condemned the attack. Mr Das said despite repeated appeals by the state government, the Union home ministry has failed to deploy additional forces in the state to counter terrorist activities. The Congress has called a 24-hour bandh and demanded the chief minister's resignation.

This is the fourth attack by militants in West Tripura this year. Eleven CRPF men were killed at Rampur in March and eight jawans were gunned down at Kamtakobrapara in April by the NLFT. Again on 13 January, the ATTF killed 16 persons at Singicherra Bazar.

Three arrested over Dhupguri strike

SILIGURI, Aug. 20. — Three persons have been arrested for providing shelter and food to the KLO militants involved in Saturday's firing at the CPI-M's Dhupguri zonal office, the Jalpaiguri SP said today. The three, identified as Dhartimohan Roy, Rajmohan Roy and Deven Roy, are from Nathua in the Banarhat PS area.

DGP Mr DC Vajpai submitted a report on the killings to the chief minister, but refused comment on his reportedly having to face the ire of partymen at Dhupguri. — SNS
Editorial: Fortress Alimuddin, p 4

down at Kamtakobrapara in April by the NLFT. Again on 13 January, the ATTF killed 16 persons at Singicherra Bazar.

21 AUG 2002

Gas deal with Dhaka must not cut NE out

By Subhas Chandra Bhattacharjee

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12/18
A final decision is awaited on the export of natural gas from Bangladesh to India. Every day brings conflicting news on this economic possibility, which is also, at least for Bangladesh, a matter of political sensitivity. After all, it means that if the deal goes through, the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, known for its anti-Delhi stance, will be changing its position to support cooperation with India.

One point is clear – there is much excitement in both countries about this trade. Dhaka needs to do more to tackle the opposition to this proposal. Much hard work from both sides has gone into making this proposal a real opportunity.

Bangladesh had appointed two committees to look into the export of gas to India – one was to focus on gas utilisation in Bangladesh and the other on gas reserves.

The committee on gas utilisation in its report recommended “limited exports” to India and the government apparently is building a consensus to begin exports pegged at 8 to 10 million cubic centimetres of gas a day (Mmscmd).

Unocal, the American energy giant, which has been active in Bangladesh for exploration and production of natural gas, is trying hard to export gas to India from its fields in Bibiyana in north east Bangladesh, close to the Indian border, along Assam’s Karimganj district. After striking gas in Bibiyana in April 1998 and conducting more exploration, Unocal appointed DeGolyer and MacNaughton (D&M), a global consulting firm on energy, to evaluate gas reserves

there.

The company said Bibiyana proved that probable recoverable reserves stood at 2.4 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of gas and 13.8 million barrels of condensate (Mmbc). D&M also estimated an additional potential of 3.1 Tcf and 16.9 Mmbc as possible reserves. Petrobangla, the state-owned energy company, has accepted these figures.

These reserves comprise about 15 per cent of the total in the country and are surplus as far as its utilisation in Bangladesh is concerned.

Unocal proposed the export of gas to India. From market surveys, it had found that India’s demand for gas far outstripped existing supplies, especially in northern and western India where most of the key industries are located.

Unocal even obtained letters of intent (LOI) from reputed Indian companies to buy gas from it. In addition, it plans to build the pipeline from Bibiyana to the Indo-Bangla border in West Bengal, a distance of 343 km.

The remaining 1,020 km in India would then be constructed and eventually linked to the Hazira Bijaipur Jagdishpur pipeline intersection in Uttar Pradesh and then further unto Delhi.

All the gas is to be exported to northern and western India but there is no plan to even send a part of it to the North East. This makes

little economic sense because with an issue like this surely, geography is a decisive factor in determining costs. The fields of Bibiyana are a bare 100 km from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Appropriate industries set up in the region could utilise this gas. This would give a boost to industrial development in all three states.

Tripura has good reserves but their exploitation will take time partly because of unsettled law and order conditions.

It has also not been possible to transport and utilise gas from Upper

Assam to these areas because of terrain and lack of industrial entrepreneurship in all these years.

With gas available and the relatively easy task of transporting to the North East from Bangladesh, some gas-specific industrial units could be set up in the region.

A gas-based power plant set up in Karimganj could supply power to the southern parts of Assam and Tripura, ending the power problems of these areas.

Power can also be sold to energy-hungry Bangladesh. Similarly, gas can be used to run food-processing (including canning, pulp and puree-making and bottling) industries in an area where there is a wide range of fruits – such as bananas, oranges, pineapples, guava, passion fruit and jackfruit – available.

Bottled fresh fruit juices have

great demand in European markets but governments must insist on high quality standards.

There is a great demand for banana chips in Asia. Sugarcane and bamboo grow well in the region and sugar mills have a great opportunity. After all, sugar is illegally exported to Bangladesh in a big way. With local production, sugar could be legally exported to a ready market in Bangladesh. The gas could also be used in the cement factories of the North Cachar Hills of Assam.

The state governments of the region as well as entrepreneurs, industrial and trade associations besides scholars and policy makers should lobby strongly on these issues with the ministry of development of the North East region (DONER) at the Centre.

New Delhi should ensure that the consortium of IOC, ONGC and GAIL, which are to manage the gas and build the connecting pipelines in India, should work simultaneously on connectivity with the North East.

The political and intellectual leadership from the region needs to push hard with the Government of India for here is a chance to build strong cooperative economic relations between the North East and Bangladesh, two neighbours joined by geography and history.

This could spin off into many other opportunities. Illegal immigration and other political issues could then go on the backburner.

(The author is retired Principal, Haflong Government College, Haflong, Assam)

open forum

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THE STATESMAN

Militants massacre 12 in Meghalaya

OUR CORRESPONDENT

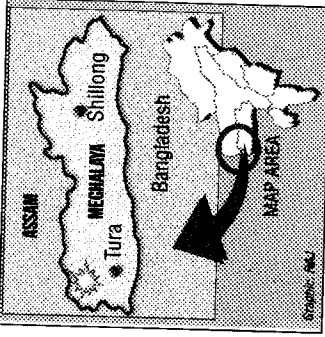
Guwahati, Aug. 13: Suspected Ufa and NDFB militants today massacred 12 civilians and injured seven on a hilly road near Tikrikilla in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills, bordering Assam.

Rattled by the killings—seen as the start of ritualistic bloodletting by militants in the run-up to Independence Day—the Meghalaya government faxed a letter to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, seeking more paramilitary forces for the state.

"The security of the public and the state is at stake," Meghalaya home minister Lotsing A. Sangma said in the letter. He said the border areas of the West Garo Hills had become a haven

for militant outfits, including the A'chik National Volunteers' Council, Ufa, NDFB and NSCN (IM). A top Assam police official said the choice of targets—all non-tribals—was an indication of the NDFB's involvement in the incident. "It has a history of such campaigns, unlike the Ufa and the ANVC," he said.

Meghalaya director-general of police L. Sailo told **The Telegraph** that the ambush took place at 8 am. He said the militants attacked a truck at Rongwalgre under Tikrikilla police station, killing 12 people on the spot and injuring seven. Three of the injured were discharged after first aid, while the rest are undergoing treatment at Tikrikilla Hospital.



The truck was headed for the Raksangre weekly market when it came under attack at a desolate spot 8 km off Tikrikilla and 4 km from the border outpost of Lakhipur in Assam's Goalpara district.

The DGP said that the attack

could be the handiwork of the Ufa and the NDFB. He ruled out the possibility of the ANVC being involved in it, though the area is a stronghold of the Garo outfit. The site of the ambush is not far from the spot where ANVC militants had gunned down the son of Meghalaya forest minister Manindra Rava on June 30.

The victims have been identified as Zakir Hussain (12), Barik Ali (58), Ram Chandra Rai (50), Kishore Rai (50), Abdul Rashid Bepari (55), Sibul Bepari (45), Phulchand Ali (25), Latchand Ali (14), Bharat Saha (45), Zeenar Sheikh, Kamal Jyoti (32) and Bodiva Sheikh (age not known). Most of them were small-time traders from Lakhipur. Teams of

the India Reserve Battalion, CRPF and Meghalaya police are combing the area for the militants, official sources said.

Like Meghalaya, the Assam government has sounded a statewide red alert. All police stations and outposts have been told, through wireless messages, to be "extra vigilant" over the next 72 hours.

Official sources said the army had begun aerial surveillance to keep track of the movements of militants in Assam. In this capital city, the police closed down parking areas beneath the flyovers. A police official explained that the step had been taken to prevent militants from planting "vehicle-bombs" under the structures.

Non-Bodos appeal to Delhi on council

RAJEEV BHATTACHARYYA

*1-9
3/8*

New Delhi, Aug. 2: The Sanmito Janagosthiyo Sangram Samiti, an umbrella organisation of 18 parties opposed to the creation of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), has made a representation to the Centre apprising it about the ground realities and the possible fallout if the BTC is created.

"It is a life and death struggle for us and we can't tolerate being reduced to second class citizens in our own homeland. We've already declared a bandh on August 15 and economic blockade for 36 hours from August 27. The council can only be created over our dead bodies," a deeply anguished Phani Medhi, chief convenor of the SJSS, told **The Telegraph**.

The delegation is reported to have met P.D. Shenoy, secretary-in-charge of the Northeast in the home ministry, and members of the North East Forum of MPs where they demanded a round table conference between the Centre, the state, Bodos and the SJSS.

"The MPs' Forum said they will take a stand in their next meeting but the response of the home ministry was very disturb-

ing in this regard. On the one hand, they say the non-Bodos have to be taken into confidence and on the other, they don't seem to have entertained the idea of a round table conference," Medhi said.

The all-party meeting held in Guwahati last month had agreed to the creation of the BTC under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Centre and state agreed to set up a committee to draft amendments to the schedule as it is applicable only to hill districts.

However, SJSS delegates said there are numerous pre-conditions to the schedule that the BTC does not fulfil.

For one, the population of the tribe (the Bodos in this case) has to be more than 90 per cent in the areas in which it is sought to be implemented, besides the contiguity of the villages they inhabit.

But Bodos are scattered in nine districts of Assam amid other communities and in many villages they are in a minority, they said.

In a related development, another delegation of the All-Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union submitted memoranda to the National Commission for Sched-

9. N b SA ✓

uled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the Union minister for social justice and empowerment, pleading for the inclusion of the community in the Scheduled Tribe category.

All major Bodo groups are opposed to the granting of this status to the Koch-Rajbongshis and the Adivasis.

Nagaland jails

Nagaland has appealed for funds to upgrade the 10 jails in the state as all of them suffer from some defect or the other.

While almost all of them are overcrowded, there is no proper security in most. In others, the inmates are made to put up with deplorable sanitary conditions and lack of other facilities.

Nagaland minister for irrigation and jail, Sedem Khaming, has met officials of the home ministry and is reported to have asked for funds to upgrade the jails in the state.

"Though the proposals were first submitted about five years ago, this is for the first time that the matter has been taken up seriously. The ministry has assured us that the matter would be looked into and necessary assistance offered," Khamming told **The Telegraph**.

Khaplang dubs rival 'terrorist organisation'

Naga factions erupt in war of words

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Dimapur, Aug. 11: The Khaplang faction of the NSCN today accused the Isak-Muivah group of confusing the Naga community by coining the term "Nagalim", effectively dashing hopes for a rapprochement between the warring insurgent factions of this trouble-torn state.

A statement issued by the NSCN(K)'s "ministry of information and publicity" said that "Nagalim", the Isak-Muivah faction's term for a "greater Nagaland", had nothing to do with the "Nagas' struggle for sovereignty of Nagaland".

The two NSCN factions have separate ceasefire agreements with the Centre, but continue to be involved in sporadic fratricidal clashes.

Branding the NSCN(I-M) as a "terrorist organisation" of a particular Naga tribe, the Khaplang faction said that its rival should leave Nagaland and "go

to their so-called Nagalim".

On the NSCN (I-M)'s ongoing dialogue with the Centre, the outfit said, "If a section of separatists wants unity, peace and reconciliation with India but not the Nagas, then the Naga Hoho and NGOs must resist such efforts." The NSCN(K) ridiculed its rival for reposing faith in Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga, saying he was someone who had "surrendered to India".

Though the situation in Nagaland has improved over the past couple of years, clashes between activists of the two NSCN factions and occasional attacks on community leaders prevent the peace process from progressing.

On Friday night, suspected militants hurled a grenade at the residence of the legislator from Thonoknyu Assembly constituency under Tuensang district.

Superintendent of police

Tokiumong Yimchunger said that a domestic help, 13-year-old Thefpo, was injured in the explosion.

The legislator was not his residence, located at the Old Medical Colony in Tuensang town, when the incident took place.

The assailants left behind a banner, on which was written that the MLA had pocketed funds meant for the development of the constituency. The legislator was not available for comment, while his wife termed it a "minor" incident.

In another incident, a former NSCN (I-M) activist, identified as Abenthung Lotha (27), was abducted and killed here yesterday. The police recovered his body from Chumukedima Block-IV near here.

Lotha had left the NSCN (I-M) and returned to his native village about three years back. Police sources said he came to Dimapur on August 8 and was abducted the same day.

Uneasy is the calm in Nagaland

DIPANKAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ONLY A QUICK END TO IMPASSE CAN AVERT STRIFE

MOKOKCHUNG, Aug. 10. — A long delay in finding a solution to the Naga problem may thrust Nagaland on to the brink of a civil war more bloody than what has been witnessed so far.

Expressing this view, a section of former ultras pointed out there were tell tale signs that the situation in the state was volatile. Of the visible indications, according to an "ex-national worker" — as militants are reverently called in Nagaland — the most obvious was intra-group feuds, which in recent times had claimed quite a few lives. The level of provocative statements and mud-slinging the groups were indulging in was on the rise, he said.

"We are passing through a crucial phase... if it's not handled properly, anything may happen, even a civil war with consequences not seen before."

The two main underground groups in Nagaland — the NSCN (Isaac Muivah) and the NSCN (Khaplang) have been on ceasefire from August 1997 and April 2001. While talks between the government and the NSCN-IM are on, a similar exercise with the NSCN-K is yet to begin.

The ground rules of the ceasefire prohibit all violent activities but this has not been adhered to, specially among the underground factions. The situation has taken a turn for the worse with the two NSCN factions refusing to halt the spat that's been going on be-

tween them for quite some time. The NSCN-K, for instance, blamed the Tangkhul tribe for perpetrating violence in Nagaland and said "historically" the tribe had no Naga lineage. The faction asked people to isolate the Tangkhuls and ordered that students belonging to the tribe should leave Nagaland by the end of the academic year.

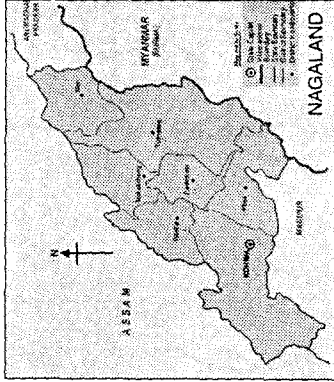
Significantly, the NSCN-IM general secretary Th. Muivah — the de facto "Prime Minister" in "People's Republic of Nagalim" — belongs to Tangkhul as does some other senior leaders of the group.

The Khaplang faction has also demanded that leaders of Naga Students' Federation and Naga People's Movement for Human Rights — both close to the Isaac-Muivah group — be arrested under Pota.

"They (NSF and NPMHR) are in Muivah's pocket. Who supports the lavish life styles of the leaders of these organisations? Who pays for their frequent trips to Bangkok to meet Muivah?" said Muivah's counterpart in the Khaplang faction, Kivoti Zhimomi.

That the scenario is not hunky dory could also be gauged from efforts of the Church, which organised a "prayer day" across the state yesterday to pray for reconciliation not only among the underground groups but also among tribes and political groups.

In what seems to be a potentially explosive situation, the only silver lining — both NSCN-K and NSCN-IM participated in the prayer.



Northeast neglected, feel MPs

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 9: The Northeast MPs Forum has passed a resolution calling for a comprehensive discussion on insurgency.

At a meeting in Sikkim House on Thursday, in which the resolution was passed, the forum also noted that the Northeast was neglected in recruitment drives by Central departments and that the Northeast Task Force on sports was yet to become functional.

The main focus of the resolution was on development and how it may be ensured in times of political disturbance.

A delegation of Assam MPs, led by former finance minister Manmohan Singh, also submitted a memorandum to the deputy Prime Minister, demanding Rs 2,500 crore as relief for the devastation caused by floods. The delegates also demanded that floods in the state be declared a national problem.

Another delegation of Koch-Rajbongshis submitted a memorandum to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, demanding granting of Scheduled Tribe status to the community.

The memorandum said denial of the status violated Article 342 of the Constitution as Ordinances to this effect were passed on three earlier occasions. It also stressed the negative implications of the Bodo Territorial Council if it were to become a reality and the ethnic clashes that it might spark.

7 0 AUG 2002

Delhi rules out military option in N-E

OUR BUREAU

Aug. 9: Ruling out a military solution to the problem of insurgency in the Northeast, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today said that the only way the Centre could restore normality in the trouble-torn region was by thrashing out various issues with militant outfits across the table.

Advani made the remark at a meeting of the parliamentary consultative committee on home affairs. He said that with the establishment of a separate ministry for the Northeast, all issues concerning the people of the region were now being tackled "in a realistic manner".

On the oft-repeated allegation that the Centre is indifferent to the problems plaguing the Northeast, the deputy PM said that the BJP-led government had left no scope for such complaints. He assured the members of the committee that the minister for Northeast development, Arun Shourie, would attend the next meeting.

Making a state-wise analysis, Advani said that militancy-related violence had increased in Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam. He said that the law and order situation in Nagaland had improved considerably, though clashes between rival outfits had

increased. In Tripura, militants have shifted their attention from non-tribals to tribals, while the Ulfa and the NSCN (I-M) have established networks in the Arunachal Pradesh districts of Tirap and Changlang, Advani said.

The deputy PM informed the committee that the trend of insurgent activity "reveals external linkages, most notably from Pakistan, and this is manifested in the improved weaponry, increasing financial capability, use of NGOs by militants, and growth of fundamentalist terrorist organisations".

He said that counter-insurgency operations continued to be the domain of the army and paramilitary forces, though the police had a crucial role to play in tackling "urban militancy". Over 3,500 underground activists have been killed over the past decade and nearly 15,000 arrested, he added.

As the parliamentary consultative committee discussed the insurgency situation, security forces turned Guwahati into almost a fortress in apprehension of strikes by an Ulfa hit squad that is believed to be already in the city.

Intelligence agencies have warned forces that the Ulfa may target the Gauhati Refinery with rocket launchers.

Unite to find solution: Jamir tells Nagas

Dipankar Roy in Mokokchung, Nagaland

Aug. 7. — Nagaland chief minister Mr SC Jamir says the Nagas must "think, feel and speak in one voice" to find the final solution to the over-five decades-old Naga political problem. "Without unity there can be no solution."

Speaking to The Statesman at his residence here, he said at best there could be piecemeal solutions if Nagas did not stand together. Nagas "are tired of the uncertainty and want a final solution." But Mr Jamir does not expect quick results from the ongoing Centre-NSCN-IM dialogue: "It is a delicate issue and we cannot expect results very soon."

While the Centre has been holding talks with the NSCN-IM, it has not started a simi-

lar process with the NSCN-K, though a ceasefire with the latter is on since 2001.

The NSCN-K is also not in a great hurry to start talks because it wants to first ascertain what the people want, an exercise which is ongoing for the last one year. But there are two other underground factions with which the Centre is yet to have any truck. "All the groups are talking of the future of the Nagas ... so all of them should be involved," he said. "After all, it is not a factional issue but a Naga issue."

Referring to agreements made in the past, Mr Jamir said those had failed because they did not satisfy all sections of the people: "So when we work out the final solution we must make sure it has the approval of all, or else it

is back to square one for Nagas."

Mr Jamir welcomed the decision of the NSCN-IM leaders to continue the talks in India. "It is good they have agreed to come to India. Since a solution has to be found with India it was meaningless to hold talks abroad."

The chief minister also said he had requested his Manipur counterpart, Mr Ibobi Singh, to withdraw the arrest warrants against the NSCN-IM leaders, but the latter has so far remained "adamant". "Peace is required for the development of the Northeast. So when they have agreed to talk we should also make some sacrifice ... animosity will block the way to peace," he said.

Editorial: On the right track, page 4



Mr SC Jamir

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On the right track

4-2 A Lifting ban on NSCN justified 8/8

The Centre's reported plan to lift the ban on the National Socialist Council of Nagalim will facilitate the return of Isak Swu and Th Muivah for talks on Indian soil and is to be welcomed. Delhi is now on the right track. The ban mattered little when talks were held outside the country, but its withdrawal becomes necessary to avoid legal hassles that may arise because of Delhi's negotiations with leaders of a proscribed outfit at home later this year. The Centre did waive all formalities when it brought the two leaders to Nagaland in May 1999 — not for talks, but to enable them to interact with their cadres and various private organisations. For the sake of peace. Perhaps, the Centre will help create a more conducive atmosphere by withdrawing the ban on other North-east militant organisations too. If for no other reason than because the ban has not had the desired effect. Surprisingly, while smaller outfits in Manipur and Tripura were outlawed in the 1980s, the NSCN-IM was banned only in November 1990 during the Chandrasekhar government.

The Centre's flexible attitude should help regain the people's confidence but militant organisations must reciprocate. It may also be necessary to review the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in both Nagaland and Manipur, the continued use of which has alienated people. At least the Meitei Revolutionary People's Front has said this will be the first step towards "ending the armed conflict between Indian soldiers and revolutionaries" and may help pave the way for negotiation.

8 AUG 2002

THE STATESMAN

After Bhutan, Ulfa sets sights on Myanmar

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Aug. 7: The banned United Liberation Front of Asom has forged a nexus with the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur to take on security forces in the region, BSF deputy inspector-general (Manipur and Nagaland ranges) P.K. Mishra said.

The senior BSF official told a news conference today that both the outfits were working in close co-operation to smuggle in weapons and ammunition from Myanmar.

The army had last year seized nearly 1,600 pieces of arms smuggled by the UNLF from Myanmar.

He said the UNLF was well entrenched in the neighbouring country. "We have reports about them (the UNLF) owning land and even operating bus services inside Myanmar," Mishra said.

Asked whether the Ulfa was shifting base to Myanmar from Bhutan, where the outfit had been served with a royal government ultimatum to shut down camps, the DIG said this could be a "possibility", adding: "But we have information that the Ulfa and the UNLF are helping each other."

Mishra said the BSF had intensified its counter-insurgency operations in Manipur. Four UNLF rebels were arrested near Thamnapokpi village in Bishenpur district on Monday. Four bags containing 35 pairs of combat uniform were also seized from the arrested militants.

BSF jawans operating in Chandel, Churachandpur and Bishenpur districts arrested 14 insurgents in the past one month. They include four of the UNLF, another four of the Kuki National Front (Military Council), three of the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup, two Revolutionary People's Front rebels and one of the Kuki National Army. BSF officials said one UNLF rebel had surrendered a Chinese-made M-

21 rifle and one pistol recently.

The BSF displayed weapons seized from various insurgent outfits, including two kg of explosives, two hand grenades, one wireless set, a pair of binoculars, a motorcycle and several incriminating documents.

The army also paraded four arrested UNLF activists before media persons. However, two of them said they were not directly related to the outfit but were arrested by the BSF for helping the UNLF transport 35 pairs of combat uniforms. The remaining two said they belonged to the UNLF.

Mishra said BSF troops in the state were also helping the common people with various civic action programmes, joining hands with Meira Paibi groups.

Tripura killing

The banned National Liberation Front of Tripura last night gunned down a panchayat chief, highlighting the Left Front government's inability to stymie the outfit's sustained offensive against party workers in the state, adds our Agartala correspondent.

Just last week, NLFT marauders had shot dead the wife, son and a nephew of a village chairman of the CPM. The Left Front today announced its plan for a statewide agitation from the third week of this month to protest the "politics of murder".

It also criticised the Union government for failing to provide additional forces for the state to counter insurgency.

The panchayat chief of the remote Aidankur village under Champa Haor police station Parendra Debbarma was shot dead in his home around 6 pm yesterday by a group of around 10 NLFT militants, police sources said. Debbarma died on the spot. The militants also warned the villagers not to work for the Gana Mukti Parishad, a tribal frontal organisation of the CPM.

8 AUG 2001

Gunmen storm Manipur CM's home

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Aug. 7: Two groups of gunmen last night attacked the private residences of Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh and public health engineering minister Govindas Konthoujam, setting off alarm bells in the state's police department and the corridors of power.

Nobody was injured in the incidents, which took place almost simultaneously. Director-general of

police S. Bimolchandra Singh said four armed men barged into the chief minister's private residence at Thoubal Athokpam village and asked to make a call.

When Ibobi Singh's relatives told them that the telephone was out of order, the gunmen ransacked the house, damaging an almirah, a showcase and a television set. As they left the house, the intruders fired about 10 rounds in the air, the DGP said. Another group of gunmen

fired at the private residence of Konthoujam at Ningthoukhong village of Bishenpur district and fled before the police arrived.

Both Ibobi Singh and Konthoujam are in New Delhi for a meeting with officials of the Planning Commission. The police chief said he had informed the chief minister over phone about the attack last night. Security personnel have been deployed at the private residences of the chief minister and the PHE minister.

The DGP, however, said it would not be possible for the police to make security arrangements at the ancestral houses of all senior political leaders. On the identity of the assailants and the possible motive behind the attacks, Bimolchandra Singh said, "We have yet to ascertain whether the attackers are militants or local goons. Guns are easily available here, which is why it cannot be assumed that anyone carrying a gun is a militant. We have to investigate

the incidents properly before arriving at a conclusion."

As a precautionary step, the police today reviewed the security arrangements for the state's political leadership. The police chief said that "VIP security" in Imphal was foolproof. "We provide an adequate level of security to all top political leaders who reside in Imphal. But we cannot deploy personnel at their private residences, most of which are located in far-flung areas."

Pressure on Ulfa via Dhaka

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OUR CORRESPONDENT AND AGENCIES

Guwahati, Aug. 6: A day after external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha extracted an assurance from Bhutan that it will not allow anti-India activities on its soil, Assam's political and security establishments made a case for a similar diplomatic onslaught on Bangladesh to put pressure on the Ulfa.

Political leaders said Delhi must maintain the momentum set by Sinha, who yesterday urged King Jigme Singye Wangchuk to convince the Ulfa and NDFB leadership to come to the negotiation table.

"As long as the Ulfa leadership enjoys the patronage of other countries, militancy will continue to fester. Hence, it is imperative for the Centre to launch diplomatic missions in other neighbouring countries as well," a minister in the Tarun Gogoi Cabinet said.

Sources in the home department quoted Union home min-

istry officials as saying that Sinha might visit Dhaka later this month. There is talk in Assam that jailed Ulfa leader Anup Chetia might be released by the Bangladesh government, which is said to be "sheltering" top leaders of the outfit.

Fears over Chetia's imminent release stem from the fact that the court in which he is being tried is close to wrapping up the remaining cases against him.

He was cross-examined in Dhaka yesterday on charges of illegal entry and unauthorised possession of currency. The cross-examination was held at the court of first assistant metropolitan sessions judge.

Two of Chetia's associates, Babul Sharma and Lakshmi Prasad Goswami, were also examined yesterday. The judge, Abu Syed Diljar Hossain, posted the cases for another hearing on August 17.

Chetia and his associates had been arrested at a house in the Mohammadpur locality of

Dhaka in December 1997. Varying sentences have been handed out in respect of three of the four cases filed against them.

Chetia had sought political asylum in Bangladesh, an issue on which the new government has yet to take a decision. The erstwhile Awami League government had rejected his appeal for asylum under pressure from

New Delhi. Though security officials are unwilling to go on record, they insist that the Ulfa leadership enjoys the patronage of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government.

The party has at times openly supported the Ulfa, with Khaleda Zia even saying that she was "sympathetic" to the outfit's cause.

Ibobi Singh apologises to lawyers



Ibobi Singh: Backs down

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, Aug. 1: Lawyers in Manipur today suspended their indefinite strike after chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh tendered an apology for the government's withdrawal of security cover from the high court premises and judges' guest house here on July 23.

The chief minister met representatives of the All-Manipur Bar Association (AMBA) and the High Court Bar Association, Manipur last night and apologised for the unfortunate incidents. The state government today also gave a written assurance to the two associations, saying it would look into their four-point charter of demands.

Gauhati High Court Chief

Justice P.P. Naolekar has also asked the two bar associations to ensure that the courts function normally once again. The Chief Justice arrived here yesterday to take stock of the current impasse involving the legislature, the government and the judiciary.

An emergency meeting of the two bar associations this morning decided to suspend the strike after considering the apology by the chief minister, the chief justice's appeal and the government's written assurance. Lawyers will resume work from tomorrow and the chief justice will supervise the sittings of the Imphal bench of the Gauhati High Court.

As part of the damage control exercises, the government

tonight hosted a state dinner in honour of the chief justice of Gauhati High Court.

The two bar associations had earlier put forward a four-point charter of demands to the government. The demands include replacement of state forces with Central forces for the security of the high court campus and judges' guest house and to book the Congress workers who gheraoed the judges' guest house on July 23.

The two associations also demanded that the government book those officials responsible for withdrawing security cover from the high court and judges' residence and sought action against the officials who locked the main gate of the judges' guest house on July 24. State law

secretary Sukumar Singh wrote to the bar associations saying the government would consider the four demands of the lawyers.

Sources here said the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court may wish to call on Governor Ved Marwah to discuss the present stand-off between the state legislature and the judiciary.

However, the Governor is still in New Delhi. The sources said the chief justice will be here for a few more days for the sittings of the high court and may meet the Governor if Marwah returns soon.

Though the tussle between the government and the lawyers ended today, the impasse between the Assembly and High Court still persists.

Piecemeal won't do

9/11/88
51-1
1/8
Third party needed for Naga talks

After the September 1964 ceasefire brokered by a peace mission comprising Jayaprakash Narayan, BP Chaliha and Michael Scott, the common refrain was that there was peace but no settlement. Then followed the signing of the November 1975 Shillong Peace Treaty between a section of Phizoites and the Centre, but this floundered when leaders like Isak Swu, SS Khaplang and Th Muivah refused to surrender arms. They took five years to realise the accord's implications, finally breaking away from the Naga National Council (which declared independence on 14 August 1947) and launched their National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Khaplang took eight years to part company with his comrades-in-arms, his reluctance to sue for peace with Delhi being largely responsible for the 1988 split. Nagaland has now completed five years of truce, the aim of which is to create a conducive atmosphere for dialogue. But by objecting to the "accommodating manner" adopted by Isak and Muivah in their dialogue with the Centre, Khaplang is showing himself in true colours.

The message is clear: even if the two leaders reach an understanding with the Centre, it will not be binding on others. Herein lies the crunch. Interestingly, the Khaplang group is also honouring a separate ceasefire with the Centre but is not yet a negotiating partner. Clearly, unity comes first whether or not the warring groups agree. The Nagas are overwhelmingly for peace and reconciliation but so far there has been little response to the Naga Hoho's move in this direction initiated last December. Peace efforts are unlikely to make headway unless a third party, comprising the Hoho, NGOs and church leaders, is involved; not a difficult task given the fact that both NSCN factions have admitted, finally, that it is the people's voice that will prevail. //

F 1 2002

THE STATESMAN

Bodo strike kills 5 jawans

OUR BUREAU

Kokrajhar/Guwahati, July 30: Bodo militants today gunned down seven persons, including five armymen, in Lower Assam's Kokrajhar district.

However, the GOC-in-C designate of the army's Eastern Command, Lt. Gen. J.S. Verma, claimed a few hours later that security forces had brought down militant activity in Assam to a "reasonable level" and that "time is ripe to begin a political process".

"Deputy inspector-general of police (western range) Mukesh Sahai told **The Telegraph** in Kokrajhar that militants of the

NDFB attacked an army team at Sishubari under Bengtol border outpost, close to the Indo-Bhutan border, at around 1.30 pm. Five army personnel and two civilians were killed in the ambush. A lieutenant was among the victims. The deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police of Kokrajhar rushed to the ambush site after the incident.

Both had not returned to the district headquarters till late in the night. The attack on security personnel is the third such incident in the state this month.

Three army personnel had been shot dead by militants in Cachar district on July 16. Seven

police personnel were killed by suspected Dimasa militants two days later in Karbi Anglong district.

However, Lt. Gen. Verma painted a positive picture of the law and order situation while addressing a news conference in Guwahati this evening.

Keen to sign off as the GOC of the Four Corps on a positive note, he told newsmen that sustained pressure from the army on militant outfits had reduced the incidence of insurgency-related violence.

Lt. Gen. Verma, who headed the strategy group of the Unified Command, said that the Ulfa and the NDFB should give up their

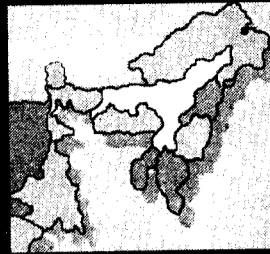
"unreasonable" demand for sovereignty.

Given the fact that the Centre has already rejected this demand, rebel groups should come forward for peace talks within the framework of the Constitution, he added.

The senior army officer said that the Ulfa leadership was presumably "waiting and watching" the progress of the ongoing peace talks between the NSCN (I-M) and the Centre.

"If the NSCN (I-M) leaders come down to Delhi for the next round of talks with the Centre, the Ulfa and the NDFB leadership will be encouraged to come forward for a similar dialogue."

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

The voice of Khaplang, Shangri-la debate

In a blistering attack on its rival faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland as well as the Government of India, the Khaplang group among the Nagas has denounced the recent discussions between the NSCN(I-M) and New Delhi as "a gross betrayal". The statement from the "K" group's chief, SS Khaplang, and his general secretary, Kitovi Zhimoni, also represents a setback to efforts by the Naga Hoho, the non-political forum which includes representatives of most Naga tribes which seeks to accommodate different viewpoints and bring about a rapprochement among the Naga militant factions and tribes.

The Khaplang faction has bitterly opposed Mr Muivah's group since the two sides split in 1988. In one of its most stinging remarks against the NSCN(I-M), Mr Khaplang accused the Tangkhul tribe of Manipur, to which the NSCN(I-M) chief Th. Muivah belongs, of selling out to the Meiteis, the dominant ethnic group in Manipur and collaborating in the state's administration. He was especially harsh on the choice of the phrase "accommodative manner" which Mr Muivah and Mr Padmanabhiyah, the Prime Minister's representative for Naga discussions, used to describe the progress at their talks earlier this month at Amsterdam.

What was needed was a solution but not accommodation, according to the statement. And any NGO "found collaborating or supporting" the I-M would have to pay amnesty to Naga families which had suffered during the struggle against Indian security forces.

The harshness of the tone cannot be surprising to Mr Muivah's supporters. The two sides have exchanged bitter words and bullets since their bloody split in Northern Myanmar in 1988. But the criticism of the Hoho was — for here is a platform which has sought to bring about peace among the Nagas and spoken frankly, even bluntly, to the leaders of both militant sides. It has emphasised the need to recognise ground realities and the demand among Nagas of all persuasions and beliefs of the need for reconciliation, a strong peace process as well as an honorable settlement.

Mr Khaplang's declaration should be seen as a clear challenge to the I-M group as well as an admonition to the Centre that merely negotiating with one faction, as New Delhi has done since 1996, will not bring about a long-term peace among the Nagas. It is now nearly five years of the ceasefire with Mr Muivah's organisation and substantive political negotiations are yet to really get off the ground, although the I-M had provided the Centre a list of demands last year. These include a separate Naga flag, emblem, external offices and trade centres while reiterating the demand for a larger Naga homeland, which included parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

But the land issue is rarely discussed at length at the formal negotiations between Mr Padmanabhiyah and Mr Muivah. Both sides know the other's position and have not pressed too hard on this most sensitive of questions, except refer to it at the talks.

The complications in the Naga situation come out time and again in such declarations and counter-declarations. Matters are not helped by the fact that Mr Khaplang is a Naga native of Myanmar, himself under pressure from Myanmar's armed forces in his bases in north-western Myanmar. This, of course, raises the question of his future role among Nagas in India in the event of an eventual settlement. But there is no question that he and his group, believed to be close to chief minister SC Jamir, sees itself as critical to future progress in the Naga story. New Delhi would do well to tread carefully. The Hoho and other civil society groups must enable the Naga militants to develop a common platform, for they already share a common goal ("sovereignty"), without insisting on unity and instead forge an ideological coalition to get the best deal they can under the existing conditions.

In an analysis on this page last week, Wasbir Hussain had reflected on the pressures on Bhutan to tackle the continuing presence of militants from Assam and West Bengal. The National Assembly debate on the issue — the discussion is about the United Liberation Front of Asom, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and the more recent Kamatapur Liberation Organisation of North Bengal — tells an interesting story.

The home minister of Bhutan spoke of his talks with Arabindo Rajkhowa, Ulfa's chairman, who "understood" Bhutan's problems and reiterated that his people would pull out of the Himalayan kingdom. But others said that the assurances had been violated and that dozens of heavily-armed Ulfa cadres had slipped into the country earlier this year.

Four camps which were closed by Ulfa by the end of last year were inspected and then set on fire by Bhutanese personnel. But Ulfa leaders said that they could not transport their men and weapons out of the kingdom because of vigilance from the Indian side. The Bhutanese have, rather naively, requested India to allow Ulfa to relocate in Indian territory!

The fact that the Bhutanese have declared that if Ulfa does not listen to the voice of reason this time, it will finally face military action is sufficient indication that patience is running very low in Shangri-la. By stating its intentions such a long time in advance, Thimpu is giving Ulfa enough time to quit without a fight. But it is also telling Ulfa that it is prepared to take them on, that Ulfa has been overhyped by the media and that it is prepared to accept potential losses. That should tell Delhi and Ulfa that Bhutan is very serious about a situation which is hurting its very integrity and sovereignty.

Manipur offers to make peace with judiciary

SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, JULY 25



CM Ibobi Singh

THE raging legislature-judiciary row in Manipur, over a summons served on CM O. Ibobi Singh, today showed signs of subsiding with Assembly Speaker T.N. Haokip hinting that the House may keep its retaliatory privilege notices against the two judges concerned in abeyance.

"The crisis has subsided and both sides are heading for a reconciliation," Speaker Haokip and the Chief Minister said today, blaming the standoff on "misunderstanding" between the Imphal bench of the Guwahati High Court, which issued the summons asking the Chief Minister to personally appear before it and the legislature.

Ibobi, however, admitted that the crisis was not over yet. "It will cool down gradually. It will take some time. I think we will have to adopt some give and take attitude," he said.

Speaker Haokip on his part termed the court action as "human error" and hoped that the issue would be re-

solved soon. He has constituted a committee, consisting of ruling and Opposition MLAs and the state Advocate General, that would suggest measures to close the "unfortunate chapter".

"It was unfortunate for judges to have interfered with the Assembly's working. The House in its collective wisdom considers it an act of contempt and the privilege committee has decided to serve a show cause notice to the judges," he said.

But their conciliatory statements gave enough indication that the notices would be kept in abeyance. However, proceedings at the high court remained suspended even today.

The state government had last night restored security

cover to the court and lifted the curfew slapped in and around the court premises after Justice B.B. Deb stayed the summons against the Chief Minister following a petition filed by fellow judge N. Surjamani Singh.

Justice Deb also quashed a privilege committee order asking Justice Singh from appearing before it, thus inviting the Assembly's wrath too.

In reciprocation, the Chief Minister restored security to the two judges withdrawn on Tuesday. But by that time both had fled Imphal and landed in Guwahati where they met Chief Justice P.P. Naolekar.

Justice Singh had even rushed to the local BSF headquarters to seek shelter on Tuesday night before flying out to Guwahati. The two judges flew back to Imphal today after their security cover was restored.

Justice Singh had in his petition yesterday stated that the Assembly was "wrongly impressed" and that the court order summoning the Chief Minister was "misunderstood".

Jamir prods Ibobi on Naga truce

24/7 9.15.02
FROM SENTINARO JAMIR

Kohima, July 23: Worried by the prospect of his efforts coming to nought, Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir today urged his Manipur counterpart, Okram Ibobi Singh, to withdraw all police cases against the NSCN (I-M) leaders for the "sake of peace in the region".

Ibobi Singh stunned a packed gathering at the just-concluded Northeast meet at Mumbai — attended by Union minister Arun Shourie — by saying his government had no plans of withdrawing police cases against NSCN (I-M) "general secretary" Th. Muivah and "chairman" Isak Chisi Swu.

Jamir said he asked Ibobi Singh on the sidelines of the Mumbai meet to withdraw the cases against the NSCN (I-M) leaders to expedite the peace process in the region "without any obstacle".

"The people of the region will soon realise that it is better to have peace than violence and that economic development will be ushered in faster if peace prevails," the chief minister said.

Jamir said deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani lauded the initiative taken by the Nagaland government by withdrawing the arrest warrant against the two NSCN (I-M) leaders.

Such an effort would remove impediments to the peace process and enable the NSCN (I-M) leaders to come to India without any obstacle and have a "meaningful dialogue" with New Delhi's representative, Jamir quoted Advani as saying during their meeting in Mumbai. Following the withdrawal of the cases against Muivah and Swu in Nagaland, the prospects of the two leaders travelling to India have brightened considerably. The NSCN (I-M) leaders are said to have suggested the idea of holding the next round of talks in Shillong. There was no official confirmation of the NSCN (I-M)'s request.

In another development, the NSCN (Khaplang) today slammed the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) and Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights saying they were "terrorist-sponsored organisations" which were detrimental to the peace process.

The Khaplang faction said the NSF and the rights body "must be banned by the state government and government of India".

THE TELEGRAPH

24 JUL 2002

Manipur plunges into crisis

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Imphal, July 28: A constitutional crisis appeared imminent in Manipur today, with battles being drawn between the legislature and the judiciary. The bone of contention is a flurry of contempt of court cases, including one against chief minister O. Ibobi Singh.

The Assembly today admitted a privilege motion against Justice N. Surjamani Singh of the Imphal bench of the Gauhati High Court. This step was taken after the judge directed Ibobi Singh to appear before the court tomorrow in a contempt case.

All members of the Assembly today denounced Justice Singh's decision. Deputy Speaker L. Lala Singh, who was in the chair, referred the matter to the privileges committee of the House. Senior Opposition member O. Joy Singh, who moved the

Singh informed the House that it could not function properly in the circumstances and appealed for a sitting of the privileges committee to discuss the motion against Justice Singh tonight.

The committee announced late tonight that it had "summoned" Justice Surjamani Singh to appear before it at 10 am tomorrow.

The issue involving Ibobi Singh took an ugly turn today when Congress workers attempted to barge into the judge's official residence by breaking open the gates of Judges' Colony here, where all High Court judges reside.

In a swift reaction, the government tonight imposed curfew in parts of Imphal where the High Court and Judges' Colony are located. It is not known whether the Imphal bench will hold its normal sitting tomorrow.

Judge summoned for asking Ibobi Singh to appear in court

tendent of police has been directed to produce the three officers before the chief judicial magistrate's court tomorrow.

Justice Surjamani Singh, in two separate cases, directed the chief judicial magistrate, Imphal to arrest the three IAS officers — school education commissioner Sambhu Singh, power commissioner Ch. Virendra and director of food and civil supplies D. Vaiphai.

While Singh and Vaiphai were remanded to judicial custody for 30 days, Virendra was remanded to judicial custody for 10 days. The sentences were all for contempt of court.

Following these developments, the Assembly was adjourned this evening. Ibobi

privilege motion, said the judge had violated parliamentary norms by summoning the chief minister while the House is in session.

Justice Surjamani Singh today also ordered the imprisonment of higher education commissioner I.S. Laishram in yet another contempt case related to the education directorate. The High Court has ordered that the IAS officer be lodged in Saijiwa jail for 10 days for failing to obey the court's order.

In another development, the chief judicial magistrate, Imphal issued arrest warrants against three more IAS officers following a directive of the Imphal bench of the High Court today. The Imphal West superin-

Extended peace

Stage almost set for crucial Naga talks

Another year of peace. That is what the Nagas are bequeathed. The exclusion of the "Bangkok clause" (the ceasefire's extension to four Naga-inhabited districts of Manipur) from the renewed truce is proof that Delhi has realised the serious implications. Last year's introduction of this "clause" brought the two neighbouring states dangerously close to confrontation. Nagaland is likely to be the venue for the next talks, with NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Th Muivah having expressed their willingness to attend. The Delhi police and the Nagaland government have dropped cases against them. Imphal, however, is unlikely to lift the arrest order on Muivah, who comes from Manipur's Ukhrul district, unless the "Greater Nagaland" concept is kept under wraps. The two leaders' presence will help buttress public opinion; moreover they are committed to consulting the people at every stage of the negotiations. On its part, the Centre would do well to withdraw the ban imposed on the NSCN-IM by the Chandrasekhar government in 1990.

The next round is crucial as 2003 is an election year. And there is a need to decide whether elections should be held at all. Opposition parties boycotted the 1998 poll at the behest of the Naga Hoho and the NSCN-IM, giving the ruling Congress a cakewalk. After the September 1964 ceasefire, when the stage was set for talks between the underground and the Centre, 11 Opposition members led by Vizol resigned on the plea that continuation of the assembly would only hinder the peace process. One could still buy this argument. SC Jamir has offered to step down. The last five years have been barren. One is yet to hear a note of optimism. Importantly, the essence of reconciliation is yet to find translation.

20 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

7 policemen killed in Assam

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Silchar, July 18: Two days after the army suffered three casualties in an ambush in south Assam's Cachar district, the police today lost seven men in an attack by the Dima Haram Daoga (DHD) in the adjoining North Cachar Hills.

Official sources in the district headquarters of Haflong said a sixth Assam Police battalion team was heading towards Block Bazar, 10 km north of Doyangmukh, in two trucks when it was attacked by militants perched atop a hillock flanking the serpentine road.

Seven of the policemen in the second vehicle were killed on the spot.

The victims include a havildar, a naik, four constables and the driver of the truck.

Manoj Kemprai, a college student who witnessed the inci-

dent, was quoted as saying that the militants did not give the police team the slightest opportunity to retaliate. He said some of the rebels walked up to the second truck to collect the weapons that the slain policemen were carrying, while the others kept the personnel in the first truck at bay by firing continuously for quite some time.

Police officials here confirmed that the militants, who were all dressed in fatigues, took away four SLRs and a carbine before escaping into the nearby jungle.

The ambush site is a stronghold of the DHD, which is led by Jewel Gorlosa. Sources said the Dimasa outfit might have carried out the attack to indicate its opposition to the proposed talks between the breakaway group, headed by Bejoy Neidung, and the government. Neidung, who fell out with Gorlosa over the outfit's strategy, has already expressed the dissident

faction's readiness to sit for talks.

The army, CRPF and the police have launched a joint operation in and around Doyangmukh, about 100 km from Haflong, to apprehend the militants involved in the ambush. North Cachar Hills superintendent of police B.B. Chetri is overseeing the operation.

While the DHD's involvement in today's ambush was confirmed straightaway, it was not until this evening that the identity of the outfit that carried out the attack on an army convoy in Cachar on Tuesday was established.

In a statement in Imphal, the proscribed United National Liberation Front (UNLF) claimed responsibility for the ambush on the Jat Regiment team. "The attack on the army convoy inside Assam territory was carried out as per an understanding with the United Liberation Front of Asom," the

outfit's publicity wing said.

It claimed that seven army personnel were killed and eight wounded in the incident, our Imphal correspondent adds.

Though the bodies of two militants killed in the exchange of fire were yesterday recovered from a hut at Saisel, not far from the ambush site, neither the army nor the police were sure which outfit they belonged to. The police said that either the Kuki National Liberation Front (KNLF) or the NSCN (Khaplang) mounted the attack, while the army presumed that it could be the KNLF or the UNLF.

Tuesday's ambush ended a period of relative calm along the Assam-Manipur border in Cachar district.

Kokrajhar bandh: The All-Adivasi Students' Association of Assam has called a 24-hour Kokrajhar bandh on August 2 in protest against the killing of nine Adivasis on Sunday.

Lease of life for Bodo ceasefire

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 18: In the tripartite talks between the Centre, the Assam government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers in North Block this afternoon, the three sides decided to extend the current ceasefire for another six months. The peace agreement was scheduled to run out on Sunday.

A.M. Nimbalkar, special secretary in the home ministry in charge of the Northeast, represented the Centre. Boro Liberation Tigers vice-chairman Kamal Mushahari, "publicity secretary" Mainu Daimari and two other BLT leaders attended the talks. Assam sent Lower Assam commissioner P.P. Verma and commissioner and secretary for the welfare of plains tribes and backwards J.S.L. Vasava for the 17th round of tripartite discussions.

The innumerable rounds of discussions have paid dividends at last, with a final solution to the Bodoland imbroglio set to be wrapped up in the coming months. The Centre, on its part, has shown its trust by not banning the BLT under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, for another six months.

The Bodos had initially demanded a separate homeland, comprising a neat division of Assam's plains areas in half.

The Tarun Gogoi government has decided to grant the Bodos the same rights that had earlier been extended to the two hill districts of the state — Karbi

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Anglong and North Cachar Hills — under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Assam will now have to amend its rules to extend the same facilities to the Bodoland Territorial Council that are enjoyed by the hill tribals.

In return, the Bodo leaders have promised to provide constitutional guarantees to the non-tribals living in their areas. The constitutional protection will go a long way in assuaging the feelings of the non-tribals. Non-tribals will be allowed to buy land and have voting rights in the Bodo area.

A large number of non-tribals living in the Bodo areas are immigrant Muslims, originally from Bangladesh, Nepalis and a small number of Assamese. A large number of people belonging to the Nepalese and Muslim minorities had been attacked by Bodo militants earlier in an effort to evict them from tribal areas.

The Assam government will begin framing the amendment to the Sixth Schedule and work out the constitutional guarantees for non-tribals into the agreement in the next couple of weeks. The home ministry will help the state government draft the document. Joint secretary (Northeast) Surendra Kumar is the centre's pointsman for this exercise. The Assam government has already formed a sub-committee to prepare the amendments to the Sixth Schedule. Surendra Kumar is likely to begin discussions on the issue with state officials tomorrow.

19 JUL 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Assam Nepalese

9.11.02
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Indigenous voice to safeguard identity ✓

Nepalese of Assamese origin have found voice and are now demanding "special protected class" status, not so much to acquire privileges as to safeguard against their being branded "foreigners" or "illegal infiltrators". A wise attempt aimed at their not being clubbed with thousands of Nepalese settlers and migrants from other states and particularly from Nepal. They also want some provisions of the 1950 Indo-Nepalese Peace and Friendship Treaty scrapped. Under this, citizens of both countries enjoy the freedom to travel, work and trade in either country, resulting in a substantial increase in the Nepalese population in Sikkim and some North-east states. After the Restricted Area Permit system was relaxed a few years ago, Meghalaya complained of a large inflow from Nepal. The Khasis' anger manifested itself in the late 1980s when a large number of Nepalese were forcibly ousted. There is need to distinguish between indigenous Nepalese and those best described as "floaters" or new settlers.

Delhi ignored former Communist Nepal Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikary's request for review of the 1950 treaty, some provisions of which are outdated. Nepal now forbids the sale of land to foreigners, including Indians. After the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane it is mandatory for Indian air passengers to prove their identity, although no such formality is required at border checkposts. The interest of indigenous Nepalese in the North-east will be served once a compulsory birth registration system is introduced.

THE STATESMAN

18 JUL 2002

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Tribal drive

Gogoi wise to consider non-Bodo interests

Dispur is in no doubt about the Bodo Territorial Council being set up under the Sixth Schedule, only its terms. The Bodo Liberation Tigers — with which it and the Centre are negotiating — are perforce wise to the many slips between the cup and the lip and may have to wait a while before they are masters of what they survey. Although a recent all-party meeting agreed to include 126 more villages (150 less than demanded), no decisions were taken on the BLT's demand for reservation of 30 of the 40 seats in the proposed Council. Besides Bodos are unhappy with the government plan to accord Rajbonghis and Adivasis in the region Scheduled Tribes status. The non-tribals, particularly the 18-party Sanmilito Janagoshthiyo Sangram Samiti, which has been vocal against the BTC's creation, are no less angry. Significantly, even the influential United Minorities Front is against the Council and wants the issue settled on the basis of the Bhupinder Singh Committee report submitted in February 1992 — but even before that was placed before Parliament, the All Bodo Students' Union-Bodo People's Action Committee combine cried foul and said it did not present a true picture of the Bodo population.

Tarun Gogoi can least afford to ignore the political significance of his drive and is now convinced non-Bodo interests will not be protected by merely amending the Sixth Schedule. He wants a separate provision included in the Constitution on the lines of the Sixth Schedule. Obviously, the interests of non-Bodos — who constitute a majority in the proposed BTC — must be adequately safeguarded. Late must win over never if the mistake of February 1993 Bodo Accord is not to be repeated.

THE STATESMAN

17 JUL 1992

Ulfa charges army with mining Bhutan border

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, July 16: The Ulfa today said the army had planted anti-personnel mines along the Indo-Bhutan border to prevent its activists from re-entering Assam. The statement is a clear indication that the outfit is preparing to close shop in the Himalayan kingdom.

Though the Ulfa did not say anything about leaving Bhutan, the tone of the statement indicates that the outfit might be feeling the pressure exerted by that country in recent times.

In an article headlined "Foolproof security measures along Assam-Bhutan border", the Ulfa mouthpiece *Freedom* said "occupational forces" — the outfit's term for the army — had beefed up security along the border to prevent "guerrillas" from coming out of their bases. "Anti-personnel mines are planted along the border according to the convenience of the Indian occupational forces and people residing in the border area are being forced to do military duty," it said.

The outfit accused the army of violating international laws

by "resorting to indiscriminate planting of landmines and use of civilian population in its war against the Ulfa".

The statement assumes significance in the light of Bhutan showing signs of impatience at the outfit's "breach of promise" to vacate its territory. It is contemplating military action to flush out the rebels. Defence minister George Fernandes, too, had said last month that joint military operations in Bhutan would get under way soon.

The Ulfa leadership is believed to be "mentally prepared" to leave the kingdom rather than face the combined might of two armies.

Intelligence agencies monitoring the movements of militants in Bhutan claim that Ulfa activists are just waiting for an opportune moment to slip out of the neighbouring country.

Bhutan's lawmakers recently discussed the kingdom's militancy-related problems over two days and unanimously resolved that the government should hold one last round of talks with the Ulfa leadership.

According to the official newspaper *Kuensel*, the National Assembly felt that if the mili-

tarnts did not agree to leave the country, the government should order military operations to flush them out.

An intelligence official, however, said the Ulfa leadership was not keen on a dialogue in the absence of a second choice. "They know that Bhutan is serious about using military force this time."

What is more worrying for the Ulfa is the possibility of a joint military operation by India and Bhutan. "It is very much on the cards, going by the defence minister's statement in Nagaon last month. The rebels know that they will not be able to match the firepower of a combined force," the official said.

The Ulfa had last year claimed to have closed down four of its camps in Bhutan, but intelligence agencies reported that the outfit had merely relocated its bases.

The Ulfa has as many as 36 camps in the south Bhutanese district of Sandrup Jongkhar.

In spite of pressure from New Delhi, the royal government of Bhutan has long been hedging on the issue of allowing Indian troops to launch an operation on its soil.

CEASEFIRE EXTENDED

Muivah accepts talks in India

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 12

IN A significant development, National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) leaders Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chishi Swu have agreed to return to the country, a Home Ministry statement said today.

This confirms that the next round of talks between the Centre and the NSCN(I-M) would be held here.

It is also a clear indication that the leaders of the Naga insurgent outfit will participate in the elections to the Nagaland Assembly due early next year.

The Central Government and the NSCN(I-M) also mutually agreed to extend the five-year ceasefire for another year, with effect from August 1.

Both the issues — return of the NSCN(I-M) leaders and extension of the ceasefire ahead of schedule — were thrashed out at meetings between the Centre's interlocutor for the Naga peace process, K Padmanabhaiah, Intelligence Bureau Director K P Singh, who represented the Indian Government, and Muivah and Swu in Amsterdam between July 9 and 11.

According to the statement, Swu and Muivah — NSCN(I-M) chairman and general secretary, respectively — have accepted an invitation from the Government of India and have expressed their willingness to return to the country after the procedural aspects with regard to their visit are taken care of.

The move to have both Swu and Muivah back in the country had been on for a long time.

It all began with Muivah being provided an Indian passport last year when he was languishing in a Bangkok prison on charges of violating Thailand's immigration laws by travelling on forged documents.

Subsequently, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani had repeatedly urged both the leaders to return to the country to carry forward and expedite the peace process.

The fact that the ceasefire has been extended long before the end of the month of July — the usual time of year when the ceasefire was extended in the past — is an indication that both Muivah and Swu may return by the end of July or the first half of August.

Centre upbeat on Naga talks

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 11: If things go according to plan, NSCN (I-M) leaders Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah will be in India for the next round of peace talks with the Centre.

The latest round of the talks, which concluded in Amsterdam today, removed much of the residual doubts about the possibility of insurgency in Nagaland coming to an end.

K. Padmanabhaiah, the centre's interlocutor in the peace talks, has held several rounds of parleys with the NSCN (I-M) leadership abroad. New Delhi, which is keen to see these Naga leaders head back home, has already persuaded the S.C. Jamir-led Congress government in Nagaland to drop all cases against them.

Both sides sounded upbeat in a joint statement issued at the end of the talks in Amsterdam.

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“The government of India recognises the unique history and situation of the Nagas. It is agreed that the talks should proceed in an accommodative and forward-looking manner so that a lasting solution can be arrived at,” it said.

Padmanabhaiah renewed Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's invitation to Swu and Muivah “to come to India at the earliest and carry forward and expedite the peace dialogue”. No date for their return has, however, been fixed, as “procedural aspects” need to be finalised first, a source said.

The issue of security of the NSCN leaders will be worked out when they return home. The schedule and dates for future discussions in the country are expected to be finalised before Muivah and Swu fly to Delhi.

There are expectations that the Naga outfit might take part in the state elections scheduled for February-March next year.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 2 10 2002

Cleft considerations

^{9/8/02} ⁵¹⁻⁹ The price of peace in North-east ^{0/7}

Generally the North-east police force has a poor record of tracking down political murderers and bank robbers. The assailants of former Manipur chief minister Yangmashao Shaiza in 1990 and his brother Lungshim Shaiza, a politician from Nagaland, four years later are still at large. The brothers were suspected to have been killed by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M). Having failed to arrest the culprits, the police conveniently put the blame on underground groups. The Delhi Police were expected to apprehend those who attempted to assassinate SC Jamir in Nagaland House in the Capital in November 1992, but they merely registered a case and issued warrants of arrest against Isak Swu and Th Muivah for "alleged conspiracy" to kill Jamir. Now they, too, have reportedly withdrawn the case to facilitate the return of the two rebel leaders for peace talks in India. The Nagaland government has already withdrawn warrants issued against the two after an abortive attempt on Jamir's life near Kohima in November 2000.

The Manipur government will be seen as blocking peace if it does not withdraw notice on the arrest of Th Muivah who is from Somdal village in Ukhrul district. The Centre is also a defaulter as it is talking to leaders of the NSCN (I-M) which it has officially banned. But there is no denying that the return of the two leaders will be a major breakthrough in restoring peace in the state. If the NSCN(I-M) and the Centre are to keep their commitment to clinch the Naga issue by 2003, they must be more sincere and serious in pushing ahead the peace dialogue which, even after five years, is still in an exploratory stage.

9 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

Time ripe for Bodo pact

By Dipankar Roy

The view is unanimous, whether it is the Bodoland Liberation Tigers, the Assam government or the Centre – there will be an administrative structure under the Constitution's Sixth Schedule to protect Bodo rights and culture. But after 14 rounds of talks in two years, the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council, is yet to become a reality.

The BLT, observing a ceasefire with the Centre after fighting for years for statehood, has laid all its cards on the table. The Assam government and the Centre have to decide when they want to sew up the deal. The BLT deadline is until 21 July when the ceasefire expires. Negotiations do not include the other powerful militant group with bases in Bhutan – National Democratic Front for Bodoland – which cooperates with the banned United Liberation Front of Assam and seeks independence from India. This faction is opposed to any settlement within the Constitution.

Before a memorandum of settlement can be drawn up with the BLT, the Central and state governments need to address two key issues: the boundary of the proposed council and reservation of seats for the council, Assembly and Parliament. But these must be seen in a demographic perspective: Bodos are a numerical minority in the proposed council; Non-Bodos and non-tribals say their rights cannot be ignored and that constitutional changes must protect their interests. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi accepts this.

While boundary demarcation is to be finalised by the state government, the Centre and state have agreed to set up a joint experts group to draft amendments to the Sixth Schedule and relevant Articles of the Constitution. This followed a meeting

between Mr Gogoi and Union Home Minister LK Advani. It is also the first time that the Schedule, which protects tribal rights and governance in the region, is being extended to the plains. The amendments are required because unlike other Sixth Schedule areas like Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in Assam, the proposed BTC area has a mixed population and total reservation for tribals (provided for in the Schedule) is not possible.

The decisions followed last week's all-party meeting in Guwahati, which agreed to include an additional 126 villages in the existing Bodoland Autonomous Council, to be replaced by the BTC. Yet the BLT wants 150 more villages and Bijni town in Bongaigaon. It also wants 30 of the 40 seats in the proposed council to be reserved for tribals. The BTC area (if the BLT's map is accepted) will have 12 Assembly constituencies in full (17 others partially), of which six are reserved; the BLT wants the remaining six seats to be reserved also.

There is one Lok Sabha seat, which is reserved, but another seat may be added after the area's delimitation. The Bodos would probably want that, too. Assam has accepted the need to recognise Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule, listed Bodos living in Karbi Anglong as Scheduled Tribes (Hills) and set up a Central University. But the state's demand for ST status for Koch Rajbongshis and Adivasis in the BTC area is unlikely to be welcomed by Bodo leaders.

Few believe that setting up of the RTC and meeting other demands would silence the statehood demand. This is the best time to forge a long-term agreement satisfactory to all groups since the BLT has compromised on its state demand and is willing to accept an autonomous council.

(The author is The Statesman's Guwahati-based Special Representative.)

1111 2002

THE STATESMAN

Ulfa is trying to build up woman suicide squad

Guwahati: The United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) is trying to build up an all-woman suicide squad, according to police sources. They said some 50 women cadres belonging to the banned outfit are undergoing a final phase of training in an Ulfa training camp located in Bhutan.

The training module developed for the women guerillas centres around handling explosives.

This apart, they would also be imparted training in an assortment of weapons, besides being made to undergo rigorous physical training, revealed the police sources.

The Ulfa, headed by Paresch Barua, is estimated to have a total strength of as many as 1200-odd cadres in its army, and the suicide squad members have reportedly been drawn from amongst the women cadres of its army.

Security experts believe that the formation of the suicide squad is a last-ditch effort by the banned outfit facing the heat after being inflicted with major casualties like that of its top leader Tapan Baruah. A top police official commented that desertions from its ranks had reached an all-time high, and Ulfa cadres were not being allowed to come down from their Bhutan camps to Assam for medical treatment as the top cadres feared they would not return.

6 JUL 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Gogoi clears hurdle over Bodo council

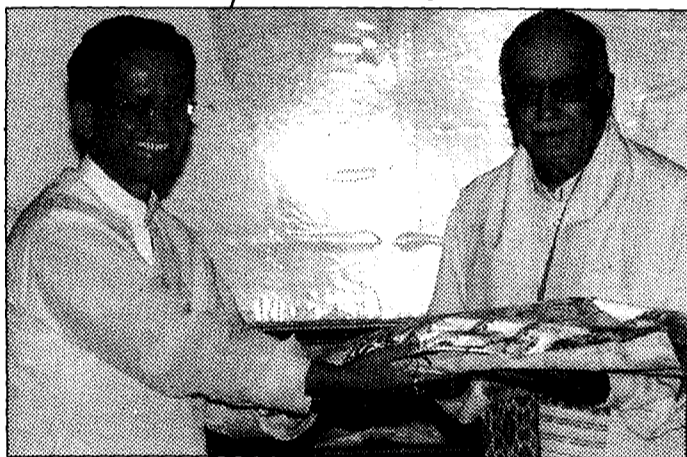
FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, July 4: After getting a clearance from Sonia Gandhi, Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi today agreed to modification of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to pave the way for creation of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council.

The council, when formed, will comprise 3,070 villages and four new districts in the Bodo-dominated areas. Gogoi said it has been decided to set up an expert committee, comprising officials from Delhi and Dispur to draft "a modified form" of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which would safeguard the rights of non-tribals living within the jurisdiction of the BTC.

Gogoi also decided to set up a state-run Madarsa Board to regulate and review the functioning of Islamic schools of learning in Assam. The chief minister said the boards would work on the lines of their counterparts in West Bengal, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The move to set up the board is aimed at neutralising the charge that several madarsas were breeding grounds of fundamentalism and Pakistan-backed ISI activity.

Gogoi today attended a tripartite meeting between the Centre, the state government



Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani prior to their meeting on the Bodoland Territorial Council at North Block in New Delhi on Thursday. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

and Bodo representatives, where deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani was also present. The chief minister also met Sonia Gandhi and AICC general secretary in charge of Assam, Mohsina Kidwai, who gave Gogoi the green signal to undertake the peace initiative.

Gogoi, however, admitted that there were differences between his government and Bodo representatives over the number of villages to be brought under BTC with the latter demanding

the inclusion of 101 more. He said the government was prepared to give half that number.

Gogoi said his government was committed to restoring normality and peace in Assam. "We have been given a mandate to do that," he said, soon after meeting Kidwai. The chief minister, however, said there was no proposal to hold talks with the ULFA at "this juncture". He also asked Advani to make available more central paramilitary forces to deal with militants in Assam.

5 191 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

ONGC seeks special security

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

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Guwahati, June 25: The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) wants the Assam government to draw up a "comprehensive security plan" for its employees, five of whom were gunned down by militants in Karbi Anglong district yesterday. One of the injured succumbed to his injuries late last night, raising the toll to six.

ONGC executive director (security) Raman Srivastav reached Cinnamara in Jorhat this afternoon to take stock of the situation. Chairman-cum-managing director Subir Raha, who left New Delhi for Calcutta this evening, will reach Dibrugarh tomorrow and then proceed to Cinnamara. After a series of meetings there, the duo will head

Top brass to meet Assam CM,
ambush toll rises to six

for Guwahati to meet chief minister Tarun Gogoi, an official in the CMD's secretariat told **The Telegraph** over the phone.

The six victims are geo-scientist Rajendra Prasad, assistant engineer R.C. Kakoti, driver Bir Singh Hanse and contract labourers J. Timung, J.K. Banik and A. Chetri.

Militants continued to wreak havoc in the state, killing one and injuring at least 10 in a grenade attack at a marketplace in Bongaigaon town of Lower Assam this evening. Police sources said the motorcycle-borne militants burst two grenades in front of a cinema hall and fled.

The Ulfa, however, suffered three casualties in an encounter with army personnel. Troops of the army's Red Horns division killed the three militants near Paneri in Darrang district early today.

A source said the primary aim of Raha's visit was to push for a "comprehensive security plan" for ONGC employees. "If the Assam government cannot give an assurance that ONGC employees will be protected, it may consider restricting its activities in the state," he said.

The ONGC personnel ambushed in Karbi Anglong yesterday were working under the "Assam and Assam-Arakan

basin" project, headquartered at Cinnamara. Inspector-general of police (law and order) S.P. Kakoti is camping in Diphu to oversee the combing operations launched by security forces to hunt for the militants.

Union petroleum minister Ram Naik today announced an ex gratia of Rs 3 lakh to the families of the deceased. Naresh Narad, additional secretary in the ministry of petroleum and natural gas, reached the state to take stock of the situation. Srivastav, too, held meetings with senior police and Central Industrial Security Force officials on security measures for ONGC personnel working in militant-infested areas of the state.

The executive director (security) will brief Raha on the basis of the discussions he had with police officials.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 JUN 2002

Five ONGC employees shot dead

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, June 24: Karbi militants today gunned down five ONGC employees in Assam's Karbi Anglong district after ambushing their vehicle on a hilly stretch of road near Diphu.

Police said heavily armed militants of the United People's Democratic Solidarity ambushed a five-vehicle convoy that included the ONGC vehicle between Doldoli and Diphu town. All five victims, among them two engineers, died on the spot.

The engineers, accompanied by two contract labourers, were headed for Diphu after a survey in Dhansiri. The ambush is believed to be in retaliation for the killing of three of the militant group's cadre by army personnel near Bokajan last night.

The ONGC has always been targeted by the outfit, which has links with Naga militants. The oil and gas giant had suspended operations in Nagaland after repeated threats and had only recently announced resumption of operations in the state.

The flurry of militancy-related incidents over the past couple of days has jolted the administration. The abduction of four businessmen by militants of the National Democratic Front of Boroland in Darrang district yesterday has already sparked an exodus of non-Bodo traders from the Bodo-dominated belt.

The businessmen were going from Guwahati to Tangla in Darrang district when their Tata Sumo was attacked. The driver, who was also abducted, stopped the vehicle after the militants fired at the tyres. The incident followed the abduction and killing of three traders by the same outfit at Rangapara in Sonitpur district on Friday night.

The police are still clueless about the whereabouts of the abducted businessmen, though a search has been launched in the forests adjoining the India-Bhutan border.

Darrang superintendent of police Khobir Ahmed told **The Telegraph** no outfit had contacted the families of the abducted businessmen for ransom. "The abductors returned to search the vehicle. They were probably looking for something," he said.

Sources said the abductions have created a "fear psychosis" in the minds of non-Bodo traders. An intelligence official said several non-Bodo traders had received extortion notices from the outfit. "The killing of three traders in Sonitpur district on Friday was a warning to those who have not paid up," he said.

Last year, the rebels had launched a similar campaign against Bhutanese traders in the border areas. The offensive is said to be a result of the businessmen's refusal to pay "entry tax" — for crossing the border — to the outfit.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 JUN 2002

Muivah can walk free in Nagaland

Kohima/Imphal, June 21

IN A move that would give a boost to the Naga peace process, the Nagaland Government has 'formally withdrawn' the arrest warrant against NSCN(I-M) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah, a State Government spokesman said in Delhi on Friday. However, Manipur has said that it would not follow suit even if the Centre asked it to do so.

Nagaland's move paves the way for Muivah and the NSCN(I-M) chairman Isak Chishi Swu to visit India to hold further rounds of peace talks. The district magistrate of Dimapur on Monday passed an order withdrawing the warrant, which was issued in February 2000 following an ambush on Chief Minister S C Jamir's convoy in November 1999 in which two security personnel were killed.

Through a separate memorandum, the State Government also withdrew the cash reward of Rs 10 lakh, which was to be given to any person furnishing information leading to the arrest of H S Ramsan Tangkhul alias Hangshi Tangkhul of the NSCN(I-M), suspected to be involved in the ambush, the spokesman said.

The NSCN(I-M) leaders have held several rounds of discussions abroad with the Centre's representative K Padmanabhaiah and other officials.

It had been suggested to the NSCN(I-M) leaders that they visit India to hold further rounds of talks, earlier reports had said.

The move to withdraw the warrant came after Jamir's public assurances in February in this regard.

This was welcomed by Union Home Minister LK Advani who had then said that such a step would help accelerate the peace process.

Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh, however, said that it would question the Centre on what conditions the cases could be withdrawn.

The NSCN(I-M) had indulged in large-scale extortion, looting and other unlawful activities along the Manipur stretch of the Imphal-Dimapur-Guwahati national highway, he said.

The Chief Minister said the Manipur Government had issued an arrest warrant against Muivah in April 1994 and announced a cash reward of Rs 300,000 on his arrest or any information leading to his capture. The warrant is still in force, he said.

Meanwhile, an all-party meeting in Imphal on Thursday decided to urge Prime Minister AB Vajpayee to initiate steps for making the present Centre-NSCN(I-M) peace talks transparent in view of the Naga outfit's merger demand.

IAN S

Bodo outfit ups stake in council

FROM P. BRAHMA
CHOUDHURY

Dotoma (Kokrajhar), June 18:

The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) today toughened its stand by seeking reservation of 30 of the 40 seats in the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council "exclusively for the Bodos". To make matters worse for the government, the rebel outfit said its demand was "not negotiable".

The BLT made it clear that it would not agree to further extension of the ceasefire — the term of the truce is set to expire on July 21 — if the Centre and the state government fail to take a

decision on its demands by then. BLT publicity secretary Mainao Dalimari spelt out the demands while speaking to The Telegraph after a meeting held here in commemoration of the outfit's sixth raising day. "We are ready to reconsider our decision to pull out from the tripartite talks if the state government makes a specific assurance on our conditions, including proper demarcation of the territory that will be administered by the BTC," he said.

The BLT leader quoted Union home minister L.K. Advani as saying at a meeting on June 12 that the Centre was ready to de-

marcate the boundary in the manner desired by the outfit. Advani told the BLT leadership that the Centre was only awaiting the state government's recommendation in this regard, he said.

Though BLT secretary-general Derhachat Basumatary had earlier announced that the outfit would observe its raising day in "full military style", there was no display of weapons at the function this morning. Activists of the outfit attended the raising day function in civilian attire instead of the battle fatigues that guerrillas usually wear.

The chairman of the BLT's Kokrajhar unit, Birgrang Musa-

hari, hoisted the outfit's flag at a local lower primary school. District secretary Gwswm Basumatary hoisted a black flag in memory of "martyrs". BLT activists saluted the yellow flag of the militant outfit as Musahari unfurled it.

The BLT publicity secretary reiterated the demand for demarcation of the BTC boundary on the basis of the 1999 notification on the territory administered by the Bodoland Autonomous Council. "In addition to the 353 villages that were notified in 1999, we want Bijni town, along with 78 adjacent villages and 19 beyond the Pachnoi

river in Darrang district, to be brought under the proposed BTC."

In a hard-hitting statement on Saturday the BLT secretary-general had accused the Tarun Gogoi government of "cheating" the Bodos. He termed the state government's changed stand on key issues "an insult to the BLT".

The Sammilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti, a federation of 18 non-Bodo organisations, yesterday threatened to back the Koch-Rajbongshi community's demand for a separate state if Bodo organisations revived their movement for statehood.

1914

ULFA ready to talk, Centre must take initiative: Gogoi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

WORRIED over various militant factions operating on the borders of Assam and often using the state as a passage for their activities, state Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on Thursday urged the Union Government to look into the matter.

As for home-grown insurgent outfits such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), he urged

New Delhi to hold peace talks with them as it has been doing with the NSCN.

"Insurgency in Assam is on the wane, but we are certainly worried about what is happening around our state and along its borders," the Assam Chief Minister told mediapersons during a press conference.

"There are many trouble-spots, such as areas in north Bihar and vast stretches near Bhutan where security forces cannot be deployed perma-

the outfit was not averse to talks but had put certain conditions which were not acceptable to either the Union Government or the state government.

"But I always say that violence will achieve nothing. ULFA will have to brought to the negotiating table," he insisted.

Gogoi claimed that he had never in the past sought any move towards a unilateral ceasefire with ULFA.

"There has to be a two-

way traffic and both ULFA and the Central Government should take initiatives in this regard...

"We can facilitate the talks, but the main support has to come from the Centre," he argued.

And this is not something difficult to achieve, Gogoi stressed. "After all, there have been such agreements with the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), Gorkha Liberation Front (GLF) and Akali Dal in the past,"

he said.

In Delhi for the past two days, Gogoi's main mission this time over is to arrange for Central development funds and foodgrain for the cash-strapped state.

In this connection, the Assam Chief Minister said that he had met Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, Railway Minister Nitish Kumar and Food Minister Shanta Kumar and all of them had assured their support to the state.



nently," he said.

As for ULFA, Gogoi said

Abetting division

Centre overdoing the Bodo peace process

Chaos plagues the Bodo region. Just when the formation of a Bodo Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule was taking shape, 18 non-Bodo organisations stood up in opposition. The decision by the Bodo Liberation Tigers not to participate in further talks because of the foisting of a boundary as defined in 1999 (which excludes about 300 villages) has stalled the peace process. The All Bodo Students Union supports the BLT and is all set to revive its demand for a separate autonomous state if Dispur fails to meet the deadline by the month end. Nothing can be taken for granted, since Bodo leaders are unpredictable. While one set is prepared to accept the territorial status, the other wants full independence. The 1993 Bodo Accord was a mere experiment and the signatories cried off when they found implementation impossible. Since elections to the Bodo Autonomous Council could not be held nine years after its formation, the accord should have been scrapped. The council was dominated by Saikia's cronies and later by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's loyalists. The Centre is overdoing the peace process with the BLT and not involving all shades of Bodo opinion.

Now Kanakeswar Narzary, chief of the Bodo Executive Council who runs the BAC and is also leader of the United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front, has the audacity to write to the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues calling for Bodo sovereignty, the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland's main demand. Being a responsible government official, Narzary should have known the enormity of the consequences of sending the memorandum on a letter-head bearing the national emblem. Dispur's failure to pull him up will only encourage secessionist elements.

13 11 2002

THE STATESMAN

Rebel demand under scrutiny

Dispur buys time on Bodo issue

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, June 10: The Tarun Gogoi government today hinted that it was not averse to accepting the Bodo Liberation Tigers' demand vis-à-vis demarcation of the territory to be administered by the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The outfit wants the territory to be marked on the basis of the 1993 notification pertaining to demarcation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council's boundary.

The Cabinet sub-committee headed by health minister Bhumidhar Barman met here this evening to discuss the issue, but failed to take a decision. Barman said the government was "examining" the BLT's demand for inclusion of over 300 additional villages in the area to be administered by the proposed new council.

These villages had been excluded from the BAC's administrative reach when the territory was demarcated in 1999.

The Cabinet sub-committee meeting was convened in the wake of the BLT announcing a pullout from the peace talks and the All-Bodo Students' Union (Absu) setting an August-end deadline for the Centre and the state government to create a territorial council "acceptable" to all.

"The Cabinet decision regarding the demarcation of the Bodoland boundary is humiliating and indicates lack of commitment. The boundary of the BAC in 1999, as mentioned by the state government in the

note sent to the Union government, can never be the boundary of Bodoland. It should be as desired by the BLT," the chairman of the rebel outfit, Hagrama Basumatary, had said.

However, Dispur argued that its recommendation to take the 1999 notification as the basis for demarcation of the territory to be administered by the proposed new council was in conformity with a resolution adopted at an all-party meeting.

Barman said the state government had decided to hand over all departments and subjects under the BAC to the proposed territorial council, which will be constituted in accordance with the amended Sixth Schedule.

The Centre had recently asked Dispur to list the departments that would have to be handed over to the new council.

A crucial meeting of the Absu's central executive committee, held here on May 7, had decided to launch a fresh movement for a separate state of Bodoland if the Centre and the state government failed to fulfil its demands before the expiry of the August-end deadline.

Accusing both the Union home ministry and the state government of going back on their assurances, Absu president Rabiram Narzary said it was not surprising that the BLT had decided to pull out from the peace talks.

The students' organisation threatened to withdraw its support for the tripartite peace talks if the Delhi and Dispur did not set things right by the end of August.

11 JUN 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Uneasy neighbours

By JB Lama

open forum

Occasional exchanges of gunfire and casualties on the Indo-Bangladeshi border are not uncommon but far more violent incidents have occurred along the interstate borders in the North East, straining relations among "sister" states. This issue assumes importance in the light of demands for a larger Naga "homeland" and the strong opposition that this faces from Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Some of these disputes go back decades and have led to many deaths, with policemen on either side digging in to battle the other in addition to clashes involving civilians.

For example, friction between Assam and Nagaland over border disputes has simmered since the creation of the latter in 1963. The first armed clash was reported in 1972. In a dawn raid on the border settlement of Merapani in Assam in January 1979, Nagas killed 59 Assamese villagers. In the same area in June 1985, a battle between Assam and Nagaland police personnel left 45 dead. Thirty people were killed in the Rajapukhri area in April 1989. The deployment of a neutral force brought a semblance of peace but minor incidents continued in the 1990s.

It is difficult to blame any particular state as clashes usually follow the exchange of allegations and counter-allegations by both sides. Apart from its uneasy relationship with Nagaland, Assam is also locked in boundary disputes with Mizoram and Meghalaya, carved out of it in the 1970s, and also with Arunachal Pradesh, formerly the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA).

The 205-km Assam-Nagaland border had been tense after Nagaland created two sub-divisions - Niuland and Kuhebot - in the 1980s in the "disputed" areas of Golaghat and Diphu reserve forests. A short distance from Jorhat in Upper Assam, travellers are confronted by a barrier and armed Naga police with a sign demanding that they show their Inner Line Passes, a British-designed anachronism under which all non-Nagas must take a permit to visit the area. There is a separate, equally outdated Restricted Areas Permit for foreign nationals travelling to most parts of the North East.

Assam accuses Nagaland of occupying 5,000 sqkm of disputed area despite a mutual understanding on maintaining the status quo.

Nagaland says Dispur should not interfere with its development activities and accuses Assam of creating the problem by throwing open the reserves to settlers who were not "indigenous" people. Nagaland has refused to recognise the boundary as

defined in the Nagaland Act, 1962 and wants it settled on the basis of the document signed by the then Ahom king and local Naga chiefs in 1833. It lays claim to Doyang and Dossoi, arguing that the British had separated these in 1866 at the time of constituting a separate Naga Hills district for the convenience of collecting revenue.

Assam wants settlement on the basis of the 1873 Regulations (the year the Inner Line Permit system came into vogue) and the 1925 Notification which defines the boundaries. This is unacceptable to Nagaland. Conscious of the need to resolve the disputes, Delhi in the 1980s appointed VK Sundaram, the then Law Commission Chairman, to go into the disputes. Nagaland did not cooperate with him nor did it accept the Sundaram Commission's interim recommendations suggesting changes in the Nagaland Act, 1962. Had the final report, submitted after three years of investigation, been made public, perhaps some points would have emerged to be resolved at future negotiations.

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have often traded charges of intrusion into each other's territory. Like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh is adamant and refuses to accept the 1951 Notification on the 705-km common border with Assam, wanting instead the "historical" border restored.

It argues that the boundary demarcation committee which took the decision did not even consult NEFA officials. The joint ministerial committee set up in 1990 did not help ease tension. Clashes between the two states continued.

There are several areas under dispute along the Assam-Meghalaya border. Meghalayans, particularly the Garos, want their government to recover lands they claim in Assam's Goalpara and Kamrup districts. In their desire to end the row, the two sides have decided to conduct a joint survey of disputed areas and include or exclude border villages on the basis of their demographic composition.

No fresh incident has been reported over the past few years along the Assam-Mizoram border after a temporary truce in the mid-1990s but this is not to suggest that all is quiet. Interim agreements and truces are mere diversions. The delay in resolving the disputes is likely to help Naga militants who have a major base in the area called Niuland.

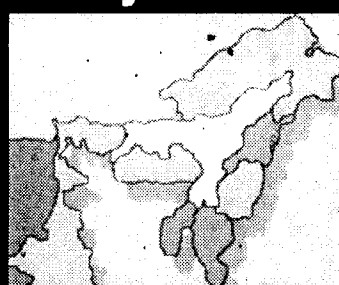
Both Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh have to rethink their "historical borders" concept since any uncompromising attitude will only deepen the crisis. The Centre must involve itself directly, especially as some of the demands of both Naga insurgents and the state government over land appear to have common ground and these will have to be dealt with when negotiations begin on political issues with the Naga militant leadership.

Border disputes are a standing indictment of the Centre's failure to solve these issues when it set about creating new states. It cannot abdicate its responsibility by asking the disputants to sort things out among themselves. Yet, enduring settlements are not possible unless the leaders in these states and influential civil society groups show flexibility.

Perhaps Attorney-General Soli J Sorabjee had this in mind last year when he proposed the appointment of a boundary commission to solve these border tangles. What is pertinent is the suggestion to make the proposed commission's findings binding on all parties concerned. In the face of new realities as seen from the perspective of Nagaland's neighbours, this seems the only way out.

(The author was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years and specialises in North East affairs)



NORTH by NORTH EAST

SANJOY HAZARIKA

Ambush and revenge: Story

of a Kuki village

On 27 May, a group of Assam Rifles personnel were ambushed by Kuki militants in a remote village in Manipur's Ukhrul district, bordering on Senapati district. Eleven Assam Rifles men were killed when attacked by members of the Kuki Revolutionary Army hiding in the village, who then made good their escape. In these times of confrontation on the Western Front, this tragedy was given just one paragraph in most of the metro media. Some didn't bother to carry it at all. But this was not a small incident. It was a premeditated killing of men who, according to the Assam Rifles, had been invited to help villagers build a sports stadium.

If the ambush was brutal, the retaliation was swift and violent: angered by the killings of their compatriots and thirsting for revenge, frustrated by their inability to hit the killers, men of various Assam Rifles units swarmed into the village and a neighbouring one, Liplen Kuki, the following day. Over the next days, the Assam Rifles personnel carried out a series of punitive raids, punishing, thrashing and interrogating scores of villagers.

Not less than 24 villagers were admitted to hospital with severe injuries, at least one was in critical condition. The photograph on this page is testimony to the viciousness of the beatings.

In some cases, according to the *Imphal Free Press*, an independent news daily from Manipur, the men were humiliated further by being stripped and beaten in front of women. The women, thankfully, were not harmed – otherwise that would have created an even worse tragedy. The Assam Rifles blamed the ambush on a combined attack by the Kukis and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M), the Naga group holding peace talks with New Delhi. The I-M, which is strong in Ukhrul and Senapati, denied its involvement and pointed out that the KRA had take responsibility for the killings. Not one "national" newspaper worth the name has carried a responsible, detailed report on these tragic killings and counter-assaults on the villagers. The Delhi media – not to leave out its honourable counterparts in the rest of the country – has failed in its essential duty: of reporting the facts.

If this had happened in Punjab or Kashmir, of course we would have plenty of headlines. But here it is taking place in another conflict zone, which is far more complex and tortuous to comprehend. The media has an essential duty not merely to report on such events but also to send reporters, understand the dimensions and context of the tragedy and inform their readers and viewers.

Devoting space and time to one story like Kashmir and the Indo-Pak standoff is an insult to developments taking place across the country. The families of the Assam Rifles men and the families of the Kuki villagers, who were mercilessly beaten, suffer in silence. Only a few voices have been raised at the state level and those are often too easily brushed aside.

Remember, too, that Ukhrul and Senapati have a particularly tragic history as far as human rights violations are concerned: in the late 1980s, several villagers disappeared from a place called Oinam, including the local pastor after a similar attack on an Army patrol. The Army officers and others involved in the assaults were dismissed from service. In the Oinam case, which is seen as a landmark in the human rights history of this country, the victims were Naga. The provocation to the troops was grave. But by not reining them in, the officers of the Assam Rifles as well as the state and Central governments may have contributed to greater alienation in the hills of Manipur.

In another part of the North East, a different tragedy is being played out. On this page, we reported the evictions of thousands of settlers living illegally on forest lands in Guwahati, the region's commercial hub. The Assam government has decided to extend this campaign across the state. The Congress MLA from Jonai, Pradan Baruah, says that not less than 200,000 people will be affected in his constituency. The catch is that there are no forests left here or in most of the reserved forests. They vanished decades ago, for the most part, to be replaced by villages and farm lands. Most residents are unlikely to budge without a struggle. Large crowds have stopped policemen and forest officials who have gone for evictions in Jonai.

The settlement has taken place apparently over the last 50 to 80 years; there are about 16 functioning panchayats, over 200 schools, village-level health centres and veterinary offices as well as Centrally funded drinking water supply schemes. Many more people are living in the "reserved forest" areas of Assam. A good number have land deeds and the state government has even collected taxes from some areas! The State cannot behave with caprice now, ignoring reality.

Nor can it ignore the fact that every Indian is entitled to fundamental rights. Where will it find additional land to accommodate not just the Jonai dwellers but those in the rest of the state? A prolonged confrontation can hurt Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's popular support base. The best settlement, though temporary, may be to let the status quo prevail for the next six months. The monsoon and the floods are coming and it would be inhuman to push people out of their homes.

After all, the State has a fundamental duty to provide an alternative. The state and Central governments with the support and advice of the panchayats, elected representatives, officials and civil society groups should use such a breather to hammer out an acceptable arrangement.

THE STATESMAN

MESSAGE FOR MEGHALAYA

Amity Is Still The Key To Development

By JB LAMA

Meghalaya goes to the polls early next year along with Nagaland and Tripura. Since attaining statehood in 1972, it has only once elected a single-party government — Garo leader Captain Williamson Sangma's All Party Hill Leaders' Conference — which successfully spearheaded the movement for separation from Assam. The APHLC split in 1976, with Captain Sangma joining the Congress, while Khasi leaders like DD Pugh and BB Lyngdoh refused to surrender their identity. Eighteen ministries in 30 years is indication enough of the chronic political instability, not to forget the reputation enjoyed by veteran BB Lyngdoh of being sworn in chief minister three times in less than a year.

Contentious issues unsolved

The present People's Front of Meghalaya coalition ministry headed by FA Khonglam and comprising the Nationalist Congress Party, the Congress and three other regional parties is the sixth in 34 months. Khonglam has the distinction of being the first Independent to become chief minister. He was animal husbandry minister in the EK Mawlong ministry and also an associate member of the NCP.

In March, Khonglam dropped seven Congress ministers, indicating clearly enough that if the party so wished it could opt out of the ministry. But it did not. This was after the Congress nominated its own candidate for the Rajya Sabha. Since the NCP was desperate to send its own nominee, Khonglam embraced a 13-member main Opposition United Democratic Party and gave them ministerial berths. Curiously, it was the same party whose government under EK Mawlong was brought down last December by the NCP and the breakaway eight-member Meghalaya United Democratic Party on charges of corruption in the Calcutta Meghalaya House deal. Khonglam is yet to initiate a judicial probe into the deal despite giving it top priority at the time of assuming office.

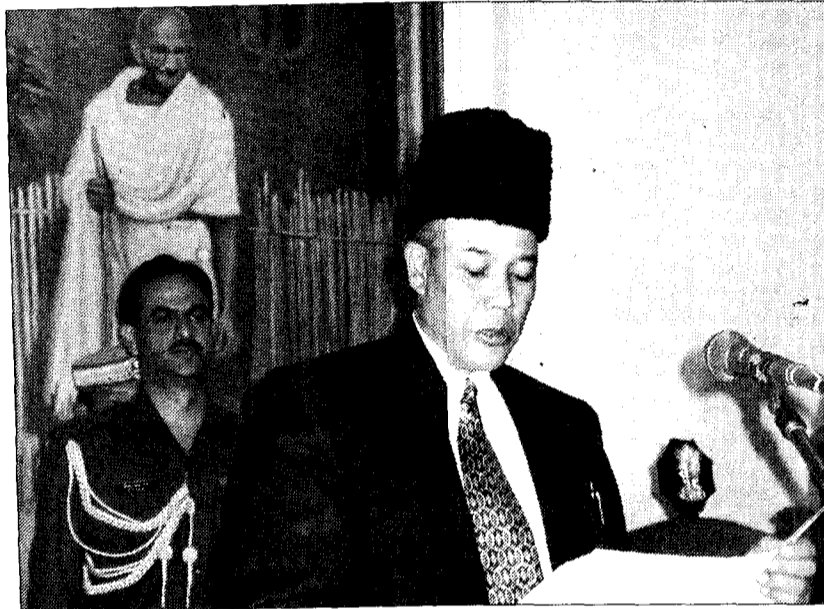
The political scenario is likely to change drastically if former Lok Sabha speaker and NCP general secretary Purno Sangma decides to enter state politics. He was chief minister in 1989-90. If the PFM and UDP forge an electoral alliance, the Congress is likely to face stiff opposition.

It makes little difference which party comes to power since no government has been able to solve any contentious issue

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

so far. The Khasi Students' Union refuses to change its hard-line position and its activities have often disrupted life in the capital city. Last August, they called a 48-hour bandh in support of their 10-point charter of demands, which inter alia, included a review of the job reservation policy, work permits for migrant labourers and introduction of the Inner Line Permit system. More than a

20 years. Many non-Khasis own property and businesses and have lived here for generations. The Inner Line system may be an effective mechanism to protect tribal identity but ground realities have changed. In Arunachal Pradesh (formerly North East Frontier Agency) and the Naga Hills (Nagaland), the system was in force since inception (1873) and in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram)



dozen government vehicles were burnt.

The KSU wants more seats reserved for Khasis. Both Garos and Khasis have 40 per cent each, five per cent are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and 15 per cent for the rest. The Khasis argue that many of their deserving candidates do not find jobs while even those not meeting the minimum criteria fill the Garo seats. There is bound to be a conflict if the Garo quota is reduced. Already the Garo-Khasi divide is becoming prominent.

Tribals and non-tribals

There is understandably some sympathy for Khasis as heavy influx has posed a serious problem, but this is not peculiar to the state. Efforts to stop infiltration through legislation have failed. The Meghalaya Residential Permit Bill 1973 did not get presidential assent. Nor did a non-official Bill in 1979 to extend the Inner Line system make any headway.

The KSU is unable to reinforce its argument for the Inner Line system. Shillong was the capital of a composite Assam and a cosmopolitan town for over

Autonomous District Council to run their businesses in the wholesale commercial complex called Iewduh (Burrabazar) following a Supreme Court ruling in 1987. The fact is Iewduh falls under the jurisdiction of the durbar of the Syiem of Myllem without whose recommendations the district council cannot act. The administration has no say in the matter either. It would, however, be a mistake to suggest that non-tribals are depriving the locals. They are said to own only 27 per cent of the shops. The alternative solution could be to establish a new wholesale market outside the ambit of the district council.

Peace must prevail

Meghalaya was comparatively free from insurgency till 1992, but it is now a safe haven for different militant organisations in the North-east. The credit for the surrender in October 1994 of the Garo militant group, Achik Liberation Matgri Army, goes to the Meghalaya police. The Achik National Volunteers Council, one of the largest Garo militant outfits, is also reportedly on the verge of surrendering. Government efforts to make the Khasi group, Hinniewtrep Liberation National Council, surrender have fallen flat. It is active, indulging in terror tactics, intimidation and extortion, targeting mostly non-tribal contractors and businessmen. Over the past decade, a number of them have been killed.

The Shillong Municipal Board has not been able to hold elections for more than 35 years because of objections by tribal organisations. Following a Supreme Court directive, the government notified elections to be held on 25 November 2000 but only one candidate filed papers. Again, the apparent motive is to keep non-tribals from being elected to the board.

It is surprising that in this age of globalisation and economic liberalisation, tribals persist in trying to isolate themselves. If tribals feel safe in other parts of the country they should also make non-tribals feel so in their land. Both have to co-exist as equal partners in the state's development.

Despite unsettling conditions, private investments have made an appearance. Meghalaya has much to gain from reviving its once buoyant economy, which was severely affected since Partition. Export and import restrictions must be relaxed. Besides, the state has rich uranium deposits and hydro potential. Moreover, Meghalaya is perhaps the only state in the region with a fairly good tourism infrastructure. But peace must prevail.

Bodo students threaten to quit talks table

HT-01
27/5

Prabin Kalita
Guwahati, May 26

WITH DELAY in implementing the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) promised to the Bodos in lieu of a separate State, the All Bodo Students' Union (Absu) has threatened to terminate all negotiation with the State Government and go back to its earlier demand of "divide Assam 50-50".

The students' body, which has been spearheading the Bodo movement for a separate State for a decade before settling down for a set up giving more autonomy under the Sixth Schedule, has now threatened to discontinue persuading the Bodo Liberation Front (BLT) to keep the ceasefire in effect and continue with the peace talks with the Government.

"We had convinced the BLT to accept the Sixth Schedule status instead of a separate State and had made them sit for talks with the Central Government. But, now we feel it is time to rethink since the Assam Government is deliberately delaying the BTC implementation," Absu president Rabi Ram Narzary said.

The students' body has called for an emergency meeting on May 27 to "reconsider" helping BLT any longer to continue with the negotiation. "Even if the BLT chooses to continue talks with the Government, we are moving out of the deal," Narzary said.

The Absu threat comes a week after the militant organisation set a May 31 deadline for

the Government to settle the BTC issue once and for all. The outfit had also barred its representatives from the tripartite meets with the Government without the outfit cabinet's approval. This, Narzary said was an "indicator that they (BLT) would pull out of the talks and the ceasefire agreement any time".

"They would not break the ceasefire agreement and go back to the jungles with a prior announcement. No one will know and the State Government will have to take the responsibility for forcing the boys, who had adjourned violence, to resort to militancy again," Narzary said.

The Absu president, who was in New Delhi and was representing the Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement (CCBM) recently, said the delegation had met "all those who are at the helm of affairs", including the Prime Minister, Home Minister, the Congress president and the BJP president. "Everyone talked of fulfilling our aspirations but field activities have compelled us not to believe the Centre and the State Government," he said.

The State had agreed for creation of the BTC with amendments in the Sixth Schedule but has so far failed to spell out what amendments it was seeking. It is also yet to settle the boundary for the proposed BTC. The Bodos have rejected the State Government's idea of sticking to the boundary of the existing Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) notified in 1999.

Naga Hoho puts seal on unity draft

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, May 23: The White Paper on Naga integration, which was placed before the general assembly of the Naga Hoho's seventh session in Senapati in Manipur yesterday, said all Naga tribes were in favour of coming under one administrative set-up, as "one people". The Senapati conclave approved the draft White Paper in principle.

It also agreed to give a final approval to it within three months. All tribal *hohos* (councils) have been asked to submit suggestions and recommendations within a month.

A seven-member "expert committee" headed by G. Gaingam, vice-president of the Naga Hoho, drafted the 37-page White Paper. The paper noted that the movement for Naga integration — born through a process of historical evolution

— has, in turn, created a "tragic history".

The first seed of integration of the Naga-inhabited areas was sown by the Greek scholar, Claudius Ptolemy, when he referred to the Nagas as "Nagalagoi", the paper said. The White Paper is believed to have been devised by D.K. Zeliang, a retired Indian Forest Service officer, who had served in Nagaland.

Zeliang had worked as a resource person and member-secretary of the expert committee, which drafted the paper.

The White Paper maintained that the total geographical area of the Nagas is over one lakh square km.

"The issue is the removal of the artificial boundary imposed by the British, Burma (Myanmar) and India," it said.

The Naga Hoho document said voices of the Naga people — for unity and the desire to be under one administration —

have come from all Nagas of Myanmar, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. "This is the fulfilment of the prophetic voice and vision of the late A. Z. Phizo," said the draft document.

"Our case is absolutely clear, and our stand is an appeal to all our neighbours and, even the United Nations, to recognise the inalienable historical and political rights of the Naga nation," the Naga Hoho said.

The document added that the Naga Hoho recognised the fact that the Nagas would not barter their birthright, unity, freedom and liberty to the "enemy's onslaught".

The Hoho also emphasised its belief in the march for consolidation of the Nagas.

The White Paper said there was no room for "sectorial outlook, which is divisive in nature, coercive in approach and exclusive in tendency".

THE TELEGRAPH

24 MAY 1972

Naga councils stress unity

FROM SENTINARO JAMIR IN
SENAPATI AND PRADEEP
PAREEK IN DIMAPUR

May 21: The Naga Hoho and the Nagaland Baptist Churches Council (NBCC) today called upon the underground factions to exercise restraint and stop killing each other's cadre. The two influential Naga bodies called upon the rebel leaders to sit together and sort out their differences.

Addressing the seventh session of the Naga Hoho general assembly, which got under way at Senapati in Manipur today, president of the apex tribal council M. Vero said the Nagas have suffered and sacrificed a great deal. The Naga Hoho session, centred on the theme "Nagas are one", is expected to bring out a white paper on Naga integration tomorrow.

NSCN factions urged to stop fratricidal killings

Vero said the Naga Hoho would initiate steps to further improve relations with neighbouring states. He urged the house to show "practical wisdom and farsightedness to solve the long-pending problem without further delay".

Taking part in the deliberations as a resource person, Niketu Iralu said, "Reconciliation does not mean reconciliation between the conflicting Naga underground factions but building a common highway for the Nagas to undertake future journeys."

In Dimapur, the Baptist Church Council expressed serious concern over the recent killings in Nagaland and urged all "conflicting groups" to be sin-

cere and not to do anything which is inhumane and against the peace process.

The NBCC fully endorsed the leadership of the churches and the Naga Hoho as the "apex Naga tribal body" for reconciliation against the backdrop of the Bangkok declaration.

It said the peace process, which is dependent on the "seriousness and sense of responsibility" of all Nagas, has been proved fragile by the recent killings in the state.

"The Church upholds and cherishes the principles of love, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace and therefore the Church has been on her knees in fasting and praying before God, asking Him to intervene and rescue us

from self-destruction," said Rev. L. Kari Longchar, director, peace affairs, NBCC.

The NBCC demanded declaration of complete cessation of violence of all kinds, especially elimination of one another's cadre and media attacks on each other by all groups, besides renouncing the doctrine of bloodshed and upholding the principles of truth and non-violence.

Expressing its position regarding the Indo-Naga conflict, the NBCC in a representation to the "collective leadership" of the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN stated that the Naga political struggle is a part of the wider historical, all-round crisis facing the Nagas today: a crisis showing the mind, spirit and soul of the Nagas responding to the difficult challenges of change in a fast-changing world.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAY 2002

PEACE WITHIN

No obstacles to peace are insurmountable if the desire for it is genuine. There is reason to be optimistic about the National Socialist Council of Nagalim leadership's desire to return to India for the next round of discussions on Naga insurgency. This is a welcome move because the NSCN, led by Mr Isak Swu and Mr Thuingelang Muivah, had earlier insisted that talks on the issue must always be held in "a third country". That was why the talks had so far been held in Geneva, Amsterdam or Bangkok. By agreeing to attend discussions in India, the NSCN(I-M) has sent out a clear signal that its insistence on "sovereignty" for the Naga people will no longer be a precondition for the talks. The rebel leadership seems to have reconciled itself to the fact that no government in New Delhi can accept its demand for "sovereignty". Holding the discussions in India can create better conditions for their success than going over the intermittent rounds in some other country. The NSCN(I-M)'s willingness to join the negotiations in India should also be significant for peace initiatives with other outlawed groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom which insist on the talks being held in "third" countries. It should not be construed as a compromise on the part of the NSCN(I-M) leadership. It only shows that Mr Swu and Mr Muivah are astute negotiators who will be guided by reality rather than by prejudices.

It should not be difficult for the Centre to "clear the decks", as an NSCN(I-M) representative put it, for the leaders' return to India. After all, they came to Nagaland in 1998 after nearly 30 years, following New Delhi's decision to allow them a safe passage. This was possible after the rebels and the government successfully implemented the ceasefire agreement between them. New Delhi should reciprocate the rebels' gesture by offering the leaders another safe passage. The progress of the negotiations should decide if the time has come for the government to lift the ban on the organization, withdraw arrest warrants against the leaders and repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act which is in operation in Nagaland and Manipur. The rebel leaders cannot be unaware of the impact of the government's response to these demands on other insurgent groups in the Northeast. New Delhi may find it difficult to repeal the Armed Forces Act, for example, because it is necessary to deal with the Manipuri rebel outfits. Some sceptics suspected that the NSCN(I-M) would use the ceasefire to regroup and rearm its cadre in Nagaland. The fears have generally proved wrong, thanks to the sincerity of purpose on both sides. The rebel leaders should take the peace process further by returning to Nagaland for the sake of peace and of the long-suffering people of the state.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 MAY 2002

A homecoming

51-A And a chance for peace in Nagaland 185

It would be premature to assume that NSCN-IM leaders Isak Swu and Th Muivah's reported decision to come to India to continue the peace talks is a major breakthrough, but it certainly is a positive development. The two visited Nagaland in May 1999 after 33 years in exile and met a cross-section of people during their month's stay in Dimapur. With the Prime Minister having invited them to revisit and the withdrawal of warrants of arrest against them issued in November 1999 following the unsuccessful bid on the life of chief minister SC Jamir, the road has been cleared. The two should not confine themselves to the NSCN-IM camp at Dimapur, as they did in 1999, but should visit their respective villages. Following the reconciliation process initiated by the Naga Hoho in December, several people representing various organisations in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal met the two leaders at Bangkok. Significantly, Isak and Muivah have agreed not to enter into any political settlement with Delhi without the people's consent. But this apart, nothing substantial emerged from the second consultative meet.

There can be no two opinions about unity preceding a settlement of the Naga problem. But the NSCN-IM has made it clear it will not resile from its demand that the rival Khaplang faction apologise for the murder of their colleagues at the time of the 1988 split and that those who signed the 1975 Shillong Peace Accord disown the pact. This puts paid to the very spirit of give and take. There can be no breakthrough unless Isak and Muivah bend to the prevailing ground realities in Nagaland. The strong public desire for unification of all warring factions cannot be brushed aside. It is for the people's organisations to present this issue more forcefully than before.

THE STATESMAN

18 MAY 2002

'Naga talks will succeed if Centre, state think alike'

By Nirmalya Banerjee
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: The NDA government at the Centre and the Congress government in Nagaland must have the same approach on negotiations with the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak — Muivah) if talks are to succeed, Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga said here recently. Mr Zoramthanga was talking to TNN on his way back from Bangkok where he had gone last week "to create an atmosphere conducive for talks".

"Our experience of peace talks in Mizoram is that it helps if the Centre and the state government think alike on issues." Congress chief minister Lalthanhawla had stepped down in 1986 to pave the way for the signing of the Mizoram accord and the holding of the elections in 1987.

NSCN(I-M) leaders had reservations about Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir's approach, he claimed. Particularly, his issuing an arrest warrant against NSCN(I-M)'s army chief V. Atem after the ambush of his convoy in

1999. The warrant was later withdrawn. Mr Zoramthanga met underground leaders Isak Chisi Swu and T.N. Muivah on two occasions, lasting a total of six hours. He also addressed nearly 100 representatives of non-government organizations from Nagaland, like churches and Ho-Hos, who were present in Bangkok during the Mizoram chief minister's visit.

The talks were still at the "procedural stage", centering around terms of the ceasefire and venue of talks, he said. The substantive political issues were yet to be taken up. "NSCN(I-M) leaders are unhappy that progress is slow, but I told them the Mizo accord was preceded by 15 years of negotiations, from 1971 to 1986."

Mr Zoramthanga indicated that it would not be easy for the NSCN(I-M) to climb down from the demand for sovereignty. "During talks with Mizo National Front, we could not give up the demand for sovereignty so easily as we could have been shot, as people felt strongly on the issue. In 1976, the MNF

held a convention in Calcutta, where we agreed to find a solution within the constitution."

The NGOs would have to play an important role in the peace process in Nagaland, he said. "If the hunters go out to hunt a tiger and come back with a deer, there must be someone to prepare the villagers mentally for this." The NGOs would also have an important role in bringing about an understanding between the NSCN(I-M) and the NSCN(Khaplang).

In his address to the NGOs, Mr Zoramthanga emphasized that the Centre was serious about the negotiations. He also said that the NSCN(I-M) was "extremely fortunate" in having already talked to Prime Ministers. "In the MNF, for a long time we had talked to a Union additional secretary, and towards the beginning he used to participate under a pseudonym."

Mr Zoramthanga would soon go to Delhi and brief Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on the outcome of his Bangkok mission.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

MAY 2007

Ulfa warns Bhutan against India pact

Prabin Kalita
Guwahati, May 16

AMID TALKS of a possible Indo-Bhutanese joint military operation to flush out Ulfa militants from the Himalayan kingdom, the banned militant outfit has asked the Bhutanese Government not to team up with the Indian forces.

According to Ulfa's mouthpiece *Freedom*, the outfit has warned the authorities of the neighbouring country through a public statement that it should not collaborate with the Indian occupation forces in any possible future campaign against the outfit.

Ulfa chief Paresh Barua's appeal to the Bhutanese Government came after the Indian Air Force along with the Royal Bhutan Army launched a vigorous aerial search for a MiG-21 fighter aircraft that went missing on

April 20, shortly after taking off on a sortie from Salonibari base at Tezpur. The two pilots, Squadron Leader TJA Khan and Flying Officer D Dahiya, are also missing since then.

The *Freedom* said, "It is indeed a blatant lie fabricated precisely by the Indian Intelligence agencies to perform reconnaissance of Ulfa bases along the international border without any diplomatic hindrance from the neighboring country."

Baruah has also clarified to the Bhutanese authorities that the outfit does not have any kind of relation with any dissident group or individual of Bhutan. Reports say that the Ulfa was trying to mobilise pressure groups within Bhutan to maintain its hold on the Bhutanese King in case of the latter agreeing to any joint operation with India.

"These are all fabricated story of Indian propa-

ganda machine to create suspicion between the Ulfa and Bhutan. Ulfa just maintains the cordial historic fraternity with the contiguous countries, which does not necessarily mean any existence of diplomatic or political relationship."

Bhutan has laid a set of pre-conditions for a joint Indo-Bhutan operation inside Bhutanese territory to flush out Ulfa and NDFB militants.

First, the operation should not be abandoned for political dialogue, Bhutanese territory should be totally purged of insurgents giving full protection to the Bhutanese people. Second, ensuring that Bhutan is not subjected to economic blockade, no harassment or harm to Bhutanese citizens in the operational area and ensuring that once the insurgents are flushed out they do not return to Bhutan.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 MAY 2002

Non-Bodos won't suffer: Gogoi

9-11-87
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Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Feb. 20. — The Assam chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, today said the state government would ensure that in its efforts to fulfil the aspirations of Bodos, it would not allow the interests of non-Bodos to suffer.

Speaking as the chief guest at the open session of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, which is celebrating its golden jubilee, at Goybari in Kokrajhar district, Mr Gogoi said the government is sincere about improving the condition of Bodos.

But the chief minister also made it clear that the interests of non-Bodos would be protected at all cost. Mr Gogoi was referring to apprehensions expressed by non-Bodos that formation of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution would lead to curtailing rights of non-Bodos living in the existing Bodoland Autonomous Council (proposed BTC) area.

The Sanmilita Janagoshtiya Sangram Samity, a platform of 18 non-Bodo organisations, has already given a call for a 36-hour road and rail blockade from 24 February in protest against the state government's nod to the Centre for setting up the BTC.

Organisations of Koch Rajbongshi and Adivasi communities, which constitute a sizeable chunk of the population of the BAC area, have threatened to take up arms if the BTC becomes a reality.

Nine years ago, the All Bodo Students' Union signed the Bodo accord which resulted in the creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council. But it did not take very long for the Absu to reject the BAC saying the administrative mechanism had failed to redress their grievances. The Absu then revived its agitation for a separate state for Bodos.

The Bodo Liberation Tigers, which was also waging an armed struggle for a separate state for the Bodos, finally entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Centre in 2000 and began negotiations. Climbing down from its demand for a separate state, the BLT settled for a set up with constitutional safeguards which the existing BAC does not provide. The BLT has assured that non-Bodos would not suffer in any manner in the event of BTC's creation. The outfit is also in favour of amendments to the Constitution so that the rights of the non-Bodos are fully protected.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

7 1 FEB 2001

Mr Shourie, DONER and Naga consultations

Arun Shourie, Minister for Disinvestment and Development of the North Eastern Region, is pragmatic enough to see his second charge, which is but seven months old, as a "pressure point and facilitator" rather than one that will transform the region overnight.

He's just had the Manipur Chief Minister, Ibobi Singh, in his room with a new list of demands, including large expensive projects for increasing the installed hydropower capacity and bringing power to villages without electricity in his state. Mr Shourie counselled the value of small projects such as local, solar-powered units, which would reduce the cost and give communities a stake in their own future, bringing development to them quickly.

Development would also introduce, one feels, an element of justice into the situation. Why justice? Because underdevelopment, allied with lack of governance, is among the worst forms of exploitation inflicted on ordinary people. No wonder they become "alienated" and embittered.

Mr Shourie, veteran hack and author of several books that deal with as wide a range of subjects as Hindutva, Dr BR Ambedkar and Islam (which draw controversy and furiously divide people along the lines of either alleging bias or balance on his part), has been travelling to the region since the 1980s and is especially remembered for a series of blistering articles in *India Today* detailing failure after failure of the Assam administration (the state was under President's Rule) that led to the slaughter of over 1,700 Bengali-speaking Muslim settlers at Nellie. He continues to travel to the region in his capacity as a Cabinet Minister, between his other responsibilities of unwrapping the public sector and carving it up for private entrepreneurs.

In a conversation this week, Shourie described the "bane of the North East" as "large projects" which become over-expensive, lead to corruption on a vast scale and create further disillusionment among the public, which never sees any benefits. His mantra: small projects, based on the natural resources of the region. He wants things to be done quickly and with local expertise and human resources. "Short gestation projects which touch the lives of people immediately and hold people accountable for every rupee spent from public funds."

The first is eminently possible; the second is far more difficult. To begin tackling the second problem, the Central Government needs to investigate the assets of MLAs (and former MLAs — this includes former and serving Chief Ministers as well) and officials from the region who have bought property and set up homes in Delhi and Kolkata in the past 20 years. We may find some of the "missing" Central funds parked in Delhi and other metros, after all.

Another Shourie priority is to market the North East as a place of business opportunities to industrialists across the country. This is no mean challenge, although, come to think of it, two big industrial houses, Tata Tea and Williamson Magor, have enormous investments in the tea industry in Assam.

Mr Shourie says that an annual Economic Summit is planned for the region. It kicks off in July this year at Mumbai, organised in part by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry. There are little-known success stories of investment in the region. These include Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL), which now manufactures its herbal lotions, especially its much-hyped fairness cream, out of a little town called Doom Dooma in Upper Assam, near Dibrugarh.

The Prime Minister's representative to the Naga talks, K Padmanabhiah, and his team of negotiators have been in Bangkok over the past few days, talking to the leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M). These are the talks which were scheduled for February and then got postponed, thanks to the Gujarat tragedy, which now appears to have a vicious life of its own.

Have the Government of India and the extremists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and other groups even understood the impact of such incidents on small groups like the Nagas and others in the North East? If they have not, they would do well to understand that this is not likely to give them a sense of much security. It is exactly the sort of thing they have been warned against by their leaders over the past 50 years and more — that they will be "swamped" by the huge Hindu population.

Not much is expected from the actual conversations with T Muivah, the NSCN (I-M) General Secretary, and Chairman Isak Chisi Swu, apart from general briefings. However, it will provide a window of opportunity for the government to understand how the NSCN leaders view the upcoming consultations with the Naga civil society groups from 6 - 10 May at Bangkok. Indeed, these are likely to be far more crucial for the peace process and people's involvement and understanding than the official-level talks.

Talks at the official level can often be sorted out by bargaining. But factional feuding, bitter personal animosities, ideological differences and tribal identities make the informal process a far more difficult job.

The Naga militant group has placed a list of 27 demands for New Delhi's consideration including, as one noted last week, the opening of trade and tourism offices abroad (one suspects this to be a way of ensuring government employment to their cadres, some of whom have married locally in South East Asia and are unlikely to return to the small state of Nagaland), a state flag and control over local resources. These and other issues are likely to come up at the meeting with 70 civil society and church leaders. One can not but wish them well and urge unity among the groups, because only that can make the peace process stable and the effort at reconciliation between the Nagas successful.

NSCN-IM ready for talks in India

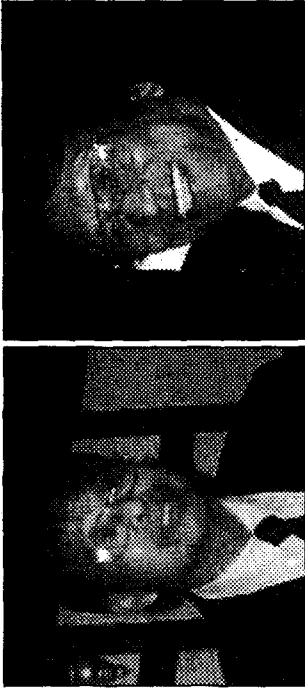
OUR BUREAU

May 16: Barely a week after Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga visited Bangkok for negotiations with the NSCN (I-M) leadership, there is talk of the outfit having agreed to an Indian venue for the next round of peace parleys with the Centre.

A senior official in the Union home ministry told **The Telegraph** over phone from New Delhi that NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu and general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah had no objection to meeting representatives of the Centre "on Indian soil". He said Delhi had

pledged to withdraw all cases against the duo to facilitate the talks. "All members of the NSCN (I-M) delegation will be provided safe passage. But the venue of the parleys has not been decided."

The home ministry official claimed the insurgent leaders made their stand clear at the last round of talks with former home secretary and the Centre's interlocutor in the peace talks, K. Padmanabhaiah. The talks were held in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. However, the NSCN (I-M) is yet to announce its acceptance of the proposal to hold the next round of discussions in India.



Swu and Muivah: Softening stand

A few days after the inconclusive meeting between Padmanabhaiah and the NSCN (I-M) leadership, Zoramthanga head-

ed for Thailand to take another shot at breaking the deadlock. "I will try to facilitate better coordination between the two par-

ties," he said before making the trip. The Mizoram chief minister had previously held three rounds of discussions with the NSCN (I-M) leadership with the Centre's consent. Sources in Aizawl said Zoramthanga would visit New Delhi soon to brief Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Union home minister L.K. Advani on his Bangkok mission. Apart from the chief minister, the NSCN (I-M) leadership met a delegation of Naga leaders in Thailand early this month. The team included members of the Naga Hoho, the apex council of various Naga tribes.

Bodo outfit pulls out of peace talks

FROM P. BRAHMA
CHOUDHURY

Kokrajhar, May 15: The ongoing tripartite peace talks to resolve the Bodoland issue suffered a setback with the Bodo Liberation Tigers today pulling out of future talks with the Centre unless the latter comes out with a stand similar to the one "desired" by the outfit.

A decision to this effect was taken at the BLT's executive meeting at Kokrajhar today, which was attended by leaders of all district committees of the outfit.

The last round of talks were held on May 6 in New Delhi wherein the BLT had insisted on a speedy solution and had cautioned both the Centre and the state government that inordinate delay would only compel it to review its stand. The BLT had also set a May deadline for a solution to the issue.

Besides a thorough review of its ongoing talks with New Delhi and Dispur, the executive adopt-

ed a resolution to reconsider the BLT's participation in future talks unless the Centre spelt out its stand.

The resolution said Delhi's view should be similar to that of the outfit's to resolve the Bodo issue. "The BLT executive also adopted a resolution asking its representatives to withdraw from future talks until further instructions from its cabinet," it read.

In a press note issued late this evening, BLT chairman Hagrama Basumatary claimed that the decision of the Tarun Gogoi Cabinet on the boundary demarcation of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council to be formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was "humiliating" as well as insincere.

"The boundary of Bodoland Autonomous Council in 1999 as mentioned by the state government in the note sent to the Union government can never be the boundary of Bodoland. It should be as desired by the BLT," the Bodo leader said.

The BLT wants the boundary of the BTC to be fixed on the basis of a government notification on the BAC boundary issued in 1993.

The BLT has demanded the inclusion of Bodo villages in the Rabha-Hajong, Tiwa and Mising autonomous councils and allotment of government land to Bodos living in Golaghat district.

"Along with the solution to the Bodoland problem, the Bodos living in Karbi Anglong must also be included in the Scheduled Tribes (Hills) list," Basumatary said, reiterating the BLT's long-pending demands.

Besides the boundary issue, the BLT also appears firm on getting the Bodo language included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

"There can be no Bodo Accord without the inclusion of Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule and setting up of a central university along with vocational institutions in Bodoland," Basumatary said.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAY 2002

NSCN faces racist slur

FROM OINAM SUNIL

Imphal, May 14: The United Committee, Manipur (UCM) has charged the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) with pursuing a policy of racial segregation and asked the Naga rebel outfit to desist from attempting to alter the boundary of Manipur.

In a statement here today, the UCM, which spearheaded the anti-ceasefire agitation last year, said efforts to build Naga solidarity should never be linked with the attempt to alter the historical and constitutional boundary of Manipur.

The UCM said the people and tribes living inside Nagaland only should solve the Naga problem. It said any move to disintegrate Manipur would be resisted. The UCM was reacting to the NSCN (I-M)'s recent statement which charged the organisation with misleading the people.

The NSCN (I-M) had said "it sees no reason why the UCM should oppose the Naga people's search for a permanent settlement". The outfit had said the ongoing talks with the New Delhi signify the willingness to resolve the Naga conflict through peaceful means.

The UCM said the people of the hills and plains are inseparable and there is no district in Manipur which are exclusively inhabited by a single tribe or com-

munity. It said the NSCN (I-M)'s policy of racial segregation would be construed as an interference in the internal affairs of Manipur.

Saying the state has suffered due to the NSCN (I-M)'s policy of racial segregation and ethnic cleansing, the UCM said, "The hills of Manipur are full of charred villages, innumerable orphans and broken families". The UCM was referring to the events of Naga-Kuki clashes in the Nineties.

It said the past events have taught all sections, living both in the hills and the plains, that the policy of segregation has brought tremendous hardship to society.

The NSCN (I-M) today criticised the UCM statement saying such observations are "propaganda", adds a PTI report from Kohima. The information and publicity wing of the underground outfit described the UCM "outbursts" as "most unhealthy and unwarranted" at a time when a peaceful solution is sought for, and urged the council not to mislead the Meiteis and create animosity with the Nagas of Manipur.

In a statement, the outfit said the Nagas have nothing to do with the aspirations of the UCM and appealed to the Meitei organisation not to interfere in the Naga peace process at this juncture.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 MAY 2002

Manipur committee gears up to safeguard territory

Panel to track Naga talks

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, May 10: Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh today said his government was preparing to monitor the ongoing Naga talks with the help of the state's various non-governmental organisations.

The ruling Secular Progressive Front (SPF) has discussed the proposal to form a monitoring committee to keep track of the talks between New Delhi and the NSCN (I-M).

Addressing a news conference this evening, the Congress chief minister said he would invite all the NGOs to discuss the formation of the committee, which can pre-empt any threat to Manipur's territorial integrity. He said the state must remain alert despite the Centre's commitment that "Manipur's territory will not be disturbed".

The chief minister will soon call a special Cabinet meeting to exclusively discuss the Naga peace talks and any possible threat to the state's boundary. "I will send the resolution of the state Cabinet to the Centre. No decision can be taken involving Manipur's territory without us," Ibobi Singh said.

He said the Centre has kept the chief ministers and governments of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur in the dark about the progress of the talks. Asked about the involvement of Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga in the negotiations, Ibobi Singh said, "He may have gone to meet the NSCN (I-M) leaders as the Centre might have wanted to utilise his services be-



Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga (centre) with NSCN (IM) general secretary Th. Muivah (right) and chairman Isak Chisi Swu at a hotel in Bangkok where more than 100 members of different Naga organisations discussed ways to "strengthen the peace strategy" at the four-day Naga consultation meeting which began on Monday. Picture by Eastern Projections

cause he is a former rebel."

Ibobi Singh said his government could not allow anyone to touch even an inch of Manipur's territory. "If anyone dares to touch Manipur we may have a World War III-type situation in our hands," the chief minister said.

He said the first point in the Secular Progressive Front's common minimum programme is to safeguard the state's boundary. "We are committed to it. I am even thinking of proposing a special session of Manipur Assembly to discuss the issue if the need arises," he added.

On the proposed committee to monitor Naga talks, Ibobi Singh said it would have members from both the government and organisations like the All-Manipur Students' Union, All-Manipur United Clubs' Organisation and United Committee, Manipur.

Step backward

Bodos must shed narrow parochialism

The Centre will find it easier to deal with problems in the North-east if tribal organisations and militant groups become a cohesive entity. Nothing has turned around in Nagaland and Bodoland despite talks with the NSCN-IM and Bodo Liberation Tigers. And just when it seemed the Bodo Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule was a reality after Dispur gave the nod, it appears to have foundered following objections by non-Bodos who constitute the majority in the proposed BTC and fear they will be reduced to second class citizens. The murder last month of All Bodo Students Union education secretary Khwrawmkhang Boro by suspected National Democratic Front of Boroland cadres has only vitiated the atmosphere. This is not the first time the Absu leadership, spearheading the movement for a separate state within Assam, has been the victim of premeditated conspiracy: in 1996 the NDFB killed Absu president Swambala Basumartary. The murder of political opponents to achieve a goal is plain cowardice and must be condemned.

Both Congress and AGP exploited the disunity among Bodos. This is one reason why the plains tribals must coordinate their activities. The Centre is dealing with moderates like the BLT ignoring the NDFB (formerly Bodo Security Force), which has been waging a war against the establishment since the 1980s. If the Centre singled out the dominant Isak-Muivah faction for talks, the NDFB should have been the ideal choice. Fumbling and piecemeal attempts lead nowhere. It is still not too late to take them into confidence by brokering a ceasefire as was done with the NSCN-Khaplang outfit. The situation is complicated enough with Bodos reluctant to sit at the same table with non-tribals, but one's prosperity depends on the other and they must learn to shed narrow parochialism.

THE STATESMAN

6 8 MAY 2002

Hurriyat 'split' may change J&K political scenario

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, MAY 7. From the controversial Dubai conclave to the expulsion of three top commanders of the Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the developments in the past few weeks may lead to changes in the political scenario of the troubled State of Jammu and Kashmir. Omar Abdullah is all set to take over as president of the National Conference and a change of guard at the Hurriyat headquarters is also certain, though towards mid-July.

The State goes to the polls in September.

Attempts to rope in separatist leaders to contest elections were made right from day one of Farooq Abdullah's tenure as Chief Minister. But, the Centre has not succeeded in its "mission Kashmir".

Groups like the Hurriyat also have not made any significant gains from their dubious role in resolving the Kashmir issue. Not only the Hurriyat's different voices, its different actions now have reduced the once powerful alliance to an "association of compromises".

Its role as the champion of separatist feelings has become suspicious and it is seen more as the "voice of Pakistan" rather than the people's voice.

Be it the Hizb's ceasefire of July 2000, Pakistan's role vis-a-vis Afghanistan or the activities of militant groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, the Hurriyat has essentially sided with the Pakistan establishment.

"It has certainly lost its own decision-making ability," commented a political science teacher.

The participation of two of its senior leaders, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Abdul Gani Lone, in the Dubai meeting, attended by the "Kashmir Committee" Chairman, Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, was a clear indication of its leaders

having adopted different stands. With its chairman, Abdul Gani Bhat, the known hardliner, Syed Ali Geelani, and Yaseen Malik not obliging New Delhi in its endeavours, the battle lines are clearer now. Though it seems to be distant dream for the Kashmir handlers to see any of Hurriyat leaders contesting the elections, the first part of New Delhi's purpose (to divide the Hurriyat) seems to be reaching its climax. Jihad and anti-jihad outbursts among the Hurriyat leaders is also seen as a shift in the "common minimum agenda".

In the backdrop of the Pakistan Government patronising the meetings like those in Dubai and Chandigarh, in which the Kashmir Committee's firebrand member, Nasim Zehra, and the former Pakistan Foreign Secretary, Najamuddin Sheikh, held discussions with some senior separatist leaders, the Hurriyat is being marginalised by its own mentors. With reports about an alternative front among the separatists gaining credence, the likelihood of the Hizb's former chief commander, Abdul Majid Dar, and two others joining this "more moderate" side is not ruled out.

In the new scheme of things, New Delhi would not lose much time in patronising the new front in which it has established deep-rooted contacts. As the elections for the chairmanship of Hurriyat Conference are also due in July, it could be possible for the moderates to bag the position. Since Mr. Geelani and Prof. Bhat would have ended their terms, the JKLF chairman, Mohammad Yaseen Malik, would have emerged a strong contender for having strong views against New Delhi. But his arrest under POTA has diminished his chances. The battle for the top post is likely swing in favour of the moderates.

Muivah still 'wanted' in Manipur

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, May 28: Thuingaleng Muivah, general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), is still on the "wanted" list of the Manipur government, carrying a reward of Rs 3 lakh for his arrest or for information leading to his arrest.

Announcing this, the Democratic People's Party (DPP) has urged the state government not to give any preferential treatment to Muivah.

It also requested the state government to inform the Centre about the list of wanted persons, which was prepared by the state home department in April 1994.

The Nagaland government has withdrawn all cases against the NSCN (I-M) leaders, including the outfit's chairman Isak Chisi Swu and Muivah, to facilitate their return to the country for the ongoing peace process.

Though Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir has announced the decision, his Manipur counterpart Okram Ibobi Singh is still firm on keeping Muivah on the "wanted" list.

Sources said Swu and Muivah, who had been given Indian passports, might arrive in the country next month to continue the peace parleys with the Centre.

The DPP — formed by anti-ceasefire activists and a constituent of the ruling Congress-led Secular Progressive Front — has sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, highlighting the Manipur



Braving inclement weather, Meira Paibis (women's groups) rallied in Imphal on Tuesday to mark "torch-bearer lady day". Thousands of women from Imphal and remote villages of Manipur participated in the rally. Picture by Eastern Projections

government's wanted list where Muivah carries a reward as a militant leader.

The party expressed displeasure over Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga's remark that the Naga ceasefire should be without any territorial limit. The Mizo chief minister had recently visited Bangkok to meet

the NSCN (I-M) leaders. Since Zoramthanga's Bangkok visit was approved by the Centre, his remark on the sensitive issue was tantamount to the Prime Minister approving his statement, the party said.

The party said people would fight for the territorial status of Manipur as it stood at the

time of its merger with the Indian Union in 1949, if the talks between the Centre and the Naga outfit threaten its territorial integrity.

Scheme abolished

The Manipur government today decided to abolish the die-in-harness scheme due to a funds

crunch.

The state Cabinet decided that there are more than 1,000 applicants for the scheme and it would be impossible for the government to give them jobs.

The Cabinet said the applicants are receiving family pension after their relatives expired while in service.

23 APR 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Pro-talks outfit warns of fresh statehood movement

Bodo dilemma for Dispur

FROM P. BRAHMA
CHOUDHURY

Kokrajhar, April 22: The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) has threatened to revive the movement for a separate state if the Centre and the Assam government do not make a formal announcement on the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council by the end of next month.

"The BLT launched its movement for statehood to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people. After discussions with the Centre and the state government, we agreed to give up our demand for a separate state and settle for a territorial council. But if the process of creating the council is delayed further, we will be compelled to revive the movement," BLT publicity secretary Mainao Daimary told **The Telegraph** in an exclusive interview here.

The Bodo outfit, which has been negotiating directly with the Centre, expects Dispur to expedite the process of creating a new administrative set-up for the Bodo heartland by taking a "positive stand" on the issue of amending the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

"The trust and confidence reposed on the state government by the Bodo people are fast eroding because of the inordinate delay in creating the council," Daimary said.

The announcement of a deadline by the BLT coincided with a protest rally in Guwahati today. The Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement, a federation of several Bodo groups, had convened the rally to pressure Dispur into speeding up the process of creating the BTC.

The Tarun Gogoi government has long given its nod to the proposal for formation of a new administrative council, but a section of non-Bodo groups has put a spanner in the works by launching a campaign against the move under the banner of the Sanmilito Janagosthiyo Sangram Samiti.

Daimary said the opposition



A dharna organised by the Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement at the Last Gate section of Dispur on Monday. Picture by Bijju Boro

of non-Bodo groups to a new administrative set-up was a manifestation of the "politics of opportunism" indulged in by a section of Congress leaders.

"They have been instigating anti-BTC forces. In any case, the actions of these non-Bodos indicate that they are against development of the Bodo-dominated areas."

The BLT publicity secretary said non-Bodos were being unnecessarily afraid of being side-

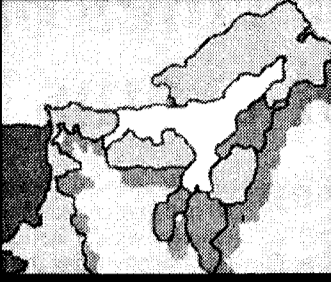
lined once the new administrative machinery is put in place. "There is no ground for the non-Bodo people to feel insecure. Even after the creation of the BTC, the law of the land will be enforced as it is now."

Daimary charged the BLT's arch rival, the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), with harming the interests of the Bodos by targeting innocent people. "The assassination of the central education secretary

of the All-Bodo Students' Union, Khwrawmkhang Boro, is a clear indication of the NDFB's tactic of exterminating all those who are working for the development of the Bodo community," he said.

He urged the NDFB leadership to shun violence and come for negotiations with the government. "The prevailing political situation warrants such a move. Moreover, that is what the Bodo people want."

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Of Myanmar's dissidents, and news plants

Overwhelmed by the standoff in Parliament, few metropolitan newspapers, leave aside the visual media, paid any attention to the arrest and release of a young dissident journalist from Myanmar. The journalist, Soe Myint, was once a student of Yangon University but quit his studies to join the movement against the military regime in his country, on the side of Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

On 19 November 1990, Soe Myint and a friend hijacked a Thai Airways flight to Kolkata, were arrested and bundled off by the police. The hijacking case has meandered on for over a decade and Soe Myint has by and large been free and politically active. His wife, also of Myanmar, strings for the BBC; Soe Myint has worked for the Voice of America's Burmese service before setting up the Mizzima News Agency, which writes about news from his homeland and of its exiles. He also helped to found the Burma Media Association.

He was granted refugee status by the Delhi office of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1993. Soe Myint's arrest, interrogation and release in Kolkata on 16 April has sent ripples of concern through the small but significant Myanmar refugee and exile population in India. Tin Swe, the exiled Myanmar member of Parliament who lives in New Delhi, said he was worried about the signals this would send to other Myanmar dissidents. One understands that the journalist's interrogators were more concerned about his political activities than the hijack issue.

This is why the arrest caused more concern because of India's growing relationship with the Myanmar junta. There are large numbers of Myanmar – both ethnic Burmans of the plains and Chins – in the border state of Mizoram. Police and other government sources, as well as exile officials and independent assessments, place this figure at about 25,000 to 30,000. Most of them are economic migrants in search of livelihoods because conditions back home in Myanmar's border areas of Saigang and the Chin Hills are extremely difficult.

About 50 of them or so (according to a list prepared by the dissident leadership) qualify as political activists based in Aizawl. This list is recognised by the Mizoram government and the Centre. The exile community is a rich source of information and resources for the security agencies operating in the North East, especially its borders. The Government of India is unlikely to disturb this relationship.

In addition, the economic migrants provide some of the best handloom workers and weavers in Mizoram; they also work as construction labour, wood cutters, cooks and maids apart from having small thriving businesses, including of "imported" or smuggled goods. Many go back and forth across the border without let or hindrance to get these goods. They bring resources, skills and commerce into the state. The Chins and the Mizos are kin – speaking the same language, holding the same Presbyterian faith and of common ethnic stock. The political activities of the Chin and Myanmar activists in Mizoram especially and Manipur too are allowed without much hindrance. Last summer, Myanmar exiles based in Thailand held a workshop in Aizawl on women's rights and refugee issues for Myanmar refugees. Neither the local nor the Central government placed restrictions on the discussions or the participants, a fact commented upon by one of the resource persons.

Soe Myint's arrest is not a precursor to action against the Myanmar dissenters in India. There should be cause to worry should it lead to a deportation drive against some of these figures. Such moves should be resisted by civil society groups. It is better to have a one-nation, two-policy approach: develop a good economic and military relationship with the Yangon government, without jeopardising the rights and concerns of the Myanmar exiles. The exiles too must understand that their freedom in India comes with some responsibilities. The main Chin faction has an unannounced office in Aizawl as do the main ethnic political parties and student groups, including Ms Suu Kyi's own National League for Democracy. Chin armed cadres have moved to the no-man's land at the trijunction of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh – all with the knowledge of Indian security agencies. Both sides need each other and dissidents need to also accept that the North East remains sensitive and volatile and that New Delhi's policies are driven by hard realism after all, North Eastern insurgents continue to live and operate out of parts of western Myanmar.

There are times when some journalists accept briefings by officials in New Delhi and other capitals without cross-checking facts or bothering to go to the field to assess the ground reality. This is especially true of "briefings" by Intelligence officials. Thus, for a few days, there have been reports of a so-called *fatwa* against Muslims by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang).

There has been such an edict in place for nearly two years but it is specifically aimed against Bangladeshi Muslims who have stealthily settled in the area, taken over lands by marrying locally. Khaplang was worried by accounts of conversions among Nagas to Islam, the growing settlement of Bangladeshi or Bengali-speaking Muslims in the Dimapur area and intermarriage between Nagas and the Bangladeshi. He shot off a ban on future marriages, concerned by the impact of such immigration and interaction on the small Naga population, which is less than two million. The news is two years old but reflects the continuing concern about Bangladeshi immigration into the North East – which appears to be eased in Assam because of decades of hostility but has moved to other areas.

THE STATESMAN

Tripura militants raid special force unit on pay day

Rebels attack camp with eye on cash

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, April 14: Tripura continued to witness clashes between rival outfits, as the National Liberation Front of Tripura yesterday shot dead an All-Tripura Tiger Force supporter and, in a separate incident, attacked a special police officers (SPO) camp.

NLFT militants yesterday opened fire on a SPO camp in the Sare-Char Meelay area under Ambassa police station of Dhala district. Sources said yesterday being pay day, sub-inspector Gajendra Biswas reached the

SPO camp with cash around 2 pm for disbursal.

As soon as the police officer arrived, NLFT rebels — perched atop the nearby hills — rained bullets on the camp, probably to loot the cash. However, the SPOs repelled the attack with heavy counter-fire.

Deputy inspector-general of police (range) A.K. Shukla, who happened to be there along with other senior police officials, launched a combing operation. But no militant has been arrested. The state government had last year created the special police officers contingent to counter militant attacks.

Sources said a tribal woman and her teenage son were gunned down at Bahuchandra Para village under Jirania police station on April 12 because the family supported the CPM. Moreover, the eldest son of the family, Mangal Debbarma, was appointed an SPO by the government.

Militants are finding it difficult to operate freely because of the presence of a large number of SPOs in villages.

Members of the SPOs — created as a subsidiary force — get a fixed monthly remuneration of Rs 1,500.

The force had, however, suf-

fered a setback in February when armed SPOs — belonging to the Reang tribal community — defected to form an outfit.

Two of them were arrested with arms. Sources said SPOs operating under police control were doing an "excellent" job in resisting militants at the grassroots level. Opposition parties have, however, accused the state government of inducting only CPM cadre in the force.

In a separate incident, NLFT rebels stormed a tea stall in Mudibari market and dragged out Umakanto Debbarma, a known Tiger Force "collaborator", before gunning him down

in front of his parents, police said. Officer in-charge of Khowai police station, Amar Datta, with sub-inspector Pradip Bhattacharya reached Mudibari with a combined police and Tripura State Rifles team and launched an operation. However, no one has been arrested yet.

Sources said the usually busy Hatkata-Padmabil road in the sub-division wore a deserted look today following reports that the two outfits were preparing for a major clash in the nearby Chhonkhola, Padmabil and Hatkata areas, where they are reported to be camping over the past 10 days.

52-9 No joy rides 1399

MEA sets cat among the pigeons in North-east

That the Centre is of no mood to fail in the North-east can be gauged from its relentless pursuit to bring the on-going peace talks with the NSCN-IM to a logical conclusion, despite ups and downs. Steps are being taken to boost the region's economy and now comes the welcome decision to raise Guwahati airport to international status following the operation of a direct Air India flight to Bangkok. The Ministry of External Affairs has shown some sense by not allowing the airline to include the region's seven chief ministers as guests on its inaugural flight; free junkets for VIPs are not to be recommended. Of course, the official reason cited is one of concern for their safety as some ULFA and NSCN-IM activists are known to be resident in the Thai capital. Apparently the MEA action springs from a fear of public ire over such extravagance.

Having set the cat among the pigeons, it is worth examining whether the weekly flight will in any way introduce a change in the people's mindset. The objective obviously is to attract Thai tourists but apart from Assam and Meghalaya, the other states do not even have basic tourism infrastructure. Anyway, who would risk visiting insurgency-prone states where there is no guarantee of personal safety? The principal gainer will probably be Kolkata, since the Thais, being Buddhists, would have Gaya on their minds. It seems Delhi is bending over to please the North-east by putting Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport on the international map without going into merits and demerits. It will come as no surprise if, within a few months, Air India withdraws this service for want of clientele.

13 APR 2002

THE STATESMAN

Ulfa remains on free Assam track

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, April 7. — The Ulfa has asked the Bodos and the non-Bodos to co-exist in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect till Assam gained independence from Indian rule.

Referring to the proposal to create Bodoland Territorial Council under the Sixth schedule of the Constitution that has created tension between the Bodos and the non-Bodos, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said: "Once Assam becomes a sovereign nation, we can discuss among ourselves and resolve all issues."

In his speech, copies of which were sent to newspapers here, on the occasion of Ulfa's 23rd foundation anniversary, he said that 'spineless Indian politicians' are sowing the seeds of disharmony in Assamese society and warned that his organisation would never allow that.

He said that the proposal to create the BTC has created a tense situation, detrimental to the cause of freedom struggle, with the Bodos and the non-Bodos. "There are many claim-

ants for one piece of land, but they are the children of the same mother," he said.

Non-Bodos, particularly a section, led by the Sanmilita Janagoshthiya Sangram Samity, has been resorting to agitation over the government's decision to create the BTC. This would lead to the curtailment of the rights of the non-Bodos living in the proposed BTC area, SJSS apprehends.

The Bodoland Liberation Tigers, which is negotiating with the Centre for the BTC, has, however, assured that the non-Bodos have nothing to fear as the Constitution would be suitably amended to protect their rights.

On the issue of talks, he said that circumstances had forced the Ulfa to impose certain pre-conditions, but admitted that talks only can solve the problem. He, however, said that the Centre is not sincere to have a dialogue with the Ulfa.

Two killed: Two Ulfa cadres were killed by the Army in Nalbari early today. Arms and incriminating documents were also recovered.

Centre set to extend NSCN ceasefire

H Bula Devi in New Delhi

April 7. — The Centre is likely to extend the ceasefire agreements with the two factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland.

The Centre entered into formal ceasefire agreement with the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN with effect from 1 August 1997. The agreement was extended later and it is now due to end on 31 July. Mr K Padmanabhaiah, the Centre's pointman, has been negotiating with the faction and the talks are under progress.

The Centre had entered into a formal ceasefire agreement with the Khaplang faction of the NSCN too due to persistent demands from various organisations, NGOs, church leaders. The one-year agreement signed between the Centre and the Khaplang faction will end on 28 April.

However, senior government officials are non-committal about the extension of the

ceasefire. But they see a ray of hope and better future by extending the ceasefires because "all parties involved in the agreements have realised the significance of it to maintain peace."

Besides, there is no reason to call off the ceasefire when the talks are on. "There has not been any provocation also from other parties which can compel the Centre not to extend the it," sources said.

The recent kidnapping of the Chandel DC in Manipur by the NSCN(I-M) cadres had created tension. The DC had been kidnapped to avenge the killing of a number of NSCN(I-M) cadres. The DC was subsequently released about a week back after the Centre categorically told the NSCN leaders that any harm done to the officer would only jeopardise the talks.

TRAIL OF TERROR IN THE NORTH-EAST

	ASSAM				NAGALAND				MANIPUR			
	1998	'99	2000	'01	1998	'99	2000	'01	1998	'99	2000	'01
INCIDENTS	735	451	536	536	202	294	195	128	255	281	245	265
ULTRAS KILLED	180	212	321	282	69	118	84	65	95	78	102	170
ULTRAS HELD	742	812	423	173	64	39	81	80	267	142	117	577
SURRENDERED	227	797	1755	304	36	6	25	59	1	1	33	7
JAWANS KILLED	72	79	76	80	14	4	4	1	62	64	51	26
ARMS LOOTED	125	44	11	42	13	15	Nil	Nil	58	147	140	16
ARMS RECOVERED	191	168	223	285	18	16	86	96	95	65	78	74
CIVILIANS KILLED	531	220	419	248	26	26	13	16	87	89	93	65

THE STATESMAN

Pilgrim's Progress

Domino Effect of a Naga Settlement

By B G VERGHESE

9-8-80

THE official talks between the prime minister's special emissary and the NSCN-IM has been reinforced by a parallel and truly moving Naga Reconciliation Movement for unity and reconciliation that engenders hope and holds out an example for Jammu and Kashmir.

The Reconciliation Movement gained impetus last June with a resolution by village development board functionaries from Nagaland's 1,000-odd villages expressing disgust at the breakdown of governance, rising anti-social activities and fratricidal violence. They called on all underground factions, IM, NSCN-Khaplang and the Naga National Council (NNC), to unite and put an end to fear, intimidation and killings. Zunheboto district declared itself a Peace Zone. Others followed suit. Violence declined. Naga unity is imperative. Neither the 16-point Agreement (1960) nor the Shillong Accord (1975) brought peace as all the factions were not on board.

The Naga Ho Ho (assembly), the Church and NGOs then launched a "journey of conscience" to bring about forgiveness, unity and healing and endorsed the current ceasefire and official talks to settle the "unresolved Naga political issue". A ringing declaration was made against the "brutalisation of human life by forces both within and without" and stating that the Naga people cannot give up their struggle "without an honourable settlement and an adequate acknowledgement of (our) history". Yet it was noted "that division, bitterness and armed confrontation will not solve the Naga political issue".

Unable to ignore this united peace lobby, the IM leadership invited the Naga Coordination Committee, led by M Vero, Ho Ho president, to a consultation in Bangkok last January. The concluding statement contained these key phrases — the Naga struggle for self-determination is neither secessionist nor separatist as the Nagas were never traditionally part of India; the Naga people were arbitrarily fragmented by the British; the Indo-Naga conflict must be settled in a manner "honourable and acceptable to both sides"; and the Nagas must be accommodative of their neighbours' legitimate interests and apprehensions.

The confidence-building measures mooted include withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and other "draconian laws", lifting the ban on proscribed Naga organisations, and rescinding arrest warrants against the Naga leadership. The consultation felt the ceasefire monitoring mechanism would gain credibility with the induction of

independent observers and the granting of greater autonomy.

Despite references to a Naga declaration of independence on August 14, 1947, reaffirmed through an NNC plebiscite conducted in May 1951, the word sovereignty is eschewed in all documents and declarations. What is sought is an acknowledgement of Naga history and self-determination. A unilateral abandonment of the Naga "cause" could seem a betrayal after decades of suffering and sacrifice. Hence, a statement forsaking the idea of Naga sovereignty could be coupled with a government acknowledgement of the Naga past as a free people while explaining the inability of the Indian state to reverse history. Simultaneously, the "Naga people" might thereupon on their own volition freely reaffirm their accession to the Indian Union, a democratic republic of sovereign and fraternal peoples. This would assuage both Naga pride and Indian constitutional imperatives.

IN BRIEF

- It was a coming together of different factions that has made the Naga peace agreement a possibility
- The Nagas' past as a free people could be acknowledged without compromising India's sovereignty
- This would assuage Naga pride
- A Naga settlement would be a catalyst for peace throughout the Northeast

The nation state is a fairly recent concept deriving from an earlier sense of "peoplehood". The Nagas have always described themselves as a people. The Indian republic, in turn, celebrates a larger diversity welded together in a continuing process of nation-building. The Nagas are, therefore, today not subjects but co-sharers in India's sovereignty that resides in the collective will of all the Indian people. Even nation states are forming larger associations and unions as in Europe for economic advancement and common security.

The Greater Nagaland or Nagalim demand is another troubling issue. If Nagas are administratively dispersed over four Indian states and in Myanmar, this is equally true of Punjabis, Bengalis, Tamils and other peoples around the world. Conversely, Dimapur was part of the Dimasakoch kingdom and was only added to the newly-formed Naga Hills district in the 1930s to provide a rail-

head. Unscrambling current realities is not easy and could lead to grief.

11-8 9/9

The answer to the Naga sense of territoriality lies in encouraging close cooperation among the Naga people for economic, cultural, social, environmental and other purposes across administrative and even national boundaries. Naga customary law and linguistic and cultural rights can surely extend to all Naga people wherever they reside. The Ho Ho itself suggests an instrumentality for bringing together all Nagas for common purposes.

With the IM-government of India talks moving from procedural to substantive issues, more can be done to advance Naga self-determination as a co-sovereign within the Union. The sense of Naga autonomy and peoplehood can be widened and deepened beyond the present compass of Article 371-A. Symbols matter. During the Raj, certain princely states had their own flags, currency, postage stamps and trade and tourist offices abroad. Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim have defined "state subjects" and consideration is being given to dual citizenship rights for NRIs. Can "Naga Indian" be embossed on Indian passports? The US and Australian states and provinces elsewhere have their own flags and emblems. Scotland has long boasted a separate currency and international football team.

What if other Indian 'people' make similar demands? Where justified, these could be conceded. Indeed, Articles 371-A to I reflect creative federalism. The Bodo problem is hopefully moving towards resolution with an agreement on a Bodoland Territorial Council under the sixth schedule that would empower the governor to override the state government in respect of "reserved" subjects. A similar dispensation could be thought of in new Naga-peopled sixth schedule areas in Arunachal, Cachar (Assam) and Manipur, whether or not these states and Nagaland share a common governor.

Talks must in due course extend to the Khaplang and NNC groups so that all factions come together as partners in the final settlement. Mr Jamir, the present Nagaland chief minister, has on earlier occasions agreed to step aside if this facilitates matters. Both he and Mr Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur, could be honourably accommodated elsewhere. So also Mr Khaplang, a Hemi Naga from Myanmar, if he accepts Indian citizenship. A Naga settlement would catalyse peace throughout the Northeast. Working for it requires patience and understanding all round.

Storm over US envoy's N-E tour

Mr. 6
4/9

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, April 3

AGP LEGISLATOR Sarbananda Sonowal today questioned US ambassador Robert Blackwill's visit to the North-east in the first week of March.

Raising a Zero Hour notice, Sonowal said Blackwill's visit appeared mysterious and that he was not here as a guest of the State Government.

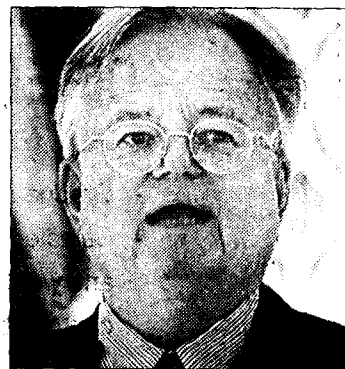
Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said, "It is very difficult for me to say what exactly was the intention of the US ambassador. Any

reaction from my side would have serious international implications as India has diplomatic relations with the US."

He said the Centre had approved Blackwill's visit. "His visit was a private one like that of many other ambassadors and the Government of India had asked me to provide him security."

Sonowal said the ambassador had met Army and Air Force commanders during his visit to the region and "what transpired at these meetings is not known."

"Blackwill also visited Nathula Pass, a very sensitive area



ROBERT BLACKWILL

where even we MLAs cannot have permission to go." He said there are serious doubts over Blackwill's visit and "this could signal some kind of tension between India and China."

Blackwill's visit was dubbed as a familiarisation trip to this militancy-infested region.

4 APR 2009

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Manipur medals may queer Naga peace pitch

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, April 2. — In a move that could have repercussions on the Naga peace process, the Manipur government has recommended gallantry awards be conferred upon Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) jawans involved in the 16 March killing of 11 NSCN(IM) men and seizure of their weaponry at Pallel in Chandel district of Manipur.

Manipur DGP Mr AA Siddiqui said the jawans have been given certificates apart from a team award of Rs 20,000. The NSCN(IM) had earlier demanded punishment for these jawans for what it termed was "cold-blooded" action. It had also demanded return of seized weapons and an apology from the Centre, in exchange of the 'life' and freedom of Chandel DC Mr Y Thakishore, then in their custody. The DC was released last Friday.

Mr Siddiqui today confirmed that the weapons are now in judicial custody and there is no question of handing them over: "You can see (them) for yourself."

APR 2 1988

THE STATESMAN

Misings follow Bodos, want 6th Schedule status

51-7 STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 21/3 9-N B Sr.

GUWAHATI, March 23. — After the Bodos, it is now the turn of the Misings to demand Sixth Schedule status to their autonomous council.

Several Mising organisations like the Takam Mising Parin Kebang, Mising Memag Kebang and Takam Mising Meme, have threatened to launch a mass movement if the government failed to concede their demand. Members of the organisations staged a dharna near the state Assembly yesterday.

Their refrain: if the government can think of extending Sixth Schedule status to the Bodoland Autonomous Council, then why not to the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) too?

A delegation of the three organisations will go to Delhi on 28 March to raise the demand before the Central government.

Though created in June 1995, the area of the MAC is yet to be properly demarcated and elections to the body have not been held.

There are two other autonomous councils governing some of the tribes settled in the plains of the state. They are the Tiwa Au-

tonomous Council and the Rabha Autonomous Council.

The MAC, TAC and RAC had all come up after the respective tribes sought self-governance in the manner of the BAC set up for the Bodos in 1993.

An official said the clamour for granting of Sixth Schedule status to these councils would grow once the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council becomes a reality.

Negotiations are on between the Central and state governments and the militant Bodoland Liberation Tigers for replacing the BAC with the BTC.

The BTC would enjoy more powers under the Sixth Schedule.

While creation of the BTC has already been agreed upon, talks are now on to finalise its area and also on the constitutional amendments that may be

required to safeguard the rights of the non-Bodos living in the proposed BTC area.

“Whether the provisions of the Schedule need to be extended to the other three councils is a matter of debate.

But there can be no doubt that other tribes would demand similar treatment as the Bodos and that may lead to some trouble,” an official said.

THE STATESMAN

24 MAR 2002

Centre asks Tripura to resettle tribals

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, March 22

THE CENTRE has directed the State Government to arrange proper rehabilitation of several thousand tribal families ousted from the site of Dambur Hydel Electric Project in south Tripura. Over 3,000 families were evicted during installation of the project some 25 years ago amid stringent opposition from tribal parties and human rights groups.

The Centre's directive came at a time when the demand for dismantling the project was gaining force. The project, which was commissioned with 12 MW production, now produces 5-6 MW per day virtually leaving no impact in the State's electric scenario where 125 to 130MW power supply is required in a day.

The Dambur Udvastoo Kalyan Samity (Dambur Oustees' Welfare Committee) has been spearheading agitation for proper rehabilitation and compensation for the displaced families.

Established in 1993, the committee has also been fighting for the right to cultivate land around the water survivor in the hydel project. The Committee has recently submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister appealing him to personally intervene in the matter.

A senior officer in the PMO has forwarded the memorandum to the State Government with a note to undertake reha-

bilitation of the oustees.

The Revenue department has been entrusted the task to initiate the follow-up action. The department is coordinating with the district administrations in Dhalai and southern districts to conduct survey and study work on the oustees.

Official records say altogether 3284 families were evicted from the vast land during installation of the hydel project in 1974. But Dambur ousters committee said the list was incomplete.

If the official record is taken, the number of evicted tribal now stands around 30,000. State Government officials have been claiming that most of the ousters were rehabilitated through agriculture and fishery departments.

In Ganddachar subdivision alone 1620 of 3284 families were rehabilitated, they said, adding that others were resettled in Amarpur and Radha Kishorepur subdivisions in South Tripura. Oustees' committee secretary Shyma Prasad Reang denied that they got proper rehabilitation and compensation.

In the memorandum to Prime Minister, Reang alleged that the State Government did not keep its promise made during commissioning of the project. He said most of them were denied land and cash reward. He warned that they will launch agitation to press their demands.

23 MAR 2002

23 MAR 2002

OUR BUREAU

March 17: Eleven militants of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) were killed in an encounter with India Reserve Battalion personnel in Manipur last night, the first such incident in the state since President's rule was revoked and a new government sworn in.

The encounter at Pallel in the Naga-dominated district of Chandel was preceded by a clash between the NSCN (I-M) and its rival faction, the NSCN (Khaplang), at a village in Arunachal Pradesh.

11 Naga rebels killed in Manipur

9-N 2-87

Sources in Changlang, one of two districts in Arunachal Pradesh that have a considerable presence of Naga militants, said the four-hour clash prompted all residents of Sachin village to flee their homes.

The NSCN (I-M) was at it again this morning, making an abortive attempt to blow up a wireless centre at Mahdevpur Tilla in the North

Cachar Hills of Assam.

Policemen deployed at the centre forced the rebels to retreat after a half-an-hour-long gunbattle, sources in Silchar said.

Three more militants of the same outfit were arrested while trying to sneak into Tripura from the Chittagong Hills Tracts of Bangladesh.

Official sources in Imphal said the 11 Naga rebels killed

in Manipur were headed for Thoubal in a mini truck when they came across an IRB patrol team on National Highway 39. When the security personnel tried to stop the vehicle, the militants opened fire, leading to a firefight that continued for 30 minutes.

Eleven militants were killed on the spot, while one escaped. The driver of the truck, identified as H.L.

Minthang, was taken into custody. An official said the militants had forced Minthang to take them to Thoubal in his mini truck. The driver suffered an injury when one of the rebels hit him on the face with a rifle-butt because he had slowed down the vehicle on seeing the IRB team.

The slain militants, all dressed in fatigues, were carrying as many as 15 sophisticated rifles. These include four AK-47 rifles, four snipers, three self-loading rifles, two .303 rifles, a US-made carbine and a sten carbine. Two hand grenades, a radio set, several rounds of ammunition and a sheaf of documents were recovered from the truck.

One of the slain militants has been identified as Kani Tangkhul, a "second lieutenant" in the NSCN (I-M) hierarchy. He hailed from Ukhrul district. Manipur director-general of police A.A. Siddiqui said the police department would recommend gallantry awards for the security personnel involved in the encounter. The IRB is a unit of the Manipur Rifles. "The outcome of the encounter is proof of our boys' calibre. They showed exemplary courage," Siddiqui said.

The commandant of the Second Battalion of the IRB, Lokendra Singh, said the NSCN (I-M) could strike back soon.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 MAR 2002

Building bricks for Bodoland

1673 51-5
By Dipankar Roy

Few believe the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council under the Constitution's Sixth Schedule would end the 15-year struggle for preservation of Bodo identity, language and culture. The movement's leaders are firm on their statehood demand.

They want to build extensive infrastructure in the proposed BTC area and insist on a compact region. The campaign for a proper state after a few years of the BTC would follow naturally. There is the example of Meghalaya, which gained statehood in 1972 after being part of the hill districts of Assam. But this is bound to be opposed by the Assamese whose state has shrunk to one-third its size in 30 years.

The demand for an autonomous state is still alive in the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam where the Sixth Schedule, a unique device developed for the North East, is in force. It also applies to Meghalaya, Mizoram and one district of Tripura - and gives special privileges to Scheduled Tribes. For the first time it would apply to the plains area of the North East and could spark demands for similar privileges from other tribal groups. The BTC became inevitable from the day the Bodoland

Autonomous Council came into being in 1993, when the Bodo Accord was signed by the state government and the All Bodo Students Union. In three years, the ABSU began criticising the BAC as an experiment that had failed to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodos and revived its pre-accord stir for a separate state.

The Centre tried to negotiate with the separatist Bodo Liberation Tigers. Unlike the ABSU and its allied bodies, which are generally democratic, the BLT sought to achieve its goal through remote-controlled, improvised explosive devices, with deadly effect on life and property, especially on the Northeast Frontier Railway.

The BLT started the talks by demanding a "Bodoland autonomous territory" but gave up after the Centre asked "Autonomous of what?" and put its foot down. The former underground outfit then mooted the BTC proposal so that constitutional safeguards would be available for the Bodos unlike in the existing BAC structure. Now that the Centre has got the state government's "no objection" to the BTC proposal, it must speed up the

9-NB Sr.
process, keeping in mind that the BLT cadres may break loose sometime.

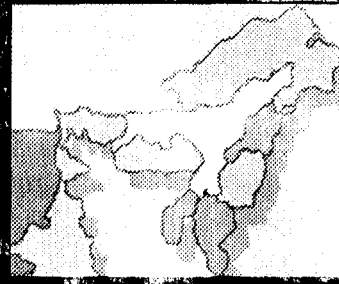
Frustration could even push its cadres into the arms of the rival National Democratic Front of Bodoland, waging an armed struggle for a sovereign Bodoland, which would grab any opportunity to spite the BLT. But closing the deal is easier said than done. The demarcation work for the BTC boundary is not yet completed with the BLT demanding more villages than notified in 1999 for the BAC. The state government is finding it "difficult" to accept these demands. The BLT would have to be more flexible. There is also the question of amending the Sixth Schedule to benefit the Bodos and protect non-Bodos, who constitute at least 60 per cent of the population in the BTC area, against infringement of their rights.

Non-tribals and non-Bodos have protested against the proposal to extend the Sixth Schedule to the mooted council. But under the provisions of the Schedule, the Governor's writ would run and the state government would still be mandated to protect their interests.

(The author is The Statesman's Guwahati-based Special Representative.)

15 MAR 2002

THE STATESMAN



SANJOY HAZARIKA

5-5 9. 11. 82 1613 Jamir and the peace process

The other evening at Shillong's Pinewood Hotel, Nagaland Chief Minister SC Jamir, dapper as always, sat down before dinner to talk about the prospects of peace in his long-troubled state. Mr Jamir is one of the most experienced political leaders of India, having begun his career as Parliamentary Secretary to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952.

He is a survivor, in every sense of the word, having outmanoeuvred his political opponents time and again; he has also escaped death by a whisker on at least two occasions. Now over 70 years old, he is the proverbial lion in winter, having governed Nagaland like a tightly run fiefdom for decades. At Shillong, in a conversation with this writer, Mr Jamir made a historic move by offering to withdraw the arrest warrants against his chief political foes, thus asserting his right to have a role in any future arrangement involving the Naga people. Drawing on his long experience, Mr Jamir has neatly used the provisions of the Indian Constitution to draw attention to his centrality in this process, no matter how much others want to ignore him.

He represents, unambiguously, the Indian State, and no government in Delhi can ignore that either. He also represents an influential constituency of people associated with the benefits of power for a long time. The point here is simple: under the Constitution, law and order is a state subject. Mr Jamir's government is the only authority which can withdraw the cases against Isak Chishi Swu and Thiungelang Muivah, leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Nagalim), who are named in the attempted assassination on the chief minister in November 1999.

The Centre can lean on him or cajole him but the final decision, which will enable or bar Mr Swu and Mr Muivah from returning to Nagaland, rests with him. In effect, Mr Jamir is telling both New Delhi and the Naga militant leadership, which has been talking with the Central government for over six years, that without his nod, the peace process could remain stalemated.

This is to say the least, an interesting development, because his opponents have consistently sought to assert that Mr Jamir was irrelevant to the present situation and the process of negotiating a long-term accord. Mr Jamir also has adroitly associated himself with the mood for reconciliation among the Naga tribes, divided by decades of suspicion, fierce loyalties, bloodshed and factionalism by saying that he was prepared to forgive and forget those opposed to him for whatever wrongs they had done.

Both in Shillong and more recently in Nagaland, where he reasserted this approach, Mr Jamir did not, in my view, go far enough. He left unanswered the criticism that during his several terms in office he had provoked a large number of Nagas, opposed to him, who blame the present regime for spiralling corruption and lawlessness.

This is important if the process of internal healing to which the Naga Hoho – representative group of all Naga tribes in Nagaland and other states of the North East – has committed itself is to succeed. Reconciliation cannot leave out one of the principal players in the Naga imbroglio and cannot be an end in itself. It has to reach out to create better understanding with Naga neighbours and extend the opportunities for peace and dialogue across the North East.

These opportunities have improved with the statement by the Naga church and NGO groups which seek a more sensitive approach by Nagas to the concerns and "apprehensions" of the neighbours. Indeed, this can now become the basis for inter-state and Naga-neighbour discussions on the future. Mr Jamir's government is known to be close to the "other" faction of the Naga insurgent movement, that led by SS Khaplang, though both sides publicly deny such proximity. It is a charge that is frequently made by his opponents, and is widely believed in Nagaland and other parts of the North East, as well as within Delhi's corridors of power.

Mr Jamir has been saying that all Naga groups must unite for talks with the Government of India, that the I-M faction does not have the mandate of all the Nagas and that the involvement of the Khaplang faction, which has the support of the largest Naga tribe, the Konyaks, and the old Naga National Council, is critical to the peace process.

A basic question arises from these complicated manoeuvres: how do they benefit the common Naga? More than 54 years after India became independent, the condition of schools and education, of power, drinking water, roads, health facilities and other aspects of infrastructure in Nagaland is abysmal. The forests are disappearing, despite the Supreme Court ban on felling for commercial purposes. Vast monies have been siphoned off for the benefit of local elites.

This is so because many Nagas have not accepted the state as their own, though it is nearly 40 years old. Many are not involved in its governance, except in a limited manner at the village and community levels. But now the ground realities of underdevelopment are hitting home: whatever the constitutional status of Nagaland tomorrow, it will still need good schools, roads, water and hospitals.

More and more Nagas recognise this as something they need to be realistic about, no matter how much they dream of sovereignty. The need to be "realistic, not utopian" is an often-heard view these days.

The sensitive issue of borders, neighbours and territoriality is too complex to be briefly addressed here. But on what basis can it be asserted, as some groups do, that the Nagas who live in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh support the demand for a Naga homeland, comprising all these places and Nagaland?

One has not come across a democratic, demographic exercise conducted by any credible group, which validates this claim. We must discriminate between reality and rhetoric. This is as true for Nagaland as it is for its neighbours.

16 MAR 2002

THE STATESMAN

A NEW GOVERNMENT IN MANIPUR

AFTER A LONG spell of Central rule, there is now an elected Government in place in Manipur. It may be true that the polls in the State did not lead to any one of the parties managing a majority in the State Assembly. But then, the humiliating defeat suffered by several of those who were part of the previous Government was clearly a verdict by the people against their backroom manipulations. The leaders of the BJP-Samata combine refused to put on hold their own interests even while the State was literally on fire — in the wake of the violent reactions there against the extension of the ceasefire agreement with the NSCN(I-M) — and this led to the fall of the Radhabinod Kojiam (of the Samata Party) Government in June 2001. Even then, there were attempts by the BJP to form its own Government (with R. K. Dorendra Singh as Chief Minister) after it managed en masse defection from the Samata Party in the Assembly. This was given up only after the BJP high command was forced by the Samata Party leadership in Delhi to prevail upon the party's Manipur unit against such plans. The alliance between the BJP and the Samata Party collapsed in Manipur and this led to the defeat of Mr. Kojiam himself in this election.

It may be true that the Congress(I)-led coalition Government in the State — the Secular Progressive Front — headed by Okram Ibobi is not a cohesive platform. Instead, this is a post-poll arrangement and in this sense is liable to suffer from problems not very different from the previous dispensations. The fact that the combine consists of MLAs drawn from parties that had contested elections against each other is sufficient for rifts in the course of time. Add to this the fact that Mr. Ibobi will have to do business with at least three MLAs belonging to the NCP — a party that was born out of a revolt against the Congress (I). Similarly, Mr. Ibobi cannot wish away the pos-

sibilities of trouble from the seven-member Manipur State Congress Party that is now part of the coalition. But then the formation of such a front itself was in tune with the mandate in the context of the defeat suffered by a cross-section of those who were part of the Kojiam Ministry. The task before Mr. Ibobi is indeed a difficult one in this context. Apart from this, the Chief Minister will have to manage the intra-party affairs. The presence of Rishang Keishing, a former Chief Minister, on the scene is a factor that Mr. Ibobi will have to reckon with. Mr. Keishing had to opt out of the race for the Chief Minister's post only because he lost the elections this time.

While all these factors could turn out to be irritants for Mr. Ibobi in running the affairs of the State, there is no way the leaders in the Front can allow themselves to be guided by such considerations. The tensions in the State resulting from some of the ill-considered moves by the Union Government in its dealings with the NSCN(I-M) call for a political leadership that could rise above mere concerns of self-preservation. Mr. Ibobi will have to ensure security to the Naga people in Imphal (whose lives and property came under threat during the violence that rocked the State in June 2001) and also in the four districts — Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Chandel and Senapati — where the Naga people are in a majority. Meanwhile, those involved with the Naga peace process and negotiating with the NSCN(I-M) leaders will help in the task of restoring peace and order in Manipur by involving (to the extent possible) representatives of the Manipur Government in the exercise and more importantly by taking them into confidence before entering into any agreement. A repeat of the April-May ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (I-M) and by implication any message that suggests conceding the idea of a "greater" Nagaland could lead Manipur into chaos.

THE HINDU

15 MAR 2002

NSCN hails PM invite, slams Jamir

HT Correspondent & PTI
Dimapur, March 13

THE NSCN(I-M) has accepted Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's invitation to its senior leaders to visit the country to speed up the resolution of the age-old Naga political problem. But the outfit turned down the recent offer of smooth passage by Chief Minister SC Jamir.

"The invitation we have received from the Prime Minister of India to speed up the search for the way to an honourable solution to the Indo-Naga issue is, we

think, a good gesture," the NSCN(I-M)'s publicity wing said in a statement last night. The outfit insisted on "sincerity on the part of the Centre to remove all obstacles in the way for the success of the ongoing peace talks".

Union Home Minister LK Advani had appealed to the NSCN(I-M) top brass to visit India and hold political dialogue at a place of their choice to expedite the on-going talks process and assured them of free passage.

NSCN(-M) bosses Isak and Muivah visited Nagaland in 1999 and held a series of talks with

NGOs and the church on the peace process. Present and former Prime Ministers have held talks with them abroad.

Several rounds of discussions were held between the Centre's negotiators and NSCN(I-M) leadership in Europe and Bangkok in the past four years, but talks on "substantive issues" were yet to start, the statement said. "We are resolved for a peaceful solution if the other side is sincere and they stop the habit of backtracking," the statement said.

The outfit rejected Jamir's announcement that the Naga-

land Government was ready to revoke arrest warrants against the NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chishi Swu and general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to facilitate their visit to Nagaland. The arrest warrants were issued after the 1999 Pipema ambush, which was allegedly masterminded by the duo.

The NSCN (I-M), however, dismissed the charges. Jamir had recently announced at Pughoboto that he would withdraw the charges against the two leaders in the larger interest of the people of Nagaland who are

yearning for peace and harmony. "He (Jamir) always resorts to hypocrisy and lay claims to all the good names and achievements of the people, nay, and he has even unscrupulously uttered dispensation of grace and forgiveness," the NSCN(I-M) statement said. It added that the organisation is committed to the cause of the Naga sovereignty and that it would not beg for mercy nor help from adversaries.

The NSCN (I-M) urged the Naga people to stand guard against being deceived by "enemy of the people".

9-N-587- HT-9 M/3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
13 MAR 2000

Two wrongs.....!

Meitei militants and social disservice

That a thin line divides genius from madness is apparent in Manipur's Meitei rebels turning their attention to social service with a difference. The People's Liberation Army is fighting the drug menace which has ruined many a young life and this week a suspected militant outfit, the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup, picked up five students found copying at examination centres and two invigilators who allegedly helped them and shot them in the feet. While such harsh action is uncalled for — it may cause a serious law and order problem — Manipur does need to check rampant malpractices which make a mockery of the examination system. Invigilators are said to have been threatened by students to look the other way.

What with the educational system already in the doldrums, the militants will do well to leave schools and colleges alone. Last year their demand for "donation" amounting to lakhs of rupees forced many missionary schools to close and vitiated the academic atmosphere for at least two months. Some years ago armed militants barged into a school run by nuns and destroyed property worth lakhs of rupees. In the absence of any effective government machinery to stop "extortion", all private educational institutions, traders, government employees and even policemen and politicians pay to ensure personal safety. This in itself constitutes a terrible social menace. Perhaps the remedy lies along the lines of what womenfolk did last year when they defied the KYKL's diktat banning the wearing of saris, salwar-kameezs and trousers. Mercifully, no one has been harmed, the underlying message is that too much of anything is bad.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAR 2002

PORTENTS IN TRIPURA

But Marxists Won't Fall By The Wayside

By JB LAMA

9
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There is no mistaking the anger in Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar's remark that "the CPI-M alone is fighting insurgency politically". Obviously sore with the Centre reneging on its promise to return two army units pulled out during the Kargil conflict despite repeated reminders, he is also scornful of the state Congress aligning with tribal parties linked with insurgents in the run-up to next year's assembly elections. In the four years since assuming office, he claims to have lost 448 of his partymen.

Sarkar blames his woes on New Delhi and never seems to tire of driving home the point that "the Centre is not helping to fight insurgency". But this catch phrase also hides the Left Front's shortcomings. The Marxists have, since the mid-'90s, complained of lack of security personnel. The Narasimha Rao government refused to listen, but two weeks after a United Front government under HD Deve Gowda was installed in June 1996, additional paramilitary forces were rushed to forestall the 10-day bandh called by the All Tripura Tigers' Force aimed at "deporting" foreigners who had entered the state after its merger with the Indian Union in October 1949.

Killing field

The UF also agreed to ban the National Liberation Front of Tripura and the ATTF. In February 1997, when the administration lost control over law and order, it accepted the state's recommendation for the promulgation of the Disturbed Areas Act. However, then tribal chief minister Dasarath Deb played politics and undermined its effectiveness by initially declaring only four of the 44 police stations "disturbed", apparently under pressure from within the party which feared the army's induction might force tribal youths to go underground and antagonize voters in traditional base. The invocation of the National Security Act in January 2000 was a desperate move that did not help the situation.

Nor was the government keen on allowing the Unified Command a free hand, thus reducing anti-insurgency operations to a mockery. Even if the state government wants to enforce the Act more vigorously (27 police stations are now covered) it does not have the where-

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

withal to do so. Moreover, this draconian law was meant as a temporary measure but is losing its efficacy having become a permanent fixture, as in Manipur.

The uncalled for sympathy displayed in the handling of rebels by the Left Front, particularly during the Dasarath Deb's regime, has reduced Tripura to a veritable killing field over the past decade. Official statistics show that in three years under Manik Sarkar 2,909

exert diplomatic pressure on Dhaka to help clear these.

The Centre must also take note of the suggestion by the North-east chief ministers' forum that insurgency be treated as a national problem. Militancy is not the bane of any one party alone and needs to be tackled as a whole. Surprisingly, Tripura's Opposition parties play a negative role and the Centre, too, does not seem to be interested in starting



people were murdered, 2,514 killed, 2,989 committed "suicide" and 15,794 houses were torched. Between March 1993, — a month before the Left Front wrested power from the Congress — and December 1997, there were 4,239 cases of "suicide" followed by another 1,079 reported between April and July 1998. In the absence of any official clarification, it must be presumed that this abnormally high "suicide" rate included victims of militant executions.

Marxist decline

One may not equate the Tripura situation with that of Kashmir but there can be no two opinions that it is as volatile, what with the outlawed NLFT operating from across the border with help from foreign agents. With tribals pitted against non-tribals, the polarisation between them complete, an ethnic war is looming large. Tripura has given the Centre a list of rebel training camps in Bangladesh and there is some justification in its request that Delhi

talks with NLFT leaders. Until this comes about, nothing short of joint Centre-State action can stem the horrific goings-on and check the proxy war.

The Marxists' strength lies in the vote of tribal Tripuris who have now become a minority in their homeland. The Left Front's concern about the party's electoral prospects in the 2003 assembly elections following the realignment of tribal political parties is obvious and it is apprehensive that disturbed conditions in the hills may affect its chances.

In the 1999 panchayat poll, the Front's percentage of total seats dropped to 80.72 from 94 in 1994. On the other hand, the Congress-Tripura Upajati Juba Samity-Tripura National Volunteers combine did well, despite losing some of their strongholds. Earlier in 1994 the Left Front secured an unprecedented mandate in the rural poll, winning as many as 35 per cent of seats uncontested.

Those happy days are over. In the 2000 Tribal Area Autonomous District Council elections, the Front rocked on its

heels. Results indicated a major erosion of Marxist influence. It managed to win only 10 of the 28 elective seats in the 30-member house, compared to 27 in 1995. That it blamed pre-poll violence for this debacle was not reflected in reports, which said that while the rebels did threaten other contesting parties, they did not interfere with campaigns by Left Front constituents.

The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, comprising the Tripura Hills People's Party, Tripura Tribal National Conference, Tripura Students' Federation and the Tripura Upajati Karmachari Samity, is now in command of the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council. Bijoy Hrangkhawl's Tripura National Volunteers, which surrendered to the Congress government in 1988, has merged with it. Hrangkhawl was the brain behind the formation of the IPFT whose basic aim was to convert the TTAADC into a separate state and introduce the Inner Line permit system.

Tribal parties

What has upset Manik Sarkar most is the Congress forging an alliance with the newly formed Indigenous National Party of Tripura, of which the IPFT, TNV and the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity are constituents. The Left Front retained the West Tripura Lok Sabha seat (comprising 30 assembly segments) in last month's by-election by a margin of 150,000 votes, wresting as many as nine segments it had lost in the 1999 poll. But Congress leaders claim they also secured more than 166,000 votes over the 1999 result.

Congress is trying to cash in on this performance. It has no base in the tribal belt. Both Bengali Hindu and Muslim immigrants vote for it. But to bounce back to power it must ride piggyback on tribal organizations. Luckily for the Left Front, the factional fights within the Congress have not ended. Tripura is perhaps the only state where the Congress has not been able to conduct organizational elections properly.

With the Trinamul Congress candidate supported by the BJP forfeiting his deposit in last month's parliamentary by-elections (it got 4.88 per cent of the vote compared to 26.41 per cent in 1999) and the party relegated to third position, the Congress will be the main rival in the next assembly elections. But unless it stems the rot inside, it is unlikely to shake the ruling Marxists.

A commoners' tale

THE STATESMAN

Come together

9.11.87 How Bodoland can win peace 5.1.87

The Bodo region is on the boil again, this time with a new ingredient: the involvement of non-tribals. Saturday's 36-hour road blockade by the Sanmilita Janajogisthiya Sangram Samity, an 18-party non-Bodo organisation, in protest against the government's decision to create a Bodo Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule has exacerbated tensions. That the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo People's Action Committee threatened to resume their agitation for a separate state if Dispur dilly-dallied is but natural. Before aligning with the AGP prior to last May's assembly elections, their slogan was "No Bodoland, no rest". They then decided not to raise the issue and wait for the outcome of the on-going talks between the Centre and the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers.

Non-Bodos constitute 60 per cent of the population in the proposed BTC area and their fears are justified. Tarun Gogoi's assurance to protect their fundamental rights is some solace, but there are practical difficulties. Any solution must result from a review of the examples of Meghalaya and Mizoram, where xenophobia runs deep. It is unfortunate that the situation has become so murky when a solution to the Bodo problem is in sight. The future involves both Bodos and non-Bodos and the sooner all concerned realise this, the better.

THE STATESMAN

Bodos threaten counter-stir

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 9. — The All Bodo Students' Union and Bodo People's Action Committee today said they would launch a counter-movement against non-Bodo groups if the latter did not stop their anti-Bodo activities.

"The consequences of such a movement could be serious and the Bodo organisations should not be held responsible for that," said Mr Rabiram Narzary, Absu president, while asking the Sanmilita Janagoshthiya Sangram Samiti to withdraw its 36-hour rail and road blockade call. The blockade began at 6 p.m. today.

The SJSS has given the blockade call in protest against the Assam government's nod to the Centre to go ahead and implement the proposal for a Bodoland Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The SJSS, a forum of 18 non-Bodo organisations, fears that creation of the BTC would result in the in-

TALKS WITH ULFA

GUWAHATI, March 9. — A decision regarding the modalities of talks with the Ulfa can only be taken if the banned outfit accepts the "safe passage package" offered by the state.

Replying to a question by the Independent MLA, Mr Pabindra Deka, regarding talks with Ulfa in the state Assembly today, the chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, said the state government has offered safe passage to the militants but it has no information whether the outfit has accepted or rejected it. "Only when the outfit accepts this offer further modalities for negotiations can be worked out", he said. Mr Gogoi further said that his government had from time to time invited the Ulfa for a dialogue in order to settle the issue politically. — PTI

fringement of rights of the non-Bodos living in the proposed BTC area.

Talking to reporters here

this morning, Mr Narzary said the SJSS had no legitimacy to speak about the BTC because its leaders were not from the BTC area.

"They are outsiders and the state government is making a mistake by talking to them," he said.

In contrast to the stand taken by the SJSS, some non-Bodo organisations who operate in the BTC area though, have extended their support to formation of a council under the Sixth Schedule.

The cabinet sub-committee on formation of the BTC had assured the SJSS that the government would ask the Centre to hold talks with it.

"If the government has to discuss with non-Bodos then it should talk to the groups from the BTC area," the Absu leader said.

Directing his ire at the state government for delaying formation of the BTC, Mr Narzary said that such tactics would force the Bodos to revert to their original demand of a separate state for themselves.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2002

Bodos vow to foil stir over BTC

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, March 8. - A confrontation between Bodos and non-Bodos over the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council has become a distinct possibility with the Sanmilita Janagoshthiya Sangram Samity calling a 36-hour road and rail blockade from 6 p.m. tomorrow and the All Bodo Students' Union-led Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement determined to foil the agitation.

The SJSS has called the blockade, likely to affect the lower Assam areas, in protest against the Assam government's go-ahead to the Centre to create the BTC under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in place of the existing Bodoland Autonomous Council.

The SJSS, which is a forum of 18 non-Bodo organisations, had planned the agitation last month but suspended it at the last moment after the government offered to hold talks with it. In the talks on 1 March, the government made it clear to the SJSS that there would be no going back on the plan to form the BTC. Spurned, the SJSS then re-

vived its agitation programme.

The chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, told the state Assembly today that his government's commitment to creation of the BTC was total but said that he would like to see a consensus develop between the Bodos and the non-Bodos on the issue.

The Absu president, Mr Rabiram Narzary, said the blockade call would be opposed. He warned that the SJSS shouldn't construe the Absu's silence on the movement against BTC as "weakness."

Yesterday, a Bodo legislator, Mr Biswajit Daimary, told the Assembly that opposition to formation of the BTC was alienating the Bodos further. He said the opposition was uncalled for since creation of the council would not lead to infringement of the rights of the non-Bodos living in the proposed BTC area.

The SJSS, however, strongly feels that non-Bodos would suffer if the BTC were to be created under the Sixth Schedule. Even the state government's declaration that the BTC would be formed after modifying the Schedule to safeguard the rights of the non-Bodos has not helped to allay the fears of the SJSS.

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR. 2002

Naga, heal thyself

By Niketu Iralu

51-5
9/3
At first light on 20 December 2001, an elderly man walked with a child into the Kohima playground. They came to the rostrum built for the launching of the Naga reconciliation process. The man knelt down. That he prayed and wept was clear. He wiped his tears and, after a while, got up and walked out of the stadium with the child.

The watchmen saw it all and experienced the unofficial but real inauguration of the reconciliation process which began officially later in the morning.

Some children came to the platform at the public meeting and their presence was enough to move many to tears as Wati Aier, a prominent Naga theologian, lifted one of them in his arms and explained that their fathers had been killed by fellow Nagas. Uncounted Nagas have died at the hands of Indian security forces in the past decades, as Nagas defended their historic position as a people.

Alas, an increasing number of Nagas have also been killed by their compatriots in the tragic contest for political control.

A call for a moment of listening and reflection "for God to reveal" where reconciliation should start turned into a period of pin-drop silence that hushed Kohima. People walked up to a bonfire in front of the rostrum and tossed pieces of paper where they had written decisions perhaps to reject revenge, to forgive, or ask for forgiveness, or other

similar personal intentions. Orphans and state Cabinet ministers, citizens of all ages and walks of life participated in a public, symbolic demonstration of moral ownership of the reconciliation process.

All leaders of Naga Hoho (the representative body of most Naga tribes), the churches, the Hoho's Coordination Committee, NGOs and representatives of 35 tribes signed a declaration stating reasons and objectives of the reconciliation process. The tribe presidents and representatives pledged to "go beyond seeing only where others have hurt us and be ready to see where we too may have provoked others to hurt us so that forgiving and being forgiven may become possible."

These beginnings are small when measured against our short but furious history of wounds, accumulated hates, mindless greed, fears and strong inter-tribe/faction rivalries and prejudices that have paralysed our society.

We must not overestimate what the reconciliation launching ceremony briefly showed. But it would be a costly error if we should underestimate these seemingly fragile openings and fail to build on them. After all, wounds and revenge for hurts make up so much of what is called politics.

Nagas decided to open a common highway to the future by launching the reconciliation pro-

cess just before Christmas. The theme was "To Heal and Rebuild the Naga Family with the Prince of Peace". The response at the launching perhaps marked our arrival at the beginning of the highway.

However, the price to be paid to walk the highway together is high. Not surprisingly, we are all

open forum

watching who will step out and start the journey! But only the most blind or selfish will deny it is our only hope.

The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M), which is negotiating with the Indian government, the Congress in Nagaland, the Opposition Naga Peoples Council, the Nationalist Congress Party and the United Forum of Naga Political Parties in Manipur declared their support to the reconciliation process. Representatives of the NSCN (Khaplang group) and the Naga National Council were present to first assess the united initiative by Naga civil society.

Within days of the launching ceremony, 44 Nagas from all Naga areas in the North East went to Bangkok for a six-day consultation invited by the NSCN (I-M).

The Bangkok Statement that

followed reaffirmed the common political stand which the Nagas have taken, starting with their position stated to the Simon Commission in 1929 till today, clarifying "the uniqueness of their struggle, not as one of secession or of separation from a union they had agreed to be a part of" because of the "historical facts" of Naga declaration of independence before the British handed power to India on 15 August 1947.

There too are the plebiscite of 1951, and the Naga rejection of the Constitution of India, demonstrated through the boycotts of the first two Indian general elections in 1952 and 1957.

The statement supported the present ceasefire and the talks between Delhi and the NSCN (I-M), reiterating the 20 December reconciliation process "so that, without being undermined by internal contradictions, a negotiated settlement of the Indo-Naga conflict may be achieved that will be honourable and acceptable to both sides."

The NSCN (I-M) leadership pledged, "No agreement would be entered into without the fullest understanding of the Naga people." Positive responses are needed from the other Naga groups, "underground" and "overground" if the promising start made thus far is to progress towards a solution.

There are signs that Nagas are beginning to make space for one

another in the search for a workable solution. Chief Minister SC Jamir's declared readiness to withdraw the pending cases by the state against the I-M leadership has been widely welcomed.

The Khaplang and NNC groups have supported the reconciliation process. They are now evolving their responses to the steps implied by it. The Naga Hoho and the public bodies which have been mandated to take this process forward, starting from the villages, fully understand the need felt by the various groups for circumspection before coming out to the common highway.

The Bangkok Statement included a significant observation about "the need for Nagas to be accommodative in our thinking to our neighbours, not ignoring their legitimate interests and apprehensions." It expresses a thought that Nagas have aired with equal apprehension on their part.

They are conscious of their unpreparedness for what it implies for them, yet knowing it is an idea they have to rise up to. Morris West said: "We are more readily betrayed by our certainties than by our doubts and curiosities."

This probably refers to some of the ideas that are beginning to find expression. We are curious. Doubts assail us. But the future is definitely tantalising.

(The author is convenor of the Naga Hoho's Coordination Committee to develop reconciliation among the Nagas)

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR 2002

BODOLAND IMBROGLIO-II

Government Must Examine Overall Consequences

By SANJEEV KUMAR

The Bodoland accord led to the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) covering 23,000 sq km, consisting of 2570 villages and seven districts of lower Assam. These districts are Kokrajhar, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bonai-gaon, Darrang, Mangaldai and Sonitpur. The Bodo representatives wanted to include 515 more villages within the BAC areas, although that was not accepted. The council was given financial powers for local development but did not have law and order, security and revenue matters. State control over these subjects remained more or less intact.

Flawed accord

The then state government under the Congress party was not in agreement with central government decision relating to this accord. According to them, the allocated districts to Bodoland council had about 50 per cent non-Bodo population consisting of Santhal, Hindu, Muslim and other tribals. The state government feared that under BAC areas, the non-Bodo population may be treated as second class citizens and this may result in ethnic conflicts. There were many demerits in the accord: (a) the BAC boundaries were never demarcated, thus creating more confusion; (b) many non-Bodo tribes especially Santhal dominated areas were placed within the BAC; and (c) 75 per cent of seats were reserved for Bodo tribals in BAC. Flawed or otherwise, many clauses related to the Bodoland accord never came into operation. The clauses relating to election, financial powers and demarcation of boundaries have still not been implemented.

Unfortunately, the state government's apprehension turned out to be true when ethnic conflicts between Santhals and Bodos in the BAC areas took the form of riots in 1996, in which more than 200 people were killed. These ethnic clashes became more frequent and government machinery and property were targeted. These ethnic clashes compelled the non-Bodos tribes, especially Santhals, to form their own militant organisation in November 1996. Important among these are the Birsa Commando Force and Adivasi Corba Militant Forces. These were formed "to resist the atrocities committed upon them by Bodos". But the ethnic

conflicts continue. The government of India, in order to contain the problem, has been adopting methods ranging from negotiations to economic assistance to ceasefire agreements.

Many groups related to movement were not satisfied with this interim body and wanted more functional autonomy with proper demarcation of BAC areas. The Government of India took the initiative and formed a joint working

non-Bodo organisations called "Sanmilita Jana-Gosthiya Sangram Samiti". Bodoland representatives, especially the extremist organisations which are under the ceasefire agreement with the government of India, had warned the central and state government not to delay the creation of the proposed BTC under the sixth schedule of the Constitution. They also warned the state government of bloodshed during the



group in 1997 to strengthen the BAC. The JWG was supposed to study the Bodo problem and suggest the extent of autonomy, i.e., administrative and financial, to be given to BAC for development of the areas. Many groups did not join the meeting called by the JWG.

Severe implications

The government of India's recent proposal to create a Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) under the sixth schedule of the Constitution is a matter of serious concern especially in the light of the statement made by the Assam chief minister on 22 January after the massacre. The implications for the non-Bodo tribes would be severe. The move has already been assailed by a body of 18

panchayat elections held in December last year.

At present the sixth schedule of the Constitution operates in north-east. Its main aim is to provide substantial autonomy to the hill people. This schedule may also be regarded as an institutional arrangement to provide protection against state interference especially in matters concerning their customs and customary rights.

The sixth schedule provides for an autonomous district, an autonomous region and a corresponding autonomous council. These tribal areas are to be administered as autonomous districts. These autonomous districts are not outside the executive authority of the state concerned but a provision is made

for the creation of district councils and regional councils for the exercise of certain legislative and judicial functions. These councils are primarily representative bodies and they have the power of law-making in certain fields such as management of forests other than the reserved forests, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs. The Governor may also confer upon these councils the power to try certain suits or offences.

Invite non-Bodos as well

These councils also have the power to assess and collect land revenue and to impose certain specified taxes. They enjoy regulatory power too such as control of money lending and trade by non-tribals and establishment of village and town committees. The executive power of these council include matters such as establishing and managing primary schools, dispensaries, markets, fisheries, road transport, road construction and so on. The laws made by the councils have no effect unless approved by the Governor.

There is no denying the fact that the objectives enshrined under the sixth schedule of Constitution is to ensure considerable extent of autonomy and self-management to the hill people of the region. It also contains within its ambit the potential of bringing peace and prosperity to the region provided it is implemented or executed in the larger interest of the people without political and social malice and ethnic bias. But in this specific case, the functioning of the BAC is complicated on the one hand. On the other hand, the proposed BTC under the sixth schedule of the Constitution would create more ethnic problems. In the proposed BTC, the Bodos do not have even a simple majority, and may enjoy considerable autonomy and power at the cost of equally populated non-Bodo tribes.

The government must examine the overall social, political, cultural and economic consequences of proposed BTC for the non-Bodo tribes. In fact, the government must take their consent and ensure the participation of the non-Bodo community in the dialogue. This would enhance the prospect of peace.

(Concluded)

THE STATE

8 MAR 2002

BODOLAND IMBROGLIO-I

Years Of Neglect Lead To Insurgency

By SANJEEV KUMAR

SR-A 7/2

The Bodoland question cannot be understood without looking into the interaction of the Bodo and non-Bodo peoples. It lends several shades to the ethnic clashes and the culture of violence. Assam, known as nature's gift, is a meeting place of many tribes and races. Once known as the abode of all the seven states of Northeast with its multi-ethnic and distinct cultural identities, it is today embroiled in ethnic conflicts with some groups demanding a separate statehood based on their cultural and linguistic identity. Earlier known for representing unity in diversity, the region has now become the home of insurgency led by different groups with grievances of their own. The issue is also sensitive because the region borders Myanmar, Tibet, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Origins of statehood demand

The demand for a separate state of Bodoland can be traced to the 1930s when a Bodo delegation met the Simon Commission and other British parliamentary and constitutional groups to present their demand for a separate entity (different from the Assamese mainstream). In fact, at the time of the debates leading to the formation of the Constitution, there was a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly on the Northeast frontier (Assam) tribal and excluded areas, headed by Gopinath Bardoloi.

The committee got many proposals ranging from Naga demands for independence to quasi-independent states to cultural autonomy for individual districts. The committee submitted its report in July 1947, rejected the demands and placed more emphasis on the larger Assamese cultural identity. The committee members regarded the "plain tribal" (Bodo dominated areas) as part of overall Assamese cultural stream and were optimistic that with passage of time these groups would be assimilated into the dominant cultural identity. The Bodos protested and regarded this as an impediment to the preservation of their cultural identity.

Even the States Reorganisation Committee report of 1956 did not favour the formation of separate hill states outside the then existing Assam Constitutional Status. It observes "... formation of a hill state in this region is neither feasible nor

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in the interests of the tribal people themselves. The hill districts, therefore, should continue to form part of Assam and no major change should be made in their present constitutional status".

Even important political parties such as the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, the local Communist Party, the Tripura State Congress Committee and the Government of Assam, while submitting their proposal to the SRC had asked for

goodwill of the tribal people in the interest of national security and unity of country.

During the 1960s, the Bodo community openly supported hill tribes of Khasi, Jaintia, Garo and Miza (hills) in their fight against the imposition of Assamese as the state's official language. The year 1967 witnessed the formation of the All Bodo Students Union. By the 1970's the Bodo leadership came under the influ-



the status quo. This is despite the fact that some hill districts did press for the formation of hill states and reiterated their demand at the Tura (Garo Hills) Conference of tribal leaders held in October 1954.

Triggers to ethnic conflict

The SRC linked the hill problem with the previous British policy of "inner line regulation", which not only demarcated the "tribal zones" but also isolated them from external influence. After Independence there was growing awareness among the tribal people of their political rights as full and equal citizens of the Indian union, which they did not have under the British rule. Their demand for a hill state was due to several other factors such as lack of sympathy from the administration, inadequacy of financial resources, neglect of tribal areas by the government, imposition of Assamese language and culture and opening of tribal lands to settlers from the plains. But in spite of all this, the SRC gave much importance to establishing a stable administration in the north-east based on

ence of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam and demanded "Udayanchal" as a separate autonomous region within Assam. Over the years the nature of the demand changed from the status of Union territory to separate state and to their present demand for creation of a Bodo Territorial Council under the sixth schedule of the Constitution.

After the signing of Assam Accord of 1983, the agitation and movements for a separate Bodoland entered a new phase with an extremist outlook followed by frequent ethnic conflicts. This accord increased the clashes between the Bodos and non-Bodos, and many Bodo families were ousted from forest land areas. The then government led by Assam Gana Parishad did not pay much attention to the Bodo problem. Even the negotiations between the Assam government and the representatives of Bodoland for autonomy and financial assistance for Bodo-dominated areas failed miserably.

All this ultimately resulted in the formation of some militant groups within the Bodoland areas in 1988. Important among these groups were Bodo Security

Forces and National Democratic Front of Bodoland. Their main objective was to fight for the formation of a separate Bodoland state by any means, including violence. They targeted the government machinery, property and non-Bodo community in general. They established a link with other militant organisations like ULFA and NSCN within the state and outside the state. During the period from the 80s to the early 90s the movement overshadowed the agitation led by other militant outfits and organisations like AASU. At the same time, the movement acquired the form of ethnic conflicts.

Hidden and open grievances

Leaders of the Bodo movement talked in terms of representing the indigenous ethnic and linguistic groups of Assam. There were many hidden and open grievances which prompted the movement to adopt an extremist approach. Some important grievances were: (a) the continuously indifferent and negligent attitude of bureaucrats and politicians towards the Bodo dominated areas; (b) exploitation of the Bodo community by non-Bodo tribes at all levels within Assam; (c) imposition of Assamese language on them when they have a rich oral and literary tradition of their own; (d) non-acceptance of their demand for including Bodo language for primary and secondary school education; (e) Government development plans not reaching the targeted groups in the region; (f) overall economic backwardness; (g) lack of basic facilities such as roads, hospitals and educational institutions in Bodo dominated areas; (h) unsympathetic attitude of the party in power; and (i) the unfavourable Assam Accord of 1983.

As the movement grew stronger, there came into existence many other organisations of students and women who joined and supported these movements. Important among them were All Bodo students union, Bodo Peoples Action Committee, All Bodo Women Welfare Federation, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and Militant organisation like Bodo Liberation Tiger Forces. The movement attracted many young people. Later, it took the shape of ethnic conflicts between Bodos and non-Bodo tribes specially Santhal. In 1993, the government of India, realising the seriousness of the problem, had a tripartite agreement signed between representatives of the Bodoland, the government of Assam and the government of India. This came to be known as Bodoland accord of 1993.

(To be concluded)

100 years ago

THE STATESMAN

7 MAR 2002

Prolonged labour

Manipur back in the doldrums 7/3

Events in Gujarat and the sudden death of Lok Sabha Speaker Balayogi have understandably delayed the revocation of President's rule in Manipur, which had a mid-poll last month. The Secular Progressive Party comprising the Congress (20), CPI (5), Manipur State Congress Party (7) and Nationalist Congress Party (2) and headed by Okram Ibobi Singh staked a claim to form a government but ominous signs have surfaced. The Congress suffered a leadership crisis following the defeat of veteran congressman and former chief minister Rishang Keishing. Not many among the young legislators are said to be happy with the choice of Ibobi Singh, who was MPCC chief. There were obstacles, too, as some coalition partners wanted a reorganisation of districts and uniform land laws for the hills and valley. The MSCP, which severed ties with the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre, had differences over the leadership issue.

J. N. B. Ghosh
The BJP with four members — two less than in 2000 — and RK Dorendro (the only former chief minister to be re-elected as three others bit the dust) as its leader may still pose a danger to the new government. He is a master of the toppling game. So adept is he in the art of horse-trading that last year he increased the BJP's tally to six by merging the two-member breakaway Democratic Federal Party of Manipur. Then just before the Central takeover last May he claimed the support of 26 BJP members to form a government. The irony is that he masterminded the defection of 18 MSCP legislators, reducing the three-month old Samata party-led government headed by Radhabinod Koijam to a minority. The Opposition now has a total of 25 members, six less than the magic figure of 31. It will be no surprise if Manipur continues to wallow in instability.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 MA

Blackwill for including N-E terror outfits in blacklist

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, March 6. — The US ambassador to India, Mr Robert D Blackwill, today said terrorist outfits active in the North-east could be added to the list of terrorist groups prepared by his country.

Talking to reporters here this evening, he said India had laid more emphasis on terrorism in J&K which was the reason why the outfits operating there figured in the list.

"The list is a work-in-progress and we can add more names as and when we have enough credible evidence against more mili-

tant outfits," he said when asked why names of militant groups in the northeast did not find mention in the list.

The ambassador admitted that terrorism was an impediment in the development of the northeast. "That is the impression I have gathered during my seven-day visit to the region," Mr Blackwill said, adding the northeast had great potential for economic development but violence had stood in the way.

Insurgency was exacting a terrible toll on the region's economic activity, he said. "Capital does not feel safe where there is violence. If the situation changes investments will follow," he said.

The ambassador assured the reporters that he would make endeavours to get US investments to the region.

Mr Blackwill was caught off balance when asked to explain how he could accept the hospitality of a tea major that had earlier come under the scanner for allegedly funding the Ulfa at a time when his country was waging a global war on terrorism.

"I came here to learn. I did not feel I met people who were under indictment. They were moving around openly and freely," he clarified, referring to his interaction with officials of the tea company in particular and captains of the tea industry in general.

THE STATESMAN

7 MAR 2002

Same old story

SC-4 9-NB Sr. 4/3
Manipur's fractured verdict no surprise

Not unexpectedly, the eighth Manipur assembly poll verdict gives no single party the mandate. Public anger against politicians who play games and neglect the state's vital interests was amply reflected in the humiliation of former chief ministers W Nipamacha Singh — who formed the new Manipur National Conference after being ousted as president of the Manipur State Congress Party — and Radhabinod Koijam of the Samata Party. The United Naga Council ensured the defeat of three-time Congress chief minister Rishang Keishing for his refusal to sign a pledge supporting the "Greater Nagaland" concept. He had set a record of sorts by nursing the Phungyar constituency since 1972. What must have weighed in favour of the Congress improving its tally over that of the 2000 election was its firm stand on preserving Manipur's territorial integrity. Few expected the Federal Party of Manipur to double its figure of six in 2000. But it suffered the biggest setback when its leader and former deputy chief minister L Chandramani Singh and his assistant Gangumei Kamei lost.

The CPI sprang a surprise by winning five seats. Its success, like that of the newly floated Democratic People's Party which wanted tainted politicians eliminated and secured two seats in its maiden attempt, is proof that money power does not necessarily clinch votes. The BJP's attempt to sweep the hills with the help of Nagas flopped. But former chief minister RK Dorendra's presence in the party means it can become a constant source of trouble for any ruling party. As if to reflect voters' preference for change, more than two-thirds of those newly elected are newcomers.

THE STATESMAN

Blackwill to visit North-east

H Bula Devi in New Delhi *SI-b*

Feb. 27. The US ambassador, Mr Robert Blackwill, is undertaking a week-long trip to the North-eastern states tomorrow to assess the infiltration afflicted situation there on the ground.

The US embassy confirmed his trip to the North-east but declined to divulge any further details while directing to contact its Kolkata office which has apparently chalked out his entire trip schedule. Sources said the ambassador will visit Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and also, touch parts of Meghalaya. It was not clear whether he would visit the other north-eastern states such as Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram.

Before leaving for the insurgency-prone region, the ambassador has taken a brief from the representatives of the people of the areas to be visited,

service people and others. *28/2*

On Monday, he invited some people for an evening tea where he asked the guests to enrich his knowledge about the region. Those who attended the party included three MPs from Rajya Sabha Mr C Apok Jamir from Nagaland, Dr Arun Kumar Sarma from Assam, Mr Swaraj Kaushal from Haryana and two MPs from Lok Sabha – Mr Bijoy Handique from Jorhat and Mr PR Kyndiah from Shillong who has also been Governor to Mizoram.

Besides, three persons with service background were also be present in the party including Gen. (Retd) Shankar Roy Chowdhury who is now a member of the Rajya Sabha from West Bengal, Gen (Retd) Ashok Mehta, and Mr KPS. Gill. Interestingly, the Centre's mediator with the NSCN (I-M) Mr K.Padmanabhaiah was also present at the get-together.

28 FEB 2002

Manipur voters pay back politicians in poll coin

SAMDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 26

FED UP of horse-trading, defections and political chicanery that has been the hallmark of Manipur politics in the recent years, the people of the state have used their ballots this time to punish their leaders, virtually banishing most of them from public life for the next five years.

It was almost like a re-run of June 2001 when people had gone on a rampage against their sitting MLAs for failing to resist the Centre's move to extend the Naga ceasefire from Nagaland to Manipur.

They had also set fire to the MLAs' houses and assaulted them apart from setting the Assembly on fire. The results too are like a re-run of the February 2000 polls, with no party getting a majority, leaving the field open for horse-trading and defections.

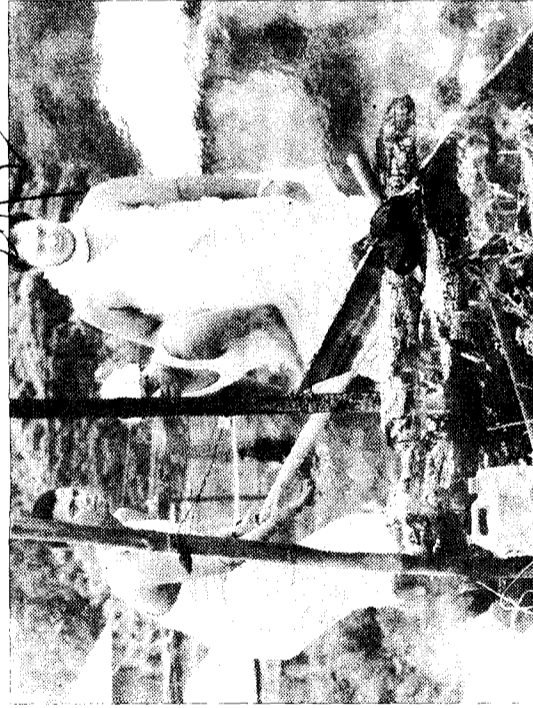
The fate of as many as three former chief ministers have been sealed. Heading the list is, Rishang

Keishing, five-time chief minister and the senior-most politician of the North-East. Keishing was defeated from Phungyar seat by Wungnaoshang of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP).

Two other former chief ministers, president of the newly-formed Manipur National Conference (MNC), W. Nipamacha Singh, and Radhabimod Kojiam too have been rejected, with the former losing to Y. Mani Singh (MSCP) at Wangoi and Kojiam conceding defeat to Meimam Bhorot (BJP) at Thangmeiband.

In the Thongu seat, former Speaker Sapam Dhananjay Singh (NCP) was defeated by Bjoy Kojiam (MSCP) by 1,000 votes. Dhananjay Singh is widely seen as the man behind the recent defection game in the state.

Yet another former speaker H. Borobabu Singh too has bitten the dust. As many as 19 sitting MLAs were rejected on the first day of counting. The only notable survivor is R.K. Dorendra Singh, four times former chief minister, who had a tough time retaining his Yaikul



The results in these elections have been almost like a re-run of June 2001 when people had gone on a rampage against MLAs for failing to resist the Centre's move to extend the Naga ceasefire to Manipur. *File photo*

tion to form a government on its own.

The Federal Party of Manipur too has done a good job, but suffers from the same problem, setting stage for a fresh round of horse-trading. The BJP and the Samata

Party, allies at the Centre, but worst enemies in Manipur are likely to see fresh defections with both Congress and FPM beginning to look for support from smaller parties to stake claim for power.

Horse-trading has been the name of the game in Manipur since the seventh Assembly was formed in February 2000.

While the Congress had won 11 seats in the polls, it was left with only one MLA, Rishang Keishing, after exactly a year when Kojiam formed a government. Similarly, the MPP, winning four seats in February 2000 was left with only one after 12 months, while the FPM with five MLAs two years ago, was left with only two in February 2001.

More enthusiastic was the BJP, which increased its tally, all through defections, from six to as many as 26 a year later. The MSCP on the other hand had 23 MLAs, which went up to 32 one month later, only to be brought down to 14. The NCP too did not lag behind, with all but one of its five original MLAs shifting loyalty within a year.

O. Ibobi Singh both of whom are contesting for the post of Congress legislature party leader, they said.

Of the 56 results declared so far, Congress has secured 17 and is likely to emerge the single largest party since it is leading in the interior Nungba and Mao constituencies, the results of which are expected this evening.

Counting of votes for the rest two, Singhat and Tipaimukh, would start after repolling at some polling stations tomorrow.

The Congress is trying to secure the support of the Manipur State Congress Party, the CPI, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and smaller parties in the state, which has been under President's rule since June two last.

The Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP), which bagged two seats, said it would not support the Congress. The Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), just behind the Congress with 13 seats, is yet to decide its course of action.

Parties begin talks for new govt
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
IMPHAL, FEBRUARY 26

THE Congress, the CPI, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Manipur State Congress Party have begun discussions today on formation of the next ministry in the state, sources said.

The meeting was convened by Congress and assumes significance as the four parties, which together command a strength of 31 of the 56 seats declared so far in the 60-member house, may decide to form a common front to form the next Ministry in the state.

The meeting was attended by CPI state secretary P.H. Parijat Singh, senior NCP leader Chungkhokai Doungel and President of MSCP and former Union minister of state for Food Processing T.H. Chaoba Singh, they said. The meeting was also attended by senior Congress leader Rishang Keishing, senior party leader T.H. Devendra Singh and Congress chief

PMO-MHA turf war likely over Naga talks

H BULA DEVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23. — A turf war over the Naga peace talks between the PMO and the home ministry appears likely. Senior government sources said the home ministry was working on a proposal to set up a group of ministers on Nagaland, which would be led by Mr LK Advani. The names of other ministers being proposed are Mr George Fernandes, Mr Arun Jaitley and Mr Arun Shourie.

GoMs have been set up for several other contentious issues, from Kargil Intelligence lapses to labour reforms. Also, sources said it was "natural" for the Nagaland issue, a problem of internal security and separatist agitation, to be tackled by a home ministry-led initiative.

However, so far the PMO has been taking the lead in the Naga talks.

The national security advisor and principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, has been responsible for most of the coordination. The Centre's interlocutor on the Naga issue, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, has been reporting to Mr Mishra. The other senior functionaries — director, In-

JAMIR REPEALS ARREST WARRANTS

KOHIMA, Feb. 23. — In a major boost to the Naga peace process, Mr SC Jamir has announced a repeal of arrest warrants against the NSCN (IM) leadership and a safe passage to them.

The Nagaland chief minister, while inaugurating an indoor stadium at Pughoboto in Zunheboto district yesterday, said he was ready to withdraw the arrest warrants against the NSCN(IM) leaders accused of masterminding an ambush on him on 29 November 2000.

He said the NSCN (IM) general secretary, Th. Muviah, had expressed reservations against coming to India because of the arrest warrants against him and "so in the interest of the Naga people, I shall withdraw the arrest warrants against them. I am prepared to forgive everyone for whatever they have done to me."

Mr Jamir said the Naga problem was not a factional issue and urged all the underground groups to unite to find "an amicable and honourable" solution. He appealed to the NSCN (IM) leaders to return to the state to discuss the issue with all sections of the people.

More than 400 Nagas had lost their lives during the four years of ceasefire, which brought untold miseries to many families, he said. — UNI

telligence Bureau, and home secretary — have so far had minimal roles. The home minister, too, hasn't had direct involvement.

Sources said that if a GoM was set up, the Centre's interlocutor would most likely report to the ministers and not to Mr Mishra. This is likely to be the main point of contention between the home ministry and PMO functionaries.

Some government leaders feel that with the Nagaland Assembly elections due in March 2003, a "fresh start" with a new institutional mechanism may be the best option. "Many interested parties want a say in the Naga talks since the latter are likely to be the main issue in the elections," a senior official said.

Some home ministry officials pointed to the Manipur

violence as a reason for not "identifying particular individuals" with "complicated negotiations". Manipur had seen a violent agitation because the ceasefire agreement with Naga leaders included a clause that placed no territorial limits. Manipuri leaders had interpreted this as violating the "territorial" limits of the state. Post-agitation the Centre had to revoke the clause.

Such complications, as well as constitutional and legal issues likely to come up during negotiations with Naga leaders, require an institutional mechanism that is political in character, home ministry officials said. A GoM will fulfil that need, they said.

When contacted, PMO spokespersons said they were "not aware" of a proposal for a GoM. The NSCN (I-M) faction also said that no such proposal came up during Mr Padmanabhaiah's visit to Malaysia.

Sources close to Isak Swu and Th Muivah, said if a GoM was set up it would mean "derailment of the talks". A GoM will not conform with the government undertaking, Naga sources said that "talks will only be held at the highest level, that is, with the PMO."

THE STATESMAN

24 FEB 2002

Eyes on Naga-dominated Manipur hills

NEWS & AGENCIES

GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 20

THE second and final phase of Assembly polls in Manipur slated for tomorrow will be crucial for the formation of a government in the state notorious for its long history of political instability.

Though the five hill districts of the state account for only 20 of the Assembly's 60 constituencies, the 20 may play a big role in the elections. The hill districts adjoining Nagaland are predominantly inhab-

ited by various Naga tribes and the Naga issue is a major factor in the current elections.

The United Naga Council (UNC) had, on February 7, forced all 47 Naga candidates in the fray to sign an undertaking that if elected they would support the Naga issue, including extension of ceasefire to Manipur. The 47 Naga candidates belong to various parties with the exception being Congress leader and former CM Rishang Keishing.

On the other hand, the memory of the public outrage against politicians, prompted by the Centre's de-

cision to extend the ceasefire with the NSCN(I-M), is still fresh in everybody's mind.

The 20 constituencies in the hill districts have returned mostly Congressmen in the past except in 2000 when parties like the NCP, the Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) and Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) made inroads and managed to push out the oldest party from its base. Altogether 5.82 lakh voters will exercise their franchise in the troubled hills tomorrow to elect 20 MLAs out of a total number of 120 candidates who are in the fray.

Every party has been playing the stability card to woo the voters, who have been victims of several years of defections the state's legislators indulged in leading to change of governments as many as three times in two years. Though stability is the oft-repeated slogan in every campaign, no formal alliance has been formed in the current elections. With the issue centering around the signing of the UNC declaration by the Naga candidates, two vital issues — acute financial crisis and deteriorating law and order — have been pushed to the background.

2 officials killed

■ IMPHAL: Three persons — two polling personnel and one India Reserve Battalion jawan — were killed and 14 injured when suspected Naga militants ambushed a polling party in Manipur's Thoubal on Wednesday. Official sources said the ultras exploded four bombs, planted on the road, when the vehicle carrying poll officials and securitymen reached Maphou. —PTI

INDIAN EXPRESS

21 FEB 2002

Born again

Jamir's change of heart welcome

SC 19/2
9-11-82

SC Jamir's "statement of intent" of his preparedness to withdraw criminal cases against Naga rebel leaders if this facilitates their return and hastens the peace process is welcome. But such cases have lost relevance after the Centre brokered the ceasefire. Of course, there was an attempt on his life in Delhi in November 1992 and Interpol was alerted, but the police failed to track down the alleged assailants. And those who tried to kill Jamir in Nagaland in February 1990 and in 1999 are yet to be identified. In May 1999, NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Th Muivah camped for a month in Dimapur and met the Prime Minister in Osaka who asked them to revisit Nagaland. Cases against rebel leaders and the ban on militant organisations have not had the desired effect. On the contrary they seem to lend them more prominence. Jamir did try to lift the ban on the NSCN(IM), probably to honour Rajiv Gandhi's promise to an election crowd at Dimapur a day before his death. The question is not so much why the Chandrasekhar government outlawed the NSCN(IM) but who was instrumental in bringing this about, with both then chief minister Vamuzo and Jamir accusing each other of misleading the Centre.

Like Khaplang and the Naga National Council, signatories to the Shillong Accord in 1975, Jamir, too, is a sworn NSCN(IM) enemy. Moreover, he is the sole surviving signatory to the July 1960 agreement which led to creation of Nagaland in 1963 and which is said to have actually divided the Nagas. He is said to be helping Khaplang, an accusation he has repeatedly denied. He offered to step down if this brought peace. Now, by offering to withdraw "cases", he believes reconciliation and not confrontation holds the solution to the conflict. The Naga Hoho should give him full marks.

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2002

ASSAM IN DIRE STRAITS

Tarun Gogoi Must Tackle More Gangrenous Issues

By JB LAMA

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S/A

Having been chief minister of Assam since May last year, expectations are high that Tarun Gogoi will do something to put the state back on the road to recovery over the next 53 months. His tenure thus far has seen the Congress's strength increase in the Assembly from 71 to 75 following the induction of the lone Assam Trinamul Congress legislator and another three from the Nationalist Congress Party, the party's return to power in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council after 12 years and its outright victory in the December panchayat elections. He still has to directly address the Ulfa and Bodo issues, festering wounds that are becoming gangrenous.

When he was sworn in, Gogoi admitted the task before him was "Herculean" and in the absence of a "magic wand" he would try to do his "best". He has been lucky in one way. When he took over, the Ulfa did not strike as it did at the time of the late Hiteswar Saikia's installation in 1991 when 14 people including a Russian engineer were kidnapped. Saikia offered a general amnesty and released more than 500 cadres arrested during Operation Bajrang, which did not help matters.

Boomerang

Again, in May 1996, when Prafulla Mahanta assumed office, violence reared its ugly head in the form of Santhal-Bodo ethnic riots in Kokrajhar, in which more than 200 people were reportedly killed and 200,000 rendered homeless. This particular incident put paid to Mahanta's promise to have the army withdrawn and forced the AGP government to change its stance and incur the Ulfa's anger.

In Assam, old habits die hard and Gogoi's reprieve was short-lived. Within 22 days of his taking over, the Ulfa launched rocket attacks on a police station and a CRPF camp. Though no casualties were reported, the raid was said to be in retaliation for the killing of three militants in Jorhat district. The message was loud and clear: they should be left alone. Subsequently, militants gunned down 12 of their former comrades-in-arms (Sulfas). In July, Bodo militants killed five Bhutanese forest guards and the next month blew up a CRPF vehicle killing eight. In October, during the Pujas, the Ulfa gunned down five policemen. Last month, the Bodos killed 16 Biharis and soon after "peaceful" Republic Day celebrations, the Ulfa set off a series of blasts to suggest the battle was not over. Gogoi's attempt to blame Delhi for its inability to exert pressure on Thimpu to flush out militants was a poor excuse.

To illustrate the point, it is worth remembering what Gogoi, as Assam Pradesh Congress president in April 1997,

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

said while failing to take a clear stand on the Unified Command, "The fact that the AGP was totally dependent on the army for its survival was a sad reflection of its incapability in handling the present law and order situation." Little did he realise how this comment would one day boomerang on him. But he did explain

view. But his government must decide fast whether or not to make fresh overtures or wait for the Ulfa initiative, which may or may not come.

Interestingly, the Ulfa declared a unilateral ceasefire in December 1991 after being cornered during Operation Rhino. Earlier, after Operation Bajrang



that what he meant was that the army's assistance was needed to curb insurgency, however much he was opposed to the idea of the Unified Command.

Insurgencies

Which provokes the question: will he do away with the Unified Command? If he favours strengthening the police machinery, he would be supporting the Union Home Ministry's policy of giving the police the cutting edge in the fight against insurgency. Welcome relief for the army which wants out from having to quell civil unrest. The Ulfa has hinted at its willingness to talk once the army is withdrawn, as have Meitei insurgents. Delhi should take note.

Dispur has to prepare the groundwork for the Ulfa-Delhi political dialogue. Gogoi is said to have welcomed the militant outfit's preconditions that talks be held in a foreign country under UN supervision and that sovereignty be included in the agenda. He believes the Ulfa's willingness to talk is in itself a positive

in 1990, they had agreed to talks on terms which did not include "Swadhin Asom", their main objective being to secure Assam's economic freedom. This may not be difficult to accomplish. Give and take are very much a part of any negotiation and based on this spirit a workable solution could be found.

What is clear is that there can be no military solution to the problem and the "Swadhin Asom" concept is a pipe dream. Ulfa hardliners must realise Assam needs investments to buttress its economy and their continued violence is only scaring away potential investors. In many ways, the return of peace in Assam will benefit the rest of the North-east states.

Of grave concern is the growing fratricidal killings between Ulfa and Sulfas. Those who surrendered after the 1991 ceasefire still have their weapons, allowed for self-defence. Saikia pampered them to the extent of letting them move about freely with their guns in government transport, full security provided. Some of them are reportedly indulging in

extortion.

Mahanta failed to keep his promise to disarm them within three months of coming to power. Gogoi, too, is said to be soft towards them but he must ensure they do not become a nuisance or an embarrassment to his government. For all intents and purposes the 20 February 1993 Bodo Accord is dead. It floundered on the issue of boundary demarcation. Dispur has now agreed to the demand for a Bodo Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule.

This should set at rest the plains tribals' feeling that "the majority of Assamese people have (a) deadly and poisonous anti-tribal attitude". For the moment, the Centre is only negotiating with the Bodo Liberation Tigers, which enjoys the support of the All Bodo Students' Union spearheading the movement for a separate state within Assam. The secessionist National Democratic Front of Boroland, which operates from hideouts in Bhutan, should also be taken into confidence before a final decision is arrived at.

The BTC may meet the plains tribals' aspirations, but will they be happy with the proposed changes in the Constitution safeguarding the interests of the non-Bodos who predominate in the area? The xenophobic experiences in Meghalaya and Mizoram should answer that question.

Financial difficulties

Assam's irony is that despite tremendous potential, it continues to languish as a backward state. It lacks proper infrastructure and unemployment is growing. Growth in terms of GDP over the Ninth Plan period has been a mere 2.07 per cent compared to the country's 5.72 per cent. With its finances in a downspin, Gogoi has written to the Union Finance Ministry warning that "unless the Centre extends help, the state may fall into an abyss from which it may not be able to recover".

Assam has a shortfall of Rs 150 crore every month for meeting obligatory expenditures. Tax collection has not been commensurate with rising expenditure. Salaries, wages and pensions have increased from Rs 2,436 crore in 1997-98 to Rs 4,836 crore in 2001-2002. Interest payment is expected to climb to Rs 1,288 crore in 2001-2002 from Rs 499 crore in 1995-96. The debt burden as on 1 April 2001 was Rs 10,171 crore, of which loans owed to the Centre amounted to Rs 5,485 crore. Perhaps Delhi can bail the state out by agreeing to the demand for a waiver or at least a 10-year moratorium on the payment of principal and interest. If neither is feasible, then a one-time grant of Rs 1,000 crore could help.

Delhi did no less for Punjab at a time when that state's resources were affected by terrorism. Assam deserves similar help. If nothing else, the demand for a hike in oil royalty merits consideration.

Land vigil forces Ulfa to take river route

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Jorhat, Feb. 15: Increased concentration of security forces on land and round-the-clock vigil on possible transit points have forced the outlawed Ulfa to use riverine routes for movement of cadre and arms.

Sources in the army and police said the mid-river encounter in Tinsukia district yesterday — five rebels were killed in the fire-fight — was a confirmation of reports that the Ulfa had begun using the Brahmaputra and its tributaries to ferry arms and rations, especially across the Upper Assam districts.

The high incidence of Ulfa attacks on timber smugglers in the vicinity of the Dibru-Chaikhowa forest reserve was what first made intelligence and security personnel suspect the militants of using riverine routes for communication. Though no timber smuggler has been reported killed, many have had their "loot" taken away by militants.

An intelligence source said Ulfa militants move in and out of the Dibru-Chaikhowa forest reserve through the Kaitia river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. Since timber smugglers use the same river to ferry their booty from the hills of Arunachal

Pradesh, they often find themselves confronted by militants.

The rebels seize boats loaded with timber and distribute the booty among the villagers living along the river.

"The Ulfa is once again building on its Robin Hood image by helping the villagers, who are easily swayed. Once they become friends, the villagers will do anything for the rebels, even giving them food and shelter for months together," the source said.

A senior army official based at Laipuli in Tinsukia district said the five militants involved in the encounter yesterday

walked into a trap laid by security personnel".

The rebels — led by self-styled lieutenant Ajay Rajkhowa, alias Montu Sonowal — mistook the army personnel on board an approaching boat as timber smugglers because they were in civvies.

The official said the same militants had seized a boat loaded with smuggled timber a few minutes before their encounter with the security personnel. The boatman, who is undergoing treatment at the Tinsukia Civil Hospital, said similar incidents had taken place on several occasions.

"Having mistaken our men

as labourers engaged in the timber business, the militants called out to them to help them anchor the seized boat, which was loaded with timber. By the time they realised that the occupants of the boat were army men in civvies, it was too late. They fished out their weapons, but our men got the better of them. Bullets struck all of them. One was killed on the spot and the rest jumped into the river," the official said.

The body recovered from the boat has been identified as that of Rajkhowa. The search for the bodies of the remaining militants was continuing till late tonight. "Local people are help-

ing in the search operation. We are searching downstream for the bodies. We are almost sure they (the four rebels) are dead," the army official said.

Ulfa militants have been using the Kaitia river to ferry arms and rations to their camps for quite some time now, while the army began patrolling the river about a month back. "Luck finally favoured us yesterday," the army official said.

A police official in Tinsukia said yesterday's incident was the second of its kind in the area. A militant identified as Pulin Moran, alias Jitu Dutta, was killed in a similar encounter a couple of years back.

Till and kill lessons for rebels in Bangla camps

FROM SEKHAR DATTA

Agartala, Feb. 15: For Tiger Force and NLFT recruits sent to Bangladesh for training, life is not just about learning to wield sophisticated weapons, extort money, kidnap and kill.

According to a report submitted by the Tripura government to the Union home ministry, the two outfits have engaged a section of their recruits in shifting cultivation and the transport business.

The report, substantiated by classified documents, states that the Tiger Force has acquired 12 kanis of land close to its camp at Kalenga (Chhanpara) under Chunarughat police station in Habiganj district. Teenaged recruits till the land, harvest the crop and sell them in the market.

The NLFT, too, uses its "surplus" manpower for shifting cultivation on forest land adjoining its camp at Taglakantai under Pachherri police station in Khagrachherri district. A huge quantity of grain is stored in this camp, the report says.

The NLFT also runs a transport business to augment its revenue. It has two Commander

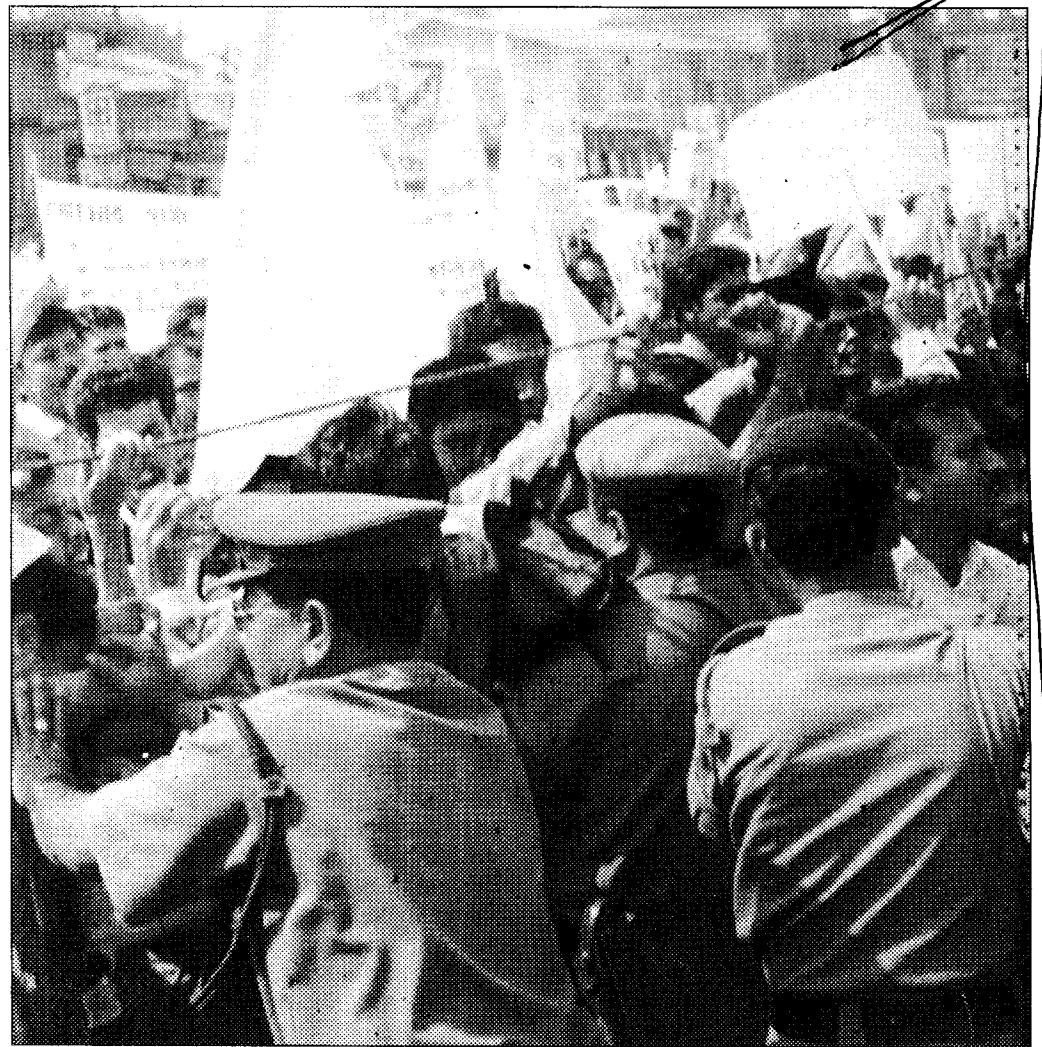
jeeps that ply between Srimangal and Niralapunji, carrying passengers at the rate of Rs 40 per head. NLFT cadre based at the Niralapunji camp under Srimangal police station in Moulavi Bazar district drive these two vehicles. Accusing the Bangladesh government of knowingly allowing militant outfits from the Northeast to merge into the commercial mainstream, the report says the Tiger Force has even made inroads into Chittagong town. "The outfit has two trucks that ply within Chittagong town. It continues to earn money through the transport business, presumably with the approval of the Bangladesh authorities."

The Tiger Force has as many as 16 camps in Bangladesh, including two safehouses in Chittagong and Dhaka. It shares the Dhaka hideout with the Ulfa. The outfit's headquarters is located at Satcherri in Habiganj district, just two km from the Border Security Force outpost at Daigyabari in Tripura. It has set up a weaving centre there, employing about nine women from the Debbarma tribe. Militant leaders at the headquarters communicate with their comrades in

the 15 other camps through high-power wireless sets. The NLFT has more camps than the Tiger Force, the report says. Five of these are in Srimangal, Habiganj and Moulavi Bazar districts, while 21 are spread across the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Its "properties" include a "rest camp" at Cox Bazar, four safehouses in Chittagong town and one in Dhaka. All these safehouses reportedly have excellent communication facilities — mobile phones, wireless sets and computers linked to the Internet.

Apart from these camps and safehouses, the NLFT has rented a house — the report names one Sushil Jibon Tripura as the owner — at Khagrachherri town in Khagrachherri district for Rs 1,000 per month.

At least 12 children of NLFT "commanders" stay there and study in Khagrachherri Primary School. They are looked after by "camp commander" Moti Debbarma. The outfit has even set up family quarters in the hilly Sajek area of Rangamati district. Militants and their families use four speedboats to cross the river separating the remote camp from the mainland.



Schoolteachers clash with police in Guwahati on Friday during a protest demonstration. Ten persons were injured in the melee. Picture by Biju Boro

Jamir ready to withdraw cases

Sanjoy Hazarika in Shillong

Feb. 12. — The Nagaland chief minister, Mr SC Jamir, has said he is prepared to withdraw criminal cases against senior Naga insurgency leaders.

If this statement of intent is translated into action, it could pave the way for the eventual return of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) leaders, Mr Isaac Chishi Swu and Mr Thiungelang Muivah, to India and give a major boost to the peace process in the region.

Mr Jamir, who has been the target of at least two assassination attempts by his opponents from the Naga insurgency, told this correspondent on Saturday: "I'm prepared to withdraw (the cases)." Mr Jamir was in Meghalaya to attend a meeting of the North-East chief ministers with the Union minister, Mr Arun Shourie.

Amongst the charges against Mr

Muivah and Mr Swu are those which emanate from the attack on the life of Mr Jamir in 1999. Also, in the early 1990s, a bid was made to kill Mr Jamir at the Nagaland House in New Delhi. The Nagaland chief minister took a couple of shots in the back but survived.

The senior Congress leader, regarded by the I-M group as one of its principal political foes, said he was "prepared to forgive everyone" for what they had done to him. "I'm committed to India and they know that I have never compromised. That is why they do not like me," he added.

Mr Jamir's remarks follow last December's meeting in Japan between Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Muivah and Mr Swu when the Naga leaders were asked to come to India for future negotiations. Mr Vajpayee was told about the difficulties of such talks within India because of the ban on the NSCN as well as

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arrest warrants against the two leaders. According to Indian officials and Nagas familiar with the talks process, the Naga leaders had asked for their return to be facilitated. Last month, a delegation of Naga civil society groups, after a five-day consultation with Mr Muivah and Mr Swu, issued a declaration in Bangkok that was conciliatory in tone and called for the withdrawal of the cases against the NSCN leaders.

Mr Jamir's response, rather than being a direct one to this declaration, needs to be seen in the context of the atmosphere of reconciliation that Nagas are seeking to create among the tribes. The reconciliation process began on 20 December last year and its advocates are trying to press forward with it in the hope that this will create a platform for a coalition among the feuding Naga factions.

The sophistication in the Naga political approach, however, needs to be recognised — despite several incidents of killings and counter-killings, there has been a calibrated response from the Nagas who have, for the most part, observed restraint. The reconciliation process has been gun and meetings between the militant leaders and the Prime Minister (and a follow-up meeting with his representative, Mr K Padmanabhiiah) have taken place. Then came the Bangkok declaration seeking a settlement honourable to both the Government of India and the Nagas, and offering friendship to neighbouring communities.

Mr Jamir is too wily a politician and too powerful a figure in Nagaland to be ignored by either the Indian government or the insurgents. Indeed, he is making several moves at one go by his statement — he's going along with the process of reconciliation, trying to ensure his political survival and seeking a role for himself in the peace process.

THE STATESMAN

13 FEB 2001

Ultras send bullets to foil the ballot

Yumnam Rupachandra
in Imphal



Feb. 12. — Violence, threats and accusations that candidates are trying to woo the electorate by promising housing loans have marred the campaign for the Assembly polls in Manipur which ended at 4.30 p.m. today.

(Unknown militants today fired at the houses of the Congress candidate, Mr L Jayanta, and the Federal Party of Manipur nominee, Mr L Ibomcha Singh, for the Keisamthong seat, adds PTI from Imphal. No one was hurt.) Almost every household in Ishok, Sanjembam and Thiyam in Nambol constituency were served with bullets and asked not to vote for the MSCP candidate, Th Bira Singh, brother of the former Union minister for state for food processing, Th Chaoba.

According to villagers, youths identifying themselves as members of Kanglei Yaol Kanna Lup (O) came to villages at night and distributed bullets with pieces of paper with names written and asked them not to vote for Th Bira.

The youths threatened that anybody voting for the MSCP candidate would face dire consequences, the villagers said while showing the bullets.

Villagers in Thiyam, about three km from the house of Th Chaoba, said the bullets were



Meira paibi members of the Democratic People's Party take out a torch rally in Imphal. — AP/PTI

given with a list of names of five aides of the former minister.

Th Chaoba confirmed that the villagers had received the bullets, but brushed away the threats by saying that villagers won't be intimidated by these tactics.

On their part, villagers said they would retaliate through voting. The atmosphere in the villages, meanwhile, remains tense.

KYKL (O) had declared Th Chaoba as its enemy and said

that his brother Th Bira was just a dummy candidate. It would work against Th Bira to ensure that he does not get elected, it had said. It had charged Th Chouba with dealing in drugs and had served notices to 100 of Th Bira's workers to "surrender" to the organisation. Since the warning, four supporters of Th Bira have been shot dead by unknown assailants.

In Thangmeiban constituency

from where the former chief minister, Mr RB Koijam, is contesting against the state BJP president, Mr M Bhorot, controversy of another kind is erupting. Unsigned pamphlets circulated in the area have alleged that the BJP is "promising" housing loans to the electorate. The North Eastern Trade Technology and Housing Promotion Company, the pamphlets alleged, had given at least 600 loan forms in Thang-

meiband only and the company has collected a total of Rs 4,154,000 from prospective applicants.

The pamphlet said Mr Bhorot and the Thangmeiban mandal BJP president, Ch Birendrakumar, are founder directors of the company. Different political parties in Thangmeiban, including the MSCP, are reportedly using these pamphlets to criticise the BJP for using the company's funds for elections.

The directors, however, denied that the company's money was being misused. Admitting that Mr Bhorot and Ch Birendra were founder members of the company, the managing director, Mr L Kunjabihari, said they have retired and have nothing to do with the company anymore. He also admitted to collecting money from the people but said it was just nominal. The company can collect up to Rs 50 lakh, but have only taken a nominal share of Rs. 3,268,800 from 7,118 shareholders, he said. The charges are baseless and just a political gimmick, he added.

Meanwhile, the chief of staff (Eastern Command), Lt Gen JR Mukherjee, arrived in Imphal today and held a meeting with the Governor, Mr Ved Prakash Marwah, and the chief secretary regarding the insurgency problem in the state and the Army's role during the polls, adds UNI. He will visit the hill districts and the valley tomorrow.

THE STATESMAN

13 FEB 2002

Tripura, Nagaland demand crackdown on ultra bases

Anirban Roy

Shillong, February 9

THE CHIEF Ministers of Tripura and Nagaland — two States wracked by insurgency in the North-east — on Saturday joined hands to urge New Delhi to “immediately crack down” on the militant hideouts in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

At the North-east Chief Ministers' Conference here, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar said planning for the development of the region would be a “meaningless exercise” if there is no holistic approach to bring an end to the problem of trans-border terrorism. “We have been facing a lot of problems in tackling trans-border militancy,” Sarkar said. Taking advantage of the hostile terrain on the international border, militants often sneak into Tripura, he added.

Almost every day, either a doctor, or an engineer or a bureau-

crat is kidnapped by the two banned militant outfits of Tripura, the Chief Minister said. The State shares 889-km border with Bangladesh, where the two banned outfits — the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and the National Liberation Front of Tripura — run full-fledged camps.

“Unless the hideouts in Bangladesh are destroyed, we cannot think of development,” Sarkar maintained, adding that it has been long that the Tripura Government had submitted a detailed report on the location and the other details of the militant camps in Bangladesh.

Sarkar expressed surprise accusing New Delhi of “not doing anything” in fighting the trans-border terrorism in the eastern frontier. “If we could send the list of wanted militants to Pakistan, what is the harm in doing so with Bangladesh as well?” he questioned.

Echoing Sarkar's views, Naga-

land Chief Minister S C Jamir expressed concern as the review meetings of the Union Home Minister with the North-east Chief Ministers on the law and order situation has been discontinued. Jamir, who has been witnessing the problem of militancy in Nagaland for more than five decades, said, “Trans-border terrorism is slowly taking shape of a wider magnitude. If we don't tackle it at this moment, there would be a lot of problems in future”.

As the militants are hiding in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the security forces engaged in counter-insurgency, also could not do anything, Jamir said. “How can one expect to woo investors in such a situation” he questioned.

The Union Minister for the Development of North Eastern Region, Arun Shourie, who was also present at the Conference, admitted that “peace” was the basic factor, which can ensure the development of any region.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

February 9, 1987

ULFA rides again

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Empower police, stop taxing army

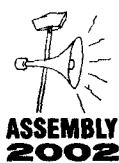
Assam Governor Lt-Gen (retd) SK Sinha's satisfaction with Republic Day celebrations having passed off peacefully was shortlived. Within hours, Ulfa militants triggered a series of blasts, killing a senior police official and a driver and injuring a score of security force personnel. Whether or not these were isolated incidents or indicative of things to come will be clear in the next few days. If they remain quiet it will be seen as lending support to the Governor's claim that the militants have lost public support. Fresh jolts could be the beginning of yet another spell of mayhem. That Tarun Gogoi anticipated trouble is clear from his SOS for more Central forces. That the Union home minister thought it unnecessary to acknowledge Gogoi must have hurt him but LK Advani is known to ignore such pleas. The Tripura chief minister's repeated requests were not taken seriously and he was left to fall back on the state police which, however, did commendably well. The thinking that only troops can clean up the mess must change.

The Centre is spending generously on the modernisation of the state police and expenses incurred in anti-insurgency operations are being reimbursed. Two years ago the Mahanta government claimed the police had infiltrated the Ulfa and got "inside information" on their movements. Then why this sudden downslide? Even Gogoi stressed the need for a proper intelligence network. Yet this continues to be the weakest link in the fight against insurgency in the entire North-east. The sooner the state police are made accountable for results, the better.

THE STATESMAN

Manipur manifestos with a difference

Yumnam Rupachandra in Imphal



ASSEMBLY
2002

Feb. 3. — Manifestos of various state parties for the forthcoming Assembly elections have laid considerable stress on dealing with AIDS.

For the first time in the country, perhaps, HIV/AIDS has become an election issue. With the number of HIV positive cases in the state being 12,817, parties can no longer neglect the problem. Never in the past 20 years had any political party taken up such issues as drug addiction and AIDS for elections in the state.

Former minister and president of Manipur People's Party Mr O Joy Singh feels the issue should be above party politics. Mr Chandramani, president of Federal Party of Manipur, feels the same. Mr Singh has mooted an idea of forming cells within the party structure to spread awareness of the disease among people. He said other parties should

NSCN(IM) blamed for candidate withdrawal

IMPHAL, Feb. 3. — The state Congress has alleged that threats from the NSCN(IM) has led to the withdrawal of its Tegnoupal candidate and former minister, Mr Morung Makunga, for the Assembly elections.

The Manipur Congress chief, Mr O Ibobi, said here yesterday that signatures of the candidate, announcing his withdrawal, were obtained under duress after summoning him to some remote place. Mr Ibobi said he had sent a message to the Election Commission on 31 January, demanding postponement of the election for Tegnoupal seat. — SNS

also open such cells.

Former chief minister Mr RB Koijam of Samata Party said his party is concerned about the growing number of HIV positive

cases and have included the issue in their election manifesto.

"We would take up whatever strong measures required to tackle the scourge." He said tactical understanding with Myanmar at the national level should be made to stop drug trafficking.

Congress (I) has put AIDs on its top priority list and so has Democratic People's Party. The BJP in its manifesto has called for restructuring of the state AIDs and drug programmes to make them more effective.

This kind of initiative to combat the disease on political level could have come sooner, said the Manipur State Aids Control Society Project director, Dr Khomdon.

"The bad news is today HIV has moved to general population and the rate of infection among children and women is at 2 per cent. In Africa, AIDS infection among children and women grew from 2 per cent to nearly 80 per cent in a span of 5 years. If we don't take proactive action now, in 5 years we will be no better. We must learn from the African experience."

THE STATESMAN

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Assam's trauma

32

AFTER A relative lull, the two main militant outfits operating in Assam, NDFB and ULFA, have struck again. On January 15, the NDFB killed 13 non-tribals at a village near the Indo-Bhutan border in Bongaigaon district. Five days later, it killed 18 non-tribals at Jangalbari village in Darrang district. However, at the Republic Day function in Guwahati on January 26, the Governor, S. K. Sinha, claimed that Assam was "emerging from the dark tunnel of violence".

The next day, the ULFA ambushed a police party at Balapara village in Kamrup district, just 50 km from Guwahati, killing a DSP and a police driver, and injuring four constables.

The day before, the NDFB had made an abortive bid on a CRPF police party in Bapeta district. On January 20, four ULFA militants were killed in Dhubri district in an encounter with the security forces.

Those experienced in counter-insurgency operations say neither "the end of the tunnel" nor "light" is visible. Extortion, violence, murder, smuggling of narcotics and gun-running have become a way of life with the militants. They target the police, the se-

The hard reality, despite official claims that the militants' backs have been broken, is that insurgency in Assam continues to fester, writes Barun Das Gupta.

curity forces and individual political leaders to show they are still a force to reckon with and to strike terror in the people. This makes extortion easy.

Their ranks have not been depleted to any significant extent. While some are killed or are captured by the security forces and some others are allowed to take *abyahati* (retirement), new recruits mainly from lower middle class sections in towns and poor families in rural areas are taking their place.

Narrating his personal experience, an official says he has found parents asking their jobless sons to join the militant groups to "either earn some money or get killed". The lure of earning money by joining the ULFA or the NDFB will always be there in a State

with limited employment opportunities, he says. Extortion is going on as before. The main victims are the tea plantation owners, rich businessmen and disbursing officers of different Government departments. At one traffic check-post, the NDFB is known to have raised Rs. 1 crore in a year.

An enormous amount of money is required to maintain the luxurious lifestyles of the top leaders of the two outfits, who live abroad with their families; to buy arms, and to run camps in Bhutan and Bangladesh. Part of the money is spent to buy gold and dollars from markets in Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai and heroin from Myanmar. The narcotics are then converted into cash.

According to the rules of the ULFA, half of the money collected by a local unit is retained by it while the other half is sent to the Central Committee. Since there is no knowing whether the individual who collects the money keeps a part for himself before turning it over to his committee, it acts as an added incentive for extortion.

The main problem in tackling insurgency is the cross-border terrorism facing the State. The ULFA and the NDFB have camps in Bhutan and Bangladesh. The previous Sheikh Hasina regime in Dhaka, which was friendly to India, was unable to disband the camps and flush out the militants.

The Government of Khaleda Zia that came to power after last year's general election is openly hostile to India. Begum Zia, while in the Opposition, had openly declared support for the various militant groups in northeast India engaged in a "freedom struggle". The situation in Bhutan, despite the Government's periodic announcements that it will not tolerate the presence of militants on its soil and its efforts to persuade them to leave, remains unchanged. In December, the ULFA said it was closing down four of its camps, but reports are that the camps were in fact shifted deeper inside Bhutan. Intelligence sources say the ULFA will not leave Bhutan so easily because its operations will suffer.

The hills of Bhutan give the outfit far better logistics than the flat terrain of Bangladesh. The Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, is sore with the Centre for its inability to persuade Bhutan to flush out the militants and thinks the Centre has not put enough pressure on Bhutan. He has his reasons.

The NDFB militants who massacred some Bengalis in Bongaigaon district came from the Bishnupur camp in Bhutan, while the group that massacred Biharis near Udalguri in Darrang district came from the Daifun camp, also in Bhutan. In both cases they fled back to Bhutan after committing the crime.

Mr. Gogoi wants the entire 260-km stretch of the Indo-Bhutan border fenced and the BSF given the responsibility of guarding it. During discussions with the Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, in New Delhi on Wednesday, Mr. Gogoi also asked for 60 additional companies of the CRPF.

The hard reality, despite official claims that the militants' "backs have been broken", and that they have lost public support and sympathy, is that insurgency continues to fester in Assam. The ULFA leaders are plainly not interested in talks, unless they are held to discuss sovereignty for Assam which they know the Government will never agree to. The State will see periods of relative calm followed by spurts in violence.



Even children were not spared by Bodo militants in Darrang.

THE HINDU

11/1/81

Talking to the Nagas: read their lips

SANJOY HAZARIKA

IT IS now more than four-and-a-half years since the dominant Naga militant group entered into a ceasefire with the Government. There have been several meetings between Isak Chishi Swu and Thiuenglang Muivah, Chairman and General Secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M), with prime ministers, beginning with H.D. Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Though the "collective leadership" of Swu and Muivah has been unchanged since 1988, the Naga movement itself split three ways: the umbrella Naga National Council (NNC) which has now shrunk in clout and members and is limited to a handful of tribes: the NSCN (I-M) and its immediate rival with the same name and a big difference — the initial K, after its founder S.S. Khaplang.

The divisions remain sharp, reflected in the killing of six members of the K-group by their rivals in Dimapur on January 18. A Ceasefire Monitoring Group, headed by Lt.-General Ramesh Kulkarni, exists but it lacks the teeth or backing by the Centre to be truly effective.

The talks have been with the I-M group although a ceasefire is formally in place with the K faction. There is no such ceasefire with the NNC, which carries the impressive tag of the Federal Government of Nagaland while the other two identify themselves in their press notes as the 'Government of the Peoples Republic of Nagaland'.

In the years of the ceasefire, civil society groups have found voice, speaking out firmly against inter-group violence, intimidation and extortion as well as human rights violations by the security forces. They have demanded that the factions honour the peace process. These pressures are no longer brushed aside by the armed groups as in the past, for they have seen the stake that Nagas have developed in peace.

That is why the second consultation between civil society groups and the NSCN (I-M) at Bangkok earlier this



Padmanabhiiah with Muivah after an earlier meeting in Bangkok. Reuters

month assumes particular significance. The first consultation took place in the NSCN headquarters four years ago in Nagaland and ended abruptly because I-M leaders were not prepared for a dialogue though people's representatives wanted one. Not less than 44 Nagas from the North-East met with Swu,

One must also remember that groups involved in independence struggles are unlikely to indicate that they are prepared to climb down, at least in statements issued for public consumption. While the opening remarks in the statement issued by the NGOs (and not by the I-M) are as full

That the NSCN (IM) have called for the withdrawal of draconian laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and arrest warrants against its leaders shows that Muivah and Swu are serious about returning home after more than 36 years and holding consultations with Indian leaders

Muivah and their associates between January 7 and 11. Accounts of the discussions from participants show greater openness among the leaders than before and a determination among civil society groups not to be bulldozed into following a particular line.

of angry rhetoric as anything one has heard in the past — and even urges Great Britain to clarify its position on "the Naga people and their land which India claims to have inherited from the then British-India".

This new line is unlikely to go down well in India, especially with the Gov-

ernment. The statement is unambiguous in its claim that the current negotiations with the Government of India "assert our people's resolve and commitment to honour our history and our rights which we hold to be sacred to us and our vision for the future." And while claiming that the present process is to "put right the unjust legacy of colonialism", the statement then declares that what is sought is a "negotiated settlement — that will be honourable and acceptable to both sides." It is clear to all that sovereignty for the Nagas is not a settlement that the Government of India can regard as either acceptable or honourable. Yet, there is not a single mention of the word sovereignty in the whole statement, which runs five pages, including the names of the participants.

Otherwise, in every major Naga declaration this word occurs at regular intervals. There are references to the "struggle for self-determination", the "referendum" of 1951, which voted overwhelmingly for an independent Naga nation, that the Nagas are "a people" who were continuing to resist the "occupation of our nation by the States of India and Burma."

Rhetoric is all very well. But when we get down to the details of this particular Bangkok Declaration, it is quite positive — it demands the same standards of the Naga armed fighters as it does of the Indian security forces (to stay within the limits of their camps, agreed to in the ceasefire in January 2001); it seeks the inclusion of civil society groups in the ceasefire monitoring mechanism (this association of NGOs was earlier rejected by the I-M); it also calls for an end to the bans on Naga militant groups and withdrawal of draconian laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and arrest warrants against their leaders.

The last request shows that Muivah and Swu are serious about returning

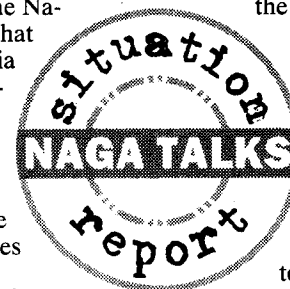
home after more than 36 years and holding consultations with Indian civil society groups and leaders as well as with their Naga brethren. Both had, in principle, agreed to come back to India for further negotiations without specifying a time, when Vajpayee told them in Osaka that it would be far easier to hold formal dialogues within the country.

The I-M regards the continuance of Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir as an obstacle to a settlement. Jamir, an implacable foe of the I-M, having survived several attempts on his life, asserts that the group is unrepresentative of the Nagas. He is seen as well-disposed toward the K group, which moves around freely in parts of the state.

What is equally significant is that the I-M has agreed not to arrive at a settlement with the Government without consulting Naga groups. Not only that, Muivah and Swu told the delegates —

although this is not mentioned in the statement — that while they would not initiate unity talks with other factions, they would leave such moves to the Naga Hoho, the umbrella grouping of all Naga tribes.

The new emphasis on reconciliation among the Nagas, an effort which goes hand in hand with the peace process and which began in December 2001, was also backed by the I-M. "There is a mellowing of the leadership," said one participant. During a lengthy interview with this writer last April, Muivah declared that Nagas would have to understand the "difficulties of the Indian Government" just as the latter would need to understand their compulsions. Indeed, the settlement of the Naga imbroglio is encapsulated in this crisp political view, for it takes into consideration all points of view and possibilities. It will not be easy but the time is now right for a formation of a political platform through the aegis of the Naga Hoho which would bring together the various factions — after all, they have a common goal, despite being at each other's throats!



INDIAN EXPRESS
INDIAN EXPRESS
2 FEB 2002

Twin Ulfa strike kills 2 in Assam

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, January 27

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS after the peaceful Republic Day celebration, Ulfa struck in two places with improvised explosive devices (IED) in Assam killing a police officer and his driver. Eleven persons, including seven CRPF personnel, were also injured in the twin strikes.

According to police, the militants blew up a vehicle of a CRPF convoy at Ghilatari in Golaghat district in Upper Assam at around 12.30 pm on Sunday.

Seven CRPF men were injured, two of whom are stated to be critical. The five-vehicle convoy started from Khatkhathi and was going to Merapani, near the Assam-Nagaland border. Golaghat special branch of police said that the explosive device was planted on the road.

About 30 minutes later, another IED exploded at Balapara in Kamrup district in Lower Assam. The Kamrup district Deputy Superintendent of Police, Debojit Pathak, who was returning from the Assam police commando force camp at Nagerbera, was killed in the blast. His driver Digbijoy Dutta was also killed.

The Ulfa had planted an IED under a wooden bridge which led

to the blast, police said.

Four policemen who were accompanying the DSP were injured and have been admitted to the Guwahati Medical College.

Earlier on January 25, the militant outfit attacked the Nagerbera commando camp but fled following retaliation by the commandos. One of the commandos was injured in the fire exchange.

Sunday's twin bomb attacks have come as a surprise for the security forces as the outfit had been lying low for some time.

Following the massacre of 29 non-tribals by National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in areas bordering Bhutan last week, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi blamed the Centre for not paying attention to the issue of eviction of Ulfa and NDFB militants from Bhutan.

He had said mass killings would continue as long as militants have their camps in Bhutan. NDFB militants are believed to have sneaked into Assam from Bhutan and after the crime had retreated to their camps.

However, Sunday's twin attacks at the two places far away from the international boundary with Bhutan show that Ulfa militants have not only sneaked deeper into Assam but have also set up camps there.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 JAN 2002

Jamir, Shenoy against peace process: Muivah

H Bula Devi in New Delhi

Jan. 25. — The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) has blamed the Nagaland chief minister, Mr SC Jamir, and the secretary (North-East) in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr PD Shenoy, for scuttling the efforts to make the peace process a success. It also suspects MHA officials of "misleading" the minister and others in power.

Th. Muivah, general secretary of NSCN (I-M), claimed that during his meeting with the Prime Minister in Osaka, he briefed Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee about these developments. NSCN leaders are believed to have told the Prime Minister that Mr Jamir and Mr Shenoy along with the Army were obstructing the peace process.

"He (Vajpayee) understands who is standing in the way of peace. We told the Prime Minister that your Army commanders, Jamir and Shenoy from the home ministry are standing in the way and are collaborating against the peace process. So the problem is with you (Indian side) and not with us (NSCN) and Prime Minister Vajpayee took it very seriously", said Th Muivah in an



Th. Muivah

interview to the North East Sun.

Responding to the critical views of Th Muivah, Dr Shenoy told The Statesman: "I have worked very hard for the peace process. I have chaired the cease-fire monitoring group and held over ten meetings, in a cordial atmosphere, in which both sides participated.

There must be some wrong assumptions (on the part of Muivah). I am surprised".

In the interview, Muivah praised the former Prime Minister, Mr Narasimha Rao, who reportedly had told the NSCN leaders in 1995, "I know the situation, I know who is who

and I will tackle the problem myself and will not allow anybody to come in between".

The NSCN leaders admit that they had anticipated problems on the way when they agreed to hold talks with the Centre. Despite the fear, the leaders "had to show that there is tolerance and patience. If we don't prove that then there is no maturity or seriousness in us. We think that the NSCN has proved itself but it is the Government which has to look into this aspect in a more serious way".

Taking a dig at NSCN-Khaplang group, Muivah accused the group of taking protection from the Assam Rifles and the Indian Armed Forces. "But the question is why the Government of India should allow this kind of thing to happen?

Jamir is there, the Governor is there, Assam Rifles chief is there, and the army bosses are responsible for this. They are the people who are creating a situation like this.

And on top of that some Home ministry officials are also participating in the situation and may be misleading the Home Minister and the Central Government", Muivah said.

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2002

conspiracy!

Bodo bloodletting

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J. H. B. Strals
Dispur-Delhi face-off back on track

The National Democratic Front of Bodoland, formerly the Bodo Security Force, must include phrases like "peace process" and "negotiated settlement" in its vocabulary. It has shed enough blood for more than a decade with no thought of a dialogue. If its fresh violence is any indication, the NDFB prefers to battle for the "liberation" of the "Bodo nation", whatever that means. For a week since 21 January, 31 innocent Bengalis and Biharis were massacred. What prompted such carnage is not clear, but the NDFB - which has been watching the progress of peace talks between its Bodo Liberation Tigers rivals and the Centre - possibly intended the killings as signal that the BLT alone cannot decide the future of the Bodos. As in Nagaland, Delhi has set a dangerous precedent by singling out one group for talks. The All Bodo Students' Union and allies supporting the peace process are pressing Tarun Gogoi to form a Bodo Territorial Council. The Absu's opposition to non-Bodo organisations being negotiating partners is a major hurdle. Which is singularly unfair because the Bodos do not constitute a majority in their homeland. Non-Bodos' interest must be safeguarded. The Absu signed the February 1993 Bodo accord and rejected it six months later, reviving its demand for a separate state. It then climbed down but is on record as having said it had not "abandoned" its demand.

Dispur has again been caught on the hop and, as quickly, has passed the buck to the Centre for not forcing Bhutan to flush out Bodo militants. This is somewhat incongruous. To suggest there would have been no outrage had there being no militants in the Himalayan kingdom is an argument deserving of derision. The authorities should have tightened security along the border in anticipation of the possible entry of militants.

THE STRAITS

25 JAN 2002

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Obtuse truce

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Peace in Nagaland merely illusory

The killing of six NSCN-Khaplang activists by the rival Isak-Muivah faction will be a big disappointment for the Naga Hoho and private organisations which initiated the reconciliation campaign last December. Clashes between the two groups were expected in the absence of a truce though they had mutually suspended operations against each other during Christmas and special occasions. Which makes one wonder why they cannot agree to a formal truce. The NSCN-IM supported the recent reconciliation move by sending a representative, but the Khaplang group did not. Then again, the Khaplang group and the parent body, the Naga National Council, attended the July 1997 Atlanta talks and committed themselves to "reconciliation, particularly in overcoming bitter political rivalry and inter-party disputes". The NSCN-IM did not attend as it also has a score to settle with the NNC. It is no secret that the NSCN-IM is determined to exterminate all five signatories (two are known to have died) to the 1975 Peace Accord.

Clearly, the two NSCN groups will never be able to subordinate their differences, however much the Naga Hoho fails to bring about some sort of understanding. There is every possibility of the NSCN-IM hijacking both the Hoho and special negotiator K Padmanabhiiah. The Centre must ensure it is not caught napping should Nagaland go up in flames again, the ceasefire notwithstanding.

THE STATESMAN

23 JAN 2002

MIASMA IN MANIPUR

New Delhi Must Shed Its Neo-Colonial Image

By JB LAMA

55 A 27/1
Electoral battles have never been fought on the issue of territorial integrity in the history of independent India. But this exception will be the main plank in next month's Manipur Assembly poll. Tensions generated by the "June 2001 Bangkok accord", extending the Nagaland ceasefire to Manipur, may have abated to some extent but the tinderbox — the pan-Nagaland concept — is yet to be defused. That the Centre accepted the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-IM's demand for extension only after Manipur was brought under President's rule in June last year suggests the takeover was calculated and deliberate.

Negative response

Two significant developments over the past few weeks may change the course of Naga politics. The NSCN-IM sent one of its vice-presidents, Khodao Yanthan, to the Naga Hoho-sponsored "Reconciliation Campaign" at Kohima last December. This month about 45 Nagas representing various tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur met NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, in Bangkok.

The ultimate objective of the reconciliation is to pave the way for a Greater Nagaland. The Naga Hoho has made no secret of its intention. That the issue was discussed at Bangkok was evident from the statement issued after the meeting that the "legitimate interests and apprehensions of the people of neighbouring states will be accommodated". What exactly this means and how it will help calm the Meiteis, Assamese and Arunachalese remains to be seen.

The Naga-Kuki tension over the Sadar Hills issue is another impediment in Meitei-Naga relations. The Sadar Hills area of Kangpokpi (Kuki majority) in Manipur's Senapati district (predominantly Nagas) was to have been converted into a full-fledged revenue entity in 1982 but the Nagas opposed it. When the administration made an attempt in 1998 to implement its decision, the Nagas blocked the main lifeline through the district — the 213-km Imphal-Dimapur Road (National Highway 39) — for about a month. NSCN-IM activists control the highway and last year they burned about 25 oil-laden tankers for non-payment of the "agreed tax".

The new government may have to either ensure the status quo over the issue, attempt an amicable settlement in a spirit of give and take or extract a Naga assurance that no economic blockade would be resorted to in future.

The Meiteis have a point when they

The author, who was on the staff of The Statesman for 42 years, contributes regularly.

complain that the Centre has adopted double standards when dealing with them. Last March the Kojiam government declared a month's unilateral ceasefire, with all state political parties endorsing its renewal by another month. But the Centre refused, citing no response from militants. And yet earlier it did not hesitate to extend the unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir for three months despite the negative response from terrorists.

The latest slur derives from Meitei

ment a breather. He failed, as did his successor Radhabinod Kojiam and resulted in President's Rule. The ban continues.

The womenfolk, however, defied the recent Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (Kangjamba) diktat on the wearing of *salwar-kameez*, *saris* and trousers. Its main objective seems to be not so much to preserve Meitei tradition as to upstage its two rival factions led by Oken and Teijemba.

The Meitei rebels are trying to endear themselves to the public by doing social



extremist groups being branded terrorist organisations under the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance. For the record, PREPAK — a comparatively smaller and new outfit, which had no more than 30 cadres — was proscribed much earlier than the NSCN. Would this imply that the Meiteis are different from the Naga, Assamese, Bodo and Tripura insurgents?

The draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has been in force in Manipur since 1980 but has not helped. Its continued application has only alienated the Meiteis. Little purpose will be served by the application of stringent laws when insurgents captured are let off within days of their arrest.

Neo-colonial image

Not many outside the state are aware that there is a milder version of Talibanisation in Manipur since July 2000 when the Revolutionary People's Party — the political wing of the People's Liberation Army — banned the screening and playing of Hindi films and songs, thereby indicating their contempt for Delhi's big-wigs. The promise to lift this ban was one of the conditions in a 26-point action plan that gave the Nipamacha govern-

ment a breather. It recently destroyed heroin worth crores of rupees. Insurgent groups organise free medical camps in remote areas where facilities are non-existent. They have forced corrupt officials and contractors to confess their guilt through local newspapers. Two contractors were shot dead after a gallery under construction at the prestigious Khuman Leipak Stadium collapsed in 1998. Recently, KYKL(O) activists shot at two Manipur University teachers for allegedly tampering with marksheets and accepting bribes. The insurgents forced liquor shops to close. However worthy such causes, no legitimate government can accord formal sanction to such activities.

There is little chance of insurgency coming to an end even as one sees no future for rebels. A local political analyst has correctly suggested that New Delhi must shed its neo-colonial image over the region and any policy on insurgency must be aimed at the roots rather than the insurgents themselves. Whichever party comes to power must take heed of this.

The task in Manipur is formidable, the road to recovery littered with obstacles. Decline pervades every sphere — be it

education, work culture, civic amenities, public health or communications. The hills' socio-economic fabric, shattered by six years of Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes, has to be repaired.

Financial emergency

Manipur is also bankrupt. Even Governor Ved Marwah admits the financial condition is far worse than he had imagined. Political parties' appeal for declaring financial emergency under Article 360 is unlikely to be heeded, but unless the Centre bails the state out it will be irretrievably lost in economic quicksands. The RBI stopped payments after the state government defaulted on repayment of overdrafts. The Nipamacha ministry is said to have exceeded ways and means advance limits several times over. To make things worse the Planning Commission slashed the 2000-2001 state annual plan by Rs 24 crores. Roads are in disrepair but the 11th Finance Commission recommended a mere Rs 13.33 crore for the maintenance of 6,700-km of roads over five years, instead of the Rs 110 crore needed for the purpose.

About 80 per cent of the state revenue goes to pay salaries. Pensions alone consume Rs 90 crores. Debt servicing accounts for another Rs 200 crores, which leaves only Rs 150 crores for development works. Governor has ordered sacking of 14,385 employees and the abolition of 9,385 posts — to be effective after the present incumbents retire.

Widening of the Imphal-Silchar Road (NH 53) deserves attention because it serves as a second lifeline when Naga blockades disrupt traffic on the NH 39. Significantly, the Border Road Task Force, whose responsibility it is to maintain national highways, has not been able to undertake the job because of the state's inability to provide security to personnel, mostly non-locals.

The number of educated unemployed has risen to 400,000 and ways must be found to harness them. Major projects now languishing must be reactivated. The Thoubal multipurpose project, which can ensure double cropping has been a non-starter following the destruction of equipment by the Nagas in the 1980s. The Loktak Downstream Project (105 MW), to be undertaken by NEEPCO, has been stymied by a dispute over payment of compensation. This was initially estimated at Rs 5-10 crores but, probably at the instigation of political leaders, claims have shot up to Rs 60 crores. Last year alone, Rs 322.90 lakhs were reportedly spent on furnishing and repairing ministers' and MLAs' offices.

Manipur cannot wear its belt any tighter. The solution calls for severe austerity measures and a quick burial of old habits.

Inward mobility

THE STATESMAN

Second carnage by separatist Bodo outfit in a week may stymie peace process

Rebels massacre 17 in Darrang

OUR BUREAU

Jan. 22: The outlawed National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) has shot down the Centre's olive branch to sundry Bodo militants by pulling its trigger in Darrang last night and killing more than a dozen non-Bodos in the ongoing war of attrition with the Bodo Liberation Tigers.

The late night NDFB strike came barely a few hours after the Centre decided to extend the ceasefire with the BLT by another six months. Though the radical NDFB has not been part of the Bodo peace process since its inception in early 2000, the six-month ceasefire extension, among other things, was ostensibly yet another signal to the NDFB to review its hardline posture. The half-yearly renewal of truce indicated that Delhi was keen to have the hardline Bodo faction as a partner in the ongoing peace process.

Gauging the NDFB's continuing defiant mood — as the outfit had gunned down 13 non-Bodos barely four days ago — security forces in the Bodo areas were "put on maximum possible alert" this morning as the toll in last night's mayhem rose from 12 to 17.

However, unofficial sources put the number of dead at the remote Junglebari village, along the Indo-Bhutan border at 20. More of the injured struggled for their lives in different hospitals. The dead included two minors.

Before fleeing, the rebels also set 20 houses ablaze in a chilling warning to the non-Bodos to leave the Bodo-dominated areas. The deliberate attack on a settlement of non-Bodos — like the previous incident — was a grim reminder of the outfit's resolve to "cleanse" its territory of all

"outsiders" whom it considers a hurdle in the way of creating a "sovereign Bodoland" exclusively for the Bodos.

The NDFB's renewed targeting of non-Bodos was also being seen as the outfit's attempts to "stay afloat" in the Bodo affairs. With all major Bodo groups backing the Centre-BLT peace talks and the proposal to create the Bodo Territorial Council, the NDFB is facing the prospect of its armed struggle becoming redundant.

"The killings are an attempt to stall the peace process and nothing else," director-general of police Harekrishna Deka said. He said a group of around 15 heavily-armed NDFB rebels raided the village — under Udalguri police station — and rounded up the villagers to a particular spot before opening fire on them.

While 12 died on the spot, the others succumbed to their injuries in hospital. Of the four injured shifted to the Gauhati Medical College Hospital, one passed away this morning.

Recounting the details, one of the survivors said: "It was 8.30 pm, time for the villagers to prepare for bed after a hard day's work. The stillness of the night was shattered by a sudden commotion as the group of gun-wielding militants surrounded the village. They ordered everyone to gather at the village chowk."

The petrified villagers could only stand and stare as some of the militants stood guard and the rest set fire to their houses. "Nearly 15 houses were torched," he added. The panic-stricken villagers barely had time to run for cover as without a word of warning, the militants opened fire indiscriminately.



Bodies lined up in Junglebari where at least 17 people were killed when Bodo insurgents attacked the village on Monday night. (AFP)

Rabri seeks security for labourers

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Patna, Jan. 22: Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi today requested the Union home minister and her counterpart in Assam to protect the "poor and helpless migrant labourers in the militant-infested districts" of the northeastern state.

Rabri Devi expressed shock over the massacre of the 17 labourers from Bihar in Darrang district of Assam last night by militants of the National Democratic Front for Boroland (NDFB). She also urged her Assam counterpart Tarun Gogoi to provide financial compensation to the relatives of the victims.

The victims of the massacre included four children and six women from the backward caste, the group that forms the ruling RJD's support base in Bihar. "They may be staying outside, but they return during the polls and vote for us," a senior RJD legislator said.

In a letter to the Union home ministry, the Bihar government said adequate security should be provided to the labourers in their camps in Assam. "This is not the first incident in which labourers from Bihar were killed for trying to eke out a living outside the state," said labour and panchayat affairs minister Upendra P. Verma.

The state governments could not provide financial assistance on a number of occasions to the victims because the labourers were not registered and had gone outside through unauthorised agents, Verma said. Thousands of labourers from 12 north Bihar districts migrate to the north and east of the country

gaigaon districts observed a

THE TELEGRAPH

7 JAN 2002

Six die as Naga ultras clash

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

KOHIMA, Jan. 19. — In an incident that may be a huge setback to the Naga reconciliation campaign launched by the Naga Hoho, the apex tribal council, and churches since 20 December, six NSCN (K) cadres were killed in a clash with rival NSCN (IM) activists at a village near Dimapur yesterday.

The police said here today that six bullet-riddled bodies were found by them and Army personnel, after being informed by villagers, in a paddy field at Tenyiphe-II village where the clash took place.

One NSCN (IM) cadre was arrested with arms and ammunition, said the police.

The NSCN (K) had offered a unilateral month-long ceasefire to its rival groups on 19 December. The Naga Hoho had urged the NSCN (K) to extend the ceasefire period and called upon its rival to reciprocate positively.

Describing the incident as 'unfortunate', the Isaac-Muivah faction claimed in a statement here that over 100 NSCN (K) cadres were intercepted by its activists when they were on their way to attack an NSCN (IM) camp near the village. The six NSCN (K) cadres were killed in the exchange of fire

NIPAMACHA'S HOUSE SET ON FIRE

IMPHAL, Jan. 19. — Suspected militants have set ablaze the residence of the former Manipur chief minister, Mr W Nipamacha Singh, and fired at the residence of former Union minister, Mr Th Chaoba Singh, official sources said here today.

Armed militants barged into the living room of Mr Nipamacha Singh's house at Wangoi area in Imphal late last night and set it on fire after holding up the family members at gun point.

However, not much damage was reported as the fire service personnel reached the spot in time, the sources said. Mr Singh was not in the house during that time, the sources said.

In another incident, gunmen fired several rounds at the residence of Mr Th Chaoba Singh, MP at Utlou, about 25 km South of Imphal yesterday, the sources said. No one was injured in the incident. — PTI

and one G3 rifle, one SLR, one M21 gun, a 303 rifle and ammunition were recovered from the Khaplang cadres, the NSCN(IM) added.

The NSCN (K) described the attack as 'dastardly' and said this exposed the NSCN (IM)'s motive of 'destroying the Naga social fabric' and that too during the NSCN (K)-called unilateral ceasefire.

In a statement, the Khaplang faction added that while on one hand the leaders of the rival group talked about peace, on the other it was instigating its cadres to confront the NSCN (K).

The NSCN(K) added that they wouldn't 'tolerate such

heinous crimes' and criticised the Isaac-Muivah faction for targeting the Meitis and the Kukis repeatedly.

Both the factions are engaged with the Centre over the ceasefire agreement that still holds on paper though the latest casualty is the biggest since the beginning of the reconciliation process.

A group of NSCN(IM) cadres was intercepted near Vidima by the Bihar regiment. One was arrested after an encounter. One M-16 US made Assault Rifle, along with some ammunition, were recovered from the militant.

RECEIVED

JAN 20 1979

Army launches hunt for militants in Manas, Upper Assam

Non-Bodos flee Bongaigaon

FROM KUMAR RAJIB
GURUNG IN BIJNI AND
ROOPAK GOSWAMI
IN GUWAHATI

Jan. 17: Assam's Bongaigaon district plunged into ethnic tension following Tuesday night's carnage by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in which 13 people were killed. Panic-stricken non-Bodos have now started to flee their homes in villages around Bijni.

The army launched full-scale operations in the Manas wildlife sanctuary to flush out NDFB rebels. Three army columns have been deployed in the affected villages, an official spokesperson said. The army also resumed anti-insurgency operations in some Upper Assam districts as the government put security forces on maximum alert to prevent violence in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations.

A deserted Deolangjhar village — 30 km from the site of the gruesome killing — greeted Assam health minister Bhumidar Barman and inspector-general of police (law and order) Mohan Raj, who were there today to assess the situation.

The district administration hurriedly set up a CRPF camp in the village as a "confidence-building measure". But the



A survivor of the NDFB attack at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital on Thursday. Picture by Eastern Projections

health minister only added to the fear of the people by stating that till such time as the Bodo imbroglio is solved, such incidents "are quite natural". The IGP referred to the recent attack on Parliament by militants saying such attacks "cannot always be thwarted".

All 100 families of the "number 2" Deolangjhar village have deserted their homes. A large

number of non-Bodos from the nearby Lakhijhora, Sikajhora, Bishnupur, Deolangjhar "number 1" and Barpathar villages have also started fleeing to Bijni town and other places.

The government today announced an ex gratia of Rs 1 lakh each to the next of kin of those killed. The Bongaigaon district Congress committee has also offered Rs 5,000 each to the families

of the victims.

On the issue of the proposed Bodo Territorial Council, the health minister said though the government supported the Centre's proposal, Dispur had suggested that the former take the non-Bodo people into confidence before taking a final decision. "If the non-Bodo people are not taken into confidence, then the enmity and mistrust among the Bodos and the non-Bodos would never end," Barman said.

The Bongaigaon deputy commissioner said apart from the CRPF camp, patrolling by police and paramilitary forces in the affected villages have been intensified. Superintendent of police Amarendra Borgohain said one of the reasons behind the attack by the NDFB could be a "warning to the Bengali Tiger Force", whose members were the main target of the Tuesday night's attack. Though he said four or five of those killed were BTF members, police are yet to identify them.

Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi today said such "inhuman and dastardly acts of violence" would not be tolerated and vowed to track down the killers.

Those injured in the attack are undergoing treatment at Bijni and in the Guwahati Medical College Hospital in the state.

THE TELEGRAPH

17/8 JAN 2002

70 2002

13 non-Bodos killed in Bongaigaon

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 16: Indicating either resumption of its violent ethnic cleansing or a bid to further divide the Bodos and the non-Bodos to jeopardise the process of creation of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), suspected National Democratic Front of Boroland militants gunned down 13 non-Bodos late last night. The massacre took place in two remote hamlets near Bijni in Bongaigaon district.

Five others were also injured while another went missing in the attack on the two villages — Sikajhar and Deolanghar — close to the Indo-Bhutan border, Bongaigaon police said.

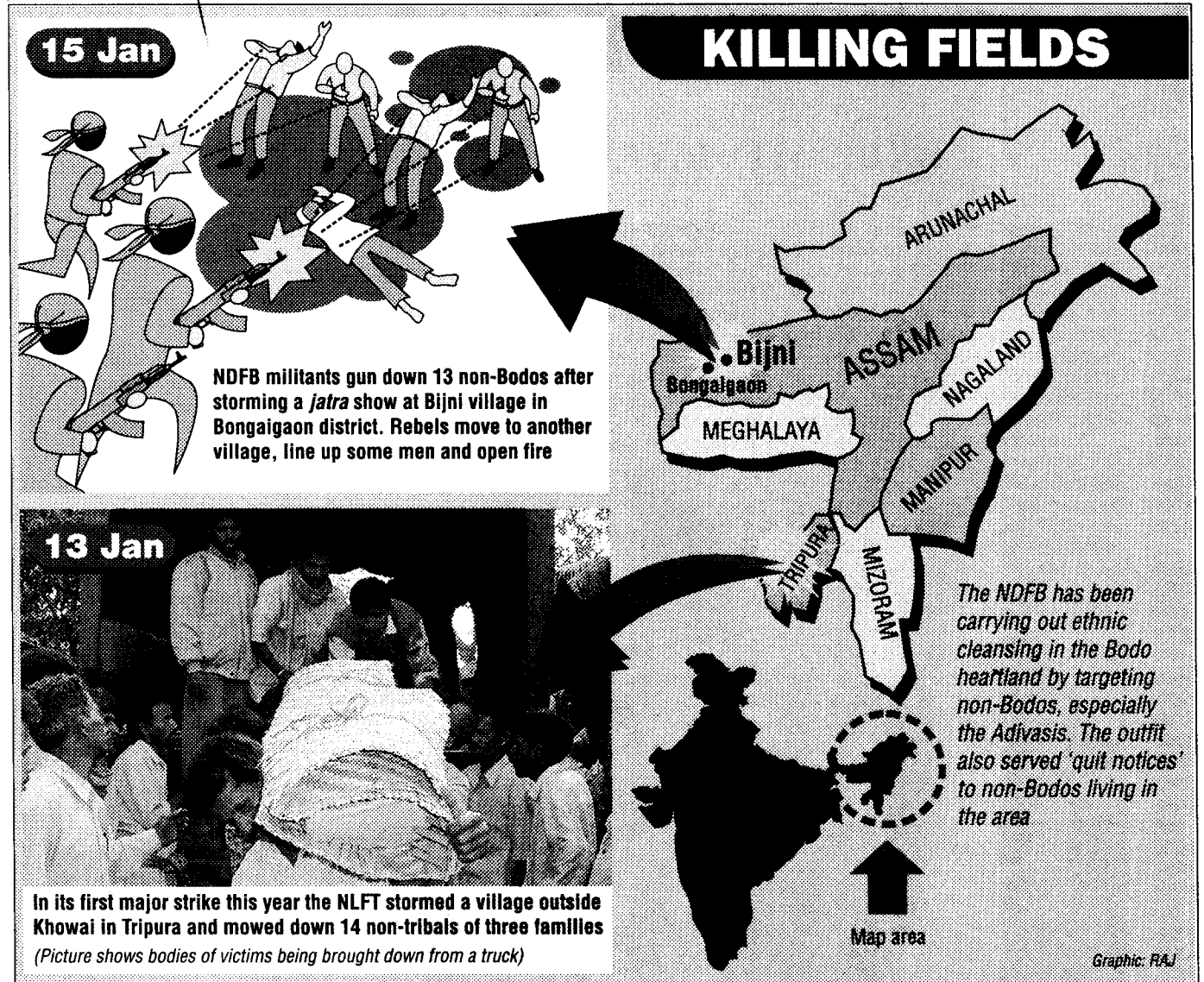
The incident occurred at 11.30 pm. According to the police, a group of heavily-armed NDFB rebels first arrived at Sikajhar and opened fire indiscriminately on a crowd gathered for a religious function. The exact number of dead in the village was not known. The rebels then moved to the other village and lined up some persons before opening fire.

Most of the people died on the spot while a few others succumbed to their injuries at the Bongaigaon civil hospital, about 30 km away. The Bongaigaon police reached the spot only this morning. They said "most of the killed are men".

Of the 13 persons killed, 11 have been identified so far. They are Bijoy Barman, Dhaniram Barman, Swapan Majumdar, Sunil Mondol, Makhan Mondol, Laltu Mondol, Rabin Sarkar, Pankaj Debnath, Prangovinda Debnath, Shivrath Chauhan and Jiban Das. Three of the injured have been identified as Sridam Barman, Sambhu Barman and Tushar Barman.

Heavy rains since this morning have delayed rescue and search operations, the police said.

The NDFB had served "quit notices" to non-Bodos living in



the area as part of its "ethnic cleansing". According to sources, the NDFB has also been under pressure to make its presence felt as its opponent, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), was close to striking a deal with the Centre for the creation of the BTC.

Sources said last night's strike will only strengthen the case of the organisations opposing the creation of the BTC, ex-

pected to be the final result of the ongoing talks between the Centre and the BLT. The NDFB is opposed to the creation of the council as it believes that such a development will render its armed struggle for a "sovereign Bodoland" redundant.

The BLT and the NDFB have targeted each other's members over the years and are the fiercest opponents with both maintaining well-demarcated

areas of operation in the Bodo-dominated areas. The NDFB considers the BLT a "puppet" of the Indian government.

Altogether 21 non-Bodo organisations, under the banner of the Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti, have been claiming that the creation of the BTC will turn them into "second class" citizens and thus "give the Bodos the opportunity to begin oppression on us".

The NDFB attack almost coincided with a statement by the All-Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo People's Movement Committee, which accused the state government of employing "divide-and-rule" tactics to instil fear in the minds of the non-Bodos. The NDFB has been carrying out an ethnic cleansing in the Bodo heartland by targeting non-Bodos, especially the ethnic Adivasis.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 JAN 2002

Bodo ultras kill 13 Bengalis

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, January 16

MILITANTS OF the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) last night mowed down 13 Bengali villagers and injured five others at a place near the Indo-Bhutan border in Bongaigaon district.

Police said masked militants swooped down on No 3 Dalongjar village, 30 km north of Bijni near the international boundary with Bhutan, and opened fire from automatic weapons.

Thirteen people were killed on the spot. Three of those wounded, who sustained serious bullet injuries, were shifted to Guwahati Medical College.

The number of those injured could go up as many had rushed

to Bongaigaon and Bijni civil hospitals on their own, police said. The victims, all Bengalis, were at a Ganesh Puja 'kirtan' when the militants struck.

Senior police officials from Guwahati rushed to the spot after Bongaigaon police came to know of the incident this morning. The area, close to the Bhutan border, was an easy target for the militants, who had come down from their camps in Bhutan, police said.

NLFT militants killed 16 non-tribals in Tripura on Sunday. Security has been tightened in entire Lower Assam following the incident and a massive search launched for the culprits. Two Army columns and a strong contingent of police have been rushed to the area for

combing operations and beefing up security measures.

Meanwhile, 12 militant organisations of the north-east today called for a boycott of Republic Day. The joint statement by the militant outfits has been issued by ULFA in its fortnightly mouthpiece, 'Freedom'.

The militants have urged all people of the region to boycott Republic Day and "prevent any celebrations being held." They have also called a general strike from 1 am to 6 pm on January 26.

The outfits include Arunachal Dragon Federation, Achik National Volunteers Council, Dima Halam Daoga, Hynnitrep National Liberation Council, Kamatapur Liberation Organisation and Manipur People's Liberation Front.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 JAN 2000

Manipur politics

Smaller parties must make coalition work

People are not far wrong if Manipur conjures up a vision of a state crawling with insurgents. It is difficult to identify a militant but every Meitei in his heart is a rebel, forced by years of neglect and apathy. More than insurgency it is the politicians' incredible ability to switch allegiance, supine administration and corrupt bureaucracy that are responsible for slowing down the state's economic growth. Since attaining statehood in 1972 it has witnessed the funeral of 18 governments and the Assembly elections scheduled for February will be the ninth, the last one being held in February 2000. Multiparty-politics is the bane of the state. Two more — Democratic People's Party and Manipur People's Conference — have emerged after the Central take over last May, making a total of 16. Even if smaller parties align with big ones it is difficult to imagine them securing an absolute majority. At the best of times Congress, which ruled the state for several years, managed not more than 22. In the last elections the Manipur State Congress Party and Federal Party of Manipur combine bagged 29 seats and formed a government by roping in the NCP, MPP, RJD and JD(U) but it started wobbling from day one.

A new experiment is being tried. To avoid any post-electoral controversy, leading parties have decided to choose leaders beforehand. How this will help remains to be seen but elected representatives are expected to behave responsibly if last June's lesson is not lost on them. In the aftermath of the extension of Nagaland ceasefire, irate crowds attacked houses of ministers and legislators for hankering only after power and failure to protect the state's territorial integrity. This issue is likely to be the main poll plank. Multi-party rule has come to stay and since stability depends on smaller parties, they must adopt a pragmatic approach to make a coalition work in the long-term interest of the state.

RECEIVED

17 JAN 2002

Accord in sight

9.12.87 But Bodos must have patience 5/16/1

Fourteenth round of talks with the Bodo Liberation Tigers in about three years is good progress, yet the plain tribals fear Dispur might let them down in the creation of a "Bodoland Territorial Council" under the Sixth Schedule. Admittedly, the last sitting was cut short by a day but they agreed to form a drafting sub-committee to prepare proposals for consideration by the Centre and Dispur. This will take time. The BLT, however, seems impatient and has reportedly told the Centre that they want a decision before the terms of the ceasefire expires on 21 January. Such an attitude is to be deplored. The present Bodo mood is reminiscent of the situation that prevailed before the signing of the 20 February 1993 Bodo Accord between the Centre and the All Bodo Students Union. Painstakingly slow pace of talks was exasperating and the Absu also set a deadline but they had faith in the negotiation.

The Bodo accord was a typical example of haste makes waste. The six-year agitation became intractable at times but within days of the late Rajesh Pilot becoming union minister of state for Home Affairs the accord was clinched, leaving many questions unanswered. Even the Absu leader who signed the agreement was doubtful about its implementation. The creation of "BTC" involves the division of five districts with a large proportion of non-Bodos. The Centre has to take them into confidence. It is better to take a little more time than repent later. Anyway, the agreement with the BLT does not necessarily mean the end of the Bodo imbróglío. Another militant group — National Democratic Front of Boroland, demanding a separate state outside India — will try to make its presence felt.

THE STATESMAN

16 JAN 2002

Nagas cheer NSCN-IM stand

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Kohima, Jan. 14: The five-day Naga consultative meeting held at Bangkok has hailed the stand taken by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) that it is willing to accommodate the views of the Naga people during all stages of its political negotiations with the Centre to resolve the decades-old Naga insurgency issue.

One of the main objectives of the meeting, held between representatives from Naga-dominated areas of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland, and the NSCN(I-M) leadership, was to strengthen the peace efforts through "people's participation".

The meeting reviewed the on-

going peace process to facilitate a negotiated settlement to the Naga issue. The meeting started on January 7.

A statement issued by the 44-member delegation which attended the meeting stated that the NSCN(I-M)'s views to consult the Naga people during talks with the Centre and seek their active participation will go a long way in avoiding misunderstandings "so that past mistakes may not be repeated and transparency ensured".

It is widely believed that the threadbare discussions at Bangkok will also go a long way in strengthening the peace process. They have also given a big boost to the reconciliation drive launched by the Naga Hoho. The NSCN(I-M) leadership has lauded the initiatives by

the Hoho and other bodies to work out the proper basis for unity of the various Naga groups. Reaffirming its support to the ongoing negotiations between the Centre and the NSCN(I-M), the meeting also stressed the need to accommodate the "legitimate interests and apprehensions" of the people of neighbouring states.

During the course of the meeting, the NSCN(I-M) leadership informed the delegation about the ongoing talks with the Centre, starting with a thorough review of the history and philosophy of the Naga struggle from its beginning. The last round of talks was held last month with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Osaka.

The meeting had urged both the Centre and the NSCN(I-M) to

honour the spirit of the ongoing ceasefire. The meeting also urged the armed forces to restrict themselves within their jurisdiction.

Highlighting the need for transparency and accountability in the monitoring of the ceasefire, the meeting suggested that the existing mechanism be upgraded to ensure impartiality and effective functioning by including independent observers. It also called for withdrawal of the ban on the organisation involved in the Naga national movement as well as the arrest warrants issued against Naga national leaders. "The ongoing peace process is to set right the unjust legacy of colonialism and to restore the natural rights of the Nagas to determine their own future the statement said.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 JAN 2002

Naga ceasefire spectre over Manipur polls

H Bula Devi in New Delhi

Dec 13. — The Assembly elections in Manipur are likely to witness three trends, each reflecting the voters' composition.

While the constituencies in the valley are likely to show one kind of trend, in the Hills, the trend is expected to be totally different and divided on the basis of the composition of Naga-inhabited areas and non Naga constituencies. The issue of territorial integrity is likely to marginalise all other issues in the polls, to be held on 14 and 21 February.

Even if political parties find it hard to project a unifocal issue, the protection of territorial rights would be a dominant and decisive factor. Territorial integrity vis-a-vis the agreement on the NSCN ceasefire and the consequent upheaval in the state, is a cause of concern for the people of Manipur.

Though it would all ultimately depend on how strongly the candidates pursue the issue during the campaign and manage to tilt the vote bank in their favour, some aspiring candidates might

NSCN scare sparks exodus

United News of India

IMPHAL, Jan. 13. — Villagers of Tuisoliyan Sotobagra, Butangkhal and Arpt Baoulveng of Manipur bordering Cachar district of Assam have fled their homes following the arrival of large number of armed NSCN I-M activists in the area.

Frequent clashes between rival underground groups forced the villagers, belonging to the Hmar community, to cross over the Barak river to safety.

Police officials visited the subdivision recently to chalk out strategies for finding a solution to the problem.

find it difficult to raise the issue. After the uprising in the state, many such candidates are now regarded as "not sensitive enough" to Manipur's interest.

With the BJP and the Samata Party being totally exposed on this issue, the same opinion can be extended to the Congress as most state Samata leaders were Congress members. But that certainly doesn't mean that the Congress's fate is sealed. In fact, given the present circumstances when none of the parties is likely to get a majority, it is perhaps only the Congress which has better chances of winning.

The newly floated political parties like the Democratic People's Party (DPP), led by Mr Mani Singh, who is an advocate and a human rights activist, and Federal Party of Manipur (FPM), led by Dr L Chandramani Singh, are likely to make a dent in the vote bank of other parties. Mr Chandramani Singh has never lost an election since 1972 except in 1990.

The FPM comprises members from various smaller parties and leaders of breakaway group.

The DPP and the FPM are likely to get maximum benefit in this election because of the territorial integrity movement and because the "climate" suits them, an observer said.

THE STATESMAN
14 JAN 2002

NLFT ultras mow down 16 civilians

Press Trust of India

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AGARTALA, Jan. 13. — In its first major strike in four months, NLFT militants today opened fire on Makar Sankranti shoppers in the crowded Singicherra Bazaar in West Tripura, killing 16 persons and injuring nine others.

The SP (operations), Mr Dhurjati Gautam, said 12 persons died on the spot and 13 were injured when two groups of NLFT ultras encircled the bazaar and sprayed bullets indiscriminately. The militants then fled the area. While two persons died on way to hospital, two others succumbed to their injuries at GB Hospital in Agartala, Mr Gautam said. Nine more were later admitted.

The deceased included two women and a seven-year old girl. The chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, visited the hospital. The Tripura State Rifles have launched a massive hunt for the militants.

The ruling CPI-M condemned the incident and called a dawn to dusk bandh on 15 January in Khowai subdivision in protest against the massacre. A statement issued by the state CPI-M secretariat said the strike was made to create panic as the militants were completely cornered and isolated due to resistance by the people and effective combat by the security forces in insurgency affected areas.

The statement alleged the Opposition Congress, the Trinamul Congress and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, who were on the process of forging an alliance against the Left Front for the 21 February parliamentary by-election, had a hand in the massacre.

THE STATESMAN

14 JAN 2002

Unity for peace

But Nagas not showing conciliatory gestures

Too much need not be read into the Bangkok meeting between NSCN leaders Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah and the 40-strong Naga team comprising NGOs and tribal leaders from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. That they met in good faith hoping to persuade the rebel leaders to see reason in forging unity is good enough. Had the two accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to visit Nagaland they would have spared the team the trouble of travelling thousands of miles. One may ask, if they could come and spend a month in Nagaland in May 1999, why not now. Their stay in Nagaland would have helped hasten the peace process. There already exists a peace camp at Chedema where one of the structures is said to have been built with Muivah's help. There can be no two opinions about peace talks preceding unity among three different warring groups. The first step is to bring about a truce between the two NSCN factions. The Naga Hoho, apex body of all tribal councils, must direct its efforts towards this. The presence of an NSCN-IM representative at the reconciliation campaign last month at Kohima brought cheers but the seemingly half empty galleries was indication that not many Nagas want to see the end of the conflict.

Muivah has repeated several times that Nagaland is not part of India and there could be no compromise on sovereignty. On the other hand, the Centre understandably has not changed its stand on dialogues only within the parameters of the Constitution. Given this one wonders what there is to discuss. As long as the Nagas remain divided too much hope need not be pinned on the on-going peace talks. The only hopeful sign is the continuation of the ceasefire despite severe strain.

THE STATESMAN

9 JAN 2002

Naga bid to form united front ahead of talks

Jaideep Mazumdar - 911
Kolkata, January 8

THE NAGA elders have launched a major exercise to reach an understanding between the rival factions of the militant National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).

A 44-member delegation from all the 36 Naga tribes as well as senior members of the apex Naga Hoho have gone to Bangkok to meet NSCN chairman Isak Chisi Swu and general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to effect a compromise of sorts with the rival faction led by Khaplang.

This whole exercise is geared to project a united face and voice of the Nagas during the next round of talks between the NSCN (I-M) leaders and the representatives of the Union Government.

"Till date, only the voice of one NSCN faction was being heard by the Union Government. That could not have been the representative voice of the Nagas. And a lasting solution to the

Naga issue cannot be achieved without taking all the voices into consideration," a spokesperson of the Naga Hoho told *Hindustan Times* from Kohima.

Another motive behind the effort is the fear that the NSCN (I-M) could arrive at some sort of covert understanding with the Union Government that "may not suit the interests of the Nagas". Also likely to come up for discussions during the ongoing five-day meeting at Bangkok is the issue of sovereignty.

"That is something that will be discussed. The Naga issue is something that concerns all the Nagas. A concrete strategy has to be prepared for the next round of talks. This meeting would definitely give Muivah and Swu added moral sanction to speak on behalf of the Nagas. Or else, the Union Government could well treat them as just one faction of the NSCN," said a source.

The Nagas fear that an understanding between New Delhi and the NSCN(I-M) could well be rejected by the

NSCN(K). "If that happens, the whole exercise would have been rendered futile. Right now, the main objective of all the Nagas is peace.

Peace should prevail at all costs and the inter-factional feuds between the two NSCN factions should end. At the Bangkok meeting, the Hoho leaders would ask Chairman Swu and Muivah to reign in their cadres and exercise maximum restraint," said the spokesperson.

Another major issue on the agenda is the collection of taxes by the rebels. "This has jeopardised the state's economy. We feel it is no longer necessary, in view of the ceasefire since August 1997, to collect such taxes anymore. Or at least, the quantum of the taxes could be reduced sharply," said an elder of a major tribe whose close relative has gone to Bangkok for the meeting. "Most Nagas have realised that sovereignty is not possible and a solution has to be found within the framework of the Indian Constitution," said a senior Intelligence officer.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 9 JAN 2002

Largesse & liability

The seamier side of Nagaland and Manipur

At last month's inauguration of the Naga Hoho-sponsored "Reconciliation campaign" at Kohima, NSCN vice-chairman Khodao Yanthan burnt Indian currency notes to portray the message that a generous flow of money was largely responsible for fracturing the cohesiveness of modern Naga society. What he apparently meant was that moderate leaders who signed the July 1960 agreement with the Government of India leading to Nagaland's creation three years later were the main beneficiaries. Until the mid-'90s, Khodao headed a faction of Phizo's Naga National Council and lived in the UK for over 30 years. He should have known better: if the Nagas had to wait for a "final settlement" they would still be under Assam. Admittedly, the Centre is responsible for spawning a nouveau riche cult. But this was not peculiar to Nagaland. When the army failed to subdue the Nagas, General Thimayya is said to have told Nehru to buy them off. And money did talk.

Yet another classic example comes from Manipur. The People's Liberation Army — which recently burnt two kilograms of heroin worth Rs 2 crore in its crusade against the menace — alleges that the Centre is attempting to subdue the Meiteri movement by making available high grade heroin to turn the militants into "zombies" on the lines of China's "Opium War". Whatever the veracity of the allegation, there is no denying the fact that Manipur has the highest number of drug addicts in the country. Even the Manipur Rifles are on record as being allegedly involved in the smuggling of "ganja" to other parts of the country, earning the sobriquet of "Ganja" Rifles. Given the Centre's eloquence on its war against drugs, it must establish its credibility by probing the charges.

THE STATESMAN

7 JAN 2002

Helping Bhutan

5/19 Ulfa's breach of faith leaves no choice 5/1

The six-month deadline for the Ulfa to leave Bhutan expired on 31 December. Militants have reportedly dismantled the camps but are said to have pitched them elsewhere. That was not Thimpu's perception. Ulfa leaders have broken their pledge to close down four camps and vacate the rest by the year end. Thanks to their presence the Royal Bhutanese Army is now better equipped and trained. Thimpu is faced with the prospect of resorting to military action. Bhutan could have used force in July after the National Assembly endorsed deployment of the army but moderate members voiced concern arguing that any such move would provoke attacks on Bhutanese citizens. Fourteen 14 Bhutanese were killed in December 2000 in Assam in what is perceived as retaliation for interception of a consignment destined for the Ulfa. G N S. S. N

Tarun Gogoi's offer of safe passage to Ulfa leadership comes at an appropriate time but no response is likely as they have rejected several such gestures in the past. Their willingness to conditional talks is a mere ploy to buy time. If they had not hijacked the peace process in 1992 after declaring a unilateral cease-fire, a solution would have been found. There are already reports of Ulfa surreptitiously trying to smuggle weapons from some South-east Asian countries and of fresh recruitment. All this merely confirms that the Ulfa is not interested in peace. The time for joint action with Bhutan if necessary, has arrived.

FILED

- 5 JAN 2002

Reconciliation tough in Nagaland

Local residents of Kohima say that almost any event — socio-cultural, political or sport — at the football ground in Nagaland's capital unfailingly draws large crowds.

But the crowds were conspicuous by their absence on 20 December when the much-touted "reconciliation campaign" was launched by the Naga Hoho, apex body of all Naga tribal councils, at the football ground. This, despite the government having declared a local holiday to enable the people to participate.

The reconciliation campaign aims at bringing together all Naga sections, particularly underground groups, to "forgive and forget" for the greater cause of rebuilding the Naga family and ending years of blood-letting.

Besides, the Hoho also feels that a final settlement of the Naga problem is not possible without including all the tribes and sections of society. The Church in Nagaland has been making such efforts for years without any apparent success.

Over the years, the situation has only worsened, with sharp and almost irreconcilable differences emerging from the underground groups in particular. This has led to the killing of hundreds of members of these groups, besides innocent people caught in the crossfire. Perhaps, more Nagas have died in the fighting among themselves than at the hands of the "Indian occupation forces" — as the rebels call the security forces — on duty in Nagaland.

The Hoho's effort is different from that of the Church in that it is a people's initiative, or that is what the body claims it to be. Yet, the galleries around the ground looked empty. More importantly, just 32 of the 80 or so tribal groups attended the launch ceremony. And, among the underground groups, only the National Socialist Council of Nagalim led by general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and chairman Isak Chishi Swu actually sent their representatives.

The NSCN's Khaplang faction chose not to take part, though it had earlier welcomed the effort. Of the two Naga National Council (NNC) factions, one sent a message supporting the Hoho move.

Irrespective of what anybody has to say, the fact remains that the NSCN-IM is the dominant group among the underground organisations because of its superior numerical and military strength.

Their presence, therefore, should gladden the Hoho and all

The crowds kept away from the reconciliation campaign launched by the Naga Hoho — apex body of all Naga tribal councils — in Kohima. The attempt to unite all sections of Naga society after years of blood-letting may not have paid off but the fact that a start has been made is encouraging, writes DIPANKAR ROY



The Naga Hoho function at the Kohima football ground on 20 December.

others who crave for Naga unity. But what "Colonel" Phungthing Shimrang, convenor of the organisation's ceasefire monitoring cell, said at the meeting left no doubt in the mind of those present that the NSCN-IM continues to stick to its old stand on reconciliation.

According to the NSCN-IM, the others made all the mistakes and, therefore, it is they who should seek forgiveness before any reconciliation can take place; in other words, the NNC must disown the Shillong accord and the NSCN(K) must apologise for slaughtering I-M men.

Considering also that the organisation, which is currently holding talks with the Central government, firmly believes that a solution to the Naga political

problem is possible without first achieving unity among all the underground groups or taking all sections of Naga society into confidence, it becomes clear that the NSCN-IM is unlikely to bend a little to take the Hoho's initiatives to any logical conclusion.

Naga civil society has always remained divided along tribal lines — remember that the famed Naga headhunters were not looking for "Indian" heads those days but that of their own people. Even today, a section of the Nagas in Nagaland do not consider the Tangkhul Nagas — Mr Muivah belongs to the Tangkhul tribe — of Manipur as Nagas.

On the other hand, the Naga National Council, which was till

then leading the Naga national movement, split in 1980 over the 1975 Shillong accord. Opposition to the accord came from leaders like Mr Muivah, Mr Swu and Mr SS Khaplang.

They wanted the then NNC president, ZA Phizo, to abrogate the accord but he did not agree. So the trio formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland even as they were waiting in Myanmar's Shan state to enter Nagaland with a huge supply of arms procured from China.

Soon though, differences cropped up between Mr Khaplang and the two others as well after the former was reportedly fed with "information" that Mr Muivah and Mr Swu were trying to broker a deal with the Indian

government behind his back.

A series of meetings did not help to melt the suspicion and check the growing mistrust and eventually fighting broke out between the followers of Mr Khaplang and those of Mr Swu and Mr Muivah.

Mr Muivah and Mr Swu were even captured by Mr Khaplang's men but they managed to escape. A large number of followers of Mr Muivah and Mr Swu were killed by Mr Khaplang's men who had the advantage of fighting on their home turf of eastern Nagaland, which by NSCN geography also includes the Naga-inhabited areas of western Myanmar.

Mr Khaplang is a Hemi Naga from western Myanmar. Finally, in 1988 the NSCN too split. Ever since, there has been no looking back.

Khodao Yanthan, vice-chairman of NSCN-IM and a past president of the NNC, puts things in perhaps the right perspective when he says that unity among the Nagas is a dim prospect.

Tribalism and clan(ism) are the two main stumbling blocks. Besides, he says, the Nagas have not really understood the struggle though they keep crying for sovereignty. Money poured into Nagaland by the India government over the years had also weakened Naga society and brought in social and economic disharmony.

Be that as it may and notwithstanding the empty stands at the ground, the NSCN-IM's seemingly inflexible posture and the NSCN-K's absence from the meeting, the pledge to strive for Naga unity has been taken and that is a good start.

The Hoho is convinced that the journey towards reconciliation has only just begun. "It is not a one-day affair and we are certain that sooner or later all will walk this path together," is what the elders hope.

Nothing perhaps could be more welcome than a reconciliation among the warring underground groups in particular and the Naga civil society in general because that can bring to an end the suffering of the Nagas to a great extent at a time when efforts are on to resolve the decades-old Naga political issue.

It remains to be seen, though, whether the latest pledge ends up only as a cry in the wilderness or marks the opening of a new chapter.

(The author is The Statesman's Guwahati-based Special Representative.)