

Ulfa doublespeak

Another disaster if it lets opportunity slip

Ulfa leaders are talking in different voices. While its commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah wants talks with the Centre, chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa seeks refuge in China. Barua's reported willingness is perhaps the most significant response to the Royal Bhutan Army's surprisingly successful offensive against anti-Indian insurgent groups. Few had expected them to come out with a conciliatory gesture having vowed to continue their armed struggle to the last man and bullet. How serious are they in shaping Assam's future will be known only when they start making realistic efforts to initiate a political dialogue.

This is the last chance to finally reach a settlement and it is time they freed themselves from the grips of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. Ulfa leaders do not have the reputation of being sincere having damaged their credibility in 1991 when, after declaring a unilateral and unconditional ceasefire following Operation Rhino, they agreed to talk but reneged within weeks.

If the Centre has rejected Barua's offer it is only reiterating its stand that it is prepared to settle Ulfa's demands only within the Constitutional framework. Barua's reported request to Bhutan to act as a mediator is at best aimed at pressuring the royal army to cease its operations. There is no room for complacency and Bhutan must continue to hunt down those who reportedly escaped taking advantage of Thimphu's 48-hour ultimatum since they could pose a serious threat to the Himalayan kingdom's vital installations.

Bhutan has rightly expressed concern over Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi's offer of general amnesty as it fears that once the recalcitrants are pardoned they could flaunt their immunity and target Bhutanese nationals along the border. One cannot ignore the fact that over the past decade hundreds of cadres surrendered but the outfit's striking power was never neutralised, nor has its strength reduced.

Rajkhowa's allegation of the Bhutanese army committing atrocities on their women and children has been proved wrong when they were handed over to the Assam authorities. Even the "dead" Ulfa ideologue and founder Bhimkanta Buragohain is now in the safe custody of the Assam police and has urged cadres to lay down arms.

Rajkhowa tried to win a propaganda war by alleging that the Bhutanese army killed Buragohain after he surrendered and in protest called a 48-hour Assam bandh. Surprisingly the NSCN-IM, not known to be friendly with the Ulfa, showed solidarity by observing a 24-hour bandh, perhaps to spite the rival Khaplang group which has good rapport with the Assamese outfit. The NSCN-IM, however, opposed the move to serve notices on Bhutanese nationals in Assam. Manipur rebels forced a 12-hour general strike.

No one gained from this. Ulfa leaders must not forget that Bhutan stood patiently by when they established their camps with impunity and for more than a decade they enjoyed Bhutanese hospitality. No friendly country will tolerate such activities. What set the stage for the crackdown was Bhutan's failure to win them over with sweet reasonableness. Ulfa leaders have only themselves to blame.

No option but to cross over: Rebels

Ulfa cries for China shelter

OUR BUREAU

Dec. 28: On the run in Bhutan, Indian militants have made a dramatic appeal to China to provide "safe passage" and "temporary shelter".

"At this moment, they (the cadre) have no other option but to enter the territory of the People's Republic of China extralegally to save their lives, negotiating sub-zero temperature and starvation.... We would like to request you and your people to permit them safe passage to your territory and temporary shelter necessary for their survival," said a joint appeal signed by Ulfa chairman Arabinde Rajkhowa.

The appeal was faxed to the "Chairman of the People's Republic of China" on Thursday, but released to the press today through e-mail. China does not have a chairman. Its most powerful leader now is Hu Jintao, who is not only the President of the country but also the general secretary of the Communist Party of China.

Besides Rajkhowa, the appeal is signed by leaders of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) — all bearing the brunt of the Bhutan flushout — and the Arunachal Dragon Force, a little-known outfit.

Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi told **The Telegraph** tonight: "The state government

will request the Centre to ensure that the militants are not patronised by any foreign country."

"Being a friendly nation, I don't see any reason why China will heed their appeal," Gogoi added.

With all their camps in Bhutan busted, the Ulfa, the NDFB and the KLO have suffered heavy losses since the Royal Bhutan Army launched Operation All



Clear on December 15. Some top Ulfa leaders, including its founder member Bhimkanta Buragohain and publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, have been captured and handed over to Indian authorities.

Rajkhowa said the people of the Northeast were yearning to establish an identity "similar to the People's Republic of China".

Stating that the rebels have been forced to retreat in the face of "a massive military attack of

the joint Indo-Bhutan forces" which included air strikes, the Ulfa chairman appealed to the communist country "to show your traditional kindness and great revolutionary zeal to our brothers-in-arms in this moment of exigency".

The appeal lends credibility to claims by the Indian Army that the rebels have been forced to move towards the north to escape the advancing Royal Bhutan Army.

Referring to the fourth signatory — the Arunachal Dragon Force — police said the Ulfa and the NDFB have forged close ties with the outfit for logistical support.

Even before the Bhutan operations began, the Ulfa and the NDFB had set up bases in Changlang and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh with the help of the local outfit.

In the sixties, Naga leader Th. Muivah had led a group of rebels through inhospitable terrain and Myanmar to reach China's Yunnan province. His trip — referred to as the "second long march" after Mao Zedong's legendary journey — was the first attempt by a Northeast group to establish contact with China and seek support for its armed struggle.

In Delhi, minister of state for home I.D. Swami turned down the Ulfa's offer for conditional talks through a neutral mediator on its demand for sovereignty.

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Centre rejects ULFA's offer

NEW DELHI, DEC. 28. The Centre today rejected the offer of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)'s offer for talks as it was laying down conditions. It asserted that the proactive policy against the insurgents, who had been "demoralised" after the flush-out operations in Bhutan, would continue.

"There cannot be talks with pre-conditions," the Minister of State for Home, I.D. Swami, said reacting to the reported offer of the ULFA commander-in-chief, Paresh Baruah, on Saturday wherein the latter wanted a neutral third party, a nation to act as a facilitator and as the outfit's main de-

for sovereignty, realising that the Government-principle was ready with any insurgent

group which laid down arms and did not put forward any conditions, the Minister said: "There is no question of any compromise on the sovereignty and integrity of the country."

Speaking to reporters after taking the salute at the CRPF's 64th Raising Day ceremony here, Mr. Swami referred to the Assam Government's offer of amnesty to the insurgents. He hoped the ULFA would respond to it and join the mainstream.

He said New Delhi was thankful to the Bhutan Government for undertaking the crackdown. "The action is in the interest of both the countries," he said.

ULFA seeks Chinese help

The ULFA today sought

"Chinese help and shelter" for the fleeing militants, who were being driven out by the Bhutanese Army.

In an e-mail statement, the ULFA pleaded on behalf of the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and the Arunachal Dragon Force seeking "sanctuary and shelter" for their cadres, "who are struggling to survive in sub-zero temperature."

Through the e-mail, the ULFA chairman, Aurobindo Rajkhowa, said: "At this moment, they [rebels] have no option but to enter the territory of the People's Republic of China extra-legally to save their lives. We would like to request you and your people to permit them safe passage to your terri-

tory and minimum temporary hospitality necessary for their survival."

Forty-three ULFA militants, captured by the Royal Bhutan Army, have been handed over to the Assam police through the Indian Army, official sources said in Nalbari.

Thirty-two were handed over by the Army to the Tamulpur police station in Nalbari district late last night.

Five ULFA militants were handed over to the Borbori police last night and were produced before the Nalbari Chief Judicial Magistrate who remanded them to five days' police custody.

Six ULFA militants, who had surrendered after fleeing from Bhutan, were today handed over by the Army to the police in Hatisingha. — PTI

Ulfa seeks China refuge, sends SOS

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Dec. 28. — On the run from Bhutan, the United Liberation Front of Asom, National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation have sought refuge in China. Identifying the people of the North-east with the Chinese, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa has written a letter addressed to "the chairman" of the People's Republic of China, seeking permission

for Ulfa, NDFB and KLO cadre to take shelter in that country. The Centre today turned down Ulfa's offer for conditional talks through a neutral mediator on its demand for sovereignty. "There is no question of any compromise on the sovereignty and integrity of the country," minister of state for home Mr ID Swami said after the 64th anniversary parade of the CRPF in Delhi.

Rajkhowa's letter, an SOS of sorts, said air and artillery at-

tacks on the camps of the three outfits in Bhutan had forced their cadre to move to the Sino-Bhutan border where they were negotiating sub-zero temperatures and also starving. "At this moment, they have no other option but to enter the territory of the People's Republic of China extra-legally to save their lives... We would like to request you and your people to permit them safe passage to your territory and minimum temporary hospitality necessary for their surviv-

al," the letter said. Narrating the plight of the cadre, Rajkhowa said the outfits, fighting for freedom from Indian "occupation", had been taking shelter in Bhutan to escape the Indian military. "Of late, we have come under massive military attack of India-Bhutan joint forces and our combatants are forced to retreat up to Sino-Bhutan border due to all out air and artillery campaigns," the letter faxed to "His Excellency, Chairman, People's Republic of

China" last week said. Copies of it were released to the media today. "We would be obliged if you show your traditional kindness and great revolutionary zeal to our brothers-in-arms in this very moment of exigency," Rajkhowa signed off.

While there had been no report of any connection between Ulfa, NDFB and KLO with China, unlike the undivided National Socialist Council of Nagaland, one senior Ulfa militant who had surrendered had reportedly said

few years ago that Ulfa procured some weapons from China. It was, however, not clear whether the weapons deal had official sanction. Reports have indicated an end to the operations in Bhutan soon. Sources said Delhi would mount renewed pressure on Bangladesh now to evict N-E insurgents sheltered in that country. The issue is likely to be raised at the meeting of the director generals of BSF and BDR beginning 6 January.

More reports on page 9

Ulfa readies rider for talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI, Dec. 27. — The Ulfa, under attack by the Royal Bhutan Army, has expressed willingness for talks with the Centre through a neutral mediator. In a statement today, Ulfa commander-in-chief Mr Parash Baruah said his outfit was ready for peace talks with New Delhi on its demand for sovereignty, but a “neutral third party mediator” should act as facilitator.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today called up Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuk to congratulate him on the RBA's success.

The Ulfa commander-in-chief said: “We had been requesting the Bhutan government to act as a mediator between us.” Mediators from India, he said, are not wel-

Army nets KLO top gun

JALPAIGURI, Dec. 27. — The Army shot a KLO militant dead and held Sanat Roy, a key leader of the outfit, at Kumargramduar along the India-Bhutan border in Jalpaiguri district last night. — SNS

(Details on page 6)

come since “we can't trust them.” Officials in Delhi, however, discounted the talks “offer”, saying operations were still underway. Besides, as the Ulfa is named under Pota, it has to be treated as a banned organisation.

Ulfa ideologue Bhimkanta Buragohain was first to express the outfit's willingness for the talks and asked

the cadres to lay down arms. (Buragohain — along with Robin Handique, Bolin Das and Amarjit Gogoi — were today handed over to police.)

Trade 'ban': The Ulfa, NDFB and KLO have “banned” trade between Assam, ‘Bodoland’ and ‘Kamtapur’ and any Bhutanese individual or corporate house from midnight yesterday till the end of “India's proxy war”.

House demand: The Tripura Assembly has passed a resolution demanding “Bhutan-like operation” in Bangladesh and that the Centre take up the issue with Dhaka, SNS adds from Agartala.

Flights ban: Bhutan has temporarily suspended Timphe-Dhaka flight to prevent Indian ultras from fleeing the kingdom.

■ ‘Baruah arranged arms transit’ page 6

'Dead' Ulfa veteran surrenders with peace cry

OUR BUREAU

Tezpur/Guwahati, Dec. 26: Ulfa founder member Bhimkanta Buragohain, whom the army pronounced dead over a week ago, today surfaced at a surrender ceremony in Tezpur to admit the futility of the militant group's violent campaign and urge fellow rebels to lay down arms.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi blamed the "communication gap" between India and Bhutan

for the wrong information on Buragohain that had been disseminated over the past week. "The Centre does not have accurate information on the number of militants killed and captured in Bhutan," he said from New Delhi.

The army announced on December 18 that Buragohain, in his eighties and lovingly called Mama by the Ulfa rank and file, died after surrendering to Bhutanese troops. The militant leader, however, appeared to be

in good health when he and three of his Ulfa comrades were paraded before the media at the Tezpur-based headquarters of the army's Four Corps.

None of the four Ulfa militants was allowed to speak to the reporters. The quartet was later whisked away to an unknown destination.

Before leaving the venue of the surrender ceremony, Buragohain read out an elaborately written statement. "I think the path which we have

chosen is the wrong one. This is why I appeal to all Ulfa members, even to Padesh Barua, to introspect. We need to know that peace does not come through the barrel of the gun, but through negotiations."

Buragohain, a former army jawan, and five more militant leaders founded the Ulfa in 1979. Espousing a different philosophy today, he said: "I want to say (to all) to agree to a ceasefire, to come to an understanding with the government of India and to

come to the negotiation table and resolve this issue once and for all."

Officials said Mama and his comrades were captured by the Royal Bhutan Army on December 18 and handed to the Indian army yesterday. Ulfa commander-in-chief Padesh Barua had claimed a day after the operations began that he was injured.

Both Barua and Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa claimed in statements thereafter that Bhutanese troops killed Burago-

hain after he surrendered.

The three Ulfa militants who surrendered with Buragohain in Tezpur are newly-appointed Ulfa political adviser Robin Handique, assistant publicity secretary Bolin Das and the militant group's camp doctor in Bhutan, Amarjit Gogoi.

Introducing Buragohain to the media, Four Corps general-officer-commanding Lt Gen. Mohinder Singh said the senior-most Ulfa leader's surrender and his appeal to his comrades to ab-

jure violence was "a historic moment for Assam and, hopefully, (an indication of) the last few moments of insurgency in this region".

A few hours after the surrender, the Ulfa, the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) announced a "ban" on the movement of people to and from Bhutan from tomorrow noon till the bodies of rebels killed in the offensive are returned to their families.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Bhutan hands over rebels' relatives

OUR BUREAU

Tamulpur/Guwahati, Dec. 24: Bhutan today handed over 64 women and children captured during the offensive there to the army at Tamulpur in Assam's Nalbari district.

The handover was more of a homecoming for the group than the formal ceremony they expected it to be. An abandoned health centre had been converted into a makeshift shelter and, watched by curious onlookers, they sat down to partake of the food laid out for them.

The women and children were brought to Tamulpur in two buses from Samdrup Jongkhar, where the Royal Bhutan Army had kept them since December 15.

The relief on the face of Asomi Devi, a self-styled lieutenant of the banned Ulfa, mirrored the feelings of the rest of the group. Most of the women were clad in jeans.

They trooped into the makeshift home along with 27 children, looking confused at first. But they seemed to regain their composure after spending some time at the shelter. The relatively peaceful ambience was a soothing balm after the tension they had gone through in Bhutan as one militant camp after another fell.

Asomi Devi, accompanied by her three-year-old daughter Venus, admitted that she was relaxed after returning to Assam.

Over 350 captured women



Relatives in a bus at Tamulpur. Picture by Eastern Projections

and children are still in Bhutan and will be handed over to the army in batches. Home commissioner B.K. Gohain said in Guwahati tonight that the first batch had been shifted to Nalbari town and the administration was ready to accept the second batch.

"The returnees will be provided proper accommodation, but the combatants, once identified, will be dealt with in accordance with the law of the land," he said.

Though both Bhutan and India have been saying that women and children captured in the Himalayan kingdom are being treated well, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said in a statement that the seven-year-old son of militant Rahul Dutta was killed in the "joint offensive by the Royal Bhutan Army and the Indian army".

Rajkhowa said a pregnant woman from Dibrugarh, Diipla Phukan, was raped during the operation in Bhutan.

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Suffering patients with above related problems may register their names immediately at the following address :-	
<p>REPROMED DIAGNOSTIC PVT. LTD. 21/2A, Gorachand Road, Park Circus, Kol-14 Mobile: 98300 17489, 98305 48102</p>	<p>IMMUNO DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES 114/A, N.S. Avenue, Serampore, Mobile: 2108 4986, Ph: 2652 0798</p>

ভারত-ভূটান সীমান্তের তিন দিক সিল, ধরা দিল আরও ৫০ জঙ্গি

পানেরি (ভারত-ভূটান সীমান্ত), ২৪ ডিসেম্বর— জঙ্গি দমনে ভূটানের সেনা-অভিযানের দশম দিনে আজ অন্তত ৫০ জন আলফা এবং এন ডি এফ বি জঙ্গি ধরা পড়েছে। ‘অপারেশন অল ক্লিয়ার’ প্রসঙ্গে আজই সম্ভবত প্রথম বার মুখ খুলেছে ভূটানি সেনা। ভূটানি সেনাবাহিনীর মুখপাত্র আজ জানিয়েছেন, আরও অন্তত পাঁচ দিন এই অভিযান চলবে। অন্য দিকে, জঙ্গিদের আত্মসমর্পণ করতে আসার রাস্তা ছেড়ে রেখে ভারত-ভূটান সীমান্তের তিন দিক ‘সিল’ করে দিয়েছে ভারতীয় সেনা।

ভারতীয় সেনাবাহিনীর মুখপাত্র লেফটেন্যান্ট জেনারেল মহিন্দর সিংহ জানান, সেনা-অভিযানে অসহায় জঙ্গিরা এখন আত্মসমর্পণ করতে আগ্রহী। ধরা দিলে জঙ্গিদের নিরাপত্তার দায়িত্ব সেনাবাহিনী নেবে বলে তিনি প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন। সেই সঙ্গেই কিছু জঙ্গি গোপনে সীমান্ত পেরিয়ে ঢুকে ভারতে যে নাশকতামূলক কাজকর্ম চালাতে পারে, সে আশঙ্কাও উড়িয়ে দেওয়া হচ্ছে না। অপেক্ষাকৃত স্বল্প নিরাপদ লক্ষ্যকেই তারা আক্রমণের জন্য বেছে নিতে পারে। সে

জন্য সেনাবাহিনী যথেষ্ট সতর্কতা নিচ্ছে বলে মহিন্দর জানিয়েছেন। ব্যবসা বা জীবিকার কাজে ভূটানের যে-সমস্ত মানুষ উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলে এসে রয়েছেন, তাঁদের নিরাপত্তার দায়িত্ব প্রশাসন নেবে। এবং এই কাজে প্রশাসনের সঙ্গে পূর্ণ সহযোগিতা করবে সেনাবাহিনী।

গুয়াহাটি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, ভূটানের সেনা-অভিযানের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে সীমান্তবর্তী অঞ্চলের নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা খতিয়ে দেখতে আচমকা অসমে এলেন কেন্দ্রীয় প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ। ভূটানে ছত্রভঙ্গ জঙ্গিদের অনেকে প্রাণ বাঁচাতে অসমে সেনা ও পুলিশের কাছে ধরা দিতে শুরু করেছে। মায়ানমারের জঙ্গিরাও ভেঙে দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে সে-দেশের সরকারের আশ্বাস মেলার কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যে অসমের রাজ্যপাল অজয় সিংহ আজ আবার অবিলম্বে বাংলাদেশের জঙ্গিরাও ভেঙে দেওয়ার দাবি করেন। প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী কাল রাতে বিশেষ বিমানে অসমের তেজপুরে আসেন। সেনা সূত্রের খবর, তিনি ‘ফোর-কোর’ বাহিনীর জি ও সি ইন সি মহিন্দর

সিংহ ছাড়াও পদস্থ সেনা ও পুলিশ অফিসারদের সঙ্গে সীমান্ত-অঞ্চলের সতর্কতা নিয়ে কথা বলার পরে আজ অরুণাচল প্রদেশের সেনা ছাউনিতে যান। সীমান্ত-সংলগ্ন কিছু ঘাঁটি ঘুরে দেখে তিনি বিকেলে দিল্লি ফিরে যান।

বাংলাদেশে জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি ভাঙার ব্যাপারে ভারতের চাপ-সৃষ্টির প্রয়োজনীয়তার উল্লেখ করে অসমের রাজ্যপাল বলেন, “এই ব্যাপারে আমি বার বার কেন্দ্রকে অবহিত করেছি। গত বার যখন দিল্লিতে যাই, সে বারও বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের সঙ্গে এ নিয়ে কথা বলেছি।” অসমের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ জানিয়েছেন, ৩১ জানুয়ারির মধ্যে যে-সব জঙ্গি আত্মসমর্পণ করবে, রাজ্য সরকার তাদের নিরাপত্তা ও রক্ষীবাহিনীতে নিয়োগ বা স্বনিয়ন্ত্রণ ব্যবস্থা করবে। তিনি বলেন, “আত্মসমর্পণে ইচ্ছুক জঙ্গিদের মধ্যে আস্থা আনতে বিভিন্ন জেলার পুলিশ ও প্রশাসনকে লিখিত ভাবে জানানো হবে। এখনও পর্যন্ত ২২ জঙ্গির আত্মসমর্পণের খবর এসেছে। ভূটানের রাজবাহিনীর কাছে বন্দি মহিলা, শিশু ও বয়স্কদের ব্যাপারে খবর আসেনি।”

Assam offers amnesty; raid on Myanmar lips

ASTAFF REPORTER

Guwahati, Dec. 23: Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi today announced "general amnesty" for all militants who surrender before January 31, hoping those on the run because of the military offensive in Bhutan will readily accept the offer.

Within hours of the amnesty announcement, defence minister George Fernandes reached the Tezpur headquarters of the army's 4 Corps for an in-camera discussion with the operations group of the unified command.

Fernandes' visit was officially described as a stopover en route to "inspection of the Sino-Indian border" in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. A source said he discussed "all aspects" of Bhutan's offensive against Northeast militants with senior army officials.

The amnesty offer coincided with a Myanmarese promise to flush out Northeast militants from its territory. "We will flush out Indian insurgents, if any, in our country," Myanmar foreign minister U Win Aung

said in Delhi this afternoon.

Nine more militants of the Ulfa and the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) surrendered to the army at the 4 Corps headquarters. The rebels fled Bhutan after the launch of Operation All Clear there on December 15.

As many as 20 militants who were based in Bhutan have surrendered in Assam since the operation began.

The nine rebels who laid down arms before 4 Corps general-officer-commanding Lt Gen. Mohinder Singh included six from the Ulfa's crack Enigma hit squad. They deposited seven AK-56 rifles, a carbine and assorted ammunition. The army did not allow the media to speak to any of the surrendered militants. All of them were whisked away to an undisclosed location after their surrender.

Gen. Singh said the militants reached Assam after trekking through dense jungles in Bhutan. He said the army killed 14 militants who tried to sneak into the state immediately after Bhutan's offensive began.

Realising that most militan-

ts were unwilling to surrender for fear of being targeted by the army while entering Assam, the government announced a few telephone numbers for them to contact officials before crossing the border.

Gogoi promised full protection to the surrendered rebels and steps to rehabilitate them. "They are facing action in Bhutan and I appeal to them to be positive and contact us at the designated telephone numbers when they decide to surrender," he said.

The chief minister said his government had made arrangements for the militants to convey their willingness to surrender over phone as most of them were wary of crossing the India-Bhutan border. He assured them of safety if they contacted the government and promised to surrender.

Making no bones about Dispur's eagerness to capitalise on the Ulfa and the NDFB's predicament in Bhutan, Gogoi said anyone willing to mediate between the government and the militant leadership was welcome.

More arms, troops along Bhutan border

29/12 9-NEER

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, December 23

THE ARMY is massing more troops in Assam and along the India-Bhutan border to beef up security and stop militants fleeing Bhutan from sneaking into India.

"There has been rumour of Assam-based militants planning attacks on Bhutanese and non-Assamese people living in Assam. We are deploying more forces to boost confidence and provide a sense of security in the zone," Maj Gen Madan Gopal said here on Tuesday at the Army's Eastern Command HQ.

Indian troops killed 14 hardcore militants and detained 17 since the Royal Bhutanese Army (RBA) began its operation.

Of the 14 killed militants, 10 were Ulfa activists, three were NDFB rebels and one belonged to the Arunachal Dragon Force, a new outfit with Ulfa links.

Most surrendered militants were Ulfa cadres and had either been captured by the Army or had surrendered at the border. The officer denied reports that former Ulfa chairman Hemanta Buragohain had died in RBA custody. "We have no confirmation if he is dead or alive," he said. Reports that Buragohain and some women and children from the Ulfa camps had



PTI

Injured Bodo militants on board an ambulance at Guwahati Medical College on Tuesday.

died at RBA hands had caused outrage in Assam, prompting Ulfa plans to call another statewide bandh.

Troops along the India-Bhutan border had also recovered 31 weapons, a large cache of ammu-

nition and Rs three lakh from militants killed and captured during operations, the Maj Gen added.

He hinted that the RBA had scaled down its flush-out operations over the past two days. "But the operations are moving

very well and all credit must go to the RBA. For a small country, Bhutan has done an excellent job (in flushing out the militants)," he said. The officer refused to speculate on when the operations might end.

Myanmar vows to take on rebels

CLOSE ON the heels of military action launched by Bhutan, Myanmar on Tuesday declared that it would flush out Indian insurgent camps, if any, in that country. It assured New Delhi that it would not allow militants from Bhutan to enter its soil.

"We will flush out Indian insurgent camps, if any in our country," Myanmar foreign minister U Win Aung told reporters here.

He was asked about reports that militants from the Ulfa, NDFB and KLO were sneaking into Myanmar from Bhutan in the wake of the military action launched by the Royal Bhutan Army.

Win Aung said he had seen reports to this effect in the newspapers. "We have a policy of not allowing any insurgents to get into Myanmar," he said, adding: "We will take whatever action is necessary." He said Myanmar "will co-operate with the Indian Government" in this regard.

Meanwhile, still dazed and surprised, several Indian separatist rebels said on Tuesday that Bhutan's recent crackdown on their groups was unexpected, claiming both sides had enjoyed good relations for years. The crackdown disillusioned some rebels, prompting them to surrender.

Over 2,000 Indian rebels reportedly moved into Bhutan in 1990 and have been engaged in attacks against Indian forces.

Peace Of Action: Assam Chief Minister Pledges Protection If Rebels Enter State Without Arms

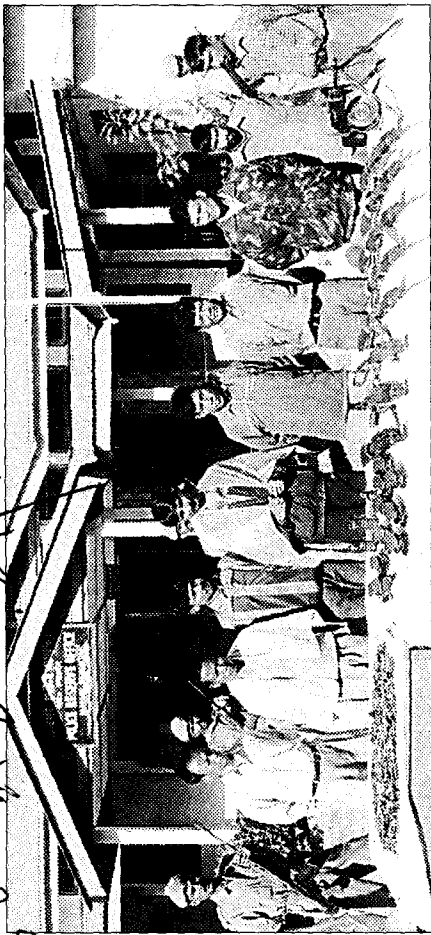
Gogoi declares amnesty for fallen militants

Our Guwahati Bureau
23 DECEMBER

ASSAM chief minister Tarun Gogoi announced a general amnesty for Ufla cadres who surrendered within January 31'04. This announcement follows the Royal Bhutan Army's offensive against North East-based militants.

Mr Gogoi said the state government has prepared a contingency plan to rehabilitate surrendered rebels. "I assure them of all security and rehabilitation when they surrender. This is an appeal to them (Ufla) that if they surrender within January 31 we can give them general amnesty," he said in Guwahati on Tuesday.

However, the chief minister has also spelled out a rider to the offer. He suggested that the militants who have expressed their willingness to surrender to the police and district administration should not carry arms while entering Assam. This will help them avoid being targeted by the Army and security forces. "Once



A FAREWELL TO ARMS: The first batch of 11 Ufla rebels and one NDFB militant who escaped the Royal Bhutan Army dragnet in Bhutan and surrendered before Assam Police in Darrang district with their arms and ammunition at Darrang Police Reserve office on Tuesday. — PTI

we get feelers from the militants, we shall inform the Army," he said. The Assam police has opened a help desk for the militants willing to surrender. Mr Gogoi said help line centres would be set up in the offices of deputy commissioners and superintendents of police in the districts bordering Bhutan.

According to him, till Tuesday 22, Ufla cadres from Bhutan had surrendered. Apart from this, the Army has handed over six other rebels, including Ufla publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, to the police. The chief minister also said the Bhutan government has conveyed to the Indian Army that all children and women apprehended inside Bhutan during the offensive would be handed over to the Indian Army soon. "We are making all arrangements for these people and have opened up relief camps," Mr Gogoi said.

KLO men confess to links with KPP

Debasis Sarkar
SILIGURI 23 DECEMBER

THE Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) members captured in an ambush by the Bhutanese army in last few days, have finally confessed. They have given enough evidence to confirm the close link between Kamtiapur People's Party (KPP) and KLO, that the police had been suspecting. Though KPP president Nikhil Roy and party spokesperson Atul Roy have claimed no links with KLO or Ufla, the police had suspected otherwise all along.

The Army, police and SSB have been interrogating all captured militants—including well-known KLO frontliners Milion Burman and Tom Adhikary—since they

were captured by the Bhutan Army from their hideout in Bhutan, said S.N. Gupta, superintendent of police, Jalpaiguri.

Tom and Milion confessed that KPP president Nikhil Roy was the mastermind in the Rangapani rail dacoity case in 1999, where three railwaymen were killed and a huge volume of government money looted. Also Ufla militant Rustom Chaudhury was one of the 10 who executed the operation, confessed Tom.

In October 2002, two KLO militants Ram Singha and Kalyan Das were killed in an encounter with police. According to Mr Gupta, a letter found with them was written by Nikhil Roy to the KLO commander in chief, Jeewan Singha, asking for Rs 2 lakh to run KPP's activities.

RIGHTS AND WRONGS

When militants pretend to talk of human rights, it is usually a ploy. The United Liberation Front of Asom, which thrived on killings and abductions, is an unlikely champion of any rights whatsoever. There is a cruel irony, therefore, in its demand that the bodies of its members fallen in the Royal Bhutan Army's offensive be handed over to their families as a mark of respect to their "human rights". It is impossible to miss the cynicism and the duplicity behind the ULFA's appeal for human rights. For more than two decades the militant group denied all rights, including the one to live, to all whom it targeted as adversaries. Not just policemen or Indian paramilitary forces, but even militants who surrendered to the authorities and returned to their families and a peaceful life were ruthlessly hunted down and killed by the ULFA. Its violent and coercive methods meant a denial of human rights to the ordinary Assamese who dared to oppose it — one has only to remember the brutal killing of Sanjay Ghose, the fearless activist of a non-governmental organization.

As the Bhutanese army's action puts the ULFA in disarray, it is important for the Assamese to take a measure of the ravages it has wrought on their lives. Because of it Assam became a land of fear and despair. Although investors shied away from the state and outsiders felt insecure, it is the Assamese themselves who bore the brunt of this reign of terror. The ULFA's curse blighted the ordinary people's lives, particularly by holding the state's economic prospects to ransom. The Bhutanese campaign should thus be seen as a beacon of peace and hope in Assam. But the Assamese cannot afford to squander the opportunity that has now come their way. It is crucial that Assam's people and political parties show as decisive a will to defeat the ULFA as Bhutan's small army has displayed to dismantle their camps and chase them away from its territory. For far too long, the ULFA's shadow darkened Assam's politics and sometimes distorted its democratic functioning. There have been times when political groups have sought to win elections or settle scores with their opponents with covert help from the militants. Assam has paid a heavy price for such suicidal rendezvous with militancy. Bhutan has destroyed their camps; it is now the Assamese people's turn to destroy the militants' myths.

Ulfa shifts camps to Myanmar

Anirban Roy
Shillong, December 21

THE UNITED Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), which suffered a major jolt following the Royal Bhutan Army's Operation All-Clear, has shifted three of its camps to Kachin in Upper Myanmar.

High-level sources told *Hindustan Times* from Shillong that Ulfa's publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, arrested by the RBA, spilled the beans about the shifting of camps to Myanmar. Daimary has said the Ulfa shifted the camps to Myanmar following continued pressure from the government of Bhutan during the past two years. He was handed over to Assam Police on Saturday at Tamulpur of Lower Assam. He and five other Ulfa cadres have been remanded in five days' police custody.

Earlier, troops of the 2 Mountain Division had smashed a joint camp of the Ulfa and the Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF) in Namsai in Lohit district and shot dead three militants, two of whom were from the Ulfa.

The Bhutan government, for the past six years, has been asking the Ulfa, NDFB and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation to vacate the country since "their presence posed a severe threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country".

The Ulfa, fighting for a sovereign homeland, has been camping in Bhutan since 1991 and had as many as 13 camps, including its central and general headquarters in the south-eastern district of Sandrup Jongkhar. The shift-

All hideouts razed, claims Bhutan

VOWING TO rid the country of the last Indian militant, Bhutan on Sunday declared that there were no more Indian insurgent camp in its territory. "The operations are going on in full swing in south Bhutan jungles where the insurgents are concentrated and their 30 standing camps had been totally demolished and there are no more camps," Bhutanese foreign ministry spokesman Yeshey Dorjee told reporters.

PTI, Thimpu

ing of Ulfa camps to Myanmar is being aided by the NSCN(K) leaders. Daimary said the Naga guerrilla outfit runs more than half-a dozen training camps there. The outfit has also shifted its arms and ammunition to the new camps in Myanmar.

In an interesting development, the NSCN(I-M), which is all out to strike a peace agreement with New Delhi, has also called for a 24-hour bandh in all Naga-inhabited areas to express its solidarity with the Ulfa.

Kachin will be a difficult refuge for the Ulfa cadres since the ruling Burmese junta, have been raiding the NSCN camps, almost regularly, in the past year.

Moreover, the Naga Nationalities League for Democracy has got into a direct confrontation with the State



FOR ANOTHER BATTLE: Indian jawans on way to the India-Bhutan border at Tamulpur, 84 km north of Guwahati, on Sunday.

Peace and Development Council over the recent decision for the formation of a national convention.

KLO men remanded

All five KLO militants handed over to the Jalpaiguri

police by the Bhutan army through the Indian Army were remanded to 10 days in police custody by a Jalpaiguri court on Sunday. The rebels are: KLO action squad chief Tom Adhikari, his deputy Milton Barman,

Jayanta Das alias Navim Dakua, Milan Roy alias Bikash Roy and Prakash Singha alias Shankar. Adhikari said KLO chief Jiban Singh had entered Bangladesh with a huge sum of money.

ভুটানিদের হত্যার

হুমকি আলফার

সিদ্ধার্থ নাহা; সমর দেব □ জলপাইগুড়ি, গুয়াহাটি

২১ ডিসেম্বর- পাহাড়ি দেশ থেকে শেষ জঙ্গিকেও না তাড়ানো পর্যন্ত জঙ্গি অভিযান চলবে বলে ভুটান সরকার জানালেও জঙ্গিবিরোধী অভিযানে বিরক্ত আলফা হুমকি দিল আসামে তথা উত্তরবঙ্গে বসবাসকারী ভুটানিদের। ভুটান সরকারের স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক ছাড়াও দিল্লিতে সেনেশের দূতাবাস থেকেও অভিযান চালু রাখার কথা বলা হয়েছে। ভুটানের ফৌজের সঙ্গে ভারতীয় সেনার জঙ্গিবিরোধী যৌথ অভিযান অবিলম্বে থামানোর দাবি জানিয়েছে আলফা। জানিয়েছে, ভুটানিদের সঙ্গে সব সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করা উচিত আসামি, বড়ো ও কামতাপুরিদের। আলফার চেয়ারম্যান অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া বাংলাদেশের গোপন ডেরা থেকে পাঠানো এক ই-মেল বার্তায় জানিয়েছেন, শত্রুর বন্ধু হয়ে ওঠায় ভুটানিরাও এখন আসামের মানুষের শত্রু। বড়ো, কামতাপুরিদেরও। এই অভিযানেই ভুটানিদের সঙ্গে সব সম্পর্ক ছেদ হচ্ছে। উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে বসবাস ও ব্যবসায় ব্যস্ত প্রতিটি ভুটানিকেই ছেড়ে যাওয়ার নোটিস দেওয়া হবে। ভুটান জানিয়েছিল, অভিযানে ভারতীয় সেনা আদৌ নেই। এখন দেখা যাচ্ছে, ভুটান মিথ্যাচার করেছিল। অভিযানে শিশু ও নারীদের ওপর অত্যাচার করে জেনেভা কনভেনশনের চুক্তি লঙ্ঘন করেছে। ওদের দাবি মতো যদি সত্যিই ৫০০ জন আলফা কর্মী আত্মসমর্পণ করে থাকে, তবে তাদের সংবাদমাধ্যমের সামনে হাজির করা হোক। নিহত ১৮০ জন মুক্তিযোদ্ধার মৃতদেহ আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থার সামনে আনা হোক। এদিকে আলফার সঙ্গে আলোচনার সব দরজাই খোলা আছে বলে জানিয়েছেন আসামের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তরুণ গগৈ। তিনি সাম্প্রতিক মিজো ন্যাশনাল ফ্রন্টের সঙ্গে বৈঠকের দৃষ্টান্ত পেশ করে বলেন, আলোচনায় সকলেরই উপকার। অন্য দিকে, ভুটান সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে ঠিকঠাক তথ্য না দেওয়ায় নানারকম গুজব ছড়াচ্ছে সেনা অভিযান বন্ধ হওয়া নিয়ে। তবে ভুটানের বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের এক কর্তা জানিয়েছেন, দেশ থেকে শেষতম জঙ্গিকেও না তাড়ানো পর্যন্ত অভিযান চলবে। ঘাঁটিগুলি ভেঙে দেওয়ার পর এখন জঙ্গল থেকেই জঙ্গিদের তাড়ানোর অভিযান চলছে। এদিকে, অভিযানে ধৃত ৫ কে এল ও নেতাকে আজই ১০ দিনের পুলিশি হেপাজতে পাঠানোর আদেশ দিয়েছে জলপাইগুড়ির মহকুমা আদালতের ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট। শনিবারই এরা ধরা পড়ে। এদের মধ্যে আছে টম অধিকারী, মিস্টন বর্মন, জয়ন্ত দাস ওরফে নবীন ডাকুয়া, মিলন রায় ওরফে বিকাশ রায় এবং প্রকাশ সিংহ ওরফে শঙ্কর। জেলার পুলিশ সুপার সিদ্ধিনাথ গুপ্তা জানিয়েছেন, ধৃতদের কাছে পাওয়া অস্ত্রও পুলিশের হাতে তুলে দিয়েছেন ভুটানি ফৌজ। জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে ফৌজি অভিযানের বিরোধিতা করে আলফার ডাকা ৪৮ ঘণ্টার আসাম বন্ধে আজ রাজ্যের বিক্ষিপ্ত কয়েকটি অংশেই মাত্র প্রভাব পড়েছিল। দুটি পাহাড়ি জেলায় কোনও সাড়া পাওয়া যায়নি। বরাক উপত্যকা ও ভুটান সীমান্তেও কোনও সাড়া ছিল না দ্বিতীয় দিনের বন্ধে। রবিবার ছুটির দিনে এমনিতেই সব বন্ধ ছিল। গত রাতে ধৃত ৬ আলফা জঙ্গিকে ৫ দিনের পুলিশি হেপাজতে রাখার নির্দেশ দিয়েছে গুয়াহাটি হাইকোর্ট। এদের মধ্যে আছে আলফার প্রচার সচিব মিধিন্দা দইমারি। নাগাল্যান্ড থেকেও জঙ্গিবিরোধী অভিযানের প্রতিবাদে ডাকা বন্ধের খবর পাওয়া গেছে। উত্তরবঙ্গের জেলাগুলির পরিস্থিতিও ছিল যথেষ্ট স্বাভাবিক, জানিয়েছেন উত্তরবঙ্গ পুলিশের আই জি ডুপিদ্দর সিং। পুলিশ অবশ্য সর্বত্রই সতর্কতামূলক ব্যবস্থা নিয়েছে। খবর এসেছিল, জঙ্গিবিরোধী অভিযানে ভুটানের ফৌজের নেতৃত্ব দিচ্ছেন স্বয়ং রাজা জিগমে সিংগে ওয়াংচুক। পরে অবশ্য সেই খবরের কোনও সমর্থন পাওয়া যায়নি। অভিযানে অংশ নিয়ে যুবরাজের আহত হওয়ার প্রাথমিক খবর ঠিক নয় বলে পরে জানা গেছে, তিনি অক্ষতই আছেন। রাজাও প্রত্যক্ষ অভিযানে আদৌ অংশ নেননি।

Ulfa rushes crack units to Bhutan

Anirban Roy
Shillong, December 20

THE ULFA, which is fighting a losing battle against the Royal Bhutan Army, has rushed reinforcement to the Dragon Kingdom to bail out its cadres trapped in the remote jungles of the country.

More than 1,500 Ulfa cadres, who have been staying in the 13 camps in the four southern districts of Bhutan, are now on the run after the Royal Bhutan Army launched a major offensive against the guerrillas from December 15.

Sources close to the outfit told *Hindustan Times* that a group of 36 commandos specially drawn from the Enigma and Volcano groups have been rushed to Bhutan on Thursday to make ways for the safe movement of the trapped cadres.

The Royal Bhutan Army soldiers have reportedly taken over the camps and captured a lot of Ulfa cadres, including women and children. Interestingly, the Red Cross has reportedly responded to Ulfa's appeal to rescue the trapped women and children from Bhutan.

The Ulfa, which is fighting for a sovereign homeland, is also trying to push in more than 100 of its cadres from its Bangladesh camps to the Garo hill districts in Meghalaya, who subsequently, would move into Bhutan, the sources said.

The banned outfit has been using the Garo hill districts in Meghalaya for safe sanctuary and training. And, with assistance from the A'chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC), the Ulfa also has been using the Garo hill districts as a corridor for their entry into Bangladesh. However, crossing two bor-

Five handed over to Bengal police

FIVE INSURGENTS of the KLO and Ulfa, captured by the Royal Bhutan Army during the offensive in the Himalayan kingdom, were handed over to West Bengal Police on Saturday night.

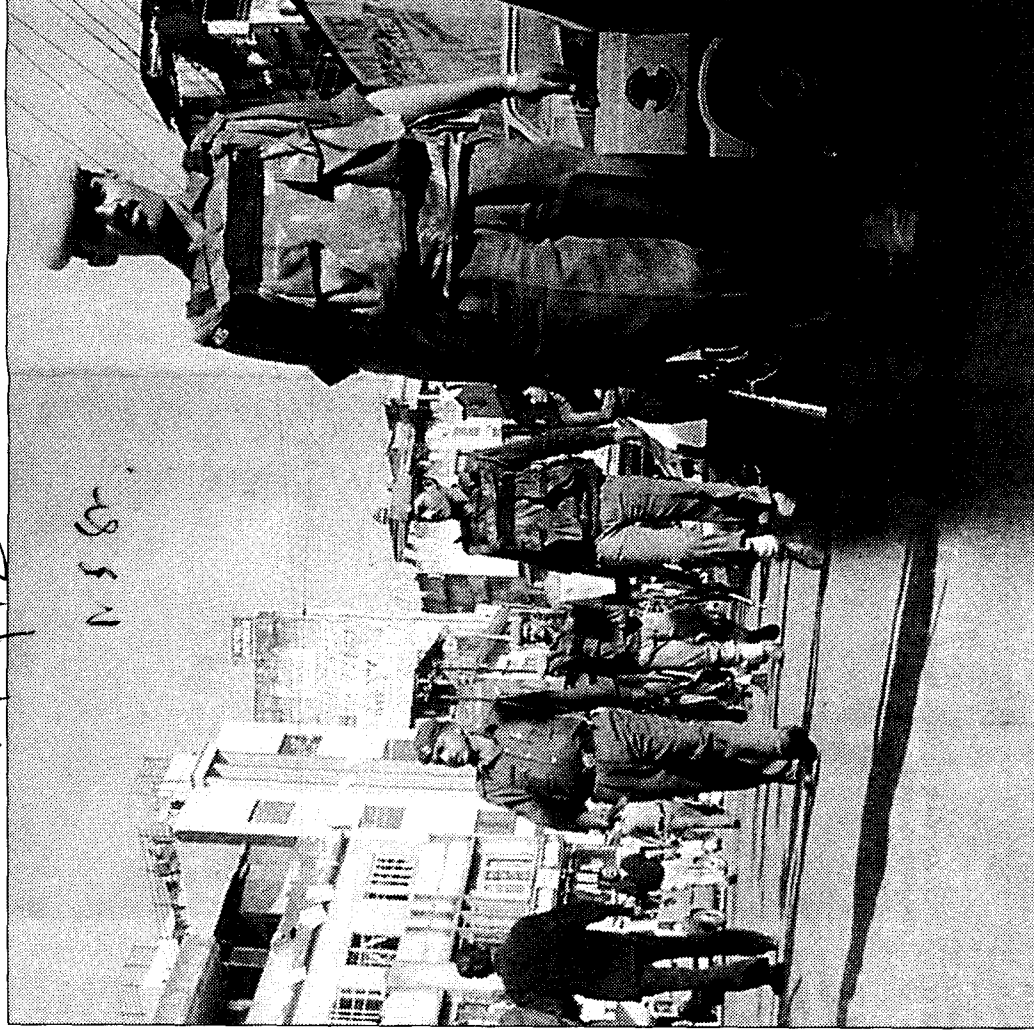
The four KLO militants handed over include its commander-in-chief, Tom Adhikary, and another top leader, Milton Barman, the police said. Both have over 12 cases of murder, dacoity, extortion and abduction pending against them. The Ulfa leader handed over is Sanjay Adhikary.

While the four KLO insurgents were captured from Bukka camp near Totopara on the India-Bhutan border, Sanjay was captured from the Deothang camp in the Sandrup Jongkhar area.

Meanwhile, a businessman abducted by the KLO from Nishigang in Cooch Behar district on September 20 was rescued and handed over to the police. The Indian Army handed over the insurgents and the businessman at Binnaguri cantonment in Jalpaiguri. The insurgents will be produced in court on Sunday.

PTI, Jalpaiguri

ders—Bangladesh and Bhutan, at this moment, may be a Herculean task for the Ulfa to rescue its cadres. Some of the cadres trying to sneak into Arunachal Pradesh from Bhutan, were also caught.



PTI

Cops patrol a street in Assam during the 48-hour bandh called by three militant outfits on Saturday.

The Border Security Force has beefed up surveillance along the Bangladesh border while Army and Special Security Bureau personnel have all most sealed the Bhutan frontier. Now, shifting bases to Garo hills districts would be the last option for both the Ulfa and NDFB. But, movement for the injured and exhausted cadres, trapped in Bhutan looks to be impossible even though intelligence agencies have reported carried them along.

about formation of an Ulfa-NDFB joint command. It has been reported that the raiding Bhutanese soldiers could not seize much of arms and ammunition as the fleeing cadres have

Plea to rescue trapped women, kids

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, December 20

THE STATE Assembly on Saturday decided to appeal to the Centre to help rescue the non-combatant women and children in the militant camps of Bhutan.

Hitendra Nath Goswami of the Asom Gana Parishad raised the issue in the House seeking to know if the government has taken any steps to rescue the women and children caught in the raids by the Royal Bhutan Army on militant camps. Independent legislator Pabindra Deka also joined in.

"Many women and children have been killed while others have been injured or arrested during the Bhutan operations that began on Monday," Goswami pointed out.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said that his government has already appealed to the Army chief in this regard. He added that a request from the House would be forwarded to the Centre for rescue of the non-combatant women and children of the militants. "We want the Centre to ask Thimpu to hand over the non-combatant women and children to us. They should not be victimised for no fault of theirs," Gogoi said.

Meanwhile, the rebels' relatives across the border in India have been passing sleepless nights for want of information about their dear ones. Families of nearly 300 Ulfa militants in this district are anxiously awaiting the return of their kin whom they had not met or heard from for years.

NAGA DILEMMA

Time ripe for open dialogue

NSCN general secretary Th Muivah's apparent motive behind repeatedly accusing the Centre of being insincere about solving the Naga problem is to put the entire blame on the Delhi leadership should the peace process break down. The outfit has, in no uncertain terms, said that if Delhi tries to "force its will" it will not yield to pressure. The prospects of a breakthrough look bleak after the Prime Minister's statement that the contentious issue of integrating the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur should best be decided by the people of the three states. Muivah feels let down; he believes the insistence on consensus is "absolutely irrelevant" and that Vajpayee's remarks "remain highly questionable and unacceptable". He also claims to have the people's "consensus" on one geographical entity for Nagas but Vajpayee has expediently emphasised a political consensus. The controversy has set the three states on fire and the Prime Minister could not have possibly taken a firm stand to appease only the Nagas. At the start of the peace talks following the ceasefire in August 1997, the main demand was for sovereignty and dialogue on the basis of the 1951 Plebiscite in which 99.9 per cent of the Nagas opted for independence, both of which have been glossed over. The integration issue threatens the peace process and the best available option remains, perhaps, to resume talks without a fixed agenda, an open discussion that takes into confidence all the three states.

THE STATESMAN 19 DEC 2004

flushout forces catch top Indian rebels; spectre of high casualty on both sides

Breakthrough and bloodshed

19/12/04
OUR BUREAU

IN THE NET

Dec. 17: The Bhutanese flushout has snared at least three top leaders of militant groups active in Assam and Bengal in a breakthrough that is as unusual as the crackdown now rolling along India's north-eastern border.

But a steady drone of Indian helicopters ferrying wounded Bhutanese soldiers outlived the occasional boom of gunfire in the jungles, raising the possibility of heavy casualties on the hunter and the hunted.

Bhutanese and Indian security officials said off the record that a top leader of the United Front of Asom and two of the north Bengal-based Kamtapur Liberation Organisation had been caught during the sweep that entered its third day today. (See chart)

Unconfirmed reports said the forces have also closed in on Jeevan Singh, the KLO chief. Officials said they would not make any comment on Singh's "status". The publicity secretary of the National Democratic Front of Boroland, B. Erakdao, is also said to be among those in custody.

Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresch Barua phoned newspaper offices in Guwahati to confirm the capture of publicity wing chief Mithinga Daimary.

The commander of the Ulfa, whose chairman had appealed to

● **Mithinga Daimary:** Also known as Deepak Das, he has been heading the Ulfa's publicity wing since 1995. He is among the close advisers of the Ulfa high command. In his early thirties, Daimary is said to be suffering from a terminal illness

● **Tom Adhikary:** The chief of the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation's action squad. Aged 28, he is considered well-versed in jungle warfare. Alleged brain behind an assault on a CPM office in Jalpaiguri in which five persons were killed and the kidnapping of an Assam MLA's son

● **Milton Burman:** The KLO's second-in-command. An honours graduate, this 33-year-old is said to be a shrewd strategist

However, chased from the jungle hideouts in the southern districts of the Himalayan kingdom, the militants are said to be putting up "tough" resistance against the comparatively "inexperienced" Royal Bhutan Army troops. Reports from Thimphu said the Indian insurgents have suffered heavy losses, but added that the casualties on the Bhutanese side, too, were "high".

"Over a 100 militants are reported to have been killed in the last three days. At least 18 hideouts have been busted and all the major camps have been dismantled," a Bhutan home ministry official said from Thimphu. "We have also suffered a few casualties," he added.

Other sources said last evening, at least 10 Bhutanese soldiers were killed when militants blew up a "suspension" bridge.

Day-long sorties by Indian Army choppers between its 20 Mountain Division headquarters at Binaguri, around 65 km from Jalpaiguri, and places inside Bhutan suggested that casualties are heavy.

An official statement from Bhutan said: "The Indian Army continues to cordon off and conduct complementary exercises along the Indo-Bhutan border. They have also been very helpful in air-lifting our wounded by helicopter. As a result, the wounded are receiving immediate treatment."

■ See Page 9

Bhutan yesterday to halt the operation, today took the mercy plea further and sought the intervention of the Red Cross. "We have appealed to the Red Cross to intervene in the conflict zone," Barua said. He ruled out surrender but said the terms for shifting the camps could be discussed with Bhutan.

Bhutan appeared to be in no mood to relent. Director in the foreign ministry Yeshe Dorjee said: "The Bhutanese government is determined to continue with its operations till the insurgents (totalling 3,000) leave our soil."



Bhutanese soldiers atop an armoured vehicle near the India-Bhutan border in Samdrup Jongkhar, 80 km south of Guwahati, on Wednesday. (Reuters)

Army antenna up for Bhutan call

SUJAN DUTTA

New Delhi, Dec. 17: The Indian Army can step into Bhutan in aid of the Royal Bhutan Army in its operation against insurgents on a request from Thimphu.

A high-level source here said the political leadership in India is keeping the option of direct involvement in operations on the ground. But this would be on a specific request from Bhutan.

As of now, the king of Bhutan during his talk with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee over the weekend informed him that the Bhutanese army was going ahead with its operation.

Despite unofficial reports that some top militant leaders have been caught, the Bhutanese embassy here reported that few leaders of the insurgent outfits have been found in the camps. "Besides the

armed women cadres, there are only wives and children of the leaders and senior cadres in the camps," a statement from the embassy said.

In communications from Thimphu, New Delhi has been requested that the operation should not be identified as one directed by India. For more than two years, India has been urging Bhutan to act against the insurgents but Thimphu wanted to exhaust all possibilities of negotiation.

For contingency, the Indian Army has identified units that can step into Bhutan if called upon to do so. Between six and 10 battalions of two divisions from the 33 Corps (based in north Bengal) and the 4 Corps (headquartered in Tezpur, Assam) have been activated. Much of these battalions have been deployed on the border.

Indian Army aviation corps helicopters are also evacuating casualties of the Bhutanese army.

Estimates of casualties in the operations vary widely with two different sources in the army quoting figures of 90 and 120. No break-up was immediately available.

Casualties have been heaviest for the insurgents but the Bhutanese army has also lost some troops, some of them to mine explosions. One source said fighting was heaviest in and near the camps of NDFB militants.

A greater involvement of the Indian Army will depend, apart from Thimphu's request, on the number of casualties suffered by the Bhutanese army and an assessment of the operation.

Special units of the Indian Army have in the past operated

inside Bhutan in hot pursuit of militants, mostly from the border in Assam.

The statement from the Bhutan embassy said: "The Royal Bhutan Army is continuing with its exercise to flush out the three armed Indian separatist groups from their 30 well-fortified camps.

"This began yesterday at 9 am along the entire southern region comprising four districts. The total number of militants who are extremely well armed is in excess of 3,000. Located on strategic heights in rugged jungle terrain, the camps are usually guarded by a series of outposts and landmines."

The statement added that "the Royal Government is maintaining close contact and consultations with the Government of India in removing the three insurgent groups from Bhutan".

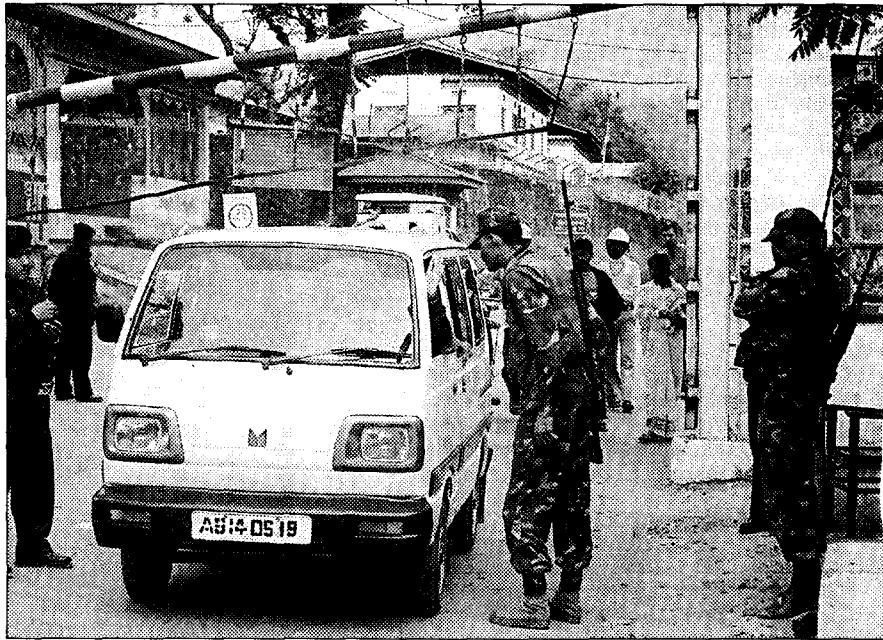
Ulfa flush-out still on, 25 killed

Jaideep Mazumdar
Kolkata, December 16

FIERCE FIGHTING continues in the dense jungles in remote parts of the southern Bhutan districts. The Royal Bhutan Army that launched operations against the 3,000-odd militants of the Ulfa, NDFB and KLO holed up there suffered a few casualties on Tuesday.

In the hammer-and-anvil operations, three Ulfa camps, including its central headquarters at Phukaptong in Samdrup Jongkhar, have been busted and more than 25 militants have been killed so far. Sources in Thimpu, capital of Bhutan, claimed two of the NDFB's 12 camps had been overrun and six Bodo militants had been killed. Bhutan has also claimed KLO cadres abandoned two of five camps.

Singyei Dorjee, a spokesman of Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told *Hindustan Times* from Thimpu: "Intensive operations were launched at 9 am on Monday. The military action is on according to plan and we expect more successes soon." "The army has taken on the militants in Samtse and Sarpang districts and the sub-districts of Kalikhola (in Namsi district), Nganglam, Bhangtar and Daifam



A jawan speaks to people entering India at a checkpost along the Bhutan border in Sandrup Jongkhar on Tuesday.

REUTERS

(in Samdrup Jongkhar district)," Dorjee added.

Indian Army officials here said the RBA deployed 15 wings to fight the militants. "They're all well-equipped and have the capability of taking on the militants who don't have the support of locals," said GOC-in-C of the Indian Army's eastern Command, Lieutenant-General J.S. Varma. He added

the operations would be over in the next 96 hours (by this weekend) if the militants realise the futility of resisting the army and surrender. "If they don't, it'll take a little longer to capture or neutralise them," he added. The army commander said that while the Indo-Bhutan border has been sealed off and supply lines to that country have been

cut off, the BSF along the Indo-Bangla border and police forces of West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are on alert.

Dorjee said the Indian Army provided helicopters to evacuate injured Bhutanese soldiers. Besides the five soldiers who were killed on Monday, 16 more were injured on Tuesday. Four are said to be critical.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 DEC 2004

Home and away

Zoramthanga must help out

Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga plays the role of facilitator in the Naga peace parleys and enjoys the best credentials, given that he was Laldenga's deputy and was associated with the 1986 Mizo peace accord. But he seems to display a sorry lack of interest in solving his own domestic problems. For example, the Reang refugee repatriation process has been slow. More than 30,000 of them have been sheltering in makeshift camps in Tripura since October 1997 following ethnic clashes. Aizawl refuses to take them back on the ground that not all of them are its citizens. But some effort must be made to settle this issue. Zoramthanga has also been cool to his Tripura counterpart Manik Sarkar's request to dismantle the Mizoram camps of the proscribed National Liberation Front of Tripura cadres and even denies these exist. Delhi, too, has chosen to largely ignore Tripura warnings that Pakistan's ISI is training north-east rebels (they reportedly run 50 camps) despite Agartala's willingness to provide "specific information".

The North-east states would do well to resolve their differences without seeking the Centre's help. Assam's boundary disputes with Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram have served to disrupt a congenial atmosphere. Agreement becomes exceedingly difficult when each state hardens its stand, but this does not mean the matter should be left to wallow in the mire. The seven states must be conscious of their geographical uniqueness and the fact that not one of them can prosper at the other's expense.

THE STATESMAN

The plain Jane who foxed Assam's cops

Dipankar Roy in Guwahati

April 20. — During a routine frisking of passengers in a city bus here, a constable came across a girl carrying a bag. Inside it was a metal tube. Asked what it was, the girl said it was part of a tube-well. The constable let her go.

It was this "part of a tube-well" that went into action sometime later in the heart of Guwahati. A total of six shells were fired from the mortar — killing three persons and injuring more than 20 — between October and December last year.

The mortars, according to the police, were fired by the girl herself. She alone undertook the 'operation'.

Meet Seema Biswas — a plain Jane *per se*. No wonder the constable had not given a second thought to the "part of a tube-well".

A member of the United Liberation Front of Asom's Enigma B group till she surrendered to the state police sometime ago, Seema was one of the two women cadre who had received training in the use of mortars. The Ulfa put her in 'charge' of Guwahati.

"I joined Ulfa not because I believed in the ideology but to express my grouse against society," she told reporters at the Special Branch headquarters here today. "I became a rebel because of problems in the family." The family problems she

spoke about were largely rooted in the "torture" by her stepmother. But at a more tender age she had to endure the brutal scene of her father being killed by a mob.

Surprisingly, despite all the trauma, she passed the HSLC and HSSLC examinations with flying colours. That was all before she took up arms against the State.

It was only recently, after a round of mortar attacks claimed the lives of a child and a woman, that she finally started realising the futility of her life as a fugitive rebel. She made contact with the police and finally, surrendered. However, she had sent back six mortar shells to the Ulfa before the surrender. Seema handed over two RPGs to the police because she could not fit them into the harmonium inside which she had decided to send them back.

And though the state DGP, Mr Hare Krishna Deka, and the IGP (Special Branch), Mr Khagen Sharma, apparently sought to take credit for Seema's surrender, which was a "huge blow" to the Ulfa, their admissions also exposed the inadequate intelligence apparatus at their command: Seema had purchased a plot of land and also built a house and had been staying in the city for about a year.

And the police never got a whiff of it till she herself came forward and surrendered.

Bangla claim belied

GUWAHATI, April 20. — Bangladesh has always denied the presence of camps run by anti-India extremist groups on its soil. But Seema Biswas told the police that she was trained in the use of explosives and mortars in Bangladesh.

The IGP (SB), Mr Khagen Sharma, said today Seema was sent

to Bangladesh for training in 2001. "She completed her training in an unknown location at Misnupur in Dhaka, but her training in firing took place at an official notified range."

Seema said Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua was a frequent visitor to the training centre where she spent four months. She said the men who imparted training spoke to her in Hindi and appeared to be Muslims, but "were definitely not Indians". — SNS



Seema Biswas

Chamling's windfall

5/10 But emotional integration still way off 16/9

Fortune seems to be smiling on Sikkim chief minister Pawan Chamling. Atal Behari Vajpayee's announcement of a Rs 500-crore special package after a four-day visit may not have measured up to the expectations raised, but it comes as a windfall and recognition of the 10-year-old ruling Sikkim Democratic Party as a progressive force. The largesse comes after years of waiting and is essentially the peace bonus Chamling was demanding for maintaining communal harmony and keeping the state insurgent-free. It is to be hoped that the BJP's seeming magnanimity is no favour for a toehold the national party has been seeking since 1994. The SDF is not an ally of the NDA but supports it.

Despite financial problems, the Chamling government has been able to move fast enough on industrialisation, education (free up to the college level) and fighting poverty. The emphasis is on building and strengthening economic infrastructure. Although there has been objection to construction of Pakyong airport, for which Rs 110 crore was allotted, Chamling is keen to see Gangtok included in the air map. Tourism, the biggest growing industry, will get the required boost with two big hotel chains setting up shop. The government may allow them to run casinos. The annual earning from the state-run lottery, which was Rs 15 crore, has increased substantially with the entire system going on line last year.

Speedier attention to the people's grievances notwithstanding, the SDF has still not been able to convince the Centre to abide by the letter and spirit of Article 371F which confers a special status on Sikkim. Restoration of reserved seats for Sikkimese Nepalese in the Assembly is one of them. Chamling has rightly pointed out during the Prime Minister's visit that Sikkim is part of the Indian Union but a huge gap exists between Delhi and Gangtok with little prospect of emotional integration. It may serve the Centre well to take a momentous decision.

'Antyodaya' scheme to be expanded

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30. Even as the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, plans to soon convene an all-party meeting to discuss the "faulty" Public Distribution System, the Centre today announced expansion of the "Antyodaya Anna Yojna" to cover 1.5 crore 'poorest of the poor' below povertyline (BPL) families with an additional subsidy burden of Rs. 2640 crores. The total food subsidy bill now stands at Rs. 24,000 crores.

Announcing the decision during his reply to a calling attention motion in the Rajya Sabha, the Union Minister for Food and Consumer Affairs, Sharad Yadav said that under the "Antyodaya" scheme 35 kg of foodgrains would be provided at a subsidised rate of Rs. 2

per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice.

So far the scheme covered one crore 'poorest of the poor'. The expanded Yojna will now cover 23 per cent of an estimated 6.52 crore BPL families in the country.

After facing three hours of Opposition onslaught for the failure of the PDS resulting in "malnutrition and hunger deaths", the Minister said in his reply that the expanded "Antyodaya Yojna" would now cover the most vulnerable sections such as old people, widows, disabled persons without families or societal support and the destitute sections of society.

While Opposition members pressed for a meeting of Chief Ministers to discuss the PDS policy pursued by the Government, the Minister said he

would request the Prime Minister to convene such a meeting as reaching subsidised foodgrains to the poor was a joint responsibility of the Centre and the States.

While associating himself with the members' concern at diversions, recycling and corruption in the PDS delivery system, Mr. Yadav said the system was 80 per cent functional. But it had to be reviewed and monitored from time to time for which the Ministry had set up a Task Force.

"We do not make the findings of the Task Force public, but discuss it separately with the Chief Ministers and it has made a difference. Not a single death from malnutrition has been reported from any State in the last three months nor has any State complained about the quality of

foodgrains delivered to them," he said.

Initiating the discussion, Suresh Pachauri (Cong.) charged the Government with pursuing a PDS policy that had resulted in malnutrition and starvation deaths despite burgeoning stocks of foodgrains in FCI godowns.

When the Deputy Chairperson, Najma Heptulla remarked that instead of rats eating foodgrains in godowns, it could be given to children, Mr. Yadav intervened to assert that the mid-day meal had faced some problem but was now running smoothly.

A. Vijayaraghavan (CPI-M) said lofty schemes like the Antyodaya Yojna were announced on the Prime Minister's birthday but they were not implemented as they should be.

0 1 MAY 2005

Strong message to neighbours on terror fight

Saurabh Shukla
New Delhi, December 15

BHUTAN'S MILITARY action against Indian insurgent groups demonstrates its commitment to friendly relationship and has reinforced its image as India's closest neighbour. The action may also send an important message to some of the other neighbours, who are not as cooperative in stamping out these terrorist groups.

Thimpu has gone ahead with the Army action against the militant groups after adequate consultations with New Delhi. Sources said the Indian mission in Thimpu was briefed well in advance and so was External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha. King of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuk then spoke to the

OPERATION AGAINST ULFA

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Saturday

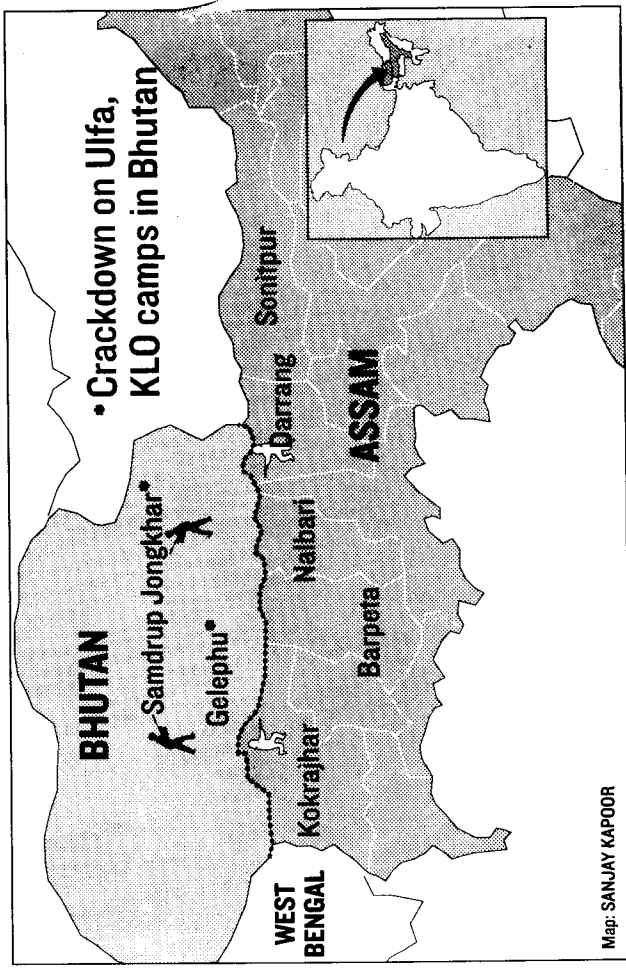
Both countries concurred that the existence of these camps were inimical to the security interests of both countries. The assessment was that these groups were only strengthening their cadres and amassing weapons and a further delay in decisive action will worsen the security situation, sources said. The action is also aimed at conveying a message to some other neighbours like Bangladesh, that if they are genuinely interested in curbing terrorism from their territory they should replicate the exam-

ple of Bhutan. In fact King Wangchuk had discussed this option during his talks with the Indian leaders in September this year. "The launch of operations against Indian insurgent groups in Bhutan has struck a blow against terrorism and terrorist activities in our entire region", External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha said in both houses of Parliament.

In fact, New Delhi has provided all logistical and material support to the Royal Bhutanese Army Helicopters and surveillance equipment has been provided to track down the militant groups who have been using sophisticated weaponry. King Wangchuk said, "Bhutan had gone after these groups after fully exhausting the peaceful dialogue process with them,

their presence threatened its very sovereignty... Bhutan is particularly sensitive to India's security concerns in this region", the Embassy of Bhutan said in a statement.

The insurgent groups - the Ulfa, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) - were using their camps in the dense forests to train their cadres, store arms and ammunition and launch surprise attacks inside India. While Ulfa has 13 camps, the NDFB has 12 and KLO five. Earlier, in response to the clarification of members on the issue in the Rajya Sabha, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha said the military action was targeted at all anti-India insurgent groups - Ulfa and KLO.



16/12/2004

16/12/2004

16/12/2004

Why is Assam burning?

By Walter Fernandes

ASSAM IS in the news again for all the wrong reasons and the usual causes of the United Liberation Front of Assam and other militant outfits being behind the unrest are being dished out. Unemployment is being cited as another reason. While there is no denying that these are among the reasons, one has to go beyond them to understand the deeper cause of decades of neglect of the Northeast in general and Assam in particular.

Without justifying the happenings, it is important to focus on the failure of the economic forces to create jobs in the region though the level of education of its people is high. Liberalisation has added to the problem by creating a crisis in the Assam tea industry, backbone of the State's economy. Immigrants encroach on the land intensifying the problem, because due to the absence of productive jobs, even the well educated continue to depend on land. Jobs in the administration, the other alternative, are declining. Besides, the Assamese feel that the economic forces are devaluing their culture and imposing their own culture on them. Amid such tensions, the politicians were able to exploit to their benefit, the Railway Recruitment Board examinations for 2000 C and D group employees. And the cycle of violence and counter-violence followed.

Low investment in productive jobs is the first issue. The Northeast is treated only as a supplier of raw material of petroleum, tea and coal to the rest of India and a consumer of finished products. In 1996, Assam had 166 large and medium industries and the remaining six States together

had 50 more. In contrast, Orissa that is considered a backward State had 374 industries in the same year.

Liberalisation has added to the State's woes. Assam produces 56 per cent of India's tea and 25 per cent of the world's total. The WTO forces India to import tea from other countries at a lower price. Besides, a few companies that control 60 per cent of

that have resulted in massacres. Be it the Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur, the Bodo-Santhal and Dimas-Hmar tension in Assam or the Tripura tribal demand for a homeland, all have their origins in competition for land.

The people also resent the control of their economy by persons from outside the region. They identify this control with Hindi. Militancy is one

The Centre has treated insurgency in the Northeast as a law and order issue or given it a communal colour by focussing on the Bangladeshi immigrants and ignoring those from the Hindi heartland.

of their reactions. The ban the militant outfits imposed on Hindi films from November 15 in Assam and much earlier in Manipur was a manifestation of this. But as they are unable to influence the decision-makers, their anger is diverted to the vulnerable daily wage earners who also encroach on their land. Every now and then one hears of the killing of Biharis in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam where encroachment is high. A critical moment can trigger a stronger reaction as it did when lakhs of candidates reached Guwahati to appear for the railway recruitment examination.

The students from Assam, who do not see much hope for their future, joined the movement for 100 per cent reservation of jobs for people from the region. That led to attacks on the Northeast-bound trains, and the vicious circle of more violence.

The Centre's reaction has been to

treat insurgency only as a law and order issue or blame it on a foreign hand or give it a communal colour by focussing on the Bangladeshi immigrants and ignoring those from the Hindi heartland. Another reaction is announcement of crores of rupees to be poured into the region without any investment plan. It can only result in corruption as what comes into the region is appropriated by a few leaders. For example, for two decades, amid the fanfare that accompanies their visit, subsequent Prime Ministers have made a symbolic gesture of announcing thousands of crores for the development of the region. A close scrutiny shows that the Planning Commission had already allocated much of what was announced as new.

With no follow up in the form of investment plans, no new jobs are created. That leads to further disillusionment of the youth. Neither the communal bias nor the exclusive focus on law and order can take the region out of this trap. Nor can 2,000 jobs solve the problem of massive unemployment. Both the Centre and the local leaders have to concentrate on regenerating the economy and creating low investment productive jobs.

Instead, the Centre plans to turn the region into the powerhouse of India by building more than 40 massive dams during the next decade, to supply power to the rest of India. They will result in more loss of livelihood but not solve the problem of unemployment. Will our leaders find long-term solutions?

(The writer is Director, North Eastern Social Science Centre, Guwahati.)

Bodoland Council sworn in

By Barun Das Gupta

9. 10 others as executive members. 110-5 8/12

KOKRAJHAR (ASSAM), DEC. 7. The man once hunted by the security forces for "waging war" against the State, today pledged to "uphold the Constitution and the sovereignty and integrity of India."

Hagrama Mahilary (till yesterday known by his assumed surname, Basumatary), 'commander-in-chief' of the now-dissolved Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT), was sworn in as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Chandan Brahma was also sworn in the Deputy CEM and

The Commissioner of Lower Assam Division, Emily Choudhary, administered the oath of office.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, who flew in from Delhi to inaugurate the BTC, said the development of Bodoland would be the special responsibility of the Union Government.

Addressing the gathering on the Kokrajhar campus of the Gauhati University at Debargaon, seven km from here, he said not only would the Centre honour all the commitments made under the BTC

Accord of March 18, 1993, but would do a lot more.

Earlier, Mr. Advani laid the foundation stone for a Central Institute of Technology (CIT) at Debargaon and the secretariat complex of the BTC at Balagaon.

Mr. Advani said the Assam Government and the Centre would together arrange for employment of the surrendered cadres of the BLT.

The Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, said he had requested Mr. Advani to undertake a special employment generation programme for the State, as unemployment was the main cause of insurgency.

Advani holds up Bodo model for other militants

SUSHANT TALUKDAR AND
P. BRAHMA CHOUDHURY

Debargaon (Kokrajhar), Dec. 7: The wheel today turned full circle for the disbanded Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), transforming their leaders from Kalashnikov-toting militants to administrators on whose shoulders rest the hopes of a community thirsting for peace and development.

Among the witnesses to this transition was deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, who described the moment as "the happiest" in his political career. It was at this very venue, seven years ago, that a group of Bodo youth had gathered to give birth to the militant group they disbanded yesterday.

Former BLT chairman Hagrama Basumatary leads the 12-member interim council that will administer the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). He used his original surname, Mahilary, while taking the oath of office in front of a mammoth gathering.

Apart from Advani, Governor Lt Gen. (retd) Ajai Singh and chief minister Tarun Gogoi were present at the rally.

The deputy Prime Minister said the metamorphosis of the BLT leadership into administrators was a message to militant groups active across the country that the people they profess to represent stand to gain if they follow the Bodo example. He said the Planning Commission would make special plan allocations to the BTAD in addition to the annual allocation to the state.

Advani made a commitment to set up a 100-bed hospital and a nursing institute in the area soon. He laid the foundation stone of the another institution, a central institute of technology, immediately on arrival.

Though the BLT leadership has been telling the 2,630 militants who laid down arms that they should not expect a rehabilitation package in return, Advani said both Delhi and Dispur would create employment avenues for them. The huge crowd cheered the announcement.

At a news conference later, Advani said Delhi would hold a dialogue only with those militant groups that conveyed their willingness to abjure violence, as the BLT had done in 1999.

On whether an exception

would be made for the Ulfa, he said the same condition applied to all militant groups.

In his speech at the rally, the chief minister urged the deputy Prime Minister to initiate a special recruitment drive by the army and the paramilitary forces for the benefit of the surrendered Bodo militants. He said Assam police would undertake a similar recruitment drive.

The chief minister made a case for a special economic package for development of education and roads in the BTAD.

Gogoi said after the rally that the state government would examine the possibility of raising a Bodo regiment of the army with surrendered BLT cadre and forward the proposal to Delhi if it was found feasible.

Amid the enthusiasm, the governor sounded a note of caution, saying security would continue to be a source of concern in the BTAD for some time. He urged the interim council to create an environment for "democratic activities" and ensure that an election is held within six months to elect a full-fledged council in accordance with the provisions of the Bodo accord.

BLT disbands with apology and hope

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOKRAJHAR, Dec. 6. — Two fingers were in play in this town in western Assam this afternoon — the index finger and the middle finger.

The 'v' for victory sign swept across the town as carloads of Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) cadres drove in a convoy to the Kokrajhar District Sports Association field to lay down their arms before chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi and Union minister of home for state Swami Chinmayananda.

Before a huge crowd, BLT chairman Hagrama Basumatary lowered the outfit's flag and raised a white flag as over 2,500 cadres buried their violent past in search of a peaceful future.

"We apologise for anything that might have hurt anyone.... we're for peace and development," he said. His name had been synony-



BLT chief Hagrama Basumatary (2nd from left). — EP

mous with terror till the BLT smoked the peace pipe with the Centre three years ago.

The outfit surrendered over 450 weapons, including machine

guns, and a large quantity of explosives. Welcoming Hagrama and his team to the mainstream, Mr Gogoi said other militant groups such as Uifa and NDFB

the latter still waging war for a sovereign Bodoland — should follow the BLT's footsteps. "There's no problem so big that can't be resolved through talks."

Swami Chinmayananda assured the unarmed BLT cadres that security forces would do everything to ensure that they were not victimised by still-active militant groups.

The biggest threat, to BLT cadres comes from the NDFB. Both sides have lost a large number of their men in mutual clashes.

The much-awaited Bodoland Territorial Council will come into effect tomorrow when a 12-member interim council takes oath in Mr LK Advani's presence. (The NDFB today warned the people against supporting the council which, it claimed, was against the interest of the Bodos, adds PTI.) Hagrama will head the interim council.

Bodo Liberation Tigers disbanded

SAMUDRA GUPTA KASHYAP
KOKRAJHAR | DECEMBER 6

THE Bodo armed movement came to a formal close today with the disbanding of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and laying down of arms by 2,641 of its cadres. But the bigger question of their rehabilitation remains unanswered.

The formal surrender of arms, which included 64 AK-series rifles and 300 other assorted weapons, is the biggest-ever surrender of any militant group in the country so far. The previous record was the surrender of 795 cadres of Mizo National Front in July 1986.

Both the state as well as the Central Government have recognised lack of employment avenues as the root cause of youth unrest and militancy in the North-East.

BLT chairman Hagrama Basumatary said while the disbanded BLT cadres would work as "soldiers of peace and development", it is the duty of the government and the society to find out how this army of youth



BLT ultras surrender in Dispur on Saturday

would be rehabilitated.

Basumatary also lowered the red-and-yellow BLT flag and hoisted a white flag in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, Governor Ajai Singh and Union Minister of State for Home Swamy Chinmayanand.

The BLT was formed in 1996 to press for creation of a separate state for the Bodo tribals of Assam and it settled down for a Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council under the amended provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The outfit, that started informal talks with the government in 1999 and

later signed an accord in February this year, had indulged in a series of violent incidents, including the Brahmaputra Mail blast on December 30, 1996, killing 42 people.

The state government, meanwhile, has notified constitution of an interim executive council of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) covering four districts, which will take charge tomorrow with Basumatary as chairman. Three new districts are being created, which along with the Kokrajhar district, constitute the BTC. Deputy PM L.K. Advani will inaugurate the BTC.

Bodo militants lay down arms

By Barun Das Gupta

adopting all steps for their security.

KOKRAJHAR, DEC. 6. The Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) laid down their arms at a function here today, signalling the end of 17 years of armed struggle. The 2,623 BLT cadres, who rode through the town in trucks and buses displaying their arms, were lustily cheered by the crowds that lined the route to the Kokrajhar District Sports Association (KDSA) stadium, where the function was held. The BLT "commander-in-chief", Hagrama Basumatary, who will be sworn in tomorrow as the Chief Executive Member (which has the rank of Cabinet Minister) of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), announced the organisation's dissolution, brought down the BLT flag and hoisted a white flag.

The Union Minister of State for Home, Swami Chinmayanand, the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, the Governor, Ajai Singh, State Ministers, MPs, MLAs and senior officials were present at the function.

Mr. Basumatary said 30 rounds of discussions had been held before the Memorandum of Settlement with the Centre was signed. He reminded the people that the Bodos wanted a "solution within the framework of the Constitution."

Swami Chinmayanand, Mr. Gogoi and Lt. Gen. Singh appealed to the other militant outfits in the region to emulate the BLT's example and return to the path of peace. Swami Chinmayanand said the BLT cadres need not feel insecure as the State would provide them full safety and security.

PTI reports:

He regretted that the Bodos had been denied their rights and that even after the signing of the the Bodo accord in 1993, violence continued to haunt the area. He hoped that with the creation of the BTC, the members of which would be sworn-in tomorrow in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, here, the struggle of the Bodo people for their rights would be fructified. Mr. Gogoi said that the non-Bodos residing in the BTC area should not feel insecure as the Government was

Mr. Basumatary appealed to the Central and State Governments to ensure the safety and rehabilitation of the cadres. Voicing concern at the violence being carried out by the ULFA and the NDFB, he said a new era of peace and development would be ushered in by the BTC.

Talking to presspersons later, Mr. Basumatary appealed to all sections of people to make the BTC a success and ensure all-round development of the backward areas.

"For the full implementation of the BTC accord, the help and cooperation of the people are a must. I am confident of implementing the accord in totality as I am sure that we can together orchestrate a new revolution for development and peace in Bodoland."

He stressed that there would be no place for corruption in the new set-up and funds would be properly utilised. After the formation of the Interim Council, the executive members would take the help of experts and chalk out a strategy for proper implementation of projects.

Top priority would be accorded to develop the communication network, education, agriculture and healthcare infrastructure. The cadres laid down more than 500 varieties of assorted weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, AK-series rifles, light machine guns and SLR rifles. The stadium was packed to capacity with Bodo men and women dressed in their traditional colourful outfits.

During the surrender ceremony, which took over two hours, a Bodo shawl was presented to each of the 2,633 cadres, welcoming them to the mainstream. Prior to the surrender, the cadres ran two laps of the stadium in their uniform.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) symbolically presented a pen and a notebook to the cadres, signifying the exchange of the gun for the pen.

The State Government has announced amnesty to all the cadres and the withdrawal of cases against them.

THE HINDU

7 DEC 2004

Bodoland Territorial Council to come into being tomorrow

By Barun Das Gupta

KOKRAJHAR (ASSAM), DEC.

This small town, headquarters of the district of the same name, is in a festive mood as it is getting ready for the formal inauguration of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Sunday by the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani.

The members of the Interim BTC will be sworn in in the presence of Mr. Advani, the Union Minister of State for Home, Swami Chinmayananda, and the Governor and Chief Minister of Assam.

There will be a formal surrender of arms by the Bodo Liberation Tigers to symbolise the giving up of rebellion

and the acceptance of the democratic and constitutional path.

In Banargaon, a small village 7 km from here, 2,623 BLT militants, well-trained in handling guns and explosives and dressed in army fatigues, have assembled for the ceremonial laying down of arms.

The BLT has a chequered history. As the movement for a separate Bodo State took the form of armed struggle in the mid-1980s, the All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) formed a body called ABSU Volunteer Force or AVF. The name was changed to Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF) in 1987. The BVF eventually became the BLT.

Their armed struggle ultimately forced the State and the Centre to sign the Bodo Accord in 1993 and set up a Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC).

However, elections were never held for the BAC and it was run by members nominated by the State Government.

Each ruling party at Dispur changed the BAC's composition and packed it with its own men. The BAC failed to satisfy the Bodos who wanted more autonomy and hence the BTC.

The Council will comprise an area where the Bodos are clearly in a minority and the non-Bodos are apprehensive about what is in store for them.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2003

9-12-03

THE INCUMBENCY FACTOR

10-10
4/12

THE VICTORY OF the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) in the Mizoram Assembly elections, giving the party a second successive term in office, has shown that anti-incumbency may be an overused rule of thumb by politicians and pundits. The MNF's last term in office does not appear to have eroded the popularity of the party or its leader and Chief Minister Zoramthanga. The party won 21 of the 40 Assembly seats, the same number it had the last time. The much-touted electoral alliance between the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) and the fledgling Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) made no dent in the MNF's support base. The MPC was actually the main loser in these elections — from 11 seats in the outgoing Assembly, the party is now down to just three, while its alliance partner, the ZNP, won one. The Congress was the principal beneficiary from the MPC's loss, doubling its seats from six to 12. But with its leader, Lalthanhawla, mired in corruption charges that go back to his two terms as Chief Minister from 1989 to 1998, the party posed no threat to the MNF.

From the verdict, it is clear that the people of Mizoram view the MNF as the party that, after waging an insurgent war against the Centre for 20 years, brought peace for the Mizos through the 1986 accord with New Delhi and also helped keep it. Even though the Laldenga-led MNF Government collapsed three years after the accord, the MNF's responsible conduct through 10 years of Congress rule ensured that the pact continued to be respected. When the MNF came back to power in 1998, Chief Minister Zoramthanga, who took over the leadership of the MNF from Laldenga after his death in 1990, promised to make Mizoram the "Switzerland of the East". While that goal is still a dream, Mr.

Zoramthanga purposefully used his rapport with the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre to start a major hydro-electric project in the State and to secure several World Bank-assisted schemes for employment generation. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA's dependence on him as a trouble-shooter in its talks with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah faction) also added to his stature. In the event, it was not surprising that the Mizo nationalism-on-the-sleeve agenda espoused by the MPC-ZNP alliance failed to find many takers. The BJP's efforts to cosy up to the non-Christian tribes of the majority-Christian Mizoram also fell flat with the party getting no seats at all in its first electoral venture.

Mizoram is often described as the "model State" of the troubled Northeast for the way in which peace has taken root and established itself there. Of the seven States in the Northeast, Mizoram is considered the best integrated with the rest of the country. However, it is not entirely without problems. Mizoram shares its borders with Assam, Tripura and Manipur, as well as Myanmar and Bangladesh. The State has to deal with refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Since 1997, it has created refugees of its own with nearly 35,000 Reang tribals fleeing to neighbouring Tripura following ethnic tensions with Mizos. In the just concluded poll, the Election Commission had to make special arrangements for these Reang refugees to vote in their camps situated across the Mizoram border. But compared with some of its neighbours, Mizoram's problems are still manageable. Mr. Zoramthanga will need to address these issues before he can achieve his dream of a Switzerland in the Northeast.

THE HINDU

4 DEC 2004

Six Karbis, two cops

5/1
20/11
killed in Assam

NSB ✓
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Nov. 29. — Two policemen and six Karbis were killed in Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong districts respectively today.

The anti-Bihari violence too resurfaced today, after a lull of 72 hours, with criminals torching 12 shops belonging to members of the Hindi-speaking community at Doomdooma in Tinsukia district. More than 50 lives have been lost in the anti-Bihari violence over the past fortnight.

Suspected Ulfa militants ambushed a police patrol at Mejeragaon in Dhemaji. In the ensuing encounter, two policemen and an "unidentified" person were killed. Three policemen were injured.

Earlier, around 4 a.m., Kuki militants killed six Karbis, including a five-year-old girl and two women, and burnt down over a hundred houses in two villages in Bokajan, Karbi Anglong. Police said the assailants could be from the Kuki Revolutionary Army. The Kuki-Karbi clashes, which started in mid-October, have claimed over 30 lives in the district. The KRA and the Karbi militant outfit, United People's Democratic Solidarity, are reported to be holding several hostages.

'ISI helping ultras'

The ISI is backing North-east militant groups that have camps in Bangladesh with the help of the Al-Qaida and Taliban, Mr MN Sajjan, additional DIG, BSF, said today, PTI adds from Guwahati.

Ulfa rocket attack targets Hindustan Lever

9 Nov 2003
28/11
Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Nov. 27. — Corporate major Hindustan Lever Ltd bore the brunt of an attack by the banned Ulfa extremists hit an apartment in the officers' complex of the company's personal product unit inside Raidang Tea Estate at Doomdooma in Tinsukia district.

Though unrelated to the violence against Biharis in the state, the ultra

attack that came around midnight kept the security forces on alert well past the wee hours today. Police said the occupants of the apartment that took the hit, commercial officer Mr Subhendu Ujir and his wife, had a narrow escape as the rocket, fired at random, pierced the 20-inch wall of the kitchen and hit the refrigerator, destroying it completely. The blast also burst a water pipe and damaged other kitchenware, but there was no fire.

"We were fast asleep and were

awakened by a loud bang and tremor," Mr Ujir told The Statesman over telephone from his flat on the second floor of the four-storied apartment block. The bedroom, he said, escaped the strike as it was located a little distance away from the kitchen. The couple came out to find the kitchen completely in shambles. "We're in a state of shock," Mr Ujir summed up. Had the rocket come in through a window close to where it hit, it would have entered the living area and caused exten-

sive damage. The Ulfa had slapped a Rs 1 crore extortion demand on Hindustan Lever in October which had prompted greater security arrangements for the company's businesses and officials. The attack came 24 hours before the start of Ulfa's "black day," which the outfit observes from the midnight of 27-28 November as a mark of protest against the ban imposed on the outfit on that night in 1990 and the simultaneous imposition of President's rule in

the state, which was followed by the launching of Army operations to tackle the extremists.

Ulfa has resorted to acts of sabotage on or around this day almost every year since then.

However, plantation manager Mr Manas Barua said work was on today in both the tea garden and the personal product factory. A series of high level meetings were held by the company to take stock of the situation in the aftermath of the attack.

THE STATESMAN

28 NOV 2003

Ulfa strike on Lever complex

OUR BUREAU

Guwahati/Jorhat, Nov. 27: The United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) launched a rocket-propelled grenade attack on the residential complex of a personal care product factory owned by Hindustan Lever Ltd (HLL) at Doomdooma in Upper Assam last night.

There was no casualty, but the attack in Tinsukia district sent shivers across the industry and the state government, which was groping for answers as the district has a heavy presence of security personnel.

HLL had received an extortion note for Rs 2 crore purportedly sent by the Ulfa in September-end, prompting the government to rush additional security to the tea belt of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh.

Tinsukia superintendent of police Apurba Jibon Barua said the incident took place at Raidang tea estate around midnight. The grenade went off inside the kitchen of the staff quarters of the commercial officer, Subhendu Uzir, who was with his wife in the living room when the grenade hit the building.

The grenade, believed to have been fired from 200 yards, slammed into quarter No. 404 on the first floor of Bristi block, damaging the kitchen wall and hit the refrigerator.

HLL spokesperson Shubhabrata Bhattacharya said in Mumbai: "We confirm the incident and are grateful to god that the damage was limited. It could have been worse."

Asked if, in the given situation, the multinational was contemplating a pullout from

Assam, the spokesperson said: "In the past, we have reiterated our commitment to Assam. Our investment in the recent years is proof enough."

"Our current assessment of the situation will depend upon the ability of the administration to provide protection to our personnel and to our assets, as well as prevent recurrence of such attacks. We are trying to tackle the situation with the cooperation of the administration."

The complex has three three-storied blocks, each housing 18 families.

The complex is surrounded by gardens on three sides and the attack was carried out from the jungle behind it.

Sources said a CRPF camp, set up after the extortion note was made public, is located within 500 metres of the complex.

The nearest army camp is at Rupai, 10 km from the site.

Barua, who took over following the killing of a youth in police firing to stop a group clash from flaring up in Tinsukia last week, said the militants probably had planned to attack the factory located about 1.5 km from the staff quarters.

But, he felt, the original plan was shelved as it was guarded by jawans of the Assam Tea Plantation Security Force.

The director-general of Assam police, P.V. Sumant, described the incident as "unfortunate", adding that there was "no need for the employees working for the multinational in Assam to press the panic button."

He said HLL's director (plantation) S.K. Dhall has reached Doomdooma from Calcutta to take stock of the situation.

9 N 1/60

65

THE TELEGRAPH

18 NOV 2003

Bodo debut in Assam mayhem, 3 gunned down

Statesman News Service GUWAHATI, Nov. 25. Suspected National Democratic Front of Bodoland militants joined the Ufa in the killing spree by gunning down three Biharis at Khanglabari in Darrang district last night, taking the toll to 54 while angry inmates of a relief camp heckled Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi when he visited them at Doomdooma in the worst-affected Tinsukia district this noon.

The killings came within hours of the RJD supremo, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, making a passionate appeal for return of sanity and upholding decades-old Assamese-Bihari brotherhood. Mr Yadav left this afternoon but not before ensuring that Mr Gogoi finally visited Tinsukia where over 25 Biharis have died so far and several thousand rendered homeless.

At Doomdooma, relief camp inmates, however, turned angry the moment Mr Gogoi started blaming inadequacy of security forces for

the ongoing violence while addressing a meeting. They started shouting "go back Gogoi, go back Ghatowar" (APCC chief Mr Paban Singh Ghatowar), and soon after left the venue ignoring requests to stay back. They ransacked the Congress office on their way back. Mr Gogoi met with similar resentment in Dulaijan, the oil township.

IG (special branch), Mr Khagen Sharma, said the place where last night's killing occurred was an NDFB stronghold. The militants, besides killing the three, injured

nine others and set 19 houses on fire.

Kuki exodus: At least 125 people belonging to the Kuki ethnic community have fled Karbi-Anglong in Assam for Churachandpur in Manipur in the wake of ethnic clashes with Karbis. The villagers, including 30 schoolchildren from five Kuki villages — Molnom, Manja, Khengmuol, Kaimai and Nuomjang — all in Karbi-Anglong, left for Manipur, which has a sizeable Kukis population.

Editorial: All awry in Assam, page 8

Dhaka role in violence alleged as toll reaches 50 ■ Assam wants all jobs for locals

More blood on Ulfa hands

SNS & AGENCIES

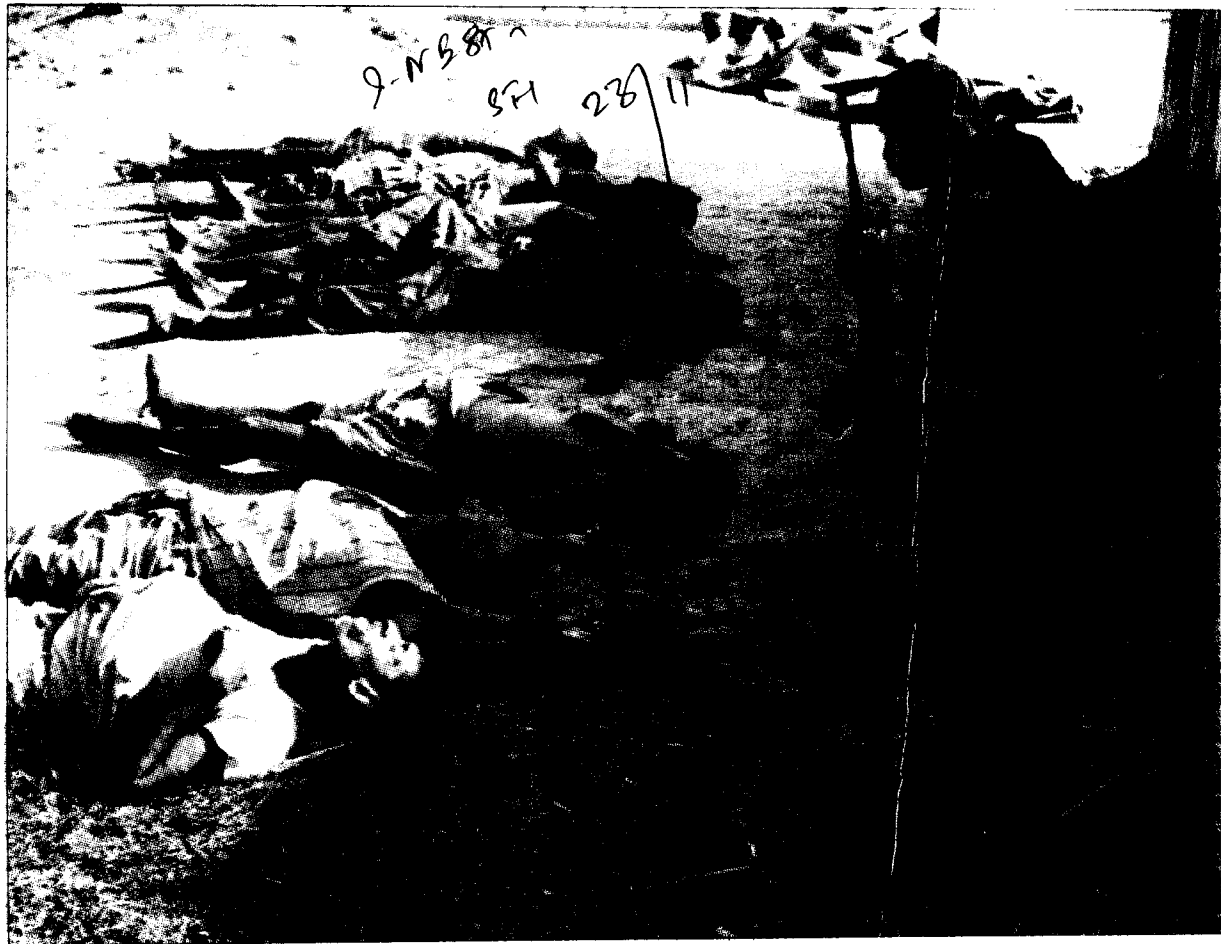
GUWAHATI, Nov. 22. — Suspected Ulfa extremists today gunned down 11 Bihari labourers near Mahakali and Lankesh tea estates in Tinsukia, threw three persons into the Brahmaputra with their hands tied in Dhola and killed two others elsewhere. Another person was burnt to death when his house was torched in Tinsukia, taking the toll to 50 since the violence began in Assam earlier this week.

Ulfa commander-in-chief Paresh Barua claimed responsibility for the Tinsukia killings, saying they took the step as Assam's "culture was being polluted". And in a turn-around, the Assam government demanded a revision of the Centre's employment policy to ensure 100 per cent job reservation for locals in Central government undertakings, even as Union ministers Mr CP Thakur and Swami Chinmayanand reached here to take stock of the situation. "The Centre should not provide a spark. It should ensure that locals are taken for jobs," said a memorandum submitted to the Central ministers' team by chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi.

In Delhi, President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam expressed concern over the violence. He received "many representations in this regard", his press secretary said. Assam Governor Lt-Gen. (retd) Ajai Singh appealed to all citizens to ensure peace.

Indefinite curfew was clamped today in four more towns of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts — Bordubi, Kakopathar, Dhola and Makum — taking the number of towns under curfew to 12. Curfew was already in force in Tinsukia (town), Duliajan, Namrup, Moran, Khowang, Tengakhat, Tingkhong and Nalbari. Three BSF companies and five Army columns were deployed in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh while the government today replaced the Tinsukia SP and DC.

Union minister for North-east affairs Dr Thakur, accompanied



Bodies of the eight Bihari labourers killed at Mahakali Tea Estate. — PTI

NEWS CHANNELS BLACKED OUT IN TINSUKIA

GUWAHATI, Nov. 22. — Cable operators in Tinsukia "voluntarily" stopped telecast of some private news channels since this morning for telecasting "inflammatory news" that they thought could be detrimental to peace.

It all happened after a channel allegedly reported that Ulfa cadres had gunned down 15 Biharis in an attack in Tinsukia this

morning. The news was telecast just before the scheduled lifting of the curfew at 10 am. "As soon as curfew was lifted, all hell broke loose and tension started running high," said a resident over telephone. The administration reimposed the curfew soon after though it was to have been relaxed for five hours today.

— SNS

by Union minister of state for home Swami Chinmayanand, visited Bongaigaon after arriving here this morning. They are to visit Tinsukia tomorrow. Dr Thakur alleged that whatever was happening in Assam was

"part of a bigger game". He blamed the Ulfa, Bangladesh and Pakistan for their complicity in the continuing orgy of violence. "The Ulfa is carrying out the killings with encouragement from Bangladesh," he said, alluding to

the description of Ulfa cadres as "freedom fighters" by some Bangladeshi politicians. However, at a press meet with Mr Gogoi, Dr Thakur rejected the demand for imposition of President's Rule in the state. "The Centre and the state are working together... it's a national problem and we'll deal with it accordingly."

In Indore, Mr LK Advani too blamed the Ulfa for the violence. "It has lost the people's support," he said. In Patna, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav declared that Bihar would send its own officials to Assam to assess the plight of Biharis there.

■ Editorial: Boys for jobs, page 8

■ More reports on pages 6 & 10

Ulfa, mob massacre 16 Biharis in Assam

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, November 22

AFTER AN incident-free Friday, suspected Ulfa militants and a xenophobic mob killed 16 Bihari daily wage-earners in Upper Assam on Saturday. The attacks coincided with visits by the Union Minister in charge of the region, C.P. Thakur, and Union Minister of State for Home Swami Chinmayanand.

The killings — the massacre of Assam's Hindi-speaking people began on November 15 — took the toll to 49. Reports said bicycle-borne militants wielding sophisticated weapons struck at two brick kilns under Bordubi police station in Tinsukia district around 8.30 am. They struck first at a kiln near the Mahakali tea estate, gunning down eight labourers and injuring two. Minutes later, they struck at a second kiln near the Lankeshi tea estate, killing three labourers.

Almost eight hours before the twin attacks, about 30 people set fire to eight houses belonging to settlers from Bihar at Tongna, also in Tinsukia district. Two people who could not escape were charred to death. An agency report said that at Dholla, three Biharis drowned after they were thrown into the Brahmaputra with their hands tied.

Also, around 11.45 pm on Friday, a middle-aged Hindi-speaking man was killed in the Geetanagar area of the capital. But the police called it an accident caused by a gas cylinder blast. Shaken by the incidents, the Tarun Gogoi government suspended Tinsukia SP Satyen Gogoi and transferred deputy commissioner M.B. Das.

Guwahati municipal commissioner Sanjay Lohia was told to proceed to Tinsukia and take over charge as the deputy commissioner while AJ Barua, commandant of the second Assam

Police Battalion based at Makum, was named Gogoi's replacement. The government also reimposed curfew in Tinsukia district. Night curfew would be in force in Dibrugarh, Nalbari and Bongaigaon districts.

Four other towns — Bordubi, Kakopathar, Dholla and Makum — were placed under an indefinite curfew in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts, bringing the number of curfew-bound towns in the state to 12.

Meanwhile, Guwahati witnessed huge peace rallies for the second day running. A massive procession was brought out by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee with Chief Minister Gogoi taking the lead.

But in Patna, transporters decided against sending trucks to Assam and other north-eastern states, threatening essential supplies to the region.

Related report on Page 4

Assam riots: Chain of blame



A boy searches for his books amidst the charred remains of his house in Guwahati. — Eastern Projections

By Nava Thakuria

THE recent attacks on train passengers from the North East in Bihar have emboldened some of the banned underground groups to try and regain their one-time high visibility and public support.

These groups were already smarting from the reaction of local film personalities who had raised their voices against the proclaimed "ban" on Hindi films in the region by these very groups. The so-called ban was to begin on 15 November. But now, the tragic events in Bihar and the consequent counter-reaction in Assam have given these armed groups a fresh opportunity to grab public attention with their warning of "far-reaching consequences."

It may be recalled that last year, several Hindi speakers had been killed in Assam. Authorities at the time had blamed the United Liberation Front of Asom, a charge the outfit had denied. This time, not less than seven armed groups issued a joint statement condemning the attacks, including the gang rape of a Naga student. The statement was issued by Rubi Bhuyan on behalf of All Tripura Tiger Force, Arunachal Dragon Federation, Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, Manipur People's Liberation Front (comprising PREPAK-Revolutionary Peoples Front and United National Liberation Front), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, United Liberation Front of Twipra and Ulfa.

Ulfa "commander-in-chief" Paresh Baruah told the Guwahati media that the wealth of Assam had become indispensable for Bihari residents.

The All Assam Students' Union, backed by the Asom Gana Parishad, the main opposition to the Congress in the state, and

the Asom Jatiyatabadi Chatra Parishad, another youth group, shut down the state during its 24-hour work stoppage on 17 November. Incidents of violence were reported from different parts of the state and AASU activists burned the effigy of Union railway minister Nitish Kumar, who is from Bihar, and demanded his resignation. In all, 30 people were killed and hundreds of houses burnt. Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts witnessed most of the arson.

The incidents erupted in a chain of events that followed the intimidation of residents from Bihar who had come to Assam for tests to fill up vacancies in the Indian Railways. The incident triggered a counter-reaction in Bihar and is creating much tension across Assam, home to large settlements from that state, who work in numerous, largely unskilled, occupations, including as labourers, fishermen, cattle herders and milkmen as well as petty traders.

The tension shows the fragility of Assam's multi-ethnic mix and the many pressures that exist below the surface.

Things have been complicated by the threat of the Ranbir Sena in Bihar, a private upper caste-based army, of stern action against Ulfa if any Bihari was harassed in Assam. How this group plans to carry out its threat is unclear. However, the Centre must insist that the railway ministry and both state governments provide security to all passengers, regardless of origin and take tough measures to stop any intimidation or attacks on linguistic groups. On this will hinge the credibility of both the Centre and the states, for the first duty of any government is to ensure the security of its citizens.

(The author is a freelance journalist based in Assam.)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2003

ASSAM'S SHAME

9 NB 88

THE KILLING OF close to 30 people in Assam in a wave of attacks over the last few days on the Hindi-speaking population of the State has once again exposed the worst face of regional and ethnic chauvinism in the North-East. The attacks, which began with Assamese students preventing Hindi-speakers from writing a selection examination for junior posts in the North-Eastern Frontier Railways (NFR), sparked off reprisals against north-easterners in Bihar, the State to which most Hindi-speakers in Assam trace their roots. This in turn became the excuse for the killings in northern Assam where a large number of Hindi-speaking people live. The Assam Government has been forced to seek the Army's assistance to bring the situation under control. The entire series of events, from the first incident to the last killing, is reprehensible and unacceptable to all who consider themselves part of a civilised society. It has to be condemned as such and a clear message sent out to the perpetrators that such actions cannot be tolerated. To her credit, the Bihar Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, took swift measures to clamp down on the incidents in her State. In Assam, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's efforts were evidently inadequate: they failed to prevent the grisly killings.

The latest episode of anti-migrant wrath in Assam has provided the United Liberation Front of Assam a tailor-made opportunity to rear its ugly head again. Since the mid-1990s, the outfit has been languishing on the margins, pushed there by the Assamese because of its resort to terrorism, retributive killings and criminal extortion. Evidence of its unpopularity came when voters defied its call to boycott the 1999 Lok Sabha elections and turned out to vote in large numbers. Hundreds of its cadres have laid down arms, some of them saying they did not agree

40-10 22/11

with the senseless violence it advocates. More recently, the group's call for a boycott of Hindi films evoked no response. In the present spate of violence gripping Assam, the State Government has named ULFA as the main instigator and the perpetrator of the killings. Clearly, the extremist organisation, which has been banned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, sees in the situation a chance to make a comeback. In all this, the role of the All Assam Students' Union needs to be highlighted. The AASU, which led the agitation in Assam in the 1980s, recently demanded that the NF railway "should be restricted to the region" and it was the first to raise the "foreigner" bogey in the matter of the zonal railway recruitment examinations. In doing so, the student body may have had an eye on its own political fortunes but its strategy has dovetailed neatly with that of the ULFA.

Mr. Gogoi has blamed the troubles on the Central Government's failure to create adequate employment opportunities in Assam. That may be true, but it is only a part of the story and a lazy way out — good for deflecting criticism but bad in the long run because it plays into the hands of the extremists. It reinforces the view that while the mainstream political establishment in Assam may distance itself from groups like ULFA, it is not above using them for its own political gains. Assam needs to look inward for answers to this week's violence. The victims were those whose families had migrated from Bihar generations ago. It is time the so-called "indigenous Assamese" looked at them as an integral part of the State's ethnic mosaic instead of as "outsiders". In this time of crisis, it rests on Mr. Gogoi's shoulders to provide leadership. Above all, he must resist the temptation to fall into the more-Assamese-than-thou trap.

70% turnout in Mizoram polls

Rahul Karmakar
Aizawl, November 20

THE POLLING to the fifth Mizoram Assembly on Thursday passed off peacefully, except in Sangpuilawn constituency where repolling has been ordered in seven of the 12 polling booths. However, the 70 per cent turnout across the state remains less than the previous elections.

The Sangpuilawn constituency, bordering Manipur, had been tense since Wednesday evening when three candidates of the Mizoram People's Conference, Congress and Mizo National Front were abducted by Hmar militants at gunpoint. They were later rescued by a Mizoram armed police team.

Tension also prevailed in the western consti-

ties of Zawlnuam and Kawrthah bordering Tripura following threats by some Mizo groups to sabotage voting if the Brus or Reangs were allowed to exercise their franchise.

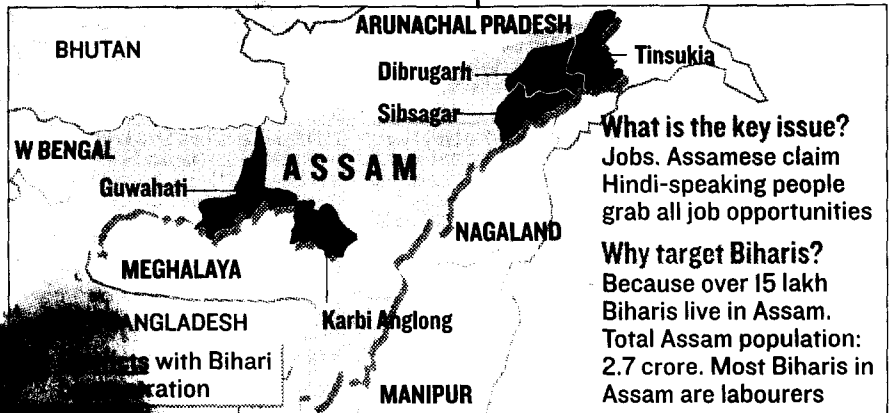
Over 1,700 Brus cast their votes — nearly 1,500 at Tuipaibari in Kawrthah and 212 at Kanhmun village in Zawlnuam. Seventeen special booths were set up at Tuipaibari and Kanhmun on the Mizoram-Tripura border to help over 4,266 Brus to cast their votes.

The Brus, who fled Mizoram six years ago following an ethnic cleansing drive, are taking shelter in six refugee camps in the Kanchanpur area of Tripura. They came in jeeps and buses provided by the Tripura government and escorted by six platoons of paramilitary forces.



Bodies of Bihari labourers gunned down by the Ulfa lie outside a Tinsukia mortuary

Assam and Bihar on the edge over railway jobs



What is the key issue?
Jobs. Assamese claim Hindi-speaking people grab all job opportunities

Why target Biharis?
Because over 15 lakh Biharis live in Assam. Total Assam population: 2.7 crore. Most Biharis in Assam are labourers

Guwahati mob prevents Biharis from taking a railways staff recruitment test on Sunday, November 9. Some girls were allegedly singed using cigarettes

REACTION: Protest marches in Bihar's Katihar and Bhagalpur railway divisions. Armed mobs in Bihar attack trains, injure 50 passengers on November 12

THE FIRE SPREADS: The Ulfa and Aasu take up the issue, call bandh and threaten Hindi speakers to leave Assam or face serious consequences

Graphic: VINEY

More Biharis massacred

Army called out; curfew in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh

Digambar Patowary
Guwahati, November 19

ASSAM CONTINUED to burn on Wednesday, with anti-Bihari violence claiming 22 more lives in Dibrugarh, Dhubri, Tinsukia and Bongaigaon districts.

Eight Biharis, including six members of one family, were hacked to death at Kheronia in the Moiran area of Dibrugarh. Three people each were killed in Tinsukia and Dhubri. Suspected Ulfa militants gunned down four Biharis in New Bongaigaon late on Wednesday night. Three bodies of people suspected to have been killed in violence earlier were recovered at Sripuria in Tinsukia, and another person died of his injuries.

About 60 Bihari homes were torched at Bishnupur in Dhema-ji district, forcing people to flee to Arunachal Pradesh. Late on Tuesday night, a primary Hindi school was burnt in Sonitpur's Biswanath Charali area.

Curfew has been imposed on Tinsukia and Duliagan. The Army staged a flag march at Duliagan in Dibrugarh after clashes rocked the oil town on Tuesday night. The police said some people damaged an additional deputy commissioner's car and tried to set another policeman's motorcycle on fire. This prompted the police to fire on the mob, killing a man on the spot.

The mayhem began after some Assamese candidates for a railway recruitment test were beat-

en up in Bihar on November 12 in retaliation to some Biharis being prevented from taking a similar exam in Guwahati on November 9. More than 38,000 jobs are stake in the 16 railway zones, and people in most states want locals to be recruited.

Passions were ignited in Maharashtra on Tuesday, with Shiv Sainiks attacking Mumbai's Railway Recruitment Board office in protest against "local youth being sidelined". The RRB's ad drew 7.5 million applications, with even some MBAs, engineers, postgraduates and graduates in the fray for the posts of *khalasis*, gangmen and helpers.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi described Wednesday's killings as unfortunate and blamed the Ulfa

for the mayhem. He has appealed to all groups for calm, and asked the Centre to provide more forces.

The West Bengal government has put Cooch Behar police on high alert to prevent violence from spilling over into the state. It has also made special security arrangements for Railway Minister Nitish Kumar's visit to North Bengal on Thursday.

More than 300 people have been arrested in Assam, and the police have tightened security in and around Guwahati.

ON PAGE 4

- 'A girl was raped and train looted in front of me'
- Railway jobs started piling up since 1982

TOLL TOUCHES 26; ULFA COMEBACK BID, SAYS GOGOI

571
20/11

Revenge killings scald Assam

9-11-87

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Nov. 19. — Mobs and an Ulfa hell-bent on regaining lost ground appear to have taken over Assam since last evening. They massacred 25 Hindi-speaking people between them till tonight, including six women and a two-year-old girl, across the state. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, New Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Nalbari and Golaghat were the worst-hit districts. They also burnt down over a hundred houses in retaliation to the attacks on rail passengers from the North-east in Bihar last week.

Another person died when police fired to quell a clash between two groups of people in Tinsukia town this morning, forcing the district administration to clamp curfew. The administration had yesterday ordered closure of all educational institutions for today and tomorrow. Night curfew was clamped in Duliajan, Naharkatia and Namrup towns in Dibrugarh since 7 p.m. today. Dibrugarh and Tinsukia witnessed the most of arson.

A visibly shaken Assam chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi said he had instructed all district deputy commissioners to seek Army help if required. The Army has been out in Tinsukia since yesterday. Mr Gogoi complained of "inadequate assistance" from the Centre and "shortage



Peace march by Karbi students in Guwahati on Wednesday. — Eastern Projections

of security forces". Army sources in Delhi, however, said today that neither the Army HQ nor the Eastern Command in Kolkata were asked to send troops. Mr Gogoi charged that apart from getting involved directly in the violence, the Ulfa was instigating people to attack Hindi-speaking persons and trying to "exploit the sentiments". Within hours, the Ulfa struck in New Bongaigaon and gunned down four persons, including a woman.

Centre tells Assam to combat flare-up, page 8

Bihar on alert

PATNA, Nov. 19. — Rattled by the killings of Biharis across Assam, the Bihar chief minister today wrote to her Assam counterpart demanding "effective steps" to stop the violence against Biharis in Assam, even as she put her own state on high alert to ward off retaliatory violence against people from the North-east in the wake of the deteriorating situation in Assam.

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, who accompanied Mrs Rabri Devi at a press meet here, said "no incident of attack on North-east people have taken place in Bihar since 12 November." He demanded the Centre intervene in the matter and help Assam government check the surge of anti-Bihari feelings among the Assamese. He appealed to the people of Assam to "live like brothers and sisters with Biharis".

All trains from North-east passing through Bihar were today escorted by RPF contingents and Bihar police up to Mughalsarai in Uttar Pradesh. — SNS

Ulfa guns down 4 truck drivers in Dhubri

5/1
19/11
Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Nov. 18. — Suspected Ulfa militants gunned down four Hindi-speaking truck drivers and seriously injured seven in Assam's Dhubri district tonight.

Police said two armed ultras came on a motorcycle to a highway *dhaba* at Baxir Hat, in Golakganj police station area, around 7.15 p.m. and fired at 25 truck drivers. Four died on the spot.

The Army was called out in Tinsukia district as tension ran high after incidents of arson and violence, mainly in Tinsukia town in retaliation to last week's attacks on rail passengers from the North-east in Bihar. The administration has ordered closure of all educational institutions for two days from tomorrow.

The Assam chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, today ordered suspension of the officer-in-charge of the Dispur po-

lice station in the city following arson last night.

9. N 5 82
Reports of stray incidents of arson and violence against Hindi-speaking people in the state continued to pour in from different parts of the state.

Mumbai violence

About 500 activists of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena, the Shiv Sena's students' wing, this morning stormed the RRB offices at Mumbai Central and ransacked the premises in protest against allowing outsiders (read Biharis) to apply for 2,200 jobs as gangmen in the Railways.

The railway ministry today postponed the next four rounds of the RRB examination even as the Bihar government recommended a CBI probe into last week's violence on train passengers from North-east in Katihar, Munger and Kishanganj.

Editorial: Quid pro woe, page 8

THE STATESMAN

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Bandh hits normal life in Assam

Guwahati: Stray incidents of violence marred the 24-hour Assam bandh on Monday, called by the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU), and brought normal life to a halt in the state.

Two motorbikes were torched, while some private vehicles were forcibly seized in Jalukbari area near Guwahati University, sources said here.

A large number of AASU activists gheraoed the North-East Frontier Railway headquarters at Maligaon and prevented railway employees and officers from entering their offices.

The bandh has been called in protest against the assault on Assamese train passengers in Bihar and is being supported by several parties and organisations, including the AGP, BJP, All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), North-East Students' Organisation (NESO) and others.

A railway spokesman said all trains left Guwahati railway station this morning as per schedule, but they had no information on whether the trains were stranded on the way. "The exact information will be available at the controls but the bandh activists are preventing us from entering our offices and as such we do not have the upto date information," he said.

Security all over the state has been tightened and a strict vigil is being maintained in sensitive parts of the state.

Meanwhile, in an apparent retaliation to the harassment of Khasi-Pnar People along the Meghalaya-Assam border, unidentified people set afire a Karbi student and beat up three others as the state government called for restraint.

Meanwhile, the Indian Federal Democratic Party (IFDP) will observe a dawn-to-dusk Bihar bandh on December 1 to protest the alleged denial of opportunity to Bihari students from appearing in railway recruitment tests in Assam on November 9. PTI

Arson, violence mark Assam bandh

56-1 18/11
Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Nov. 17. — Sporadic incidents of arson and violence in retaliation to attacks on rail passengers from the North-east in Bihar marked the 24-hour Assam bandh that began at 5 a.m. today, paralysing life across the state.

A mob attacked a house where some Hindi-speaking people were taking shelter, injuring at least 12 of them at Mirza near here. In the city, 10 houses, a car and a motorcycle were torched and the Samata Party office was ransacked today.

In an incident that can

Nirish no to regional quota

PATNA, Nov. 17. — Union railway minister Mr. Nriish Kumar today rejected the demand for regional quota in Railways jobs. "Job quota can't be granted on the basis of region under the existing laws," he said here, adding, "There is even a Supreme Court order against regional quota in jobs." RJD chief Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav and some political parties from Assam have been demanding regional quota in Railways jobs. Mr. Kumar said the existing laws allowed an Indian citizen to apply for jobs in any part of the country. — SNS

have serious repercussions, four activists of the All Assam Students' Union, which called the bandh, were beaten up at Margherita in Tinsukia district this morning. They were resisted while trying to enforce the bandh at a local market and a clash ensued.

One of them has been admitted to the Assam Medical College and Hospital in Dibrugarh. Margherita police said the situation was tense but under control.

Mobs also attacked two trains at Golaghat and Kamrup stations injuring several persons.

The response to the bandh call in the city and elsewhere in the state was total. The roads in the city were empty barring the stray pedestrian and private vehicle while markets, educational and financial institutions remained closed. Train and air services, however, remained largely uninterrupted.

Biharis in particular and Hindi-speaking people in general are tense after the Ulfa warned of "far reaching consequences" in the wake of the Bihar violence. The outfit was allegedly involved in the massacre of over 50 Hindi-speaking people about two years ago.

MURDER MOST FOUL

And Manipur stands up as one

THE murder of eight-year-old Lungnila Elizabeth, daughter of a Manipur minister, leaves one at a loss for words. Nine days after she was kidnapped from school came news of her decomposed body being found in a nearby locality. Her killers who demanded a Rs 15-lakh ransom are yet to be identified. The girl was said to have offered no resistance, implying that her kidnappers were known to the family. For nine days, she was the child of every parent in Manipur, the entire population pleading for her release in what must be a rare case of unity in a state divided along ethnic lines. More poignant, her assailants were said to have received Rs 10 lakh in two installments, the money collected by well-wishers.

This again exposes poor police intelligence. They drew a blank in their search of the locality; and this in a state where kidnapping is on the rise. The son of former chief minister Rishang Keishing, the Chandel district deputy commissioner and a German national attached to an NGO will realise how lucky they were. They were let off unharmed. The administration then toyed with the idea of setting up a separate Rapid Reaction Force to free hostages. How many more forces of this nature will Manipur require before it can quell "social terrorism"? While chief minister Ibobi Singh is busy balancing his ministry, overall law and order takes a dive. He must either pull up his socks or invite President's Rule.

Ufa tells Biharis to leave Assam

16/11
57-1
Some shops near Nehru Stadium here were also attacked and railway property damaged at Tinsukia yesterday. The administration today directed all government offices and services to function normally during the proposed 24-hour bandh called by the Asu on Monday. Security has been tightened ac-

9-11-87
ross the state in view of tomorrow's second round of Guwahati Railway Recruitment Board test for Group-D posts. North-east Frontier Railway officials said the examinations will be held as per schedule. Railway authorities have strengthened security in trains to and from the region. Control rooms

have been opened at Guwahati, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri and Katihar stations with hotlines to communicate with the train crew. An official said authorities had gone into the alleged reports of rape, molestation and abduction and found "they were not based on facts." Meanwhile, Bihar chief

Elizabeth murder unites Manipur

IMPHAL, Nov. 13. — In an unprecedented show of unity, almost the entire state turned up at the funeral of eight-year-old Lungnila Elizabeth.

Lungnila, a student of Little Flowers School and daughter of Mr Francis Ngajokpa, general administration department minister, was found murdered yesterday. She was kidnapped on 4 November from the school premises. Thousands gathered at the Don Bosco ground in Chingmeirong, here, to pay tribute to the little girl. Mr Ngajokpa, however, forgave his daughter's killers and prayed she be the last such victim. He said his daughter had unified the state through her death.

Chief minister Mr Ibobi Singh was present at the funeral with his council of ministers. The NSCN-IM today said in a statement that it would "deliver justice" and "punish the culprits" involved in the killing. — SNS

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Rhetorically yours

556 Why Nagaland wins over Manipur 1074

If "preoccupation with the forthcoming assembly elections" took the pen through the Prime Minister's scheduled visit to Imphal, expediency certainly took him on a maiden three-day trip to adjacent Nagaland. The Congress-led coalition in Manipur may feel slighted by Central rhetoric but in a sense it was just as well since empty streets, however spruced-up, would have greeted him because of the public anger over his special emissary K Padmanabhaiah's "proposal" to have a committee redraw Manipur's map with the inclusion of its Senapati and Ukhrul districts in Nagaland, not to forget the "unconditional" release of 13 NSCN-IM cadres arrested in Manipur. As for intent, Atal Behari Vajpayee did visit Jammu and Kashmir where the situation is far more volatile than in Manipur. However, the Imphal itinerary would not have been worth the public expenses were Vajpayee to symbolically inaugurate projects, address a handful of selected spectators at the fortified Assam Rifles' parade ground at Kangla and pick up public memoranda.

More importantly, Nagaland is now friendly turf for the BJP which has seven members in the Rio government. Vajpayee's Rs 1,050 crore largesse is a significant pointer to how a state friendly to the BJP can gain financially. Earlier perceptions that the party's coming to power would spell doom for Christian-dominated states are ~~challenged~~ ^{challenged} by the BJP. The BJP and NSCN-IM share a common interest, though how long this state of affairs continues will depend on how deftly the Union government handles the demand for a single administrative unit for Nagas, an issue that has deadlocked the ongoing peace process and damaged age-old Manipuri-Naga relations. Vajpayee has left this to be decided by the people and the states concerned. A "good friend but a dangerous enemy" is how the late AZ Phizo described Delhi's leadership in 1953. There still seems to be evidence of agreement with his analysis, enough at least to make one wonder whether history will repeat itself.

SIXES & SEVENS⁵¹⁸ But Bodos set for second coming

HOPEFULLY, the interim Bodo Territorial Council will not go the way of the interim Bodo Autonomous Council formed after the 1993 Accord. It ran into trouble within six months because the deed was done in unseemly haste, without the boundary issue being resolved. Unexpectedly, when Dispur unilaterally announced it by excluding 515 villages, BAC chief executive, SK Bwiswamutiary, quit in protest, rejecting Dispur's explanation that these were left out because they did not constitute a Bodo majority. Nor did he accept the offer of 250 more villages considered later. The interim body dragged on for more than 10 years without an election being held and was dissolved after the militant Bodo Liberation Tigers and the Centre signed the MoS in February.

The Bodo Bill has already received Presidential assent but the dispute over the BLT's demand for 95 additional villages threatens a smooth transfer of power. The Assam Cabinet subcommittee reportedly agreed to incorporate 25 villages more though some of these do not have 50 per cent Bodo population. There is every likelihood of the dispute turning sour for the simple reason that land is the motivating force behind the Bodo movement. Besides, Dispur is yet to decide on general amnesty to BLT cadres, cases against some of whom can be decided only by courts. Non-Bodos, who make up a majority of the region's population, have been left in the lurch. The threat by their 18-party Sanmilito Janagoshthiya Sangram Samity to launch a 100-hour bandh from the day the BTC comes into effect could spell trouble. The irony is that the latest Bodo pact was clinched by a handful of militants.

Secret killings charge puts Mahanta in a spot

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, NOVEMBER 4

FOR former Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, staging a comeback after he was dumped by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) over a raging controversy of alleged bigamy in September 2001, has rather proved to be an uphill task.

While last week he captured headlines by forcing party president Brindaban Goswami to convene a special session of the AGP's central executive over the All Assam Student's Union (AASU)'s attempts to prevent him from attending the upcoming general convention of the party at Tezpur, Mahanta is caught in another web of his own.

The AASU has been crying hoarse for Mahanta having allegedly unleashed a reign of terror in 2000-01 by asking the security forces to carry out what the student body termed as "secret killings". AASU has alleged that Mahanta as chief

minister was instrumental in eliminating a number of youth who supposedly had links with the ULFA.

The 2001 state Assembly elections too had seen the Congress focus on the "secret killings" to garner votes. The party, on coming to power, also instituted a judicial inquiry into the matter.

Last week, when the AGP central executive met, Mahanta had apparently stated that the "killings" were at the behest of the Central government, which had in 1997 pressed the AGP regime to set up the Unified Command (UC) structure to counter insurgency in the state.

"I never said my government had ordered any 'secret killing' at the behest of the Centre. It's a statement that has been unnecessarily attributed to me," Mahanta told a press conference here today.

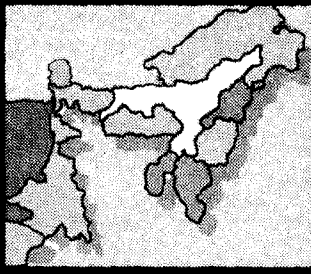
He also recalled that CM Tarun Gogoi had stated on the floor of the state Assembly that there have been

no "secret killings" whatsoever in the state and blasted the government and state Rural Development Minister Ripun Bora for having blamed him for the "killings". "Let the inquiry commission come out with its report," Mahanta said.

The commission has hardly made any headway, and retired Guwahati High Court judge Meera Sharma has already put in her papers complaining that the state Law department was not cooperating with her.

Mahanta also came down heavily on the government for failing to keep its election promise of getting rid of the UC. "The Congress, which raised a massive hue and cry against the UC during the election two and a half years ago, is still carrying out operations against insurgents under the same arrangement. If UC was so unnecessary, then why can't the Gogoi government do away with it now?" he asked.

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

PM's message is clear: Goodwill, not ill-will

THE Prime Minister's visit to Nagaland was unique in a number of respects - and extremely courageous for a political leader of his stature. Atal Behari Vajpayee is the first Prime Minister to have acknowledged the "unique" history of Nagaland. This is a not so oblique reference to the statement made by the NSCN (I-M) and the Centre's Interlocutor at the peace negotiations earlier this year which stressed the "unique history" of the Nagas. This is significant in more ways than one - it gives a strong political basis for the negotiations to progress.

Let me explain this briefly: one of the primary Naga demands, by the NSCN (I-M) as well as other Naga groups, party politicians and civil society leaders, has been that unlike other groups struggling against the Indian State, theirs is a special history since they held that they were never subjugated by any Indian kingdom or state and only incorporated by the British into India. We should appreciate this perspective even if we do not agree with it. In addition, the Naga pro-independence groups have been consistent on this issue.

Mr. Vajpayee also declared that too much bloodshed had taken place, that mistakes had been made and that "there is no issue which cannot be resolved through patient dialogue." To those of us who have been advocating a composite, reconciliatory approach that should bury the bitterness of the past, this appears to be the right path to travel upon. No Indian Prime Minister has had the guts to say this until now that any lasting solution must be based upon Naga "honour and dignity." His approach must be applauded for it comes from the head of the government of one of the largest nations of earth and its biggest democracy (with many flaws).

And talking about travel, his economic packages were large and especially generous for Nagaland's bad roads (one wonders whether it needs a prime ministerial visit to focus attention on the horrible patches which pass for roads in the North-east - don't local politicians travel on them too?) It is a good thing that the work on the roads has been entrusted to the Border Roads Organisation. Anyone can see that this delegation of duty is not exactly a vote of confidence in the capacities of the state government.

However, there are unhappy Naga hearts on the question of integration, the other issue which many Nagas have sought, irrespective of political affiliation, for decades. There are even Nagaland Assembly resolutions on this score, and counter-resolutions affirming the integrity of Manipur by the latter state's assembly! It is the most contentious and explosive of the Naga demands and has the capacity of hurling the entire region into a fresh caldron, if not handled sensitively. The Prime Minister of India cannot be seen to be taking sides on an issue like this. He has merely stated the reality: that there is no consensus on the issue of changing state boundaries. He has not said they should, shouldn't or won't be changed. Mr. Vajpayee has not said either that people should not work for a consensus of views - indeed, they should, in either way. That is a test of democracy, of building participation and understanding. In addition, he has pressed for the involvement of "all sections of society" in a final settlement, again a rebuff to those who advocate a settlement with just one group.

The Naga issue, over these decades, involves their neighbours because they co-exist with them, they live in other States. This may be an accident of history but it is also a reality of life - it cannot be undone by rhetoric but by negotiations, better understanding and democratic processes. Many Nagas communicate with each other and with people from Assam in Nagamese, a combination of the local dialect and Assamese, and an assertion of co-existence.

When Vajpayee came visiting

A missed opportunity

By Oken Jeet Sandham

The Centre's game plan of upsetting the harmonious relationships among various ethnic communities in the region especially in Manipur is under close scrutiny, whether its leaders are really for a solution or for continuing the problems of the region. In this crucial juncture, various political leaders either in State politics or national politics have added more problems in the name of territorial integrity of the State. Even Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, and many other national political leaders have been assuring the Manipur government and other state governments in the region that their territories will not be disturbed while negotiating with the Nagas.

But it is worth pondering how the Government of India is going to resolve the Naga issue because it could not be settled in the past when the Nagas were united. By dropping his Manipur visit while coming to Nagaland, the Prime Minister has missed one of the finest opportunities to narrow down differences that have been built up over the years and which could be a stepping stone to a solution. Even if he visits Manipur in the future, it would not have the same impact as a visit would have had at this crucial hour.

The abrupt cancellation of the Prime Minister's visit raises serious questions about whether some agencies are working against the interests of the people. The Prime Minister may inaugurate some buildings here and there and announce some economic packages but does he think that this will resolve the situation and restore peace?

What is the use of granting crores of rupees if the people in this part of the region live in horror? It is simply a ritual.
(The author is a freelance writer based in Nagaland)

Voices

Not by packages alone

By Kaka D Iralu

First of all, we must express our sincere gratitude to Atal Behari Vajpayee for daring to travel our bumpy and dangerous roads so that the Naga public would not be disappointed by a cancelled programme due to bad weather. The respected elderly Prime Minister of India has performed a feat, younger and more agile former Prime Ministers of India had feared to undertake. We thank Vajpayee for his courage and his noble gesture towards the Naga people.

We are also aware of his courage and commitment towards a final settlement of the 56-year Indo-Naga conflict and we wish him the best in all his endeavours towards that final and permanent settlement. On top of

this, we are most grateful to him and his NDA government for the one time grant of 365 crores to clear Nagaland's accumulated deficit. But having said that, allow me to impress upon the Prime Minister of India the fact that the Indo-Naga conflict is not an economic conflict but a political conflict. It is indeed true that Nagas have benefited a lot from India's generous economic packages given to Nagaland over the past half a century. In the light of these facts, if the Indo-Naga conflict was an economic conflict, the amount of Indian money poured into Nagaland should have solved the "Indo-Naga economic conflict" long ago.

This should be so, because besides the thousands of crores that India has poured into Nagaland, Nagaland also enjoys an extraordinary special status under Article 371 A of the Constitution of India. No other Indian state enjoys the privileges of Nagaland. Yet in spite of all these privileges, there is still a conflict of blood and tears between India and Nagaland. The Prime Minister also admitted this in his speech at the Indira Gandhi stadium. Yes, a lot of blood - both Naga and Indian blood - have been shed in Nagaland because of the political conflict. Conflicts of national identities cannot be solved by money or economic packages. On our part, we accept him as a great Indian Prime Minister. But throughout his speech we never for one moment thought that he was a Naga.

Today, many Nagas are also today attired in Indian dress, Indian uniforms and even driving Indian cars with Indian flags fluttering on their cars. But however much they try to act Indian, the moment they go back home and disrobe themselves from all these external Indian paraphernalia, they all realise that they are Nagas and nothing else but Nagas. This is the essence of the Indo-Naga conflict. The Indo-Naga conflict is a political conflict of two national identities and two geographical identities. And this geo-political conflict can only be resolved when India recognises and acknowledges the fact that Nagas are not Indians and cannot be forced to become Indians.

In the final analysis, if our two nations can accept this undeniable fact then we can live as two separate nations with the best neighbourly relationship. On our part, we hope that instead of always asking economic packages, we shall also be able to someday give something in return for all that India has done for us. This we shall do in true Naga spirit of reciprocity, if someday we discover ways and means through which we can do so.

(The author is a Kohima-based writer and activist)



No room for ambiguity

By Pradip Phanjoubam

It was a tough message delivered softly. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's unequivocal terms are, in war or peace, India will not negotiate what it considers as non negotiable. This was announced in Kohima, but the message is reverberating in all other insurgency prone states.

Belying high expectations amongst a good section of the Nagas, and in the process allaying apprehensions in neighbouring states, particularly Manipur, that their interests may end up compromised in the event of buying peace in Nagaland, Vajpayee left no room for ambiguity or misinterpretation in spelling out India's conditions to the insurgents: that it is better to negotiate than fight, for regardless of which option, the conflict, intellectual or physical, can carry on and India can absorb all the consequences.

Hence, seven years of peace talks or 56 years of violent conflict has not made the Indian government budge an inch on the core demands of the NSCN(M) - sovereignty and Greater Nagaland.

The message is equally loud and clear for those organisations who continue to refuse the olive branch: nothing that cannot be negotiated by peaceful means will be conceded to violent challenges. Vajpayee's appeal to them is also, choose peaceful negotiations, but for the negotiations to be meaningful, choose to negotiate within the parameters of the Indian constitution.

The two pronged message is being taken very well in Manipur. Campaigners for Manipur integrity, spearheaded by the United Committee Manipur, UCM, are understandably elated and have profusely thanked the

Prime Minister for his pragmatism. There is also a visible sense of relief amongst both the Congress-led ruling coalition, Secular Progressive Front, SPF, as well as the BJP-led opposition Democratic People's Alliance, DPA.

The advocates for the creation of Greater Nagaland, in particular the United Naga Council, UNC, as well as the strong delegation of Manipur Nagas who went to Kohima to press for the merger of the Naga dominated districts of Manipur to Nagaland, understandably have returned bruised. So far there have been no open reaction from them, but the floodgates can lift anytime.

The NSCN(IM) too has not reacted substantively as yet but there can be no doubt it is the party pushed against the wall. Remove the sovereignty goal, and any Naga solution will reduce to a rehash of the controversial 16-Point Agreement, which former chief minister and Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee president, SC Jamir calls the bedrock of the Naga society and the former termed as a betrayal of the Naga cause.

It seems Jamir has already smelled blood and his statement to the press that any resolution to the Naga problem should take the solution further the 16-Point Agreement promised, is a jab calculated to make the NSCN(IM) leadership uneasy.

But even if the final settlement was for terms similar to the 16-Point Agreement, which also has the Naga integration clause, there is no guarantee that trouble will end. Different communities which neighbour Nagaland have different ideas of territory and land ownership. However, if they too drop the idea of sovereignty then maybe there are ways of getting around this problem.

(The author is editor, The Imphal Free Press)

Nagas remain sceptical

Says the Amsterdam-based Naga International Support Centre, which often voices the views of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (I-M)

In contrast to the earlier talks in which an understanding was reached, the understanding of the uniqueness of the history of the Nagas, the Naga International Support Centre was quite astonished to see and hear the Prime Minister of India... The history of the Nagas is clear on their common stand in relation to outsiders invading their lands. They resisted the colonial British and they stood up against the invaders from India. Yet India divided the Nagas not only by separating them through an international border, but also separating them further by drawing borders between states of India itself.

So, consequently it is historically factual that the Naga Nation is one culturally and politically. The NISC, from listening to the speech of the Prime Minister made to the Nagas and at such critical time, cannot be anything but sceptical about the sincerity of the Indian Government. Nisc, surprised to learn about the Prime Minister's statement while speaking before the Nagas, wonders if the government of India is aware of the sensitivity of the issue.

Does the Prime Minister realise that at this critical juncture... the Nagas are more than sceptical about this statement? For, this statement could be felt as an insult and thus be harmful to the peace talks.

Meiteis smile, Nagas sceptical, PM scores

Dipankar Roy in Kohima

Oct. 30. — The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that borders of states can be redrawn only if there is consensus among the parties concerned, appears to have cooled frayed tempers of the Meiteis without annoying the Nagas.

At a press conference here before concluding his three-day visit to Nagaland yesterday, the Prime Minister said since there was no political consensus at present, no question of acceding to the demand of the Nagas for integration of all Naga-inhabited areas under one administrative umbrella arose. "To change the borders of states there has to be political consensus. At present there is no polit-

ical consensus here," he had said when asked of the Centre's stand on the demand for integration.

Reports from Imphal quoting United Committee, Manipur — leading the movement against integration — the All Manipur Students' Union and political parties said that Mr Vajpayee's statement was welcomed by Manipur's majority Meitei community. They said the Mr Vajpayee's statement will herald "peaceful coexistence" in the region. Trouble had been brewing in Manipur over the Naga demand of integration. There are four districts in the state inhabited by Nagas and integration would entail Manipur forfeiting a large chunk of its territory.

The NSCN-IM said Mr Vajpayee's statement was not the fi-

Ibobi accolades

IMPHAL, Oct. 30. — Chief minister Mr O Ibobi Singh today thanked Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for declining to consider the Greater Nagaland demand in course of the ongoing talks with the NSCN-IM. He hailed the statement as "mature", but was sceptical of the economic package announced by the Prime Minister for Nagaland. He said while a similar package had been announced for Manipur as well a few years back, the state was yet to reap the benefits. He was, however, happy for the immediate gains of Nagaland which include cellular service and a Rs 365-crore loan waiver some-thing. He said Manipur could do with as well. On the highway project, he said even Manipur will be a beneficiary should it come about. Mr Singh dismissed the Opposition allegation that he did not take enough initiative to secure Mr Vajpayee's visit to Manipur during his recent tour. — SNS

nal outcome of talks with the Centre. Mr V Horam, deputy home minister in the Government of People's Republic of Nagalim, said that decision on the NSCN-IM demand will be settled only across the table. "The peace

process is on and everything will be hammered out in due course," he told The Statesman over telephone from Dimapur. President of Naga Hoho, which is the apex body of all Naga tribal councils, declared there

can be no compromise on the demand. "We are not asking the Meiteis for their land, we are demanding our own land back," he said while calling for a peaceful approach to resolve the matter.

Former chief minister Mr SC Jamir said the Centre in any case, can not change the borders of states without the consent of all. "Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution provide for that," he told The Statesman. "Besides, the NDA manifesto had stated that territorial integrity of the North-eastern states would not be disturbed while finding a solution to the Naga political problem.

According to observers here, the Centre is in a bind over the integration issue."

RS 1,050-CRORE LARGESSE TO NAGALAND

PM leaves integration issue to Nagas and Meiteis

Dipankar Roy in Kohima

Oct. 29. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today left the question of integration of all Naga-inhabited areas to the people, particularly Nagas and Meiteis, and the states concerned to settle saying that political consensus was required to redraw state boundaries. The contentious issue is, therefore, a closed chapter as far as the Centre is concerned, at least for now.

If that disappointed the Nagas, who were expecting to hear something more positive from the Prime Minister on the integration issue, he compensated it by announcing a Rs 1,050-crore package for all round development of the state.

Adding to his yesterday's announcement that the Dimapur-Kohima section of National Highway 39 would be widened to accommodate four lanes and the state capital would be connected to the east-west corridor, Mr Vajpayee today declared a slew of projects totalling Rs 1,050 crore for improvement of roads, and in the sectors of education, healthcare, power, agriculture and employment generation among, other things.

"If state boundaries are to be changed it can only be done by evolving a political consensus. At present there is no political consensus he-



Mr AB Vajpayee beside his bust made by a local sculptor at a dinner hosted by Nagaland chief minister Mr Neiphiu Rio in Kohima on Tuesday. — PTI

PM blames it on politics

KOHIMA, Oct. 29. — "Politics made me forget poetry," Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said today at the end of his three-day visit to Nagaland. Asked at a press conference whether he enjoyed his stay and whether the picturesque Nagaland inspired him to write some poems, Mr Vajpayee said, "*Rajnitī mein reh kar mai kavita bhool gaya* (politics made me forget poetry)." The Prime Minister, who met reporters before leaving for Delhi after a three-day visit to the state, said he enjoyed his stay here. — PTI

re," he said at a press conference before leaving for Delhi via Dimapur this morning at the end of his three-day visit to Nagaland.

Integration of all Naga-inhabited areas as one administrative unit is a key demand of the NSCN-IM to resolve the decades-old Naga political issue.

Asked when the talks are going to conclude, Mr Vajpayee said it was a continuous process and was progressing well.

"I can't give you details but there is no time frame for talks, no deadline. We want it to succeed and conclude as early as possible," he said.

He also ruled out talking only to the NSCN-IM to find a solution to the Naga problem.

NSCN-IM reaction: The NSCN-IM has welcomed Mr Vajpayee's assertion on continuation of political dialogue for a honourable solution to the vexed Naga issue, adds PTI.

I have a dream, says Naga CM

Udit Prasanna Mukherji
KOHIMA 29 OCTOBER

NAGALAND chief minister Neiphiu Rio reiterated the dream of Nagalim (greater Nagaland) before Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Kohima. Nagaland has had a long-standing demand for the unification of all Naga inhabited areas in neighbouring Manipur, Assam and Arunachal with Nagaland. These states have not agreed to this proposal.

Mr Rio gave enough indication in his address about the Naga unification issue. However, Mr Vajpayee preferred to play it safe. The Nagaland CM said: "The people of Nagaland have great expectations from you. The hope for an early resolution of the Naga political problem is pinned on you and we are all ready to strengthen your hand."

The Prime Minister, though, said mistakes were committed earlier in handling the problem in the region. However, he preferred not to evade the issue. Commenting on the insurgency, the Prime Minister said: "Rather than remaining tied to the past, we have to take care of the present and look to the future. This is the time for reconciliation and peace making."

Earlier, the Naga chief minister said Mr Vajpayee was the first Prime Minister to have made a genuine effort to bring peace to his state by taking that extra step that characterises a statesman. "Lifting the ban on NSCN has contributed greatly in creating an environment of trust and confidence. These



ATAL: NAG(A)ING PROBLEM

high-minded initiatives on your part have won over the hearts of the Naga people," he added. Taking a cue from the Prime Minister's address on Monday about a peace rider for development, the chief minister said: "We believe that peace is for development and development is for peace."

Vajpayee calls for consensus on greater Nagaland

Udit Prasanna Mukherji
KOHIMA 29 OCTOBER

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called for a political consensus among the north-eastern states to resolve the Naga problem. He felt that the demand of Nagalim (greater Nagaland) could only be met if other states in the region agreed to this concept. Incidentally, Manipur is vehemently opposed to the inclusion of Naga dominated districts of the state in Nagaland.

Greater Nagaland is the most vital element in the Naga peace talks. "If state boundaries have to be changed, then it can only be done by evolving a consensus," he said at a press conference here in Kohima. The Prime Minister also indicated that there has been no progress in this issue, saying there has been no political consensus on this issue. However, he made it clear that the peace talks will not be limited to the NSCN. "All sections of society will be involved in the process of finding a solution to the Naga problem. A beginning has been made and the process will continue," Mr Vajpayee added. He also said there is no timeframe for the Naga peace process.

Vajpayee and Nagas tread the hope trail

9 N 6 6m
Dipankar Roy in Kohima

Oct. 27. — It was not exactly a long march but about 5,000 Nagas from the four Naga-inhabited districts in Manipur walked down the 30 km from Mao Gate on the Manipur-Nagaland border to this capital town of Nagaland to welcome the Prime Minister who started his three-day visit to the state this afternoon on a delayed note owing to inclement weather that necessitated a change in his travel plans.

They had a reason to be here. The need to unify all Naga-inhabited areas under one administrative arrangement — something urged by the Naga Students' Federation, Naga Mother's Association, Naga People's Movement for Human Rights and, of course, the NSCN-IM among others — has to be impressed upon the Prime Minister.

Having come here at the behest of the United Naga Council, a Naga organisation in Manipur, they are said to be armed with signatures of a thousand Naga village chiefs of that state who want unification. The UNC has been in the news over the last few days for having issued a diktat to Naga legislators of Manipur to declare their support to unification.

The Prime Minister, who was scheduled to arrive here at 1.30 p.m., was delayed by more than three hours after the plan to fly in from Dimapur by helicopter was shelved because of inclement weather over Kohima.

Two helicopters had carried out a recce before it was decided that Mr Vajpayee and his entourage should travel by road instead.

The 75-km drive over a bumpy and potholed NH-

39 gave him a first-hand taste of the infrastructure, or the lack of it, in Nagaland.

The delay forced many school children, who had been standing by the roadside to welcome him since 11 in the morning, to return home. A sizeable crowd stayed back though to receive Mr Vajpayee who is the first Prime Minister to visit Nagaland after the ceasefire between the Centre and the NSCN-IM was declared in August 1997.

Mr Vajpayee later had a routine meeting with the state Council of Ministers led by the chief minister, Mr Neiphiu Rio, who asked the Prime Minister to expedite the peace process and assist the state in development of infrastructure and creation of employment opportunities.

He also launched the first ever BSNL cellular service in the North-East. The operation, in real earnest, however, is expected to start later. Launching the service by calling communication and IT minister Mr Arun Shourie, Mr Vajpayee in his message to the people of Nagaland, said: "Let the peace process proceed, distances be removed and confidence rebuilt."

Meanwhile, the state unit of Congress, while asking the Prime Minister for an early settlement of the decades-old Naga political problem also urged him to consider "seriously" the "important factor" that 99.9 per cent of the Nagas had endorsed independence in a plebiscite conducted by the Naga National Council in 1951.

The Prime Minister will inaugurate a sports stadium and a hospital and attend the first convocation of the Nagaland University tomorrow as part of his itinerary.

28 OCT 2003
29 OCT 2003

CLOAK AND STAGGER

Must Manipur Pay For 'Greater Nagaland'?

By JB LAMA

51-46
27/10

As if the variety of problems facing Manipur was not enough, two recent events, somewhat related, have raised the roof. The first was a Delhi media report on the Centre's special emissary, K Padmanabhaiah, mulling a boundary committee to redraw the maps of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur by including their respective Tirap, Senapati and Ukhrul districts in Nagaland, which whipped up spontaneous public protest.

Polarisation

Hardly had the tension subsided when Manipur police commandos arrested the NSCN-IM "Home Minister" and 12 of his colleagues in Senapati district while they were on their way to Naga-dominated Tamenglong to attend what they called a "workshop" on "political awareness", reportedly connected with Padmanabhaiah's "proposal". Their release by the Ibobi government the next day "under pressure" from the Centre provoked fierce protests, forcing the beleaguered administration to clamp curfews for more than a week.

Chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh defended his decision by saying it was dictated by the greater interest of peace in the North-east. He might have saved himself public wrath had he asserted his position and extracted an assurance from the NSCN-IM that its cadres would not move around with weapons under threat of punishment, but call him spineless or anything similarly related, Ibobi did, in a sense, help preserve age-old Manipuri-Naga relations, now under severe strain over the "Greater Nagaland" demand.

On the other hand, had Ibobi stood his ground, there is no mistaking the possibility of an outrage across state lines or in the Manipur hills itself. That the 13 arrested were accorded an impromptu farewell in Senapati and received in Nagaland as "heroes" only serves to emphasise the growing Manipuri-Naga polarisation.

According to reports, the NSCN-IM group was escorted by the Nagaland police up to Mao, the boundary between Nagaland and Manipur, implying its visit was known to the Nagaland Ceasefire Monitoring Group and the Ceasefire Supervisory Board, whose duty it is to oversee strict adherence to the ground rules.

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

The NSCN is no longer a proscribed outfit after the Centre in November last year allowed the gazette notification banning it to lapse. There is no restriction on the movement of people from either state. But since some of the cadres were said to be armed, one expected the Nagaland police, at least for reasons of prudence, to inform their counterparts in Manipur. For one

the Manipur police had prior information about the speaker passing through town to catch a flight.

But this confusion and misunderstanding arose because the terms and conditions of the Nagaland ceasefire are vague and, for reasons best known to the Centre, are not made public. While the Centre is categorical that its jurisdiction is limited to



thing, the group was visiting Manipur where the Nagaland ceasefire is not in force. The cadres themselves could not have been unaware of the security forces in Manipur regularly patrolling highways and vehicles being subjected to heavy checking.

Drama

Apparently, the lesson of the March 2002 Pallel tragedy is lost on the NSCN-IM. A group of their men dressed in military fatigues and armed with sophisticated weapons was on its way to Thoubal in a "hijacked" mini-truck when it was challenged by India Reserve Battalion personnel and lost 11 cadres in the encounter. The fallout was the abduction of the deputy commissioner of Chandel district, Yambem Thamkishore, by a Kuki militant group owing allegiance to the NSCN-IM. Not many Manipuris know of the drama behind his release a few days later but the fact that it was done in strict confidence and at the highest level involving the PMO suggests there was some hard bargaining.

Some years ago, the Manipur police was provoked into firing on the Nagaland speaker's car after it defied a traffic signal in Imphal town. A former chief minister's brother accompanying the speaker was killed. The tragedy could have been averted if

Nagaland, the collective NSCN-IM leadership claims the truce is between them and the Centre and it applies to all their cadres wherever they are.

In June 2001, the Centre suddenly announced the extension of the ceasefire to parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh following the "Bangkok Agreement" with the NSCN-IM. Manipur went up in flames with irate crowds destroying government property running into lakhs of rupees. Eighteen protesters were killed in police firing. The Centre was forced to withdraw the "without territorial limits" clause incorporated in the "Bangkok Agreement" and somewhat defused the tension. But the NSCN-IM collective leadership was quick to deny any such deal with the Centre, asserting that "any announcement of declaration or statement by the Indian home ministry or in any mass media is unfounded so they are in no sense acceptable to the Nagas". The Centre is yet to clarify the resultant confusion. Senior NSCN-IM leaders VS Atem and Khodao Yanthan are on record as having said that there is a de facto understanding with the security forces in Manipur and if the Centre does not accept it they would reconsider continuing the ceasefire.

Since the jurisdiction of the ceasefire is mired in controversy

and is the main cause of continuing tensions between Nagaland and Manipur, it is time to take a critical look at it and consider brokering a separate truce for Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The very essence of creating an atmosphere conducive for talks has been defeated. Against this background it would seem the existing truce, which came into force in August 1997, will also go the way of the September 1964 ceasefire. That agreement did bring peace in Nagaland, but Manipur's three hill districts (then under the ceasefire) witnessed more bloodshed than in the previous decade. The rebels used the truce to consolidate their position which ultimately led to the 1992 Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes and left more than 1,500 dead in less than five years. Some rebels (the present Naga leadership included) also went to China to train in guerrilla warfare.

Ambiguity

In a way, the Centre has been treating Manipur in a lackadaisical manner. One fails to understand why it still maintains an enigmatic silence over the so-called Padmanabhaiah "suggestion". Nor is the NSCN-IM any more forthcoming. If such was the outcome of the last round of talks at Amsterdam, let there be transparency. For the first time the two sides refrained from issuing a joint statement after the talks. The report on Padmanabhaiah's "suggestion" appeared in a Delhi newspaper and was picked up by a local Imphal publication and that is how the Manipuris came to know. Why did the Centre not think it necessary to consult Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur since their physical integrity is threatened? Has Padmanabhaiah at long last been able to work out a compromise formula by hiving off Tirap, Senapati and Ukhrul (the home district of NSCN-IM head honcho Thuingaleng Muivah)?

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who has postponed his scheduled visit to Imphal this month citing elections, has a lot to answer for because his government's ambiguous policy on insurgency has driven Manipur and Nagaland perilously close to dangerous confrontation and nervous reflexes on either side could put paid to good neighbourly ties.

Indeed, the Manipuris are waiting for Vajpayee's visit to hear straight from the horse's mouth that their territorial integrity will not be disturbed.

NSCN violating ceasefire: Gogoi

Guwahati
24 OCTOBER

11-2-25-10
9/15/87

THE Assam government on Friday threatened military action against the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) for violating a ceasefire agreement. "Militants belonging to the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN are entering Assam with arms and ammunition and creating trouble in our state," Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi told journalists. "We have asked security agencies to deal with the militants firmly."

The NSCN, which is fighting for an independent homeland in Nagaland, entered into a ceasefire with New Delhi in 1997. The two sides are holding peace talks; the last round ended in Amsterdam on September 18.

The Assam government has asked New Delhi to caution the Naga militants against violating the truce. "We shall not tolerate any such acts of violence and have since informed the central

government about the NSCN militants taking advantage of the ceasefire," the chief minister said. "We have asked our security forces to deal with the NSCN with a firm hand if they try to enter our state to create violence."

Assam and Nagaland share a common boundary. In recent months, the NSCN has been accused of violating the truce in Nagaland and in other adjoining northeastern states as well. "We have got reports of NSCN cadres moving around with weapons outside their designated camps and indulging in extortions," a senior Nagaland police official said. "Such acts are clear violations of the ceasefire ground rules."

Paramilitary soldiers earlier this month shot dead two NSCN rebels in Manipur state. The NSCN is the oldest and the most powerful of the 30-odd rebel armies operating in the region since India's independence in 1947. More than 25,000 people have lost their lives to insurgency in Nagaland since then. — IANS

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 OCT 2003

NHRC's intervention

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 8. — Several human rights groups have sought the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission to check forcible repatriation of the Chin refugees from Mizoram.

To escape the atrocities and grave violation of their human rights allegedly perpetrated by the Army personnel in Myanmar, Chins fled their country to take refuge in neighbouring Mizoram.

Despite having settled in Mizoram for many years, Chin refugees have now being evicted from their homes, as several local polit-

ical bodies have given them the ultimatum to get out of the state.

Several petitions have been filed before the Commission, urging it to direct the Mizoram government to restrain such local groups from violating the basic human rights of the Chins.

Taking cognisance of one such petition by the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) recently, the Commission has issued a notice to the Union ministry of home affairs and the Mizoram government, asking them respond to the issue within four weeks. "The process of forcible eviction of Chin refugees by a group like the Young Mizo Association gained momen-

sought on forcible repatriation

tum following the rape of a Mizo girl on 17 July this year by a Mizo immigrant from Myanmar," ACHR director Mr Suhas Chakma told The Statesman here yesterday.

Describing the forcible eviction as 'gross violation of basic human rights', the rights groups have urged Mizoram and the Centre to take steps to end this process

Though the offender was arrested, local groups with vested political interests have used the incident to incite people against the Chins and have taken upon them-

They maintain that life and liberty of about 40,000 to 50,000 Chin refugees living in Mizoram, who crossed the international border for safety, are at stake. Their forcible eviction from Mizoram could again threaten their lives in Myanmar.

The ACHR filed a fresh petition before the commission today, highlighting the plight of those Chin refugees who have again returned to Mizoram after being forcibly sent back to Myanmar.

About 105 such refugees, including 24 women and 39 children, have taken shelter at Bambuk refugee camps in Saiha district near the Indo-Myanmar border.

While the accused must be punished, the YMA has no right or jurisdiction to award collective punishment to all Chin refugees, said Mr Chakma. He alleged that even the state government had turned a blind eye to such illegal and unconstitutional moves of local political bodies.

Describing their forcible eviction as "gross violation of basic human rights", the concerned human rights groups have urged the Mizoram government as well as the Centre to take urgent steps to halt this process.

Refugee Arghu

RELEASE OF NSCN(IM) MEMBERS LEADS TO VIOLENT PROTESTS

Curfew clamped on Imphal

S.F. 8 9/10
9-N 5, 87

Statesman News Service

IMPHAL, Oct. 8. — An indefinite curfew was clamped here from 1 p.m. today following widespread violence during the 18-hour general strike called to protest against the release of 13 members of the militant Naga outfit, NSCN (IM), by the Manipur government, official sources said.

Imposition of curfew followed reports of incidents of violence such as pelting stones at vehicles, destruction of public property, attempted arson and blockade of traffic from Wangkhei, Chingmeirong, Kwa-keithel, Singjamei and Khurai during the 18-hour strike called by the United Committee of Manipur (UCM), sources said.

The DM, Mr H Imoc-ha, declared the prohibitory order under Section 144 of the CrPC following reports that unlawful activities were being planned.

Tension erupted last evening after the Congress-led SPF government decided to release all 13 members of

the NSCN(IM) team who had been nabbed by Manipur police commando last Monday in Senapati district.

The local student body, AMSU, took to the streets in protest and burnt effigies of the chief minister, Mr O Ibobi Singh, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to protest against the release of the NSCN(IM) leaders. In other areas, several people also took out torch rallies in protest.

The curfew comes even as most people stayed indoors following a general strike called by United Committee Manipur from 12 midnight till 6 PM tonight.

All shops, educational institutes, banks and business establishments down shutters while vehicles stayed off the roads. Long-distance bus services were cancelled. Flights, however, were not disrupted.

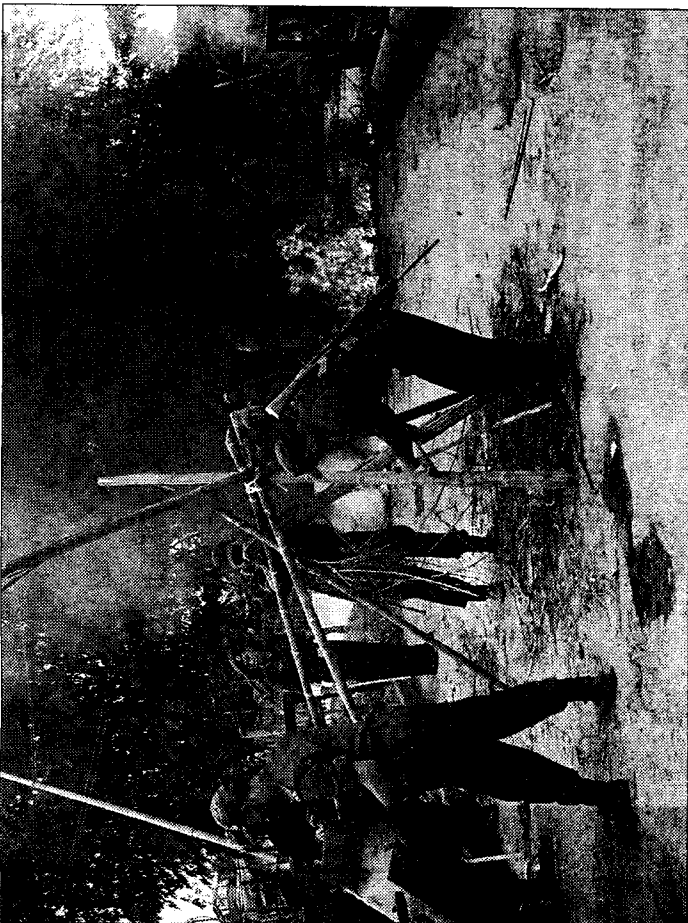
Police, paramilitary forces and the CRPF have been put on a high alert to prevent repetition of the "18 June" violence. At least 18 lives had been lost and several government estab-

lishments, including the Assembly and the chief minister's house, had been torched on 18 June 2001 when the GoI had sought to extend the cease-fire (area) between NSCN(IM) and GoI to Manipur at the former's insistence. Normalcy was restored after the GoI did a U turn.

However, the recent unconditional release of the NSCN(IM) home minister along with his entourage by the SPF government, under what is seen here as "pressure" from the Union home minister, Mr LK Advani, is seen here as an informal extension of the cease-fire area to Manipur.

Tension mounted today following reports of the NSCN(IM) minister having been escorted out of the state and handed over to the Monitoring Cell chairman, Gen. Kulkarni, at Mao Gate on the Manipur Nagaland border.

At Senapati, where tension had mounted yesterday following reports of arrest of the NSCN (IM) team, a reception of the released minister was held late last



COMBATING MOB FURY: Securitymen remove barricades at Naoremthong bridge in Imphal during Wednesday's bandh. — Eastern Projections

evening, before he was taken to the Mao Gate. Stray incidents of burning of effigies and tyres were reported from several parts of the state capital. SP, Imphal West, speaking to the Statesman, said the situation was now under control.

An opposition DPA leader, Mr L Ibomcha, Keishamthong MLA, has called for prosecution of all ministers who supported the idea of releasing the NSCN(IM) leaders.

DRPP, which recently lost two of its MLAs to the Congress, have also opposed the release. Spokesperson Mr RK Anand has demanded resignation of the chief minister, Mr O Ibobi Singh in this regard.

Polity priority

9-23-88
NSCN-IM must spell things out 5-8

Former Nagaland chief minister SC Jamir is entitled to his views that "Greater Nagaland is only a secondary issue, the real one is about finding a political framework that is acceptable to the Nagas". Implicit is the suggestion that since the demand for consolidation of contiguous Naga-inhabited areas is incorporated in the 16-point Agreement of 1960 and under Articles 3 and 4 the boundaries of any state can be altered, the immediate task is to try to resume peace talks which, because of the NSCN-IM's insistence on one administrative unit, is approaching "make-or-break" point. In other words, Jamir is not unresponsive to the "Greater Nagaland" concept, he only differs with the NSCN-IM's approach in achieving it. Jamir is duty bound to defend the agreement; he is the sole surviving signatory but the NSCN-IM has not yet reconciled itself to the creation of Nagaland in 1963, which actually divided the Nagas, but for which a solution could have been found a long time back. Over the years, the Centre has also diluted the provisions of the agreement, depriving Nagaland of special financial assistance.

The collective NSCN-IM leadership would do well to spell out the political content of their movement. In this respect, many would like to share Jamir's views. People are still in the dark as to the sort of government Isak Swu and Th Muivah have in mind, whether they will rejuvenate the democratic process or render political parties irrelevant. All an ordinary citizen now visualises is a government run by trigger-happy youth in military fatigues totally unfriendly and intolerant of dissent and opposition.

THE STATESMAN

22 SEP 2003

Cong meet to counter BJP clout in N-E

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Sept. 15. — The Congress think tank in the region will meet at Shillong for two days from tomorrow to draw up strategies to counter the growing clout of the BJP in the North-east.

The meeting of the North East Congress Coordination Committee will be attended, among others, by party stalwarts like Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Oscar Fernandes, Ms Mohsina Kidwai, and top party leaders from the region.

Former Nagaland chief minister Mr SC Jamir will chair the meeting.

The NECCC meeting, being held after a gap of two years, will conclude just two days before the scheduled launch of the North East People's Fo-

rum, which is a non-Congress and non-Left grouping, here on 19 September.

The NEPF, a brainchild of former Lok Sabha Speaker and Nationalist Congress Party leader, Mr Purno A Sangma, is another reason for the Congress to convene the meeting. The party has already described the NEPF as the 'B' team of the BJP-NDA.

"The BJP has already demonstrated to what lengths it can go to keep the Congress out of power in the North-eastern states, and we can't sit idle," said a Congress leader from Assam. "The NEPF also can't be taken lightly given that it has the BJP and other NDA allies in its fold."

The Congress' concerns are genuine, given the party's defeat in the hands of an alliance that included the BJP in Nagaland

BJP denies plotting Mithi ouster

SHILLONG, Sept. 15. — The BJP today denied that toppling of the Mukut Mithi government in Arunachal Pradesh was a "pre-meditated" step to install the Gegong Apang government.

"It was neither a pre-meditated plan nor a move to saffronise the entire North-eastern region," the party's national council member and former MP,

Mr RK Khrimy, said here. The BJP never forced any minister of the Mithi Cabinet to quit the government and join Apang. "We did not force them. They took the decision on their own," Mr Khrimy said. He claimed that Mr Mithi wanted to "merge" his party with the BJP earlier but was "prevented" by Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani. — PTI

in the Assembly elections in February, and the party's ouster from power in Arunachal Pradesh in late July through a coup that saw the BJP taking over the reins without having a single MLA in the Assembly.

The BJP is allegedly trying to carry out a similar strike in Manipur where

the party has four legislators. The other states in the North-east where the Congress is in power are Meghalaya and Assam.

The seven North-east states together have 25 Lok Sabha seats to offer, which constitutes a significant bloc given that days of single party rule at the Centre look like to be over.

Mizo-BNLF talks fall through

Press Trust of India

AIZAWL, Sept. 15. — The ninth round of talks between the Mizoram government and the underground Bru National Liberation Front held here today remained inconclusive and would be resumed tomorrow, officials said.

The dialogue was held between a six-member BNLF delegation, led by the outfit's president, Surjomoni Reang, and working group of representatives of the state government, led by the new deputy commissioner of Aizawl district Mr C Tawnluaia.

The other members of the BNLF delegation comprised the top brass of the organisation, including its

general secretary Solomon Prophul Ushoy, "army chief" Hmunsiamia and "communication secretary" Bruto Meska.

A four-member delegation of the Bru Welfare Association of Mizoram led by its president Biakmawia also participated in the two-day talks.

The BNLF changed its demand from an autonomous district council to a regional council during the course of negotiations last year.

The talks, which began in September 2001, gained significance as the state government insisted that repatriation of Brus who fled to neighbouring Tripura in 1997 would not be implemented unless and until the BNLF eschews violence.

THE STATESMAN

13 SEP 2003

Shooting trouble

9/11/81
NEC could ease Centre's burden 5/1/89

The Gangtok session of the North Eastern Council should also have discussed measures to end some of the region's immediate problems. Like the threat to millions and damage to crops worth crores of rupees caused by the Brahmaputra, in spate every year across the North-east region. Instead of "preventive" measures which gobble up crores of rupees every year, investments on permanent structures would far outweigh the losses. Then there is the 1996 Supreme Court ban on felling trees which has rendered thousands jobless. Since tribals depend heavily on forests for sustenance, some concessions must be made for them as also for wood-based industries without affecting the ecological balance. The focus on a master plan and integrated plan is all very well, but little can be achieved unless there is emotional integration as well. Inter-state border disputes have long been a hindrance. Manipur cannot hope to prosper when Nagas in the state block the vital Dimapur-Imphal Road for the greater part of the year on one pretext or other, also hindering trade with neighbouring Myanmar.

Arunachal has proved beyond doubt that development is no panacea for insurgency. This must be tackled politically. The Centre's lack of perception is clear from its indulgence of particular Bodo and Naga militant factions, ignoring others in Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. Set up in 1972 against the background of linguistic passions and separatist demands, the NEC is a symbol of inter-state cooperation and could, if suitably equipped, forge strong socio-economic unity among the states and strengthen infrastructural facilities. Thankfully, the Centre has begun to acknowledge its importance, an encouraging sign. If not deprived of funds, it could well set the region on the road to recovery.

THE STATESMAN

16 SEP 2003

Screen test for the North-east

THE CRY of 'cultural imperialism!' is normally heard emanating from the lips of those upset at the way America peddles its products to the world. Whether it be Hollywood movies or fast food outlets and aerated drinks, it's the US as the seductive salesman which, we are told, is responsible for the dying out of rich local cultures. The same principle of 'cultural imperialism' seems to have been placed on India's Hindi movie juggernaut. The ULFA and nine other militant organisations have imposed a ban on Hindi movies in the North-east states of India which they want to be effective from November 15. The ban is already in force in Manipur and the militants now want the prohibition elsewhere.

Despite the threat, the militants are facing one serious obstacle: reality. People in the North-east — like elsewhere in the country and indeed outside India — *want* to see Hindi movies. Film distributors in the region understand this reality better than the militant 'sub-nationalists'. They realise that without Bollywood films, the local film industry will simply collapse. So they have come to a compromise and plan to put a plug

on those movies which can be deemed as being 'vulgar and obscene'. Deciding what is 'clean' and what is 'vulgar' is notoriously difficult, especially in a country which is forever practising double standards on protecting cultural sensitivities. But what is sinister and unfortunate is that the 'compromise' between the distributors and the militants came about when, allegedly, a Rs 1 crore deal was struck between the two parties.

The ULFA's behaviour is no more logical than that of the erstwhile Taliban government in Afghanistan or that of Islamabad, which wanted to stop Indian soap operas and programmes from being aired on Pakistani TV. The ULFA, which professes to speak on behalf of the people of the North-east, has little inkling of what north-easterners want — in this case Hindi movies. If indeed the people preferred to avoid watching Hindi *masala* movies, it would have been self-evident by the rules of the box-office. That is obviously not the case. One hopes the intended ban faces the same predicament that campaigns against Coca-Cola and McDonald's have faced in this country over the years.

CMS differ on assessment of N-E

Statesman News Service

GANGTOK, Sept. 11. — Different opinions exist among the chief ministers of the eight North-east states in relation to the law and order situation in the region.

While the Assam chief minister, Mr Tarun Gogoi, advocates for a strict approach against the militants in the North-east, the Mizoram chief minister, Mr Zoram Thanga, believes militancy is on the wane in the region. The Tripura chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, is all for the Centre to

treat the North-east at par with Kashmir, while Nagaland chief minister Mr Neiphiu Rio is in favour of a cautious approach and wishes to see the Centre-NSCN dialogue end on a happy note.

Speaking to The Statesman during a break in the 48th meeting of the North Eastern Council at the newly-built Chintan Bhawan, Mr Gogoi expressed consternation at the Centre's lack of will to end militancy in the North-east. "No effort is being made to close down the militant camps in the neighbouring countries," Mr Gogoi said, a point later endorsed by

the NEC security adviser Lt-Gen. HS Kanwar.

Lauding the Bengal government's efforts to control militancy in the state, Mr Gogoi said: "We are working in tandem with Bengal to keep the menace under check."

The Tripura chief minister also wants more attention from the Centre to deal with the problems in Tripura. "We have specific evidence of ISI involvement in Tripura," Mr Sarkar said. According to him, the Centre should also approach the Bangladesh government to freeze the militant groups' bank accounts in the country.

"Though Kashmir is a different ball game, the situation in the North-east is going the same way. It requires immediate attention and both in terms of development and security," Mr Sarkar said. Mizoram chief minister Mr Zoram Thanga is of the view that militancy is on the decline in the North-east. "The region should now be nursed properly so that the militants can return to the mainstream with conviction," he said.

Nagaland chief minister Mr Neiphiu Rio agrees. "The ceasefire ground rules need to be followed to the end."

NEC meet focuses on integrated plan for states

Statesman News Service

GANGTOK, Sept 11. — "A master plan for the states in the North-eastern region, which would be complementary and not competitive, is the need of the hour. The plan would have to be time and resource bound," the NEC chairman and governor of Assam, Mr Ajai Singh, said in his opening address at the 48th North Eastern Council meeting held in Sikkim today.

Hosting the NEC meet for the first time since a significant moment for the hill state planning body by an NEC Amendment Act in December 2002.

The thrust of the council's deliberations today was on drawing up a regional plan for the North-eastern region.

The NEC chairman also said: "An effective and active monitoring mechanism backed by a reviewing mechanism should be set up. The review committee would apprise

the Prime Minister's office about the actions being taken and the ground realities."

"Revitalisation of the North-east council has been identified as a thrust area, which will be monitored by the Prime Minister," the Union minister for SSI and North-east development, Mr CP Thakur, said.

The minister said the Centre has decided in bringing a "radical improvement" in the situation of the North-east by tackling the basic problem of integration and balanced economic development.

He further added: "The Tenth Plan outlay for all the North-eastern states is Rs 28,700 crore. Each Central government department is required to earmark at least 10 per cent of its gross budgetary support for the North-eastern region".

"The unspent balance, if any, would be pooled into a control pool of resources for specific projects in the region," the minister said.

Mr Thakur said the Prime Minister's special package for the North-eastern region,

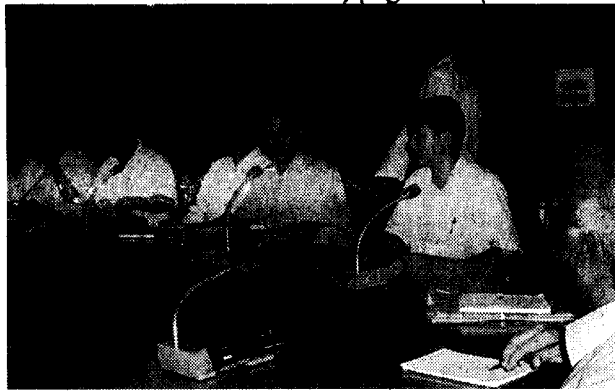
with an investment of over Rs 13,000 crore, is in place covering 28 schemes in different sectors.

"Possibilities are being explored for converting the entire North-eastern region into an export processing zone or special economic zone. Since the North-eastern states are all border states, the Centre will also recommend that the finance ministry establishes a special line of credits with the neighbouring countries," the Union minister added.

THE STATESMAN

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No headway in talks on BTC boundary



BLT chairman Mr Hagrama Basumatari (third from right) with other Bodo leaders at a meeting with officials of the state and Union home ministries in Guwahati on Thursday. — Eastern Projections

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Sept. 11. — The first round of talks of the boundary settlement committee, which was set up to decide on the geographical jurisdiction of the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), particularly with reference to the demand of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) for inclusion of more villages, ended inconclusively here this morning. The tripartite talks were held among representatives of the BLT, the Centre and the Assam government.

Emerging from the talks, BLT chairman Mr Hagrama Basumatary, said the Council's boundary must be clearly defined before the interim council is formed. He said the BLT has given all details supporting its claim on the 95 additional villages.

The MoS signed among the Centre, the Assam government and BLT on 10 February had stated that a committee comprising representatives of the

three would finally settle the question of including the additional villages by a consensus within three months of signing of the agreement.

The next round of talks is likely to be held later this month. Mr Basumatary further said that all cases against those who participated in the Bodoland movement, be they from the underground or not, must be withdrawn as stipulated in the accord. He said that the state could at least show its sincerity by taking a Cabinet decision in this regard.

Some reports say the state is not interested in withdrawing cases involving heinous crimes. Another key demand is granting of ST (Hill) status to Bodos living in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. Mr Basumatary said the Centre has given its assurance and the BLT was satisfied with it. The BLT supremo warned that delay in setting up of the council could lead to other complications.

Mindless mayhem

q n s & Nagaland must reflect and resolve 5/8

The intense face-off between the two factions of the NSCN threatens to muddy the peace process in Nagaland and resumption of talks could be delayed if bad blood grows any thicker. The recent clash in Mon district, where SS Khaplang reportedly holds sway, is indicative of the Isak-Muivah group's determination to make headway in the rival area, a cause for concern because both had shown remarkable restraint after together losing about 200 cadres in the first three months of the ceasefire in August 1997. Khaplang's deputy, Dally Mungro, was murdered near Kohima in August 1998. Both groups are observing a truce with the Centre but there has been no such arrangement between the two. The need for one may not be of much relish for either party, particularly the NSCN(IM), which refuses to admit the other's existence, but there can be no two opinions about an honourable political settlement of the Naga problem hinging on their burying the hatchet.

There is little hope of the reconciliation campaign launched in December 2001 by the Naga Hoho being honoured. It was derailed from day one when NSCN leader Khodao Yanthan commented that reconciliation was not necessary and later Th Muivah said it could not be "forced" on them. Of course, the task is difficult, but now that the Naga Hoho as well as the rebel leaders seem to have dropped their opposition to the state's involvement in the peace process, the Neiphu Rio government must assume a significant role in ending the mindless mayhem. No less important, the rebels must be reminded to strictly observe truce guidelines. The lesson of the recent Mokokchung incident, in which people attacked Khaplang men after the death of a student, should not be lost on them.

THE STATESMAN

10 SEP 2003

AMORPHOUS ARUNACHAL

Apang, Saffron Shades And Chinese Checkers

By JB LAMA

Few could have foreseen Arunachal Pradesh, an island of peace in North-east India until the early 1990s, acquiring a notoriety that has reduced it to a state of flux. Administered for two decades by the Congress under the redoubtable Gegong Apang, its serene political landscape did not change as often as happened in Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland. All the emphasis then was on development, the Planning Commission was all praise for its performance and financial management.

Congress

But "paradise" was to acquire its serpents in the emergence of militant groups like the United Liberation Volunteers (of Arunachal Pradesh), United Liberation Movement, United People's Volunteers and Arunachal Dragon Force. Bereft of ideology, these outfits indulged in petty crimes. The NSCN(Khaplang) has been around since the 1980s and confines itself to Tirap and Changlang, bordering Myanmar, but after the incursion of the rival Isak-Muivah faction into the area some years ago there are dark forebodings for the future because the two districts come under the NSCN(IM)'s "Greater Nagaland" concept.

Returning to Apang's earlier tenure, there must have been something wrong with his concept of development and progress, or else why do Tirap and Changlang, which together have 12 legislators in the house of 60 and hold the key to power, now cry for separate territorial status? Apang's biggest weakness was his failure to unite diverse tribal groups, merely promoting his own Adi tribe as evident from their predominance in various government departments. As in Nagaland, only a handful benefited from generous central allocations. The condition of the majority, particularly those in the remote areas, continues to remain primitive and pathetic.

The history of Arunachal is in part Apang's own, and it is ironic that someone who once dutifully defended the Congress citadel should come to so bitter a parting of ways. There was a time when the Congress needed him because Arunachal lacked leaders of proven ability, but so disgusted is Apang that he has now vowed "never to return to the Congress again", describing his long association with the party as a "misadventure".

All this because Apang antagonised the Congress leadership by supporting the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union's demand for deportation of Chak-

ma and Hajong refugees, settled in the state by the Centre in 1964 on humanitarian grounds. The Narasimha Rao government's decision to give refugees citizenship raised student hackles. Apang later ensured the defeat of the two Congress sitting Lok Sabha members and, to pre-empt any disciplinary action, broke away from Congress in 1996, taking as many as 51 members to form his Arunachal Congress.

(IM) elements from Tirap and Changlang (declared "disturbed") in view of the on-going peace process.

But Mithi was within his rights because Arunachal Pradesh did not come under the purview of the Nagaland ceasefire. Also, he feared that if he did not act fast enough the rebels' presence would affect his party's political fortune in the assembly elections, due next year, as was the



He started losing clout after the 1998 parliamentary elections and his induction of son Omak Apang as Union minister of state for tourism, ignoring claims by senior state leaders. His downfall in 1999 was brought about by his home minister Mukut Mithi who, stripped of power, led the dissidents, floated the Arunachal Congress (M) and headed a government with the support of four Congress members.

Realising that his party would not be able to fight the election on its own, Mithi merged with the Congress — in a sense, a homecoming as most of his supporters originally belonged to the national party. Mithi was sworn in for the second time after his resounding victory in the October 1999 assembly elections. Apang's party secured a lone seat, his own.

Peace process

Toppling governments is not a new game in the region but by covertly and overtly drawing support from militants the BJP is setting a dangerous precedent and creating an atmosphere in which no democratic set-up feels safe. It is no coincidence that Mithi's absolute majority government crashed within days of Union minister of state for home, Swami Chinmayananda's visit to Itanagar. He criticised Mithi's launch of Operation Hurricane to flush out NSCN-

case in Nagaland where, in the last assembly poll, the BJP secured seven seats with the proxy support of militants.

The NSCN(IM) particularly was looking for an opportunity to teach Mithi a lesson ever since his government passed the controversial Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organised Crimes Act in 2001 amid howls from different organisations. The legislation was primarily aimed at the NSCN because the Prevention of Terrorist Act does not apply to them. Last year the outfit directed all 12 legislators from the districts to resign.

Recently Mithi created disaffection by using the APCOC Act to book some of his ministerial and former colleagues for their alleged nexus with militants. Not unexpectedly, simmering differences surfaced and in a swift-moving development last month home minister Kameng Dolo led the dissidents, floated the Arunachal Congress (Dolo) and agreed to serve under Apang. Dolo was made deputy chief minister and his wife was also given a ministerial berth. It would have been impossible for Dolo's party to survive without the Centre's blessing so he did the wise thing by merging it with the BJP en masse, in the process creating a record of sorts by ensuring that the saffron brigade was the first ever to rule a state in the North-east and without a ballot.

The BJP's gift of the chief ministership gives rise to the suspicion that Apang had a "deal" with the party and the NSCN(IM). He made as much clear when, within hours of being sworn in, he visited one of the rebel-infested districts as if to convey his gratitude for support and promised to confer on Tirap and Changlang the status of autonomous district council. The draconian APCOC Act has since been repealed.

The delay in the merger of Apang's Arunachal Pradesh following strong opposition from the state unit of the BJP suggests he was accepted on the latter's terms. He is in the saddle perhaps with the understanding that he is not indispensable. Apang must bear in mind that he is working with young generation leaders that no longer adhere to his brand of political ethics and commitment. It comes as no surprise that rumblings were heard at the time he was distributing portfolios.

Refugees

Since the refugees issue led to Apang's downfall, he is bound to rake up the subject. Will the BJP agree to reverse the Congress decision to confer citizenship on them? During his earlier tenure, Apang submitted a memorandum to the President criticising the "callous and indifferent attitude" in forcing "permanent settlement" of the refugees whom Gauhati High Court and the Supreme Court held to be "foreigners".

The status quo is being maintained after the apex court ruled out coercion to evict them. But this cannot continue indefinitely and a decision must be arrived at to defuse tensions.

Peace must prevail in the sensitive strategic border state. Its unique problems call for special attention. One must not forget that before Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's official visit to Beijing last June the Chinese Army allegedly crossed the Line of Actual Control as if to remind Delhi of its claim to parts of Arunachal Pradesh. While China has recognised Sikkim as part of India, it made threatening noises after Arunachal Pradesh became a state in 1987.

No less disturbing was the Chinese intrusion into the state's Sumdorong Chu valley in May 1986. Unless the international border is fixed, the refugee issue resolved and Nagas belligerency subdued, Arunachal Pradesh will continue to bubble.

The BJP's aim of making Arunachal a model state by giving it a new lease of life — economically and politically — is praiseworthy and one hopes it will be approached with the utmost seriousness and sincerity.

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

North-eastern forum meet likely on 19 September

H Bula Devi in New Delhi. 5/9/10

Sept. 2. — The first conference of the newly constituted North East Peoples' Forum is likely to be held in Guwahati on 19 September.

This convergence of "like minded" politicians from the North Eastern states belonging to "non-Congress, non-Left" parties, however, appear to be only a marriage of convenience.

Insurgency, infiltration, and security may be the Forum's buzzwords but the aim is to secure their own political gains at the Centre. For the BJP and the Samata it is to safeguard their positions in the "far-flung" north eastern region. The BJP's inroads in the region by subtle political manoeuvring in all probability will not lead to any significant influence — the reasons being the North-east is politically too diverse and the BJP can only piggyback on a regional party.

Arunachal Pradesh may have been an exception where the BJP has made political history by deciding to form a government in the state without having a single legislator of its own. Chief minister Mr Gegong Apang and his legislators have joined the BJP. History proves that the majority of North-east states have had regional parties at the steering wheels of governance. The Congress, however, managed to make inroads because of its all-India outlook.

With an eye on next year's Lok Sabha elections, the leaders of the newly formed Forum have decided to meet in Guwahati to chalk out its future strategy. Nagaland chief minister Mr Nephieu Rio is the convener of the Forum; general secretaries are Manipur's former chief minister Mr Radha

Binod Kojam, MP from Assam Mr Rajen Gohain and Meghalaya's former MP Dr BB Dutta.

Chief ministers Mr Zoramthanga (Mizoram), Mr Gegong Apang (Arunachal Pradesh), former Lok Sabha Speaker Mr PA Sangma, former chief ministers of Manipur Mr Dorendra Singh and Mr Nepamacha Singh, Nagaland's finance minister Mr K Therie are among the members of the organising committee. Among the various issues to be addressed are insurgency, illegal migration (with particular reference to the demand for repeal of the IMDT Act), infrastructure development (with special reference to the demand to inter-state and border trade development), unemployment, electoral reforms, and good governance.

Rural development conference

Prior to the North-east Council Conference to be held here on 11 September, Sikkim will play host to the North-east Rural Development Conference on 5 September, adds a report from Gangtok.

The rural development conference, first of its kind to be held in the state after it formally joined the North-east Council, will be attended by the rural development ministers of all the eight North-east states along with their secretaries and commissioners from the department.

Union minister for rural development, Mr Kanshi Ram Rana is expected to attend the conference, which will review and discuss various rural development programmes of the North-east states and also chalk out future policies.

THE STATESMAN

3 SEP 2003

**SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP**

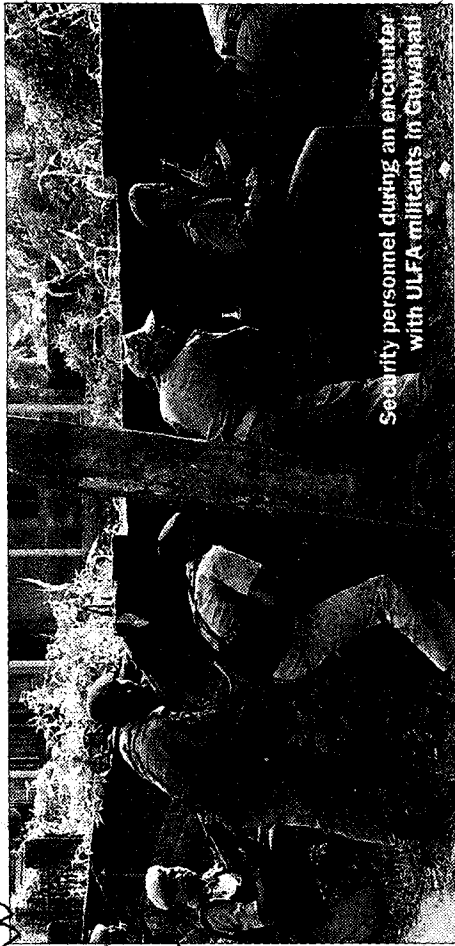
SOcial worker Sanjoy Ghose's sensational murder case may have come to a close with life imprisonment to the two accused, looking back one finds that the murder also triggered the downfall of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

When Sanjoy Ghose, IN-LAKS scholar, founder of URMUL, Rajasthan, and CHARKHA, New Delhi, and the winner of Sanskriti Award, landed in Assam in April 1996 to launch a project in Majuli, the world's largest river island in Brahmaputra, he definitely raised many eyebrows.

His friends and family thought he had gone crazy to choose an island infested with ULFA ultras. The ultra group, on its part, identified Sanjoy as an Indian Army spy in the guise of a social worker.

Sanjoy believed that the only cure to the ills of the North-East was the people themselves. "If youths could be helped to see an alternative path, a path of constructive work and development, much of the problems would end," he wrote in his diary, which his wife later brought out as a book.

Thus, when he assessed the problems of Majuli, he found



Security personnel during an encounter with ULFA militants in Guwahati

ULFA's "achievements". For the ULFA, it was simpler to abduct Sanjoy than to introspect on their relationship with the people.

In doing so, the ULFA stressed their impotence. AVRAD-NE's mouthpiece "Dweep-Alok", caused further sensation as it started focusing on cases of corruption. The first issue, for instance, uncovered a scam on Indira Awas Yojana in the Bongaigaon panchayat, where the local panchayat chief Parul Bora, had given the contract for building houses to her son.

The work was incomplete, and it featured, with photographs, in "Dweep-Alok". So irked were the vested interests that Sanjoy soon started receiving letters, initially anonymous and later on the ULFA letterhead, which termed him an "unwanted outsider" and an "Army spy" and asked him to quit. Sanjoy, however, decided to negotiate and explain to "the boys" that he was here in good spirit. But the ULFA refused to listen, and on July 4 1997, when he was returning from a village on his bicycle along with Chandan Doley, a local volunteer, a group of ULFA cadre whisked him away. That was the last time he was seen alive.

While the ULFA initially said it would free Ghose if AVRAD-NE wound up its op-

erations and apologised to the people for its "wrong-doings", they failed to release him even after the NGO complied with this request. A few days later, the ULFA issued a statement saying Ghose had died after falling from a hill when he tried to escape—a story that turned out to be false. They had indeed killed him on the first day itself and dumped his body into the Brahmaputra. This was later confirmed by the CBI.

Sanjoy's killing also goes down as the beginning of the downside for the ULFA. His abduction and murder caused widespread resentment in Assam. A resistance movement started by Umesh Rabha, a former BSF jawan, emboldened the common people. Police records say at least 20 ULFA cadre have been lynched over seven years.

Of the eleven persons named by the CBI in Sanjoy's murder, only two have been arrested so far, while three have been killed in encounters with security forces. The ULFA's support base has considerably weakened. Its general secretary Anup Chetia is serving a jail term in Dhaka, while vice-man Pradip Gogoi is locked in the Guwahati district jail for over four years. The Bhutan government has served a quit notice to the outfit.

Sanjoy's murder spelled ULFA downfall

His abduction and murder caused widespread resentment. Records say 20 ULFA cadre were lynched over seven years

that while the government schemes failed to address the issues, the young people of the island could be put to constructive work through low-cost, community-managed schemes. He discovered that huge sums of money sanctioned by the government for development were going into the pockets of remote hamlets and people of all backgrounds — tribal farmers, Scheduled Caste

fisher folk, school teachers — and soon came to be accepted as part of Majuli. Within months, hundreds came out to work with him. This also made Sanjoy and his team, enemies of contractors, who till then benefited from the annual ritual of flood control work. He also became a potential threat to the ULFA. Sanjoy's popularity offered an unpleasant comparison to

Mokokchung lesson

msr, 4.6.03, 2/9
Welcome warning against 'tax collections'

Slowly the tide seems to be turning in Nagaland. People have begun to give back as good as they have been taking from militants. This is evident from the recent Mokokchung incident in which an irate crowd lynched two militants and destroyed houses and vehicles of NSCN (Khaplang) leaders in retaliation for the gunning down of a student. What caused the killing is not clear but the rival NSCN(IM) has warned individuals and organisations in "Nagalim" to stop collecting "taxes" and threatened to deal with defaulters severely. Extortion in the name of "taxes" has instilled fear in the public mind and must be stopped. Anti-socials posing as rebels are involved. Each border village reportedly pays Rs 50,000 annually and every trader Rs 5,000, no questions asked. The Naga-Kuki ethnic clashes in Manipur in 1992 were triggered by the NSCN(IM) demand for "taxes".

What is "tax" in Nagaland is "donation" in Manipur. Everyone, even state staff, must "pay" for peace. Even private schools are not spared. The joke is that even when an ordinary citizen starts constructing a house with his savings he must pay for every brick laid, over and above the price of honest labour. National Highways in Nagaland and Manipur are happy hunting grounds for militants, their dictum being "pay up or else..." It is to be hoped that rebel outfits will learn from the Mokokchung incident and that the NSCN(IM)'s warning will have the desired effect. Because the public is long past the phase of forgiveness.

THE STATESMAN

• 2 SEP 2003

All parties sing the Hazarika tune

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Aug. 30. — The Centre's failure to name culture icon Dr Bhupen Hazarika as the President of India's nominee to the Rajya Sabha, has offered the political parties here a chance to exploit the situation for brownie points.

The Asom Gana Parishad today said that it would nominate Dr Hazarika as the party's candidate in the state's next election to the Rajya Sabha if the Centre did not review its decision by then. The party is not interested in making efforts to ensure that the maestro is elected unanimously.

The BJP, which has been caught on the wrong foot, on the other hand, said that all parties should rise above their political considerations and unanimously elect the versatile to the Rajya Sabha.

The ruling Congress, however, felt that serving as an ordinary representative of the state in the Rajya Sabha was in no way as prestigious as being a Presidential nominee. Chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi has already taken up the matter with the Prime Minister.

AGP president Mr Brindaban Goswami said that Dr Hazarika would easily win election to the Rajya Sabha because of the understanding that the party has with three other groups in the Assembly.

"There would have been nothing to complain about had his name not been on the short list. But to reject him after that is a grave insult to a man who is not just an individual but an institution," he said. Mr Goswami also alleged that successive Congress governments at the



Centre had neglected the North-East. "We had expected the BJP to be different but the party has turned out to be the other side of the same coin," he said.

The state unit of the BJP, by way of a prompt damage control exercise, was quick to point out that it was the BJP-led NDA government that had made Dr Hazarika the chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and member of the Prasar Bharati.

With Dr Hazarika not being nominated, the state and North-East is fuming with various organisations, both political and social, as well as eminent individuals condemning the Centre's action.

The All Guwahati Students' Union held demonstrations in front of the BJP office in the city and also blocked roads for a few hours while the North East Students' Organisation staged a demonstration at Jantar Mantar in Delhi yesterday.

Everywhere, the refrain was: Dr Hazarika's exclusion was yet another instance of the Centre's neglect of the region.

Arunachal Pradesh: BJP's aggressive foray

By Dipankar Roy

THE official web page of the Arunachal Pradesh government still maintains that Mukut Mithi is the chief minister of the state, even though it has been more than a month after Mithi's fall from power. The lag surely must be attributed to the general inertia that plagues governments in the country. In the context of Arunachal Pradesh though, the people responsible for updating the page may just have demonstrated their farsightedness by not replacing Mithi's name with that of his successor, Gegong Apang.

Consider this. On 26 August, the BJP announced with great fanfare that the party had accepted 36 legislators of Congress (D), two Independents and an unattached MLA as its members. The party also said that it had, "in principle", also accepted Apang as a member of the BJP. In other words, with 40 members on its side in the 60-member Assembly, the BJP was in power although the party had no MLA of its own!

However, in the notification issued by the Speaker the next day, it was found that he had recognised only 31 members as BJP legislators, all belonging to Congress (D). So, instead of enjoying an overwhelming majority in the house, the BJP is now just one MLA ahead of the half-way mark. Of course, barring the Congress, all other members have vowed to support the United Democratic Front government led by the BJP.

The situation thus is once again fertile for another game of destabilisation that started in late July. Under the circumstances, it is perhaps only wise of the officials, who



IN TROUBLE: Chief minister Gegong Apang.

update the web page, to wait and see what happens next before making the changes.

The BJP's star in the North-east has been shining since February when the party made its debut, winning seven seats in the Nagaland Assembly elections and together with its allies ousted the Congress from power amidst allegations that its success was largely due to the help it received from the NSCN (I-M).

In between its entry into the Nagaland Assembly and assumption of power in Arunachal Pradesh (the name of the government being UDF notwithstanding), the party had also scored a small but significant victory — again, like in Arunachal Pradesh, not through the ballot — in the North Cachar Hills District Autonomous Council when it wooed five Independents to don saffron. Till then, the BJP had no member in the Council.

The BJP's aggressive foray into the North-east has obviously sent alarm bells ringing within the Congress, which still leads coalition governments in Meghalaya and Manipur besides independently ruling Assam. While the party may not be easy to topple in Assam, the same cannot be said of Manipur and Meghalaya given the fickleness of the smaller parties in those two states.

The birth of the non-Congress and non-Left North East People's Forum comprising some regional and national parties including the BJP could be another matter of concern for the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections slated for next year.

(The author is the Guwahati-based Special Representative of The Statesman.)

Sanjoy Ghose abductors sentenced

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Aug. 27. — The court of the ad hoc additional sessions judge, Kamrup, here today sentenced Ulfa militants Moni Neog and Kania Hazarika to life imprisonment for the kidnapping of development worker Sanjoy Ghose on 4 July 1997 in the river island of Majuli in Jorhat district of upper Assam. Ghose was subsequently murdered and his body thrown in the Brahmaputra. The body was never found.

Delivering the judgment in a crowded courtroom, Mr PK Phukan quoted a Supreme Court judgment to say: "Kidnapping is an act which infringes upon human rights and right to life as enshrined in Article 21. It strikes terror in the mind of the people and in this case also they abducted two innocent

persons with motive to murder. They do not deserve any leniency."

The judge also ordered the two to pay Rs 2,000 each as fine and in default to undergo another six months imprisonment. The two were booked under IPC section 364.

The trial had begun on 16 December with recording of the statement of Sanjoy Ghose's widow, Mrs Sumita Ghose, who was also working with her husband's Avarid-NE in Majuli when he was abducted and murdered.

The CBI, which investigated the case, had charge sheeted 11 Ulfa militants including the outfit's commander-in-chief, Paresh Barua, in 1999. Of the 11 accused, three have died in encounters since then while the six others are absconding.

Moni and Kania were the ones who had taken away Ghose and one of his companions, Chandan Doley,

when the two social workers were visiting a goat farm on the island telling them that "Sir" wanted to talk to them. Doley, however, managed to escape.

A boatman, who was one of the key prosecution witnesses, had said in his statement that he had ferried five persons to an islet on the night of 5 July, the day after Sanjoy was kidnapped. When he was returning after dropping them, he had heard two gun shots. When he met the four Ulfa militants the next day he saw one of them wearing the shoes worn by the fifth person. He enquired about this fifth person but they said that had left him with "mahashoy". It was only later that he learnt from newspapers that the fifth person on his boat was Ghose.

The Ulfa had initially said Ghose was punished because he was working for the RAW.

Karbi militants mow down five of family

SARAT SARMA

Nagaon, Aug. 22: The anti-talks faction of the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) last night gunned down five members of a family from Bihar and injured two as part of "Operation Rangni", an offensive against the Hindi-speaking community of Karbi Anglong district.

Superintendent of police Abdul Kuddus said two UPDS

militants, one carrying an AK-47 rifle and the other a 9mm pistol, barged into the residence of Kedar Rai, a grade IV employee of the irrigation department, in the Dilaimukh Rangfarbasti area at 9 pm.

On being told by his 22-year-old son Shatrughna that Rai was not at home, the militants lined up the rest of the family in the living room and fired continuously for several minutes. Five members of the Rai

household were killed on the spot, while two infants were seriously injured.

A day-old grandchild of Rai and three other members of the family escaped unhurt. The injured infants are six months and nine months old. The victims were Sabinda Devi, Prava Devi, Santu Rai, Runu Kumar and Shatrughna.

The superintendent of police said preliminary investigations revealed that the two as-

and 9mm pistol shells in the room where the killings took place. Kuddus said the anti-talks faction of the UPDS presumably targeted Rai's family because he had a personal rivalry with a colleague from the Karbi community.

The UPDS has set October 17 as the deadline for all Hindi-speaking people to leave Karbi Anglong.

The rebel group had called a 72-hour Karbi Anglong bandh

recently in protest against alleged encroachment of tribal land by non-Karbi people.

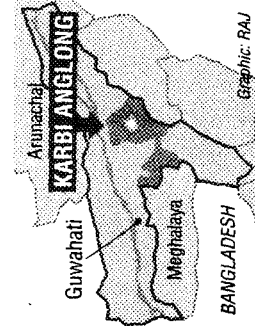
Rai's is the only non-tribal household in the Dilaimukh Rangfarbasti area, which is under the jurisdiction of Manja police station.

Sources said the irrigation department employee had been transferred to Ganfai, but he refused to vacate his government quarter for his Karbi re- placement, Hemali Killing.

The police said Hemali's brother Ranjit was a member of the UPDS and masterminded the attack last night.

Hemali and two residents — Nripen Killing and Rajen Killing — were arrested today. However, Ranjit is absconding.

In Agartala, minister of state for home Swami Chirmayanand blamed Tripura's Left Front government for August 14 massacre which left more than 30 people dead.



sailants had come to the Rai residence and left on foot. The police found 17 empty AK-47

23 AUG 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

KILLING HABIT

It must be terrible to live in constant fear of the killer's gun. Large numbers of people in Tripura seem doomed to such a frightful existence, thanks to the government's inability to protect them from ruthless killers masquerading as insurgents. The brutal killing of 26 innocent villagers last week is one more proof that violence has become an end in itself for Tripura's militant groups. The ethnic militancy that began two decades ago ostensibly to reclaim the state for the once-majority tribal population has clearly degenerated into a murder machine. The rebels can no longer have any doubt that the killings will not help them achieve anything, let alone their goal of establishing a "sovereign tribal state". But, if they can easily strike defenceless people with death and terror, it is largely because of the state government's abject failure to meet the challenge. The ruling Marxists have only their own muddled politics to blame for this. The anxiety to retain their political base among the tribals seems to tie their hands on what is clearly a law and order problem. It is understandable that the government has to be wary of the militants' cynical design to incite ethnic passions. That cannot, however, be an excuse for inaction.

Tripura's problem is compounded, like those of several other northeastern states, by its porous border with Bangladesh. The latest killings once again exposed the rebels' strategy of using some areas across the border as training camps and hideouts. The Union home minister, Mr L.K. Advani, and Tripura's chief minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, recently put the number of such camps at close to 90. The issue has been a constant irritant in relations between India and Bangladesh, which routinely denies the existence of any such camps on its soil. The massacre in Tripura, allegedly perpetrated by members of the All Tripura Tiger Force raiding from across the border, once again rips through Dhaka's bluff. Terrorist strikes in different parts of the world have proved beyond doubt that harbouring terror groups for narrow gains can be a dangerous game. It is time New Delhi sent an unequivocal message to Dhaka that relations between the countries cannot improve unless northeastern militants are driven out from Bangladesh. Tripura's chief minister is right in arguing that this aspect of the problem makes it difficult for the state to tackle it without the Centre's help. He is justified in asking New Delhi for more paramilitary forces to deal with the situation. But, while New Delhi talks to Dhaka, the state government too needs to show greater political will to tackle the problem.

MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2003

18/8 **TERRORISM IN TRIPURA** 9 N B 80 10-10

THE INDEPENDENCE DAY-EVE killing of 30 non-tribal people by the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) brings greater urgency to the demand of the State Government for adequate deployment of Army and paramilitary forces in the disturbed areas of the State. By repeatedly choosing soft targets for attack, in the latest instance two predominantly Scheduled Caste hamlets, the Tigers have sent out the message that terror will remain the sole means for achieving their awful project of ethnic cleansing, that is the expulsion of the overwhelming Bengali majority from Tripura. Among those massacred on August 14 were 13 women and six children. After the February 2003 Assembly election swept the Left Front back to power a third time, the Tigers and another secessionist-terrorist outfit, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), have stepped up attacks on the villages bordering Bangladesh in West Tripura. The Centre withdrew the security forces for no justifiable reason after the Assembly election. Three aspects of the present situation in the Northeast are extremely worrying. For the first time, nine extremist organisations, including the ATTF, NLFT (Biswamohan Group) and the United Liberation Front of Asom, gave a joint call for the boycott of Independence Day celebrations across the region. Secondly, in the run-up to August 15, 2003, the two Tripura extremist organisations carried out a series of murderous attacks spread over four days on both unarmed people and security personnel. Thirdly, there is a continuing use of a large number of terrorist camps across the 850 km India-Bangladesh border relevant to the State.

The latest attacks squarely raise for political India the issue of the scale and menace of the terrorist camps across the border. The ATTF, which conducts its training in the Chittagong Hill tracts, has its headquarters in Tarabon in Bangladesh and its chief, Ranjeet Debbarma, has

taken refuge in that country. India must demand from the Khaleda Zia Government an immediate closure of all terrorist camps and a crackdown on the extremists. Although the Tripura Chief Minister, Manik Sarkar, submitted to the Union Government in 2000 a detailed report on the locations of extremist base camps in Bangladesh and the arms supply arrangements, there has been little helpful action by the Centre. Deploying the Army in sufficient strength in the disturbed areas of Tripura and augmenting the Border Security Force and paramilitary forces have become an imperative. There is also a need for beefed-up monitoring of the State's borders.

Just as worrying is the strong linkage established by the ATTF with other terrorist organisations in the region. There are reports that ULFA, the ATTF and extremist groups active in Manipur have formed an umbrella organisation for 'liberating' the region; and that the NLFT, which also enjoys sanctuary in Bangladesh, has links with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). With the extremist groups having sanctuary in a neighbouring country and coordinating their dangerous projects across different States, no State Government can be expected to mobilise the necessary resources to combat terrorism. The Centre must do much better by the people of Tripura and the Northeast region in the weeks and months ahead. Much worse in relation to the extremist-chauvinist challenge in Tripura has been the role of the Congress. Just as the party under Rajiv Gandhi joined hands with the extremist Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) on the eve of the February 1988 Assembly election, it had no compunction in forging an alliance for the February 2003 contest with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), the NLFT's overground front. Such dangerous games where national sovereignty, unity and security are at stake must be stopped immediately.

THE HINDU

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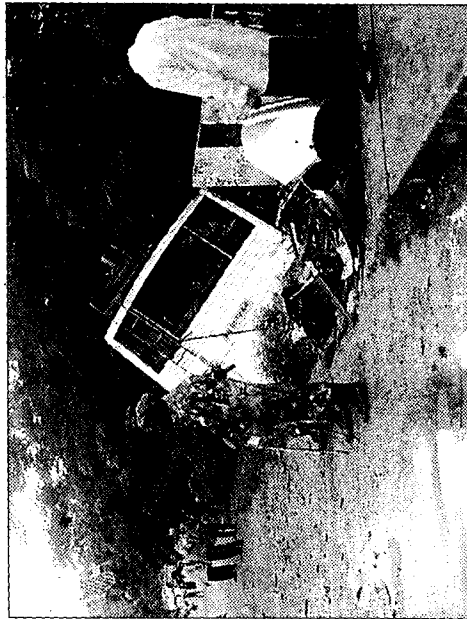
Violence mars I-Day celebrations in N-E

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 15

THOUGH security forces were on full alert in view of the Independence Day boycott call given by over 15 different militant groups in the North-East, ultras managed to strike in Tripura and Manipur, gunning down at least 36 people in the two states in a span of less than 24 hours since yesterday.

Thirty people, mostly Bengali-speaking settlers, have been massacred in three different incidents since last evening in Tripura. It was the worst-ever incident of militant violence in the two-and-a-half-decade-old history of insurgency in the Northeastern state.

Meanwhile, Independence Day was observed under heavy security in Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam, with the chief ministers of



The bus which was blown up by militants on the outskirts of Imphal on Thursday morning. PTI

the respective states once again making a fervent appeal to the militants to come forward for a peaceful negotiated settlement of their grievances.

The worst violence was seen in Totabari village of Khowai subdivision of West Tripura district where militants belonging to the All Tripura

Assam, Nagaland defy ultras' boycott call

■ GUWAHATI: The boycott and strike call by militant groups in the North-East on Independence Day failed to make an impact in Assam or Nagaland, with celebrations taking place as scheduled and attended by the public in large numbers, officials sources said here. People defied the call to attend the official flag-hoisting ceremonies and other programmes. — Agencies

cluding women and children. Five others who sustained injuries died later. In both cases, the militants arrived in military fatigues, dragged out people irrespective of sex, and opened indiscriminate fire on them, police said in Agartala. In three other incidents, security forces including the BSF also

came under attack though there were no casualties. The ATTF was one of the 15 insurgent groups of the North-East which had called for a boycott of the Independence Day celebrations, saying "India was forcibly occupying" the region.

Five BSF jawans were injured at Khanitlang, close to the Bangladesh border, shortly after dusk yesterday when a state police patrol party was fired upon at Kapatoli in South Tripura district.

Police sources, however, suspected the hand of the National Liberation Front of Tripura, another underground group, in the two attacks.

The ruling Left Front and Opposition Congress have called a dawn-to-dusk Tripura bandh tomorrow to protest the killings. LF spokesman Gauram Das said the bandh was called to press for their five-point charter of demands, including deployment of Army in

disturbed areas and increase in the BSF strength along the 856-km-long Indo-Bangla border.

In Manipur too, Independence Day celebrations were marred by violence as different militant groups started attacking civilians and security personnel in different districts of Imphal valley starting Thursday morning, leaving at least eight people injured.

While six people were killed on the spot when militants triggered a powerful explosion as a bus was crossing a bridge on the Lilong in Imphal (West) district yesterday, two others were killed in incidents elsewhere. At least 15 passengers of the ill-fated bus are battling for life at RIMS Hospital, sources said. Meanwhile, bus services have been suspended in the Indo-Burma-Sugno road after three transport organisations announced a seven-day ceasefire in protest against the blast at Lilong.

Insurgency a national problem: Tripura CM

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 13. — Unable to keep a tab on insurgent outfits, Tripura chief minister Mr Manik Sarkar has urged the Centre to declare insurgency a national problem.

Mr Sarkar, who is in the Capi-

S-8

tal these days, stressed on the need for New Delhi to "pressurise" Dhaka to dismantle the terrorist camps from its soil. "They (Dhaka) should also hand over the ultras to India," he said.

He sought an increase in the number of BSF battalions in the state and suggested that the government should fence the entire

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Indo-Bangla border to prevent North-east militants from taking shelter in the neighbouring country. "It is impossible for a small state like Tripura to control militancy on its own," he said.

Underground insurgent groups such as National Liberation Front of Tripura and All Tripura Tiger Force are among the sever-

S-8

al rebel groups from the region that have set up camps in Bangladesh. He accused the ISI and fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh of colluding with North-east militants to spread terror in the region.

"It is necessary to 'break the network of the terrorist groups of the region', he said.

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The chief minister has claimed that the NSCN factions are fomenting trouble in the state and urged the Centre to ensure that both factions of the NSCN observe cease-fire rules outside Nagaland as well.

"... The NSCN (I-M) and NSCN-K are creating trouble in other states of the North-east in-

cluding Tripura by violating the ground rules," Mr Sarkar said. Supported by the NSCN factions, the NLFT and the ATTF have intensified their subversive activities across the state, he alleged.

"The Centre must ensure that the NSCN(IM) strictly observes cease fire ground rules in the region."

14 AUG 2003

Guwahati encounter fuels panic

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Aug. 12: Police today shot dead a suspected Ulfa member in the heart of the Assam capital, adding to the tension over the possibility of a large group of militants being present in the city to spread terror before and on Independence Day.

The police appeared jubilant after killing the militant, but had no explanation for the entry of an armed person into a city that resembles a fortress. The slain youth was carrying a 9mm pistol and seven rounds of live ammunition.

City superintendent of police H.C. Nath said the militant was trying to extort money from a businessman at Fancy Bazar, the city's commercial hub, around 3.50 pm when a group of police personnel in civvies zeroed in on him.

The extortionist had telephoned the businessman this morning and asked

him to keep Rs 5 lakh ready.

"He fired at the police personnel on realising that he had walked into a trap. The policemen retaliated and injured him seriously. He died on the way to hospital," Nath said.

On whether the police were sure the Ulfa rebel was an Ulfa member, the SP said his identity had not been confirmed.

Sources did not rule out the possibility of the extortionist being a surrendered Ulfa member who was being used by the militant group to collect money.

The incident prompted a re-assessment of the security arrangements in the city for Independence Day and beyond. The Ulfa and the National Democratic

Killing of suspected Ulfa rebel in Assam capital raises security fears before I-Day

Front of Boroland (NDFB) are among the nine militant organisations of the Northeast to have announced a general strike on August 15 and a public boycott of all official functions.

Intelligence reports indicate that as in the past, the banned outfits are planning to target vital installations and security personnel across the region in the next few days.

The police arrested an Ulfa militant named Ayub Ali from a house in the Fakiragram area of Lower Assam this afternoon and seized a diagram of oil pipelines and pumping stations.

Apart from Ali, two persons were staying in the house. The duo, however, eluded

the police.

In Tinsukia district, where the Ulfa has been overly active in recent times, a team of police and CRPF personnel conducted a dawn-to-dusk combing operation. The operation focused on the Mechari forest reserve in the Talap area of Doomdooma.

Police officials were tight-lipped about the outcome of the operation, but sources said the team discovered a deserted transit camp of the Ulfa within the forest reserve. At least 40 militants, including women, had presumably stayed in that camp a few days ago.

The security personnel rounded up five residents of the Talap area for sheltering militants.

In another incident, the army today gunned down four militants of the Hmar People's Conference (Democratic) near Lalpani on Cachar district's border with Manipur.

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TEMPERED HOPE

Ethnic insurgencies in the Northeast are often desperate expressions of the desire for self-rule. It is a valid aspiration as long as it does not militate against national security and sovereignty. By amending the sixth schedule of the Constitution, the Lok Sabha has finally cleared the decks for the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council. The move should inspire hope not only for peace in a troubled area in Assam but also for economic uplift of one of the poorest regions in the entire Northeast. But laws are only instruments and it is up to the people's representatives as to how they are used. The legislative and executive powers that the new council will have cover a wide area, ranging from land, education, health, forests and revenue to *panchayat* and municipal administration. The council should have little problem in reaching its benefits to the people, provided it has the will and the resources to do so. The enthusiasm for the BTC should, however, be tempered by the experience of the failure of the Bodoland Autonomous Council that had been set up in 1993 following an agreement between the Centre, the Assam government and the All Bodo Students' Union. One reason for that failure was the feeling that the negotiations had ignored large sections of Bodo groups outside the ABSU.

That danger also plagued the Union and state governments' recent talks with the Bodoland Liberation Tigers. Now that the constitutional barriers on the formation of the BTC have been removed, it is time that fresh attempts were made to involve the National Democratic Front of Bodoland in the whole process. Peace initiatives are never successful if the partners are chosen selectively. New Delhi's peace talks with Naga rebels are a case in point. The negotiations with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim faction led by Mr Isak Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah have not pleased the other group led by Mr S.S. Khaplang. Although the former faction is far more powerful than the latter, peace in Nagaland demands that the government take both into account. But the greater responsibility for making the BTC work will lie with its members themselves. Given the long and sad history of ethnic violence in the area, the tribal-majority council will have to ensure the security of non-Bodos living in the area. The law has kept some safeguards to this effect, but it may not work without the Bodos' goodwill. The Bodos had long agitated for self-rule because they felt alienated from Dispur's rule. It is up to them now to ensure that the minority non-Bodos do not feel the same under the BTC's dispensation.

11 AUG 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

NSCN (I-M) scores again

By Dipankar Roy

THE year so far has perhaps been one of the best periods of time for NSCN (I-M) since it entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Centre and started a dialogue just over six years ago.

Just after a month into the year, SC Jamir's Congress Party government in Nagaland bit the dust when it was voted out of power by a coalition of regional and national political parties with generous doses of help from NSCN (I-M) – denials of the latter notwithstanding – in the February Assembly elections. To add insult to injury, the Congress suffered further when some of its MLAs crossed the floor to sit on the treasury benches, apparently because they realised, albeit a little late in the day, that they needed to strengthen a dispensation that was "sincere" about bringing lasting peace to Nagaland by helping the peace process along and finding a solution. Their actions and the reason trotted out implied that Jamir and his Congress had both the potential and desire to scuttle the efforts.

With the Jamir threat removed and an obliging government in place, the NSCN (I-M) was on a stronger wicket in Nagaland to make its writ run. And run it has. Take for instance the incapacitation of the Church and Naga Hoho-backed Reconciliation Commission even before its members could get a real feel of their chairs. The NSCN (I-M) took umbrage at the selection of two of the members. The fact that the two members in question are held in high regard by Naga society did not cut any ice with the NSCN. This is perhaps understandable given that the organisation is uncomfortable with views that are not in sync with its own. What was tragic was the abject capitulation by those who had set up the panel with the avowed objective of bringing about reconciliation among various segments of society in general and among the warring underground groups in particular.

If securing Nagaland was step one then getting to have a say in the affairs of neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh was next in the road map that NSCN (I-M) and BJP had drawn for themselves to reach their joint and separate destinations. And, hand in hand, they took that step with vigour.

On 2 August, the Mukut Mithi-led Congress government was shown the door when it lost a trust vote with just over a year rem-



HATS OFF TO...? Newly elect Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Gegong Apang. — Eastern Projections

Open forum

aining for the next elections. Mithi had to seek the confidence of the house after a majority of his MLAs deserted him and went over to his *bete noire*, the lone Arunachal Congress MLA and former chief minister, Gegong Apang. Apang, backed by his new flock, staked his claim to form the government.

Mithi did not mince words, saying that his government had been brought down by the BJP with support from the NSCN (I-M). Both BJP and NSCN ridiculed the charge, with the latter whining that it was blamed whenever anything bad happened in the North East.

But what followed lent credence to the charge levelled by Mithi.

Soon after taking over, the new chief minister, Gegong Apang, announced that his government would recommend autonomous district council status under the Sixth Schedule for Tirap and Changlang districts, would repeal the Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organised Crimes Act and would also withdraw "Operation Hurricane" which had been launched in the districts to flush out NSCN militants, particularly those owing allegiance to the I-M faction.

He also disagreed with his predecessor that there was no Naga in Arunachal Pradesh while one of his lieutenants, the new home minister, L Wanglat, felt that "in principle" a ceasefire should be without boundaries.

Those remarks reminded many of the ill-fated and short-lived announcement of the summer of 2001 when the Government of India and the NSCN had declared in Bangkok that the ceasefire would be without boundaries, provoking sharp reactions from neighbouring states, especially Manipur.

Another indebted and obliging government was in place and nothing else – at least at this stage of its negotiations with the government – could have better warmed the heart of the NSCN.

For the NSCN, it is the autonomous district council status for Tirap and Changlang that matters most in the long run, the others being mainly matters of short term joy. For, from the status of an autonomous district council to that of a union territory and from there on to even the area's merger with Nagaland, if required, should not be too difficult especially if the Central and state governments see eye to eye. There are signs that the present dispensation in Delhi and Itanagar are on the same wavelength for their respective compulsions on such a scheme. The NSCN would then have its dream of a "greater Nagaland" fulfilled, even if in part.

If it has been a good year for the NSCN, it has been a happy hunting season for the BJP: the party made its debut in Nagaland winning no less than seven seats and now has created the conditions to try and make an entry into Arunachal Pradesh Assembly next year. Besides, by siding with the NSCN in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, the BJP may have also paved the way for the coalition NDA government, of which it is the main constituent, to make an attempt at resolving the Naga imbroglio or, at least, to be in a position to determine the contours of the possible solution before next year's Lok Sabha elections and reap its benefits in the North East.

Be that as it may, what should be of concern is that in their apparent haste to reach their respective goals, the BJP and NSCN may have trod on some toes. At what cost or damage to the long term peace process, only time will tell.

(The author is a Guwahati-based Special Representative of The Statesman.)

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Press Trust of India

Apang distributes portfolios

ITANAGAR, Aug. 5. — Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Mr Gegong Apang, who assumed office on Sunday, distributed portfolios to his council of ministers today.

While 33 are of the Cabinet rank three are ministers of state. Twenty ministers of the erstwhile Mukut Mithi's Congress government, who formed the Congress (D) and joined the United Democratic Front under Mr Apang's leader-

ship are members of the ministry.

Mr Kameng Dolo, president of Congress (D) who took the oath as the state's first deputy chief minister, will look after personnel, administrative reforms, district administration, and training. UDF secretary Mr L Wanglat has been made minister for home and Mr Kalikho Pul finance.

Mr Lijum Ronya, spokesman of UDF, has been made the minister for power (electrical). Mr TL Rajkumar will look after law, justice and parliamentary affairs, and Mr T Wangham ~~run~~ ^{depart-}

ment. Mr Rajkumar and Mr Wangham were ministers in the Mithi government.

Also, Mr Wanglat, Mr Rajkumar and Mr Wangham were arrested under Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organised Crime Act by the Mithi government for alleged links with the NSCN(I-M) in April but were later pardoned by the court.

The only woman member of the UDF Ms Mekap Dolo, wife of the deputy chief minister, has been made minister of state for social welfare and woman and child development.

Apang sworn in Chief Minister

9.5.68 1 By Barun Das Gupta 110' 1/8

GUWAHATI, AUG. 3. A 37-member United Democratic Front Ministry, headed by Gegong Apang, was sworn in by the Arunachal Pradesh Governor, V.C. Pandey, at Itanagar today. The newly-formed UDF has 42 MLAs.

Besides Mr. Apang, there are 33 Cabinet Ministers and three Ministers of State. Kameng Dolo has been named Deputy Chief Minister.

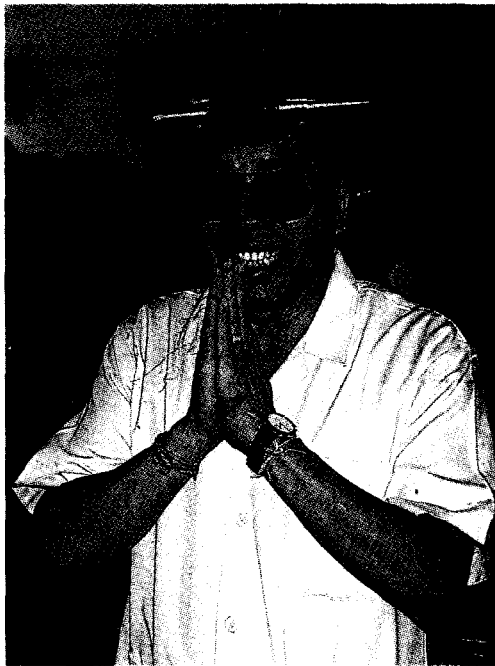
Mukut Mithi, Congress Chief Minister, resigned after he lost the confidence vote in the Legislative Assembly last night by voice vote.

Mr. Apang comes back as Chief Minister after three and a half years. Several of his Ministerial colleagues in the new Cabinet had earlier been either expelled from the Congress or arrested under the Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organised Crimes Act (APCOCA) for alleged involvement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah).

PTI reports:

There are eight new faces in the Apang Ministry — six Cabinet and two Ministers of State — including the lone woman minister, Mekap Dolo, wife of the Deputy Chief Minister.

Speaking to newsmen after the swearing-in ceremony, Mr. Apang said portfolios would be distributed later. Mr. Mithi did not attend the ceremony at the Raj Bhavan, though some of his supporters did.



The Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, after taking the oath of office at the Raj Bhavan in Itanagar on Sunday.

— Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar

4 AUG 2003

Apang sops for NSCN

Dipankar Roy in Itanagar

Sema's remark his: BJP

Aug. 3. — Immediately after being sworn in as the Arunachal Pradesh chief minister for the fifth time, Mr Gegong Apang today promised Autonomous District status for the NSCN strongholds of Tirap and Changlang districts and repeal of a Pota clone that had become a headache for the militants. Also, a minister announced that Operation Hurricane against the rebels would be called off.

Mr Apang was administered the oath of office by the Governor, Mr VC Pandey, at Raj Bhavan this morning, Mr Apang said the decision on Autonomous Councils for the two districts was in "deference" to the wishes of the people.

The Mukut Mithi-led Congress government was voted out of power late last evening. The government was reduced to a minority after 40 MLAs deserted last week, allegedly under NSCN-IM's pressure. Also sworn in with Mr Apang were 36 other ministers, including three ministers of state. The Speaker has also been named a minister but he can be sworn in only later. That leaves only four UDF

NEW DELHI, Aug. 3. — The BJP today distanced itself from the statement recently made by the Naga leader Dr Hokishe Sema on the future of Nagas and Nagaland. A former Nagaland chief minister, Dr Sema, who joined the BJP several months ago, had recently said: "It is high time that we (the Nagas) should decide our future. If Nagas decide to unite, who can say no to us?". The BJP said it "fully disowns" Dr Sema's remark. — SNS

MLAs without any ministerial portfolio.

The chief minister's stand on the two districts was described by Mr Mithi as a move to facilitate their future inclusion in "Greater Nagaland" that the NSCN-IM has been demanding.

Mr Apang also said the recently enacted law to deal with crime, particularly terrorism, would be repealed. Three of his ministers were arrested in May by invoking the Act for their alleged NSCN-IM connections. He said their cases would be reviewed.

Photograph on page 9

Mithi Government voted out

ITANAGAR, AUG. 2. The minority Congress Government of Mukut Mithi in Arunachal Pradesh was tonight defeated on the floor of the State Assembly by a voice vote after a stormy eight-hour debate during a special session.

The Mithi's Government was reduced to a minority on July 27 when 31 Congress MLAs broke ranks and joined hands with the former Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, to form the United Democratic Front alliance to stake claim to form the Government.

Mr. Mithi, who had taken over after engineering the downfall of Mr. Apang four years ago, was defeated by Congress defectors led by the former Chief Minister.

The Governor, V.C. Pande, convened today's session for Mr. Mithi to prove his majority on the floor of the House after Mr. Apang paraded 42 MLAs before him on July 28.

Mr. Mithi, in a desperate move to stall the special session, had moved a writ petition at the Itanagar bench

of the Gauhati High Court.

The petition, challenging the authority of the Speaker, Tamiyo Taga, to conduct the proceedings, was admitted by the court and posted for hearing on Monday.

The session began on schedule at 3 p.m. with Congress MLAs loyal to Mr. Mithi questioning the propriety of Taga presiding, in view of the pendency of the writ petition filed by the Health and Family Welfare Minister, Hari Notung, yesterday.

Mr. Taga, however, told members that he had not received any communication from the High Court on a stay order or otherwise in regard to the proceedings of the House.

He told the House that whatever he was doing was legal. The Governor had summoned the special session and he had to conduct it according to the provisions of the Constitution.

Participating in the debate, the leader of the 42-member UDF, Mr. Apang said he was the lone Opposition member in the House and was not craving for power.

Mr. Apang, the sole Arunachal Congress member in the House, said his friends who wanted his services for the State, had made him the leader of the UDF. Criticising the Congress for unnecessarily taking the issue to court, he said the party did this just to confuse the people.

He said during his 19 years of chief ministership, he had never been a traitor.

Mr. Apang said that while moving the confidence motion, Mr. Mithi had painted a rosy picture of his achievements and unnecessarily hurled charges against the Centre to hide his own failures.

Refuting accusations that he had links with the NSCN(I-M), Mr. Apang said that he would renounce politics if this was ever proved. — PTI



The Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Mukut Mithi, makes a point during his address at the special Assembly session in Itanagar on Saturday. At right, Gegong Apang, leader of the newly-formed United Democratic Front, is all smiles. — Photos: Ritu Raj Konwar

3 AUG 2003

42 MLAs PARADED BEFORE GOVERNOR

Apang stakes claim to form Arunachal Govt.

ITANAGAR, JULY 28. The leader of the newly-formed United Democratic Front (UDF) and former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, today met the Governor, V.C. Pande, at the Raj Bhavan here and paraded 42 legislators, including himself, to stake claim to form the Government.

The meeting lasted about 90 minutes and the Governor's decision was awaited on whether he would ask the Congress Chief Minister, Mukut Mithi, to resign or prove his majority in the House.

Mr. Pande had on Sunday night directed Mr. Apang to line up all the MLAs supporting him.

Soon after meeting the Governor, Mr. Apang, Arunachal Congress chief, told reporters that the Mithi Government, which he claimed had been reduced to a minority, should resign.

Mr. Apang, who was ousted as Chief Minister by Mr. Mithi in January 1999, said he was ready to prove his majority on the floor of the Assembly if an emergency session was summoned.

Giving details of the constituents of the 42-member UDF, Mr. Apang claimed that 38 of



the Congress Legislature Party's 56 members had broken away from the party and that the split had been approved and accepted by the Speaker today.

Others in the UDF were two associate members of the Congress, one from the Arunachal Congress (Mr. Apang himself) and L. Wanglat, an unattached member, he said.

Twenty-three of the 39-member Council of Ministers had tendered their resignation from the Mithi Government.

"You can ask every individual legislator whether they have been confined or anything was being paid to them," Mr. Apang said refuting Mr. Mithi's allega-

tion that he had been paid Rs. five crores by the NSCN (I-M) last year to topple the Mithi Government.

"The Ministers and MLAs are qualified and honourable members of the House and are not purchasable commodities... All of them were frustrated with (Mr.) Mithi's style of running the Government and once again (they) made me the leader in the interests of the State," Mr. Apang said.

On Sunday, the UDF came into being amid fast-paced developments when Mr. Mithi was mostly out of the State. Rebel Congress legislators quit the party, formed the Congress (D) and joined hands with Mr. Apang, Mr. Wanglat and the two associate Congress members to set up the Front.

At a press conference, the State Congress general secretary, T.C. Tok, alleged that the NDA Government at the Centre was behind the game to topple the Mithi Government and that some anti-socials had kept the party legislators confined. The APCC has called a 12-hour "chakka bandh" from 6 a.m. on July 30 in protest, he added. — PTI

Editorial on Page 10

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TUESDAY, JULY 29, 2003

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BEHIND THE SPLIT 10
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THE REBELLION AGAINST the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Mukut Mithi, was brewing for some time but the speed and decisiveness with which it materialised was wholly unexpected. The fact that as many as 31 of the State's 58 Congress MLAs broke away to form a separate political front reflects the vertical nature of the split and reinforces the erratic and fickle nature of Arunachal Pradesh's politics. On the face of it, the fact that the political realignment was masterminded by a politician whose party, the Arunachal Congress, holds only one seat in the legislature may seem astonishing. But as someone who ruled the State for almost two decades and is known for his shrewdness and resourcefulness, the former Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, was in a position where his political influence was not limited by his party's lack of strength in the Assembly. Mr. Apang's 'achievement' may seem like something of a counter-coup as he was forced to step down as Chief Minister in early 1999 after Mr. Mithi lured away a large enough group of dissidents to stake a claim to form the Government. Later that year, Mr. Mithi, who merged his party with the Congress, registered a stunning victory in the Assembly election, leaving its rival Arunachal Congress with just one seat (which Mr. Apang won unopposed).

At one level, the fact that Mr. Apang has been able to turn the tables on Mr. Mithi is a measure of the opportunism that marks the State's politics. At another and much more disturbing level is the shadow of Naga militancy and the seemingly increasing influence it has in shaping Arunachal Pradesh's politics. If there were insinuations that Mr. Apang's ouster in 1999 was achieved with the help of the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), there are allegations now that the rival Naga militant faction, the NSCN (I-M),

scripted the move against Mr. Mithi. The Tirap and Changlang districts of north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh are dominated by Nagas and the Mithi Government had seemed extremely uneasy with the Centre's policy of engaging the NSCN (I-M) in talks, which have recently flirted with the idea of a separate Union Territory for Nagas in lieu of a Greater Nagaland. Not long ago, after New Delhi turned down Arunachal Pradesh's request for additional forces to flush out the NSCN (I-M) from the Tirap and Changlang districts, an undeterred State Government mobilised its own forces to launch 'Operation Hurricane'. A few months ago, Mr. Mithi ordered the arrest of three dissident MLAs for allegedly having links with the NSCN (I-M); significantly, one of them has become the Secretary of the new Gegong Apang-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

The UDF decision to support the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre has led to allegations that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) engineered the split. This charge may or may not be true but it deserves notice that the BJP does not have a single seat in the State Assembly. However, what it points to is a broad convergence of interests between the Centre, which does not want the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN alienated as long as negotiations continue, and the UDF, which is likely to play along. The BJP is no stranger to Mr. Apang, whose Arunachal Congress had links with it. In the 1999 election, the two parties had an understanding for the two parliamentary seats in the State; the BJP contested the Assembly seats on its own. If the calculation is that the political realignment may pave the way for the Centre and the State to evolve a common approach towards negotiating with Naga militants, the latest development has revealed the disturbing impact that such militancy has on Arunachal Pradesh's politics.

BEHIND

29 JUL 2003

Arunachal govt reduced to minority

OUR BUREAU

July 27: History is being repeated in Arunachal Pradesh. Four years after staging a coup that left his mentor Gegong Apang in a political cul-de-sac, chief minister Mukut Mithi today found himself in a similar situation with 31 of his legislators deserting the Congress to reduce the government to a minority.

The breakaway group, which calls itself the Congress (D) and is led by former home minister Kameng Dolo, has already teamed up with Apang and intends to stake claim to form a new government tomorrow.

The 31 Congress deserters went into a huddle with Apang at a hotel in Itanagar this evening and unanimously elected him as the leader of a new coalition, to be called the United Democratic Legislature Party.

Apang, who was the longest serving chief minister of the Northeast till Mithi unseated him in January 1999, confirmed the development and claimed to have the support of 38 legislators.

Apart from the 31 deserters, the new coalition includes expelled Congress legislator L. Wanglat. He is the spokesperson for the party, while rural works minister Tingpong Wangham is the general secretary.

Mithi was in New Delhi when the exodus from the Congress took place, but he seemed to know that it was coming. He had said yesterday that the Centre was plotting his govern-

ment's downfall to appease "various forces, including the NSCN (I-M)".

The government recently launched an operation code-named Hurricane to flush out NSCN (I-M) militants from Tirap district. It had sought additional paramilitary forces for the offensive, but Delhi turned down the request.

The chief minister, who returned to Itanagar this morning, repeated the allegation after the mass desertion by his party's legislators.

"For the last three years, they (the National Democratic Alliance and the Centre) have been trying to topple my government. But the campaign gained momentum last year after the arrest of two NSCN (I-M) activists in Itanagar," he told The Telegraph over phone from the state capital.

On whether Apang was involved in the alleged conspiracy, Mithi accused his predecessor of taking money from the NSCN (I-M) to engineer the split.

Speaker Tamiyo Taga confirmed receiving a list of 31 legislators and a written request to recognise the split in the Congress Legislature Party.

"I have received a signed note from 31 legislators, saying that they have formally split from the Congress. I will seek advice from constitutional experts before making a judgment."

The Congress had 58 legislators in the 60-member Assembly prior to the split. Apang was the lone man in the Opposition before Wanglat was expelled from the ruling party.

MILITANTS ATTACK CONVOY, 2 KILLED

Manipur CM escapes bid on life

IMPHAL, JULY 27. The Manipur Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi Singh, today escaped a bid on his life but two of his security men were killed and five injured when heavily-armed militants opened fire on his convoy at Wangjing area, 35 km from here, prompting the authorities to sound a red alert.

Brigadier E.J. Kochehan, Commander of 9 Sector Assam Rifles, posted at Thoubal, told PTI that the attack was carried out by the separatist People's Liberation Army (PLA) and led by "Lt." Gojen Singh.

The Chief Minister's convoy was attacked at around 10.55 a.m. shortly after he left Wangjing area after inspecting the construction of a dam at Sangaiyumpham in Thoubal district.

Police commandos and India Reserve Battalion personnel, who were part of the convoy,



Ibobi Singh

chased the militants and engaged them in a gunbattle at nearby Salungpham village.

A police commando and an IRB battalion personnel were killed and four policemen and a civilian wounded in the exchange of fire lasting over an

hour. Mr. Ibobi Singh, who was unhurt, was escorted back to his official residence here.

Brig. Kochehan said there had been intelligence reports that some PLA militants were roaming in the area before today's attack, which he termed an incident of "provocative firing".

Authorities asked all police and security posts to intensify security measures in their respective jurisdiction and detect any movement of armed militants. Search operations were launched in Wangjing area after the attack but no arrest had been made so far, sources said.

PLA is the armed wing of the banned Revolutionary People's Party, which is a constituent of the Manipur People's Liberation Front, which also has the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak and the United National Liberation Front as its members. — PTI

Cong. splits in Arunachal, Apang stakes claim

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, JULY 27. The Mukut Mithi Ministry in Arunachal Pradesh was reduced to a minority today after 31 of the 58 Congress MLAs, including 17 Ministers, announced that they had resigned from the party. The breakaway MLAs said they had formed a separate legislative group, Congress (D), named after its president, Kameng Dolo.

Along with two Opposition MLAs, the Congress (D) also formed the United Democratic Front (UDF) and elected the former Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, as their leader. The breakaway group claimed the support of four more MLAs.

Mr. Apang called on the Governor, V.C. Pandey, this evening and staked claim to form a new government. Till recently, Mr. Apang, of the Arunachal Congress, was the lone Opposition MLA. Some time ago, a Congress legislator, S. Wanglet, was expelled from the party and became an "unattached" member.

Factionalism, simmering within the Congress for a long time, became intense three months ago after the Chief Minister, Mukut Mithi, got the Rural Works Minister, Thingpoing Wangham, and the Congress MLAs, Mr. Wanglet and T.L. Rajkumar, arrested for "having secret links" with the NSCN(I-M) in the Tirap and Changlang districts.

Mr. Rajkumar was recently taken back into the Cabinet after he reportedly made up with Mr. Mithi. Reports reaching here from capital Itanagar said Mr. Mithi was expected to meet the Governor today. The indications are that he will demand a trial of strength on the floor of the Assembly. Observers said the developments needed to be seen in a wider political context. The ongoing negotiations in Bangkok between the Centre and the NSCN(I-M) leadership have brought the BJP close to the militant outfit.

The first outcome of this camaraderie was the defeat of the ruling Congress, led by the Chief Minister, S.C. Jamir, in the Assembly elections in Nagaland in February. A Democratic Alliance of the Nagaland Government came to power, with Neiphieu Rio as the Chief Minister.

The proposal to create a Union Territory for Nagas, living in contiguous areas outside Nagaland, in lieu of a 'Greater Nagaland' also showed the eagerness of the Centre in keeping the NSCN (I-M) in good humour.

Our New Delhi Special Correspondent writes:

The Congress high command, which met at 10 Janpath here tonight, decided to send the AICC secretary in-charge of Arunachal Pradesh, Dalbir Singh, to Itanagar to salvage the situation. Maj. Singh is to leave for Itanagar on Monday.

28 JUL 2003

Situation in Assam town under control

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, JULY 26. The situation at Kachubeel in Darrang district of Assam, where seven adivasis were killed in police firing and 17 injured in firing and clashes between adivasis and Bodos on Friday, was "tense but under control", district officials said.

Police resorted to firing after they failed to disperse the armed adivasis and Bodos.

The All-Assam Adivasi Students' Association (AAASA) had given a call for a bandh demanding recognition for adivasis as the Scheduled Tribes in Assam and opposing the proposed Bodo Territorial Council.

The clash started when the Bodos resisted the bandh and refused to close their shops. Despite the strong presence of the State police, the CRPF and the Army, groups of armed Adivasi youth, armed with bows and arrows, were seen moving about today, fearing attacks by Bodos.

The AAASA president, Justin Lakra, alleged that some Bodo Liberation Tiger activists had also fired on the adivasis, along with the police.

Police, however, denied it.

27 JUL 2003

THE HINDU

9-N 5/8
5/11

Seven Adivasis killed in Darrang police firing

2/17

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, July 25. — Seven Adivasis were killed and several others injured when police fired on a mob that was trying to enforce a bandh at Kasubeel, in the Paneri area of Darrang district, this afternoon.

Mr Pradip Kumar, DIG, Northern Range, said the police resorted to firing after the mob attacked them and snatched two rifles. Two policemen were injured.

The All Assam Adivasi Students' Association had

called a 12-hour statewide bandh demanding ST status for Adivasis and opposing creation of the Bodoland

Trouble broke out during a bandh called by a students' group demanding ST status for Adivasis

Territorial Council.

A group of bandh supporters had gone to the market at Kasubeel, which has a majority of Bodos and is a stronghold of the All Bodo Students' Union. Shop own-

ers were told to down shutters. At this, Absu members objected and told them to go back.

The small band of Aasa supporters went back but returned with about 2,000 people. Armed with bows and arrows, they attacked the police party which then opened fire. Two persons died on the spot, while five succumbed to injuries later. Mr Justin Lakra, an Adivasi leader, has demanded a judicial probe and sought Rs 5 lakh as compensation to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Why Nagaland Could Do With A Miracle

By JB LAMA

✓ 9.16.07 5-6

The Nagaland ceasefire's extension by yet another year keeps alive hope of a settlement and peace. As restoration of serenity continues to be the overriding concern, both sides are committed to strictly observing guidelines that would yield results. But as things stand, there is little likelihood of NSCN-IM leaders Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah soon resuming talks with the Centre. Since their last meeting in January, K Padmanabhaiah, the Prime Minister's special emissary, has thrice shuttled between Delhi and Bangkok to cajole the two leaders into dropping their demand for a single administrative unit for Nagas so that the dialogue could progress, but to no effect.

No hurry

Accepting the demand which, in another words means "Greater Nagaland", is certain to raise hackles in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur as it poses a threat to their territorial integrity. The Centre does not, however, appear to be bothered by the delay and probably wants to wait until parliamentary elections hopefully give the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance the required clout to push through any agreement reached. It is also in no hurry to appoint a political mediator to replace Padmanabhaiah as demanded by the NSCN-IM.

The primary purpose of dialogue is to hammer out differences and find a solution and since the on-going parley is unconditional it is only fitting to take up the "Greater Nagaland" issue as well. Tensions in the three neighbouring states cannot be allowed to simmer for much longer and the Centre will have to take them into confidence by categorically telling them that there will be no disintegration of their territory. A democracy justifies every citizen's rights to raise demands but the government is under no obligation to accept these. The BJP should have understood the implications of the Naga demand when it agreed to continue talks initiated by the former United Front government. The "Greater Nagaland" concept found mention in the 1947 Nine-Point Agreement the Naga National Council signed with the governor of Assam, Sir

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

29/7

Akbar Hydari (the Nagas disowned it after three days). Its Clause 6(2) advocates the need "to bring under the unified administrative unit, as far as possible, all Nagas". The demand is also included in the 16-point Agreement the apolitical Naga People's Convention signed with the Government of India in 1960. Clause 13 of that accord says,



"The Naga leaders expressed the view that other Naga inhabited contiguous areas should be enabled to join the new state." Of late there has been some developments, notable among these being Nagaland tourism minister Vatsu Meru's meeting this month with the NSCN-IM collective leadership in Bangkok. This represents a major shift in the Centre's policy because so far the state government was not involved in the peace process in deference to the wishes of Naga leaders, including the late Angami Zapuo Phizo.

Trip cancelled

Originally, Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio and his finance minister K Therie were scheduled to visit Bangkok but the Centre decided otherwise. Rio later sought to clarify that the trip had been cancelled because the "issue" he was to discuss had already been "solved". Not many will share this view because the manner in which the NSCN-IM reacted — it charged the Centre with "insincerity" — would suggest that it was waiting to have talks with Rio. What could have prompted the Centre to cancel the visit was Rio's proposed visit to London from Bangkok to meet NNC president Adino Phizo. Allowing this would definitely have antagonised the NSCN-IM leadership which has made it abundantly clear that "if you say you talk

with us, then you have to honour it. Apart from that, if you take the initiative in talks with anyone else we will not be a party to it".

What is intriguing, however, is why, of all people, Rio decided to depute a greenhorn like Meru and not Therie, who resigned from the Jamir ministry last year and is said to be NSCN-IM sympathiser. Or for that matter, any

when they visited Bangkok last year. In an exclusive interview to *The Statesman* in February, Muivah said "peace and reconciliation cannot be forced, it has to come naturally". This, incidentally, came 13 months after the Naga Hoho, the apex tribal council, launched its "Reconciliation campaign" explaining that it was "the only option to heal the wounds of the Nagas". When the NSCN-IM sent its representative to Kohima at the time of the campaign's launch, it was implicit that the move had its support, but the gesture turned out to be cosmetic.

Ambiguous messages

Muivah obfuscates the issue by releasing articulated and ambiguous messages, one of which stated that "the NSCN-IM aspires after unification of Nagalim for negotiations to bring about reconciliation and principled national unity for the welfare of the Naga people. If reconciliation is not for the good of the people the NSCN is not interested. Reconciliation and unity must be brought about on the basis of admission of mistakes, wrongs, or crimes committed and asking for forgiveness from the victim/victims".

Surprisingly, even Naga Hoho chief M Vero seems to confuse the issue when he said that "whomever believed reconciliation was the precondition for settling the Naga problem had another think coming since the issue has no boundary, no territory". The NSCN-IM's refusal to cooperate with the newly-constituted Reconciliation Commission headed by chairman Niketu Iralu and secretary Charles Chasie is yet another sign of a widening chasm. The two-office bearers, who belong to Phizo's community, were described as "persons who persistently try to justify traitors and collaborators in the name of unity and reconciliation". They, along with other members have since resigned following the Hoho's decision to keep the commission "in abeyance".

In sum, the NSCN-IM wants the rival Khaplang group to apologise for the massacre of several of its comrades at the time of the 1988 split and the section of the NNC, who signed the 1975 Shillong Peace Accord, to admit their mistake. It would appear that the cross predominantly Christian Nagaland has had to bear can be removed by nothing short of a miracle.

Off again, on again

9-11-82
Bodos caught between moods

61-6
2072

Bodos may soon realise their hope of becoming masters of their own destiny. However, despite the Lok Sabha scheduled to take up the Bill on the creation of a Bodo Territorial Council, Bodo Liberation Tiger leaders seem to be a little worried: though they had signed the Memorandum of Settlement on 10 February, the Bill was not introduced in Parliament until the last day of the Budget session, suggesting some hassles. Some leaders are said to be camping in Delhi to elicit support and have set 15 August as the deadline, failing which they threaten to return to agitation. If anything, the MoS has sharply polarised the Bodos and non-tribals who constitute the majority in the proposed council area. Non-tribal organisations were not allowed to participate in the negotiations, all the more reason that their interests should be safeguarded. Even as the Sixth Schedule awaits constitutional amendment, problems multiply. A case is pending before the Supreme Court filed by former chief executive of the now dissolved interim Bodo Autonomous Council challenging the validity of the MoS. Karbi Anglong has vehemently opposed the demand for hill Scheduled Tribes status for Bodo-Kacharis in the district as they don't want them to own property. The large population of non-tribal Koch Rajbongshis want their ST status restored. This had been sanctioned by the late Hiteswar Saikia under an Ordinance but lapsed before it received Parliament's approval. Besides, there are disputes over the inclusion of villages. It was the boundary controversy that ultimately derailed the 1993 Bodo Accord. But the Bodos need to realise that these have to be sorted out, that ultimately their economic progress depends on peacefully coexisting with non-tribals.

Arunachal slams Centre for backing ultras

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, July 21. — The Congress-ruled Arunachal government has launched a frontal attack on the Centre, accusing it of being soft towards terrorists and riding roughshod over the sentiments of the people of the "sensitive" northeastern state on the Chakma-Hajong refugee issue.

"Arunachal Pradesh is sitting on a powder keg, waiting to explode and the Centre would be responsible if it doesn't end its ways immediately," Mr Takam Sanjoy, state government spokesman and education minister, said.

Mr Sanjoy said the Centre was encouraging terrorism by the NSCN-IM in Tirap and Changlang districts and that there was a "nexus" between some Union ministers and the Naga group.

The Arunachal government had launched an operation, codenamed 'Hurricane,' to flush out militants from the

districts. Instead of providing help to and lauding the effort, the Centre had only criticised it. "The Centre is bending over backwards to please the NSCN-IM," Mr Sanjoy said.

Union minister of state for home Swami Chinmayanand had reportedly told a rally in Arunachal Pradesh recently that the operation against the NSCN-IM was "not necessary" as a ceasefire was in place between the Centre and the group. "There is no ceasefire in Arunachal Pradesh and we cannot allow our people to be made targets of the NSCN-IM's depredations," Mr Sanjoy said. "We would welcome a settlement between the Nagas and the Centre but why should our state have to suffer for that."

The minister alleged that the Centre had been apathetic to the sentiments of the Arunachalees on the Chakma-Hajong refugee issue. "The Centre is trying to grant the refugees citizenship

through the Election Commission. We have no problem about that. But they will not be allowed to stay on in our state." The Chakmas and Hajongs, numbering 50,000, were settled in Neifa, now Arunachal Pradesh, in 1964.

'Apang may be arrested'

The Arunachal Pradesh government has warned the state's former chief minister Mr Gegong Apang that he may be arrested if he maintains his alleged links with militants, adds PTI from Guwahati.

"We may be forced to arrest Mr Apang if he does not stop his attempts to topple the government with the help of the NSCN-IM," Arunachal Pradesh government spokesman and education minister Mr Takam Sanjoy said last night. He said political leaders and businessmen who were forced to buy peace with the extremists have also been arrested for doing so.

9-N B. Stalin

Braveheart II

51-6 21/2

A lesson for Ibohi and Delhi

Manipuri housewife, Irom Chanu Sharmila deserves to win. She has been on a fast unto death since 7 November 2000, demanding withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, in force in the state since September 1979. The immediate provocation was the killing of 10 civilians by the Assam Rifles the previous day. Arrested, freed and rearrested, she is unwavering in her endurance; her lone crusade a record of sorts. Presently confined to a special hospital ward with armed guards posted outside, she shows no lack of tenacity. She has seen two chief ministers come and go, and the present incumbent, Okram Ibohi Singh, is in a dilemma whether to seek the Act's withdrawal or to let Sharmila continue her protest. His indecision has cost him dearly. He told the Assembly that the government had so far spent Rs 2,39,425 to forcefully feed her through the nose. No persuasion has worked and Opposition parties suggest defence minister George Fernandes intervene immediately.

The continuation of the draconian law has in no way helped tackle insurgency; its prolongation has only alienated people. The army's presence may be a deterrent but the government cannot continue to depend on troops to contain insurgency. In any case, the Act has lost much of its teeth following the Supreme Court's restrictions on Army functioning. The Centre's decision to entrust the CRPF with the task of looking after security of the entire North-east by 2005 is plausible but maintenance of law and order is the state's primary responsibility. Insurgent groups say they are prepared to sit across the table if the Centre withdraws the Act. Perhaps this deserves as much attention as Sharmila.

21 JUL 2003

55-6
12/7

Mizo myopia

But charity must begin at home

9/11/88

Apparently charity, for Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga, does not begin at home. He has, for some time now at the Centre's behest, been shuttling between Aizawl and Bangkok meeting NSCN(IM) leaders. Recently he was involved in a controversy over meeting Khasi militant leaders without the knowledge of the Meghalaya government. And now he claims to have contacted some Manipur militant leaders as well but will not name them. Having gone to such lengths, he should have also made efforts to repatriate 30,000 Reangs who fled the state in October 1997 in the aftermath of an ethnic riot and are now living in Tripura refugee camps. The militant Bru (Reang) National Liberation Front, which is demanding an autonomous council, is said to have instigated the exodus and is championing their cause. Zoramthanga cannot be unaware of the protection and rights of religious minorities under the Constitution. If Bru militancy is not contained, it is certain to hamper implementation of several development schemes under the "peace bonus" Mizoram earned in 1999.

As it happens, the 1986 accord never really ended the rebellion. A day before its 17th anniversary last month, there was a blast in Aizawl — suspected handiwork of former MNF rebels unhappy with the accord's implementation. Laldenga's autocratic style of functioning led to his downfall and a Central takeover. There need have been no reason for discontent especially when the Centre had sanctioned Rs 15 crore for rehabilitation of about 600 former MNF insurgents including compensation. Laldenga is a lesson for Zoramthanga. Meeting their demands and understanding Reang refugees' problems may help refurbish his image as a peacemaker and also ensure a surplus of goodwill in the Assembly elections, due this November.

Naga peaceniks feel the heat

By Oken Jant Sandham

AS K Padmanabiah, Centre's representative to the talks with National Socialist Council of Nagalim, led by Isak Chisi Swu and Th Muivah, prepares for another round of negotiations in Bangkok later in July, several problems at home continue to stalemate the "internal" peace process among the Nagas.

The NSCN-IM is sticking to its demand that leaders of the Reconciliation Commission, set up recently by Nagaland Christian Forum and Naga Hoho (assembly of representatives from various Naga tribes) quit.

"We're very critical about two of them but it's not that we are going to punish anybody," NSCN-IM deputy minister (minister) V Horam said. "Therefore we wanted to see that they walk out. This is what we express to the Naga Hoho." This tangle is likely to top the agenda at the soon to be held Hoho session in Kohima.

The NSCN's position drew a withering response in the Naga media from Rev. Tuisem Shishak, one of the most outspoken church leaders, civil society and theological figures in the state, saying that he fully backed both Niketu Iralu and Charles Chasie. He tersely told the militant group that civil society did not need to take permission from the underground to conduct its own affairs and said that people were fed up of the extortion and threats from various armed factions but too afraid of being shot. In addition, Rev. Shishak said that the NSCN's position that the Hoho needed to review its appointments indicated that it was assuming that the Hoho leaders had not thought through the issue.

When such confrontations arise, many Nagas, for a change, turn their eyes to the state government to defuse the situation. But the state government appears to have been extremely busy with its own priorities, including cobbling together a majority on its own in the Assembly.

Interestingly, the celebrations of the Democratic Alliance of Nagaland's 100 days in power were followed by a series of political defections. Chief minister Neiphiu Rio has been accused

of engineering splits in the Congress Party and Naga Democratic Movement.

At least two political splits have taken place recently. Seven Congress MLAs deserted the party (Congress) on June 27 and later merged with the 21-member Nagaland People's Front Legislature party, as the alliance is called in the Assembly. Again after ten days of this development, the three-member Nationalist Democratic Movement legislature party was been reduced to one after two MLAs left it on July 7. The two are yet to merge with the NPF. So the strength of the NPF in the ruling DAN coalition Government may go up to 30, tantalisingly near a majority.

The excuses made by the seven Congress deserters, appreciating DAN's approach to the Naga peace process and the Centre's Rs 365 crore peace bonus to the state, has failed to convince the public. After all, the Congress has been equally vocal on the Naga political problem and had appreciated DAN for having secured the Rs 365 crore grant.

There is concern in political circles in Nagaland that the NPF may induct the new entrants into the government, to shore up its position. But it would be suicidal for Mr Rio to sacrifice any of the ministers who belong to BJP, the second largest group in the DAN coalition. The NDA Government at the Centre is generous to Nagaland not because it is a non-Congress Government but because the BJP is a partner there.

The BJP has already cautioned that "if anything happens in the present situation in Nagaland, it will have serious political repercussion in the Naga peace process." The Nagaland Government and the BJP wanted to see that the "peace process (was) unhindered" and reached its "logical conclusion."

The peace process is viewed here as having become stagnant and for it to progress, a strong and stable Government is essential in Nagaland. The recent differences on the Reconciliation Commission issue and current spate of defections in State politics are unlikely to create a conducive political environment for the fragile peace process.

(The author is a journalist based in Nagaland.)

Good intentions

Q-N 5/85 Nagaland could be right, after all *5/86 10/2*

Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio is a man in a hurry. He quit the SC Jamir ministry just a few weeks before the assembly elections, accusing the chief minister of being a hindrance to the peace process. Ministers usually think twice before making such categorical utterances but he was obviously confident of being elected and occupying the hot seat. With proxy support from the NSCN(I-M) — something he refuses to admit but which is no secret — he played his cards pretty well. As importantly, the rebel outfit's desire to remove SC Jamir's "puppet government" by hook or by crook was met. But after more than four months in charge of state affairs, Rio now realizes the path to peace is littered with tribal barricades, notwithstanding the existence of the apolitical Naga Hoho, which is trying to unite people and reconcile the warring factions. The Nagas support Rio's stance that "the underground organizations should listen to the voice of the people if they are working for the people", but Big Brother is unmoved.

Somewhat to Rio's amazement, the Centre has reportedly shot down his plan to visit Bangkok and London to meet NSCN(I-M) leaders and Naga National Council president Adino Phizo. This, of course, conforms to the policy of not involving state governments following resistance by rebel leaders — Jamir was not consulted when former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda met NSCN(I-M) leaders in Europe in 1997. But the situation has changed, as has the profile of a state government now led by a regional party, and it is eminently suited to play the role of facilitator. Given the justified argument that peace is, after all, a mass movement, there is no reason to disregard Rio's position.

Bhutan toys with throwing out rebels

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, July 7: After several rounds of talks with North-east rebels based on its soil, Bhutan thinks the insurgents may not be sincere about leaving. This leaves Thimphu no other option but to use force to eject the "undesired elements" from its territory.

There are over 2,000 rebels operating from different camps in southern Bhutan for many years. The United Liberation Front of Asom is the biggest insurgent group there, but the National Liberation Front of

Boroland and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation have also found a safe haven in Bhutan.

The Bhutanese National Assembly, which is in session now, is expected to review the government's stand on the insurgents shortly. A final decision will be taken after the issue is discussed in the Assembly.

"We want a peaceful resolution of this problem. And with this in mind we have held several rounds of talks with the insurgents," Bhutanese ambassador in Delhi Dago Tshering said.

But he admitted that the negotiations had not yielded the de-

sired results as the armed rebels kept shifting camps. "In the past, they had closed down some of the camps. But they have relocated to other areas," Tshering said.

He said Bhutan had exhausted almost all options and may have to push the rebels out.

But Tshering said that even after Bhutan ejects the insurgents, "the ultimate solution lies with India".

The ambassador said no deadline has been set for the rebels to leave. There were reports that Thimphu had set a June 30 deadline, but the rebels had not responded in time.

"There was no deadline set by the government. We know the seriousness of the problem and we are trying our best to handle it in the most responsible manner," Tshering said. "The presence of the Northeast insurgents also poses a serious security threat to Bhutan," he added.

The rebels' presence in Bhutan has been the one sore point in an otherwise "excellent" relationship between the neighbours. India considers Bhutan one of its closest allies and the security of the countries are interlinked and interdependent.

The insurgent camps came to

Bhutan's notice in 1996. Considering its army was hardly equipped to force the rebels out, Thimphu tried to persuade the insurgents to leave without bloodshed.

But many in India see this as an attempt by Bhutan to drag its feet over a sensitive issue. It has often been asked why Thimphu cannot deal more firmly with the insurgents. But Bhutan contests this view. It lists a number of measures that it has taken in the recent past to resolve the problem peacefully.

The rebel camps are situated in southern Bhutan which bord-

ers Bengal and Assam, from where most of its essential supplies come. Thimphu is worried that any drastic step against the rebels could affect this supply line.

Bhutan has just set up a new 10-member council of ministers and portfolios will be allotted soon. Once a new home minister is appointed, one last round of negotiations will be held with the rebels.

"This will be the last time that we will try to convince them to leave the country peacefully. But if it fails, we will have no other option but to use force to drive them out," Tshering said.

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Blame it on Rio

But money is the route of all endeavour

Since "loyalty" is an alien practice among politicians in the North-east, the recent desertion by seven of the 21 Naga Congress legislators comes as little surprise. Assuming theirs would be a lonely furrow to plough within 10 hours of the formation of the Nagaland Congress, they joined the ruling Nagaland People's Front and boosted its tally to 28 in the 60-member House. They qualify their action with the general feeling that chief minister Neiphiu Rio is trying to reinforce the ongoing peace process and his hands must be strengthened. But the haste with which they decided to merge would suggest they were given a useful handle by the ruling party. Reports allege that each of the rebel Congress MLA was promised Rs 30 lakh and some of them with work orders worth a crore of rupees. Opportunists to the core, they realised soon enough that the ruling party is flush with Central funds from a "peace" bonus.

Rio's Democratic Alliance of Nagaland includes the BJP (7), Samata (1), Independents (4) and three from the JD(U). The three-member Naga Democratic Movement lends its support from outside, in recognition of which one of its members was made a minister only to be dropped a few days ago. Of the 43 legislators, 32 hold ministerial posts. The axe may now fall on some ministers to accommodate the seven Congress deserters. Where numerical strength is no guarantee, the government's stability will depend on how dexterously the chief minister balances his books.

Tripura militants in arms deal with Bangla ultras

Statesman News Service

AGARTALA, July 3. — Dhaka authorities, who have been always denying knowledge of North-East ultras' presence in the country, were put in a tight spot after Bangladesh police told newspapers that the outlawed All Tripura Tiger Force ultras were caught supplying arms to terrorists in Bagura district of Bangladesh.

Two Bengali dailies from Dhaka, *Janakantha* and *Jugantar*, reported quoting the Bangladesh police yesterday that about 90,000 rounds of bullets and 200 kg of powerful explosives were intercepted when they were being secretly supplied to Bagura from the ATF camp at Satchhari. Police told the newspapers that an extensive search was on by the police and Bangladesh Rifles at the villages of Kahalu and Dupchapia upazilas

in Bagura district to recover arms and explosives earlier supplied by the ATF insurgents. Five persons including prominent ATF activists, Mr Kishore Devbarma, Mr Jogesh Devbarma and his son Mr Chitta Devbarma were arrested along with three of their collaborators were arrested. They reportedly admitted having killed at least four Bangladeshi nationals fearing information leakage.

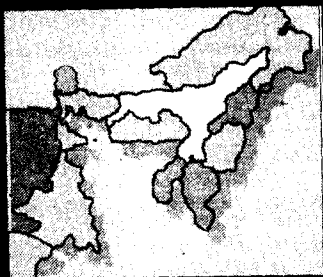
According to border intelligence sources here, some of the rebel units from India have stepped up operation in Bangladesh in collusion with the urban terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists. The Islamic militants and the ATF insurgents from Satchhari camp had crossed over to Tripura on 6 May and massacred 21 Indian villagers.

Bangladesh home minister Mr Altaf Hossain Chaudhuri earlier told the Bangladeshi

Parliament that the explosives recovered on 30 June and 1 July were powerful enough to blow off half the Dhaka city. Mr Chaudhuri however blamed the Opposition Awami League for hatching a "conspiracy" to destabilise the BNP led government.

The Bangladesh Workers Party for the first time, urged the Bangladesh government to take appropriate action against Indian insurgents and demolish their camps.

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

5/6 Nagaland: Setting the record straight

THERE seems to be some lack of clarity about my views on the Naga peace process and particularly in Nagaland and Manipur as well as among leaders of the Naga movement within and outside those areas. So let me, briefly and as succinctly as possible, reiterate them.

One: the Government of India is doing the correct thing by talking to the biggest, best-organised and best-led of the Naga political groups. They are not yet talking to the Naga National Council of Adinno Phizo or the NSCN (I-M) of SS Khaplang – that should be a clear message of their thinking although, one is sure, future talks with the others are not ruled out. A ceasefire with the Khaplang faction has been in place for a couple of years.

Two, the capacity of Th Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, general secretary and chairman respectively of the National Socialist Council for Nagalim (I-M), which has been engaged in these talks with the Centre for nearly seven years is unquestioned – that they have battled against huge odds, kept the flag flying and had the political sagacity to opt for a political settlement and make the Government of India understand their perspective is an enormous achievement and a tribute to the openness of both sides. The military strength of the NSCN, though not huge by any modern military assessment, was enough to hold Indian forces at bay.

Three, the Shillong Accord of 1975 and its fallout have led to the unfortunate divisions among the Nagas, as much as anything else.

Four, the current peace process is crucial to the future of the Nagas and of the North East, as well as the rest of India, and must be supported in every possible way; it is not an end in itself but a means to achieving greater peace across the region and development – it is not a question of power and privileges but of restoring dignity, honour and enabling equitable development that reaches the weakest and the poorest and the most marginalised in these areas. One wishes both the I-M leadership and the Government representatives well in this onerous and sensitive task.

Five, one supports the proposition of the Naga Hoho and the churches of Nagaland that all political groups will need to be reconciled if not united; this is as much an ideological and philosophical approach as much as one based on real politik and the ground realities in Nagaland.

Six, any future settlement of the Naga issue must spread goodwill all around, not ill-will especially with their neighbours, the Assamese, the Manipuris and the people of Arunachal Pradesh. I do not believe this can happen by trying to push through territorial unity over the opposition of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Manipur and Assam have a long record of written history and this cannot be brushed aside while considering Naga demands. History is shared – it belongs to us all. It is not one side's story.

Seven, one recognises that different groups do not believe in reconciliation for reconciliation's sake – I think that most Nagas would agree and that a peace process that worked, say in South Africa, may not work elsewhere. But that does not mean that the need for healing hurts and pains can be skirted – these are also part of the reality as are Naga political goals.

Eight, I am reminded of Mr Muivah's remarks to me in Amsterdam in February, when we had a long conversation at the railway station, where he cast himself in the role of a statesman and negotiator to calm the fears of neighbours. This was on the crucial and sensitive issue of unification of Naga areas in the North East, an issue that has emerged as a major sticking point at the negotiations. The talks though have not broken down and they have led to a better appreciation of each other's positions, despite the poor media understanding and coverage.

"If we don't understand each other, how will we solve the problem? Nagas cannot ignore the reality of Assam. If Nagas do that it is a mistake. We respect that reality. We have to accept that and I can prepare myself for talks. We will respect the Manipuris. Will the Manipuris respect the Nagas?" (Muivah offers olive branch to neighbours, *The Statesman*, 25 Feb 2003)

That is a fine response from a man whose politics is sophisticated: Mr Muivah should talk to civil society representatives from Assam and Manipur, whether in India or in Bangkok or in Amsterdam. He will find them quite open and responsive but they will also have strong views, which need discussion and understanding – debate is the essence of democracy and part of the open process that leads to peace.

Mr Muivah believes that the NNC of Adinno Phizo is of "no consequence." That is his viewpoint, especially as he is a believer of what he calls "practical politics ... to be realistic is better than to be good." (Reconciliation can't be forced, *The Statesman*, 24 Feb 2003)

This week we carry an interview with the Chief Minister of Nagaland and an analysis of the problems that the Reconciliation Committee and the internal process are facing, especially in the light of the I-M's public support to the latter in December 2001 and its changed stance, as one has seen from media reports. The I-M should recognise that, as a practical side of politics and life, not everyone is going to agree with their views. This is part of life. It does not mean that the others are opposed to the Naga cause! The two issues should be seen very clearly as separate situations and not mixed up.

Many people want the current peace process to lead to a long-term settlement. And Mr Muivah, as an elder statesman, will need all Nagas with him, whether through reconciliation, understanding or whatever. The chief minister's points need stressing here – without unity in the overground, how can the underground be brought together (even on a theoretical basis – because none of the three groups is really for unity)? The path forward remains long, narrow and bumpy. Those in the peace process, overground, underground or middle-ground, need to look at not just how to secure an honourable agreement but also how to improve the living conditions of all in the area.

21 JUN 2003

Ulfa changes command structure

NR A 17/6

Chandan Nandy
New Delhi, June 11

TWO WEEKS after the aborted bid on Ulfa chief Paresh Barua's life in Dhaka, the outfit is now reorganising itself to strengthen its presence in Bangladesh.

Paresh was attacked by gunmen suspected to be henchmen of Ulfa deputy chief Raju Barua. He is now recuperating in hospital under the watchful eyes of the Bangladesh Directorate of Fo-

rces' Intelligence (BDFI). Paresh, who was hit by two bullets in his left leg, spoke over phone last week to two doctors in Assam, one based in Guwahati and the other in Nalbari.

Last Friday, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa convened a meeting of the outfit's highest decision-making body, the central executive committee, in Dhaka. Both Paresh and Raju attended the meet.

Sources in the Indian se-

curity establishment said the central committee decided that Raju, who has posed a challenge of sorts to Paresh's supremacy, would now be stationed in Dhaka.

This apart, the Ulfa leadership felt it was time to "scale down" the outfit's presence in Bhutan where a joint operation by Bhutanese and Indian security forces to wipe out its five camps now appear imminent following Army chief N.C. Vij's visit to Thimpu last

month. The Army chief subsequently briefed Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani of a possible strike against the Ulfa in Bhutan.

Apprehending "action" by June-end, the Ulfa decided to create three new zones of operation within India: activities in the Garo Hills in Meghalaya would now be supervised by Drishiti Rajkhowa. The other two zones are Tirap and Changlang in Arunachal where, sleuths suspect, the Ulfa might take the

assistance of the NSCN(K).

The Ulfa has also effected some administrative and financial restructuring. The committee has scaled down the allocation for its general headquarters in Bhutan from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 4 lakh.

The budgetary outlay for the Ulfa's command headquarters has been fixed at Rs 3.5 lakh. The outlay for the outfit's Enigma Unit that carries out sabotage and assassinations has been fixed at Rs 5 lakh.

1 2 JUN 2003

NORTH-EAST IMBROGLIO

Centre Must Tackle Twin Problems Of Terrorism And Separatism

During the British rule the north-east part of India comprised one full-fledged province (Assam), two native states, (Manipur and Tripura) and the centrally-ruled North-East Frontier Agency. After Independence, the North-East turned out to have seven full-fledged states — Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh poetically called "seven sisters" to which Sikkim has been recently added. They had all their paraphernalia — a Governor, a civil secretariat, a public service commission each though not yet provided with separate High Courts. The Guwahati High Court is serving them so far but each of the states has its own university.

Sincere efforts

The reason behind the region being split into so many district-size states was apparently to satisfy the political aspirations of the various ethnic groups though the region was earlier traditionally quiet, the people peace-loving and inter-dependent for their basic needs.

However, the first to agitate for independence and secession were the Nagas under the leadership of AZ Phizo who argued that Nagaland was never part of India and that the Britishers forcibly grabbed the Nagas. Since the Britishers had left it would be fit and proper, Phizo argued, for independent India to restore Nagaland to the Nagas and give full independence.

The Naga leader even met Gandhiji at Birla House in New Delhi and pleaded that Nagaland should be freed. In his characteristic manner Gandhiji told Phizo that Nagaland belonged to him as much as to Phizo but if Phizo said "no", nobody could keep them forcibly. The Naga leader used to interpret Gandhiji's words as support for Naga independence.

Be that as it may, Phizo had never

The author is the former editor of The Assam Tribune.

relented in his bid for Nagaland's independence. In fact, he carried on a virulently violent agitation with the support of the British people and the press besides the British tea planters and missionaries working in Assam. However, the government of free India has made sincere efforts to

the present Prime Minister had talks with self-exiled Naga leaders on foreign soil that apparently later enabled the two leaders of the I-M faction to visit India to hold talks with Atal Behari Vajpayee last year in the capital. But neither of the two sides has divulged even an inkling



settle the Naga problem through a number of accords. The first one in this regard was the accord signed by Sir Akbar Myderi, Governor of Assam, in 1947 followed by the Shillong accord of 10 November 1975 to which the Naga leaders including a few from the underground Nagas were signatories.

Honourable settlement

Despite such commitment by Naga leaders the problem remains unsolved for 54 years. Meanwhile the National Socialist Council of Nagaland had split into two factions after the death of the prime rebel leader Phizo in London where he was in self-exile. But for reasons of ethnicity the NSCN has split into two factions. Yet the government of India has not given up hope. Indeed, Morarji Desai while he was the Prime Minister had granted an interview to Phizo in London, against the advice of the Indian High Commissioner BK Nehru. Similarly,

about the subject of the discussion.

However, a very significant feature of the Naga imbroglio is that in Nagaland the general mood of the people are for what they call for an honourable settlement. Perhaps Indira Gandhi's offer in 1987 that the solution of the Naga issue need not be found within the framework of the Indian Constitution but could be solved "within the framework of the Indian Union" still holds good. It is to be seen whether the next round of talk between Prime Minister Vajpayee and the I-M leadership yields any positive result.

The Mizos of the southern hill district of Assam were the other hill tribe to start a violent stir but its leader Laldanga having spent 20 years of jungle life in Assam and outside India with the assistance of foreign powers eventually realised that his objective of an independent Mizoram was "impracticable", finally entered into an agreement with the government of India and became

chief minister of Mizoram. In this connection mention may be made of Mr Lalthanhowla who was second in command to Laldanga during the Mizo rebellion. He is playing a mediatory role in the ongoing peace talks between the government of India and the Naga leadership (IM). However, judging by past experience in respect of peace accords with the rebel Nagas the end of the 54-year Naga problem will not come to an end unless the NSCN (Khaplang) faction and Congress leader and former chief minister SC Jamir are associated with the peace process.

Neglect continues

However, the Naga problem is not the only secessionist movement in Assam. The Bodos, the largest plains tribe in the region, have also been leading a violent movement for a separate state. They have recently a tripartite agreement with the Centre and the government of Assam for a Bodo Autonomous Council though it has not been formed so far as an Act has yet to be passed in Parliament. But certain political quarters suspect that the council will be a stepping stone for a separate state.

The United Liberation Front of Assam is the latest secessionist group which is causing serious damage to what has remained of Assam after major splits by the creation of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Initially, the ULFA used to get support from the Assamese people but it has lost that support with the top leaders living a luxurious life in Bhutan and Bangladesh. But the fact remains that terrorism and separatism continue to be two serious problems in the eastern region. The reason appears to be neglect by the Centre since the British days. True, Prime Minister Vajpayee has put one of his senior ministers in charge of the North-East affairs but the latter is so engrossed in party affairs that he is apparently not in a position to devote his attention to the complex problems.

9 JUN 2013

'Bonus' for Nagaland

By Our Special Correspondent

9-7-03
11-9-03

NEW DELHI, JUNE 8. As part of the Centre's effort to give yet another push to the ongoing peace process in Nagaland, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today extended a "peace bonus" to the north-eastern State by converting the Rs. 365-crore loan into a "one-time grant".

Taking note of the peaceful elections in Jammu and Kashmir, the Prime Minister said the Naga peace process had also attained a momentum.

"This needs to be sustained. The key to an enduring peace is all-round and sustainable development," he said in a statement here.

Significantly, Mr. Vajpayee put the two insurgency-affected States almost on the same scale so far as increased economic activity is concerned. Several organisations of Jammu and Kashmir have often compared the peace process in Nagaland to that of Kashmir where the Centre's emissaries have tried to spur economic activity.

They have pointed out that New Delhi has been talking to the Naga insurgent leaders even outside India, a demand raised by some of the Kashmiri militant outfits.

Mr. Vajpayee hinted at boosting the peace initiative in Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland and Mizoram in the far north-east.

"I am glad that Jammu and Kashmir has presented a zero-deficit budget. This is significant coming as it does after deficit budgets born of strife and insurgency. This has been made possible by a Central assistance of Rs. 2,950 crores that I have sanctioned for the State. This is also an increase in Central assistance to Jammu and Kashmir in 2003-2004 of Rs. 750 crores," he said.

Similarly, it had been decided to extend a "peace bonus" to Nagaland.

"An amount of Rs. 365 crores extended to Nagaland as a ways and means loan will now be converted into a one-time grant. This will enable the State to meet all its past liabilities and will also result in an annual interest savings of Rs. 44 crores. Nagaland should now be able to devote its efforts to schemes and policies aimed at poverty alleviation and balanced economic development," he said.

'Please tell Mr Advani this is our Ayodhya'

Sanjoy Hazarika in London

President of the Naga National Council Ms Adinno Phizo says that Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani will never accept further division of the North-East to placate the Nagas. Ms Phizo has a poignant turn of phrase for him: "Please tell Mr Advani that this is our Ayodhya, we cannot let go."

Ms Phizo, daughter of legendary Naga leader AZ Phizo, also sought to dispel the impression that theirs was a religious struggle — an image that saffron outfits have tried to stamp on the Naga movement. "The Nagas are not fighting a jihad or a religious war against Hindus or Muslims. That is completely wrong ... it is only for nationality."

Ms Phizo, and her 62-year-old brother Mr Kevi Levor, maintain

that Nagaland is a land under occupation and point out that the Nagas did not break off the talks in 1972 when New Delhi unilaterally abrogated that ceasefire. "The Nagas did not end that dialogue, the Nagas are not in any other country but their own — the Indian Army is in Nagaland, not the other way around," Mr Levor asserts.

The Phizos say that Naga politicians and other leaders, including former chief ministers and church figures, regularly visit them and they speak with sadness of the way the Assam movement spiralled into violence and of the Ujfa's growth.

But the Phizo siblings do give a strong impression of living in the past and of not recognising the cont-

emporary realities of Naga politics. And they find the possibility of Nagas opting for a situation less than independence quite inconceivable and unacceptable. They are also disinterested in the current negotia-

tions because they believe that Mr Muivah and Mr Swu will not be able to bring sovereignty to Nagas.

Mr Muivah and Mr Swu split with Mr Phizo in 1980 and formed the NSCN with SS Khaplang, a Naga leader from Myanmar. The organisation split in 1988 after an attack authorised by Mr Khaplang on Mr Muivah's camp. The Muivah faction regrouped and later emerged as the most powerful Naga military force.

Although the rhetoric of Ms Phizo

and Mr Muivah at times sound similar, they are poles apart politically as well as in terms of Naga realpolitik. Also, New Delhi has given little or no importance to NNC as it deals with the best-equipped militant group. That is understandable because the "Federal Government of Nagaland" of the NNC has little clout in physical terms.

But it would be short-sighted not to acknowledge the special place that the NNC holds, as the mother of the Naga Movement, in the hearts of many Nagas. For that "special place" is built around a legend — the legend of Phizo. And neither Mr Muivah nor the government of India can afford to ignore history. In Nagaland, as many Indian administrators have found out too late, feelings matter as much as facts.

■ **TOMORROW: Secrets of the Shillong Accord**



PHIZO'S DAUGHTER & THE NAGA PEACE PROCESS - II

'Greater Nagaland' pitch queered

Sanjoy Hazarika in London

In one of the most significant assertions by any Naga leader over the past few decades — especially in the light of the NSCN(IM)'s declared aim of uniting all Naga-inhabited territories including parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh under one roof (the so-called 'Greater Nagaland' demand) — Ms Adimo Priza has declared that all Nagas wanted was to live in the current state of Nagaland.

Ms Phizo is the president of the Naga National Council, the original Naga panel to challenge India's control of Naga areas, and the daughter of legendary Naga leader Aungmyi Zapu Phizo.

"There are historic boundaries between Nagaland and neighbouring Indian states," she remarked. "If there are Nagas in Manipur who want to be part of Nagaland, we will first have to discuss it with the Meitais and Manipuris. That applies to Assam as well." Ms Phizo's remarks are significant in

the light of the latest round of talks between the NSCN(IM) and Indian government representatives where Mr Muivah re-asserted the group's old demand for unification of Naga-inhabited areas. Mr Muivah is a Tangkhul Naga from Ukhrul district of the Manipur hills, and this fact is seen as a major driv-



ing force in the demand for unification. The Phizos are Angamis — one of the largest and most influential tribes of Nagaland — which spearheaded the resistance to the British and then to India. The Tangkhuls of Manipur came into the pro-independence movement in the 1960s and I-M cadres, who are predominantly Tangkhul, often say that earlier questions are no longer of relevance to the Naga situation.

But sitting in a tiny apartment in London's upmarket Kensington — where Ms Phizo lives with her brother Kevi Levor, a management consultant — the daughter of one of South Asia's legendary revolutionary figures is also keeping alive the dream of an independent Nagaland free of Indian rule.

The Phizos continue to speak their father's language and are clearly committed to his vision. They are critical of the peace talks between New Delhi and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by Th. Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu and said that India was following a policy of dividing the Nagas. Delhi, they said, was also protecting the activities of the NSCN, which was targeting its opponents in the NNC and another rival faction.

"The reason India is trying to initiate the NNC by bringing in the NSCN is that they know that through talks with Muivah they will be able to internalise the situation," Ms Phizo said.

■ **TOMORROW: 'Please tell Mr Advani this is our Aoyahya'**

3 JUN 2003

SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2003

SPLIT OVER UNIFICATION

THE UNIFICATION OF Naga territories is the core issue that remains to be addressed in the ongoing peace process after the conclusion of talks in Bangkok between the Government of India interlocutor and the Naga separatist outfit, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). As the issue concerns other States, including Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the Centre is understandably slow in dealing with the demand for a "Greater Nagaland" comprising all Naga-inhabited areas. After the violent protests in Manipur against the extension of the ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) to the Naga-inhabited areas in the neighbouring States, the Centre seems to have realised the full implications of any commitment to the Naga separatists on this issue. Apparently, the effort at the Government level is to keep the peace process on and, at the same time, side-step the controversial points. As an interim arrangement that would not jeopardise the peace process, the Government is reportedly considering expanding the ambit of Article 371(A) that confers a special status on Nagaland in relation to religious practices, social customs and legal procedures of the Nagas. For the moment, this might appear the best course, but sooner or later, the peace process is bound to hit roadblocks.

Already, the general secretary of the NSCN (I-M), Thuingaleng Muivah, has described as "non-negotiable" the issue of unification of all "Naga territories". He even threatened to raise the demand for a referendum in the Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland to resolve the dispute over integration into a "Greater Nagaland" in the event of the Union Government being unable to forge a consensus on the issue. Quite expectedly, the Governments of Manipur and Assam, fearing loss of territory, have voiced their opposition to the idea of referendum. They have nothing to gain and

something to lose from such a referendum. The Centre would, therefore, have to bring about some agreement among the North-East States before placing concrete proposals on the table for the NSCN (I-M). Caught in this North-East maze is the question of Naga identity. In the land of numerous tribes, notions of the ethnic identity of the Nagas are often loose, and the identity of some of the tribes claimed as Nagas by the NSCN (I-M) — for instance, the "Old Kukis" in Manipur — is subject to dispute. Ethnic identity is often mixed up with political affinities.

Whatever the difficulties, the task of finding a solution would not be made easier by circumventing the core issue. Further progress is unlikely to be achieved in the peace process without touching on the unification of all Naga territories, howsoever defined. As of now, the NSCN (I-M) appears fully committed to the peace process. However, the Government of India would have to seriously consider holding talks at the political level. The interlocutor, the former Union Home Secretary, K. Padmanabhaiah, did what was expected of him: the spade work. The Centre must now widen the scope of negotiations and bring in all the stakeholders, especially the State Governments that stand to lose territory in the event of the NSCN (I-M) gaining concessions. Indeed, the Naga leaders called for a political negotiator to continue the talks after Mr. Padmanabhaiah suggested that the separatists disarm themselves. Clearly, after having done more than his bit, there is little else the interlocutor can do. If the peace process is not to reach a dead-end, the Centre must build on the talks held so far and continue negotiations at the political level. There are differences and difficulties over the unification demand, but that is precisely the reason why the next round of negotiations must focus on this core issue. //

31 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Just do it

Resurrect Naga talks from limbo

NSCN general-secretary Th Muivah is no longer in two minds about Delhi's sincerity in finding a solution to the Naga problem. That he now says Indian leaders are "keeping themselves on the right track" is seen as a significant development but his contention matters little with the people whose patience seems to be wearing thin in the absence of any concrete agenda for the next round of talks in Delhi. Interlocutor K Padmanabiah's meeting last week in Bangkok took a jolt with Naga leaders reportedly refusing to hold talks with a bureaucrat and demanding the appointment of a political negotiator. Save for a brief period, Padmanabiah has all along been a part of the peace process and had built up a good rapport with those involved. What apparently irked the Naga leaders was his reported statement that the militant outfit should be disarmed, prompting Muivah to reassert that "the Nagas will never lay down arms, freedom or territories". Indeed, since the Mizo rebels were not told to surrender their weapons, there is little sense in imposing the precondition on the NSCN-IM. Even if the outfit surrenders its weapons, there is no dearth of replacements in the arms bazaar.

If the NSCN-IM sticks to its stand that the agenda for talks must include the unification of all Naga territories, there is little the Centre can do to remedy that situation. More than reconciliation and the restoration of peace, the Nagas are now driving for a single administrative unit. The Prime Minister promised to amend the Constitution to meet Naga aspirations, so why change the script? Suspicious minds and mindless conformity are no heralds of progress. After all, dialogue is unconditional and whether or not the Centre agrees to concede their demand is quite another matter.

27 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

Divided over unification: Muivah

J BALASUBRAMANIAN
BANGKOK, MAY 25

UNIFICATION of the Naga territories is standing in the way of a final solution to the peace process, NSCN (I-M) chief Thungaleng Muivah said here emphasising "the Nagas will never lay down arms, freedom or territories."

"At the moment the crux of the issue is unification. If the Government can understand our issue, we don't need to hurt them. If they refuse to understand us, the question of referendum will come," Muivah, told PTI in an interview here. "Eighty per cent of the Nagas support the peace process today," he claimed.

Muivah and K. Padmanabhaiah, special envoy of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, ended two days of talks on the ongoing peace process. "Keeping the Naga-territories divided and talking of a solution is an insult to us," he said. "We told the Indian Government whatever might be the efforts to bring about a solution to the Indo-Naga issue, if the unification of Nagas is not done, there will be no solution whatsoever."

"As far as the final solution



'Nagas have always lived on their own land...they (Manipur) want to claim it as their own territory'

is concerned, it will certainly take time but with the Indian side now on the right track, it is both positive and praise-worthy. There is better understanding between us," Muivah said.

Praising the Vajpayee Government, he said: "The leadership in India is more committed to finding a solution to the problem and it shows they are keeping themselves on the right track...If this attitude continues, it will surely lead to solutions. We praise them."

Muivah asserted that the Shillong Accord could not be made a matter for negotiations



any more. He said the Nagas were the "happiest" when Mahatma Gandhi assured them of an independent country. "Gandhi was farsighted." At that time the Nagas, did not take up arms till "Nehru sent 200,000 troops to take over Nagaland," Muivah added.

The next meeting between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M) is likely to be held next month. The two-day meeting was the second round of talks between the two sides after Muivah and his colleagues visited New Delhi at the invitation of Vajpayee in January.

The other members of the delegation at the talks here were Gen Atem, convenor of the steering committee, Lungalung, 'Home Minister' and Zami, secretary of the steering committee. Muivah blamed the Government for creating a division by "putting Nagas in various states." "India thought they could just ignore the Nagas and crush them, but it is not so," he said, adding "even if we go on talking, we will still refer to the main issue of unification."

The NSCN (I-M) leader said the Centre was serious about the issue. "They know

that the Nagas are justified on their part, only the way to work it out may be a problem. "We are not going to take any part from Manipur, the Meiteis, because since times immemorial, we have been living in our own territory and not in anyone else's territory," Muivah said adding "but now they want to claim it as their territory," apparently referring to Manipur.

"I told the Centre that the Nagas did not come into this world to live under the Meiteis or anyone. If this is not solved, the Centre's claim of sincerity to solve the issue is a sham."—PTI

NSCN trains referendum gun on Centre

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, May 25: The NSCN (I-M) today threatened to go in for a referendum on its demand for the integration of Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast if the Centre continued to be indecisive on the issue.

The organisation announced its stand after the talks between its leadership and the Centre's chief interlocutor, K. Padmanabhaiah, again ended in a deadlock. The meeting was held in Bangkok.

NSCN (I-M) chairman Isak Chisi Swu and general secretary Th. Muivah were unavailable for comment, but a source in the Thai capital confirmed that the duo held firm on the issue of integrating Naga-dominated areas. He said the NSCN (I-M) top guns made it clear that this demand was "not negotiable".

The outfit's "collective leadership" had initially refused to talk to Padmanabhaiah, but relented after the former Union home secretary lobbied hard for a meeting with the duo. When the dialogue finally began on Friday, the two sides failed to ar-

rive at a consensus on the main issue.

"Delhi should understand that the masses are with us on the issue of integrating Naga territories. If it continues to ignore our genuine grievances and demands, we will be forced to go in for a referendum," the source quoted Muivah as saying.

Official sources in New Delhi said Padmanabhaiah, who has been retained as chief interlocutor in spite of repeated objections by the NSCN (I-M), informed Swu and Muivah that the Centre was willing to have an "open agenda" for the next round of talks, provided they agreed to come to India.

NSCN (I-M) deputy *kilo kilonser* (home minister) V. Horam had said on Friday that his outfit had no objection to holding talks anywhere, provided all substantive issues were included in the agenda. It is not known whether Swu and Muivah, who had met Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other political leaders in New Delhi in January, expressed similar views during the discussions with Padmanabhaiah.



Muivah: Adamant

26 MAY 2003

FBI TELEGRAPH

SAVING FACE & LITTLE ELSE

2-16-82

North-East Needs Security Manned By Home Stock

526 157.5 By JB LAMA

The Centre is neither able to formulate a concrete policy for the North-east nor come up with a cohesive plan to combat insurgency. Everything so far has been on an experimental basis as is evident from Delhi's dialogue with one faction of the NSCN and the Bodo Liberation Tigers. How can a government, lacking parliamentary strength to push through important changes, imagine that once it is able to clinch these two issues others will fall in line? Moreover, every security organisation set up over the past dozen years has either failed to function effectively or stay the course.

Wishful thinking

The latest in the series is last month's creation of a multi-agency centre and a joint task force to improve the Intelligence apparatus to counter insurgency. According to KP Singh, director general of the Intelligence Bureau, his organisation, the Research and Analysis Wing, central ministry agencies and state police personnel will coordinate. On the face of it, a laudable approach because the Intelligence network has so far been the weakest in the fight against insurgency and the need to strengthen and revamp it was never in question. What is of great significance is Singh's pertinent emphasis that there will be no clash of egos, no questioning the credibility of claims by the various agencies and forces, that each will be an equal component of national security.

In a multi-services match-up that exemplifies the North-east, ego clashes are unavoidable. For example, in 1993 the Army submitted a report to the committee of secretaries of Home and Defence offering to train paramilitary officers and personnel to improve their "operational capabilities".

There were no takers. While the CRPF argued that it was raised to oversee law and order of the "wicker basket, shield and lathi variety", the BSF maintained it had the expertise to train its own and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police showed little interest, stressing its "civil ethos and restrained training".

If accepted, the Army could have freed itself from being called out for internal security duty, a contingency that appropriately belongs to paramilitary forces and the police. But that is not all. In

1992 the Manipur government set an unhealthy trend by seeking the Army's assistance for what it considered a simple job — that of clearing the NSCN-IM blockade on the Pallel-Moreh segment of National Highway 39, a vital link for Indo-Myanmarese trade. In that year, the sickness was exposed when feuds between

But Assam and Manipur suspected this was a deliberate attempt to dilute their authority and agreed only after its nomenclature was changed to "coordination centre".

Nothing eventually came about because of inter-services rivalry over who should head it. The name of supercop KPS Gill was



Nagas and Kukis rocked the state. Administrators set up a coordination committee of security forces and police under the chairmanship of the chief secretary. But its ineffectiveness was evident soon enough when a security force unit stationed a few kilometres from the Naga village of Lamdan in Churachandpur district refused to act despite being warned of an impending attack.

Plain as mud

The North-East Security Coordination Council formed in 1992 was devoid of any operational and tactical values. It was to foster rapport and coordination among police forces and share information on the movement of militants, but the Mizoram police queered the pitch by raiding Hmar rebel areas in the North Cachar Hills without so much as consulting others, provoking a strong protest from Dispur. Ego? Definitely.

In 1994 the Union Home Ministry proposed a 12-member Central Command with its base at Shillong with the same objective of coordination among security agencies and state police forces.

aired. Ego again? Too true. Yet another set up was proposed in 1997-98 for a specially trained force to combat insurgency. Not surprisingly, it remained on paper.

Firing on the Nagaland speaker's car by Manipur police some years ago could have been avoided had Kohima informed Imphal about his itinerary. On the way to Imphal airport to catch a flight, the Speaker picked up a friend, a former Army officer and brother of an earlier Manipur chief minister, Yangmashou Shaiza, and drove through the town. When security men signalled the vehicle to stop, it sped off, forcing them to open fire resulting in the friend's death. Obviously ego tolled the bell. The Nagaland speaker could scarce have stomach the idea of his vehicle being checked by Imphal police, of all people.

Which brings to mind a rather comical incident at Imphal airport in 2001. When a tribal tried to force his entry into the lounge, the security personnel stopped him. He argued in chaste Hindi that he was an Army officer but refused to identify himself. After a brief

but heated argument, he left only to reappear within minutes in full uniform and took up from where he had left off. Such unpleasanties could have been averted but for the fact that a bruised ego demanded such an act of saving face.

Ego initially prompted former Assam chief minister Prafulla Mahanta to oppose the formation of a Unified Command comprising the Army, paramilitary forces and the police. He wanted the chief secretary to be in overall charge, with him in the background.

Why experiment?

Nor did the induction of elite Punjab police commandos in the Bodo region help matters. They clashed more with civilians than rebels. Again, the presence of the newly formed Rashtriya Rifles in Manipur in the mid-1990s did little to improve the situation. Every state cries for more central forces, an admission that their own are not equal to the task. A recent report says that by 2004, the CRPF, not trained for counter-insurgency, will oversee the security of the entire North-east.

This reinforces the conviction that instead of experimenting with the impracticable, what the region needs is a composite regional force staffed by people drawn from all the seven states and capable of understanding local sentiment, as suggested by the National Police Commission in 1983. This is as much a necessity to ensure overlapping of duty.

The 176-year-old Assam Rifles fits the bill but it no longer lives up to its "friends of the hill people" image, having lost their trust and goodwill when it underwent drastic structural changes in the 1960s and found itself under the operational command of the Army.

A North-east study team set up on the advice of the Home ministry has rightly suggested gradual withdrawal of the Army and revival of *thanas*' primacy and toning up of the police administration. Today, apart from law and order, the police have to guard VIPs, deal with drug trafficking, urban insurgency and ethnic clashes.

It is time the Home ministry kept its promise of modernising the police force by providing it with arms and ammunition and communication and other essential equipment.

Last but not least, a diagnosis of the North-east malady is as much a necessity for remedy.

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

Atal resents sanctions double face

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 11: Less than 24 hours after American emissary Richard Armitage left Delhi, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has hit out against what he called a discriminatory sanctions regime that was denying India access to technology while rewarding errant nations in the neighbourhood.

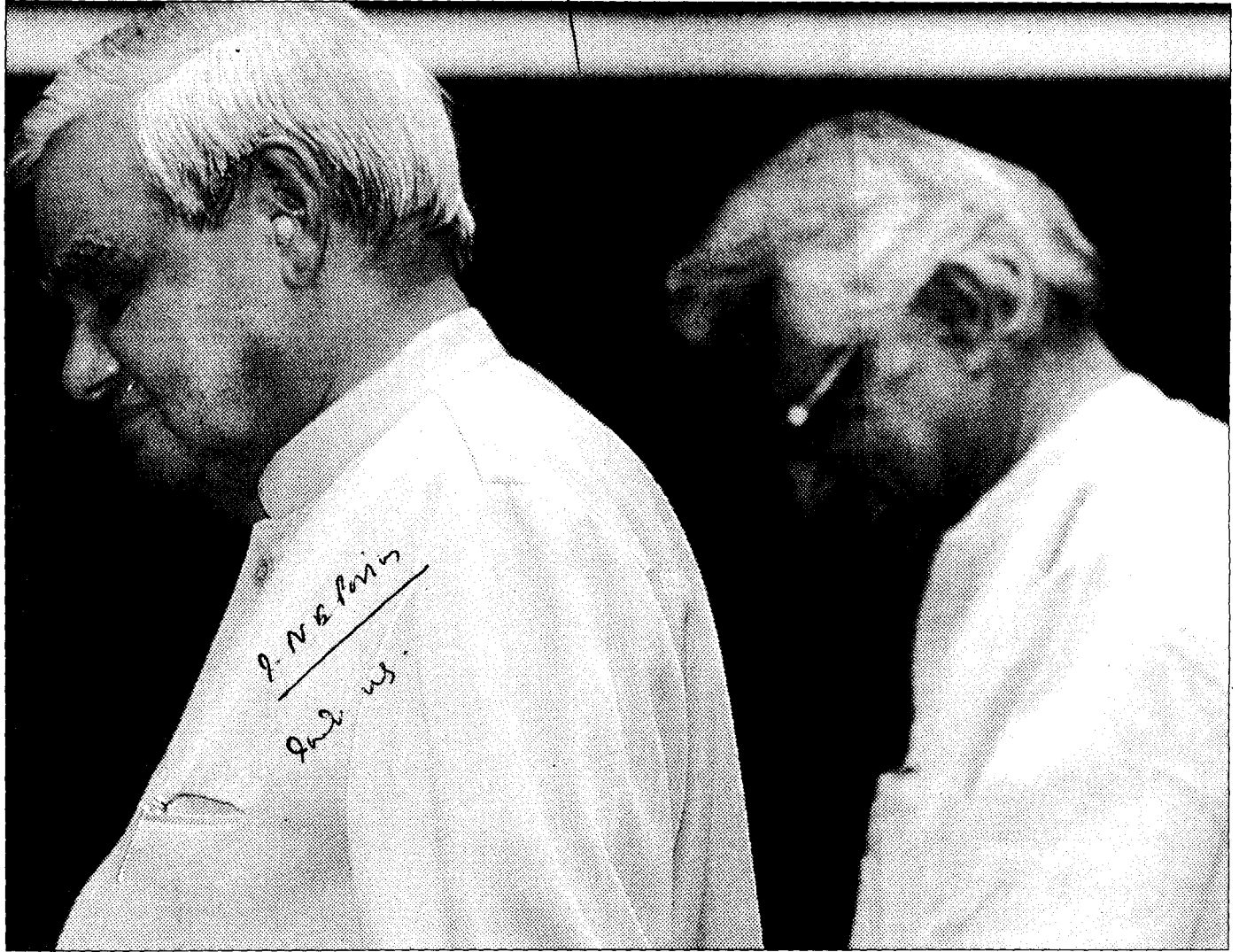
Without naming the US, Vajpayee expressed New Delhi's resentment of waivers and assistance for Pakistan. The Prime Minister's comments came close on the heels of an American indication that it may consider Pakistan's request to write off a \$1.8-billion debt in addition to the recent cancellation of a \$1-billion debt.

"In our near and extended neighbourhood, we can see many examples of double standards in this (sanctions regime). Countries guilty of missile and nuclear proliferation have not attracted sanctions. Some even continue to receive liberal economic assistance," Vajpayee told scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Vajpayee's comments are a clear indication that the peace initiative notwithstanding, India will continue to exert pressure on Pakistan, particularly through the US.

The Prime Minister was speaking on the occasion of National Technology Day, which commemorates the nuclear tests of May 11 and May 13, 1998. The nuclear tests provoked Washington to impose more sanctions against India, delaying and even throwing into disarray research on military projects.

Vajpayee said the discriminatory sanctions continue to remain in place despite India stating clearly that its policies were measured and did not have aggressive intent. "... India has strictly exercised a self-imposed restraint on transfer of nuclear, missile and dual-use technologies and materials. We have de-



AB Vajpayee and George Fernandes at the DRDO function in New Delhi. (AFP)

nied ourselves many lucrative contracts and joint ventures. We have never received any recognition for this," the Prime Minister said.

Vajpayee pointed out that sanctions were imposed against certain items of trade on India long before the 1998 nuclear tests. They were first imposed after the nuclear test of 1974 even though India was not a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Later, more sanctions were added under "the equally discriminatory missile technolo-

gy control regime". Some of the sanctions of the seventies and the eighties continue to remain in force even now.

Vajpayee said it was in this context that defence research had to continue and be supported aggressively. He said he was in favour of a proposal from the scientific adviser to the defence minister, V.K. Atri, to give incentives to retain DRDO recruits from the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institute of Science.

Vajpayee urged the DRDO to

intensify research and produce items that were necessary to combat terrorism. "Military technologies have to be closely intermeshed with military strategies. There has to be intensive coordination between the technology developers and the user agencies of the armed forces," he said.

Defence minister George Fernandes said there was an effort to underplay the achievements of the DRDO. Referring to the christening of the Light Combat Aircraft last week

— an event signifying that the indigenous fighter aircraft project was nearing fruition — Fernandes said the *Tejas* was indeed using some equipment imported from abroad but it was a product of indigenous scientific effort.

Fernandes also said the criticism against the DRDO that many of its projects were far behind schedule was not fair. Whenever the DRDO has not been hit by sanctions and has been given the wherewithal, its establishments have been successful.

Assam Rifles replaces BSF on Indo-Myanmar border in Manipur

Shuffle of troops in Northeast

OUR BUREAU

May 11: The biggest repositioning exercise of armed forces in the Northeast since 1999 has begun in Manipur with Assam Rifles units gradually replacing the Border Security Force (BSF) along the Indo-Myanmar border.

The BSF battalions withdrawn from Manipur are being sent to Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya for deployment along the Indo-Bangladesh border. Another change in the offing is the CRPF's inclusion in the counter-insurgency set-up of Manipur.

The exercise is being carried out on the recommendation of a

ministerial committee, which suggested a "one-border-one-force theory" for more effective protection of the international borders in four states of the Northeast. A source said the change would break the monotony of the forces, "who have been deployed in one place for far too long". The process of repositioning will take at least a year to complete, he said.

All BSF personnel are expected to move out of Manipur in a month's time. Their new positions will be under the direct command of the deputy inspector-general of the BSF headquarters in Tura, Meghalaya.

"Of the five BSF battalions stationed in Manipur, one has already moved out, while the others are ready to leave," deputy inspector-general (Nagaland and Manipur range) P.K. Misra told newsmen at Chizami in Nagaland's Phek district.

"However, the two BSF battalions in Nagaland will stay there for the time being," he said.

The spurt in militant activities in Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam, where rebels carry hit-and-run operations after sneaking in from their bases in Bhutan and Bangladesh, is likely to hasten the repositioning exercise.

The CRPF will be trained and

fully equipped by 2005 to face militants in the Northeast and Kashmir.

Assam Rifles has been preparing for its new assignment on the Indo-Myanmar border for four years now. The paramilitary force has raised nearly 40 battalions, eight of them in the past four years. It guards the Indo-China border on the Assam-Arunachal sector at present and has a considerable presence in Agartala and Sikkim.

The Centre adopted the one-border-one-force policy after a team of Union ministers compiled an extensive report, based on their visits to the country's

trouble spots in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict. Under the new security arrangement, the BSF will man the international borders with Bangladesh and Pakistan, except the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir.

Several army battalions had been withdrawn from Manipur at the height of the Kargil conflict. Some of these units were to be redeployed in the state after the elections in Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat. Chief

minister Iqbal Singh claims that the law and order situation in his state took a turn for the worse after all army units were relocated to the western frontier.

1 2 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

NLFT forces tribals into bonded labour

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, May 11: It takes them two days to reach their destination, but the long trek is the easiest part of their ordeal. The real test for these people, bonded labourers at the mercy of the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), is to survive the grind that awaits them in the *jhum* (shifting cultivation) fields scattered across the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

After killing and abducting people at will, the NLFT has now made bonded labourers out of as many as 4,500 tribal residents of villages along the Indo-Bangladesh border. These impoverished people are supposedly paying the price for voting the Left Front to power for the second successive time.

Tribal welfare minister Jiten Chowdhury said after a visit to the hilly interiors of Kanchanpur and Longtarai Valley subdivisions that tribal residents of these areas were being taken in batches to the no-man's land across the border to work in the NLFT's *jhum* fields.

"Since the poll results were declared, at least 4,500 tribals have been displaced from villages in Kanchanpur, Longtarai Valley and Khowai subdivisions. I have confirmation that 483, 253 and 250 families have been displaced from these three areas by the NLFT. Another 448 families have been driven away from other hilly regions."

The minister said tribal vil-

lagers owing allegiance to the CPM were being persecuted even in areas where the NLFT's alleged political wing — the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) — won the elections. He said most complaints had come from Ampri constituency of South Tripura and Chhawmanu constituency of Dhalai district.

Reports of tribals crossing over to the Baroncherra area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to work as bonded labourers started filtering in last month. An official source in Ambassa, the headquarters of Dhalai district, said government employees based in Chhawmanu block came to know of this during visits to remote villages for health camps.

He said the NLFT had not spared even those suffering from enteric diseases. "During visits to villages like Gobindabari, Rajdhar and Malidhar, where there has been an outbreak of gastroenteritis and other waterborne diseases, we were told that nobody was excused from a stint as a bonded labourer in the NLFT's *jhum* fields. There are reports of diseased villagers dying without treatment after being taken to the Baroncherra area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts."

The NLFT began shifting cultivation only recently. The first to be chosen as bonded labourers were tribal villagers of Gobindabari, Rajdhar, Malidhar. The militants gradually spread their net to villages under Chhawmanu block.

12 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Back to basics

Centre must face Naga consequences

The Naga peace parley is running out of track. The January meeting between the NSCN's Isak Swu and Th Muivah and Central leaders ended without any agreement for future talks and a joint statement saw no change in the "scope of negotiation". Then at last month's Amsterdam meeting, some jarring notes were heard after Indian emissary K Padmanabhiiah conveyed the message that the demand for a single administrative unit for Nagas be excluded and other issues be taken up first. The angry reaction that they would not resume talks unless the topic was included was only to be expected. If the peace dialogue is supposed to be unconditional why can the subject not be discussed?

Especially after the Vajpayee government reportedly admitted the uniqueness of the Naga problem. It is no longer an awkward question and keeping it under wraps must heighten tensions in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur which find their territorial integrity threatened. The topic will have to be tackled sooner or later, so why not seize this opportunity to give a categorical answer and set at rest fears of these states even if it means jeopardising the talks. The air is dense and needs to be cleared. In any case, general Naga public opinion is opposed to a piecemeal accord with a faction that enjoys no popular mandate, although the NSCN-IM claims it is the "voice of the people".

The Vajpayee government must blame itself for the predicament. This is the price for overindulging the NSCN-IM — the BJP was able to send seven members to the Nagaland assembly in the February elections, no mean achievement on debut and that, too, in a Christian-dominated state. If anything goes wrong the NSCN-IM, which has repeatedly accused the Centre of being insincere, will blame the BJP. "Unwise endeavour," it has told the BJP, "will only squander away the goodwill of the Naga people and accelerate the demise of the peace process." The dialogue lacks direction and the ceasefire is under strain.

Last month two Army Intelligence personnel were killed and in a raid the Army reportedly seized a huge quantity of arms and ammunition and ganja. Though the NSCN-IM denies ownership of this haul, one cannot wish away the fact that the contraband was found in their town headquarters. Nagaland seems to be headed for bad days again.

MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

Familiar sight of smoking houses, stream of VIPs in aftermath of mass-killing rerun,

Sleepy village turns hub of horror

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Simna Colony (West Tripura), May 7: Smoke billowing out of gutted huts and a ceaseless stream of VIP visitors were the most visible signs of the tragedy that befell this sleepy village early today.

A dusty 45-km ride to the north from the state capital of Agartala took one to Kalitilla, the locality where the Tiger Force militants indulged in their orgy of violence. The body count, 19, reflected the murderous mood the militants and their 40-odd "collaborators" were in when they raided the area.

As ministers Pabitra Kar and Pranab Debbarma consoled the family members of the victims, senior police officials moved about with a look of suspicion on their faces about the motive of any new visitor. However, the new security arrangements and the kind words of the two ministers did little to ease the villagers' grief.

Thirty-eight-year-old Dhananjay Sarkar, who runs a tea stall, lost his entire family of five in the carnage. Pointing out the remnants of what was once his home, he said the death of his father Raicharan, wife Lalita and sons Uttam, Biswajit and Narottam was yet to sink in.

"We never thought this could happen to us. Even if we had, there was nothing we could have done to prevent it," Sarkar said in a tone of resignation typical of hapless villagers in the insurgency-ravaged interiors of Tripura. Sarkar and his father had migrated to Simna Colony

DEATH AT DOORSTEP



(Top) Victims of the massacre and (above) Dhananjay Sarkar, who lost his entire five-member family, points to the gutted remains of his house (AFP)

from Madhavpur of Bangladesh in 1970 when he was only five. Though Simna has 49 non-tribal families, only 13 came under attack.

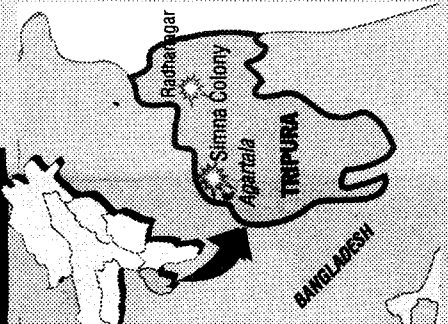
Forty-year-old Kumud Sarkar, a member of the CPM's

local committee, was one of those killed in the mayhem. "He saved me and our two children by taking the hail of bullets on his chest," his wife Bela said.

In another part of the locality, nine-month-old Swapna

stared blankly at the unfamiliar faces as her saviour, 35-year-old Parubala Das, cradled the infant in her lap. Swapna's parents Swapan and Jharna Malik, and uncle Dipen were killed in the Tiger Force attack.

9 N 5 8 7



- Twelve militants and about 40 tribal 'collaborators' raid Simna Colony in the wee hours of Wednesday
- The attackers target 13 of the 49 families, all Bengali-speaking settlers, and hack 19 people to death
- The massacre site is 45 km from Agartala and under Sadar subdivision of West Tripura district. Just half-a-km from the border is the Indo-Bangladesh area and a BSF outpost. Across the border, in Habiganj district of Bangladesh, is the headquarters of the All-Tripura Tiger Force
- Another group of militants abducts four and kills a couple and a CPM leader in North Tripura district around the same time

Graphic: RAJ

Militants massacre 19 in Tripura

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Simna Colony (West Tripura), May 7: This sleepy village near the Tripura capital was today bathed in blood as militants, aided by tribal "sympathisers", hacked and shot to death 19 people in a pre-dawn swoop on Bengali settlers.

The massacre by the All Tripura Tiger Force is the worst in the state in two years. The toll, including nine women and six children, is expected to rise with four of the six injured reported to be in a critical condition.

The ruling Left Front has called a 12-hour bandh tomorrow in protest against the killings.

A group of 12 militants led the assault on the residents of Kalitilla locality of Simna Colony, which is known to be a CPM stronghold. The rebels reached the area around 12.30 am, split into groups of four and guided their 40-odd tribal henchmen to the 13 houses there.

The militants set fire to the thatched houses and let loose a hail of bullets when the residents rushed out in panic. Those who escaped the bullets were hacked to death. Eyewitnesses said several children were hurled into the flaming houses or shot from close range during the hourlong mayhem.

After the massacre, the rebels and their henchmen are believed to have returned to their base at Satcheri in Bangladesh. Residents alleged that BSF personnel

manning an outpost close to Simna Colony neither rushed to their help nor intercepted the militants despite noticing flames and hearing gunshots.

BSF commandant R.P. Sonowal, however, refuted the allegation. "As a disciplined force, we do not react to charges like these. But I can assure you that our men have performed commendably in even Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

The site of the massacre is just 45 km from Agartala. The Indo-Bangladesh border and the BSF outpost are just half-a-km away. Across the border is Habiganj district of Bangladesh, where the headquarters of the Tiger Force is located.

The victims have been identified as Sujit Sarkar (25), Laxmi Rani Sarkar (45), Kumud Sarkar (40), Swapan Malik (28), Jharna Malik (25), Dipen Malik (15), Raicharan Sarkar (60), Lalita Sarkar (28), Uttam Sarkar (5), Biswajit Sarkar (3), Narottam Sarkar (2), Namita Sarkar (30), Ritumohan Sarkar (45), Chhaya Rani Sarkar (35), Jayanti Sarkar (6), Rekha Sarkar (5), Kajal Sarkar (6), Prabhasini Malik (49) and Ranjit Sarkar (24).

An hour before the massacre, militants of the National Liberation Front of Tripura killed a non-tribal couple and a tribal woman in North Tripura district and Khowai subdivision.

The victims were Nilimesh Pal and his wife Alpina and senior CPM activist Rasama Debbarma.

Delhi seal on Assam migrant Act repeal

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 6: The Union Cabinet tonight decided to repeal the contentious illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983, fulfilling a long-standing demand of the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and several other organisations of the state.

Parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj told journalists after the Cabinet meeting that the process of detecting and deporting illegal migrants who entered Assam on or after March 25, 1971, could be accelerated by repealing the IM(DT) Act.

She said the Cabinet had approved a draft Bill for repealing the legislation with effect from a date that would be notified soon. The Centre will move Parliament on the issue this week.

Swaraj said there had been complaints about "discriminatory provisions" in the IM(DT) Act and the fact that it was applicable only to Assam. Under the Act, the onus of proving that a person is an illegal immigrant is on the complainant.

The Foreigners Act, 1946, is applicable in the rest of the country.

The Union minister said former Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had first petitioned the Centre to repeal the Act. The then Governor, Lt. Gen. (retd) S.K. Sinha, expressed similar views in a special report to the President in 1998.

The same year, the attorney-general of India, too, had argued that different Acts cannot be applied for detection and deportation of illegal immi-

grants in different parts of the country. He also argued that the IM(DT) Act was "promoting state domicile, which is highly detrimental to the concept of unity and integrity of India".

After the IM(DT) Act is repealed, all cases that have been referred to or are under consideration of the tribunals set up in accordance with the legislation will probably be taken up afresh under the provisions of the Foreigners Act.

However, appeals pending before the appellate tribunal might be retained. The Gauhati High Court could be empowered to review the decisions of the appellate tribunal.

From the inception of the Act till December 31, 2002, just 1,501 illegal migrants were "physically deported" from Assam.

In contrast, 4,89,046 Bangladeshi nationals were deported from West Bengal under the Foreigners Act between 1983 and November 1998.

The AASU had recently warned of another mass movement if the Centre did not convene a joint session of Parliament to discuss the issue of scrapping the Act. Its president, Prabin Boro, accused Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Union home minister L.K. Advani of "fooling the people of Assam all along" by maintaining that the BJP could not scrap the legislation because it did not have the strength of numbers in the Rajya Sabha.

One of the BJP's pre-poll promises was that it would try to scrap the Act, which the AASU and many other organisations perceive to be the biggest hurdle in detecting and deporting illegal migrants.

7 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Militant outfits on collision course over formation of new territorial council

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Fresh tremors in Bodo heartland

OUR BUREAU

May 4: The woes of Assam's battered Bodo heartland appear far from over with the banned National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) setting the stage for another burst of fratricidal clashes by targeting people who support the rival Bodo Liberation Tigers' accord with the Centre and the state government.

As the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Bill awaits Parliament's sanction, intelligence agencies are worried over the friction between those who are for and against the new accord.

The greatest fear is of retaliation to the NDFB's assaults by the BLT, whose members have yet to surrender their weapons.

A few days after NDFB militants gunned down four of a Bodo family, unidentified assailants shot dead two members of another family in Kokrajhar district. The police are tight-lipped about the identity of the group behind the incident last night, but sources indicated that the killers could be members of the BLT.

The four-member group went to Bhumka Maligaon village under Bishmuri police outpost around 10 pm and shot dead 40-

year-old Kameswar Basumatary, a resident of the village. The assailants then barged into the nearby residence of the victim's father, Biren Basumatary, and killed him.

Sources said the father-son duo was killed for allegedly sheltering NDFB activists. On April 26, the NDFB had killed four members of a family, including two minors, at Tejouguri village under the same police outpost.

The new Bodo accord was signed nearly three months ago — on February 10 — but it has yet to be implemented because a Bill facilitating amendments to the Sixth Schedule of the Consti-

tution has yet to be tabled in Parliament. The amendments are necessary for the creation of a new administrative council for the Bodo-inhabited areas.

The formation of an interim BTC has been delayed, too, making a section of the Bodo community restive.

In accordance with the Bodo accord, BLT members are required to surrender their arms within a week of the interim council being formed. Security agencies have cautioned the government that the longer it delays the interim arrangement, the greater will be the risk of a showdown between armed BLT

members and their counterparts in the NDFB. BLT sources said the top leaders of their outfit today left for New Delhi to pressure the Centre to table the BTC Bill in Parliament before May 10, when the current session ends. The outfit's leadership is worried that further delay would give the NDFB the opportunity to intensify its campaign.

The All-Bodo Students' Union (Absu) and its associates have expressed similar concerns. Absu president Rabinam Narzary said procrastination would send wrong signals to the BLT and encourage "secessionist forces like the NDFB".

Bodo rebels in city police net

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, April 30

KOLKATA POLICE arrested two top guns of the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) on Tuesday night. NDFB secretary Sunil Brahma (40) and his aide David Waris (38) had come to the city to "collect" money from city-based business houses with interests in Assam.

A crack team of the Special Operations Unit from Assam is arriving in the city on Thursday to interrogate the two. The Union home ministry too has been informed of the arrests.

The duo were nabbed from a Park Circus hotel and had on them Rs 10 lakh. They were produced before a Sealdah court and remanded to police custody till May 6.

Sleuths say they had been collating intelligence about

visits by Bodo militants who frequent the city to "raise" funds. The money collected here are used to fund "anti-national activities, procuring sophisticated arms and ammunition and terrorist trainings abroad". Their targets, sleuths said, were business houses — mostly tea majors — with headquarters here and interests in Assam.

In the past, the sleuths have been in a bind because the information was never specific as the terrorists continuously shifted their bases in Kolkata. This time, the police had specific information that they had arrived here on Monday by an Indian Airlines flight from Dimapur and were scheduled to leave on Wednesday.

The duo had met their contacts and collected Rs 10 lakh, after which the detectives arrested them and recovered the

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entire sum from them. The sheer gall of the militants in running such an operation here has come as a bit of a shock to the police, who now say they will inquire into the companies that have been providing funds to these groups. DC (DD-1) Soumen Mitra said, "We will probe this aspect."

Brahma, who also used aliases like B. Simang or B. Benga, is referred to as the "speaker". This NDFB founder-member resides in Mohanpur's Balagaon in Assam's Darang district. David, alias Bedhung Basumatarai, alias Indra Mohan, alias B. Butlang, is also from the same district.

Police sources said while the duo has a host of cases against them in Assam, they are also wanted in West Bengal. On May 26, they had set off an explosion at the Bhubanghat Forest Guest House in Jalpaiguri.

NSCN to negotiate only if demand included in talks

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 27 APRIL

THE Naga peace process may have hit a major hurdle with the NSCN(I-M) refusing to take the negotiations further unless the Centre gives an assurance that their main demand for Greater Nagaland will be included in the agenda for all future rounds. During the visit of Centre's interlocutor K. Padmanabhaiah to Geneva earlier this month for the latest round of talks with the NSCN leaders, the latter sought a clarification on whether or not Greater Nagaland was among the demands to be negotiated across the table.

When Mr Padmanabhaiah reiterated that the controversial demand will figure only at a later stage as the dialogue on other demands progresses, the Naga leaders are believed to have expressed their unwillingness to come to India for further talks unless an assurance was given that Greater Nagaland was very much on the agenda.

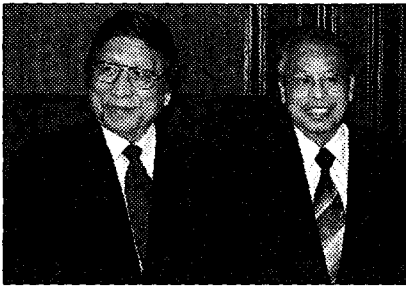
In fact, the Geneva talks — attended by NSCN chief T. Muivah and Intelligence Bureau director K.P. Singh — virtually flopped when the NSCN

leaders refused to resume discussions unless the aforesaid assurance came through even as Mr Padmanabhaiah seemed to be in no position to accede to their demand.

The Centre had, when it started identifying the demands to be discussed in future rounds with NSCN leaders T. Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu came visiting in January this year, told them to keep aside

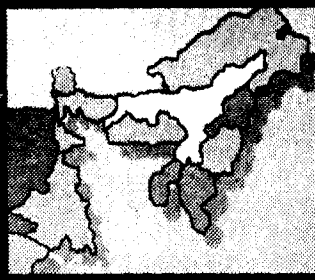
the controversial issues of sovereignty and Greater Nagaland lest the talks should fall through at the very start. Although the NSCN leader did agree on the condition that these demands will be brought forward as the talk progress, they did a somersault during Mr Padmanabhaiah's visit to Geneva, insisting that Greater Nagaland figure on the immediate agenda.

Obviously, the interlocutor returned disappointed as sensitivity of the Greater Nagaland demand — which has implications not only for Nagaland but even for Assam, Manipur and Arunchal Pradesh as their Naga-inhabited areas are included in the proposed boundaries of Greater Nagaland — prevented him from relenting on the NSCN's demand for such an assurance.



MUIVAH & SWU: TALKING TOUGH

NORTH by NORTH EAST



SANJOY HAZARIKA

Learning from neighbours

BANGLADESH is often criticised in India, especially by Right-wing, conservative forces, for "sending" hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants to settle in our country, particularly in the North East. Some politicians and policy-makers in Delhi and elsewhere would have us believe that the demographic movement of migration is a "planned" strategy by Dhaka to overwhelm the North East.

This, in my view, is rather far-fetched. Of course, there is migration into India - there can be no doubt about that. One person has travelled extensively in Bangladesh and documented this movement. The Bangladesh High Commissioner to India conceded late last year that there was "economic migration". But to suggest that there is a meticulous plan aimed at reducing the North Eastern communities to a minority and nudging Bangladeshis living there into a majority strikes me as far more complex and organised than is physically possible.

About 15 million Bangladeshis are living in India, according to a task force set up by the home ministry. One assumes that after Bangladesh came into being in 1971, these people have travelled across the borders since then. What existed before was East Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh, after the liberation war and the Indian Army's campaign against Pakistan, was a negation of the concept of a partitioned subcontinent.

The trouble in India, especially our regional parties and the Right-wing, is that they think there's can't be any agenda except a "Boot-Bangladeshis-out" programme. Anything less than that is considered sacrilegious. But if we just consider one factor - that of size and scale - how can 15 million people be sent out in an organised manner? And as often this column has stressed: the country of origin of the illegal immigrant must accept him/her back. Without this basic agreement, can anyone be sent anywhere?

On top of that we have this IMDT (Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal) Act of 1983, a legacy of the then Congress raj which makes international law on illegal migration stand on its head. In all other countries, a suspected illegal immigrant has to prove that he is not that. In Assam, the law states that the accuser has to prove his charge, unlike elsewhere in the world! Under the IMDT Act, he has to be living in the same police station area as the accused and pay Rs 10 to file the complaint - to ensure no frivolous charges are made!

The IMDT Act is state specific. The law does not apply to the rest of India, a most discriminatory provision that is one reason why the Act should be struck down. Is this to suggest that there are illegal immigrants only in Assam and no other state of the North East? What about the rest of the country? This is an issue that can be discussed and written about ad infinitum.

But there are other things to Bangladesh besides migration and floods. That country anyway has done a good job in flood management. It has brought down the fatality rate in natural disasters, reduced the birth rate and the size of the average family (giving women a chance to live longer) and improved the condition of its poor. It has succeeded through a number of innovative schemes, including the much revered and reported Grameen Bank, as well as a vast network of non-government organisations supported by international donors working in every possible area - from flood-control and road building to primary health care, education and culture.

Indeed, there are lessons to be learnt from Bangladesh.

This week's North East Page has a new, occasional section which gives voice to some issues plaguing the flood-prone plains of Bangladesh. It's written by a sensitive and far-sighted person who works for the World Bank (it's hard to believe that such people exist!). It reflects on the developments in that country which are both encouraging and cause for concern. He minces no words while talking about the problems faced by Hindu fishermen in the area he worked. He speaks about the use of the embankment and how it has transformed life in the region and how the lives of the poor and marginalised have actually improved.

It would be a big mistake if we in the North East shrug these off as not relevant to us. Mobilisation of communities, empowering the poor, strengthening the traditional agricultural and fishing occupations - how are these to be done?

The questions raised in Bangladesh mesh with the issues raised by Rangan Dutta, former Director-General of CAPART, in Open Forum. The Assam State Development Report and its recommendations have been raised in this paper, this page and these columns earlier. But even in the North East, the report has not been studied adequately by journalists and academics or policy-makers and politicians; and not enough has been written or debated about it. One wonders why! Possibly because journalists find it too difficult to read a couple of hundred pages? Have they got out of the habit of reading?

The national budget is written about, analysed, dissected and reviewed from every possible angle by many people, including my good friend and renowned columnist Swaminathan S Aiyar. But what about the state budgets? Just a cursory, standard story (or maybe two or three) which could have been written by anyone sitting in any old office, without bothering to go into the details of what it means to the ordinary people and the state. And then we forget about it.

How many reporters - and how many editors encourage them - go to the field to assess the impact of these state policy proposals on people (for whom it is written)? And why not ask the state finance minister a simple question: explain what is meant by deficit financing. It is not the monster that it's painted to be.

These are issues as critical as migration? Are they not? Is the livelihood of a fisherman in Majuli as critical if not more than the *karmachari* member in the Assam state secretariat? Don't people in the rural areas deserve a better life? Why should we deny them a decent standard of living - Assam's GDP in the past 40 years has fallen drastically to be among the lowest in the country, and the state matches Bihar in the lack of growth.

The details are there in ASDR, and it's good news indeed that Dr Jayanta Madhab, one of the region's most experienced bankers and respected name in financing, has agreed to be the financial adviser to the Assam government. This step should have been taken a year ago. Dr Madhab realises, as much as anyone else, the need to accelerate the implementation of economic programmes instead of developing new concept papers. He has developed micro-credit schemes through the Eastern Himalayan bank in Guwahati and knows the region well enough and is familiar with international and national finance and financial institutions.

Whatever is needed for Assam's deliverance and that of the North East has been put down on paper - clearly and precisely (Shukla Commission Report, etc.). Instead of additional reports, we need a time-frame to implement the work in hand. And one of the first steps must be to reduce the size Assam's huge bureaucracy (especially the number of school teachers) so it ceases to be a burden on the state. This can become an example for other states of the North East.

We have to work at the ground level to improve the livelihood of the people living along the Brahmaputra and in the Barak Valley. That is going to be the test of what we learn from our neighbours and one of Dr Madhab's greatest challenges.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2003

THE ULFA MORTAR ATTACKS

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IN RECENT MONTHS, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has taken to launching a series of mortar strikes in Assam, particularly in and around the capital. The State police have achieved an important breakthrough in these attack cases with the surrender of a frail 20-year-old woman, Dwipamani Kalita. This unlikely looking executor of terrorist strikes was directly responsible for two mortar attacks in Guwahati, one on the Dispur capital complex last October and another in the busy Ambari commercial area in December. Three persons died in the latter attack in which five mortars were fired in quick succession while the single explosive that landed in the daring Dispur complex attack only succeeded in damaging a few vehicles. With Dwipamani's surrender and the killing of another militant in an encounter in the Garo Hills, the police believe they have all but smashed a three-member group that was specially trained and commissioned to carry out mortar attacks. Her surrender and confession have revealed that the series of mortar attacks since last October was scripted in Bangladesh by ULFA's commander-in-chief, Paresh Barua, his deputy, Rajesh Barua, and a few of their close associates. Moreover, that this was a meticulously planned operation. Weapons experts systematically trained the three-member team selected to execute it.

The real ingenuity in this grisly terrorist plot is the emphasis on stealth and secrecy, with the gang members living in anonymity and often operating single-handedly. But the authorities, both at the State and the Central levels, are bound to be extremely concerned that such a meticulous operation (which involved foreign weapons experts and four months of mortar training in an area not far from Dhaka) could have taken place in Bangladesh. It is an open secret that ULFA and various other northeastern terrorist groups have operating bases in Bangladeshi territory, which they use for their subversive activities against India. The previous Awami League Government had initiated some steps against permitting such

groups from doing so. For instance, there were attempts to crack down on the activities of the ULFA chief and, a couple of years ago, Anup Chetia, a former ULFA general secretary, was sentenced to three years imprisonment for illegal possession of foreign currency. Going by recent indications, fears that the emergence of the BNP Government would embolden Indian terrorist groups to regroup in Bangladeshi territory have not been unfounded. There is also evidence that some groups such as the ULFA had started the process of relocation from Bhutan to Bangladesh ever since the Bhutanese Government started turning the heat on them a couple of years ago.

This process, if anything, seems to have been stepped up with the ultimatum issued by the Bhutanese Government last month. The Government has asked all Indian separatist groups to vacate its territory by June or face the prospect of being removed by military action. This ultimatum was served mainly with the ULFA and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in mind, the two main groups that have bases in southern Bhutan. Such ultimatums have been issued by Bhutan before, but the recent one, which followed strong pressure from India, was accompanied by reports that the two countries had carried out several joint operations to dismantle rebel camps along the border. Thimpu's cooperation in eliminating all local support to Indian terrorist groups has apparently led outfits such as the ULFA to pull out of the kingdom and move via Meghalaya into Bangladesh. This view gained credence when security forces recently found two large hauls of explosives in the West Garo Hills area — including rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles and huge quantities of explosives — just kilometres away from the India-Bangladesh border. There are a complex set of political and social causes for terrorism in the Northeast but, as the story that has emerged following Dwipamani's surrender suggests, tackling the phenomenon is complicated by the ULFA's use of foreign territory for planning and coordinating its violent activities.

23 APR 2003

THE HINDU

Envoy gung-ho on Naga talks

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi/Dimapur, April 22: The Centre's chief interlocutor in the Naga peace talks, K. Padmanabhaiah, today claimed that the last round of talks with the NSCN (I-M) leadership in Amsterdam went off well. His positive outlook was, however, tempered by the outfit's angry reaction to an Assam Rifles raid on its "town command headquarters" in Dimapur.

Padmanabhaiah, a former Union home secretary, told **The Telegraph** in New Delhi that that the tenor of the negotiations in Amsterdam was on "expected lines" and that venues for future talks would be decided "as and when the time comes".

"Overall, there is reason to believe that the developments in Amsterdam have been positive and the steps to carry the peace process forward will be worked out soon," he said.

The former bureaucrat's comments are in contrast to the NSCN (I-M)'s announcement that it will not resume the dialogue until Delhi issues a "clari-

fication" on its emissary's reported statement that all members of the outfit will be "disarmed" before any agreement is signed. "Problems arise because of communication gaps and especially when you say something in English and it is translated into another language. A single word makes a lot of difference," Padmanabhaiah said.

He claimed to be in the dark about the NSCN (I-M)'s demand for a clarification on the issue. "We aired divergent opinions on certain issues in the Dutch capital, but I am unaware of any demand for a clarification. Differences are not unnatural on a gamut of issues. But there is no serious problem as such. It is quite naive to expect results overnight and after every round of discussion. You move forward only by an inch," he said.

In Dimapur, "quick-reaction teams" of the Assam Rifles' 10th



Padmanabhaiah

battalion raided the NSCN (I-M)'s "town command headquarter" and claimed to have recovered a large cache of arms and ammunition, narcotics, cars, fake registration plates and incriminating documents. Two members of the outfit were arrested during the raid

on the office, located at Kushia-bil.

The seized items include two M-20 pistols, an AK-47 rifle, a 9 mm carbine, 19 pistols, 350 rounds of ammunition, two cordless telephones, 96 electric detonators, one kg of heroin, five kg of *ganja*, six fake car number plates, two cars without valid papers and a sheaf of incriminating documents. Phungthing Shimrang, convener of the NSCN (I-M)'s ceasefire monitoring cell, was livid after the raid. He accused Assam Rifles of violating the ceasefire ground rules.

Shimrang claimed that the

contraband items had actually been seized by "NSCN (I-M) officers" from a truck on Sunday near the Old Airport Road. He identified the consignor as Shyam Panik from Imphal. The driver of the vehicle, Tomba Singh, and another person, Wahimbam Tiken, had been "detained", he said.

The insurgent leader claimed that the NSCN (I-M)'s "antisocial elements checking committee" was taking stock of the seized goods when the Assam Rifles team raided the office.

Charging the Assam Rifles with trying to mislead the people by falsely implicating his organisation in illegal activities, Shimrang said, "If they do not honour our members, we have nothing to do with the government or the talks."

He termed the raid, which was conducted yesterday, as "an act of revenge" for the killing of two military intelligence officials. "Though there is no proof of the NSCN (I-M)'s involvement in the incident, the army and the Assam Rifles believe we are responsible," he added.

THE TELEGRAPH

Girl behind major ULFA mortar attacks surrenders

GUWAHATI, APRIL 20. A 20-year-old girl with a troubled family life was behind all major mortar attacks of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) here in the past one year, police said today.

Dwipamani, who surrendered today, was presented before the media by the police who claimed that a major arm of the ULFA attack had been completely neutralised.

She deposited a pistol and three rocket-propelled gun shells with the Special Branch of the city police.

She had all alone attacked the high security Assam Assembly campus, sending a shockwave throughout the country. She attacked the ACP office, killing three persons and injuring 21 others, including a former MP. She carried out all operations alone.

She carried the mortar in bags, travelled in city buses and chose relatively safe areas to fire the mortar, said the Director-General of Police, H.K. Deka.

Dwipamani, a student, told presspersons that she joined the ULFA due to personal bitterness and not to serve



ULFA activist Dwipamani Kalita, who surrendered before the police on Sunday, handing over an RPG shell to the Assam DGP, Harekrishna Deka (right), and the IGP (SB), Khagan Sarma, at the Special Branch headquarters in Guwahati. — Photo: Rita Raj Konwar

any cause or ideology.

"I was angry with my personal life and chose the path of destruction and like a machine I went on carrying on one after another mortar attack," she said, adding that it was a mistake and she wanted to begin her life afresh.

Later, the IGP (SP), Khagen

Sharma, said Dwipamani belonged to a three-member elite group of the ULFA, who were given special training in Bangladesh.

One member of the group, Dilip Roy, had been eliminated by the police at Garo hills, while the third member Pranay Roy was still at large. — UNI

ULFA mortar terror turns out to be a 20-yr-old girl

Although a very bright student, having passed matriculation and higher secondary with distinction, Dwipamani was deprived of any support from her family and friends, added Khagen Sharma, IGP (Special Branch), who played a major role in convincing her to give up her underground life.

She had joined ULFA in 1998, Dwipamani said, adding how the top leaders of the militant outfit had sent her as a member of a special squad for training in mortar firing to Bangladesh. She received her training at an unknown location three hours drive from Dhaka in what looked like an official firing range of a security agency.

Having completed her training, she was despatched to Guwahati and was told to lead a normal life to deflect any suspicion even as she carried out the attacks, she said. She, in fact, purchased a plot and constructed a house on the outskirts of Guwahati. "Unlike the other ULFA cadre, she travelled by public transport and did not carry any cell-phone or call up the leadership from Guwahati after she was sent out on these missions," IGP Sharma said.

The IGP said that to carry out the

two attacks, one on the Dispur capital complex in October and the other in the busy commercial area of Ambari on Christmas night, Dwipamani travelled with two-inch-long mortars in city buses. "Her most potent weapon was her complete anonymity and secrecy," Sharma pointed out.

Interestingly, even as the police were checking small vehicles and two-wheelers in the city for militants responsible for the city attacks, Dwipamani started calling up IGP Khagen Sharma on the phone, taunting him for having failed to catch the culprits. "I used to heap insults on the IGP and sarcastically remark that the police cannot catch ULFA cadres. Gradually, however, Sharma sir started talking me out of the destructive life that I was leading," she told reporters.

"I realised I had been used as a machine by the ULFA leaders like Paresh Barua, Raju Barua, Drishti Rajkhowa and Ram Gogoi," Dwipamani said. Meanwhile, DGP Deka announced that the police would rehabilitate her in a "non-conventional way" by supporting her education and giving whatever other support she required to settle down in life, given her good academic record.

INDIAN EXPRESS

N-E demography worries Advani

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 20

DEPUTY PRIME Minister L.K. Advani on Sunday said the "most alarming" demographic change was taking place in the North-eastern region of the country and held "forcible change" (illegal immigration) and religious conversions as two principal factors behind such a trend.

Speaking at a book release function, Advani said: "If there is anything we are opposed to, it is the demographic changes that are taking place in the country."

The authors of the book — *Religious Demography of India* — have, in their own admission, received "blessings" from RSS sarsanghchalak K.S. Sudershan. In fact, Sudershan, former BJP President and Law Minister Jana Krishnamurthy were among many RSS leaders present at

the function. The book was published by the Chennai-based Centre for Policy Studies.

He said the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh has been taken up from time to time with Dhaka. But Bangladesh was continuing to try to push in its own population into Indian territory, he added. Pointing out that people were scared to discuss anything related to religion now as it would be "violate of secularism", Advani said the book had "relevance to present-day politics".

Authored by A.P. Joshi, M.D. Srinivas and J.K. Bajaj, the book, which has derived its data from all the census conducted since 1951, says: "In the heartland and eastern regions, comprising UP, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam, Indian religionists (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs) are under great pressure."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 APR 2003

A sense of camaraderie prevails among different groups while efforts are made to solve the Naga problem, but it may not be long before friends become foes

A MATTER OF TIME

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By JB LAMA

THE Centre's inability to fix a venue and agenda for the next round of Naga peace talks and appoint a political mediator as demanded by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) is indicative of their predicament. The last confabulations in New Delhi in January ended with both sides discussing "substantive issues" and agreeing to continue talks until a solution was found. What these "substantive issues" involved was not made clear. The Centre is in a fix over formulating a concrete proposal after Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah pressed their claim for the inclusion of sovereignty and a single administrative unit for all Nagas because of the constitutional complications.

While the issue of sovereignty or independence could feature in the next discussion, the one-unit proposal encompasses, willy-nilly, parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to fit in with the NSCN-IM's scheme of a "Greater Nagaland". Delhi is obviously inhibited by fear of a fresh outburst in Manipur. In June 2001 the Centre's decision to extend the Nagaland ceasefire to Manipur's four hill districts provoked Meities in the Imphal Valley to burn government buildings, including the assembly hall. In the police firing that resulted, 18 of them were killed.

This, however, does not mean the issue cannot be tackled; after all, Swu and Muivah agreed to attend the talks without preconditions. The Centre has realised there is a Naga situation and has stuck its neck out far enough. But to restore peace it must give something in return. Nagas are now putting to the test the Centre's sincerity in finding an honourable settlement and it will be interesting to watch how Delhi's policy of talking to only one faction will pan out.

At the time the two Naga leaders were in Delhi, Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh headed an all-party delegation and reportedly met the Prime Minister who assured him that Manipur's territorial integrity would not be disturbed. Any chief minister who finds his territorial boundary challenged

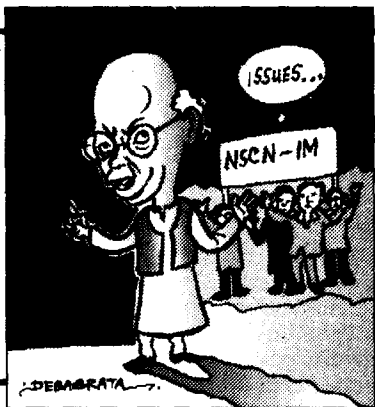
would do as much, since failure to object would amount to abdication of duty. Muivah was apparently annoyed and sought clarifications from the Prime Minister.

Why transparency is not a feature of the talks is not understood. Even the Prime Minister has not confirmed nor denied Muivah's repeated assertions that he assured Swu and Muivah, during a brief Paris meeting in 1998, that the ceasefire would be extended to other

lem, or for that matter the problems plaguing the entire North-east.

Interestingly, the circulation of a 73-page "white paper" prepared by the Kohima-based Naga Hoho on Naga integration, submitted to the President, coincided with the assembly session as if to embarrass the Meiteis. It tried to explain that Naga integration meant removal of arbitrary boundaries and it blamed the British for "superimposing" this condition wherein they were

Why transparency is not a feature of the talks is not understood



Naga-inhabited areas. Again, Swaraj Kaushal, the lawyer appointed by the Prime Minister as chief interlocutor, could not have got it wrong. He quit within weeks, alleging that the Prime Minister had reneged on the issue. The truth emerged when, in June 2001, the Centre signed the "Bangkok Agreement" covering Manipur's four hill districts, making it abundantly clear that Delhi had underestimated the Meiteis.

Nor can Muivah be faulted when, within two weeks of the truce coming into force on 1 August 1997, he claimed it was not confined to Nagaland alone. Then Prime Minister IK Gujral, who brokered the ceasefire, kept Parliament in the dark about its terms and conditions and asked members not to press for details, suggesting a secret deal.

Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani has also been secretive. He reportedly said, "I have the answers to the issues raised (by the NSCN-IM) but I don't want to disclose these now. I want the talks to go on". Such ambiguity serves only to expose the Centre's lack of confidence. The fact remains that there is no official who understands the Naga prob-

placed under different administrative units within India and Myanmar without their knowledge and consent. The paper said it wanted to reclaim 100,000 sq km (more than six times the present geographical size of Nagaland) on the plea that Naga-inhabited areas "did not spring up overnight".

From the point of view of similar rationality, the Meiteis could lay claim to the Kabaw Valley which was part of Manipur and ceded to Myanmar after the Indo-Burmese Treaty in the 1950s, the provisions of which were never divulged to the Meities, as alleged by the Revolutionary People's Front (political wing of the People's Liberation Army).

A Tangkhul argues that even if the Meiteis were left with only the Imphal Valley (2,200 of 22,327 sq km) they, with their skills and ingenuity, could transform the holding into a prosperous place like Singapore by investing Central assistance for its development and progress. It is true, he says, that the government gets nothing from the hills in terms of revenue and very little has been done so far to improve living standards of hill

tribes. According to him, the Tangkhul-Meitei divide is complete and mocks the claim of "co-existence".

A Meitei observer counters this view. "There exist symbiotic relations between the hills of Manipur and people in the valley. To divide Manipur into hills and plains and put them under different administrative units will spell disaster. Loktak Lake exists because of the hills surrounding it. These hills are green because of Loktak. When the seemingly unrelated material bodies are brought under different administrations, their management becomes micro and when these micro managements are not complementary (as in most cases like the Indo-Bangladeshi water problem and the Cauvery water dispute), fresh complications arise. True, not all administrative blocks can be created according to national or natural biospheres, but efforts should be made to club together areas that share the same environmental space. As to the argument that Meiteis should not covet what they do not inhabit, the Tangkhuls or the Nagas should not covet the hills inhabited by the Kukis simply because the Nagas do not live there. All people should co-exist."

Before leaving Delhi, Swu and Muivah said they "recognise the legitimate aspirations of all neighbouring people... let us end tension and live as good neighbours... we are prepared to discuss contentious issues". This, perhaps, was what prompted a Naga Mothers' Association team to visit Imphal in March.

How Delhi goes about calming ruffled feathers remains to be seen but it must remember that Manipur has twice witnessed an upsurge over territorial claims. The people's mood seems lackadaisical. Saikul in Senapati district has a mixed population of Nagas, Kukis and Nepalis and it is from here the NSCN-IM draws its cadres. The Nagas are enthusiastic about becoming part of Nagaland, the Kukis say this will never happen. The Nepalis, as one puts it, are like potatoes — conducive to meat, fish and vegetables, Hobson-like in their approach to crisis. For now, there is an innocent camaraderie that prevails, and only time will dictate when friends become foes.

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

Insurgency cannot be viewed in isolation: Tripura CM

9. 4. 81.

By Anil Bhattacharjee

AGARTALA, APRIL 11. The Tripura Chief Minister, Manik Sarkar, believes that the insurgency problem in his State cannot be viewed or dealt with in isolation. He feels that the economic backwardness, especially among the tribals, in the entire northeast is one of the main causes. Added to this is the role of vested interests inside and outside the country.

He told this correspondent here recently that the region's tribals were a neglected lot. Pointing out that there had been attempts to misguide the tribal youth by vested interests, he said his Government, as a counter, proposed to emphasise on comprehensive development, particularly in the tribal areas.

The scope for education and employment had to be further extended for the tribal youth, he said adding that economic development meant they had to be made self-reliant.

"We have asked the extremists to return to the mainstream, to lay down their arms. We are out to help those who want to start their lives anew. Those who do not pay heed to our call and are determined to continue with disturbing peace, to continue atrocities, to stand

in the region and with the senior officials.

cording to sources in the Central and State intelligence agencies the two outfits did have their centres in that country.

The top leaders of the two outfits regularly met personnel of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), he said. In fact, some outfits had themselves admitted it.

An extremist who had surrendered recently had confessed to receiving commando training in Pakistan, the Chief Minister said.

Asked whether he had witnessed any policy-shift by the Centre in view of the fact that underdevelopment was perceived as the major factor in the insurgents' war against the Indian state, Mr. Sarkar said a development package had indeed been announced.

"It would have been best if all the aspects of the programme were made equally effective. I do not feel the programme will solve all the problems of the northeast, but it will help the development process to a considerable extent."

Pointing out that two-and-a-half years had elapsed since the announcement of the programme, he said it was time review meetings were convened by the Prime Minister with the Chief Ministers of the States in

the region and with the senior officials.

Mr. Sarkar also sought more powers to the NEC (North Eastern Council) that was set up in 1972.

"It has to be admitted that the council is not serving its purpose fully. Without any reflection on their initiative or ability, I feel Governors (as chairman) have certain limitations. Union Ministers or the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission could be more effective."

Turning to the recent election to the State Assembly, he said the Congress-led alliance was defeated as the democratically-conscious people had rejected its nexus with the forces of separatism and secessionism.

The verdict was a positive mandate for developmental programmes, undertaken by the Left Front Governments in the past, he said. "As a result of the multi-purpose development projects undertaken during the last five years, we have several achievements to our credit.

Per capita income in the State has increased; there has been considerable increase in agricultural and industrial production which is reflected in the volume of revenue collected. The electorate took note of this fundamental change and gave its verdict."



Manik Sarkar

in the way of development, they will be confronted. We have asked the Centre to exert pressure to see that the training centres for insurgents in Bangladesh are demolished. The border with Bangladesh should be sealed and the number of BSF personnel in the State should be increased."

"The Central Government is taking steps and extending help, but all our demands have not been met. Talks with Bangladesh are on, we are waiting," Mr. Sarkar said.

On reports that Bangladesh was harbouring members of the two outlawed outfits — ATTF and NLFT — he said that ac-

1 3 APR 2003

THE HINDU

Warring Assam tribes fail to bury hatchet, more huts torched

Arson after friendship vow

OUR BUREAU

Guwahati/Silchar, April 11: A day after leaders of the warring Hmar and Dimas tribes agreed to rebuild bridges of friendship, 80 more houses were set ablaze at Khepre near Maligaon in North



Disaster refugees in Imphal on Friday. Photo: New Delhi wire

Assam. The fire broke out in the early hours of the morning and spread rapidly, destroying 80 houses. The area is known for its dense forest and is home to several tribes. The Hmar and Dimas tribes have been warring for years, and this incident is seen as a violation of their recent agreement to build bridges of friendship. The fire has displaced many people, and the situation is tense in the region.

...with security forces trying to deal with the problem. The fire has caused significant damage to the community, and the authorities are working to provide relief to the affected people. The situation remains volatile, and there are concerns about further incidents.

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strife-torn district. Government officials believe violence will subside until the Centre leads on militant outfits in the area.

Union minister of state home I.D. Swami is scheduled to visit Assam tomorrow.

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Kuki claim witchhunt over hostage crisis

KHILEN THOKCHOM

Imphal, April 11: German social worker Heinrich Wolfgang today left Manipur with not-so-fond memories of 17 days in captivity, but the drama over his abduction continued with a rights group accusing police of targeting the Kuki community in a "witchhunt" following his release.

In a memorandum to the Imphal East superintendent of police, the Kuki Movement for Human Rights said "innocent villagers" were being arrested in the area from where the Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) had abducted Wolfgang on March 29.

T. Lunkim, chairman of the rights group, said the Kuki villagers had been detained with-

had been "only picked up for questioning" and "allowed to go" after a few hours.

However, the Kuki Movement for Human Rights insisted that many Kuki villagers were still in police custody. "Questioning of villagers is being done through illegal detention," it said.

The rights group blamed the state government for the breakdown of law and order in the area, saying it had ignored requests by the villagers to set up a permanent police post there. "Militants have been terrorising the villagers and the government has not done anything to stop them," Lunkim said.

As the controversy raged, the man whose abduction was the beginning of it all made a quiet exit from the state capital. Wolf-

was taken hostage by the KLA two days later while he was returning to Imphal after attending a meeting in the Maphou Dam area of Imphal East.

The KLA militants freed Wolfgang on Wednesday, which was coincidentally his 48th birthday. The German was handed over to representatives of the Church in the presence of some newsmen at a militant hide-out, somewhere in Sadar hills district.

Denying that money had changed hands, the KLA said it freed Wolfgang in response to appeals by "civil society and the Church". The outfit said the German was interrogated about the development activities funded by his NGO.

The United NGO Mission, which had invited Wolfgang to

Manor beat captors, flee

IN REVEREND NEWS

Shillong, April 11: The manager of the Narsing estate, Junior Jagai, fled from the clutches of his tortors by overpowering the a brawl last night.

Armed tribals had at Jagai from the plan Kuki Kooie division on when he had gone to inspect an abandoned but reportedly used by r outfits. He said he fled h out in the dense jungles of Cachar Hills after inflicting injuries on all four gang members keeping a vigil on him.

Jagai's captors had ransom note to the Western Cachar Tea Co Ltd, headquartered in C demanding Rs 60 lakh for lease. Jagai is a Tangkh from Manipur's Ukhrul Police, which earlier

had that Jagai's abduction handiwork of the NSC

Kidnapping and NGOs in Manipur

By Peadar Kirby

MUCH to the relief of Manipur, German national Heinrich Wolfgang was released unharmed after 18 days in captivity of a relatively new Kuki underground outfit, the Kuki Liberation Army. Wolfgang works for Evangelischer Entwicklungswerke, a development agency that funds NGOs, and was kidnapped on March 27.

KLA shot into prominence earlier this year after ambushing Ukhrul SP's party in Ukhrul district, and then abducting some high profile people, including Victor Keishing, son of a member and longest-serving chief minister, J. Rishang Keishing, sitting Rajya Sabha member and longest-serving chief minister, J. Lunsum, general manager in-charge Manipur telecom circle; and Wolfgang.

The objective behind these kidnappings was not ransom, says KLA. But the rumour mills and off-the-record comments by officials have a different story to tell. Wolfgang's abduction, for instance, is said to be for an initial ransom of Rs 1 crore, though KLA has denied this in its press releases. The German aid worker, KLA says, was taken into custody to be educated on the discriminatory manner in which EED funds (for rehabilitation of victims of the mid-Nineties' Kuki-Naga ethnic feud) were being misused. The outfit charged that the funds were used "heavily in favour" of the Nagas, though the Kukis bore the brunt of the bloody three-year feud.

Wolfgang has since left Manipur.

There are however larger and more disturbing issues involved in the Wolfgang episode. This becomes particularly clear when the event is viewed against the backdrop of growing lawlessness and the proliferation of underground militant outfits in the state. For instance, even while Wolfgang was being held captive, another self-proclaimed underground outfit, Human Rights Guild of Manipur, came into being. Most, if not all, of these groups have the declared objective of crusading against social evils, but nobody is fixated about the consequences of the trend. The "law" is going to flow out of many more barrels of guns, plunging everybody's life into deeper chaos.

Wolfgang's kidnapping has highlighted one more dark area - the NGO movement in Manipur. Today 2,155 NGOs in Manipur are registered with the government, and an estimated ten times the number unregistered. While there can be no doubt many of these are genuine and socially committed, others have strayed into the movement in their quest for greater pastures in a social landscape of growing unemployment and a hopelessly stagnant economy.

Manipur's official figure for the educated unemployed registered with the employment exchange, is over 400,000 against a population of about 2.5 million. It's also interesting, but definitely not totally out of context of the above argument, that many of the most well-endowed and well-connected NGOs either belong to or have as patrons sitting legislators

and sometimes senior bureaucrats. Hence, if the new insurgency trends have been described as akin to an industry, the same can be said of the NGO movement. In such a scenario, "industrial disputes", cut-throat competition for resources, envy of success and even turf wars, are only but natural.

There was tremendous public outrage over Wolfgang's kidnapping. During 18 days of his captivity, public appeals (cutting across community lines) for his unconditional release flooded the local media newscrooms. Other militant groups, including MPLF and KNF, too disapproved of the abduction. Even a manifesto was launched by local Meira Patbis, the powerful women's groups in the Langol area of Imphal West, after rumours that a foreigner had been seen there.

In the North East, the kidnapping of a foreigner violates the sense of hospitality that the region's people are known for. Though abduction and extortion as a fall-out of the endemic insurgency is well known, the militants don't like ransom becoming a part of the ball game. They understand only too well the implications it will have if it takes root and stays on the fabric of their society, already deeply riven and shaken by years of violence. The problem is that these days there is a new trend of the starve-walling of the people's will because of the growing arrogance of those who wield the gun.

(The author is Editor, The Imphal Free Press.)

Fresh clashes in riot-hit Assam district

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Silchar, April 10: Two persons were killed and over 100 houses set ablaze in fresh clashes between the Hmar and Dimasa communities in North Cachar Hills district of Assam, where a 48-hour curfew has been in force since yesterday.

Suspected Dimasa militants set fire to 10 houses at Heronbasti near Umrangshu. Armed Dimasas set ablaze another 25 huts in neighbouring Rezkol and 72 houses in the remote Saranbasti village. The toll in the clashes since March 31 has risen from 24 to 32.

Police sources in Haflong said there was heavy exchange of fire between armed groups at Saranbasti. However, there were no casualties.

Union minister of state for home I.D. Swami will visit the state on Saturday for an "on-the-spot assessment" of the situation in Cachar and the North Cachar Hills. BJP Legislature Party leader Bimalangshu Roy today said deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani informed him over phone two days ago that Swami would be touring the twin strife-torn districts.

Roy said the Centre was "very concerned" over the spate of violent incidents, starting with the massacre of 24 Dimasas by Hmar militants on March 31.

Accompanied by a team of senior home ministry officials, Swami will visit Cachar and

North Cachar Hills on an IAF chopper and later hold a meeting with chief minister Tarun Gogoi. Though no untoward incident was reported over the past 24 hours, the situation in Cachar and North Cachar Hills remained far from normal. The army said another carnage could have taken place in Mahur block of North Cachar Hills district yesterday had its troops not been on maximum alert.

A senior army official said Dimasa youths had attacked Hmar and Kuki tribesmen at Sharon and Samban villages, but "speedy deployment of troops" prevented a massacre. He said columns of the Red Shield Division rushed to the villages from different directions and took control of the situation.

Veterinary minister G.C. Langthasa, who is from the Dimasa tribe, told The Telegraph that he planned to form peace committees comprising representatives of the warring communities. The Hmar community of Manipur is preparing to welcome hundreds of fellow tribesmen displaced during the clashes in south Assam.

Nearly 500 Hmars are on their way to Imphal via Dimapur in six buses, adds our Imphal correspondent.

Displaced Hmars who had fled to Jiribam in Manipur after the first wave of clashes have, however, returned to Cachar.

11 APR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Army out in Assam carnage zone

OUR BUREAU

Silchar/Guwahati, April 4: The army was called out in North Cachar Hills district of Assam and asked to be on standby in nearby Cachar as the orgy of ethnic violence continued to torment tribal-inhabited villages and the body count mounted.

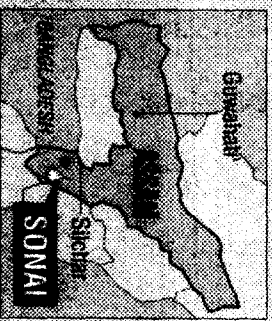
Alarmed by the worst ethnic flare-up in the state since the Bodo-Advvasi clashes in Lower Assam, the Assembly decided to send a peace mission to the affected areas tomorrow. Speaker Prithibi Majhi will lead the Assembly delegation.

Police officials in Silchar said panicked Dimasas lynched a Kukri tribesman, mistaking him for a Hmar, in Chongmukh village of North Cachar Hills district. The district administration immediately called out the army to prevent a flare-up between the Dimasa and Kukri tribes.

The Dimasas have been restive since 21 people were massacred by suspected Hmar militants in Cachar district on Monday. Overall, 24 people have died and thousands displaced in clashes between the two tribes over the past week. Unofficial sources pegged the toll at 29.

Cachar deputy commissioner today announced ex gratia of Rs 5,000 each to the families of the victims. However, it was small consolation for the Dimasas, who continued to bear the brunt of the violence. Sources said a group of armed Hmars set fire to two Dimasa-inhabited villages, Guwabari and Chhilaacherra in the morning, forcing at least 75 villagers

BROTHERS AT WAR



- February 24: Hmar Peaga's Counterforce, in cooperation with the NSCN-IM, abducts three DHD activists.
- March 2: Dimasa militants retaliate by abducting three Hmar farmers.
- March 3: Dimasa rebels attack Hmar villages of Baimai and Haidhaho in the North Cachar Hills, forcing 760 Hmars to flee.
- March 26: A dozen armed Dimasa men attack the Hmar-inhabited Mhidampurij village, assault Hmars and ask them to leave. They also abducted seven Hmars but released them later.
- March 31: Party Hmars, open fire on Dimasa hamlets of Chokacham and Meghacham in Cachar district. The mayhem continues for four hours. 70 Hms torched while one person is killed, two are injured and more than a dozen villagers go missing.
- April 2: DHD vice-president threatens to call off ceasefire in protest against attack.
- April 3: Bodies of 21 bullet-riddled Dimasa tribes found on Khasai range. Police say all 21 victims were lined up by Hmar militants and shot dead.

to take shelter in Udarbond town, about 10 km from Silchar.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi sent minister of state for home Rockybhai Hussain to Silchar to take stock of the situation in the two districts. Senior police officials, led by director-general Hare Krishna

Deka, are camping in the two districts to monitor the developments.

Home commissioner B.K. Gohain told the army's "visible presence" in North Cachar Hills district was expected to calm the people.

The decision to send a delegation of legislators on a peace mission to the troubled area was taken after the chief minister backed a proposal made by BJP member Bimalangshu Roy during Zero Hour. Bodoland Demand Legislature Party member Hemendra Nath Brahma supported the resolution and made a case for keeping strict vigil on the other hill district of Karbi Anglong. He said ethnic clashes could break out in Karbi Anglong if the administration took it easy.

Gogoi informed the Assembly that he had asked the minister of state for home and the DGP to personally monitor security arrangements in Cachar and the adjacent North Cachar Hills. He said about 1,000 people were sheltered in two refugee camps in Cachar district.

On the possibility of a backlash by the Dima Halam Daoega (DHD), the chief minister said his government had restrained the Dimasa militant group from retaliating. "We have asked the outfit to stick to the ground rules of the ceasefire and leave everything to the law-enforcing agencies." "The DHD has threatened to call off the ceasefire if the government fails to protect the lives and property of the Dimasa people.

PCC president Pawan Singh Chatawar and the AICC general secretary for Assam, Mohsina Kidwai, told a news conference that the clashes in North Cachar Hills and Cachar districts were the outcome of rivalry between militant outfits and not the Hmar and Dimasa communities.

NE poll scenario

No drastic changes expected

Of the three North-east States going to the polls on Wednesday, Nagaland evokes considerable interest because political parties there have joined to thwart chief minister SC Jamir's bid to retain power for the third time in a row. The Congress has been ruling the state at a stretch since 1993, winning 35 of the 60 seats in the state assembly. It had a cakewalk in the 1998 election after the Opposition boycotted the elections at the instance of the Naga Holo and the NSCN-IM.

On the last occasion, fear kept voters away from the polling booths in large numbers even as elections were held in 17 constituencies. The situation this time is distinctly different. The mindset of the voters has changed after the venue of the peace talks shifted to Delhi, with people believing that chief minister Jamir is trying to scuttle an honourable settlement. Much depends on whether the NSCN-IM will encourage candidates from the sidelines although it has voiced the least interest in the poll process. The Congress has strong roots in the state and if discontent surfaced only recently it could be because of some powerful lobbies which are now at work.

Meghalaya is headed for a hung assembly this time. The ruling Nationalist Congress Party is so confident of emerging as the single largest entity that it is already thinking of forming a coalition. In the outgoing ministry the Congress shared power with the NCP but is now against joining it. Since the Garos, the traditional Congress vote bank, are with the NCP and Khasi political heavyweights are with regional parties, the post-poll scenario is likely to be very fluid and marked by hectic lobbying and a large degree of instability.

In Tripura, the Left Front feels the disturbance in the hill may affect its prospects. But violence before elections is nothing new in the state and the Marxists have always fared well. Admittedly, their influence over the tribal belt has waned in recent times as is clear from the humiliating defeat in the 2000 Tribal Area Autonomous District Council elections by the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, which allegedly has links with the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura. What bugs the Left Front the most is the Congress alliance with the newly formed Indigenous National Party of Tripura, which includes the Tripura National Volunteers (of Bijoy Hrangkhawl) and the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity. This is meant to be a serious threat but the Congress is not so cohesive a team as to pose a great challenge and, on one level, its alliance with non-democratic forces in the state is certain to alienate Bengali and Muslim immigrant votes. The Trinamul Congress, with which the BJP has aligned, is now relegated to third place despite Mamata Banerjee's best efforts. Whatever the outcome, Tripura's political landscape is not likely to change drastically.

Reality bites

Ulfa back in Dispur's face

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As if to dispel belief that it is on the run the Ulfa has, since December last year, unleashed a series of rocket attacks on Dispur and an IAF base and, most recently on a Digboi oil installation. This amounts to deliberate provocation, a message that cannot be ignored. The assault comes at a time when changes are taking place in neighbouring Nagaland, where serious efforts are on to restore lasting peace. The Ulfa has apparently taken advantage of Tarun Gogoi's complacency that militants will think twice before creating a fresh spell of chaos as in the early 1990s. Dispur probably thought the December rocket attack was an isolated incident. It should have toned up its intelligence which, unfortunately, still remains the weakest link in the fight against militancy. The use of rockets is indicative of the Ulfa not only handling sophisticated weaponry but also acquiring capability in smuggling, ostensibly with the help of agents from across the Bangladesh border.

With the Ulfa showing no signs of abjuring violence there is little likelihood of their coming to the negotiating table. The latest activities must be viewed with concern as they pose a threat to vital installations. There is need for strong measures tightened vigilance. It is quite clear that the Ulfa will not leave their hideouts in Bhutan voluntarily. Moreover, Bhutan is beset by domestic compulsions and is without adequate resources to act on its own. Delhi and Thimphu must work together to neutralise militant threats.

THE STATESMAN

13 MAR 2003

Blaze in Digboi refinery as ULFA attacks oil installations

By Barun Das Gupta

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GUWAHATI, MARCH 8. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) struck simultaneously at four places in upper and lower Assam last night, targeting oil installations and police posts. Two persons were killed and six injured.

Following the attacks a high alert was declared all over the State.

In Digboi, the ULFA targeted a fuel tank of a refinery containing 4,500 kilolitres of oil. The flames from the fire leapt up to 100 metres high, lighting up the night sky.

Nandan Saikia, deputy general manager of the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Assam Oil Division, said that efforts were on to prevent the fire from spreading to the 12 adjacent tanks.

About 3,000 people have been evacuated from this area and fire-fighting equipment rushed from the nearby districts to contain the fire.

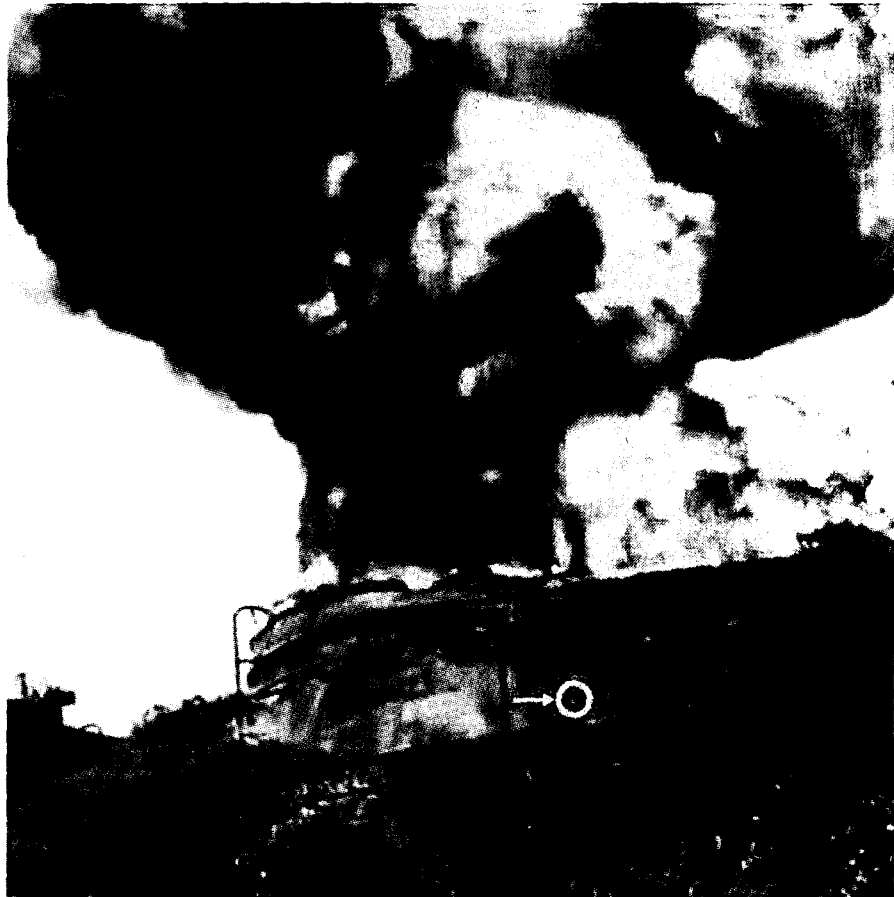
In another incident near Duliajan in upper Assam, the ULFA blew up Oil India Limited's pipeline carrying oil to the power-generating station of the North-Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) at Kathalguri.

The ULFA made a rocket attack on the Bongaigaon police reserve, but there was no casualty. Militants also fired on the Rangjuli police station in Goalpara district. No policemen were hurt, but the fleeing militants, firing indiscriminately, killed two labourers and injured six.

PTI reports:

Paresh Baruah, a self-styled commander-in-chief of the ULFA, rang up media houses in Guwahati this morning to claim responsibility for the attacks.

In Kolkata, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister, Ram Naik, said the fire in Digboi had been controlled. The extra foam



A motor spirit tank in the Digboi Refinery on fire on Saturday. The gaping hole on tank 559, said to have been caused by a rocket propelled grenade, is believed to have triggered the blaze. — AP

required for containing the fire had been sent from Guwahati, he said.

Asked whether adequate security measures were in place to protect oil installa-

tions in the country, Mr. Naik said that all were guarded by a separate Central force. "In spite of security arrangements such attacks take place," he added.

THE HINDU

9 MAR 2003

Tripura wants Mizoram to pull down rebel camps

Statesman News Service

AGARTALA, March 19. — Tripura wants the Mizoram government to pull down rebel camps run by the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura in Mizoram immediately. Chief minister Mr Manik Sarkar said here that the NLFT was now running five camps in Mizoram for training its personnel.

The rebel groups have also extended their network to some areas of Meghalaya, including the state capital Shillong. Mr Sarkar said the Mizoram government had been given details about the stepped-up activities of the state's insurgents inside in that state. The state authorities wanted Aizawl to take appropriate measures immediately to demolish the NLFT camps in Mizoram. Mr Sarkar reiterated that Tripura's banned rebel

groups were also running 58 camps in Bangladesh and that New Delhi was being approached by the state government repeatedly to bring adequate diplomatic pressure Dhaka to destroy the camps in that country.

Mr Sarkar said that he had discussed the states' insurgency problem with the Mizoram chief minister Mr Zoramthanga recently.

"He can take an initiative to persuade the Tripura rebels to participate in a dialogue to sort out their problems within the framework of the Constitution. As Mr Zoramthanga is a member of the Northeastern council, he can use that platform to make an appeal to the rebels to take the initiative for peace", Mr Sarkar said.

"We have no objection if the rebel leaders are interested in opening a dialogue with the Union government.

He however reiterated that although a number of hard-core militants had already surrendered arms before the authorities by responding to the government's appeal for peace, none of the top leaders of the outlawed rebel groups shown any readiness so far to open a dialogue with the authorities. Mr Sarkar said the Tripura government had taken steps for the economic rehabilitation of rebels who had returned to the mainstream.

The Mizoram chief minister said in Aizawl recently that some of the front ranking leaders of Northeastern rebel groups had secretly welcomed his initiative to invite them to the talks table. He was however reluctant to disclose the identity of those rebel outfits. Mr Zoramthanga has already initiated dialogue with the Naga rebel leaders for peace.

20 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

Lapang sworn in with jumbo team

Sangma decides to be in 'constructive' Opposition

HT Correspondent
Shillong, March 4

BRINGING TO an end the ongoing political crisis, the Congress-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government was sworn in at Raj Bhawan on Tuesday evening with D.D. Lapang as Chief Minister.

Lapang has inducted 37 other ministers in his jumbo Cabinet, out of which 27 are Cabinet ministers. It is quite surprising to see such a jumbo-size ministry in Meghalaya, which has been suffering from an acute financial crisis during the past year. The MDA, which had been claiming the 'sup-

port of 40 legislators till late Monday night, added two more legislators of the Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) in the coalition on Tuesday morning.

Of the total 38-member ministry, the Congress has 14 Cabinet ministers and seven ministers of state, while the UDP has eight.

The MDP has three, while the Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) and HSPDP have one Cabinet minister each. One Independent legislator has also been given Cabinet status. Interestingly, former Chief Minister Flinder Anderson Khonglam of the HSPDP has also been inducted as a Cabinet minister.

The Congress has seven out of the 10 ministers of state, the KHNAM has one, while the remaining two are Independent legislators.

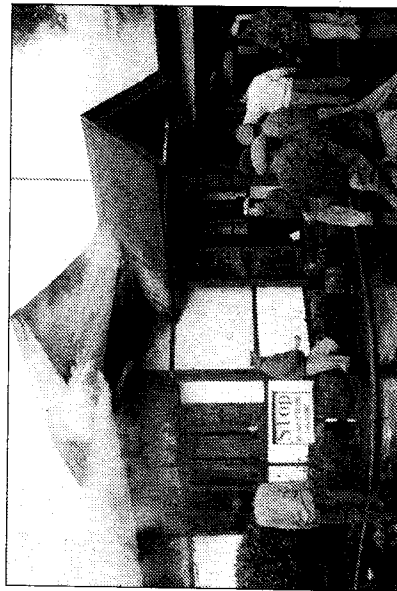
The portfolios are likely to be allocated on Wednesday. The new CM said the ministry had to be jumbo-size to accommodate all the MDA allies. "We'll try our best to make best use of the services of all the 42 legislators," Lapang said, adding that the remaining four, who could not be inducted into the ministry, would soon be given important responsibilities.

Lapang said stable governance would be the MDA's topmost priority. "We'll also try our best to resolve the unemployment problem in the state," he maintained.

100-yr-old records reduced to ashes in Secretariat fire

WHILE D.D. Lapang and his council of ministers were being sworn in at the Raj Bhawan on Tuesday evening, the Governor's Secretariat was reduced to ashes in a devastating fire. "We have no idea how this happened," S.K. Tiwari, Principal Secretary to the Governor, told HT, adding that all valuable government records had been reduced to ashes in the fire.

More than half a dozen fire-tenders rushed to Raj



Fire engulfs the Governor's Secretariat in the Raj Bhawan Complex in Shillong on Wednesday.

Bhawan to ~~collapse~~ flames. However, only a few sofas and shelves could be salvaged.

HTC, Shillong



D.D. Lapang (L) is sworn in as Meghalaya's Chief Minister by Governor M.M. Jacob in Shillong on Tuesday.

Lapang said he would try his best to rehabilitate the misguided youths in such a way that peace prevailed in the state.

Meanwhile, unable to woo the required support to form a coalition in Meghalaya, former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno Agitok Sangma's Nationalist Congress Party is now getting ready to play the "positive role of the Opposition". Sangma, kingmaker of Meghalaya's political theatre, had creat-

ed a major crisis and more confusion than anything else at Raj Bhawan on Monday morning when he claimed his party enjoyed the support of 34 members in the 60-member House.

"We respect the people's mandate. We also want a stable government in Meghalaya," the NCP general secretary told *Hindustan Times*, adding that the party legislators would now play the positive role of Opposition for the state's development.

SF-1
9/3

Ulfa blasts Digboi oil tank

J-N 5/8

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, March 8. — Ulfa militants carried out a series of attacks last night, blowing up a 5000 KL oil storage tank of the Assam Oil Division at Digboi in Tinsukia district, blasting a gas pipeline in Dibrugarh, firing on a police camp in Goalpara district and a commando barrack in Bongaigaon district. While fleeing after the attack on the police camp, militants fired at a Bihari settlement killing three persons.

No casualties have been reported from the blasts at Digboi and Dibrugarh.

Ulfa's self-styled commander-in-chief Mr Paresh Baruah rang up newspapers in Guwahati this morning to claim responsibility for the attacks on the IOC's petrol storage tank near Digboi refinery and the gas pipeline in Dibrugarh.

Tinsukia deputy commissioner Mr BN Das said militants used rocket launchers or mortars to hit the oil tank. Assam Oil Division deputy general manager Mr Nandan Saikia said the blast caused two ruptures in the tank and the preliminary loss was estimated at over Rs 10 crore.

Mr Das said the flames at IOC's petrol storage tank initially leapt to about 70 feet. More than 70 fire-tenders doused the flames and prevented it from spreading to six other nearby tanks late tonight.

In Dibrugarh district, Ulfa militants blasted an Oil India Ltd

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pipeline, damaging it partially. The pipeline carries gas from OIL, Duliajan, to the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd grid. Police seized wires and batteries of foreign make from the site. The pipeline was repaired this afternoon and flow of gas restored, IOC officials said.

Another group of militants attacked the Darrangiri a police outpost in Goalpara shattering window panes. The policemen returned the fire and the militants fled. But while fleeing they fired on a Bihari settlement, killing two persons. Another person died later in the hospital.

In Bongaigaon district, militants fired rocket propelled grenades on a commando barrack. The grenades missed the target and fell on the battalion inspector's residential quarters about 300 yards behind the barracks, officials said. The building's roof was partially damaged.

Naga Front may take over

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, March 2. — The Nagaland People's Front-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland is likely to form the next government in Nagaland.

The alliance, comprising the NPF, BJP, Samata Party and Janata Dal (United), has won 20 of the 58 seats for which results have been declared. The results for two more seats are expected on Tuesday. The DAN, however, is yet to stake claim to form the government.

The ruling Congress has so far won 21 seats and emerged as the single largest party. The Nagaland Democratic Movement and Independents have won four seats each.

Former chief minister and leader of the Nagaland unit of the BJP, Mr Hokishe Sema, told The Statesman that the chief minister would be from the NPF because it was the senior partner in the alliance and won 19 seats. The BJP made its debut winning seven seats while the Samata Party won one

Cong stakes claim in Meghalaya

GUWAHATI, March 2. — The Congress today staked claim to form the government in Meghalaya with the support of United Democratic Party, MDP and others. State Congress chief Mr DD Lapang called on the Governor this evening.

The Congress has 22 seats while the UDP and MDP have nine and four seats respectively. Of five Independents, three support the Congress-led coalition. Chief minister Dr Khonglam has indicated that he would resign tomorrow. — SNS

and JD-U two seats.

NPF leader Mr Neiphiu Rio said the Legislature Party leader would be elected at a meeting of DAN constituents tomorrow. Mr Rio claimed that the DAN had the support of four Independents taking its strength to 33. But DAN

sources differed with Mr Rio saying that the alliance was so far sure of the support of only one Independent MLA. He was also optimistic of the alliance winning the two seats for which results are yet to be declared.

In Kohima, chief minister Mr SC Jamir said he would resign tomorrow paving the way for formation of the government by the DAN, adds PTI.

While Mr Rio, who was home minister in the Congress government but left the party just before the polls, appears set to be elected as the NPF legislative party leader, the sources said he may not be accepted by all the DAN allies.

The alliance, one of them said, had fought the elections under the convenorship of Mr Sema so he should be made the chief minister.

Asked how the BJP could fare well on debut in a Christian state like Nagaland, Mr Sema said the people had realised that the BJP was "good" for them.

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THE STATESMAN

Naga talks hinge on new govt

CL Manoj in New Delhi

March 2. — Who heads the next government in Kohima could have a significant bearing on the ongoing Naga talks. The SC Jamir-led Congress government's failure to retain its hold on the state should not come as a surprise since the recent Centre-NSCN-IM talks in Delhi had clearly placed the odds against the Congress strongman.

Significantly, for the first time the NSCN-IM did not issue a boycott call though it did not participate in the polls. NSCN(I-M) boycott calls during earlier polls had made things easier for its most consistent opponent, Mr Jamir, since he never had to face a serious rival in the electoral field.

It is widely believed that this time the NSCN (I-M) leadership had clandestinely backed candidates of the Nagaland People's Front, making things difficult for Mr Jamir. But he managed to put up a respectable fight, demonstrating his political acumen and

fighting spirit. But a hung Assembly may deny him the status of being the Congress's longest-serving north-eastern satrap.

It is clear that the BJP and some other local outfits and fronts will this time back the NPF to help it form a government. On the one hand, it will help the BJP and the NDA government to unmake a strong Congress fort in the north-east and more importantly an NPF government could play an active and fruitful role in taking the Centre-NSCN -IM talks further.

It was believed that a victory by the Congress could have upset the momentum of the Naga talks. The possibility of the pro-NSCN (I-M) NPF heading a government in Nagaland could also add to the uneasiness of other North-Eastern states as it could give a boost to the demand for a Greater Nagaland, comprising the Naga-inhabited areas of neighbouring states. Mr Jamir has been a strong opponent to the demand for a Greater Nagaland.

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