

Two more Biharis killed

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, NOV. 23. Two more Biharis, including an 80-year-old man, were killed, two injured and several houses burnt on Saturday night in Tinsukia district. The rest of Assam was quiet.

Near Rupai Tea Estate under Dum Duma police station limits, octogenarian Lal Dhari Das was hacked to death by a mob around 11.30 p.m. last night. Two were injured.

Kamal Kurmi was hacked to death at Ningsi Sonarigaon village under Dhola police station limits and a house was set on fire.

The Union Minister for the Development of the North-East Region, C.P. Thakur, and the Minister of State for Home, Swami Chinmayananda, visited Tinsukia and Dibrugarh today.

Laloo to lead team

PTI reports from New Delhi: The Rashtriya Janata Dal president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, will lead an eight-member Parliamentary delegation to Assam tomorrow on a goodwill mission to instil confidence and a sense of security among Biharis there.

Mr. Yadav said the team would return on Tuesday after assessing the situation and present its report to the Prime Min-



WHEN WILL THIS MAYHEM END? The question seems to haunt this Bihari labourer in Guwahati after hearing the news of the killing of two more men from his State on Sunday. — Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar

ister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi.

"We will meet the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, and leaders of political parties there and also talk to Bihari

people in the State", he said.

The team would comprise Swaraj Kaushal (Haryana Vikas Party), Rajeev Shukla (Congress), and the RJD MPs, Ramendra Kumar Ravi, Ramdeo Bhandary, Saroj Dubey, Prem Gupta and Kum Kum Rai.

Sena queers ethnic strife pitch

Statesman News Service

Rape scars Assam

MUMBAI/PATNA, Nov. 21. — Railway authorities today cancelled the 23 November examination in Mumbai for recruitment of 2,200 candidates as gangmen and helpers in the D category, following what was called "damage to computer system and other records" during vandalism by Shiv Sainiks on 18 November. Officials said the examination date would be intimated to candidates later. The RRB in Mumbai had received 6.5 lakh application for the 2,200 posts.

Today's edition of *Saamna*, the Shiv Sena daily, had carried a threat by Sena chief Mr Bal Thackeray against recruitment of Biharis and other "outsiders" for the posts. He had said his party would not allow the test "at any cost" till "outsiders"

GUWAHATI, Nov. 21. — The first case of rape in the ongoing orgy of violence in Assam was reported today from Golaghat. An eighteen-year-old girl was raped there on Wednesday night. The death toll in the state reached 33 today. Officials put it at 27. Arson continued in several places across the state. — SNS

Details on page 5

were banned from taking the test. Maharashtra deputy chief minister Mr Chhagan Bhujbal supported the Sena stand and said he too would demand reservation in jobs for local youths.

Justifying the killings of Biharis in Assam, Mr Thackeray said in *Saamna* it was his organisation's policy too in Maharashtra. "Formation of states on linguistic basis entails sons of the soil get priority in employment." He

was specific about jobs for locals in all PSUs, besides Railways.

A three-member Central team led by Dr CP Thakur will visit violence-hit areas of Assam tomorrow.

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav today called Mr LK Advani to express his "grave concern" over the Sena chief's remarks. He urged him to restrain Mr Thackeray from making "parochial statements". "Mr Thackeray has done a criminal act by issuing such an inflammatory statement... how you can save Kashmir when you have people like Bal Thackeray threatening the country's unity and integrity."

Bihar BJP leader Mr Sushil Kumar Modi today charged RJD leader of Jamalpur Mr Bharat Yadav with engineering the attack on train passengers.

More reports on page 5

25 die in Assam as violence snowballs, army help sought

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & PTI

Guwahati: A violent backlash over the recent assault on Assamese train passengers left 25 Biharis dead, including four gunned down by ULFA insurgents, on Wednesday as the army was called out statewide and indefinite curfew clamped in the worst-hit Tinsukia district.

Official sources said ULFA militants shot dead four Biharis and injured seven in New Bongaigaon.

The incident came a day after motorcycle-borne ULFA militants shot dead four Bihari truck drivers at Baxirhat in Dhubri district.

Suspected ULFA militants also struck at Dibrugarh district, hacking to death the family members of a small-time Bihari trader at Kheronipathar. The victims included two women and two little girls, while the businessman escaped unhurt, the sources said.

ULFA chief Paresh Baruah had threatened action against Hindi-

speaking people and asked them to quit Assam following the attack on railway passengers from the state in Bihar.

The sources said three of a family, including a three-year-old child,

Douzing the flames

- ULFA chief Paresh Baruah threatens action against Hindi-speaking people
- Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi writes to Assam CM Tarun Gogoi seeking effective steps against the culprits
- Union minister for north-east affairs C.P. Thakur will submit a report to the Centre

were butchered at Hahakargaon in Tinsukia district on Wednesday.

According to a report from Patna, Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi shot off a letter to her Assam counterpart Tarun Gogoi, seeking effective

steps against those perpetrating atrocities on Biharis.

"I request you to identify the persons responsible for the grave crimes against Biharis and initiate strong action against them. I would also like you to apprise us about the action taken," she said in the letter.

In a related development, the Nagaland government has stepped up measures to ensure peace in the state "at any cost."

State home minister T.M. Lotha, in a communique, on Wednesday asked all deputy commissioners of districts in the state, particularly in Dimapur and Kohima which are inhabited by both tribals and non-tribals, to ensure that peace was maintained.

Union minister for north-east affairs C.P. Thakur said he would submit a report to the Centre on the violence in Assam and Bihar triggered by the assault on Bihari students by Assamese locals during the Railway Recruitment Board examination on November 9.

Assam backlash bandh stokes embers

OUR BUREAU

Nov. 17: Hindi-speaking residents of Assam continued to bear the brunt of the backlash over rail passengers from the Northeast being attacked in Bihar. Sporadic incidents of violence were reported from across the state during the 24-hour bandh called by the All Assam Students Union (AASU).

The Bihar government this evening handed over the probe into the attacks on rail passengers to the CBI and requested Delhi to send 20 additional companies of central forces.

The announcement followed a request by Assam to institute a judicial inquiry or one by the CBI.

"Without losing faith in the ability of our police to probe such cases, we have decided to recommend a CBI inquiry as the incidents involved people from several states and also in consideration of the request from my Assam counterpart," chief secretary K.A.H. Subramanian told reporters in presence of RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav in Patna.

Several passengers from the Northeast had complained of molestation — a woman was stripped and tormented in one instance — and assault while their trains passed through Bihar last week after an allegation that some applicants from Bihar were prevented from taking a railway recruitment test in Guwahati.

In Guwahati, the AASU leadership claimed the 24-hour statewide bandh was "total and peaceful".

However, reports of people hailing from Bihar being targeted continued to pour in from various parts of the state. Some of these incidents occurred in the



AASU activists burn tyres to block a road during the bandh on Monday. (Picture by UB Photos)

capital city. The impact of the bandh revived memories of the anti-foreigner agitation in the state from the late seventies to the early eighties.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi cut short his visit to Mizoram in view of the worsening situation in his state. He reviewed security arrangements immediately after returning to Guwahati and asked the administration to deal sternly with troublemakers.

The officer on special duty in the chief minister's office, Debojit Das, said an all-party meeting would be held from 11 am tomorrow to review the situation.

Bhattacharyya blamed miscreants for the violence and said all district units of the student organisation had been asked to prevent unscrupulous people from taking advantage of the situation. He said the Centre and the Bihar and Assam governments were responsible for the outbreak of violence.

Governor Lt Gen. (retd) Ajay Singh invited the AASU leadership for discussions after reviewing the situation.

During the meeting, Bhattacharyya repeated his organisation's demand for cent per cent reservation of grade C and D

railway jobs in Assam for resident candidates.

The AASU leader told the media after the meeting that the governor promised to raise the subject in Delhi.

Chief secretary J.P. Rajkhowa wrote to his Bihar counterpart Subramanian, urging him not to delay the probe into the attacks on rail passengers.

He said an inquiry was necessary to "allay the hurt feelings of the people of Assam and parts of the neighbouring states".

Subramanian had yesterday described the attacks in Bihar as "unfortunate and shameful".

Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Laloo Prasad Yadav appealed for peace again after his interaction with Bhattacharyya and AASU president Prabin Boro.

He said the Rabri Devi government would issue shoot-at-sight orders in the event of recurrence of violence against passengers on trains passing through Bihar.

Laloo Yadav, who sympathised with the Northeast residents' anxiety for jobs in the railway, demanded a fixed quota of railway jobs for "my brothers and sisters of the northeastern states".

9 killed in Kuki-Karbi conflict

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, Nov. 17. — The ongoing Kuki-Karbi conflict in the Karbi Anglong district is likely to take a turn for the worse with the recovery of nine bodies of Kukis from two places in the Singhason Hills.

Seven bodies were found from Ganjan and two from Dihanglang. A faction of the United People's Democratic Solidarity, a Karbi militant outfit, is suspected to be behind the killings.

The Karbi Anglong DSP, Mr Abdul Quddus, said the killings at Ganjan took place on 14 November: 70 houses of the Karbis were torched. Militants carried out the killings at Dihanglang last night.

More than 20 people have died and several houses torched in the nearly month-long clashes between the UPDS and the Kuki Revolutionary Army.

Karbi-Khashi clash

A Karbi youth was set on fire by a mob in Shillong around 1.30 p.m. today in an apparent retaliation to Khashis being driven out from the Karbi Anglong district.

The youth, a student of Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, is being treated for serious burn injuries.

THE STATESMAN

18 NOV 2003

Assamese assaulted in Bihar trains

Kishanganj (Bihar): Anti-Assamese violence continued in parts of Bihar following the alleged assault on Bihari job-seekers in the railways in Guwahati on Sunday. Agitated students vandalised railway property and stopped the Trivananthapuram Kamroop Express train in Kishanganj station protesting against the alleged assault, officials said on Thursday.

Official sources said hundreds of students stormed the Kishanganj station on Wednesday night, stopped two trains, beat up some Assamese passengers and indulged in heavy stone-throwing, damaging a few bogies of the trains.

They also shouted anti-Assam

government slogans and lodged a strong protest against the alleged attack on Bihari students at Kati-har station on Tuesday.

sengers protesting against the alleged denial of permission to appear in the exams for group D posts in Guwahati on Sunday.

Chauvinistic youth



Rabri Devi

- Kishanganj station stormed
- Railway property damaged
- Rabri warns against violence
- DMs will be held accountable
- District officials asked to safeguard railway property

Meanwhile, chief minister Rabri Devi warned that the state government would take strong action against district magistrates and police superintendents concerned if such violence recurred.

The DMs and SPs concerned will be held responsible if fresh violence is reported in their respective districts against the Assamese property assaulting Assamese pas-

travelling through trains or roads, the chief minister said on Thursday.

Ms Rabri Devi directed the authorities to intensify patrolling and beef up security measures. No violence will be tolerated, she said.

RJD supremo Laloo Prasad Yadav has also condemned the incidents.

State home secretary B.K. Haldhar said the district officials had also been asked to safeguard railway property and provide full protection to passengers.

The East Central Railway has moved in two companies of the Railway Protection Force to Kati-har to maintain peace and provide security to passengers and railway property. PTI

British cops fail to wash away racial slur stains

Indo-Asian News Service

LONDON, Nov. 3. — The BBC's sting operation to expose racism in the police forces in Britain continues to cause ripples, with new disclosures in the media almost every day. Based on a confidential report, the *Observer* has reported that the Metropolitan police had not done enough to eradicate racism.

There are allegations that it allowed a racist culture to develop unchecked in its ranks, with black and Asian officers facing insults, discrimination and intimidation by white colleagues.

The damning internal report says the Metropolitan police has a poor image with black and Asian people, both inside and outside the force, and often approaches grievances from ethnic minori-

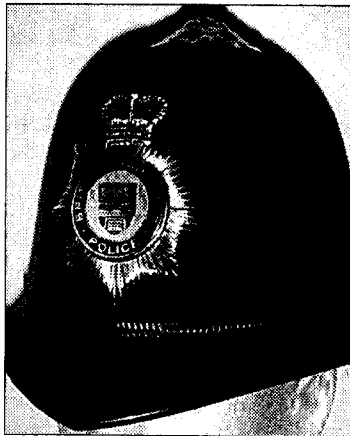
ty staff with "apathy" and "misdirection".

It says that a greater proportion of black and Asian officers leave the force during their training or probationary period than equivalent white officers.

The paper said the police confirmed that claim, admitting that more than double the number of black and Asian officers who join the force leave before they have completed their probationary period compared to whites.

The report quotes an officer at the force's training centre in Hendon, north London, as saying to one Asian trainee: "If one of my daughters came home with a black man, I'd probably kick him out of the house."

The report, "What is Happening to Our Ethnic Minorities?", will reignite the debate about racism in police sparked by the BBC documentary, *The Secret Policeman*.



ETHNIC IRASCIBILITY

Growing North-East Militancy And The Tribal Psyche

By JB LAMA

An Assam Rifles column sent deep into the Naga Hills to establish outposts at Mon and Noklak in 1951 had to trudge 10 miles a day through inhospitable terrain to reach destinations. Beyond Mokokchung no road existed and they had to hire a large number of young men to carry rations. At every village along the way, fresh teams had to be hired because no single group would venture beyond familiar boundaries for fear of being attacked by neighbouring marauders. These limits arrived at, the carriers would collect their wages, group together and make haste for home to ward off surprise attacks. Those were times when headhunting was still in vogue, villages were often caught up in internecine strife and each Naga was known by the tattoo he carried on his face.

No consolation

The past 53 years have laid to rest that primitive past and the boundaries no longer exist. But there is little consolation. Going by the latest trend of people dividing along ethnic lines, it would seem the entire North-east will one day be engulfed in ethnic cleansing or ethnic insurgency, making it impossible for people to move around freely. Manipur bore the brunt of such tragedy in the 1990s. The mushrooming of militant groups is largely responsible for the mounting tensions and in Manipur alone there are about two dozen outfits. Indeed, not a single state in the North-east is free from the scourge.

For generations the Nagas and Kukis in Manipur's hill districts of Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong have lived in peace although there has been an undercurrent of tension since 1982 with the administration's decision to convert the Sadar Hills area of Kangpokpi (Kuki-dominated) in Senapati district — where Nagas predominate — into a separate revenue entity.

Then in 1992, relations dipped after the National Socialist Council of Nagalim headed by Isak Swu and Th Muivah imposed "taxes" on Kuki villages and traders in Chandel district. To put pressure on the Kukis, they often blocked the Palel-Moreh Road. Moreh is an important Kuki-dominated border town where business worth lakhs of rupees is transacted daily. Nagas and Meiteis make up a small percentage of the population, along with Tamils who were forced to settle there after being driven from their homes in Myanmar in the 1960s.

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

The NSCN-IM's apparent motive is to control Moreh.

Simmering tensions surfaced when suspected Naga activists allegedly killed a young Kuki at Bonjang village in the Moreh police station area, provoking his clansmen to retaliate and drive several Tangkhuls from their homes. In the bloody exchanges that rolled on for more than five years, over 750 people were killed (the unofficial figure runs to 1,500). Savagery of the worst kind was practised when 88 Kuki men, women and children were butchered in

for reunification of the Zomi areas in Manipur, Assam and Tripura. More than this, what could have inflamed the Kukis was the Paites' claim that they were a separate tribe, possibly to avoid being attacked by Nagas.

The latest in the series of ethnic clashes was in Assam's Cachar and North Cachar Hills districts between the Dimasas and Hmars, leaving 30 dead. The Hmars, of the Kuki-Chin community, have no territory of their own and are scattered through Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, Tripura and Myanmar.



September 1993 at Zoupi village (in Senapati). Mercifully, there have been fewer killings since the ceasefire came into effect in Nagaland in August 1997 although Manipur's four hill districts do not come under the purview of the agreement, an indication perhaps that some goodwill still persists.

Most unexpected

Most unexpected were the 1995 Kuki-Tamil clashes at Moreh because there was no known enmity between them. About a dozen were killed and Tamil-run shops in Premnagar at the heart of Moreh were razed. It all started with the abduction of a Tamil teenager by suspected Kuki militants in the belief that he was an NSCN-IM informer. What led to the killing was not known but both the communities deny having struck the first blow.

More confusing perhaps were the clashes between the Paites and Kukis in Manipur's Churachandpur district in July 1997. The Kuki National Front gunned down nine Paite villagers and in the arson that followed 24 more were reportedly killed. Ironically, both communities belong to the same Kuki-Chin stock and had for generations lived in peace. The conflict arose from KNA suspicions that the Paites were hobnobbing with neighbouring Mizoram's Zomi Revolutionary Organisation, said to be working

1950s over the Hmars refusal to contribute to the Kuki fund.

Peace returned to Mizoram in 1986 after two decades of rebellion led by the Mizo National Front, the party now in power. It earned monetary assistance as a peace bonus. But since 1997, the Bru (Reang) National Liberation Front has been active and champions the cause of 30,000 Reang refugees who fled their homes following an ethnic flare-up in October the same year and are now sheltering in Tripura. The trouble began when a Mizo forest warden was murdered. In the riot that ensued, 10 Reangs were killed. The Mizo-Reang relationship has been strained over the latter's demand for an autonomous district council and reservation of 3 assembly seats.

A worried lot

In Arunachal Pradesh also, ethnic animosities run high. The Arunachalese are opposed to the Centre's move to confer citizenship on 50,000 Chakma and Hajong refugees whom Delhi had settled on humanitarian grounds in 1964.

In Assam's Bodo region, the Adivasis are a worried lot. Several killings have taken place in the past. While the moderate militant Bodo Liberation Tigers has happily accepted the creation of a Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule, the proscribed National Democratic Front of Boroland has made no secret of its design for ethnic purification.

Even now hundreds of victims of ethnic killings in the Bodo area are said to be languishing in relief camps. Mizoram has refused to repatriate Reang refugees from Tripura camps, claiming that the majority of them are not its citizens.

In the Manipur conflagration, more than 5,500 houses were razed, rendering 25,000 homeless. It is alleged that notwithstanding the presence of a Central team to oversee their rehabilitation and the sanctioning of adequate amount of funds, there are still people waiting to be resettled. So who is responsible?

Minister of state for home ID Swamy and Dispur leaders lost no time in visiting the affected areas in the North Cachar Hills and Cachar to instill confidence. But one must remember, too, that the killing instinct and vendetta are deeply ingrained in the tribal psyche. The smallest spark has the potential of developing into a forest fire. The basic cause of occasional ethnic uprisals is backwardness promoted by ignorance. Perhaps fast and balanced regional development would prompt a more responsive end to it all.

Congo ethnic group alleges atrocities

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UNITED NATIONS, MAY 22. Representatives from Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have alleged that military and other armed groups are committing atrocities, including mass murder and cannibalism, against the indigenous pygmy minority which, they say, is on the verge

of extinction. The representatives, who are attending the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, said the allegations might be difficult to believe but they are true.



Tribal militiamen at an undisclosed locality near Bunia on Thursday. — AFP

of extinction. The representatives, who are attending the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, said the allegations might be difficult to believe but they are true.

They urged the media to keep the international community focused on the horrors being committed in the country, particularly against the pygmies.

Describing the DRC as "a country at war in spite of itself," Njuma Ekundanayo, a Vice-chairperson of the Permanent Forum, told presspersons that while there were no exact statis-

tics on the number of indigenous people of Congo, years of brutal violence and reprisals had clearly revealed that the pygmy minority was the most attacked. She painted a picture of an entire race of people on the verge of extinction — politically marginalised in towns and villages and hunted down, trapped and eaten by the military in the Congolese jungles.

Mass grave

Meanwhile, aid workers clearing bodies from a troubled north-eastern Congolese town have discovered a mass grave, bringing the death toll from tribal fighting to

more than 300, a U.N. official said on Thursday. Aid workers were tipped off about the grave, which was found to contain more than 32 bodies, on Wednesday by residents on the outskirts of Bunia where it was located, said Isabel Abric, a spokeswoman for the U.N. mission in Congo. The bodies appeared to have been dumped into a pre-existing pit and were in a state of decomposition, making it impossible to say exactly how many there were, Ms. Abric said. — AP

23 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Tripura rebels kill 30 Bengalis

Ethnic cleansing the motive

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, May 7

IN A frenzied bout of violence over two nights, militants in Tripura butchered 30 Bengalis in three separate incidents.

In the latest strike, on Wednesday night, suspected ATTF activists raided Mohurchara market in West Tripura around 9 pm and mowed down eight people on the spot. A ninth man, taken to the GB Hospital in Agartala with seven others, died on admission.

The same outfit had struck on Tuesday night, killing 19 and wounding eight people at Jogeswar Nagar, a predominantly Bengali village along the Bangladesh border in West Tripura, about 55 km from here.

Two others were killed in another attack in the state on Tuesday evening.

The Jogeswar attack — part of a renewed vendetta against the area's Bengali settlers — was carried out by a joint team of ATTF militants and criminals from Satchari in Bangladesh where the militant outfit has its headquarters.

"The attackers didn't come merely to kill; they were bent on killing in a brutal manner, sack the village and loot the houses," Ranjit Sarkar, a survivor, said.

Police confirmed that it was a coordinated and well-thought-out attack. The attackers had come in a group of 80 or more people, they said.

Reliving the horror, Amalesh Sarkar, a villager, said, "It was around midnight when the militants swooped down and encircled the village. Soon they started torching our houses and killing our people. They also threw a child and man into a blazing house and then entered the burnt-out huts to loot whatever valuables had escaped the fire. Even the cattle were not spared".

Seventeen people, including five women and three children, died on the spot, while two others died on way to hospital. At least seven bodies were charred beyond recognition.

One-year-old Swapna Sarkar lost five family members, including her parents. Hers was just one of four families wiped out in the carnage.

Local MLA and forest minister Pranab Debbarma, the first VIP to visit Jogeswar Nagar after the carnage, said the massacre had the blessings of foreign agencies trying to create ethnic tension in the region.

The ruling and Opposition parties called a 12-hour statewide bandh on Thursday.

8 MAY 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Insurgent politics

By Wasbir Hussain

19/4

NEW front has emerged in Assam's insurgency and ethnic milieu. If two small ethnic groups' deciding to set aside their age-old antagonistic stance and to get locked in a bloody turf war is had enough, the involvement or realignment of heavily-armed rebel outfits in the conflict is an ominous development. In fact, the bout of mindless arson and rioting between hill tribal communities concentrated in southern Assam — the Dimasas and the Hmar — for nearly two months now, is the direct outcome of the actions of rebel groups claiming to represent both these communities. The result — innocent civilians being drawn into the vortex of this conflict.

The root of this ongoing Hmar-Dimasa ethnic feud can be traced to the February 24 abduction of three important members of the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) — a Dimasa rebel group active in southern Assam's North Cachhar Hills district, bordering Manipur and Nagaland, by cadres of its former ally, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Miyah). The abduction, which was subsequently carried out with the help of the Hmar People's Convention (Hemacrat), Hmar rebel group led to a string of retaliatory attacks by armed Dimasas, triggering counter-

attacks. The biggest such attack that turned the ethnic feud into a full-scale riot was the raid on at least two Dimasa villages in the Cachhar district by Hmar gunmen on March 31. Around 30 Dimasa farmers were kidnapped. The attackers later shot 23 of them dead. Four persons are missing while several others are in hospital. This resulted in the Dimasas hitting back at the minority Hmars, displacing hundreds of people. Over 200 houses, mostly belonging to the Hmars, have since been touched by armed raiders.

The 1991 Census put the total population of Dimasas in Assam at

fully in the area for decades. In 1985, some radical Dimasa youths formed the DHD to fight for the rights of their comparatively marginalised community. The DHD aligned itself with the NSCN (I-M) with the latter agreeing to provide its cadres arms and training in return for a share of 'tax', which is essentially extortion money, collected from almost everyone in the North Cachhar Hills district. Government officials and elected local councillors included. The DHD-

the current violence in southern Assam may look like an ethnic riot as it has all the ingredients of one. But it is actually a battle for territorial supremacy between rival insurgent groups. The DHD has already enlisted into a ceasefire agreement with the Government, and a deal is likely on the lines of the agreement for greater autonomy clinched between the Bodo rebel group, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), and the Centre in February. Therefore, the DHD

insurgent outfit enough spare to manoeuvre, such as regrouping, replenishing their weapons and ammunition supplies and mass-contact. This becomes possible because of the near-free movement that the rebels come to enjoy after entering into a truce with the authorities. In the current case, too, two of the warring groups, the DHD and the NSCN (I-M), have entered into ceasefire agreements with the Government.

In such situations, the authorities in the region, as elsewhere in the country, often prefer to go for fire-fighting measures, and nothing more. The Assam administration in the current case called out the Army to tackle the riots. New Delhi on its part responded by rushing the Minister of State for Home, I. D. Swami, to the State. Mr. Swami promised two things during his visit: payment of an ex-gratia amount of Rs. 1 lakh to each of those killed in the ethnic feud, and enhancement of Central funds towards the modernisation of the Assam Police. These are measures that cannot in any way address the problems. The Centre and the State Government in the Northeast must review their policy, if there is one, on the modalities of a ceasefire before holding peace talks with one or the other insurgent groups in the region, many of which are no better than rag-tag bands of armed men. The authorities must put in place a mechanism to ensure that cadres of a rebel group that has entered into a truce with the Government do not behave as if they are above the law. Going by the situation on the ground as of now, neither the NSCN (I-M) nor the DHD cadres are adhering to the mutually agreed ceasefire ground rules, nor are the rebels staying put in their designated camps. The result is that violence is continuing, and newer fronts, often avoidable, are being created in this already turbulent frontier.

(The writer is an Associate Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management.

The authorities must put in place a mechanism to ensure that cadres of a rebel group that has entered into a truce with the Government do not behave as if they are above the law.

NSCN (I-M) combine created a reign of terror in the area. The terrain provided them easy trans-border access between Assam, Nagaland or Manipur. Everything was going well for this rebel alliance until the DHD started pushing its demand for a separate Dimasa homeland or Dimarajit openly. What ruffled the rift between the DHD and the NSCN (I-M) was the former's claim to the bustling town of Dimapur, Nagaland's commercial hub, as an integral part of Dimarajit. Dimapur, from the DHD's point of view, belongs to the Dimasas as their chiefs had lorded over their people in the past with the town as a focal point. The NSCN (I-M) would not think of ceding any Naga-inhabited area to anyone, and would rather want parts of Assam to be merged in its proposed 'Greater Nagaland' plan. The other reason why the DHD severed its ties with the NSCN (I-M) was the latter's claim to the large chunk of 'tax' collected by the DHD, rather on its own or jointly, from an area dominated by the Dimasas. After it parted ways with the DHD, the NSCN (I-M) moved closer to the in-

terested. However, Secretary, Government of Assam, to hold peace

19 APR 2003

THE HINDU

19 APR 2003

Insurgent politics

By Wasbir Hussain

19/1

ethnic problem HD-10

A NEW front has emerged in Assam's insurgency and ethnic minefield. If two small ethnic groups' deciding to set aside their age-old harmonious coexistence and to get locked in a bloody turf war is bad enough, the involvement or realignment of heavily-armed rebel outfits in the conflict is an ominous development. In fact, the bout of mindless arson and rioting between two hill tribal communities concentrated in southern Assam — the Dimasas and the Hmars — for nearly two months now, is the direct outcome of the actions of rebel groups claiming to represent both these communities. The result: innocent civilians being drawn into the vortex of this conflict.

The root of this ongoing Hmar-Dimasa ethnic feud can be traced to the February 24 abduction of three important members of the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD), a Dimasa rebel group active in southern Assam's North Cachar Hills district, bordering Manipur and Nagaland, by cadres of its former ally, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). The abduction, which was apparently carried out with the help of the Hmar People's Convention (Democratic), Hmar rebel group, led to a string of retaliatory attacks by armed Dimasas, triggering counter-attacks.

The biggest such attack that turned the ethnic feud into a full-scale riot was the raid on at least two Dimasa villages in the Cachar district by Hmar gunmen on March 31. Around 30 Dimasa farmers were kidnapped. The attackers later shot 23 of them dead. Four persons are missing while several others are in hospital. This resulted in the Dimasas hitting back at the minority Hmars, displacing hundreds of people. Over 200 houses, mostly belonging to the Hmars, have since been torched by armed raiders.

The 1991 Census put the total population of Dimasas in Assam at 65,104, and the Hmars at 11,189. The two groups have been living peace-

fully in the area for decades. In 1995, some radical Dimasa youths formed the DHD to fight for the rights of their comparatively marginalised community. The DHD aligned itself with the NSCN (I-M) with the latter agreeing to provide its cadres arms and training in return for a share of "tax", which is essentially extortion money, collected from almost everyone in the North Cachar Hills district. Government officials and elected local councillors included. The DHD-

the current violence in southern Assam may look like an ethnic riot as it has all the ingredients of one. But, it is actually a battle for territorial supremacy between rival insurgent groups. The DHD has already entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Government, and a deal is likely on the lines of the agreement for greater autonomy clinched between the Bodo rebel group, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), and the Centre in February. Therefore, the DHD

insurgent outfit enough space to manoeuvre, such as regrouping, replenishing their weapons and ammunition supplies and mass-contact. This becomes possible because of the near-free movement that the rebels come to enjoy after entering into a truce with the authorities. In the current case, too, two of the warring groups, the DHD and the NSCN (I-M), have entered into ceasefire agreements with the Government.

In such situations, the authorities in the region, as elsewhere in the country, often prefer to go for fire-fighting measures, and nothing more. The Assam administration in the current case called out the Army to tackle the riots. New Delhi on its part responded by rushing the Minister of State for Home, I. D. Swami, to the State. Mr. Swami promised two things during his visit: payment of an ex-gratia amount of Rs. 1 lakh to each of those killed in the ethnic feud, and enhancement of Central funds towards the modernisation of the Assam Police. These are measures that cannot in any way address the problem. The Centre and the State Governments in the Northeast must review their policy, if there is one, on the modalities of a ceasefire before holding peace talks with one or the other insurgent groups in the region, many of which are no better than rag-tag bands of armed men. The authorities must put in place a mechanism to ensure that cadres of a rebel group that has entered into a truce with the Government do not behave as if they are above the law. Going by the situation on the ground as of now, neither the NSCN (I-M) nor the DHD cadres are adhering to the mutually agreed ceasefire ground rules, nor are the rebels staying put in their designated camps. The result is that violence is continuing, and newer fronts, often avoidable, are being created in this already turbulent frontier.

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The authorities must put in place a mechanism to ensure that cadres of a rebel group that has entered into a truce with the Government do not behave as if they are above the law.

NSCN (I-M) combine created a reign of terror in the area. The terrain provided them easy trans-border access between Assam, Nagaland or Manipur. Everything was going well for this rebel alliance until the DHD started pushing its demand for a separate Dimasa homeland or Dimaraji openly. What caused the rift between the DHD and the NSCN (I-M) was the former's claim to the bustling town of Dimapur, Nagaland's commercial hub, as an integral part of Dimaraji. Dimapur, from the DHD's point of view, belongs to the Dimasas as their chieftains lorded over their people in the past with the town as a focal point. The NSCN (I-M) would not think of ceding any Naga-inhabited area to anyone, and would rather want parts of Assam to be merged into its proposed "Greater Nagaland" plan. The other reason why the DHD severed its ties with the NSCN (I-M) was the latter's claim to the large chunk of "tax" collected by the DHD, either on its own or jointly, from areas dominated by the Dimasas. After it parted ways with the DHD, the NSCN (I-M) moved closer to the little-known Hmar People's Convention (Democratic). On the surface,

could now be keen on going ahead with an ethnic cleansing in the areas of its dominance to oust whatever little Hmar population may be there. The Hmars, or the Hmar rebel groups such as the HPC (D), may have seen through the DHD game plan, forcing them to move closer to the NSCN (I-M) for support. This may or may not be the case, but the NSCN (I-M) aligning itself with the HPC (D) immediately after severing its ties with the DHD goes to show the fragile nature of rebel alliances in the northeast. It has proved that most of such tie-ups are marriages of convenience or opportunistic. Within months of severing its links with the Dimasa outfit, the NSCN (I-M) is being accused by the authorities in Assam of setting ablaze Dimasa homes and threatening members of the community.

Another aspect that cannot be overlooked is the extent of undesirable activities in which insurgent groups in the region indulge after entering into a truce with the Government or security forces. A ceasefire to enable the rebel group concerned and the Government to hold peace talks often provides cadres of such an

19 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

19 APR 2003

Prisoners escape by helicopter

AIX-EN-PROVENCE (FRANCE): Police fanned out across southern France as officials on Tuesday vowed to capture three jail



inmates who escaped by helicopter on Monday. The prisoners fled with the help of accomplices who hijacked a helicopter and ordered the pilot to hover over the prison courtyard in Luyens, southeastern France, police said. One of the accomplices dropped from the helicopter on a rope ladder and used a high-powered saw to cut through the prison's steel security netting. The three inmates —

accused of running an international drug ring — grabbed hold of the ladder and were flown away. Police said the helicopter landed shortly afterward in a nearby stadium from where the prisoners fled by car (the picture shows prison buildings in Luyens). — AP

U.N. to probe Congo killings

GENEVA: A team of United Nations human rights experts will travel to northeastern Congo this week to investigate the killings of almost 1,000 people in ethnic violence earlier this month. Tuesday's announcement of the mission follows a decision by the U.N. Security Council to ask the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Vieira de Mello, to look into the issue. The 15-member team of experts based in Congo will travel to the area of Drodro and surrounding villages, 42 km northeast of Bunia, starting Wednesday, a spokesman, Jose Diaz, said. A preliminary U.N. investigation into the attacks



found that 966 people, mainly from the Hemba community, were killed in the pre-dawn attack on Roman Catholic mission Drodro and surrounding villages on April 3. It found that between 150 and 300 are buried in mass graves at Drodro alone. The human rights team will return to the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, on April 23, Mr. Diaz said. (the picture, women in the violence try to protect themselves up in Drodro recently). — AP

16 APR 2003

APR 16 2003

Ethnic violence worries Cachar tea industry

Dipankar Roy in Silchar

April 7. — The tea industry in Cachar, southern Assam, hit by recession and insurgency, now fears a possible "spill over effect" of ethnic clashes in the districts.

Last week militants drove out Dimasas from Mazertuk village. They spent the night at the Padma Tea Estate's Nagalbar division, while the workers stayed inside the factory. Some labourers were roughed up by the militants.

A tea industry official said the militants even fired

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in the air before they left. "There could have been trouble if any labourer got shot," he said. There are many gardens in the "conflict zones" and if such clashes continue workers will be affected.

Mr Junio Jagoi, assistant manager of the Bierampore Tea Estate's Koorkoorie division, was abducted on 1 April by suspected NSCN-IM militants.

A few newspapers had reported that the abductors had demanded Rs 60 lakh as ransom. Mr Jagoi remains untraced. His was the second abduction this

year. In February, the assistant manager of Jatinga Valley Tea Estate was abducted. He was released after a week. It is not known if any ransom had been paid.

In the last few years, at least 35 tea garden staff or their kin, including a three year-old girl and a woman, were abducted and later released. Six were killed.

On recession, the official said: "Over the last five years the average price of tea has dipped by over Rs 22 a kg while the production cost has increased by over 38 per cent."

THE STATESMAN

8 APR 2003

Ethnic massacres claim hundreds

Kigali. Inter-ethnic massacres have claimed hundreds of lives in Congo's troubled northeastern Ituri region, sources said on Sunday. "They're talking about several hundred dead," General Kale Kaihura, commander of Ugandan troops in the region, said by telephone from Bunia.

The casualties were found in the towns of Drodro and Largo and were said to be members of the Hema community. They died in an attack by members of the Lendu ethnic group, Ugandan officers said. One of them, Captain Felix Kulayigye, told newsmen from Bunia that "between 350 and 400 members of the Hema community" had died. AFP

7 APR 2003

THE TIMES OF UGANDA

Silent exodus from Manipur

Statesman News Service

LAKHIPUR (Cachar), April 6. — Thanks to the Hmar-Dimasa ethnic clashes, a continuing silent migration to Assam's Cachar district has finally drawn attention of the powers that be.

For over a month now, Bengali Hindu families living in areas of Manipur bordering the district have been arriving here in a steady trickle after being forced to leave their homes. But politicians took serious note of their presence only after they visited the area following the Hmar-Dimasa clashes in the past few days.

Mr Khutiram Das, one of about 400 people staying in a girls' school converted into a relief camp, said they left Manipur to avoid unbearable atrocities of Meitei militants of United National Liberation Front and People's Liberation Army. "It's their writ which runs there... there's no law and order machinery to check their depredations," he said. Bengali Hindus were living in that part of Jiribam sub-division for ages, he said and added: "We are voters in Manipur and we have titles over the lands where we were staying... They have captured our lands and built houses there."

7 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

Fiji may slap sedition charge on Chaudhry

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SUVA, JANUARY 12

Ethnic Problem

Fiji's deposed prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry could face sedition charge for saying in Delhi that ethnic Indians here face "brutal repression," it was reported on Sunday. Assistant Information Minister Simione Kaitani warned today the government was considering laying a sedition charge against Chaudhry when he returned to the country, the *Daily Post* newspaper said. Police will question the former prime minister on his return to Fiji, Kaitani said.

Chaudhry, himself an ethnic Indian, reportedly said in a speech at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference of

overseas Indians in Delhi last week that Indians in Fiji were under siege.

"They are victims of racial discrimination and brutal repression under the rule of the ethnic Fijian Party," Chaudhry said. He said the repression was a kin to apartheid and it "has become very difficult to live on as an Indian in Fiji."



Kaitani said Chaudhry was scare-mongering and his remarks were "a reflection of his racist and negative outlook in Fiji." He told the *Daily Post* the speech was causing instability by stirring up emotions of indigenous Fijians. Around 44 per cent of Fiji's 840,000 people are descendants of Indian sugar cane contract workers imported by the British in the late 19th and early 20th century.

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